Exploring Parents' Perceptions of Child-Rearing Anxieties

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine current trends in parenting on the Central Coast, New South Wales (NSW). I explore the concerns, perceptions and everyday experiences of parents with children under five. Specifically, I aim to analyse the anxieties and concerns of parents during child-rearing and how this affects their everyday life. Parenting has become "expert guided, child-centred, emotionally absorbing and financially expensive" (Hays 1996). I will examine the underlying social expectations that allow for a more intensive form of parenting to exist. The impact of different forms of advice and gendered notions of mothering are explored to highlight how they affect parents' feelings of guilt, judgement and self-doubt. My research also explores the role that the media plays in making parents feel anxious, guilty or judged, based on their child-rearing choices. My research is based upon in-depth interviews with 12 parents and four professionals within child-related industries and participant observation at a local playgroup over six months. Overall, I concluded that there are several key interrelated societal factors including mothers' dual role as primary caregiver and employee, the conflict between mother's sense of identity and childrearing responsibility and judgement from parents themselves and external sources, including friends, family and through social media.

Introduction

In this thesis, I examine current perceptions of parenting, taking as a case study the fears, experiences and concerns of parents with children under five on the Central Coast, NSW. How do these affect their everyday practices of parenting? One purpose of my research is to ascertain whether parents feel that there has been an increasing inclination towards over-protective parenting styles, as is often alleged by the media (Hoffman 2008). Many childhood experts assert that parenting has become increasingly intensive, typifying it as "expert-guided, child-centred, emotionally absorbing and financially expensive" (Hays 1996). A second core theme of my thesis is its exploration of the role that the media plays in making parents feel anxious, guilty or judged, based on their child-rearing habits and choices. Overall, I argue that a more protective style of parenting is being demanded of mothers and fathers.

The thesis is divided into three core sections. Firstly, a historical overview of how parenting practices have changed will be used to provide the context for current parenting styles. Secondly, an analysis of parents' sense of guilt over their child-rearing, generated through the complex interaction between demands that they put their children first, above themselves, and the belief that a child's behaviour and accomplishment are an indicator of the parents' own success. Thirdly, a discussion of how the media increases visibility of parenting practices and how the vast array of often conflicting information creates for many parents an experience of, and anxiety about, external public judgement.

Children and parenting are topics that have been intensely studied in a range of different academic fields. These include, but are not limited to, anthropology, psychology, education, sociology and family studies. With so much research in the field, it is important to explicitly differentiate how the research I present adds to academic knowledge to highlight the significance of this study. Typically, research into parenting styles focus on child-rearing as part of a larger cultural structure (LeVine 2007), on how parenting affects the socialisation process of children (Cucchiara 2013; Kusserow 2004; Hoffman 2013; Hunt 2008; Schiffrin et al. 2014) or the role children play in the cultural reproduction of knowledge (Ahn 2010; Attard 2008;). Somewhat by contrast, I will provide an in-depth exploration of the stresses and anxieties that parents experience on a day-to-day basis, in particular, the emotional tensions based on guilt, judgement and anxiety that are associated with parenting. My aim in exploring parenting experience on an everyday level is to open and redirect the discussions of parenting within academia, rather than challenging an established notion of parenthood.

My research also differentiates itself from other works in this field as it is focuses on parents, rather than children. Particularly in the field of psychology, studies that examine parenting concentrate on how parenting practices affect childhood development and achievements, child mental health, social wellbeing and sense of self (Padilla-Walker and Nelson 2012; Ochs and Izquierdo 2009; Gibbs 2009; Hunt 2008). Additionally, my research deals only with parents of children under five. In most studies, children included in research are usually in older age ranges. Often, the study of infancy in our own culture is overlooked, as it is often believed that infants'

development is mainly based on biological processes and that they cannot communicate in conventional forms (Gottlieb 2000).

Within anthropology as a discipline, childhood, parenting and kinship are key issues that have been explored in a range of different ways and contexts. Initially, ethnographers such as Margret Mead and Bronislaw Malinowski provided pivotal works that legitimised the study of everyday life and different cultural practices (LeVine 2007). During the 1960's the Six Cultures Study by John Whiting was a key turning point in the anthropology of childhood (LeVine 2007). This study was meant to be a holistic approach to the research of childhood globally. Research on this scale was unique and aimed to show how a child's environment influenced their socialisation (LeVine 2007). In the period following the Six Cultures Study, the anthropology of childhood became more cross-disciplinary and spanned almost every society.

Recently, anthropologists have been debating whether childhood has been adequately studied (LeVine 2007; Hardman 2001; Hart 2006). Alternatively, Lancy (2012) maintains that childhood has been significantly researched, but that the results are fragmented across a broad range of disciplines. While there is a substantial amount of research on childhood, the lack of a holistic attitude towards the study of childhood creates a feeling of inadequate representation. Additionally, while anthropology typically examines culturally diverse approaches to parenting, westernised countries such as Australia are infrequently studied in regards to childhood.

Many anthropologists are currently suggesting new paths for future research to be undertaken. Small (1998) aims to move away from the anthropology of childhood and onto the anthropology of parenthood. While both these sub-disciplines are relevant for the future study of families within anthropology, examining parenting as an issue itself, rather than a process that enables children to be socialised, is a new area for this discipline. Beyond new subjects to explore, anthropologists such as Hardman (2001) and LeVine (2007) suggest methodological changes in the study of childhood. Deeper analysis of oral rhymes and drawings using formal analytical frameworks and the use of technology such as film, would improve how this discipline understands childhood and parenting (LeVine 2007; Hardman 2001).

Parenting is becoming an increasingly vexed topic, particularly and somewhat surprisingly amongst the global middle classes. Societal shifts in gender and class, and the increasing emphasis on education, have fundamentally changed the way parenting is practised (Shaw 2008; Edin and Kefalas 2005; Padilla-Walker and Nelson 2012). This has resulted in “the onset of adulthood [being] delayed in westernized nations, subsequently extending parental involvement” (Padilla-Walker and Nelson 2012: 1177). Child-rearing can be an extremely stressful experience as parents foster the safety, development and mental and physical health of children with rapidly changing needs.

However, in this current time, anxiety seems to be increasingly prevalent among parents and is becoming normalised as appropriate and necessary parenting behaviour. This type of parenting has been referred to by many different labels. Sharon Hays (1996) calls this ‘intensive mothering’ and argues that the high level of physical,

emotional and psychological investment that is required of women conflicts with societal expectations of individualism and ambition in employment. Similarly, Frank Furedi (2001) uses the term ‘paranoid parenting’ and examines the over-protection of children by fearful and anxious parents, particularly focusing on how parents perceive risk and how the media accentuates these fears. More recently, the media has referred to this style of over-anxious parenting as ‘helicopter parenting’, and there are currently questions as to whether this type of child-rearing can be classified as a distinct pattern of parental decision-making (Padilla-Walker and Nelson 2012). The label of helicopter parenting describes a style of child-rearing characterised by over-involved parents who “hover over and around their children, interceding as soon as the child faces an unpleasant situation” (Hunt 2008: 9). Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012: 1178) outline some of the characteristics of over-attentive parenting styles, including “intrusive and unnecessary micro-management of a child’s independent activities, and strong affection in the absence of child distress”. My thesis argues that underlying social processes allow over-anxious parenting styles to exist.

The discipline of psychology is currently debating whether helicopter parenting has positive or negative implications for childhood outcomes (Schiffrin et al. 2014). Unarguably, those who are claimed to be helicopter parents believe they are doing the best for their children and consider their parenting style to achieve positive outcomes. Parental involvement that is supportive, but not controlling, is generally believed to have positive results such as socially and emotionally healthy children (Schiffrin 2014). Alternatively, over-involved parenting styles are argued to result in higher levels of anxiety, depression and a lack of resilience in children (Schiffrin et al. 2104). According to Hunt (2008) there are several factors that relate to the current existence of helicopter

parenting. The ability to be in constant communication has become easily accessible and normalised (Hunt 2008). Also, the decreasing size of families is stated to factor into parents' capability to supervise of their children at all times, with families today usually consisting of only one or two children (Hunt 2008). Furthermore, parent's self-worth is argued to be as much linked to their child's success, as to their own personal identity, potentially resulting in an increasing desire to control the child's behaviour in order to ensure their achievements (Hunt 2008). By contrast, my research indicates parenting practices as being part of a continuum, with the participants interviewed being located at different points on this scale, rather than falling into the two main diametrically opposed styles identified by the literature.

To provide context on these issues, Chapter One outlines a brief history of parenting. In particular, the historical overview focuses on how parenting styles have shifted and how the roles of the 'expert' and 'mother' have changed. Primarily, this discussion aims to link industrialisation and the increasing value placed on the medical profession to the removal of parenting expertise from mothers.

Chapter Two examines the internal guilt and anxiety mothers feel over the child-rearing choices they make. I explore the differing expectation for mothers and fathers in their roles as parents. This chapter also reviews a sentiment that has been repeatedly expressed by participants; the belief that parents should be self-sacrificing and the struggle mothers face to achieve this goal. My thesis argues that the heavy expectations placed on parents often leads to self-judgment and self-doubt.

Complementary to this idea of self-judgement, Chapter Three foregrounds Foucault's analysis of the panopticon, in which a central tower is able to watch its surroundings without those in its surroundings being able to similarly observe, to draw a parallel with parenting and current uses of social media. The increasing interconnectedness and visibility of parenting practices that social media provides, creates a 'virtual' panopticon, in which parents are afraid of the gaze of others and question the best way to raise children. The anxiety of judgement from external sources, such as friends or the media, is linked also to the wide variety of literature, opinions and advice, which confuse and worry parents when making child-rearing decisions.

Lastly, the conclusion of my thesis draws together the threads, patterns and similarities from the preceding chapters to provide an overall impression of the current state of parenting in the middle-class of New South Wales. The research from this thesis demonstrates that fear and anxiety play a significant role in parenting styles and decision-making processes. This is a tentative conclusion, which further study can more thoroughly explore.

Methodology

I have used a variety of primary research methods to investigate attitudes towards parents. The main research methods that I used for this thesis are in-depth interviews and ethnographic participant observation, as is consistent with an anthropological approach. I completed participant observation at a Salvation Army run play group, located on the Central Coast, for approximately six months. Additionally, I conducted a total of 16 in-depth interviews completed. There were two types of research participants involved in the in-depth interviews, with slightly different questions. Of the 16 participants, 12 were the parents of a child between the age of zero and five. The participant's families ranged from having only one child within the age range of zero to five, to families with more than one child under five and families with children within the age range, as well as older siblings. The remaining four interviewees were conducted with professionals in child-related industries, including two Child and Family Health Nurses, the play-group co-ordinator and an adolescent health worker. These research methods, interviews and participant observation, consist with an anthropological approach to research. These methods enable me to gain an in-depth understand of daily life and experiences.

I participated in a playgroup between February and July 2015. Playgroup consisted of a two-hourly session once per week, although sessions often began early or ended later based on the arrival or departure time of parents. During my time at the playgroup I acted as a volunteer and assistant to the playgroup co-ordinator, Natalie. As I am childless, acting as a volunteer in the playgroup does not necessarily allow

me to gain an experience of parenting itself, it did give me valuable insight into the parenting experiences of others and some of the responsibilities involved in childcare.

The playgroup consists of an indoor and outdoor area that has facilities such as a kitchen and playground equipment, and a variety of activities for children. Natalie, the playgroup co-ordinator, states there is regularly up to approximately 18 activities such as the ‘reading corner’, baby toys, creative play (i.e. teddy bears, dolls, dress ups), fine motor activities (i.e. stickers, drawing, painting), gross motor activities (i.e. sand pit, playground, balls), sensory activities (i.e. playdough, clay, slime) and craft activities. These activities vary week to week and involves a roster of the parents who are responsible for providing one craft activity and preparing one morning tea per week. As a participant of the group I was also included on this roster.

My role in the playgroup included setting up the room with activities for parents, helping with the preparation of morning tea, cleaning up after playgroup and helping parents and children engage in activities. These duties allowed me to both observe the playgroup as a whole and interact one-on-one with parents. In particular, I found morning tea preparation to be an excellent time to speak to different parents one-on-one. In addition to the individual activities available, which again provided an opportunity to interact with parents as we played with the children, the playgroup ended the session with a group reading and singing activity that allowed me to interact with the group as a whole. During the playgroup’s session I would interact primarily with parents, although this would involve engaging with their children also, especially when completing an activity.

I did not take notes during my time in the playgroup, but recorded relevant experiences and conversations in written notes directly after playgroup had finished. This was for two reasons. Firstly, taking notes during the playgroup would limit my ability to participate in the group. Secondly, note-taking during participation would create between group members and myself, potentially making parents feel objectified or judged, which could lower their willingness to interact with me.

Attending the playgroup also enabled me to recruit interview participants, including parents from the group and Natalie, the playgroup co-ordinator. Interviews with parents were based on daily experiences, values and opinions. Exploring the perceptions of new parents may capture information about how parenting styles are formed and influenced. New parents may have unique and current anxieties that may not be relatable for older parents. Interviews for parents covered topics such as daily life and routine, parenting experience, fears and anxieties, how the media influences their parenting and knowledge of anxious parenting techniques. For example, I asked questions such as ‘what is a typical week like for your family’, ‘who gives you advice about parents and how do you feel when you get this advice’, ‘other than family and friends, where do you go to look for advice (i.e. media, books, websites), and ‘have you ever heard of the term helicopter parenting’. A full list of interview questions asked to parents is attached in Appendix A. Additionally, I also asked interviewees unique questions in response to their answers to the standard questions.

Professional interviewees were asked questions about longer ranging parenting trends, observed throughout their working life. For example, I asked questions such as ‘in the time that you’ve been working with children, have you noticed

any changing trends in parenting', 'in your opinion, why do you think these changes have occurred' and 'what are some common fears or anxieties that the parents you deal with commonly ask about'. A full list of questions asked to professionals is attached in Appendix B. Interviewing professional provides a number of benefits to my research. As professionals in childcare related industries often deal with a large number of parents over a long period of time they are in an excellent position to give insight into how parenting trends have shifted over time and what parents are concerned about. Additionally, as I argue that parenting 'authority' exists outside the family unit and in the hands of professionals I feel it is necessary to gather opinions from professionals in child-related industries.

It is important to acknowledge the position of the research participants in a broader context. While both men and women participated in this research, I will explores the anxieties and concerns of mothers in particular. Additionally, almost all of the participants identify with an Anglo-Saxon, middle class background. For the purposes of this thesis, middle class is defined as having a comfortable level of income that allows for discretionary spending and having consistent or regular employment in a skilled or semi-professional role. While the participants did not quantify income, social cues such as owning a home or being able to afford a rental property in a reasonable area, the high standard of cleanliness and decoration within the home and having employment in fields such as government, finance or health care allowed them to be classified as middle class.

The parents interviewed ranged broadly in age, from twenty-one to forty-seven. The parents had between one and four children, with most families having three

children (seven participants). While all parents interviewed had a child between the ages of zero and five, some parents also had older children. In total, the participant's children's ages ranged from eight months to 24 years old at the time of the interview. Most participants were in a heterosexual couple, with only one mother being a single parent and one other woman with a partner who was not the biological father of the child. The scope of this project means that the research focuses on middle class families on the Central Coast of NSW. Therefore, the findings of the research cannot be generalised to parenting as a whole, with parents in different classes and from other ethnic backgrounds likely having different experiences and concerns during the years of child-rearing.

Nominally, I have explored parenting experiences overall. However, the research is inherently gendered as the majority of experiences discussed with 'parents' came from mothers. This is a reflection of early childhood parenting practices throughout society, with mothers typically being the primary childcare provider. Of the 12 parents interviewed, there were only three male interviewees, resulting in the possibility that fathers face a range of issues that the research was unable to identify. Similarly, at playgroup, it was unusual for men to be present. There were three fathers observed at the playgroup, only one of whom attended semi-regularly. Due to the lower number of male participants in this study the perspectives of mothers are primarily used throughout the thesis.

Chapter One – The Rise of the Expert: Historical Trends of Parenting

> *In the hospital with Chloe as a new mum, the nurse grabbed my boob and grabbed my baby and tried to show me how to [breastfeed]. And I was like 'Are you for real? How on earth do you think that is going to get a good result? Everybody is now stressed out. That doesn't help anything. I know there's milk there, I know my baby wants it, I'm pretty sure I'll work it out.' I think the whole of parenting, pregnancy and birth is something that the medical system, particularly male doctors, have done a really excellent job of taking that away as something women are allowed to own… And I feel, in my opinion, it's rooted in patriarchy, because of course women don't know what's best for them, how could they possibly? When in fact there's a whole history of knowledge that women had, and still have, but a lot of that has been taken away.*
>
> *Interview with Alison (33, mother of two)*

Current parenting practices have been shaped over time and have changed the way children are raised. It is important to understand the broader contextual history and major societal influences that have shaped the way in which parenting is currently practised. Chapter One argues that parenting expertise has gradually shifted away from close family networks to professional industries, such as medicine and psychology. To show this shift, I will briefly outline key societal shifts that have impacted upon child-rearing, including industrialisation, urbanisation, changing family structures and employment conditions. Following this, I will examine current factors

that may influence parenting. Firstly, I analyse the interview participant's perceptions of how they were raised by their own parents to highlight how previous practices affect child-rearing techniques. Secondly, I will explore issues of class to highlight the different discourses used when describing and judging lower class parents, compared to middle and upper class parents. Lastly, in this chapter, I review the discourse that suggests parents, in particular new mothers, are perceived to have lack of knowledge about childrearing and link this to feelings of judgement, uncertainty or doubt that parents may have. In discussing these issues, I aim to highlight the complex context of the society in which parenting currently occurs.

Reviewing the historical attitudes towards parenting techniques, it is clear that the ideologies of parenting have shifted between authoritarian parenting models and more permissive styles (Cleverly and Phillips 1986). Authoritarian parenting models, as outlined by Cleverly and Phillips (1986), focus on restricting the actions of children in order to promote self-will. Authoritarian models have historically been strongly linked with religious discourse, which deems that children parented without strict rules and structure will turn to sin (Cleverly and Phillips 1986). This is in contrast to permissive styles of parenting, in which childhood is viewed as a period of innocence and there is emphasis placed on the value of allowing children to roam free (Cleverly and Phillips 1986).

During the early 20th century, parenting experts were seen as "a relatively new form of authority" and religious discourse on parenting became less relevant (Halley 2007: 27; Cleverly and Phillips 1986). Halley (2007: 27) links the emergence of children-rearing professionals with industrialisation and modernisation.

Industrialisation, with its inevitable association with urbanisation rather than agricultural models, has changed the position of children and women within the home (Halley 2007). Whereas parents previously valued larger families to help with agricultural production, within an urban context children became a more significant financial burden (Halley 2007). Children in an urban setting were less likely to provide economic benefits to the family, whereas their labour in a farm setting had done so (Halley 2007).

Previously, the agricultural labour model combined ‘work’ and ‘life’, whereas industrialised definitions of work placed greater emphasis on the wage received by men (Halley 2007). Women’s domestic work was devalued due to its lack of financial rewards. Women began to be raised to experience their lives through what Skolnick (1992) calls ‘the marriage plot’. This involves the typical gender roles associated with the early to mid 20th century. Women were raised to become wives and mothers (Skolnick 1992). Once married to a male breadwinner, women were expected devote their life to the rearing of children (Skolnick 1992). Due to the combination of these factors, there was an increased focus on the child-rearing practices. In this new urbanised context, mothering became the primary role of women and the most significant contribution the female could make to the household (Halley 2007).

In the context of a society where primarily men entered the public workforce, as the field of medicine grew, so too did the dominance of men in this profession. The medical profession has not always been seen as a prestigious or valuable form of employment (Halley 2007). At the beginning of the 20th century, the field of medicine saw an unprecedented redefinition. As medical technology began to drastically

decrease mortality rates for patients, the field of medicine became respected as a legitimate institution (Halley 2007). In particular, doctors became essential regarding the health of the baby while still in the womb. The medicalisation of events such as childbirth further cemented the legitimacy of 'experts' outside the home, whereas previously, women were seen as the keepers of this type of knowledge (Halley 2007). Once medical advancements lowered the child mortality rates, the quality of childcare came under greater scrutiny (Jensen 2010).

Following the trend of medical experts in the areas of childbirth, the field of psychology quickly produced experts to provide advice on child rearing, focusing on the quality of childhood, rather than physical survival (Jensen 2010). As childcare became the territory of psychology, the value placed on maternal love also changed. Previously maternal love was seen as a natural, guiding instinct that a mother used to ensure she made the best child-rearing decisions available. This was no longer seen as a viable option, as psychology, medicine and science claimed more legitimacy than the day-to-day knowledge a mother gains through her lived experience raising children (Halley 2007; Jensen 2010). The historical relativisation of maternal love is most easily seen in that body of psychological work that suggests a mother should not hold, touch or cuddle their babies for any length of time (Cleverly and Phillips 1986). "Women were told to turn to science rather than 'intuition' – or other women – to learn about mothering" (Halley 2007: 34). In this way, maternal love became a barrier to the 'proper' treatment of children, again devaluing the role of women (Cleverly and Phillips 1986; Halley 2007).

The increasing expertise situated within medical and scientific professions changed the way the bond between mother and child was normalised. Small (1998) highlights how new scientific 'discoveries' reconfigured how mothers and babies interacted, particularly immediately following birth. Near the beginning of the 20th century "pregnancy became part of the medical model; that is, it was now treated as an illness rather than a natural process, and as a result the medical establishment rather than mothers were given the right to dictate policy" (Small 1998). Following Martin Cooney's use of incubators to lower the mortality rate of premature babies, the medical profession believed it was safest for all babies to be separated from their mother and be placed in a sterile, hygienic incubator (Small 1998). These children had little contact with their mothers or medical staff and were only returned to their mother's care for feeding at intervals (Small 1998).

In the 1960's and 1970's, the psychological work of John Bowlby's attachment theory and the feminist movement's encouragement of women's rights and capabilities again shifted the way the medical profession viewed the maternal bond (Small 1998). Hospitals reinstated close physical contact between the mother and child based on new scientific evidence. Science now believed that physical and emotional bonding occurred quite early in the post-natal period. Small (1998: 22) argues that:

> western culture [has] moved from a 'scientifically based' belief that germs will invade babies if they come in contact with their mothers (which motivated the removal of babies from their mothers) to a different 'scientifically based' belief that if babies do not come in immediate contact with their mothers, they—and their mothers—will be psychologically and emotionally harmed.

In this way, scientific and medical experts deconstructed, destroyed and then reconfigured maternal bonding norms, highlighting the significant impact they have over parenting practices.

Accompanying the physical changes to parenting styles, there was an overall shift in the way childhood was viewed. Currently, childhood and adolescence are seen as distinct phases of maturity a child must experience to attain adulthood (Stearns 2003). In comparison to pre-20th century viewpoints, parents view children as more fragile, less capable and requiring more emotional support (Stearns 2003). As this new perspective on childhood emerged, Stearns 2003 (2003: 4) asserts that "new kinds of self-doubt" also surfaced. This was particularly accentuated by dwindling family sizes (Stearns 2003). With most families consisting of between one and three children, it became more physically possible to always be available to supervise and support as a parent.

As women won the right to enter the public work sphere, in a post WWII society, their role as primary care giver to children was also maintained (Halley 2007). However, by this point, the respect given to mothers as experts was significantly devalued. This was particularly noticeable when considering class. Edwards (1995: 239) states that in reviewing attitudes towards child-rearing, professional and social commentators view "working-class mothers, although 'well meaning', [as] inevitably ignorant and in need of appropriate guidance in all aspects of child care". This type of thinking is most often applied to parents with a low income or from a minority ethnic group. In terms of social policy, perceived parental ignorance is not only a justification of the need for experts in this area, but is also purported as a cause of social inequality

(Hoffman 2013). This rhetoric places blame on parenting techniques rather than acknowledging the social and economic disadvantages low income earning families face.

While there has never been one style of parenting accepted by all as the 'right' way, current parenting increasingly labels and defines different child-rearing styles as distinct from one another. Terms such as free-range parenting or helicopter parenting are regularly used to define differences in attitudes, beliefs and practices within parenting. Hoffman (2013: 32) describes current parenting as taking place in "a culture that is defined strongly by concerns with risk and blame" and that "threats to children's well-being lurk virtually everywhere". As physical risks for children in developed countries significantly diminish, as reflected in decreasing child mortality rates and improving life expectancy, parents became increasingly concerned about their children's social and emotional issues (Stearns 2003).

These historical changes were referenced in the reflection of interviewees, when they spoke about their memories and experiences of being parented by their own families. The impact of how parenting was practised by previous generations still has significant impact on how parenting plays out in current times (Riesch et al. 2010). Parents today reflect on the child-rearing techniques they were raised with in order to guide their own parenting practices, particularly when dealing with stressful situations or uncertainty (Riesch et al. 2010). There are a range of ways that the participants' experiences of being parented have impacted upon their own child-rearing techniques, including carrying over positive child-rearing techniques, avoiding certain practices and maintaining values from their own childhood. Often, these reflections are idealised

and usually involve the participants in this study expressing the wish they could bring certain elements experienced in their own childhood into their current parenting.

Many of the research participants', particularly those in an older age group, alluded to their own youth, where they were allowed to do as they pleased "until the street lights came on" (Cheryl, 58, Child and Family Health Nurse) and it was time to go home. Louise (52, Child and Family Health Nurse), confirms that this was what her childhood was like, stating "your mum didn't actually know where you were all day… it was just assumed if you didn't come home that you were at your friend's house". Usually, this type of childhood is viewed positively as a time of freedom in comparison to the restrictive and anxious parenting techniques used today. Despite this, no parent said they would replicate this lack of boundaries with their own children (Riesch et al. 2010). By contrast, one participant hinted at a sense of neglect and discontent with what was typically considered normal by the previous generations of parents. Hannah (38, mother of three) states "people speak of their kids being free to roam. What that actually means is the parents did something else and the kids looked after themselves, all day." What can be inferred from this is the idea that previous parenting styles may not be something to which society should aim to return.

Similarly, Daniel (34, father of three) expresses that he wants to avoid replicating a parenting practice that he experienced during childhood in his own child-rearing techniques. Daniel describes his own childhood, and his father, noting that "because my dad's a school teacher, it was like he was closer to his students than to his kids". He aims to avoid this by "being able to make a distinction between work and family life", which is particularly relevant for Daniel as his work is mostly from home.

In order to avoid perpetuating this behaviour, Daniel ensures that all members of his family participate in dinner together, giving an opportunity to have quality time and discussions. Riesch et al's (2010) study of how father's reflect on the way in which they were parented echoes Daniel's sentiments. For the participants who acknowledge an emotional distance between themselves and their own parents, and most commonly their fathers, there is also a desire to prevent this in their own families, instead desiring "more warmth, closeness, and affection than was received" (Riesch et al. 2010: 20; Shaw 2008).

Of all the participants in the study, Hannah (38, mother of three) and Daniel (34, father of three) are the only two to express negative perspectives of previous child-rearing practices. These two experiences illuminate that other somewhat idealised reminiscences of childhood cannot be considered a complete or holistic example of what parenting used to be like. In some cases, idealising child-rearing in their parents' era can make current parenting practices seem lacking, creating feeling of guilt "over their failure to provide traditional levels of care (whether these levels were real or imagined)" (Stearns 2003: 3). For example, Madeline (47, mother of three) states that "when I was little, the mothers stayed home. It was always brownies waiting when you got home from school and we always had a big breakfast… Mum was always there, you know. Now it's different, because mums and dads both have to work". For Madeline, it is extremely important to dedicate time to her children. Madeline has to work most week days and is unable to be home before school finishes for her children each day. However, she has been able to adapt her schedule to routinely spend quality time with her four year old son, "Friday's we will just usually chill out". In light of Madeline's comments about her mother's availability, the time she dedicates to her

child every Friday can be seen as her way of ‘making up’ for not being able to provide the perceived level of care as in previous generations (Stearns 2003).

These examples highlight just how significantly previous child-rearing techniques, and the values that underpin them, still have in the everyday lives of current parents. Based on the responses from interviewees and current literature, experiences of being parented appear to directly reflect on current parenting practices being implemented or avoided (Riesch et al. 2010). The instances recounted during the interviews also illuminate that while expertise for child-rearing techniques does exist in the fields of medicine and psychology, day-to-day life is still very much influenced by generational values and personal context.

Another issue that impacts upon parenting and the way it is perceived and judged is class and socio-economic status. When discussing ‘class’, it is important to recognise that this term not only infers a difference of attitudes and practices, but also the structural inequalities within society. This includes social issues, such as employment and housing shortages, a lack of stability or equal access to the same quality of schooling, food and healthcare (Jensen 2010). The parenting practices of lower class or minority families are “increasingly identified as the source of many contemporary social problems, from delinquency to school failure” (Hoffman 2008: 32). Even when receiving criticism about the child-rearing techniques used, middle and upper class parenting is privileged, with blame being shifted to rapid social changes. This is in sharp contrast to lower class families, whose parenting skills are questioned based on a lack of education, with individualistic responsibility presented as the main issue, leaving the impacts of social inequality unacknowledged.

The notion of class within western society, particularly within the political domain, is generally replaced in the discourse with ideas of individual achievement (Jensen 2010). Whereas as the term ‘class’ allows for distinct social disadvantages to be acknowledged, current discourse aims to place personal responsibility on each individual for their socio-economic status through the political use of a language of inclusion. For example, ‘lifestyle choices’ is often used when referring to class, denying the existence of inequalities (Jensen 2010). This is coupled with the endless publicity about individuals who ‘come from nothing’, yet are able to overcome their background and achieve success. This type of ideology is linked to institutions such as social welfare and universally available education as an equaliser in terms of social class (Jensen 2010). Despite this shift in the discourse on class within society, the impact of a class system still has very real influence on individuals in their daily lives.

Class is often a key factor in judging how effective a parent is at raising their child. The lower down a family is on the class ladder, the more they have to compensate to achieve what society deems as success. Often, low class, single or younger parents are assumed to be ignorant and uneducated in how to best raise a child (Edwards 1995). Education is often presented as the best way to overcome the poor child-rearing practices of lower class parents. This reinforces the denial of social inequalities by personalising the blame of ‘bad parenting’ solely on the individual or their perceived lack of willingness to better themselves through education (Edwards 1995). Edwards (1995: 256) argues against this commonly held opinion, stating there is no reason “to believe that ‘the poor’, like ‘the young’ or ‘the single’, should possess fewer skills of parenting than the rich, the older or the married”. Instead of blaming the

individual capabilities of lower class families, Edwards (1995) suggests that addressing social inequalities is a better way to improve parenting abilities overall.

One example of how the denial of social inequalities impacts upon parenting is to examine the way parents, and in particular mothers, are blamed, shamed or judged for their child-rearing techniques. Jensen (2010) provides various case studies of parental blame, particularly for lower class families, through an analysis of the reality TV show *Supernanny*. The host of the TV show, Jo Frost, is a self-proclaimed parenting expert who employs psychological and behavioural techniques to help improve the child-rearing skills of struggling parents. One parent, Lucy, describes how these new techniques seem unachievable in everyday life due to her exhaustion from her job as a shift worker (Jensen 2010). She suggests that psychologising childhood behaviours in order to parent more successfully "presumes that parents are only ever parents and do not have other tiring demands, such as employment" (Jensen 2012: 179). Already, there is a clear bias against lower income families, as there is no recognition of the 'time famine' experienced by working class parents, who often work longer hours for less money in order to support their families (Jensen 2010). This issue is exaggerated by the over-representation of lower class families participating in the TV programme (Jensen 2010). Interestingly, despite the rhetoric of individualisation that underpins Western society, *Supernanny* rarely acknowledges the personal challenges each family faces, instead providing a 'one size fits all' method of parenting based on psychology.

Rhetorically, helicopter parenting is closely associated with middle and upper class parents (Hoffman 2013; Cucchiara 2013). Middle and upper class parenting

techniques usually escape the significant levels of judgement faced by lower class families. However, over-anxious child rearing techniques, including helicopter parenting, are beginning to receive increasing amounts of criticism. Helicopter parenting is viewed as controlling and producing incompetent and irresponsible children (Padilla-Walker and Nelson 2012; Cucchiara 2013). The judgement of this type of parenting also criticises the perceived frivolity of upper class lifestyles. The majority of the interviewees also view helicopter parenting negatively. It is described as “potentially very harmful” (Annabelle) and providing a childhood where “kids don’t have enough room to develop” (Hannah). However, even in judging overly-anxious parents, class privilege can be seen. Helicopter parenting is not described as the actions of an individual, or a parenting mistake that can be simply corrected through educating particular individuals. Instead, it is discussed as a reflection of societal norms, blamed instead on the constant ability to communicate (Hunt 2008), “the fact that late childhood was becoming in some ways more difficult” (Stearns 2003) or smaller family sizes that physically allow for children to be shadowed (Vinson 2013). Unlike the language of personal responsibility and a denial of social inequalities that is used to discuss the inadequacies of lower class parenting, middle class parenting techniques, such as helicopter parenting, is referred to as a reflection of societal changes. The language of individual responsibility is outside the discourse used to discuss the parenting of middle and upper class families.

The need for expertise is particularly relevant for first time parents. The lack of expertise attributed to the mother, coupled with further denigration of parenting techniques based on social factors such as class, can cause feelings of doubt and uncertainty. The role of expert is important because the reality of parenting can be

vastly different to prenatal expectations (Delmore-ko et al. 2000). In particular, the time in which transition to motherhood occurs can evoke feelings of unpreparedness and stress (Delmore-ko et al. 2000). One mother, Deanna (21, mother of one), admits that her ideas of motherhood changed after having her first child. She says “it wasn’t until I actually gave birth to Abigail that our perception of parenting changed. So before I was pregnant we were thinking about…a very structured way of parenting. But after Abigail was born, that perception has changed from structured to more of a looser parenting style.” Matt (25, father of one), Deanna’s husband, continued on this theme, “we are kind of learning from our lived experiences…even simple things, like we never wanted to bottle feed, but then Deanna got mastitis”. In situations such as this, despite preconceived ideas for parenting, physical realities impacted the choices this couple could make.

Additionally, parenting is often discussed with a level of exclusivity, with many topics relating to childbearing and child-rearing segregated to other parents only. For non-parents, this means the everyday realities of parenting are often not discussed. This creates a discourse that suggests an individual can only truly understand the difficulties of parenting after becoming a mother or father themselves. This attitude adds to the idea that parents, especially first time parents, do not have an idea of what is required of them, necessitating intervention and education from experts. For example, Daniel (34, father of three) says:

> friends of ours are due to have their first [baby] in a week and a half or so and they also just bought a house and they are moving as well...it’s their first time so they don't really know what to expect or how much work is going to be involved. To want to move as well… but would

they have made the same decisions if they were second time parents or third time parents?

While it is unclear if Daniel's friends have experience with other children, Daniel believes that they may have made different choices based on their inexperience with their own biological children. The rationale behind this is that a person cannot truly understand parenthood until they have their own child.

In Weaver and Ussher's (2007) study of motherhood, many women described being unprepared for motherhood. This was attributed to a perceived 'gap' between the idealised version of parenting displayed in the media and by family or friends and the 'realities' of child-rearing (Weaver and Ussher 2007; Delmore-ko et al. 2000). One participant, Marie (31, mother of three), said she "had no frame of reference at all for what it would be like to bring home a baby". This is part of the exclusivity of parenting, where non-parents or very new parents are not expected to have any 'true' knowledge of what motherhood is like and any preconceived notions of parenthood are inevitably wrong. This creates an interesting contradiction of ideologies. The non-parent, who bases knowledge of mothering on expert advice will be judged as wrong due to lack of first-hand experience. By contrast, as shown earlier in this chapter, mothers are made to feel their own personal experience and instincts are not valid, and that expert advice is needed to ensure appropriate child-rearing techniques are used. In practice, this highlights the importance of both expert advice and first-hand experience in making decisions as a mother.

In this chapter I have argued that parenting expertise has shifted from the family unit to professional industries. The broad societal shifts that have occurred, such as

the impact of industrialisation and urbanisation on gender roles, illuminates the devaluation of the maternal role. This is particularly relevant for new parents, whose previous lack of experience with their own biological children often results in the invalidation of their parenting practices, necessitating intervention by experts. Through my examination of current factors influencing parenting, including gender, class and how individuals perceive the way they were parented, I have illustrated the context in which parenting occurs and have drawn attention to new issues in parenting. Exploring the use of the personal responsibility discourse has demonstrated that although class is often downplayed as an influence on parenting, it remains a key influence on how parenting techniques are judged.

Chapter Two – The Child Comes First: Gender Expectations in Parenting

But it's just a weird, weird thing that you can't explain, you can't understand, you can try to explain, but you can't understand unless you've got kids. It's this weird mother guilt and it hangs over the head of every mother. So guilt for not going to something or guilt for losing your cool, guilt for not playing with the kids enough, guilt because you stick them in front of the TV rather than letting them do painting or whatever. It's just this weird thing…Sometimes it will be ridiculous, it will be things like I feel like if I don't get out of the house fast enough to get to play group on time, I'm like that's 10 minutes of fun Ava would have had at play group. It's that ridiculous…Like I know that I would be pretty happy with how I am, overall. I'm very confident in who I am as a person and I'm confident in my mothering ability, so I don't know why I would then have this guilt, if I'm comparing myself to who? It's not. I don't really look at any other mums and just think 'oh you're doing a better job than me'. So that's what is so weird, that somebody who's as confident as I am would feel like that.

Interview with Bree (30, mother of two)

In this chapter, I investigate the contemporary expectations placed upon mothers and fathers, and whether these expectations are different in order for them to be deemed 'good' parents. Whereas the previous chapter focused on wider societal changes that impact parenting practices, this chapter aims to provide a closer and

more nuanced examination on an everyday level. To highlight the gendered differences between mothers and fathers, I analyse issues such as time spent with children, the quality of care, and employment are analysed. Building upon this, I will examine the stereotype of the good mother as self-sacrificing, exploring its impact on the identity of women and its potential to cause guilt and anxiety. In particular, I will address the concept of 'mother guilt', a unique form of anxiety that, as the name suggests, applies only to mothers, rather than fathers or childless individuals in society. Lastly, I am to illuminate certain moral values connected to parenting and question why many parents themselves attribute children's success or failure to be a reflection of their own, or others', parenting, implicitly excluding as factors social, political and biological processes.

Typically, in psychological studies derived from certain limited 'Western' contexts, women have been seen as the moral authority during the child-rearing process (Hoffman 2008: Büskens 2001; Walzer 1998). In general, it can be accepted that people want to be good parents who raise good children, although there are significant social differences regarding what 'good' means (Hoffman 2008). Not only do most parents desire to be a good parent, many also feel a certain amount of anxiety about being perceived as a 'bad' parent. While the potential judgement from others leads to a form of parental anxiety, there is also an internal self-judgement that parents make about their own child-rearing techniques. Examining what society and the research participants perceive as good parenting highlights the underlying values, paradoxes and anxieties parents currently face in their everyday lives.

According to the interviewees, what is a 'good' parent, and how does this differ between mothers and fathers? When discussing what is deemed good or bad parenting, it is important to note that these values differ between cultures, ethnicities and classes. While the values of white, middle class parents do not represent the experiences of all members of society, "these values are the ones that are imposed as the standard" (Small 1998: 106). They are also reflective of the participants' backgrounds in this research. In this thesis, these questions are 'answered' from the perspective of the middle class participants on NSW's Central Coast.

Interviewees have given a wide variety of responses regarding what they believe to be a good parent. However, one of the most common responses is that good parents 'put their children first'. For examples, when Natalie (43, playgroup co-ordinator) discusses the parenting practices of the mothers who attend her playgroup, she says "I think we went through a stage where if you're not devoting 100% of you time to your child, you're not a good parent". Madeline (47, mother of one) echoes this sentiment: "I think good parents put their children as first". Similarly, Hannah (38, mother of three) believes that "being there for the kids" is what makes a good parent. Several parents question their ability to assess their own parenting. Louise (52, Child and Family Health Nurse) states "I don't think you ever know if you're a good parent or a bad parent". Similarly, Marie (31, mother of three) queries "how will I know if I'm a good mother?…I think that's an unanswerable question at this stage. I think all mothers have a lot of doubt". Dale (55, adolescent health worker) believes self-doubt as a parent is normal, stating "I think if a parent is worried about being a bad parent, they're reflecting on themselves, so they are probably not".

Other studies in this area have also found that putting children first is a key concern for mothers (Weaver and Ussher 1997; Wall 2010; Büskens 2001). These studies can give some insight into why mothers both desire and feel pressured to put their children first. Weaver and Ussher (1997) found that women feel activities such as social engagements, time with their partners and their own needs are less of a priority than caring for their child. Despite this, research in time management processes questions the ability of women to give intensive levels of care while participating in modern activities, such as employment (Büskens 2001; Craig et al. 2014). This unrealistic expectation often results in mothers feeling isolated and doubtful about their parenting skills (Büskens 2001). Büskens (2001: 84) suggests that making the contradictions of motherhood visible will allow "mothers to see the problem as one located in social structure and not in their parenting practices or time management". Wall (2010) argues that mothers feel more personally responsible for their child's social and intellectual development than fathers, and therefore pursue more intensive parenting styles to ensure success in these areas. These explanations are by no means exhaustive, but they do highlight female parent's reasoning as to why prioritising children equates with 'good' mothering.

By contrast, bad parenting is repeatedly described in terms of being unavailable. Most parents bring up neglect or abuse as obvious examples of bad parenting. However, several mothers and professionals also define bad parenting as "someone who doesn't listen to their children" (Louise, 52, Child and Family Health Nurse), is "self-absorbed" (Cheryl, 58, Child and Family Health Nurse) or "someone who is selfish" (Matt, 25, father of one). All of these notions of bad parenting relate to the underlying assumption that children's needs must be put first, and anything

preventing this is a negative parenting practice. Interestingly, Madeline (47, mother of three) even frames drug use as bad parenting not because the act of using drugs is illegal, but because it is an example of prioritising the parents' own wants over their children's needs. She says "when it comes to your last 10 or 20 dollars do you buy that pack of cigarettes or do you put bread and milk in the cupboard and fridge? In my opinion, that's a bad parent. They take their own addictions and needs above their kids' needs".

According to Williams (2009), notions of 'good' mothering are also classed. A stay at home mother with a breadwinning father, a typical arrangement of middle class early-childhood parenting, is viewed positively. By contrast, a lower-class mother who remains at home, receiving social welfare payments is often perceived as lazy (Williams 2009). This negative construction of working class mothers, often reinforced by media representation, is simply the latest stereotype of classed moral judgements (Williams 2009; Jensen 2010). Single mothers in particular have often been vilified and scapegoated as "irresponsible, feckless and a threat to wider societal norms" (Williams 2009: 468). One new issue facing middle and higher class mothers is the increasing tension between choosing either a career or a family (Williams 2009). While work-family balance has been an issue since the mid-20th century, it is exacerbated as women seek to enter traditionally male-dominated, professionalised employment, at a higher level than previously achievable (Williams 2009). In the process it is important to differentiate employment from career. In the gendered construction of social life produced by popular media – and sometimes reproduced by women themselves – employment is often presented as a necessary evil in order for a woman to help support her family. By contrast, mothers with a career are viewed as selfishly

ambitious, placing higher value on their own goals than on their families (Williams 2009). Typically, middle class women who attempt to maintain both a family and a career are viewed as overcommitted, and are perceived as not a wholly effective mother or professional (Williams 2009).

What is deemed 'good' parenting also differs based on gender. According to the literature, fathers face changing expectations about what is required of them. As women have entered the work force there is a new expectation that fathers will be "both financially responsible for his child(ren) and actively involved in routine caretaking" (Pedersen 2012: 231). Beginning in the 1990's, men's interest in 'fathering' has significantly increased (Shaw 2008; Doucet 2009). According to Shaw (2008) for example, unlike the stereotypical emotionally distant fathers of previous generations, men actively seek quality relationships with their children and want to be involved in their day-to-day care. The changing roles of men within parenting also reflects the shifts in gender roles as a whole. A small minority of men have begun to reject the stereotypical notion of their being the primary breadwinner and instead have started to push for more opportunities to express their family values, by lobbying for example, for a longer period of parental leave for fathers (Shaw 2008).

Any visit to the park during the working week, however, reveals the differences between mothers and fathers concerning the everyday activities of parents and the expectations placed upon them. For the interviewed mothers, being a good parent directly relates to the time and quality of care they give to their children. By contrast, for men, being a good father is framed in terms of spending leisure time with their children (Pedersen 2012). Analysing the way men interact with their children highlights

the differences between what is considered good parenting by fathers in comparison to mothers. Often, it is referred to in terms of helping or supporting, revealing the underlying assumption that the primary responsibility for child-rearing is the mother's, and that in this task the fathers play a secondary role (Pedersen 2012).

In discussing the differences between the parenting expectations of mothers and fathers, Cheryl (58, Child and Family Health Nurse) says:

> Fathers tend to be more physically boisterous. I don't think there's a father in the universe that hasn't thrown a child giggling and laughing up in the air, and then the mother's rushed over and said don't do that you might drop them. You know, fathers are boisterous. Fathers are often not as TLC-ish [tender loving care]. Mothers tend to look at all the little things. Are they hot, are they cold, and is that spot going to become a rash? Whereas fathers don't generally look at the minute. I think mothers are quite physically and emotionally nurturing, whereas fathers are more loving and boisterous and say come with me, look at this, I'll play with you, and generally across the board I think that still holds.

For Cheryl, there is a perception about what the primary role of the father encompasses, with time spent with children being categorised as leisure or entertainment.

Research has established the clear differences in the type of time fathers spend with their children. In comparison to mothers, fathers have a lower base rate of time spent with their children (Craig et al. 2014). However, Craig et al.'s (2014) analysis of the time use of parents discovers that the way fathers spend their time with children is

shifting. Fathers are not necessarily spending more time with their children, but the time they do spend is becoming more intensive and child-centric (Craig et al. 2014). The time fathers spend on leisure with their children is actually decreasing slightly, instead being replaced with active childcare (Craig et al. 2014). While there is no suggestion that men spend the same amount of time as women engaged in intensive parenting, the shift towards more active care reflects changing expectations concerning what makes a good father.

The lower rate of time fathers spend with their children is often attributed to employment (Craig et al. 2014). This was evident at the playgroup. When the playgroup's organiser, Natalie, was questioned about the low number of fathers in the group she theorises that "it's simply because of employment. That's all it is. That's the reason they're not here, they're at work". However, she then further rationalises that "obviously, there are those dads that don't want to be with a group of women, more than just their children, they might prefer to go to go to the park with their kids rather than a playgroup." Natalie's comments make clear that there are still strict social and gender roles in place within parenting. Men are still expected to be the primary income earner, while women remain home with children. Her remarks also imply that men who do take a more active role in parenting may shy away from seeking emotional support from a playgroup. For fathers, gainful employment is an indicator of good parenting, rather than the time or quality of care given to child-rearing.

Clearly, there are differences in the ideology or discourse concerning good parenting for men and women respectively. Walzer (1998) links the difference in time spent by men and women with their children to broader social issues, such as unequal

pay rates in which men generally earn more per dollar than women. Given this economic discrimination, as well as the physical necessity for women who are breastfeeding to be with their younger children, it is not surprising that contrasting gender roles are still in place within most families (Walzer 1998). The gendered notion of parenting, or rather motherhood, continues to remain strongly embedded and re-confirmed throughout everyday life activities. Even with the rising child-rearing responsibilities fathers are assuming, the overwhelming majority of men do not engage in the level of intensive parenting that is required of mothers (Shaw 2008; Walzer 1998). For example, most mothers significantly reduce the time spent on work and leisure activities, whereas comparatively fathers spend more time at work and less time caring for their child on their own (Shaw 2008). Furthermore, leisure time and family time can often coincide for fathers, for example while watching sport (Shaw 2008; Walzer). Simply put, the expectations for men to sacrifice time and/or money, and 'be there' for their child is not socially enforced as strongly as it is for mothers (Shaw 2008).

As the above shows, good mothering is often associated with high levels of investment, both in regards to time and quality of care. The desire for mothers to put their children first is often connected to the ideal of self-sacrifice (Shaw 2008; Williams 2009). The dominant discourse demanding that mothers prioritise their children's needs carries with it an underlying assumption that prioritisation requires sacrifice from the mother. (Shaw 2008). "That is, mothers are expected to focus primarily, if not exclusively, on their child's needs rather than their own desires and needs" (Shaw 2008: 689). Partially out of necessity, "women have to forfeit many aspects of their former lives to childcare, particularly in the first year when such care is especially

demanding (Weaver and Ussher 1997: 58). While it is important to acknowledge that child-rearing, particularly for first time parents, requires significant lifestyle changes, the discourse surrounding the good, self-sacrificing mother goes beyond this.

Of the participants, only one mother provides a contrasting viewpoint reflecting upon this expectation. Bree (30, mother of two) highlights that attention to the self is necessary, for her as a person, rather than as a mother. While Bree identifies that her life has clearly changed after childbirth, she asserts that “who I am has not changed. The time I have with my friends has not changed, it’s adapted sure, but I still have just as much time with my friends”. For her, placing priority upon her social needs has not been significantly affected by becoming a parent. Bree sees a good parent as “anyone that loves their kids. It’s not necessarily putting your kids before yourself. You can be a good parent with all different styles, you need to be genuinely trying to do things right”. Madeline (47, mother of three) echoes this idea, although she reframes self-care in terms of prioritising her children’s needs. She says “make sure you’re healthy, obviously, because you can’t look after [your children] if you’re not well”.

From a cultural and evolutionary perspective, Small (1998) examines how the mother-child bond is perceived and normalised within society. From a bio-physical standpoint, mothers having a strong emotional bond with their child is an extremely important survival tactic (Small 1998). Small’s (1998) comparison of the offspring of humans and other primates highlights that humans produce altricial infants which are helpless and unable to take care of themselves for an extended period of time (Small 1998). Like all parents of altricial infants, there is a significant degree of selflessness required to put the needs of the child before the parent’s needs. However, unlike other

primate species and mothering in other cultures, mothers in this Central Coast study appear to prolong the attachment period and the rhetoric of self-sacrifice extends well beyond infancy. As children age, the intensive physical requirements of parenting diminish as children begin to do things by themselves. Instead, these physical demands are replaced by concern for the educational, social and emotional wellbeing of children. Cheryl, a Child and Family Health nurse, agrees with this perspective, stating new mums need to be aware of “the physical side, but also the cognitive side, the social and the emotional”. Similarly, Marie (31, mother of three) currently sees her role as a mother being “extremely physically demanding….Peter and Jamie still require a lot of our assistance. However, she believes as her children get older “the challenges become much more emotional ones, rather than physical demands”.

This dedication to children creates a form of identity for female parents. Even prior to becoming a mother, womanhood is often linked with child-rearing, with motherhood being seen as part of the natural progression in a woman’s life (Weaver and Ussher 1997). Mothers also feel internal pressures to be a good mother and be able to effectively display positive mothering skills (Hensley and Ellis 2008). Having a mothering identity based around self-sacrifice often leads to negative judgments when others perceive that mothers are not adhering to these high expectations. Natalie agrees with this, stating the parents in her play group “definitely feel that pressure, that they’re on show and that if something gets misconstrued or viewed the wrong way that they are going to be the next headline”. This is the result of women internalising external societal messages about what mothering should look like (Heisler and Ellis 2008). Motherhood is often discussed with a level of exclusivity and as unknowable until it is personally experienced (Weaver and Ussher 1997). One element of a

mothering identity is that it becomes the sole focus of daily life and conversation. Women feel they are 'just a mother', with no recognition of their achievements in employment or other areas (Weaver and Ussher 1997). Interestingly, women participate in the reinforcement of this holistic mothering identity (Weaver and Ussher 1997). When interacting with other mothers this 'background' information is often not raised in casual conversation (Weaver and Ussher 1997).

Heisler and Ellis (2008) use Goffman's concept of 'face' to explain the seemingly paradoxical relationship between the unrealistic social desire for a woman to be the perfect, self-sacrificing mother and the reality of parents daily lived experiences. 'Face' is described as a front that a mother presents to others, modifying their 'real' identity into a more socially desirable persona (Heisler and Ellis 2008). For mothers, there is a tension "between desired and real selves, between self-understanding and self-presentation" (Hoffman 2013: 36). For example, this might mean a mother displays confidence in their parenting skills, instead of doubt. Heisler and Ellis (2008: 446) conclude that "as a new mother, a woman may struggle to balance her constructed, mother image and acknowledge her insecurities, need of connection, support and advice from others". For example, Jacqueline often feels a sense of isolation and inability to reach out to other parents: "mums still think we are the only ones who are struggling. And I still think that too. That I'm the only one who forgot to give my kids breakfast this morning".

Idealising self-sacrificing models of parenthood produces contradictions for the children themselves. On the everyday level, this can have a significant impact, particularly for female children, on how gender roles and individual achievement are

viewed. While so-called helicopter or intensive parenting aims to provide their children advantages, socially, academically and professionally, self-sacrificing models can be seen to counter-act this. Shaw (2008: 690) states that “there is an irony in mother’s raising daughters to be successful in all areas of life (social, intellectual, athletic, etc.), with the expectation that they will relinquish these endeavours once they become mothers themselves”.

Unlike mothers, fathers are not generally expected to be self-sacrificing. Instead, fathers contend with issues similarly specific to their gender and what is expected of them as a good parent. One of the most significant of these issues is the barrier fathers’ encounter when attempting to be more involved with childcare. Matt’s (25, father of one) experiences of attempting to integrate with a playgroup is an example of this. Matt is the primary care giver in the family, as he is studying, while his wife works full-time. Matt has attended both a mother’s and a father’s group, however for different reasons feels excluded from both. When attending as the sole father at playgroup, he says “because I’ve been a bit more active than other dads, there’s been a little bit of looks from other parents. Some of the mother’s group types, they kind of treat it as their own secret. Especially the ones that have taken extended maternity leave”.

Doucet (2009) recounts the experience her own partner had of being the only male in an otherwise all female play group. He is described as being viewed with “a strange combination of suspicion, disdain, and, at times, congratulatory amazement” (Doucet 2009: 105). This primarily negative reaction resulted in the husband abstaining from the playgroup, instead preferring to take care of his child alone

(Doucet 2009). Alternatively, when Matt (25, father of one) has attended a group consisting of all fathers, he has received criticism from the general public. When the group has been out walking with their children, they have been told “why don’t you guys man up” by another male. These experiences illuminate that there continue to be multiple barriers for fathers attempting to fully enter the realm of parenthood, not the least including some men’s resistance to sharing domestic and child-rearing responsibilities.

Perhaps due to the less intensive parenting undertaken by fathers, their ability to take care of their children is often questioned. Women often describe their lifestyle changing completely when they become mothers, describing it as “having changed in ways that [their] husband’s had not” (Walzer 1998: 10). In the context of the wider society, which both asserts a mother’s natural parenting instincts while diminishing it as in need of professional advice, having the abilities of the father further distrusted is a substantial impediment for men wanting to be more involved with child-rearing (Walzer 1998). There is also an underlying sense of mistrust when fathers take the lead on parenting responsibilities. Pedersen (2012: 238) calls this a form of ‘maternal gatekeeping’, where mothers aim to “control how fathers parent their children”. This is done for a variety of reasons, either to become a physical or emotional buffer between father and child, particularly during discipline or because the mother believes the father will parent incorrectly (Pedersen 2012). This type of maternal gatekeeping indicates a lack of trust in fathers and their parenting abilities (Pedersen 2013).

Mothers also dealt with feelings of inadequacy. Several participants mention feelings of guilt as a mother, based on feelings of inadequacy. Bree terms these

feelings ‘mother guilt’, identifying that it is a distinct form of self-reproach that is not felt by fathers or childless women. Out of the three fathers spoken to in this research, only one mentions feeling guilt. Matt (25, father of one) describes an incident where he accidently bumped his daughter’s head on a doorframe when carrying her to bed. In comparison to the descriptions of guilt from mothers, from the limited comparison this research allows, it seems that fathers do not feel the same type of constant and overwhelming guilt about their child-rearing choices. As the term suggests, ‘mother guilt’ is a distinctive form of anxiety experienced only by women.

Several women mentioned feelings of guilt. As Bree (30, mother of two) talks about the challenges of child-rearing she divulges that:

> What I would say I found harder than I thought was that you do feel really guilty when you’re not perfect. Sometimes I’m too hard on myself. Sometimes, you know, you snap at the kids and you just lose it and you’re like ‘oh my gosh, I feel so guilty now, I’m a bad mum’ and you beat yourself up. It’s so stupid.

Similarly, Jacqueline (37, mother of four) admits to feeling “constant guilt” as a parent and Natalie (43, playgroup co-ordinator) believes “parenting is the hardest job in the world, the most rewarding, but a lot of the stress and anxiety and guilt comes from ourselves”.

One argument about why women feel this specific type of guilt is that motherhood is significantly morally regulated (Shaw 2008). Children are seen as reflections of their parent’s child-rearing skills, values and identity (Shaw 2008). In this way, “mothers are seen to be worthy of praise when their children are ‘successful’, but

also deserving of blame when things go wrong" (Shaw 2008: 688). To an extent, this is true. However, positioning mothers as the sole influence on child's actions denies that other factors significantly impact the socialisation of a child. For example, this perspective does not allow for the influence of other individuals, including extended family, child care workers, friends and teachers. Nor does it acknowledge social and cultural influences on behaviour, the child's own agency or potential physical and mental issues. It also diminishes the possibility that neurological process plays a role in the way children act.

Many of the research participants seem to have internalised the notion that their children's behaviour is a reflection on their parenting techniques. Marie (31, mother of three) believes that "ultimately if you can see that as adults they are secure in themselves and have loving relationship and have the ability to function well in society. That would be the biggest indicators that you've been a good parent". This argument is based on "the assumption that parents can control child outcomes and shape the future intellect and personality of their children" (Wall 2010: 255). Paradoxically, some interviewees believe that physical and biological factors, or 'nature', influence the socialisation of their child, while simultaneously viewing their child's behaviour as a direct reflection of their own parenting capabilities. When participants have been asked how much influence they as parents have had over the socialisation process of their children, the majority have responded that they think biology has had a bigger impact than the way they nurture their children. For example, Madeline (47, mother of three) states "Kids seem to be who they are from birth. They've all got their own personalities…I don't think that has anything to do with my parenting". This belief is in

a paradoxical relationship with the society-wide belief that children are the moral reflection of their parents.

With such rigorous social expectations placed on mothers it is easy to see why forms of ‘intensive’, ‘paranoid’ or ‘helicopter’ parenting practices have become more prevalent (Hays 1996; Furedi 2001; Hunt 2008). More recently the time parents, and in particular mothers, spend with their children is “more intensive and child-centered” (Craig et al. 2014: 569). Many responsibilities that were previously expected to be delivered by other institutions or individuals is now expected to be delivered by the parents themselves. Current child-rearing discourses believe “intensive parental attention is essential to children’s development” (Craig et al. 2014: 555). For example, schools were previously seen as the primary site of education. However, due to the strong rhetoric on the importance of early childhood development, mothers are required to start educational practices as early as possible to improve the cognitive development of their children (Wall 2010). Similarly, many mothers feel that health care issues should be dealt with at home first, with a doctor being a secondary source of health information (Doyle 2013; Radley and Randolph 2009). Ideally, to be an effective mother involves acquiring “professional-level skills such as those of a therapist, pediatrician…consumer products safety inspector, and teacher” (Douglas and Michaels 2004: 5).

For women, the increasing responsibilities of motherhood can create feelings of stress, guilt, competition and doubt and even the belief that they are not doing enough for their children (Wall 2010). The desire to meet the ever-broadening responsibilities of motherhood is naturally met with increased effort and intensity

(Büskens 2001). However there is an impossibility for mothers to be able to achieve what the idealised version of motherhood demands (Büskens 2001). The burden of parenthood “has come to rest exclusively, and in isolation, on the shoulders of the biological mother”, and results in women feeling stress and anxiety (Büskens 2001: 81). This unrealistic expectation of women to be “good mothers, good wives, good employees, good to themselves” creates a ‘double bind’ where any parenting choice will be judged (Johnston and Swanson 2003: 245). For example “double-bind messages condemn stay-at-home mothers for being overly enmeshed in their children’s lives, and employed mothers for jeopardizing attachment” (Johnston and Swanson 2003: 245). These contradictory requirements of motherhood inevitably lead to more intensive styles of parenting as women attempt to fulfil societal expectations.

It is important to recognise the underlying factors that allow for, and arguably encourage, over-involved forms of mothering to exist as there can be negative outcomes for children experiencing this type of parenting (Schiffrin et al. 2013). Children of over-controlling parents may “have lower levels of psychological well-being…significantly higher levels of depression and less satisfaction with life” (Schiffrin et al. 2013: 548). Additionally, not only are child outcomes negatively influenced by intensive child-rearing practise, parents have unrealistic expectations that inevitably result in feelings of guilt, anxiety and judgement particularly for mothers (Büskens 2001).

As I have highlighted in this chapter, there are different expectations for mothers and fathers used to measure and judge ‘good’ parenting. For women, the dedication of time and high quality care form the basis of good mothering. The ideal

mother is also self-sacrificing. However this can create feelings of anxiety, as mothers doubt their parenting skills and question whether they do enough for their children. In contrast, good fathers are expected to provide financial support for the family while spending a greater amount of leisure time with their children. While there is a shift towards fathers providing more active childcare, mothers remain the primary childcare provider. For mothers, this means shouldering the burden of responsibility for how children develop. Women in particular see their children as a reflection of their parenting skills. Due to this, mothers can feel a unique sense of guilt that is not usually experienced by fathers. In this chapter, I have identified some of the complex negotiations between expectations of parenting and everyday lived experiences. These somewhat unrealistic and contradictory expectations inevitably result in feelings of guilt, judgement and anxiety generated by mothers themselves.

Chapter Three – The Visibility of Parenting: Media, the Internet and Judgement of Parenting Practices

I tell the mothers in group, don't forget we all present our best side on Facebook. Nobody really presents their worst day or the worst things that are happening. So you can't compare your day to what lovely picture somebody's just put up on Facebook, because that's not the other 23 and a half hours of that person's day, and I remind people that we all like to show our best bits, but nobody knows what goes on behind closed doors…I think they have an expectation of being a perfect parent…especially when they're out in public, a lot of people feel very judged. A lot of parents feel out of control with their toddlers. They feel that they have no control and some of them feel they've lost their control as a parent because society doesn't allow them to do things like smacking and things like that...when you have a child people are suddenly saying well you can to this, you can't do that. You might have your parents, the children's grandparents…then you've got the child and family health nurse telling you something else. You've got the latest toddler book you've bought and that's telling them something else. I think they're feeling very confused.

Interview with Louise (52, Child and Family Health Nurse)

In this final chapter, I will explore the relationship between the media and parenting. I will use Foucault's concept of panopticism as an analogy to analyse how the apparent visibility of parenting practices result in self-surveillance and in the

internalisation of judgement. Secondly, I will examine why parents, and mothers in particular, consider the media and online parenting websites as a legitimate source of child-rearing advice and support. In this chapter, I will investigate how the media makes parenting practices more visible, both 'globally' in cyber-space and on the everyday level. In particular, I will examine how the media can effect anxiety and fear that impacts everyday parenting practices. Lastly, I will discuss the visibility of parenting and the diversity of child-rearing advice in terms of doubt, confusion and judgement.

Technologies such as the internet and social media, television and mobile phones have made the ability to communicate and share everyday experiences much easier (Hunt 2008). Foucault's (1975) analysis of panopticism, based on Bentham's theoretical design of a prison, allows for a parallel comparison with the high level of visibility that parenting practices currently receive. The panopticon consisted of a circular building with a central tower surrounded by a ring of cells (Foucault 1975). This design allowed for individuals, such as guards, to have unfettered observations of those in the cells, while the prisoners were unable to view those in the tower and other inmates (Foucault 1975). For the prisoner, the inability to know whether someone was monitoring them from the central tower internalised a discipline over their own behaviour, based on the mere suggestion of perpetual surveillance.

This experience of self-modification under suspicion of the surveillance of imagined others is analogous to the situation of parents in this Central Coast study today, where social media facilitates the public sharing and judging of everyday life. Unlike the prison situation, users of social media are both guards and inmates, able to

both judge and be judged by what they share amongst family and friends online. This type of panoptic “surveilling is assumed to be most common among middle and upper-middle class mothers” (Henderson et al. 2010: 234). Mothers’ behaviours are “subtly reinforced by interactions with other moms in public settings” (Henderson et al. 2010: 234). For example, most mothers no longer practise behaviours seen as unacceptable, such as smacking or yelling at children in public, “out of fear that an objective authoritative figure will see it and punish accordingly” (Henderson et al. 2010: 235). However, for the everyday mother it is not necessarily fear of institutions, such as the police of the Department of Community Services (DoCS), that influences their child-rearing decisions, but rather fear of judgement from their peers and their own internal sense of guilt (Henderson et al. 2010). In this way, parenting practices can be seen to function under the same rules as Foucault’s panopticism, as “people begin surveilling themselves and others without the necessity of formal institutions” (Henderson et al. 2010: 235). Surveillance through the media, from other parents and self-surveillance all increase mothers’ feelings of judgment concerning their child rearing practices (Henderson et al. 2010).

Many interviewees made comments about feeling that there was always potential for their parenting to be exposed in a public setting, particularly through the use of technology. Louise (52, Child and Family Health Nurse) stated that “you hear all the time that somebody videoed some woman smacking their child in the supermarket, or somebody videoed the husband yelling at the child that wouldn’t put the seatbelt on. And then they get put up online and people get vilified by complete strangers”. Similarly, Matt (25, father of one) describes dropping a mobile phone while passing it to his wife, with the phone accidently hitting his one year old daughter; “I

was worried DOCS would be called at day care the next day. But she comes home with bruises every day from day care, because she's so adventurous. So I'm not going to be on the front of the [local newspaper] as the 'Bad Phone Father'".

Parenting practices can be seen to have a panoptic quality, particularly in a public setting, both physically and digitally. This can be seen in the case of Tammy Cooper, an American mother of two, in which the media made it possible for even minute parenting practices to become international news. Unlike the examples of Louise (52, Child and Family Health Nurse) and Matt (25 father of one), who both feared the possibility of having parenting practices made visible, Tammy Cooper did have her mothering ability publically judged and shamed internationally through media coverage. In 2012 Tammy Cooper was arrested for child endangerment and abandonment after a neighbour called the police (Langford 2012). Cooper's two children, then six and nine, were reportedly playing with their scooters on the driveway, located in a quiet suburban cul-de-sac. Despite assuring police that she had been watching her children, Cooper was arrested. She was eventually released 18 hours later (Langford 2012). Overall, the incident cost approximately $7,000 in legal fees and required child protective services to complete an investigation before the matter was dropped (Langford 2012).

Although an exception, Cooper's case exemplifies something of the way surveillance of parenthood operates in society. The media can be seen to have a panoptic effect on parenting practices. This can clearly be seen when the media reports on 'bad parenting' (Henderson et al. 2010). These reports serve as a public humiliation, meant to reinforce the standards of mothering by having authoritative

institutions, such as the police or child protection services ‘punish’ the parent for their behaviour. While this incident occurred in America, the story became international news, being widely reported by the media in Australia. Underpinning this account of a mother’s supposed irresponsibility is an anxiety about the faceless dangers threatening children (stranger danger), and the responsibility that the wider, uninvolved public feel towards protecting them. As Tammy Cooper’s ordeal illuminates, mothers are not the only ones hyperaware of the activity of their own children: other parents and even strangers also react with anxious interference to unsupervised children. The report also highlights how the surveillance of children and parenting practices frames current discourses on child-rearing.

There seems to be a contradictory relationship between the media and mothers. While social media and parenting websites can provide a source of support, these same online resources also invoke a sense of anxiety. One of the most significant ways the media can be seen to impact the current parenting practices is through examining the discourse on child-safety. Particularly in regards to fear of the unknown, “Parents, especially mothers, are flooded with fearful rhetoric from the media” (Henderson et al. 2010: 233). The high saturation of sensationalist television news and social media means “we are never far from hearing stories of paedophiles, abductions, health scares, recession and violent crime” (Franklin and Crosby 2009: 161).

Daniel (34, father of three) agrees that “a lot of media helps to breed fear”, but he doesn’t “really think it’s more dangerous now, I think maybe we’re just more aware

of the danger". He views the increased awareness the media provides as a tool to help parents be more protective:

> [On] the 7.30 Report, last night I don't know if you saw it, where a supposed 14 year old girl was being approached by an older man just for sex over the internet, but it was really a police sting and he got arrested. But, and it's not a bad thing that that's covered in the media, but that sort of thing isn't isolated to now. That sort of thing is tragic but has gone on throughout history. But the result is that parents now can be fearful, whereas parents in the past may not have been exposed to stuff.

One mother had a very explicit fear of stranger danger, based on a personal experience and media content. When Hannah's (38, mother of three) oldest daughter was approximately nine months old, she believed that her daughter was taken by a stranger after Hannah was unable to find her in the house. She describes being surprised at the quick arrival of a significant number of police: "we had four adults and three sets of police and then the big senior policeman came. And they were doing a search under the house and around the house and in the park and they had people doing sweeps of the area". Fortunately for Hannah, Melody had slept through the entire event, but had been hidden under the doona blankets. However, once Melody had been found, police revealed to Hannah that:

> There had been a guy who had been reported in the area, like within two blocks of the house trying to get kids to get in his car twice, in the preceding couple of weeks. And when I'd reported a one year old missing they'd all thought she'd been kidnapped. And Patricia [my sister]

> had spent the whole hour, or hour and a half, that Melody was missing thinking she'd been kidnapped and was now going to be a child sex slave.

For Hannah, her children "getting stolen was my biggest fear… there were always news stories about children getting stolen". This anxiety continues for Hannah, especially in her everyday life: "if I lose them in a shopping centre my first fear is that they've been stolen by some weirdo." Natalie (43, playgroup co-ordinator) attributes the increasing awareness parents, and mothers in particular, have of child safety issues to the media. In particularly in relation to stranger danger and child abuse, Natalie says "we know more of the dangers, we know what can happen if we're not diligent…I think even though there were always the same fears and concerns, we didn't see missing children on Facebook every time we opened it up. We didn't hear about the abuse occurring".

This use of media is another element of panopticism, as it increases awareness of potential dangers for children and therefore changes child-rearing decisions based not on personal experience, but on the fear of what has happened to an unknown other. While only one mother had an experience that was even close to having their child endangered in this way, many other interviewees had a fear of strangers. For example, Marie (31, mother of three) is "very careful who we leave our children with…the only people that care for them are very close friends occasionally, or their grandparents". Marie has never left her children with an unfamiliar child care provider because "the idea of getting a babysitter in, someone who doesn't know my children and my children don't know, I couldn't actually do that…I wouldn't want to leave them with someone who doesn't know my kids". Similarly, Louise (52, Child and Family

Health Nurse) says the mothers she deals with at the Early Childhood Centre “are just so concerned about their kids getting taken”. Based on the media’s over-representation of children as victims of strangers, mothers have changed what is and is not allowable for their children.

However, the use of media sources, such as the internet, can also facilitate support networks. As illuminated in Chapter One, parenting expertise is located outside of the family unit, with responsibility for advising mothers about how best to raise a child placed on ‘industries’ such as medicine, science, psychology and childcare (Halley 2007; Jensen 2010). More recently mothers have placed almost equal significance placed on information sources such as self-help books, reality television and social media. In particular, television shows, online magazines and social media forums all play a role in providing advice for uncertain mothers (Radey and Randolph 2009). Accompanying the increasing demand for media programming on parenting practices is the legitimatisation of celebrities, online journalists and social media commentators as experts giving advice regarding child-rearing, usually based on personal experience, rather than on empirical analysis. Just as with notions of beauty, the media is instrumental in representing idealised versions of parenting styles. In doing this, “the role of media involves making judgements on what counts as valid and desirable parenting…[and] is an important channel for adults learning what this role entails (Assarsson and Aarsand 2011: 78). This indicates that the experiences of mothers are significantly impacted by media discourses (Shaw 2008). As the media generates a standard of the appearance of ‘good’ parenting, it gains a sense of legitimacy as mothers aim to comply with these representations.

The media has become a legitimate source of parenting advice for a range of reasons. Increasingly, “parenting discourses have also been popularized and perpetuated through discussions and advice in parenting books and magazines, articles in the newspaper, television reports and other forms of media communications” (Shaw 2008: 689). As the media, in particular television and the internet, discuss parenting more frequently, it becomes a primary source of information that mothers can turn to (Shaw 2008). The internet is also often praised for being more up to date and accessible than information given by family or friends, and even health care professionals (Doyle 2013; Radey and Randolph 2009. Additionally, forms of social media, such as parenting forums and websites, create support networks based on common interest rather than on geographical location (Doyle 2013).

Social media and online resources appear to be a legitimate source of child-rearing advice as it has up to date information that is easily accessible. For the interview participants, family members were not usually the primary source of information for new mothers. Many interviewees were particularly hesitant to receive advice from their parents or their friends with significantly older children. Deanna (21, mother of one) describes the advice given to her by the previous generation as “outdated, I don’t think people use it in today’s society”. Similarly, Louise (52, Child and Family Health Nurse) advises the mothers she deals with at the Early Childhood Centre that “using current, up to date things” is important, and regularly recommends using parenting websites and programs based on recent psychological research. Hannah (38, mother of three), in particular, voiced concerns about the legitimacy of advice and information given to her by family or friends:

> There's so many books, there's so much information already out there and it's up to date and it's referenced and it's more than a sample of one. So if you want all that information you can do it and if you want advice from random [people], you can go onto *Essential Baby* or one of the thousands of blogs where people write about how to get kids to sleep and what worked for them and what didn't. When I'm actually talking to people I would rather talk about something that wasn't my kids and how we're raising them. Because they're not going to agree with you. No one is going to raise their kids exactly the same way.

Examining the way social media and online resources impact parenting is particularly important as "middle-class parents are much more likely than working class parents to be active consumers of parenting media and materials" (Hoffman 2010; Radey and Randolph 2009). Child-rearing information frequently comes from the internet, magazines or television. (Radey and Randolph 2009). Other common sources of information include family and friends (Radey and Randolph 2009). Most mothers seek child-rearing information from a combination of professional, informal and media sources (Radey and Randolph 2009). Women, in particular, are more likely to seek out child-rearing advice (Radey and Randolph 2009). Radey and Randolph (2009) suggests this may be due to mothers being the primary care giver, therefore requiring more childcare knowledge, having more doubt and being more willing to look for information.

According to Henderson et al. (2010: 241) however, mothers "are not recognizing or are not admitting that the media, or changing social norms could

possibly have as much influence over them as their peers or their own ideals". For this reason, it is important to recognise why the media is a legitimate source of parenting advice, in order to highlight the significance that the media has in shaping child-rearing decisions. Cheryl, a Child and Family Health Nurse confirms this idea, stating its "rare" for a mother to admit to receiving advice from a media source, and that usually women:

> Won't say it's come from a magazine, they will say something like, 'oh I've heard of about this idea', and you might register it comes from a celebrity. But they don't present it to you in that way. It's difficult to know whether they are getting [advice] from their peers, who might be reading the same magazines, or if it's from the media.

Louise, also a Child and Family Health Nurse says some of her clients do mention ideas from the media to her:

> I think a lot of the dietary things come from celebrities. Putting kids on that Paleo thing that is coming through at the moment. But kids doing all these special shakes. I think celebrities have more influence with that sort of thing and with fashion, rather than actual parenting advice. I think a lot of parenting advice comes from these blogs and like the Sydney's Child Magazine and the Coast's Child Magazine.

Many mothers feel the need to seek out additional child-rearing information as they encounter new challenges in their daily life (O'Connor and Madge 2004). For example, "it is often not until parents are at home and experiencing difficulties that they are receptive to learning about day-to-day care" (O'Connor and Madge 2004: 353). The immediate access to information through online resources, coupled with the perception that the information is more up to date, creates a sense of legitimacy about

the advice it contains (O'Connor and Madge 2004). The legitimacy of the internet and media as a source of authority is confirmed as mothers use these resources as a primary location to seek advice (Radey and Randolph 2009). In particular, women often seek out healthcare information from social media or online resources (Radey and Randolph 2009). Jacqueline (37, mother of four) described how she saw a post on social media from another mother detailing a medical issue their child was experiencing:

> Most people don't go to doctors anymore. They go on Facebook. There was a post one night saying 'my daughter seems to be having trouble breathing, she has a rash on her face, what should I do?' And I said, 'Call the fucking ambulance, why are you on here?' So I don't know what's going on, but there's this weird shift where we are going to social media and completely unqualified people for health advice.

For interviewees such as Jacqueline (37, mother of four) the internet and social media are clearly inappropriate places to seek information. However this is becoming an increasingly familiar occurrence, with mothers being more likely to try home-based remedies or seek peer advice before visiting a medical professional (Doyle 2013). Jacqueline attributes this to being "stressed and busy and the thought of going to the doctor and having a child home from school, we don't even want to go there". Online resources are also accessible at all hours (Madge and O'Connor 2006). Additionally, the use of social media and parenting website allow mothers to receive support, while not exposing family or friends to potentially contagious illness (Doyle 2013). Mothers may be uncertain whether medical attention is necessary, not wanting to be seen as overly sensitive (Doyle 2013). Jacqueline agrees with this, stating "we feel silly when

we go to the doctor and they find nothing wrong with our kid. It's like we're hesitant to make a fuss". Mothers may also feel qualified to judge themselves as "experts in their children's health" (Doyle 2013: 23).

As Chapter One illuminates, the medical profession in particular devalues maternal skills gained through experience, preferring to rely on science-based research (Halley 2007; Cleverly and Phillips 1986; Doyle 2013). Despite this, the use of online parenting websites and social media highlights that personal experience is still valued by mothers (Doyle 2013; Madge and O'Connor 2006). Doyle (2013) suggests that women prefer using online parenting websites and forums as it allows them to avoid the prevailing discourse about health, gender and parenting that places them in an unequal power relationship with the medical profession. Additionally, while the internet allows parenting practices to become more visible, it can also provide anonymity for individual mothers (Madge and O'Connor 2006). This anonymity provides "mothers with the opportunity to 'speak' candidly without the fear of reprisals or embarrassment" (O'Connor and Madge 2004). For mothers, "online forums offer a way for people to reassert control over knowledge and over how it is used in everyday life" (Doyle 2013: 25). For mothers, shared experiences and receiving advice from someone who also had children was more important than medical training (Madge and O'Connor 2006).

The internet and social media is often the first place mothers will turn for advice on day-to-day child-rearing advice (Radey and Randolph 2009). Jane, a writer for a well-known parenting website, explains that:

> The reason sites like ours are so popular is because it supports. We're supporting each other. There's funny things, there's comforting things. You can ask questions. I think the reason we are so popular is because we are sort of that place you can go at two a.m. when you're sobbing and feeling like shit and you can read about someone else who felt the exact same way.

This type of constantly accessible support is particularly relevant considering social norms regarding family structure. The mother is typically the primary care giver for their child, even while there may be a perceived lack of support from the child's father. As families do not usually live in multigenerational homes, it may be easier for mothers to seek advice online rather from their own parents (Heisler and Ellis 2008; Doyle 2013). Furthermore, women do not usually rely on the wider community for parenting support (Büskens 2001), and often families may not have close relationships with neighbours in their geographical community (O'Connor and Madge 2004). As online communities often consist of members with common interests, rather than common geographical location, the advice of the participants from online forums can be more relevant (O'Connor and Madge 2004).

However, not all information provided by the media or online sources is reliable, accurate or suitable for a particular family. Many mothers turn to their friends and family for advice and support (Heisler and Ellis 2008). While some mothers find the advice from previous generations 'outdated', several interviewees found advice from their own mothers extremely useful. Bree (30, mother of two) sought out a mixture advice from child care literature and her own mother:

> The advice I get from my mum is very good. Because mum…would never be like ‘oh that's not how I do it’. Mum only offers advice when I ask for it…she's not telling you what to do. So pretty much everything she says, I take up. I definitely take everything mum says on board…I try to steer clear of reading things that I know are going to make me feel inferior. You know, I don't tend to read mummy bloggers, because I feel like they try to paint a sugar coated picture of family life and it’s a joke.

By contrast, several participants mention tension at receiving advice from their family or friends, particularly those without children themselves. For example, Annabelle (22, mother of one) receive particularly explicit forms of judgments on her mothering from her sister, Tessa. In particular Tessa, childless at the time, had strong view about breastfeeding. Annabelle explains that when her daughter was a few months old “I wanted to give her baby food, because I sucked at breastfeeding and we were having a horrible time…I had to go out with a housemate and sneak baby food it, I had to hide it in the cupboards so she wouldn’t find it and yell at me”. Annabelle’s situation highlights just how significant an impact judgment on parenting practices can have in everyday life.

Louise (52, Child and Family Health Nurse) regularly sees the anxiety of new mothers when receiving advice from family members. In a mothers’ groups for newborn babies Louise saw a woman, with “her mother in law standing over her shoulder watching her changing the nappy, saying ‘why don't you try this, why don't you try that’”. Louise believes “people are trying to be helpful in giving this type of

advice, although often it results in feelings of judgement and doubt. Mothers “are worried about being criticised for doing things poorly…I don’t think anybody wants to be seen not to be doing a good job.” (Louise). In order to overcome these feelings of judgment, Louise suggests “advice should be given, but not necessarily taken. I think people learn to make their own mind up”.

In addition to the advice that is sought out, whether from family or friends or from online sources, many mothers receive unsolicited advice, often while in a public setting (Heisler and Ellis 2008). The increased visibility of parenting, in part due to media coverage and social media, has a real impact on everyday life. The higher visibility seems to give the general public permission to comment and pass judgment on the parenting practices around them. For mothers, “advice, solicited or not, is offered by well-meaning family members and medical professionals… even the media offers counsel with entire magazines devoted to the shape, fears and health” (Heisler and Ellis 2008: 448). Many of the parents interviewed described their personal experiences of unsolicited advice. Daniel (34, father of three) states “you get advice, you don’t really have a choice about it, and people just tell you what they think”. When pregnant, Alison often received unsolicited parenting advice when in a public setting:

> Everybody will give you advice as a pregnant woman, as a married woman. I would sit on the train, as a pregnant woman going to work, and people would sit next to me, and give me advice, tell me what gender I was having, tell me that I should be doing this or that, or that I shouldn't be doing this. It’s like what the hell!...I learnt to sit on the train with my head phones on, reading a book very overtly and I wouldn't make eye contact. I didn't want anybody to bother me, but some people

> will badger you anyway. I don't know why people do it. I never felt compelled to do that, but people do, yeah.

Due to the large volume of advice sought by parents or given without solicitation, they can often feel a sense of confusion when analyzing conflicting information. For example, Daniel describes the contradictory advice given to him for how to deal with a crying child: “if you listen to anything you would do everything and nothing. Because one piece of advice might be… go and get them and give them a bottle if they’re crying. And then someone else will tell you to let them cry for a bit… you can’t do both”.

With many conflicting sources of advice, from online resources, medical professionals and family and friends, mothers may find it difficult to distinguish what is relevant and useful. Jensen (2010) terms the wide array of parenting information available, often from opposing viewpoints, as ‘polyvocal advice’. The differing advice given “can sometimes lead to heated arguments in which experts, and the parents loyal to them, passionately proclaim the rightness of this philosophy over that one” (Jensen 2010: 176). Ultimately, this leads to the judgment of others’ parenting practices. The wide array of advice is linked to the rhetoric that “no two families are the same, and, indeed, that no two kids are the same” (Hoffman 2013: 33). For mothers, this mean having an understanding of many different child-rearing styles, and then using trial and error until they find the one that ‘fits’ their child (Hoffman 2013). Marie’s strategy to deal with the wide variety of advice given from family and friends is to “listen to all the advice around, but ultimately listen to your own instincts”. Louise says “it’s important for people to get advice from a variety of different sources, work out what’s right for their family”.

In this chapter, I have highlighted the panoptic analogies of parenting practices. The media and the internet can create feelings of anxiety and judgement, both in terms of making child-rearing more public and visible and by emphasising the tragedies and mishaps of other mothers. I have also shown that advice is increasingly being sourced from social media and online parenting websites and forums. However, online resources remain as only one of a vast array of child-rearing advice and information. Mothers continue to seek out the advice of close family and friends for support, although the geographical distance and lack of community support does impact this. Additionally, I have illuminated that the increasing visibility of parenting elicits unsolicited advice from the general public and that this changes the way parenting in practiced on an everyday level. This multiplicity of advice can be confusing for mothers, with most women hoping to find child-rearing techniques that 'fit' their families best.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that there are a range of different influences that generate feelings of guilt, judgment, self-doubt and anxiety for mothers during child-rearing. Each chapter has outlined a separate area of parenting practices that both encourage and subtly enforce an intensive style of parenting. The changing role of women due to historical social shifts in the labour market, the rise of parenting experts in professionalised industries, the differing expectations for mothers and fathers and the increasing visibility of child-rearing have all influenced the diffusion and acceptance of a more intensive style of parenting. Viewing these influences in a holistic manner highlights the creation of a 'space' in social relations that allows intensive parenting to exist.

From my research, an overall picture of parenting practices from the parents in this Central Coast study can be outlined. I have argued that there are a multitude of factors that encourage increasingly intensive parenting practices, particularly for mothers. Mothering abilities have been repeatedly invalidated and dismissed, in deference to professional experts, such as health care professionals, the advice from friends or family and by conflicting information from the media, online resources and social media (Halley 2007; Jensen 2010; Henderson et al. 2010; Radey and Randolph 2009; Doyle 2013; Madge and O'Connor 2006). In particular, I have highlighted industrialisation and urbanisation as significant historical shifts that have changed the role of women, especially in relation to the value of their labour (Halley 2007; Jensen 2010). Due to this, women are both responsible for the majority of child-rearing and required to participate in the labour force (Büskens 2001). Not only are women

expected to be a mother and an employee, but the responsibilities of motherhood have been significantly expanded to include the cognitive development, education, physical growth, psychological health and social-emotional wellbeing of their children (Wall 2010; Douglas and Michaels 2004). These increasing expectations come at a time when women are expected to be the primary caregiver for their children, often with minimal support from fathers or members of their immediate geographical community (Heisler and Ellis 2008; Büskens 2001). Furthermore, in completing their mothering tasks, women are expected to be self-sacrificing and place their child's needs above their own (Shaw 2008; Williams 2009). Overall, I have illuminated the impossibility for mothers to comply with society's conflicting expectations without the inevitable feelings of guilt, anxiety and judgment this generates (Büskens 2001).

I have argued that there have been several ways in which the authority and legitimacy of mothers' knowledge has been devalued. The shift from agricultural to urban lifestyles has positioned women's domestic labour as less valuable than the paid employment men undertake, positioning childcare as the primary duty for women (Halley 2007; Jensen 2010). Concurrent with this, the improving capabilities of the medical profession, and of the men who dominate this field, creates a discourse where scientific ideas are valued over maternal wisdom and experience (Jensen 2010). Based on the participant observations of a group of children & mothers over six months, plus the structured interviews I conducted, the parents in this Central Coast study often romanticised and idealised the mothering that took place in the mid-20th century. This sentimentalised version of history formulates the belief for mothers that modern standards of parenting are not sufficient, particularly for women who are employed outside the home (Stearns 2003; Jensen 2010). These broader issues can

significantly affect parenting practices and illuminates the differing social expectations faced by mothers. Many parents stated that their experience of child-rearing, and day-to-day understandings of children have been devalued.

My research indicates that these historical shifts have impacted the way society's expectations of mothers' affects everyday life, by creating feelings of self-doubt and guilt in parents, particularly for mothers. My research agrees with current literature that states mothers are still expected to be the primary caregiver and that the time women spend with their child is more likely to be engaged in active childcare (Craig et al. 2014). By contrast, fathers in this Central Coast study were primary caregivers who remained at home while their wives works, which provided interesting insights into experiences of fathering, although the conclusions that can be drawn from this due to the low number of male participants. While there are indications in the literature that some fathers are becoming more involved in active childcare, the responsibility for how children develop still devolves to women (Craig et al. 2014; Wall 2010).

'Good' mothers are expected to have a higher level of dedication and provide greater quality of care than fathers, often requiring women to be self-sacrificing and to place their child's needs above their own (Weaver and Ussher 1997; Wall 2010; Büskens 2001). The participants I interviewed felt this strongly, as shown in Chapter Two. The inability of women to meet these intensive and unrealistic expectations of motherhood can result in feelings of guilt and anxiety (Büskens 2001). In particular, one mother, Bree (30, mother of two) introduced the concept of 'mother guilt', a specific type of guilt felt by women during child-rearing based on self-doubt and the belief that

their children's behaviour is a reflection of their parenting abilities (Shaw 2008). Overall, my research has explored the compromises between the unrealistic expectations of motherhood and everyday experiences of parenting.

Based on the interviews I conducted, parents may not only feel their own internalised self-judgement, but judgment from external sources, such as friends, family, television and social media (Radey and Randolph 2009; Doyle 2013). I have used Foucault's (1975) concept of the panopticon as an analogy for the increasing visibility of parenting practices, given its high levels of media coverage and online parenting resources (Henderson et al. 2010). The visibility of parenting practices, made possible through technological advances and the ability to be in near constant communication, results in mothers being very aware of their own parenting behaviours, the parenting practices of others and possible risks for their children, particularly in public spaces (Henderson et al. 2010). Online parenting resources, such as social media and online forums, appear to be playing an increasing role in how mothers seek parenting advice (Doyle 2013; Radey and Randolph 2009; O'Connor and Madge 2004). Online parenting websites are a source of easily accessible, up to date advice that allow mothers to find support outside of their geographical community or family network (Doyle 2013; Radey and Randolph 2009; O'Connor and Madge 2004). Highlighting the variety of forms of advice parents receive, including online sources, from family or friends and even unsolicited advice from the general public, illustrates how mothers can be confused and feel judged about which parenting practices are most suitable (Heisler and Ellis 2008; Jensen 2010).

This is particularly significant for new mothers, who are expected to have no prior understanding of what childrearing requires (Delmore-ko et al. 2000). The expectation that women follow expert advice rather than the collective knowledge of generations of women or their own maternal intuitions creates a sense of anxiety, doubt and confusion regarding best child-rearing practices. Indeed the very fact that child-rearing is positioned as a practice that parents, in particular mothers, must make rational and conscious decisions about can raise anxieties (Halley 2007; Jensen 2010).

In this thesis, I hope to have highlighted the underlying social factors that create a space where intensive parenting practices are encouraged. The combination of what is expected of parents (that they will ensure physical, social, emotional, psychological and educational wellbeing of their children), the decrease in available time and the increasing visibility of parenting practices creates position where there is conflict between the parents' responsibilities, sense of self and sense of confidence. Understanding and acknowledging the struggle that parents face during child-rearing may have benefits for both parents and children.

This research has the potential to shift the perception of parenting practices as it gives an opportunity to re-evaluate and re-define what is expected of mothers (Büskens 2001). Identifying the stresses of motherhood can have significant benefits for the wider society. Raising women's awareness of the contradictory impossibilities of being a perfect mother could mitigate feelings of self-judgment and guilt. As identified in Chapter Two, intensive parenting styles can potentially have negative outcomes for both the children and their parents (Schiffrin et al. 2013). Mothers can

have higher levels of stress and anxiety, which has the potential to be transferred to their children (Wall 2010; Padilla-Walker and Nelson 2012). Additionally, children may face other negative consequences including higher levels of depression and lower levels of resilience (Schiffrin et al. 2013). Continuing to raise this topic in an academic setting can be viewed as the beginning of a social shift that relieves pressure from the daily lives and decision-making processes of mothers. Highlighting the underlying factors that encourage intensive styles of child-rearing is the first step in actively changing the social expectations that govern mothering.

Specifically, there are five key areas that could be further researched to add to the knowledge in this area and provide more awareness for the conflict parents can face in their everyday lives. Firstly, there could be further examination of how the historical role of women has impacted current expectations for parents, especially mothers, and if the current expectations of motherhood need to be re-evaluated. Secondly, further analysis of the conflict between women's role as primary caregiver and employee could be approached from an anthropological perspective to observe how this conflict plays out on a day-to-day level. Thirdly, the concept of 'mother guilt' could be further explored to determine the significance that the feelings of guilt and self-doubt have on mothers. Fourthly, further study on how social media and the internet have impacted the way parents' source information about childrearing. And lastly, academics could begin to build knowledge on how the increased visibility of parenting practices, through tools such as social media, television and the internet, affect decisions during childrearing.

The topic of this thesis has the scope to be a part of a larger study, suitable for a PhD. The literature reviewed has revealed a paucity of contributions on parenthood and mothering from the discipline of anthropology. Due to the relatively small scope of my research area, findings are limited to a small participant group and focus on mothers from a singular geographical location, my findings are only able to understand the views of mothers in this Central Coast study. Further study in this area should aim to expand the locations participants are recruited from within Australia. Additionally, cross-cultural comparison with middle class parents from countries including, but not limited to, America, Canada or the United Kingdom would enable a more nuanced understanding of middle class mothering. In particular, further study could explore the tensions for mothers in their daily lives, such as work/life balance and personal identity during motherhood. In addition, this thesis has treated children as a homogeneous group, whereas future study could differentiate between parenting practices based on gender of the child. Using this thesis as a starting point for future research, an expanded investigation of parenthood and mothering can build on the emerging academic literature within anthropology.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions for Parents

If you don't mind, I am going to tape this conversation. This is so I can listen to you, rather than take notes. I'll be asking a few general questions, but you can talk about anything you feel is important, even if I don't ask about it. If there are any questions that you don't want to answer or makes you feel uncomfortable, just let me know and of course you don't have to answer those. Are you ready to get started?

Firstly, tell me a little bit about yourself.

How old are you?

Are you working or staying at home with kids?

Where do you work?

Who is your family made up of (children, siblings, parents)?

How many children do you have? How old are they

What do you like best about being a parent?

What do you like the least?

What is a typical day/week like?

What are the differences/similarities between you expectations of being a parent and the day to day reality?

What are your dreams/plans for you children?

What can a parent do to ensure this future?

In what ways do you help your child do better at school/pre-school? What do you do?

How does a parent's job change as the child ages?

Did you follow the plan that your parents may have had for you?

How much influence do you think a parent has over their child's life/socialisation?

What is one piece of advice that you would give expectant parents/couples trying for a baby?

Who gives you advice about parenting? What do you think/how do you feel when you get advice?

People have a lot of different feelings about what it means to be a parent

What makes a good parent?

A good child?

What makes a bad parent? Is this different for a mum or dad?

Describe bad parenting behaviour.

What do you fear as a parent?

Do you think these fears are realistic?

Is there a reason that you fear _____?

Is there anything that makes you anxious?

How much involvement do you have in your child's school/pre-school?

Have you heard the term helicopter parenting before?

Have you/where was the first place you heard it (or first place participant mentions)?

Where are other places that you have heard the term?

What do you think the characteristics of a helicopter parent are?

Do you know any helicopter parents?

What other stories have you heard about helicopter parents?

Is anyone you know a helicopter parent?

What is an example of their behaviour that you think makes them a helicopter parent?

Do you think other people would say you are a helicopter parent? Why/why not?

Is there anything else about parenting or parenting anxieties that you would like to add?

Do you have any final comments?

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Professionals

If you don't mind, I am going to tape this conversation. This is so I can listen to you, rather than take notes. I'll be asking a few general questions, but you can talk about anything you feel is important, even if I don't ask about it. If there are any questions that you don't want to answer or makes you feel uncomfortable, just let me know and of course you don't have to answer those. Are you ready to get started?

Firstly, tell me a little bit about yourself.

Tell me about your job:

What do you do?

What is your job title?

Where do you work?

How long have you worked there?

What type of people do you deal with?

Tell me about some of the different services your organisation provides?

In the time that you've worked with children, have you noticed any trends?

What are they (Probe fully)

Have they changed over time?

What has changed? What is different between now and then (Probe fully)?

Why, in your opinion, do you think these changes have occurred?

What are some common fears or anxieties the parents you deal with commonly ask about?

What is your response (probe fully)?

Do you think these fears or anxieties are relevant/rational/valid? Why/why not?

How do parents take the advice that you give them?

Do parents feel anxiety about advice given to them by family or friends? What do you think of this?

Do parents report receiving advice from celebrities or from other media sources? What do you think of this?

What makes a good parent?

What makes a bad parent? Is this different for a mum or dad?

Describe bad parenting behaviour.

Have you heard the term helicopter parenting before?

Have you/where was the first place you heard it (or first place participant mentions)?

Where are other places that you have heard the term? (Probe fully)

What do you think the characteristics of a helicopter parent are?

Personal Experience with Helicopter Parents

Do you know any helicopter parents?

What is an example of their behaviour that you think makes them a helicopter parent?

Is there anything else about parenting or parenting anxieties that you would like to add?

Is there anything about your professional dealings with parents or children that you would like to comment on?

Do you have any final comments?