Doctor of Education Thesis – The University of Derby

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2018

Research Title

Surveillance of Modern Motherhood: An exploration of the experiences of mothers that have attended a Universal Parenting Course.

Aim

- To gain a deeper understanding into the discursive practices and constructs of modern motherhood in the UK, through a feminist post-structuralist analysis of experiences of mothers that have attended universal parenting courses.

Objectives

- To explore the experiences of mothers that have attended universal parenting courses.
- To consider the constructs of modern motherhood in relation to different levels of surveillance.
- To produce a greater understanding of some of the pressures within modern motherhood in the UK today

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the experiences of mothers of children aged 0-3 years that have attended universal parenting courses. The aim of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that motivate mothers to attend a universal parenting course and to explore the wider experiences of early modern motherhood in the UK. In order to develop this understanding, the research explored participant perceptions of any benefit or otherwise in attending a parenting course and also considered the different forms of parenting advice accessed by mothers and how this provides an insight into the wider constructs and experiences of modern motherhood. Ultimately, the goal of this research was to consider the social and cultural pressures within modern motherhood in relation to different levels of surveillance (Henderson *et al.*, 2010) and to produce new knowledge for practice within the early years sector in relation to the support currently offered to new mothers.

A feminist post-structuralist worldview was taken to explore the dominant discourses within modern motherhood. This approach provided a *'productive contradiction'* (Baxter, 2003, p. 2) whereby multiple experiences could be considered, particularly in relation to feelings of oppression, empowerment and being 'good enough' (Winnicott, 1964) within modern motherhood. A qualitative methodology was developed with the first phase being a survey with a range of questions designed to generate insight into the experiences of mothers (30 participants), followed by qualitative interviews with a sample of mothers using semi-structured photo elicitation interviews (7 participants).

Findings revealed that universal parenting courses can provide opportunities for new mothers to build daily structure, social networks and reduce feelings of isolation. Some negative experiences of parenting courses were reported when health professionals and early years practitioners were considered 'pushy' or 'non neutral' – particularly regarding sensitive areas such as breastfeeding or the reaching of developmental milestones. Participants demonstrated that there is a perceived place in society for parenting courses when they are practical, supportive and neutral rather than formulaic, homogenous or grounded in psychoanalytical or neurodevelopmental underpinnings, which can promote feelings of judgement or added pressure. Findings also link to the wider 'parenting culture' (Furedi, 2008; Lee *et al.*, 2014) with societal pressures, motherhood ideologies, comparisons between mothers and other aspects of interpersonal surveillance including social media and celebrity culture all adding to the challenge of retaining an identity and of finding confidence and agency within the role.

Overall, self-surveillance is identified as the most powerful aspect of modern motherhood with challenges relating to a reluctance to discuss 'taboo' aspects of motherhood including difficulty with attachment following birth and the internalisation of social and cultural pressures. It was important to note that, although there are clear levels of surveillance that are embedded into society which resulted in evidence of self-doubt and dependency, there was also evidence of agency and autonomy in the responses to these levels which were developed through strong social networks and support systems.

Following on from this research; proactive, empathetic, practical and localised support from health professionals and early years practitioners is needed along with empowering opportunities for new mothers to develop confidence in an informal environment and foster truthful, non-judgmental interpersonal support networks. It is through these support systems that new mothers will continue to be able to resist or reshape the dominant discourses and ultimately, enjoy the experience to its full potential.

Key Words: Motherhood, Universal Parenting Courses, Surveillance, Feminism, Post-Structuralism

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Participants: who offered their personal and emotional insight into the roller coaster experiences of becoming a new mother. I am humbled and grateful for the trust they gave me.

My Doctoral Supervisors: Val, who has motivated me and kept me going from the very beginning of this process and who has supported and challenged me to aspire to be more than I ever thought possible and Anne who helped me to consider new ways of listening to and exploring the different experiences of mothers.

My Family: who have supported me every step of the way. My husband for never letting me give up, my children for inspiring me every day and for travelling on this journey with me. My parents for teaching me that what I do matters and that if a jobs worth doing its worth doing well, and my mother in law for always believing in and supporting me.

The Early Childhood Studies Team: I am so lucky to be part of a team that supports each other and that values the diverse work that we do within our sector and discipline.

Dedication:

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my own mother. The woman who I've probably always taken for granted but who has always been there for me and who encouraged me to trust myself when I became a mother, this was the greatest gift she could give me. I will never stop being thankful for her endless love, humour and support.

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Context

My professional background in Higher Education as Programme Leader and Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies and Pathways Leader on the Masters in Education (Early Years Pathway), along with my own experience as an early years practitioner and upon becoming a mother moved me towards a deep interest in the support available for new mothers within the UK. I am particularly interested in the social and cultural pressures that new mothers experience during the early days of the transition into this new role. These pressures may come in many different formats and 'help' is offered in ever-expanding forms including parenting courses, advice forums and baby manuals that are grounded in often conflicting and contradictory child-rearing philosophies.

Partnership working with parents is a fundamental aspect of responsibility for students that undertake the degrees I work within and it is therefore essential that graduates have an insight into the pressures of modern parenting in order to offer sufficient and well informed support. With roles such as Family Support Workers and Family Liaison Officers citing *'higher-level qualifications including a degree in social work, childhood studies or working with families'* (National Careers Service, 2016) as a training and development requirement, more of our graduates are supporting families and delivering parenting education programmes. We as a programme, therefore have a responsibility to review aspects of our own course and equip our students to understand the contemporary issues that new mothers face and develop an insight into the support that mothers would find both useful and relevant. This can be achieved in part through the development of an insight into the experiences of modern mothers and a response to the increasing focus on parenting education and in particular, motherhood.

Involvement with relevant academic and professional networks, including strategy group membership of the Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network (ECSDN), involvement with the University of Derby Childhood Research Cluster and my role as Link Tutor for the delivery of the degree with Mediterranean

college in Greece all give me a strong position to disseminate this research within both my own and wider institutions, nationally and internationally.

1.2 Research Interest and Ontological Approach

As the introduction to my research context above alludes, my position within higher education and my professional background in working with students and early years practitioners has played a large role in the development of my research. It was through my own experience of becoming a mother though that a powerful need to explore and listen to experiences of other mothers was fostered.

As an early years practitioner myself, I transitioned into motherhood with a naïve belief that I would be well equipped for the challenges that lay ahead of me. I was surprised therefore, to find that despite my theoretical and practical experience, the reality of becoming a mother bore no resemblance to the natural and instinctive experience that I had expected. Despite a deep love for my new daughter, the overriding emotion that I felt during those early days of motherhood was that of anxiety. I felt an overwhelming sense that I was losing control of myself and the world around me and that I was not going to be able to cope with the demands of this role and that the responsibility of looking after another human lay entirely at my feet. I remember feeling that I must be the only person that had ever felt this way, new motherhood had always been portrayed as something beautiful and natural and although I expected to feel exhausted and in some physical pain, the immediate impact on my mental health was not something that I had been able to prepare for and I found this difficult to discuss.

During these early days I was given baby manuals (Ford, 2002; Frost, 2007) from well-meaning friends, which were helpful at times but also seemed to contradict each other, adding to this feeling of confusion and a difficulty in making decisions. I was also directed to parenting websites such as *Mumsnet* (Mumsnet, 2000), where I read forum conversations about aspects of parenting decisions such as co-sleeping, breastfeeding and sleep routines which were met with explosive and highly emotive responses from other mothers. It seemed that there were strong opinions about every aspect of child-rearing which made it increasingly difficult to find agency and confidence.

Health visitors and midwives talked about the ‘baby blues’ as something that was to be expected in the early days of motherhood, but I began to wonder whether other new mothers had experienced the same physical and emotional rollercoaster that I certainly felt and that to my mind, no-one had pre-warned me about. Through the support of family, friends and health visitors I began to attend the local Sure Start Children’s Centre. It was there that the interest in the experiences of new mothers developed further. Upon meeting mothers and attending different parenting courses (including baby massage, ‘weigh, stay and play’ and baby weaning groups), the conversations that I had with them made it evident to me that I was not alone in this overwhelming experience.

Mothers reported concerns and a feeling of pressure regarding many different aspects of this new role including breastfeeding, with leaflets given out regularly and posters on all of the walls citing ‘breast is best’, there was a feeling of failure in the air for those mothers, including myself who were not able to breastfeed or who chose not to. The loss of identity was also evident during conversations with new mothers who were no longer called by their name, instead, referred to by doctors and health visitors as ‘Mum’, at a time long before their actual child would be able to form this word. During this first year, mothers were encouraged to attend parenting courses and develop networks, some of which were extremely helpful and positive, some of which seemed to promote a formula for both parenting practice and for meeting the developmental needs of children. It also became apparent that the practical support and guidance that mothers sought, they were not getting from the health professionals but from other mothers. Mothers’ shared practical tips about sleep training, often borne out of a desperate need for rest themselves, they also shared real experiences regarding routines, developmental milestones, feeding and every other aspect of motherhood.

As I developed my interest further, I explored post-structuralist concepts (Foucault, 1977; Rose, 1999) in relation to motherhood. I was able to deconstruct my own experiences and those of the mothers I had met in the first year of becoming a mother myself. I could see the way that levels of surveillance (Henderson, Harmon and Houser, 2010) had impacted on the expectations I had on myself and on those around me came as a result of structural surveillance;

from health professionals, government initiatives, parenting education programmes and through representations in the media (Figure 1).

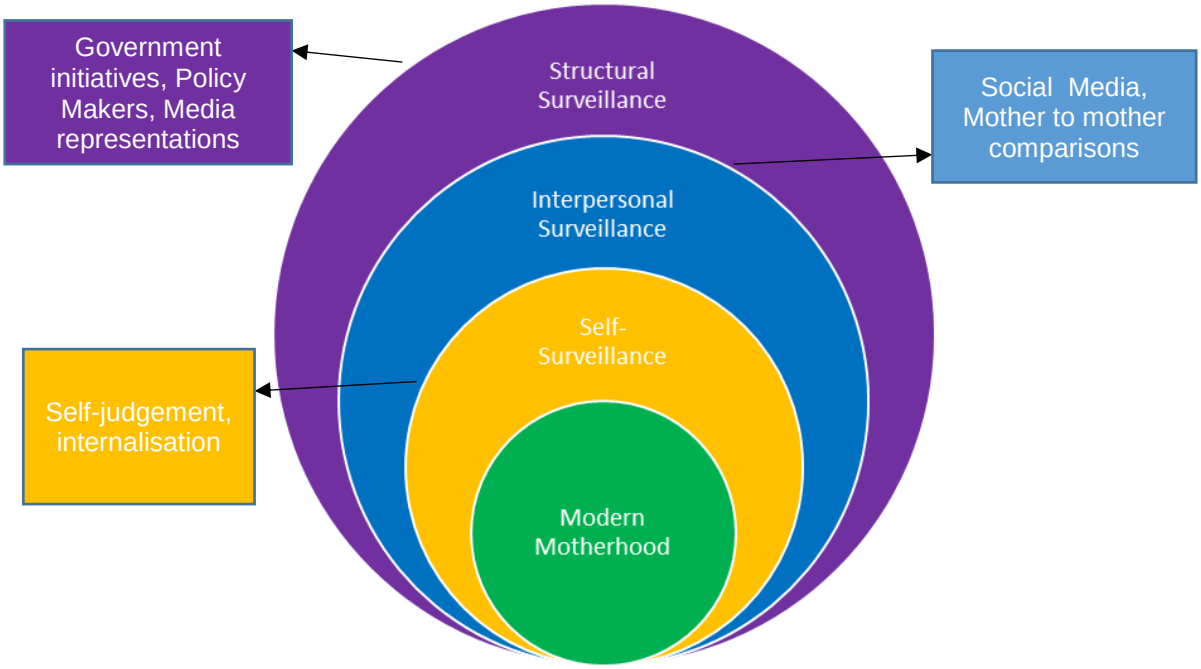

Figure 1: Levels of Surveillance within Modern Motherhood

(Based on Henderson *et al.*, 2010)

This structural attention on parenting has developed further since the Allen (2011, p. xiv) report highlighted the *'right kind of parenting'* and the importance of early intervention, there has also been a rise in so called 'online parenting' forums including *Mumsnet* (Mumsnet, 2000); *Netmums* (Netmums, 2000); *Babycentre* (Babycentre, 1997).These forums along with baby manuals where self-proclaimed experts offer their philosophies of child-rearing and increasingly popular 'makeover TV' such as *'Supernanny'* (Channel 4, 2004-2012), suggests that the government, psychologists and TV presenters alike believe themselves to hold the secrets to 'good' parenting.

Academics within the field of early childhood (Roberts, 2010; Murray, 2017; Musgrave, 2017) recognise and promote the fundamental importance of valuing children as individuals and as autonomous, researching experts of their own lives. It seems that this message is not extended to the lives of mothers though with policy makers continuously publishing intervention agenda that endorses a

standardised formula for parenting. With the plethora of conflicting and contradictory 'advice' and representations of motherhood throughout society, there is a risk that pressures on new mothers are heightened and the opportunity to create anxiety increased. According to Gambles (2010, p. 698) '*Parenting is the subject of much contemporary public discussion within the UK as well as other forms of popular culture'*. This attention, according to Furedi (2008, p. 182), ties in with the rise in what can be described as a *'professionalisation of parenting'* whereby parenting is becoming more *'intensive, literally a full time occupation requiring professional support'* (Furedi, 2008, p. 15) and is echoed in the increased government focus on parenting as a critical feature for a child's future wellbeing (Figure 2).

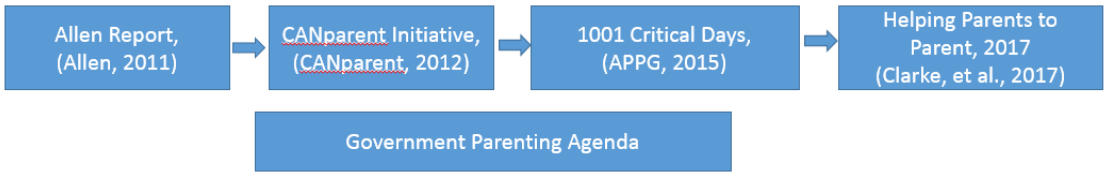

Figure 2. Government attention on Parenting

Foucault (1977) related the attention on human behaviour as linking to normalized behaviour that is to be promoted as a *'master-narrative'* (Kerrick and Henry, 2016, p. 1) through societal structures, surveillance and the use and often misuse of neuroscientific research (Macvarish, 2014; Garrett *et al.*, 2017; Vandenbroeck *et al*., 2017) and developmental psychology (Burman, 2008) by policy makers and those in positions of power.

Interpersonal surveillance was also evident between mothers who, in my experience, whilst supporting and encouraging each other in many ways, also demonstrated competitive traits and judgement of one another at times adding to the potential for self-surveillance; the internalisation of the first two levels of surveillance, with acceptance and conformity to the expected behaviours that this role demands. However, the groups that I attended highlighted to me the autonomy of women. I could not fully align to a post-structuralist ontological approach because I witnessed different reactions from mothers to both structural and interpersonal surveillance.

It is difficult to resist levels of surveillance, particularly at a time in life where hormones, tiredness and the transition into a new identity demands much navigation, but that does not mean that all women will navigate this transition in exactly the same way. In the responses to advice given to them, I witnessed mothers resist or reshape the dominant discourses within modern motherhood, taking aspects of the advice and ignoring the elements that did not work for them or for their baby. It is therefore important for me to acknowledge that autonomy, individuality and resistance is a possibility within the exploration of modern motherhood, to consider the position of mothers as being *'powerful, powerless or a combination of both'* (Baxter, 2003, p.66).

With agency and individuality remaining a central feature of this research and through the capturing of the mothers' voice in relation to their different experiences of motherhood, it was important to provide the space to deconstruct these experiences without the classification of cultural or class based labels. I decided early on within the research process that I would not ask mothers to classify themselves into a particular class structure, the research participants would be considered first and foremost from the position of a new mother (Oakley, 2005) with no other potentially unhelpful labels placed on them. This will be explored further within the exploration of the ethical process (3.4.7 Protection of Participants).

In order to ensure that a wide demographic of settings was approached within the research and that a range of experiences of different parenting courses would be explored, I included rural and city centre settings within the sample framework and a range of universal parenting courses (including state sponsored, third sector and private) were also included**.**

A feminist post-structuralist (Davis, 1997; Weedon, 1997; Baxter, 2003) ontological, epistemological and theoretical approach, allows me to explore the experiences of new mothers in order to:

> Analyse how they are structured, what power relations they produce and reproduce, where there are resistances and where we might look for weak points more open to challenge and transformation (Weedon, 1997, p. 133).

Whilst recognising the potential for individualised experiences within modern motherhood, it was important to me to explore the dominant discourses and potential forms of surveillance that may have had an impact on the lives of new mothers in the UK today. With Public Heath England (2017) stating that *'perinatal mental health problems affect between 10 to 20% of women during pregnancy and the first year after having a baby'* (Public Health England, 2017) and cost the *'NHS and social services around £1.2 billion annually'* (Public Health England, 2017), the need to investigate some of the potential factors that can be attributed to adding to these problems was clear. This process began with a literature review that will magnify the dominant discourses and themes surrounding modern motherhood followed by an exploration of the experiences of mothers that have attended a universal parenting course.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This research began with an exploration of the dominant discourses and themes within modern motherhood through a review of relevant research, government initiatives, theory and literature. The review started with a search into the notion of the 'expert' as a source of advice for mothers, something which, as evident throughout the literature, is not a new phenomenon. Moving forward with the literature review, other dominant discourses began to emerge including the role of 'expert' as something that has changed with technological advances and political intervention strategies. The literature review developed over a long period of time (2013 onwards) as new research and publications emerged, providing a changed lens within which to view the experiences of mothers. The themes which included an exploration of the role of online social networking and another theme that considered the implications on neuroscientific research and its use within parenting intervention programmes both developed as important research emerged (Wu Song and Paul, 2016; Vandenbroek, 2017). Insight into these dominant discourses or *'master narratives'* (Kerrick and Henry, 2016, p. 1) over time, provided a platform in which to view the social and cultural context of modern motherhood. As identified within the introduction, feminist post-structuralism is the underpinning worldview within which this research is framed. It is important therefore to begin this section with a detailed insight into how these philosophies worked together to drive the analysis of the literature regarding the dominant discourses within modern motherhood.

2.2 Feminist Post-Structuralist Worldview

This section will begin with an insight into the post-structuralist concepts that underpin much of this research. The discussion will then move on to justify, in greater detail, why the conceptual framework could not be aligned, in its entirety, to post-structuralism and how, through a combined feminist post-structuralist worldview, the opportunities to explore the experiences of the participants from a range of possible perspectives were heightened.

2.2.1 Post-structuralism

Post-structuralist theory challenges the structures that result in members of society behaving in a certain way. Drawing from Foucault's (1977) exploration of 'Panoptism' and his disciplinary technologies, it is possible to explore modern motherhood through a post-structuralist lens and consider how current motherhood ideologies have become the norm that all mothers must strive towards. This, according to post-structuralism does not just refer to the surveillance and discipline from others, but the internalisation and self-surveillance of individuals to achieve the norm and behave in the 'right way'. This way the behaviour of others, in this case, mothers is 'naturalised' and the desired, normalised behaviour is fostered. It is through the process of Foucault's disciplinary technologies; surveillance, judgement and correct training that power is asserted. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982, p. 157) explain the subtlety of this movement on members of society; *'it does this not by crushing them or lecturing them, but by 'humble' procedures of training and distribution'.* That is not to say that a solution is offered through the lens of post-structuralism. The aim of such research is not to rectify a 'problem', but to provide an understanding of the origins of a particular issue and to explore the meaning and reflect upon the discourses and power relations that may have led to the behaviours within motherhood that we now consider to be the norm. This will begin with an identification of what Foucault labels the 'dominant discourses' (Foucault, 1977).

Dominant discourse within society are practices or behaviours that over-time, appear to be given 'the stamp of truth'. These practices become *'highly ritualized'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 184) according to Foucault and combined with the *'deployment of force'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 184), they serve to form '*the establishment of truth'* Foucault, 1977, p. 184). The acceptance of these dominant discourses over time and changes in both social policy and practice within services offered as support to families, strengthen further the expected and normalized behaviour by members of society.

The notion of the 'expert' (Davis, 2012) as socially constructed, for example, can be associated to Foucauldian concepts of truth when exploring both historical and contemporary forms of correct training. Foucault (1977) considers the *'simple*

instruments' (Rabinow, 1991, p. 188) used within society to train acceptable and correct unacceptable behaviour. Such instruments, as explored by Foucault can be compared to the philosophy and outline of current parenting education. Identified by Foucault as *'hierarchical observation', 'normalizing judgement'* and *'their combination in a procedure that is specific to it – the examination'* (Rabinow, 1991, p. 188). Each of Foucault's instruments can be explored and compared to current parenting education programmes.

The first instrument to explore is *'hierarchical observation'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 170) and is associated with *'hierarchized, continuous and functional surveillance'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 176), the concept that through a top down approach, the behaviour of others will be constantly observed by those in positions of power, whether that be in the form of an educational environment or in this case, within parenting practice. Correlating to the work of Lee *et al.* (2014) who, whilst making no direct reference to Foucault in their work, question the philosophy that underpins parenting education programmes and the idea that good parenting is something that can be learnt by those willing to engage in a parenting programme, Foucault also comments on forms of correct training as originating from a place of power and judgement. Both Foucault (1977) and more recently, Lee *et al.* (2014) suggest that the idea that those in a hierarchical position in which they can observe the behaviour of others and pass judgement accordingly is something worth exploring and questioning.

The second of Foucault's instruments within correct training is *'normalizing judgement'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 177). This is, arguably at the very heart of the aim of parenting education. Through the initial practice of hierarchical observation and structural surveillance, judgement is passed and a system of correct training formed. The government focus on parenting as a *'public health issue'* (Clarke *et al.*, 2017, p. 4) and on normalising parenting courses to become as routine as antenatal classes can be connected to the ideas of Foucault that the *'power of normalization imposes homogeneity'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 184). In the form of parenting education in the UK, this would refer to a standardised programme of child-rearing and parenting. Within parenting education, normalizing judgement may go some way to explaining why some mothers struggle to feel 'good enough'

(Winnicott, 1964; Currie, 2008) as they compare themselves to others and feel judged as a result of constant hierarchical observation and surveillance. The overall impact therefore, relating not only to parenting education, but to parenting practice overall.

Henderson *et al.,* (2010) in their investigation of modern motherhood apply Foucauldian concepts of surveillance to what they found to be the most powerful level of surveillance; *'interpersonal (mother to mother), not structural (media to mothers) level'* (Henderson *et al.*, 2010, p. 232). The work of Henderson *et al.* (2010) gives a new lens within which to explore the experience of modern mothers and they also point out the increased pressure mothers place on themselves in terms of 'self-surveillance' whereby, unconsciously they compare themselves to other mothers and judge themselves harshly in terms of parenting ability. Within their research they found that *'not only are mothers blaming themselves and feeling guilty about the job they do as parents, but it is their self-blame and guilt that leads to a higher level of pressure to be perfect'* (Henderson *et al.*, 2010, p. 240). The different forms of surveillance suggested by Henderson *et al*.'s (2010) investigation provide an interesting way of viewing the pressures felt by mothers to be 'good enough'. It is important to consider the way these forms of surveillance, whether through the media or state surveillance, surveillance from other mothers or self-surveillance, add to the pressures felt by mothers and link to the motivating factors in attending a parenting course.

This struggle to meet societal expectations, from a post-structuralist perspective, can also be connected to the final of Foucault's instruments for correct training; *'the examination'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 184). It is at this point, according to Foucault that the hierarchical observation and normalizing judgements are combined. A result is formed here, a *'normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 184). At this moment, within parenting education, a mother may begin to feel some of that control return, to feel 'good enough' (Winnicott, 1964; Currie, 2008) as a mother. Foucault refers to the examination as the point which *'establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judge them'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 184). Self-judgement occurs here too, the comparison of one's self to another within

the process of correct training leading to an internalisation of the expected societal behaviours. Considering self-judgement in light of Foucault's concepts of surveillance, discipline and punishment is useful. The instruments of correct training form rules and regulations which can be applied to the correct way of parenting.

Foucault further explored the effects of continuous surveillance through his application of Bentham's *'Panopticon'* and his discussion of a system which increases the psychological control over inmates who *'must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment, but he must be sure that he may always be so'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 01). This method of discipline creates order based on the constant surveillance and *'permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). In the case of parenting education, the instruments of correct training, together with the surveillance of society through a continuous *'faceless gaze'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 215) heightens the expectations and pressures of modern motherhood. This perspective could therefore, provide insight into the way in which *'women's subjectivities are structured, in part, through the mastery of technique and specialized knowledge required to move, adorn and otherwise manage a feminine body'* (McCann and Kim, 2017, p. 363).

Foucault's exploration of *'panopticism'* can also be considered in relation to motherhood from the perspective of the normalizing judgements that dictates an appropriate way to behave as a mother and also on a wider level, the surveillance through interaction with other mothers, and the internalised pressure mothers place on themselves. Using post-structuralist concepts this relates to the internalization of the panoptic machine, the way the application of societal norms, through the process of surveillance of mothers, *'add to their internal and specific function a role of external surveillance, developing around themselves a whole margin of lateral controls'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 211). The stigma and fear of punishment, in this case being potentially labelled as a 'bad mother' or 'not coping', according to this perspective would lead mothers to act in accordance with the rules.

Foucault's ideas have been advanced through the work of Rose (1999, p. 1) who explores the attention of the family, particularly from a psychological perspective as developing a means by those in positions of power to *'govern the soul'*. Rose's work, whilst not aiming to critique psychology as a body of knowledge, does seek to explore the way that such discourses have *'rendered knowable the normal and pathological functioning of humans'* and how this knowledge has subsequently been transformed into *'problems offered by political, economic, and moral strategies'* (Rose, 1999, p. xxvii). Rose's work offers a useful insight into the focus on parenting education that will be explored within this research, particularly when considered alongside the parenting intervention programmes that use psychoanalytical and neurodevelopmental research to underpin their strategies.

The post-structuralist emphasis on members of society and how their exposure to *'the establishment of truth'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 184) leads to normalised behaviour are refuted by some though. Indeed, it is recognised by feminist writers (McNay, 1992; Ramazanoglu, 1994) that there are tensions between feminist and post-structuralist thought that cannot be ignored, many feminist arguments centre on the limitations of post-structuralist writing to explain female autonomy:

> This lack of rounded theory of subjectivity or agency conflicts with a fundamental aim of the feminist project: to rediscover and re-evaluate the experiences of women (McNay, 1992, p. 3).

Given the tensions between the feminist and post-structualist worldviews, it is important to now consider how they may work alongside each other and in fact, complement each other and bring multiple possibilities and reactions to the experiences of modern mothers.

2.2.2 Feminist post-structuralism

Whilst it could be suggested that the *'emancipatory stance of feminism and the deconstructive purpose of post-structuralism should be seen as dichotomous'* (Baxter, 2003, p. 14), the development of a feminist post-structuralist approach makes it possible to consider the construction of normalized judgements and the internalisation of these structures whilst also acknowledging the possibility and opportunity for agency and resistance within the experiences of mothers.

> One of the major enterprises of feminist post-structuralist theory has been the deconstruction of female subjectivity and the analysis of the extent to which women's experiences of themselves as subjects may be constructed within discourses, practices and power relationships (Baxter, 2003, p. 33).

Similar to the post-structuralist perspectives outlined above, feminist research, through its exploration of the contested ideologies of motherhood (Douglas and Michaels, 2005; Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple, 2011) and the cultural contradiction (Hays, 1996) within them have attempted to offer insight into the constructs of motherhood within modern society. Explored further within the wider dominant discourses, feminist theories of motherhood ideologies (Douglas and Michaels, 2005; Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple, 2011) aim to expose the discursive practices and messages portrayed within modern culture that motherhood should be considered something natural and instinctive and how these messages serve to contradict and confuse mothers who are encouraged simultaneously to attend parenting courses in order to learn the 'right way' to mother.

A combined feminist post-stucturalist lens provides an opportunity '*which reveals what is going on in women's lives'* (Letherby, 2003, p. 6). Maintaining a feminist post-structurlaist epistemological and ontological position throughout this research allowed the constructions of human behaviour in this case, motherhood, to be explored whilst also providing the opportunity for multiple possibilities in the form of agency and autonomy to be considered.

This research, as within the ethos of feminist research, maintained respectful considerations of participants and acknowledges opportunities for the resistance of the dominant discourses, as reported by Miller (2005):

> The topic of mothering and motherhood is an area of social research that has greatly benefited from a range of feminist contributions, not least identifying it as an area worth scrutiny (Miller, 2005, p. 7).

Drawing on the work of Foucault, Baxter (2003, p. 37) proposes that *'post-structuralist inquiry may indeed support feminist projects with an intent to liberate subjugated groups as long as these aim to promote the free play of multiple voices within diverse contexts'*. Within her research and the development of a feminist post-structural discourse analysis theory, Baxter suggests that using

these two approaches together produces a *'productive contradiction'* (Baxter, 2003, p. 2) whereby criticisms surrounding the post-structuralist lack of recognition of agency and resistance of the dominant discourses embedded into motherhood practice, can be explored more deeply within a feminist lens. Similarly, criticism of emancipatory feminism politics including the *'quest to expose the gendered nature of society or the structural inequalities it produces'* (Ahall, 2012, p. 106) can be explored within a post-structuralist lens, a modern perspective can be formed which reviews some of the *'old assumptions'* and new constructions of motherhood can be considered.

This also echoes the work of Henderson *et al.,* (2010) and their levels of surveillance, whereby rather than exploring motherhood from an oppressive male dominated feminist perspective, it becomes possible to consider how interpersonal surveillance between mothers impact on the early experiences of motherhood, and adds to the internalisation of the normalizing judgements and constructs of feeling 'good enough' (Winnicott, 1964; Currie, 2008).

With Baxter's (2003, p. 2) notion of the *'productive contradiction'* in mind, it is also possible, within a feminist post-structuralist perspective, to recognise that *'women are not passive recipients of these constructions'* (Johnson *et al.,* 2009, p. 901). Whilst this thesis is interested in the wider social issues rather than exploring the individual experiences, it is still possible to consider experiences of motherhood in relation to the discursive practices, *'master narratives'* (Kerrick and Henry, 2016, p. 1) or *'storylines'* (Davis, 1997, p. 275) that are associated with motherhood on a wider level. Similarly, Baxter (2003, p. 12) suggests that *'the local meaning of talk always work within, represent and reconstitute broader discursive structures, relations and processes'.*

As previously highlighted, the lack of recognition around the notion of self-regulation or autonomy is one of the major criticisms of post structuralism as a philosophy (Ramazanoglu, 1994; McNay, 1992). Criticism include the assumption that women are *'docile bodies'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 136) that show little or no ability to resist the dominant discourses they are subjected to or at the very least, negotiate these constructs to suit their own identity and parenting practice (Johnson, 2009). This assumption, arguably, does members of society

a disservice and goes no way to explaining why and how some of these members contest the normalizing judgements and challenge the cultural practices that are embedded within society as the norm.

With this in mind, an advocate of feminist post-structuralist theory; Weedon (1997) accepts the criticisms of post structuralism and the perception that the experiences of others are socially constructed through the dominant discourses and therefore *'deny the authenticity of individual experience'* (Weedon, 1997, p. 121), she goes on to suggest though, that *'what Foucault's work offers feminists, however, is, a contextualisation of experiences and an analysis of its constitution and ideological power'* (Weedon, 1997, p. 121). By bringing both feminism and post structuralism together it is possible to provide the opportunity for women to reflect on their experiences, constructs of motherhood and *'choose from the options available'* (Weedon, 1997, p. 121). In this sense, feminism and post structuralism will work together to produce a deeper insight into motherhood through reflection on, and possible challenging of, the dominant discourses.

Similarly, returning to the advancement of Foucault's work through Rose (1999, p. vii), subjectivity is explored through history in relation to how events and changes over time have *'gone to make up our current ways of understanding and relating to ourselves as human beings with a certain subjectivity'*. In these terms, Rose is interested in how psychological theory itself *'celebrates values of autonomy and self-realization'* but how, when used by those involved in 'structural surveillance' (Henderson *et al.*, 2010) to explain human behaviour can serve to *'fabricate subjects – human men, women and children – capable of bearing the burdens of liberty'* (Rose, 1999, p. viii).

Through his exploration and discussion of disciplinary and normalizing technologies, Foucault was interested in the *'bio-power'* (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 133) associated with the internalisation of different social and cultural norms within society. Feminist writers acknowledge Foucault's *'important contribution to social theory'* (McNay, 1992, p. 9). Similarly, Ramazanoglu (1994, p. 5) suggests that *'Foucault's work provides a sharp critique of some of the ways in which feminists have set about explaining gendered power'*. Whilst contributors to Ramanzanoglu's (1994) edited volume express their concerns about some of

Foucault's assumptions and the limitations towards feminist theory, they also acknowledge *'what he has usefully done is to provide new means for thinking through some of the areas of understanding social life which have proven contradictory and problematic'* (Ramanzanoglu, 1994, p. 5). Again, in support of how feminism and post-structuralism can work together is Baxter:

> What a specifically post-structuralist approach offers feminism, with its emphasis upon specific and localised forms of transformative action, is a politically confidence approach to all forms of research inquiry (Baxter, 2003, p. 41).

In consideration of how a post-structuralist lens could work alongside a feminist lens, particularly in relation to this research, I believe it is possible for the two philosophies to work alongside one another. Both philosophies aim to explore how the dominant discourses create power relations that determine the lived experiences of others and how systems and structures can be considered and reflected upon, in order to reveal the normalization and internalisation of a particular regime. Together, a combined feminist post-structuralist epistemological approach allows for a broader interpretation and exploration of the experiences of modern motherhood. With the focus on exploring the early experiences of modern motherhood, specifically through the eyes of those who have chosen to engage with parenting courses, a feminist post-structuralist lens acts as a way of *'aligning subjectivity with cultural ideologies of motherhood'* (Johnson *et al.*, 2009, p. 900).

Another key supporter of the feminist post-structuralist approach is Davis (1997) who suggests that this approach, rather than ignoring the importance of individual experience, seeks to *'enable us to see the subject's fictionality, whilst recognising how powerful fictions are in constituting what we take to be real'* (Davis, 1997, p. 272). In this respect, the idea of the storylines, *'fictionality'* or *'master narrative'* (Kerrick and Henry, 2016, p. 1) by which we live are the important constructs that must be explored and understood more deeply and a feminist post-structuralist approach provides a lens for the exploration of the opportunities for both the oppression and empowerment of women within modern motherhood. According to Davis (1997), a feminist post-structuralist perspective embraces the

contradiction and opportunities within these combined approaches, to bring about change. Davis suggests that:

> Linear forms of logic are too constraining for those of us who wish to embrace the rich complexity of life lived through multiple and contradictory discourses (Davis, 1997, p. 272).

In this respect, feminist post-structuralism allows for a plurality of perspectives, for individuality to be acknowledged and for the *'establishment of truth'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 184) to be explored simultaneously**.** Both philosophies also consider how people internalise these societal norms, further adding to this regulation. Whilst Foucault (1977) contests the idea that all power relations are negative and unproductive, his post-structuralist underpinning still stresses the importance of exploring such relations. With this in mind, McNay (1992) suggests that Foucault's ideas on power relations have:

> provided feminists with a useful analytical framework to explain how women's experience is impoverished and controlled within certain culturally determined images of feminine sexuality (McNay, 1992, p. 3).

This naturalization of certain images of women, in particular mothers therefore, can be considered through both feminist and post-structuralist lenses. By exploring the ways in which particular normalised behaviours are formed which have moved towards a specific 'parenting culture' (Furedi, 2008; Lee *et al.*, 2014) it may be possible to consider and challenge the different levels of surveillance that lead a mother to feel that they are not 'good enough' (Winnicott, 1964; Currie, 2008) as a *'fictitious atom of an ideological representation of society'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 194). Through a feminist post-structuralist lens (Figure 3), I considered the constructs of motherhood whilst also acknowledging the possibility of *'autonomy and self-realization'* (Rose, 1999, p. viii). Weedon (1997) suggests that through this feminist post-structuralist lens it is possible to analyse the discursive practices in order to explore the power relations and structures within them, it is through this exploration that we may challenge practices and consider ways to make changes and transformations. This began with an exploration of the dominant discourses within the literature and research surrounding experiences of motherhood.

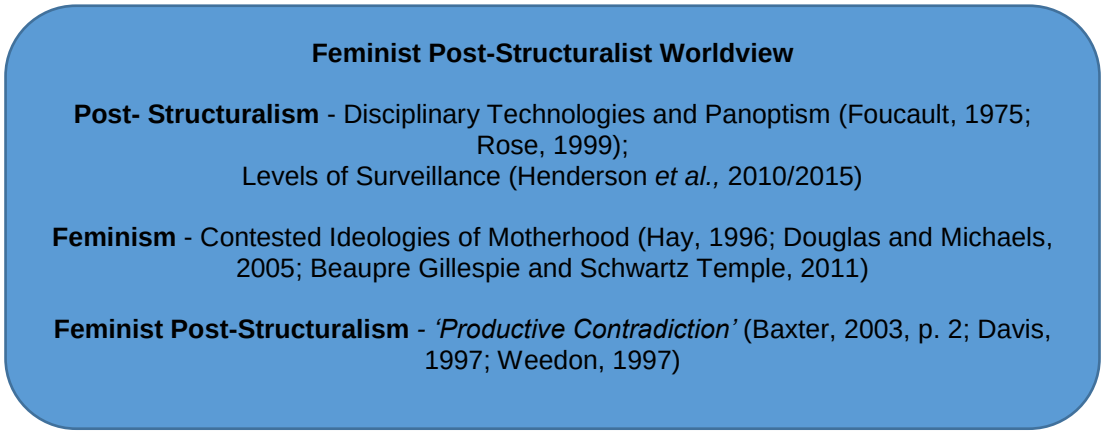

Figure 3: Feminist Post-Structuralist Worldview

2.3 The Dominant Discourses

The dominant discourses and themes that emerged through the literature review are listed below. These were explored through a feminist post-structuralist worldview, with a focus on the way each discourse was constructed through levels of surveillance (Henderson *et al.*, 2010). An outline of this approach with associated dominant discourses and themes from the literature review can be found in Appendix 1.

The dominant discourses that emerged through the literature review were:

1. Historical Discourse of Expert Advice
2. Online Social Networking
3. Political Intervention
4. The Rise in 'Parenting Culture'
5. 'Good Enough Mother' Discourse
6. Evaluations of parenting Courses and the 'Neuroparenting' Discourse

Taken in this order, each discourse will be explored and key concepts from the literature will be identified through the figures at the end of each section.

2.3.1 Historical Discourse of Expert Advice

Based upon 160 oral history interviews, Davis (2012), in her book *'Modern Motherhood: women and family in England 1945-2000'* investigated the effects of the exposure to the many conflicting notions of the best way to care for children. It is clear from her research that this is by no means a new phenomenon and the accounts of the women that Davis spoke to show the level of confusion and

uncertainty produced through the conflicting advice that they received from baby and childcare manuals. At least since post Second World War Britain, women have been exposed to the many different opinions on the best way to bring up their children These opinions and a now deeply and ever growing embedded societal perception of motherhood as a role that must be taught, has increased the potential for both the *'professionalisation'* (Furedi, 2008, p. 180) and *'problematization'* (Rose, 1999, p. xi) of modern motherhood.

On reviewing historical child-rearing philosophies, Davis states that *'their advice was by no means consistent and mothers were under pressure to conform to conflicting models of care'* (2012, p. 112). Her study focuses on 6 popular figures of 'authority on child development' from post-World War Two. They were: Fredrick Truby-King, John Bowlby, Donald Winnicott, Benjamin Spock, Penelope Leach and Gina Ford. Their approaches range from the strict and rigid routine based approaches of Truby-King and Ford to the more instinct promoting and baby led philosophies of Winnicott and Spock. All held their own perspectives on the best way to child-rear based on their own experiences and knowledge which varied greatly.

Similarly, Kinser (2010) explored the varied perspectives of child-rearing experts in America in relation to social construction. Kinser observed how pressure on parents, particularly mothers are heightened during times of increased political attention. Kinser (2010), like Davis (2012), noted a shift after World War II whereby a rise in 'permissive parenting' occurred following Benjamin Spock's hugely popular manual, *'The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care'* in 1946. Similar to the currently popular 'attachment parenting' style, with Spock's approach, mothers were encouraged to be led by their baby:

> Without being remotely distracted by any outside interests or concerns, those who spent hours talking and thinking at a child's level, those who embraced the constant emotional work on top of this physical work of mothering, would produce happy, well-adjusted citizens (Kinser, 2010, p. 65).

Similarities can be drawn here with Spock's child rearing philosophy and current parenting education programmes, both of which lay the foundation of well-rounded, securely attached individuals firmly with parents, particularly mothers.

Although no definitive definition is provided regarding what would constitute 'middle class', Kinser goes further with her arguments to suggest that child-rearing philosophies such as those put forward by Spock are largely aimed at middle class mothers since *'dominant culture is more invested in the middle class in general, and in its members as consumers in particular, it was middle class mothers who bore the brunt of critique'* (Kinser, 2010, p. 65).

Correspondingly, from the women Davis (2012) interviewed in the UK, she also found links to the social, cultural and political constructs of the time in which each particular child rearing philosophy was developed. In the 1940s Truby-King's popularity was at its highest with the belief that strict routines and lots of fresh air was the key to good child-rearing. The popularity of Truby-King continued into the 1980s although, according to Davis, some of his advice, particularly in relation to not 'spoiling' a baby with too much attention, specifically leaving them to cry was beginning to be seen as outdated. The rise in the popularity of the 'expert' is further explored through the work of Cunningham (2006) who, through his presentation of the history of childhood in Britain over the last 100 years, considers the importance that the particular political landscape has in driving forward a specific child-rearing philosophy:

> It came to be thought that the personality type that would emerge from a Truby-King type upbringing, with its stress on obedience, would be more suited to the German Third Reich than a country fighting for democracy (Cunningham, 2006, p. 202).

Interestingly, although Truby-King's strict routine-based, no-nonsense approach was beginning to be seen as outdated by the 1970s and 1980s, the popularity of a similar approach from Ford has risen since the release of her book *'The Contented Little Baby Book'* first released in 1999. Her strategies, once followed, help to develop a baby that will sleep better, eat better and be in overall better health. Ford states that by following her routines, parents will be able to *'understand his needs and meet them quickly and confidently'* (Ford, 2002, p. 37). Ford's book, whilst controversial, has proven to be very popular with its promise of more sleep for both parents and baby resulting in thousands of copies being sold in the UK. Whilst the strict routine may return control to some parents when they need it the most, Asher (2012) through her interviews with mothers,

expressed concerns over the rise in guilt and the sense of failure that such advice manuals transmit:

> I remember agonising over the fact that my baby insisted on sleeping after being fed rather than engaging in rigorous mini-gym exercise as favoured by Tracy (Hogg), and hanging my head in shame when I didn't get it together to express milk by seven o'clock in the morning, as advised by Gina (Ford) (Asher, 2012, p. 71).

From a historical perspective, Ford's approach to parenting is an extreme version of parenting advice. Paediatrician and psychoanalyst Winnicott (1896-1971) *'advocated a less authoritarian and regimented approach'* (Davis, 2012, p. 119); it would therefore be interesting to consider what he would make of Ford's disciplined and rigid style. Winnicott's fundamental belief about parenting, specifically motherhood, is that '*best mothering comes out of natural self-reliance'* (Winnicott, 1964, p. 9) and that, whilst there is a place for supporting mothers to reflect on their parenting skills, it must not come at the cost of spoiling any natural instinct. Winnicott's knowledge of babies and children from a medical and psycho-analytical perspective gave him a unique approach to both childhood and parenting. A firm believer in the 'good enough' approach, he encouraged mothers to spend time getting to know their babies and respond to them as individuals, and yet not agonise if they 'got it wrong'. When relating Winnicott's philosophy to modern motherhood, Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple (2011) acknowledge that his work can be considered alongside current, intensive motherhood and helpful in the realisation that mothers who *'allow her child to separate, problem-solve and even experience discomfort bestow greater gifts than the outwardly 'perfect' mother, who stifles independence by fixing every problem immediately'* (Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple, 2011, p12).

Winnicott's approach could not have been further from the Hogg (2001) or Ford (2002) perspective of following a formula or deciding what 'type' of baby you have: '*angel baby, textbook baby, touchy baby'* (Hogg, 2001, pp. 29-32). Winnicott (1964) encouraged mothers to stand back and consider the bond they have with their baby, from inside the womb and beyond, he aimed to empower mothers to trust their own instincts as the only people who really know this new person. Winnicott's approach was practical and information giving rather than

judgemental or opinion based advice, as opposed to a rigid philosophy of child rearing which encourages mothers to follow a prescriptive formula:

> One might ask how a mother can learn about being a mother in any other way than by taking full responsibility? If she does what she is told, she has to go on doing as she is told, and to improve she can only choose somebody better to tell her what to do. But if she is feeling free to act in the way that comes naturally to her, she grows in the job (Winnicott, 1964, p. 25).

This notion of 'natural' motherhood in itself puts pressures on mothers who are anxious and struggling to find this instinct within themselves. It is acknowledged by Davis (2012, p. 120) that Winnicott's claim that *'being a mother of a small baby should be all absorbing for a woman'*, could move to reinforce an unhelpful, homogenous ideology of motherhood. This critique is further supported through the work of Rose (1999, p. 207) who explores, through a historical examination of the development expert advice, how Winnicott's work was concerned with *'the pathology of the normal child and the therapy carried out by the normal mother'*, which she does by *'simply by being devoted to her infant'.* Whilst acknowledging the *'great humanity and sensitivity'* (Rose, 1999, p. 207) in Winnocott's work, the normalization of this ideology of motherhood does not help to ease feelings of pressure for women to struggle to meet it or do not want to.

Mothers that struggle to conform to this ideology turn to other forms of advice as support and whilst, if we accept that all forms of advice come with a well-meaning intention, problems arise, as Goodwin (2007, p. 5) states as '*it tends to come with an ideological sting in its tail'.* Whether advice is offered in relation to how the baby should sleep, be fed or be held, this conflicting advice may leave a mother feeling confused, anxious and guilty for 'failing' in some way and thus adding to the impact of motherhood ideologies (Hays, 1996; Douglas and Michaels, 2005; Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple, 2011) that are embedded within contemporary society.

Throughout modern history, the focus of child-rearing and the impact of the debates stemmed from the particular experts of the day have, according to Cunningham (2012, p. 199), firmly placed *'the spotlight on the family'*. This, according to Burman (2008) has developed as a response to the rise in attention to the importance of attachment in mother-child relationships, following on from

the work of Bowlby (1907-1990) after World War II. Burman (2008, p. 139) associates this to a *'developmental psychological discourse'* which served and continues to serve as a system that *'reinscribes the regulation of women as mothers'.*

Similarly, Humphries and Gordon (1993) in their exploration of parenthood experiences between 1900-1950 recognise a shift in attention onto parenting, from a '*private activity best left to the instincts and intuition of the mother*' (Humphries and Gordon, 1993, p. 49) to a *'matter of major public and national importance'* (Humphries and Gordon, 1993, p. 49) with a rise in baby manuals, health visitors and more than 3,500 infant welfare centres by the late 1930s (Humphries and Gordon, 1993). This can be considered again in relation to the way developmental psychology, according to Burman (2008, p. 139) has regulated aspects of motherhood as it *'homogenises normality and pathologies difference'.*

With no agreed body of knowledge for parenting practice, but with what Foucault would describe as a '*normalizing judgement*' (Foucault, 1977, p. 184) deeply embedded into the various forms of available advice, the potential for feeling scrutinised and judged as a parent is ever present with *'parents bound into the language and evaluations of expertise at the very moment they are assured of their freedom and autonomy'* (Rose, 1999, p.208). The key literature within this discourse are identified in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Key Literature within 'Historical Discourse of Expert Advice'

The next part of this chapter will explore how the development of smart phone technology has added to the opportunities for members of society to be visible in all aspects of their lives.

2.3.2 Online Social Networking

Moving forward to 2018, the feeling of being scrutinised and judged within 'structural surveillance' (Henderson *et al.*, 2010) has been exacerbated by the increase in surveillance opportunities through social networking, including social media sites e.g. Facebook (Facebook, 2004), online parenting forums e.g. Mumsnet (Mumsnet, 2000), and group messaging opportunities e.g. WhatsApp (WhatsApp, 2009). It is important to consider the role that these popular cultural platforms may have on the lives of modern mothers.

Support for such networks and forms of parenting advice come from the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) (2011), themselves a key provider of both antenatal and post-natal parenting courses. They advocate the positive impact that classes and online support can provide. The NCT (2011) state that '*one in five women go online in search of help and questions relating to such things as breast feeding and sleep'*. With more online support for new parents such as *Baby centre* (Babycentre, 1997); *Mumsnet (*Mumsnet, 2000) and *Netmums* (Netmums, 2000) there is more information than ever for new parents. Critics (Lee *et al.*, 2014) though, have accused *'Mumsnet'* and other such forums of being at best judgemental, and at worst, promoting bullying, aggressive and judgemental attitudes. Foster, Longton and Roberts (2003) the co-founders of *'Mumsnet'* collated many of the postings submitted by parents in relation to a wealth of different subjects. Although not an academic source, their work still offers an insight into the underpinning philosophy embedded into their parenting website which is:

> Punctuated by facts, tips and summaries of what the parenting experts have to say. From teething troubles to meddling mother-in-laws, there's not a dilemma faced in the first year of your child's life that you won't find on these pages (Foster, Longton and Roberts, 2003, p. 1).

Research into the effects of parenting websites and social media suggest a potential increase in interpersonal surveillance, corresponding to Foucault's

(1977) exploration of 'panopticism', whereby members of society are observed and scrutinised in relation to all aspects of their lives.

Recent US findings show a tension between the way social media can be both empowering and oppressive for new mothers. Wu Song and Paul (2016) explored the influx of product information available on-line and how this can become overwhelming and often serve as an internal indicator to how making the *'right choices will adequately signal their qualification as 'good mothers'* (Wu Song and Paul, 2016, p. 894). The idea that the materials and resources chosen by mothers for their new babies will somehow link to their ability as a mother is correlated by Wu Song and Paul (2016) to the modern day ideology of *'intensive mothering'* (Hays, 1996, p. 97). Wu Song and Paul's research explores the notion of intensive mothering in relation to the rise in pressure from a consumerism perspective and other cultural developments such as popularity in practices including baby showers, which in recent years have seen a rise in popularity in the UK and is no longer solely a US based practice.

Wu Song and Paul consider these practices as *'making natural those inclinations, dispositions and practice that are in fact culturally constructed'* (Wu Song and Paul, 2016, p. 894). This research acknowledges that women with *'race and class privilege are more favourably positioned to capably navigate the sea of choices presented to them during pregnancy and early motherhood'* (Wu Song and Paul, 2016, p. 895). Research by Anderson and Grace (2015, p. 943) supports this idea and acknowledges that *'social capital comes in the form of digital and critical fluencies and educational and economic privilege'*. It is not only the race or class privilege that will determine the influence that social media networking has on early experiences of motherhood. McDaniel and Coyne (2011) also found differences in the ways that mothers engage with social media to be a contributing factor in terms of feelings of connectedness as a new mother.

Exploring the rise in blogging by new mothers in recent years and examining this practice in relation to maternal well-being found that *'blogging predicted feelings of connection to extended family and friends which then predicted perceptions of social support'* (McDaniel and Coyne, 2011, p. 1509) interestingly though, the use of social media platforms such as Facebook was not found to have this affect.

McDaniel and Coyne suggest that this absence of connectedness may be associated with the way such social networking sites operate with mothers using them to *'look at pictures and status updates, but may not receive much support in return'* (McDaniel and Coyne, 2011, p. 1515). This connectedness may go some towards explaining the rise in the phenomenon of *'mommy blogging'* as labelled by Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple (2011, p. 147). The idea of reduced connectedness through social media is contested by the research of Valchanov, Parry, Glover and Mulcahy (2015) though.

This research suggests that rather than reducing connectedness, through social networking mothers can *'turn to the internet as a source of community, which helps them connect, communicate and share'* (Valchanov *et al.*, 2015, p. 51). They do however, make links to ideologies of motherhood such as *'intensive mothering'* (Hay, 1996, p. 97) and the way mothers may portray themselves publically within social media arenas and the different, private reality. Valchanov *et al.* (2015) suggest a feeling of judgement between mothers through social media and acknowledged varied experiences people have with this way of networking. Whatever the impact of it, a shift in the way new mothers network digitally with family and friends is apparent and the influence that those platforms have within modern motherhood is important to consider (see Figure 5).

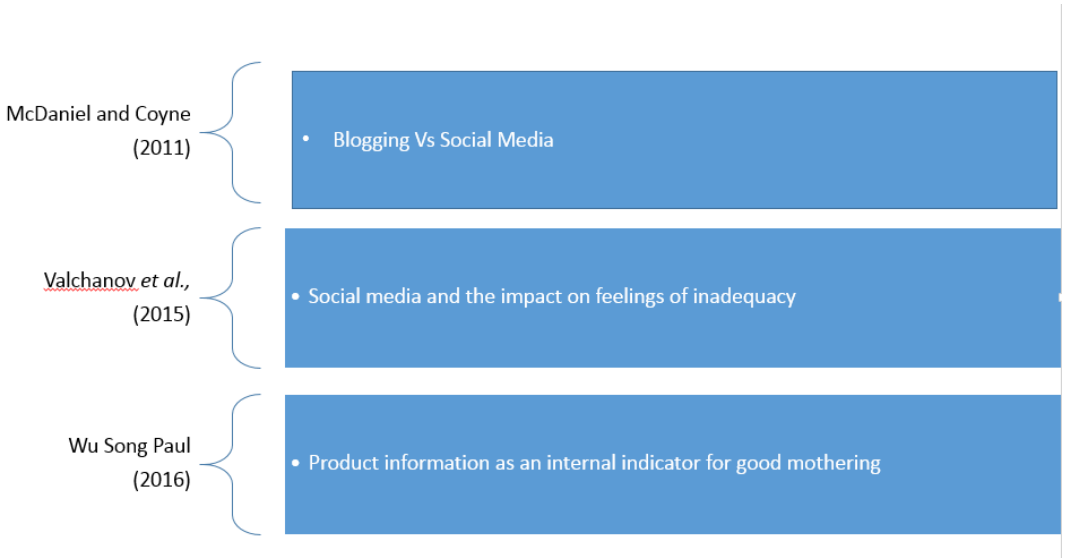

Figure 5: Key Literature within 'Online Social Networking'

The attention given to motherhood and parenting practices generally is not exclusive to child-rearing experts or social networking sites though, a focus on parenting intervention initiatives have also increased from policy makers and will be explored in relation to surveillance within the following section.

2.3.3 Political Intervention

The Labour government's (1997-2007) focus on localised support for families and the introduction of Sure Start Children Centres brought with it a rise in the number of opportunities for parents to meet in various different settings and be offered practical tips and advice relating to different aspects of parenting. These opportunities differed from 'targeted' parenting classes which provide support for parents with a specific focus, e.g. lone parents, teenage parents or parents of children with specific needs, to 'universal' or 'elective' parenting courses which are available to all parents of children within a particular age focus. Examples of these classes include the CANparent (2012) programme which is a government initiative that offers parenting courses in settings including Sure Start Children's Centres, Community Centres and Primary Schools in key areas around England. The courses offered through the CANparent (2012) initiative (including Solihull Approach (solihullapproachparenting, 2012); Positive Parenting (Positive Parenting, 2013); PEEP (Peeple: Supporting Parents and Children to Learn Together, 2014), vary from free drop in sessions, weekly group meetings or costlier, scheduled parenting support sessions. Whether the Government's initial intention or not, the philosophy behind parents, especially mothers having opportunities to meet to discuss any pressures or common aspects of their lives is arguably a positive one. Indeed, Hardyment (2007) in her analysis of advice available to parents agrees that opportunities to meet could be valuable:

> It is the isolated nature of modern parenting that creates anxiety. Getting in touch with likeminded people eager to help and share does far more good than the most enlightened of advice manuals (Hardyment, 2007, p. 305).

Support for forums where new parents can share experiences together comes from other sources. Barlow and Coe (2012) in their review of the *Family Action Perinatal Support Project* identified a gap in the support available for vulnerable mothers, particularly for those who are not considered eligible for the intensive

support from midwives and health visitors, but who may still be suffering from '*mild to moderate depression'* (Barlow and Coe, 2012, p. 11).

Barlow and Coe recognise the potential value for new parents to meet one another, share experiences and support one another in a safe and non-threatening environment. Their research as part of the Warwick Medical School suggested that opportunities including a befriender service and parenting support groups would help to reduce the risk of developing post-natal illness. With a rise in parenting classes offered to families (e.g. those offered through the NCT or CANparent initiative) those who wish to receive additional support through such forums have plenty to choose from. A 2017 evaluation of the CANparent universal parenting programmes did acknowledge though that *'there was no evidence of a reduction in levels of parenting stress, nor was there a significant improvement in satisfaction with being a parent'* (Lindsay and Totsika, 2017, p. 1).

Most recently the *Helping Parents to Parent Report* (Clarke *et al.*, 2017), serving as a form of state surveillance, identified parenting intervention initiatives as a fundamentally important source of support for new parents. Despite acknowledging a limitation in their report in relation to the long term outcomes of parenting intervention programmes in terms of child development, the report, which was commissioned by the Social Mobility Commission (2017), recommended an increase in universal parenting programmes and suggested that they:

> are shown to enhance parental knowledge about child development, equip them with knowledge of the most effective parenting strategies and an understanding of the behavioural tools that support child development, especially in relation to their own interaction with their child (Clarke *et al.,* 2017, p. 30).

With health visitors moving towards more targeted support, it is Early Years Practitioners such as those graduating from the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies who deliver support groups, stay and play sessions and facilitate peer group support. Edwards and Gillies note a rise in recent years in the types of settings offering parenting advice:

> There has been a major expansion of state-sponsored, third sector and private sector initiatives directly targeting families under the rubric of 'parenting support' (Edwards and Gillies, 2011, p. 142).

Their research explores the notion that the advice is offered as a '*classless and gender-neutral activity'* (Edwards and Gillies, 2011, p. 142). They note that the rise in government policy and agenda relating to the intricate detail of all aspects of parenting has led to this huge surge in 'support' offered to parents. They explore whether parents are in fact '*consumers or clients'* (Edwards and Gillies, 2011, p. 142) of this support and conclude that in fact the resources on offer are not entirely genderless or classless, but rather something accessed by middle class consumers and aimed almost entirely at 'mothering skills'. They suggest that middle-class parents view themselves as consumers and '*pioneers who would like to access expert advice'* (Edwards and Gillies, 2011, p. 146)**.**

Similar to the suggestions of Kinser (2010), Edwards and Gillies (2011) suggest that working-class mothers (evaluated by Edwards and Gillies (2011, p. 14) as being *understood in relation to middle-class practices*) consider themselves clients of this sort of support, and indeed view it as more of an intrusion on a judgemental level whereby '*this sort of professional advice could cut across their own sense of common sense expertise as parents'* (Edwards and Gillies, 2011, p. 142). Furedi (2008) agrees, suggesting that the *'role of the parent changes if authority shifts to the professional. The parent now has to listen and defer to outside opinion'* (Furedi, 2008, p. 181). This perspective also connects with the historical exploration of childhood by Cunningham (2012) who stated that during the era 1900-1950, *'by and large, working-class mothers were less likely to adhere to the rules than middle-class mothers'* (Cunningham, 2012, p. 199) and quoted one interviewed mothers as reporting *'they'd some queer ideas at the clinic……. They was full of ideas that was daft'* (Cunningham, 2012, p. 199).

The research conducted by Edwards and Gillies (2011) provides insight into the perceived benefit or otherwise of attending a parenting class. If this support in the form of parenting classes or advice from health professionals is seen as compulsory and judgmental rather than those who are accessing the 'experts' advice as consumers, this has huge implication on the perceived value and outcomes of the support. Similarly, it is important to consider the reality of the support offered. Thomson, Kehily, Hadfield and Sharpe (2011, p. 155), connecting to the research of Wu Song and Paul (2016), suggest that a particular

age group 'consume' this advice and suggest that *'advice across different media, available in a range of formats, peaks most clearly to the 26-35 age groups as experienced consumers'.*

Similarly, whilst pitched as advice for 'parents', baby manuals, forums and parenting courses, according to Edwards and Gillies, are actually in reality related to 'mothering skills', this connects with the 'historical discourse of expert advice' where Humphries and Gordon (1993, p. 49) recognise that throughout history, *'babycare was seen as an exclusively feminine activity'*. Edwards and Gillies (2011) research suggests fathers are unlikely to access the support in the same way mothers will. Where mothers will seek out '*the emotional support about and the practical advice for* (their new baby)' (Edwards and Gillies, 2011, p. 145) according to their research, fathers do not place equal value on such support forums.

Within their geographical research into newly emerging forms of education, Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2012) observes a correlation between political agenda and the movement towards normalizing parenting education. This can also be considered alongside Foucault's second instrument in corrective training, *'normalizing judgement'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 184) whereby through continuous, hierarchical surveillance, judgements can be made upon aspects of societal norms such as appropriate parenting, or mothering, which becomes a '*ritual of truth'* (Foucault, 1977) through a combination of power and knowledge.

The Labour Government involvement in parenting agenda (*Every Child Matters Green* Paper, HM Treasury, 2003 and later *Every Parent Matters*, DfES, 2007a) both sought to promote parent involvement and parenting intervention with an aim to *'tackle both social exclusion and antisocial behaviour'* (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012, p. 96). In 2010 the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition shifted onto a focus on parenting and the movement to encourage universal parenting classes for all parents of young children, including initiatives such as the CANparent (2012) programme highlighted throughout this research.

Just as Edwards and Gillies (2011) suggested, Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson agree that the reality of parenting education has the potential to create tension.

With critics of parenting intervention (Furedi, 2008; Lee *et al.*, 2014) and associations that can be made to Foucauldian (1975) concepts of *'panoptism'* arguing that such government agenda has led to the *'problematization'* (Rose, 1999, p. xi) and *'professionalisation'* (Furedi, 2008, p. 180) of motherhood, the suggestion is that mothering has become a skill that must be learned rather than a relationship strengthened through time and experience. This tension is enhanced by the reactions to parenting intervention, which still brings with it an embedded stigma (Edwards and Gillies, 2011) that the engagement of programmes may bring with it a message of inadequacy, as stated by Burman (2008, p. 134) *'how much more pathological a mother must be if she needs to be taught what is supposed to come naturally'.*

The concern that child and family policy has *'been shaped by middle-class values, with working-class parents being encouraged to behave in middle-class ways'* (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012, p. 96) is described by O'Connor (2011, p. 122) as *'another winning strategy in the game of life'*. This can also be linked to concepts of social capital, whereby working class families may shy away from services available to them within Children's Centres and where middle-class mothers are *'more comfortable accessing professional support and guidance and having the confidence to take what they need and want from the services available to them'* (O'Connor, 2011, p. 122).

Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson also aimed to *'examine the attitudes of parents of different social class positions to the provision of parenting education'* (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012, p. 96). Their findings correlate to both Edwards and Gillies (2008) and Cunningham (2012) that middle-class mothers find it easier to accept the support available to them as consumers and that the underpinning philosophy of parenting courses is that '*parenting education is based on the assumption that parenting is a context free skill'* (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012, p. 96) which can be learnt and taught through parenting courses.

The reactions to political attention on parenting may be different depending on whether they are viewed upon by members of the public as targeted or universal. It is clear though, upon reviewing the political agenda in regards to parenting (see Figure 6), that government intervention strategies will continue to be developed.

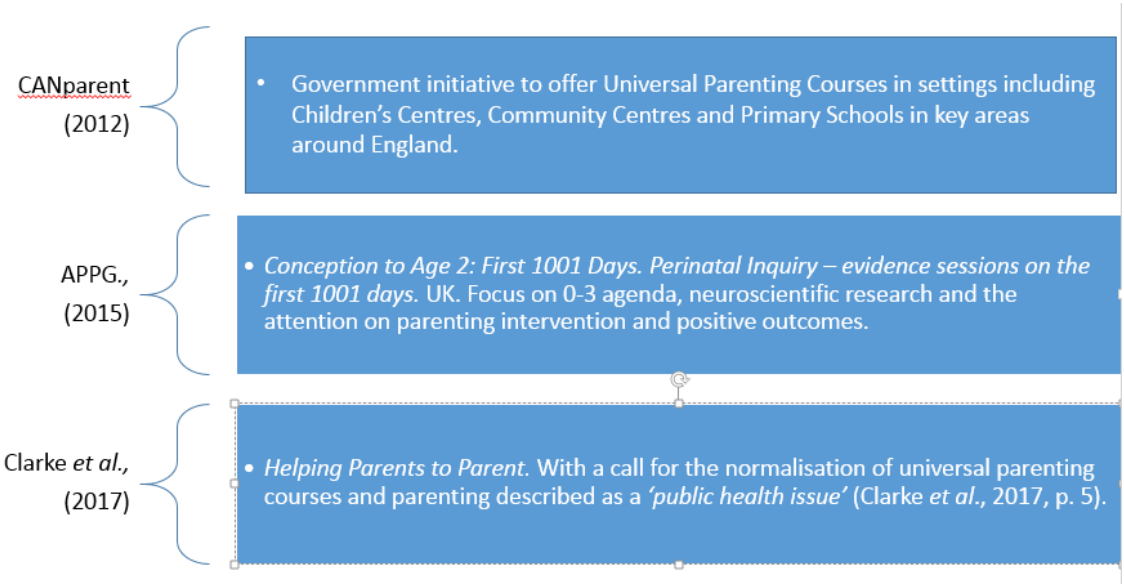

Figure 6: Key literature within 'Political Intervention'

Attention on parenting will now be explored in relation to the suggestion that political intervention and strategies such as the ones highlighted within this part of the literature review are promoting a wider 'parenting culture' within the UK.

2.3.4 The Rise in 'Parenting Culture'

Academics such as those within 'The Centre for Parenting Culture Studies' at Kent University have provided increased critical insight into the rise in universal parenting education. Concerns include state interference in the form of government initiatives (CANparent, 2012) encouraging the normalisation of parenting classes and support in the form of 'expert' advice. Concerns over the rise in social and cultural pressures on new parents, particularly mothers, is not new though. Indeed, the work of Hays (1996, p. 97) highlighted a trend of *'intensive mothering'* whereby modern mothers are exposed to much conflicting advice and encouraged to strive to be the perfect mother whilst also maintaining a career and self-identify, has led to a generation of women under pressure from what Hays (1996) described as *'the cultural contradiction between home and world'* (Hays, 1996, p. 3). Concerns have continued to be raised in other forums about these pressures, and how the increase in government policy has only heightened the potential for this pressure. This is supported with the Foucauldian concepts of surveillance which would suggest that policy and agenda is used by the state as a way of controlling public behaviour, linking again to his exploration

of panopticism. Foucault (1977) considers how those in positions of power manipulate society to create rules, regulations and obedience as part of the *'panoptic machine'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 217).

Furedi (2008) suggests that parenting and the attention that it has received in recent years, has led to 'paranoia' and made parenting practice harder today than ever before. Furedi (2008, p. 99) explores the different forums that promote what he considers, *'parent-scaring'* and the implications this may have on parenting. By constantly undermining parenting as something that should be learnt through the guidance of 'experts' Furedi believes the social pressures placed on parents are increased considerably:

> The representation of parenting as an ordeal is fuelled by strong social pressures that continually inflate the problems associated with it. Parent-scaring has become so deeply embedded in our culture that sometimes commentators wonder how anyone can enjoy the experience of child rearing (Furedi, 2008, p. 99).

Furedi relates the rise in parenting intervention as giving way to a new myth of *'parenting as an ordeal'* (Furedi, 2008, p. 97). What may have originally been considered as an attempt to be more honest about the daily realities of parenting as something that is not always as easy or as natural as once expected, which Furedi suggests is the old myth of *'the naturally competent parent who finds fulfilment in family life'* (Furedi, 2008, p. 97) has in fact become an industry that creates more guilt and pressure on parents to 'get the job right'.

This perspective has been taken further with colleagues of Furedi from the Centre for Parenting Culture Studies at Kent University. Lee, Bristow, Faircloth and Macvarish (2014) commenting on the politics of parenting, raising their concerns and exploring the rise in pressures placed on new parents; with recognition given that this is usually focussed towards mothers in the form of different advice forums, baby manuals and state interference. Lee *et al*. (2014) also examine how neuroscientific research is linked to parenting and how this, along with increased focus on the importance of secure attachment has resulted in added pressures for mothers. Macvarish (2014) associates the rise in attention to baby brain development research with the rise in popularity of 'attachment parenting', a parenting style which advocates a baby-led approach to all aspects of parenting

including breast feeding, touch, co-sleeping and flexible, baby led routines. Macvarish (2014) considers both attachment parenting and the recent attention given to interpretations of neuroscientific research regarding baby brain development to be adding to the pressures on new parents and she lays some of the blame with the media:

> Besides the media appetite for exaggerated neuroscientific claims emanating from university laboratories, and the promotion of particular neuroparenting styles in books, on the internet, and through parent-training courses, manufacturers have also employed brain claims to sell products to parents (Macvarish, in Lee *et al.*, 2014, p. 170).

It is true that many of the parenting courses highlighted within this thesis base the content of their classes on neuroscience research, for example, the Solihull approach (solihullapproachparenting, 2012) use neuroscience research to demonstrate the importance of touch and affection in order to promote positive behaviour in young children. It is through close proximity and regular physical interaction, according to psychologists Gerhardt (2004) and Gopnik (2003) that very young children are able to form the neural connections that will build the foundations for the future.

According to such research, using recent understanding within the field of neuroscience can not only promote good behaviour, but can also help to develop and sustain strong attachments within early relationships. Criticisms have come in the form of Macvarish (2014), Garrett (2017) and Vandenbroeck *et al.* (2017), all of whom question the use and potential misuse of neuroscientific research by policy makers. Macvarish in Lee *et al.* (2014) labels the rise in attention to brain development research in recent years and the way this research is used to explain almost all human behaviour as *'neuromania'* (Macvarish, in Lee *et al.*, 2014, p. 166). Macvarish also points out that neuroscientists themselves often criticise the way that this research is used by *'those who appropriate the authority of scientific objectivity to pursue moral, political, or commercial agendas in the public sphere'* (Macvarish, in Lee *et al.*, 2014, p. 166). These concerns are returned to later on in this chapter through the exploration of some of the parenting courses themselves (2.3.5: 'Evaluations of parenting courses and the 'Neuroparenting' discourse').

Lee *et al.* (2014) moves on to explore other aspects of the modern parenting culture, including concerns relating to the *'breast is best'* (National Health Service (NHS), 2014) campaign which encourages all women to breast feed their babies, a message that is positive in terms of attachment and nutritional value to children, but which does not take into consideration women's rights to choose or some of the various reasons why a woman may be unable to breastfeed. This, according to Lee *et al.* (2014) is another example of pressure being placed on mothers to be conform to an ideology of motherhood, with no thought to the potential harm or damage this may cause in terms of maternal mental health and relationships**.** Similarly, research relating to breastfeeding *'propaganda'* has also been conducted by Simonardottir and Gislason (2018, p. 1). This research centres on global advice which has promoted *'dominant discourses on breastfeeding as the optimal feeding method for infants and a way for mother and child to develop a strong bond*'. Their interviews with women demonstrate a worrying internalisation of the breastfeeding message that leads to a belief of failing in some way if they are unable to breastfeed or chose to bottle feed their baby.

Lee (2014) believes that claims relating to the benefits of breastfeeding have been used to promote *'parenting determinism'* (Lee in Lee *et al.* 2014, p. 217). This echoes the work of Holloway and Pilmott-Wilson (2012) who expressed concerns over parenting support which does not take into account different social contexts. When practices within parenting are promoted through policy and media propaganda and the idea that a 'one size fits all philosophy' to breastfeeding, behaviour management or sleep training is presented as appropriate, the opportunity for suppression and inequality is heightened. This is further supported through the work of post-structuralist writer Rose (1999, p. 211) who claims that *'forms of parental authority, ways of disciplining children, prohibitions on certain types of activity differed among classes and cultures'* and yet, through the means of 'structural surveillance' (Henderson *et al.*, 2010), judgemental and formulaic parenting practice has *'imposed one set of norms as if they were universal'* (Rose, 1999, p. 211).

Similarly, Guldberg (2009, p. 2) suggests that modern motherhood is currently positioned within a wider *'parenting industry'* in which government policy and

popular cultural genres alike prey on the insecurity of new parents and seek to rectify problem parenting. Guldberg's (2009) concerns about these 'experts' relate to what she considers the *'flawed assumptions'* (Guldberg, 2009, p. 141) of what these experts consider to be good advice. Indeed, she suggests much of the advice offered could be construed as *'intrusive and patronising'* (Guldberg, 2009, p. 141), therefore more connected to societal expectations on children's behaviour rather than education. Guldberg does, however acknowledge some value in providing forums for parents to share *'common challenges'* (Guldberg, 2009. p. 143) for example, coping with toddler tantrums or sleep problems. Guldberg, correlating to the earlier discussion regarding the historical forms of expert advice from Davis (2012) and Cunningham (2012) has concerns that extend further and relate to the over-reliance on the self-proclaimed experts to tell parents how to parent instead of empowering parents to trust their own instincts:

> The widespread idea that parents must always seek expert advice or risk raising 'damaged' children who will then do damage to society – an idea continually promoted by government officials, television gurus and numerous newspaper and magazine articles – only contributes to feelings of uncertainty among parents (Guldberg, 2009, p. 143).

Anderegg (2003) also agrees that the notion of encouraging new parents to seek guidance rather than trust or be offered support to develop their own parenting instincts is fundamentally flawed. Exploring the notion of *'over-parenting'* (Anderegg, 2003, p. 4) and how, within the American culture this is associated with the feast of parenting advice forums preying on an already overly-anxious parenting culture:

> Overthinking, overworrying and eventually, overreacting on the decisions arrived at in a worried state. Overparenting is trying to make perfect decisions every single time, in a world that is much more indeterminate and forgiving than most parents think (Anderegg, 2003, p. 4).

Anderegg associates much of this worry to the facts that mothers may no longer live in communities with extended families around to support one another and discuss common problems. Therefore, he suggests that parents use books and magazines as a way of discovering if anyone else is finding the same aspects of parenting as difficult as they are. Anderegg (2003) suggests the main problem

with this form of support-seeking is the media hype that can be associated with common childhood issues becoming a 'crisis'. This trend as described by Anderegg increases the anxiety felt by parents, particularly those who are already feeling isolated without extended family to support them. Anderegg suggests that *'We would certainly expect such people to be more worried about raising their children than their parents were'* (Anderegg, 2003, p. 5). There are similarities to the thoughts of Lee (2014) here who, in her consideration of the CANparent (2012) programmes promoted by the government, voices her concerns about:

> the belief that raising children is just too important and difficult to be left to mere parents and their communities has become a dogma, which allows no room for alternative evidence or viewpoints (Lee *et al.*, *2014*, p. 219).

The above perspective on parenting advice in its various forms presenting parenting as an ordeal or '*predicated on the assumption that unless guided and educated, parental behaviour represents a risk to children'* (Furedi, 2008, p. 104) places no value on the parenting courses, manuals and other forms of advice forums that so many new parents, in particular new mothers, access regularly.

The perspectives from within the parenting culture discourse offers an important insight into the potential harm that may be caused by the attention currently placed on all aspects of parenting (see Figure 7). It must be acknowledged though that there are similarities to be made with criticisms that come from feminist arguments (McNay, 1992; Ramazanoglu, 1994) in relation to the post-structuralist tendency fail to recognise that human beings may react in different ways to such attention.

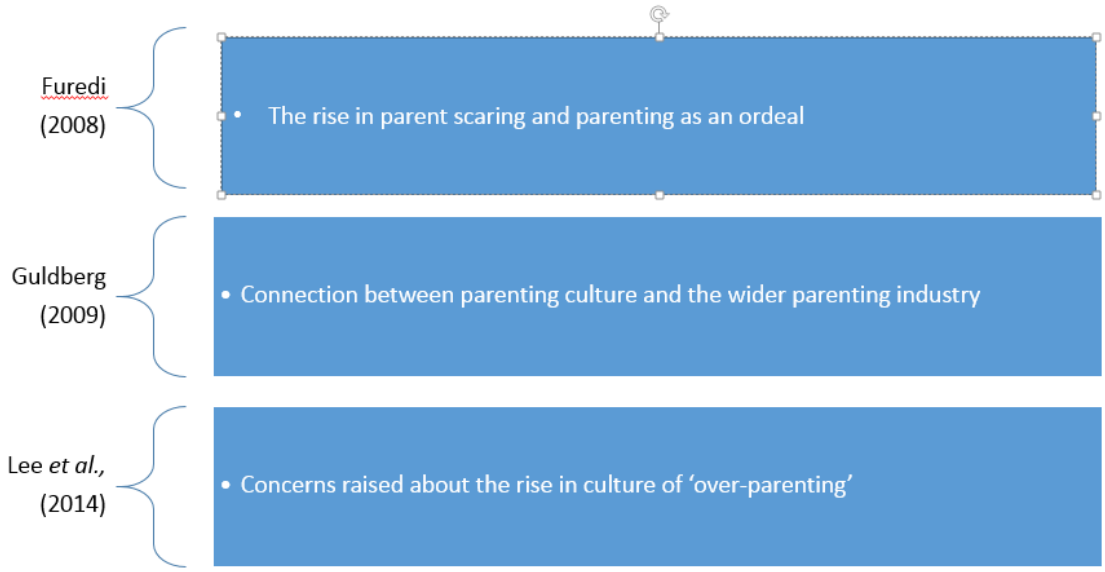

Figure 7: Key Literature within 'The Rise in 'Parenting Culture''

The next part of this chapter will explore opportunities where mothers, rather than being hapless victims of the parenting culture, may take the wealth of available advice and select relevant parts, resisting, reshaping or ignoring the rest. Currie (2008) for example, considers how mothers use parenting advice including parenting courses as a tool for empowerment; taking the advice they see as valuable and building strategies in order to regain some control within the new role.

2.3.5 'Good Enough Mother' Discourse

Within her research into maternal mental health, Currie (2008) relates the notion of being a 'good enough' mother to coping with the demands of the new role. Currie defines coping as including:

> efforts to manage stressful, challenging or difficult events, and is affected by lifestyle changes experienced since the birth of a child, the general difficulty of the mothering role and social pressures to succeed in that role (Currie, 2008, p. 34).

The research conducted by Currie (2008) provides essential insight into some of the factors that may increase motivation for attending parenting classes. She describes the link between being *'good enough'* and *'a sense of feeling in control'* (Currie, 2008, p. 35), similarities can be made here to the work of Winnicott (1964)

who also placed high emphasis on the importance of feeling 'good enough' as a mother.

This striving for feeling in control in a situation that can be very different from the daily realities of life before children could, according to Currie, encourage and empower mothers to seek to form strategies that can be implemented to go some way to restoring those feelings of control. In this respect, rather than being exposed to different forms of the *'parenting culture'* (Furedi, 2008; Lee *et al.*, 2014), attending a parenting course could be viewed as a proactive measure taken by new mothers to restore the feeling of control in their lives. The concern should perhaps be with the mothers who do not feel able to access the different forms of parenting support available to them. The stigma associated with admitting to somehow not be coping and the association with being 'good enough' put these women in a potentially vulnerable position (Currie, 2008).

It is during the transition period into new motherhood that the feelings of coping or not coping are at their highest: *'a changed self-identity, reduced freedom and levels of tiredness never experienced before'* (Currie, 2008, p. 36) are all factors contributing to these feelings. It is only when mothers take back some of the control by implementing strategies and building self-confidence that the stress and loss of control can be reduced. In this sense, parenting courses have the opportunity for mothers to reflect on their experiences and feel 'good enough'. Similarly, in their exploration of modern motherhood, Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple (2011, p. 5), relate the developing feelings of being in control to an acceptance of feeling 'good enough'. They suggest that generationally, more is expected of mothers than ever before and they relate this expectation to a feeling of responsibility within modern mothers in relation to the historical battles with equality. This manifests itself now as a feeling within modern motherhood of *'you can be anything. You can do anything….. We are supposed to have it all'* Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple (2011, p. 4) including engaging fully with education and career pathways alongside being of a devoted, natural mother. According to their research this sense of responsibility has led to an internalised feeling of pressure whereby *'perfection became an addiction, motherhood a competitive sport'* (Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple (2011, p. 4), only

lessened when mothers relinquish the belief that *''you can do anything' means 'you can do everything''* (Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple (2011, p. 4) and move forward within their own secure identify (Bassin, 1994; Miller, 2005).

This tension is exacerbated when considered alongside other societal messages through developmental psychology *where 'mothers are portrayed as so central to, and absorbed within their children's development that any assertion of power or independence on their parts appears to be at the expense of damaging their children'* (Burman, 2008, p. 134). With such conflicting discourses embedded into the psyche of society, it is little wonder that motherhood brings with it a deep challenge in relation to the navigating, resisting or reshaping of these discourses.

This feeling of taking back control of their lives can also be associated with the rise in online communities whereby parents use the forums, and advice available to them, to share experiences of the day to day aspects of being a new parent. The popularity of the online parenting website *'Mumsnet'* (Mumsnet, 2000) provides opportunities for parents, usually mothers, to post questions and wait for helpful responses. Within their investigations of *'Mumsnet'* (Mumsnet, 2000) as a new form of feminism, Pedersen and Smithson (2013, p.100) describe motivations for accessing online communities as *'the need for support and advice'*, in this respect then, although accessing online forums bring with it issues in relation to increased feelings of inadequacy (McDaniel and Coyne, 2011; Valchanov, 2015) in relation to exposure to aggressive and judgemental responses to posts, the initial motivations for accessing advice comes from parents trying to create the strategies that they can implement in order to return the sense of control highlighted by Currie (2008).

The rise in the attention on parenting has also been linked to the increasingly popular makeover television programmes such as '*Supernanny'* (*C*hannel 4, 2004-2012). With Furedi (2004) describing the rise in such advice forums as directly linked to the *'professionalisation of parenting'* (Furedi, 2004, p. 180), whereby a:

> lack of belief in parental competence has been absorbed by contemporary culture and is regularly communicated to the public through sensational accounts about the failure of fathers and mothers (Furedi, 2004, p. 180).

During his collection of 23 interviews of first time parents though, Gambles (2010, p. 707) found that mothers who have watched such programmes '*demonstrated resistance and scepticism of the techniques and approaches espoused by supernanny'.* It is interesting to consider how some mothers use make-over TV and other advice forums as a way of empowering their own situation and boosting their self-esteem and overall parenting skills (Gambles, 2010), linking to both empowerment and autonomy. Other sources, however, question the motivation of such programmes. Lunt (2008) in his analysis of makeover TV remained unsure about the possible implications of such media and questioned whether similar programmes lead to *'docile subjects'* (Lunt, 2008, p. 545) or indeed, whether opportunities to reflect on parenting *'pragmatically facilitates self-help in parents'* (Lunt, 2008, p. 545). This dichotomy relates back to the earlier discussion surrounding the rise in influential social media and how it can promote practical support and source of community (Valchanov, *et al.*, 2015) in some cases and a source for reducing societal connectedness (McDaniel & Coyne, 2011) in others. This is a discussion which reoccurs within the literature review. The tension between whether parenting education is an oppressive or an empowering tool appears to be at the very heart of this debate and is a theme running through each dominant discourse.

Johnson *et al.*'s (2009) research into breastfeeding practices resonates with this theme and recognises the different ways mothers react to 'expert' advice. Johnson *et al.* (2009) and Currie (2008) both suggest that it is the very act of trying to take control back that leads women to search for strategies, such as those found within parenting courses, and how this perception of control can be linked to coping and being 'good enough'. Similarly, Thomson, Kehily, Hadfield and Sharpe (2011) in their research of modern motherhood and the vast amount of contradictory, and at times, judgemental advice from experts, discuss *how* mothers process the advice they are exposed to**.** Mothers, they suggest, develop the skill of becoming selective with regard to the many different forms of advice available to them. Thomson *et al.* (2011, p. 156) acknowledges though, that this requires some *'affective manoeuvring'*.

It is interesting to consider the various forms of advice as a potential empowering opportunity, at a time where there is more available information than ever before, if mothers are able to extract from it helpful information and not engage with concepts that they do not consider to be relevant to them or their baby. In this research it was essential to capture the experiences of mothers who have been 'exposed' to the parenting industry.

Research (Furedi, 2008; Lee *et al*., 2014) has been explored that suggests that, through parenting education, mothers are manipulated and insecurities heightened at an already potentially vulnerable and isolating time of their lives. Other perspectives though (Barlow and Coe, 2012), suggest that universal parenting courses provide an opportunity for mothers to socialise with other mothers, reduce isolation encourage reflective parenting. Supporters of parenting courses would suggest that the different forms of advice be it baby manuals, makeover TV, website forums and in particular the increasingly popular parenting intervention programmes offer comfort and in fact, build confidence for new parents. The issue though, according to Furedi (2008, p. 183) is not *'whether parenting needs to be learned but whether it can be taught'* and how the rise in parenting education, as outlined within this chapter undermines the value of companionable learning (Robert, 2010) as a crucial component of the emergence of strong relationships.

Returning to the work of Foucault (1977), the strive that mothers feel to be 'good enough' comes not exclusively from the judgements made by those in positions of power, for example health visitors, midwives or from educational settings, but also from other mothers. The pressure and feelings of judgement from the surveillance of other mothers may go some way to providing insight into the motivations of attending a parenting course. Rose (1999) agrees that the internalisation and scrutiny of motherhood creates a '*constant scrutiny of our inherently difficult interactions with our children and each other, a constant judgement of their consequences for health, adjustment, development, and intellect'* (Rose, 1999, p. 213).

With comparisons being made between mothers relating to the reaching of developmental milestones, achievements in sleep training and behaviour

management techniques, the pressure is certainly on for mothers to feel 'good enough'. Linking again to Foucault's (1977) exploration of Bentham's *'panopticon'* whereby through constant surveillance and the manipulation of members of society, eventually *'universal norms'* are created where *'the disciplines…hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 222).

This is further supported by Henderson *et al*. (2010) and their suggestion that 'interpersonal surveillance' is the most powerful level of surveillance in motherhood. Given this suggestion, perhaps the concepts put forward by Furedi (2008), Guldberg (2009) and Lee *et al.* (2014) that firmly place the pressures internalised by new mothers at the door of the 'structural level' of surveillance including state and media interference in parenting, are missing some of the other underlying issues. In their research Henderson *et al.* (2010) also noted that the comparison of parenting methods, parenting styles and practices is at its *'most common amongst middle and upper-middle class mothers'* (Henderson *et al.* 2010, p. 234), supporting the previously mentioned research of Edwards and Gillies (2011) and Holloway and Pilmott-Wilson (2012).

Correlating further to the work of Henderson *et al.* (2010), explorations of contested ideologies of motherhood (Johnston and Swanson, 2006; Kerrick and Henry, 2016) associate the internalisation of pressures with the transmission of messages throughout society. Johnston and Swanson (2006) refer to these messages as:

> events, actions and images we create, and we consume packaged meanings that are perpetuated by societal groups to make sense of the seemingly random behaviours, beliefs, values and identifies that we claim and perform' (Johnston and Swanson, 2006, p. 509).

The key literature explored within this discourse is outlined in Figure 8.

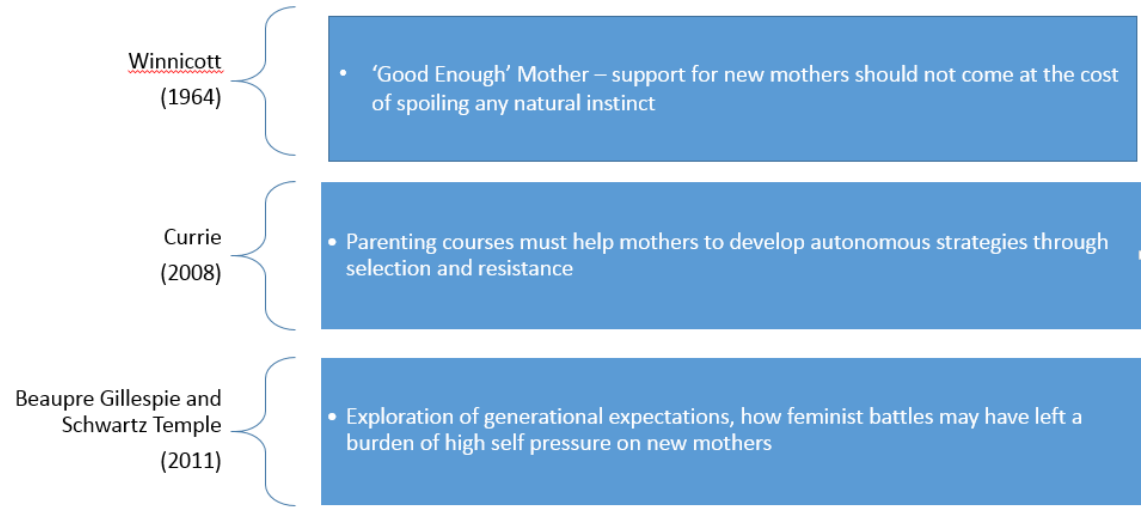

Figure 8: Key Literature within 'Good Enough Mother' Discourse

Along with the motivating factors in attending, an objective of this research was to explore the perceived benefit or otherwise in attending a parenting course. In order to explore this perceived effectiveness and to gain insight into the motivations to attend them, it is useful to examine some of the many evaluations of the specific universal parenting courses currently available in the UK. However, the evaluations themselves are explored with a critical eye given that they are, rather tellingly, often produced by the founders of the courses themselves.

2.3.6 Evaluations of parenting courses and the 'Neuroparenting' discourse

The literature thus far has explored parenting education and the, largely, potentially harmful consequences for new mothers. Concerns focus on problematising motherhood as something that must be learnt and taught. The historical context surrounding parenting education shows that child-rearing philosophies are nothing new and although the huge amount of information available to parents on how to 'get the job right' has been around certainly since World War II, historians such as Davis (2012) and Cunningham (2012) recognise that with the increased presence of online forums and parenting courses in local area, and with support and promotion that came from the Coalition government (2010) and more recently with the *'Helping Parents to Parent'* report (Clarke *et al.*, 2017), the focus on parenting seems to be at is highest. It is therefore important to explore some of the universal parenting courses and parent's

experiences of these in order to evaluate the perceived benefit of those who attend them. Furedi (2008) expresses his concerns over the:

> rarely asked question – 'is this doing any good?' The reluctance to evaluate the role of this industry is all the more surprising since there is little evidence that it has helped men and women to become better fathers or mothers (Furedi, 2008, p. 180).

Whilst difficult to find long term evidence regarding the benefit of parenting classes, it is possible to provide some insight into evaluations of some of the courses currently available. The CANparent (Parenting UK, 2018) initiative held trials between 2012 and 2014 and was a scheme which offered £100 vouchers for local courses in 4 target areas (Camden, Middlesborough, High Peak in Derbyshire and lastly, Bristol.). The trial was extended until March 2015 and a final evaluation was completed at this time. The pilot itself offered a range of parenting courses across the different areas in settings in local areas such as Children's Centres, Community Centres, Health Centres and Libraries. Parenting programmes offered included the Solihull Approach (*solihullapproachparenting*, 2012); Positive Parenting (*Positive Parenting*, 2013) and PEEP (*Peeple: Supporting Parents and Children to Learn Together*, 2014). These courses offered a range of opportunities for parents with different focuses threaded throughout, but with the common aims remain the same; normalizing parenting courses to become as routine as antenatal classes and supporting parents with the daily realities of bringing up children aged 0-5years.

The CANparent final evaluation (Lindsay *et al.*, 2014) reported that the overall demand for the *'universal parenting courses was 2956 participants, most of whom were mothers (91%), the overall take-up was substantially lower than the initial DfE planning assumption'* (Lindsay *et al.*, 2014, p. 35). Despite the lower than expected take up rate of the classes offered to parents, the final evaluation is mainly positive about the trial overall. Although the review is largely from a business perspective**,** evaluating the perceived success of the courses along with a focus on participant opinion as to whether they would have been willing to pay for such a course in the future, the report does offer some insight into the reasons behind why participants felt motivated to attend the courses in the first place,

individual motivators highlighted from follow-up interviews with 50 parents included:

- Desire for parenting advice, guidance, tips
- Experiencing problems related to parenting
- Interested in learning (in general, or specifically about being a parent)
- Desire to meet local parents
- Looking for free activities to do to fill in time
- Desire that both parents would develop a shared parenting approach (Lindsay *et al.*, 2014, p. 35).

The evaluation suggests that courses are offered to parents in a range of formats including *'face-to-face groups, one-to-one, blended face-to-face with online and or self-directed learning components and pure on-line delivery'* (Lindsay *et al.*, 2014, p. 35). The evaluation states that the aim of the universal parenting classes offered is to:

> Increase support for parents to help them develop positive relationships and communicate better with their children, encourage good behaviour, and prevent the development of later problems (Lindsay *et al.,* 2014, p. 35).

As this was not a longitudinal study it is difficult to be clear as to the prevention of *'development of later problems'*. In this respect it is possible to make links back to the post-structuralist perspective (Foucault, 1975; Rose, 1999) that parenting is, in some way being *'problematized'* (Rose, 1999, p. xi) without a clear rationale. However, the report continues to view the overall effectiveness of the universal parenting courses as positive, with key findings suggesting that:

> after attending a parenting class, parents felt more satisfied with being a parent, saw themselves as more effective parents, and had higher levels of mental well-being than before taking the parenting class (Lindsay *et al.*, 2014; p. 20).

The 'mental well-being' referred to here is based upon the parents who attended a class completing standardised surveys measuring *'parent mental well-being (Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being scale), parent satisfaction, confidence and sense of efficacy as a parent (Being a Parent Scale); and aspects of their child's behaviour (Parenting Daily Hassles Scale)'* Lindsay *et al.***,** 2014, p. 51.

Although the final evaluation of the CANparent programme is largely positive, critics of parenting education courses including Lee (2014) associate these programmes with parental determination which *'disregard any possibility that*

learning by experience, and the tacit knowledge that accumulates this way, is a perfectly good and acceptable way to go about raising children' (Lee, 2014, p. 219). Whilst, perhaps unsurprisingly, the evaluators consider the programme to be a success, Lee (2014) argues that such programmes have created a 'parallel universe' whereby:

> those who hold a belief in the need for parenting education simply cannot accept that parenting may neither need nor want expert advice: the only conclusion that they can draw is that more must be done to find ways to train parents and to increase 'demand' – that is, parent's willingness to be trained (Lee *et al.*, 2014, p. 219).

The report highlights the importance of parenting courses as a way to promote early intervention and parenting support, and relates this to the importance of parenting and the critical period of the 0-3 years in terms of child development and emotional attachment. The report comments on the importance of removing any potential stigma attached to parenting education and suggest that accessing support should be as normal as attending antenatal support, this can also be associated with the recent *'Helping Parents to Parent'* report (Clarke *et al.*, 2017) which recognised the stigma attached to targeted provision and recommended future parenting intervention programmes be labelled *'under the umbrella term 'universal''* (Clarke *et al.*, 2017, p. 5). Similarly, the authors of the CANparent evaluation (Lindsay *et al.*, 2014) acknowledge that there is still some way to go here and that there is stigma attached to attending a parenting courses, thus explaining the lesser than expected take-up for the classes offered in the trial locations. In addition to this, the recent evaluation of the CANparent trial acknowledged that despite the rationale, it cannot yet be determined whether '*universal interventions have measurable benefits to overall levels of behaviour problems in the population'* (Lindsay and Totsika, 2017, p. 10). This has not halted the increase in the proposals of more intervention programmes by the government though.

The Solihull Approach (*solihullapproachparenting*, 2012) is a programme that was offered through the CANparent initiative and through other settings and providers across the UK, they offer online and group parenting courses and training courses for practitioners. This approach makes strong links to neuroscientific research and uses this as the foundation for their courses, in

particular, the '*Understanding Your Child'* universal parenting course (*solihullapproachparenting*, 2012).

Russell (2014) attended this 10 week course within the Solihull area and reported within the professional journal *'Children and Young People Now'* (2014) that her experience was positive, with opportunities to meet in a group and share experiences in a non-threatening and non-competitive environment, the overall experience gave her the chance to reflect on her parenting style and the time she spent with her child. She acknowledges that the stigma associated with parenting courses is still there, that by admitting the need for some help and support, parents are in some way admitting defeat:

> Signing up to a parenting course crosses the line…. Telling people you've signed up to a parenting course invites them to question the very foundations of your self-worth and identity as a parent (Russell, 2014, p. 24).

Connections can be made back to the research of Edwards and Gillies (2011, p. 141) who identified a divide between those who could be identified as *'clients'* and those who could be considered *'consumers'* within parenting education opportunities. Russell (2014) recommends that the term 'course' be removed in order to lessen the stigma in some way that parenting is something that needs to be taught. Using her own experience as an example, she now considers parenting courses as a reflective opportunity to:

> step back and observe our children. We need some structured guidance to help us reflect on all the factors that make them behave in the way they do; some development, some circumstantial (Russell, 2014, p. 24).

Other evaluations of the Solihull Approach are also very positive. Three separate articles within the Community Practitioner Journal (Maunders, Giles and Douglas, 2007; Johnson and Wilson, 2012; Cabral, 2013) report positive experiences of attendees through opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of behaviour and relationships. Maunders *et al.* (2007) explored some of the experiences of mothers in relation to support from community health professionals and reflected on the vital role that health professionals play in supporting new parents and helping them to feel understood and a *'good mother'* (Maunders *et al*., 2007, p. 28). Such progammes though, do bring with them a very real concern (Burman,

2008, p. 154) that rather than identifying a problem embedded into society, they serve to *'provide a scapegoat'* whereby the '*locus of the deficit'* can revolve around mother child relationships rather than identifying where and how any real problems may have originated, in this sense, these parenting intervention programmes serve to *'negate state responsibility'* (Burman, 2008, p. 154).

The Solihull Approach, whilst initially used by health professionals as a targeted programme moved forward in 2012 when the *'Understanding Your Child's behaviour'* was made available as a 10-week universal parenting programme. It is important to acknowledge that Douglas, co-author of one of the evaluations of the Solihull Approach, founded the Solihull Approach and could therefore, within Foucauldian concepts, be considered a person in a position of power who uses their position to engage in *'hierarchical observation'* and *'normalizing judgement'* as a way to produce knowledge within *'the means of correct training'* (Foucault, 1977, pp. 170-194), in this case, a parenting programme, thus making it difficult for the evaluation to be considered entirely impartial.

Similarly, to the previous parenting programme evaluations, Johnson and Wilson (2012) in their evaluation of the Solihull Approach suggested that the combination of psychotherapeutic and neurodevelopmental concepts which the approach is formed on, provide opportunities for parents to not only build their own self esteem but also understand their children better. The approach claims to use containment, reciprocity and learning theory as *'the basis for developing a relationship model that focuses on providing a containing experience for parents so that they are able to be calm, process emotions and retain the capacity to think'* (Johnson and Wilson, 2012, p. 29). This research again reports positive experiences of participants with parents reporting *'increased knowledge', 'making changes'* and *'improved interactions'* (Johnson and Wilson, 2012, p. 29).

These claims would be contested through the 'parenting culture' discourse, as previously highlighted Macvarish (2014) and colleagues at the Centre for Parenting Culture Studies raised their concerns about the overemphasis and misuse of neuroscientific research by those in positions of power which serves to create a culture of *'neuromania'* (Macvarish, in Lee *et al*., 2014, p. 166). Responses to the rise in the use of neuroscientific research have continued to

develop in recent years. Garrett (2017, p. 14) explores the use of an increased *'medical model'* to suggest a correct way of parenting which is grounded in the belief that children's brains are *'irrevocably wired after the age of three'*. Garrett (2017, p. 13) states that *'across a range of disciplines, including neuroscience, many researchers question the validity of such claims and express concern about the direction of polices'*, a recent publication from the *'Contesting Early Childhood'* series observes similar concerns about how the *'neurosciences are used to shape early childhood education as a commodity and an investment of which we expect an economic return'* (Vandenbroeck *et al*., 2017, p. 1). Similarly, from a post-structuralist perspective, Rose (1999, p. 211) explores the regulation of motherhood *'as bolstered by dubious psychological theories of maternal instinct, mother-child bonding, and primary maternal preoccupation'* echoed further by research from Wall (2017) who expresses her concern about representations of attachment that are linked to young children and brain research within parenting education information**.** The way that neuroscience research is used by those in positions of power is arguably then, another form of state surveillance (Henderson *et al.,* 2010) whereby the consciences of new mothers are manipulated in such a way that the message that there is a right way to parent is internalised.

The final report also highlights the *'positive impact of parenting programmes'* (Cabral, 2013, p. 33) with acknowledgement given that it is important that parenting programmes continue to be delivered and available to parents during these *'financially challenged times'* (Cabral, 2013, p. 33). Through her survey Cabrel suggested:

> a significant increase in self-esteem and parenting sense of competence; improvement in the parental locus of control, a decrease in hyperactivity and conduct problems and an increase in pro-social behaviour (Cabral, 2013, p. 30).

Some of the above claims are unsubstantiated given that the research was conducted over the 10-week period of the parenting programme; a longitudinal study may have proved more reliable in terms of measuring the effectiveness, perceived or otherwise, of the parenting programme.

Similarly, when reviewing the effectiveness of the Triple P parenting programme, Ramaekers and Vandezande (2013, p. 80) describe an *'apparent contradiction'* between parenting courses as a way of encouraging parenting to become more independent and the prescriptive, one dimensional nature of parenting courses themselves. Ramaekers and Vandezande acknowledge the contradiction as *'parents (apparently) can only become independent problem solvers after having actively participated in information sessions on parenting'* (Ramaekers and Vandezande, 2013, p. 80). Similarly concerns have been expressed by Lee in relation to the over emphasis on the *'prejudices and imaginations of those committed unquestioningly to the importance of 'parent training''* (Lee *et al*., 2014, p. 220) and by Wall (2017) who contest the way neuroscience research is used by policy makers and those developing parenting programmes as a way of making *'vigilant and frequent responsiveness a necessity for all parents who wish to maximise their children's brain potential'* (Wall, 2017, p. 9).

The tension between the psychotherapeutic, neurodevelopmental discourse of parenting education versus critical, post-structuralist perspectives means that there is no agreed benefit of parenting courses or agreement on how the focus on parenting on a wider scale is impacting on the experiences of modern motherhood (see Figure 9).

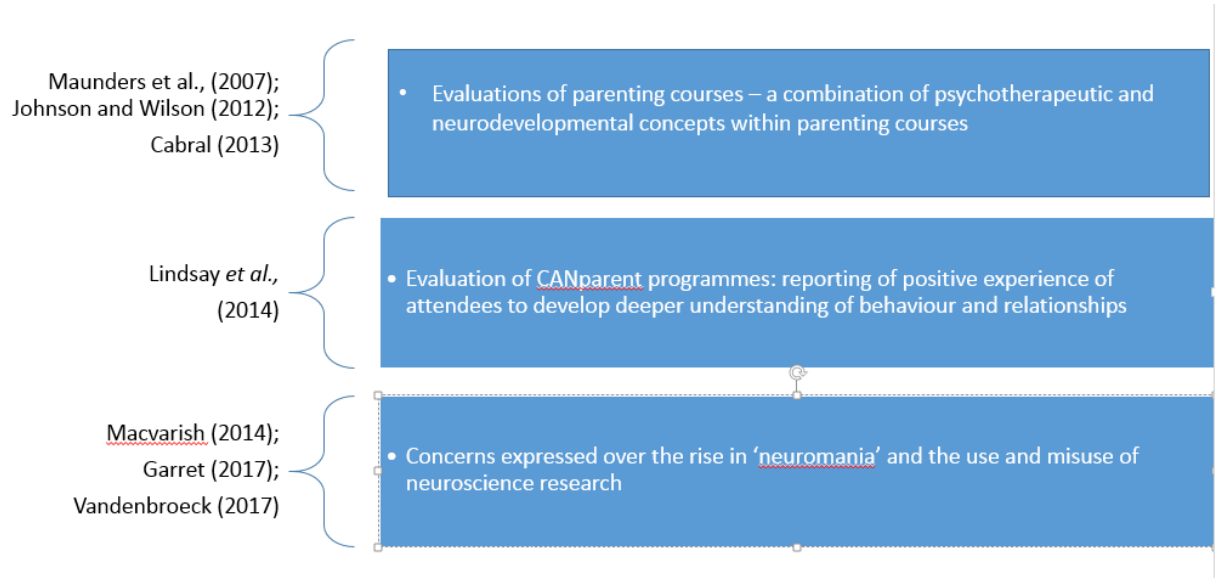

Figure 9: Key Literature from 'Evaluations of parenting courses and the 'Neuroparenting' discourse'

It is important to now consider the way in which the dominant discourses work together to provide an insight into these experiences and how they will be explored alongside the reflections of the mothers that participated within the research.

2.4 Outline of the Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is presented (Figure 10) which is shaped around the dominant discourses and themes from literature review. Outlined below, through the Feminist Post-Structuralist worldview, Henderson *et al.*'s (2010) levels of surveillance are provided (yellow circles) as embedded and experienced within the 6 dominant discourses and themes (blue circles) from the literature review. These dominant discourses outline and highlight the different pressure points within modern motherhood stemming from historical interest and expert advice to more recently intensified pressures in the form of intrusion through social media platforms and government intervention programmes, all of which have served to heighten the opportunity for added pressure and attention on mothers. At the centre of these discourses is modern motherhood (green circle) and, in keeping with the feminist post-structuralist philosophical approach, the recognition that mothers have multiple and varied reactions to their experiences.

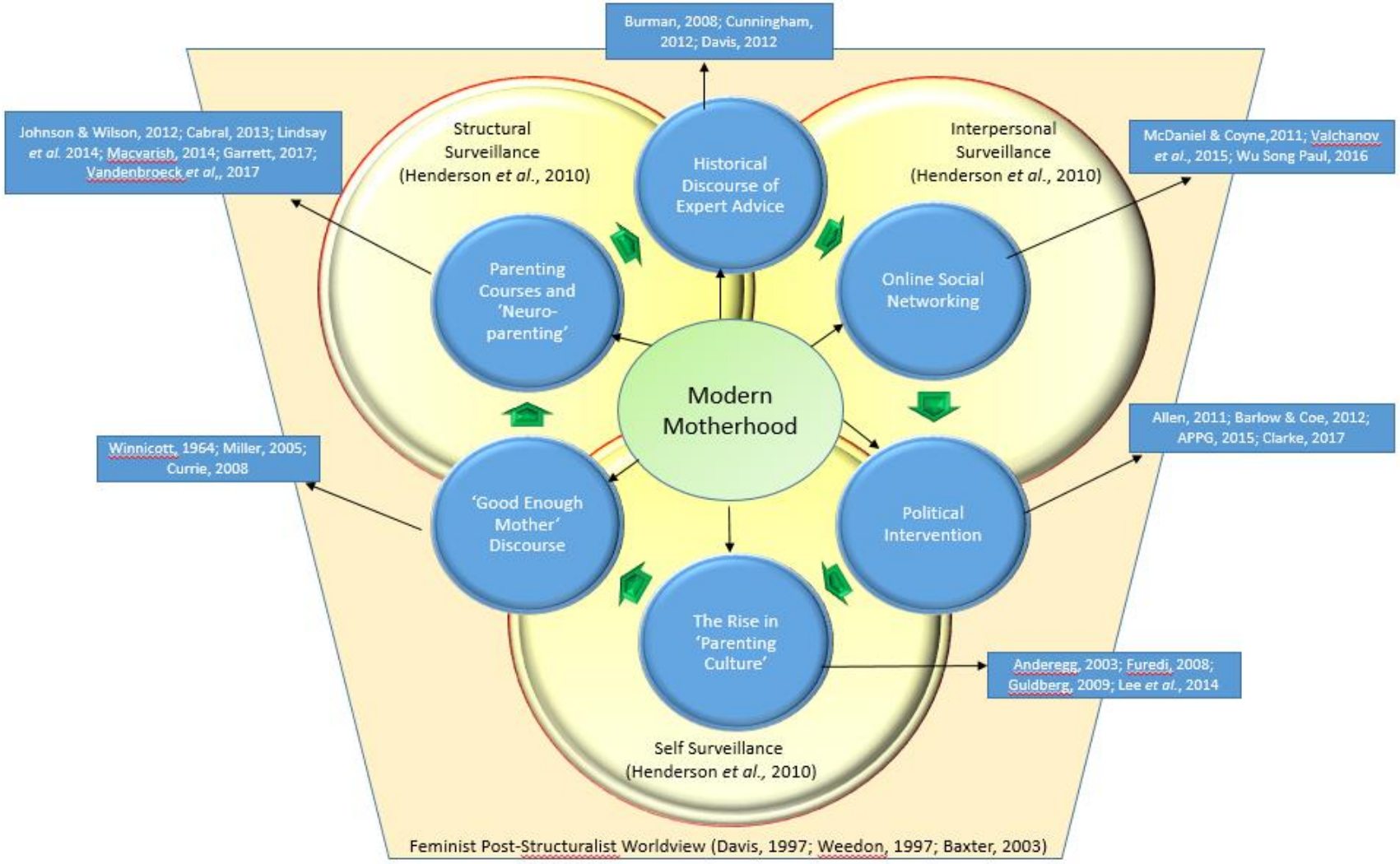

Figure 10: Surveillance of Modern Motherhood - The Conceptual Framework

2.5 Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout the exploration of the dominant discourses and themes within the literature review and within the conceptual framework (Figure 10) there are several highly conflicting strands. These strands have been considered through a feminist post-structuralist worldview in order to explore modern motherhood, particularly in relation to different forms of surveillance that are embedded within these experiences.

What is clearly missing through the dominant discourses is the voice of the mother. With acceptance throughout the literature that 'parenting education' is indeed aimed at mothers, the varied experiences and reflections of mothers who have attended these courses is noticeably absent. As evidenced throughout this chapter, a purely post-structuralist perspective would not allow the research to acknowledge the opportunities for women to demonstrate agency or individualism within their experiences, whereas a purely feminist perspective would not provide opportunities for a deeper exploration of the wider social constructs that lie within the discursive practices of the participants. A combined feminist post-structuralist perspective therefore, as highlighted by Baxter (2003, p. 2) allows the research to develop and explore the rich stream of evidence within the varied reflections of mothers and to acknowledge all possible experiences within the *'productive contradiction'* of the methodology. This combined approach ensures that the voices of mothers are heard through the findings which, as evidenced throughout the literature review, are currently missing. The next chapter will explore the methods and approaches that were adopted in order to meet the aims of the research and to ensure a contribution to knowledge which centres on the experiences and reflections of mothers.

Chapter 3 – METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to gain a deeper understanding into the discursive practices and constructs of modern motherhood in the UK, through a feminist post-structuralist analysis of experiences of mothers that have attended universal parenting courses. The objectives of the research were:
Objectives:

- To explore the experiences of mothers that have attended universal parenting courses.
- To consider the constructs of modern motherhood in relation to different levels of surveillance.
- To produce a greater understanding of some of the pressures within modern motherhood in the UK today.

This chapter will provide a critical exploration of contemporary methodological debates, research ethics and the implications in relation to this piece of research so that the originality and significance of the investigation can be fully appreciated. The feminist post-structuralist epistemological and ontological approach that underpins this research has been explored through the dominant discourses in the literature review and with this is mind, wider methodological aspects of this research will be considered throughout this chapter, including my own research position, an exploration of the development of the chosen methods and their appropriateness. Finally, a description of research procedures and an outline of the research process will be provided.

3.2 Research Position

In order to move forward as a researcher and to develop my own professional practice I reflected upon my position within the research itself. This began by considering my ontological approach as detailed at the beginning of this thesis, with recognition that my personal experiences as a mother and of meeting other new mothers were fundamental to the feminist post-structuralist ontological and epistemological approach I would take throughout this research.

From a professional perspective I also explored the concept of 'insider research' (Drake and Heath, 2011) when considering my position within the research. On first reflection, the notion of 'insider' researcher is something with which I struggled to align myself with as I am an insider within my own institution, as an academic I am helping to equip students with the relevant theory and knowledge they need for their chosen professions. I am no longer an 'insider' within the early childhood sector itself though and ultimately it is my students' practice that I support and the service they deliver for children and families. Therefore, a deeper insight into the aims of a professional doctorate and the different research perspectives within it was an important place to begin when reflecting upon my position within this research.

Lee (2009) describes professional doctorates as *'being associated with the acquisition of knowledge and research skills, to further advance or enhance professional practice'* (Lee, 2009, p. 6). On a professional level, I can see how this relates directly to me within my institution and beyond, by developing my own research skills as a lecturer and member of a faculty team; this will have a directly positive impact on my own pedagogical practice and the discussion will make recommendations that impact graduates as they move forward into multi-disciplinary roles, many of which will involve supporting new mothers.

Practitioner experience is premised on burgeoning experience of professional knowledge that I hold as an academic, coupled with my personal experience of raising children. These factors contribute to my interest in this field of knowledge and my ontological approach, as is also noted by Drake and Heath (2011) and Newby (2014). An important part of navigating the professional doctorate is by understanding one's own position within the research in a reflexive way. Recognising myself as an insider-outsider researcher means I can see that I possess '*multiple perspectives'* (Oliver, 2010, p. 116). As both an academic and someone who has an insight into the professional sector, it is possible that this would impact on the way I approached the study and interpreted the data.

I no longer work directly with children or parents and therefore I believe I can no longer class myself as wholly an 'insider' researcher. My position, along with my own personal and professional experiences have equipped me with a deep

understanding of the research area though and the different components of my role have also given me a strong network of those currently working within the sector. My research will not only make a direct impact on the organisation I work within in terms of programme development, the Teaching Excellence Framework (DfE, 2017) and the Research Excellence Framework (HEFCE, 2014), it will also have implications for the professional sector that I still very much consider myself a part of, on a 'community' level.

The knowledge and experience that I hold within this research comes from my own professional background and specialist areas within my teaching. Through regular attendance as a strategy group member at the Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network (ECSDN), conference presentations and published research into leadership in the early years (Simmons and Yates, 2014; Yates and Simmons, 2014), I monitor changes within the sector and reflect on what this means for students and the wider Early Childhood community. The position of maintaining inside knowledge and access to an understanding of the research area whist maintaining some level of distance is something that Drake and Heath (2011) explore through their discussion of the insider-outsider continuum; in which the researcher moves in different directions and manages different identities during the course of the research. This move and navigation is not always a smooth transition, indeed the nature of professional doctorates means that there are threats, opportunities and inevitable times where the path becomes muddied through career changes, personal transitions, politics within the specific sector or feelings of losing the focus and strategy.

For me, these changes included professional progression to Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader, developments in terms of beginning to deliver on the MA Education Degree and personal changes including both of my children starting school, my family moving house and the births of 4 new nieces and nephews. These transitions were to be expected during the 6 years I have been undertaking the professional doctorate but each one brought with it a temporary barrier to my focus that I would have to navigate carefully. This involved careful planning and reflection, meetings with my doctorate supervisors and line manager and a good

amount of self-discipline in order to protect the time and space necessary for me to complete this work.

However elusive the feeling of being an insider-outsider researcher may be at times, there are clear advantages from holding this perspective. Through their discussions of inhabiting the *'hyphens'* Drake and Heath (2011, p. 27) state that

> to actively take charge of the hyphen is to appreciate one's uniqueness as an insider-outsider and to cross over between the communities.

Although challenging, I found that an important part of taking '*charge of the hyphen'* (Drake and Heath, 2011, p. 27) was through the maintenance of regular access to early years settings and through engaging in research and publications within the sector including a chapter in the newest edition of the Early Childhood Studies text book (Nahmad-Williams and Simmons, 2018).

As my professional roles have changed, so too have my responsibilities and I have found that as a programme leader, the processes and systems that I work within can become all-consuming at times. Therefore, in order to successfully negotiate these different responsibilities whilst maintaining my research focus, it was essential to ensure regular contact within settings and external networks. I was able to do this through the support of those I work with and my doctoral supervisors who encouraged me to develop contacts within the sector and discipline and to submit different phases of my research as abstracts for relevant conferences. This encouragement led to the attendance and presentation at professional and academic conferences including British Education Research Association (BERA) Conference (Simmons, 2015) and at the Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network Research Conference (Simmons, 2018). I found that, throughout the lengthy duration of the professional doctorate, it was these networks, conferences and opportunities that helped me to maintain my focus, keep the momentum and remind me that it was my passion for early childhood that underpinned my reasons for beginning the doctorate in the first place.

Both sides of the insider-outsider position held advantages that worked together to strengthen this investigation. From the outsider perspective, I had more chance of maintaining the important 'critical distance' of not being overtly involved with

the systems, intricacies and the specific settings within which the parenting courses took place. From an insider perspective I have an understanding of the research field and was *'able to take advantage of this knowledge in order to pursue the research aims'* (Oliver, 2010, p. 12) and I was also able to empathise with the experiences of new mothers, having young children of my own. From these experiences, I was able to recognise feminist post-structuralism as my ontological and epistemological lens which would be able to account for *'competing subjective realities'* and *'resistance to change'* (Weedon, 1997, p. 9).

As highlighted through the exploration of my ontological position, an important part of the development of the philosophical approach came from my personal experience as a mother and through witnessing multiple reactions to structural, interpersonal and intrapersonal surveillance (Henderson *et al.,* 2010) including support, judgement, conformity and resistance. The reflections of these experiences served to help me to apply an approach whereby a 'one size fits all' philosophy would not be sufficient. An essential part of exploration of my own position within the research involved ongoing reflections and considerations regarding the ethics of this position and what impact this worldview would have on the development of the research at each stage of the process.

3.2.1 An Ethical Approach

Reflexivity and self-awareness are essential parts of ensuring an ethical approach to this research and my position within it. Through a deep exploration of the experiences that influenced my own ontological position it was possible to develop a meaningful approach to exploring and analysing the experiences of the mothers I would be working with. The work of Ackerly and True (2008, p. 693) provided a useful platform in which to consider my own *'reflexivity in practice'*. As highlighted through the introduction and literature review, my research position was closely aligned to a post-structuralist perspective from the outset. My own awareness of government agenda, initiatives and parenting 'experts' may have influenced the position that I would gravitate towards and this was developed further through the academic discipline that I am part of which aims to critique and question the regulatory structures that govern our society. Through an *'attentiveness to epistemology'* (Ackerly and True, 2008, p. 695) though, I began

to see my ontological position shift with the development of the literature and through deeper reflections from my own experiences as a mother and of observing other mothers. This shift developed into a recognition that a purely post-structuralist approach would only serve to discount the incidents where mothers would demonstrate resistance and agency in their experiences. Through acknowledging my underlying suspicions that a post-structuralist perspective alone would not be sufficient within this research, I was able to see that the:

> purpose is not to privilege the epistemological standpoint of the most marginalized but rather to adopt an epistemological perspective that requires the scholar to inform her inquiry with a range of perspectives (Acklerly and True, 2008, p. 696).

Acknowledging subjectivity within the experiences of mothers is a fundamental part of the ethics within this research. Post-structuralist theory, as stated by Weedon (1997, p. 21) *'theorizes subjectivity as a site of disunity and conflict, central to the processes of political change and to preserving the status quo'*. Whilst this may prove evident through the experiences of participants, within my ontological perspective and in order to retain my ethical position, I felt that I had to acknowledge the potential for autonomy within the experiences of mothers including the possibility that not all mothers would react to the dominant discourses in the same way.

Critical self-reflection at each stage was essential in order to maintain this attention to my ontological approach and for me, this involved maintaining a reflexive diary. This helped me to not only express thoughts, feelings and ideas but also to understand the '*key influences acting upon the development of the research'* (Oliver, 2010, p.116). Through the process of being '*reflexively self-aware'* (Forbes, 2008, p. 453) I was able to consider the different identities I held within this research and how they and my ontological position along with it, would change and *'shift positions'* (Forbes, 2008, p. 453) over time and experience. An example of this (Appendix 2) occurred when I attended a conference on the same day I interviewed my first participant. The conference was centred around parenting culture and was extremely critical of parenting courses and any such intervention as undermining to parents. At this point my own ontological perspective was such that I could see the potential harm that formulaic and

homogenous support for new mothers could have. I was therefore surprised by my reaction and the unshakable feeling I had that the suggestion that all mothers, without exception, were docile victims of modern parenting culture (Furedi, 2008; Lee *et al.,* 2014) did mothers a fundamental disservice. It was reflections such as this along with a recognition that the voices and real life experiences of mothers were missing through this narrative that resulted in the shifting ontological perspective towards a feminist post-structuralist worldview. As stated by Ackerly and True (2008, p. 702), it is through this attention to epistemology and deep reflections on the position of the researcher that it is possible for the research question to be formed *'out of engagement with the real world experiences of non-elites'*. Incidents such as this, along with engagement with literature and policy relating to attention on parenting, particularly motherhood, influenced the underpinning aim within this research which was to hear from the mothers themselves about their experiences of attending a parenting course and their own reflections about modern motherhood.

The following sections will explore, in more detail, the research design that was developed in order to undertake this research, with a justification of the chosen methods followed by an exploration of the ethical process observed in order to achieve approval from the University of Derby.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Strategy of Inquiry

This section includes a detailed exploration of the different research opportunities available along with the approaches and methods that would complement the overall methodology. In the case of this research, as identified throughout the literature review chapter which provided an outline of the conceptual framework, a feminist post-structuralist approach was considered to be the most appropriate.

A feminist post-structuralist approach as a form of 'critical inquiry' (Gray, 2014, p. 27) aims to call into question the structures and systems that are embedded into society and reflect on the behaviours of members of that society. With an acknowledgement from an ethical and ontological perspective that the interpretations made from the research findings are relative to my own *'moral,*

political, economic and cultural perspective' (Newby, 2014, p. 36) the research explored the experiences of participants with an awareness of the potential for subjective interpretations and multiple reactions to these experiences.

Within his review of theoretical perspectives, Gray (2014) highlights critical inquiry, to which both feminism and post-structuralism belong, as different from positivism and interpretivism as this, as an epistemological approach, involves a *'meta-process of investigation, which questions currently held values and assumptions and challenges conventional social structures'* (Gray, 2014 p.27). Figure 11 outlines the epistemological, ontological and theoretical perspectives that form the strategy of inquiry for this research:

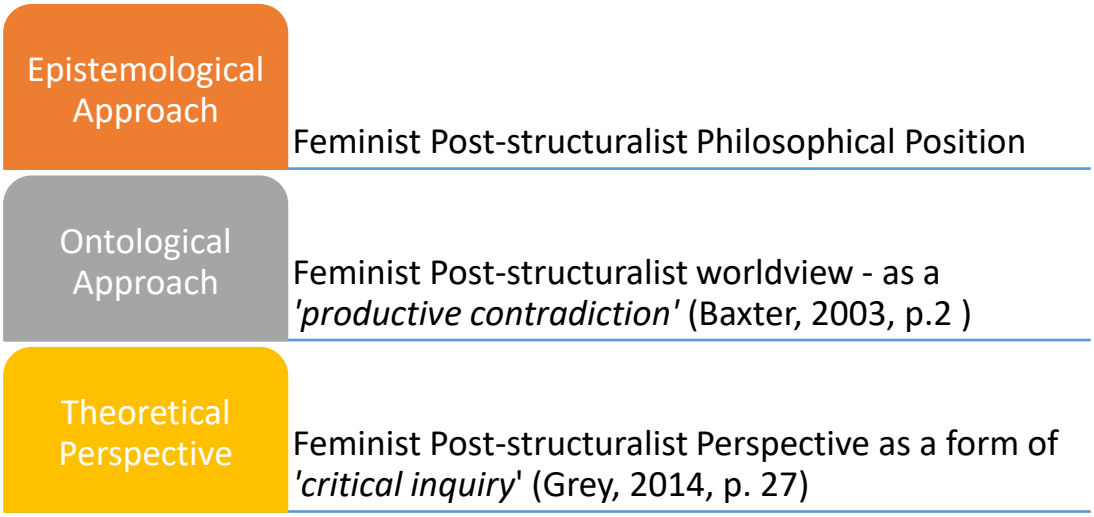

Figure 11: Strategy of Inquiry

3.3.2 Mixed Methods Approach

Feminist and Post-structuralist approaches to methodologies both recognise the value in 'multiple-methods' research (Letherby, 2003; Alasuutari, 2008; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). When explored through a feminist post-structuralist lens, a mixed methods approach can provide opportunities for the research findings to '*both test theories and generate them'* (Creswell, 2014, p.51) and within this research, a mixed methods approach was considered appropriate, with a focus on qualitative data collection.

The first phase of the research was a descriptive survey (Appendix 4) that included quantitative questions that would provide an insight into the different

forms of advice accessed by new mothers. The second phase of the research was semi structured photo elicitation interviews (Appendix 9) that focussed on the wider experiences of modern motherhood and the responses to the different levels of surveillance embedded within those experiences.

Quantitative research is traditionally thought of as a positivist technique, seeking to generate new knowledge through the use of statistics as its primary aim. Quantitative research is often used within social research as a way of discovering correlations between the population which, according to Creswell (2009, p. 12) '*provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population'.* In more recent years though, the use of quantitative research, such as descriptive surveys, has begun to be considered a useful technique to adopt within social research as, quantitative research can provide an insight to a particular problem on a wider level and in a more easily accessible format:

> Statistical techniques exist for generalizing from a small population to a large one; survey research is used to provide information about problems that seemingly occur to only a few people and it's useful in demonstrating how a problem is distributed in a particular way throughout the population and whether or not the problem is increasing (Letherby, 2003, p. 93).

Mixed methods research, according to Creswell (2009) can be divided into three general strategies: sequential mixed methods, concurrent mixed methods and transformative mixed methods, the first of these strategies being most appropriate for this research. A sequential mixed methods methodological approach often involves using a particular method; in this case a descriptive survey, to provide insight into a particular issue, then subsequently moves towards generating a research sample for the deeper and more insightful phase as *'a qualitative method involving detailed exploration with a few individuals'* (Creswell, 2009, p.14).

Through this methodological approach, along with close *'attentiveness to epistemology'* (Ackerly and True, 2008, p. 695), it was possible to gain a multi-layered insight into the experiences of new mothers that had attended a universal

parenting course and to explore the wider experiences of modern motherhood. In order to generate these in-depth reflections and consider multiple experiences within modern motherhood, the research focussed on a predominantly qualitative approach which was developed from the feminist post-structuralist worldview, It is the researcher's ontological and epistemological worldview that, according to Wisker (2008, p. 68) serves *as 'the continuum of beliefs that underpin and inform the chosen methodologies'*. Indeed, the researchers own *'political and theoretical perspective'* in relation to the chosen topic will determine the appropriate methodology. Although this position may be obvious to some researchers, I found that developing and refining the research position was a process that involved a long period of time, much vacillating, extensive reading and which eventually led me to *'combine aspects or elements from more than one approach'* (Lee, 2009, p. 71) and that an entirely post-structuralist lens would not do justice to the unique experiences of participants.

This recognition that a clear-cut, one size fits all position was not going to work for this research meant that I was able to develop a creative approach which also reflected my own moral, epistemological and ontological beliefs that motherhood is not an exact science and cannot be explored through one rigid approach. I found that the application of a feminist post-structuralist approach provided the flexibility of recognising experiences of motherhood through more than one lens and with more than one possible reaction to the levels of surveillance embedded in these experiences.

Qualitative research lies at the very heart of social research. In order to explore and gain a greater understanding into human behaviour and experience, it is essential to undertake the rich and complex techniques that qualitative strategies of inquiry offer. Qualitative studies including ethnography, grounded theory and phenomenological research (Creswell, 2009), all provide opportunities for in-depth insight into characteristics and experiences of human beings, be it in relation to a particular context, community or in relation to the lived experiences of those people. Narrative research (Creswell and Plano Clarke, 2011; Creswell, 2014) and life story interviews (Atkinson, 1998) were two approaches considered in relation to this research. For the purpose of gaining a deep insight into the

experiences of mothers, both approaches had the potential to provide opportunities for rich reflections. Narrative research and life story interviews are used to form a continual account of a person's life or aspect of their life and whilst I could see the value in these methods, I decided that they would not compliment the research position of this investigation which aims to explore and challenge, not one person's experience as a narrative but rather the wider discursive practices embedded within modern motherhood. These methods of qualitative research were therefore not considered to be appropriate within a feminist post-structuralist epistemological approach.

Qualitative research which, in this instance, is grounded in a feminist post-structuralist worldview offers an opportunity for experiences of participants to be explored as a way to *'understand meanings, interpretations, and/or to look at, describe and understand experience, ideas, beliefs and values – intangibles such as these'* (Wisker, 2008, p.75). Pring (2006) maintains that whilst individuals are unique and therefore when exploring the experiences of a small number of mothers it is important not to make theoretical claims on a wider level, individuals also have *'something in common'* (Pring, 2006, p. 42) and that *'graphic descriptions may alert one to similar possibilities. They as it were, 'ring bells''* (Pring, 2006, p. 41). In this way, a feminist post-structuralist approach served to address the research aim and objectives and to explore the different experiences and reactions to levels of surveillance that are embedded within current society.
When the uniqueness and small number of participants (Plowright, 2011) makes generalization difficult, transferability is something that may be more appropriate as a way to offer insight into the *'intangibles'* to which Wisker (2008, p. 75) has referred. The findings offer detailed insight into the experiences of a small number of participants and this confirms it is a '*legitimate method''* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 304) of research. This links to a feminist post-structuralist philosophy which, whilst not claiming to be able to make bold claims about a population, suggests that the experiences of a small sample can go some way to provide insight and transferability on a larger scale. Feminist post-structuralist analysis does not aim to suggest that all findings are generalizable (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2005; Silverman, 2006) but it does propose a degree of transferability

(Gray, 2014), whereby the insight and understanding generated by a small number of mothers can shed light on the experiences of mothers on a wider scale as a way of exploring the *'meticulous rituals of power'* (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 188) as a *'generalizable model of functioning'* (Foucault, 1975, p. 205). Similarly, feminist post-structuralist analysis has allowed the opportunity for a deeper understanding of the experiences of mothers to bring about potential change. Davis explains that:

> As a feminist, I am not willing to forgo the possibility of conceptualising and bringing about change. So yes, I want my cake and I want to eat it. And as a post-structuralist I do not find that problematic (Davis, 1997, p. 272).

Using a feminist post-structuralist worldview and with a focus on qualitative research within a mixed-methods approach, I considered the methods available and selected those that would be best served to provide insight into the experiences of mothers, whilst also considering ethics and the appropriateness of the methods in question. For this research, a qualitative methodology shone a light on the lives and multi-layered experiences of participants.

In the first phase of the research, descriptive surveys were distributed, followed by semi-structured photo elicitation interviews. By taking each method in turn in chronologically in the following sections, it will be possible to explore their appropriateness in relation to the research aim and objectives.

3.3.3 Surveys as a method

A survey was developed with the aim of focussing on the factors that motivated mothers to attend a parenting course and also to explore any other forms of parenting advice that were accessed within the early days of motherhood. The survey itself was developed using Lime Survey (limesurvey, 2003), which is used by the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at the University of Derby. The development of an on-line survey allowed me to produce and distribute via email or website links (Creswell, 2009) and generate responses and results in various formats. The low cost and quick response nature of online surveys make them a desirable, and ever growing method of inquiry within social sciences and research on a wider level (Sue and Ritter, 2007).

Online surveys have their disadvantages but were still considered preferable to email surveys as case anonymity was preserved (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011) with participants able to choose whether or not they provided their details at the end of the survey. Non-traceability could be a problem for some surveys but in this instance, the choice of respondents to *'keep their identity from the researcher'* (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 281) is in keeping with the ethics of this research in that, the control of the research, as far as possible, lay with the participants.

In order to move forward with the research and develop a sample for interview the survey did include an option for participants to identify whether they were willing to be contacted for further interviewing in relation to their experiences of motherhood, this would require contact information thus revealing participants identity. This survey included an information letter where participants were briefed on the nature of the survey, how the data would be used, the length of time the survey will take and any risks to participating (Sue and Ritter, 2007).

Online surveys are still a relatively new method and are not without their limitations. As with all online methods; they come with the assumption that the population being researched has access to software. It was important to recognise that this may not be the case and to accept that this may have an influence on the overall validity of the results. Similarly, it was important to *'opt for simplicity'* (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 281) when selecting the survey software. I selected a system that was used and recommended by my home institution rather than a *'high level program'* (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 281) that may be complicated or cause difficulties in terms of loading, graphics or browser connections. With simplicity in mind, the questions and layout were designed to be easy to navigate and easy to complete.

Another disadvantage of online surveys is the respondent's temptation to abandon the survey mid-way through, the characteristics of the participants meant that they have very young children and completing a time-consuming online survey was not likely to be a priority for them. To reduce the risk of abandonment the *'survey should be as short as possible – that is, ask only the questions that are related to the project objectives'* (Sue and Ritter, 2007, p. 13).

This was not easy as the temptation is to include predominantly open questions to give rich, insightful responses, this took careful planning and piloting (see 3.6.1 – survey pilot) to ensure the questions best fit the purpose. This does not mean that all questions were closed, the nature of the research meant that experiences and reflections were essential and therefore a combination of Likert and open questions were included. It was also important to ensure that the wording of the open questions avoided leading the participants in any way, as this would affect the validity of the results. Therefore, the language of each question was considered and kept as *'short, clear and easy to understand as possible'* (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 284).

According to Gillham (2008) another aspect of social survey methods to consider is the issue of access. This needed to be well thought through for real world research, the sample selection depends on the *'research question and the nature of the data that is being gathered'* (Matthews and Ross, 2010, p. 205) and this along with the way that the survey is disseminated can have a huge effect on the outcomes of the research. Gillham (2008, p. 25) describes this as the *'point of entry'*. Once the researcher has established in their own mind who the survey is aimed at, in this case, mothers that have attended a parenting course, and made some breakthrough with a strategy which could be through a contact or networking opportunity, it is possible to approach this contact and agree an appropriate course of action in order to ensure the survey meets as many participants as highlighted in the research design. Through these *'specialised informants'* (Gillham, 2008, p. 250) it is possible to move forward with real world research and pilot the developed survey.

3.3.4 Photo Elicitation Interviews as a method

Different forms of interviewing were considered during the planning process of this research. The aim of relationship building and the potentially emotionally sensitive nature of these interviews led me to discount focus groups as a research method, whist I recognise that the conversations that occur during focus groups could produce rich reflections and insight into the experiences of mothers, I am also aware that within focus group interviews, people may hold back in some way, particularly in relation to any discussions relating to the daily 'unspoken'

discourses of motherhood e.g. any particular frustrations or areas that could be perceived as negative or taboo. The possibility that *'interpersonal surveillance'* (Henderson, *et al.*, 2010, p. 2) may restrain authentic responses from participants was certainly a factor to consider when reflecting on the type of interview for this research. In order to aim for honest and open responses. I therefore decided that one to one open and flexible semi-structured interviews would be more appropriate.

I was particularly drawn to photo elicitation interviews as a form of semi-structured interviews. As someone who has a very keen personal appreciation for the power of photographs, particularly family photographs, the notion of photographs being used as part of the interview process is something I found interesting as a unique methodology. Key researchers within of the use of visual data within social research, Harper (2002), Banks (2007) and Rose (2012) all emphasise the potential for deep reflection when using photographs within the interview process. It is useful to consider Banks (2007) definition of photo-elicitation as:

> *using photographs to evoke comments, memory and discussion in the course of a semi-structured interview…. Can become the basis for a discussion of broader abstractions and generalities: conversely, vague memories can be given sharpness and focus, unleashing a flood of detail* (Banks, 2007, p. 65).

Within the context of this research, as Banks (2007) suggests, participants would be asked to share existing family photographs, taken since they have been mothers. The aim was to generate reflections of different phases of this new experience, maintaining some level of focus around the factors that lead the participants to attend a parenting course and their wider experiences of early motherhood. The interviews would *'inspire subjects to define how they interpret the events depicted'* (Harper, 2012, p. 19) and using the existing family photographs it was hoped, that deeper reflections could be drawn. It was also hoped that the interviews would open opportunities to explore the wider social and cultural issues surrounding why new mothers felt the need to access support, with feminist post-structuralist underpinnings to consider these reflections in terms of the discursive practices embedded within modern motherhood.

There are other opportunities generated through using a photo-elicitation technique, the potential to be an effective 'ice-breaker' is one not to be ignored. By passing the control of who selects the photographs to the participant, the aim is that power divides and that any differences in status are also reduced. Interviews in participant's own homes, discussing their own photographs and using them to generate informal and flexible discussions would all go some way to alleviating potential anxieties and awkwardness. Banks (2007) claims that *'direct eye contact need not be maintained, but instead interviewee and interviewer can both turn to the photograph as a kind of neutral third party'* (Banks, 2007, p. 65). The potential for photographs to empower participants and help to generate deeper more meaningful reflections is something desirable, but it was important to acknowledge the potential '*emotional and intense*' (Rose, 2012, p. 305) nature that the interview may take as a result of the inclusion of photographs. Asking people to relive and draw upon experiences of new motherhood could be a joyful and deeply gratifying experience, but there was also the potential, depending on the experience of the mother, for other feelings to emerge. Whilst it was the deepest, richest and sincerest reflections from experiences that would benefit the research, it must not be at the emotional expense of participants and this was considered sensitively during the research design process.

It was important to consider other ethical issues and limitations of photo-elicitation interviews. Firstly, it was to be made clear to participants that the photographs that they share would remain their own personal property and would stay with them for the duration of the interview and afterwards. No copies of photographs were requested and the reasons for sharing the photographs were purely for reflection and memory generating purposes only. It was also important to consider the possibility that the photographs may lead the interview down a road that does not match the aim of the study, by adopting an informal and relational approach to the interview the potential to cause the responses to deviate from the intention somewhat is created.

That is to assume participants would be willing to share their existing family photographs in the first place when there was a very real possibility that they may

not. I considered this to be a risk due to the sensitive and personal nature of the photographs rather than there not being any photographs to share. In the digital world we live in and research conducted into photographs and their meanings to families (Rose, 2012) particularly within new and extending families, it was expected that there will be many photographs of this time to share.

In terms of other possible interview techniques that were also considered, life story/history interviews are often used to compare experiences of particular political and social activity (Bold, 2012). Whilst the dominant discourses within the literature review explored historical forms of expert advice, the focus within the data collection was current experience of motherhood rather than any strong links to past social contexts. There are some similarities to be made to the life history method of interviewing though, the main being that both life histories and photo-elicitation interviews attempt to explore more deeply, the real lived experience of people, in this case mothers. Both attempt to give a voice to participants through an open and flexible approach with limited input from the researcher, both acknowledge the importance of a rapport between the participant and researcher and they aim to explore the *'social experience'* (Letherby, 2003, p. 89) of human being's daily realities.

Other similarities between photo elicitation interviews and life story interviews include the recognition of the importance of the environment in which the interview itself takes place. Atkinson (1998) whilst discussing interview guidelines for life history interviews, along with explaining the purpose of the interview and using open ended questions, cites the setting as one of the most important aspects of a good interview. In the case of this research, it was anticipated that the home environment of the participant would be the most appropriate setting for the interviews to take place, a comfortable and familiar environment to the participant would be essential to encouraging a reflective and open response.

Photo-elicitation interviews are, in essence, asking participants to reflect on a particular time in their lives and are something that is at the heart of life story interviews. Indeed, many life-story interviews use photographs as prompts to *'help people recall the stories and events of their lives…. Provide further insight into the events and experiences'* (Atkinson, 1998, p. 29).

It was hoped from the beginning of the process that this phase of the research was to be the most challenging and rewarding, this is where I aimed to develop a trusting relationship with the mothers I would be interviewing. Trustworthiness (Gray, 2014; Nowell, Norris, White and Moules, 2017) was essential here, this concept within social research refers to the integrity of the actions of the researcher, the instruments used and the considerations of the factors surrounding the research itself as a way to ensure that research *is 'recognised as familiar, and understood as legitimate by researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and the public'* (Nowell *et al*., 2017, p. 3). Trustworthiness also relates to the interpretation and analysis of results, being aware of the responsibility to tell the story of that person in an honest and in no way misleading way. In this case in order to promote an environment of trust and encourage participants to be open and honest, a semi-structured photo elicitation interview with flexibility and open questions was deemed to be the most appropriate.

3.3.5 Women interviewing women, ethics and trustworthiness

Whilst I acknowledge that I am a researcher and an academic, I am also a woman and a mother and I hoped that participants would find it possible to open up to me in a way that breaks down any potential power barriers. However, it is important not to be naive here: I was still an investigator with an overall aim. Letherby (2003, p. 113) points out that:

> *although a researcher may feel sympathy or empathy with respondents, her involvement with them affects her working life, her career. Similarly, respondents may consciously be using the research and the researcher as a receptacle for their emotions.*

Through reflexivity, *'attentiveness to relationships'* (Ackerly and True, 2008, p. 703), an awareness of the way I presented myself and by taking a flexible and informal approach to the interviews, I aimed to build a non-hierarchical and friendly atmosphere, which is a vital part of the researcher-participant relationship. This breakdown in barriers with participants would relax them and encourage reflection, and I accepted that this may require some level of self-disclosure particularly in relation, to some degree, to my own experiences of motherhood. In terms of the impact on the quality of the data though, I was aware that this open approach would have implications in the way I would interpret the

responses. It was therefore important for me to recognise the subjectivity of the participants. Their experiences of motherhood may not have been the same as mine as on the basis of *'race, class, age and cultural background'* (Weedon, 1997, p. 91) and the feminist post-structuralist approach supported this subjective lens.

Relating back to my position as an insider-outsider researcher required some acknowledgement that my identity would shift (Ackerly and True, 2008) during the course of the research process. Whilst I have a *'shared identity'* (Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2008, p. 333) with respondents as a mother; I am also an outsider with, what could potentially be perceived as, an aim to use personal experiences for my own gain. This shifting identity required a deep level of reflexivity, attention to shifting power relations (Ackerly and True, 2008) and sensitivity on my part from the beginning and it was useful to consider the work of Oakley (2005) who reflected on her experiences of interviewing women. Her reflections are particularly relatable to this research as she explored factors that must be considered in relation to women interviewing women and how this relationship can often become *'something which existed beyond the limits of question asking and answering'* (Oakley, 2005, p. 224).

This is particularly true when, as highlighted above, the aim within the early stages of the interview was to relax participants and develop some level of rapport through the shared identity and *'natural empathy'* (Cohen *et al*., 2018, p. 236) of being mothers of young children. Oakley (2005) goes further in her reflections and explores the interview process from a feminist perspective and how this position led her to the decision to move away from a *'textbook code of ethics'* (Oakley, 2005, p. 225). Rather than claiming to take an entirely objective position within the interview, the development of a relationship, building up of trust and rapport means that the interview may easily take a turn from clear cut, 'clean' questions into a more conversational, two-way communication. From a feminist position, Oakley suggests that a deviation from *'taken-for-granted sociological assumptions about the role of the interviewer'* (Oakley, 2005, p. 226) in favour of an approach that will encourage deeper, sincerer reflections from women about their lives and experiences. The role of the interviewer then, is to provide a more

relational environment whereby rather than just extracting information, experiences could be shared in a non-judgemental, non-hierarchical way making possible '*the articulated and recorded commentary of women on the very personal business of being a female in a patriarchal capitalist society'* (Oakley 2005, p. 226).

The consideration of the methods that have been explored in this section moves this research towards an original design. However, in order to produce trustworthiness (Gray, 2014; Nowell *et al*., 2017) there were other factors to consider. Whilst my position as an insider-outsider researcher and feminist post-structuralist worldview means that my own previous experience as a practitioner and mother would impact on the research, it is important to maintain an open mind throughout the research process and this involves reflexivity throughout the planning, designing and analysis of the research. As identified by Creswell (2009) qualitative research can be categorised as interpretive research. This not only raises ethical concerns but also personal ones from the perspective of the researcher:

> With these concerns in mind, inquirers explicitly identify reflexively their biases, values and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socio-economic status that may shape their interpretations formed during the study (Creswell, 2009, p. 177).

That is not to say that all objectivity can be entirely removed. As explored, my own personal experiences could both enhance and hinder the interpretations of the research findings. Indeed, holding true to the feminist post-structuralist worldview requires a more reflexive approach to the research than simply expecting my lived experiences as a woman to be enough. As Hammington (2009) states *'a feminist standpoint requires an effort at standing back to gain a holistic picture of power struggles'* (Hammington, 2009, p. 54). At the same time though, linking back to the work of Oakley, a successful interview, from a feminist perspective will take a *'no intimacy without reciprocity'* (Oakley, 2005, p. 226) stance, and whilst recognising the need to proceed with caution in terms of any potential bias, in agreement with the work of Oakley, I do not *'regard it as reasonable to adopt a purely exploitative attitude to interviewees as a source of*

data' (Oakley, 2005, p. 225). This is particularly true given the sensitive and personal nature of the subject matter.

Similarly, Mauthner, Birch, Jessop and Miller (2002) recognise how valuable the development of rapport can be within the interview process but how careful consideration of results needs to take place. When, what they call '*over easy rapport'* takes place for example *'when interviewees said: 'You know what I mean', she tended to reply: 'I know', partly deliberately to build rapport but also intuitively because she felt she genuinely did know'* (Mauthner *et al.*, 2008, p. 117). It was important to consider this before the interviews took place, the importance of rapport should not replace the trustworthiness of the conversations taking place and the interpretations and analysis of them, and this highlights the dangers of *'reading between the lines'* (Mauthner *et al.*, 2008, p. 117) within interpretations of interviews. The ethics of women interviewing women and the consideration of trustworthiness formed an important part of this investigation, there are now other ethical considerations that needed to be explored in relation to research as a whole.

3.4 Ethical Process

It is through feminist post-structuralist worldview**,** the dominant discourses within the literature and an ethical research design that moves this research to offer an original contribution to knowledge. Whilst I was clear in my own mind of the potential benefit that this research could have to new mothers, through the exploration of modern motherhood, this must not have been at the expense of the participants. A thoughtful and sensitive approach was to be maintained at all times and coercion avoided. Whilst this research, I believe, was underpinned by *'good ethical motives'* (Mauthner *et al.*, 2008, p. 65), this does not suggest that it is acceptable for the process to lead to any negative repercussions for participants and the implications for emotionally charged questions and reflections were considered thoughtfully during the ethical approval process and throughout research supervision meetings prior to the data collection phase of the research. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Derby ethics committee in November 2014 (Appendix 3). Ethical considerations including the

right for withdrawal from the investigation, debriefing and confidentiality were reflected upon during this process and are outlined below.

3.4.1 Consent

A consent and information letter (Appendix 4) formed the introduction to the survey which provided *'clear and adequate information'* (Matthews and Ross, 2010, p. 73) and outlined the focus and intention of the research, highlighting participant's rights to privacy and anonymity throughout the study. The final part of the survey also asked participants to identify whether they would be willing to be interviewed for the next phase of the research and if so, to provide contact details. During the interview phase, participants were asked to sign a consent form outlining the research focus and reminding participants that their identities would remain anonymous. These steps were taken at each stage of the research to ensure that a *'fair explanation of the procedures to be followed and their purpose'* (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 122) was clear to all participants.

3.4.2 Debriefing

In order to retain an *'honest and open'* (BERA, 2018, p. 16) approach through the duration of the research process, interviewees were offered the opportunity to review their interview transcripts. This was outlined in the interview consent letter and was verbally communicated to participants at the time of the interview.

3.4.3 Research undertaken in public places

Research undertaken within participants home and in other public settings followed the University Health and Safety procedures (staff.derby.ac.uk/sites/hr/Health-Safety, 2014). This process included ensuring that my doctoral supervisor held a schedule of the research timetable. Participants were made aware at the start of the interview that these details had been shared with my supervisor for health and safety purposes only. This information was destroyed following on from the interview. A risk assessment for lone working was completed in line with the University of Derby off-site working requirements(staff.derby.ac.uk/sites/hr/Health-Safety/Organisational-Safety/Pages/Lone-Working, 2014). The control of the location of the interview

was given to participants, in line with the ethics of the research. 5 out of the 7 interviews took place in the participants home and children were present for 4 out of the 7 interviews. The children that were present during the interviews were all under the age of 2 years old and I was mindful that should it be necessary, the interviews would halt or cease at any time participants needed to tend to their children.

3.4.4 Withdrawal from the investigation

Participants were not coerced in any way and no incentives were given for participation in this research. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw without prejudice. Participants were advised that they may withdraw from the study up to 4 weeks following on from completing the survey or interview. In this instance, data would be destroyed and not used as part of the study. In line with BERA (2011) and recently updated BERA (2018) guidelines, participants were given my contact details should they wish to contact me following the research or to withdraw without any *'coercion or duress'* (BERA, 2018, p. 18). In the instance where individuals that had completed the survey identified themselves as willing to be interviewed but did not engage with following attempts to make contact, no further attempts were made and I instead, accepted this as the *'participants decision to withdraw'* (BERA, 2018, p. 18).

3.4.5 Deception

There was no intended deceptive element involved in this research and the research did not involve concealed information or covert research (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). The purpose was made clear within information and consent letters at each stage of the research. The shifting focus from the survey phase which focussed on participants experiences of attending a parenting course followed by the interview phase which explored in greater detail, experiences of early motherhood was outlined within the letters given to participants.

3.4.6 Confidentiality and Data Protection

The *'confidential and anonymous treatment of participants data is considered the norm for the conduct of research'* (BERA, 2018, p. 21). In order to comply with this and to protect the identity of participants, identification numbers were given

to participants of the surveys and pseudonyms were given for all of the interview participants. The data collection took place between July 2015 and June 2016 and compliance with the UK Data Protection Act (1998) was met throughout this research process. All data were kept in a secure place, electronic copies were stored on a password secured computer and any hard copies were stored in a locked cabinet. It was made clear to participants that any use of personal photographs during interviews would be for the purpose of the interview only. No copies of photographs were requested and the photographs remained with the participants at all times during the interview.

Requirements outlined within BERA (2018) ethical guidelines regarding compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) act which came into force from March 2018 were met during and will continue to be met following on from, the end of the research process. This includes the storage of raw data once the doctorate is complete. All raw data will be deposited in The University of Derby archives.

3.4.7 Protection of the Participants

The feminist post-structuralist worldview that underpins this research is one that ensured attention to the *'privilege of being able to do the research and to the power relationships that are part of the research process'* (Ackerly and True, 2008, p. 701). An example of this came from the decision not to ask participants to identify themselves within a particular class structure as this would not be in keeping with the philosophical worldview and may imply from the outset, an unhelpful feeling of being judged.

The attention to the protection of participants also included a consideration to the potential psychological risk regarding the disclosure of potentially emotional responses from participates. It was outlined, through the ethical approval stage that should it be deemed necessary, which fortunately it was not, participants would be directed to their health visitor or doctor for appropriate support. Similarly, it was possible that during the interviews, participants would disclose information or ask for my advice, I would be clear that I was conducting the interviews in the capacity of researcher and not as a health professional. Should

participants require further assistance or advice on a particular topic, they would be sensitively directed to the relevant and appropriate support. Care was taken throughout the process to *'desist immediately from any actions, ensuing from the research process that can cause emotional or other harm'* (BERA, 2011, p. 10). As stated in the BERA (2011, p. 10) ethical guidelines *'researchers must recognise that participants may experience distress or discomfort in the research process and must take all necessary steps to reduce the sense of intrusion and to put them at ease'.* Similarly, within the feminist post-structuralist lens of this research and in order to retain integrity as a researcher, I was mindful throughout the research of my responsibility to, as outlined by Cohen *et al.* (2018, p. 133), ensure that participants do not *'leave the research situation with greater anxiety or lower levels of self-esteem than they came with'.* A reflexive journal was kept throughout the research process in order to reflect on each interview and recognise my own role within the research. This included acknowledging when participant reflections regarding sensitive aspects of motherhood chimed with my own experiences and I found that keeping a diary helped me to be reflexive throughout the process.

Following on from the ethical approval stage, it was important to test the methods that were proposed. Through the piloting of both phases of the research design, which will be explored in the following section, it was possible to consider carefully the effectiveness of the selected methods in practical terms but also in relation to the trustworthiness of them and any analysis (Kvale, 2009) made from the reflections following this stage.

3.5 Piloting of Methods

3.5.1 Survey Pilot

Through the family support co-ordinator that oversees the parenting course provision across a city within the East Midlands UK, I was invited along to the end of course picnic for 5 of the children centres in a locality group. I was able to distribute the survey and this contact proved to be very supportive about my coming back to the group upon the completion of the next round of parenting courses. This process proved very useful, not only for me to distribute my survey

but also to consider some of the questions and the order of them (Matthews and Ross, 2010) within the survey itself. Specifically, following on from the pilot group I was able to identify that I needed to change the following:

- Question 4 – I had not included children centres as one of the possible places parents go to for help in the early days.
- Question 10 – I had not asked respondents to identify whether or not they paid for the parenting course.

The pilot proved a useful strategy in assessing the quality of the survey. It also became apparent, through this process, that the response rate of the surveys themselves would be quite small. I disseminated 30 surveys on the day of the picnic and only received 17% of these back. Upon reflection and discussion with my supervisor it became apparent that a combined purposive and snowball sampling framework would be necessary and appropriate in order to reach a wider demographic.

It would be productive to continue to disseminate the survey through the Sure Start Children's Centres as originally planned but also to send out the link to my survey on a wider scale to other contacts and networks within the sector. In addition, I would ask these contacts to forward the survey to any contacts that have attended a universal parenting course.

3.5.2 Interview Pilot

Through conducting a pilot interview, I was able to consider the appropriateness of the questions I was asking. The original interview script had 12 questions which, upon reflection were repetitive from the descriptive survey questions. They focussed on the structure and content of the parenting courses, access to other forms of advice and more generalised questions relating to asking participants to reflect on the rewarding and challenging aspects of parenting. Whilst it was felt that the later focus in the interviews was important, I reflected and re-worded the questions to become more focussed around some of the wider discourses within modern motherhood. The development of the interview questions came through the building and refining of the conceptual underpinning, particularly in relation to

different levels of surveillance explored by Henderson *et al.,* (2010), with the research seeking to explore different reactions to these proposed levels.

From a feminist post-structuralist worldview, the aims of this research developed from an exploration of mother's experiences of attending a universal parenting course to a wider consideration of mother's experiences of early motherhood including some of the social and cultural pressures on mothers within the UK today. These reflections led to changes to questions including:

- *Question 12 - In your experience, how well do mothers support each other?* This question was added to the interview schedule in order to provide insight into interpersonal surveillance (Henderson *et al*., 2010)
- *Question 13 - Do you think mothers put pressure on themselves at all?* This question was added to the interview schedule in order to aimed to provide insight into self-surveillance (Henderson *et al*., 2010)

The pilot interview not only helped to consider on how well the aims of the research were reflected in the interview questions, but also the wording of the interview questions themselves. Some of the language used within the questions did not correlate to the informal, relational aims of the interviews themselves. Linking back to the work of Oakley (2005) previously highlighted, my aim within this research was to build an atmosphere where participant felt safe to open up about a highly personal experience and some of the wording of the questions were not conducive to this aim. An example of this from the pilot interview was:

- Question 7 - Why do you think parenting as a whole is the subject of so much contemporary public debate?

Upon review, I considered this question to be too formal, suggesting that participants would have awareness of contemporary public debate, whilst this may be the case, it is important not to make assumptions. I therefore reworded this question to be less formal and to include examples which may trigger a deeper, more insightful response:

- Question 12 - Why do you think parenting receives so much attention? E.g. more classes, baby manuals, websites than ever before?

Conducting a pilot interview was helpful as a way of consolidating and confirming the aims of the research and to ensure those aims were reflected in the questions

asked. Good interviews may not always develop as expected or run in accordance with a rigid plan (Roulston, 2010), but it is important to plan ahead and whilst maintaining a level of flexibility, try to have a degree of foresight at the same time in order to maximise the potential and trustworthiness (Gray, 2014; Nowell *et al*., 2017) of the overall investigation.

3.6 Final Research Design

The final research design considered the initial research design, piloting stages and reflections from these stages in the development of a refined sample framework and re-formulated methods. In light of the reflections from the piloting stage, the sample framework for the survey phase in particular, required some careful consideration.

3.6.1 Survey Sample

As anticipated from the start of the research design process and confirmed during the pilot stage, the survey would be distributed to mothers using purposive sampling (Gillham, 208; Sarantakos, 2013; Gray, 2014) with the characteristic of those completing the survey being mothers of children aged 0-3 years that have attended a universal parenting course in order to, as Robson (2009, p.142) states *'enable a researcher to satisfy her specific needs in a project'*.

Purposive sampling involved the selection of participants that are *'relevant to the project'* (Sarantakos, 2013, p. 177) and Robson (2009) identifies the need for a personal, hands on approach by the researcher when collecting data. As an outsider to the setting itself, during both the piloting and real data collection stages, it was important to acknowledge my previous experiences as an insider to the sector, this would help to break down potential barrier to the research including feelings of intimidation or uncertainty from participants who may have viewed me as an 'outsider'. Robson (2009) explains that an outsider researcher must be prepared to convincingly outline the benefits of engaging with this research, particularly to those whose environment is being entered. Transparency would be essential, it must be clear participants that there was no hidden agenda to the research; that engagement within this research was not to be compromised in any way. This was done not only through the information letter

but also through dialogue with practitioners prior to the research and open and honest dialogue with participants throughout the research process.

In this case, purposive sampling also helped to bring more clarity to the sample. By having a clear idea of the community I wished to contact, it was possible to take a direct approach and provide more trustworthiness (Gray, 2014; Nowell *et al*., 2017) to the research overall. In addition to this, Gillham (2008) states that although *'empirical generalisation'* (Gillham 2008, p. 20) cannot be claimed through this type of research, having a clear rationale and focussed sampling framework which identifies key characteristics of participants can help to provide *'theoretical generalization'* (Gillham, 2008, p. 20) whereby results can often be applied to other individuals in similar context. Similarly, Gray (2014, p. 185) associates purposive sampling with trustworthiness as this type of sampling framework can illuminate *'pertinent issues and factors'*, similarities can then be explored and analysed to illustrate common themes and issues with the sample and beyond.

Whilst purposive sampling remained essential to the sample framework throughout, in order reach a wider demographic, as identified within the pilot reflections, a combination of purposive sampling with snowball sampling was also required within the survey distribution phase. As Sue and Ritter (2007) recognise, not always representative, snowball sampling can be a *'good way to select members of specifically defined, highly targeted populations'* (Sue and Ritter, 2007, p. 33). It was therefore hoped that a combined approach to the sampling framework would increase the likelihood of a wider sample of mothers that have attended a combination of state sponsored, third sector and private universal parenting courses, which are identified as being available to all parents, *'under the umbrella term 'universal''* (Clarke *et al.*, 2017, p. 5).

3.6.2 Interview Sample

Following on from the piloting and survey phase of the research, purposive sampling was used again to draw out those that has identified themselves as willing to participate in the semi-structured photo elicitation interviews relating to their experiences of early modern motherhood. The final sample framework is highlighted below (Figure 12):

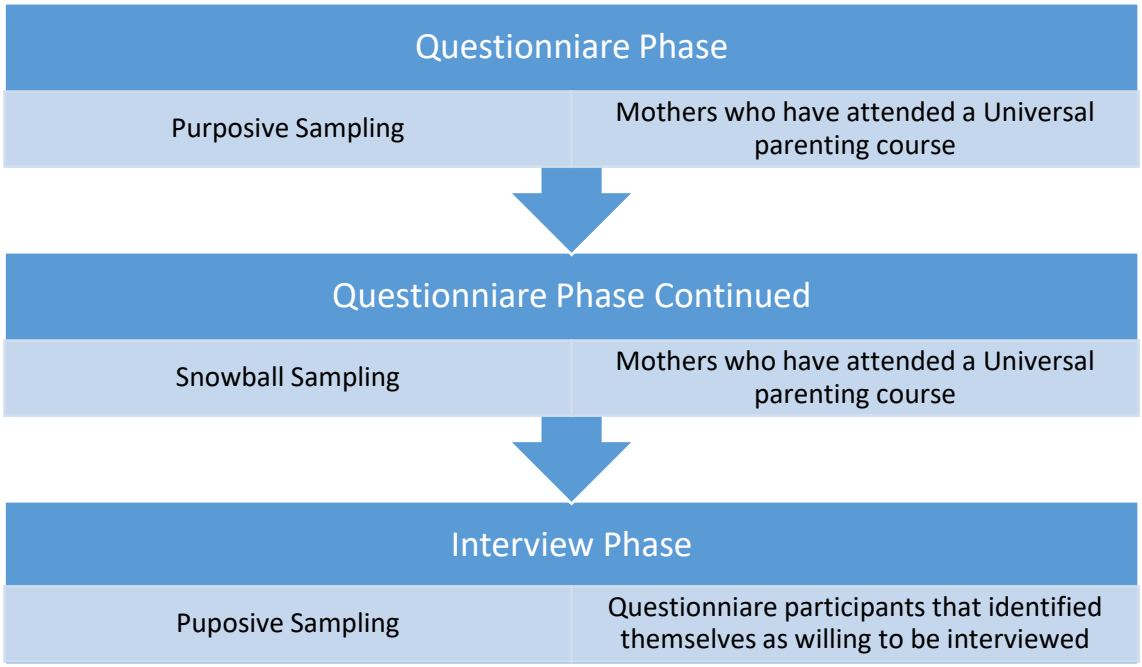

Figure 12: The Sampling Framework

3.6.3 Survey Participants and Access

Following on from the reflections of the piloting stage and combining purposive and snowball sampling allowed me to widen the target area whilst staying within the ethical boundaries proposed. Within the final research design, the survey sample came through the previously identified contact from the East Midlands Sure Start Children's Centre who kindly forwarded the online survey link to other local Children's Centres. Following on from this, the Lime Survey (limesurvey, 2003) link was also forwarded to Early Childhood Studies alumni that remain in contact and who work within settings that deliver universal parenting courses and wider networks including the HUB at the University of Derby and The Childhood Studies Research Cluster at the University of Derby. Some contacts within the different settings asked for a printed version of the survey to distribute within the courses. In accordance with discussions with my doctoral supervisor this was agreed to. The survey information and consent letter can be found in Appendix 4 and the dissemination schedule can be found in Appendix 5.

Between the months of July 2015 and May 2016 I received 30 completed surveys from mothers that had attended a universal parenting course. 83% of participants

were between 30-40 years of age and 77% of children were under the age of 6 months when their mother attended a universal parenting course.

The settings that were approached to complete the survey were from a range of rural and city centre locations including children centres, village halls, churches, community centres and primary schools**.** The universal parenting courses that were offered within these settings included a range of state sponsored, third sector and private courses. A full catalogue of research procedure, profile of survey respondents and detail of the attended parenting courses can be found in Appendices 6 and information regarding the parenting courses attended by participants can be found in Appendix 7.

3.6.4 Interview Participants and Access

Upon initial analysis of the 30 completed surveys, 11 of the survey participants identified themselves as willing to be interviewed. I began to make contact with these participants via the email addresses they provided at the end of the survey. 3 of the participants did not respond to my email, which asked whether they would still be willing to be interviewed. I therefore moved ahead corresponding with the remaining 8 participants. I forwarded them the consent and information letter (see Appendix 8), outlining the aim of the interview and detailing the request for photographs to be used as part of the interview, but stressing the fact that these photographs would remain with the participants during the interview and no copies would be requested**.** At this point, 1 participant did not respond to this email and no further contact was made. Whilst I was disappointed at this point, I had to accept that although I understood the nature of the photo elicitation interview, the idea of sharing photographs of their children with a stranger could be off putting for potential participants. Roulston (2010, p. 41) concurs that *'researchers need to be prepared for the eventuality that not all people who agree to participate actually will'.* The remaining 7 participants confirmed that they were happy to go ahead with the interview and the date, time and interview sites were arranged via email and interviews took place between March 2016 - August 2016 and each interview took approximately 1 hour to complete. Details regarding the participants, location of the interview and parenting course that they had attended are below:

Claire:

This interview took place in March 2016 in Claire's home. Claire had attended a universal parenting course at her local Children's Centre near where she lives in a town and civil parish within the East Midlands. She had 2 young children (aged 2 and 1 years old at the time of the interview) and both children were present during the interview. Claire was 38 years of age at the time of the interview.

Jenny:

This interview took place in April 2016 in Jenny's home. Jenny had attended a universal parenting course through an NCT location near where she lives in a town within the East Midlands. She had 1 young child (aged 13 months at the time of the interview) and her child was present during the interview. Jenny was 33 years of age at the time of the interview.

Priya:

This interview took place in April 2016 in Priya's home. Priya had attended a universal parenting course at her local Children's Centre near where she lives in a large village within the East Midlands. She had 2 young children (aged 6 and 3 years old at the time of the interview), neither children were present during the interview. Priya was 35 years of age at the time of the interview.

Ruth:

This interview took place in April 2016 in Ruth's home. Ruth had attended a universal parenting course at her local Children's Centre near where she lives in a large village within South Yorkshire. She had 2 young children (aged 5 years old and 4 months at the time of the interview) and her youngest child was present during the interview. Ruth was 35 years of age at the time of the interview.

Gemma:

This interview took place in May 2016 in Gemma's home. Gemma had attended a universal parenting course at her local village hall near where she lives in a large village in the East Midlands. She had 2 young children (aged 3 and 4 months at the time of the interview) and her youngest child was present during

the interview, although asleep in a different room. Gemma was 32 years of age at the time of the interview.

Louise:

This interview took place in May 2016 at a restaurant near Louise's place of work in South Yorkshire. Louise had attended a universal parenting course at her local Children's Centre near where she lives in a suburb of South Yorkshire. She had 2 young children (aged 5 and 2 years old at the time of the interview), neither children were present during the interview. Louise was 35 years of age at the time of the interview.

Kate:

This interview took place in June 2016 at a restaurant near Kate's place of work in the East Midlands. Kate had attended a universal parenting course at her local Children's Centre near where she lives in a suburb of South Yorkshire. She had 2 young children (aged 4 and 1 years old at the time of the interview) neither children were present during the interview. Kate was 35 years of age at the time of the interview.

3.6.5 Interviews – Research Site

One aim during the interview was to create a relaxed atmosphere, therefore it was important to give ownership of the decision of the interview site to the participant (see Appendix 9 for the interview schedule and Appendix 10 for the profile of participants and the date and site of the interviews).

Within email correspondence, I offered the option for the interviews to take place within a location of the participant's choice. This would, I hoped not only help participants to feel a sense of control within this process but also help with the logistics of organising the interview around their busy lives with at least one young child. 5 of the interviewees requested that the interview take place within their home, in support of the reflections of Oakley (2005) this was the desired location as this more informal, familiar setting which would help to relax participants and encourage deeper reflections. Due to work commitments though, 2 of the interviews took place near the participants' places of work.

As highlighted above, it was important to, as much as possible give the control of the interview site to the participant, keeping in line with the feminist nature of the interviewing. Roulston (2010) agrees that the main aspect of feminist interviews is:

> Rather than reproduce the exploitative relationships of traditional forms of social scientific research, feminists aim to work with participants in respectful and ethical ways that allow women's voices to be heard. (Roulston, 2010, p. 23).

That is not to say that the practice in meeting this aim is simple, as discovered when conducting the interviews, despite my belief in the well thought out ethical boundaries of this research I was still aiming to gather very deep and personal responses and this brought both logistical and personal challenges along the way.

3.6.6 Challenges and the role of the researcher

Logistical challenges came in the form of finding the locations of participant's homes and learning the hard way about the importance of asking for the participant's mobile number in order to reduce this stress. Other logistical challenges came from traffic noise for the 2 interviews that took place near participants' place of work, and the presence of very young children during 4 of the interviews. As will be explored within the discussion part of this research, the presence of children during the interviews had an impact on the engagement of photo elicitation as an interview method as an unforeseen outcome of this was that participants used their own children as sources of reflection rather than photographs they had with them.

Aside from the logistical challenges though, I found that my role as researcher came quite naturally. As a mother of 2 young children, I recognised the importance of arriving at the interview dressed casually and to try to develop a reciprocal relationship before the interview took place. The importance of promoting an informal, non-threatening interview was done in line with Oakley's (2005, p. 231) belief that it is only through this style of interviewing that *'people come to know each other and admit others to their lives'.*

Prior to starting the recording of the interview itself, time was taken for a short discussion around not only the interview process but also the participant's day or,

if appropriate, some disclosure about my own children and demands of the day so far. I was conscious that the content of the interviews was very personal and I therefore felt that measures and time needed to be taken in order to relax the mother that I was interviewing and also to try and show empathy as a mother myself. It was important for me to engage in such discussions not only in order to put the participant at ease but also in order to remain close to the feminist post-structuralist approach of this research and to take measures to ensure that I did not seem to participants, a source of *'hierarchical observation'* (Foucault, 1977, p.170).

An unexpected outcome from the interviews occurred following the 6th interview. This interview was also the longest and most detailed with the participant describing the interview process as 'rather therapeutic' at the end of our meeting (although this was not part of the recorded interview). Approximately 4 hours after the interview, I received an email from the participant expressing her concern that she had been overly negative during the interview and stressing that she really does love being a mother and has a lot of support. Although I had anticipated, when considering the ethics of this research, the possibility of some emotional disclosures during the interview and the importance of *'protecting people from harm'* (Silverman, 2006, p. 322), I had not expected participants to reflect on the interview in such depth and feel anxious about their responses. This was a challenge to me as a researcher and I responded with a reassuring email, assuring the participant and again offered her the opportunity to read the transcript once complete. This unexpected outcome will be explored in more detail during the discussion phase of the thesis, with possible links to the continuing force of the internalisation of the *'master-narrative'* (Kerrick and Henry, 2016, p. 1) associated with the taboo messages mothers feel they can and cannot give about their role.

Once the process of the interviews themselves was complete, it was important to begin analysis, the following section will explore the structure of analysis of the all of the accumulated data.

3.7 Structure of Analysis

The feminist post-structuralist approach to this research guided the structure of analysis as it came from the same position of critical inquiry (Gray, 2014; Newby, 2014) and sought to *'develop new understandings as a guide to effective action, confronting unjust social systems'* (Gray, 2014, p. 27).

The analysis therefore would come from the same subjective feminist post-structuralist ontological and epistemological approach that has driven the research throughout.

The process of analysis took the following structure:

1. Collation of the raw data
2. Coding of both sets of data into a series of issues
3. Group the issues into themes
4. Blending of themes and issues across data (i.e. blending of survey and interview themes and issues – see 3.7.3)
5. Using conceptual framework and literature review to *explain/explore/ challenge and critique the findings* (Coles and McGrath, 2010, p. 145) through a feminist post-structuralist lens (Davis, 1997; Weedon, 1997; Baxter, 2003).

3.7.1 Raw Data Analysis

The first stage of analysis involved the correlation and consideration of the surveys followed by the transcription of each interview. Surveys were completed in both hard copy format and via the electronic link. Hard copy surveys were then uploaded electronically and the surveys were analysed using Lime Survey (limesurvey, 2003) software with a combination of statistical and open narrative results produced.

3.7.2 Transcription of the Interviews

As quickly as possible after each interview had taken place I began the transcription process**.** The interview was recorded on a Dictaphone and then up-loaded onto my computer with an aim to begin the transcription on the same day.

I was keen to transcribe the interviews quickly and to reflect upon the answers that were given during the interview.

Naturally, the reflection process had already begun in some way as, for many of the interviews, I had a long distance to drive home and this gave me time to consider how some of the responses linked to the conceptual framework and any surprising answers that were given. I was keen to listen to the interview again and transcribe each specific interview in turn before beginning a new one, I wanted to consider each interview individually and not allow myself to begin to analyse or compare responses or experiences between participants. The transcription stage is an important part of the first stage of data analysis and needs to be considered carefully (Creswell, 2014), described by Atkinson (1998, p. 54) as '*the most time consuming whole* (interview) *process'*. The organization and structure of this stage would have implications for the overall analysis of the research.

I transcribed every utterance as it occurred so that the end result would be an exact script of the conversation. Having recorded the interviews, the process of transcription was more authentic than if making notes as it is *'simply impossible to remember… such matters as pauses, overlaps, breaths and the like'* (Silverman, 2006, p. 204). The process of transcribing took a long time, averaging approximately 30 minutes typing for 10 minutes' dialogue. There are many different ways of transcribing an interview and as highlighted here by Roulston (2010, p. 107):

> Novice researchers are often surprised at the subjective choices they must make in transcription – for example, how to convey what has been spoken in grammatical and punctuated sentences, whether to notate dropped letters (goin') or include swear words, or even if they should include utterances commonly used in everyday talk ('Umm,' 'uh huh', 'you know', 'like' and 'do you know what I mean''.

Whilst, I decided that, in order to provide an authentic representation of the interview I would include the linguistic features as Roulston (2010) highlights, I must also acknowledge that there are, inevitably, components of the interview that will not appear within the transcript. I tried to include stressed words with capital letters and include pauses with *'pause'* but not all body language, glances

or gestures were included and this must be acknowledged. The fact remains that there is a possibility that those non-verbal forms of communication may have provided some important insight into the thoughts, feelings and experiences of the participants.

I followed every completed transcript with a final listen to the interview to verify and make any necessary corrections. Atkinson (1998, p. 57) suggests that transcription *'at this level becomes interpretative, because the closer you become to the text itself, the closer you are to its meaning'*. At the end of each interview, as part of the ethical process, I reminded participants that they have the right to review the interview transcript. No participants requested to see the final version of the transcript.

3.7.3 The coding of surveys and interviews and the blending of the data

As identified by Newby (2014, p. 473), the process of coding is not a *'clean'* one and there are likely to be *'false starts'*. I certainly found this during the first attempt at coding the data which I tried to do by using the conceptual framework alone as a tagging system. I found that I was becoming increasingly detached from the responses of the participants as I tried to force the responses into different parts of the literature and philosophical approach. Following discussions with my doctoral supervisors, I decided to start again and apply a simpler, more open interpretation of the data through open coding. Despite the frustrations here in relation to time wasted, I felt satisfied that this was the right course of action in order to bring more '*authenticity'* (Gray, 2014, p. 186) to my analysis, through a responsibility to relate *'analysis and interpretations to the meanings and experiences that are lived and perceived by the subjects of the research'* (Gray, 2014, p. 186).This method of analysis would also fit more closely to the feminist post-structuralist epistemological approach that underpins this research and allows for multiple experiences to be considered more openly. In addition, I reflected that, as stated by Newby (2014, p. 473), as a researcher, learning skills for analysis the hard way:

> is no bad thing because each time we learn something new. However, it does (usually) come good at the end!

By first reading again and highlighting all the interesting points from both the survey and interview data, without the distraction of trying to fit the conceptual framework into this initial analysis stage, I was able to begin to identify issues. This process involved *'focussed reading'* (Gray, 2014, p. 604) whilst highlighting key words or phrases that would form the beginning of the coding process in a way that was *'simple and memorable'* (Coles and Mcgrath, 2010, p. 133). A key phrase would be allotted to each identified section and these were developed and blended into the emerging issues (e.g. Issue 1, Emotions in the early days; Issue 2, Unprepared for how hard/difficult the early days of motherhood were). See Appendix 11 for an example of transcript and coding and Appendix 12 for the full outline of the emerging issues and themes.

During the *'review/amend codes'* (Gray, 2014, p. 604) stage of the analysis process, the issues were reviewed and categorised again into seven main themes, each one containing a series of issues that were identified in the first stage of analysis. This is not an easy process and a common concern with qualitative analysis is that *'coding tends to fragment the data'* (Gray, 2014, p. 605). It was therefore important to continually review the data and check that it is well represented through the codes, this process also helped to *'refine, re-order and reduce in scale the data we begin with'* (Newby, 2014, p. 473) which was very challenging given my closeness to the data and a desire to include everything offered by participants. The coding process helps to form the progression of the data analysis into something that is *'inescapably a selective process'* (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 55) and ensures that whilst views and experiences are represented, the presentation of the data in the findings avoids becoming overly repetitive.

These issues and themes were reviewed again and blended into the amalgamated survey and interview themes and issues that form the findings chapter (Figure 13). The process of crafting the final version of the findings chapter was a very challenging one. The sense of responsibility to the participants and a feeling of wanting to share all of their experiences and voices meant that the previous drafts of this chapter were extremely lengthy. With synthesis, coherence and the research objectives in mind though, the findings chapter needed to be refined and this was a process that took a long time and many

drafts. Through discussions with my supervisors and reflections on the responses that were given within each theme and issue, I was able to see where points may have been repeated by participants and provide more of a narrative overview through the codes to identify similar experiences or reflections of motherhood. As alluded to by Roulston (2010, p. 153) the ongoing process of coding, reading and re-evaluating develops *'different ways of thinking about how the data might be understood'*. This meant that an overly repetitive style was able to be avoided whilst also acknowledging correlating experiences.

The analysis process then moves on within the discussion chapter when the findings are analysed through the conceptual framework and philosophical approach, which, according to Miles and Humberman (1994, p. 55) serves as the *'best defence'* as a strategy to refine and refocus the themes from the findings.

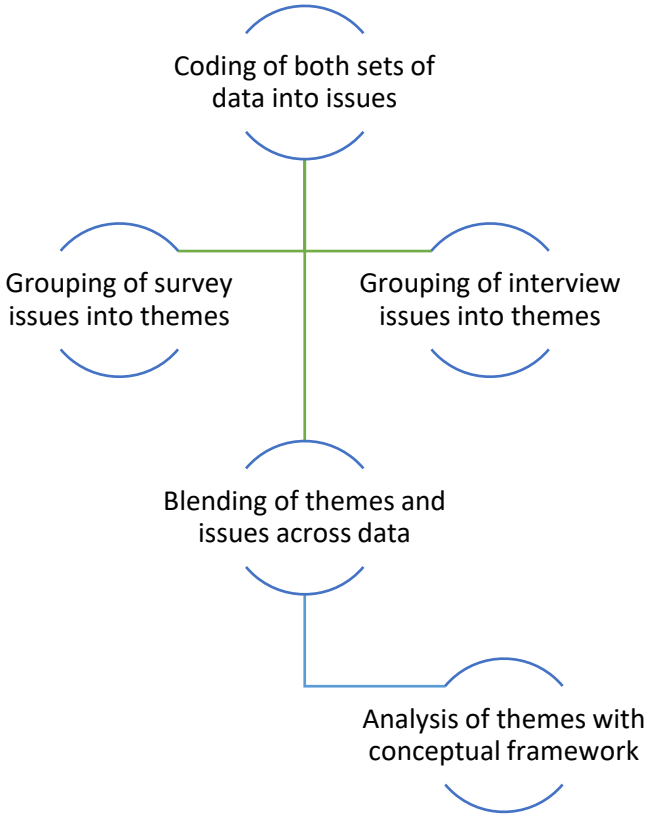

Figure 13. Process of analysis

3.8 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide a rationale for the analysis of the data through a detailed exploration of the development of the methodology and

justification of the methods selected including an insight into the barriers and constraints within each selected method, particularly in relation to photo elicitation interviews as a visual methodology. This chapter has also outlined the ethical considerations and processes that are rooted within the research and that work within the feminist post-structuralist worldview that underpins this research. The following chapter will present the data clearly and methodically in order to accurately represent the reflections of participants within both phases of the data collection.

Chapter 4: REPORTING OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the findings from the 30 completed surveys. As the survey was distributed through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling, it is not possible to provide a sample return figure. These findings are combined with the findings from the 7 interview participants (sample return, 23%). This chapter will *'contain summaries of the data that focus on the main findings of the research'* (Gray, 2014, p. 641). The themes and issues have been identified within each relevant section.

The focus of the surveys was to gain an insight into the experiences of attending a parenting course and to explore other forms of advice that are accessed within the early days of motherhood (refer back to Appendix 6 for profile of survey participants and Appendix 7 for information regarding the attended parenting courses). The interview phase moved towards a deeper exploration of the wider experiences of modern motherhood. This is reflected in the themes that were blended using both sets of data with theme 1 exploring the initial feelings on becoming a mother, themes 2, 3 and 4 reflecting on the factors that lead participants to attend a parenting course and experiences of attending the courses and themes 5, 6 and 7 exploring the wider social and cultural experiences within modern motherhood.

4.2 Coding of the participants:

For the purpose of the findings, survey respondents will be referred to by their ID number (e.g. ID8) and interview participants will be referred to using their pseudonym. Each theme will link to an issue as a code e.g. T1/I1 refers to Theme 1 Issue 1 (Coles and McGrath, 2010).

At the start of each quote from the survey respondent, the remainder of the code will be given, e.g. ID8/Q14 refers to ID8 from question 14.

At the start of each quote given from the interview participant, the remainder of the code will be given, e.g. Claire/P1 refers to Claire/Page 1 from the interview transcript.

4.3 Outline of Emerging Themes

The themes have been identified under the following headings, each theme has a set of associated issues from the data that will be explored in turn. The themes were created by identifying patterns from the data and then forming those into clusters which became the issues that formed the larger themes (as identified in 3.7.3 The coding of surveys and interviews and the blending of the data).

Theme 1. Navigating the early days of motherhood

Theme 2. 'Expert' advice and support for new mothers

Theme 3. Reasons identified for attending a parenting course

Theme 4. Experiences of attending a parenting course

Theme 5. Feeling judged

Theme 6. 'All consuming' pressure on self to be 'Super-mum'

Theme 7. Reflecting on motherhood

4.4 Findings from the surveys and interviews

4.4.1 Theme 1: Navigating the early days of motherhood

This theme relates to emotions and reflections from the time immediately following the birth of participant's children. Reflections demonstrated elements of self-surveillance such as the internalisation of pressure and self-doubt in relation to the motherhood role.

1. Emotions in the early days (T1/I1)
2. Unprepared for how hard/difficult the early days of motherhood were (T1/I2)
3. Immediate pressure on self (T1/I3)
4. Frustration with partner (T1/I4)
5. Lack of confidence / self-doubt (T1/I5)

Table 1: Emerging Issues within Theme 1

T1/I1 Emotions in early days

The most commonly cited words that were used by interview participants to describe feelings in this time were *'tired, exhausted or drained'* (Jenny/P1, Priya/P1, Ruth/P1 and Gemma/P1) with *'shock'* (Clare/P1, Gemma/P1, Louise/P1)*, 'emotional'* (Jenny/P1, Priya/P1 and Louise/P1) *and 'overwhelmed'* (Clare/P1, Ruth/P1, Gemma/P1). For example:

> Emotional. Really emotional, I think I used to cry a lot, like all the time pretty much when I came home! (Priya/P1).

T1/I2 Unprepared for how hard or difficult the early days of motherhood were

Three participants (Louise, Priya and Jenny) discussed how they felt unprepared for how difficult the early days of motherhood would be with responses including:

> I didn't expect it to be that hard… I just didn't know what to expect. I didn't realise that this was what having a baby was all about!.....
> I thought I was prepared for it but I really wasn't. urm, and then in pain on top of that! After just having this baby and then no-one told me about this! So yeah it was….. Not what I expected, at all! (Priya/P1);

> A few people had said to me, 'it'll be the hardest year of your life and if you can get through that, you can get through anything'…
> You don't realise, I don't think, how hard it'll be. You think 'It will be alright, they may have found it really hard but we'll be ok… cos we're different!', but nobody is! When you're that sleep deprived……it takes you a while to find your rhythm doesn't it? (Jenny/P2).

T1/I3 Immediate pressure on self

Two Participants (Louise and Ruth) discussed the tendency to put immediate pressure on themselves in relation to breastfeeding, having a routine quickly and maintaining an organised house. Examples of responses below:

> (Speaking about breastfeeding) I genuinely was at the point where I thought 'I can't do this' and I remember feeling like I'd let myself down and that's really hard……I was pushing it on 'M' (husband) as well to make the decision because I didn't want to make that decision. And I actually know a couple of friends that I've spoken to

> that have said, their husband turned round and said 'you're crying all the time, this is ridiculous, you know, we're gonna do…..(bottle-feeding)'. So I think support around that is really important if that's what you chose to do (Louise/P6);
>
> You've got everybody coming to visit initially, so it's hard to try and get a routine going then and you don't want everyone walking into a bombsite so you've got to do the house and all that sort of stuff as well, so there's…. yeah, I think help getting them into a routine would have been quite useful (Ruth/P2&3).

T1/I4 Frustration with partner

Two participants (Louise and Jenny) recalled resentment with their partners and an increase in arguments at this time.

> I almost resented 'M' (husband) a little bit when he went back to work, because I was like 'oh you've got some normality, and you can get up and go to work, you can have your tea or your lunch without a baby stuck to your boob or feed a baby and can have a full conversation' and I resented that a little bit, at first because I hadn't got into the swing of things (Louise/P6);
>
> 'M' (husband) and I were just biting at each other the whole time. And yeah, I think there was this pressure on myself cos I was feeding him and I had to do it and M couldn't do anything and I was angry with him cos he couldn't do anything. And expressing I just found just didn't help cos I just found that to get M to feed him I had to spend time expressing and that was just really hard work as well (Jenny/P1).

T1/I5 Lack of confidence / self-doubt

Two participants (Louise and Gemma) recalled a feeling of self-doubt within the early days of motherhood, Louise and Gemma returned to this issue more than once:

> I think you are constantly looking at how you've approached things and how you've handled it…You're always looking at how you can better yourself, and I think you question yourself more than you do with anything else… you put a lot of pressure on yourself because, it's so emotional as well so its… it's a real funny one because you constantly think 'I should have handled that differently or they're doing that better than I am because their baby's….. 'But… you're constantly questioning yourself and your ability to do this job which is the most important thing you've ever wanted… you've ever

done… and you're given no instruction on how to do it!!! (Louise/P1-3);

Thinking you're not able to do it and self-doubt. Over analysing everything and thinking everyone around you knew what they were doing and almost holding yourself back because you kind of felt that you weren't….. Doing it right. So you kept away a little bit, kept yourself to…. yourself.
H – From other people?
G – Yeah (Gemma/P1).

4.4.2 Theme 2: 'Expert' advice and support for new mothers

Within this theme participants reflected on different sources of support that were accessed within the early days of motherhood. Participants demonstrated awareness of added pressures through conflicting messages from these different sources of advice, they also reflected on how they came to resist these messages as confidence grew during the first year of motherhood.

1. Using baby books (T2/I1)
2. Family and friends as sources of advice (T2/I2)
3. Midwives/Health visitors/GP (T2/I3)
4. Children's Centre (T2/I4)
5. Parenting forums/websites (T2/I5)
6. Contradictory advice (T2/I6)
7. Ways of ignoring contradictory advice (T2/I7)
8. Need for confidence (T2/I8)

Table 2: Emerging Issues within Theme 2

T2/I1 Using baby books

From the survey phase 8 (27%) of participants said they 'often' and 16 (53%) said they 'sometimes' used baby books as a source of advice within the first 6 weeks of the baby being born.

Four interview participants (Louise, Priya, Clare and Jenny) discussed using baby books as a source of advice. One of the participants (Clare) described the use of baby books as supportive and a replacement source of advice when family is not

accessible. Three participants referred to the contradictory nature of such books and the way they can add to feelings of pressure:

> I do think mums need a lot of support. I think the problem with this country is, because my husband's North African and over there, they have, the family virtually live with you when you've had a new baby so you've got masses of support, and I think, we don't have that, so having the manuals and the guides and the help out there, it is a big help cos you can't always rely on your immediate family (Clare/P4);
>
> I was given lots of books as well, who's the woman? Gina Ford….. Yeah and I just didn't like that one at all….. I felt like a total failure (Louise/P5);
>
> I know with T, I read too many books and I think that was, a mistake… Cos I didn't have a clue what to do and I read all these books and I tried to do everything month by month and I was like, well he should be doing this by this month and you know, that started. I think that started to stress me out and make me go a bit 'doo lally' to be honest! (Priya/P9);
>
> I remember reading a bit of Gina Ford and just getting a few pages in… cos a friend from our NCT course was following it and seemed to be getting on well. I read a couple of pages and her saying 'and know you have a cup of tea!' and I just thought 'I don't want to be told when I can have a cup of tea!!' and so she went back to the library! I didn't try any of that! (Jenny/P2&3).

T2/I2 Family and friends as sources of advice

The most often accessed source of advice identified by survey participants was 'partner' 20 (67%), 'their own parents' 18 (60%) and 'friends' 15 (50%). 26 (87%) of participants stated that they never accessed support from their neighbours.

Five interview participants (Kate, Louise, Ruth, Priya and Jenny) mentioned family and friends as sources for advice with friends female family members cited most often within this category:

> I did go my mum and……. Sometimes my mother in law gave me advice even when I didn't particularly seek it …. But I did use the advice. I didn't mind taking the advice, but I think definitely my friends more than anyone (Kate/P1);
>
> My mum came and stayed with me for the first 2 weeks… and that was amazing, I don't know what I would have done without her to be honest. But it was really hard when she went, and I found it really hard and that used to upset me loads when she went. You know, no-ones like your mum, you can talk to your mum about anything

> right? I did find it hard but what do you do hey? You've just got to get on with it;
>
> My mother in law's lovely so, I think for me that's what really helped….. she's like, really supportive, she was great, so that was…. Like, they really helped me out a lot, things like cooking, you know, little things that you don't have to worry about, things like cooking dinner and doing laundry and the house they are all the extra things that you have to think about. You know like, I don't know how people do it without any, with no support (Priya/P12).

T2/I3 Health visitors/GP

From the survey phase, 15 (50%) of participants said they 'often' and 14 (47%) said they 'sometimes' accessed health visitor support as a source of advice within the first 6 weeks of the baby being born. 3 (10%) of participants said they 'often' and 22 (73%) said they 'sometimes' accessed GP advice.

Three interview participants (Ruth, Priya and Clare) mentioned health professionals as a source for advice.

> I was at the health visitor every week getting him weighed so if there was anything specific that I wanted to ask, I would ask. I think if you get a nice, friendly health visitor it's a really useful service, but sometimes you get these ones who just want you in and out or they make you feel that if you're not doing everything by the book, then you're not doing it right (Ruth/P1);
>
> But the breastfeeding support was really good, every time I felt down about it, I remember the health visitor would come round and she'd like literally just sit there and help me latch him on to my boob and I would literally sit there and cry and going 'I can't do it, I'm not doing it properly!' and she'd be like 'no, no you are, you're doing it really well' and mainly, I thought that support was really good. (Looks at young picture of baby and laughs and smiles) (Priya/P7);
>
> I had a really good health visitor with K, she was really good. Then I joined the children's centre….. Illnesses and things like that, obviously doctors. But normally, I'd speak to the health visitor first, she was really good (Clare/P1).

T2/I4 Children's Centres

From the survey phase, 8 (27%) of participants said they 'often' and 16 (53%) said they 'sometimes' accessed Children Centre support as a source of advice within the first 6 weeks of the baby being born.

Four interview participants (Louise, Gemma, Priya and Clare) cited Children's Centres as a place they 'often' went to for advice and support. The importance of local provision with a multi-agency support and a place to meet other people was highlighted here.

> It's kind of like turn up (to the Children's Centre) and they ran it for about 12 weeks. I think, since then they've stopped it and it's such a shame cos that did, that did saved my life! I think if they're spending the money on anything it should be that
>
> H – it's that local thing isn't it…?
>
> G – yeah and even if they don't run the same thing themselves, even just putting people in touch with people that have had babies around the same time, cos not everybody has friends who have babies at the same time. If you're someone having a baby for the first time without friends who have had babies previously, it's very……..shit…..(laughs) (Gemma/P2&3).

T2/I5 Parenting forums/websites

From the survey phase, 6 (20%) of participants said they 'often' and 18 (60%) said they 'sometimes' used parenting forums or blogs. 7 (23%) participants said they 'often', with 21 (70%) stating they 'sometimes' used baby or parenting websites as a source of advice within the first 6 weeks of the baby being born.

Two interview participants (Gemma and Ruth) referred to using parenting forums and websites with *'mumsnet'* and *'netmums'* cited. Both responses referred to caution or avoidance in using these sites as sources of advice and support.

> I guess you get drawn to other things and then you're looking at the 'netmums' websites or whatever… and that's why it gets…. I don't know…. (Gemma/P7);
>
> Because he was my first, I was very nervous about using anything that wasn't NHS guidelines or anything that like that or just other people's advice, I was a bit dubious. So yeah, for him it was more NHS and midwife and health visitor websites and that kind of thing, just to get their sort of, advice…..I didn't tend to use the 'mumsnets' or things like that much. It's just too many opinions, you just want to go to one place that's got the information. And that's it, whereas if you start…. One person says one thing, another person says another thing and you're just in a worse state than you were before cos you've just got too much information (Ruth/P1).

T2/I6 Contradictory advice

Two participants (Gemma and Jenny) described how advice can be overwhelming and contradictory at times.

> You're gonna get advice off everyone and everyone's advice is not necessarily the right advice but I think, as you get a bit more confident you learn where… who to listen to more and what advice to take and I think, you need to listen to yourself and… cos, you're gut feeling is generally right….. Cos you think, at that point, you think everyone else knows what they're doing so you think 'oh, well I was gonna do this, this and this but I'll do it… they must be right, they're better at that than me, and that kind of thing…..' (Gemma/P2);

> I think then you just become so overwhelmed with advice because when you then ask a few friends who tell you there experiences which will be different to yours and then you read a few books that will all be conflicting and then your health visitor tells you what they have to tell you at this certain point of time which was probably different to what they would have told my sister when she had her child cos things have changed (Jenny/P3).

T2/I7 Ways of ignoring contradictory advice

Two (Louise and Jenny) participants described strategies for dealing with contradictory advice from different sources.

> I think you pick and choose the subjects that were of interest to me (Louise/P10);

> It's just then finding your way, I just picked the bits that worked for us or that H fit into. If he was already doing something from one of the books I would think 'oh that's the one I'll use then cos then cos he fit into that box' (Jenny/P3);

> I think people want to share don't they? And say….'we've been through it and it's really hard…..and this is what you can do to help yourself'. But it's just that angle of 'this worked for us but it won't necessarily work for you' rather than 'this is the only way' (Jenny/P8).

4.4.3 Theme 3: Reasons identified for going to a parenting course

Within this theme participants reflected on the factors that led them to accessing a parenting course, with adult interaction identified as the most common reason for attending a course.

1. The importance of having structure to a day
2. Feeling isolated
3. Adult interaction
4. Social interaction for child
5. A place to breastfeed
6. Specific need or developmental reasons
7. Need for practical advice

Table 3: Emerging issues within Theme 3

T3/I1 The importance of having structure to a day

One survey respondent and three interview participants (Kate, Priya and Jenny) highlighted the importance of having some structure and routine to the day with a new baby.

> Social reasons on the whole, a day and a time to aim for in what could sometimes be a very hectic week! Also met friends there (ID30/Q11);
>
> I liked that it was regular so I could always think…. Oh on a Wednesday afternoon I'm always gonna see these girls or (Kate/P4);
>
> It was part of our routine every week…. and it got me out and it was good (Priya/P6).

T3/I2 Feeling isolated

One survey respondent and four interview participants (Kate, Gemma, Ruth and Clare) discussed the need for support close to home as a reason for attending a parenting class. Feelings of isolation were highlighted and needing to have a regular activity. Gemma, in particular, returned to this issue several times throughout the interview.

> I felt alone and in need to meet other parents for company and assurance. I did not think my close friends and family would

> understand what I was going through but other new parents would. I also needed a quite space for my babies and me (ID83/Q11);
>
> That (the parenting class) was a lifeline, cos it was somewhere to go for an hour or two (Gemma/P6);
>
> The social aspect, that's the most important thing…. There's nothing worse than staring at your 4 walls and thinking…… and he was a January baby as well …. It was winter. In the summer you can just go out and do a bit of walking…..I remember….it was kind of like, the worst thing in the world being at home (Gemma/P6&7);
>
> I'd just moved back from Sheffield to here and I didn't know anybody and getting out, was….really difficult cos I didn't want to, sort of, go on my own. So, when I joined the children's centre, they sort of got me to a play centre. Just a small one, so there wasn't a lot of people, and it made a big difference, because now I'll go anywhere, I'm not bothered, but just that initial get you out and get you back into the community and talking to other mums.
> H – Especially when you are new somewhere?
> C – Yeah, yeah, I mean I've got my family for support but sometimes you just need someone else to talk to whose in the same position (Clare/P1&2).

T3/I3 The importance of a Network/Adult interaction (same age children)

Sixteen survey respondents and six interview participants (Kate, Louise, Gemma, Ruth, Priya and Jenny) described the importance of developing a social network with parents of children that are the same age as their own child. Responses also related to the importance of knowing people that are going through the same things at the same time and the value in developing a social network that is long lasting and how this can become a very supportive and valuable relationship. This issue was referred to on several occasions.

> Even though it was for a social thing, you still spoke about, 'oh my babies not sleeping…or have you seen this lump… do you think this is normal?' so even though you're not going there for advice, your constantly asking for advice from other people and other mums… so I suppose, definitely seeking that support from other people really…. (Kate/P3);
>
> I think, just a general, it's a camaraderie that you really need (Louise/P6&7);
>
> Interestingly they're not….. the people that I met there aren't necessarily the people that I've kept in touch with er…. But they were

> really important in those first few months because its… it's almost quite nice to have faceless people that didn't know who I was….. Not faceless, that sounds really horrible but…people that didn't have any expectations of how I was going to be as a mum …. Because I think you do…. Do change don't you…..you change as soon as you've got that individual and it was nice to be with people that didn't know that and…. It sounds like a really weird thing but…. (Louise/P7&8);
>
> The main thing, meeting the friends from it. The fact that it did give us help and time out of the house and the kind of…. At that point it was the highlight of the week cos I knew I had something to go to and get out of the house and I knew I was going to have people (Gemma/P4);
>
> It was nice meeting other mums and sharing labour and birth war stories (laughs) you know (Ruth/P5);
>
> Again, it was talking to other mothers, getting out, just having that adult, social interaction with other people…..I think I used to like, watching how they were with their children as well (Priya/P5);

T3/I4 Social interaction for child

Three survey respondents and one interview participant (Priya) highlighted the importance of social interaction between the children as a reason for attending a parenting class.

> To teach my child social skills (ID74/Q11);
>
> Thought would be an enjoyable activity to do with my child (ID79/Q11);
>
> It was nice for them, for the kids to be around other kids. (Pauses and looks at picture of T) - I used to feel like they'd remember kids they used to see regularly. I'd be like 'arhhh, they remember, they know who they are now…..' (Priya/P5).

T3/I5 A place to breastfeed

One participant (Priya) identified 'a place to breastfeed' as a reason for attending a parenting class. This point was raised on two occasions by Priya.

> Because I was breastfeeding, I never felt that comfortable going out… so going to Sure Start I felt comfortable. I knew that was one place I could go, and have that bit of interaction, feed and not have to worry about any of that? H – Do you mean the self-conscious side? P – Yeah, absolutely (Priya/P2).

T3/I6 A specific developmental reason

Three survey respondents and one interview participant (Clare) referred twice to a specific developmental aspect of parenting as a reason for attending a parenting course.

> To help me be a better parent (ID8/Q11):
>
> Concerns over my son having delays in development with regards to hearing and communicating (ID88/Q11);
>
> I was struggling with their behaviour but after the course I realised, it wasn't their behaviour, it was probably mine. So yeah, I was looking for advice on …. tantrum twos, whatever you call it! And just trying to give attention to both of them while I've got one that's having tantrums, and one that's still needy (Clare/P2);
>
> Mainly just child behaviour and how to handle situations and going back to the basics….. we had the pyramid, where you go back to the basics where you play, talk and listen and that sort of thing. I thought the course……some of the parts of courses were for older children, not for mine, but it did give me some of the right ideas of what to do. And it does work, sitting and playing with them and giving that bit of attention (Clare/P2/3).

T3/I7 Need for practical advice

Twelve survey respondents and five interview participants (Ruth, Kate, Louise, Gemma and Priya) discussed the need for practical advice as a reason for attending a parenting course, reasons included a desire to learn more about weaning a baby or support with fostering a routine for a baby. Reassurance from health professionals and early years practitioners regarding meeting care needs of babies were also cited, along with an informal place for mothers to meet.

> They did weaning further down the line lots of like hold techniques cos 'I' was really windy and was… I don't think he had proper colic but he used to really really struggle so there was like, the tiger in a tree type hold…so but the, the ladies that ran it had very young children as well so I think it was kind of nice … and it just kind of put me at ease (Louise/P4);
>
> Just wanted to know what to do with various bits, wanted advice with teething, sleeping, then subsequently weaning and everything like that (Gemma/P3);

> I think helping you get your child into a routine is a big thing because I think once you do get them into a settled routine it makes life a lot easier because they know what to expect and you know what to expect, so you can plan your life more…….. I can could have done with a bit of advice with people saying to me, you know, this is a generally good time to put them to bed, this is what time they should be sleeping til, maybe a morning nap, maybe an afternoon nap… (Ruth/P2).

4.4.4 Theme 4: Experiences of attending a parenting course

This theme relates to the focus of the surveys which concentrated predominantly on the experiences of attending a parenting course and the context of the courses themselves. Aspects of interpersonal surveillance were reflected on here including the varied and influential experiences of meeting other mothers.

1. Comparisons between mothers
2. Support offered by other mothers
3. Course content
4. Sense of achievement
5. Increased confidence / competence

Table 4: Emerging issues within Theme 4

T4/I1 Comparisons between mothers

Three survey respondents and five interview participants (Louise, Gemma, Ruth, Priya and Jenny) highlighted the way mothers within parenting courses made comparisons between themselves. According to responses given by these mothers, comparisons around the meeting of developmental milestones can lead to feelings of being judged by other mothers. Jenny also highlighted a feeling of being judged or compared to by other mothers when the sensitivities may have actually been her own.

> Some parents love to compare children (this is true in any situation though) (ID31/Q15);

> I did meet some overly competitive mums that made you question what you were doing but once you clock them you avoid them!! (ID42/Q15);

> The only thing is the occasional competitive parent…….but you get that literally get that from day one and people always joke about school mums you know 'soccer moms' and it's true and you see if right from day one 'oh he's so placid, just so lovely….. he's so smiley' whilst yours is sat there in a pram like, bright red screaming, with steam coming out of his ears and you like 'oh, yeah……' and you think 'what have I produced??' but you know, you do very quickly start to spot people (Louise/P11&12)
>
> I think there's a lot of kind of comparison ….. and I think at first as well, when you meet a new group of friends, there isn't that kind of trust. And people aren't meaning to be… they're just saying what their experience is and you kind of…. They're not being nasty or not being unsupportive… (Gemma/P8);
>
> There's definitely the kind of competition there, definitely (sighs) 'my baby sleeps through the night, my baby's taking this much milk…. Ooo look my baby…….. My babies only 2 weeks old and he's already rolling over and crawling!' 'Oh really??? (Ruth/P7);
>
> It sometimes did get a bit much. I actually remember someone asking me…… I remember her saying 'oh… mines only however old and … and he's already crawling… oh, don't worry! You'll be alright'….It was so patronising. It was SO patronising! I remember actually ringing P (husband) up after and getting really upset and I think he was just like 'you need to stop going to these ridiculous classes if this is how you're going to feel when you come out of them!' (Priya/P5&6);
>
> You do get the odd ones that just, they just want their child to be a little bit better than yours! (Priya/P8&9);
>
> I think the times I've felt sensitive have been more about my own issues, rather than anyone else, when I've over analysed things people have said or done. At the time, when I was moving breastfeeding to bottle-feeding I felt really sensitive about that……, at the time I thought 'but, they're still breastfeeding and they're doing it all the time' and almost feeling that they were judging you for not, and they weren't. (Jenny/P8).

T4/I2 Support offered by other mothers

Nine survey respondents and five interview participants (Kate, Louise, Priya, Jenny and Clare) highlighted the way that both mothers who met each other at

parenting courses and mothers who they knew previously would support each other when there was open and honest communication.

> Going to a group with other new parents made me realise that the worry I was feeling was totally normal, sharing experiences/sleep stories/wind stories etc put my mind at rest. I found it easier to deal with these things once I knew that they were totally normal. (ID42/Q14);
>
> It's amazing what, just someone saying you know something like 'you look good' even though you think you've not really washed your hair or something, you know, it really boosts you and it makes you feel good……if a kids tantruming you don't need someone whose making judgements on you, you need someone who will give you that smile and tell you it's alright that that's happening (Kate/P6);
>
> You'd go to those little group and you'd see other people crying…. Because their babies had been up since you know, 12oclock at night and…. you know… having a little weep ...and you're like 'ooooh, it's alright….. It's just such a wonderful time' (laughs). But, you know that you're totally normal in how you feel (Louise/P13);
>
> When I went to baby sensory I remember when A was about 8 months and remember, I was sitting there breastfeeding him and a couple of the other mums used to always come up to me and be like 'oh, your doing so well.....your doing so well to still do it'….. it's so nice when other mums can tell you how well you're doing. Now if I'm out and I see someone breastfeeding, I always try and smile. (Priya/P8&9);
>
> Sharing advice, it was lovely. I mean, it got a bit full on at one point. When I started to get a bit sensitive about feeding or having a particular difficult period with sleeping and it feels like everyone else is doing ok and I dipped out for a bit. But everyone has had a moment and they dipped out and then come back in and were all still in touch now and see each other when we can (Jenny/P6&7).

T4/I3 Course content

When asked to reflect on the benefit or otherwise in attending a parenting course, 22 (73%) of the survey respondents strongly agreed that the course provided them with the 'opportunities to meet other mothers'. 6 (20%) respondents strongly agreed that the course helped them to 'consider their parenting style'.

17 (57%) survey respondents offered positive reflections about the course content including flexible start times and practical support:

> I joke that it saved my life but in all honesty it probably did... I'm not sure what I would have done without the support, reassurance and advice from the other mothers. More so when the parenting course finished and we grew closer and helped each other with what's normal, what's not normal and all the bits in between when we didn't have a clue! (ID27/Q14);
>
> I think it's all practical, useful information. I've not been to anything where I thought 'where that was a load of….. you know, that was just loads of theory' you know, it was all practical things where I could take something away from, whatever session it was so with the weaning, they showed you the different stages, with the baby massage you have actual tools that you can use when they're screaming in the middle of the night or whatever and I suppose that's what you need isn't it?, because you're constantly looking for information about how you can improve what you're doing and then you give it a go (Louise/P10).

12 (40%) survey participants offered negative responses about the content of the parenting course, particularly about the over-emphasis on breastfeeding advice.

> We had a very pushy woman talk to us about breastfeeding for one whole session. She refused to speak about bottle feeding at all. (ID44/Q15);
>
> The NCT position on breastfeeding wasn't helpful. There was no information provided on other ways to feed your baby if and when it was needed. The classes should have supporting families at the heart of them, not pushing a particular agenda (ID35/Q15);
>
> As with everything in parenting, whomever is teaching to some extent gives their own opinions. In all honesty, I feel the focus should be on empowering women to find and trust their instincts as when you do, everything becomes much simpler! (ID47/Q15);

One interview participant (Kate) noted a change in provision between having her two children. She moved into a more affluent area whilst expecting her second child and discussed the reduction in provision within this area.

> When I had M (first child) there was a lot more going on because there was a Sure Start Centre just a few roads away but when I had L (second child) there wasn't much……There wasn't that many community groups, particularly council run, there was a lot of baby groups but they were run by volunteers at different churches etc. which I did attend but, in terms of the council support for our area…

> I think they sort of think a more affluent area…. we won't provide….. but that was something I really did notice (Kate/P3).

T4/I4 Sense of achievement from going

Two participants (Louise and Jenny) recalled a sense of achievement and a feeling of purpose from attending a parenting course.

> I felt like I'd done something really productive and I think that was a really big thing. I think in those first few months you kind of feel that you've got no….. your purpose is your baby but you've got no purpose outside your baby…and I, I remember like, M coming home from work and not really having much to tell him about… oh yeah, he's done a poo… he's done a wee… he's done so and so and so and so but… I felt like I had something to contribute to so it was a good opportunity (Louise/P12);

> I guess I'd normally feel quite pleased that I'd been out and done something and seen people. You just feel that sense of achievement for actually going somewhere and making it and if I was on time and if H slept and everything went to plan… I felt like a superhero! I was like 'I've conquered the world!' (Jenny/P7&8).

T4/I5 Increased confidence / competence

Two survey respondents and three interview participants (Kate, Ruth and Clare) recalled increased feelings of confidence and competence from the attendance of a parenting course and also from experience over time.

> When my children were born I questioned every decision I made, and wondered if I was making the right choices by them. The group allowed me to have a sounding board and helped me feel more confident in my parenting skills (ID65/Q14);

> I have learned that what I was experiencing was not unique and in fact there are other parents who have it worse than I have. I also learned that parenting is no science. It is OK to get it wrong (ID83/Q14);

> I definitely felt really positive after attending just because it really gave me that confidence and back up that I felt that I needed, just, so I thought I was making the right decisions about different things (Kate/P5);

> Well when I first got there, I was saying oh this is their bad behaviour, but by the end of it I was realising that it's my behaviour that they

> are mimicking. So highlighting that and making you see the bigger picture was really good. …..So it helped me to focus a bit more (Clare/P3);
>
> They sort of got me back out into the world, and I've sort of gone my own way now, so, I don't go there very often now. But if I want to go back, then I know it's there, so….. So it just, I don't know I think getting back out there and talking to other mums. I just felt relieved that wasn't the only one that was going through the same thing. So, it's not just me and I felt, I feel as though I can talk to people now (Clare/P3/4).

4.4.5 Theme 5: Feeling Judged

The effects of all three levels of surveillance (state, interpersonal and self) were demonstrated within this theme. Reflections focussed on feelings of being judged within the mother role, an awareness of different sources that increase this feeling including social media, celebrity culture and the parenting industry and the overriding difficulty in resisting these sources of added pressure.

1. Not wanting to 'bother' a GP
2. Feelings of a 'hidden agenda' of health professionals over issues e.g. breastfeeding/growth
3. The importance of non-judgemental health practitioners e.g. no pressure for 'textbook' babies
4. Judgements from others e.g. family, friends, strangers
5. Reflecting on historical parenting styles/generational differences
6. Need for honesty between mothers
7. Role of social media
8. Added pressure of media/celebrity
9. Awareness of 'parenting industry'

Table 5: Emerging issues within Theme 5

T5/I1 Not wanting to 'bother' a GP

Two participants (Kate and Ruth) mentioned a feeling of not wanting to take minor issues to a doctor.

> Particularly as a new mum….. You feel like…. If you're going to the doctors to ask a question, you need to ask a really serious question. You don't want to ask about… Snot or something….whereas in a more informal setting… you feel as though you can talk about anything… and it's much more relaxed and you feel that no-one is going to judge you. Whereas you feel like, yeah, if you're going to book an appointment with the doctors, it needs to be a serious issue and a problem (Kate/P4&5);
>
> I didn't find very helpful whenever I went to a GP, I was sort of made to think that I was being an over cautious mum and I was being over anxious and I was, you know, taking it too far sort of thing, so I tried to steer away of GPs which isn't great, you know, you should feel that you can go and see a GP if you need to (Ruth/P4);

T5/I2 Feelings of a 'hidden agenda' of health professionals over issues e.g. breastfeeding/growth

Three participants (Gemma, Ruth and Jenny) mentioned a feeling of a hidden agenda with health professionals and parenting course professionals. This seemed particularly pertinent around breastfeeding advice with concerns expressed from participants about the lack of information given in relation to bottle feeding or support for those who are unable to or choose not to breastfeed.

> They wouldn't even teach you about bottle feeding or anything like that at all, at the NCT they said they wouldn't even cover it because that's not what they advise or what they do and I remember kind of thinking 'right ok' and genuinely don't think I would have even read into how I would have don't it because I just expected to be very, very, it's all natural and it'll all happen and your baby will be fine….. And actually that wasn't my experience at all (Gemma/P5&6);
>
> It's (breastfeeding) a big thing they try and push and I don't think previously they've understood the impact that that has on mothers that can't do it or don't want to do it. It can really knock your confidence…. And you have people ringing you up you know, 'are you still breastfeeding, are you still managing it?' and you don't want that in your home! ……It's just, it's too intrusive I think, it's far too intrusive (Ruth/P4);
>
> I actually spoke to our NCT course leader…. she actually said 'well our hands are tied, we can't say anything about bottle feeding during the NCT courses cos we've signed up to the world health organisation code on breastfeeding' and I said 'well I think…..the code should be about supporting mothers to be happy and healthy and…..... I don't know anybody who hasn't given it there absolute

> best shot to breastfeed…. '. The most important thing is that they're happy, relaxed and feeding their baby'…….had I know that, perhaps I wouldn't have gone to the NCT classes……They are very one sided in what they'll tell you and you'll learn a lot more… when baby arrives (Jenny/P4).

T5/I3 The importance of non-judgemental health practitioners e.g. no pressure for 'textbook' babies

Five participants (Louise, Gemma, Ruth, Priya and Jenny) highlighted the importance for the health professionals and early years practitioners that offer parenting courses to be non-judgemental and recognise all children as individuals rather than adding pressure through developmental milestones.

> I remember T wouldn't have lumpy food for ages, and they would be really funny, they'd keep telling me that, he should be having this by now and he should be doing this now…. so I would find them to be quite forceful like that…. Kind of judgemental…. I experienced that with T, and I was really upset after, I'd be like 'well obviously I'm doing something wrong because he's not doing it and maybe I should be doing something different.' I learnt that when I had A (second child). I just used to… if I needed to take him for appointments and get him weighed, I would just not tell them…. just so I didn't get judged by it, and it was fine. I felt much better for it!... all kids do stuff at different stages, it's not all text book or, you know, every child develops differently (Priya/P4&5);
>
> I'd get anxious before I went, in-case they asked me something about what he was doing and if he wasn't doing it or if he wasn't doing it at the right age and I'd start over thinking things and getting stressed out about things like that.. I think if that pressure wasn't on, I think I maybe would have gone a bit more….. sometimes, I wouldn't even go….. (Priya/P6);
>
> I think (parenting course practitioners need to be) just open, friendly. Non-judgemental and I guess that's the bit you didn't get from the NCT. She was very friendly but obviously now I know she was pushing a certain agenda and wasn't a neutral. Whereas, some of the other groups, like baby bundle, the lady who lead that was lovely and just wouldn't bat an eyelid whether someone got food out or boobs out or you know, changing nappies or whatever, it was just anything goes and that's what you want in that sort of environment, you don't want to feel that you're doing something wrong or being judged (Jenny/P6).

The importance of health practitioners to have empathy and their own experience was highlighted by Louise:

> You're instantly looking for someone to bond with over that experience and……that's what I found very useful, when someone says…. Oh yeah, that's what mine were like and mine did this…. And 'oh god yeah….. This happened' someone who's really chilled out about it and also someone who talks to you… in lamens terms…..
>
> I think sometimes, it's all very medical at certain points of your pregnancy you know, I think, when you've got someone in front of you that's talking from personal experience and they're explaining …… and they're like…. Have you tried this or have you tried that??? Cos I think some of them… I remember some people say to me 'oh, my health visitor has told me not to cuddle my baby and they've told me to put them in a basket as soon as they're asleep and blah blah blah…' (Louise/P9&10).

T5/I4 Judgements from others e.g. family, friends, strangers

Two participants (Louise and Gemma) highlighted feelings of being judged by other people particularly in relation to breastfeeding and behaviour management.

> When you take your kids to cafes and restaurants and there's like… older couples…. it's almost like they've forgotten how hard it is to have a child …… and you get funny looks don't you and ….. I always think it's always refreshing when you come across an older person that remembers what it's like having their child and you kind of…… you feel a kind of a bond there (Louise/P9);
>
> It's almost like it's an Issue like 'oh, you've got to……got to feed again?' whereas when you have a bottle it doesn't matter where you feed them…. So I've, I have fed her out and about and I have felt more confident this time but with H, I would absolutely never had the confidence to do that.
>
> H – to breastfeed in public?
> G – No. I think if I'd carried on just breastfeeding H then I would have completely lost the plot (laughs) (Gemma/P8&9).

T5/I5 Reflecting on historical parenting styles/generational differences

Two participants (Louise and Ruth) reflected on the generational differences with parenting styles including the added pressure in relation to the exposed nature of modern parenting, greater expectations on children to conform to an adult world and changes in regards to increased financial pressures for mothers to return to work.

> I do think that's one of the added difficulties with our generation now, cos, everyone's parenting techniques are in your face. You can't do it your own way without thinking, maybe their way is better because you know, when you think about when our mums had us, it wasn't like that, and they might have had a home phone and might catch up at playgroups and stuff. But there just wasn't the pressure, and I suppose all these parenting courses, they wouldn't have been around necessarily, would they? (Louise/P12);

T5/I6 Need for honesty between mothers

Four participants (Kate, Louise, Ruth and Priya) discussed the need for more honesty between mothers rather than a feeling of having to hide the challenges that this role brings.

> We were just saying to each other 'oh yeah, everything's great!' and actually, we said let's stop doing that and say 'I've had a rubbish week! Works been really hard, M has been playing up and having tantrums, M is not sleeping' and let's just say to each other what our… issues have been that week because it makes us feel, actually better, because instead of trying to perform as 'supermum'…. because it is very easy to go 'oh everything's great' but actually deep down you're thinking 'ahhhhh, help!' (Kate/P6&7);
>
> I suppose it's only really after those first few weeks that people start being honest and saying 'oh my god…' and don't get me wrong you do still get people that you come across that say 'oh yeah, they're sleeping through at 4 days old' and you're like 'hahaha…. Ok!' but I would say …. Once I'd found …the people that I was comfortable with and I felt people I knew were telling the truth…. (Louise/P4);
>
> Unless its mothers who are already your friends and you just happen to have had babies at the same time. I think that's the best kind of support you can get because, you're gonna be honest with each other… about the horrors! (Laughs). Whereas other mothers…… (see) their child through rose tinted glasses and you need someone… …….If you've got friends that are honest…. it really makes a difference because… its, it can be hilarious! Some of the

> things that you talk about, but I don't think other mums have got that level of honesty. Probably because there is so much pressure around to be….this super-mum. You know, your child's the best behaved, best dressed, your house is the cleanest, your full face of makeup and hair done by 8 o'clock in the morning and full time job…. And it's not, it's not realistic (Ruth/P8);
>
> Although sometimes I think a lot of the time… people….. Lie! A lot of the time, I've now figured that out! Back then I think you just feel that…oh god… their kids do this and they do this but my kids don't but I've now come to believe that they lie! (Priya/P3).

T5/I7 Role of social media

Three participants (Kate, Louise and Gemma) all mention the role that social media plays in adding pressure to motherhood.

> Everything is so highlighted these days….everything is either on Facebook or… I do think it's because there is so much opportunity now to interact with each other… because our phones are so readily available and we have these apps you know, what's app and viber and we create these groups and you know, it can turn into a bit of a monster really, that gets bigger than you need it to be (Kate/P6);
>
> I think what makes parenting is very different these days, like with the whole Facebook thing and social media thing…. people put snapshots and snippets…. The best bits and you don't see the rest of it and I think, if you're someone that does worry and constantly thinks, is my child happy? You would question it because you think….. well their child is always happy…. But there are things that they don't tell you about. And M (husband)……can spot people like that straight away, whereas I'm not like that..... I'm crying inside! But you do start to get used to it don't you, and you start to realise the truth don't you, cos you know that it can't be perfect all the time! (Louise/P12);
>
> I've had weeks where I don't look at Facebook and you actually feel well… happier… you don't have that constant 'what are people doing?' ….if you're just at home and kind of pottering around. You don't have that 'oh, they're travelling, they're doing that' …..you can't get away from it can you? And generally people put the best of what they're doing on it and you're thinking 'oh my god, people are living the best all the time' and they're perhaps not and perhaps they're just doing that once in a lifetime, but you don't know that…..but you just think 'oh, that's what they're doing and that's what their lifestyle is like' and you just think 'oh, I'm just here and I'm stuck in xxxx and

wah wah wah' …… so I find that… getting away from Facebook sometimes, that helps (Gemma/P10).

T5/I8 Added pressure of media/celebrity

Three participants (Louise, Gemma and Ruth) highlight the added pressure of the media and celebrity as a factors within modern motherhood.

> I do think there is a tendency, you know, it is all picture perfect….. You know you see a lot of celebrities around having babies and it's almost been glorified a little bit and you know it is beautiful… it is lovely and I wouldn't change it for the world but… there is…. There is a hard side to it as well and you're knackered (Louise/P6);
>
> You read 'OK' magazine and it's so and so having a baby and they look amazing and they've got makeup on and you know, the baby's just sleeping calmly in their hands and I know, actually the reality is….. you've just seen that picture of me when I'd just had a baby and I look like I've been dragged up…..(laughs) I look like I've died and been brought back up! 'M' always says 'you look like you've died and we've wheeled you in for a happy photo…! (Laughs) and I do…… I'm dead behind the eyes (Louise/P15);
>
> I don't know…. it's originated from celebrities and that kind of thing that have got….. That are back into their size 6 jeans 2 weeks after having a baby. I don't know if that's part of it but you know, they've got personal trainers and chefs and nannies and all this sort of stuff but you're doing it, you know, on your own. Give yourself a break… you know, you have to prioritise and your kids should be the most important things (cuddles baby) (Ruth/P9);
>
> Because when you're…. tired and you're emotional and all that sort of stuff and you don't think about things rationally and you do get, get swamped with images of people doing things perfectly and doing it different to you. And you feel as though you're doing something wrong… and you're not! (Ruth/P9);
>
> People do put pressures on themselves. Whether it's because of what they see, in the media or and they don't… take into account that these people have got full time nannies….. and you put pressure on yourself to be the same and it's not realistic and why would you want to be like that? You're supposed to enjoy being at home with your child and being in your pyjamas until 11 o'clock and playing and laying on the floor with them and all that sort of stuff. Not spending the time cleaning your house, kids are only gonna be babies once (kisses baby – 'aren't you?') (Ruth/P8).

T5/I9 Awareness of 'parenting industry'

When asked about why they think parenting is given so much attention these days, two participants (Ruth and Jenny) highlighted a link to the notion of a parenting industry.

> I do think it's become an industry….. Especially the sort of…. Earth mother ways of raising kids, it is sort of like, cashing in on peoples beliefs and vulnerabilities, definitely… it's like a wedding industry (laugh!) it is… it's like selling, selling you the perfect way to raise a child and its… its funny (laughs) (Ruth/P7);

> I think there's a bit of a money spinner on it as well now… because people have jumped on the bandwagon and people know that with a parenting book, whatever it is, people are so desperate in those early weeks to get their baby to sleep you will buy every book that tells you 'we'll get your baby to sleep' … so I think that's part of it (Jenny/P8).

4.4.6 Theme 6: 'All consuming' pressure on self to be 'Super-mum'

This theme also provided evidence of self-surveillance with the internalisation of pressures to feel a certain way about motherhood, particularly in relation to bonding and attachment. As in theme 2, mothers demonstrated awareness of this form of surveillance and displayed a shift in confidence when reflecting on the end of the first year in the child's life when they perceived themselves as becoming the expert.

1. Pressure on self ('Mother's guilt')
2. Feeling of taboo topics around motherhood (not all fairies and flowers)
3. Going back to work
4. Anger at partner for not 'doing it right'
5. Frustration with other family members
6. Concerns about post-natal depression
7. Reclaiming control
8. Learning to trust own instincts

Table 6: Emerging issues within Theme 6

T6/I1 Pressure on self ('Mother's Guilt')

When asked the question 'do mothers put pressure on themselves' all seven participants (Clare, Jenny, Priya, Ruth, Gemma, Louise and Kate), agreed that they do.

> You feel like a swan so you give off the air of being really confident and everything's going really smoothly and underneath you're sort of paddling as hard as you can to kind of keep things going (Kate/P6);
>
> I like to keep fit, I like to be a good wife, I like to provide food, I like all their clothes to be clean, I like the house to be tidy, I like to do really well at my job… but at some point….. you can't be all those people and be 100% of all those people and I know I put massive pressure on myself and that is only from me to blame (Kate/P7);
>
> Even the most confident of people.... I see that they probably felt very similar to how I did and I think …. that comes from the expectations of what it's gonna be like you know, the fact now that most girls that have babies have had careers they've worked and you know…. the reality is that I think it's the hardest thing you'll ever do…. So you know, you do put pressure on yourselves (Louise/P15&16);
>
> I think you probably (have an) internal battle that you're kind of fighting against (Gemma/P9);
>
> You can feel yourself doing it and I have to stop myself sometimes and say it doesn't matter if the house isn't perfect and if the carpet needs hoovering? If you're my friend and you're coming round to my house, then, you know, what does it matter? (Ruth/P8&9);
>
> You do, you just feel you have to do the right thing and be the best ….but its ok not to be (Priya/P9);
>
> There is some sort of weird, hormonal, emotional thing that just completely takes over and I always thought I was quite level headed and sort of black and white about things and this completely floored me (Jenny/P9);
>
> I've often said, 'oh I'm not doing a very good job'..... 'I'm the worst mum in the world some days'… you know when you just can't get your head round things……I think talking to other people makes you realise you're not a bad mum…..it's just a learning curve. Its day by day and everyone, they're all different (Clare/P5);
>
> You put so much pressure on yourself and that 'mothers guilt' that just….. I just never knew that something like that could exist! Or where it comes from, even when you're thinking about it really logically, it's just all-consuming isn't it? (Jenny/P9).

T6/I2 Feeling of taboo topics around motherhood (not all fairies and flowers)

Three participants (Gemma, Priya and Clare) made comments about their experiences followed by questions referring to the seemingly taboo topic they were referring to.

> I used to think, like when he was a baby 'oh, he's being really naughty' but he wasn't naughty, he was just being…. He was just there but perhaps because I wasn't in the right place I would just think 'it's just being …. Annoying'. That's really bad isn't it??? (Gemma/P10);
>
> Some children just seem to do what their parents ask and you're like (pulls a face) 'Why doesn't mine? Just one time?'…. and then sometimes now he does, just say 'ok' and you're like 'ok!' I'm in control!!! It's bad that you feel like that isn't it? (Gemma/P11);
>
> It's not all that great at the beginning. It's not all like fairies and you know…. You look at your baby lovingly…. It doesn't always work like that (Priya/P7&8);
>
> Before I was like, as though, oh, you can't really say that, you're a mum, you're not allowed to say things like that… I feel as though ….. it's not just all flowers and hearts. It's difficult, it's the hardest thing you'll ever do. It's the hardest thing I've ever done (Clare/P5).

T6/I3 Going back to work

Two participants (Kate and Jenny) referred to going back to work as important part of their early experiences of motherhood.

> The job that I was in at the time, they didn't put me under pressure but they kind said 'no one else is going to be doing this work…so the longer you're off'…. Work was everything before M came along and I think when you make those decision….. You're probably maybe not in the frame of mind. Not that the world ends but you kind of feel that you've got a personal responsibility to people (Kate/P7&8);
>
> Going back to work helped with that, nursery and work really helped I think because then you're not just H's mum, you're back to work, you both got a bit more of an equal relationship (Jenny/P11).

T6/I4 Anger at partner for not 'doing it right'

Jenny referred to a feeling of anger towards her partner for managing tasks in the early days of parenting in the same way that she would.

> We put a lot of pressure on ourselves….. And on others…. I remember not letting M make bottles up. I couldn't let him do it without watching him for weeks and weeks and if he hadn't completely levelled off or if there was a couple of ml more water than it said on the pack I would just flip! 'Are you trying to kill him?? he's going to really upset his tummy and he might die!'….all logic goes out of the …. it was just absolutely crazy and I don't know where that came from…. emotions, hormones, whatever (Jenny/P9&10);

> Going back to the emotional stuff, attachment thing. I want to make all the decisions, and I know that's not right and we need to talk about things but I almost feel like I know better and I should have the final say on everything… that's been the biggest challenge I think, that knowing that….. you're a team and finding your rhythm…. (Jenny/P11).

T6/I5 Frustration with other family members

Ruth discussed frustrations with other family members, particularly grandparents.

> I do think that it's important that discipline is a constant through parents, grandparents, things like that……other people should do their best to respect how they know we want him raised. So dealing with… that is quite difficult cos if he is with grandparents or aunts and uncles for a certain period of time and he has been allowed to get away with things he knows he shouldn't be allowed to get away with…. , And it's then your job to pull it back into line and then you come across as being mean mum (Ruth/P10);

T6/I6 Concerns about post-natal depression

Four participants (Louise, Gemma, Clare and Jenny) identified post-natal depression as either something they had been diagnosed with or something they were concerned about.

> I think from a mental health point of view…. I think I was a bit 'doo lally'….. looking back…. I wasn't really that normal. For quite a while, I'm not saying that there was something mega wrong but I think it affected me more than I thought it was going to and I think…. I obsessed over everything to do with them… but it's not healthy for you is it? So I think for me, that's why I found them (the parenting course) really useful because it gave me something else to think about ……to know that it was totally normal (Louise/P13&14);

> It's taken quite a long time and (pause) I don't know if I had post-natal depression or something with H but, he was quite quick at like walking and everyone would be like 'oh my, he's amazing' and I'd think 'no he's not, he's just annoying!' do you know what I mean? But now, I can kind of appreciate who he is but it's taken a long time (Gemma/P10);
>
> I was suffering from post-natal depression. So after the course, I'd got myself back onto antidepressants (Clare/P3);
>
> I know I spoke to my sister a bit about post-natal depression and whether I should go and speak to the doctor because I was like 'I don't feel right' but there's still something in me like 'I can't go to the doctors and say this, I'm just really tired and emotional and hormonal'…. like the way I spoke to M and the things he did that just made me fly off the handle……. I very nearly punched M in the face!.....I should have perhaps gone to the doctors….. it's just 'am I depressed or am I just tired and is this just how new mums feel and is this just normal?' and you've nothing to compare it to have you?
>
> I think that's the bit, actually, that gets missed in those early stages. Apart from in your 6 week check when you see the doctor who literally just says 'how are you feeling?.... didn't really dig into anything… just wanted to tick the boxes and get me off the list. Nobody actually asked or said anything about post-natal depression or what's normal, what the signs are…. somebody looking out for you (Jenny/P13).

T6/I7 Reclaiming control

Two participants (Louise and Jenny) both discussed the return of a feeling of control during the first year of having their baby.

> I think by that point you're starting to work out a bit… a bit more decisive and thinking 'well, no that not going to work for me….and this is why…' I think otherwise I would have just been a nervous wreck during that whole process! (Louise/P8);
>
> You know we're still not there but around 10-12months there was a bit of a change because I relaxed a bit about it H, I don't know if it's when they turn 1 or what but we seemed to relax about sleeps, food and what not (Jenny/P11).

T6/I8 Learning to trust own instincts

Louise linked this feeling of control to learning to trust her own instincts again.

> Because there's just so many, people tell you so many different ways. Doctors that talk about it and these professionals that talk about it.....actually, one thing I have learnt to do a lot more than I did before is trust my instincts and know that I understand what he wants and no, he's not going to like that cos he doesn't like x, y and z……. I would say I'm a lot better….. I had instincts but my instincts went…. My common sense went out the window when I first had him… I just didn't trust them at first, I was just like 'yeah, I'll try what you said cos you're obviously better at this cos you're a professional' but it's not true isn't it…… you don't believe it cos you've never done it, you've just never done it….. That first time….you're just like well, that's wrong, this is wrong, they're not doing this as they should do…. Well obviously somethings going wrong in that whole process that we've got to change (Louise/P11).

4.4.7 Theme 7: Reflecting on motherhood

Reflections are presented within this theme with a focus on aspects of motherhood that individual participants found the most rewarding, challenging and opinions on how new mothers can be best supported.

1. Less stressful after having second child
2. Most rewarding aspects of motherhood
3. Most challenging aspects of motherhood
4. Ideas about how mothers can be best supported

Table 7: Emerging issues within Theme 7

T7/I1 Less stressful after having second child

Three participants (Gemma, Ruth and Priya) discussed the more relaxed experience they had with their second child.

> Then second time it's a breeze! And you think 'how was it hard??' You're in that life, that situation, know what to expect (Gemma/P3);
>
> But this time I'm more content and I actually….it's actually quite nice to have a bit of time at home.

> It's a shame really that you can't…… you don't feel the second, that you didn't feel with your first like you did with your second (Gemma/P7);
>
> Just society… other mothers… everything. Everything together makes you feel like oh, you should be doing this at this stage, but. So yeah, I think we put a lot of pressure on ourselves but I really think that it's when you have your first child that you do it a lot more, when you've moved on from your first, you're like, 'ok its fine…..' (Priya/P9&10).

T7/I2 Most rewarding aspects of motherhood

The participants all reflected on different aspects of motherhood as the most rewarding including breastfeeding (Kate), watching their children reach developmental milestones (Ruth, Priya, Clare and Jenny) and feeling more comfortable in the mother role (Gemma and Louise).

> I think the fact that I could breastfeed her really really easily…… I'm really, really proud of that. And….. It's been rewarding that I've been able to have my own life in terms of work and from a just purely motherly point of view, and the fact that I've been able to feed them…. And I know that some people don't get that opportunity and it's not a judgement on them but it's just a personal thing (Kate/P7);
>
> I think, finally feeling comfortable and enjoying it a bit more (Gemma/P10);
>
> Oh, it is really rewarding! Just, each milestone that they reach like, when they first talk, when they crawl, when they go to walk…. when they go to school and they can first read. Everything is rewarding…..but can't imagine your life without them after (Priya/P10);
>
> Oh, I just, I wouldn't be without them. I mean, some days I could just scream but I wouldn't be without them. I…..we were trying for 3 and a half years before we had Z…. It's just like, seeing them grow and their personalities coming out, I mean they're both so funny… I wouldn't say I wouldn't have them, cos I love them to bits and they're definitely the most rewarding job I've ever done, if you think of it as a job (Clare/P5&6);
>
> Just seeing H grow up and change and learn new things and yeah I think that's it…. Everyday there is something that is rewarding, or that every day he makes me laugh. I never used to laugh every day. There was never anything that happened every day that was particular funny…. but there's always something funny that happens

with H. So yeah, I thinks it's just watching him grow and change and learn new things (Jenny/P10&11).

T7/I3 Most challenging aspects of motherhood

The participants all reflected on different aspects of motherhood as the most challenging including being decisive as a new parent (Louise, Jenny and Ruth), juggling many different responsibilities (Kate), the behaviour of the child (Gemma), breastfeeding (Priya) and post-natal depression and bonding (Clare).

> I would say it's that… the constant reassessing….'right then, this is where we are then….what are we gonna do from here….?' I think it just never expected the, the huge difference that it would have on your life so that was probably the most difficult thing…. The dawning… which is weird because you knew it would happen (Louise/P16&17);
>
> You (used to) see people disciplining for one thing and then not another and you always think 'oh, I'll never do that….. I'll be really consistent' and then when you've got your own you know that they've got their own way of doing things or if they've had a bad day the day before or if they're teething or poorly. …. it's all so straight down the line isn't it when you've not got one and when you have… (Jenny/P9);
>
> I think sticking to your own beliefs and the way that you want to do it when there are so many people (points to kitchen where husband is) telling you that you should be doing it a different way. Or…. interfering in how you want to do it. Letting things slide when they know that you wouldn't want them to slide…..if he's in the care of someone else (Ruth/P10);
>
> The challenges are challenges that I've kind of put out their myself like the whole, wanting to be 'super-mum', wanting to be there to collect the kids every single day….. it's just kind of juggling it all the time and I think that's probably one of the hardest things… and I don't think that'll ever end because even though they'll be going to school, that'll be a whole new set of things to juggle (Kate/P8);
>
> Having a child that does not listen???? But then again, I think that's probably my way. I guess it is the way you do things that makes them no…. I don't know, I just think H is quite spirited and …. Wilful so it's, its difficult (Gemma/P11);
>
> I've always had depression, even before I had children, so I knew it was sort of gonna happen….. and me, getting my head around, it's not the kids cos … when I had Z, I literally thought that he was

> crying just to annoy me so that was really difficult …. I think I was annoyed with myself because you hear some people say 'oh you get this overwhelming love when you first see them' and I didn't have that, it took us a while to bond and I think that admitting that's quite difficult, and admitting it in front of other mums is quite difficult… and I think that people should be more open….. it's not always instant and you don't always get that overwhelming love.....it's like when you first meet someone, it's getting to know them… you've got a new person in your life and you've got to adapt to how they are and so, yeah it's, it's not easy (Clare/P6).

T7/I4 Ideas about how mothers can be best supported

The interview participants all reflected on different ways in which mothers can be best supported in the early days of motherhood including informal and localised support groups (Kate, Gemma, Clare), more early information regarding support groups (Louise) and neutral, individualised advice from health professionals regarding sensitive areas such as breastfeeding and the reaching of developmental milestone (Kate, Ruth, Priya and Jenny).

> People to not put pressure on them, particularly, say midwives and health care practitioners …..Because we all do feel like we're being judged and that's the worst feeling that you can have. So I think, anything that's in an informal setting where people can feel comfortable and confident to ask any questions that they might have…. I think anything too structured, people just feel pressures to… perform in a particular way rather than actually admitting where they are with things (Kate/P8&9);

> Ideally, family. The family would be better, but we, we seem to have; we don't have that round here. Everybody's got their own lives, everybody's busy. But I think these Children's Centres are fantastic and the health visitors and the midwives, they're brilliant…. I think, my health visitor because she was so on the ball…. that was really good. But, you know, she was a mum herself so I think, you know, that she understood…… it's quite sad to know that some of them are closing down and I think that'll be a big loss…..I was just sat in the house, dreading going out and now I just get on with it but if it wasn't for the initial support from the Children's Centre, I wouldn't be where I am today. So yeah, I think more support for new mums from places like that is great (Clare/P6&7);

> Maybe a proactive you know, call, from the hospital? Or somebody to say … 'who have you actually made contact with? Or what groups are you getting out to?'……. in the first few weeks or the first month (Louise/P17);

I think they need to have more options available to them, without the thought of being judged about which option they pick. So if you take breastfeeding and bottle feeding. For example, there should be just as much information about bottle feeding, sterilising, that kind of thing, as there is about breastfeeding, without the thought of 'I'm gonna be judged if I don't pick to do breastfeeding'….. there's all sorts of comparisons where certain things are pushed above another, you know, you should have this kind of pram, and you should have, this kind of bedding and this is the best mattress and the best cot and you should……. They're all the most expensive ones and you know, they all cost a fortune and it's not realistic for people to do that…. …. The entire system needs streamlining…. There's just so many different places that you can go to now…it's difficult to wheedle out what's right and what's wrong (Ruth/P11&12);

Not having as much pressure from health visitors about what your child's doing. You know, saying they should be able to do this, that and the other at this age ….. I think just to be a bit more supportive rather than judgemental…….. It just makes you not want to call them or not want to go…..I'm sure people are like that… and then they just sit at home and cry about it instead. Just deal with it themselves…. having someone to talk to and you know, give advice but just that forcefulness needs to just go (Priya/P11);

Just general, like, getting through the day! So it wasn't anything kind of specific. I don't know, I can't quite put my finger on it. I think what they need help with is being confident in their decisions, and not being compared to or told they should be doing things… or baby should be doing… x y and z by now….. They are all just so different (Jenny/P3);

My health visitors were quite good. They weren't judgemental. I think the difficulty is you see so many health visitors, you haven't got that one person that knows your story or your situation …. When people were coming to the house in the really early day, that they were just ticking boxes, like they'd just got to get certain things checked off.

I remember there was one thing…. The health visitor rang me and I didn't answer my phone…. and I didn't call them back and then someone popped round and I didn't answer the door and then that was it, I was kind of forgotten about. And then a few weeks later when I went to get him weighed, somebody mentioned it, they said, 'oh yes I can see on the system that we've tried to call you and you didn't answer and popped round but there was no answer' and it was fine cos I was ok….. I was talking to mum about it and she was like 'what if you'd have been a really vulnerable mum? Surely you don't just knock on the door and then go away…?' So I think new mums… they do need a bit of persistence with the help, because you don't

always want to go and tell people that you're not coping (Jenny/P12&13).

4.5 Conclusion and the Next Stage of Analysis

This chapter has presented the blended findings of both phases of the data collection and systematically displayed responses of participants within associated issues and themes. The next chapter will apply a feminist post-structuralist epistemological worldview (Baxter, 2003; Davis, 1997; Weedon, 1997) as a way to interrogate the findings and literature, with an ultimate aim of providing important messages for health professionals, early years practitioners and policy makers regarding the support currently offered to new mothers.

As discussed within the literature and the methodology chapters, a feminist post - structuralist approach to the analysis of this research allows the experiences of modern motherhood and reactions to different levels of surveillance to be explored. This exploration provides a multi-layered insight into some of the wider cultural and social pressures faced by mothers today and allows for the deconstruction of modern motherhood in relation to the experiences and social practices that are ingrained within motherhood. As noted by Baxter (2003, p. 12), '*local meanings of talk always work within, represent and reconstitute broader discursive structures, relations and processes'.* These discursive practices will be analysed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.2 Introduction

This chapter will apply a feminist post-structuralist analytical approach (Davis, 1997; Weedon, 1997; Baxter, 2003) to *explain/explore/challenge and critique* the findings (Coles and McGrath, 2010, p. 145). At this stage of analysis themes are reviewed and refined (Grey, 2014; Newby, 2014) so that key findings can be critically evaluated through the conceptual framework. This involved reconsidering the themes and how they may be best explored, in order to fully consider how each refocussed theme addresses the research aims, objectives and overall focus.

The analysis and discussion themes are listed below:

1. Emotions, advice and support in the early days of motherhood (analysis of themes 1 and 2 from the reporting of findings)
2. Surveillance or Support: Experiences of attending a universal parenting course (analysis of themes 3 and 4 from the reporting of findings)
3. Feeling Judged (analysis of theme 5 from the reporting of findings)
4. The Internalisation of 'Normalizing Judgement' (analysis of theme 6 from the reporting of findings)
5. Reflecting on Motherhood (analysis of theme 7 from the reporting of findings).

5.2 Emotions, advice and support in the early days of motherhood

The overall aim of this research was to explore discursive practices and constructs of motherhood and this will begin with a consideration of theme 1 (Navigating the early days of motherhood, 4.4.1) and theme 2 ('Expert' advice and support for new mothers, 4.4.2) of the findings chapter. The purpose of this theme is to consider the immediate reactions to the transition into motherhood and how, for some mothers, this led to the accessing of different forms of advice, including the attendance of a universal parenting course.

The words that were used by participants and the emerging issues within this theme related to a feeling of being overwhelmed and unprepared, (Curries, 2008),

for the motherhood role, for example Priya stated '*I thought I was prepared for it but I really wasn't'* (Priya/P1/T1/I2). The aspects of new motherhood within this theme that were highlighted as adding to feeling unprepared related to breastfeeding, establishing a quick routine for the baby and increased arguments with partners due to feelings of resentment and isolation when partners returned to work. The words used to describe the early days of motherhood demonstrated a feeling of lacking confidence and increased self-doubt within this period, Louise for example, reflected on the early days of motherhood as *'you put a lot of pressure on yourself'* (Louise/P1-3/T1/I5). Linking back to the conceptual underpinning of this research, correlations can be made to self-surveillance (Henderson *et al.,* 2010) and this internalisation of feeling there is a 'right way' to parent, reinforcing Foucault's (1977) application of *Panopticon* whereby members of society somehow come to believe there is a right and a wrong way of performing and how mothers *'come to govern their intimate relations and socialize their children according to social norms'* (Rose, 1999, p. 132) and if doubt is experienced about a specific role or function then they must be failing in some way.

Similarly, the 'good enough mother' discourse (Winnicott, 1964; Currie, 2008) whereby ideologies of motherhood as natural and instinctive (Douglas and Michaels, 2005; Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple, 2011) can be considered in relation to how the messages given to new mothers may go some way to explaining why they feel surprised and unprepared when the role is quite different from the one they expected, including Jenny's reflections of *'You think 'It will be alright, they may have found it really hard but we'll be ok… cos we're different!' but nobody is!'* (Jenny/P2/T1/I2). This resonates with Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple's (2011) research which reflected that the reality of modern motherhood can be challenging *'for a generation so accustomed to raising the bar'* (Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple, 2011, p. 63).

Choi, Henshaw, Baker and Tree (2005) suggest that as within other social roles, mothers learn their behaviours *'though social conditioning and access them through available cultural discourses. However, in engaging in them, we perpetuate and reinforce such cultural norms so that they remain unchallenged'*

(Choi *et al.*, 2005, p. 169). From a feminist post-structuralist lens, it is clear that these social norms have been bolstered through attention in the form of structural surveillance (Henderson *et al.*, 2010) on private family life for *'public, political ends'* (Rose, 1999, p. 126) including the many forms of expert advice available in modern motherhood.

Currie (2008) relates the feeling of coping as a new mother to an expected sense of control that may not always be achievable in the very early stages of motherhood. This was reflected in the findings of the research with issue 2 from theme 1 (T1/I2) which highlighted that Louise, Priya and Jenny all felt that they were unprepared for how hard or difficult the early days of motherhood would be. Currie concludes that:

> parenting is not something we prepare people for adequately. It is acknowledged as difficult, but at the end of the day there is a public expectation that parents will succeed. Future studies could explore the notion of 'real' mothering, where stress, tiredness and lack of coping or sense of control at times are exposed as normal experiences (Currie, 2008, p. 8).

It is the *'idealization of motherhood'* (Rose, 1999, p. 127) in relation to this notion of coping that must be reconsidered in order to support new mothers with the transition into this role without unrealistic expectations on themselves which, in the case of Gemma, resulted in a belief that *'everyone around you knew what they were doing'* (Gemma/P1/T1/I5) and led to such heightened pressure that she isolated herself from other mothers that were perceived by her to be *'doing it right'* (Gemma/P1/T1/I5).

In terms of developing a sense of coping within the motherhood role, participants reflected on different support systems that were available to them during the early days of motherhood. During the survey phase participants' highlighted partners, friends and their own parents as the most commonly accessed source of advice with neighbours and in-laws cited as the least accessed sources of advice.

This was reinforced during the interview phase with 'family and friends' cited most often as the place participants went to for advice in the early days of motherhood. However, it was acknowledged by some participants that other forms of advice

are useful, particularly when access to family and friends is not possible. Clare in particular, acknowledged that baby manuals were a source of support during the early days of motherhood as she compared her experiences to her husband's culture, *'my husband's north African and over there, they have, the family virtually live with you when you've had a new baby so you've got masses of support, and I think, we don't have that'* (Clare/P4/T2/I1).

Whilst recognising the role that the various forms of advice can offer in the early days of motherhood, participants also reflected on the potential for confusion as a result of the plethora of conflicting information available in modern parenting (Davis, 2012) and leading to what Winnicott (1964, p. 25), perhaps understatedly, dubbed *'sometimes causing a feeling of muddle'*. Priya described the experience as making her *'go a bit doo lally'* (Priya/P9/T2/I) whilst Ruth and Jenny demonstrated an awareness that there can be too much information available for new mothers and that *'one person says one thing, another person says another thing and you're just in a worse state than you were before cos you've just got too much information'* (Ruth/P1/T2/I5). As identified by Davis (2012, p. 209), the responses from participants demonstrated that the sheer influx of information regarding parenting practice, with conflicting *'ideas of how mothers should behave'* and *'definitions of what made a 'good' mother'* resulting in increased levels of confusion and stress with mothers feeling they have to *'adjust to these changing requirements'*.

Similarly, participants highlighted health professional support as both a potential useful source for practical advice but also a source for conflicting or judgemental advice with breastfeeding advice cited several times as a source for both support and added pressure. This is reminiscent of the work of Simonardottir and Gislason (2018) and their concerns regarding breastfeeding propaganda and the potential harm this can have on the women that internalise this message.

These findings are also reinforced through the exploration of the rise in 'parenting culture' where Furedi (2008) and Lee *et al.* (2014) explore the increase in attention to parenting and suggest that the overwhelming amount of parenting advice in its various different forms serve to add to the parenting industry as a

whole and promote a new myth of *'parenting as an ordeal'* (Furedi, 2008, p. 97) Interestingly though, analysis through a feminist post-structuralist lens showed that participants did recognise that confidence is something that developed over time. This increased confidence helped participants to resist contradictory advice and move forward with individualised strategies to filter helpful versus overwhelming advice. Gemma reported a rise in recognising that *'your gut feeling is generally right it just that kind of everything else clouds your judgement a little bit'* (Gemma/P2/T2/I6) and Louise demonstrated increased agency, developing over time when *'you pick and choose the subjects that were of interest'* (Louise/P10/T2/I6). This confidence related to a feeling of beginning to find autonomy (McCann and Kim, 2017) and trust their own instincts more. These findings also echo the research of Choi *et al.,* (2005, p. 168) who agree that it is only through time and experience that a mother can begin to challenge the ideology of *'women as natural mothers, immediately able to care for their babies'* and that *'agency may develop later when the woman has adjusted',* this can prove difficult for mothers in this early period, when conflicting and overwhelming advice leads to a conclusion that *'they must be right'* (Gemma/P2/T2/I6).

This also relates to the 'historical forms of expert advice' explored within the literature chapter whereby different forms of child-rearing philosophy were considered in relation to the impact conflicting opinions can have on new mothers. Foucault (1977) would suggest the 'normalizing judgement' is deeply embedded within the different forms of parenting advice, feminist theory such as that highlighted above by Choi *et al.* (2005) would agree to some extent but also suggest that time and experience offers mothers an opportunity to challenge the ritual of truth, reshape the dominant discourses and bring their own constructs to the role, as demonstrated by Louise and Jenny when they felt able to select the advice that worked for them and ignore the rest. This can be associated with Winnicott (1964) who recognised the importance of encouraging mothers to trust their instincts and recognise themselves as 'the expert' when it comes to looking for advice and believe that *'no one who comes along to give you advice will ever know this as well as you know it yourself.* (Winnicott, 1964, p. 20).

Davis (2012), along with Rose (1999), acknowledges that although Winnicott's ideas of emphasising the importance of the mother's role, could be *'censorious towards those women who could not meet this ideal of selfless devotion or did not want to'* (Davis, 2012, p. 120). Davis (2012) also recognises the influence that Winnicott had on empowering women to *'have confidence in their own ability and experience'* (Davis, 2012, p. 121). It is this confidence that is often missing during the early days of motherhood, this factor is considered again in relation to the underpinning reasons identified as leading to participants attending a parenting course.

5.3 Surveillance or support: Experiences of attending a universal parenting course

The first objective of this research was to explore the experiences of mothers that have attended universal parenting courses. This objective is explored through the consideration of theme 3 (Reasons identified for attending a parenting course, 4.4.3) and theme 4 (Experiences of attending a parenting course, 4.4.4) of the findings.

As outlined through political intervention strategies explored within the literature review chapter, there has been a rise in government attention to parenting education including the recently published *'Helping Parents to Parent'* report (Clarke *et al.*, 2017) which was commissioned by the Social Mobility Commission and which calls for the normalization of parenting programme and increase in comparative government approaches that consider universal parenting support as a *'public health issue'* (Clarke *et al.*, 2017, p. 5). The report also suggests that policy can reduce the stigma (Burman, 2008; Edwards and Gillies, 2011) associated with parenting intervention programmes. This report, along with the CANparent initiative are underpinned with the belief by policy makers that *'all parents will benefit from support to develop their parenting skills and that, as a consequence, this public health approach would reduce the provenance of child behavioural difficulties'* (Lindsay and Totsika, 2017, p. 10).

With an increased social and political focus on parenting education, some of the underlying motivations associated with making the decision to attend a course were explored with participants, with an aim to develop a deeper understanding

of exactly what sort of support new mothers felt they needed and in some way were not receiving elsewhere. Perhaps surprisingly given the influencing factors identified by Clarke *et al.* (2017), the reasons highlighted by participants in both the survey phase and interview phase linked, overwhelmingly, to a feeling of isolation and a strong desire to meet a network of other adults with children of a similar age to their own in the local area. Commonly identified reasons for attending a parenting course include '*I felt alone and in need to meet other parents for company and assurance'* (ID83/Q11/T3/I2) and *'there's nothing worse than staring at your 4 walls'* (Gemma/P6&7/T3/I2).

It is interesting to consider the above in relation to the previously identified concept of 'parenting culture' (Furedi, 2008; Lee, 2014) which dismisses opportunities such as parenting courses as simultaneously promoting a society that internalizes the belief that there is a right way to parent whilst also neglecting any *'state responsibility'* (Burman, 2008, p. 154) to parents in regards to the *'provision of resources'*. Whilst this may well be true, it does seem that by considering the responses given by participants through a feminist post-structuralist lens, the most desirable aspect of accessing parenting advice is initiated by new mothers not through a feeling of needing to be taught how to parent but as a practical self-help strategy to reduce feelings of isolation, breastfeed in a *'comfortable'* (Priya/P2/T3/I5) place and to develop a local social network. This can once again link back to the work of Currie (2008) who reported the implementation of strategies within motherhood as a proactive way to move towards a feeling of coping with this new role and how the development of a social network can support this**,** reinforced further by the high proportion of participants (sixteen survey respondents and six interview participants) that identified the importance of a social network as a driving factor for accessing a parenting course.

Similarly, Douglas and Michaels (2005, p. 25) emphasised the need for motherhood to be viewed on as a *'collective experience'* rather than an *'individual achievement'*. These findings can therefore be seen as reactions to state surveillance in modern motherhood as demonstrating a degree of proactive empowerment. This also correlates with Baxter (2003, p. 66) who recognised that

through feminist post-structuralist analysis it is possible, rather than assuming oppression or submission, to position women as *'powerful, powerless or a combination of both'.* Similarly, Zimmer-Gembeck, Webb, Thomas and Klag (2015) reported increased levels of competence in mothers who seek out and attend a universal parenting course:

> Parenting self-efficacy does accompany positive parenting, including warmth, involvement, responsiveness, limit-setting, non-punitive caregiving, and efforts to enhance parenting skills through attending formal parenting education and self-education (Zimmer-Gembeck *et al.* 2015, p. 1425).

The above research is however, also reminiscent of the parenting course evaluations explored within the literature review whereby, those associated with the creation of courses, with psychotherapeutic and neurodevelopmental concepts embedded within them, suggest an increased *'sense of competence and parental locus of control'* (Cabral, 2013, p. 30).

It does seems a contradiction in terms to suggest an increase in independence through exposure to manualised and formulaic support such as parenting courses. An explanation for this could relate back to *'hierarchical observation'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 170), *'structural surveillance'* (Henderson et al., 2010, p. 232) and critics of the rise in 'parenting culture'. Macvarish (Macvarish, in Lee *et al.*, 2014, p. 166) for example, associates the increased focus on parenting practice as being directly linked to *'neuromania'* whereby the government promotion of parenting intervention programmes stem from a belief that all antisocial behaviour is a direct result of poor parenting practice with very young children. This association is explored further through concerns raised by Burman (2008), Garrett (2017) and Vandenbroeck (2017) all of whom highlight the perceived misuse of neuroscience research by those in position of power. Rose (1999, p. 123) labels childhood as the *'most intensively governed sector'* with the attention on child-rearing being linked '*in thought and practice to the destiny of the nation and the responsibilities of the state'* (Rose, 1999, p. 123). The internalisation of these messages therefore lead to a misguided belief that parenting can be improved through being taught how to get the job right and ultimately produce upstanding members of society. This then serves to *'neglect state responsibility'*

(Burman, 2008, p. 154), with policy makers and government having to do little to address any inequalities by simply laying any societal problems firmly in the hands of mothers.

It must be acknowledged again though that participants did not all demonstrate quite the docile (Foucault, 1977) need to be taught how to parent from a desire to increase knowledge in neuroscientific aspects of their child's development. There certainly was a deeper desire to build informed knowledge in relation to the practical aspects of caring for children. Linking to some of the findings highlighted in the *'Helping Parents to Parent'* report (Clarke *et al.*, 2017) for example, Gemma reported *'I just wanted to know what to do with various bits, wanted advice with teething, sleeping, then subsequently weaning and everything like that'* (Gemma/P3/T3/I7). In contrast to this though, Clare twice reported feeling motivating factors for attending a parenting course as relating to the behaviour of her children and reflected that following on from the course, she believed that *'it wasn't their behaviour, it was mine'* (Clare/P2/T3/I6). As highlighted within the evaluations of parenting courses in the literature review, Johnson and Wilson (2012), the creators of the Solihull approach encourage parents to understand their child's behaviour and make necessary changes to their own parenting practice and behaviour, this seems to have taken place with Clare who has subsequently come to view her own parenting ability as the reason for her very young children behaving in a way that is arguably, perfectly normal.

This internalization of the behaviour of Clare's children is worrying and shows correlation between what Foucault (in Rabinow, 1984, p. 213) described as *'the regular extension, the infinitely minute web of panoptic techniques'* and the desire from policy makers to normalize parenting intervention and increase opportunities for parents to reflect their own practice, leading to an *'exercising of power, controlling relations and separating out dangerous mixtures'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 199). In contrast though, it could be argued that opportunities for parents to reflect on their parenting practice is a positive step. In the instance of Clare, she felt that her children were *'mimicking'* (Clare/P3/T4/I5) her behaviour, and if the chance to consider her parenting practice within a safe, non-judgemental environment

helped her within her life, where she is away from her family and friends then the Foucauldian concepts cannot be considered entirely accurate.

The critical importance of the practitioner role in the overall experiences of attending a parenting course was also evident through participant reflections. Responses regarding how the courses '*should have supporting families at the heart of them, not pushing a particular agenda'* (ID35/Q15/T4/I3) were common and often associated with how well received the courses were and were also connected to how empathetic and neutral the practitioners were. Corresponding to Foucault's (1977) concepts of hierarchical observation, participants expressed negative feelings around the judgement of practitioners, particularly in relation to parenting decisions such as breastfeeding. For example, *'we had a very pushy woman talk to us about breastfeeding for one whole session'* (ID44/Q15/T4/I3) and *'There is strong emphasis on breastfeeding, which I understand. However, I don't think enough advice and support is given to those who can't breastfeed or choose not to'* (ID65/Q15/T4/I3). This can also be associated with Davis (2012, p.211) who reported, from her own interviews with mothers, an increased feeling of *'guilt and anxiety if they did not live up to ideals of good mothering with which they were confronted'*.

Other negative reflections from participant's time on the parenting course related to comparisons between mothers, particularly surrounding children meeting developmental milestone and issues relating to feeling judged, for example, *'I did meet some overly competitive mums that made you question what you were doing'* (ID42/Q15/T4/I1). Priya reflected on comparisons between mothers at the parenting course she attended and reported a suggestion from her husband that she should stop attending *'these ridiculous classes if this is how you're going to feel when you come out of them!'* (Priya/P5&6/T4/I1). This echoes the findings of Henderson *et al.*, (2010) who identified interpersonal (mother to mother) levels of surveillance as the most powerful level, with echoes of Foucauldian concepts of the way members of society internalise the acceptable social rules and judge each other. From a feminist post-structuralist perspective lens though, it is again important to recognise other experiences and reactions to interpersonal surveillance.

The findings show a high number of reflections in relation to the support offered between mothers during the parenting courses, with some positive experiences cited, for example, *'sharing experiences/sleep stories/wind stories…. put my mind at rest. I found it easier to deal with these things once I knew that they were totally normal'* (ID42/Q14/T4/I2) and *'It's amazing what, just someone saying you know something like 'you look good'…. it really boosts you and it makes you feel good…. that's why it's nice to meet up with friends that have got kids because they go 'oh don't worry…'* (Kate/P6/T4/I2). Participants reflected that mothers do try to support one another particularly in encouraging breastfeeding and offering support through their child's developmental milestones but, correlating to Henderson *et al.,* (2010; 2015) findings there is an underlying feeling of competiveness and comparisons between mothers with the acknowledgement that there are some mothers *'who just want their child to be a little bit better than yours!'* (Priya/P8&9/T4/I2). This belief can be associated to the myth of perfectionism as explored by Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple (2011, p. 57) that, whilst this ideology may be something that *'exists only ever as a composite…. still haunts us, making it harder to develop personal definitions of success'.* This is supported within the findings from reflections of the parenting courses and will be explored again further within the 'feeling judged' section of this chapter when wider societal judgements and pressures are considered.

In relation to reflections from the course itself, similarities can be made with the previous section where participants were able to acknowledge a sense of achievement and a rise in confidence leading to a feeling of coping and becoming more competent within the role. Jenny (P7&8/T4/I4) for example describes feeling like *'a superhero… I've conquered the world!'* each time she managed to attend the parenting course session on time and when this coincided with her son sleeping and the day running smoothly. The completion of a parenting course was viewed by participants as a *'productive'* (Louise/P12/T4/I4), positive step towards feeling competent as a mother. It is important to note here that all interview participants completed the parenting course, it would be interesting for future research to consider the confidence levels of a new mother who began a parenting course but did not complete it. From the responses given by

participants, the construct of filtering out unwanted information continues as participants described their sense of achievement and rising confidence. For example, Kate reported that *'it really gave me that confidence and back up that I felt that I needed…. I thought I was making the right decisions about different things'* (Kate/P5/T4/I5).

A number of participants also highlighted the way they began to limit their attendance at the parenting course as their confidence grew, how the course itself would act as a *'sounding board'* (ID65/Q14/T4/I5) and following on from it they would *'sort of carry on'* (Ruth/P6/T4/I5). Relating this the 'good enough mother' discourse', the importance of opportunities for new mothers to reflect in a safe, non-judgemental way and then move forward with confidence in their role is highlighted once again.

5.4 Feeling Judged

The second objective identified within this research was to explore the constructs of modern motherhood in relation to different levels of surveillance and this will be explored through a consideration of theme 5 (Feeling Judged, 4.4.5) of the findings. Issues that emerged within this section can be linked back to reflections from the parenting course itself, this includes the value placed on a supportive, non-judgemental health professional and the critical importance placed on relationships and networks that develop in early motherhood and how these relationships have the potential to impact both positively and negatively on this experience. Now, some of the wider societal experiences of motherhood can be explored through the analysis of the data collected during both phases of the research.

In relation to the important role health professionals have in the early days of motherhood, both Ruth and Kate reported feeling that they should avoid taking their child to the doctor's unless there is a *'serious issue and a problem'* (Kate/P4&5/T5/I1). Both participants reflected on the usefulness of local settings where they could go to where *'it's more relaxed and no-one is going to judge you'* (Kate/P4&5/T5/I1) and seek advice on the daily queries without the feeling that they are taking a doctor's appointment over something that may be considered

trivial and feel they are *'wasting their time'* or *'being an over cautious mum and I was being over anxious'* (Ruth/P4/T5/I1). Whilst it is a positive example of how services can support new mothers on a local level, it is also a concern that mothers do not feel they can make an appointment to see a doctor without questioning themselves or feeling judged. Davis (2012, p. 211) raised similar concerns and also found that the reflections of mothers evidence a worrying *'arrogance of medical professionals who felt that they, rather than the women they attended, knew best'.* This finding also resonate with research identified within the literature review relating to the 'good enough mother discourse' whereby Henderson *et al.* (2010, p. 235) recognise modern motherhood as an experience of constant scrutiny from both *'formal and informal settings'*. Within formal settings this can be linked to how *'professionals in social institutions such as education, medicine, or even child psychology serve as social control agents'* (Henderson *at el.*, 2010, p. 235), further enforced through the way neuroscientific research is used to make direct links between parenting and positive outcomes for children (Wall, 2017; Vandenbroek et al., 2017).

Henderson *et al.*, (2015, p. 516) highlight how *'public discourses of motherhood'* can increase feelings of anxiety in mothers, even when they do not *'fully subscribe to the ideology'* (Henderson *et al.*, 2015, p. 516). Similarly, Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple (2011) recognised the resistance that some mothers demonstrate towards the dominant discourses as they reflected on how many times during their interviews they heard the phrase *'I'm not like the other mothers'* (Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple, 2011, p. 44) and how despite an awareness and dislike of the dominant discourses and the *'emotional and isolating'* impact of motherhood ideologies, there is still an internalised impact from them, as demonstrated by Ruth and Jenny, who both displayed an awareness of the dominant discourses within modern motherhood, particularly in relation their awareness and concerns that parenting has become *'an industry… cashing in on peoples beliefs and vulnerabilities'* (Ruth/P7/T5/I9).

The theme of feeling judged emerges many times throughout this research, the scrutiny and surveillance attached to new mothers is extreme and can certainly also be associated with concepts of the impact of surveillance and power.

Foucault (1977) described the levels of power connected to the role such as doctors as promoting *'domination'*, arguing that *'power ultimately is repression; repression, ultimately is the imposition of the law; the law, ultimately, demands submission'* (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 130). It is the case here that levels of surveillance have affected new mothers in such a way that they feel unable to seek support from a doctor. Whist more comfortable seeking support from other health professional including health visitors, midwives and practitioners leading parenting courses, there is still a reported feeling of *'pushing a certain agenda'* (Jenny/P6/T5/I3) by some health professionals and a need for individualised support rather than the promotion of homogenous, formulaic or judgemental parenting advice. It is essential therefore, that health professionals are aware, not only of the important role they play as the service that new mothers may feel the most comfortable with, but the risk factor that has developed due to mothers feeling that they will be judged about the decisions they make.

Although the focus of the interview was post-natal parenting courses, Gemma, Ruth and Jenny all reflected back to antenatal classes provided by the NCT or support immediately following birth where feeding advice was only given from a perceived one sided perspective. Gemma reported an expectation, enhanced by the classes she attended before birth that breastfeeding would be '*all natural and it'll all happen and your baby will be fine….. And actually that wasn't my experience at all'* (Gemma/P5&6/T5/I2), with Jenny describing a situation where she asked the course leader why no information regarding bottle feeding was given out, Jenny expressed anger at being told by the course leader *'well our hands are tied, we can't say anything about bottle feeding during the NCT courses cos we've signed up to the world health organisation code on breastfeeding'* (Jenny/P4/T5/I2). Ruth also demonstrated frustration towards health professionals in relation to the over emphasis on breastfeeding, stating this, '*is too intrusive I think, it's far too intrusive'* (Ruth/P4/T5/I2). Rather than being docile recipients of support or expert advice here, participants demonstrated clear awareness of the potential damage this level of intrusion can have. This is another example where, though a feminist post-structuralist lens, of

the different reactions mothers have to the dominant discourses surrounding them.

This feeling of health professionals having a hidden agenda around issues such as breastfeeding is a cause for concern as it led to a mistrust from some of the participants (Louise, Gemma, Ruth, Priya and Jenny) who wish for individualised support not only for themselves when making decisions, but also for their babies in relation to meeting developmental milestones. Judgement and expectation from practitioners who are not *'a neutral'* (Jenny/P6/T5/I3) source of support added to the anxiety and pressure felt by mothers, the concerns expressed by participants have wider implications and can be associated to what Rose (1999, p. 133) labelled the *'three guises of normality'*, whereby child-rearing practices are viewed upon as *'natural and hence healthy'* (mothers that breastfeed), *'judged and found unhealthy'* (mothers that do not breastfeed) and *'what is to be produced by rationalised social programmes'* (the support currently offered to new mothers). That an awareness and at times, resistance, to the over-emphasis on breastfeeding from health professionals has been demonstrated by participants, does not diminish the concern regarding the pressure that this is adding to new mothers, even those who do not *'buy into'* Henderson, *et al.,* (2015, p. 512) the dominant discourses of motherhood. Similarly, the research by Simonardottir and Gislason (2018, p. 7) suggests a worrying internalisation of the 'breast is best' message whereby women fear that their children are *'lesser than because of not being breastfed'*, despite the simultaneous recognition by the same women of the breastfeeding *'narrative as propaganda'* (Simonardottir and Gislason, 2018, p. 7).

From a feminist post-structuralist perspective, other examples of resistance and challenge to the dominant discourses were demonstrated by participants. Although perhaps worryingly, this resistance was in the form of withholding any information that may be judged upon. Priya in particular noted several times the internalisation of pressure that came from feeling that her baby should have met developmental milestones at the *'right text book age'* (Priya/P6/T5/I3). She went on to report that she felt so strongly about this sense of being judged by health professionals that she would either not attend the parenting course or, on

occasions, withhold information about her child's development. This finding correlates with Foucault's (1977) instruments of correct training where normalizing judgement is *'simultaneously individualistic and homogenous as it seeks to make individuals conform to the acceptable standard of behaviours'* (Wallbank, 2001, p. 7). Similarly, Henderson *et al.* (2010) report the opportunity for parents to internalise the pressure produced through formal power relationships when, *'there are signs that a parent is not meeting that perfect standard'* (Henderson *et al.*, 2010, p. 235) and, as stated by Kerrick and Henry (2017, p. 3) mothers *'both take up and resist cultural expectations or master narratives of motherhood'.*

The feeling of being judged, and the pressure to ensure that their baby meets certain developmental milestones, seems to relate to a lottery of the type of support provided by health professionals. In contrast to Priya; Gemma Jenny and Louise expressed the relief of having access to an empathetic health professional where there was '*no…. shoving it down your face'* (Gemma/P4/T5/I3) and how important that is because *'you don't want to feel that you're doing something wrong or being judged'* (Jennyp6/T5/I3). This culture of development occurring in line with a *'text book*' (Priya/P6/T5/I3) though may also be associated to wider ongoing debates relating to the professionalisation of the early years workforce (Musgrave, 2010; Dyer, 2016; Moss, 2017; Murray, 2018). The debate regarding qualifications, pay and status of those working with children and families suggest that the current early years workface are *'dominated by a strongly positivistic and regulatory discourse'* (Moss, 2017, p. 11) and that those working in the sector face limited agency, few opportunities for critical reflection on their own practice and are in danger of *'being perceived as technicians fulfilling pre-set approved practices'* (Dyer, 2016, p. 9 in Czerniawski and Lofthouse, 2018). It is important therefore when evaluating the findings and considering the implications for practice to reflect on the role of those delivering the parenting courses and the reality that they may be facing similar problems in their challenge to find autonomy as the mothers themselves.

Reports from participants concerning the judgement of others was not limited to health or early years professionals, who could be considered, by mothers, to be

in positions of hierarchy and therefore associated with structural surveillance (Henderson *et a*l.*,* 2010). Participants also reflected on the judgements made from other member of society and from other mothers. This will be considered in relation to 'interpersonal surveillance' which was identified by Henderson *et al.* (2010) in their research as being the most powerful level of surveillance. Judgements made by family members, friends and even strangers, were all highlighted during the interviews as aspects of motherhood that can heighten the overall feeling of being scrutinised with breastfeeding and behaviour management cited as particular aspects of motherhood that are observed closely by others, linking to not feeling 'good enough' (Winnicott 1964; Currie 2008) in their role. Generational changes were also highlighted by Louise and Ruth as adding to the pressure on new mothers, with modern parenting bringing with it a feeling that *'everyone's parenting techniques are in your face, you can't do it your own way without thinking, maybe their way is better'* (Louise/P12/T5/I5).

Four participants (Kate, Louise, Ruth and Priya) highlighted a need for more honesty between mothers, linking back to the responses highlighted earlier from the reflections of the parenting courses themselves. It seems that, on a wider scale, more acknowledgement of the daily realities and difficulties of parenting need to be expressed between mothers rather than a feeling of projecting a perfect ideology that has *'driven us to strive for maternal superstardom'* (Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple (2011, p. 57) and viewing motherhood through '*rose tinted glasses'* (Ruth/P8/T5/I6). Participants highlighted a feeling of having to hide the challenges that modern motherhood brings and how, when a connection is found with another mother and honest reflections are made, this brings with it a level of support and reprieve. Kate reflected on an experience when she and her friend acknowledged they were *'trying to perform as supermum'* (Kate/P6&7/T5/I6), and not being honest with each other, *'we realised that we were just saying to each other 'oh yeah, everything's great!' and actually, we said let's stop doing that'* (Kate/P6&7/T5/I6). Similarly, Ruth noted that when friends are honest with each other *'it can be hilarious!'* (Ruth/P8/T5/I6) with Louise emphasised the importance of finding a network that *'I knew were telling the truth'* (Louise/P4/T5/I6).

The above reflections correlate with the work of Hays (1996) highlighted within the literature review regarding how modern motherhood promotes *'the ideology of intensive mothering and the extent to which mothers' attempts to live up to it is responsible for the cultural contradictions of motherhood'* (Hays, 1996, p. 97). This can be further supported by returning to Henderson *et al.* (2010) and their suggestion that interpersonal surveillance is the most powerful level of surveillance for mothers, and Foucault's (1977) proposal that the panoptic machine includes all members of society, not just those in positions of hierarchy. This also relates to Rose (1999, p. 133) and his suggestion that there are a set of *'instructions to all involved as to how they should identify normality and conduct themselves in a normal fashion'*. Thus, the way that mothers compare themselves against the perceived achievements, or mothering ability, of others would demonstrates further that:

> we are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism (Foucault, 1975, p. 217).

The rise and role of social media and celebrity culture was highlighted as a highly and ever expanding influential interpersonal aspect of modern motherhood. Facebook (Facebook, 2004) in particular was highlighted by participants (Kate, Louise and Gemma) as something that, '*can turn into a bit of a monster'* (Kate/P6/T5/I7), adding to the pressure of modern motherhood. Awareness was demonstrated that social media does not reflect reality. Louise for example described an awareness of Facebook as *'the best bits and you don't see the rest of it'* however, despite this awareness, Louise also reflected on the way social media makes her *'worry and constantly thinks, is my child happy? well their child is always happy'* (Louise/P12/T5/I7).

This echoes the exploration of online social networking within the literature review which discussed the normalization in recent years of members of society sharing all aspects of their lives on line particularly through social media (McDaniel and Coyne, 2011; Anderson and Grace, 2015; Valchanov *et al.,* 2016; Wu Song and Paul, 2016). In terms of interpersonal surveillance, this can be associated with the constant social comparison mothers make between themselves *'leaving*

many mothers feeling overwhelmed and inadequate, when they saw other mothers who apparently 'do it all'' (Valchanov, 2016, p. 59). This feeling is exacerbated at a potentially isolated time in a new mother's life and the negative impact of it was reinforced by Gemma when she recalled her feelings that *'oh my god, people are living the best all the time'* (Gemma/P10/T5/I7).

Similarly, Schoppe-Sullivan, Yavorsky, Bartholomew, Sullivan, Lee, Kamp Dush and Glassman (2016) found associations between the use of Facebook (Facebook, 2004), mothering identity and depressive symptoms, within their research they suggested that:

> mothers who were more prone to seeking external validation for their mothering identity and perfectionistic about parenting experienced increases in depressive symptoms indirectly via greater Facebook activity (Schoppe-Sullivan *et al.,* 2016, p. 276).

The association between Facebook use and maternal wellbeing can be linked to levels of surveillance and the panoptic machine which, in this case, extends into the homes of new mothers through engagement with social media. This is particularly pertinent during the transition to motherhood when sites like Facebook offer the possibility of *'connection and affirmation'* (Schoppe-Sullivan *et al.,* 2016, p. 277) but increase the exposure to *'intensive mothering'* (Hays, 1996; Douglas and Michaels, 2005) where mothers are *'striving to meet nearly impossible domestic and parenting ideals'* (Schoppe-Sullivan *et al.,* 2016, p. 277) to the detriment of their mental health and may go some way to explaining why Gemma reflected that *'I find that… getting away from Facebook sometimes, that helps'* (Gemma/P10/T5/I7).

This also concurs with the suggestions put forward by Henderson *et al.,* (2010) who recognised the power that interpersonal relationships, between mothers, have in reinforcing Foucault's panoptic machine through *'interpersonal communication and observation, ranging anywhere from conversations about children's appropriate developmental milestones to a covert, silent monitoring'* (Henderson *et al.*, 2010, p. 231). Similarly, the rise in celebrity culture was highlighted as adding pressure to modern motherhood with Gemma, Ruth and Louise reporting unrealistic expectations and added pressure to be *'picture*

perfect' (Louise/P6/T5/I8) partly as a result of the presence of celebrity mothers in the media. Participants were aware however, when discussing both social media and celebrity culture, of the idealised nature of the images that are transmitted to them and the role that, combined with the notions of expert advice and rise in parenting education, can promote a culture of *'selling you the perfect way to raise a child'* (Ruth/P7/T5/I9). Participants demonstrated an understanding of their role in the '*parenting industry'* (Guldberg, 2009), but ultimately find it difficult not to internalise these ideologies and *'feel as though you're doing something wrong….. and you're not!'* (Ruth/P8/T5/I8). Douglas and Michaels (2005, p. 25) relate this tension to mothers feeling *'simultaneously guilt ridden and ready for an uprising'*.

Through a feminist post-structuralist lens, participants demonstrated that they were able to recognise their position within the parenting industry (Guldberg, 2009), therefore challenging Foucault's (1977) belief that all members of society move through the panoptic machine unaware. The pressure in this instance relates more to the difficulty in challenging and resisting (Henderson *et al.,* 2015) the ideology that is so deeply entrenched in modern motherhood.

5.5 The Internalisation of 'Normalizing Judgement'

Staying within the second objective of this research which was to consider the constructs and experiences of modern motherhood in relation to different levels of surveillance, theme 6 relates to the ''all-consuming' pressure on self to be 'super-mum' (4.4.6) and can be explored within both interpersonal and self-surveillance. By considering interpersonal surveillance as a factor that will influence the experiences of motherhood, it is possible to reflect on the impact of it in regards to the internalisation of the normalizing judgements that have been explored throughout this chapter and ultimately how this internalization correlates to Foucault's (1977) concepts of '*the examination'*; the final component of the instruments of correct training, that through:

> humble procedures of training and distribution. It operates through a combination of hierarchical observation and normalizing judgement. These combine into a central technique of disciplinary power: the examination (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 156).

Issues surrounding the internalisation of normalizing judgement emerged predominantly during the late stages of the survey and interviews when mothers had reflected on how they felt in the early days of motherhood, considered advice and thought back to their experiences in attending a parenting course. The interviews took an almost chronological journey whereby once considering these early stages some of the wider social issues began to emerge surrounding interpersonal relationships and different types of surveillance that were felt by mothers as they try to build confidence and feel 'good enough'. What came to the fore next was participant reflections on their own positions within the discursive practices and how they reclaimed some of the control within the motherhood role and move forward with confidence.

Within the theme 'pressure on self (mother's guilt)' (T6/I1) saw responses from all seven mothers give overwhelmingly similar answers regarding internalised pressure which correlate with the idea of fighting an *'internal battle'* (Gemma/P9/T6/I1) and an *'all consuming'* (Jenny/P9/T6/I1) sense of *'mothers guilt'* (Jenny/P9/T6/I1). For example, Kate described feeling like '*a swan so you give off the air of being really confident and everything's going really smoothly and underneath you're sort of paddling as hard as you can to kind of keep things going'* (Kate/P6/T6/I1) and with Clare reporting experiences of *'I've often said, oh I'm not doing a very good job….. I've sat and thought, oh I'm the worst mum in the world some days'* (Clare/P5/T6/I1).These findings relate to ideologies of motherhood as something to be considered natural and instinctive (Wallbank, 2001; Douglas and Michaels, 2005; Choi *et al.*, 2005; Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple, 2011) and to research by Miller (2005) who suggests that, during her research:

> women claim that they do not feel like mothers and can express concerns that they are fearful they will be 'found out'. Such worries are deeply rooted in perceptions of the moral context in which mothering occurs (Miller, 2005, p. 15).

From a feminist perspective, Miller (2005) also acknowledges the power of self-surveillance and how this is intensified by the discursive practices so deeply entrenched within societal norms. In Foucauldian terms, *'the examination'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 184) has become the judgement passed by mothers

themselves in relation to their own ability. Here the normalizing techniques have served to *'define practices which fall outside their system as deviant behaviour in need of normalization'* (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 198). As demonstrated from all seven interview participants, this internalisation can be associated with increased pressures that mothers feel within modern society, creating an *'internal battle'* (Gemma/P8/T6/I1) due to higher expectations placed on them as a result of *'significant benefits from feminist campaigns…. For example, educational and employment opportunities, a new ability to control their fertility and equality legislation'* (Davis, 2012, p. 212). These benefits, whilst extremely positive for women, do bring with them a heavy burden to access and achieve within all of the available opportunities, further demonstrated by Kate who noted *'I like to keep fit, I like to be a good wife, I like to provide food, I like all their clothes to be clean, I like the house to be tidy, I like to do really well at my job'* (Kate/P7/T6/I6).

Following on from this, other concerns expressed by mothers related to a feeling of certain aspects of motherhood being 'taboo' and how, if expressed, would suggest that they are either not coping or not responding to motherhood in the natural, instinctive way that is embedded into motherhood ideologies internalised by society and this has the potential to undermine maternal wellbeing. Examples of these *'confessions of maternal shortcomings'* (Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple, 2011, p. 58) came in the form of reflections from mothers on the difficulty and pressure to form an attachment with their babies immediately after birth including '*you can't really say that, you're a mum, you're not allowed to say things like that'* (Clare/P5/T6/I2). Both Priya and Clare discussed the pressure from society to '*feel this connection straight away'* (Priya/P7&8/T6/I2). Priya reflected that '*it's not all that great at the beginning. It's not all like fairies and …. You look at your baby lovingly'* (Priya/ P7&8/T6/I2), similarly, as noted by Clare, *'it's not just all flowers and hearts. It's difficult, it's the hardest thing you'll ever do'* (Clare/P5/T6/I2).

Correlating with this, during the interviews themselves and afterwards as discussed within the methodology when reflecting on the challenges and my role as the researcher, a number of participants (Louise, Gemma and Clare) sought out reassurance from me regarding the nature of their responses, there was a

feeling that they had in some way spoken out of turn. On two occasions during the interview Gemma stopped in mid-sentence and said *'that's really bad isn't it?'* (Gemma/P11/T6/I2) and *'it's bad that you feel like that isn't it?'* (Gemma/P11/T6/I2). On both occasions Gemma was discussing her annoyance at her son's behaviour and once she had expressed her annoyance and subsequently questioned herself for it, she reflected that *'I've probably made him naughtier in a way, with the way I've dealt with that'* Gemma//P10&11/T6/I2).

This can be associated with a transmitted *'sense of shame'* which Foucault (1977, p. 10) suggests *'is constantly growing; the psychologists and the minor civil servants of moral orthopaedics proliferate on the wound it leaves'*. Gemma's reflections regarding what she saw as a benefit of the parenting course that she attended, relate to a sense of internalising not only the behaviour of her son but also a subsequent period of self-blame in which time, the behaviour and possible reasons for it, are deflected onto herself through her confirmed belief that her children are mimicking her own behaviour. Burman (2008) attributes the way that mothers internalise the behaviours of their children to the societal association, through the portrayal of developmental psychology, between the actions of the mother and strong positive outcomes for the child. In this way, mothers have absorbed the message that their '*needs must be assimilated to those of their children for them to avoid censure as bad mother'* (Burman, 2008, p. 134).

These taboo topics can also be explored in relation to how whether forced of self-imposed, silences reinforce the dominant discourses within modern motherhood. The belief that certain aspects of motherhood cannot be spoken about negatively, or in some case at all, serve to strengthen the impact of motherhood ideologies. Simonardottir and Gislason (2018, p. 13) in their exploration of the internalisation of breastfeeding advice for new mothers suggest that silence is *'always meaningful as it is accompanied by social and political judgments about what is acceptable and unacceptable'*.

Clare's reflections that the parenting course encouraged her to realise that the behaviour of her sons were as a direct result of her own behaviour echoes Rose's (1999, p. 133) discussion about motherhood and the '*criteria of normality'*. This

criterion serves to *'provide the means of identifying abnormality and the rationale for intervention when reality and normality fail to coincide'* (Rose, 1999, p. 133). Miller (2005) expresses further concern about the internalisation of such taboo topics and how:

> ironically, by silencing ourselves and only retrospectively voicing accounts of normal difficulties and uncertainties, we help to perpetuate and reproduce the myth that mothering is instinctive and natural (Miller, 2005, p. 26).

Worryingly, in association with the power of self-surveillance, four of the participants (Louise, Gemma, Clare and Jenny) reported post-natal depression is something they had either been diagnosed with or had concerns about with Louise and Jenny both wondering whether it was *'normal'* (Louise/P13&14/T6/I6; JennyP/13/T6/I6) to feel the emotions they did in those early days of motherhood or whether they were displaying signs of post-natal depression**.** The impact of the ideologies of motherhood and feelings that are created as a result of *'unattainable image of infinite patience and constant adoration'* (Douglas and Michaels, 2005, p. 2) leads to a deeper, more worrying concern that post-natal depression may be present when these ideologies are not fully realised. With Public Heath England (2017) stating that *'perinatal mental health problems affect between 10 to 20% of women during pregnancy and the first year after having a baby'* (Public Health England, 2017) and cost the *'NHS and social services around £1.2 billion annually'* (Public Health England, 2017) then some of the underlying pressures and the *'master-narrative'* (Kerrick and Henry, 2017, p. 1) of motherhood needs to be considered in relation to the sort of support that mothers really need.

With the emphasis and use of neuroscientific research by policy makers (e.g. *Helping Parents to Parent Report,* Clarke *et al.*, 2017) to underline the direct association between the parenting of young children and cognitive outcomes, parenting intervention programmes are highly likely to continue to develop further in the near future. It is essential therefore to provide a balanced perspective in relation to the potential for help and the potential for hindrance for mothers that are increasingly exposed and encouraged to attend these programmes.

From a feminist post-structuralist perspective, the aim of this research is not to 'blame' a particular aspect of society, but to acknowledge the realities of modern motherhood and to develop an understanding of the experiences of participants. As suggested by Simonardottir and Gislason (2018:14), once the dominant discourses surrounding modern motherhood are identified, *'we are much better equipped to disrupt and untangle these constructions and power relations and critically engage with the normalizing discourses'.*

The above discussion outlines the power that the combined levels of surveillance and disciplinary technologies have on the practice of motherhood and go some way to explaining why participants have highlighted, throughout both the survey and the interviews, the critical importance of a trusted, truthful social network of other mothers to share experiences with. Interestingly, when asked to rank statements relating to the benefit of attending a parenting course (T4/I3), the statement that was ranked the highest was '*this class gave me opportunities to meet other parents'* with 73% of participants strongly agreeing**.** Once again, the importance of social interaction and a supportive network is highlighted as a need for new mothers. As Douglas and Michaels (2005, p. 250) highlighted, motherhood, at its most enjoyable is a *'collective experience',* further supported by Davis's (2012, p. 212) observations regarding how important the development of social networks are for mothers in order to take *'mutual pleasure in the delight that motherhood could bring, but also with the aim of alleviating some of the difficulties and inequities that they faced'.* Despite some negative experiences in terms of interaction and competition with other women, overwhelmingly, it is the interaction and the opportunity to meet other mothers that led them to attend a parenting course in the first place. From a feminist post-structuralist perspective, it is this proactive strategy that brings the opportunity for empowerment, whilst interpersonal surveillance is no doubt a hugely important aspect of being a new mother, there is agency within this experience and the reactions to this level of surveillance are by no means one dimensional.

Kate and Jenny reported returning to work as an important aspect of their experience of early motherhood, their experiences were quite different though. Kate returned to work 6 weeks after her first child was born and reflected that

'Work was everything before… I think when you make those decision….. You're probably maybe not in the frame of mind' (Kate/P7&8/T6/I3). Jenny who had a longer maternity leave with her first child reported how her return to work signalled a return to her own identity and how *'you're not just H's mum, you're back to work, you've both got a bit more of an equal relationship'* (Jenny/P11/T6/I3).This echoes the work of Miller (2005, p. 113) who recognises the return to work for some mothers, as an opportunity for *'a greater sense of control in a life with glimpses, and sometimes more, of a pre-baby self and life*'.

These findings suggest that the level of autonomy and control a mother has on her return to work correlates to how helpful that can be in redefining an identity within motherhood. Similarly, within the constructs of self-surveillance, participants also reflected on their frustrations with partners and other family members in relation to care and decision making, this can be linked to a sense of needing to regain some control. It was also acknowledged that the need for being in control was a component of mothers putting immense pressure on themselves, including difficulty in sharing decision making with partners when there is a perception that '*I know better and I should have the final say on everything'* (Jenny/P11/T6/I4). The process of navigating the early stages of motherhood corresponded to a feeling of regaining some level of control, this related to different and varied factors for participants including returning to work, developing a sense of knowing 'the right way' to look after their baby and also an increased confidence and trust in their own ability as a mother. This change signals some level of resistance to the concepts of being, and remaining a 'docile body' in Foucauldian terms, and instead, working towards developing agency and autonomy within the mother role. Whilst Henderson *et al*., (2010) levels of surveillance may be embedded into motherhood practice, the reactions to these levels are not identical or static.

Echoing reflections regarding the beginning of being able to ignore contradictory advice (T2/I7), Jenny and Louise reported a shift as their babies moved towards turning 1-year-old and a feeling of regaining control. Louise reflected that she became a '*bit more decisive and thinking 'well, no that not going to work for me….and this is why…'* (Louise/P8/T6/I7) and Jenny reported that by the time

her baby reach 10-12 months old she *'relaxed a bit'* (Jenny/P11/T6/I7). Miller (2005, p. 112) labelled this change *'a return to normal: becoming the expert'* and recognised this as linked to the passage of time and experience where mothers can begin to return to their identities with newly emerging confidence in their mothering ability and shifts *'that occur around perceptions of expert, authoritative knowledge as control in a life felt to be regained'* (Miller, 2005, p. 112). It is interesting to consider this identity shift from a feminist post-structuralist perspective as an acceptance that 'being good enough' is indeed, enough in relation to the different reactions to the levels of surveillance within motherhood experiences. Whist participants reported positively about this increase in confidence however, the fact that this emerges so late in relation to the transition into motherhood could suggest either a normal rite of passage that all mothers must go through or as a missed opportunity that can be associated with the internalisation of self-surveillance and its subsequent effects.

A secured identity as an individual (Winnicott, 1964) and a rise in levels of coping (Currie, 2008) is a constructive development. Participants did reflect however, on the limitations in support for new mothers, including the influx of information given from health professionals which is not individualised in any way and does not encourage mothers to recognise themselves as the potential expert and instead, breeds a culture of belief that *'I'll try what you said cos you're obviously better at this cos you're a professional'* (Louise/P11/T6/I8). Whilst it is encouraging to see that participants were able to reflect back and see how their confidence and self-belief has developed over time, arguably, the damage has already been done in relation to the impact on the experience of the early days of motherhood and as Louise concluded *'obviously somethings going wrong in that whole process that we've got to change'* (Louise/P11/T6/I8).

5.6 Reflecting on Motherhood

The third objective of this research was to produce a greater understanding of some of the pressures within modern motherhood in UK today. The final theme that emerged from the findings related to 'reflecting on motherhood' (4.4.7) whereby participants were asked to consider the most rewarding and challenging

aspects of motherhood and also to reflect on how they believe new mothers could be best supported in the future.

On reflecting on the most rewarding aspects of motherhood, aside from finding joy from the children themselves as they grow and develop, and in observing *'each milestone they reach'* (Priya/P10/T7/I2), participants also reported a sense of achievement in relation to the personal aspects of motherhood such as being able to breastfeed, returning to work and feeling proud of their role in nurturing their children, echoing Winnicott's (1964) philosophy of the importance of enjoyment and self-identity. Louise and Gemma both reflected on the rewarding aspect of mothering coming from being able to find enjoyment and feeling more comfortable in the role, this correlates to the work of Zimmer-Gembeck *et al.,* (2015) who found a direct link between efficacy, confidence and autonomy to levels of enjoyment and competence in motherhood.

When considering the most challenging aspect of motherhood, participants reinforced previous reflections on the early days of motherhood. Tiredness and lack of sleep was highlighted again here, however, some different responses were also given which show the unique experience of the participants themselves. Whilst Kate recognised the pressure she had placed upon herself to '*be super-mum'* (Kate/P8/T7/I3), Louise focussed more on the life changing experience motherhood that is and how she *'never expected the huge difference it would have on my life'* (Louise/P16&17/T7/I3. Other participants identified different aspects of motherhood to be the most challenging, Priya identified breastfeeding as her biggest challenge and Ruth identified *'sticking to your own beliefs and the way that you want to do it when there are so many people……. telling you that you should be doing it a different way'* (Ruth/P10/T&/I3).

All participants selected a different aspect as most challenging to them as an individual. Clare for example reflected on her experiences with post-natal depression that were discussed earlier in the chapter. Clare reported her biggest challenge as *'admitting'* (Clare/P6/T7/I3) she was struggling and taking the time to realise that, as with all other relationships in life, *'it's getting to know them and getting to like what they like'* Clare/P6/T7/I3. Although unique aspects of

motherhood were expressed as the most challenging by participants, each participant's reflections relate to characteristics that can be associated with self-surveillance. Each mother related to a facet of their own behaviour, further strengthening the idea of self-surveillance as linked to an overriding societal *'bio-power'* (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 143). Similarly, Rose (1999) in his exploration of the *'genealogy of modern self'* and the role the that psychology as a domain of knowledge has played in the importance placed onto parenting education, stresses the pressure now placed on new mothers to *'precede the teacher'* and how:

> If she plays her part well, the child's future life chances will be immeasurably enhanced, if she fails through ignorance or impatience to realize or to actualize such a learning scheme, woe betide her child when he or she enters school (Rose, 1999, p. 182).

Overwhelmingly, the reflections of participants in relation to how they can be best supported suggest that mothers do not feel they need to be told how to look after their baby and they do not express desire to develop knowledge or insight into the neuroscientific development of their babies (Rose, 1999; Burman, 2008). Instead, they desire safe, informal, non-judgemental places to meet other people with children of a similar age and a chance to share experiences and feel valued as an individual human being. This resonates back to the work of Winnicott (1964) who outlined the importance of mothers finding their confidence through the affirmation of their own identity first. Winnicott suggested that through the developing recognition of the mother as a person separate from their child, the feeling of intense pressure can be reduced and a sense of enjoyment increased.

Bassin, Honey and Kaplan (1994) recognise Winnicott's concepts and constructs of motherhood as *'being in some way even more difficult, and perhaps in some ways easier – at least more gratifying – than Winnicott imagined'* (Bassin *et al.*, 1994, p. 160) but also saw the potential for Winnicott's philosophy had potentially positive implications for mothers and that *'allowing the mother to be a person first is the key to maternal resilience'* (Bassin *et al.*, 1994, p. 160). Similarly, society has, since the post 1930s focus on motherhood (Humphries and Gordon, 1993; Burman, 2008; Cunningham, 2012; Davis, 2012) has served to add to the

pressures on mothers through multiple layers of surveillance which reinforce the message that *'it is the duty of women to produce strong, obedient citizens upon whom the future strength and stability of the nation depends'* (Humphries and Gordon, 1993, p. 49). Whilst participants displayed some difficulty in resisting this discourse, they did demonstrate an awareness of it and the way these societal messages lead to the internalisation of *'mother's guilt'* (Jenny/P9/T6/I1). Participants also demonstrated a clear recognition that more thought needs to put into the support currently available to new mothers.

The role of the health professional has been continuously highlighted as important and when considering other forms of support, all participants outlined the significance of local support and the importance of having supportive, empathetic, *'proactive'* (Louise/P17/T7/I4) health professionals. The overriding importance of not feeling judged by health professional was emphasised by all participants. As stated by Kate *'we all do feel like we're being judged and that's the worst feeling that you can have'* (Kate/P8&9/T7/I4) and therefore, informal support in the form of a setting where mothers *'feel comfortable and confident to ask any questions that they might have'* (Kate/P8&9/T7/I4). Despite their experiences of attending a parenting course, participants recognised that with anything too structured or formalised*, 'people just feel pressures to… perform in a particular way rather than actually admitting where they are with thing'* (Kate/P8&9/T7/I4) and that new mothers need someone to *'talk to and you know, give advice but just that forcefulness needs to just go'* (Priya/P11/T7/I4). The positive influence that her local Sure Start Children's Centre support gave her was reflected upon by Clare, who emphasised that *'if it wasn't for them I wouldn't be out and about in the first place doing what I'm doing now…I was just sat in the house, dreading going out and now I just get on with it'* (Claire/P6&7/T7/I4).

Opportunities for mothers to share experiences in a safe and non-judgemental environment, whilst being supported to enjoy these experiences with their own identity secured, has to be acknowledged as fundamental for new mothers. If the wellbeing and maternal resilience of mothers is secured then, as linking back to Winnicott's (1964) philosophy then the relationship and experiences of new mothers can be facilitated to be a positive, 'good enough' one.

5.7 Conclusion

The findings of this research confirm that structural, interpersonal and self-surveillance (Henderson *et al.*, 2010) are indeed embedded into our society and into the discursive practices within modern motherhood in the UK today. Unlike Henderson *et al.*, (2010) though, who found interpersonal surveillance to be the most powerful, this research recognises self-surveillance; the internalisation of the *'master narratives'* (Kerrick and Henry, 2016, p. 1) as the most powerful level of surveillance. What is also clear from this research is that, by listening to the real experiences of mothers through a feminist post-structuralist lens, without the assumptions that mothers are simply *'docile'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 136) victims of surveillance, the reactions to these levels can certainly demonstrate agency and autonomy. It is acknowledged, and will be considered further in the following chapter, that it is difficult to resist the dominant discourses, but through the development of individualised support systems that centre on informal, neutral and practical support for new mothers, along with opportunities for mothers to foster trusting and open social networks, mothers will feel empowered to share their experiences with honesty and move forward in the resisting and reshaping of the dominant discourses.

Chapter 6: CONCLUSION

My unique philosophical and methodological approach, along with my findings make this research an original contribution to knowledge, the following chapter will conclude and summarise my findings with an insight into the implications for future research, publications, policy and practice.

6.1 Conclusion and Summary

Through an exploration of the first two emerging themes (T1 – Navigating the early days of motherhood and T2 – 'Expert' advice and support for new mothers) within the findings there is a recognised feeling of shock, being unprepared and overwhelmed in the early stages of motherhood, linking back to the ideologies of motherhood as something that should be natural and instinctive (Choi *et al.*, 2005; Douglas and Michaels, 2005; Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple, 2011). Recommendations can be made for some acknowledgement that the aforementioned feelings are not uncommon and that competence is something that develops over time with experience and appropriate support for new mothers (Winnicott, 1964). This is supported by reflections from the participants who reported the developing ability to filter un-welcome or conflicting advice from baby manuals, popular parenting websites and from family, friends and health professionals, after a period of time, as confidence developed.

Through a feminist post-structuralist perspective these findings can be seen through the lens of multiple possibilities within the experiences of mothers including feeling dependent on and judged by others (Foucault, 1975; Rose, 1999) and finding agency and empowerment (Weedon, 1997; Baxter, 2003; Davis, 2010), with time being the important variable to be recognised as an opportunity for confidence to grow alongside a regained feeling of coping (Currie, 2008). Exploring the experiences of motherhood within a feminist post-structuralist perspective offers through post-structuralism; '*a useful, productive framework for understanding the mechanisms of power in our society and the possibilities of change'* (Weedon, 1997, p. 10) whilst also acknowledging, through feminism, the importance of autonomy and resistance to the dominant discourses in a society where *'to be inconsistent is to be unstable'.* (Weedon, 1997, p. 10).

Consideration of theme 3 (T3 - Reasons identified for going to a parenting course) and theme 4 (T4 – Experiences of attending a parenting course) from the findings focussed on reflections of the parenting courses themselves and showed that the opportunity for building a social network and reducing the potential for isolation, were the main motivating factors in attending a parenting course. The evidence from within the findings also showed a desire for helpful and practical advice on aspects of parenting including sleep, breastfeeding and weaning. This challenges the government focus on parenting intervention programmes that offer psychoanalytical or neurodevelopmental programmes focussed on parenting style, childhood behaviour and an in-depth insight of child development (Johnson and Wilson 2012; Clarke *et al.*, 2017). Reflections from the parenting course themselves showed that the importance of the role of the practitioner was crucial here. Participants responded negatively when they felt that health and early years practitioners had a hidden agenda including, 'pushing' them into breastfeeding or judging them if they were not able to or decided not to. Similarly, the importance of supportive relationships with other mothers during the parenting course was highlighted and acknowledgement given to competitive mothers having a negative influence on the experience of attending the parenting course, this important 'interpersonal relationship' supports the previously explored research by Henderson *et al.* (2010). Overall, the completion of the course itself lead to a sense of achievement and increased feelings of confidence and competence within participants. It can be acknowledged through this research that there is a place for parenting courses as a way to support mothers but it is important that they come from a practical, supportive and neutral position rather than grounded in neuroscientific and theoretical underpinnings, which have not been considered as useful for participants and indeed, seem to promote internalised feelings of judgement and added pressure.

Theme 5 (feeling judged) explored issues such as mothers feeling unable to make a doctor's appointment through the impression that they are being overly anxious or 'wasting the time' of doctors. Some positive findings relating to localised, informal support that parenting courses or groups offer where mothers can ask the questions they may have. Again here, concerns were raised

surrounding the perceived hidden agenda of professionals to promote aspects of parenting such as breastfeeding, meeting of developmental milestones and the connection this has to a developing feeling of pressure from participants. The need for neutral, empathetic and non-judgemental health professionals were consistently raised by participants.

Interpersonal surveillance was explored again within this theme in relation to the need for more honesty and removal of the *'rose tinted glasses'* (Ruth/P8/T5/I6) between mothers about the challenges of modern motherhood. Issues were raised surrounding comparisons between mothers that are heightened through social media and celebrity culture. Awareness of the parenting industry but difficulty in resisting this (Henderson *et al.*, 2015) was also demonstrated, this level of surveillance can be seen as, alongside structural surveillance, a contributing variable in the most powerful level of surveillance which was found within this research to be self-surveillance.

Theme 6 (the 'all-consuming' pressure to be 'super-mum') reinforced self-surveillance as the most powerful level of surveillance within modern motherhood with participants reporting a feeling of guilt and pressure to perform in a role that was perceived by society as natural, feel an instant connection and an *'overwhelming love'* (see Clare/P6/T7/I3). This self-surveillance developed into a worrying silence (Simonsardottir and Gislason, 2018) whereby for some participants, aspects of motherhood were deemed 'taboo' including annoyance at their child's challenging behaviour and finding the role difficult were not to be discussed. Opportunities were explored through returning to work, frustrations with partner and family members and concerns relating to post-natal depression all associated with the internalisation of society messages and the *'master narrative'* (Kerrick and Henry, 2017, p. 1) of motherhood ideologies. A shift in confidence was noted as developing towards the end of the first year when participants reported feeling more relaxed, competent and demonstrated more awareness of the unhelpful implication of contradictory advice and wider parenting culture.

The final theme, theme 7 (reflection on motherhood) reinforced self-surveillance as the most powerful level of surveillance with fundamental aspects of resilience identified as being linked to the need for mothers to retain or regain their own sense of identity, develop their confidence through appropriate local support and resist the dominant discourse that motherhood is natural and instinctive for all women. Overall, I consider the internalisation of structural and interpersonal levels of surveillance (Henderson *et al.,* 2010) as resulting in the most powerful surveillance which is self-surveillance whereby, in Foucauldian terms, *'rights and obligations are established and imposed'* across members of society (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 192). Within the exposure to the different levels of surveillance, there is a recognition that the reactions to these have a degree of autonomy within them that can be further nurtured through the building of confidence within this role. Rather than a prescriptive, one size fits all approach to motherhood, through support systems that encourage agency and individuality, mothers may be able to *'reflect upon the discursive relations which constitute her and the society in which she lives, and be able to choose from the options available'* (Weedon, 1997, p. 121).

6.2 Future Research, Publications, Policy and Practice

It is important now to use this research, and any subsequent research, as a way of considering the support currently offered to mothers in the UK in relation to the implications of different forms of surveillance embedded within society on maternal wellbeing, identity and resilience. The dissemination of this research through the national and international networks that I am part of have the potential to be valuable and I aim to continue to disseminate to both academics, students and practitioners that work directly with new mothers.

I hope to raise awareness of the pressures on new mothers through further publication (see 3.2 Research Position for outline of current publications) and debate through the networks I am involved with including The Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network (ECSDN); Association for the Professional Development of Early Years Educators (TACTYC); British Education Research Association (BERA), The Centre for Parenting Culture Studies (CPCS) at Kent University and The Childhood Research Cluster at the University of Derby.

Academic journals including the *Journal of Early Childhood Research* (2018); *Health and Social Care in the Community* (2018) and professional magazines such as *Nursery World* (2018) also have the potential to be valuable sources of dissemination. It is important to use this research to highlight the experiences of new mothers and consider the implications in relation to practice and support available during this time. This may be in the form of an outline of the research as a whole through publication in the sources highlighted above and also through focussing on some of the main contributors of pressure.

Through publication with a concentration on the results of the research including the impact that social media has on the lives of new mothers, the essential role of an empathetic and neutral health professionals and early practitioners and the effect that the overwhelming influx of contradictory 'expert' advice has on sensitive aspects of motherhood including breastfeeding and the meeting of developmental milestone, it will be possible to shine a light on these issues and bring a deeper awareness to those supporting new mothers. I am currently involved in the development of an edited book from the first Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network research conference, where I delivered a presentation based on my key research findings in January 2018. This will be the first publication based on my doctoral work. Following on from this, along with the publications and segments of my research that I would like to share through different forums and networks, I would like to pursue the possibility of developing a book proposal and ultimately, a monograph which focusses on my research as a whole, allowing the findings to be presented in full. Another aim is to share the findings of my research with the settings that currently deliver parenting courses. It is important that practitioners including graduates from the Early Childhood Studies Degree that I am Programme Leader for, hear the experiences of mothers that have attended the courses that they deliver and that they understand that whilst such courses do have the potential to reduce isolation and provide an important support network for mothers, there is also the possibility for harm when mothers feel judged, undermined or inadequate. It is essential that those delivering such courses are able to be critically reflective and consider their practice and professionalism (Dyer, 2016) in order to deliver the appropriate

support for each mother they work with and this is an area that I would like to develop further.

It is important to provide opportunities for policy makers and practitioners to reflect on research such as this and take proactive steps to avoid portraying motherhood at formulaic and homogenous at best, and as an ordeal at worst, with potentially disastrous implications if a mother somehow fails in her role. Instead, steps need to be taken towards supporting mothers to find the confidence in this role with appropriate, practical support, to feel 'good enough' (Winnicott, 1964), retain their own identities and ultimately, enjoy the experience to its full potential. The overarching importance of proactive, neutral, practical support from health and early years professionals along with opportunities within the local area for mothers to share experiences and develop an honest, truthful, non-judgemental interpersonal support network are identified, through this research, as particularly important for new mothers.

6.3 Summary of Findings

Table 8 below outlines the six key findings from this research. For each key finding, a recommendation is provided regarding the important next steps that must be taken in relation to the support currently offered to new mothers from early years practitioners, health professionals, policy and academia.

No.	Finding	Provocations and Recommendations
1	Parenting courses can provide opportunities for new mothers to build daily structure, social networks and reduce feelings of isolation.	Localised support groups, developed by qualified early years practitioners and health professionals is crucial. Such support groups must consider the views and experiences of new mothers, including a flexible approach to course delivery which

		responds to the diverse needs of group members.
2.	Some negative experiences of parenting courses occur when practitioners are considered 'pushy' or 'non-neutral', particularly regarding sensitive areas such as breastfeeding or the reaching of developmental milestones. It is important that those professionals delivering universal parenting courses are well qualified, critically reflective practitioners that understand the needs of new mothers and young children and can deliver individualised support.	Proactive, empathetic and practical support from health professionals and early years practitioners is needed. A move towards a graduate–led workforce of early years practitioners and health professionals that are encouraged, through policy, to recognise mothers and young children as individuals with differing needs, is essential.
3.	Participants see a perceived place in society for parenting courses when they are practical, supportive, individualised and neutral rather than formulaic, homogenous or grounded in psychoanalytical or neurodevelopmental underpinnings, which can promote feelings of judgement or added pressure.	The structure and underpinning theoretical base of parenting courses should be re-considered and centre around practical and flexible support developed in conjunction with well qualified early years practitioners, health professionals and new mothers, with recognition of the critical important of the inclusion of the mothers' voice.
4.	Findings link to the wider 'parenting culture' with societal pressures, motherhood ideologies, support or comparisons between mothers and other aspects of interpersonal	Opportunities for further research include investigating the impact of social media on the mental health of mothers is vital and the findings of this research will be considered in

	surveillance e.g. social media, celebrity culture, adding to the challenge of finding confidence and agency within the role.	relation to how it can be widely shared with new mothers, policy makers, academics, early years practitioners and health professionals.
5.	Self-surveillance is identified as the most powerful aspects of modern motherhood. Challenges include, a reluctance to discuss 'taboo' aspects of motherhood such as challenges with instant attachment following birth, and the internalisation of social and cultural pressures.	Any future universal parenting courses should include content which highlights the impact that structural, interpersonal and self-surveillance can have on new mothers. It is essential that this research is shared with new mothers as a way to shine a light and work towards reducing the damage that silences on taboo aspects of motherhood can have. This includes exploring opportunities to disseminate findings of this research to new mothers through health, early years education and social media channels.
6.	It is important to note that, although there are clear levels of surveillance that are embedded into society, there is also evidence of agency and autonomy in the responses to these levels which were developed through strong social networks, support systems and the retaining of identity. The list below identifies some of the	Empowering opportunities are needed for new mothers to develop autonomy and confidence in an informal environment and foster trusting, interpersonal support networks. It is through these support systems that new mothers will continue to be able to recognise, resist and reshape the dominant discourses and

	different reactions to the levels of surveillance which may move and change over time and in response to different scenarios. **Dependency / Feeling Judged:** Characteristics such as: • Feeling a loss or shifting in identity • Looking to others as sources of expert advice including early years practitioners, health professionals, baby manuals and parenting forums/ websites • Experiencing a feeling of self-doubt or loss of control • Feeling judged by others e.g. health professionals social media • Comparisons / Competitiveness between mothers **Proactivity / Feeling 'Good Enough':** Characteristics such as: • Accessing advice materials • Beginning to form strategies for building confidence and a sense of 'coping' • Recognition of the 'parenting industry' and the unrealistic nature of social media posts – some difficulty in resisting the potentially negative impact, despite awareness	ultimately, enjoy the experience to its full potential.

	Autonomy / Empowerment: Characteristics such as: • Recognition of self as the expert • Resistance of the dominant discourses including using relevant strategies and ignoring or filtering those that are not considered to be appropriate • Increased sense of identity, agency and autonomy • Trusting networks between mothers that promote open and honest communication.	

Table: 8 Key Findings and Recommendations

6.4 Reflections

This final section will consider the research process as a whole including what I, as researcher have learnt through the application of the approach, methods and finally, reflections on the contribution to knowledge made from this research. .

6.4.1 Feminist Post-Structuralist Approach

Recognised as a potential *'contradiction in terms'* (Baxter, 2003, p. 2), a feminist post-structuralist ontological and epistemological approach was taken within this research in order to allow the findings to be analysed with the potential for multiple possibilities to the reactions to different levels of surveillance (Henderson *et al.*, 2010).This approach is described by Baxter (2003, p. 2) as a *'productive contribution'* which offers the opportunity for the experiences of women to be explored without the limitations of *'old assumptions'* (Baxter, 2003, p. 2) as both philosophies share a *'common concern with subjectivity'* (Weedon, 1997, p. 40). Within this perspective, the experiences of women in modern society can be explored in relation to the pressures from multiple perspectives specifically within this research, those pressures come from the different forms of surveillance that

mothers are exposed to i.e. structural, interpersonal and self-surveillance (Henderson *et al.*, 2010) and how these pressures work within the different aspects of the panoptic machine (Foucault, 1977) and serve to *'govern the soul'* (Rose, 1999, p. 1).

Another advantage of analysing this research through a feminist post-structuralist perspective came from the possibility of exploring examples of resistance and agency within the reflections of mothers. The lack of recognition within the literature review of how women may use parenting education as a way to empower themselves, select the strategies that work from them and develop their own confidence proactively, were of concern. As reflected throughout this research, I felt that a purely Foucauldian or 'parenting culture' discourse (Furedi, 2008; Lee *et al*., 2014) would do mothers a disservice. This was confirmed within the interviews with participants acknowledging that the parenting courses they attended were *'a lifeline'* (Gemma/P6/T3/I2) for them at a time in which they needed this support. Over time, participants were eventually able to *'be a bit more decisive and thinking 'well, no that's not going to work for me… and this is why…'* (Louise/P8/T6/I7). In these instances, rather than being *'hapless victims of actions wholly beyond their control'* (Nakano Glenn, Chang and Rennie Forcey, 1994, p. 337), participants demonstrated that they reclaimed control and were *'capable of framing strategies to enhance their situation'* (Nakano Glenn *et al.*, 1994, p. 337) Rather than being *'docile'* (Foucault, 1977, p. 136), mothers were, within the constraints of a society that projects an ideology of motherhood as natural and instinctive, able to develop their own strategies and rebuild identifies and confidence. Davis agrees that, within a feminist post-structuralist perspective it is possible to *'embrace the rich complexity of life lived through multiple and contradictory discourses'*. (Davis, 1997, p. 272) and agency is encouraged and promoted through the opportunity to share these experiences, give voice to and therefore disempower the *'silences on motherhood'* (O'Brien Hallstein, 2008, p. 144).

As researcher I also learnt an important lesson during the early analysis stage. I have reflected upon my frustrations regarding the *'false start'* (Newby, 2014, p. 473) that I experienced when, over the course of approximately 6 months, I tried

to drive the data directly into the conceptual framework which resulted in a detachment to the individual responses of the participants. A more open interpretation was therefore applied during the second attempt which carefully identified issues that could later be categorised into themes. This was an important lesson for me as researcher and as I reflected on the importance of retaining the responses of participants at the heart of the study which in turn, complimented the feminist post-structuralist approach to the research.

6.4.2 Photo-elicitation Interviews as a method

I was drawn to photo elicitation interviews, a visual method, as a way to incite deeper and more sincere reflections from participants. I believed that asking participants to look at existing family photographs throughout the interview would be a potentially powerful way of generating thoughtful memories from the time they became mothers, as explained by Rose (2002), photographs can be seen as *'carriers of true evidence of what was there when they were taken, truer even that the human witnesses to those scenes'* (Rose, 2002, p. 11). I was clear in my own mind from the start that I did not want to be too prescriptive with this though, I refer to the work of Oakley (2005) who recognised the importance of resisting a controlling grasp during the research and therefore within the interview information letter. I asked participants to bring along photographs from when they became a mother but I did not prescribe how many, or exactly what sort of photographs I wished to see. I found that the way each participants approached the photo elicitation interviews varied greatly (see Appendix 13). For example:

> Claire:
> As her children were present Claire did not use photos – she tended to refer to the boys using gestures and glances rather than referring to images of them;
>
> Priya:
> Photos were used as reflection before and during this interview (rolling images on laptop). Especially photos of Priya with her first child. They were useful for ice breaking and reflecting on the time he was born, how hot it was and considering how she felt at that time including using 'grow eggs' to control temperature and all those early worries;

Louise:

> Photos were used here before the interview and again during. 1 photograph in particular was used several times which showed Louise and her husband and son right after the birth – Louise focussed on how she felt right after and how she now feels when she sees that photo, describes herself as *'dead behind the eyes'* (Louise/P15/T6/I8)

In line with the feminist post-structuralist approach to the research, I aimed to avoid being overly directional with the photo elicitation interviews (Harper, 2002; Banks, 2007 and Rose, 2012). I wanted as much of the control of the interview to be with the participants and I avoided directing questions towards specific photos as I felt this was too unnatural for the informal type of interview I was aiming for and trying to force this method would not have supported the ethics of the research. I maintain using this method within the research though, despite the variation from participants in terms of engagement with it. The main benefit of using the photos came as an ice-breaker activity, especially where children were not present. This proved to be a useful technique to relax both myself and the participant. Interestingly, where children were present during the interview, an unanticipated outcome was that the participants would use the children as reference points and did not use photographs at all. It would therefore be interesting to consider in future how human beings themselves are used within visual methodologies to elicit deep reflections.

6.4.3 Contribution to Knowledge

My ontological position, along with a methodology that centres around the experiences and voices of mothers makes this research an original contribution to knowledge. A review of the literature showed a gap in the research through the exploration of the dominant discourses, particularly in relation to listening to the experiences of new mothers through a more open, feminist post-structuralist worldview. Whilst there were many strong opinions and research surrounding the support that should be offered to new mothers, be it from the political promotion of parenting agenda, or through the contrasting suggestion that parenting agenda only serves to reinforce the message that parenting can be taught, there was limited research relating to asking new mothers to reflect on their experiences of

attending a parenting course, leading to in-depth reflections on motherhood on a wider scale. By considering the experiences of modern motherhood from a feminist post-structuralist worldview and by keeping the voices of the mothers at the centre if this research, I was able to analyse both the constructs of modern motherhood and the varied responses to these experiences.

As a mother of children who were aged 2 and 3 when I began the professional doctorate I was able to identify with many of the responses from mothers during the interviews as I had been there myself fairly recently. I consider this experience to be an advantage within the research overall as it strengthened my ontological position and reinforced the relational elements of the interviews (Oakley, 2005) that were fundamental to the feminist post-structuralist position within which this research was grounded. As stated by Ackerly and True (2008, p. 705) it is the responsibility of researchers to put *'our commitment to self-reflexivity, our attentiveness to the power of epistemologies, of boundaries and relationships into the practice of our research'*. From a feminist post-structuralist perspective, it is the development of a deeper understanding of the discursive practices that are so deeply embedded *'in particular society, at a particular moment, is the first step in intervening in order to initiate change'* (Weedon, 1997, p. 131). Therefore, by exploring the experiences of mothers it has been possible to consider their experiences as socially constructed whilst also considering each woman as an agent of social change who can *'reflect upon the discursive relations which constitute her and the society in which she lives, and choose from the options available'* (Weedon, 1997, p. 121).

The intention of the research remained throughout the lengthy process of the Doctor of Education programme and this was the aim of exploring the experiences of mothers that have attended a universal parenting course and to provide a deeper insight into some of the social and cultural pressures that are embedded within modern motherhood. This research has provided this insight along with the potential for further research in relation to some of the individual issues and themes within the findings that need further exploration including the influence and impact of social media during the transition to motherhood, the impact of breastfeeding discourse and the fundamental role of health

professionals and early years practitioners in supporting new mothers along with some of the challenges they face in finding their autonomy when they support new mothers. As I move forward to develop future research, the critical importance of hearing the reality of modern motherhood remains and this can only be done by continuing to provide opportunities for mothers to share their experiences and for those in positions of power to be encouraged to listen to these experiences in order to ensure that any support provided reflects the voices of those who really do know best, the mothers themselves.

Word Count: 63,051

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Appendix 1 - Outline of Feminist Post-Structuralist Approach with associated dominant discourses and themes from the literature review

Philosophical Approach	Author / Date/	Summary	Associated Dominant Discourses/ literature review themes
Post Structuralism	Foucault 1977	Disciplinary technologies and panoptism - hierarchical observation and normalizing judgement are used as instruments of correct training within the panoptic machine, and subsequently internalised by members of society.	• Historical Discourse of expert advice • Online Social Networking • Political Intervention • The rise in 'Parenting Culture' • Evaluations of parenting courses and the 'Neuroparenting' Discourse'
Post Structuralism	Rose 1999	Explores how psychological theory is used as a form of surveillance and regulation for members of society by those in positions of power.	• Historical Discourse of expert advice • Online Social Networking • Political Intervention • The rise in 'Parenting Culture' • Evaluations of parenting courses and the 'Neuroparenting' Discourse'
Post Structuralism	Henderson, Harmon & Houser 2010 Henderson, Harmon and Newman 2015	Levels of Surveillance within modern motherhood – structural, interpersonal and intrapersonal and how these develop. Extension of research including observations regarding those who do resist the dominant discourses still having some impact from them	• Historical Discourse of expert advice • Online Social Networking • Political Intervention • The rise in 'Parenting Culture' • Evaluations of parenting courses and the 'Neuroparenting' Discourse'
Feminism	Hays 1996	Motherhood ideologies and concepts of '*intensive mothering'* and *'cultural contradiction'* – how mothers have internalised the dominant discourses and meet societal expectations.	• Historical Discourse of expert advice • Online Social Networking • Political Intervention • The rise in 'Parenting Culture' • 'Good Enough Mother' Discourse • Evaluations of parenting courses and the 'Neuroparenting' Discourse'
Feminism	Douglas and Michaels 2005	Motherhood ideologies – The tensions of motherhood have resulted in multiple possibilities including women feeling	• Historical Discourse of expert advice • Online Social Networking

		'simultaneously guilt ridden and ready for an uprising' (Douglas and Michaels, 2005, p. 25).	• Political Intervention • The rise in 'Parenting Culture' • 'Good Enough Mother' Discourse • Evaluations of parenting courses and the 'Neuroparenting' Discourse'
Feminism	Beaupre Gillespie and Schwartz Temple 2011	Contesting ideologies of Motherhood – exploration of how mothers embrace the 'good enough'	• Historical Discourse of expert advice • Online Social Networking • Political Intervention • The rise in 'Parenting Culture' • 'Good Enough Mother' Discourse • Evaluations of parenting courses and the 'Neuroparenting' Discourse's
Feminist Post-structuralism	Weedon 1997	*Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* – a combined approach provides an opportunity for women to reflect on their experiences, constructs of motherhood and ideological powers.	• Historical Discourse of expert advice • Online Social Networking • Political Intervention • The rise in 'Parenting Culture' • 'Good Enough Mother' Discourse • Evaluations of parenting courses and the 'Neuroparenting' Discourse'
Feminist Post-structuralism	Davis 1997	The importance of exploring subjective *'fictionality'* (Davis, 1997, p. 272) as something to be explored more deeply and considered from multiple perspectives.	• Historical Discourse of expert advice • Online Social Networking • Political Intervention • The rise in 'Parenting Culture' • 'Good Enough Mother' Discourse • Evaluations of parenting courses and the 'Neuroparenting' Discourse'

Feminist Post-structuralism	Baxter 2003	*Positioning Gender in Discourse: A Feminist Methodology* – a combined approach offers a 'productive contradiction' in which to explore the multiple experiences of mothers.	• Historical Discourse of expert advice • Online Social Networking • Political Intervention • The rise in 'Parenting Culture' • 'Good Enough Mother' Discourse • Evaluations of parenting courses and the 'Neuroparenting' Discourse'

Appendix 2 – Reflective Diary Extracts

First interview Reflection – 21.03.16

I was really pleased with this. I was able to develop an instant rapport with xxxx as we found common ground discussing similarities with our children and discovering we have both lived in xxxxxxx. I spent some time chatting with xxxxx first in order to break the ice. Photos were not deemed appropriate for this interview, her boys were present so she used their presence/behaviour as a way to reflect rather than needing the photos.

It felt good to finally interview someone – I also felt privileged as she allowed me into their home, clearly during a busy morning – neither she nor the boys were dressed and yet she opened up to me about some very personal problems including her battle with depression and feeling isolated as a new mum new to the area. Driving back to the Uni, I reflected on how I find it hard to be wholly critical of parenting classes, it is clear that they have been a real life line for xxxxx- providing opportunities for her to meet with people, even just motivation to get out of the house. I am attending a conference tonight and the key note speaker is xxxxxxx whom I know will be very critical of the government push for parenting classes and whilst I can see why, I do wonder if we do mothers a disservice in some way? xxxxxxx clearly took what she needed from the classes and hardly actually mentioned the content of the course itself - it was all about the network and chance to get out and meet people who are the same stage in their lives.

Conference Reflection – 22.03.16

I attended a conference yesterday with xxxxx talking about 'parenting, neuroscience and the state' it was a fascinating event. I couldn't help but feel a bit worked up in parts though. I do wonder about this perspective – they just seem to be so opinion based and not grounded in any actual research (the words stupid, ridiculous and banal were used over and over again - I was hoping for a more detailed insight into the 'myths of neuroscience' as was promised rather than just an undermining and slightly preachy rant). I totally get that there is a wider issue relating to the agenda and government focus on parenting - I accept that, and how it links to Foucault's instruments of correct training and levels of surveillance. But I can't help but go back to the problem I have that neither those from this perspective or the government themselves have actually spoken to mothers – or if they have, they have twisted the results for their own agenda. After a day of interviewing xxxxx and hearing her describe the course that she attended as a lifeline for her, I can't help but feel that tonight's conference did mothers a disservice in some way. I raised this question in the conference and was not given a satisfactory answer, rather referred again to the problem of the parenting culture.

There seems to be this aggressive tension between the ‘processed parenting’ and ‘neurospeak’ argument against the ‘nanny state’ but neither side have actually stopped and asked mothers what they want – maybe both are guilty of thinking they know best??? Could it be that in their approach of telling parents what is best for them they are not too dissimilar after all????

I had considered attending a 2 day conference with xxxxxx but I don’t honestly think I could listen to 2 full days of it, just as I couldn’t listen to 2 days of ‘baby brain’ conferences or government outlining their life chances agenda. Until they start asking mothers and properly listening, I find it hard to give either side much credibility.

Appendix 3 - Ethical Approval letter and Form

Date: 21st November 2014
Name: Helen Simmons

Dear Helen,

Re: Request for ethical approval for study entitled 'What are the driving factors that motivate mothers of children aged 0-3years to attend universal parenting classes?'

Thank you for submitting your application for the above mentioned study which was considered by 3 reviewers on behalf of the College of Education Research Ethics Committee on 21st November 2014.

Your study has been **approved with recommendations**; these are listed below. No additional submission will be required for this project, unless you change the methods detailed in this submission significantly. Additional phases of your research will require further ethical applications.

Recommendations:

- More attention needs to be given to the way in which snowball sampling might expose identity or result in a biased sample.
- There should be a stronger statement in the informed consent conveying the fact that no material stored in an IT system can be guaranteed as secure.
- Photo Elicitation and its uses; make sure that the purpose of the use of photographs during the interview is fully clear in the ethics submission and to participants through informed consent. It should be made clear in the main body of the application that no photos used at interview by parents will be copied or retained by the researcher. The consent letters say this is so, but not the main application.
- Please ensure that sentence construction, spelling and, in particular, use of apostrophes and hyphens (e.g. mothers', participants' and semi-structured interviews) is correct on all documents that will be seen in the public domain.

I wish you every success with your study.
Yours Sincerely

Dr Neil Radford Chair of the College of Education Research Ethics Committee

UNIVERSITY of DERBY

Request for Ethical Approval for Individual Study / Programme of Research by University Students

Please complete this form and return it to your Independent Studies Supervisor or Co-ordinator as advised by local guidance. Feedback on your application will be via your Independent Studies Supervisor or Co-ordinator

1. Your Name:	Helen Simmons	**2. Programme name and code** EdD PX3AA
3. Contact Info	**Email: h.simmons@derby.ac.uk** **Tel No. 01332 591860** **Address: 24 Willow Drive, Groby, Leicester LE6 0EL**	
4. Module name and code	Independent Research 8EU501	
5. Name of project supervisor (Director of Studies)		
Val Poultney		
6. Title or topic area of proposed study		
What are the driving factors that motivate mothers of children aged 0-3years to attend universal parenting classes?		
7. What is the aim and objectives of your study?		

Aim: To gain a deeper understanding into the influencing factors behind mothers motivation to attend universal parenting classes and to explore the participant's perception of any benefit or otherwise in attending these classes. The findings of the study will produce knowledge for practice within the early years sector in relation to support offered to mothers.

Subsidiary questions:

- What drives mothers of very young children to seek advice on parenting?
- Do mothers access other forms of parenting advice and if so what?
- What do mothers perceive to be the benefit or otherwise in attending a parenting class?

8. Brief review of relevant literature and rationale for study (attach on a separate sheet references of approximately 6 key publications, it is not necessary to attach copies of the publications)

Phase 1 Snowball Sampling – contacts and participants will be asked to forward survey to others they know have attended a parenting class.	An online survey will be disseminated to mothers who have attended a universal parenting class. The survey will be produced using Lime Survey and disseminated using social media, early years networks and contacts from early years settings. The questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

1

	There will be a focus on motivations behind attending and perceived benefit or otherwise of attending a universal parenting class, identification of other forms of advice that may have also been accessed.	
Phase 2	Semi-Structured Photo Elicitation Interviews will take place with mothers who have attended a universal parenting class and who have identified themselves in phase 1 as willing to be interviewed. Experiences of motherhood will be explored with a focus on driving factors for attending a parenting class plus links to other forms of advice that may have been accessed. Perceived benefit or otherwise from accessing parenting advice will also be explored. These interviews may need to take place in the participant's home and across different times depending on availability. Each interview will take approximately 1 hour per to complete.	

10. Research Ethics

PROPOSALS INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS MUST ADDRESS QUESTIONS 10 - 14.

Does the proposed study entail ethical considerations **Yes** / No **(please circle as appropriate)**

If 'No' provide a statement below to support this position.
If 'Yes' move on to Question 11.

11. Ethical Considerations: Please indicate how you intend to address each of the following in your study. Points a - i relate particularly to projects involving human participants.
Guidance to completing this section of the form is provided at the end of the document.

a. Consent

Written consent will be obtained through reading and signing the consent letter attached to the survey. The consent letter will also highlight participant's rights to privacy and state that pseudonyms will be used throughout the study. The online survey will also include information regarding the right to withdraw up to 4 weeks after the completed survey. The survey sample will be generated through snowball sampling, participants will be asked to forward the survey to other mothers they know have attended a universal parenting course. For the interview phase, participants will be asked to sign a consent form outlining the research focus. Interview participants will be notified of their right to withdraw up to 4 weeks after the completed survey.

b. Deception

There is no intended deceptive element involved in this research. The purpose of the research is to explore motivations for attending parenting classes along with perceived benefit or otherwise in attending them. The purpose will be made clear through information and consent letter at each stage of the research.

c. Debriefing

Participants will be debriefed on request. Interviewees will be offered the opportunity to view their interview transcripts until a certain point following on from the interview (4 weeks). This will be made clear in the interview consent letter.

d. Withdrawal from the investigation

Participants will not be coerced in any way; they will have the right to withdraw without prejudice. Participants will be advised that may withdraw from the study up to 4 weeks following on from completing the survey or interview. At this time all data will be destroyed and not used as part of the study.

e. Confidentiality

The participant's anonymity will be maintained throughout the research project through the use of pseudonyms. All data held will be accurate and stored on a password secured computer.
As identified within the BERA (2011) ethical guidelines, social networking and other on-line activities can present confidentiality challenges. In the case of this research there will not requirement of forum activity monitoring. Participants will be made aware that responses to questionnaires will only be accessed by the researcher and used for the purposes of this research.

f. Protection of participants

As discussed in section E, confidentiality will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms. The interviews will take place in the participant's homes in order to maintain confidentiality and exposure further.

g. Observation research [complete if applicable] – n/a

h. Giving advice

No advice will be given; the research is for information gathering purposes only. Consideration will be given regarding the potential psychological risk and the disclosure of potentially emotional responses. Should it be deemed necessary, participants will be directed to their health visitor or doctor for appropriate support. While it is possible that during the interviews, participants will disclose information or ask for my advice, I will be clear that I am conducting the interviews in the capacity of researcher and not as a health professional. Should participants require further assistance or advice on a particular topic, they will be directed to the relevant and appropriate support.

As stated in the BERA (2011)ethical guidelines *'researchers must recognise that participants may experience distress or discomfort in the research process and must take all necessary steps to reduce the sense of intrusion and to put them at ease'*. (BERA 2011:10). In respect to this research, these steps include the research taking place in the security of the participants own homes and care will be taking to *'desist immediately from any actions, ensuing from the research process that can cause emotional or other harm'*. (BERA 2011:10)

i. Research undertaken in public places [complete if applicable]

Research undertaken within participants home will follow the University Health and Safety procedures (staff.derby.ac.uk/sites/hr/Health-Safety). The supervisor of the researcher will hold a schedule of the research design. Participants will be made aware that their address details have been shared with a supervisor for health and safety purposes only. This information will be destroyed following on from a home visit. A risk assessment for lone working will be completed in line with the University of Derby off-site working requirements (staff.derby.ac.uk/sites/hr/Health-Safety/Organisational-Safety/Pages/Lone-Working). The risk assessment will be discussed with my supervisor and a copy given to them prior to any off-site work.

j. Data protection

Compliance with the 1998 Data Protection Act will met. All data will be accurate and will be kept in a secure place, electronic copies will be stored on a password secured computer and any hard copies will be stored in a locked cabinet in my academic office. Pseudonyms will be used for participant's names throughout the study. No personal information will be shared with any parties. Participants will be made clear that any use of personal photographs during interviews will be for the purpose of the interview only. No copies of photographs will be requested and the photographs will remain with the participants at all times during the interview.

k. Animal Rights [complete if applicable] n/a

l. Environmental protection [complete if applicable] n/a

BERA (2011) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. Council of the British Educational Research Association. UK.

12. Sample: Please provide a detailed description of the study sample, covering selection, number, age, and if appropriate, inclusion and exclusion criteria.
Phase 1 - An Online survey to mothers who have attended a universal parenting class, this phase will use snowball sampling, asking participants to recommend other mothers who have attended a parenting class. Initial access to participants will come through social networking, early years networks and contacts from early years settings. It is hoped that approximately 30 participants will respond to the questionnaire. Phase 2 – The sampling framework here will depend on the response rate. There are three possible scenarios; that all respondents will be interviewed if only a small number of questionnaires are completed and those respondents identify themselves as willing to be interviewed, random sampling may be used if the return rate is larger (e.g. 10 or more), purposive sampling may be used if factors such as the age of the mother or type of parenting class accessed are found to provide insight into the area of interest. Following on from the sampling process, phase 2 will involve semi-structured photo elicitation interviews with mothers who have attended a universal parenting class.
13. Are payments or rewards/incentives going to be made to the participants? If so, please give details below.
No
14. What study materials will you use? (Please give full details here of validated scales, bespoke questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group schedules etc and attach all materials to the application)
Online Survey Semi-Structured Photo Elicitation Interview
15. What resources will you require? (e.g. psychometric scales, equipment, such as video camera, specialised software, access to specialist facilities, such as microbiological containment laboratories).
A voice recorder and means of transcribing the interviews. Travel to the participants for the interviews.

16. Have / Do you intend to request ethical approval from any other body/organisation ? Yes / No (please circle as appropriate) If 'Yes' – please give details below.
17. The information supplied is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate. I clearly understand my obligations and the rights of the participants. I agree to act at all times in accordance with University of Derby Code of Practice on Research Ethics http://www.derby.ac.uk/research/ethics/policy-document Date of submission 3/11/14 Signature of applicant H. Simmons Signature of project supervisor (Director of Studies) V. Poultney
For Committee Use *Reference Number (Subject area initials/year/ID number)*..... Date received 3/11/14 Date approved 21/11/14 Signed Dr Neil Radford Comments Approved with Recommendations – please see minutes comments above and on the ethics decision letter.

PLEASE SUBMIT ALONG WITH THIS APPLICATION THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTATION WHERE APPROPRIATE (please tick to indicate the material that has been included or provide information as to why it is not available):

Questionnaires/interview schedules ☐

Covering letters/information sheets ☐

Briefing and debriefing material ☐

Consent forms for participants ☐

Advice on completing the ethical considerations aspects of a programme of research

Consent

Informed consent must be obtained for all participants before they take part in your project. The form should clearly state what they will be doing, drawing attention to anything they could conceivably object to subsequently. It should be in language that the person signing it will understand. It should also state that they can withdraw from the study at any time and the measures you are taking to ensure the confidentiality of data. If children are recruited from schools you will require the permission, depending on the school, of the head teacher, and of parents. Children over 14 years should also sign an individual consent form themselves. If conducting research on children you will normally also require Criminal Records Bureau clearance. You will need to check with the school if they require you to obtain one of these. It is usually necessary if working alone with children, however, some schools may request you have CRB

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clearance for any type of research you want to conduct within the school. Research to be carried out in any institution (prison, hospital, etc.) will require permission from the appropriate authority.

Covert or Deceptive Research
Research involving any form of deception can be particularly problematical, and you should provide a full explanation of why a covert or deceptive approach is necessary, why there are no acceptable alternative approaches not involving deception, and the scientific justification for deception.

Debriefing
How will participants be debriefed (written or oral)? If they will not be debriefed, give reasons. Please attach the written debrief or transcript for the oral debrief. This can be particularly important if covert or deceptive research methods are used.

Withdrawal from Investigation
Participants should be told explicitly that they are free to leave the study at any time without jeopardy. It is important that you clarify exactly how and when this will be explained to participants. Participants also have the right to withdraw their data in retrospect, after you have received it. You will need to clarify how they will do this and at what point they will not be able to withdraw (i.e. after the data has been analysed and disseminated).

Protection of participants
Are the participants at risk of physical, psychological or emotional harm greater than encountered ordinary life? If yes, describe the nature of the risk and steps taken to minimise it.

Observational research
If observational research is to be conducted without prior consent, please describe the situations in which observations will take place and say how local cultural values and privacy of individuals and/or institutions will be taken into account.

Giving advice
Students should not put themselves in a position of authority from which to provide advice and should in all cases refer participants to suitably qualified and appropriate professionals.

Research in public places
You should pay particular attention to the implications of research undertaken in public places. The impact on the social environment will be a key issue. You must observe the laws of obscenity and public decency. You should also have due regard to religious and cultural sensitivities.

Confidentiality/Data Protection
You must comply with the Data Protection Act and the University's Good Scientific Practice http://www.derby.ac.uk/research/policy-and-strategy This means:

- It is very important that the Participant Information Sheet includes information on what the research is for, who will conduct the research, how the personal information will be used, who will have access to the information and how long the information will be kept for. This is known as a 'fair processing statement.'
- You must not do anything with the personal information you collect over and above that for which you have consent.
- You can only make audio or visual recordings of participants with their consent (this should be stated on the Participant Information sheet)
- Identifiable personal information should only be conveyed to others within the framework of the act and with the participant's permission.
- You must store data securely. Consent forms and data should be stored separately and securely.
- You should only collect data that is relevant to the study being undertaken.
- Data may be kept indefinitely providing its sole use is for research purposes and meets the following conditions:
- The data is not being used to take decisions in respect of any living individual.
- The data is not being used in any which is, or is likely to, cause damage and/or distress to any living individual.
- You should always protect a participant's anonymity unless they have given their permission to be identified (if they do so, this should be stated on the Informed Consent Form).

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- All data should be returned to participants or destroyed if consent is not given after the fact, or if a participant withdraws.

Animal rights.

Research which might involve the study of animals at the University is not likely to involve intrusive or invasive procedures. However, you should avoid animal suffering of any kind and should ensure that proper animal husbandry practices are followed. You should show respect for animals as fellow sentient beings.

Environmental protection

The negative impacts of your research on the natural environment and animal welfare, must be minimised and must be compliant to current legislation. Your research should appropriately weigh longer-term research benefit against short-term environmental harm needed to achieve research goals.

Appendix 4 – Consent/ Information letter and Survey

Parenting Course Survey

Mothers who have attended a universal parenting course.

Parenting Course Survey

I am a doctoral student at the University of Derby. I am also a mother of 2 children and I am undertaking some research with mothers who have attended a parenting course relating to children aged 0-3years. I would like to gain insight into the experiences of mothers who have attended universal parenting courses (a course of classes that you attended on a voluntary basis which may have covered content relating to the care of babies and very young children including parenting styles, sleep training, routines, promoting good behaviour etc.). I have gained ethical approval from the University of Derby for undertaking this study.

Information gained from the research would remain confidential and be stored according to current data protection guidelines (Data Protection Act 1998). Should you choose to take part in the research you will be asked to provide consent for the use of the information provided, however you retain the right to withdraw at any point up until the information is to be analysed (Four weeks after the completion of the survey)

Information collected will be accessed by the researcher only and will be destroyed after analysis and collation. **If you are willing to be interviewed in relation to this research please complete the consent form at the end of the survey and the researcher will contact you.**

The results for the research will be written up as a doctoral thesis and it is also anticipated that this will be disseminated at conferences or in other academic forums.

If you need further information please contact me on the details below.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Helen Simmons

H.Simmons@derby.ac.uk

Direct Line 01332 591860

There are 16 questions in this survey. A note on privacy This survey is anonymous.

The record kept of your survey responses does not contain any identifying information about you unless a specific question in the survey has asked for this. If you have responded to a survey that used an identifying token to allow you to access the survey, you can rest assured that the identifying token is not kept with your responses. It is managed in a separate database, and will only be updated to indicate that you have (or haven't) completed this survey. There is no way of matching identification tokens with survey responses in this survey.

1. **Your age and ethnicity**

Answer

2. **How many children do you have?**

Answer

3. **Age of child / children**

Answer

4. **Please indicate below where you went to for advice in the first 6 weeks of the baby being born.**

	Often	Sometimes	Never
Partner			
Midwife/Health Visitor			
General Practitioner (GP)			
A Children's Centre			
Your Parents			
Your In-Laws			
Extended Family			
Friends			
Neighbours			
Baby Books			
On-Line Forums/blogs			
Baby / Parenting Websites			
Parenting magazines			

5. **How did you find out about the parenting class you attended?**

Answer

6. **Ages of child/children when you attended the parenting class**

Answer

7. **What was the name of the course and where was it held?**

Answer

8. **What was the duration of the course? e.g. 1 hour a week for 4 weeks**

Answer

9. **Did you attend all sessions offered on the course? If no, please indicate which sessions you attended and what the focus of the sessions were.**

Answer

10. Did you pay for this class? If yes, please indicate the price

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose

11. Why did you decide to attend a parenting class?

Answer

12. Please consider the following statements and indicate your level of agreement.

(Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree)

The class offered practical tips for parenting.

The class gave me opportunities to meet other parents.

The class helped me to feel less isolated.

The class helped me to consider my parenting style.

I would recommend the parenting class to other mothers.

I think there is enough support for new mothers.

I think all new parents should attend a parenting class.

My confidence has grown since I attended a parenting class.

My relationship with my partner has benefited as a result of my attending the parenting class.

My relationship with my child/children has benefited as a result of my attending the parenting class.

13. Did you attend the classes with another person or alone? If with another person, please indicate who e.g. friend, partner, parent.

Answer

14. What were the positives in your experience of attending a parenting class?

Answer

15. Were there any negatives in your experience of attending a parenting class?

Answer

Please identify below if you would be willing to be interviewed for this research. If you are willing to be interviewed, please provide the following information:

1. Name.
2. Email address
3. Telephone Number.
4. Location.

Appendix 5 - Survey Dissemination Schedule

Setting	Date	Dissemination
Children's centre.	July 2015	Pilot - Through end of course event
Children's centre picnic	July 2015	Through Lime Survey link via professional contact
Children's centre	December 2015	Hard copy hand out by me during a course session
Children's centre	December 2015	Hard copy hand out by me during a course session
Children's Centre	December 2015	Hard copy via course leader
Children Centre contacts – East Midlands	March 2016	Through Lime Survey link sent to contact
NCT	March 2016	Declined to participate as not a collaborative project
Professional contacts	March 2016	Hard copy hand out through contacts
Professional contacts	March 2016	Lime survey links

Appendix 6 - Profile of Survey Participants

Age	Under 20 Years - 0 25 – 29 Years – 4 30 – 40 Years – 25 41 – 50 Years – 1
Nationality (as identified by the participant)	White - 2 White British - 9 British - 5 Indian - 1 Did not answer - 13
Number of Children	1 – 8 2 – 18 3 – 3 4 – 0 5 – 1
Age of eldest Child (at the time of attendance at the parenting course)	0 - 6months -23 6months – 18months - 3 18months -3 Years - 4
Age of eldest Child (at the time of completion of survey)	0-5 years - 19 6-10 years - 9 10+ Years - 2

Appendix 7 - Information regarding the attended parenting courses

Below is the information provided by survey participants regarding the parenting courses they attended:

Who informed participant of parenting course	Children Centre – 9 Health visitor – 6 Midwife – 5 Recommendation / word of mouth – 7 Internet search - 3
Location of courses	Children Centre Course – 13 NCT courses in various locations – 7 Village hall – 1 Local School – 3 Maternity Hospital – 1 Breastfeeding café – 1 Health centre – 1 Location not given - 3
Duration of the course	1-6 weeks – 12 6-12 weeks – 7 12 weeks – 1 year – 1 1 hour per week (duration not given) - 8 Not disclosed - 2
Was course completed?	Yes – 27 No - 3 Reasons given for not completing the course: ***ID 40****. I mainly attended for help and advice on breastfeeding and weigh-ins.* ***ID 74****. I just attended music and dance classes and baby massage.* ***ID. 88****. The ones I went to were about how a baby communicates and most of the sessions were very similar.*
Did participant pay for the course?	No – 20 Yes: £70 - £100 – 3 Over £100 – 4 No answer – 3
Did participants go to course alone?	Alone – 20 With friend – 2 With partner – 7 Not sited - 1
Willing to be interviewed -	Yes – 11 No contact details provided – 19

Appendix 8 - Consent / information letter for Interview

Dear……..,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Derby, the title of my research is:

Exploring modern motherhood: the motivations and experiences of mothers of children aged 0-3years who have attended universal parenting classes.

I have contacted you as you have expressed willingness to take part in an interview as a part of this research. The interview would take around 30minutes and could take place in a location of your choice.

The aim of the interview is to explore your experiences of early motherhood, including your experiences of attending a parenting course. Some of the questions I ask may require you to refer to some of your favourite photos of your child/children from around the time you attended the parenting course. This is solely for your own reflection purposes and I as the interviewer would not need to handle these photos at any point.

Information gained from the research would remain confidential and stored according to current data protection guidelines (Data Protection Act 1998). Should you agree to take part in the research you will be asked to provide consent for the use of the information provided, however you retain the right to review your interview transcript and to withdraw at any point up until the information is to be analysed (four week after the date of interview).

The information collected will be accessed by the researcher only and will be destroyed after analysis and collation. Verbal responses may be cited within the study, but these will be anonymous and only used with your consent. The results for the research will be written up as a doctoral thesis and it is also anticipated that this will be disseminated at conferences or in other academic forums.

If you need further information please contact me on the details below.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Helen Simmons

Helen Simmons
H.Simmons@derby.ac.uk
Direct Line 01332 591860

I am willing to take part in an Interview as a part of this study	Y N
I consent to using photographs for reflections during the interview	Y N
I consent to verbal responses being cited within the study	Y N
I consent to the information gained to be used within the study	Y N

Signed _____ Date _____

Contact Number_____

Appendix 9 - Interview Schedule

- At any point you may find it useful to use existing family photos for reflections or as prompts for our conversations when we explore different experiences / phases.
- The photos can be used at any time during the discussions to discuss any aspect of motherhood – these photos will stay with the participant throughout the interview and will remain with them after. No copies will be requested.

1. Can you explain how you felt in the early stages of motherhood?
2. Where did you go to for advice for looking after your baby?
3. What sort of things do you think mothers need help with in those early days?
4. Can you tell me about how you found out about the parenting class that you attended?
5. When did you attend and how old were your child/children?
6. What were the motivating factors for you to attend a parenting class?
7. What can you tell me about the course itself (content, group size, length, location, price, practitioner)
8. What did you like about the course?
9. Was there anything you didn't like about the course?
10. How did you feel after attending the course?
11. In what ways do you think you benefited from attending a parenting course?
12. Why do you think parenting receives so much attention? E.g. more classes, baby manuals, websites than ever before?
13. In your experience, how well do mothers support each other?
14. Do you think mothers put pressure on themselves at all?
15. In terms of motherhood, what aspects have you found the most rewarding
16. What have you found to be the most challenging aspects of motherhood?
17. Finally, how do you think mothers can be best supported in those early days of motherhood?

Appendix 10 - Profile of Interview participants and Interview Date/Site

NB. All names are pseudonyms

	Name	Date/Time	Location of interview
1	Claire	March 2016	East Midlands – participant's home
2	Jenny	April 2016	East Midlands – participant's home
3	Priya	April 2016	East Midlands – participant's home
4	Ruth	April 2016	South Yorkshire – participant's home
5	Gemma	May 2016	East Midlands – participant's home
6	Louise	May 2016	South Yorkshire Restaurant
7	Kate	June 2016	East Midlands Restaurant

Appendix 11 - Transcript Extract and Coding

Quote	Issue	Issue	Theme
Priya: Page 1 of transcript 1. Can you explain how you felt in the early stages of motherhood? *Erm… emotional. Really emotional, I think I used to cry a lot, like all the time pretty much when I came home! Erm… it was so hard, I didn't expect it to be that hard… tired. But yeah, I just didn't know what to expect, I didn't realise that this was what having a baby was all about! I thought I was prepared for it but I really wasn't. urm, and then in pain on top of that! After just having this baby and then no-one told me about this! Erm, so yeah it was….. Not what I expected, at all!* Code: Priya/P1	Issue 1 – Emotions in the early days *Emotional. Really emotional, I think I used to cry a lot, like all the time pretty much when I came home!*	Issue 2 – Feeling unprepared for how hard or difficult the early days of motherhood were *I didn't expect it to be that hard… tired. But yeah, I just didn't know what to expect, I didn't realise that this was what having a baby was all about!....I thought I was prepared for it but I really wasn't. urm, and then in pain on top of that! After just having this baby and then no-one told me about this! Erm, so yeah it was….. Not what I expected, at all!*	Theme 1 – Feelings in the early days of motherhood Final Codes: Code: Priya/P1/T1/I1 Code: Priya/P1/T1/I2

Appendix 12 – Blended Emerging Issues and Themes

Theme 1. Feelings in the early days of motherhood

Emotions: overwhelmed, tiredness, anger, happiness, indecisiveness Feeling unprepared Immediate pressure on self (house, visitors, routines) Frustration with partner Wanting immediate answer to difficulties e.g. lack of sleep Pre-conceived ideas about parenting Loss of confidence / self-doubt

Theme 2. Places to go to for advice

Using baby books Family and friends as sources of advice Health visitors/GP Children's Centre Parenting forums/websites Contradictory advice Ways of ignoring contradictory advice Need for confidence

Theme 3. Reasons identified for going to a parenting class

The importance of having structure to a day Feeling isolated (needs to be close to home) Adult interaction (same age children) Social interaction for child A place to breastfeed A specific need or developmental reason Need for practical advice

Theme 4. Feelings before, during and after attending a parenting course

Comparisons between mothers Support offered by other mothers Course content Sense of achievement Cliques at parenting courses Increased confidence / competence

Theme 5. Feeling judged over parenting decisions e.g. breastfeeding or not

Not wanting to 'bother' a GP Feelings of a 'hidden agenda' of health professionals over issues e.g. breastfeeding/growth The importance of non-judgemental health practitioners e.g. no pressure for 'textbook' babies Judgements from others e.g. family, friends, strangers Reflecting on historical parenting styles/generational differences Need for honesty between mothers Role of social media Added pressure of media/celebrity Awareness of 'parenting industry'

Theme 6. 'All consuming' pressure on self to be 'Super-mum'

Pressure on self (answer to questions: do mothers put pressure on themselves?) Reclaiming control Learning to trust own instincts Pressure to feel instant connection Feelings of taboo topics around motherhood (not all fairies and flowers) Going back to work 'Mothers guilt' Anger at partner for not 'doing it right' Frustration with other family members Concerns about post-natal depression

Theme 7. Other important reflections from participants

Less stressful after having second child Most rewarding aspects to motherhood Most challenging aspects to motherhood Ideas about how mothers can be best supported

Appendix 13 – Reflections on photo-elicitation as a method

Interview 1 (Claire)

As her children were present Claire did not use photos – she tended to refer to the boys using gestures and glances rather than refereeing to images of them.

Interview 2 (Jenny)

As above

Interview 3 (Priya)

Photos were used as reflection before and during this interview. Especially photos of D with her first child. They were useful for ice breaking and reflecting on the time he was born, how hot it was and considering how she felt at that time including using grow eggs to control temperature and all those early worries.

Interview 4 (Ruth)

We used the baby pictures as an ice breaker and discussed R's eldest child who was at school that day. Her youngest child was present during the interview. J is 7months old.

Interview 5 (Gemma)

No photographs were used. I found it hard not to intervene with this one, the silences and gaps I struggled with – she would pause and I needed to learn to let that happen. This interview certainly felt a bit more like a therapy session, she actually described it as such at the start!

Interview 6 (Louise)

Photos were used here before the interview and again during, 1 in particular was used which was the one of L and her husband and son right after the birth – L focussed on how she felt right after and how she now feels when she sees that photo.

Interview 7 (Kate)

Despite describing her enthusiasm for using the photos at the start of the interview, no photos were referred too.