

**Motherhood in Oxfordshire c. 1945-1970: A Study of Attitudes, Experiences and Ideals**

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**A thesis submitted to the University of Oxford for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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**Abstract:**

This thesis examines women's experiences of, and attitudes towards, motherhood between 1945 and 1970. The thesis is based on ninety-two oral history interviews with women from different locations in Oxfordshire – rural, urban and suburban. Oral history is a methodology that can provide objective information about women's lives, but also reveals their thoughts and feelings through the subjectivity of their accounts. The thesis forms a qualitative study looking at six aspects of motherhood. The first is the portrayal of motherhood in contemporary social surveys and community studies. The second is the issue of education for motherhood and questions over whether mothering was innate to women or needed to be taught. Thirdly, the thesis investigates maternity care provision and disputes over who should provide it (namely midwives, GPs or consultants); where this care should take place; and whether pregnancy and childbirth were medical conditions at all. Next it discusses theories of child development and discourses of 'good' and 'bad' mothers, in order to look at women's relationship with authorities on childcare. Then it considers critiques of working mothers and debates over whether women should work outside the home; if so, when they should do so; and what strategies they should employ so that work and motherhood could be combined. Finally it analyses popular conceptions of motherhood, marriage and the family, and how the interviewees related to representations of the ideal mother figure during the immediate post-war decades and beyond. The thesis concludes by demonstrating the real difficulties mothers faced during the period 1945-1970; that interviewees from all types of background shared an understanding of how 'normal' women should behave; and also that the stereotyping of the period as one of conservatism before the changes that began in the later 1960s and 1970s means the ways in which women were already organising themselves to improve their lives has tended to be disregarded.

## **Long Abstract:**

This thesis will examine women's experiences of, and attitudes towards, motherhood between 1945 and 1970 using Oxfordshire as a case study. A plethora of social surveys, community studies, and medical studies were conducted between 1945 and 1970 which provide information on the lives of mothers, but these tended to be focused on sociological trends and public health issues rather than women's thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, the questions asked by the interviewers often reflected their own preoccupations rather than the concerns of their female respondents. In contrast, oral history, the methodology for this research, provides objective information about women's lives, but also reveals their thoughts and feelings through the subjectivity of their accounts. Oral history can therefore complement and sometimes even challenge the evidence of contemporary surveys and records. The case study approach was chosen in order to investigate how variations in women's experiences related to issues of locality; geographical, social and economic contexts; and housing and community structure. Ninety-two oral history interviews were undertaken with women living in different areas of Oxfordshire, rural, urban and suburban. These were the villages of Benson and Ewelme in south Oxfordshire; the Wychwood villages in west Oxfordshire; the twenty-four square miles near Banbury in north Oxfordshire covered by the *Country Planning* (1944) survey; Oxford city centre; and the contrasting suburbs of Cowley and Florence Park, and North Oxford and Summertown. Women with a variety of educational backgrounds were selected, from minimum age school leavers to graduates. The aim of the research is to see how locality, education and class influenced women's experiences. The women chosen were aged between their late fifties and their nineties, allowing change and continuity over time to be examined.

The thesis forms a qualitative study, examining Oxfordshire women's experiences of being a mother in the context of national debates surrounding the role of women. The introduction addresses the questions of why motherhood between 1945 and 1970 is an important area for historical study, and why oral history was chosen as the methodology for this research. Chapter two places this study in the context of theoretical approaches to motherhood, maternity and the mother role. It focuses on the historical, sociological, psychoanalytic and feminist debates that have developed over the course of the twentieth century. In order to assess how ideals of mothers and mothering have been changing it

also examines shifting understandings of childhood and the family. Changes in conceptions of 'women', the maternal role, and the theoretical positions surrounding them, are summarised in order to provide a basis for examining attitudes towards motherhood in post-war Britain. Chapter three then provides a survey of Oxfordshire and the localities in which this study has been undertaken. It establishes the geographical, social and economic contexts of the contrasting communities in which the interviewees lived. It evaluates the significant features of these environments and how different localities affected women's experiences of motherhood at this time. It examines how conditions varied for women living in urban, suburban and rural areas, and how these were changing during the period.

Developing from chapter three, chapter four then examines national debates about the place of mother in the family and wider community, with reference to the experiences of Oxfordshire women. It addresses the concepts of motherhood and family which were in vogue in the post-war decades as revealed in contemporary texts, such as social surveys and community studies. Through an assessment of the role of kinship, neighbourhood and class in women's experiences, it examines the growth of the nuclear family and decline of the extended family (which was popularised by sociologists at this time, although differently located by historians of the family); the changing relative importance of family and friends; how women formed their social networks; and to whom they turned for advice and support. While this study confirms some of the findings of the contemporary surveys – for example the existence of a street-life in traditional working-class communities which was not replicated elsewhere – it also indicates that post-war investigators were overly pessimistic about the new estates, tending to over-romanticise the old neighbourhoods. They did not recognise the agency of women, especially mothers of young children, in striving to form bonds of friendship, and often assumed women were the passive victims of their environment rather than active participants within it.

Chapter five then addresses the process of educating women to be mothers. As chapter four shows, there were conventional assumptions and expectations about the role women were supposed to play in the family and community. Chapter five examines how women were instructed to fulfil this role. It asks whether commentators in the post-war period, and women themselves, felt that they needed to be taught how to mother or whether they

thought it came naturally to them. It then considers where it was believed that this instruction should take place, and who should provide it: home, school, or medical professionals. Through an analysis of the interviews with Oxfordshire women the influence of these national debates on individual experiences is shown: for example women were receiving a domestically-orientated education at school and were increasingly attending antenatal classes. The chapter discusses three principal discursive models surrounding education for motherhood: motherhood as innate, commonsensical, or a skill that needed to be learnt. It concludes that while women embraced elements of these discourses and incorporated both their ideas and associated language within their own narratives, they did so in complex ways.

Chapter six extends the examination of women's relationship with medical professionals begun in chapter five by looking into maternity provision and the changing relationship between mothers and the health services between the late 1940s and early 1970s. It focuses on the spheres of antenatal care, childbirth and postnatal care, and looks at the degree of choice women had in regard to the care they received. It examines the extent to which maternity was coming to be medicalised throughout this period, and how locality affected the, sometimes unwelcome, effects this had. It reveals that there was no unified position amongst health professionals, with the period witnessing inter- and intra-professional debates between midwives, GPs and consultants. Changes in national and local policy sometimes corresponded to women's desires and sometimes occurred in opposition to their needs and wants. From the Oxfordshire interviews it is clear that the whole system of care women and their children received was shaped by the locality in which they lived, with regional practices and personalities being highly significant. The ways in which women told their stories of pregnancy and childbirth were also revealing. Ideals of stoic and heroic womanhood that were present in the contemporary culture of the middle decades of the century (and beyond) informed the ways in which women constructed their own accounts of maternity.

This analysis of women's relationship to expert advice is further developed in chapter seven. The chapter examines how ideas of the 'good' and 'bad' mother were conveyed to women through the writings of childcare experts. It considers the work of five principal authorities on child development who were popular from the 1940s to early 1970s. They are Frederick Truby King, John Bowlby, Donald Winnicott, Benjamin Spock and

Penelope Leach. It explores how the women interviewed felt about their theories, the consequences of trying to follow the experts' advice, and the struggle that women could experience in their attempts to reconcile the demands that the experts were making upon them. While they could give women confidence and support, the experts' hypotheses did not always have positive effects. Theories of child development and the role of the mother in ensuring the healthy growth of their children, with the connotations of 'good' and 'bad' mothering that resulted from these, could be oppressive for women in the post-war decades. Women who did not meet the ideals of motherhood that were being presented were left feeling anxious and guilty.

Chapter eight explores how these theories of 'good' and 'bad' mothering came to influence mothers' feelings about work inside and outside the home. It investigates how the interviewees combined paid labour and motherhood in the course of their lives and how society perceived them. It also addresses how important class and levels of education were in determining women's attitudes towards, and experiences of work. It demonstrates that women of all classes and backgrounds could feel the need to rebel against the domestic role assigned to them. At the same time, many respondents reported that they were more than happy to cease work and devote themselves to full-time motherhood. Their opinions could also change at different points of their lives. The women interviewed were aware they were living through a reconceptualisation of women's work, but their attitudes towards working mothers were as ambivalent as those of commentators of the mid-twentieth century, and this was clearly seen in their attitudes towards their daughters' generation. They also displayed an interesting tendency to not think of themselves as members of the labour force even if they had been employed outside the home, and they prioritised family in their accounts. However, perhaps influenced by the discourses of second-wave feminism, women spoke of their desire to gain independence through work, whether this was inside or outside the home. Both paid work and motherhood were conceived of as ways in which autonomy could be gained for women in the post-war world.

Chapter nine considers how these ideas of the proper conduct of mothers, inside and outside the home, were presented within popular culture. It investigates how ideals of the family, principally those of breadwinning husbands and dependent wives, were portrayed to women, the ways in which conceptions of motherhood altered over time, and how

interviewees tried to respond to these changing representations in their accounts. The chapter demonstrates how the women interviewed tried to tell their stories of motherhood using the narrative genres surrounding the family that were available to them. These were shaped by the popular understandings of the family and the role of women within it. The chapter concludes by arguing that it was not always easy for women to reconcile their private experiences with the public discourses surrounding motherhood. The interviewees had grown up with a strong image of what form the family should take and the accompanying ideals of homemaker wives and breadwinner husbands. They were familiar with this model of the family and felt comfortable when describing it – they had the language to do so. However the respondents were also aware of the changing conceptions of the role of the mothers that had developed in the years after 1970. While some welcomed these developments, others found it harder to relate to the changes, often within their own families, that had subsequently occurred.

Motherhood was a contested subject between 1945 and 1970. It was being battled over by sociologists, educationalists, medical professionals, psychologists and child development theorists. This post-war period is of particular significance because of the ways in which women were simultaneously idolised, scrutinised and controlled. The thesis demonstrates how motherhood at this time was a subject fraught with contradictions and ambiguities, and these tensions are reflected in women's articulations of their attitudes and experiences. The thesis concludes by demonstrating the real difficulties mothers faced during the period 1945-1970; that interviewees from all types of background shared an understanding of how 'normal' women should behave; and also that the stereotyping of the period as one of conservatism before the changes that began in the later 1960s and 1970s means the ways in which women were already organising themselves to improve their lives has tended to be disregarded.

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## Chapter One: *Introduction*

The years between 1945 and 1970 were marked by significant social developments. Yet, as Selina Todd has noted, the post-war era remains greatly neglected by historians.<sup>1</sup> Historical analyses of the period have been inclined to reinforce contemporary optimism. The Birmingham Feminist History Group conclude that a pervasive confidence was characteristic of the period: 'Ideologies in the fifties stressed agreement, the promise of the future, and economic expansionism; the continued existence of class divisions, poverty and inequality were forgotten.'<sup>2</sup> Illegitimacy and divorce rates were low and marriage rates were high, which encouraged a belief in the stability of marriage and family life. Perspectives on the period also tend to be over-generalised. The 1950s are seen as golden age of prosperity and consensus before the upheavals of the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> In reality, as has been increasingly demonstrated over the past two decades, the picture is more nuanced. Many of the social changes believed to have occurred after the war had already commenced beforehand and there was a great deal of continuity as well change. In recent years historians have also shown how the effects of both changes and continuities were mediated by factors such as class, geography and ethnicity. However, as Stephanie Spencer argues, while the notion of consensus has been challenged as more records have become available and the complexity and compromise of post-war policies have become apparent, the comparative lack of interest that has been shown by women's

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<sup>1</sup> Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England 1918-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Birmingham Feminist History Group, 'Feminism as Femininity in the Nineteen-Fifties?', *Feminist Review*, 3 (1979), 48-65, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Sked and Chris Cook, *Post-War Britain: A Political History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993); Marwick, Arthur, *British Society since 1945* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).

or gender historians means that the mainstream historical understanding of the period remains relatively untouched by the introduction of a gendered perspective.<sup>4</sup>

The period after World War Two is an important area for research into motherhood due to changing conceptions of the role of women. Historians have characterised these changes in various ways. Referring to the post-war insistence on the social role of the mother Jane Lewis comments:

early twentieth-century middle-class philanthropists had certainly stressed the importance of full-time motherhood. But the social and economic context of the late 1940s was very different. The role of the mother was given priority because attention was focused on social dislocation as the primary cause of failure, and concern over the economic responsibility of the father did not bulk as large as formerly.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, as Carol Dyhouse points out, the years after World War Two were a time of contradictions for women. There was ‘a growing ideology of home-centeredness reflected in the proliferation and phenomenal growth of the women’s magazines spreading the gospel of salvation through consumption during the period’; but this was accompanied by ‘a steady significant rise in the number of women leaving their homes, particularly when children were old enough to go to school, and returning to paid employment.’<sup>6</sup>

These changes were recognised at the time. Writing in the late-1950s Richard Titmuss argued that because the typical woman had now completed her mothering role by the age of forty there was a new tension between her work inside and outside the home.<sup>7</sup>

However, while married women were increasingly present in the workforce they were not

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<sup>4</sup> Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 9-10.

<sup>5</sup> Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Carol Dyhouse, ‘Towards a “Feminine” Curriculum for English Schoolgirls: The Demands of an Ideology’, *Women’s Studies International Quarterly*, 1 (1978) 291-311, p. 308.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Titmuss, *Essays on ‘The Welfare State’* (London: Unwin, 1958), p. 102.

conceived of as workers on the same terms as men. Instead, after the war, there was a redescription of the housewife as worker. Women as mothers or potential mothers were, in the words of Denise Riley, 'the true target of postwar social philosophy'.<sup>8</sup> Dennis Dean argues that the consequence of this emphasis on women's domestic role was that: 'Other demands, even those for equality of pay or career opportunities, were regarded as preoccupations of a minority of women who had rejected either marriage or motherhood. They came far down the list of priorities of a reforming government.'<sup>9</sup> The Birmingham Feminist History Group stress that post-war ideologies about women were 'underpinned by the notion of 'equal but different'.' This notion of separate spheres was not new, but they note the conditions prevailing in the 1950s gave it new connotations. This was a generation of women who were expected to successfully combine the loving and caring role of the mother 'with an ability to run their own homes probably without domestic help and to work in the public sphere as well.'<sup>10</sup>

The post-war decades are also interesting because of the changing expectations of women who were reaching adulthood at this time. Judy Giles believes that girls growing up in the 1920s and 1930s 'experienced a widening of their cultural horizons that had not been possible for their mothers.' The department store, the cinema, the dance hall, and the mass production of newspapers, magazines and cheap books offered 'a kaleidoscope of images, commodities, and experiences, representing a world beyond the family, home, and the locality.' At the same time the growth of public and private transport systems

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<sup>8</sup> Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of Child and Mother* (London: Virago, 1983), p. 171.

<sup>9</sup> D.W. Dean, 'Education for Moral Improvement, Domesticity and Social Cohesion: The Labour Government, 1945-1951', in Liz Dawtrey, Janet Holland and Merrill Hammer, with Sue Sheldon, *Equality and Inequality in Education Policy* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1995), p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Birmingham Feminist History Group, 'Feminism', p. 50.

allowed women to extend the geographical boundaries of their worlds.<sup>11</sup> Developing this theme Sally Alexander argues it was above all an era of new aspirations:

advertising and the cinema, playing on fantasy and desire enabled women to *imagine* an end to domestic drudgery and chronic want...Few women replaced the copper with the washing-machine or the outside lavatory with the bathroom during the 1930s. But the dream was there...<sup>12</sup>

Significantly Giles argues that for most girls this dream of escape was through marriage, motherhood and a ‘commitment to domesticity and respectability.’<sup>13</sup> This thesis will examine how powerful these new desires were in women’s accounts of their attitudes and experiences of motherhood in the post-war years, whether it is possible to discern differences in how women articulated their hopes over time, and how far women in differing circumstances were able to realise their dreams.

This thesis is based on oral history interviews with ninety-two women who were living in different locations in Oxfordshire – rural, urban and suburban. These are the villages of Benson and Ewelme in south Oxfordshire; the Wychwood villages in west Oxfordshire; the twenty-four square miles near Banbury in north Oxfordshire covered by the *Country Planning* (1944) survey;<sup>14</sup> Oxford city centre; and the contrasting suburbs of Cowley and Florence Park in east Oxford and North Oxford and Summertown in north Oxford. The women all lived in Oxfordshire when their children were growing up, but the range of communities they lived in was specifically chosen to enable a comparison of local experiences. As many women as logistically possible were interviewed. While the numbers are significantly lower than for social survey and sampling methods, as Kate

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<sup>11</sup> Judy Giles, ‘Narratives of Gender, Class, and Modernity in Women’s Memories of Mid-Twentieth Century Britain’, *Signs*, 28 (2002), 21-41, pp. 34-5.

<sup>12</sup> Sally Alexander, ‘Becoming a Woman in London in the 1920s and ’30s’, in Sally Alexander, *Becoming a Woman, and Other Essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Feminist History* (London: Virago, 1994), 203-24, p. 205.

<sup>13</sup> Giles, ‘Narratives’, pp. 34-5.

<sup>14</sup> The Agricultural Economics Research Institute Oxford, *Country Planning: A Study of Rural Problems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944).

Fisher has argued, 'Oral history provides the historian with dense and rich qualitative material rather than strength in numbers.'<sup>15</sup> Interviewees were principally found through community groups, social clubs and by women recommending other women to me. Kate Field argues this 'snowballing', where each respondent gives the name of another person to participate, is a particularly appropriate method for finding elderly respondents to a local study because it helps secure the trust of interviewees through being 'recommended' to them by their friends.<sup>16</sup> The group of graduates of Somerville College, Oxford were found through the college's alumni association. The sample was self-selecting in that all the women had volunteered to be interviewed. However the aim was to construct a sample that ranged in age from their late fifties to their nineties and represented both middle and working classes<sup>17</sup> and a variety of educational backgrounds (from minimum-age school leavers to graduates) to see how locality, education and class influenced women's experiences. The interviews were semi-structured, following the model described by Penny Summerfield,<sup>18</sup> and were typically between one and two hours long. However when silences, literal and figurative, were encountered in the narratives time was always given to respondents to allow them to decide how they wished to proceed. To address some of the ethical issues surrounding oral history all the potential respondents were informed in advance of the interview about the aims of the research. They therefore had the opportunity to make decisions about what they would choose to divulge prior to the interview which placed them in a more powerful position.<sup>19</sup> This advance notification also prevented any difference in expectation between interviewer and interviewee. All

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<sup>15</sup> Kate Fisher, 'An Oral History of Birth Control Practice c. 1925-50: A Study of Oxford and South Wales', Unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 1997, p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> Katherine Field, 'Children of the Nation?: A Study of the Health and Well-being of Oxfordshire Children, 1891-1939', Unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 2001, p. 103.

<sup>17</sup> Interviewees were asked to give their class of origin. Forty-three described themselves as working class and forty-nine middle. The difficulties of defining women by class are discussed further on pages 81-2 and 101-2. However the language of class was clearly influential upon their lives and is a useful analytical tool.

<sup>18</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 1-42.

interviewees were asked to sign copyright forms at the end of the interview whereby they had the chance to specify any restrictions they wished to make on their contributions. To preserve the anonymity of the interviewees pseudonyms have been used.

Interviews were based upon the life cycle and interviewees were encouraged to reflect upon their own lives in comparison with those of their parents' and children's generations. There is evidence that the life-cycle model mirrors the way women tend to construct and articulate their narratives. Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame has noted that women are less likely than men to place themselves at the centre of public events, downplaying their own activities and emphasising the role of other family members in their recollections.<sup>20</sup> To use Susan Geiger's phrase, women's 'embeddedness in familial life' may shape their view of the world and even consciousness of historical time.<sup>21</sup> The life-story approach was also selected because, as Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet has argued, it:

makes it possible to go beyond the preconstituted discourses and 'surface assertions' collected through survey research. It highlights the complexity, the ambiguities, and even the contradictions of the relations between the subject and the ideological image of woman.<sup>22</sup>

The life-cycle model allowed the women interviewed to tell their own stories with as little intervention from the interviewer as possible. However it also enabled some comparability between the interviews as they all covered the same key themes.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Field, 'Children', pp. 104-5.

<sup>20</sup> Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame, 'The Life History Approach to Internal Migration: How Men and Women Came to Paris Between the Wars', in Paul Thompson (ed.), *Our Common History: The Transformations of Europe* (London: Polity Press, 1982), 186-200.

<sup>21</sup> Susan Geiger, 'Women's Life Histories', *Signs*, 11 (1986), 334-51, p. 348.

<sup>22</sup> Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet, 'Narrative Structures, Social Models and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story', in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds.), *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York and London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991), 77-92, p. 89.

<sup>23</sup> The basic interview structure is in Appendix Four. It only formed a guide to the interviews and each interview was unique.

Oral history is reliant on memories, usually of older people, and has therefore faced criticism because the speaker's personal knowledge is viewed as less reliable than written documents. However, oral historians have offered many convincing defences for the practice while reflecting on its methodological challenges.<sup>24</sup> Interviewing elderly people about the past is not like interviewing young people about current events and it is important to be aware of how memory functions in older people.<sup>25</sup> Research undertaken in this area has shown that people remember certain events more than others, for example childhood is better remembered than the events of the previous year. Life changing, extraordinary events, which would normally include the birth of a child, are also well-remembered. There are also some particular difficulties attributed to the use of oral data due to the ways in which people remember. When using oral sources historians need to be aware of the methods of storytelling that interviewees employ. People use narrative genres as a way of structuring their accounts. For example Penny Summerfield has demonstrated how the women she interviewed about their experiences of World War Two principally adopted two narrative models, the stoic and the heroic.<sup>26</sup> Seen in the context of a range of other sources, oral history can therefore reveal the complex ways in which women compose their narratives in order to reconcile ideals of femininity with the reality of their own lives.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Kate Fisher provides one such defence in the introduction to her DPhil thesis, which includes a comprehensive review and critical appraisal of the existing literature and debates. Fisher, 'Birth Control', pp. 31-80.

<sup>25</sup> Joanna Bornat (ed.), *Reminiscence Reviewed: Perspectives, Evaluations, Achievements* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994); Peter Coleman, *Aging and Reminiscence Processes: Social and Clinical Implications* (Colchester: John Wiley, 1986); Faith Gibson, *Reminiscence and Recall: A Guide to Good Practice* (London: Age Concern England, 1994); Clare Gillies and Anne James, *Reminiscence Work with Old People* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1994); Leah L. Light and Deborah M. Burke, *Language, Memory and Aging* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>26</sup> The ways in which the women interviewed for this study also adopted the stoic/heroic models in their accounts of pregnancy and childbirth is discussed on pages 149-52.

<sup>27</sup> Bronwen Davies, 'Women's Subjectivity and Feminist Stories', in C. Ellis and M.G. Flaherty (eds.), *Investigating Subjectivity: Researching on Lived Experience* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992), 55-76, p. 55.

While people can remember accurately, memory can also be distorted by external constraints. In his interviews with Australian World War One veterans Alistair Thomson found his respondents remembered events in such a way as would provide acceptable accounts of their war service to their present selves.<sup>28</sup> What respondents do not say can be as important a source of information as what they do say, and the way people remember is as important as what they remember. Hence oral history is a methodology that can provide objective information about women's lives, but also reveals their thoughts and feelings through the subjectivity of their accounts. To quote Alessandro Portelli, 'oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did'.<sup>29</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, the subjective nature of oral history enables the relationship between the ideal and reality of motherhood to be examined. It also makes it possible to examine how women review their experiences in light of later developments in their own lives and the changing attitudes towards women that occurred over the course of the century. As Philip Gardner puts it, 'the story of a life may also become the story of the historical landscape within which that life has been lived.'<sup>30</sup> Much can be learnt about the expectations of, and constraints upon, women in the middle decades of the twentieth century through analysing the silences, uncertainties and contradictions within the oral history interviews. Reflecting upon this point Joan Sangster argues, 'Asking why and how women explain, rationalise and make sense of their past offers insight into the social and cultural patterns they faced, and the complex relationship between individual consciousness and culture.'<sup>31</sup> Oral history allows women to be the central figures of analysis. They are involved in

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<sup>28</sup> Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>29</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 50.

<sup>30</sup> Philip Gardner, 'Oral History in Education: Teacher's Memory and Teachers' History', *History of Education* 32 (2003) 175-88, p. 184.

<sup>31</sup> Joan Sangster, 'Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 87-100, p. 88.

creating this history through the oral history interview and are the principal focus of the study.

This thesis is a study in gender history and women's history. Sally Alexander has commented that:

Women's history in the early 1970s sprang from that utopian and romantic disposition – 200 years old – which sought to tell women's stories in their own words, to unveil new vocabularies for women, and to re-map the division between the personal and the political.<sup>32</sup>

Oral history seems an ideal methodology to meet these aims, encouraging as it does the study of subjectivity within historical accounts of women's lives. As Alexander argues, subjectivity need be neither universal nor ahistorical, and 'structured through relations of absence and loss, pleasure and unpleasure, difference and division, these are simultaneous with the social naming and placing among kin, community, school, class which are always historically specific.'<sup>33</sup> Psychoanalysis offers a way of analysing this subjectivity and construction of identity. Indeed Alexander believes that the first wish of feminist history, 'to fill the gaps and silences of written history, to uncover new meanings for femininity and women, to project sexuality to the forefront of the political mind', shares some of the intentions of psychoanalysis. The 'discovery of a subjective history through image, symbol and language' is central to both.<sup>34</sup> Giles believes psychoanalytic theory's recent emphasis on symbolic and linguistic structures has provided gender historians with new approaches to the historical construction of gendered subjectivities.<sup>35</sup> Graham Dawson, for example, has developed an analysis linking Melanie Klein's theory of psychic composure with cultural theories of narrative, coining the term 'cultural

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<sup>32</sup> Sally Alexander, 'Feminist History', in Elizabeth Wright (ed.), *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 108-13, p. 108.

<sup>33</sup> Sally Alexander, 'Women, Class and Sexual Difference in the 1830s and '40s: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History', in Sally Alexander, *Becoming a Woman, and Other Essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Feminist History* (London: Virago, 1994), 97-125, p. 109.

imaginaries' to describe the 'vast networks of interlinking discursive themes, images, motifs and narrative forms that are publicly available within a culture at any one time, and articulate its psychic and social dimensions.'<sup>36</sup> The use of oral history in this thesis will enable an exploration of the 'cultural imaginaries' which shaped women's experiences of motherhood in the post-war decades.

This thesis studies attitudes, experiences and ideals of motherhood in the period 1945-1970. To begin, chapter two places the thesis in the context of theoretical approaches to motherhood, maternity and the mother role. It addresses the historical, sociological, psychoanalytic and feminist debates that have developed over the course of the twentieth century. Chapter three provides a survey of Oxfordshire and the places within it in which the study has been undertaken. It evaluates the significant features of these environments and how different localities may have shaped women's experiences of motherhood in the mid-twentieth century. Chapter four examines the place of the mother in the family. It investigates the ideas of motherhood and family life that were in vogue in the post-war decades through an analysis of contemporary texts, such as social surveys and community studies, and considers them in the light of the oral history interviews. Chapter five addresses the process of educating women to be mothers and asks how far commentators in the post-war period, and women themselves, felt they needed to be taught how to mother or whether it came naturally to them. Furthermore, if women did need to be educated about motherhood, where was it assumed that this education should take place? Chapter six looks at maternity provision and the changing relationship between mothers and medical professionals from the late-1940s to the early-1970s in the spheres of

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<sup>34</sup> Alexander, 'Feminist History', p. 109.

<sup>35</sup> Giles, 'Narratives', p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 48-52.

antenatal care, childbirth and postnatal care. It examines the extent to which maternity was increasingly medicalised within this period and how locality mediated the process. Chapter seven examines how ideas of what made 'good' and 'bad' mothers were conveyed to women through the works of childcare experts. It considers the women's attitudes towards these theories, and the consequence of trying to follow 'expert' advice. Chapter eight explores mothers' feelings about work inside and outside the home, how women combined paid labour and motherhood in the course of their lives, and how society perceived the working mother. It also addresses how important class and levels of education were in determining women's attitudes towards work. Chapter nine then looks at cultural conceptions of the family and the relationship between these public understandings of motherhood and women's accounts of their personal experiences. Taken together, these analyses present a picture of the complexities and contradictions that existed for women as mothers of young children at this time, and how they tried to reconcile them.

## **Chapter Two: *Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Motherhood***

In *Marriage as a Trade*, first published in 1909, Cicely Hamilton wrote, ‘Woman, as we know her to-day, is largely a manufactured product.’<sup>1</sup> The study of ideals relating to the figures of ‘woman’ and the ‘mother’, and the recognition that they are problematic terms, has a long history. Psychoanalytic, sociological and feminist theories have enhanced historians’ understandings of motherhood and the maternal role. Psychoanalytic theorists have examined the mother’s unconscious actions and attachment to her children; sociologists have attempted to trace the mother’s actual experience of child-rearing, identifying the way that society and culture have affected attitudes and behaviour; and feminists have been concerned with the subordination of women within the institution of motherhood. While motherhood is both a biological and cultural state there is, as Ellen Ross argues, little that is truly ‘natural’ about an institution which is so embedded in social and cultural practices. Ideas of motherhood have accordingly changed over the centuries.<sup>2</sup> Indeed ‘motherhood’ itself seems to be a relatively recent invention. Ann Dally cites 1597 as the first entry for ‘motherhood’ in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and then only as a fact rather than an ideology. She argues it was not until the Victorian era that the word emerged as a concept.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter changes in conceptions of the maternal role, and the theoretical positions surrounding them, will be summarised in order to provide a basis for examining attitudes towards motherhood in post-1945 Britain.

There are conflicting accounts of when developments in ideals of motherhood and mothering have taken place and these are influenced by similarly divergent histories of

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<sup>1</sup> Cicely Hamilton, *Marriage as a Trade* (London: Chapman and Hill, 1912), p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870-1918* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ann Dally, *Inventing Motherhood: The Consequences of an Ideal* (New York: Schocken, 1983), p. 17.

childhood. Hugh Cunningham points out that while historians have shown a burgeoning interest in children and childhood in the past forty years they have rarely been in agreement.<sup>4</sup> French historian Phillipe Ariès published the seminal work in this area, *Centuries of Childhood*, which was first translated into English in 1962. He proposed that before the early-modern period childhood as an idea did not exist. He argued that while parents may have felt affection for their children no-one admitted that these feelings were worthy of being expressed.<sup>5</sup> While Ariès has received considerable support,<sup>6</sup> historians examining family life are not united in the belief that children and childcare attracted such little value or interest before the early-modern period.<sup>7</sup> Ariès has been criticised by historians both for his methodology and analysis, not least by those who have uncovered the personal testimony of letters and diaries.<sup>8</sup> Despite the criticism which it has received, however, Ariès's thesis on the development of childhood has been deeply influential for historians examining motherhood. Marianne Hirsch states, 'The ideology of motherhood as the ideal of femininity coincides with the institutionalisation of childhood during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.' As representations of the child's vulnerability and need for nurturing and protection became more prominent motherhood came to be seen as

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<sup>4</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage, 1962), p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> For example, see James Schutz, *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages, 1100-1350* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 244-51; Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 23; Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (London: Collins, 1976), p. 168; Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 246.

<sup>7</sup> For example, see Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 268; Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (London: Longman, 1984); Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 89-118; Betty Travitsky, 'The New Mother of the English Renaissance: Her Writings on Motherhood', in C.N. Davidson and E.M. Broner, *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980), 33-43; Brigitte Niestroj, 'Modern Individuality and the Social Isolation of Mother and Child', *Comparative Civilizations Review*, 16 (1987), 21-40; Patricia Crawford, 'The Construction of Maternity in Seventeenth-Century England', in Valerie Fildes (ed.), *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England* (London: Routledge, 1990), 3-38, p. 6; Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> See Adrian Wilson, 'The Infancy of the History of Childhood: An Appraisal of Philippe Ariès', *History and Theory*, 19 (1980), 132-53, pp. 150-2.

an 'instinct' or 'natural' role as well as a practice.<sup>9</sup> In her history of the maternal instinct, *The Myth of Motherhood*, Elizabeth Badinter concludes that the impulse to love and care for children did not exist for women in western Europe until it was imposed on them beginning in about the eighteenth century. This obligation developed in tandem with the stress on caring and watching over children as being women's most important role.<sup>10</sup> However Stephen Wilson has criticised Badinter for judging the behaviour of mothers of the past by the standards of today and for making little attempt to appreciate that behaviour within its own context. He gives the example of the dirty condition of nurslings and peasant children which Badinter condemns (as doctors of the time had done) as a sign of neglect, without any appreciation that for peasant women dirt might have been regarded as of positive benefit to the child, protecting it from envy and malevolent influences.<sup>11</sup> Wilson stresses that given the circumstances in which women lived in medieval and early-modern Europe 'one is struck not so much by their callousness towards or neglect of their offspring as by their patient devotion.'<sup>12</sup>

Evelyn Nakano Glenn believes that feminist historians have helped uncover the historical specificity of the construction of motherhood as women's primary and exclusive identity, the encapsulation of women and children in the nuclear household, and the emphasis on mothering as emotional care.<sup>13</sup> For example in their study of middle-class men and women from the late-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century in the industrial town of Birmingham and the agricultural counties of Essex and Suffolk, Leonore Davidoff and

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<sup>9</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct* (London: Souvenir Press, 1981).

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Wilson, 'The Myth of Motherhood a Myth: The Historical View of European Child-rearing', *Social History*, 9 (1984), 181-98, p. 186.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

Catherine Hall found that, ‘Evangelical categorizations of the proper spheres of men and women provided the basis for many subsequent formulations and shaped the common sense of the nineteenth-century social world.’<sup>14</sup> Glenn notes that these ideas became widespread within the white bourgeoisie in western Europe and north America in the late-eighteenth century, as the rise of industrialisation meant manufacturing gradually shifted out of the household. This transfer left the household as the unit of responsibility for ‘reproduction’ – the activities and relationships involved in maintaining people.<sup>15</sup> The separation of spheres for men and women had significant consequences. Dally concludes that it was during the nineteenth century that the idealisation of the mother strengthened the idealisation of the woman. Mothers were viewed as providing personal care and emotional rather than economic support; child-rearing came to be understood as a task that was best done primarily by the individual mother without reliance on servants, older children, or other women; and it was expected that all women whether biological mothers or not would have a maternal instinct.<sup>16</sup> However as Jessie Bernard has noted, ‘Victorian motherhood was a male – and a middle-class – conception.’<sup>17</sup> The more gender historians have studied the experiences of motherhood from the point of view of women themselves the less authentic the concept looks. For example, women’s continued participation in paid labour has been revealed. Bernard concludes, therefore, that the ideal was never a genuine portrait of the Victorian mother.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Evelyn Nakano Glenn, ‘Social Constructions of Mothering: A Thematic Overview’, in Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chung and Linda Rennie Forcey (eds.), *Mothering: Ideology, Experience and Agency* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1-32, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 180-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 450.

<sup>15</sup> Glenn, ‘Mothering’, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Dally, *Motherhood*, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> Jessie Bernard, *The Future of Parenthood* (London: Calder and Bayars, 1975), p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard, *Parenthood*, p. 13.

Many of the elements of motherhood as it was conceived in the post-1945 decades, such as its association with sex, cohabitation, and capitalist consumption, had been established by the late-nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Ross goes as far as to argue that mothers were ‘discovered’ by social thinkers between the 1870s and 1918.<sup>20</sup> Influenced by Charles Booth’s *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1889-1903) there were a number of studies (often authored by women) that focused on poverty, housing and employment, and their implications for family life. The picture of women’s lives that came out of these surveys was not a happy one. There was a preponderance of absent fathers leaving responsibility for running the house and raising the children solely to wives. Maud Pember Reeves thought many a husband was ‘accustomed to seeing his wife a slave.’<sup>21</sup> Wives were often kept in ignorance about their husband’s earnings and some struggled on only a small proportion of them.<sup>22</sup> Husbands were presented as wasting the money drinking and gambling, and wife beating was not unusual.<sup>23</sup> However, in her oral history study of working-class women from the towns of Barrow, Lancaster and Preston during the period 1890-1940, Elizabeth Roberts reached a somewhat different conclusion. She believed the essential nature of woman’s household management skills to the family economy elevated their status and gave them power. It was often the wife who managed the family finances and ‘good’ husbands were expected to hand over their wages without any deductions being made. Roberts therefore discovered a more nuanced picture of women’s experiences. While a minority of respondents recalled husbands and fathers who were brutal, drunken and overbearing, she concludes: ‘The oral evidence does

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<sup>19</sup> John Tosh argues that modern understandings of fatherhood had been similarly established by the Victorian period with a belief in the association between breadwinning and fatherhood becoming customary. John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 85.

<sup>20</sup> Ross, *Love and Toil*, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Maud Pember Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week* (London: Bell, 1913), p. 155.

<sup>22</sup> Lady Bell, *At the Works: A Study of a Manufacturing Town* (London: Virago, 1985) (1907), p. 176; Reeves, *Pound a Week*, p. 155; Helen Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor* (London: Macmillan, 1899), p. 107.

<sup>23</sup> Bell, *At the Works*, pp. 238-244.

not...suggest universal oppression of women within working-class marriages; indeed, in the great majority of marriages in the sample, the women exerted significant power, not so much from legal rights as from moral force.’<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless motherhood and married life was not shown as a very attractive state for women in the contemporary Edwardian studies and feminist writers were already critiquing the mother role. Describing marriage for women as ‘a trade’, and one which was ‘practically compulsory’, Cicely Hamilton argued that a woman was regarded ‘not as a human being with certain physical and mental qualities which enable her to bring children into the world and cook a dinner, but as a breeding-machine and the necessary adjunct to a frying-pan.’<sup>25</sup> Countering the assumption that all women would want to be mothers she wrote: ‘I am inclined to doubt that there exists in every woman an overpowering maternal instinct which swamps all other interests and desires.’<sup>26</sup> She concluded that education, training and employment opportunities were needed to prevent women remaining ‘unintelligent breeding-machines.’<sup>27</sup> In a study of married working-class women in which she compared those who worked outside the home and those who did not, Clementina Black found that – contrary to popular opinion – neglected homes and children were most common among those women who did not earn.<sup>28</sup> Among women who chose to work, although they could live off their husbands’ wages, houses were almost invariably well-kept. Black stated: ‘To visit them is to go away encouraged

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<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 110.

<sup>25</sup> Hamilton, *Marriage*, p. 53.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>28</sup> Clementina Black, *Married Women's Work* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1915), p. 2.

as to the future of the race.’<sup>29</sup> She therefore surmised that, ‘what is wrong is not the work for wages of married women, but the under-payment’.<sup>30</sup>

Ross believes the legacy of these studies was that the magnitude of mothers’ labours was newly appreciated. Consequently legislators used this discovery to make mothers the objects of novel kinds of regulation from the law, state institutions, and the new professions, particularly the medical profession, which developed between the mid-nineteenth century and World War One.<sup>31</sup> Anna Davin suggests that a new form of discourse developed around the idea of scientific motherhood at this time.<sup>32</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English comment that while this discourse could be unsettling to mothers it was also reassuring because it did at least admit that child-rearing was a skilled and difficult occupation.<sup>33</sup> The ideology was in part a response to the declining birth rate which meant that motherhood had to be made to seem desirable. In addition, the Second Boer War (1889-1902) had focused attention sharply on the ability of mothers to rear fit children. The fate of the empire was deemed to depend on tomorrow’s soldiers and an unacceptable number were either not surviving infancy or growing up physically feeble. Concern about the wastage of infant life intensified in the years preceding World War One with Medical Officers of Health convinced that if mothers were better educated in the art of mothering fewer babies would die. They believed there were too many incompetent mothers who jeopardised the lives of their children through ignorance and carelessness. Diarrhoea, thought to be caught from germs on dirty feeding bottles or dummies, was the main killer of small babies. The cheapest and simplest solution seemed

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Ross, *Love and Toil*, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Anna Davin, ‘Imperialism and Motherhood’, *History Workshop Journal*, 5 (1978), 9-65, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts’ Advice to Women* (London: Pluto Press, 1978), p. 176.

to be educating women in hygiene and encouraging them to breastfeed their young and keep their houses cleaner. Motherhood was to be looked on not just as a personal duty but as a national one. This belief that motherhood was a duty meant that in the context of the falling birth rate it was argued that women, particularly middle-class women, should do their duty by having larger families. There was concern, notably from the eugenics movement, that the health of the British 'race' was in danger through the falling fertility of the middle classes who were in danger of being 'swamped' by the poorest sections of society.

Elizabeth Peretz believes this discourse of scientific motherhood continued to flourish in the inter-war period, 'disseminated by experts who found an easy target amongst families concerned for their children's welfare.' While infant welfare clinics and health visitors were the key promoters of modern methods in child-rearing practices, mothers were exposed to changing ideas from a variety of sources. There were advice columns on child-rearing in national and local newspapers and women's magazines; advertising hoardings urged patent products to safeguard children's health; and health programmes were broadcast on the radio. Special child-rearing books and magazines were produced with a wide circulation and multiple reprints.<sup>34</sup> The state's interest in motherhood in the late-1930s is also seen in the creation of the Royal Commission on Population to look into the causes and consequences of the falling birth rate, although due to the war its report was not published until 1949.<sup>35</sup> In addition, despite the fact that there was a trend towards more specialised surveys after World War One, on topics such as living

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<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Peretz, 'The Costs of Modern Motherhood to Low Income Families in Interwar Britain', in Valerie Fildes, Lara Marks and Hilary Marland (eds.), *Women and Children First: International Maternal and Child Welfare 1870-1945* (London: Routledge, 1992), 257-80, pp. 257-62; Elizabeth Peretz, 'Infant Welfare in Inter-War Oxford', in Richard C. Whiting (ed.), *Oxford: Studies in the History of a University Town since 1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 131-45.

<sup>35</sup> Royal Commission on Population, *Report* (London: HMSO, 1949).

conditions, delinquency, unemployment, and housing and planning, women's experiences of motherhood were still being investigated. Under the auspices of the Women's Health Enquiry Committee Margery Spring Rice conducted a survey of working-class, married women's health in the 1930s. She found a dismal picture of women's wellbeing which was not dissimilar to that found by social investigators at the turn of the century. One respondent explained:

My life for many years consisted of being penned in a kitchen 9 feet square, every fourteen months a baby, as I had five babies in five years at first, until what with the struggle to live and no leisure I used to feel I was just a machine, until I had my first breakdown and as dark as it was and as hard as it was it gave me the freedom and privilege of having an hour's fresh air.<sup>36</sup>

Another reported that the traditional segregation of men and women's worlds was still strong: 'So many of our men think we should not go out until the children are grown up...It isn't the men are unkind. It is the old idea we should always be home.'<sup>37</sup>

Feminists continued to address questions surrounding motherhood, although they were increasingly divided (between those stressing equality with men and those asserting difference) over whether or not they should emphasise women's maternal function. Eleanor Rathbone, president of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), was a prominent figure in the 'difference' camp who campaigned for the endowment of motherhood. In a Presidential speech to NUSEC in the early-1920s she argued: 'We must demand what we want for women, not because it is what men have got, but because it is what women need to fulfil the potentialities of their own natures and to adjust themselves to the circumstances of their own lives.'<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Margery Spring Rice, *Working-Class Wives: Their Health and Conditions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939), p. 94.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>38</sup> Eleanor Rathbone cited in Sally Alexander, 'Women, Class and Sexual Difference in the 1830s and '40s: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History', in Sally Alexander, *Becoming a Woman, and Other Essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Feminist History* (London: Virago, 1994), 97-125, p. 102.

The development of psychoanalysis has had profound influence upon understandings of motherhood during the twentieth century. It has shaped concepts of femininity and also provided the dominant language for speaking about family relationships in western society. The currency of psychoanalytical theories, particularly – since the 1920s – those surrounding child development, has charged mothers with new responsibilities for their children’s formation. Mothers were seen in relation to the growing child, serving or frustrating their various developmental needs. Sigmund Freud described how in the early years of the infant’s life the relationship with the mother was close, but during the oedipal conflict the infant boy renounced the love of his mother in fear of his more powerful father while the infant girl moved away from her mother whom she saw as powerless and ‘castrated’.<sup>39</sup> Through this account of psychic development Freud also explained how infant girls matured into adult women. He argued that the ‘feminine situation is only established...if the wish for a penis is replaced by one for a baby, if, that is, a baby takes the place of a penis in accordance with an ancient symbolic equivalence.’<sup>40</sup> Freud’s ideas of difference between male and female behaviour provided a starting point for many theories on motherhood.<sup>41</sup> By the 1930s Freud had also come to stress the importance of the pre-oedipal phase. During this period he believed the mother-child relationship was of great importance for both sexes and that it was the foundation of all relationships to come. A woman’s relation to her mother was the ‘original one’; her attachment to her father was built upon it.<sup>42</sup> In consequence mothers became the parent most responsible for the infant’s optimal development. As the sociologist Sondra Farganis has noted,

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<sup>39</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Femininity’ [orig. 1933], in *Standard Edition*, Vol. 22, 112-35, p. 128.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>41</sup> Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester, *Freud’s Women* (London: Virago, 1993).

<sup>42</sup> Freud, ‘Femininity’, pp. 230-1.

Freud's theories provided a useful source of information about women's behaviour for the feminists, psychoanalysts and sociologists who came after him.<sup>43</sup>

The importance of the mother-child relationship was further explored during the inter-war years by the female psychoanalysts Helen Deutsch, Karen Horney, Anna Freud and Melanie Klein. Helen Deutsch was the first leading woman member of Freud's Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. She had trained as a doctor before joining the Society in 1918, and started seeing patients psychoanalytically the following year. Janet Sayers argues that Deutsch was one of the first female psychoanalysts to use her mothering experience to draw attention to the place of identification with others, beginning with the mother, in personality formation and disorders of narcissistic self-esteem.<sup>44</sup> Deutsch built upon Freud's theories to demonstrate the maternal as well as the patriarchal roots of women's femininity. While Freud traced psychosomatic symptoms, such as Dora's nervous cough and anorexia, to oedipal desire for the father, Deutsch pointed to the maternal basis of such symptoms. Rejecting Freud's penis envy account of women's motive in having babies, Deutsch attributed it instead to the attempt to counteract feminine passivity through identifying, in fantasy, with an active image of the mother. Women did feel ambivalence towards motherhood and desired both to be and not to be mothers. However she argued that women could only find true happiness through having children and that they possessed characteristics expressly for motherhood which were not shared by men, such as 'tenderness, altruism, and a specifically coloured activity.'<sup>45</sup> The consequence of this line of psychoanalytic thought was that women who deviated from the ideal of

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<sup>43</sup> Sondra Farganis, *Social Reconstruction of the Feminine Character* (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1986), p.78.

<sup>44</sup> Janet Sayers, *Mothering Psychoanalysis: Helene Deutsch, Karen Horney, Anna Freud and Melanie Klein* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991), p. 25.

<sup>45</sup> Helene Deutsch, *The Psychology of Women, a Psychoanalytic Interpretation: Volume Two Motherhood* (London: Research Books Ltd, 1947), p. 19, 233, 429.

feminine behaviour could be considered dysfunctional. Karen Horney, a contemporary of Deutsch, also challenged Freud's phallogocentric account of sexuality and emphasised social and parental, as opposed to the instinctual, determinants of neurosis.<sup>46</sup> These ideas became popularised through the mother-centred psychoanalysis of the post-war period.

Psychoanalysis after the war was also deeply influenced by the work of Melanie Klein. Klein believed that the resolution of the oedipal conflict was not as important as the developmental period which preceded it when the mother, as the primary nurturer, was the most important 'object' in the infant's life. Drawing on Freudian theory, Klein established a psychoanalytic school of 'object relations' during the 1920s that focused attention on the pre-oedipal child's deep attachment to its mother.<sup>47</sup> Klein's importance came from her work with children and her stress on the significance of the mother on the 'inner world' of the child. Although she took into account the father's involvement she believed the mother was more important to the child because she was the source of its nourishment. The infant, Klein explained, fantasised the mother as the 'good' and 'bad' breast. As the infant's need for nourishment was its prime concern, nervous and depressive anxieties in later life could be related to the way the child had coped with the nursing experience.<sup>48</sup> Sayers believes this development of mother-orientated psychoanalytic theory enhanced the status of mothers and motherhood as it recognised the importance of women in shaping our psychology. However Klein's work also implied

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<sup>46</sup> Karen Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth* (New York: Norton, 1950).

<sup>47</sup> Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the 'Good Enough' Mother* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 8-12.

<sup>48</sup> Although Klein related the child's problems to its nursing experience with its mother she would not consult with the mother, insisting on seeing the disturbed child alone. Melanie Klein, *Narrative of a Child Analysis: The Conduct of the Psycho-Analysis of Children as Seen in the Treatment of a Ten-Year-Old Boy* (London: Virago, 1989) (1961).

that any problem a child may have had was an indication that the mother's care had been deficient.<sup>49</sup>

Mother-centred theories of psychoanalysis came to play a crucial part in child psychology and psychoanalysis after World War Two. John Bowlby and Donald Winnicott both stressed the importance of the mother-child relationship and the need for mothers to remain at home with their children, although they approached this subject in different ways. Winnicott based his work on Kleinian theories, but focused on the performance of the mother rather than concentrating on the fantasies of the child. During his radio broadcasts he asserted that he did not want to place impossible demands on the mother asking only that she be 'good enough', which he defined as adapting to the child's demands and enabling it to develop without 'anxieties and conflicts'.<sup>50</sup> Winnicott praised mothers and emphasised the positive benefits to both the individual and society which 'the ordinary good mother' made through being devoted to her infant. In contrast a father's only role was to provide 'moral support'. He declared that although the mother must be prepared to put the infant's interests above her own, the child-rearing process was natural and intuitive and the child's needs were easy to anticipate and accommodate.<sup>51</sup> While purporting to comfort mothers Winnicott considered that problems with the child's growth and development resulted from inadequate mothering. Furthermore, as Janice Doane and Devon Hodges have pointed out, he did not take into account the paradox in his own role as expert and adviser; if the mothering role were natural his recommendations would not be needed.<sup>52</sup> Resulting from his research with children separated from their parents during the war, Bowlby perhaps developed an even stronger

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<sup>49</sup> Sayers, *Mothering Psychoanalysis*, pp. 10-1.

<sup>50</sup> D.W. Winnicott, *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* (London: Tavistock, 1958), p. 300.

<sup>51</sup> D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock, 1971), p. 10.

view of the influence of mothering, expressed in the concept of ‘maternal deprivation’. He stressed the damaging effects upon the mental health of children when the mother-child relationship was broken.<sup>53</sup> The assumption that Bowlby’s thesis required children to always be in the company of the mother was indicated by his pamphlet entitled *Can I Leave My Baby?*<sup>54</sup> Denise Riley notes that feminist interpretations of ‘Bowlbysim’ have taken it as no coincidence that after World War Two childcare facilities for the children of working mothers were withdrawn at the same time as Bowlby’s ideas were widely promulgated, viewing it as part of a concerted drive to revive traditional values and return women to the home.<sup>55</sup> Riley concludes, however, that the connections between government plans for the movements of women to and from the labour market and the development of psychological beliefs were far weaker and less organised than this vision allows.<sup>56</sup>

Criticisms of Bowlby were part of a wider critique of psychoanalysis that developed within the feminist movement from the 1960s as feminists came to challenge the conclusion that women could only achieve true femininity as wives and mothers.<sup>57</sup> Writing in 1970, Kate Millet accused Freud of displaying ‘a rather gross male-supremacist bias.’<sup>58</sup> Class-ridden and patriarchal Freudian psychoanalysis was condemned as simply offering a justification for the social order that it described, namely that of turn of the century, bourgeois Vienna. It could provide no insight into the position of women in the contemporary society of the 1960s. Betty Friedan argued: ‘One needs

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<sup>52</sup> Doane and Hodges, *Klein to Kristeva*, p. 21.

<sup>53</sup> John Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> John Bowlby, *Can I Leave My Baby?* (London: National Association for Mental Health, 1958).

<sup>55</sup> Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of Child and Mother* (London: Virago, 1983), p. 92, 169.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> Simone De Beauvoir had already critiqued Freudian psychoanalysis in *The Second Sex*, first published in 1949 and translated into English in 1953; Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage, 1997), pp. 69-83.

<sup>58</sup> Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970), p. 258.

only to know what Freud *was* describing, in those Victorian women, to see the fallacy in literally applying his theory of femininity to women today.’<sup>59</sup> However in her introduction to *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* Juliet Mitchell offered the more sympathetic interpretation that ‘psychoanalysis is not a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society, but an analysis *of* one. If we are interested in understanding and challenging the oppression of women, we cannot afford to neglect it.’<sup>60</sup> Addressing feminist critiques of Freud she concluded:

In our society the kinship system is harnessed into the family – where a woman is formed in such a way that is where she will stay. Differences of class, historical epoch, specific social situations alter the expression of femininity; but in relation to the law of the father, women’s position across the board is a comparable one. When critics condemn Freud for not taking account of social reality, their concept of reality is too limited. The social reality that he is concerned with elucidating is the mental representation of the reality of society.<sup>61</sup>

Jacqueline Rose believes an affinity between feminism and psychoanalysis exists which rests on the recognition that there is a resistance to identity which lies at the very heart of psychic life. Viewed in this way psychoanalysis is no longer best understood as an account of how women are fitted into place, but, ‘becomes one of the few places in our culture where it is recognised as more than a fact of individual pathology that most women do not painlessly slip into their roles as women, if indeed they do at all.’<sup>62</sup>

Sociology in the post-war period also provided new rationales for the idealisation and enforcement of women’s maternal role. The structural-functionalist theory of the family, espoused by the American sociologist Talcott Parsons, had an influence on contemporary ideas of motherhood. Parsons believed that the nuclear family’s small size, and its members’ complementary roles, meant it was the ideal form in a modern, industrial,

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<sup>59</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) (1963), pp. 91-2.

<sup>60</sup> Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. xv.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 406.

consumer society. The nuclear family fulfilled two main functions for its members: the ‘primary socialisation’ of children and the ‘personality stabilisation’ of adults. Parsons reinforced the male-breadwinner model: the role of the husband and father was to work outside the home providing resources, while the wife and mother’s role was to run the domestic sphere. He concluded that the gendered division of roles was inevitable as it was based upon women’s unique maternal capacity.<sup>63</sup> These views were widely accepted within post-war British society. The Birmingham Feminist History Group have noted how writing and thinking on women in the 1950s, by feminists and non-feminists alike, tended to take place within a framework which accepted the primacy of the woman’s role as wife and mother. Other aspects of women’s lives had to be fitted in around this responsibility. While emphasis on the dual role of women as both mothers and as paid workers was characteristic of the period, it was always insisted that the family must come first.<sup>64</sup> In her account of graduate wives published in 1957 the social researcher and psychologist Judith Hubback typified these views, stating, ‘Reasonable modern feminism builds on the diversity of the sexes. It is not crudely egalitarian. It takes differences into account not with the aim of over-emphasising them but with the sole purpose of seeing what *contribution* each sex can make to the *common good*.’<sup>65</sup> The Birmingham Feminist History Group have concluded that feminism, at this time, ‘was, therefore, bound by femininity in such a manner that we as feminists today do not easily recognize its activities as *feminist*.’<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Jacqueline Rose, ‘Femininity and its Discontents’, *Feminist Review* 14, 1983, 7-21, p. 9.

<sup>63</sup> Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales, *Family: Socialization and Interaction Process* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), pp. 7-23. See also Ernest W. Burgess, Harvey J. Locke and Mary Margaret Thomes, *The Family: From Institution to Companionship* (New York: American Book Company, 1963).

<sup>64</sup> Birmingham Feminist History Group, ‘Feminism as Femininity in the Nineteen-Fifties?’, *Feminist Review*, 3 (1979), 48-65, p. 50.

<sup>65</sup> Judith Hubback, *Wives who went to College* (London: Heinemann, 1957), p. 83.

<sup>66</sup> Birmingham Feminist History Group, ‘Feminism’, p. 48.

However the notion that all women desired motherhood was not universally accepted. Writing in 1949, Simone De Beauvoir had argued that women's ability to give birth was the source of their subordination. She believed women were twice condemned, firstly during pregnancy when they lacked control over their bodies, and secondly when children restricted them to the home.<sup>67</sup> In America in the late-1950s Betty Friedan conducted a survey of Smith College graduates focusing on their education, subsequent experiences, and satisfaction with their present lives. She eventually published her findings in 1963 in *The Feminine Mystique*. Examining the consequences of living in a privatised nuclear family with the division of labour so lauded by functionalism and its implications for women, she identified the unhappiness of middle-class, educated, suburban housewives who were pressured into the maternal role and consequently felt unfulfilled and discontented. She wrote of the isolation and boredom that gripped many of these women who felt relegated to an endless cycle of childcare and housework.<sup>68</sup> Friedan found women disproportionately suffered from depression, tranquilliser and alcohol dependency and other mental illness.<sup>69</sup> Criticising the ideal of the nuclear family she wrote: 'there was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform.'<sup>70</sup> Female sociologists in Britain reached similar conclusions. Published in 1961, Hannah Gavron's *The Captive Wife* was a study of around a hundred young married women from north London. She investigated the effects of relocation and the privatisation of the working-class family for women and discovered that the close relationship between working-class mothers and daughters was substantially weakened. Consequently women were left feeling increasingly isolated.<sup>71</sup> Gavron found

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<sup>67</sup> De Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, pp. 501-42.

<sup>68</sup> Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, pp. 24-6.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28, pp. 253-4.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> Hannah Gavron, *The Captive Wife: Conflicts of Housebound Mothers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) (1966), p. xi.

some women regretted getting married and felt prisoners in their own homes.<sup>72</sup> However she stressed it was motherhood rather than wifedom that provoked women's ambivalence towards the feminine role. The advent of children brought isolation, confusion and insecurity. She asserted: 'it is children not marriage that present problems of role and expectation to the women of this survey.'<sup>73</sup> Despite challenging the idea that motherhood was unproblematic for women, unlike later feminist writers Gavron did not question contemporary assumptions about the structure of the family.<sup>74</sup>

From the late-1960s, with the advent of second wave feminism, feminist analyses of the mother role burgeoned and its implications for women received new attention. Indeed Patrice DiQuinzio has noted how the 'resurgence of the women's movement in the second half of the twentieth century has intensified the contention surrounding mothering.'<sup>75</sup> Feminists at this time appear to have an uneasy relationship with motherhood, although many were mothers themselves. Sheila Rowbotham explains:

feminists have grappled with the contradictory extremes of female destiny which mothering raises. To dismiss the delights of motherhood denies intense and passionate aspects of women's lives. But to elevate these into an alternative ideal is to deny the negative feelings, to return women to the sphere of reproduction and subordinate childless women to a maternalistic hierarchy.<sup>76</sup>

Like De Beauvoir before her, the radical American feminist Shulamith Firestone argued that women's oppression lay in her child-bearing and child-rearing role. Firestone asserted that 'Pregnancy is barbaric' and called for the 'freeing of women from the tyranny of their biology by any means available.'<sup>77</sup> In her study of the legacies of 1960s

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65, 122.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58, 130.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68, 137.

<sup>75</sup> Patrice DiQuinzio, *The Impossibility of Motherhood* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. vii.

<sup>76</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, 'To Be or Not to Be: The Dilemmas of Mothering', *Feminist Review*, 31 (1989), 82-93, p. 87.

<sup>77</sup> Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case of Feminist Revolution* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1970), p. 226, 270.

feminism Lauri Umansky notes that 'Firestone's critique of motherhood does surpass that of virtually all other early feminists'. While many radical feminists during this period included the institution of motherhood in their critiques, Firestone's suggestion that the physical condition of pregnancy would remain oppressive no matter what social, political, or economic alterations were made placed her at the far end of the spectrum of feminist antinatalism.<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, feminists have examined parenthood as a period of often traumatic transition for women and have also considered the increasing technologisation of pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>79</sup> In addition scholars such as Ann Oakley have applied sociological concepts of work to mothering. Oakley criticised existing sociology for not identifying the position of women in society. For her, 'Interviewing women was...a strategy for documenting women's own accounts of their lives.'<sup>80</sup> Oakley challenged the desirability of marriage and the nuclear family and concluded: 'The housewife role must be abolished. The family must be abolished. Gender roles must be abolished.'<sup>81</sup> However appraisals of motherhood such as Oakley's have been criticised by later feminists for taking too narrow a view. For example Sarah Ruddick has challenged the negative portrayals of motherhood by some feminists, advocating for the importance of mothering work not just for children but for society as a whole.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Lauri Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived, Feminism and the Legacies of the Sixties* (London: New York University Press, 1996), p. 32.

<sup>79</sup> For example see Phyllis Mary Henry, *Maternity Care: Mothers' Experiences of Childbirth* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967); Ann Oakley, *Becoming a Mother* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1979); Ann Oakley, *Women Confined: Towards a Sociology of Childbirth* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1980); Dana Breen, *Talking with Mothers* (London: Jill Norman, 1981); Mary Georgina Boulton, *On Being a Mother: A Study of Women with Pre-School Children* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1983).

<sup>80</sup> Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1974), pp. 1-28; Ann Oakley, 'Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms', in Helen Roberts (ed.), *Doing Feminist Research* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 30-61, p. 40. See also Helen Z. Lopata, *Occupation Housewife* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1977).

<sup>81</sup> Ann Oakley, *Housewife* (London: Allen Lane, 1974), p. 22. In her autobiography Oakley states these conclusions should be understood in a metaphysical rather than a literal sense. Ann Oakley, *Taking It Like a Woman* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1984), p. 89.

<sup>82</sup> Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (London: The Women's Press, 1990).

Feminists have also drawn on psychoanalysis as a means of understanding motherhood. According to Nancy Chodorow, 'Mothering is most eminently a psychologically based role.'<sup>83</sup> Inspired by the work of Margaret Mahler, Chodorow has argued that because women are responsible for mothering daughters and sons are treated differently and in consequence develop differently.<sup>84</sup> Daughters, who share a 'core female identity' with their mothers, are encouraged to imitate them while sons are expected to be separate and autonomous.<sup>85</sup> During the oedipal conflict the daughter remained in an 'attached' relationship, which ideally suited her for adopting the caring and nurturing responsibilities in the domestic sphere. The son, on the other hand, turned away from his mother and towards his father whom he saw as more worthy. He adopted competitive traits which were suited to the powerful public sphere.<sup>86</sup> While Chodorow acknowledges the importance of the outside world in which the mother moves, she ultimately concludes, 'Women come to be mothers because they have been mothered by women.'<sup>87</sup> Chodorow's work was taken up by the women's movement as the most competently theorised new writing on mothering,<sup>88</sup> however she has also been criticised for her presumption that families were healthy, white, western and middle class, with a strong, rational father at the head.<sup>89</sup> Pauline Bart and Judith Lorber have both censured Chodorow for ignoring sociological research on the mothers' practical experience by relying on clinical data in her analysis. They claim that she has overlooked variations in the mother's situation such as the number of children in the family, the birth order of the

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<sup>83</sup> Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), p. 32.

<sup>84</sup> Margaret S. Mahler, Fred Pine and Anni Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> Chodorow, *Reproduction*, p. 151.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10, 39.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>88</sup> Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female?: Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (Virago, London, 1994), p. 136.

<sup>89</sup> Janneke van Mens-Verhulst, 'Reinventing the Mother-Daughter Relationship', *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 49 (1995), 526-39.

sons and daughters, and the mother's and the child's health.<sup>90</sup> Doane and Hodges believe Chodorow has perpetuated the myth of 'insatiable children and selfless mothers', which positioned women's role as primarily maternal.<sup>91</sup> Consequently Hirsch has noted that 'while psychoanalytic feminism can add the female child to the male, allowing women to speak as daughters, it has difficulty accounting for the experience and the voice of the adult woman who is mother.'<sup>92</sup>

The theoretical debates detailed above provide the context for this thesis and inform the interpretation of the oral history material. Contemporary community studies which examined traditional neighbourhoods and modern estates, the effects of mobility, and the role of kin are appraised in the survey of Oxfordshire undertaken in chapter three. Chapter four, which examines the place of mother in the family and wider community, considers the construction of women and the family in post-war sociology, but also the challenge to this often benign view which was offered by Betty Friedan, Hannah Gavron and Ann Oakley. Chapter five addresses ideas of how women become mothers, considering the influence of psychoanalytic theories and sociological approaches. It also explores how the discourse of 'scientific motherhood' (which Davin notes originated in the late-nineteenth century) evolved in the period 1945-1970. The development of 'scientific motherhood' is further explored in chapter six, which reviews the maternity care on offer to women in Oxfordshire in the context of the hypothesis of the medicalisation of childbirth put forward by Oakley and others. Mother-centred theories of psychoanalysis, and the criticisms of these (as discussed above), are the focus of

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<sup>90</sup> Pauline Bart, 'Review of Chodorow's *Reproduction of Mothering*', in J. Trebilcot (ed.), *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory* (New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), 147-52; Judith Lorber, 'On *The Reproduction of Mothering: A Methodological Debate*', *Signs*, 6 (1981), 482-6, p. 483. See also Alice Rossi, 'On *The Reproduction of Mothering: A Methodological Debate*', *Signs*, 6 (1981), 492-500, p. 496, n. 34; Ellen Ross, 'New Thoughts on the Oldest Vocation: Mothers and Motherhood in Recent Feminist Scholarship', *Signs*, 20 (1995), 397-413.

<sup>91</sup> Doane and Hodges, *Klein to Kristeva*, p. 41, 51.

chapter seven, which considers ideas of 'good' and 'bad' mothering as interpreted by mid-century authorities on childcare. Chapter eight draws on second-wave feminist critiques of full-time motherhood for women, but also the assertions of later feminists that the value of mothering as an activity should be recognised, in order to assess attitudes to mothers and their work inside and outside the home. Finally, chapter nine considers conceptions of motherhood, both in the period 1945-1970 and beyond, to see how the interviewees related to the changing ideas about the role of women in the family influenced by second wave feminism from the late-1960s and 1970s.

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<sup>92</sup> Hirsch, *Mother/Daughter*, p. 12.

## Chapter Three: *Oxford and Oxfordshire Contexts*

### Introduction

One of the aims of this research project is to investigate the importance of locality in shaping lived experience and to engage, in Charles Phythian-Adam's words, in the process of 'unravelling localized identities.'<sup>1</sup> Did where women lived and the type of community they lived in affect their experiences of being a mother between 1945 and 1970? Using Oxfordshire as a case study it is possible to examine a range of communities: rural, urban and suburban. Within these categories there are further differences such as those between the middle-class suburbs of north Oxford and the lower-middle and working-class suburbs of east Oxford, and between expanding villages and static villages. While ethnicity and religion are also important variables in determining people's experiences of community they were not particularly significant in Oxfordshire at this time. Female immigrants from Commonwealth countries were not common in Oxfordshire before the 1970s and none were interviewed for this study. Although many women had attended church as children and recalled the importance of the church in their social life, from church fêtes to Mothers' Union meetings, they did not present religion as a determining factor in their experiences of motherhood. Their silence regarding to religion may have resulted from its declining social significance in the latter half of the century.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Phythian-Adams, *Re-thinking English Local History* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), p. xii.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Williams and Margaret Houlbrook have found the influence of religion in regulating behaviour was strong in London, but women in Oxford did not report this as being the case. Religion seemed to play a stronger role in Oxfordshire's villages and small towns than larger urban and suburban areas. Sarah Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c. 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University

Sociologists and social anthropologists writing during the 1950s and 1960s attributed the different social characteristics they found in communities to the particular nature of the areas they studied. In rural communities the extended family was considered to be particularly strong because there was little mobility and much intermarriage.<sup>3</sup> It was also believed that the father-son tie was stronger in rural areas because men shared the same occupation and farms were passed down the male line.<sup>4</sup> The middle classes were held to be less kin-orientated than the working classes. Geographical mobility meant they lived away from family and therefore friends played a more important role. These friends tended to come from further away, were found through education and employment rather than amongst neighbours, and they were often found through the husband rather than the wife.<sup>5</sup> Families in the suburban estates of both the inter-war and post-war years were thought to be more privatised because there was no sense of neighbourhood, which in turn left women lonelier and more isolated than they were in traditional urban communities.<sup>6</sup> There were a number of social surveys and community studies undertaken in Oxfordshire at this time such as John Mogeys study of St Ebbe's and Barton, Margaret Stacey's studies of Banbury, and the Barnett House survey, which provide the basis for this chapter.<sup>7</sup>

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Press, 1999); Margaret Houlbrook, 'Rite Out of the Past: The Churcing of Women in the Twentieth Century', Social History Society 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference, University of Reading, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> C.F. Kuchemann, A.J. Boyce and G.A. Harrison, 'A Demographic and Genetic Study of a Group of Oxfordshire Villages', in Michael Drake (ed.), *Applied Historical Studies* (London: Methuen, 1973), 195-220, p. 211.

<sup>4</sup> W.M. Williams, *A West Country Village: Ashworthy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 181-2.

<sup>5</sup> Colin Bell, *Middle Class Families: Social and Geographical Mobility* (London: Kegan and Routledge Paul, 1968), pp. 93-5.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> John M. Mogeys, *Family and Neighbourhood: Two Studies in Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956); Margaret Stacey, *Tradition and Change: A Study of Banbury* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960); Margaret Stacey, Eric Batstone, Colin Bell and Anne Murcott, *Power, Persistence and Change: A Second Study of Banbury* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975); A.F.C. Bourdillon (ed.), *A Survey of the Social Services in the Oxford District, I, Economics and Government of a Changing Area* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938); A.F.C. Bourdillon (ed.), *A Survey of the Social Services in the Oxford District, II, Local Administration in a Changing Area* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940).

Oxfordshire is also a suitable place for testing other variables which could influence women's attitudes towards motherhood. Oxfordshire has a population with a variety of educational experiences amongst its female inhabitants, from those who attended rural elementary schools where a range of ages were taught in one or two rooms by one or two teachers, to women who were Oxford University graduates. During this period Oxfordshire was often at the forefront of developments in maternal care. These changes came in part from a forward-looking medical profession, encouraged by the presence of a teaching hospital – there was the early provision of a family planning clinic in 1935 and a move to attaching health visitors to doctors' practices in 1955 – but also because the city attracted influential middle-class intellectuals such as the birth educator Sheila Kitinger. In both Oxfordshire and the city of Oxford maternal mortality, infant mortality and perinatal mortality rates were generally below the national average. The rates for Oxford also tended to be lower than those for Oxfordshire. There were many significant differences in the maternity care women received from the Oxford Public Health Department and the Oxfordshire Public Health Department, such as in the provision of antenatal classes, child welfare clinics, and the proportion of home-births.<sup>8</sup> There is an interesting comparison to be made between the two authorities in the provision of care in urban and rural areas.

This chapter will analyse the nature and history of each of the Oxfordshire areas I am investigating and how this affected women's experiences of living within them. The themes which will be focused upon are employment patterns, population trends and the provision of services. It will provide the context for assessing to what extent and in what

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<sup>8</sup> City of Oxford Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health, Bodleian Library; Oxfordshire County Council Annual Reports of the County Medical Officer of Health and Principal School Medical Officer, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies; Jessie Parfitt, *The Health of a City: Oxford 1770-1974* (Oxford: The Amate Press, 1987).

ways women's experiences of motherhood depended upon the localities in which they lived.

## **Oxford**

The city of Oxford had expanded rapidly in the years before World War Two. Its growth had been irregular because of its geography and history and it did not follow a conventional concentric pattern. Large areas of open space alongside the flood plains of the Isis and Cherwell rivers remained within the city centre. Housing development, which spread out from the ancient centre, took place between and beyond these open spaces. The principal areas of house building were to the southeast along Cowley and Iffley roads, with additional lines of development to the east along London Road, to the south along Abingdon Road, to the west along Botley Road, and to the north along Woodstock and Banbury roads.<sup>9</sup> With the development of the North Oxford suburb in the mid-nineteenth century Oxford's residents began to include a growing number of retired army officers, civil servants, literary and professional men and women, a society of rentiers, widows and sisters. These newcomers generated a buoyant local demand for services and goods, including domestic service, supplementing that of the University and Oxford's native and prospering commercial and professional classes. Oxford's middle-class residents, the women in particular, also had an important social role to play and involved themselves in welfare and charitable work with disadvantaged mothers and children. During the post-1945 period Oxford had a substantial proportion of middle-class, educated women, who were at the forefront of challenging conventional wisdom about the mother's role and current maternity practices. The uncertain nature of men's

work in the Oxford colleges meant that in the first half of the century women's employment was both required and accepted.<sup>10</sup> The payment for domestic service was higher than in most other available occupations, which encouraged its popularity. It was also believed that domestic service was a good preparation for young girls in their future career as wives and mothers. Violet Butler discovered that the most sought after employment for young girls was taking out a baby. She believed this was 'rather hard on the babies, but it gives their nurses some rudimentary ideas of how to look after them.'<sup>11</sup>

By the inter-war years Oxford enjoyed the more general prosperity of the south-east as the region became the most advanced in the country. Oxford benefited from the expansion of certain types of industries such as light engineering and motorcar production, which from the beginning of the century tended to be located in the midlands and the south. In the inter-war period these regions took an increasing share of net industrial output. The most prosperous towns in the country were now Coventry, Luton, Oxford and Reading, whereas before 1914 they were found in the north and on the Celtic fringe.<sup>12</sup> Ian Scargill argues that that 'the transformation of Oxford began in 1920.' While in 1920 Morris Motors produced fewer than 2,000 cars five years later the total exceeded 55,000. Further growth followed the establishment of the Pressed Steel Company on an adjacent site in 1926 and the adoption soon afterwards of the moving assembly line. The total workforce in the Oxford car industry had grown from 200 in

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Collison and John M. Moge, 'Residence and Social Class in Oxford', *American Journal of Sociology*, 64 (1959), 599-605, p. 599; See also Chris Day, *Modern Oxford: A History of the City from 1771* (London: University of London, 1979).

<sup>10</sup> Fred Bickerton, *Fred of Oxford* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1953); Olive Gibbs, 'Our Olive' *The Autobiography of Olive Gibbs* (Oxford: Robert Dugdale, 1989); Raphael Samuel, "'Quarry Roughs': Life and Labour in Headington Quarry, 1860-1920. An Essay in Oral History', in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Village Life and Labour* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 139-263.

<sup>11</sup> Violet C. Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1912), pp. 67-68.

<sup>12</sup> Richard C. Whiting, *The View from Cowley: The Impact of Industrialization upon Oxford 1918-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 2.

1919 to 10,000 by the early-1930s.<sup>13</sup> Some of this labour was recruited locally as college servants discovered an alternative to the low pay of university work, but large numbers were drawn from outside the city. In February 1931, of 4,278 workers at Morris Motors and Pressed Steel about 70 percent lived in Oxford itself and of the rest about half came from villages and towns within 5 miles of the city and the other half from further afield.<sup>14</sup> The Earl of Mayo, S.D. Adshead and Patrick Abercrombie wrote in their regional planning report on Oxfordshire that, 'There is growing up in Oxfordshire what may be called a 'rurban' population, a population which works in the town and there has the interest of its occupation and its wage, but which lives in the country.'<sup>15</sup> The divisions between urban and rural in Oxfordshire were under modification in the post-war period and grew less clear as Oxford became increasingly important as an employment centre.

Oxford was also a magnet to the unemployed from around the country. In the 1930s forty-three percent of all male insured workers in Oxford were recent immigrants. Of these immigrants the largest proportion, 36.7 percent came from south-west England, 10.8 percent came from Wales, for the most part from south Wales, and 10.7 percent from London. The south-eastern region contributed 9 percent and the midlands 8.2 percent.<sup>16</sup> The growth of the car works meant that the occupational structure of the population had been transformed in the inter-war years. In 1920 the male workforce was largely made up of craftsmen and unskilled labourers. The growth of the vehicle industry introduced a new group of semi-skilled workers, capable of earning as much as the traditional craftsmen. Between 1921 and 1937 the population of Oxford grew from 67,290 to an

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<sup>13</sup> D. Ian Scargill, 'Responses to Growth in Modern Oxford', in Richard C. Whiting (ed.), *Oxford: Studies in the History of a University Town since 1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 110-30, p. 111.

<sup>14</sup> The Earl of Mayo, S.D. Adshead and Patrick Abercrombie, *Regional Planning Report on Oxfordshire* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

<sup>16</sup> Bourdillon, *Social Services, I*, pp. 25-46.

estimated 96,350.<sup>17</sup> No-one could be unaware of the changes that were taking place. The implications of rapid population growth for the social, economic and administrative development of Oxford and its immediate neighbourhood was the subject of a two-volume study carried out in the late-1930s for Barnett House, the Social Studies Department of the University. Scargill asserts that this wide-ranging investigation, covering employment, housing, local government, planning, education, health and other services, a local equivalent of the Barlow Report at the national scale, provides the foundation of those academic analyses of Oxford's development that have taken place over the course of the succeeding half-century.<sup>18</sup> Oxford and Oxfordshire were the subject of many studies in the second half of the century, such as Mogeys's comparison of St Ebbe's and Barton or Stacey's studies of Banbury and this interest means conditions in Oxford and Oxfordshire were well-documented. While women's experiences are not the principal focus of these studies, they still provide valuable context.

One of the more striking consequences of Oxford's growth was the geographical separation of the different social classes and the distinct characters of its different areas. Peter Collison and John Mogeys revealed the extent of these divisions in their 1959 study, 'Residence and Social Class in Oxford'. Collison and Mogeys divided Oxford into five sectors (north, east, south-east, south and west) and looked at the distribution of the different social classes, measured on the five tier Registrar General's occupational scale, in each area. They found that in the north sector, which consisted of North Oxford and Summertown, class one and to some extent class two, which included university lecturers, were heavily overrepresented, with the remaining classes underrepresented. The east sector, which was the area around Headington, conformed closely to the pattern of the

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<sup>17</sup> Scargill, 'Responses to Growth', pp. 111-2.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111-2.

city as a whole and was socially mixed. In the south-east, which included the Cowley works, classes one and two were underrepresented and class three, the skilled labourers, was overrepresented. In the south sector classes one, two and three were underrepresented and classes four and five were overrepresented. In the west classes one and two were underrepresented while class four was overrepresented.<sup>19</sup> They attributed the separation in part to the polarisation of the housing market into public and private sectors and in part to the distance separating the car factories from the old centre of employment around the university.<sup>20</sup> Oxford was a socially segregated city with important differences between its distinct areas, which determined both who lived there and what it was like to do so. For women in Oxford in the post-war period the neighbourhood they lived in determined not only the quality of housing they enjoyed but also the services and facilities available to them.

### **City Centre**

In her study of Oxford published in 1912 Violet Butler outlined the condition of the housing in the working-class districts of central Oxford in some depth. Butler thought these houses were really country cottages, without drainage or adequate foundations, but set up in rows. They were generally two-storied buildings, the front door opening on to the living-room from which a staircase led up to the bedrooms with a small scullery sometimes attached to the back of the house.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly in his survey of rural life published a year later, Seebohm Rowntree wrote that slum housing in rural areas 'might very often have been transplanted, singly or in rows, from some cheerless little street in a

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<sup>19</sup> Collison and Mogey, 'Residence', p. 601.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 603-5.

<sup>21</sup> Butler, *Social Conditions*, pp. 98-105.

sordid city area.’<sup>22</sup> Describing the housing in St Thomas’ where she grew up in the first decades of the twentieth century, Olive Gibbs recalled ‘front rooms kept immaculately cleaned and polished with bits of brass and china, presents from Southsea, or Weston-super-Mare, prominently displayed, together with plush-framed photographs of members of the family, mostly men in uniform.’<sup>23</sup> The interviewers who conducted the research for Mogey’s study of family and neighbourhood in Oxford relayed similar accounts of the St Ebbe’s interiors of the 1950s. One interviewer explained:

The room, apparently the living-room, gave immediately the impression of tidiness and cleanliness. There was a tremendous fire made of both coal and wood logs in the old-fashioned grate highly polished with black lead. The fender was low and there were pokers, &c., with brass knobs also highly polished.’<sup>24</sup>

The fact the houses seen by Mogey’s team corresponded so closely to those described by Gibbs demonstrates how little change had occurred over fifty years. The consequence of this continuity was that women were still struggling to maintain homes and raise children in houses without facilities such as bathrooms, inside toilets and central heating.

By the 1930s the worst of the houses had been condemned and declared as clearance areas. There were 1,200 houses classified as unfit for human habitation under the 1930 act and 780 of this number had been demolished or closed by 1937. The authors of the Barnett House survey believed the problem of slum clearance in Oxford was similar to that in other old non-industrial towns, but quite different to that existing in big industrial cities: ‘There are no large areas of uniformly mean and squalid houses, inhabited by the poorest sections of the community. Oxford’s ‘slums’ consist of small pockets of

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<sup>22</sup> B. Seebohm Rowntree, *How the Labourer Lives: A Study of the Rural Labour Problem* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1917) (1913), p. 329.

<sup>23</sup> Gibbs, ‘*Our Olive*’, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood*, p. 22.

insanitary houses.<sup>25</sup> In Oxford, the majority of the people removed from clearance areas came from these relatively small but well-established neighbourhoods. Mogey had found that long residence was common in St Ebbe's with almost seventy percent of the sample population having been married and living in their present house for ten years or longer. Fifty-five percent of the housewives interviewed were born and brought up in these parishes.<sup>26</sup> In their study of family and kinship in Bethnal Green and a new suburban estate at 'Greenleigh' in east London in the mid-1950s, Michael Young and Peter Willmott highlighted the isolation women could feel, separated from kin.<sup>27</sup> When the residents of Oxford's central areas were removed to new municipal housing developments in Cutteslowe, Barton and Rose Hill, the inhabitants of the new estates, particularly the women, faced many of the same problems sociologists had found their contemporaries encountering elsewhere.

While many of the same people may have lived in both the old areas and the new estates, the nature of the communities changed. The built environment of the areas was very different. In the city centre houses were packed tightly together. Small terraced houses with little private outside space meant the residents spent more time on the street. The community in the old areas was also stable with privately rented houses remaining in the family with rent-books passed down the generations. Houses in the new estates were usually semi-detached with gardens to the front and back, which meant that physically the families were further apart. Although many inhabitants of the old areas moved together to the new estates there was still great dislocation and all the residents had new neighbours. Women were particularly affected by the move and they suffered from the

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<sup>25</sup> Bourdillon, *Social Services, II*, p. 342.

<sup>26</sup> Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood*, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, p. 117.

lack of shops and provision for social life on the new estates.<sup>28</sup> Throughout the 1950s and much of the 1960s decentralisation was actively encouraged by planning policies which favoured the comprehensive redevelopment of run-down inner-city areas. Oxford faced renewed attempts at slum clearance. Demolition in St Ebbe's began in 1962 and was completed ten years later, with its population being rehoused at Cutteslowe, Barton, Rose Hill and the new estate at Blackbird Leys. The traditional, neighbourhood-centred community that Moge described had disappeared. Hannah Gavron demonstrated how the loss of street life she found in London in the 1960s meant: 'The young working class mother in this sample was confined to her home in a way that previous generations may not have been.'<sup>29</sup> The move to new suburban estates meant that women were encountering a different type of neighbourhood and community life, and consequently a new experience of motherhood.

### **North Oxford and Summertown**

Until the nineteenth century the area of St Giles' Field was agricultural. Park Town was the first part of St Giles' Field to be developed in 1853 on land formerly owned by New College. Subsequently St John's College also began to develop the areas of North Oxford it owned. The area undoubtedly became characterised as a middle-class suburb.<sup>30</sup> The legacy of St John's ownership of North Oxford was still felt by residents after World War Two. Sarah lived in a North Oxford house owned by St John's in the 1940s. She recalled putting out her washing 'and our landlady, an elderly lady, brought it all for me one day and I thought how sweet of her, and then I discovered there was a clause, it was all St

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<sup>28</sup> In contrast in St Ebbe's, Moge had found a large range of shops and services on offer. There was a general store and public house about 100 yards from any front door, and a fish and chip shop and café within 250 yards. Churches and community halls were so over-abundant that some were used as warehouses or offices. Moge, *Family and Neighbourhood*, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Hannah Gavron, *The Captive Wife: Conflicts of Housebound Mothers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 132.

John's property, and there was a clause saying that no washing must be hung out.'<sup>31</sup> It was popularly assumed that the suburb of North Oxford was developed to provide housing for fellows of colleges of the university and their families once they were allowed to marry. However both Park Town and North Oxford were actually started twenty years before the University reforms which resulted in the increased number of career tutors permanently resident in Oxford. Once the reforms were in place many people associated with the University did come to live in these areas and the suburb certainly became portrayed, and not without some justification, as an academic place of residence.<sup>32</sup> The lifestyle of academic wives in the suburb was greatly influenced by the university. According to Shirley Ardener, there were two models of behaviour for the wives:

On the one hand there is the 'involved wife' participating in heady intellectual discussions in elegant social settings at home or in college and busily making a modest but real contribution towards community life and the aims of scholarship. On the other hand we have the 'excluded wife', frustrated, isolated, eating her (proverbial) scrambled eggs alone while waiting for her husband to return from stimulating talks across a laden college table or from pouring over his books as he adds to knowledge.<sup>33</sup>

Academic families in North Oxford seemed to display an extreme version of the characteristic Colin Bell found amongst middle-class couples in Swansea, whereby friends were found through the husband's work rather than through the wife.<sup>34</sup> For women who did not share in their husband's interests, the fluid nature of academic life meant that North Oxford could be a lonely place.

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<sup>30</sup> Ann Spokes Symonds, *The Changing Faces of North Oxford Book One* (Witney: Robert Boyd Publications, 1997), p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Sarah, NO2, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Tanis Hinchcliffe, *North Oxford* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 167-8.

<sup>33</sup> Shirley Ardener, 'Incorporation and Exclusion: Oxford Academic Wives', in Hilary Callan and Shirley Ardener (eds.), *The Incorporated Wife* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 27-49, p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> Bell, *Middle Class*, pp. 64-5.

The concentration of University families around the centre of Oxford had begun to change from 1913 when the residential requirement was abolished and voting rights in Congregation were reserved for the academic and administrative staff of the University. There was no longer any particular advantage to living within the one and a half mile limit and with the help of the motorcar and the bus University society, along with the rest of middle-class Oxford, began to move out beyond North Oxford to Foxcombe, Headington and Boar's Hill. This drift of senior members away from North Oxford meant that by World War Two the majority of the larger houses, built for large families with domestic staff, had been converted into flats, student accommodation or adapted for institutional use. Yvonne lived in the Woodstock Road when she had her first child in 1959 and described how the changing use of the houses meant that there were not many families living there. She said, 'It wasn't at all that kind of, it wasn't a baby demography, and a lot of the big old houses were broken up already and student houses, students or flats, or else they were older people, no babies.'<sup>35</sup> The loss of servants dramatically increased the workload of the women who remained in the houses. Mary Prior has described the arduous, dirty work girls in service in middle-class households faced before the war and their employers reliance upon them: 'The almost endless labour of these maids of all work was commented on with pity by a coal-labourer, but was part of the nature of things to the inhabitants of North Oxford.'<sup>36</sup> Consequently the absence of servants was keenly felt. Describing life for the wives of academics who remained in North Oxford in the post-war period Shirley Ardener writes, 'By then the household of the average Oxford academic was lucky if it had part-time help with the cleaning. In the 1950s and 1960s...many wives lived in vast, sometimes magnificent houses, hardly able

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<sup>35</sup> Yvonne, NO3, pp. 12-3.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Prior, *Fisher Row: Fishermen, Bargemen and Canal Boatmen in Oxford 1500-1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 333.

to keep them moderately tidy, let alone clean and warm.’<sup>37</sup> This decline in domestic service meant that middle-class women were now responsible for domestic work that would have been undertaken by servants for their mother’s generation. As well as being unpleasant this housework was time-consuming and deprived middle-class women of the free time they had seen their mothers enjoy; they found themselves tied to the home. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska argues that for women whose aspirations conflicted with the domestic role they were expected to fulfil, this situation was perceived as being degrading, boring and isolating and encouraged the rise of second-wave feminism.<sup>38</sup>

The nature of north Oxford<sup>39</sup> had also been altered with the building of a council estate just north of Summertown. In 1925 the City of Oxford Corporation had purchased part of Summertown Farm and six years later began to build council housing on the site which became known as the Cutteslowe Estate. The first houses were completed by 1932. In 1933 a section of land along the Banbury Road was sold to the Urban Housing Company (UHC) to form the Urban Housing Estate (UHE). This was a private estate of owner occupiers which later became known as the Sunnymeade Estate. During the construction of the UHE a temporary fence was erected between the two estates to prevent the inhabitants from the Cutteslowe Estate gaining access to the UHE. There was particular concern about slum clearance families who were rehoused in Cutteslowe in 1934. The UHC decided to keep the estate roads private and to build walls across Carlton and Wentworth Roads.<sup>40</sup> The Cutteslowe walls became a notorious symbol of class conflict between the residents of the private and council estates. Despite years of protest by the

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<sup>37</sup> Ardener, ‘Academic Wives’, p. 35.

<sup>38</sup> Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, ‘Housewifery’, in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 149-64, p. 153.

<sup>39</sup> North Oxford usually refers to the area between St Giles and Summertown whereas the term north Oxford encompasses the whole area from St Giles to the ring road.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Collison, *The Cutteslowe Walls: A Study in Social Class* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 45-53.

inhabitants of Cutteslowe against the walls, and their demolition on two occasions, the walls were not finally removed until 1959. The walls demonstrated the continued class tension between the two estates and how important social divisions remained. In the post-war decades north Oxford still saw a concentration of classes one and two. Even with the estate at Cutteslowe there was very little council housing in north Oxford and none at all within the first two miles of the city centre, which made the area attractive to people high in the social scale and maintained the degree of segregation of the social classes.<sup>41</sup> The hostility towards the council estate at Cutteslowe serves to illustrate the extent to which Summertown, and north Oxford in general, had been characterised as a middle-class area. In many ways, however, the lives of women living in both private and council estates were becoming similar. Small, nuclear families were the usual form of household on both types of estates at this time. Class differences continued to be keenly felt in the lives of women living in north Oxford during the post-war decades, but the decline in domestic service, smaller families, and rising marriage rates meant that housewifery and motherhood became the norm for all women. In practice their experiences were in some ways converging.

### **Cowley and Florence Park**

In the inter-war years Cowley became synonymous with the motorcar industry. The rise of Morris Motors was dramatic: in 1920 Morris had only been producing five percent of cars built in the UK, by 1925 his share was up to forty-one percent.<sup>42</sup> In 1926 the firm Pressed Steel was also opened in Cowley, originally set up by William Morris and others to press bodies for Morris Motors. Morris later surrendered his shares and Pressed Steel expanded to take orders from other manufacturers. By 1936 the people employed by

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>42</sup> Whiting, *Cowley*, p. 32.

Morris Motors and the Pressed Steel Company numbered thirty percent of the insured workers in the area.<sup>43</sup> As such a large employer the Cowley works had a profound impact on the local area and its influence was pervasive. The works provided employment opportunities for women as well as men. Women became involved as workers at Cowley most conspicuously during World War Two, but were also part of the workforce both before and after the war. Prior to 1914 the number of women employed in the motor industry had been negligible but by 1930 women contributed one-sixth of the labour force and were employed not only in the glue shop, canteen services, despatch offices and cleaning, but also on the lines.<sup>44</sup> These women made their presence felt. The twelve-day strike at Pressed Steel in 1934 was started by women from the press shop marching off the line as their wages were found yet again to be short. Anne-Marie Sweeney argues that:

The women in the press shop knocked the widely held belief that women were intrinsically unsuited to heavy, dirty or wet work...The argument made by the 1934 strikes was that all workers were unsuited to hazardous and heavy working conditions. It was the start of a trade union movement of both men and women, organizing to protect both standards of living and health and safety conditions.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the poor working conditions, employment at Cowley was highly attractive for women because of the higher wages they could earn. Domestic labour was low paid in comparison, five shillings to ten shillings a week for school leavers, sixteen shillings to one pound for women over eighteen. In Cowley the wages at the start of the 1934 strike were approximately a shilling an hour, depending on piece rate.<sup>46</sup> These higher wages enabled the women working there a degree of economic independence. However until World War Two it was the unwritten practice at Cowley to dismiss a woman on marriage.

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<sup>43</sup> Bourdillon, *Social Services, I*, p. 73.

<sup>44</sup> Anne-Marie Sweeney, 'Women Making Cars, Making Trouble, Making History', in Teresa Hayter and David Harvey (eds.), *The Factory and the City: The Story of the Cowley Automobile Workers in Oxford* (London: Mansell, 1994), 116-39, p. 117.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120-1.

After the war the majority stopped work upon the birth of their first child. For most women their knowledge of the car factories was derived from their husbands. Despite the presence of women workers the car factories were conceived of as a masculine place.

There were various social activities for the workers at Cowley which were sponsored by the firm. A social club at Crescent Road was opened in 1929 on land William Morris had purchased for them. Morris took a visible part in these activities, giving out the trophies at football matches, presiding at annual dinners, and attending sports meetings. Of more material benefit was a life insurance scheme, set up in January 1926 and paid for by the firm, which provided coverage up to £100.<sup>47</sup> Morris Motors was known for a paternalist approach to its workforce. It organised a savings club, a benevolent club and a sickness fund for its workforce, but unions were opposed. Morris's paternalism did not extend to direct housing provision, although in 1926 Morris asked Headington Rural District Council, then responsible for Cowley, to build housing to sell to its workers. This initiative resulted in the first large housing estate in Cowley at Bullingdon Fields.<sup>48</sup> However it was private speculative house builders who from the late-1920s began to respond most vigorously to the new demand.<sup>49</sup> Francis Moody shows that the council positively encouraged this private building firstly by constructing roads and sewers and secondly by selling the plots to builders.<sup>50</sup> Florence Park was unusual in that it was built to be let rather than sold. The company of N. Moss & Son of Cardiff purchased 73 acres of land for £13,000 from Christ Church College in 1933 and then proceeded to rapidly

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>47</sup> Whiting, *Cowley*, p. 38.

<sup>48</sup> Malcolm Graham, 'Housing Development on the Urban Fringe of Oxford 1850-1914', *Oxoniensia*, 55 (1991), 147-66, p. 157.

<sup>49</sup> Stephen Ward, Ossie Stuart and Erik Swyngedouw, 'Cowley in the Oxford Economy', in Teresa Hayter and David Harvey, *The Factory and the City: The Story of the Cowley Automobile Workers in Oxford* (London: Mansell, 1993), 67-92, p. 75.

<sup>50</sup> Francis H. Moody, 'Florence Park: A History of its Development and Building', Unpublished MSt thesis, Oxford University, 1999, p. 32.

build the Florence Park Estate, consisting of 610 houses, using Welsh labour. The land where the estate was built was known as Pether's farm, a very wet and boggy site.<sup>51</sup> The houses that were built were of two types. Those on the central avenue, the main Florence Park Road, were the parlour type. These houses had two rooms downstairs with a small kitchen, three to four bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs. The vast majority were the non-parlour type, which only had one living room, a kitchen and bathroom downstairs and three or four bedrooms upstairs. All had a larder under the stairs.<sup>52</sup> Inside, the houses had fireplaces in the living rooms made of Welsh slate treated to look like marble, with back boilers to heat the water. There were built-in cupboards each side of the fire that held the airing cupboard, hot water tank and gas and electric meters. The kitchens had deep stone sinks and wooden draining boards with floors of red quarry tile. Upstairs the two main bedrooms had small gas fires, but these were very rarely used and most families relied on the one source of heat in the living room for the whole house.<sup>53</sup> For women moving in to these new houses from slums in the city or rented rooms, living conditions were greatly improved. Families now had a home to themselves, indoor bathrooms and piped water and gas.

While the houses promised much, the estate had been built so rapidly that in some cases as little as three weeks was taken from start to finish. Consequently the houses were poorly finished and the whole site was prone to flooding. Arthur Excell moved in shortly after the estate was built and describes the conditions he found:

We got settled in, but the whole place was disgraceful. Some people moved in one week and out the next, but there was such a shortage of houses in Oxford, that Moss & Co had no worry about getting tenants...One day I saw the concrete floor crack and a type of wild rhubarb plant come up. Another

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<sup>51</sup> Arthur Excell, *The Politics of the Production Line: Autobiography of an Oxford Car Worker* (Oxford: History Workshop Journal, 1981), p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Sheila Tree, *The Changing Faces of Florence Park* (Witney: Robert Boyd, 2001), p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

day when the chain was pulled the cistern came down off the wall. Most people had that complaint. And then when we had some heavy rain, the water rushed down the back garden straight through the back door rising to a depth of six inches and out through the front door.<sup>54</sup>

By 1935 the residents began to mobilise themselves and a rent strike was organised.<sup>55</sup>

Class tensions in Oxford were reinforced by divisions in housing. Moreover as their work-lives in the Cowley factories became increasingly politicised this struggle spilt over into the workers' lives outside the factories as well. Neither Hope nor her husband were employed by the factory yet they still felt their daily life was influenced by events inside its gates. Hope described how the falling numbers and industrial unrest in the works, particularly in the 1970s, affected the wider community: 'when there was a strike on the feel of Cowley was different, and there weren't the people in the shops and the shop owners weren't happy because they weren't getting the trade. It was quite nasty.' When asked whether she felt the effects of it even though she was not directly involved, she replied, 'Oh yes. Yes the atmosphere of the place changed.'<sup>56</sup>

The new housing estates around Cowley were very much the products of the local motor industry. For example as Lisa, whose husband was employed at the works in the 1960s, recalled:

we had a semi-detached house in Dodgson Road where most of the people in that road were working in the factory. There were people doing other things but it was very much in those days, there were many thousands of people working in the car factory, and a lot of them lived around there, and went off to work with a bike every morning for seven fifteen in the morning, and that was life for some thirty years.<sup>57</sup>

The residential concentration of the working class which resulted did not imply any obvious social solidarity however. The workers who lived on the estates had been

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<sup>54</sup> Excell, *Production Line*, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Ward *et al*, 'Cowley in the Oxford Economy', p. 76.

<sup>56</sup> Hope, CO11, pp. 24-5.

<sup>57</sup> Lisa, CO12, p. 8.

attracted to Oxford from various backgrounds and were settled in an area which did little to break down the barriers of regional difference. The divisions within the Florence Park estate led Francis Moody to conclude that it was not a 'cohesive community'.<sup>58</sup> Arthur Excell was a Welsh immigrant living on the Florence Park Estate which became known as 'little Rhondda' because the Welsh population was so high. Nonetheless he described the hostility the Welsh faced, 'The Oxford people didn't want the Welsh, because the Welsh were undercutting the English...When I went to live on the estate the hatred against the Welsh was terrible.'<sup>59</sup> These Welsh immigrants suffered isolation from their friends and relatives as later Commonwealth immigrants did. Women were thought to be particularly affected because they had previously relied so heavily on support from kin. Women shared the same trade of housewifery, with knowledge and skills passed down the generations; increased mobility meant that this chain was broken. Mogeys gave the example of a Welsh woman who had missed the advice of her kin and struggled to learn how to care for her sons.<sup>60</sup> The estates were believed to foster a more privatised, insular lifestyle centred on the nuclear family. Comparing Barton and St Ebbe's Mogeys found that the neighbourhood-centred society of St Ebbe's had been replaced by a family-centred society at Barton.<sup>61</sup> The estates themselves were several miles from the centre of the city, usually on its eastern edge. Richard Whiting argues these peripheral estates experienced severe problems of social dislocation, such as crime, vandalism, youth disaffection and inadequate leisure facilities.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Moody, *Florence Park*, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> Excell, *Production Line*, p. 2.

<sup>60</sup> Mogeys, *Family and Neighbourhood*, p. 66.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 152-3.

<sup>62</sup> Richard C. Whiting, 'Association and Separation in the Working Class, 1920-1970', in Whiting (ed.), *Oxford*, 144-66, p. 161.

Whether in the form of the privately-built estates of the 1930s or the later council provision of the 1950s and 1960s, housing in Cowley was larger in scale and more uniform in character than anything in the older working-class districts. Whiting describes the social context of the estates as being ‘rather barren’.<sup>63</sup> Young and Willmott found a similar picture at ‘Greenleigh’, an Essex council estate. Mrs Prince, one of the women interviewed, told them, ‘When I first came I felt that I had done a crime, it was so bare.’<sup>64</sup> Rebecca lived in Jericho, a traditional city-centre neighbourhood, but volunteered at the Rose Hill family planning clinic. She described what life was like for the women living on the estate:

Young mums came to the clinic and they were always dressed up with the baby, you know the toddler or whatever they’d got that was dressed up. And it was their outing, and they met people at the clinic and we encouraged this very much but I did think, you know it was rather sad. And one rather snappy doctor did say, because of course we only had one room and then a curtain, ‘Wouldn’t your mother look after the children when you come?’ and I thought you old cow, but it was noisy, she had to raise her voice and so on. And they never had anybody they could leave the children with. Eventually I suppose they got to know each other, but er a sort of family planning clinic isn’t really where you want to spend your little outing.<sup>65</sup>

In the estates at Cowley the situation was somewhat improved as time progressed and the communities within them developed. Women began to meet at the shops, clinics and outside the school gates. There were some facilities on the estates from their creation and more were introduced. Florence Park was unusual in that it was the only privately built estate to have shops, most of which were on a very grand central avenue. In addition, it had its own doctor’s house and a park. The residents also formed their own associations to provide support and services for their communities. The Florence Park Residents Association was launched in 1949 and moved into its own purpose-built community

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<sup>63</sup> Whiting, *Cowley*, p. 69.

<sup>64</sup> Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, p. 117.

<sup>65</sup> Rebecca, OX10, pp. 18-9.

centre in 1957.<sup>66</sup> A Young Wives Club started in Florence Park in 1960 with about sixty members and belonged to the National Woman's Club.<sup>67</sup> Judy was a resident of Florence Park at this time. She described how active the Community Centre was and the importance of the centre to her. 'There was lots going on at the Community Centre here...There was a Young Wives' group...And there were fitness classes and things like that that I went to...It was very good. A good way to meet other people and get out of the house.'<sup>68</sup> Moreover not everyone regretted moving away from their old areas and to the new estates. Michael Mann found that most of the Bird's factory workers he questioned, who relocated from Birmingham to Banbury between 1965 and 1966, liked their new place of residence and 'a majority of those in sample who lived in the traditional working-class areas of Birmingham did not even like their supposed 'communities'.<sup>69</sup> While the patterns of community seen in the traditional working-class neighbourhoods of the city centre were never replicated on the new estates, the estates did mature as the post-war period progressed and women found new ways of associating and organising. Women could experience such estates as friendly places.<sup>70</sup>

## **Oxfordshire**

At the start of the twentieth century Oxfordshire was predominantly a rural county. However the nineteenth century had seen a decline in the power of agriculture, as in the country at large, and it continued to decrease in the twentieth century.<sup>71</sup> Over the period

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<sup>66</sup> Tree, *Florence Park*, p. 61.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>68</sup> Judy, CO10, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Mann, *Workers on the Move: The Sociology of Relocation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 172, 235.

<sup>70</sup> See pages 94-7.

<sup>71</sup> Pamela Horn, 'The Village in Victorian Oxfordshire', *Oxfordshire Local History*, 1 (1983), 17-32, p. 17.

1911 to 1931 the number of agricultural workers in the county fell by roughly one-half.<sup>72</sup> In contrast the population of the county experienced significant growth. Between 1921 and 1931 the rural districts of Oxfordshire showed a large increase (22.2 percent) from 16,650 to 20,352. There were some significant exceptions to this expansion with the remoter villages away from the main roads showing little growth and some losses.<sup>73</sup> In 1931 nearly one-third of the occupied men who lived in the rural districts were still engaged in agricultural occupations. The remainder were chiefly in employment connected with the motor industry and in building and transport.<sup>74</sup> Workers went into the aluminium factory at Banbury, which opened in 1931, cement production at Shipton-on-Cherwell, aerodrome construction, and the Witney blanket mills. Morris's factory had inevitably attracted workers from the rural regions around Oxford. In 1936, 1,332 workers who had first taken out employment books in the rural areas of Oxfordshire from the Bicester, Chipping Norton, Thame and Witney branch districts exchanged them in Oxford.<sup>75</sup> Many of them travelled into Cowley every day from the villages nearby and in 1936 the 'satellite' villages around Oxford sent 1,677 workers into the car factories. In sum it was estimated that around 3,000 ex-agricultural workers were in the Cowley motor industry by 1936.<sup>76</sup> Many of the husbands and fathers of the women in Benson worked at Cowley. For example Tina said that her husband worked at Morris' in the early-1960s which, she thought, 'nearly everyone did in Benson.'<sup>77</sup> Her perception was of the motor industry as being a dominant employer for village men. In reality this claim was somewhat exaggerated, but it demonstrates how powerful the presence of the car factories was felt to be by residents of the villages around Oxford.

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<sup>72</sup> Bourdillon, *Social Services, I*, p. 139.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>76</sup> Whiting, *Cowley*, p. 39.

<sup>77</sup> Tina, BE3, p. 17.

There were obvious incentives for men to switch jobs from agriculture to the new industries, particularly since many of them still lived in the villages and avoided paying high rents. Wages in the rural industries were regarded as very low and the depression of the 1920s had meant farmers were keen to dispense with labour.<sup>78</sup> In some respects the outlook was rather brighter in the years after World War Two. As Alun Howkins puts it, 'British farming stood high in public opinion'. With high wartime profits and the provision of the 1947 Agricultural Act – which guaranteed prices for the vast majority of agricultural products – most farmers were able to face the immediate post-war world with a sense of moderate wellbeing and security.<sup>79</sup> There were limitations to this picture of prosperity. Howkins demonstrates how those who worked in agriculture and its associated trades were already under threat by the early-1950s. The increase in numbers employed in agriculture during the war was sustained immediately afterwards, but declined in the years after 1950.<sup>80</sup> Discussing agriculture in Oxfordshire in 1954 John Russell wrote, 'The labour problem is becoming more and more serious.'<sup>81</sup> Farmers dealt with this problem by increasing mechanisation. In consequence Oxfordshire continued to experience both a decline in agriculture and a rapid industrial development in the second half of the century. Theresa, a resident of Adderbury, thought that her husband typified these changes. He had left farming and taken employment in a garage after World War Two, a common experience for village men at the time, who:

had been in the army and had done better things, learnt to drive, learnt mechanics and that, and of course, the General Foods opened and there was the aluminium works, different factories were open, and of course the farms had got more mechanised so they didn't need so many, I think they got used to [doing] without them during the war.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Whiting, *Cowley*, p. 40.

<sup>79</sup> Alun Howkins, *The Death of Rural England* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 142, 145.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>81</sup> E. John Russell, 'Agriculture', in A.F. Martin and R.W. Steel, *The Oxford Region: A Scientific and Historical Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 132-40, p. 135, 140.

<sup>82</sup> Theresa, BA10, p. 18.

In his 1913 survey *How the Labourer Lives* Seebohm Rowntree found that average weekly earnings for agricultural labourers in Oxfordshire were the lowest in country at fourteen shillings and eleven pence.<sup>83</sup> However Rowntree also found that subsidiary earnings by other members of the family and produce from gardens and allotments helped to supplement the male worker's income.<sup>84</sup> With reference to the village of Headington Quarry, Raphael Samuel has described the extent to which all family members contributed to the family living before World War One.<sup>85</sup> Families continued to supplement the male wage after World War One. Recalling her childhood growing up in the village of Ducklington between the wars, Mollie Harris writes:

Everybody had big allotments as well as their gardens. Both men and women toiled on these; into late evenings they would work, growing enough potatoes and other vegetables to last all the year round. Children, too, helped their parents with picking up potatoes, hoeing, and weeding.<sup>86</sup>

There were also other ways of adding to the family's income, such as poaching, wooding and gleaning. Harris explains:

I really do not know how some of the families in the village would have managed to survive in those days without a bit of poaching. And although our Mother did not encourage Bern or Bunt to go, she was really quite glad when Denis, the youngest, took it up.<sup>87</sup>

While women's employment in field-work was in steady decline (in 1911 there were 94,700 females employed in agriculture, in 1921 there were 83,100, but by 1931 this fell to 55,700<sup>88</sup>) they still added to the family's earnings. Discussing women's contribution to the family economy in the village of Headington Quarry, Samuel argues:

housekeeping itself depended on her own efforts rather than the amount of his allowance. The children's clothes, for instance, depended upon her skills with the needle and thread...Pig-keeping was the joint responsibility of the

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<sup>83</sup> Rowntree, *Labourer*, p. 24.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>85</sup> Samuel, 'Quarry', p. 174.

<sup>86</sup> Mollie Harris, *All Kinds of Magic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181; See also Sheila Stewart, *Lifting the Latch: A Life on the Land* (Charlbury: Day Books, 2003).

<sup>88</sup> Edith H. Whetham, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: Volume VIII, 1914-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 213.

husband and wife...When the pig was killed, the woman of the house was involved in a whole series of manufacturing activities...Pickling vegetables was another species of manufacturing activity which, in the autumn, took up a lot of the woman's time.<sup>89</sup>

All members of the family contributed to their income and they did so in various ways.

Although this way of life was changing, elements of the rural economy continued into the post-war period for working-class families, notably this supplementing of the male wage.

Madge was born and brought up in Shipton-under-Wychwood moving to the neighbouring village of Milton-under-Wychwood upon marriage. She had five sons between 1940 and 1948. When describing how she and her husband coped with the financial strain of having this number of children born so close together she explained that villagers produced much of their own food: 'of course we had big gardens and we grew a lot, everybody. We had a big garden and we used to keep some hens as well.'<sup>90</sup>

Gloria was born and brought up in Benson. She said as a child her parents instilled in her that was important to be 'self-sufficient'. In adulthood Gloria put this education into practice and she and her husband 'got an allotment, we grew a lot of our veg, which was again that's following on, that's from his parents and from my parents which will still do, we still grew our own veg.' Gloria also proudly explained how she and her neighbour used to go wooding, stating, 'Buy logs, never, not in a hundred years, we'd never buy logs.'<sup>91</sup> Poaching was also referred to as a way of contributing to the family economy, particularly in times of financial hardship. Doris, another Benson resident, told an anecdote about her husband who had been caught poaching as a child and his parents' reaction. Her husband's father was ill with tuberculosis and as a result 'money was tight'. Her husband went out poaching rabbits, but he was caught and had to go to court. When

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<sup>89</sup> Samuel, 'Quarry', pp. 200-1.

<sup>90</sup> Madge, WY8, pp. 13-4.

<sup>91</sup> Gloria, BE14, p. 23.

he got home his father 'gave him a good hiding'. Her husband asked 'what was that for?' and his father replied 'for getting caught'.<sup>92</sup> Doris' sister-in-law Tina told a story about her husband who had gone out poaching when they were married. He had been redundant from the Cowley car factory and was unemployed so he used to go out poaching pheasants and rabbits to feed the family.<sup>93</sup>

There were also continuities within the housing provision in rural areas. *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* describes typical rural housing conditions at the turn of World War Two. Cottages were often small, with only two bedrooms, one reached through the other. They lacked hard floors, water, storage space and drainage. Many were out of repair with leaking roofs, damp walls, and windows that let in the wind and rain. However, because of the general shortage of houses in rural areas many workers had no choice but to accept the housing provided on the farms where they worked. If alternative housing could be found in a village there was the inevitable walk to work and rents were generally above the level which could be afforded from the agricultural wage.<sup>94</sup> Flora Thompson's description of growing up in a hamlet in north-east Oxfordshire at the end of the nineteenth century gives a flavour of living conditions in rural Oxfordshire at this time. She described the village houses:

Some of the cottages had two bedrooms, others only one, in which case it had to be divided by a screen to accommodate parents and children. Often the big boys of a family slept downstairs, or were put out to sleep in the second bedroom of an elderly couple whose own children were out in the world.<sup>95</sup>

While the village may have looked picturesque conditions in the cottages were basic. Only three of the thirty cottages had their own water supply and there was no public well or pump. Thompson described how 'The less fortunate tenants obtained their water from

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<sup>92</sup> Doris, BE2, p. 58.

<sup>93</sup> Tina, BE3, p. 58.

<sup>94</sup> Whetham, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: Volume VIII, 1914-1939*, p. 48.

a well on a vacant plot on the outskirts of the hamlet, from which the cottage had disappeared’, or from water butts outside their cottages to catch and store the rain-water from the roof.<sup>96</sup> The only sanitary arrangement, known as ‘the hovel’, was housed either in a little beehive-shaped building at the bottom of the garden or in a corner of the woodshed. It was not even an earth closet, but merely a deep pit with a seat set over it.<sup>97</sup> The quality of housing and provision of facilities for many rural residents were inferior to those for their urban counterparts. These conditions were still the norm for rural Oxfordshire into the 1940s, indeed many places were without mains water or sewerage into the 1950s and 1960s.

The authors of the 1944 survey *Country Planning* (discussed further below) did not think it was only living conditions that were worse for rural residents. They argued: ‘Both in his purchasing power and in the physical and social conditions of his life – housing, the public services, education, leisure and the opportunities for using it – the countryman was at a disadvantage with almost any urban dweller.’<sup>98</sup> They believed that education was the area in which rural inhabitants were probably most disadvantaged. Children in the 1940s still faced: ‘Inequality of opportunity, the lack of central and continuation schools, unsuitable sites, buildings, and playgrounds.’<sup>99</sup> Access to health care was also restricted. Before the creation of the National Health Service (NHS) in 1948 the cost of seeing a doctor meant that traditional cures and ‘old wives’ tales’ were the forms of health care most often followed. Recalling her childhood in Adderbury in the 1920s and 1930s Theresa said, ‘I remember once when I had a very bad ear, my Dad saying, “Try a drop of

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<sup>95</sup> Flora Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford* (London: Penguin, 2000) (1939), p. 19.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>98</sup> The Agricultural Economics Research Institute Oxford, *Country Planning: A Study of Rural Problems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. iii.

<sup>99</sup> Agricultural Economics Research Institute, *Country Planning*, p. 140.

olive oil, try the middle out of a boiled walnut, coz the doctor will charge half a crown”.’<sup>99</sup> Theresa went on to explain: ‘It turned out I had an abscess in my ear, which all these things happened after measles, and that’s why I lost most of my hearing, and he was a bit sorry after.’<sup>100</sup> This limited access to health care was also seen in relation to maternity services. Village handywomen, who acted as midwives and layers out of the dead, remained important figures into the inter-war years. By the time of the *Country Planning* survey most country women, like their urban counterparts, were attended by the District Nurse, or midwife, although if their doctors prescribed hospital treatment, they went to the Maternity Department at the County Infirmary.<sup>101</sup> However while in the city of Oxford ante-natal clinics were available in the 1930s, these were not on offer in rural areas until the late-1960s.<sup>102</sup> In terms of antenatal education Oxfordshire also lagged behind the city. Antenatal classes were not started in Oxfordshire until 1961, and then only two classes were in operation.<sup>103</sup> In Oxford city mothercraft classes were on offer by 1947.<sup>104</sup> Perhaps the most striking difference was in the provision of family planning advice, which showed how far advanced Oxford city was in comparison to Oxfordshire. In the city of Oxford a birth control clinic was started in May 1935 by the Assistant Medical Officer of Health, Dr Mary Fisher, to give birth control advice on medical grounds.<sup>105</sup> With regard to the county, however, the Medical Officer of Health did not even mention family planning in his report until 1964 and it was not until the Family Planning Act 1967 came into force that the first clinic was set up in the county.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Theresa, BA10, p. 16.

<sup>101</sup> Agricultural Economics Research Institute, *Country Planning*, p. 177.

<sup>102</sup> City of Oxford MOH, 1935, p. 84; Oxfordshire County Council MOH, 1967, p. 23.

<sup>103</sup> Oxfordshire County Council MOH, 1961, p. 9.

<sup>104</sup> City of Oxford MOH, 1947, p. 23.

<sup>105</sup> City of Oxford MOH, 1935, p. 84.

<sup>106</sup> Oxfordshire County Council MOH, 1964, p. 10; Oxfordshire County Council MOH, 1967, p. 33.

By the post-war period Oxfordshire was experiencing both growth and decline. There were parts of the county which witnessed expansion and development such as the areas surrounding Oxford and Banbury and the commuter villages. However some of the smaller villages away from transport links remained static or declined, limiting the range of services and facilities on offer. For the residents of both types of area the post-war period saw many transformations in their way of life. In her study of continuity and change in Elmdon, a village in north-west Essex, Jean Robin concluded that patterns of life had remained remarkably stable in the village between 1861 and 1961, but by 1964 ‘the seeds of change, leading to a final break in the pattern we have observed in Elmdon itself for over a century had already been sown.’<sup>107</sup> For some parts of Oxfordshire these ‘seeds of change’ were sown earlier with the growth of the motor industry, but their effects were the same. While community structures in rural areas had a long history of change due to factors such as migration and population decline, in the inter-war years many women still found themselves as part of a tight-knit and interdependent community. It was these relationships that were threatened by the changes in village life that were occurring in the post-war world.

### **North Oxfordshire**

The Agricultural Economics Research Institute, which formed part of the School of Rural Economy at Oxford University, undertook a survey of twenty-four square miles near Banbury in north Oxfordshire under the title *Country Planning* which was published in 1944. The area studied fell approximately within the confines of one six-inch Ordnance

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<sup>107</sup> Jean Robin, *Elmdon: Continuity and Change in a North-West Essex Village 1861-1964* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 243. See also Marilyn Strathern, *Kinship at the Core: An Anthropology of Elmdon, a Village in North-West Essex in the Nineteen Sixties* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Survey Sheet (Oxfordshire Sheet IX). This area has been broadly replicated for the oral history interviews conducted with women from north Oxfordshire. While *Country Planning* had a clear agenda (it aimed to provide an investigation of current social and economic life in rural areas to see how best to plan for agricultural reconstruction at the end of the war), it still provides a valuable description of the deprivations north Oxfordshire's rural dwellers faced in the 1940s. The authors described how living conditions for those in rural areas were substantially worse than in urban areas because they lacked many of the services common in towns. Water or electricity were rarely used even when available. In only six out of the twenty villages studied were there piped water-supplies. In the other villages water had to be fetched from the nearest well or street stand-pipe. Only two of the villages had sewerage as well as water. Electric light and power were only available in eight villages, with the rest regarded as too far from the grid to make the supply of current practicable.<sup>108</sup> Families in rural areas lived without facilities their contemporaries in towns largely took for granted. For women raising children in such cottages their poor condition meant more time spent engaged in arduous, dirty work and in unpleasant and unhealthy surroundings. Jackie described the 'culture shock' she faced when moving from London to Oxfordshire in the early-1960s. She explained:

North Oxfordshire generally it was fairly, well I hesitate, I can't really say backward. I know when we were looking for the cottage in 1961 we looked at places like Hook Norton and a lot of the properties hadn't got mains drainage, and Hook Norton really struck us as really the back of beyond, it really was quite a shock, unmade roads, buckets, lavatories, outside taps.<sup>109</sup>

Conditions for the inhabitants of north Oxfordshire had improved by the 1970s with the gap between urban and rural narrowing. In 1975 a restudy of the *Country Planning*

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<sup>108</sup> Agricultural Economics Research Institute Oxford, *Country Planning*, pp. 114-22.

<sup>109</sup> Jackie, WY10, p. 4.

survey was published which showed marked progress in comparison to the 1940s – ‘Today the dweller in this rural area is no longer handicapped in every economic and social activity and every condition of life as he was at the time of the 1943 survey.’<sup>110</sup>

The authors thought:

It is a remarkable achievement by the Local Authorities that services in this rural area have improved so much since the war. Compared with the situation in 1943 when only two settlements had piped water and sewerage and six had piped water only, now, in 1973, piped water, sewerage, electricity and public telephones are available throughout the survey area.<sup>111</sup>

However, not all their discoveries were positive. Loneliness and boredom, never mentioned in the first study, were now problems commented on. Young wives with small children frequently complained about being left alone all day without transport, usually on a new housing estate at the edge of a village away from any possible meeting places such as shops, and probably surrounded by the empty houses of employed neighbours. This was by no means a universal complaint amongst the villagers; indeed some women stressed how the villages provided friendship and support. For example a resident of Hook Norton explained how ‘loneliness and boredom are counteracted by the Village Society which gets people together to talk.’ An inhabitant at South Newington felt ‘there is no loneliness and boredom here, the wives with young children are busy all day, few go out to work and they meet for coffee mornings, or to organise the play group, tea parties, etc.’<sup>112</sup> One of the wives of the Bird’s factory workers questioned by Michael Mann, who had relocated from Birmingham to a village outside Banbury in the mid-1960s, explained how ‘After two months I think I’d chatted with all the wives in the village, either at the shop or outside the school.’<sup>113</sup> However, it is interesting that feelings of loneliness and isolation amongst village women seemed to be a newly discovered trend.

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<sup>110</sup> Lady Mary Bates and B.V. Cudmore, *Country Planning: A Re-Study* (Oxford: University of Oxford Institute of Agricultural Economics, 1975), p. 95.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p 93.

These complaints support Young and Willmott's findings from the urban context that it was women who suffered most from the decline of traditional communities.

### **South Oxfordshire**

Much of south Oxfordshire developed rapidly in the post-war period. Although some villages saw population losses these were usually smaller settlements less accessible from motorways and rail.<sup>114</sup> The proximity of major employment centres like Oxford, Reading and London contributed to the prosperity the area enjoyed. There was a high proportion of owner-occupiers and the incidence of privately rented unfurnished accommodation was lower than the national rural mean. Households renting from the local authority were mainly found around the urban centres.<sup>115</sup> While the influence of urban pressures was clearly seen in the structure of south Oxfordshire there were remnants of the old rural economy reflected in the tenure pattern. In some areas, particularly the larger agricultural parishes, the level of privately rented unfurnished accommodation remained high. There were also significant concentrations of households living in non-permanent accommodation throughout the period. At Field Farm, an ex-service camp, up to 200 hundred families were living in its huts in the late-1940s. This number fell as the poorer huts became uninhabitable, but there were still seventy families living there in 1958 when the camp was demolished and the village of Berinsfield built in its place.<sup>116</sup> At this time most families were living in damp rooms, without hot running water or toilets, and only half had a cold water tap. Peggy lived in a similar ex-army hut in Chipping Warden. She

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<sup>113</sup> Mann, *Workers*, p. 177.

<sup>114</sup> Michael Dunn, Marilyn Rawson and Alan Rogers, *Rural Housing: Competition and Choice* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), p. 95.

<sup>115</sup> Dunn *et al*, *Rural Housing*, p. 112.

<sup>116</sup> R.N. Harris and John M. Mogeey, *The Sociology of Housing: Studies at Berinsfield* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 27-8.

recalled: 'they weren't draught proof, they were dreadful, all the fire, all the boards, all the dust came up and all the draught, and when the snow was on the ground my god it was cold and I'd got three kids, yeah it was dreadful it was the worst place I ever had.'<sup>117</sup>

The housing shortage in the area remained with families still forced to live in temporary accommodation, but with mobile homes replacing the huts. In 1971 mobile homes accommodated 4.4 percent of all households in South Oxfordshire. Gail lived in a caravan outside Benson in the early-1960s. It had:

no mod cons whatsoever, and then our first baby was born in the spring of 1961, still in the caravan...and I think about two months before then the owner of the site had got the water supply to each caravan, and that was all right during the summertime, but it wasn't at all easy in the winter with a baby and no where to dry the washing and that sort of thing, great difficulties even in doing it because of the little tiny sink. I had to boil up every drop of water I needed hot, I had a big pan. So it wasn't easy.<sup>118</sup>

Apart from the privations associated with this temporary accommodation, housing quality in this area was generally good. However there were poor standards of amenity provision which correlated with concentrations of privately rented property within the district, particularly within estate villages, and in the fringe areas of Oxford.<sup>119</sup> Benson and Ewelme lay in an area of south Oxfordshire designated for Oxford overspill. The area saw rapid development in the post-war period and this affected the nature of its communities. There was much new housing built, large numbers of immigrants moved to the villages, and traditional patterns of rural life were being modified.

## **Benson**

Benson lies on the east bank of the River Thames at the confluence of the small Ewelme brook and is twelve, fifteen and forty miles from Oxford, Reading and London respectively. Despite the agricultural depression from the mid-1870s the traditional

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<sup>117</sup> Peggy, BA9, pp. 20-1.

<sup>118</sup> Gail, BE11, pp. 1-2.

sources of employment in farming and domestic service still remained important to the village in the twentieth century. At the 1901 census, out of a population of 319 working men and boys over the age of 10, 152 were working in agriculture. Seventy-four of these were agricultural labourers and the rest had more skilled jobs. Fifteen men were employed in domestic service and it was an even more important source of work for village women. Out of a working population of 191 women and girls over the age of 10, 66 were employed in domestic service of some kind.<sup>120</sup> After World War One the dominance of farming was beginning to be challenged by work outside the village. New industries offered higher wages and improved transport facilities (and later increased car ownership) made it a possibility to commute to work. Twenty-four Benson men were employed in the Morris Motor Works and Pressed Steel by 1936.<sup>121</sup> The 1930s also saw the arrival of the Air Force in the village. The Air Ministry's new aerodrome was built on Fifield Farm land from 1937 as part of the country's rearmament programme. While the village did not see much enemy action during World War Two there was constant aircraft activity.<sup>122</sup> As well as the works at Cowley, employment was on offer at Didcot Depot, the railways, and after the war at Rowse Honey at Ewelme then Wallingford, the Atomic Energy Research Authority at Harwell, Aldermaston and Culham and Didcot Power Station.<sup>123</sup> By the post-war period most men were no longer employed in agriculture and worked outside of Benson, which changed the character of the village.

Living conditions in the village were also transformed during the post-war period. In the 1920s Benson was supplied with mains-water pumped from the Chilterns and electricity

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<sup>119</sup> Dunn *et al*, *Rural Housing*, p. 114.

<sup>120</sup> Janet Burt and Peter Clarke, *Benson. A Century of Change: 1900-2000* (Wallingford: Pie Powder Press, 2004), p. 49, 52; Kate Tiller, 'Benson 1700-1918', in Kate Tiller (ed.), *Benson: A Village Through Its History* (Cholsey: Pie Powder Press, 1999), 95-128.

<sup>121</sup> Bourdillon, *Social Services, I*, p. 310.

<sup>122</sup> Alison Reid, 'Twentieth-Century Benson', in Tiller, *Benson*, pp. 147-53.

<sup>123</sup> Burt and Clarke, *Benson*, p. 67.

generated at Preston Crowmarsh Mill. However not all houses had these amenities until after World War Two. Sewerage did not come to the village until the mid-1950s.<sup>124</sup> The houses themselves were also changing. While often picturesque, the pre-war cottages provided only basic accommodation for their inhabitants, conforming to the standard found in the north of the county by the *Country Planning* survey. Some council housing was built during the late-1940s and early-1950s. Large private estates were then added in the 1960s after Benson was declared an expanding village. The population had reached over four thousand by 1971.<sup>125</sup> Writing in 1965 in an investigation of post-war changes upon the state of the landscape in Oxfordshire, Lionel Brett described Benson as a 'big bleak community'.<sup>126</sup> He stated, 'Benson appears to be a village gone mad. The few remaining cottages...have been swallowed into the mass of a sprawl of spec. building...What with aircraft noise and visual shock, Benson is an exhausting place.'<sup>127</sup> Benson was fortunate, though, in having a range of services to provide for its growing numbers of inhabitants. In 1939 there was a boot mender, postmaster and newsagent, three dairies, two butchers, three general shopkeepers, a hairdresser and a shop selling coffee, tea, cocoa and salt products. By 1970 only the boot mender had gone and a range of new business had opened in its place.<sup>128</sup> From 1953, when Dr Andrew Millar moved to Benson, the village also had a resident doctor.<sup>129</sup> For women with young children who tended to be confined to the village this wide range of services made Benson an attractive place.

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<sup>124</sup> Reid, 'Twentieth-Century Benson', p. 137.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 157-8.

<sup>126</sup> Lionel Brett, *Landscape in Distress* (London: Architectural Press, 1965), p. 52.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>128</sup> Reid, 'Twentieth-Century Benson', pp. 138-9.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

## **Ewelme**

Ewelme is a small Oxfordshire village lying east of Benson, located in a valley between the Chilterns and the Thames. At the beginning of the twentieth century it remained largely agricultural. Ewelme Watercress was a significant presence in the village for much of the century – the beds were opened in the 1890s and did not close until 1988. During this time the beds played a part in the village economy providing work, including employment for women who were involved in tying the cress into bundles and packing them.<sup>130</sup> However, even by the late-nineteenth century Ewelme had become popular with middle-class residents as a dormitory village and place to retire. The decline in the agricultural nature of the village meant men started looking for work outside it. By 1936 five Ewelme men were employed in Morris Motor Works and Pressed Steel.<sup>131</sup> There was still a range of services on offer in the 1930s, including three grocers, one of which was also a post office, a baker, draper, confectioner, blacksmith, carpenter, two pubs and a carrier service;<sup>132</sup> and, as in Benson, living conditions saw improvements during the inter-war years with the arrival of electricity, water and mains drainage.<sup>133</sup> During the second half of the twentieth century Ewelme continued to become less agricultural and self-sufficient. The range of shops and services on offer declined and the closure of Greenway stores in mid-1970s left Ewelme without a shop. The second half of the century was not simply a period of decline for the village though. In 1954 the Rowse Honey Company was established. Like the watercress beds before it, the honey factory became a significant village employer (for women as well as men) and remained in Ewelme until 1987 when new premises opened in Wallingford. Like many other villages

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<sup>130</sup> John Leigh, *The Story of Ewelme Watercress* (Ewelme: The Friends of Ewelme Watercress, 1999), p. 9.

<sup>131</sup> Bourdillon, *Social Services, I*, p. 310.

<sup>132</sup> Kelly's Directory of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, 1939, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies.

<sup>133</sup> Anne Chisholm (ed.), *Glimpses of an Oxfordshire Village. Ewelme 1900-2000* (Ewelme: The Ewelme Society, 2000), pp. 14-5.

Ewelme also faced an influx of new people. A private housing estate was built in the early-1960s at Chaucer Court on the site of an old barn. The estate was popular with middle-class commuters and developed a strong sense of community that was encouraged by the uneasy relationship the residents enjoyed with the native villagers. Lionel Brett was as scathing about the developments in Ewelme as he had been about those in Benson, stating: ‘The road from Watlington passes some of the worst-sited and worst-landscaped...council housing imaginable; the brook-side road from Benson is lined with a variety of bungalows. It is a wonder that Ewelme preserves its beauty-spot reputation.’<sup>134</sup> The village also felt the presence of the expanding base at RAF Benson and in 1957 out of eighty-six children at the village school over half were from Air Force families.<sup>135</sup> Ewelme’s decline as an agricultural village and growing attraction for commuters and weekenders was not entirely negative. The growth in population meant that new facilities for the villagers were also developed, such as a recreation ground in 1956, a child welfare clinic held once a month from 1960, and a preschool held in the village hall began in 1970. These facilities particularly benefited mothers and their children.

## **West Oxfordshire**

Reflecting the diminishing status of agriculture in the county as a whole, west Oxfordshire witnessed a prolonged agricultural decline from the 1820s onwards, exacerbated after 1850 by the deforestation of Wychwood Forest.<sup>136</sup> While farming and associated trades were still the main activities in west Oxfordshire during the first half of the twentieth century in the decades after 1945 the numbers employed in agriculture

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<sup>134</sup> Brett, *Landscape*, p. 50.

<sup>135</sup> Chisholm, *Glimpses*, p. 50.

rapidly decreased. In 1951 twenty percent of the workforce were still employed in agriculture, but this fell to about six percent by 1971.<sup>137</sup> There were relatively few employment alternatives in the area, which meant its residents increasingly lived in the area but worked elsewhere. As in north Oxfordshire the housing conditions for west Oxfordshire residents in the middle decades of the century remained poor. In 1951, 48.5 percent of households lacked their own toilet and 15 percent of households had more than one person per room.<sup>138</sup> The area therefore entered the post-war period somewhat decayed and run down. In part this situation was alleviated by the growth of tourism in the Cotswolds, and by the commuters and retired people who sought to settle there. In addition, the opening of a RAF base – in Brize Norton in 1937 – brought growth to the area, as in Benson. The presence of the base was felt most keenly during World War Two itself and ‘there was no escaping the sound of the many training planes in the skies over the Wychwoods’.<sup>139</sup> The consequences of these social and economic changes meant that during the second half of the century west Oxfordshire witnessed both decline, particularly in respect of agriculture and local employment, but also significant development.

### **Milton and Shipton-under-Wychwood**

The villages of Milton and Shipton lie to the south of the river Evenlode between the market towns of Chipping Norton, seven miles to the north, and Witney, nine miles to the south-east. Throughout the nineteenth century agriculture was, as Kate Tiller argues, ‘the lifeblood of the Wychwood villages’, although the landscape and communities it

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<sup>136</sup> Kate Tiller, ‘Wychwood Forest Transformed: The Forest in the Nineteenth Century’, in Charles Keighley (ed.), *Discovering Wychwood: An Illustrated History and Guide* (Charlbury: The Wychwood Press, 2000), 47-61.

<sup>137</sup> 1951, 1971 Census Reports, Bodleian Library.

<sup>138</sup> 1951 Census Report.

<sup>139</sup> Wychwoods Local History Society, *That’s How It Was: Women in the Wychwoods during World War Two* (Shipton under Wychwood: Wychwoods Local History Society, 2000), p. 17.

supported changed substantially.<sup>140</sup> South-east of the villages lay the ancient Wychwood Forest which undoubtedly played a part in the lives of the villages until the 1853 Act of Parliament which called for its disafforestation. Stories about the uncontrolled character of the forest had abounded<sup>141</sup> and sixty years after enclosure, in his 1916 survey of agriculture in Oxfordshire, John Orr still described Wychwood as a ‘cold and late country of bad reputation.’<sup>142</sup> The remoteness of the Wychwood area meant that it continued to have a distinct culture and identity in the twentieth century. Over the course of the twentieth century, however, farming was being reduced to a less significant role in the economy of the villages, with changes in both the farms and farming methods being substantial. Many of the small mixed farms of 100 to 200 acres disappeared which reduced the amount of local employment available and encouraged people to seek work outside of the villages. The introduction of the tractor to many local farms in the inter-war period, and the mechanisation that followed, accelerated these trends and meant the end of ancillary trades such as blacksmiths and drovers. There was also a more general reduction of facilities within the villages with the local dairies and water-mills being lost.<sup>143</sup> Between 1930 and 1988 the number of shops, garages and public hostelrys in Milton and Shipton fell from thirty-two to twenty.<sup>144</sup> However the villages did not only experience decline in the post-war decades and both saw much new building. The 1920s saw the first council houses built in the villages at Shipton Road in Milton and after World War Two council house building was further developed. Private building grew

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<sup>140</sup> Kate Tiller (ed.), ‘Milton and Shipton in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century’, *Wychwoods History, the Journal of the Wychwoods Local History Society*, 3 (1987), 4-67, p. 5.

<sup>141</sup> Arthur Young, *General View of the Agriculture of Oxfordshire* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles Reprints, 1969) (1813), pp. 236-9; C. Belcher, ‘On the Reclaiming of Waste Lands as Instanced in Wichwood [sic] Forest’, *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, 24 (1863), 271-85, p. 280.

<sup>142</sup> John Orr, *Agriculture in Oxfordshire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), pp. 51-2.

<sup>143</sup> John Rawlins, ‘Fifty Years of Change’, *Wychwoods History, the Journal of the Wychwoods Local History Society*, 5 (1989), 54-94, pp. 61-2.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

significantly from the 1960s.<sup>145</sup> This development has been accompanied by improved services, such as piped water, mains drainage and electricity. The second half of the century therefore witnessed the demise of agriculture and local employment within Milton and Shipton, but this occurred alongside the villages' growing attraction to commuters and increased building to meet these incomers' needs.

## **Conclusion**

The twentieth century was a period of transformation for both the city of Oxford and Oxfordshire. Employment opportunities, population size and service provision were all undergoing change. There were important differences between the experiences of the urban and rural localities, especially early on in the period, but they also shared some significant similarities. The decline in agriculture and domestic service affected employment opportunities for men and women. More stable male employment in both rural and urban areas meant that women's (and children's employment) was not so necessary to keep families afloat. The growth of industry, which ran parallel to this transition, created many new jobs for the population of the towns in which these industries were located, but also for the surrounding countryside. The motor industry, the nexus of which was the works at Cowley, was perhaps the most significant of these industries but there were others such as the aluminium factory at Banbury which opened in 1931. By the middle decades of the century employment opportunities often united both urban and rural areas rather than dividing them.

Linked to changes brought about by these new employment patterns was that of population mobility. The decline of jobs where people had traditionally lived, such as in

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

agriculture, and improved transport and communications which meant people no longer needed to live where they worked, broke down many of the old communities, both urban and rural, and created new ones. Government planning policy, both local and national, exacerbated these trends. Some communities were judged suitable for development, such as Benson classified as an expanding village in the late-1950s; others shared the fate of St Ebbe's, demolished as a slum clearance area in the 1960s. Not all the changes were negative. The general availability of services such as water, sewerage, gas and electricity increased. The better wages available in the new industries and the improved living conditions that new housing brought benefited many people. The communities that developed could never replicate the old, but after initial periods of dislocation they did mature and began to provide support for their members. These alterations were not without their consequences. As populations became more mobile family members lived further apart which could lead to loneliness and isolation, especially for women. While transport brought improved access to facilities outside the local area, those services on offer within a village or district often declined. For example, the growth in car ownership meant that local bus services were severely reduced. The latter half of the twentieth century brought substantial change to Oxfordshire. Although the pace of these changes did vary throughout the county none of its inhabitants were unaffected. Moreover it was often women, and particularly mothers of young children, who felt the consequences of this change most keenly.

## **Chapter Four: *Kinship, Neighbourhood and Class: Surveying Women and the Family***

### **Introduction**

The lives of women were subject to scrutiny in the decades following World War Two. Issues concerning family, community and class were of prime importance to social scientists from the late-1940s to the 1960s and were the principal themes of British social surveys and community studies undertaken at this time. After the war there was an array of new legislation that heralded the creation of the welfare state. The austerity of the immediate post-war years diminished and confidence grew that material conditions were on an upward trend. This mood of expectation conditioned the studies conducted during the period. For researchers writing in the 1950s and early-1960s there seemed many reasons to be content. They believed that both the social and economic life of the country was improving, and they thought that greater prosperity would positively affect patterns of community and family life. This chapter will discuss the effects of these changes in Oxfordshire and ask whether the optimism of the social scientists writing at this time was reflected in the reality of women's lives. It will employ contemporary community studies as historical sources, analysing the evidence they provide about the areas they studied, but also what they reveal about the climate in which they were written.

J.E. Goldthorpe argues that the period after World War Two was a golden age for the nuclear family, which coincided with the golden age of functionalist sociology.<sup>1</sup> The two were intimately linked. Functionalism stressed the essential nature of the nuclear family to modern, industrial society; the nuclear family consisting of the married couple, living

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<sup>1</sup> J.E. Goldthorpe, *Family Life in Western Societies: A Historical Sociology of Family Relationships in Britain and North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 42.

solely with their young children, was its foundation. Talcott Parsons' argument was that the nuclear family was uniquely well-adapted to the needs of modern, consumer society because the system minimised competition between its members and was a small enough unit to be geographically and economically mobile, as an industrial economy demands.<sup>2</sup> In Parsons' conception of the nuclear family, the husband and father worked outside the home providing resources, while the wife and mother ran the domestic sphere.<sup>3</sup> This gendered division was based upon a presumption about women's natural abilities. It was argued that the particular tasks assigned to the sexes were a consequence of the unique capacities of women for bearing and nursing children.<sup>4</sup> The existence of the nuclear family made the theory of functionalism seem persuasive, and functionalism gave credibility to a belief in the continuation of the nuclear family. Divorce rates fell during the 1950s and seemed to stabilise at levels that, while higher than before the war, were far below the immediate post-war peak. People married at younger ages with fewer remaining single.<sup>5</sup> There was also a wish to consolidate family life after the disruptive effects of war.<sup>6</sup> This combination of factors encouraged a generally optimistic mood about the stability of marriage and family life which is reflected in the community studies of the period. Sociologists had long been interested in domestic life, so the concern with marriage and family in the post-war decades was a continuation of a well-established trend. What was new was that sociologists thought that the economic prosperity of the post-war period was conducive to changes in the family and they were convinced that conditions for married life were improving. Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield argue

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<sup>2</sup> Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales, *Family: Socialization and Interaction Process* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), pp. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> David Coleman, 'Population and Family', in A.H. Halsey with J. Webb (eds.), *Twentieth-Century British Social Trends* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000), 27-93, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the Royal Commission on Population, *Report* (London: HMSO, 1949); Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce, *Report*, (London: HMSO, 1956).

that the influence of functionalist theory was implicit in the British studies, with a stress on a new companionate partnership in marriage and privatisation of family life.<sup>7</sup>

British social scientists did not support all Parsons' conclusions, however. Michael Young and Peter Willmott stressed the importance of the extended family (by which they meant families who formed kinship networks rather than living together as one household) in British working-class culture.<sup>8</sup> In their study of Bethnal Green in the mid-1950s Young and Willmott had been surprised by how many Bethnal Green residents had their family in close proximity with more than two out of every three people, both men and women, having their parents living within two or three miles.<sup>9</sup> Bethnal Greeners saw their relatives often and many women saw their mothers on a daily basis: 'We asked the wives to give us brief diaries of their days. Mum was rarely absent.'<sup>10</sup> Historians also challenged Parsons' hypothesis that the nuclear family was a response to industrialisation. In his 1960s research, Peter Laslett questioned assumptions about the nature of the family and household in western Europe in the early-modern period. He demonstrated the view that the small, nuclear family was a product of industrialisation and urbanisation was incorrect and claimed that the predominant residential group in pre-industrial England was the nuclear family. Three-generation households, and households in which kin such as uncles, cousins or married siblings were present, were rare. Only one non-nuclear element, live-in servants, was commonly found. In addition Laslett showed that early-modern English society was highly mobile. Only a relatively small minority of each

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<sup>7</sup> Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield, 'Social Reconstruction and the Emergence of Companionate Marriage, 1945-1959', in Graham Allen (ed.), *The Sociology of the Family: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 12-34, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. xxviii.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

rising generation lived in the same parish throughout their lives.<sup>11</sup> Industrialisation could promote ties of kinship. In his study of Preston, Michael Anderson concluded that some kind of assistance was necessary to members of the Lancashire Victorian working class to meet the problems of social welfare, accommodation and information that they faced. Kin were the major source of this aid.<sup>12</sup> Some of the conclusions about household and family structures outlined by Peter Laslett and the Cambridge Group have now been challenged,<sup>13</sup> but they have also been built upon. For example Leonore Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink and Katherine Holden have highlighted how a key problem with both functionalist and Marxist explanations of family structure is their assumption that it was the family which changed in response to wider economic and political developments, which conceals the ways that families have shaped and formed economic and social life.<sup>14</sup>

As well as family structure, sociologists were also concerned with the vitality of the communities they were studying. The consequences of the movement of families from traditional urban neighbourhoods in city centres to new suburban estates were a prime focus of concern. In her 1944 study of the problems of adjustment involved in the severance between the workplace and housing, Kate Liepmann commented upon the social disintegration she found in suburban estates due to 'the newness of the dormitories and the thinness of the urban fabric'.<sup>15</sup> Indeed Elizabeth Bott thought that by the 1940s it had become part of folklore that estates were responsible for marked losses of working-

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (London: Methuen, 1965).

<sup>12</sup> Michael Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 160-1.

<sup>13</sup> For example Wally Seccombe has argued that, although the average numbers in households may have been the same for many centuries, the composition of families did change in significant ways. Until the late-nineteenth century households often included farm servants, but this was a much less common phenomenon later. On the other hand, purely domestic servants were rare until the nineteenth century, reaching a peak just before 1914. Wally Seccombe, *Weathering the Storm: Working-Class Families from the Industrial Revolution to the Fertility Decline* (London: Verso, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Leonore Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink and Katherine Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960* (London and New York: Longman, 1999), p. 24.

class sociability.<sup>16</sup> Whereas in Bethnal Green Young and Willmott found that residents had acquaintances in every direction, they thought 'Greenleigh' was a far lonelier place. Comparing the two localities they asserted: 'In Bethnal Green, the kindred are at hand every day of the week. At Greenleigh the family has to wait for summer, for week-ends, for holidays, before they appear.'<sup>17</sup> Women in particular found the distances from their family prohibitive. Even when the distance moved was not great and transport was easily available, as the case in Oxford, kin relations decayed. Whereas sixty percent of the St Ebbe's households studied by John Mogeby had regular kin contacts, at Barton, only three miles away, half that number did so.<sup>18</sup> Hannah Gavron concluded that young working-class women living in new high-rise estates suffered from isolation that was unknown to previous generations; the street life of old working-class communities had provided them with social contacts.<sup>19</sup> However, Willmott and Young portrayed life in the suburb of Woodford (which they considered to be middle class<sup>20</sup>) in a far more positive light than that in 'Greenleigh'. Residents were deemed to be friendlier, more co-operative and supportive of one another. Willmott and Young thought the difference between the two areas was a result of class. They suggested that the middle-class residents of Woodford had a certain capacity or skill at 'making friends'. In contrast Bethnal Greeners did not need this capacity because whether or not they made any effort they had plenty of friends around them, and were therefore 'lost when they were transported to the strange

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<sup>15</sup> Kate Liepmann, *The Journey to Work* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1944), p. 83.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Bott, *Family and Social Network: Roles, Norms and External Relationships in Ordinary Urban Families* (London: Tavistock, 1957), pp. 184-6.

<sup>17</sup> Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, p. 112.

<sup>18</sup> John M. Mogeby, *Family and Neighbourhood: Two Studies in Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 81.

<sup>19</sup> Hannah Gavron, *The Captive Wife: Conflicts of Housebound Mothers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 61-2.

<sup>20</sup> Although Willmott and Young classed it as middle-class, Klein says Woodford offers a 'vivid picture of the upward-moving working-class family.' Josephine Klein, *Samples from English Cultures* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 328.

environment of the housing estate.’<sup>21</sup> Willmott and Young argued that it was friends, rather than family, who were central to middle-class life. These friends were recruited amongst their neighbours and provided one another with a good deal of practical help.<sup>22</sup>

Discourses of class dominated mid-twentieth century Britain and class was the prevailing mode of analysis for the authors of the post-war community studies. The period after the war was characterised as one of affluence and the question of whether or not there was embourgeoisement of the working classes, and whether they were adopting middle-class patterns of life, encouraged great debate.<sup>23</sup> However Peter Hiller and H.F. Moorhouse, writing in the 1970s, both found that within the space of one discussion people may change their definition of ‘class’ a number of times, without being aware of inconsistency.<sup>24</sup> In their study of working-class attitudes to marriage in 1943, the social psychologists Elizabeth Slater and Mark Woodside proposed that realisation of one’s ‘class’ position emerged from routine activities of everyday life: it was the ‘feeling of belonging’ which was ‘felt to be natural and was taken for granted’. They found their respondents were concerned as much with symbolic expressions of power in social relationships as with material realities.<sup>25</sup> Joanna Bourke suggests that this subjective perception of class position ‘provides one way around the thorny problem of gender’.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Willmott and Michael Young, *Family and Class in a London Suburb* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1960), p. 128.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Millar’s optimism was exemplary of the positive view. ‘In the socially-fluid society of the Sixties new lines are being drawn which owe little to the old criteria of accent, social behaviour and family background.’ Robert Millar, *The New Classes* (London: Longmans and Green, 1966), p. 19; Goldthorpe *et al*, thought this was not the case. There was no assimilation of the working class into the middle class but at most a less dramatic process of convergence. John H. Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechofer and Jennifer Platt, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 26.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Hiller, ‘Continuities and Variations in Everyday Conceptual Components of Class’, *Sociology*, 9 (1975), 255-87, p. 255; H.F. Moorhouse, ‘Attitudes to Class and Class Relationships in Britain’, *Sociology*, 10 (1976), 469-96, p. 469.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Slater and Mark Woodside, *Patterns of Marriage* (London: Cassell, 1951), p. 255.

<sup>26</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.

She stresses that employing categories such as occupation, income, or relationship to the means of production as indicators of 'class' is clearly problematical when focusing on women. Employed women may be categorised in terms of their own occupation, or that of the 'chief breadwinner' in the household, and women without paid employment are often allocated to the 'class' position of their husband or father.<sup>27</sup> Carolyn Steedman goes further, concluding women are 'without class, because the cut and fall of a skirt and good leather shoes can take you across the river on to the other side: the fairy-tales tell you that goose-girls may marry kings'.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless the language of class was dominant in the post-war decades and influenced how women viewed themselves.

This chapter will investigate these themes of family and kinship, neighbourhood and community, and class and social mobility in relation to women's accounts of motherhood between 1945 and 1970. It will examine how women's experiences were shaped by these factors, and ask whether despite these differences motherhood could in fact be a unifying experience.

## **Kinship**

Rather than recalling an institution in decline, many women reported the centrality of the extended family to their lives. Locality was influential here. Of the women interviewed in Oxford, more lived near members of the family in the city centre than in the suburbs. Half the women interviewed from the city-centre areas of Oxford had their mothers living within a few streets. Esther who lived in Osney and Fanny who lived on the Cowley Road lived next door to their parents. Olive and her husband shared a house in St

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Clement's with her mother for several years.<sup>29</sup> These figures fell to only a quarter for those living on the Cowley estates, and to a sixth for women in north Oxford. The closeness of the extended family seems to have been strongest in traditional urban working-class communities.<sup>30</sup> Rural women also recalled the significance of their extended families. Jessica was a doctor in Bloxham from the late-1940s. When discussing the changes that had occurred in the village over the last half-century she stated: 'I think that families were much more important, partly because they lived together and there was a strength in that, but it was more than that, there was a discipline that's not there now, that's changed tremendously.'<sup>31</sup> Jessica herself had not lived near an extended family and displayed, perhaps, a degree of envy and even romanticisation for the support of relatives that she felt she had missed.

There was also a class element at work as the ties of extended family were generally stronger for working-class women. Geographical mobility meant middle-class interviewees had often lived further from their families, although they recalled they would have liked help if it had been available. Megan grew up in a middle-class household in north London, but lived in St Clement's when her children were born in the early-1970s away from her family. Like Jessica, Megan felt she suffered because of this separation: 'My mother didn't live near, and neither did my mother-in-law, so I did feel very isolated, I think that was difficult.'<sup>32</sup> Middle-class women and their families often made efforts to remain in contact despite the distances between them. They had greater access to cars

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<sup>28</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape of a Good Woman: The Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 15-6.

<sup>29</sup> Esther, OX1, p. 7; Fanny, OX4, p. 1; Olive, OX6, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Roberts' respondents recalled similar networks of kin in Lancashire. Mrs O. 1. B., pp. 26, Elizabeth Roberts Archive, Centre for North-West Regional Studies.

<sup>31</sup> Jessica, BA8, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Megan, OX11, p. 7.

and telephones than their working-class contemporaries which helped them to do so.

Discussing the suburb of Woodford in east London, Willmott and Young wrote how:

Cars, telephones and letters are all means by which middle-class people can straddle the distance they have interposed between themselves and their relatives. With these technical aids, the middle-class people of Woodford keep in touch with relatives almost as much as working-class people do.<sup>33</sup>

It is noteworthy, however, that irrespective of class none of the Oxfordshire women recalled the close mother-daughter relationship, which significantly came at the expense of husbands, that Madeline Kerr presented as occurring in inner-city Liverpool. She found the attitude, 'I couldn't get on without my mother. I could get on without my husband. I don't notice him', was not unusual.<sup>34</sup> While some women were close to their mothers, when reviewing these relationships from their current perspective (often as the mothers of adult daughters themselves) they remembered them as being more nuanced and less intimate than those depicted in contemporary writings on traditional working-class communities.

In both traditional urban and rural areas the extended family network offered women company and entertainment with families coming together to celebrate rites of passage such as engagements, weddings, christenings and funerals.<sup>35</sup> Maud was born in Churchill Heath in 1921 and moved to nearby Milton-under-Wychwood after her marriage in 1940. She recalled how her extended family remained the centre of her social life throughout her childhood and adulthood. 'You know we had parties for everything under the sun, with a big family you've always got something haven't you? Somebody was either going to be married or [a] christening, so we were always something happening.'<sup>36</sup> Bethany was born in her grandmother's home in Wallingford in 1944. Both she and her husband

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<sup>33</sup> Willmott and Young, *Family and Class*, p. 80.

<sup>34</sup> Madeline Kerr, *The People of Ship Street* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1958), p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> Compare Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, p. 64.

had their family in the area and she moved to her husband's village of Preston Crowmarsh when she married in 1966. She described how important her extended family was to her parents when she was growing up: 'There were several cousins. We were very close really it was. My mother had five brothers and one sister. There were seven in the family and also there was a family farm. Life did revolve quite a lot around the family I think.'

The extended family remained a centre of friendship and support for Bethany:

I had quite a lot of cousins who had children at the same time...We used to go to the park and play tennis and the children would play as they grew bigger, so yeah, and of course I was fortunate that I'd got lots of my friends from living locally, you knew so many more people really.<sup>37</sup>

It was not only friends but even husbands who were met through the family circle. Maud's husband was a friend of the family whom she met through the Baptist church. She remembered how her husband had asked her father for her hand in marriage: 'He went properly, and so they approved you see really, but of course they knew him, they knew his people, they knew his father, well we called them uncle and aunty...but then of course they became my mother-in-law and father-in-law.'<sup>38</sup> Implied within Maud's account was the belief that marriage was as much between the families as the couple themselves.

In addition, the extended family also remained important as a site for the exchange of services. Childcare was perhaps the most important support which it provided to mothers at this time. Madge was born in Shipton-under-Wychwood in 1918 and grew up there before moving to the neighbouring village of Milton-under-Wychwood when she married in 1939. She described how she relied on many members of her kin to look after her children when she was unwell:

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<sup>36</sup> Maud, WY4, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Bethany, EW4, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Maud, WY4, p. 5.

I had a friend who not only had her own children, she used to foster them [too], and I was very friendly with her...and she was the one who looked after [my children], and then she went on holiday and my sister had him, they had quite a different variety of mothers to look after them. And then I had others who I was friendly with. I had a great aunt who was living next to me and she used to take them out in a pram for a walk, oh yes I had quite a lot of help.<sup>39</sup>

It is interesting to note how friends and relatives were interchangeable in Madge's discussion of the aid she received. She did not consider that a dichotomy existed between them as sociologists thought existed in urban working-class communities. Another contrast to the findings of Young and Willmott was that women in Oxfordshire described living close to members of their extended family but rarely visiting them. Young and Willmott found that women who had family living at close proximity saw them frequently (for example fifty-five percent of Bethnal Green women interviewed whose mother was alive had seen her in the previous twenty-four hours).<sup>40</sup> Doris and Tina were sisters-in-law who both lived in Benson when their children were young. While they felt they were a close family they also said they did not see each other on a regular basis. Doris explained: 'I mean we know where one another is if we want one another...I mean I've got a brother living in the village but I don't live in his house. But there again I know where he is and he knows where I am.'<sup>41</sup> The close mother-daughter bond described by Young and Willmott may also have been over-sentimentalised. For Oxfordshire women proximity did not equate to an intimate relationship.<sup>42</sup> Young and Willmott have been criticised for over-emphasising the warmth of Bethnal Green life. Jennifer Platt contended that, 'A preference is implied for the social atmosphere of the working-class communities', and the weaknesses of working-class life were downplayed.<sup>43</sup> Indeed Michael Young later admitted that due to his desire to challenge 'superior people who

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<sup>39</sup> Madge, WY8, p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Doris, BE2, p. 23.

<sup>42</sup> See pages 125-6.

<sup>43</sup> Jennifer Platt, *Social Research in Bethnal Green* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 13-7.

looked down on people in places like Bethnal Green as being inferior', he painted Bethnal Green in 'too rosy colours'.<sup>44</sup> Reflecting on the early work of the Institute of Community Studies, Peter Townsend has also acknowledged that the Institute's enthusiastic portrayal of working-class life meant that there were 'certain oppressive factors about male domination, in terms of gender, which we were then less sensitive to.'<sup>45</sup>

Women did express concern that the extended family was declining due to the increasing mobility of its members. However women in Oxfordshire also felt that grandmothers were now playing a greater part in the provision of childcare than when their children were young, due to the increasing numbers of working mothers. Mavis thought grandmothers today, including herself, spent more time looking after their grandchildren than previous generations.<sup>46</sup> Ingrid told an anecdote about a conversation with her granddaughter to illustrate this point: 'certainly [my granddaughter] only the other day she said, "Granny we've never had an au pair", and then said, "Well I suppose really you're our au pair aren't you?"'<sup>47</sup> Increased mobility meant that some women were unable to take an active part in caring for their grandchildren, but the majority of women did not present themselves as being any less involved with their grandchildren than their mother's generation had been. Their keenness to portray themselves in this way indicates not only that they thought that grandmothers were still central to the family, but that at a time when family ties are deemed to be less strong they felt it necessary to defend their role.

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<sup>44</sup> Michael Young interviewed by Paul Thompson, 'Reflections on Researching *Family and Kinship in East London*', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7 (2004): 35-44, p. 35.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Townsend, 'Reflections on Becoming a Researcher', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7 (2004): 85-95, p. 90.

<sup>46</sup> Mavis, EW10, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Ingrid, SO11, p. 13.

One notable change over time that did emerge was that fewer women lived with members of their extended family. This development coincided with the shift from privately rented housing to council housing and owner-occupation that accelerated in the decades after the war. In the 1940s and 1950s women recalled how they had still relied on their extended families to provide them with housing. Farmers' wives were the most obvious group as they moved to live with their husband's families on the farms they ran. However, many other women shared housing with their own, or their husband's families. The housing shortage during and after World War Two meant that women marrying in the 1940s often had no choice but to do so. Phyllis was originally from Burton-on-Trent, but joined the Land Army during the war and was sent to Shipton-under-Wychwood. She met her husband there and they married at the end of the war. Discussing the difficulty of finding housing Phyllis detailed the moves the couple made. They lived:

to start with, with my sister-in-law, coz accommodation was very hard to get. And then we went into a farm cottage. And then we went from there to live with my mother-in-law. And then from that when my eldest daughter was about three we moved into a council house.<sup>48</sup>

Like many women at this time Phyllis recalled her delight at moving into this council house – the first home of her own. Bobbie and her family were from Milton-under-Wychwood. Like Phyllis she met her husband, who was originally from Brighton, during the war when they were both in war-work at De Havilland's aircraft factory. Her husband chose to remain in Oxfordshire and joined Bobbie and her widowed mother in the family home after they married in 1948. She said, 'you couldn't get houses so we lived here with Mum, and we stayed here.'<sup>49</sup> The resigned manner in which Bobbie articulated this decision indicates that she had mixed feelings about the couple living with her mother. While she had a close relationship with her mother, who was a widow, and felt some

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<sup>48</sup> Phyllis, WY3, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Bobbie, WY7, p. 5.

degree of duty to remain with her, it seems the couple would have also liked to have some privacy and start married life in their own home.

As indicated above, circumstance rather than choice could bring families together. Some women who remembered seeing family members regularly recalled this was out of duress rather than choice. Doris and Tina, who were sisters-in-law from Benson, recalled the ambivalence they felt towards their mother-in-law. Doris had been born and brought up in the area and her family lived in Benson. Tina moved to Wallingford as a child to live with foster-parents after her own parents separated and moved into Benson upon her marriage. They both remembered their mother-in-law as being an extremely influential, but difficult figure in their lives:

Doris: We used to have to go up there nearly every day didn't we?

Tina: Yeah. If you didn't go up every day, if you were late it was, 'you should have been here half hour ago'. So if the kids needed feeding or something you didn't do it because of the routine.<sup>50</sup>

Tina felt this uneasy relationship with her mother-in-law was exacerbated by the fact that, unlike Doris, she did not have her own mother to turn to:

I think actually she didn't mean it, it came across wrongly, I always thought that. But she'd say the most awful things. I was always in tears. I think I spent the first years just in tears because of something that she'd said. Like she'd come in without any notice, she'd just come up and walk in, and I can remember one day I was using the pressure cooker, which was the thing in the sixties, and she said, '[My son's] never had food cooked in a pressure cooker. I don't know what you're doing to him?' And now I would just say well that's how I want to cook and that's it. But it was sort of really upsetting at the time, because I had no-one to really go and talk to about it. It really upset me.<sup>51</sup>

Peggy's mother had died when she was a child and like Tina she felt that this left her particularly vulnerable to the criticisms of her mother-in-law. After a number of years

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<sup>50</sup> Doris, BE2, pp. 22-3; Tina, BE3, pp. 22-3.

spent following her husband, a seaman, around the country, Peggy settled in Middleton Cheney her husband's home village in the mid-1950s. Despite her mother-in-law living 'up the avenue' she was totally unsupportive of Peggy. Peggy remembered how she told her she was: "Not good enough for my son", I don't know what she thought he was going to have, yes she told me, "You're not good enough for my son". She said, "That's it, you've got no education". I thought, "We'll see about this", but oh she was hateful.<sup>52</sup> Women in supposedly tight-knit communities who had kin nearby could have ambivalent attitudes towards their family members. In addition, women who chose to leave their families and kinship networks would surely have provided contrasting accounts of the communities in which they had lived. Nonetheless for many women the extended family provided help and assistance, friendship and support. While ties tended to be stronger in traditional urban and rural communities, and for working-class families, there was no strict rule in patterns of behaviour. In their description of the mother-daughter relationship and strength of the extended family in Bethnal Green, Young and Willmott did not take into account the tensions and ambiguities that could also occur within families. As the Oxfordshire evidence shows, while families were always important to women they were not always benign.

## **Neighbourhood**

Women were held to be central in preserving the unity and coherence of traditional communities. Ross McKibbin argues that the mother-daughter relationship was indeed the axis of the working-class family.<sup>53</sup> In relation to London at the beginning of the

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<sup>51</sup> Tina, BE2, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Peggy, BA9, pp. 6-7.

<sup>53</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 170.

twentieth century Ellen Ross has demonstrated that ‘Mum’ was the centre of the ‘survival networks’ by which extended families looked out for each other. It was ‘Mum’ who negotiated mutual assistance with other matriarchs in those larger networks which tied together neighbouring extended families.<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Roberts depicted a similar matriarchal community in Lancashire during the period 1890-1940. She demonstrated the mutual support and help women provided one another, but also the lengths to which they would go in their determination to establish and preserve their concepts of decent moral behaviour.<sup>55</sup> It was other women who featured most prominently in the Oxfordshire women’s accounts of their support networks. Reminiscing about Benson life during her childhood in the 1940s and 1950s, Gloria described an interdependency in the village based upon:

Knowing families and knowing they’re there if you need each other. I can see my mum now, we lived in the High Street and we were surrounded by elderly people, and no way would those people have been neglected. You didn’t lock your doors or anything like that, you know if you were worried if they seemed ill or something, somebody would be in there to make sure they were okay.<sup>56</sup>

There was sadness in Gloria’s account as she recalled what she felt was a vanishing world. This sense of loss was particularly upsetting as it highlighted the passing of a happy time in her life which may have caused her to exaggerate the villagers’ closeness. Nonetheless, at several points during her interview Gloria demonstrated the importance of the village community to her. Theresa illustrated the solidarity between women in the hamlet of Edgecote where she lived in the early-1950s stating:

if anything was desperate I would just say to somebody you know perhaps, ‘Will you just keep an eye on the kids?’, there was a woman opposite who had small children, and, ‘I’ll nip up and get so and so.’ Or she would come to me and say, ‘Oh will you watch mine, I’m off on [my bike].’<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ellen Ross, ‘Survival Networks: Women’s Neighbourhood Sharing in London before the First World War’, *History Workshop Journal*, 15 (1983), 4-27.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman’s Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), pp, 187-94.

<sup>56</sup> Gloria, BE14, pp. 21-2.

<sup>57</sup> Theresa, BA10, p. 17.

What is interesting from the Oxfordshire evidence is that the patterns of neighbourhood and community that social scientists believed characterised traditional working-class urban areas could also be seen in rural localities.

Interviewees who lived in Oxford also recalled tight-knit communities, though. Rebecca and her husband rented rooms in a house in Jericho when they had their first baby in the early-1950s. She explained:

We had a very nice landlady...we were right up at the top of one of those houses backing onto the factory and we shared our tiny flat with seven undergraduates and there was one bathroom with the only loo in it. And the landlady was an absolute charmer, sweet, she loved the baby, she was very deaf. 'Bring him downstairs I'll look after him when you go off to the cinema', and this was wonderful.<sup>58</sup>

In the absence of her own mother, Rebecca's landlady acted as a maternal figure to her and offered support and advice. Georgie recalled a similar picture of help from her landlady when her first baby was born in 1961.<sup>59</sup> As well as mother substitutes, women also recalled building up a quasi-extended family amongst their neighbours. Before moving to their own house in North Oxford, Emily and her husband had lived in a shared house in the city centre when their first baby was born. Emily found that there was a strong support system at work in the house and she missed this when the family moved. Having other mothers around had been beneficial to her. She stated: 'I didn't know what I would have done without that actually'. She had 'neighbours down below who had three children a little bit older, she was therefore an experienced mum. She really tutored me I would say...And so if anything [happened] I always knew I could go and ask.'<sup>60</sup> Faith recalled how her neighbours in Jericho proved invaluable when she was left alone with her young baby after her husband walked out on her. In discussing how they had

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<sup>58</sup> Rebecca, OX10, p. 11.

<sup>59</sup> Georgie, OX2, p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> Emily, NO8, p. 8.

helped her she described a similar neighbourhood-centred street life to that Mogeys had found in St Ebbe's:

I was fortunate to have wonderful friends who helped me through it. Women who had children. They weren't University people, they were quite a different set. They were people who lived in Oxford and who had grown up here and who had lived in our neighbourhood and became friends.

*So how had you come to meet them? Was it people you were living near?*

Yeah people I was living near. And I think everyone was out more, people were on the street, and they'd have a drink and you know people were very sociable. And we just got to know them and you know liked them enormously and they just kinda took us under their wing.<sup>61</sup>

While neighbours obviously proved a notable support network for women in traditional neighbourhoods, Young and Willmott had stressed that in Bethnal Greeners' conception of community neighbours were acquaintances rather than friends. They stated: 'Most people meet their acquaintances in the street, at the market, at the pub or at work. They do not usually invite them into their own houses.'<sup>62</sup> There was some evidence of this distinction in the narratives of the Oxfordshire women. Olive was brought up in St Clement's but moved to Jericho after her first child was born. When asked whether she socialised much with the other mothers living around her she replied:

I don't think I had many womenfolk in, I had children in and playing in the garden I think, but I don't think I would have had as many people in as I personally would have probably liked. I don't think we went to each other's houses either very much, we would meet mostly in the park or in the recreation ground or something of that nature.<sup>63</sup>

Maud lived in the village of Milton-under-Wychwood after her marriage in 1940. She stressed the strong sense of community that existed and the support villagers provided to one another. However she did not approve of what she considered to be the modern practice of neighbours forming friendships, arguing that, 'I think there'll be a lot of

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<sup>61</sup> Faith, SO12, p. 5.

<sup>62</sup> Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, p. 84.

fighting before it's finished, coz people don't tend to get on with their neighbours, I don't think.'<sup>64</sup> Overall, though, interviewees did not remember a concern with respectability or desire to keep themselves to themselves. Indeed some of the women who had moved into these communities wished it had been possible to form closer bonds of friendship. Lindsay moved to St Clement's to join her husband who lived there and found it very difficult to integrate into the community because it was such a tight-knit neighbourhood.<sup>65</sup> As the period progressed and increasing numbers of families were rehoused the demographic make up of the city-centre areas made it even harder for mothers who moved there. Young families tended to be the first to leave so women were left without their peer group. Mabel's husband was sent to Oxford during the war and she moved to join him, also living in St Clement's. When asked whether there were any other women with young children around, she answered, 'there was no other young mothers. The girl next door had none, and the other ladies were older.'<sup>66</sup>

It was also notable from the interviews with Oxfordshire women that they found estates to be places with a strong sense of neighbourhood. In contrast to the contemporary sociological orthodoxy – which negatively compared the feeling of community amongst residents in new estates with established housing stock – women from all areas of the county who lived in housing estates recalled enjoying the friendship and support of their neighbours. The feeling of community amongst women on estates was encouraged by the fact that they tended to bring together people in like circumstances and at the same stage in the life cycle. Grace lived in a small, private estate in north Oxford when she had her first baby in the mid-1960s. She recalled her neighbour as being a hugely significant

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<sup>63</sup> Olive, OX6, p. 20.

<sup>64</sup> Maud, WY4, p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Lindsay, OX12, p. 11.

<sup>66</sup> Mabel, OX9, p. 4.

figure in her life and in doing so revealed the difficult time she faced after the birth of her first child:

I had a very nice neighbour...she said, 'Why don't we have a tot lot? Why don't we take it...', there were three of us with small babies, 'Why don't we on Monday, Wednesday and Friday one of us have all three children, let them play together all morning and give them lunch so mum can go off and do something.' And this was, you know as I was saying, I was pretty hopeless as a mother and I found it desperately lonely and desperately, you know, one worried and [my neighbour] was absolutely my salvation, it just transformed my life.<sup>67</sup>

Stories of the support women received from neighbours on these estates were common.

Joanna lived in an estate of newly-built houses in east Oxford when she had her children in the 1960s. She said:

It was a little community. The children all went to the same school. And when [my daughter] was born, by chance, when she got to be sort of two or three, there were five families in the close, all with little girls strangely enough, about the same age...so it was like a small nursery, just five of us.<sup>68</sup>

In Polly's street, which was on a private estate built in Benson in the 1960s, each mother had all the children for one morning a week, allowing the other mothers some free time.

Fiona lived on the same Benson estate as Polly. She said: 'I suppose really my closest friends were the people who lived near us. Lived on the same estate. It just so happened that there were people of like mind you know. And we used to have a lovely time.'<sup>69</sup>

Fiona had enjoyed life on the Brighton estate she previously lived on so much that she had been determined to live on an estate again. For Agnes the neighbours on her estate also formed her social life. They enjoyed such sociability it was almost burdensome. She lived on a newly-built, private estate in Ewelme in the 1960s and felt that because the residents were all newcomers to the village, and struggled to integrate with the native villagers, they formed a tight-knit group:

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<sup>67</sup> Grace, NO7, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Joanna, CO5, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> Fiona, BE10, p. 13.

Because we were all external we celebrated every birthday, every anniversary, because we felt like it...We had a party every week. So it got to the stage when I said to [my husband], 'I think I'm sick of parties', you know, 'we haven't given one in three weeks we better have it.'<sup>70</sup>

In contrast to the findings of Young and Willmott in 'Greenleigh', working-class women in Oxfordshire remembered the same camaraderie existing on estates as their middle-class counterparts. Doreen and Peggy were neighbours from a council estate built in the 1950s in the village of Middleton Cheney on the Oxfordshire-Northamptonshire border. They had enjoyed a close friendship from when they moved into their houses up to the present day, and in the course of their interview (they chose to be interviewed together) both stressed how significant this had been throughout their lives. Peggy summed up what their friendship had meant to her: 'Yeah it's good to have a friend like that, no matter what happens.' She also stressed how happy she had been to move into the house, saying, 'I've never moved since, I wouldn't, the next place I go is over the back to the cemetery...I waited long enough for this, my god I did.'<sup>71</sup> Peggy's house and her relationship with her neighbours were a central theme of her narrative demonstrating their importance to her. Rita was born and brought up in Adderbury. She and her husband initially lived there with her parents after they married before moving to a newly-built council house on an estate in Kings Sutton in the mid-1950s. Although she recalled the distance from her family as being difficult – after her mother died she used to walk with the baby in the pram to Adderbury three miles away for the afternoon to visit her father – she still spoke of the happiness and improvement to their lives that the move brought. She remembered the friendship and support on the estate that she received from her neighbours, again sharing childcare together.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Agnes, EW1, p. 19.

<sup>71</sup> Peggy, BA9, p. 21.

<sup>72</sup> Rita, BA6, pp. 8-9.

It is clear that in Oxfordshire women with a variety of class backgrounds and who lived in new estates across the county, including those in suburban areas, villages, and both council and privately built, found that estates provided a strong sense of community. Neighbours were referred to as being extremely significant people in the women's lives. Moreover on moving from a traditional urban neighbourhood to a new housing estate some women actually discovered the patterns of neighbourliness that researchers had thought were confined to old areas. Glenda moved from London to Banbury and discussed the benefits of relocating:

it was very boring in London, extremely boring. Because, well I suppose it was us in a way, because you were sat in this little house all day long from morning to night, it was a bit lonely, and you'd take the pram and do the shopping, come back and have a bit of lunch, take the pram out and then, yeah daytime was dull.

In contrast when the family moved to Banbury:

we moved into a new house in a group of eight and everybody was very friendly, so for a start it was so much more friendly, this idea that London's all that pally is not true. It was very pleasant, we had three small children, we had quite a nice house, and it was a very pleasant little town.<sup>73</sup>

As stated above, women often established informal groups to share childcare, however they also reported more structured associations. Ellen and her neighbour set up a toddler group in Ewelme and she also belonged to baby-sitting circles in both Ewelme and Benson. She thought they were a 'good social contact, as well as being useful to have.'<sup>74</sup> Playgroups were the other important organisations developed at this time. The national playgroup movement began in 1961 with a letter to the *Guardian* women's page suggesting that because of the lack of nursery school places mothers might get together and provide their own substitutes. The Preschool Playgroups Association (PPA) was formed later that year. Although it initially saw playgroups as a temporary expedient to meet the unsatisfied demand for state-

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<sup>73</sup> Glenda, BA2, p. 11.

provided pre-schooling, the PPA came to promote them as an alternative form of provision.<sup>75</sup> Several of the women reported being involved in running playgroups. Lindsay recalled how the 1960s were a revolutionary time when women were starting to form organisations and associations to enhance their lives. She said: ‘this was the time also that the national housewives register was formed via the women’s page of the *Guardian*, and of course a whole lot of other things were started there, the Preschool Playgroups Association, that started with a letter in the *Guardian*.’<sup>76</sup> Jackie also remembered having first read about playgroups in the *Guardian* women’s page. She was one of the co-founders of the Wychwoods playgroup. When discussing why she got involved she explained it was largely to provide her with a break from her children: ‘having twins of course, I was rather keen that I should get them off my hands a bit [laughing], you see it was desperation, and reading the *Guardian* and hearing about this playgroup movement...I thought that this sounded like a good idea.’<sup>77</sup>

Janet Finch argues that playgroups operated on the model of paternal breadwinning and homely maternal care for children as they assumed the availability of the mother not only to provide the basic care for children when they were not at playgroup, but also to actually run the organisation.<sup>78</sup> While playgroups did not offer an alternative to full-time motherhood, they did provide women with the opportunity for social contacts, work outside the home and a break from their children, all of which were very welcome. Playgroups have been categorised as a middle-class phenomenon. Not only did they begin on the *Guardian* women’s page, but they flourished rapidly in suburban areas and small towns and villages.

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<sup>74</sup> Ellen, EW3, p. 11.

<sup>75</sup> Janet Finch, ‘The Deceit of Self Help: Preschool Playgroups and Working Class Mothers’, *Journal of Social Policy*, 13 (1984), 1-20, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Lindsay, OX12, pp. 11-12. The ‘Housebound Wives’ Register’ was also set up in 1961 through the women’s page of the *Guardian*. From 1966 it was known as the ‘National Housewives’ Register’.

<sup>77</sup> Jackie, WY10, p. 13.

<sup>78</sup> Finch, ‘Self Help’, p. 5.

Finch suggests that setting up a voluntary organisation is fundamentally a middle-class activity and the tradition of voluntary work is rooted in middle-class experience.<sup>79</sup> This picture is not altogether borne out by the Oxfordshire evidence. Diana was involved in starting the playgroup in Ewelme. She did find a divide in attitudes towards the playgroup in the village, but she defined this as being between old and new villagers rather than simply class based. Discussing reactions in the village when the playgroup was launched, she said, 'I suppose you'd call them the indigenous families, they resisted, they didn't believe in not bringing up the child themselves.'<sup>80</sup> In neighbouring Benson, Florence who was a 'native' of the village did express this view, refusing to send her children to the playgroup set up there.<sup>81</sup> Interestingly Florence was a 'working mother'. She was employed as a nurse and shared childcare with her husband. Nonetheless she was critical of mothers who sent their children to the playgroup and was hostile to the idea because it seemed an unnecessary invention by incomers. This division between old and new villagers, and perhaps also between the generations, seems to be more important than class. Marilyn described herself as working class. She left school at sixteen and worked as a typist before having her children in the early-1970s. After her marriage she moved to Benson with her husband for his work. Unlike Bridget she was happy to be involved in the Benson playgroup because it 'kept me out of the house and gave me something to do.'<sup>82</sup>

## **Class**

Women did use the language of class in defining their identities. They described how class distinctions had influenced their upbringing. Their mothers especially had stressed

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> Diana, EW2, pp. 2-3.

<sup>81</sup> Florence, BE8, p. 11.

<sup>82</sup> Marilyn, BE13, p. 6.

what was appropriate behaviour for girls of their own class.<sup>83</sup> What was and what was not a suitable career seemed to have been of particular importance. For example Deirdre came from an upper-working-class background in Banbury. Her father had worked as a gentleman's tailor, but her mother clearly had aspirations to improve the family's status and had a strong sense of what was 'respectable' behaviour. When discussing what she wanted to do when she left school during the war Deirdre recalled, 'I remember saying to my mum I would like to join the Wrens, "Oh for goodness sake" she said, "What do you want to go into the Wrens for?" she said, "You don't know who you're going to meet".'<sup>84</sup> Bet was from a similarly upwardly mobile working-class family and her parents ran a shop. Bet's mother did not want her to go into nursing, telling her 'oh it's very dirty'.<sup>85</sup> Class was also important for the women in that they associated with people with similar class backgrounds. For Gloria the feeling of community in Benson was linked to class. She thought it was the working-class residents who shared a common way of life and were all in the 'same boat'.<sup>86</sup> The phrase 'in the same boat' seems to have been a popular way for members of the working class to describe themselves at this time and was also used by Roberts' interviewees in Lancashire.<sup>87</sup> It was when women met people from outside of their own class that distinctions became most apparent. Camilla came from a middle-class background in Sheffield and had been university educated, but she experienced an intense culture shock when confronted with upper-middle-class life after husband got a job at Rugby School. In one anecdote she recalled how a senior wife had said, 'My dear you must remember that we never push out our own children and nobody [should do it] in the mornings'.<sup>88</sup> Kelly thought that class was a particularly important

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<sup>83</sup> Phoebe, SO8, pp. 16-7; Emily, NO8, p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> Deirdre, BA1, p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> Bet, CO1, p. 6.

<sup>86</sup> Gloria, BE14, p. 25.

<sup>87</sup> Mrs L. 2. L., p. 26, Elizabeth Roberts Archive, Centre for North-West Regional Studies.

<sup>88</sup> Camilla, SO6, p. 5.

issue in Oxford as it was rife with class divisions. She explained: 'there's a very strong class element round here.'<sup>89</sup> She was not alone in this view. Rebecca also thought Oxford was polarised along class lines, arguing, 'Some [are] very poor and some pretty rich in Oxford as I'm sure you know.'<sup>90</sup>

Tina thought that class distinctions had changed over time:

I've heard [my husband] and I've heard [my brother-in-law] say it, "We're working class and proud of it", and I sort of say, "I'm not working class I'm working upwards mate", and it's sort of more that, and I don't think there is a class distinction as such. They don't say you're rich, you're poor, you're on a different level. It's moulded in a lot more. But there's always going to be obviously where you're born and who you're born to.<sup>91</sup>

As Tina's comments illustrate, definitions of class are both ambiguous and subject to change, with gender also influencing people's responses. The difficulties in assigning women to a class were seen amongst the women interviewed in Oxfordshire. Marilyn felt she came from a working-class background in Lewisham. Her mother was a shop assistant, who worked throughout her childhood, her father was a porter, and she herself left school at sixteen to work as a typist. She felt that she and her middle-class husband were from very different backgrounds and she was not happy to be viewed as middle class herself.<sup>92</sup> Indeed she found it uncomfortable to discuss the class difference between her own and her husband's families as there was some tension between them. Siobhan was married to a dentist and was herself university educated. She was, however, the daughter of a cooper from a family of Irish immigrants. She later worked as a receptionist at her husband's practice. If her class were to be determined by her father's occupation, her husband's occupation and on her own occupation, each would have a

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<sup>89</sup> Kelly, SO10, p. 18.

<sup>90</sup> Rebecca, OX10, p. 19.

<sup>91</sup> Tina, BE3, p. 35.

<sup>92</sup> Marilyn, BE13, p. 5.

different outcome. Siobhan herself did not think she was strongly attached to any class.<sup>93</sup> Some women married below their class. Lindsay's father was a civil engineer and her mother was a doctor, she was herself an Oxford graduate, but she married a local Oxford man who worked at Harwell (she explained he was employed at the lowest grade), and they lived in St Clement's. While Lindsay did not explicitly say that she had fallen down the class hierarchy, at several points in her narrative she explained with some regret that she had not enjoyed the same standard of living as her parents had done.<sup>94</sup>

In their accounts women who moved between classes did express the difficulties they faced in doing so. For example Claudia, who came from a working-class background in Yorkshire, felt uncomfortable when she went to Oxford University because she felt like the 'poor relation'. She stated: 'Oh I was very intimidated by all the posh accents and the fact that most of the other girls came from private schools. I can certainly remember feeling that.'<sup>95</sup> Rose also had experienced difficulties in adjusting to life at university in Oxford when she moved there from Yorkshire. Both her parents had worked in the local textile industry, although her mother stopped work upon marriage. She felt her education produced a degree of tension between them. 'I zoomed up the educational ladder [pause]. There had to be a certain amount of informal negotiating of the relationship but [pause] always it was a close relationship in which they clearly cared a lot for me and I felt a great deal of obligation to them.'<sup>96</sup> She found it difficult to talk about her relationship with her parents. At this point her narrative became disjointed, an indication of her ambiguous feelings. From their study of Woodford Willmott and Young had concluded that 'movement from one class to another creates a barrier inside the family only for men, not

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<sup>93</sup> Siobhan, BE1, p. 1.

<sup>94</sup> Lindsay, OX12, pp. 6-8, 10.

<sup>95</sup> Claudia, SO2, pp. 5-6.

<sup>96</sup> Rose, NO12, pp. 1-2.

for women.’<sup>97</sup> While in part this view seems to be a simplification of the complex tensions that could exist for women, it is interesting that when Rose’s father retired her parents came to live in Oxford and after her mother was widowed she moved to live with Rose. Rose’s experiences suggest that irrespective of women’s social mobility women’s ties to their family remained strong.

Class differences did emerge in the women’s experiences. While most women seemed to form friendships from amongst their neighbours, middle-class women were more likely to join organisations in order to find companionship. This was a trend that had been commented upon by social investigators at the time, for example Willmott and Young found that in Woodford fifty-seven percent of all inhabitants belonged to some kind of club or association.<sup>98</sup> In Oxfordshire, the most popular organised groups were linked to the church, with the Young Wives and Mothers’ Union being the most commonly referred to.<sup>99</sup> However these were not exclusively middle-class groups and several working-class women also attended them. Judy, who was the most active member of organisations in the sample and was involved in running the Florence Park community centre, came from a working-class background.<sup>100</sup> Another interesting feature of the Oxfordshire evidence is that the women interviewed who presented themselves as being the most isolated – in that they said they did not have a friendship network or even need this support – were all highly educated, although not necessarily from middle-class backgrounds. Rose came from a working-class background in Yorkshire, but won a scholarship to Oxford and went on to marry an Oxford don. When asked how much socialising she did with other mothers she regretfully replied, ‘Virtually none...I think

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<sup>97</sup> Willmott and Young, *Family and Class*, p. 86.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 101-8.

<sup>99</sup> Glenda, BA2, p. 13; Ethel, BE6, pp. 13-4; Nancy, CO3, pp. 14-5; Deborah, CO6, pp. 14-5; Eve, CO8, p. 2; Judy, CO10, p. 8; Hope, CO11, p. 13; Lisa, CO12, p. 9; Georgie, OX2, pp. 28-30; Lindsay, OX12, p. 11.

this is maybe the bugbear of a very academic background. What I valued most was time for myself and all the time the children were growing up I never, I can see that now I'm much older, went in for making friends.'<sup>101</sup> Hannah continued to work full-time as a university researcher after her children were born and felt that she had little in common with other mothers, and subsequently did not enjoy their company. She recalled how 'we used to go out to dinner too, and then after dinner people would separate and I used to be bored stiff listening to the conversation of [the other women], yes I felt quite isolated.'<sup>102</sup> It is significant that even amongst a group of women from a similar class and educational background Hannah felt separate from them due to her pursuit of a career. Similarly, when asked how easy she found it to make friends when she moved from Oxford to Manchester, Kelly replied:

It wasn't. There were hardly any women in the university...I really had made no friends in Manchester, there were some people basically the parents of children who knew each other, I think everybody had their problems and no-one really understood mine or was interested in mine.<sup>103</sup>

This theme of having no close female friends ran throughout Kelly's narrative. Indeed the points in her story when she revealed her difficulties in adjusting to motherhood were also moments when she expressed sadness at having no female friends to support her.

Rather than using a simple class analysis, Margaret Stacey offered an alternative dichotomy between the traditional and non-traditional in describing residents of Banbury. The traditional residents were more likely to have been born in or near the place where they would spend their lives and so be physically close to their families. They were less occupationally mobile and often had a 'traditional' view of the social hierarchy.<sup>104</sup> The

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<sup>100</sup> Judy, CO10, p. 8.

<sup>101</sup> Rose, NO12, pp. 14-5.

<sup>102</sup> Hannah, SO7, pp. 4-5.

<sup>103</sup> Kelly, SO10, pp. 13-4.

<sup>104</sup> McKibbin, *Classes*, p. 101.

non-traditional encompassed the large numbers of middle- and working-class newcomers who moved into the town in the 1930s after the construction of the aluminium factory, who were socially and geographically mobile, and whom were harder to place.<sup>105</sup> This concept seems applicable when talking about the rural communities in Oxfordshire as well. Agnes and Diana both moved into Ewelme in the 1950s and recalled the ‘great deal of suspicion’<sup>106</sup> with which they were greeted by the native villagers. They felt this reaction was particularly strong because, as Stacey had also found in Banbury, they challenged the existing social hierarchy. Diana explained:

It was the early sixties and the only new houses that had been built since the war were council houses, so all the rest of the houses, as you know, had been there a long time, and they were either big houses or cottages. And then there were four bungalows built, and we bought one of those. So I was a bit different from people who lived in small cottagey places, coz they rented, so that made a difference. And it was when the children, well when my son started going to school and his best friend used to come and play but my son was never invited to go there...But we were sort of kept separate, we were in a different category altogether. We weren’t village people, we weren’t big house people.<sup>107</sup>

Jackie faced a similar reception when she moved into Milton-under-Wychwood. The other villagers thought:

we were very exotic as people, ‘A’ we came from London and ‘B’ we were in politics because [my husband] had been adopted as the [Liberal Party’s parliamentary] candidate by then. So in a way we were a bit celebrities, people didn’t know quite what to make of us. We were also very poor, and usually celebrities quote unquote are quite well off [laughing] and we weren’t at all and we lived in this very small cottage. People didn’t know what to make of us at all.<sup>108</sup>

Working-class women who moved into villages faced the same distrust and even hostility as their middle-class counterparts. Peggy had been born in Redditch, but spent much of

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<sup>105</sup> Margaret Stacey, *Tradition and Change: A Study of Banbury* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 11-4.

<sup>106</sup> Agnes, EW1, p. 18.

<sup>107</sup> Diana, EW2, p. 10.

<sup>108</sup> Jackie, WY10, p. 4.

her childhood in Banbury. When she moved into the nearby village of Middleton Cheney, which was where her husband was from, she found the villagers unfriendly.<sup>109</sup> Peggy's neighbour Doreen had been born and brought up in Lancashire and moved to the village to join her husband after the war. When asked what it was like to move there she replied:

Well first of all I'd been in the forces, and when I got married, I mean there's always girls around you. Then when I got married...I didn't know a soul down there. The only people I knew was [my husband's] family up in the village here, so it was a big shock to me, shock to the system like.<sup>110</sup>

The native villagers did express ambivalent feelings about incomers to their villages. Alice, who lived in Middle Barton, thought people who moved into the village from towns were unsuited to village life, missed the amenities of towns and 'didn't last long, a couple of years and they were gone again.'<sup>111</sup> Commenting upon changes which had occurred in Benson, Florence said, 'There's a lot of people who only sleep here, yeah go to town to work, to London or to Oxford and they literally only come home at night, but also they don't all participate in things in the village, which I always think is a pity.'<sup>112</sup> Gloria, another Benson resident, thought that people who had been brought up and then continued to live in the same place, as she herself had done, enjoyed a better quality of life than those who were geographically mobile:

I do feel sorry sometimes for people who sort of flit from one place to another and never really getting to know somebody properly, and really, really knowing them, and knowing their history. Coz you see living in a village, and if you know what their mum was like and what their mum's mum was like they can't put on any airs and graces because you know exactly what stock they've come from and they know that about us, so there's no pretence, there's no putting on airs and graces, so you know all about them, so you're relaxed with them.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Peggy, BA9, p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Doreen, BA3, p. 1.

<sup>111</sup> Alice, WY2, pp. 11-2.

<sup>112</sup> Florence, BE8, p. 13.

<sup>113</sup> Gloria, BE14, pp. 21-2.

In her account of Benson's traditional community Gloria alluded to another significant point – the centrality of women.<sup>114</sup> Gloria presents Benson as a matriarchal society providing stability but also regulation for its members, and it was this structure that she felt had been lost.

## **Conclusion**

The type of neighbourhood a woman lived in had a great effect on her experiences of motherhood during the post-war decades. It influenced patterns of marriage, kinship and friendship. Social scientists who were investigating British social life at this time recorded similar findings and also believed that they could account for why these differences occurred. Josephine Klein believed transition was the key factor in explaining the variations that the studies depicted.<sup>115</sup> Ronald Frankenberg thought that the differences between villages, towns and cities could be explained by seeing them as stages on an evolutionary process. The studies were documenting social change, this took place at variable rates in different localities and encompassed ideas of regional and occupational-group based differences.<sup>116</sup> The implication of this theory of transition was that all groups would reach the same level of progress at some point. This view is elaborated in Young and Willmott's *Symmetrical Family* where they suggest that a newer form of family life based on companionship had slowly filtered down from the middle class to different levels of the working class. Young and Willmott's view had significant implications for women's experiences of motherhood because they thought the role of women in the family would be transformed. They believed the conception of marriage as

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<sup>114</sup> See pages 90-1.

<sup>115</sup> Klein, *Samples*, pp. 176-7.

<sup>116</sup> Ronald Frankenberg, *Communities in Britain: Social Life in Town and Country* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 1.

a partnership would continue to develop ultimately culminating in the spread of the symmetrical family, where husband and wife would have more or less equal roles, both working in the home and outside it.<sup>117</sup> The authors of the social surveys and community studies made some perceptive analyses of the variation that occurred in families during the period, such as the contrasting power and status of men and women in the home in different areas. The limitation of the studies was that they tended to operate on a class-based differentiation and assume a value-laden division between urban, rural and suburban communities. Furthermore, there was a lack of appreciation of the ambivalent feelings women could hold towards their families.

From the Oxfordshire interviews it is clear that women of all social backgrounds shared mixed experiences of family. In addition there were similarities for women with regards to their experiences of being a mother that existed irrespective of class. Whatever the type of neighbourhood women lived in having children seemed to provide them with an entry into the community and other mothers of young children provided their principal support networks. Despite sociologists suggesting that in 'old' communities kin provided support and in 'new' communities friends did, this dichotomy does not seem to be reflected in the experiences of young mothers. Neighbours provided women in both sorts of area with social contacts. Enid and Ethel were both born and brought up in Benson, each having two children between 1938 and 1948. They both recalled how when they had their children the young mothers in the village would go for walks together with their babies, noting that this was no longer a feature of village life.<sup>118</sup> This network of mothers continued to exist in Benson in the 1960s. Gloria was also raised in Benson and had a large extended family around her. However she recalled it was her neighbour, rather than

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<sup>117</sup> Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *The Symmetrical Family: A Study of Work and Leisure in the London Region* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) (1973).

relatives, with whom she spent most of time.<sup>119</sup> Karen lived in Garsington when her first baby was born in 1967. She was an immigrant to the village, but also explained that it was her neighbours in the village rather than her friends outside it who offered her help and companionship: ‘there were two other women of around my age which was twenty-one...who had children of around the same age as [my son]...And so we got quite friendly and one of them ended up being my childminder when I went back to university.’<sup>120</sup> Neither does this experience seem to have been confined to rural areas. Esther lived in Osney when her children were born. When asked whether she socialised much with other mothers of young children she said, ‘Yes there were quite a lot of mothers with young children. There was a nice mixture. We all helped each other out.’<sup>121</sup> Rebecca summed up what she believed to have been the common experience for women having children in the 1950s and 1960s: ‘I think like many mothers of my generation a lot of very good friends started with meeting at the school gate or you know that sort of thing.’<sup>122</sup> Women used their shared circumstance of being mothers of young children to develop social networks. While the ways in which they did so and their level of success depended on factors such as their background and the locality they lived in, motherhood still served as a unifying experience for women in the post-war decades.

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<sup>118</sup> Enid, BE12, p. 16; Ethel, BE6, p. 16.

<sup>119</sup> Gloria, BE14, p. 25.

<sup>120</sup> Karen, SO4, p. 7.

<sup>121</sup> Esther, OX1, p. 5.

<sup>122</sup> Rebecca, OX10, p. 11.

## **Chapter Five: *How to Make a Mother: Preparing Women for Motherhood***

### **Introduction**

In the middle decades of the twentieth century the question of how girls should be prepared for their future role of mothers provoked considerable debate. Amongst those who believed motherhood needed to be taught there was often disagreement about where should this education take place. Others argued that education was unnecessary as the ability to mother was innate. Despite the rhetoric during these years about the need to educate girls to be mothers it is questionable how successfully these aims were put into practice. Indeed personal testimony indicates how ignorant and ill-equipped many women felt with regards to pregnancy, childbirth and infant care as late as the 1960s. While the importance of motherhood for women, for their children and for society was universally accepted, the processes by which women came to see themselves as mothers were largely ignored and taken for granted. This chapter will explore how and to what extent women were being prepared for motherhood, where this preparation took place and whether patterns of experience crossed background and class.

As Penny Summerfield has argued, it is possible ‘to encompass within oral history analysis and interpretation, not only the voice that speaks for itself, but also the voices that speak to it, the discursive formulations from which understandings are selected and within which accounts are made.’<sup>1</sup> This chapter will therefore examine the discourses surrounding the education of women for motherhood in the period 1945-1970. It will address the ideals of innate motherhood, commonsensical motherhood and learnt

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<sup>1</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 15.

motherhood, and how women used elements from these ideals in their narratives. Joan Scott has noted how fantasy is at play in the articulation of identity. 'It extracts coherence from confusion, reduces multiplicity to singularity, and reconciles illicit desire to the law.'<sup>2</sup> The chapter will conclude by seeing how women's fantasies of becoming a mother helped them construct their identities as mothers, and how these fantasies correlated with their actual experiences.

### **The Education of Mothers**

The notion that women learnt how to mother in the home derived from two principal sources. Firstly, from psychoanalysis and the belief that girls unconsciously internalise maternal values and behaviours and then relive their experiences of their relationship with their mothers when they in turn become mothers. The implication of this view was that motherhood could be expected to come naturally to women. Secondly it derived from sociology and social learning theory, namely that girls learn to mother and to be like mothers by consistently and positively being reinforced when they imitate their mothers' behaviours.<sup>3</sup> Women learnt through experience with knowledge best acquired in the home, passed down from mother to daughter. With regard to psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud's theories of the development of the individual, femininity and female sexuality were firmly established by the inter-war years. Freud had argued that the desire for motherhood was part of normal female psychic development.<sup>4</sup> In addition, psychoanalytic theory highlighted how the mother-daughter relationship was instilled with a renewed importance when women had a child of their own as they relived their

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<sup>2</sup> Joan W. Scott, 'Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity', *Critical Inquiry*, 27, (2001), 284-304, p. 289.

<sup>3</sup> Carol Boyd, 'Mothers and Daughters: A Discussion of Theory and Research.' *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51 (1989), 291-301, p. 291.

experience of being mothered. The well-known post-war paediatrician and child psychologist Donald Winnicott thought a woman could learn little from the medical profession, but argued that she ‘may have learned a great deal from having been an infant and also from watching parents with babies and from taking part in the care of siblings, and most of all she has learned a great deal of vital importance when playing at mothers and fathers at a tender age.’<sup>5</sup> Likewise writing in the early-1960s, the midwife and agony aunt Clare Raynor believed, ‘A little girl, playing with a doll, is more than a pretty sight. She is acting out her relationship with her mother, and, consequently, her future relationship with her own children.’<sup>6</sup> This concept of a maternal instinct was widely disseminated. As Sally Macintyre notes, it has been used within everyday society to imply that ‘humans (and especially women) want to have babies, or have instinctual drives towards reproduction; that this drive has individual and species survival value; that pregnancy is normal; and that childbearing is woman’s highest, yet most basic, function.’<sup>7</sup>

As well as the psychoanalytic view of women re-enacting their fantasies of being mothered with their children, commentators also felt that girls learnt from their mothers in a more practical way. Mothering was a skill learnt by experience and passed down the generations. In *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957) Michael Young and Peter Willmott argued that mothers and daughters could ‘co-operate so effectively because the younger has not only the same work, but has learnt how to do it from the older woman.’<sup>8</sup> Young and Willmott found that women continued to learn from their mothers after their children were born, with mothers providing their principal source of advice. They stated:

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<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Femininity’ [orig. 1933], in *Standard Edition*, Vol. 22, 112-35, p. 128.

<sup>5</sup> D.W. Winnicott, *Babies and Their Mothers* (London: Free Association Press, 1988), p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> Clare Raynor, *Mothers and Midwives* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd, 1962), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Sally Macintyre, ‘“Who Wants Babies?” The Social Construction of Instincts’, in Sheila Allen and Diana Leonard Barker (eds.), *Sexual Divisions and Society: Process and Change* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1976), 150-173, p. 151.

‘When the wife gets contradictory advice from the welfare clinic and from her Mum, she usually listens to the person she trusts most.’ They believed that this situation was the result of the local kinship structure in Bethnal Green with the geographical proximity of mothers and daughters promoting the bond between them.<sup>9</sup> The notion that girls should learn housewifery from watching and helping their mothers was commonly held. The educationalist Kathleen Ollerenshaw thought ‘most girls do learn a great deal about homemaking from their mothers.’<sup>10</sup> In her 1955 book on the role of mothers in educating their children Ruth Anderson Oakley aimed to show that girls learnt not only within their own homes but also those of others. ‘The natural training school for the nation’s potential mothers were the homes of England, where thousands of women were employed as cooks, housemaids and nurses’.<sup>11</sup> She was therefore dismayed by the decline in domestic service believing it was the logical arena for working-class girls to be educated how to run a home. The class element here is notable and there was no mention of where middle-class girls were supposed to be similarly schooled.

The problem of how girls should be educated to fulfil their future role as adult women encouraged considerable debate. One underlying concern was whether or not women should be educated to become wives at all. With the increasing demand for female labour in the post-war economy it was questioned whether they would be better educated to become workers. However as AnnMarie Wolpe has noted, common ideological assumptions about distinct gender roles ran through the Norwood, Crowther and Newsom reports published between 1943 and 1963. She states: ‘Where they have considered educational problems for girls as distinct from those of boys they have revealed that they

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 159.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>10</sup> Kathleen Ollerenshaw, *Education for Girls* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. xiv.

had presupposed what will and should be the lives of girls.’<sup>12</sup> Women reaching adulthood in the period 1945-1970 had received a gendered education. June Purvis argues, ‘For both middle class and working class girls, growing up and learning to be ‘feminine’ meant socialization into a future ideal of wifehood and motherhood.’<sup>13</sup> These attitudes lasted well into the post-war period and, as Stephanie Spencer has demonstrated, despite increases in employment opportunity the prevailing ideology of domesticity as the ultimate goal for girls remained embedded in a gendered curriculum in secondary modern and, to a lesser extent, grammar schools.<sup>14</sup> As Spencer intimates, however, the extent to which women received a domestic education was dependent upon the type of school they attended. The stress on domesticity was most powerful for working-class girls who attended elementary and later secondary modern schools where the teaching of domestic subjects was strongest. Grammar schools, where middle-class girls dominated, tended to provide a more academic education for their pupils. Describing the 1950s Purvis notes it was girls at secondary moderns who received the most limited education, specifically being taught in domestic subjects to care for and look after other people such as brothers and sisters, and to engage in domestic skills such as washing, cooking and darning. In short, to be socialised into a maternal role.<sup>15</sup>

Yet although schools were keen to educate girls on the subject of running a home they were less inclined to educate them about maternity itself. Schools were more comfortable providing domestic science lessons than sex education. While the instruction of children in general hygiene had been part of the school curriculum since the inception of state

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<sup>11</sup> Ruth Anderson Oakley, *Challenge to Heritage* (London: The Saint Catherine Press Ltd, 1955), p. 97.

<sup>12</sup> AnnMarie Wolpe, ‘Official Ideology for Girls’, in Michael Flude and John Ahier (eds.), *Educability, Schools and Ideology* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 138-59.

<sup>13</sup> June Purvis, ‘Domestic Subjects since 1870’, in Ivor Goodson (ed.), *Social Histories of the Secondary Curriculum: Subjects for Study* (Lewes: Falmer Press, 1985), 145-76, p. 147.

<sup>14</sup> Stephanie Spencer, ‘Reflections on the Site of Struggle: Girls Experience of Secondary Education in the Late 1950s’, *History of Education*, 33 (2004), 437-49, p. 446.

education in 1870, the idea of teaching children about sex was more controversial.<sup>16</sup> There were developments in this picture, and Lesley Hall has demonstrated how a more active approach to sex education in schools was introduced from the 1940s.<sup>17</sup> Indeed by 1956 sex was deemed the 'single most immediate problem' in the Ministry of Education's handbook on health education.<sup>18</sup> However as Wolpe has noted, sex education in the handbook was still equated with teaching biological reproduction.<sup>19</sup> The conventional attitude towards sex seen in the 1956 handbook was also seen in the Ministry of Education report *15 to 18 (The Crowther Report)* of 1959, which encouraged the conscious use of sex education to inculcate the values of chastity, marriage and family life.<sup>20</sup> Similarly while the 1963 report *Half our Future (The Newsom Report)*, on secondary modern and comprehensive schools did recommend positive and realistic guidance on sexual behaviour, it asserted that religious instruction should play a part in providing young people with a firm basis for sexual morality. Furthermore it suggested that married teachers were best equipped to handle the teaching of sex education.<sup>21</sup> It was not until 1968 that official guidance explicitly stated that children should be taught about human reproduction. The 1968 version of the handbook on health education was also the first time birth control was mentioned in an official publication with a discussion of the contraceptive pill.<sup>22</sup> That it took until 1968 for this first mention of birth control to occur indicates the limited sex education children must have received up until this point.

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<sup>15</sup> Purvis, 'Domestic Subjects', p. 164.

<sup>16</sup> Jane Pilcher, 'School Sex Education in England 1870-2000', *Sex Education*, 5 (2005), 157-74, p. 154.

<sup>17</sup> Lesley Hall, 'Birds, Bees and General Embarrassment: Sex Education in Britain from Social Purity to Section 28', in Richard Aldrich (ed.), *Public or Private Education?: Lessons from History* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004), 98-115.

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Education, *Health Education* (London: HMSO, 1956), p. 44.

<sup>19</sup> AnnMarie Wolpe, 'Sex in Schools: Back to the Future', *Feminist Review*, 27 (1987), 37-47, p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Education, *15 to 18. Volume I (Report)* (London: HMSO, 1959), pp. 37-8.

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Education, *Half our Future* (London: HMSO, 1963), pp. 70-1, 54-5, 61.

<sup>22</sup> Department of Education and Science, *A Handbook of Health Education* (London: HMSO, 1968), p. 71.

Because of this reluctance to discuss human reproduction in schools many members of the medical profession, including midwives, doctors and psychologists, thought the antenatal period was the best time to teach women about parenthood. The increasing medicalisation of maternity that took place during the post-war decades also encouraged medical professionals to believe that they were best placed to provide women with this education. For example a midwife, Jean Grime, stated in the *Nursing Times* in 1965 that, 'The antenatal period has always been considered the period *par excellence* for health education of the mother';<sup>23</sup> and, writing in 1970, the psychiatrist P.S. Cook claimed: 'It is found that those who attend such courses come in a perceptive frame of mind, the majority being primiparae in the early stages of married life, with a common "crisis" ahead of them.'<sup>24</sup> Some doctors went as far arguing that antenatal education should begin before the woman was even pregnant. In an article published in *Obstetrics and Gynaecology* in 1969, Ben M. Peckham, an obstetrician, commented:

Premarital counselling and examination – since it provides a special opportunity to those involved in rendering such services for review of the couple's physical, emotional, and educational preparedness for family life and conception – constitutes an important part of maternal care.<sup>25</sup>

While there was no unified idea of what form preparation should take there was some agreement that women were not receiving this education at school. In Cook's words: 'At present many couples, who have spent years at school learning much that is not essential for healthy living, enter matrimony inadequately equipped to build a stable marriage, and much less well equipped to be good parents.'<sup>26</sup> Similarly in his educational book addressed to pregnant women, Frederick Warren Goodrich wrote:

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<sup>23</sup> Jean Grime, 'The Maternity Patient in Hospital: An Experiment in Health Education' *Nursing Times*, 61 (1965), 249-50, p. 249.

<sup>24</sup> P.S. Cook, 'Antenatal Education for Parenthood, as an Aspect of Preventive Psychiatry: Some Suggestions for Programme Content and Objective', *Medical Journal of Australia* 13, (1970), 676-81, p. 677.

<sup>25</sup> Ben M. Peckham, 'Optimal Maternal Care', *Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 33 (1969), 862-8, p. 864.

<sup>26</sup> Cook, 'Antenatal Education', p. 676.

There will be moments when you wonder why you feel the way you do, when you feel the way you do, when you wonder what is going on inside you, when you wonder why the doctor gave you such and such advice. At these times a knowledge of what is happening and what you can do about it is not one of the things you acquire at school.<sup>27</sup>

Reflecting these national debates, antenatal education in Oxfordshire was increasing as the period progressed. The Medical Officers of Health (MOHs) for both Oxford City and Oxfordshire shared the belief that teaching women in the antenatal period about childbirth and childcare would be beneficial. In his report for 1964 the MOH for Oxford City, J.F. Warin, wrote: 'The expectant mothers are in an eager and receptive frame of mind so that they are anxious to learn as much as possible about the development, birth, and subsequent care of their children.'<sup>28</sup> The MOH for Oxfordshire, M.J. Pleydell, believed that medical professionals also experienced benefits when women were educated in this way, noting that, 'Midwives, too, report better cooperation from women who have attended classes, with a consequent reduction in demand for gas and air analgesia.'<sup>29</sup> In general there were two differing strands of antenatal education: mothercraft, which was slanted mostly towards the care of the baby, and theoretical and practical preparation for labour.<sup>30</sup> Initially the limited classes that were available in Oxfordshire were orientated towards mothercraft. In Oxford classes had begun in 1947 when a course of six lectures held on 'Child Care and Parentcraft' was given at Margaret Road School in Headington.<sup>31</sup> Attendances at the mothercraft classes in the city then rose swiftly from 379 in 1954 to 560 in 1963.<sup>32</sup> The county's classes took longer to become established than in Oxford

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<sup>27</sup> Frederick Warren Goodrich, *Maternity: A Guide to Prospective Motherhood* (London: Staples Press, 1960), pp. 17-8.

<sup>28</sup> City of Oxford Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health, 1964, p. 52, Bodleian Library.

<sup>29</sup> Oxfordshire County Council Annual Reports of the County Medical Officer of Health and Principal School Medical Officer, 1965, p. 14, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies.

<sup>30</sup> Margaret Williams and Dorothy Booth, *Antenatal Education: Guidelines for Teachers* (Edinburgh and London: Churchill Livingstone, 1974), p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> MOH Oxford, 1947, p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> MOH Oxford, 1954, p. 41; MOH Oxford, 1963, p. 116.

itself. It was not until 1961 that M.J. Pleydell, Oxfordshire's MOH, could write of arrangements to set up classes in health education and instruction for motherhood. However he also stated his hope that it would be possible 'to increase the ante-natal health services in the future.'<sup>33</sup> The classes did develop rapidly. By 1964 classes were held in 15 areas with 320 mothers enrolled and by 1969 there were classes in 18 areas attended by 600 women.<sup>34</sup> Many women, particularly as the period progressed, recalled that these antenatal classes were their main sources of information on childbirth.

The remainder of this chapter will examine the relationship between social constructions of motherhood and how women should be prepared for it, and women's own construction of their identities as mothers. It will examine how hypotheses surrounding the education of women for motherhood were interpreted in three different locales – home, school, and antenatal classes.

## **Home**

Using language informed by psychoanalytical thought, whether or not they were conscious they were doing so, a number of the women interviewed explained how they thought the desire to care came naturally to mothers. Polly's father was a farm labourer and she grew up on a farm in Aylesbury in the late-1940s. She believed living on the farm had helped her to adapt to motherhood. 'I don't know, perhaps it's being brought up on the farm. I saw the animals with their babes and whatnot and they took to it naturally, so perhaps it's part and parcel of that.'<sup>35</sup> Her explanation evokes John Bowlby who stressed that motherhood was something that came naturally to women. Citing evidence

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<sup>33</sup> MOH Oxfordshire, 1961, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> MOH Oxfordshire, 1964, p. 13; MOH Oxfordshire, 1969, p. 17.

drawn from ethnology he argued that a mother's motivation to look after her young derives from the intense tie or bond between mother and offspring.<sup>36</sup> A common characteristic amongst the interviewees who supported the belief in a maternal instinct was that they were very accepting of what happened to them. These women did not question that they would have children or be full-time mothers, and this might be why they thought motherhood came naturally. In contrast Ivy thought there was a maternal instinct but that she did not possess it. It was not something she considered to be innate to all women. She had not wanted to be a mother and had an unplanned baby, which may have led to her difficulties in adjusting to motherhood.<sup>37</sup> Similarly Olive, who had two children in Oxford in 1945 and 1950, thought her daughter-in-law took more naturally to motherhood than she herself had done: '[my daughter-in-law] was much more relaxed and you know more, much more motherly than ever I was, I don't think I had the same kind of instinct as she had.' When asked specifically if she thought there was such a thing as a maternal instinct she replied, 'Yes I think I did have that, but not to the degree that [my daughter-in-law] had.'<sup>38</sup> Olive projected her fantasy of the 'natural' mother onto her daughter-in-law. She therefore suspected that motherhood had not come as easily to her as she felt it had done for her daughter-in-law and she expressed this view with a degree of envy and regret.

Few interviewees believed the capacity to mother was entirely in-born, however. Many modified the idea of an instinct by combining it with elements from the discourse that motherhood was something to be learnt. They took features from both these theories to create a model through which they could articulate how they believed women came to be

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<sup>35</sup> Polly, BE7, p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss: Volume I, Attachment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 183.

<sup>37</sup> Ivy, BE4, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Olive, OX6, p. 26.

mothers. For example Rachel, who had her first child in 1957, explained that she thought it was instinctive to want to care for her children, but felt she did not know how to.<sup>39</sup> During her narrative Rachel tried to reconcile how motherhood could feel both natural and alien to her at the same time. Rachel was not alone in this attempt at forming such a compromise. Siobhan reflected upon this same subject:

I think it's something that you have to learn. I mean the instinct is that you want to care for your child, and you want to take good care of it. But knowing how, I don't think that comes instinctively at all. I mean if you hand someone who's never held a baby a baby, they don't instinctively know to put a hand under its head to support its head and all that. I did know, but only because when I was a little girl there were babies in the house and you were taught how to hold them. But no I don't think any of it's instinctive.<sup>40</sup>

Some women also talked of things coming naturally to them with subsequent children indicating they did not know how to behave when they had their first child. For instance Tania thought instinct itself was something that had to be 'learned'. She felt that she acquired it by the time her second child was born, but had not possessed it with her first.<sup>41</sup>

Many of the women also equated instinct with commonsense. They did not think they had an innate capacity to mother, but instead possessed a practical resourcefulness which enabled them to cope. Louisa, an Oxford graduate who had her first child in 1968, stated: 'One went very much on instinct and what one had read. I think child-rearing really is a lot of commonsense.'<sup>42</sup> It is interesting that as an educated woman her 'instinct' was in fact to turn to books for advice. This conception was linked to the ideal of the mother who just 'got on with it'. The women who expressed such a stoic account of motherhood in their narratives were united by experiencing a lack of support networks. They told me, with some satisfaction, that they had been able to manage independently rather than

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<sup>39</sup> Rachel, OX7, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Siobhan, BE1, pp. 15-6.

<sup>41</sup> Tania, EW8, p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> Louisa, SO5, p. 21.

relying on others' advice. Monika originated from Germany and had no family nearby when she had her first and only son in Oxford in 1955. She contrasted her ability to adjust successfully to motherhood with the difficulties women faced today: 'One wasn't so dependent as people are now on being told things, you bloody well did them, you know it's extraordinary that nobody seems to dare to move without being told things.' Again she stressed child-rearing was 'common sense'.<sup>43</sup> In contrast to Monika, who had obtained a doctorate, Mabel left school at fourteen and had married by eighteen. Similarly to Monika, though, she was living in Oxford away from her family in Croydon (after her husband had been sent to Oxford to work at the car factories during the war), and both women had also lost their mothers as children. When asked to whom she turned for advice, she replied, 'No-one really, I just got on with it.'<sup>44</sup> It is noteworthy that for women of all class and educational levels isolation necessarily produced self-reliance. In addition, irrespective of their background there were a number of women who embraced ideals of the heroic nature of motherhood and prided themselves on being self-taught mothers. These women believed that successful parenting ultimately relied upon their own commonsense.<sup>45</sup>

The idea that women learnt how to mother from their own mothers was also a commonly expressed sentiment amongst the interviewees. Many of the women explained how they thought the skills deemed necessary to be a housewife, such as cookery or needlework, were passed down through the generations. They echoed views expressed during the 1950s and 1960s that motherhood was a female trade, which girls learnt in the home as apprentices to their mothers. For example Theresa recalled the birth of her sister who was eight years younger:

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<sup>43</sup> Monika, SO1, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Mabel, OX9, p. 4.

Well yes my mother had what they called a live-in nurse at that time and she stayed and I was eight years old and she taught me how to bath a baby and all that. And when I had my own I just did it and the district nurse said, 'You bathed a baby before.' And I said, 'Well, not for a long time!'

*So you found it came back to you when you had your own...*

Yeah, yeah. She [the live-in nurse] always said, 'Take an arm and a leg and turn the baby over, and always have hold of an arm and a leg when you're working on them, and that's it'.<sup>46</sup>

As Sally Alexander has argued of girls growing up in the inter-war years: '[they] watched their mothers and fathers and learned what it meant to be a woman.'<sup>47</sup> Consequently a number of respondents felt it was difficult for women who did not have a mother around when they were young to adjust to motherhood. Sharon believed that 'when you look after your children, you probably are recalling how your mother looked after you. So if you haven't had a good mothering experience, I think it must be very difficult to know how to mother other children.'<sup>48</sup> Tina was brought up by foster-parents after her mother abandoned her as a young child in the 1950s. She supported this view, saying, 'it caused a lot of trouble as well. Coz I'd never been used to a mum and dad to sort of have a role model.'<sup>49</sup> This lack of a maternal figure as a source of support and advice was a recurrent theme throughout Tina's narrative. Her phrasing is interesting because she depersonalises events by saying it 'caused a lot of trouble', rather than specifying that it was she herself who experienced the difficulties. It was a painful subject for her to discuss and one she did not want to confront.

It was a common belief in the post-war decades that if women felt unprepared for motherhood it was because this traditional way of learning within the family was being

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<sup>45</sup> This dichotomy between stoic and heroic discourses of motherhood is further explored on pages 149-52.

<sup>46</sup> Theresa, BA10, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Sally Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman in the 1920s and '30s', in Sally Alexander, *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History* (London: Virago, 1994), 203-24, p. 220.

<sup>48</sup> Sharon, EW9, p. 14.

lost as a result of demographic changes, with smaller families and girls not having younger brothers and sisters to help look after. Siobhan, born in Abingdon in 1945, was the eldest in a family of five, the daughter of Irish immigrants. She also grew up with an extended family nearby. She was fourteen when her youngest sister was born and recalled her embarrassment when people thought she was her sister's mother. However while her involvement in looking after her siblings should have been the perfect preparation, Siobhan explained that:

When I got home from the hospital and I needed to change this baby, and I suddenly realised I didn't know what to do. And even having seen my mother looking after her own babies, I suddenly, I remember sitting down bursting out crying...I think it was just probably the post-natal depression, which I hadn't had, and that was it, that little burst of tears then and this overwhelming feeling. You suddenly realise that you're responsible for this little person which when you're in the hospital, because there are nursery nurses caring for the babies, you didn't feel particularly responsible for them. You did feel that bond with your baby, I think it's just something that happens instantaneously, but you didn't feel that you were responsible for them at all, that was quite a shock when you got home.<sup>50</sup>

Helping to look after younger brothers and sisters did not match the reality of caring for your own child. The feeling of shock that Siobhan presented in her account indicates she felt the experiences and emotions associated with having a first child could not be rehearsed. It was true, however, that women who did not live close to their families could feel that they missed out on traditional means of learning about motherhood, such as observing mothers, aunts and sisters. Ivy noted with sadness that she 'hadn't been with my sister at all when she'd been pregnant',<sup>51</sup> and thought this was one reason why she had been so unprepared for childbirth. Even women who were in close proximity to relations did not necessarily think they learnt from them. Mabel lived with her elder

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<sup>49</sup> Tina, BE3, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Siobhan, BE1, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> Ivy, BE4, p. 8.

sister and her sister's children but explained, with some regret, that she was not involved in helping her sister look after them.<sup>52</sup>

Interviewees' experiences of learning from their mothers varied significantly according to class. Those women who came from middle-class backgrounds thought they learnt far less from their mothers than their working-class counterparts. They contrasted their own experiences with that of the ideal of mothers and daughters sharing a common profession that characterised many sociological analyses of the working class. The mothers of middle-class girls growing up in the inter-war years often had domestic help, servants were principally responsible for the more practical elements of their children's upbringing. Louisa recalled how her nanny essentially ran the household and that her mother had not done any cooking until she was forty. She therefore felt her mother had 'very little influence' on the way she subsequently organised her home.<sup>53</sup> Indeed these women often thought it was amusing how little their mothers had known about child-rearing, although their accounts are also tinged with regret that their mothers could not offer more support. For example Grace explained: 'I had the sort of middle-upper-class upbringing with a nanny, in fact I don't think my mother ever changed a nappy until she changed a nappy on my child.'<sup>54</sup> Middle-class women were also less likely to have their mothers at close proximity than their working-class peers due to increased geographical mobility. It is interesting, though, that they often thought they would have been of little use to them anyway.

Not all working-class women had a close relationship with their mothers either. Indeed from the testimony of the working-class interviewees it seems that some mothers did not

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<sup>52</sup> Mabel, OX9, pp. 1-2.

<sup>53</sup> Louisa, SO5, p. 3.

want to be involved in helping their daughters with their children. They felt that they had already raised their own families and did not want to begin the process again. This experience contrasts with the findings of Young and Willmott in Bethnal Green who reported that when a woman 'wants to go out shopping' or 'wants to go out in the evening to the cinema with her husband, she does not have to look far for a "baby-sitter".'<sup>55</sup> Ethel only lived a few minutes away from her parents in Benson, but recalled with some resentment how her mother 'wouldn't baby-sit for me, occasionally if I wanted to go out somewhere for the day I could send [my daughter] up to her, but she wasn't very good about it, she'd had her six, and she said she'd had to look after them.'<sup>56</sup> Madge recounted that her mother's attitude towards her was: 'they're my children, I can get on with it.'<sup>57</sup> Women who had their children around the same time as their mothers were finishing raising their own families found their mothers often played a limited role, either by choice because they did not want to be involved in caring for small children again or necessity in that they were too busy to do so.

Despite the stress placed on the mother-daughter bond by sociologists and psychologists it is clear from the oral evidence that while women may have had close relationships with their mothers this did not mean that they would discuss topics such as sex and childbirth. These were 'taboo'<sup>58</sup> subjects within most families. Many women said they could not remember their mothers being pregnant with their younger siblings. For example Esther explained: 'I think I did know, yes, I was five, but I don't really remember a lot about it.

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<sup>54</sup> Grace, NO7, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*, p. 38.

<sup>56</sup> Ethel, BE6, p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> Madge, WY8, pp. 17-8.

<sup>58</sup> Violet, BA7, p. 6. Lucinda McCray Beier reports upon a similar situation in Lancashire. She writes that of the 250 oral history interviews she and Elizabeth Roberts conducted in Barrow, Lancaster and Preston for the period 1900-1970, 'Virtually all informants born before 1930, and many born before 1950, said that sex was never discussed between parents and children.' McCray Beier, Lucinda, "We were Green as Grass":

I don't think I was told, not like they do now.'<sup>59</sup> Fiona was teaching in a girls' public school when she became pregnant with her first child and continued working until a month before she gave birth. She recalled with some amusement that one of the girls asked if they were supposed to know she was pregnant.<sup>60</sup> Florence's mother was the district nurse in Benson from the 1930s to the 1950s and she remembers pregnant women coming to her mother for their antenatal care, yet Florence's mother never told her anything about pregnancy or childbirth.<sup>61</sup> In this climate of secrecy it is questionable how much women really did pick up from family members. Referring to childbirth Ivy, who had her first child in 1947, said, 'And you know it's terrible I didn't really know what happened, what to expect.'<sup>62</sup> Likewise Peggy, who had her first baby in 1951, explained:

Well a funny thing is, and you'll laugh when I tell you, I knew how it got in there but I didn't know how it got out, and that's as true as I sit here, I hadn't got a clue, I thought perhaps me belly button opened or something, I just hadn't got a clue, now that's how ignorant I was, I was eighteen, I didn't know a lot.<sup>63</sup>

While Peggy presented her ignorance as comical this was one of many instances in her narrative where traumatic incidents were recalled with humour, which was Peggy's mechanism for coping with them. In reality, Peggy's lack of knowledge made for a frightening experience of childbirth. While the situation improved as the post-war years progressed some women still revealed their ignorance about childbirth into the 1960s.<sup>64</sup>

When asked if she had been taught about childbirth at home or school Fiona replied:

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Learning about Sex and Reproduction in Three Working-class Learning Communities, 1900-1970', *Social History of Medicine*, 16 (2003), 461-80, p. 465.

<sup>59</sup> Esther, OX1, p. 2.

<sup>60</sup> Fiona, BE10, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Florence, BE8, pp. 4-5.

<sup>62</sup> Ivy, BE4, p. 8.

<sup>63</sup> Peggy, BA9, pp. 4-5.

<sup>64</sup> This state of affairs appears to have been nationwide. The Oxfordshire women's recollections closely matched Elizabeth Roberts' interviewees in Lancashire, Elizabeth Roberts Archive, Centre for North-West Regional Studies. The women interviewed for the Oral History of Birth Control collection (who principally

Oh no, no. First time I ever saw a picture of childbirth was when I was about to have one myself. And it was all a bit of a shock to us all. Yes it was at the Sussex Maternity they showed us a film. ‘Oh’ we all went, ‘Oh er’. But it wasn’t in very much gory detail. I remember they showed us a film and all these models that midwives used for showing about birth, and the baby turning and the birth canal and the rest of it, you know. Yes it was rather a shock I must say.<sup>65</sup>

Many mothers were too embarrassed to talk to their daughters about sex and childbirth. Rebecca’s parents left books around for her to look at when she grew up in the 1930s and 1940s, but her mother was too shy to address the subject specifically.<sup>66</sup> Georgie had her first baby in 1961, but explained: ‘I knew absolutely nothing about babies, nothing at all, I’m an only child, my mother how she brought me up I don’t know because she wasn’t much good with babies, and she only had me...I had nobody to ask about babies.’<sup>67</sup>

Olive had her first child in the 1940s and reported a similar experience:

I had absolutely no idea, and I mean I was a reasonably intelligent person and I knew nothing about the way, about childbirth, nothing, to the extent of I didn’t realise, I don’t think, that there were two stages...So yes it just amazes me that I could have been so ignorant, certainly much more than they are now.

However what is interesting about Olive’s comments is that she also remembered having an intimate relationship with her mother and felt she could discuss anything with her. Her mother had particularly tried to be more open because of her own childhood experiences when she had not been told about menstruation. Despite their close relationship, with Olive recalling ‘we talked about anything that I wanted to know’, this openness did not extend to childbirth. Olive thought their reticence on this subject was because ‘you just thought it was one of these things that happened reasonably naturally.’<sup>68</sup> Her use of the

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grew up in the 1950s and 1960s) also reported a culture of secrecy, C644 Oral History of Birth Control, Sound Archive, British Library.

<sup>65</sup> Fiona, BE10, pp. 21-2.

<sup>66</sup> Rebecca, OX10, pp. 4-5.

<sup>67</sup> Georgie, OX2, p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> Olive, OX6, pp. 15-6.

word ‘naturally’ demonstrates how Olive had incorporated the ideal that maternity was an essential part of normal womanhood into her own narrative. However the lack of communication between mothers and daughters that she highlighted, despite the much-lauded mother-daughter bond, may indicate why women welcomed the advice of people outside the family such as medical professionals. It also accounts for why commentators believed it was so important for women to be educated for motherhood outside the home.

## **School**

All the women interviewed recalled receiving a gendered education designed to prepare them for their lives as adult women, but the form it took and the extent to which it was domestically orientated depended upon their class, presumed academic ability and the locality in which they lived. Girls who attended elementary schools in the 1930s and early-1940s, or secondary moderns after the 1944 reforms, reported that they received an inferior education and were denied the opportunities available to grammar school children, and this sense of deprivation could be particularly strong in those who lived in rural areas.<sup>69</sup> Even for the most privileged girls educational opportunities were limited by gender – only 3,310 girls out of 271,778 leaving school in 1959 went to university.<sup>70</sup> Nicola attended a private school in Leicester which became a grammar school in the 1940s. She explained her contemporaries were not very academic: ‘I mean ‘A’ levels were unheard of, well perhaps the odd one, we just about managed the odd ‘O’ levels.’ She thought her school was preparing the girls to be ‘young ladies’ and this education

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<sup>69</sup> Discussed further in Angela Davis, ‘‘So It Wasn’t a Brilliant Education, Not Really I Don’t Think.’ Class, Gender and Locality: Women’s Accounts of school In Rural Oxfordshire, c. 1930-1960’, *History of Education Researcher*, 78 (2006), 72-83.

<sup>70</sup> Ministry of Education, *Education in 1959. Report of the Ministry of Education and Statistics for England and Wales* (London: HMSO, 1960), p. 142.

consisted of poetry, art and drama.<sup>71</sup> Yvonne attended Oxford High School in the 1950s.

Discussing whether the school expected girls to get married she said:

Not all that much, no the school ethos was definitely make the most of your education, become independent, marry later if you want, but it was historically the Girls Public Day School Trust, we were made very aware that it was a great break through for women to be able to choose whether or not to marry and that our school was part of what had made that possible.<sup>72</sup>

There is ambiguity in her narrative at this point. Yvonne conceived of this choice in terms of either marrying or having a career, not combining both, although when she spoke she was not aware she did so. While she aimed to show, with some pride, the opportunities which were presented to girls at her school, she also unwittingly described the limitations implicit in the school's philosophy.

The women interviewed held mixed opinions about the gendered education they received. For women who felt they were successful at domestic skills, this brought them a great deal of satisfaction. Even those women who did not enjoy domestic science at school, and were keen to stop lessons as soon as possible, looked back on it as being of use. Indeed some regretted they had not been better at it, demonstrating the close association between domesticity and femininity. For example Lisa said, 'it was the only exam I ever failed, I burned my stewed apple, the only useful thing I learned at school and I, you know, failed it.'<sup>73</sup> Moreover some women enjoyed domestic science lessons because they thought it would help them reach their goal of marriage and motherhood. Bet explained: 'I did Home Economics and I think I got a first class pass in that because I was interested. So I was well set up for domestic life and my dream was to be married, and the ultimate thing was to have a family and to have more than one.'<sup>74</sup> Her description of doing well in

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<sup>71</sup> Nicola, BA5, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> Yvonne, NO3, p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> Lisa, CO12, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Bet, CO1, p. 7.

domestic science lessons because she was interested in the subject directly echoed John Newsom's argument that girls' education should be related to the home because this would evoke their intellectual interest and curiosity.<sup>75</sup> However this equation of domesticity with femininity repelled women from domestic science as well as attracting them. Yvonne described it as:

Awful. You were expected to make things you would never wear, maybe some of the others would of but not me, fancy aprons such as my mother didn't wear and peg bags which was something we didn't use, and my thread was always getting knotted and my needle was always coming unthreaded and it was very difficult for me to finish anything let alone to the standard they expected. And it was no better when we got onto machines either. I was no good at that either. I expect this was all a reaction against the domestic as well. It was books that I liked.<sup>76</sup>

Indeed Yvonne tried to consciously reject both domesticity, and a conventional femininity, by defining her self as someone who did not wear the 'fancy aprons' that the girls were expected to make.

The gendered education women received in schools involved socialising them into the behaviour expected of an adult woman rather than practical or emotional preparation for becoming a mother. The slow development of sex education in schools was recalled in the accounts of the Oxfordshire women interviewed.<sup>77</sup> When asked about sex education Rachel, who grew up in the 1930s and 1940s, emphatically replied: 'Oh no, nothing, we didn't learn anything.'<sup>78</sup> Women recalled sex education that did occur in school was really incidental rather than an inherent part of the curriculum. June was asked if she received any sex education when she was at school in Oxford in the 1940s. She

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<sup>75</sup> John Newsom, *The Education of Girls* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 109.

<sup>76</sup> Yvonne, NO3, pp. 3-4.

<sup>77</sup> The Oral History of Contraception confirmed this was a widespread experience. C644 Oral History of Birth Control.

<sup>78</sup> Rachel, OX7, p. 3.

answered, 'Only indirectly...We were taught biology and botany.'<sup>79</sup> When sex education was actually taught it focused more on the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases than the process of having children. Rebecca explained: 'Well we weren't taught about pregnancy and childbirth in school at all, but what we did have was, really they were very terrifying when I look back, slide shows about VD, I think this was an awful warning and they were very, very unpleasant, quite frightening.'<sup>80</sup> Rebecca recalled this fear of sexuality that her school tried to inculcate had a long-lasting effect. Her three children born between 1951 and 1961 had all been unplanned pregnancies because of her reluctance to discuss the subject with her GP. After her children were born Rebecca became actively involved in trying to promote information on birth control through the Family Planning Association. She explained that she wanted to do so in order to prevent other women suffering from the same ignorance about sex and contraception.

Megan attended a Girls' Public Day School Trust school in Hampstead in the late-1950s. She thought the limited focus on sex education was part of a wider reticence to discuss these subjects which extended to the children themselves. She believed this reserve affected their ability to talk about sex. She contrasted this behaviour with that of the next generation whom she believed to be more open and less inhibited:

Perhaps our questions were fairly uninformed and unimaginative compared with those of the next generation. When my daughter was about this age, she said, 'I thought you'd told me the facts of life, but you never mentioned fellatio!'...After my school lessons, I asked my mother about birth control, and she said 'Oh, you leave all that to your husband'.<sup>81</sup>

In her oral history study of birth control practice in Oxford and south Wales between 1920 and 1950 Kate Fisher found that contraception was not considered a suitable subject

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<sup>79</sup> June, CO2, pp. 2-3.

<sup>80</sup> Rebecca, OX10, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> Megan, OX11, p. 2.

for women to discuss (irrespective of what their actual knowledge levels were).<sup>82</sup> This was also the attitude that many of the women interviewed for this research felt existed when they were young, regardless of their class. The lack of sex education provided in schools seemed symptomatic of this belief that sex and reproduction, and indeed maternity itself, were not appropriate subjects to teach to girls. Furthermore, despite the increased availability of birth control and the introduction of the contraceptive pill in 1961, this outlook appeared to have been little modified into the 1960s.

### **Antenatal Classes**

The lack of education that women received about pregnancy, childbirth and also childcare in schools meant that antenatal classes were often their main source of instruction. However, the classes inspired a mixed reaction amongst the Oxfordshire women who attended them. Despite medical professionals arguing that they were best placed to educate women about maternity, women themselves seemed more ambivalent about this stance. Lindsay went to a privately run clinic on the Cowley Road attending classes ‘in what they then called mothercraft which was run by a sort of wonderful old lady who was always known just as sister and she was very sensible and practical and you know we made copious notes.’<sup>83</sup> Ingrid was less impressed though. She recalled that the first thing the woman who ran the classes asked was, “‘Now you can all smock can’t you?’”, and that was really her introduction to the mothercraft class and I suppose they taught us a few things...I don’t remember anything very much about diet that we were told.’<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Kate Fisher, ‘‘She Was Quite Satisfied with the Arrangements I Made’’: Gender and Birth Control in Britain 1920-1950’, *Past and Present*, 169 (2000), 161-93, p. 189.

<sup>83</sup> Lindsay, OX12, p. 11.

<sup>84</sup> Ingrid, SO11, pp. 5-6.

Until the mid-1960s antenatal education for women in Oxford principally consisted of these mothercraft classes. Before then the relaxation classes were restricted to mothers who had a doctor's recommendation.<sup>85</sup> Physiotherapy classes combined with parentcraft classes were first introduced at Blackbird Leys Health Centre in November 1964. These were arranged jointly between the Oxford area supervisor of the National Childbirth Trust (NCT), the midwives and health visitors. The MOH for Oxford felt they 'proved most valuable and have been greatly appreciated by the women attending.'<sup>86</sup> By 1969 relaxation was considered to be an inherent part of the classes.<sup>87</sup> It is interesting that while mothercraft played such an important part in the early classes provided in Oxford, when asked what they learnt women generally said they were taught little about baby care. Time period was probably influential as the term mothercraft went out of vogue. Antenatal education became characterised as preparation for birth and so women prioritised this teaching in their accounts. Ann Oakley has argued that antenatal classes in this period were just about 'relaxation or breathing' and many respondents echoed Oakley's contention.<sup>88</sup> For instance Bethany said, 'Well we did just exercises really';<sup>89</sup> Sharon remembered the classes as 'lying on the floor and doing relaxation';<sup>90</sup> and Nicola summed them up as, 'Relaxation, and then they talked about breathing.'<sup>91</sup> Indeed the women seemed to think this was the format classes were expected to take. When I enquired what occurred during the classes they indicated that they felt this was a strange question to ask – the answer was obvious.

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<sup>85</sup> MOH Oxford, 1961, p. 98.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>88</sup> Ann Oakley, *Women Confined: Towards a Sociology of Childbirth* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1980), p. 37.

<sup>89</sup> Bethany, EW4, p. 10.

<sup>90</sup> Sharon, EW9, p. 9.

<sup>91</sup> Nicola, BA5, p. 5.

The proponents of antenatal education often held loftier ambitions.<sup>92</sup> While there was no universally accepted technique, most teaching was based on that of Grantly Dick-Read or psycho-prophylaxis or a mixture of both.<sup>93</sup> Mary Nolan argues that in practice Dick-Read and Fernand Lamaze advocated similar strategies for preparing women for childbirth, although the theory underpinning their approaches was different: Lamaze believed women should be taught to distract themselves from the pain of labour; Dick-Read thought labour was painful for women because they were afraid.<sup>94</sup> This emphasis on educating women about childbirth, on relieving pain through relaxation and breathing, and on demanding women be conscious throughout the entire birth process was revolutionary at the time.<sup>95</sup> However women held mixed opinions about this expert advice. Only one interviewee, Stephanie, recalled she had a book by Lamaze, which she found very useful, but she may have been acquainted with him through her training as a physiotherapist.<sup>96</sup> Dick-Read proved to be more popular with the women and several had read his books. There was a class distinction in the women who were acquainted with Dick-Read, though, and educated middle-class mothers were more familiar with him. Rose, who had her first baby in 1959, was the most enthusiastic of the women interviewed. She remembered his book as ‘very sort of sober, explaining pregnancy and childbirth so you’d know all about it.’<sup>97</sup> A Dick-Read book was also Maxine’s principal source of information about childbirth.<sup>98</sup> Karen was sent a copy of his book by a friend’s mother, but while she did think it was useful she also felt it was a little dated by the time

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<sup>92</sup> C.W.F., Burnett, ‘The Value of Antenatal Exercises’, *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the British Empire*, 63 (1956), 40-57; F.M. Hardy, ‘Antenatal Care’, *Nursing Times*, 58 (1962), 571-3; W.C.W. Nixon, ‘Refresher Course for General Practitioners: Antenatal Care – 1. Advice for the Expectant Mother’, *British Medical Journal*, 4804 (1953), 268.

<sup>93</sup> D.A. Mandelstam, ‘The Value of Antenatal Preparation – A Statistical Survey’, *Midwife and Health Visitor*, 7 (1971), 217-24, p. 217.

<sup>94</sup> Mary Nolan, *Antenatal Education: A Dynamic Approach* (London: Baillière Tindall, 1998), p. 4.

<sup>95</sup> Mary Thomas, *Post-War Mothers: Childbirth Letters to Grantly Dick-Read, 1946-1956* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1997), p. ix; Grantly Dick-Read, *Natural Childbirth* (London: Heineman, 1933).

<sup>96</sup> Stephanie, EW7, p. 5.

she had her first baby in 1967. She said, 'I suspect they were the thing at the time when she had her children.'<sup>99</sup> Marjorie thought the content of the book was extremely beneficial, explaining, 'I did believe in that. I was a great believer in relaxation and that sort of self-hypnosis.' However, she was less impressed by the manner in which Dick-Read wrote recalling that 'it got awfully boring in parts and repetitive.'<sup>100</sup> Glenda religiously followed the exercises in the book she had, but when asked if they were useful she replied, 'No, not in the least, not in the least. It was all a big con, it does hurt!'<sup>101</sup> While in general the women who read one of Dick-Read's books did value them as a useful source of information about what occurred in childbirth, they were less certain that this knowledge made for an easier labour.

Overall the interviewees who thought antenatal education was most useful to them were those who felt they had been unprepared for pregnancy and childbirth up to that point. It offered a last chance for those women who had missed out on any prior instruction. They recalled how the classes helped dispel their ignorance and enabled them to know what to expect. For example Hope remembered being given 'details of what giving birth actually involved so you really felt clued up about the various stages.'<sup>102</sup> Bet recalled that her antenatal classes were:

led by an elderly lady, I should think she was about my age, you know just before retirement, and she'd obviously been a matron and all sorts of different things and she took us right through breathing exercises and exercises to prepare our muscles, our husbands were involved and we had to take them along to see the birth on a film and all the rest of it and so that was super, I was really well-prepared. I was in a way dreading it because it's like jumping off a cliff but I knew all there was to know, and so did [my husband].<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Rose, NO12, p. 6.

<sup>98</sup> Maxine, WY6, p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> Karen, SO4, pp. 9-10.

<sup>100</sup> Marjorie, NO10, p. 15.

<sup>101</sup> Glenda, BA2, p. 7.

<sup>102</sup> Hope, CO11, pp. 7-8.

<sup>103</sup> Bet, CO1, p. 12.

It is noteworthy that Bet stressed the matron's age and experience in qualifying her to give advice as much as her medical expertise. In Bet's account the matron assumed a motherly role passing on information to younger women. Indeed, women often stated it was the opportunity to talk to women who had already had children as being the most valuable part of the classes.<sup>104</sup> However, while some interviewees found classes useful and said they put the ideas they learnt into practice, others felt the circumstances of their children's birth prevented them from doing so. The classes did give some welcome information on childbirth, but because they were principally concerned with techniques for labour they could not help for women who had abnormal deliveries. Marilyn thought the classes:

teach you about childbirth, but I never had a normal delivery, I had two caesars. So you had quite a good idea of what went on in a normal birth. But they didn't really teach you until the last fortnight about what could happen, you know what could go wrong.'<sup>105</sup>

Marilyn went on to describe the births of both her children as being extremely traumatic and she found it upsetting to talk about them. Her lack of preparation was clearly something she regretted and felt was detrimental to her.

Oxfordshire was perhaps unusual and more advanced in relation to antenatal education than other areas of the country due to the fact Sheila Kitzinger, the social anthropologist and birth educator, was based there.<sup>106</sup> Responding to an appeal from the NCT for women to show pregnant women how to breathe and relax for labour she ran the first couples' classes in the country from the late-1950s.<sup>107</sup> Several of the women interviewed had been aware of Kitzinger's work and commented upon it. A small number had also

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<sup>104</sup> See Audrey Wood, 'Education for Parenthood through the Maternity Services', *The International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 314 (1966), 199-205.

<sup>105</sup> Marilyn, BE13, p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> Sheila Kitzinger, 'A Fresh Look at Antenatal Exercises', *Nursing Mirror and Midwives Journal*, 129 (1969), 14-6; Sheila Kitzinger, *The Experience of Childbirth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984) (1962).

attended her classes. At this time there was a significant class bias in those she helped, which she herself acknowledged,<sup>108</sup> and it was only the middle-class mothers who remembered her. While generally thinking her work was a good thing, there was an element of ambivalence in their recollections of the classes. Monika was dismissive: ‘Sheila Kitzinger was carrying on about this, and natural childbirth was a great cry. I wasn’t at all sold on natural childbirth, I thought the easier the better thankyou very much.’<sup>109</sup> Claire attended a class but was unsure about it. When asked what it was like she replied, ‘Oh we saw photographs of Sheila giving birth, surrounded by dogs and with Sheila in the middle...But I only went to one class.’<sup>110</sup> There were women who had more positive experiences. Emily remembered Kitzinger as being a highly significant figure. ‘She was the guru and we went to her classes and [my husband] must have been one of the first men to have gone to classes as well.’ Emily held Kitzinger in high regard and thought ‘she was a very, very inspirational writer, and she interviewed us all and followed us all up and all the rest of it so that was important, a very important feature of the time.’<sup>111</sup> Perhaps the most interesting recollection came from Grace who attended Kitzinger’s classes and found them ‘very supportive’ and appreciated the opportunity to meet ‘other mums in the same position’. However she also recalled that ‘when I had a caesarean I terribly felt I’d let her down which was perhaps silly but that’s how it was, it was a great shock.’<sup>112</sup> Her guilt at having a caesarean reveals the pressure she felt to have a natural birth. Echoing the belief that motherhood was innate to women Grace felt that successful childbirth meant receiving as little medical intervention as possible. She thought her capability as a mother was threatened by not doing so.

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<sup>107</sup> Sheila Kitzinger, *The Politics of Birth* (London: Elsevier, 2005), p. 46.

<sup>108</sup> Sheila Kitzinger in conversation with the author. See also Kitzinger, *Politics*, pp. 48-9.

<sup>109</sup> Monika, SO1, p. 11.

<sup>110</sup> Claire, NO1, p. 4.

<sup>111</sup> Emily, NO8, p. 9.

<sup>112</sup> Grace, NO7, p. 1.

The availability of antenatal classes was also highly dependent on where women lived. Many respondents had not attended any classes well into the 1960s. Fiona, who had her first child in Brighton, recalled that there were not any classes because the consultant at the hospital did not agree with them. Interestingly this consultant was a woman, dispelling the myth that women medical professionals would be more progressive in respect to maternal care than their male counterparts. Fiona had to go to private classes for her second child after having none for her first. She explained that classes:

didn't happen in Brighton, not on the National Health it didn't, because the number one consultant at the Sussex Maternity, who happened to be a mother of four, didn't believe in it. I don't know quite what she was on about, but you know, you just had to grin and bear it apparently.<sup>113</sup>

In contrast she found the classes on offer when she had her third baby in Benson to be very good. This local variation reflected a wider uncertainty within the health services about their role in preparing women for motherhood. Local health departments accepted different levels of responsibility for providing antenatal education. Women living in Oxford benefited from a forward thinking authority which offered a range of services, but it is clear that this was not the case nationwide. Furthermore women were not always willing recipients of the instruction they received.<sup>114</sup> Despite describing how she actively sought private antenatal classes to provide her with information, Fiona felt that her lack of knowledge about medical matters was actually a good thing because if she did not know there was a problem she could not worry about it. Indeed this somewhat contradictory view was one she expressed on several occasions. For example when her first baby was born he had the umbilical cord around his neck and did not cry, but she 'was so ignorant that I didn't realise this was actually something to worry about'. Her second son had to

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<sup>113</sup> Fiona, BE10, p. 20.

<sup>114</sup> John B. McKinlay, 'The New Late Comers for Antenatal Care', *British Journal of Preventative and Social Medicine*, 24 (1970), 52-7.

have a blood transfusion and again she said, 'ignorance is bliss. I mean it never occurred to me that he might not be alright, and he was alright.'<sup>115</sup>

Further developing upon this line of thought, Polly felt the antenatal care women now received caused them unnecessary stress:

I must say I don't think I would want to go through what people go through today. Scans and things like that, because I think that gives you more worry...I never even thought that I would have a deformed baby. I don't think you worried about, at least I didn't worry about things like that. So I'm not sure whether these, all these tests and what not are good now.<sup>116</sup>

Siobhan believed that access to information is the principal difference between what it was like for her to be a mother and for today's mothers, but thought that this information could increase concern:

I mean there were ways of finding out about bringing up your children, or about nutrition, or diseases or whatever, but it wasn't always straightforward or easy, whereas now most people have computers and you can call things up on the internet and you get a worrying amount of information and sometimes sorting it all out, that can be another difficult thing now. Whereas when I was young you just went and asked your mother.<sup>117</sup>

Siobhan was dubious about expertise in maternity and childcare now being viewed as the preserve of health professionals and challenged the discourse of medical authority. Advocating the stoic ideal of motherhood, Bethany thought the precedence that was now given to scrutinising every element of maternal and child health, rather than just 'getting on with it', was a significant change over time:

I suppose in days gone by you didn't actually analyse everything you did, which you do today probably. That's probably come out more recently. Things happened and you did things, you responded, but now everybody analyses what they're doing and why they doing it, but we didn't do that in those days, we just got on with it.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Fiona, BE10, p. 8, 23.

<sup>116</sup> Polly, BE7, p. 7.

<sup>117</sup> Siobhan, BE1, pp. 26-7.

<sup>118</sup> Bethany, EW4, p. 27.

The women were uncertain whether increased access to information was beneficial or harmful to women and expressed contradictory opinions. Several of the women stated that not knowing what was going on led to stress, particularly in the area of childbirth.<sup>119</sup> However, they also felt that knowledge equated to worry. The women seemed to find this dilemma irresolvable, perhaps reflecting the contemporary debate in the post-war years over whether it was necessary or desirable to educate women for motherhood.

## **Conclusion**

When addressing women's experiences of becoming a mother in the period 1945-1970 it is important to consider how the preparation of girls for motherhood was a source of competing discourses in the middle decades of the century. Women embraced elements of these discourses and used their language within their own narratives. They did so in complex ways, however, and borrowed different strands from the varying ways of thinking in order to construct an identity of motherhood that was acceptable to them. Indeed Bronwen Davies believes this practice of 'taking up as one's own those discourses through which one is constituted as female' is an inherent part of the experience of 'being "a woman"'.<sup>120</sup> The process of incorporating these discourses into their own accounts was not unproblematic, however. The difficulties women experienced were revealed in the contradictory statements respondents made about how they believed they came to be mothers. For example many said they thought the ability to mother was innate to them, but then also explained that it was something they had learnt. They tried to reconcile the fantasy of motherhood being instinctive and effortless with the real need for instruction that many had also felt. These fantasies are significant because, as Alexander has

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<sup>119</sup> See pages 157-61.

demonstrated, 'fantasy draws on the immediate and historical for aspects of its content, form and context'.<sup>121</sup> Interviewees' fantasies of being 'natural' mothers demonstrates the pressure they felt as women having their children in the middle decades of the century to fulfil the ideal of the 'perfect' mother; namely one who was selflessly devoted to her children, who provided continual care, and who found that this came naturally to her.

There was also a gulf between women's own experiences and the portrayals of how girls were supposed to develop into mothers. Women were often assumed to learn about maternity in the home, but it seems clear that the reluctance of families to talk about sex and childbirth meant that for many women this was not the case. Despite the ideal of motherhood being a shared tradition passed down generations of women, a significant number of women reported they had very little experience of babies and childcare. This situation could be particularly problematic for women as schools often abdicated from the responsibility of providing sex education for their pupils on the premise that parents wanted to perform this role. The reluctance of national government to require schools to play an active role educating children about sex meant that numerous interviewees reported that animal reproduction was the extent of what they were taught. For many women, therefore, as late as the 1960s, the antenatal period was the first time they were educated about pregnancy and childbirth. Despite the instruction they then received respondents often recalled how they still entered into motherhood feeling decidedly ill-equipped. In addition women themselves held equivocal attitudes towards education for motherhood. The interviewees were uncertain about whether increased access to information was beneficial or harmful to women and expressed contradictory opinions. Several respondents stated that not knowing what was going on led to stress, particularly

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<sup>120</sup> Bronwen Davies, 'Women's Subjectivity and Feminist Stories', in Carolyn Ellis and Michael G. Flaherty (eds.) *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience* (London: Sage, 1994) 53-76, p.54.

in the area of childbirth. However they also indicated that they felt today's women could be burdened by knowledge and spoke of their reticence about advising their own daughters, fearing it would not be welcomed. Women were ambivalent about the question of preparation for motherhood and seemed to find the dilemma between knowing too little, or indeed knowing too much, irresolvable. This uncertainty in their accounts was linked to their ambiguity over whether motherhood came naturally to women or needed to be taught. To the women themselves, however, their accounts were not inconsistent. They were endeavouring to reconcile the conflicting ideals surrounding preparation for motherhood with which they were confronted.

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<sup>121</sup> Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman', p. 206.

## **Chapter Six: *Maternity Provision: The Changing Relationship between Mothers and the Health Services***

### **Introduction**

The practice and development of maternity care between 1948, when the National Health Service (NHS) came into existence, and 1974, when a reorganisation of the service saw the local Public Health Departments being abolished, has been the focus of much debate. A number of questions were being asked throughout this period. These include the issue of whether there was such a thing as a normal pregnancy and labour; if so, where should the 'normal woman' give birth and who should attend to her; and did the mother or child need to be the principal focus of attention. Implicit throughout discussions on maternity care at this time was the question of whether pregnancy and childbirth should be medical questions at all. Histories of maternity care provided to women during pregnancy and childbirth in the twentieth century, both from a medical history approach such as Philip Rhodes' history of clinical midwifery and feminist interpretations such as those of Ann Oakley and Marjorie Tew, have detailed developments and debates surrounding maternity provision.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Jean Donnison has identified the inter-professional rivalries between midwives and doctors.<sup>2</sup> However research has often focused on clinical and professional developments rather than the thoughts and feelings of the women who were at the receiving end of maternity care. This chapter will therefore look at how debates surrounding maternity provision in the decades after World War Two determined the

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Rhodes, *A Short History of Clinical Midwifery* (Hale: Books for Midwives Press, 1995); Ann Oakley, *The Captured Womb: A History of the Medical Care of Pregnant Women* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984); Marjorie Tew, *Safer Childbirth?: A Critical History of Maternity Care* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Jean Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men: A History of the Struggle for the Control of Childbirth* (New Barnett: Historical Publications, 1988).

services on offer to Oxfordshire women, and how women experienced this care. Reflecting the differing ways in which oral history can be used to reveal both objective and subjective information about women's lives the chapter will examine how respondents thought the provision of care was changing throughout the period 1945-1970 and how where they lived conditioned the effects of these developments; it will also probe the ways in which interviewees recalled their experiences of maternity in order to examine how women constructed their accounts of encounters with the health services. I will suggest that Penny Summerfield's typologies of the heroic and stoic, which she proposed in her oral history of women during World War Two, are also appropriate for analysing women's experiences of pregnancy and childbirth at this time.

### **Developments and Debates in Maternal Care**

The introduction of the NHS in 1948 gave rise to a renewed interest in maternal and, to an even greater extent, child health. Women and children were perhaps its greatest beneficiaries as they had gained least from the pre-war insurance schemes. The post-war generations of babies profited from this investment in their wellbeing and were bigger and healthier than the generations before, enjoying their subsidised milk, orange juice and cod-liver oil. However there was never any clear and universally agreed upon conception of what form maternity care should take. Policies surrounding maternity care were always being modified in response to changing medical opinions and technological developments. The creation of the NHS initially resulted in a dramatically increased role for General Practitioners (GPs) and it seemed they would be the principal providers of maternal care. This situation was already being altered by the 1950s, however, with a shift to the hospital as the locus for both childbirth and antenatal care. The Cranbrook

report of 1959 called for seventy percent of births to take place in hospital.<sup>3</sup> The resulting move from home to hospital as being the primary location for childbirth was a dramatic change. *Maternity in Great Britain*, the report of the 1948 Joint Committee of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Population Investigation Committee, found that most women wanted to have their babies at home.<sup>4</sup> However the reverse occurred. Nationally the proportion of deliveries in hospital was 63.7 percent in 1954 and only slightly more, 64.7 percent, in 1960, but between 1963 and 1972 the rate rose from 68.2 percent to 91.4 percent.<sup>5</sup> Of the women interviewed for this research the proportion of deliveries in hospital was 67.9 percent for the period up to 1955, 62.2 percent for the years 1956-1965, and 81.3 percent for those who had their babies after 1966.<sup>6</sup> This relocation of birth from home to hospital meant a decline in the importance of the independent midwife as the woman's attendant. It is not true to say that all women wanted to have their children at home but were forced to have their children in hospitals. Early in the period more women wanted hospital births than there were beds to accommodate them. Prior to the introduction of the NHS, and in the years immediately following, nursing homes helped satisfy this demand for beds amongst those who could afford to pay for them. However the increasing belief that hospital was the only safe place to have children (in 1970 the Peel Committee recommended provision for 100 percent of confinements to take place in hospital<sup>7</sup>) meant that women's right to choose was severely curtailed; when women were being told that hospital was the only safe place to give birth it was hard to dissent.

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Health, *Report of the Maternity Services Committee* (London: HMSO, 1959).

<sup>4</sup> Joint Committee of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Population Investigation Committee, *Maternity in Great Britain* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948).

<sup>5</sup> Oakley, *Captured Womb*, p. 215.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix Three, p. 292.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Health and Social Security, *Report of the Sub-Committee on Domiciliary and Maternity Bed Needs* (London: HMSO, 1970).

Running alongside this medicalisation of childbirth, however, was a growth in opposition towards it. As we have seen, Grantly Dick-Read had argued in the 1930s that most women did not need medical intervention. The growth in opposition to the medicalisation of childbirth accelerated in the years after the introduction of the NHS. Prunella Briance, whose baby had died after conventional obstetric care, launched the Natural Childbirth Association of Great Britain in 1957 to promote Dick-Read's teaching. After a period of internal conflict it became a charitable trust changing its name to the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) in 1961. The NCT aimed to teach pregnant women skills in relaxation and breathing but also tried to persuade medical authorities to facilitate home-births, or at least to provide a more homely environment for institutional births including allowing the presence of husbands or other companions. Initially the organisation tried to work with the medical profession, although it increasingly found itself in opposition to the medical establishment as the period progressed. Other organisations which campaigned for a new approach to maternity care were also formed at this time. In 1958, after a distressing stay in hospital for the birth of her child, Sally Wilmington tried repeatedly for a year to find a newspaper willing to print her letter asking if other women had shared her unhappy experience. Childbirth was still considered such a taboo in the 1950s that it took her a year to get the letter published. The response to her letter once it did appear, however, gave rise to a voluntary organization, originally called the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Pregnant Women, but from 1960 the Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services or AIMS.<sup>8</sup> The work of bodies such as the NCT and AIMS did have some effect on women's experience of maternity care as the period progressed. While deference to medical staff was common throughout the years 1945-1970, with consultants in particular remaining distant figures, hospitals were becoming less regimented and more attuned to the needs of the patient.

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<sup>8</sup> Tew, *Safer Childbirth*, pp. 235-6.

These national debates and developments were reflected in the care on offer to women in Oxfordshire. In Oxford between 1948 and 1952 between fifty-six percent and sixty percent of deliveries took place in hospital but by 1971 this was ninety-four percent.<sup>9</sup> The numbers of home-births in the city of Oxford were higher than in the county throughout the period. This was principally because the poor living conditions that still existed in rural areas, with houses without electricity and running water, meant that more women were recommended hospital births on social grounds. In 1954, for example, twenty-seven percent of births took place at home in the county, thirty-four percent in Oxford.<sup>10</sup> By the end of the period this difference had levelled off, particularly after the opening of the Churchill's GP unit which increased the number of beds open to women in Oxford.<sup>11</sup> This rapid move to hospital deliveries throughout Oxfordshire was the result of changes in policy at the national level with local health departments reacting to these pronouncements. In 1958, the year before the Cranbrook report, the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) for Oxfordshire, P.W. Bothwell, indicated that he thought the question of where a woman should give birth was open to debate. He wrote:

While many mothers prefer hospitalisation for their confinements there are many people who consider that home is the proper place in which to be born. Contact with the family and children and the personal general practitioner is not then lost. On the other hand, specialised assistance is not so readily available, even with a Flying Squad Maternity Emergency Unit, and many general practitioners would feel happier to be able to conduct their own cases at home antenatally and in a G.P. hospital bed if hospital care is necessary.<sup>12</sup>

After the Cranbrook report in 1959 called for seventy percent of births to take place in hospital the debate in Oxfordshire was over. In 1966 the policy of discharging home

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<sup>9</sup> City of Oxford Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health, 1952, p. 4 Bodleian Library; MOH Oxford City, 1971, p. 87.

<sup>10</sup> MOH Oxford City, 1954, p. 8; Oxfordshire County Council Annual Reports of the County Medical Officer of Health and Principal School Medical Officer, 1954, p. 19, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies. By the early-1960s the number of home-births in Oxfordshire was further reduced because of a shortage of midwives.

<sup>11</sup> MOH Oxford City, 1966, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> MOH Oxfordshire, 1958, p. 5.

early patients delivered in consultant units was introduced to provide for as many hospital births as possible.<sup>13</sup>

### **Heroes and Stoics – Narratives of Maternity**

Deciphering women's accounts of maternity provision is problematical due to the complexity with which women articulate their experiences of the health services and the initial reluctance that many demonstrate to speak critically of the care they received. Providing an analysis in which women can be both the receivers of care and also the active determinants of it has been a difficult task for those examining the subject. Feminist writers have often portrayed the history of maternal care over the twentieth century as the story of increasing technologisation and medicalisation at the cost of women's needs and desires. Consultants have been viewed as trying to exercise and maintain their power at the expense of women and other medical professionals. For example, Ann Oakley has argued that through an ideological transformation of the 'natural' to the 'cultural' doctors have legitimised reproduction as a medical speciality.<sup>14</sup> That there is some truth in this accusation is demonstrated by the rapid changes in accepted practice (such as the decline in home-births or the provision of child welfare clinics), which were often at odds with women's demands. However as Jane Lewis asserts:

the process of medicalization must be carefully differentiated. It comprises advances in technology which become the province of professionals; intra-professional issues of the status according to, say, doctors over midwives; the nature of the patient/doctor relationship and greater authority exerted by the doctor; and the place of treatment, which has increasingly become the hospital

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<sup>13</sup> MOH Oxfordshire, 1966, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Ann Oakley, *Women Confined: Towards a Sociology Childbirth* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1980), p. 18.

rather than the clinic or home. It is a mistake to see women as passive recipients or victims of these changes.<sup>15</sup>

I believe that one way of overcoming this dilemma is to probe behind the initial responses the women gave in order to examine the ways in which they told their stories. In her study of the role of discourse and subjectivity in women's accounts of World War Two Penny Summerfield found that her interviewees articulated their experiences in one of two principal narrative forms. There were those who saw the war effort as something to be endured, who 'just got on with it', producing what Summerfield termed the 'stoic' accounts, and women who welcomed the war effort and told epic narratives, which Summerfield termed 'heroic' accounts.<sup>16</sup> These modes are not entirely discrete, reflecting the fact that both public and private accounts of femininity can be confusing and contradictory. Indeed Summerfield describes how 'Even women who told confident stories conducive to the maintenance of self-esteem about one part of their lives, became less secure in their narratives of other parts.'<sup>17</sup> In their attempts to reconcile their understandings of their own individual pasts with the public representations of womanhood, women may, as Summerfield has put it, 'express their stories only in fragmentary and deflected accounts'.<sup>18</sup> Taking these qualifications into account, the dichotomy between stoic and heroic models that Summerfield adopted also seems an appropriate way to analyse women's experiences of maternity. There were the women who recalled that they stoically 'got on with it', bearing discomfort and accepting dismissive medical practitioners; and by contrast, there were women who told more epic

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<sup>15</sup> Jane Lewis, 'Motherhood Issues in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in Katherine Arnup, Andrée Lévesque and Ruth Roach Pierson, *Delivering Motherhood: Maternal Ideologies and Practices in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (London: Routledge, 1990), 1-19, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 87-99, 284-5.

<sup>17</sup> Summerfield, *Wartime Lives*, p. 285.

<sup>18</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 65-93, p. 92.

narratives of surmounting the trials they were confronted with, questioning the status quo and challenging the power of health professionals. These were not the only discourses which women employed in their accounts. Issues of class, locality and family circumstances were also influential. However while women borrowed from a range of depictions and understandings of motherhood, when referring to their experiences of pregnancy and childbirth ideals of stoic endurance or heroically overcoming adversity predominated. The heroic/stoic dichotomy seems to be a feature of the way women articulated their responses to out of the ordinary challenges – like the war effort or childbirth. These were circumstances that were unusual, unknown and over which they had very little control.<sup>19</sup>

These narrative models reflected, and developed out of, wider ideals in society at large. The stoic model was rooted in the belief that it was neither feminine nor well-mannered, nor indeed British, to ‘make a fuss’. For example when asked about her pregnancy Bethany said, ‘I was probably fairly lucky, I didn’t have any complications everything was fairly easy really.’ However, when asked if she enjoyed being pregnant she said, ‘I’m afraid I had four months of sickness, when [my daughter] was born. I couldn’t, well I didn’t eat anything, the only thing I could eat was digestive biscuits, so the first four months weren’t very nice.’<sup>20</sup> This element of inconsistency in her account may have resulted from a combination of interrelated reasons: to avoid recalling unpleasant memories; reticence about discussing the subject with the interviewer; and an attempt to meet an ideal of womanhood in which women are accepting and do not complain. Her initial response was to reply that it all went fine, in a similar fashion to when people are asked how they are and they reply they are well. Secondly, and leading on from this, she

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<sup>19</sup> It is noteworthy that some of the women interviewed also employed these discourses when discussing how they coped with caring for a first baby. See pages 121-2.

believed that some degree of discomfort was unavoidable in pregnancy and labour, and so was not worth mentioning. In the same way the women in Margery Spring Rice's study of working-class wives in the 1930s initially replied that they were in good health before listing the catalogue of minor ailments they in fact faced.<sup>21</sup> In contrast at the other end of spectrum were women who glorified their experiences and presented epic accounts of overcoming the trials and tribulations of pregnancy and childbirth. This model derived from the image of childbirth as being something heroic for women and a seminal moment in their lives. It was also influenced by the ideal of the competent and in-control woman, active in all aspects of her maternity, which was celebrated within the contemporary natural childbirth movement, and also developed out of second-wave feminism. In addition the different models may have been linked to the change from a collective understanding of experience, which shares characteristics with the stoic model, to an individualistic understanding, linked to the heroic model. Women's use of these stoic and heroic narrative genres can be seen in their accounts of all elements of their maternity care, from the antenatal period to the postnatal period. The remainder of this chapter will investigate how the women interviewed in Oxfordshire used these narrative forms.

## **Pregnancy**

Visiting their doctor when women discovered they were pregnant was often their first encounter with the maternity services. However women recalled approaching this first meeting in very different ways. There were those who went apprehensively, seeking their doctor's affirmation and approval of the fact they were pregnant. For example Hope remembered visiting her doctor to confirm that she was pregnant in the 1950s:

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<sup>20</sup> Bethany, EW4, p. 9.

you know until the doctor could actually feel something you couldn't be certain that you were pregnant. I said 'What about a pregnancy test?' which in those days I think they injected some of your urine into a frog and it ovulated or something, and he said, 'Well yes, we can arrange that but it would cost I don't know how much.'

Hope recalled how she was philosophical about the situation and replied, "'Oh we can't afford that we need that money for the baby", so anyway I was pregnant and it duly arrived at the appropriate time.'<sup>22</sup> Hope was both accepting of her pregnancy and the advice (or lack of it) that her doctor could offer. However, in contrast, some women recalled being rather more self-assured when they first sought out antenatal care. Gloria presented herself as in an equal or superior position to her doctor – she had come to tell him she was pregnant rather than to seek his opinion on whether she was:

My periods hadn't come so I though oh blimey this don't seem right, but it just didn't worry me. I only went to the GP when I was four months. And he said, 'Why didn't you come before?' You know, we know them well, that's Dr Millar. He said, 'Well you're about four months', and I said, 'That's alright innit?' He said, 'Well yeah, it would be nice to know a bit earlier'. So you know it didn't worry me, so that was that.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed women's approach to their first meeting revealed a divergence in how they dealt with medical professionals in general. There were women who accepted the word of the professionals and bowed to their authority even if they had doubts about its validity. Other women celebrated the fact that they challenged unwelcome and unwarranted advice. While women who presented themselves as heroic figures may have felt they determined the events they described, the personalities of the medical staff involved could also be deeply influential. How well a woman knew her attendants was a significant factor. For women who had good relationships with their doctors it was easier to take this

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<sup>21</sup> Margery Spring Rice, *Working-Class Wives: Their Health and Conditions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939).

<sup>22</sup> Hope, CO11, pp. 6-7.

<sup>23</sup> Gloria, BE14, p. 10.

less acquiescent stance towards them. Like Gloria, Polly was also a patient of Dr Millar's in Benson. Describing the birth of her first child she explained how:

Andrew was called in with my daughter, because I've got a very low threshold of pain...and I passed out and I can just remember him coming in and slapping me round the face and saying, 'come on sort yourself out I need your help', or words to that effect. 'You can't just...'...And I remember him saying, 'Anne's [his wife] had to put my dinner in the oven for me.' And it's surprising what actually you think of at that point. And I thought I don't care a damn about your dinner.<sup>24</sup>

Later in her account Polly recalled how her doctor subsequently told her that if he had known there would be complications 'he would have put me into the Battle [Hospital in Reading], and I'm quite happy I wasn't there, because I'd gone through six or seven months with his care, so no way would I have been happy going into the Battle.'<sup>25</sup> Polly had great faith in her doctor and trusted him implicitly. She was not inhibited around him and felt comfortable in telling him what she really thought, which may have helped enable her to construct a more heroic account.

Women's descriptions of their attendance at antenatal clinics often formed the next part of their narratives. Women who were booked for hospital confinements attended the antenatal clinics the hospital ran and tended to be rather uncomplimentary about the care they received. Rebecca recalled her experiences at the Nuffield Maternity Department in the Radcliffe Infirmary in the early-1950s. 'I'm not at all modest but you did get whatever Prof or whatever was on, and then you got about twenty students all looking, peering in and out...you didn't ask questions very much, you didn't get a chance.'<sup>26</sup> Many women described how there was a lack of respect shown towards them by the medical professionals at the hospital clinics. However they also explained that at the time they did not question the authority of the medical staff. Ingrid remembered how 'you changed into

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<sup>24</sup> Polly, BE7, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Polly, BE7, p. 8.

one of their horrible gowns and were weighed and measured quite publicly.<sup>27</sup> Camilla, who worked as a teacher, recalled what happened on an occasion when these gowns ran out:

I remember going straight from school where I had a certain respect to these antenatal classes where you were...like a herd animal, you were not really treated as an individual. I remember one particular time it must have been quite late on because it was summer, and I turned up relatively late for this clinic, and they'd run out of gowns, and I said you know, 'I don't have a coat with me', and they said, 'Well, sorry, you'll just have to do it in your knickers', and actually it didn't worry me particularly because I don't mind that sort of thing, but I thought you know some people did, and they just thought that was okay you know.<sup>28</sup>

It is interesting that Camilla presented herself as stoically putting up with the situation, but worrying that other women may have found the circumstances unacceptable. There appears to have been a class difference in the expectations of women attending the clinics. It was often a new experience for middle-class women to being treated with such lack of respect and the clinics featured more prominently in their narratives. It is also noteworthy that the women who did state that they tried to confront the system were middle class.

Grace explained how on one occasion she decided she had endured enough:

I had to go into the Infirmary for antenatal clinics and that was a nightmare because I had an eighteen months toddler with me and it was the period when they told everybody to come at once. So there you were sitting perhaps for two hours. And one occasion I got up and walked out...and after that they used to put me at the head of the queue, I felt it was grossly unfair, you know middle-class mum pulling rank but at the same time, I don't know, there it was.<sup>29</sup>

Nonetheless, many middle-class women also recalled that they too had been reluctant to make a fuss.

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<sup>26</sup> Rebecca, OX10, pp. 8-9.

<sup>27</sup> Ingrid, SO11, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Camilla, SO6, pp. 7-8.

<sup>29</sup> Grace, NO7, p. 9.

For most women the medical staff in hospital, and consultants in particular, were distant and unapproachable figures who could be dismissive and repressive towards their female patients. This was a widespread complaint and the Oxfordshire women's accounts corroborate studies of other areas. A Mass-Observation respondent writing about childbirth in the late-1940s explained:

The consultant used to appear with his entourage, formally dressed and never speaking to anybody. The poor sister had to remember everything he said to her and come back and tell the mother after he had gone. We were not allowed, while he was in the room, to get out of bed for any reason at all. Going to the loo or asking for a bed pan was forbidden.<sup>30</sup>

Penny's consultant in Oxford displayed the same arrogance when she was pregnant with her third child in the early-1960s:

There was a Professor of Gynaecology...and I went to him. And he explained about this new technique and what a success this was going to be. [Pause]. And I think it was eighteen weeks that they put these sutures in, well I had been going to him regularly for antenatal checkups and I went one day...and he was in a hurry and just fitting me in...and he examined me and he estimated the length of the pregnancy...And he did this, and then he said, 'Oh it's all going very nicely, you know in a couple of weeks time when you're eighteen weeks pregnant we'll do this.' And I was saying to him, 'But I'm eighteen weeks now!' [Bangs her fist on table]. He didn't take any notice. [Pause]. Within a week I had lost the baby. I was furious, I could have sued him, but what's the point. And he was terribly flustered, and he came along and tried, and I said, 'I consider you've been negligent', and he had been and knew he'd been negligent...And in those days of course people paid such reverence to somebody with a medical coat, it really was an education.<sup>31</sup>

Penny's distress was still evident as she told this story. The breaks and pauses in her narrative demonstrate the difficulty with which she did so. However it was also important to Penny to make it clear that she had not accepted the situation and had shown her anger towards her consultant. Penny went on to have another successful pregnancy, but she recalled how this experience of losing her baby had been a revelation for her and she no longer felt obliged to take the word of doctors as law. Penny also presented herself as trying

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<sup>30</sup> Mass-Observation Archive (University of Sussex): Replies to Spring 1997 directive, part 1 (You and the NHS), [C2570].

<sup>31</sup> Penny, CO7, p. 11.

to take on the medical staff and the disregard shown to women by many in the health service. She had twins with her last pregnancy, but this was diagnosed late because both her doctor and midwife had not believed her protestations that she was carrying them. Bet remembered how when she went for her antenatal examination and asked her doctor whether it was a multiple birth, his response was, 'Good heavens no.' She then told her concerns to her midwife who said:

'Oh it's because you're older and your muscles are getting stretched', and I thought, 'A load of rubbish', knowing how I'd carried before. Every time she came I asked her, and every time she felt the baby out and said, 'No, this is one big baby', she said, 'I'm getting fed up with you asking', and she wrote in red pen, 'One large baby.'<sup>32</sup>

Bet still refused to accept this pronouncement and recalled with some satisfaction that her doctor eventually identified twins. She had been vindicated. Women's experiences of antenatal care in the period 1945-1970 were therefore conditioned by the view of medical professionals that they rather than their patients knew best. However women explained how they dealt with this situation in different ways – there were those who presented themselves as stoic figures who accepted the situation, whether or not they had doubts about its legitimacy, and those who presented themselves as heroically challenging the poor treatment and disrespect they faced.

## **Childbirth**

The ignorance and fear that many women felt about childbirth, coupled with lack of support from hospital staff, meant that many women felt they had no choice but to accept the conditions they encountered and try to make the best of it. For those who had given birth in the main hospital for the county, the Radcliffe Infirmary, it was generally not a pleasant experience. Indeed the women who described feeling most traumatised by

childbirth were those who faced the combined effect of unexpected difficulties and disregard from hospital staff. The most frequent complaint women levelled against their care in hospital were the hours of being left alone and uninformed. Georgie described what it was like when she had her first baby in the Radcliffe in 1961:

Of course I hadn't a clue, I didn't know, I thought when they came every twenty minutes or fifteen minutes or so that the baby was on the way, well they decided the [contractions]...were not close enough together to put me into a delivery room, so they stuck me in the corridor, coz all the delivery rooms were full. Well they, nobody came, they left me there for hours on end.

Georgie was in labour nearly twenty-four hours with the birth of her first baby. Her own lack of knowledge in conjunction with the neglect she experienced from the medical professionals meant that she recalled the birth as a stressful experience. She encapsulated the indifference of the staff by recalling how that they refused her a cup of tea after her baby was eventually delivered.<sup>33</sup> Gloria also felt let down by medical staff at the hospital. She had haemorrhaged while on the bus to work from Benson to Oxford in the mid-1960s and had to be rushed to the Radcliffe Infirmary. While she felt the care she received before the birth was excellent, 'the birth wasn't exactly brilliant.' She had been prepared to have a caesarean, but 'then the consultant marches in with his entourage and examines me you know. Oh there's no need for a caesarean, she'll be able to give birth herself. So that was that wasn't it.' Gloria explained it was the lack of communication from the staff that upset her most, which was compounded by her reluctance to ask questions of them. She told me: 'That was it, my first baby, I hadn't got a clue what was going on...And in the end, I think I took so much gas and air that I knocked myself out.'<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Bet, CO1, pp. 21-2.

<sup>33</sup> Georgie, OX2, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Gloria, BE14, p. 12.

Marilyn experienced a similar situation to Gloria nearly ten years later when she had her first child at the recently opened John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford in 1973. She felt the staff had acted in the best interests of her baby, however not being told what was going on was a huge source of worry. She did not want to criticise the staff and said they gave her excellent medical care, but clearly felt that her emotional needs had not been met. Marilyn was induced because she had a large baby and was overdue. She went into labour but the baby got distressed and she had an emergency caesarean, which was something she felt totally unprepared for and not in control of. She felt the medical staff:

don't warn you, no-one told you in any of the classes at that time what you were going to go through with an operation like a caesar. And it's not something they can explain at the time because they had to work so quickly...But that was quite a frightening experience because it's happening very, very quickly, you can't fault the care but not knowing that that could happen to you, they just pounce.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the change of environment with the opening of the new maternity unit at the John Radcliffe Hospital and the passing of nearly ten years, Gloria and Marilyn described remarkably similar experiences when recalling the emotional support, or lack of it, they were offered. Indeed their accounts indicate the slow pace of change in this field even though the 1961 report *Human Relations in Obstetrics* had proposed improvements that needed to be made.<sup>36</sup> Their accounts also revealed the pressure women felt to not complain or make a fuss. Indeed the imbalance of power between women and medical professionals in hospitals meant that even if women did raise concerns about their care they were often disregarded.

Some women did recall with pride that they had not been so compliant and were determined to challenge the self-importance of medical staff. Ruby had her first child in

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<sup>35</sup> Marilyn, BE13, pp. 8-9.

<sup>36</sup> Standing Maternity and Midwifery Advisory Committee, *Human Relations in Obstetrics* (London: HMSO, 1961).

the Radcliffe Infirmary because she was over thirty and hence considered at risk, a ruling she thought was unnecessary and unwarranted. She found the staff at the Radcliffe Infirmary were unfriendly and patronising. She explained:

I cannot change a baby on my knee, I have to put it on something, and she [the nurse] was, 'we don't put our babies on the bed'. So I felt like saying she's not going to get up and run away she's only just been born. And then she was allergic to the plastic nappy things, so I was told to go down and get some proper nappies from where they used them for the prem. babies. So I took myself off down, and then I get down there and I'm told by a not very nice nurse, 'You can't have those they're for prem. babies.' So by this time I was getting a little bit annoyed, shall we put it. And I was more or less packing my bags to come home.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed this assertion they would not stay and put up with the conditions in hospital, and that they were not afraid of showing their displeasure by walking out, was a common feature of heroic accounts of hospital stays. Florence had her first child at the Maternity Unit at the Churchill in Oxford and felt it was even worse there than at the Radcliffe Infirmary. She worked as a nurse in a mental hospital and thought her patients received much better treatment than she got. She eventually discharged herself after ten days, four days early.<sup>38</sup> Florence was keen to present herself as not taking any nonsense from the staff in hospital. She stressed her own professional knowledge as a nurse in endowing her with the confidence to do so.

While there were continuities in women's accounts of maternity provision over the period 1945-1970, significant changes did occur. Women who had a normal delivery at the beginning of the period stayed in hospital for two weeks and were not expected to get out of bed for several days. By the end of the period women were being discharged within twenty-four hours. The atmosphere within hospitals was also changing. Husbands were increasingly allowed to remain present throughout labour and visiting hours were

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<sup>37</sup> Ruby, BE5, pp. 16-7.

<sup>38</sup> Florence, BE8, p. 2.

extended. The husbands of women who had their children in the 1940s and 1950s were often forbidden from being present at the birth; childbirth was considered to be a female preserve. Describing visiting hours when she was in the Radcliffe Infirmary for the birth of her first child in 1951, Rebecca recalled:

only fathers could visit and only something like four evenings in this week you stayed in hospital then, and when my son was born...it was over two days before he saw him. And he was desperate and he rang his parents in Austria and said, 'What's wrong with him, what's wrong?' My mother-in-law was horrified.<sup>39</sup>

Even during home-births many husbands chose to remain out of the room or were kept out by the midwives. Enid had her first baby at home in Benson in 1943. Her midwife sent her husband on a fictitious errand to Wallingford because she did not want him in the house.<sup>40</sup> By the end of the 1960s this attitude had softened. Fiona felt her husband developed a closer relationship with their second son born in 1968 than with their first born in 1966 because he was present at the birth. She explained that he was 'more involved' because 'he'd been there and it wasn't this sort of women's mystery. And I was much happier having him there. Because he didn't see [our first child], he didn't even know he had a son until nine o'clock that morning when he rang.'<sup>41</sup> However it is important to note this was still the exception rather than the norm. Many of the women interviewed indicated ambivalence in their attitudes towards husbands being present. Interviewees whose husbands were not present often said they were glad he was not there. Some women liked having ownership over pregnancy and childbirth believing it was a shared female event in which men could not participate and indeed they thought that they gained power and esteem from this.

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<sup>39</sup> Rebecca, OX10, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Enid, BE12, p. 11.

## **Continuity of Care and the Postnatal Period**

Where a woman gave birth also determined her experiences of antenatal and postnatal care. Fiona explained that she missed out on antenatal care with her third child because her local GP in Benson thought she was having it provided by the hospital in Oxford and vice versa. She also felt the medical professionals were more concerned with the health of the baby than about her. Although she tried to make light of this by telling the story in an amusing way, and did not want to appear unappreciative of her doctor, it was something she still recalled as being upsetting. 'I came over all funny at the hospital on one occasion. That's when they suddenly realised they'd been checking the baby, but they hadn't actually been checking me. One did rather feel like a vessel you know.'<sup>42</sup> Women could be left feeling that antenatal care was directed at their babies rather than them, and they were not valued by the medical services. While not feeling comfortable explicitly criticising their care they wanted to feel their needs were appreciated too. For women who had home-births antenatal care could be more effective because the same midwife provided antenatal and postnatal care and also attended the delivery. Consequently women built up a relationship with their midwives and felt the care was more personal. Lisa who was living in Cowley when her baby was born, described how, 'I had the baby at home, the midwife came and delivered it...And then the midwife came in every day for the first week and then every other day for the next couple of weeks.'<sup>43</sup> Interviewees who wanted to have home-births explained this was because they thought it would be a more relaxed and intimate experience. Even if husbands or relatives were not present during the birth they could be on hand and there were no difficulties with visiting. Midwives stayed with the woman throughout labour so she was not left alone and there

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<sup>41</sup> Fiona, BE10, pp. 24-5.

<sup>42</sup> Fiona, BE10, pp. 20-1.

was someone to explain what was happening. Women who already had other children liked the fact they were not separated from the families. Perhaps most importantly home-births enabled continuity of care as the woman was able to build a relationship with her midwife.

This continuity did not exist for women coming home from hospital. For these women the maternity services offered piecemeal provision rather than a unified service and the consequences for them were significant. For example Florence had to travel to Oxford to have an abscess on her breast treated because her GP said as she had been under the hospital for the birth he could not see her. Although she now thought this was ludicrous, and despite her portrayal of herself as someone who not be cowed by doctors, at the time she accepted it unquestioningly.<sup>44</sup> In the late-1940s and 1950s when women remained in hospital for two weeks after the birth they were usually given some instruction in how to care for their babies, for example feeding and bathing, during their stay. The length of time women spent in hospital was decreasing, though, with the policy from the 1960s onwards of discharging women early from hospital into the care of their midwives. While this procedure was originally a response to the shortage of hospital beds many women preferred leaving hospital early and then having postnatal care provided by midwives in their own homes. Indeed women's desire for integrated postnatal care had been revealed by investigations like *Human Relations in Obstetrics* (1961) and was a key argument of bodies such as AIMS. It was an area of need that was recognised by the health authorities in Oxfordshire and there was an increasing effort made to provide this type of unified service. Initially co-operation occurred through midwives, health visitors and district

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<sup>43</sup> Lisa, CO12, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> Florence, BE8, pp. 7-8.

nurses being attached to GP practices (this was being tried from the mid-1950s<sup>45</sup>), and by the 1960s it was supplemented by the growth of health centres where all the health professionals were based together under one roof.

The issue of breastfeeding was usually the first test women made of the maternity services with regard to support and advice after the birth of their child. It often revealed the lack of a coherent policy amongst medical professionals. To breast or bottle-feed was a question of great importance during this period. Women could feel under pressure to breastfeed or not to breastfeed depending on the opinions of the medical staff they encountered. Sharon, whose first child was born in the early-1970s, did breastfeed, but felt she was going against the prevailing current. She spoke with some satisfaction that she overcame the scepticism of both her contemporaries and medical staff. She said, 'I breastfed for nine months, and it comes out as nought percent for the time. So small that it didn't even feature in the graph.'<sup>46</sup> However there were interviewees who wished they could have behaved more heroically in standing up to medical staff but felt unable to do so. Amanda's baby was premature and initially fed by bottle. She explained that the hospital 'gave you subistron [ph] in those days. Apparently it isn't a very good thing now it's a carcinogenic, but in those days I just had it to dry me up straight away...And I think I should have [continued], coz I breastfed my other three really well.'<sup>47</sup> Amanda would have liked to persevere longer in her attempts to breastfeed, but was encouraged to stop by the hospital. Despite being a nurse herself she did not have the confidence to challenge this pressure.

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<sup>45</sup> MOH Oxfordshire, 1957, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Sharon, EW9, p. 12.

<sup>47</sup> Amanda, BE9, pp. 9-10.

For women who did breastfeed it could be an incredibly satisfying experience and encouraged them to feel they had fulfilled the ideal of the natural mother. Cherie, for example, 'loved that part of it, breastfeeding, I think it's a lovely close feeling...I don't think there's anything as nice as breastfeeding your baby and feeling that closeness.'<sup>48</sup> However despite this enjoyment of breastfeeding that some respondents reported, how they fed their babies was an extremely sensitive subject for women and recalling problems surrounding feeding still caused them great distress. Several interviewees had felt compelled to breastfeed because they were receiving messages from sources such as midwives, health visitors and sometimes their own mothers that it was essential for the health of the child.<sup>49</sup> Many medical professionals did argue breastfeeding was healthier for babies. Reviewing the results of a 1952 breastfeeding survey which showed that sixty-five percent of babies in Oxford were breastfed at the end of two months, the MOH for Oxford City, J.F. Warin, reported that he wanted this figure to increase.<sup>50</sup> This campaign to encourage breastfeeding left some women feeling that they had been bullied into it when they felt their babies were better-off bottle-fed. These women presented themselves as stoic figures trying to meet the demands of unsympathetic medical staff.

Bethany thought:

you feel pressured, probably, into breastfeeding and you've got to, you know, you think oh that's what we should be doing. But I remember a friend came over and she marched me up to the village and bought a bottle and some milk and we came down and we fed her and she seemed more content.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Cherie, CO9, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Writing in the early-1940s the obstetrician and psychoanalyst Merell P. Middlemore stressed the importance of a woman's mother in shaping her response to breastfeeding: 'The attitude of the mother to breast feeding has been built up on her own experiences and her fantasies of being suckled; they are as important in deciding how easily she feeds the child as is the knowledge she gains later from reading or from the advice of more experienced people.' This work was based on a study of forty-six nursing mothers observed in hospital. Merell P. Middlemore, *The Nursing Couple* (London: Cassell and Company, 1941), p. 118.

<sup>50</sup> MOH Oxford City, 1952, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Bethany, EW4, pp. 12-3.

It is noteworthy that although Bethany presented herself as a somewhat passive figure in her account, her friend was given the heroic role of encouraging her to disregard medical advice and making it possible for her to do so. Deborah presented a similar account of her efforts to breastfeed. She said: 'I did try to breastfed and then in the end I had to bottle him because either it wasn't coming or I didn't have any, and the others just went straight on the bottle I think. They used to try you didn't they, "You must try, you must try", even if it wasn't going there.'<sup>52</sup> These efforts on the part of the staff were not always resented or endured by women. There were women who welcomed the help they offered. These women viewed the efforts of the medical staff as being supportive rather than authoritarian, enabling them to fulfil their potential as mothers. Grace had her first baby in the Radcliffe Infirmary in 1965. She explained that the staff 'were very anxious for you to breastfeed your baby and that's not always and it wasn't easy but they got, you know they got me going and they were terrific.'<sup>53</sup>

The information women received about breastfeeding was also dependent on its source and this meant they could receive conflicting advice. For example they could be presented with differing opinions on whether it was alright to supplement feeding or to give their babies cow's milk.<sup>54</sup> Gloria described a dispute between doctors and midwives over breastfeeding which reflected the power struggle that existed between them. She recalled being moved to Wallingford to recuperate after giving birth at the Radcliffe Infirmary:

Matron comes in, 'Right let's sort this baby out then, well you're having problems breastfeeding the baby?', 'Yes I am matron', 'Right that's it' she says, 'I'll dry your milk up, don't worry about it we'll get bottles. I'm not having my mothers upset by these doctors.'

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<sup>52</sup> Deborah, CO6, p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> Grace, NO7, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Alice, WY2, pp. 7-8.

The midwives at Wallingford were heroic figures in Gloria's story, challenging the tyrannical doctors in Oxford. Indeed, she went on to describe her happiness at being allowed to bottle-feed, saying 'it was wonderful.'<sup>55</sup> Breastfeeding was an emotive issue for the women. Those who could not breastfeed found this very distressing and were keen to defend their decision to bottle-feed (and it is significant they still felt they needed to) explaining they could not give their babies enough milk. Many of the women seemed to feel that breastfeeding was seen as a criterion of being a good mother during the period. For example Ivy, who had her children in 1947 and 1950, was encouraged to breastfeed but found it difficult. Rather than considering this to be a physiological problem she thought it was because she lacked maternal instincts.<sup>56</sup> Breastfeeding was bound up with the ideal of motherliness.

Health visitors also provoked an ambivalent response amongst the women interviewed and were a prominent feature of women's narratives of postnatal care. Indeed, health visitors were expected to be the most significant figures in the lives of postnatal women. In 1960, the MOH for Oxfordshire M.J. Pleydell wrote: 'The health visitor with her knowledge and understanding...is a front-line worker in the promotion of mental and physical health.'<sup>57</sup> Some women did report their health visitors as being useful figures and the first person they would turn to if they had any questions or problems. Deborah, a Cowley resident, thought 'they were very nice people.'<sup>58</sup> Molly who lived in North Oxford reflected, 'It was nice having somebody come into the house, you know, and just talking to you while you'd got the baby on your lap, it was quite a nice atmosphere, and

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<sup>55</sup> Gloria, BE14, p. 11-2.

<sup>56</sup> Ivy, BE4, p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> MOH Oxfordshire, 1960, p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> Deborah, CO6, p. 11.

they seemed to be helpful.’<sup>59</sup> Karen felt that her health visitor was ‘absolutely fantastic’ and said, ‘I’ve always been very grateful to her, because I knew absolutely nothing about babies at all and she managed to tell me all things I needed to know without making me feel like a complete fool for not knowing them.’<sup>60</sup> However other women resented the health visitor coming, thinking that she was interfering and passing judgement on their ability to care for their children. Describing the visits of the health visitor was an opportunity for these women to present themselves as courageous figures standing up to their unwanted intervention. Lisa recalled that she ‘didn’t have a great deal of respect for the health visitor’ because she ‘didn’t seem to me to be frightfully helpful.’<sup>61</sup> By ignoring the advice given to her and refusing to bow to her dictates Lisa was able to construct an image of herself as an independent and self-sufficient figure. These ideas that health visitors were interfering, and that it was necessary to take their advice with a healthy scepticism, had been common in the inter-war years, and it is interesting that similar attitudes existed in the post-war period too.<sup>62</sup>

Conceptions of health visitors were changing over the period from the experienced, older woman who gave mothers advice on baby care to young, highly-trained professionals who were expected to form the front line of public health provision. Irrespective of this change, however, the visit of the health visitor was consistently presented by a number of women as something that had to be endured. While they may not have welcomed her intrusions, and in fact still held a defensive attitudes towards them, they also considered her an authority figure and therefore felt some deference towards her. They recalled how

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<sup>59</sup> Molly, NO4, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> Karen, SO4, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Lisa, CO12, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> Graham Smith found this scepticism amongst women in his study of mothers in Dundee between 1911 and 1931. Graham Smith, ‘Protest is Better for Infants: Motherhood, Health and Welfare in a Woman’s Town, c. 1911-1931’, *Oral History*, 23 (1995), 63-70, p. 66.

they thought it was their responsibility to try and modify their behaviour to her expectations rather than the other way around. They were also afraid of appearing to be a bad mother in front of her. It is interesting how this opinion crossed class, challenging the traditional stereotype that it was working-class women who resented the middle-class health visitor entering their homes. Grace was university educated and was married to a university lecturer. However she was very uncomfortable when the health visitor came and presumed she was passing judgment upon her: 'I was pretty chaotic. We were living up the road in a little house which had one big room downstairs and these tiny babies and the health visitor used to come and visit invariably when the baby was sort of crawling round the floor in a filthy nappy.'<sup>63</sup> There were also interviewees who would have welcomed more intervention from their health visitors, but did not want to appear demanding or needy when this was not forthcoming. These women, who were usually middle class, felt that they had been neglected by health visitors who assumed that as they came from stable, affluent homes they would be able to cope with their babies. This view was summed up by Juliet who said health visitors 'didn't deal with the middle classes.'<sup>64</sup> Fiona felt her health visitor could have gone further to offer her help and thought that because she came from a stable middle-class family she underestimated her need for support:

I think in some ways they were a bit too polite to me. The health visitor we had was actually a cousin of one of [my husband's] colleagues at the university. So she knew something about the family background, but I don't think she knew how incredibly ignorant I was.'<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Grace, NO7, pp. 1-2.

<sup>64</sup> Juliet, NO9, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Fiona, BE10, p. 27.

Reflecting back upon their behaviour from their current standpoint some respondents now regretted that they had been governed by this desire to appear uncomplaining. Emily also thought the health visitors neglected middle-class mothers explaining that:

I don't think actually they kept anything like enough eye on the middle classes. Actually I think they assumed we would manage and we weren't managing. I can remember being in a deep state of panic when [my daughter] was six weeks old and she got a tummy bug, I think I'd been putting her out in the cold too much or something...So there was that kind of thing, that people didn't realise, they thought if you were middle class and educated you were okay, but you weren't not at all. And I remember one time, the baby would be crying and crying and crying and I can remember this health visitor coming in and asking me was I alright, she could see the baby was you know crying a lot, and of course being a good, stiff-upper-lip, middle-class girl I said, 'Oh yes I'm fine', but I wasn't, I could have battered that child.<sup>66</sup>

Emily felt that her health visitor was guilty of not probing her situation fully, but she also wished that she had asked for help. It was middle-class mothers who often believed they missed out on support, which was exacerbated by the fact they were often further away from relatives and therefore family assistance. This lack of support was a particular problem for women who were medical professionals themselves, because others assumed they must know how to care for their babies. Also, they were often reluctant to ask for help because they were afraid their professionalism would be questioned if they did so. Despite her own medical training as a paediatric nurse, and her experience of working in a maternity hospital, Amanda felt she suffered both during and after the birth of her first child through a lack of help and advice. She recalled:

they said, 'you know all about it', but really I wish I'd had the backup, I didn't... And the midwife, no the health visitor used to come and ask me what was happening in the hospital now, but she never gave me any advice, she always asked for advice for her, new things you know, she'd just come and plague me for information. So I felt that nobody was there to support me.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Emily, NO8, pp. 11-2.

<sup>67</sup> Amanda, BE9, pp. 9-10.

Due to their reticence in requesting support directly from their health visitor or doctor many women preferred to seek advice through talks with the staff at the baby clinic. They felt they could ask questions of the staff at the clinic that they did not want to trouble their own GP with. Discussing the clinic, Hope explained, 'you felt that you could go to the health visitor sometimes with a problem that wasn't big enough to take to the doctor.'<sup>68</sup> Yvonne described the clinic as 'reassuring and a place you could get advice.'<sup>69</sup> It was during visits to the clinic that babies were weighed and their progress monitored. However for some women this monitoring could bring worry as well as reassurance. Georgie remembered how concerned she had been when she had found out her daughter had lost weight:

she'd go on the scales and they'd say, 'Oh dear, she's lost half an ounce', and I'd go, 'Oh', I'd put her in the pram and I'd go and walk up to the works where [my husband] was coming out and I'd say, 'She's lost half an ounce and I don't know what to do about it?'<sup>70</sup>

The pressure women felt to succeed as mothers could cause them a considerable degree of distress. Interviewees still vividly recalled the anxiety they felt, which illustrates how powerful this worry and guilt had been.

## **Conclusion**

Two differing strands of evidence were revealed through this analysis of women's experiences of maternity. The first strand was the more tangible evidence that emerged from the interviewees' accounts; namely the changes in the provision of maternity care in Oxfordshire between 1945 and 1970, and how local personalities and practices

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<sup>68</sup> Hope, CO11, p. 10.

<sup>69</sup> Yvonne, NO3, p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> Georgie, OX2, pp. 15-6.

conditioned their effects. The second strand was the ways in which respondents constructed their accounts and the modes of storytelling they used.

While the principal factors that influenced women's experiences of childbirth were when and where their children were born, it is noteworthy that the women interviewed did not stress the introduction of the NHS as precipitating major change. For example Nora, who had her four children between 1941 and 1953, did not think there were any differences in her care when she had her last child after the creation of the NHS.<sup>71</sup> Similarly Cassie thought the only change between when she had her first baby 1946 and her second in 1952 was that she no longer had to pay.<sup>72</sup> Only Jessica who worked as a GP in Bloxham both before and after the launch of the NHS was adamant that it brought benefits. Asked how it affected the care she was able to provide she told the story of a mother of a sick child. Jessica had enquired from the mother why she had not been called and was told, "Well my heart sinks when you walk through the gate doctor because I know that's three and sixpence and I can't really afford it", well that was an awful thing...and all that was gone with the NHS.'<sup>73</sup> When talking about health care in general the women stressed that there were improvements after NHS and they believed these were as much a result of advancements in medical knowledge as improved accessibility to health care. Indeed the most commonly referred to cause of change was the discovery of antibiotics. Several respondents had stories to tell of how their lives were saved by the introduction of penicillin.<sup>74</sup> Michelle compared the effect childhood illnesses had upon her and her children:

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<sup>71</sup> Nora, OX3, p. 5. Celia and Phyllis also expressed similar uncertainty at the date the NHS was introduced and whether it made any difference to the care they received: Celia WY5, pp. 13-4; Phyllis WY3, p. 7.

<sup>72</sup> Cassie, NO6, p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> Jessica, BA8, pp. 7-8.

<sup>74</sup> Joy, WY1, pp. 16-7; Olive, OX6, p. 14.

But thank god there was antibiotics coz I...spent most of my childhood being quite poorly, and a lot of my contemporaries had diphtheria and you could see the hole for the tracheotomy and scarlet fever and things like that, and died from tonsillectomies too. So in one generation there was a huge improvement.<sup>75</sup>

It is also striking that the women did not describe any gradual change in the provision of maternity care, for example a gradual increase in the number of hospital births, and instead their accounts illustrated how changes in national policy had rapid effects on the type of care women received. In a matter of a few years home-births went from being common in Oxford to virtually nonexistent. Indeed individual women recalled the dramatically different care they were offered with their different children's births. Midwife attended home-births and GP supervised births in home or hospital which were common throughout the 1940s and 1950s swiftly declined in the 1960s. The role of independent midwives and GPs diminished, particularly in relation to childbirth, as delivery at a consultant-run hospital was increasingly deemed the ideal. In consequence women lost the ability to decide where they wanted to give birth. However positive changes were also underway by the end of the period. Hospitals were making some efforts to improve the quality of care they could offer, particularly the emotional care, encouraged by the campaigns of movements such as AIMS and the NCT. The women also noted the great differences that had occurred as a consequence of the increased use of technology, such as scans and foetal heart monitors. However they queried whether these really brought an improvement in care or simply resulted in increased worry. From the interviews it appears that some women were sceptical of the changes that had taken place as they seemed to be in opposition to their own desires. As a result they felt alienated from these developments.

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<sup>75</sup> Michelle, OX8, p. 10.

Locality was the second crucial factor in determining the care women received. It had a huge bearing on all areas of their care and variations could be considerable within small areas. Substantial differences emerged within Oxfordshire itself and the implementation of policies was patchy – for example health centres were less common in rural areas. For women who had children around the country these differences were magnified reflecting the influence of individual health departments. Amanda had her four children (born between 1965 and 1973) in different parts of the country and consequently she demonstrates the range of maternity practices in different regions. She had her first two children in Bristol, the first at a maternity hospital and her second at home, because that was the practice in Bristol at the time. She had to go to a large general hospital to have her third child as by this stage she had moved to the midlands and hospital births were obligatory. She then was able to return to a maternity hospital to have her fourth baby, after moving to Benson.<sup>76</sup> The location in which a woman gave birth, namely home or hospital (and the type of hospital was also extremely important), had a significant effect on her level of satisfaction with the care provided. It also determined her antenatal and postnatal care, with women who had home-births recalling a more unified and seamless service. The continuity of care these women received enabled them to form better relationships with the midwives who attended them than was possible for most of the women who gave birth in hospital. Women's experiences of maternity were highly dependent on where they lived and the policy in the area at the time.

The relationships women enjoyed with medical professionals also varied according to the type of community they lived within. GPs were particularly influential in rural areas. They dealt with the whole family over several generations and viewed their medical care within this context. Village doctors were well-known and respected figures in the

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<sup>76</sup> Amanda, BE9, p. 8, 11-3.

community who had often lived and worked in the village for many years.<sup>77</sup> Examples of these family doctors existed in all of the rural areas of Oxfordshire studied. For example in the Wychwoods two generations, father and son, had both been doctors in the village. It meant that both the doctor and patients in the village had been acquainted with one another over generations forming a close relationship. Dr Scott, whether senior or junior, had been a fixture of the village throughout the whole period. Maud described the elder Dr Scott as ‘a friend really, he used to come in and see the old folk at the farm, my mother-in-law, and have a chat.’<sup>78</sup> It was harder to develop such a close relationship in urban areas because the population was more disparate and transitory. To some extent the midwives who operated in Oxford fulfilled the role of confidant and guide, but this was only for those women having home-births. Chloe Fisher who worked in the city centre was a very well known figure and held in great affection.<sup>79</sup> The relationships women built with their medical attendants influenced how satisfied they were with their maternal care. From the Oxfordshire evidence it seems that while interventionist medical procedures were becoming more common as the period progressed their effects depended upon the type of locality a woman lived in and the relationships she enjoyed with the medical professionals she encountered. The transformations in care that were remembered so unfavourably by women in urban areas, such as the increasing hospitalisation of birth, were not so opposed in the villages where change seems to have been alleviated for women by having closer relationships with their carers.

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<sup>77</sup> In interviews with GPs who practised during this period it is clear that for many being a family doctor was what they liked most about their profession. They enjoyed providing health care to several generations of the same family and treating the whole patient rather than just their symptoms. Oral History of General Practice, Wellcome Library.

<sup>78</sup> Maud, WY4, p. 9. Discussing their GP in Middleton Cheney in the 1940s and 1950s Doreen and Peggy defined him as a ‘family doctor’ Doreen, BA3, pp. 8-10; Peggy, BA9, pp. 8-10. In Benson Dr Andrew Millar and Dr Anne Millar were recalled as significant figures by a number of women. Siobhan, BE1, p. 17; Tina, BE3, p. 13; Ruby, BE5, p. 10; Polly, BE7, pp. 7-9, 13-4; Fiona, BE10, p. 16, p. 12; Gloria, BE14, p. 10; Agnes, EW1, p. 14; Diana, EW2, pp. 5-6; Ellen, EW3. See Angela Davis, ‘To What Extent Were Women’s Experiences of Maternity Influenced by Locality? Benson, Oxfordshire c. 1945-1970’, *Family and Community History*, 8 (2005), 21-34.

Women recalled their experiences of maternity using two main narrative models, the heroic and the stoic, which were identified by Penny Summerfield in her research on discourse and subjectivity in women's accounts of their war-work during World War Two. While the context of women's experiences of maternal care is undoubtedly different from that of wartime, the divergent feminine identities (of those who acted heroically and those behaved stoically) which women employed when recalling their experiences of the war were also used by women in their accounts of maternity. In part this similarity seems to result from the way in which women described extraordinary, life-changing events, such as childbirth or the war. The fact that the generation of women that were interviewed for Summerfield's research and this research largely overlap is surely also significant. The women interviewed for both studies had lived at the same time period and had received the same cultural representations of the feminine and the role of women. Informed by ideals of stoic and heroic womanhood that were present in the contemporary culture of mid-century Britain (and the decades that followed), women used these linguistic elements in their construction of their own accounts of maternity. There were women who presented themselves as heroic figures overcoming the ordeals of childbirth and confronting the arrogance of medical professionals. In contrast there were those who depicted themselves as stoically enduring their discomforts and privations without making a fuss and displaying deference to the medical staff who attended them. Even if women did not identify themselves with either ideal they often transferred these characteristics to another player in their story. These genres were not entirely distinct and the women interviewed could borrow from both at different points in their narratives to suit the point they were trying to make, and to enable them to provide a version of events that was acceptable to their present selves. This analysis of Oxfordshire women's

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<sup>79</sup> Chloe Fisher was referred to by Michelle, OX8, p. 7; Megan, OX11, p. 5; Lindsay OX12, p. 11; Yvonne NO3, p. 14.

experiences of maternity reveals that the objective information that women presented in their accounts of pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period cannot be viewed in isolation from the subjectivity of their interviews. The events women recalled in their accounts affected the way in which they told their stories.

## Chapter Seven: *Maternal Deprivation and 'Good Enough Mothers': Women's Relationship with Childcare Experts*

### Introduction

Childcare manuals were abundant throughout the twentieth century and many self-proclaimed experts were writing on the subject. Their advice was by no means consistent and mothers were under pressure to conform to different models of care at different times. Thinking about child development during the years 1945-1970 was greatly influenced by the experiences of World War Two with children experiencing family breakdown, separation and evacuation. Anna Freud advanced her hypothesis of maternal separation on the basis of her work in war nurseries; John Bowlby reported on the mental health of homeless children in post-war Europe for the World Health Organisation; and the war years gave Donald Winnicott the opportunity to work with seriously disturbed children who had been evacuated from London and other big cities, and separated from their family.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most significant and contentious idea which arose was Bowlby's concept of maternal deprivation. Denise Riley argues that:

Feminist writings, looking back, have often assumed that the return of women to their homes after the last war was intimately linked with, if not positively engineered by, Bowlby's psychology, whose anti-nursery tenets were in harmony with the government's desire to get shot of its wartime labour force, and reassert its 'normal' male one. Not unreasonably, given all the orchestrated appearances, feminism tends to hold to a vision of post-war collusion between the government and psychology to get working women back to their kitchens, and pin them there under the weight of Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation in an endless dream of maternity throughout the 1950s.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Freud, *The Writings of Anna Freud, Vol. 3: Infants without Families* (London: Hogarth, 1973), pp. 333-4; John Bowlby, *Maternal Care and Maternal Health* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1951); D.W. Winnicott, *Deprivation and Delinquency* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 13-80.

<sup>2</sup> Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of Child and Mother* (London: Virago, 1983), p. 11.

The moral panic over latchkey children and juvenile delinquency during and after the war did encourage concern about the role of mothers. Mothers were blamed for their children's problems whilst fathers' role in child-rearing was neglected and masculine failings attributed to inadequate mothering. In their 1947 book *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia Farnham stated in reference to perceived psychological problems among young people, that, 'The bases for most of this unhappiness, as we have shown, are laid in the childhood home. The principal instruments of their creation are women.'<sup>3</sup> Similarly, writing in 1955 Ruth Anderson Oakley asserted, 'It is within the province and the power of good mothers to eradicate most of the prisons and the asylums'.<sup>4</sup> However Bowlby's writings were often been misinterpreted and taken to extremes he did not intend.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, at no point did Bowlby's theories hold sway over every psychologist and sociologist in post-war Britain, and by the late-1960s and 1970s his views were increasingly being challenged. Writing in 1972, the psychologist Michael Rutter argued that the concept of 'maternal deprivation' was erroneous. He thought the evidence strongly suggested that most of the long-term consequences of a child being separated from its mother were due to privation rather than loss which meant the 'deprivation' half of the concept was somewhat misleading. The 'maternal' half of the concept was also inaccurate in that the deleterious influences concerned the care of the child or relationships with people rather than any specific defect of the mother.<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Casler's criticism was even stronger and he stated: 'the human organism does not need

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<sup>3</sup> Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (New York: The Universal Library, Grosset and Dunlop, 1947), p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Anderson Oakley, *Challenge to Heritage* (London: The Saint Catherine Press Ltd, 1955), pp. 26-7.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Rutter, *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Rutter, *Maternal Deprivation*, p. 119.

maternal love in order to function normally.’<sup>7</sup> Other psychologists also supported the view that the infants Bowlby had studied suffered not from maternal deprivation but from perceptual deprivation. While it was important that infants received suitable care this did not have to be from the mother.<sup>8</sup> The view that juvenile delinquency resulted from maternal deprivation was also tempered in later studies. By 1965 Bowlby’s colleague Mary Salter Ainsworth considered that ‘delinquency has not been found to be a *common* outcome of maternal deprivation or early mother-child separation.’<sup>9</sup> Robert H. Andry looked at the link between paternal deprivation and delinquency, finding that ‘faulty *paternal* relationships rather than faulty *maternal* relationships primarily occur for the type of delinquent boy studied.’<sup>10</sup>

While the concept of maternal deprivation was extremely influential in the post-war period it did not have universal acceptance. Many psychologists were aware that the impact and consequences of maternal deprivation could be overstated at the expense of other factors. In addition, feminists from the late-1960s onwards increasingly highlighted the loneliness and isolation that mothers who spent their days entirely in the company of young children could feel.<sup>11</sup> Riley has concluded that the development of psychological beliefs in the post-war years was far more fragile than the feminist vision of collusion between Bowlby and the government allows. There was, in fact, no concerted attack to

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Casler, ‘Perpetual Deprivation in Institutional Settings’, in Grant Newton and Seymour Levine, *Early Experience and Behaviour: The Psychology of Development* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1968), 573-626, p. 612.

<sup>8</sup> H.R. Schaffer, *The Growth of Sociability* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 160; Bruno Bettelheim, *The Children of the Dream: Communal Child-Rearing and Its Implications for Society* (London: Paldian, 1971) (1968), p. 1969; Simone Yudkin and Anthea Holme, *Working Mothers and Their Children* (London: Michael Joseph, 1963); Ronald Davie, Neville Batter and Harvey Goldstein with the assistance of Eva Alberman, Euan Ross and Peter Wedge, *From Birth to Seven: A Report of the National Child Development Survey* (London Longman, 1972), p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> Mary D. Salter Ainsworth and John Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (Harmondsworth, Penguin: 1965), p. 202.

<sup>10</sup> Robert G. Andry, *Delinquency and Parental Pathology: A Study in Forensic and Clinical Psychology* (London: Staple Press, 1971) (1960), p. 30.

keep women in the home.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless Bowlby's ideas did hold great sway in society at large and were extremely popular. In a survey of teachers in the 1960s, E.J. Goodacre found they viewed working mothers as a detrimental factor in a child's success at school.<sup>13</sup> Bowlby's theories were also influential on parents who thought that even short mother-infant separations could psychologically harm their children.

Five principal authorities on child development who were popular from the 1940s to the early-1970s will be considered here. They are Frederick Truby King, Donald Winnicott, John Bowlby, Benjamin Spock and Penelope Leach. The chapter will examine both the content and tone of the literature and the authors' influence in reinforcing certain stereotypes of motherhood, but its main focus will be on the relationship between the experts' pronouncements and the thoughts and feelings of the women interviewed.<sup>14</sup>

### **Frederick Truby King**

The principal thread running through the advice of Frederick Truby King, the oldest-established of these experts, was that babies need strict routines.<sup>15</sup> He told mothers: 'Regular habits of the baby are of first importance. A baby cannot be expected to thrive if his mother is not regular and punctual in the matter of all details in his daily routine.'<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (London: Pluto Press, 1978), p. 203.

<sup>12</sup> Riley, *Nursery*, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> E.J. Goodacre, *Teachers and Their Pupil's Home Background* (Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales, 1968), p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Jay E. Mechling has demonstrated the relationship between women and the experts is complex. Mothers could ignore advice or act in the opposite way. Jay E. Mechling, 'Advice to Historians on Advice to Mothers', *Journal of Social History*, 9 (1975), 44-63.

<sup>15</sup> Truby King's first book on the subject of the welfare of babies was published in 1913. Frederick Truby King, *Feeding and Care of Baby* (London: Royal New Zealand Society for the Health of Women and Children, 1913). Although he died in 1938 his influence continued in the following decades with his books remaining in print and his daughter Mary also publishing on the subject. Mary Truby King, *Mothercraft* (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1942).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Indeed he went as far as to argue that mothers themselves should follow a routine, urging, ‘Come what may, the taking of a regular daily walk, regardless of weather, should be an absolute rule of life.’<sup>17</sup> Although they did not necessarily specify they were followers of Truby King, women who had their children in the late-1940s recalled being influenced by this belief in the necessity of routine. Truby King’s books appear to have been principally aimed at middle-class mothers, he often refers to nurses and nannies. He also assumed his readership would be educated, telling them ‘the exercise of intelligence cannot be dispensed with. Indeed, reason becomes continually more necessary for women as they depart further and further from the simple ways of Nature.’<sup>18</sup> In Oxfordshire, however, women with a range of backgrounds recalled following strict routines with their babies. When asked what she thought were the principal changes in childcare between the 1940s when she had her children and today, Maud, a farmer’s wife, replied, ‘Well we had a proper routine. That’s what we had.’<sup>19</sup> Similarly Mavis, who lived in Ewelme and was married to a beekeeper at the honey farm there, thought a lack of routine caused difficulties for today’s mothers: ‘I used to work to a routine, I found it better. They get in the habit of doing it then and it helps a lot. If you don’t, a lot of women today don’t, and they get in such a state, you know they can’t cope.’<sup>20</sup> Winifred was a nurse who had two children in 1946 and 1951. Like Mavis she spoke with regret about the lack of routine she felt characterised child-rearing today. Directly echoing Truby King’s pronouncements she stated, ‘I think if you allow children to just wander as they will, they grow up with no sense of order at all.’<sup>21</sup> Sarah had four children in the 1940s and 1950s and lived in North Oxford. She was a self-confessed follower of Truby

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<sup>17</sup> Frederick Truby King, *The Expectant Mother and Baby’s First Month* (London: Macmillan, 1924), p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Frederick Truby King, *Feeding and Care of Baby* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1940), p. 230.

<sup>19</sup> Maud, WY4, pp. 10-1.

<sup>20</sup> Mavis, EW10, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Winifred, CO4, p. 16.

King and thought his books were supportive of mothers because following a routine made life easier for them. 'I think there's something to be said for it, babies do settle down and they do get used to a routine and it does mean the mother's less worn out.'<sup>22</sup>

An important part of a baby's routine was supposed to be their daily dose of fresh air. Truby King told mothers to 'Keep baby in open air and sunlight as much as possible'.<sup>23</sup> The belief that babies needed regular fresh air for their health and wellbeing was popular with the Oxfordshire women and was supported by mothers who had their children from the 1940s to the 1970s and across all social classes.<sup>24</sup> Phyllis, who had her first baby in Shipton-under-Wychwood in 1946, explained: 'I used to take my baby out every day, if I didn't manage to get out I always put her outside to sleep you know, and she never came to any harm.'<sup>25</sup> Similarly Celia who had her first baby in the early-1950s recalled: 'Well we were told that you put them outside every day in all weather other than fog, it didn't matter if it rained, it didn't matter if it was cold, they were supposed to be outside.'<sup>26</sup> It is interesting that Celia remembered being 'told' to put her baby outside. Although she did not say who had instructed her to do so she clearly associated the recommendation with authority and remembered it as being the official viewpoint. Women thought this practice of putting babies outside had been declining in the years after they had their children. Eve recalled that a row of prams outside on the doorsteps of houses was a common sight both when she was growing up in the 1930s and when she had her own children in the 1950s, commenting that these had now disappeared.<sup>27</sup> Doris thought social changes such

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<sup>22</sup> Sarah, NO2, pp. 8-9.

<sup>23</sup> Truby King, *Expectant Mother*, p. 55.

<sup>24</sup> Many mothers interviewed by Pauline King and Rosalind O'Brien also reported putting their babies outside for 'a good airing'. Pauline King and Rosalind O'Brien, 'You Didn't Get Much Help in Them Days, You Just Had to Get On with It': Parenting in Hertfordshire in the 1920s and 1930s', *Oral History* 23 (1995), 54-62, p. 56.

<sup>25</sup> Phyllis, WY3, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Celia, WY5, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> Eve, CO8, p. 2.

as women working and an increased fear of traffic and child abductors meant today's mothers were too afraid to leave their children out.<sup>28</sup> But the belief that babies needed fresh air was still supported by women in the 1960s. Emily lived in North Oxford and had three children between 1963 and 1967. When discussing contemporary attitudes to childcare she asserted: 'a lot of fresh air was required I think, sleeping out in the garden and doing all those sort of things.'<sup>29</sup> Rita had thought it was necessary for her two children, who were born in the early-1960s, to 'have their daily dose of fresh air.'<sup>30</sup> Unlike some of the other elements of his advice, Truby King's ideas about the beneficial nature of time spent outside for small babies held currency into the 1970s. Ellen was a university graduate who brought up six children in Ewelme in the 1970s and 1980s. She still believed a routine, including time spent outside, was vital for small children, explaining, 'I've always been a great believer in fresh air and exercise...you've got to have your daily ration of fresh air and exercise.'<sup>31</sup>

The routine Truby King believed was most crucial was a feeding routine. He argued: 'Babies fed from birth only five times a day sleep more soundly, and tend to suck more vigorously and with better appetite. They readily get enough food, but run less risk of overfeeding.'<sup>32</sup> He threatened women with dire consequences if they disregarded his advice, stating, 'Never give a baby food merely to pacify him or to stop his crying; it will damage him in the long run.'<sup>33</sup> As well as asserting that four-hourly feeding was necessary for babies Truby King also instructed mothers to never feed through the night, warning that irregular feeding in babies would lead to problems in later life. He told

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<sup>28</sup> Doris, BE2, p. 14-5.

<sup>29</sup> Emily, NO8, pp. 18-9.

<sup>30</sup> Rita, BA6, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Ellen, EW3, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Truby King, *Expectant Mother*, p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

mothers, 'Let the baby sleep eight hours at a stretch during the natural darkness: don't encourage broken rest and insomnia. Bad habits, if started in early life, tend to recur and give trouble later on.'<sup>34</sup> For Truby King feeding meant breastfeeding. 'A woman's milk is not her own. It is created for the baby, and the first duty of the mother is to ensure, by foresight, a proper supply of the only perfect food – the baby's birthright.'<sup>35</sup> He argued that practically every mother could breastfeed if she wanted to and was encouraged to, and that women should not abandon attempts at breastfeeding for some weeks after childbirth.<sup>36</sup> Again he told mothers the consequences of not doing so would be severe. 'Babies don't make themselves delicate and sickly; they become so through faulty treatment – mainly though bottle-feeding.'<sup>37</sup> Babies would then need to be weighed before and after feeding as this was the only means of ascertaining whether a breastfed baby was getting the right quantity of food. Furthermore he told mothers, 'This rule is absolute.'<sup>38</sup> The belief that babies needed a feeding routine was a highly influential element of Truby King's philosophy. For example, on their own initiative Janice, Cherie and Jackie kept diaries documenting when their babies were fed and how much they weighed.<sup>39</sup> When asked what were the contemporary ideas about childcare when she had her children in the 1940s Olive answered, 'I think that most people [thought] you had a certain time [to feed] and if they cry you leave them.' Despite saying this was the orthodox method of feeding babies, Olive also added that she 'wasn't very keen.'<sup>40</sup> Olive was ambivalent about routines. Her doubts may have been the result of looking back with hindsight, which led her to change her attitudes. Esther had her children in 1959 and

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>35</sup> Truby King, *Care of Baby*, p. 65.

<sup>36</sup> Truby King, *Expectant Mother*, p. 103, 75.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>39</sup> Janice, NO11, p. 7; Cherie, CO9, p. 12; Jackie, WY10, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Olive, OX6, p. 17.

1963 and expressed a similar position. When asked if she followed feeding routines she replied:

Yes [emphasis]. I was very strict. I didn't believe in demand feeding, it was every four hours. I've changed my mind though since then.

*Why's that?*

I don't think it's good to be that strict.<sup>41</sup>

It is interesting that as Truby King's ideas had become discredited in the years after Esther had her children she had felt the need to re-evaluate her stance, and now concluded it was a mistake.

In addition to his books Truby King's theories on childcare were dispersed through Truby King Societies. Oxford's Truby King Society ran a clinic in Oakthorpe Road in Summertown in the 1940s. Sarah attended the clinic and classed her daughter as 'a Truby King baby'. She described what the clinic was like:

They weighed the baby once a month and when [my daughter] first started imports hadn't stopped and we were getting some very strong creamy milk, looked like clotted cream almost, in tins from New Zealand which you used when you were weaning the babies...and of course it was very strict on bringing the children up with four-hourly feeding and no feeding at night and the routine established itself. And I fed [my daughter], breastfed, for nine months and the last month you reduced the feeds, there were five feeds, first you cut out the middle one, and then you put the middle one back and cut out the next week the two in between ones, and then all three of the middle ones, and then just the last night and morning, and that was done on a weekly basis and you finished at the end of the nine months, it was terribly prescribed. And of course...we intellectual mothers of North Oxford, went by the book because the book was there you see. And when I was in the hospital having [my daughter], the woman in the bed next to me was the wife of the head waiter at the Randolph, nice motherly sort of girl, and she said, 'Oh I can't wait to get them out of here and do what I like with them', you know, I was horrified, I was quite sure she was ruining her baby.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Esther, OX1, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> Sarah, NO2, pp. 7-8.

Sarah's use of the phrase 'nice motherly sort of girl' in her description is telling. It suggests she felt that motherhood had come more instinctively to less-educated women such as the waiter's wife than to 'intellectual mothers of North Oxford' such as herself.

Truby King's theories were also disseminated through public health bodies and medical professionals. Juliet was a doctor who worked in public health in Oxford holding child welfare clinics in the 1940s and early-1950s. She followed a routine with her own children and recommended her patients to do the same.<sup>43</sup> Phoebe had her first baby in 1948 and recalled that her health visitor had been heavily influenced by Truby King. While she thought the health visitor was 'very helpful', she was also sceptical about some of her advice. 'She did have this pernicious, what was it called, it was New Zealand way,<sup>44</sup> and you were supposed to let the baby cry so it got into regular habits, and I don't think it was good at all.'<sup>45</sup> Similarly Rebecca, who had her first baby in 1951, was also unhappy about her health visitor's reliance on Truby King:

The health visitor, ours, was an absolute horror, put me off for life.

*What was wrong with her?*

A nasty old spinster I think you know, and the ruling guru was Truby King still and Truby King you've probably heard about from other people was very strict.<sup>46</sup>

Many of the women interviewed recalled how their mothers had followed Truby King and had passed on his ideas. Claire was educated at Cheltenham Ladies College and Oxford University and lived in North Oxford when her children were young. When asked why she followed a routine with her first baby she explained it was on the advice of her

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<sup>43</sup> Juliet, NO9, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Frederick Truby King was born in New Zealand in 1858, and was based there for most of his life.

<sup>45</sup> Phoebe, SO8, p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> Rebecca, OX10, p. 9.

mother.<sup>47</sup> Maxine lived in Shipton-under-Wychwood and had three children in the late-1950s and early-1960s. She had grown up in Lancashire and attended Bolton Grammar school followed by Manchester College of Housecraft. She also reported being influenced by her mother. When asked if she followed the advice of any childcare experts she replied: ‘My mother followed the Truby King routine and gave me many tips.’<sup>48</sup> Middle-class mothers may have been the first to embrace Truby King’s advice but they also seem to have been the first to abandon it as well. His ideas had a longer resonance with the working-class mothers interviewed who were slower to adopt the more child-centred approach of later experts, perhaps because they continued to rely on their own mothers’ advice. Gloria had gone to Dorchester secondary modern and then technical college in Oxford and had her children in Benson in the mid-1960s. She strongly believed in the need for babies to have regular time outside: ‘Don’t matter if it was winter, or whatever, during the day for her sleep she’d be outside, both my babies. Wouldn’t be in here, wouldn’t be in her cot, she’d be in her pram, outside, under the plum tree, wrapped up snugly and warm if it was winter.’ When asked why she thought it was important, she answered: ‘It was something my mum used to do I suppose.’<sup>49</sup> From the interviews, class, generation and the relationship a woman had with her own mother (and these were often interlinked) seemed to be the principal factors in inclining women to be influenced by one expert rather than another. Interviewees occasionally recalled consulting with their husbands, but the assumption childcare was ultimately the women’s duty and the belief that mothers ‘knew best’ meant – at least during their children’s infancy – that they were primarily responsible for deciding how to parent.

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<sup>47</sup> Claire, NO1, p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> Maxine, WY6, pp. 7-8.

<sup>49</sup> Gloria, BE14, p. 18.

As noted above, women increasingly questioned Truby King's approach as the post-war period progressed. The aspect the women interviewed were most sceptical of was his insistence that children should not be 'spoiled'. Truby King had warned mothers that, "spoiling" may be as harmful to infants as callous neglect or intentional cruelty'.<sup>50</sup> An important part of his approach, and one which many women recalled, was that in between feeds mothers should leave babies to cry:

The 'can't-be-so-cruel' mother or nurse, who won't bring herself to wake the baby a few times, if needed, in order to establish once and for all regular feeding habits; or who weakly gratifies every whim of herself and the child, rather than allow either to suffer discomfort for the sake of permanent health and happiness – such a woman is really cruel, not kind. To save a lusty, honest cry she will pacify an infant with a 'comforter', or with food given at the wrong times, and may thus ruin the child in the first month of life, making him a delicate, fretful, irritable, nervous, despotic little tyrant who will yell and scream, day or night, if not soothed and cuddled without delay.<sup>51</sup>

Women who pandered to the whims of their babies threatened their children's development into responsible citizens.<sup>52</sup> Many women objected to this requirement that they be physically distant from their babies. Truby King had told them: 'much harm is done by excessive and meddlesome interference and undue stimulation.'<sup>53</sup> He aimed at 'preventing young mothers from treating their babies as mere interesting playthings', and instead thought 'the baby's earliest play should be mainly with his first playmate – himself.'<sup>54</sup> Siobhan described how she had decided this advice was wrong and hence chose to ignore it:

I went against the rules of the time with my own children, because you were told if they were crying to let them cry, but I just couldn't bear it if they were crying. I thought they were not happy. And so I used to pick them up and try and find out what the matter was. And I used to conclude that if they weren't

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<sup>50</sup> Truby King, *Care of Baby*, p. 12.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 221-2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

wet and they weren't hungry then they were bored, so I used to play with them.<sup>55</sup>

Several interviewees recalled how Truby King became to be seen as outdated. Yvonne, who had her first child in the early-1960s, associated Truby King with her parents' generation. She said her mother-in-law had followed Truby King but, 'found it difficult to observe it, to go by the book because it was so stern.' Her own mother was also 'very clear that you needed routines and you must have time without the baby, and you had to look after yourself as well as your baby, which I think you'd get in Truby King to some extent.'<sup>56</sup> When asked if there was more of a stress on routines when she had her first baby in the 1940s than with her subsequent children Phoebe explained how her husband, who was ten years older, was more influenced by Truby King than she was. She felt he was already going out of fashion amongst her contemporaries.<sup>57</sup> Sarah also described how Truby King's popularity was waning during the years she had her children. She had four children between 1940 and 1950. Her first baby was 'a perfect Truby King baby' but she changed her approach with her later children, explaining 'we'd got rather beyond this completely rigid way of feeding.'<sup>58</sup> Influenced by new the new approaches to child development which were appearing during the period, women had begun to doubt whether such a strict routine was really necessary.

Many respondents spoke with uncertainty about what they thought was the most successful method of child-rearing was. Tina had mixed feelings about the changes in attitudes to childcare that had occurred between when she had her children in the 1960s and her children's generation today. She was unsure whether the developments were

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<sup>55</sup> Siobhan, BE1, p. 16.

<sup>56</sup> Yvonne, NO3, p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> Phoebe, SO8, p. 7.

entirely positive, but had also felt dissatisfied with the routine she had followed. 'I think the kids take over more now, I don't know if it's a good thing. I think there was just a routine and you just sort of did it without thinking. Sometimes I felt like a robot almost.'<sup>59</sup> In calling herself a 'robot' Tina implied that she felt she was controlled by the routine, rather than imposing it. Gail, who like Tina had her children in Benson in the 1960s, was asked whether she felt there was more of a focus on routine when she had her children than for mothers today. She replied:

Yes, yes it definitely was. These days the baby fits in with life, those days life was centred around the baby, and you'd have to be home for feeding-time and bed-time and everything else...But none of that happens now. If they want to be out late-ish well the baby's there as well and it's been fed hasn't it and they go home. But you see you wouldn't do that, you had to be back home so they were in bed at six or half-past and that was it. But I have to say they don't seem to suffer from it these days. So you were quite tied, but then it was something that everybody accepted, I didn't know anybody who ever moaned about it.<sup>60</sup>

Looking back with hindsight Gail wondered whether keeping to a strict routine was really beneficial or whether it was just something women had been conditioned to do. While at the time she had unquestioningly accepted the routine, she now doubted whether it really did make mothers' lives easier. Despite Truby King's assertion that by keeping to a strict timetable mothers would enjoy more free time, in practice many women reported that they abandoned his regime because it was so demanding. Joy explained that when she tried to keep to four-hourly feeding with her first baby she thought 'the only thing in life I could hope for was a good night's sleep'.<sup>61</sup> Similarly Lisa decided to stop her initial attempts at keeping to a routine because it required too much time and effort on the part of the mother and brought distress for both her and her baby. She recalled:

I tried very hard with the first one to feed at the times you know they were set, they were set three hourly or four hourly or whatever it was, but sometimes

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<sup>58</sup> Sarah, NO2, p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> Tina, BE3, p. 25.

<sup>60</sup> Gail, BE11, p. 22.

<sup>61</sup> Joy, WY1, p. 25.

she wanted feeding every two hours, and I'd be thinking I'd done it wrong somewhere rather than just getting on and feeding her again you know. I spent an awful lot of time calculating times, but er we survived.<sup>62</sup>

From the interviews it seems clear that women were turning away from Truby King's advice as the period progressed. Although they continued to approve of some elements, such as regular fresh air for babies, they were also looking for a more relaxed experience for both mother and baby.

### **Donald Winnicott**

Donald Winnicott was one expert who was offering a less authoritarian and regimented approach. A paediatrician and psychoanalyst, Winnicott's views were extremely influential through his radio broadcasts and in the press.<sup>63</sup> Winnicott was supportive of mothers and unlike Truby King who often seemed severe, he addressed them in a friendly tone: 'I would like to talk to mothers about the thing that they do well, and that they do well simply because each mother is devoted to the task in hand, namely the care of one infant.'<sup>64</sup> Rather than criticising women for their failings as mothers he was keen to demonstrate what an important job they did in raising their children, how well they accomplished this, and the respect that should be accorded to a mother's own knowledge and wisdom. Winnicott's belief that mothers knew best held resonance with many of the women interviewed. Phyllis lived in Shipton-under-Wychwood and had seven children between 1946 and 1959, only three of whom survived past infancy. When asked if she tried to follow the advice of childcare experts Phyllis replied that ultimately she put faith in her own abilities. 'I tried, but of course you do feed a bit, you do break the rules, I

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<sup>62</sup> Lisa, CO12, pp. 12-3.

<sup>63</sup> D.W. Winnicott, *The Child and the Family: First Relationships* (London: Tavistock, 1957); D.W. Winnicott, *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964).

<sup>64</sup> D.W. Winnicott, *Babies and Their Mothers* (London: Free Association Press, 1988), p. 3.

mean is there a rule? No. You've got to use your own commonsense really.'<sup>65</sup> At the other end of the period Bethany, who had two children in 1969 and 1971, recalled a similar experience. She also treated the advice of childcare manuals with suspicion, doubting their use, and instead 'muddled along'.<sup>66</sup> Siobhan had two children in the early-1970s and recalled how she decided to trust in her own instincts rather than trying to follow the book. She described how she had become disillusioned with the manuals which existed but seemed to offer contradictory advice, none of which suited her babies. She described how:

it was at the cusp between when you were told that feeding was strictly every four hours and, you know, that you had to have a routine for your baby, which I think is fair enough, I don't think that babies necessarily need to run your life for you. And there was the other strong school of thought that everything was demand led by the baby, but I couldn't really see that you could live life, entirely being dictated to by your baby.

In the end she abandoned trying to follow either practice relying on what she thought was best. 'I didn't really take too much notice of them, coz after a short while you realise that he's just a little person and you get on with getting on with it.'<sup>67</sup>

Winnicott's endorsement of mothers and their inherent aptitude for caring for their babies could be empowering to women. Interviewees were keen to emphasise motherhood was an interesting and important job and felt society should do all it could to enable mothers to care for their children. For example Carla explained: 'it's incredibly hard work to produce good, kind and law-abiding children.'<sup>68</sup> However Winnicott could also be censorious towards those women who could not meet this ideal of selfless devotion or did

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<sup>65</sup> Phyllis, WY3, p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Bethany, EW4, p. 14.

<sup>67</sup> Siobhan, BE1, pp. 16-7.

<sup>68</sup> Carla, BA4, p. 10. From her questionnaires sent to women who graduated from Liverpool University between 1947 and 1979 Sarah Aiston also found that marriage, and especially children, was emphasised as an aspect of her respondents' lives that they felt was very worthwhile but sadly undervalued by today's society. Sarah Aiston, 'A Maternal Identity? The Family Lives of British Women Graduates Pre- and Post-1945', *History of Education*, 34 (2005), 407-26, p. 425.

not want to. Winnicott thought being a mother of a small baby should be all absorbing for a woman – ‘to a large extent she is the baby and the baby is her.’<sup>69</sup> Mothers should therefore want to care for their babies on a continuous basis and enjoy doing so.<sup>70</sup> He believed that mothers laid down ‘the foundations of the individual’s strength of character and richness of personality’, which meant that any imperfections necessarily had severe consequences:

failure of mothers at the Ordinary Devoted Mother level is one factor in the aetiology of autism. It is felt to be an accusation when one really goes on logically and refers to the effects of Ordinary Devoted Mother failure. But is it not natural that if this thing called devotion is really important, then its absence or a relative failure in this area should have consequences that are untoward?<sup>71</sup>

The women interviewed did articulate some support for the view that poor mothering negatively affects children. Glenda unfavourably compared the daughter from her son’s marriage, whose mother returned to work shortly after she was born, with the children of her own daughters who were both full-time mothers until their children were at secondary school. She considered the conduct and character of her son’s daughter to be inferior. ‘I can see the difference, she’s not a bad girl but I can see the difference in her behaviour.’<sup>72</sup> Her view was perhaps influenced by her different attitudes towards her daughters and daughter-in-law, but also reveals the contemporary stereotype of the working mother as ‘bad’ mother. Winnicott’s hypothesis on the crucial role mothers played had entered into contemporary discourse and the women echoed his views. While his theories did have a strongly prescriptive message, his emphasis that mothers knew best also encouraged women to have confidence in their own ability and expertise.

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<sup>69</sup> Winnicott, *Babies*, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25, 4.

## John Bowlby

While Winnicott was an influential figure in the post-war decades, his contemporary John Bowlby, and Bowlby's theory of 'maternal deprivation', was perhaps more notorious.<sup>73</sup>

The view that maternal care in infancy was crucial for the physical development of the child had long roots stretching back to the late-nineteenth century, with poor maternal care acknowledged to have a detrimental effect. What was new was Bowlby's idea that mere physical separation from the mother was a pathogenic factor in its own right. He stated: 'a child is deprived if for any reason he is removed from his mother's care.'<sup>74</sup>

Bowlby argued the close relationship between mother and child was not only natural but essential for a child's development.<sup>75</sup> This hypothesis was particularly demanding for mothers because it implied that only their care was good enough. Bowlby's influence was evident in the opinions of medical professionals in Oxfordshire and there was a clear association between poor mothering and problem families in contemporary discourse.<sup>76</sup>

The Medical Officers of Health of both Oxford and Oxfordshire constantly expressed the belief that nursery care should only be provided in exceptional cases. Attitudes towards nurseries hardened as the period progressed which may indicate that Bowlby's theories

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<sup>72</sup> Glenda, BA2, p. 13.

<sup>73</sup> Bowlby's most renowned work is the Attachment trilogy: John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss: Volume 1, Attachment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971); John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss: Volume 2, Separation, Anxiety and Anger* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975); John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss: Volume 3, Sadness and Depression* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Education, 1981).

<sup>74</sup> Bowlby, *Maternal Care*, pp. 10-1.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>76</sup> Discourses surrounding problem families remained prevalent in the post-war period and often focused on the capacity of the mother. In their book *The Neglected Child and His Family*, The Women's Group on Public Welfare concluded: 'In looking at these problem families there emerges one dominating feature – the capacity of the mother.' Women's Group on Public Welfare, *The Neglected Child and His Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 22. M.J. Pleydell the MOH for Oxfordshire wrote in 1959 that health visitors should 'offer advice on budgeting, home management, management of children and adolescents, so that the standard of living in these families can be improved and a reasonably happy family life achieved.' He thought health visitors should be educating women to reduce social problems amongst these 'problem families' as well as medical ones. 'The health visitors continue, through their advice, instruction and friendship, to support and instil a sense of social responsibility, self-discipline and self respect in families where these are so sadly lacking.' MOH Oxfordshire, 1959, p. 11; MOH Oxfordshire, 1961, p. 13.

were gaining ground. At the end of World War Two, in 1945, there were 11 nurseries in Oxford with 530 places. Oxford's Assistant MOH in charge of Maternity and Child Welfare, Mary Fisher, wrote, 'There is no doubt that the nurseries were much appreciated by the parents, and their continuation in some form after the war is necessary.'<sup>77</sup> Only a year later, however, her tone had significantly changed. A re-organisation of the War-time Day Nurseries took place on 1 April, 1946. Mary Fisher stated: 'It was decided as a matter of principle by the Maternity and Child Welfare Committee that children under two were better left at home, and as a result nurseries should be provided only for those mothers who for various reasons had to go out to work.'<sup>78</sup> In Oxfordshire nursery attendance was still only considered suitable where there were unusual circumstances at the end of the period under discussion. In 1968 the priorities for attending the Local Health Authority Day Nursery were where there was only one parent; where the mother was ill; where day-care could prevent breakdown of the family; and where the child was seriously affected by the lack of opportunity to play with others.<sup>79</sup>

Bowlby's theories seem to have been influential upon many of the women interviewed in Oxfordshire.<sup>80</sup> When Polly was asked if she returned to work after her children were born in 1968 and 1970, she emphatically replied she did not. She disapproved of those women who did work and thought children needed maternal care in infancy to become well-behaved, law-abiding adults. She explained:

I think it's fantastic that in those days we were actually there because I was always brought up to understand that the first five years of a child's life are their actual development years...And I think today because parents are

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<sup>77</sup> MOH Oxford, 1945, p. 69.

<sup>78</sup> MOH Oxford, 1946, p. 67.

<sup>79</sup> MOH Oxfordshire, 1968, p. 22.

<sup>80</sup> In her study of London women Stephanie Spencer found that her interviewees were clearly aware of Bowlby's childcare theories, even if they did not express it as such. Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 162.

working they're off in pre-schools or whatever and they're not getting the discipline or the bringing up.<sup>81</sup>

In addition the women discussed their unhappiness with the phenomenon of 'latch-key' children. Both Tania and Gail recounted how their mothers had condemned mothers of 'latch-key' children, and they also shared this view. Tania 'never went home to an empty house'. She thought this was a principal cause of behavioural problems in children, stating: 'I think it all sort of stems from there.'<sup>82</sup> Gail said her mother felt very strongly about latch-key children:

she would never ever do that because she thought that was something very bad for the children. They like stability and someone there who is responsible. And if they get left on their own well they will wander around and get into mischief and she did not agree with that at all, and neither did my husband or I so ours were not latch-key children either. Never. Never latch-key children.<sup>83</sup>

The women were supportive of the idea that it was important for young children to be brought up in stable, secure environments in order to develop into successful adults. They also felt working mothers encouraged delinquent children.<sup>84</sup>

The belief that children needed continuous care from their mothers therefore had resonance with the women interviewed. When discussing the changes between the way they raised their children and today's generation many referred to the growth of nurseries. Women echoed Bowlby's pronouncements that infants could not receive the same quality of care in nurseries as from their mothers. Florence worked as a nurse when her children were young but made sure she only worked shifts during evenings and weekends so her

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<sup>81</sup> Polly, BE7, pp. 19-20.

<sup>82</sup> Tania, EW8, p. 13.

<sup>83</sup> Gail, BE11, pp. 17-8.

<sup>84</sup> Bowlby made an in-depth analysis of the relationship between deprivation and delinquency in, John Bowlby, *Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves: Their Characters and Home-Life* (London: Ballière, Tindall and Cox, 1946).

husband could look after them. When asked how she had managed to combine work and motherhood she replied:

we didn't have nursery schools in those days, in fact I was one of the mums that didn't really believe in nursery schools for a long time, I thought that if you had babies they were yours to look after and you shouldn't expect anyone else to look after them...I know they started a small nursery school in our old scout hut, back when [my sons] were tiny...and [the teacher] came and said, 'Would you send your two?', and I said, 'No, I wouldn't even consider it...I don't believe in them, I think mums should look after them.' I'm still a bit like that I suppose.<sup>85</sup>

These ideas crossed class and educational background. Ruby was born in 1939 and grew up in Benson. She left school at fifteen and had worked in the dispensary at the local surgery before her two children were born in the early-1970s. It was her opinion that 'if you've got a husband who's out working then you look after your children. That's what you had 'em for. Not to send them off to early, pre, play schools and people like that.'<sup>86</sup>

Rose was born in 1932 and grew up in Yorkshire. She did her undergraduate degree in Oxford and then undertook further research before leaving to have her first child in 1959. While she had enjoyed academic life she thought was important that she had been a full-time mother when her children were young. She explained: 'I have a strong aversion to the notion of packing a child up like a parcel at seven o'clock in the morning in order to take it to the nursery in order to go to your job, I don't think that's good for the child.'<sup>87</sup>

Ingrid was an Oxford graduate who worked as a teacher (although not when her children were infants). She had been involved in helping look after her grandchildren while her daughter went back to work and interestingly she thought this situation was also inferior to her daughter providing full-time care. She described how she had done 'an immense amount of fetching and carrying, I don't mind at all, I love it and they treat this as much as their home as their own, but it's not the same as just being able to be really at home

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<sup>85</sup> Florence, BE8, p. 11.

<sup>86</sup> Ruby, BE5, p. 9.

<sup>87</sup> Rose, NO12, pp. 19-20.

you know. So I think...they have lost out.’<sup>88</sup> The women interviewed were not arguing that mothers needed to remain at home throughout the whole of their children’s upbringing nor that doing so would be unproblematic, but they did think young children who were not cared for by their mothers missed out. Deirdre thought there could not be the same bonding between a baby and its mother when she spent long hours at work.<sup>89</sup> Marilyn’s own mother had worked throughout her childhood and she was looked after by her grandmother. She regretted this state of affairs and believed her relationship with her mother suffered because of it. She had therefore decided not to work when her children were young, explaining, ‘I didn’t want them to be like myself with my mother working.’<sup>90</sup>

In her discussion of how she felt her relationship with her mother had been damaged because her mother worked, Marilyn raised another theme of Bowlby’s hypothesis, namely that a close, continuous relationship with their baby was also important for mothers. He argued:

Just as the baby needs to feel that he belongs to his mother, the mother needs to feel that she belongs to her child and it is only when she has the satisfaction of this feeling that it is easy for her to devote herself to him. The provision of constant attention day and night, seven days a week and 365 in the year, is possible only for a woman who derives profound satisfaction from seeing her child grow from babyhood, through the many phases of childhood, to become an independent man or woman, and knows that it is her care which has made this possible.<sup>91</sup>

The women interviewed in Oxfordshire stressed that it was not only the children who suffered from being separated from their mothers. Indeed Enid thought that it was mothers who were deprived rather than their children. Discussing the effects of women going out to work Enid provided the example of her grandson’s wife who worked full-

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<sup>88</sup> Ingrid, SO11, p. 12.

<sup>89</sup> Deirdre, BA1, pp. 12-3.

<sup>90</sup> Marilyn, BE13, p. 12.

time. She explained that she did not think the situation was a problem for her granddaughter because:

She's not going to say, 'Well I was only two and I remember my Mummy not being there all day'. And she's been to nursery you see, and the nursery's been good for her, and [my granddaughter-in-law] is wonderful with her when she's with her. But I think [my granddaughter-in-law's] lost out, because there's all those hours you know, mummy's lost out more than the baby's lost out.<sup>92</sup>

Similarly, when asked why she was opposed to nursery care and whether she thought this was because the children missed out, Florence replied, 'Yes I'm sure they did, or parents miss out on children, because...like the first steps and that sort of thing, if you're not there when they take them they're never repeated are they?'<sup>93</sup> From the interviews it is clear the women were uneasy about the mothers of young children working, partly because they were concerned about the effects of nursery care on the children but also, and they laid great stress on this point, because they thought women who were not at home with their children lost out on perhaps more than they realised.

While the women interviewed did indicate support for many of Bowlby's hypotheses those who did not meet Bowlby's ideal of maternal care could be left feeling guilty and inadequate. Phoebe was a psychiatrist and when asked how influential she thought Bowlby's work was in the post-war decades she replied, 'Yes, the attachment, I think very important. Very important. It's obviously very biological isn't it that when the child becomes mobile they should have this attachment and I think that work was very important.' However she also recalled how this stress on the importance of attachment made it worrying when she had to leave her own children to work, and she had tried to

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<sup>91</sup> Bowlby, *Maternal Care*, p. 67.

<sup>92</sup> Enid, BE12, pp. 22-3.

<sup>93</sup> Florence, BE8, p. 11.

minimise the time she spent away from them.<sup>94</sup> Similarly Siobhan described the feelings of guilt she felt when she tried returning to work and which eventually led her to leave her job. She explained:

these two small boys came to me one day and said...‘could you stop what you’re doing please,’ so I did, and he said, ‘we’ve been thinking, and we think you should be at home, looking after us properly and making proper food for us not going out to work and then giving us things like fish fingers.’ How to make somebody feel really guilty.<sup>95</sup>

Hannah had three children in the 1950s but continued working as a research assistant in Oxford University. When asked if she had read any childcare manuals she answered, ‘the book that was all the rage was Bowlby. Yes. And that of course was another, yes that was very worrying, and that is what people kept referring to, deprivation.’<sup>96</sup> Georgie’s relationship with Bowlby’s theories was also complex. She was a teacher and returned to work when her first daughter was a few months old. She did not think working had harmed her relationship with her daughter and said her daughter thought she had an excellent childhood. However she also argued that parents today do not spend enough time with their young children and stressed the importance of the mother-child relationship in a child’s first years. Moreover, during another part of the interview Georgie expressed doubts about her mothering ability saying how she believed her daughter’s anorexia was a result of her problems feeding her when she was a baby. There clearly were anxieties – perhaps not fully explored – about how she had related to her children in infancy.<sup>97</sup>

Women who did not meet Bowlby’s high standards of close and continual care for their infants could be left feeling anxious and guilt-ridden, fearing that they could be harming

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<sup>94</sup> Phoebe, SO8, p. 13.

<sup>95</sup> Siobhan, BE1, pp. 9-10.

<sup>96</sup> Hannah, SO7, p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> Georgie, OX2, pp. 15-6.

the development of their children. There was great pressure on women in the post-war decades to conform to the model of the 'good mother' that child psychologists such as Winnicott and Bowlby deemed essential for the health of the child. To women who had left paid work and careers when their children were young these pronouncements served as an endorsement of their choices and validated the role of full-time mother. However for women who could not meet this ideal these theories appeared as distressing and censorious.

### **Benjamin Spock**

Benjamin Spock was the most important expert to the women interviewed in Oxfordshire and the majority had read his *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*.<sup>98</sup> Phoebe was born in 1921 and had five children, the first of whom was born in 1948. She studied medicine at Oxford and practised as a psychiatrist. When asked if she had read any of the childcare literature that was around at the time she answered, 'Yes. I think was it Mr? Dr Spock came along and that was pretty sensible.'<sup>99</sup> Marjorie was also an Oxford graduate who lived in North Oxford when her first child was born in the late-1950s. She declared that, 'Dr Spock was sort of the source of all knowledge then.'<sup>100</sup> Spock was not only the preserve of highly-educated women, however, but had universal appeal. Eve was born in 1927 and grew up in Lancashire before moving to Cowley. She had left school at sixteen and worked as a secretary, but also stated that, 'Dr Spock was the man who we all followed in those days.'<sup>101</sup> June, who lived in Cowley throughout her life and had four children in the 1950s and 1960s, turned to Spock for advice after her sister-in-law in

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<sup>98</sup> Benjamin Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946).

<sup>99</sup> Phoebe, SO8, p. 8.

<sup>100</sup> Marjorie, NO10, p. 15.

America sent her a copy.<sup>102</sup> Moreover Spock remained popular with women until the end of the period under discussion. Marilyn left school at sixteen and worked as a secretary before having two children in Benson in the early-1970s. When asked if she consulted any childcare experts she replied, 'Yes. In our day Dr Spock.'<sup>103</sup> Carla, a secretary from Banbury who had her children in the early-1970s, believed the only childcare manual at the time was Spock.<sup>104</sup> More educated women were still consulting Spock too. Ellen, who was born in 1947 and had a Master's degree, had six children the first of whom was born in the early-1970s. When asked if she had any books on childcare she replied, 'I have, I've got a copy of Dr Spock.'<sup>105</sup> Spock was positively remembered by a diverse range of the Oxfordshire women interviewed. His popularity cut across social background, locality and age, and many women recalled him as being the only childcare expert that they knew of.

Part of the reason Spock was so well-liked was because in contrast to the strict routines advocated by earlier childcare manuals, such as those of Truby King, he urged parents to be flexible and to see their children as individuals. In addition he delivered this advice in a reassuring and common-sense manner. Many of the women commented upon this difference. Camilla compared the advice she and her mother-in-law had respectively followed. She explained that her own generation had been:

brought up in the old-fashioned style of you leave the baby to cry, you know the pram down the garden, it's got to learn. In a way, the way I brought up my children was pretty novel at the time, and I think Dr Spock has a great contribution to that, huge. Totally outdated now, but at the time he was right at the forefront of thinking about child upbringing.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Eve, CO8, p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> June, CO2, p. 6.

<sup>103</sup> Marilyn, BE13, p. 10.

<sup>104</sup> Carla, BA4, p. 9.

<sup>105</sup> Ellen, EW3, p. 11.

<sup>106</sup> Camilla, SO6, p. 11.

Spock entreated women to trust in their own judgment. In his opening line of *Baby and Child Care* he told mothers, 'You know more than you think you do.'<sup>107</sup> Women turned to Spock because he gave them confidence. Rose was an Oxford graduate married to a university lecturer and had two children in 1959 and 1961. Discussing why she consulted Spock Rose said:

of course the great confidence boost of Dr Spock was as mother you'll know, this notion that [you have] some sense of competence. But I don't quite know how he elaborated it now, but I know that was a genuine message that came out, and I certainly was willing to take the view if I had enough information and paid attention it could be possible, that I as me and my child as him could work our way along and I think that was before the time.<sup>108</sup>

Likewise Rebecca thought Spock was helpful because 'basically it was do what the mother wants, it was lovely, very nice, from then on I stuck with Dr Spock really.'<sup>109</sup> Again women thought this was a positive aspect of Spock's advice which they favourably compared with Truby King. Emily had three children in the mid-1960s and claimed that for her generation 'Dr Spock was our bible and that was that really, it was Dr Spock at all times.' She thought 'he was very refreshing because basically he thought mothers were okay you know, you felt good about what you were doing. So I think that must have been quite refreshing because my mother had Truby King, oh dear oh dear, that was a disaster.'<sup>110</sup> Women turned to Spock because in contrast to other experts they felt his advice was encouraging and supportive. He made them feel confident in their abilities as mothers.

Spock told mothers to have faith in their own abilities and feel comfortable in disregarding others' advice. He told them, 'Don't take too seriously all that the neighbours say. Don't be overawed by what the experts say. Don't be afraid to trust your

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<sup>107</sup> Benjamin Spock, *Baby and Child Care* (London: The Bodley Head, 1958), p. 15.

<sup>108</sup> Rose, NO12, pp. 6-7.

<sup>109</sup> Rebecca, OX10, p. 12.

common sense.’<sup>111</sup> Several of the women confirmed that they put their faith in Spock rather than seeking advice from their mothers. Camilla stated that she ‘was the Spock generation’ and ‘didn’t believe in old wives’ tales’. She felt her generation were consequently better parents: ‘my generation was quite lucky in being given a bit more advice in the upbringing of their children rather than listening to mother.’<sup>112</sup> Similarly Lindsay preferred to follow the advice of Spock than her mother, even though her mother was a doctor, because she thought her mother was too old-fashioned: ‘Mother was a strong advocate of potty training from I think three months. I was going by Spock and took the view there was no point in trying to potty train before the child knew what the hell was going on.’<sup>113</sup> However Spock was so successful in conveying the principle that mothers knew best that some women decided to disregard his advice. Emily was a supporter of Spock but confessed she did not always follow the book:

we soon got used to the idea that Benjamin Spock would be saying one thing about children having to drink a pint of milk and do this and do that and do the other, but we had the evidence of our eyes...They seemed to live on water and dried biscuits for weeks on end and then maybe they’d have an egg or two...and yet they appeared to be fine.<sup>114</sup>

In addition some women did not feel that Spock’s suggestions were useful to them. Jill felt that Spock’s American perspective reduced the applicability of his advice. His book ‘all seemed to be about something mysterious called formula.’<sup>115</sup> Agnes was more

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<sup>110</sup> Emily, NO8, p. 13.

<sup>111</sup> Spock, *Child Care*, p. 15.

<sup>112</sup> Camilla, SO6, p. 11. Lucinda McCray Beier has also referred to this generational shift in attitudes with reference to the oral history interviews she and Elizabeth Roberts conducted in Lancashire for the period 1900-1970. She states, ‘As the “modern” generation, born after 1920, came of age, working-class health culture was increasingly regarded as quaint and backward—associated with gendered ignorance and superstition, encapsulated in “old wives’ tales” and displayed in a variety of unhealthy behaviors.’ Lucinda McCray Beier, ‘Expertise and Control: Childbearing in Three Twentieth-Century Working-Class Lancashire Communities’, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 78 (2004), 379-409, p. 409.

<sup>113</sup> Lindsay, OX12, pp. 14-5.

<sup>114</sup> Emily, NO8, p. 13.

<sup>115</sup> Jill, SO3, p. 6.

scathing and when discussing literature on childcare said, ‘Spock, I threw that out the window. I’m not joking. I thought this is stupid.’<sup>116</sup>

Overall though, Spock attracted much support. Women welcomed his confirmation of their instinctive desire to comfort a crying baby or follow a flexible timetable. He encouraged mothers to adopt an easygoing attitude towards their babies. Contrasting his advice with that of other experts he said, ‘You’d think from what some people say about babies demanding attention, that they come into the world determined to get their parents under their thumb by hook or crook. This isn’t true. Your baby is born to be a reasonable, friendly, human being.’ This quote exemplifies Spock’s over-riding philosophy: parents should take pleasure from being with their babies, and this was necessary for their child’s development. Spock told parents: ‘Don’t be afraid to love him and enjoy him. Every baby needs to be smiled at, talked to, played with, fondled – gently and lovingly – just as much as he needs vitamins and calories. That’s what will make him a person who loves people and enjoys life.’<sup>117</sup> In contrast to the strict regime demanded by Truby King such an opinion could be liberating for mothers. However, as with Winnicott and Bowlby, Spock required women to devote themselves to their children. He also expected higher levels of dedication from mothers than from fathers. While he addressed his books to parents rather than mothers, he implied the ultimate responsibility for care laid with the woman. He did not think it was a bad thing if fathers were involved, but wrote, ‘Of course, I don’t mean that the father has to give just as many bottles or change just as many nappies as the mother. But it’s fine for him to do these things occasionally.’<sup>118</sup> Spock reinforced the conservative view that a mother’s place was at home. He thought women working could have negative consequences for their children –

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<sup>116</sup> Agnes, EW1, p. 13.

<sup>117</sup> Spock, *Child Care*, pp. 53-4.

who would grow up ‘neglected and maladjusted’ – and was strongly opposed to nursery care. While he acknowledged some women had to work for financial reasons, he concluded they should not work unless they absolutely had to:

The important thing for a mother to realize is that the younger the child the more necessary it is for him to have a steady, loving person taking care of him. In most cases, the mother is the best one to give him this feeling of ‘belonging’ safely and surely. She doesn’t quit in the job, she doesn’t turn against him, she isn’t indifferent to him, she takes care of him always in the same familiar house. If a mother realizes clearly how vital this kind of care is to a small child, it may make it easier for her to decide that the extra money she might earn, or the satisfaction she might receive from an outside job, is not so important after all.<sup>119</sup>

Spock had become associated in the interviewees’ minds with the belief that a mother knows best. He was seen as an easy-going and reliable source of advice. Unlike figures such as Truby King or Bowlby, he had not become tainted in their eyes by later criticism, although they acknowledged that he was probably now considered out of date. Few women levelled the complaints against Spock that they did with other experts, even when the message he gave was similar. For example Rose said, ‘Spock was before Bowlby wasn’t it and these very much more demanding messages about attachment and so on.’<sup>120</sup> In reality, as noted above, Spock was as insistent as Bowlby in his assertion that infants needed full-time care from their mothers. Spock offered women both freedom and constraint. He gave them confidence to follow their own instincts and care for their children how they saw best, but within a traditional model of woman as full-time mother. Fiona highlighted this tension, explaining, ‘Dr Spock, I went to him a lot, who was great because he believed that parents had to have rights as well as children.’ However she went on to argue, ‘I don’t know quite why everybody thinks that Dr Spock was so

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 570.

<sup>120</sup> Rose, NO12, p. 7.

incredibly permissive, he was about feeding on demand, but [not] in things about expecting children to have attention all the time.’<sup>121</sup>

## **Penelope Leach**

Penelope Leach’s work shared many similarities with that of Spock and was also a reaction against the rigid regime advocated by those such as Truby King. She told parents: ‘Rearing a child “by the book” – by any set of rules or pre-determined ideas – can work well if the rules you choose to follow happen to fit the baby you have. But even a minor misfit between the two can cause misery.’<sup>122</sup> Moreover she thought that following such a strict routine was futile as it made caring for infants harder. ‘All babies demand, but the babies whose needs are met or anticipated do not demand more than the others, they demand less.’<sup>123</sup> She told parents not to worry about doing things the wrong way, feelings of guilt and self-reproach would be counter-productive and of no benefit to their children. She argued that she was not attempting to lay down rules but instead was ‘passing on to you a complex and, to me, entrancing folklore of childcare which, once upon a time, you might have received through your own extended family.’<sup>124</sup> Rather than positing herself in opposition to the traditional methods of childcare that women may have learnt from their mothers, she was offering herself as a substitute if they were not able to fulfil this role. Leach argued her books were novel because they were written from the baby’s point of view.<sup>125</sup> Comparing the advice of experts from the early-

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<sup>121</sup> Fiona, BE10, p. 27.

<sup>122</sup> Penelope Leach, *Baby and Child* (London: Michael Joseph, 1977), p. 8.

<sup>123</sup> Penelope Leach, *Babyhood: Infant Development from Birth to Two Years* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp. 17-8.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>125</sup> Leach, *Baby and Child*, p. 8.

twentieth century with that of Leach and her contemporaries, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English explain this difference of approach:

In the early-twentieth-century “scientific” phase, the mother had been the representative of the expert in the home, imposing his regimens on the child. But now it is the child who acts as a junior field representative of the expert, instructing the mother in routines of daily life.<sup>126</sup>

Similarly, Cathy Urwin critiques Leach by arguing that ‘The only way in which one can argue that the needs of the mother and baby are identical, of course, is by totally discounting the mother as an independent person altogether.’<sup>127</sup>

Women who were aware of Leach felt that her explanations of how their babies felt in given situations, why they did so, and how mothers should respond to them were helpful. Karen had the first of her four children in 1967, her second in 1970 and then had a gap before having the next two in the 1980s. She did not remember reading any useful books on childcare when she had her first two children but thought Leach’s books had been a significant development and were useful to her when she had her later babies.<sup>128</sup> However Leach’s style also alienated women who thought she focussed too much on the child’s needs and not enough on the mother’s.<sup>129</sup> She was, perhaps, particularly resented for this approach because as a mother herself women believed she should be more sensitive and understanding of the difficulties and complexities of motherhood. In addition, feminist critiques of childcare experts who demanded full-time motherhood were increasingly prevalent in the 1970s which may have encouraged women to hold a more critical view at this time.

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<sup>126</sup> Ehrenreich and English, *Own Good*, p. 197.

<sup>127</sup> Cathy Urwin, ‘Constructing Motherhood: A Persuasion of Normal Development’, in Carolyn Steedman, Cathy Urwin and Valerie Walkerdine, *Language, Gender and Childhood* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) 164-202, p. 193.

<sup>128</sup> Karen, SO4, p. 11.

## Conclusion

From the women's accounts of their relationships with childcare experts it is clear there was a conflict between the confidence the experts' guidance gave women and the anxiety it brought for those who felt they did not live up to the standards expected. Truby King offered women a model where their time was deemed valuable. Babies were supposed to adapt to their mothers' wishes, not the other way around. The downside of this approach was that women could feel torn between their desire to meet their babies' needs, such as feeding a baby who seemed to be hungry, and the strict routines they were supposed to be following. The consequences of failure were also severe, with 'spoiled' children becoming flawed adults. In contrast the theories of experts such as Bowlby, Winnicott and Spock could be liberating for women. They gave them the confidence to believe that they knew best in regard to their children and encouraged women to take pleasure in motherhood. The stress they placed on the importance of the mother role legitimised the decision of many women to care for their infants on a full-time basis: they were doing a worthwhile and rewarding job.

Yet full-time motherhood could also be restricting for women. Many mothers felt anxious or blameworthy whenever they had to leave their children. Women who had to work for financial reasons or chose to pursue careers were left feeling guilty that they could be damaging their children's future emotional and physical wellbeing. Lee Comer has concluded that John Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation provided a 'scientific' basis for what was, by then, the status quo.<sup>130</sup> Comer argues, therefore, that no amount of reasoned criticism demonstrating the deficiencies and simplifications of his work could

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<sup>129</sup> Rebecca, OX10, p. 12; Fiona, BE10, p. 32.

<sup>130</sup> Lee Comer, *Wedlocked Women* (Leeds: Feminist Books, 1974), pp. 142-3.

reduce its significance because it sounded right. This was of course natural as society exactly mirrored his dictates.<sup>131</sup> The justification of the status quo provided by experts such as Bowlby and Winnicott could offer women support and validation. However they also promoted the breadwinner model of husband as earner and wife as domesticated dependent. Women who did not conform to this ideal often paid a considerable emotional and economic price.<sup>132</sup> Subsequently women could feel dissatisfied with the prescriptions placed upon them by the experts, perhaps influenced by later feminist critiques, and this was seen most visibly in their reactions to Penelope Leach. For example, as Rebecca explained, 'I didn't take to the later gurus at all, I've forgotten her name Penelope Leach...worked for children's rights, but I think, I preferred mother's rights.'<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>132</sup> See pages 225-6.

<sup>133</sup> Rebecca, OX10, p. 12.

## Chapter Eight: *The Working Mother: Women's Labour Inside and Outside the Home*

### Introduction

From the late-1940s married women were being urged to return to paid work. They were needed to fill the gaps in the workforce created by labour shortages, particularly in areas such as teaching and nursing where there were large numbers of vacancies encouraged by the post-war social reforms. In 1963 the Committee on Higher Education, under Lord Robbins, reported:

We should greatly welcome a tendency for more girls to stay on at school, if only from the national point of view of making better use of what must be the greatest source of unused talent at a time when there is an immediate shortage of teachers and of many other types of qualified person.<sup>1</sup>

The growing number of married women in the labour market encouraged debate over how motherhood and employment should be best combined. There was particular concern over whether women educated for professional careers felt frustrated by domesticity. The ambiguities and disagreements within the literature of the period about what the role of women should be illustrate how contested the issue was.<sup>2</sup> Some commentators were conscious of the new demands upon women that resulted from their increasing participation in the workforce. Richard Titmuss described how the typical woman of the 1950s had completed her mothering role by the age of forty and thought the tendency for married women to engage in paid work was a response to this. Titmuss believed it

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<sup>1</sup> Committee on Higher Education, *Robbins Report* (London: HMSO, 1963), p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Discussing the psychological dilemmas faced by women in their two roles of mother and worker Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein concluded it was only the minority of educated middle-class women who were affected; Colin Rosser and Christopher Harris thought 'domesticity' was higher in working-class wives than their middle-class counterparts. In contrast, Ann Oakley thought the belief the 'unhappy housewife' was a purely middle-class phenomenon was too simplistic stating: 'Working-class women are no less likely than middle-class women to express dissatisfaction with housework.' Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, *Women's Two Roles* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), p. 149; Colin Rosser and Christopher Harris, *The Family and Social Change* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 208; Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1974), p. 77.

brought a new conflict for women between ‘motherhood and wage-earning.’<sup>3</sup> Proposals on how to solve these difficulties were also put forward. Criticising the current education of girls, which they felt did not address the realities of women’s lives, Judith Hubback and Hannah Gavron argued changes were needed to better prepare women for their roles as mothers and workers.<sup>4</sup>

Women did not enter the labour market on equal terms to men, however, because their domestic role was considered to be of paramount importance. Dolly Smith Wilson suggests that ‘men and women existed in two separate labour markets, one for men, considered the real workers, the other for women, considered low-paid auxiliaries working on the side, unrelated to their real role as wives and mothers.’<sup>5</sup> Considering the post-war welfare reforms, Jane Lewis proposes that women’s role in William Beveridge’s conception of society was quite specifically to redress the decline in the population and provide domestic support for men in full-time employment. She believes that this narrow conception of women’s role came at the expense of women’s interests because ‘the needs of race and nation for women’s work as wives and mothers’ came before ‘the needs of women as individuals.’<sup>6</sup> Beveridge can be seen as raising the status of women, though, in as much as he assigned to them a crucial role in the nation’s future. Jennifer Dale and Peggy Foster contend that the domestic role was not necessarily perceived as oppressive in the 1940s and 1950s and that women’s role as mother was awarded a high status – the

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Titmuss, *Essays on ‘The Welfare State’* (London: Unwin, 1958), p. 93, 102. Young and Willmott also detailed the difficulties working, married women faced. Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *The Symmetrical Family: A Study of Work and Leisure in the London Region* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) p. 117. Louise Tilly and Joan Scott believe changes in the work patterns of married women observed by Titmuss were a continuum from pre-war trends, speeded up by wartime opportunities, rather than the effects of war itself. Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Gavron was primarily interested in working-class women, Hubback ‘really intelligent girls’. Hannah Gavron, *The Captive Wife: Conflicts of Housebound Mothers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 146-8; Judith Hubback, *Wives who Went to College* (London: Heinemann, 1957), pp. 12-3.

Beveridge Plan acknowledged housewifery as a profession. They conclude it has only been with later feminist analyses that dependence and low esteem have been assumed to characterise the role of housewife.<sup>7</sup> Stephanie Spencer believes this recategorisation of domesticity as work meant women in the post-war decades did not need to think of themselves as giving up work on marriage or motherhood, but simply ‘changing jobs’.<sup>8</sup> The women interviewed in Oxfordshire did give precedence to their domestic role in their narratives. Although all of the respondents had been engaged in some kind of paid or voluntary work after their children were born they constructed their identities as mothers rather than as workers. It was common for women to say they had not worked after having their children when initially asked, but then later in their narratives to reveal that they had. In part this may have been a legacy of the lack of emphasis on careers they received at school, which meant they had grown up expecting to become full-time mothers. It may also have been due to the lack of status ascribed to women workers. Women who had their children at the end of the period were more concerned with identifying themselves with work outside the home, but all the women interviewed regarded being a mother as their primary identity.

This chapter will assess the attitudes towards work of the women interviewed in Oxfordshire in the context of national debates surrounding women’s employment. It will examine three models of work for mothers. The first is professional motherhood and the ideal that full-time housewifery could provide women with a career in itself. The second

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<sup>5</sup> Dolly Smith Wilson, ‘A New Look at the Affluent Worker: The Good Working Mother in Post-war Britain’ *Twentieth Century British History*, 17 (2006), 206-29, p. 225.

<sup>6</sup> Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 92.

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Dale and Peggy Foster, *Feminists and State Welfare* (London: Routledge, 1986). Similarly Elizabeth McCarty has argued that to regard women who liked being housewives as colluding in their own oppression, or at best as victims of false consciousness, fails sufficiently to explain this enjoyment. Elizabeth McCarty, ‘Attitudes to Women and Domesticity in England, c. 1939-1955’, Unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 1994, pp. 22-3.

model is the woman who ‘worked on the side’, with paid work being supplementary to her principal role as mother. The third model is the working mother who combined motherhood with the pursuit of a career, and for whom both aspects of her life held equal weight. Women’s understandings of these models derived from watching their mothers’ generation, their contemporaries and their daughters’ generation, and therefore perceptions of change over time will also be considered.

### **The Profession of Motherhood**

The belief that women should contribute to society through marriage and motherhood was entrenched within post-war thinking. In 1942 Beveridge had argued, ‘In the next thirty years housewives as mothers have vital work to do in ensuring the adequate continuance of the British race and of British ideals in the world.’<sup>9</sup> Women themselves embraced these discourses. Rose had two children in 1959 and 1961 and recalled how she and her contemporaries were influenced by such views:

after the war...everybody was having children, lots of people having children and families...so I think without necessarily examining ourselves we assumed that at some stage we’d do the same...and it seems preposterous to me now that at one stage I even had the thought, ‘well I really should have children it would be selfish not to,’ you know you mustn’t leave it to everybody else, you must make some sort of contribution, you must all have some place in society.

However after her children were born Rose’s attitudes changed. ‘When I had the children I realised just to keep them going was as much as I can manage, you know keep them out the hands of the police and the social services is as much as you can hope, I’m not sort of

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<sup>8</sup> Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> H.M. Government, *Social Insurance and Allied Services (The Beveridge Report)* (London: HMSO, 1942), p. 52.

making a gift to society.’<sup>10</sup> Rose’s account of her optimism at contributing to society through motherhood when she first had her children and subsequent disillusionment indicates that she had come to question the glorification of motherhood which characterised post-war thinking. She now questioned whether it was such a valuable job. Her re-evaluation of her attitudes with the passing of time may also reflect the later feminist reappraisals of the mother role as her doubts set in the 1960s.

Women could be left disenchanted if they did not find full-time motherhood to be the satisfying experience celebrated by the contemporary ideal. Sheila Rowbotham believes that, ‘Young, middle-class, educated mothers found the contrast between their assumption of equality and the reality of their domestic confinement was acute.’<sup>11</sup> The dissatisfied, educated mother was a stereotype of the period.<sup>12</sup> The issue of how important a woman’s level of education was in determining her attitudes towards motherhood was hotly contested and the letter pages of newspapers, such as the *Guardian’s* women’s page, ran many letters from unhappy, graduate mothers. Susan Gail, a London housewife, described her life in Ronald Fraser’s book *Work: Twenty Personal Accounts*, first published in 1965. She found housework monotonous and unrewarding:

When something happens to stimulate me to my former awareness – an enjoyable social occasion, or the tutorials which I still give once a fortnight in the university – I feel I have come back to life. I am ashamed to admit that quite frequently I come home afterwards in a mood of savage rejection.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Rose, NO12, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, ‘To Be or Not to Be: The Dilemmas of Mothering’ *Feminist Review* 31, (1989), 82-93, p. 83.

<sup>12</sup> Educated women’s dissatisfaction with housewifery was not new, however. In her study of the Cooperative Correspondence Club, set up in 1935, Jenna Bailey argues that many of the correspondents were ‘intelligent, university-educated women who were denied the opportunity to work. Once married and confined to the home, many of these women found that they were not ideally suited for life as a housewife and mother.’ Jenna Bailey, *Can Any Mother Help Me?* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Gail, ‘The Housewife’, in Ronald Fraser (ed.), *Work: Twenty Personal Accounts* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 144.

Similar descriptions are prevalent in Michelene Wander's collection of the life stories of women who attended the first women liberation conference in 1970.<sup>14</sup>

Middle-class women in Oxfordshire who had grown up seeing their mothers employ servants to take care of the house did comment upon the difference in lifestyle they and their mothers enjoyed. Louisa was born in 1939. Her mother was a dentist and worked throughout her childhood. Louisa tried to explain why her mother had been able to combine work and motherhood while she had not: 'My mother worked you see, but she had childcare, there was no problem. We're the sort of the part-time generation because there was no childcare. I mean it was bad enough finding a baby-sitter. I just couldn't go out because I was let down so many times.' Louisa thought this was a common experience for educated women of her generation having children in the 1950s and 1960s. She recalled that only one or two of her friends had careers.<sup>15</sup> Camilla, who had her children in the 1960s, thought she belonged to a 'lost generation' who came between 'my mother's generation with the nanny and somebody who came to do the washing and my daughter's generation who send out the laundry and send them to the crèche. We had to do it all.'<sup>16</sup> Full-time motherhood provoked an ambivalent response for a section of educated women. By the late-1960s and 1970s these women were trying to gain public recognition for the difficulties women could face and make it acceptable for women to articulate them.

The women interviewed in Oxfordshire benefited from these campaigns and felt able to talk of the loneliness and frustration they had experienced as mothers to young children.

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<sup>14</sup> Michelene Wander (ed.), *Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation* (London: Virago, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Louisa, SO5, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Camilla, SO6, p. 17.

Lindsay was an Oxford graduate who had two children in the early-1960s. She explained how she found it difficult to adjust to full-time motherhood:

I mean having children absolutely, as happened to a lot of graduates, really threw me. I was totally unprepared for not only the sheer drudgery, but what it does to one's feelings, including...occasionally...the feeling that I could quite cheerfully kill this child.<sup>17</sup>

Yvonne spoke of her unhappiness after moving away from her family in Oxford to accompany her husband, an academic, to Algeria for a year. This experience spurred her on to study for a degree on their return, in part to provide her with social contacts.<sup>18</sup> The isolation that mothers of young children faced was frequently referred to. Hayley, a graduate from Bedford College, London, also found that being at home all day with small children could be wearisome. She recalled that 'children drive you up the wall after a bit they really do.' Significantly the interviewees explained the ways in which they tried to counter this unhappiness rather than accepting the situation. Hayley thought it was imperative that women had an opportunity to 'get out of the house'. She did not think this necessarily need be for paid work and undertook voluntary work herself.<sup>19</sup> Ellen, who had a Master's degree and had six children in the 1970s and 1980s, also talked about how important it was to her to get out of the house and see other adults.<sup>20</sup>

In Oxfordshire, however, it was not only educated middle-class women who talked about their frustrations as mothers. Cherie had left school at sixteen and worked as a secretary before having her children. She lived in Cowley when her three children were born in the 1960s. Like Hayley and Ellen she thought it was very easy for women to feel isolated and 'a bit sort of shut off at home if you're not careful.' She also made the point of

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<sup>17</sup> Lindsay, OX12, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Yvonne, NO3, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Hayley, NO5, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Ellen, EW3, pp. 12-3.

leaving the house everyday even if this was only for a walk around the park.<sup>21</sup> Tina was a Benson mother who had three children between 1964 and 1971. She had left school at fifteen and got married at eighteen to a man who worked at the car works in Cowley. Despite not being educated or middle class she was one of the women who spoke most powerfully of her profound difficulties of coping with the expectations placed on her in the role of mother. She recalled how she had felt trapped and depressed by her circumstances – ‘I’d just had enough of everything.’<sup>22</sup> It is clear from the Oxfordshire evidence that difficulties in adjusting to motherhood and reconciling society’s expectations with the reality of their lives was not the preserve of middle-class mothers. Indeed Marilyn, who had attended a secondary modern and left school at sixteen, argued that it was a unifying experience for women at this time. Marilyn also expressed her discontent with the housewife role. ‘I didn’t find it easy because you know all you’re doing is housework and cleaning and things like that’. However, she felt this situation was alleviated by the fact that there were ‘quite a lot of people in the same situation’ who provided one another with friendship and support.<sup>23</sup>

Women recalled this time spent in the company of other women as being not only helpful but enjoyable. Karen had four children between 1967 and 1985. Her account of the close relationship that mothers of young children enjoyed encapsulated the views of many of the interviewees about the importance of this community of women:

when you have children, it may not be the same for everybody but it is for lots of people, you’re often at the end of your tether, but not in any desperate way, but you often have to do things that you’re not good at doing, you have to do things when you’re very tired. You have to clean up mess, you would not have contemplated clearing up in cold blood. And all those kind of things, and the...other mothers...are people who are living in that kind of place with you. So in some ways it’s a kind of very comfortable relationship. Because

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<sup>21</sup> Cherie, CO9, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Tina, BE3, p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> Marilyn, BE13, p. 16.

people joke about, 'Oh I scream at my children.' But actually they know that they do sometimes scream at their children, but it's ok, and if you got worried that you were screaming at your children too much you would have people...you could actually talk to people who would actually understand the context...So there's that kind of comfortable thing, you know. And being able to talk to people when you've got sick down your back, because actually they know it's not really that sloppy it's because you haven't looked in the mirror since you put your baby over your shoulder...you haven't necessarily got anything in common apart from that, and people laugh at that kind of baby thing, but it's very good, it was a good part of my life.<sup>24</sup>

Karen's views seem similar to those of Sarah Ruddick, who in her book *Maternal Thinking* challenged the negative portrayals of motherhood that had been common in much earlier feminist writing, stating that, 'Many mothers, whatever their other work, feel part of a community of mothers whose warmth and support is hard to match in other working relationships.'<sup>25</sup> It is clear that while women may not have enjoyed all aspects of the mother role in the middle decades of the century there was much that was a good experience.

Indeed, not all women found marriage and motherhood restrictive. Some respondents said they found it liberating, especially if they had not enjoyed their jobs or were keen to cease employment. It is of note that the women from the Oxfordshire sample who voiced the strongest desire to leave work were actually educated and middle class. Sharon referred to marriage as a 'wonderful escape' from doing a PhD which she was not enjoying.<sup>26</sup> In a similar vein, when Grace an Oxford graduate was asked if she had always wanted to get married and have a family, she replied, 'Yes I think, I think I had, yes. Partly because of status I think. I mean I wasn't earning, I was living in a bed-sitting room not earning very much money and not very happy, and I was jolly lucky I met

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<sup>24</sup> Karen, SO4, pp. 24-5.

<sup>25</sup> Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (London: The Women's Press, 1990), p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> Sharon, EW9, p. 7.

him.<sup>27</sup> Cassie had been a civil servant working in the War Office before marriage and worked as a tutor in Oxford before having her first child in 1946. When asked whether she ever returned to work she replied, 'having earned my living for ten years before I married I didn't feel the urge to go back.'<sup>28</sup> Responding to the esteem with which professional motherhood was held at this time it was possible for women in the post-war decades to believe that marriage and motherhood could offer them the chance of achieving status and independence.

### **Mothers and Paid Work**

Women had a variety of approaches to combining work and motherhood. Judith Hubback argued that individual methods were always necessary:

What is needed is to work out the individual combination or compromise which achieves the best possible relationship between the three sides of a married woman's life, the woman as wife, as a mother, and as an individual. No-one can do this piece of work for another woman, for each must find her own compromise...to come to certain conclusions. And these conclusions can only be temporary ones, because the years will not stand still, and what works at the age of twenty will no longer be satisfactory at forty.<sup>29</sup>

However the most common course of action for women was to seek part-time work once their children were school-age. This trend towards part-time work was prevalent amongst women of all classes and educational backgrounds. Indeed Pat Thane has noted how few married Girton Graduates spent their adult lives in full-time paid employment; instead many of them had career patterns similar to less-educated contemporaries.<sup>30</sup> These findings differ somewhat from the plans women reported having in contemporary studies.

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<sup>27</sup> Grace, NO7, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Cassie, NO6, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> Hubback, *Wives*, p. 144.

<sup>30</sup> Pat Thane, 'Girton Graduates: Earning and Learning, 1920s-1980s', *Women's History Review*, 13 (2004), 349-58.

In their study of graduate level women *Sex, Career and Family*, published in 1971, Michael Fogarty, Rhona Rapoport and Robert Rapoport found:

Highly qualified women today are decisively committed to being lifetime workers. Four out of five of those British women of 1960 who are married with children have a firm intention of being in employment, most of them full-time, after their children have grown up, and only 1 per cent have a firm intention *not* to be so. Four out of five also intend to be in employment when their children are between 6 and 12, but in this case most of the employment would be part-time.<sup>31</sup>

While women may have intended to return to full-time work there seems to have been some gulf between women's aspirations and the reality of their working lives whereby they found part-time work to be more practical.

The limited occupational opportunities open to women resulted from the expectation that their employment would be secondary to their main function as mothers, and that their future husbands would be their families' main providers. While both the Crowther (1959) and Newsom (1963) reports acknowledged the long-standing pattern of girls engaging in paid work between school and marriage, for working-class girls this was viewed as inevitably un- or semi-skilled because it was only a stopgap before a young woman commenced her 'true' career as wife and mother. Spencer suggests this brief period of quasi-independence from parents or husband was framed more as a rite of passage than as a finite identity.<sup>32</sup> Expectations of women in the labour force were shifting, however, as the century progressed. Penny Summerfield proposes that in the pre-war discourse, training for specific jobs built on supposed innate female characteristics (such as caring) and pre-supposed closure on marriage.<sup>33</sup> The post-war removal of the marriage bar in occupations such as the civil service and teaching led the way to the emergence of the

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Fogarty, Rhona Rapoport and Robert Rapoport, *Sex, Career and Family* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), p. 474.

<sup>32</sup> Spencer, *Gender*, p. 81.

dual-role discourse.<sup>34</sup> The typical career pattern for women in the 1950s and 1960s was to work between school and their first baby and then to return to work, usually part time, once their children were older.<sup>35</sup>

This pattern was the experience for the majority of the women interviewed in Oxfordshire, and it was the model that they thought determined women's work at this time. For example when asked whether she and her school friends expected to have careers or get married Bethany answered get married, adding:

I mean, quite a few of the people that I was at school with...have actually become physiotherapists, radiographers, and different things. But I think it was probably more that type of female stereotype jobs really. Most of them actually that did have careers sort of left them and got married and had families I suppose anyway.<sup>36</sup>

Even university-educated women recalled that they were expected to get married rather than pursue a career.<sup>37</sup> Louisa attended Oxford University in the late-1950s and discussing her friends' careers said:

My friend, she did medicine and she's now an anaesthetist consultant. But she's the only one really who's had a proper career, but she's the only one who's unmarried you see, all the others did. Oh one's a teacher, and again her husband died early so she had to work, the rest of us didn't really, we got married and we didn't.<sup>38</sup>

However Bella was noticeably more upbeat and less diffident in her evaluation of the careers of her contemporaries than either Bethany or Louisa. Perhaps this difference was because she placed less emphasis on paid employment and more on a successful public role, including voluntary and charity work. She thought that women were using their

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<sup>33</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

<sup>34</sup> As noted above, however, Tilly and Scott argue these changes built upon pre-war trends rather than marking a radical break. Tilly and Scott, *Women*, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Ferdinand Zweig, *Women's Life and Labour* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1952); Pearl Jephcott, Nancy Sear and John H. Smith, *Married Women Working* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962); Myrdal and Klein, *Women's Two Roles*.

<sup>36</sup> Bethany, EW4, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Emily, NO8, p. 4.

university education and were engaged in many interesting activities and occupations.

She stated:

I think people have a tendency to look back, I mean you keep on hearing about 1950s housewives, but among those who'd got university degrees, maybe they were housewives but they were all of them, I mean when I get a Somerville report they're still full of good works.'<sup>39</sup>

A substantial number of working-class mothers interviewed needed to work for financial reasons. Peggy, a resident of Middleton Cheney, had four children between 1951 and 1965 and explained how she had to take a job throughout her children's upbringing. While her husband was employed he spent most of his wages in the pub and she had to make up the shortfall in order to support her family. She said, 'I've always had to work, I've never had a time that I could sit back and say, "Well I don't have to work"...I've waited a long time, but I've got it at last.'<sup>40</sup> Peggy felt she was forced to work. She implied that it was not something she wanted to do and she would have preferred to remain at home. Not all the women who worked enjoyed doing so and several recalled feeling they had missed out through not being at home with their children when they were young. Lily, who lived in Ewelme, had five children between 1946 and 1961. Although she had left work when her first baby was born she had to return after first husband died. She stated: 'I had to go back to work. First of all there used to be a honey factory in the village...I went there for two years. I can't say that I thoroughly enjoyed it but it helped.'<sup>41</sup> However while paid work could be a necessity for women rather than an active choice, many women did take pleasure in their jobs. Rita also had to find employment after she was widowed. She was happy to resume her work as a seamstress which she had left upon the birth of her first child. In part her satisfaction derived from

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<sup>38</sup> Louisa, SO5, pp. 5-6.

<sup>39</sup> Bella, SO9, p. 12.

<sup>40</sup> Peggy, BA9, p. 14.

the flexibility her trade brought her as she could work from home. In consequence she did not feel her ability to care for her children was compromised.<sup>42</sup> Paid work could remain supplementary to Rita's role as mother and she did not have to challenge contemporary perceptions of womanhood.

Another group of women who had to work were farmers' wives as their labour was crucial to the farm economy. While census statistics have shown the number of female agricultural workers had been in sharp decline over the first half of the century,<sup>43</sup> it was clear from the interviews with Oxfordshire farmers' wives that they were still engaged in farm work. Women's work in rural areas was probably under-recorded in the post-war decades, perhaps due to the fact that farm work was not seen as a suitable job for a woman at this time. Furthermore, as highlighted by Hilary Callan in *The Incorporated Wife*, the work undertaken by wives assisting their husbands in professions such as farming was taken for granted. The 'hidden services' wives provided only became visible when they were withdrawn.<sup>44</sup> Maud reported that as a farmer's wife she was expected to care for the prisoners of war stationed on her husband's farm during World War Two.<sup>45</sup> While she told this as a humorous story, recalling having to quickly learn how to cook pasta, she also spoke of the arduous work it caused. Daisy and her husband bought a smallholding in Shipton-under-Wychwood in the early-1950s on which they were required to keep chickens and pigs. Her husband worked full time so she was responsible for the animals and recalled, 'I had two children to look after and chickens and pigs so I tell you it was quite tough really.' Running the smallholding was associated in Daisy's

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<sup>41</sup> Lily, EW6, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Rita, BA6, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> See page 58.

<sup>44</sup> Hilary Callan, 'Introduction', in Hilary Callan and Shirley Ardener (eds.), *The Incorporated Wife* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 1-26, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Maud, WY4, p. 6.

mind with hardship and she highlighted this by telling a traumatic account of an incident when her son was attacked by one of the pigs. In 1955 she and her husband took on a milk-round because they were struggling to pay their mortgage and needed a new source of income. Again Daisy was left in charge of this as her husband still worked outside the village. She explained: 'I had to take the little boy of three...and he had to sit in the van whilst I delivered milk.'<sup>46</sup> Daisy clearly felt this responsibility was a burden to her rather than an exciting employment opportunity. Even in the 1960s farmers' wives were still playing an important role. Alice was twenty-two when she married a farmer in 1961. When asked what she did on the farm Alice replied, 'Oh driving tractors, I used to do most of the hay and straw-bailing in the summer...I'd work at school in the morning then go home pick up some sandwiches, take them up the fields and probably stay up there the rest of the day.'<sup>47</sup> It was notable from the interviews that for these farmers' wives work was conceived of as part of life. They described it as their duty rather than something they did for their own satisfaction.

It was often assumed in the post-war decades that growing affluence meant fewer women had to take jobs in order to support their families and that those who did were working in order to afford luxuries rather than necessities. Using elements from the post-war discourse that 'good' husbands should be able to support their families combined with later feminist ideas about women's need for a satisfying career, Sharon recalled the only women she knew who had paid employment when she had her children in the early-1970s were those who needed the money. She said, 'There were lots of women working at that stage, but they were working-class women who needed the money desperately, not

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<sup>46</sup> Daisy, WY9, p. 3, 4, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Alice, WY2, p. 14.

career-minded aspiring women.’<sup>48</sup> Yet it was not simply working-class women who had to work for financial reasons. Middle-class women also had to work if they were the only financial providers. Jessica, who was a doctor, had to return to work in the late-1940s when her husband left her with three small children. She explained:

I wasn’t intending to practise, I was intending to bring up the children and then think again. But when he left me...he took any money we had, so I’d got by that time three little children and no income, I had a house and a car but I had nothing else, I had twenty pounds in the bank, so I put my plate up on the wall, and gradually I built up a practice.<sup>49</sup>

The difficulties of being a single parent were still acute at the end of the period. Faith experienced a similar situation to Jessica twenty years later. Her husband left her when their daughter, born in 1971, was six-weeks old. She explained that she had to return to work ‘because we had to pay the rent. And so it was really quite difficult. And I was in trouble with my doctor, who said I shouldn’t have gone back to work so soon. So I couldn’t really say, “Well I just have to, I don’t really have a choice”.’<sup>50</sup> Both Jessica and Faith were somewhat defensive and reluctant to talk about their need to return to work. In the post-war period the belief that women would not have to be financially responsible for their families was so strong that the subject was almost unmentionable. In consequence women who were single mothers due to widowhood or divorce, or who were never married, faced acute difficulties trying to reconcile their roles as mother and worker. The employment sector and state welfare provisions assumed women’s wages merely supplemented those of men and that all families would be headed by a male breadwinner. Families who deviated from this norm were defined as anomalous and therefore limited attention was given to understanding or ameliorating the complex problems they faced.

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<sup>48</sup> Sharon, EW9, p. 15.

<sup>49</sup> Jessica, BA8, p. 7.

## Working Mothers?

Some women were familiar with ideal of the working mother and had witnessed at first hand through the example of their own mothers that it could be possible for women to combine motherhood with a successful professional life. As Carol Boyd has noted, mothers' occupations and work orientation had a profound influence on their daughters' employment.<sup>51</sup> For the sample of graduate women interviewed whose own mothers had been professionals – such as teachers, medical professionals (including doctors and dentists as well as nurses), academics and writers – the expectation was that they too would have a career. Lindsay's mother was an eye specialist who had returned to work when Lindsay and her sister were still young children in the late-1930s. Lindsay's parents took it for granted that she too would have a successful career, which in fact caused distress for Lindsay who struggled to meet this ideal.<sup>52</sup> Hannah, who was born in 1924, talked more positively about her mother's influence and indeed credited her mother with her own successful academic career. Her mother was a teacher and Hannah felt she was a 'wonderful model for me, absolutely, and tremendously encouraging. I mean she always made me feel I was the ants' pants and I think that you know it gave me tremendous self-confidence, I owe that to her...I always felt I could do anything.'<sup>53</sup> The findings from this sample of women are noteworthy as they challenge Spencer's assertion that:

Middle-class female school leavers at this time of transition were unlikely to have had mothers with whom they could discuss the entry into work' and

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<sup>50</sup> Faith, SO12, p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> Carol Boyd, 'Mothers and Daughters: A Discussion of Theory and Research', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51 (1989), 291-301, p. 295. See also Henrietta O'Connor and John Goodwin, 'She Wants to Be Like Her Mum?' Girls' Experiences of the School-to-Work Transition in the 1960s', *Journal of Education and Work*, 17 (2004), 95-118.

<sup>52</sup> Lindsay, OX12, p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> Hannah, SO7, p. 11.

belonged to ‘the first generation where it was assumed that *all* young women would go into some kind of employment.’<sup>54</sup>

There were women growing up who had experienced working mothers. Many of the graduate women in Oxford described following in their mother’s footsteps and thought it was their mother’s generation, rather than themselves, who were the pioneers.

The mothers of these women could act as role models because they had been ‘working mothers’ combining motherhood with a career. It was important to women to have role models who did not jeopardise their domesticity.<sup>55</sup> This reflected wider ideals of femininity in society at this time. In her study of graduate women, published in 1957,

Judith Hubback wrote:

The early pioneers for the higher education of women thought of themselves mainly in terms of future salary-earners and as competing with men in the professions, which were (thanks largely to them) gradually opened to women. They sometimes seem, to one of my generation, to have overstressed the incompatibility between the intellectual and biological sides of women’s lives. Or, as we owe them so much, should we perhaps say instead that they were more willing to sacrifice the biological aspects of womanhood than we are?<sup>56</sup>

Reminiscent of Hubback’s words, Sharon said her teachers acted as ‘anti-role models’ because she considered them to be ‘a lot of rather dingy spinsters.’ She recalled how she had resolved that, ‘I’m not going to be like her. I’m going to get married. I don’t want to be like her’.<sup>57</sup> Women were not seeking role models who rejected a woman’s traditional role as wife and mother, but instead those who offered an example where family and career could be successfully combined. For the group of Somerville women interviewed for this study their most admired figure was Janet Vaughan, the College Principal. The

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<sup>54</sup> Spencer, *Gender*, p. 111. See also Stephanie Spencer, ‘Women’s Dilemmas in Post-War Britain: Career Stories for Adolescent Girls in the 1950s’, *History of Education*, 29 (2000), 329-42.

<sup>55</sup> Sarah Aiston found similar results in her survey of women who graduated from Liverpool University between 1947 and 1979. Sarah Aiston, ‘A Maternal Identity? The Family Lives of British Women Graduates Pre- and Post- 1945’, *History of Education*, 34 (2005), 407-26, p. 417.

<sup>56</sup> Hubback, *Wives*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>57</sup> Sharon, EW9, p. 4.

interviewees held her in esteem because she managed to combine an academic career with marriage and motherhood.<sup>58</sup> Camilla attended Somerville in the late-1950s and thought Janet Vaughan was ‘fantastic’. The weight she placed on Janet Vaughan’s domesticity was seen in an anecdote she told about seeing ‘the nappies hanging out outside the principal’s lodgings’ when her grandchildren came to stay, which Camilla felt highlighted the maternal side of Janet Vaughan’s personality.<sup>59</sup>

Several of the women interviewed spoke of how they wanted to have children, but also to continue working after their children were born. They were aware, however, that it would be a fight to do so. Monika was an undergraduate and postgraduate at Oxford in the late-1940s and early-1950s. When asked whether university-educated women were expected to have careers she replied, ‘it wasn’t very easy in the fifties for people to do that. So the expectation wasn’t there. But the personal expectation was there, and my husband’s support was very strong.’<sup>60</sup> Yvonne had her first three children in her late-teens and early-twenties as soon as she left school. At first she was content to be a full-time mother, but recalled how when they were school-age she realised, ‘I’d got to go to university, I really needed to do something.’<sup>61</sup> While Yvonne did not become conscious of her need to have a career until after her children were born, Georgie always knew she wanted to be a teacher. Indeed one of the reasons why she married her husband was because he understood how important this was to her:

I had quite a lot of boyfriends as well as him...I had one who said, ‘Marry me, and then you don’t need to be a teacher’, I thought, ‘You don’t understand me, I am a teacher, first and foremost’, and my husband never ever tried to stop me teaching, quite the reverse he was totally supportive of me.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Camilla, SO6, p. 17; Hannah SO7, p. 13; Phoebe SO8, p. 3; Bella SO9, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Camilla, SO6, p. 17.

<sup>60</sup> Monika, SO1, p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> Yvonne, NO3, p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> Georgie, OX2, p. 7.

It was not simply educated middle-class women who wanted to pursue careers. Enid grew up in Benson and left school at fourteen. She had her first baby at eighteen in 1943. Like Yvonne, it was after she had her children that she felt the desire to pursue a new interest and so she and her husband bought a shop which she managed.<sup>63</sup> Similarly Tina started to question her life when her three children, born between 1964 and 1971, started school, concluding that, 'I haven't done anything with my life, and I want to sort of do something.'<sup>64</sup> Doris, Tina's sister-in-law, had two children in the early-1960s but worked throughout their childhood, usually in part-time domestic work. Unlike the educated women who valued employment because it brought intellectual stimulation, Doris prized the financial independence that work brought. She said, 'it's just nice to have that little bit which is mine sort of thing. And if I want something I don't have to ask [my husband] if I can have it, I can get it myself.'<sup>65</sup>

There were women who did report that they went on to have interesting and successful careers from which they took great satisfaction on returning to the labour market. It is also noteworthy that women who felt they had done poorly at school and in their pre-marriage careers were amongst those who felt they had accomplished the most. Enid left school at fourteen in 1939 and Tina had left school at fifteen in 1959. Both had only worked in temporary, low-skilled jobs for a few years before marrying at eighteen. However, Enid subsequently ran her own shop and Tina her own catering business.<sup>66</sup> A small number of respondents who were older mothers and did not have their children until they were in their thirties, and as a result had worked for fifteen or so years before having children, felt they had already achieved all they could in their careers and were happy to

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<sup>63</sup> Enid, BE12, pp. 17-20.

<sup>64</sup> Tina, BE3, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Doris, BE2, p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> Enid, BE12, pp. 17-20; Tina BE3, p. 5.

now give priority to motherhood. For example Cassie had worked as a civil servant in the War Office, which delayed marriage and motherhood for her. Although she had enjoyed the work she was relieved when the chance to start a family finally came and she had her first child aged thirty-three in 1946. Ruby worked as a dispenser in the surgery in Benson and was happy to leave work when she had her first and much longed for baby in 1972 at the age of thirty-two.<sup>67</sup> Finally, the group of women in Oxfordshire whose accounts indicated they felt they most successfully combined work and motherhood were school teachers. Whilst it seems likely that several factors were at work here to produce their satisfaction, it was surely significant that teaching was presented in popular imagery as a profession that could be combined with motherhood. School working hours and holidays meant that difficulties in providing childcare, at least for school-age children, were reduced. Olive returned to teaching when her youngest child started school and recalled that the only day when she was not available at home was staff inset days, when her eldest daughter babysat her younger brother.<sup>68</sup> There was little social disapproval of women teachers because teaching, particularly primary school teaching, was constructed as a female profession. Due to the shortage of teachers those who had left to have families were being positively exhorted to return to the labour force. Consequently there was less conflict than in other occupations between their identities as wives and workers.<sup>69</sup>

In her study of two thousand male and female graduates of late-1930s, Carol Dyhouse found the women who wrote most confidently about the ways in which they had combined child-rearing with professional work were married to successful professional

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<sup>67</sup> Cassie, NO6, p. 13; Ruby, BE5, p. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Olive, OX6, pp. 21-2.

men, whom they described as having been supportive of their careers and cooperative in domestic arrangements.<sup>70</sup> The fact these couples could also afford childcare must have been important. Both Hannah and her husband had successful academic careers. Hannah recalled:

[my daughter] was born in 1952 and I was determined to go straight on, in fact I took six weeks off and went back into the Physiology Department...and the way we managed is that we had au pair girls living-in and [my husband] agreed to completely share looking after her.

However, even when husbands took an equal part in child-rearing compromises still had to be made. When asked if she felt having children affected her career Hannah answered:

Oh yes, I mean certainly, certainly. As I say they were the centre of my life and I didn't, for instance, I didn't think of going on sabbatical leave abroad, I didn't travel to conferences until they were much older, yes. But that applied to both of us...I mean we sacrificed, we went very much more slowly than we would have done otherwise.<sup>71</sup>

Hannah and her husband had to be prepared for their careers to advance at a reduced pace in order to successfully combine work and parenthood. Moreover while many women described their husbands as helpful, it was rare for them to take an equal share in housework and childcare and women had to find other strategies. Jill graduated from Oxford University in the mid-1950s and remained at work in the university both before and after her two children were born in 1966 and 1970. She explained that she was capable of doing so because she shared childcare with a colleague's wife: 'she was a teacher in fact, and she had a baby at almost the same time, and we used to swap babies.'<sup>72</sup> By far the most commonly referred to means of combining work and home by the middle-class mothers of Oxford (particularly north Oxford), was employing an au pair

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<sup>69</sup> The women who worked as teachers before and after they had their children were: Fiona, BE10, June, CO2; Joanna, CO5; Agnes, EW1; Sarah, NO2; Emily, NO8; Georgie, OX2; Fanny, OX4; Laura, OX5; Olive, OX6; Ingrid, SO11.

<sup>70</sup> Carol Dyhouse, 'Graduates, Mothers and Graduate Mothers: Family Investment in Higher Education in Twentieth-Century England', *Gender and Education*, 14, (2002), 325-36, p. 333.

<sup>71</sup> Hannah, SO7, p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Jill, SO3, pp. 10-1.

girl and these were common throughout the period.<sup>73</sup> Their prevalence may have been encouraged by the fact that Oxford attracted young, foreign, female workers because it was a famous university city. The women interviewed displayed some uncertainty in their attitude towards au pairs and their narratives revealed ambivalence. Phoebe had eight au pairs and recalled that she had enjoyed living with all but two. Nonetheless she thought ‘it comes apart when you give an untrained au pair too much responsibility, leave them too long alone with the children.’<sup>74</sup> For Michelle these doubts extended to unhappiness. She recalled: ‘I had a French au pair girl who was absolutely hopeless and didn’t understand any English and it was all very traumatic.’<sup>75</sup> Furthermore the opportunity to have an au pair was limited to women who could afford one and was therefore an option outside most women’s reach.

Women reported the many difficulties that working mothers faced. Janice enjoyed an academic career in Oxford, but felt that she was unusual, asserting: ‘No it was very rare to be a working mother even in Oxford. You needed to have money.’<sup>76</sup> Molly, an Oxford graduate, also discussed the hurdles that existed for women in her account of why she did not return to full-time work. It is interesting that rather than recalling this as an experience personal to her, she defined it as the common experience for women at the time:

It always seemed such a big expense. So unless you were earning quite a bit it didn’t work out. So you would just get a job for hours when they were at school. I mean I did try at one time doing something in the evenings when my husband would be there with the children, but only after they were in bed. I would always be there when they’d come home from school to put them to bed, that sort of thing. So it didn’t, we weren’t the sort of couple who were equally sharing. And talking to people, other people my age, you know they

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<sup>73</sup> The women who had au pairs were Michelle, OX8; Megan, OX11; Juliet, NO9; Bella, SO9; Phoebe, SO8; Hannah, SO7; Janice, NO11; Yvonne, NO3.

<sup>74</sup> Phoebe, SO8, p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> Michelle, OX8, p. 9.

<sup>76</sup> Janice, NO11, p. 3.

quite often say that the husbands weren't as helpful as they probably became later on. And you felt it was really difficult to get more training and have a job. I mean I once wanted, well right away really, I wanted to do some other courses and different things and it was, 'Who's going to look after the children if you're doing that?'<sup>77</sup>

Amanda, who was a nurse, also reported that her husband was a hindrance rather than a help to her career ambitions: 'I wanted to do health visiting...I was due to do my degree, but my husband wasn't keen...coz I had to be resident or something. And I sort of, I don't why, but I sort of agreed not to do it, which was crazy.'<sup>78</sup> Even with supportive husbands the perceived hardships of combining work and motherhood dissuaded women from trying. Fiona describes how it would have been physically impossible for her to combine work and motherhood when her children were young:

There was no question of being able to work, absolutely no question. I mean I had thought there might be. But there was no formal childcare to be had anyway...And actually when it came to it I felt so tired you know with a new baby and getting up at night, and broken nights and that sort of thing. I don't think I could possibly have managed it.<sup>79</sup>

Ellen initially continued at work as a researcher when her first child was born but it also proved physically difficult:

I thought oh I'm going to be at home all day, I can do this, that and the other, I'll be out in the garden, but I couldn't even do what I had done, what I was doing when I was at work full-time once I'd got this baby that was so demanding...So it was, you know, a big change.<sup>80</sup>

Mothers who did try to pursue careers experienced significant discrimination. Hannah was an academic in Oxford University. Initially a research assistant she later became a university lecturer. When asked whether the university was sympathetic to women with children she emphatically answered, 'Oh totally no. No. In fact in 1956 the head of department said to me that I had to leave...he said, "You have a husband and children, I

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<sup>77</sup> Molly, NO4, pp. 13-4.

<sup>78</sup> Amanda, BE9, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> Fiona, BE10, p. 7.

don't think you should be here," and he threw me out.' She was only able to resume her position when there was a change in personnel.<sup>81</sup> Kelly reported the prejudice she faced as a lecturer at Manchester University in the 1960s and 1970s. She declared, 'There was a great deal of discrimination in Manchester I didn't realise how extensive it was, I was discriminated in payment, I was discriminated in every respect, and in promotion, and I intensely objected to that.'<sup>82</sup> This inequity was not limited to academics. As a civil servant Ivy had to leave work upon her marriage in 1946.<sup>83</sup> Olive was a teacher and should have stopped work when she married but was allowed to carry on due to the shortage of men in wartime. However she said, 'I can always remember them saying, "We shall have to examine you every so often to see that you're still fit enough to teach".'<sup>84</sup> Sarah and her husband moved from Leeds to Oxford because married women were not allowed to teach in Leeds but were in Oxford due to the different rules of the two authorities.<sup>85</sup> Increasingly women were expected to give up work on pregnancy rather than marriage, but conventions were still strictly adhered to. Tania worked as a cashier in a cinema and explained that she gave up work when she had her first child because 'once you became pregnant, it was basically you gave up work. They didn't want to know you then.'<sup>86</sup> Social and cultural expectations reinforced this view that women with young children should not work. Siobhan remembered that when she and her husband applied for a mortgage in the late-1960s she was:

the one with the steady income...But the bank would not take my earnings into account at all. And in fact looking back on it, that was in fact, although it seemed sexist at the time, it was actually beneficial to the family because as

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<sup>80</sup> Ellen, EW3, pp. 7-8.

<sup>81</sup> Hannah, SO7, p. 6.

<sup>82</sup> Kelly, SO10, p. 9.

<sup>83</sup> Although she was later allowed to return to her position when the marriage bar was removed, she became pregnant soon after and again had to leave. Ivy, BE4, p. 7.

<sup>84</sup> Olive, OX6, pp. 9-10.

<sup>85</sup> Sarah, NO2, pp. 13-4.

<sup>86</sup> Tania, EW8, p. 5.

one could only get a mortgage based on one salary, house prices were based on one salary.<sup>87</sup>

It is interesting that Siobhan felt this discrimination in some ways advantaged women. She thought that it freed them from having to work as families could live on one, namely the husband's, income.

There is evidence of a generational difference in women's attitudes to working mothers. Women who had their children in the late-1960s and early-1970s and who chose not to return to paid work, or only did so when their children were past school-age, did seem more apologetic in their accounts of why they did not go back. Educated women seemed to feel particularly guilty that they had not fulfilled the potential their education gave them. Siobhan had two sons in the early-1970s and compared herself negatively to her brother and sisters:

In fact I think I consider myself to be the least successful of my siblings. My brother is a professor of optometry...and my middle sister was in charge of remedial teaching, she was responsible for the education of handicapped adults in Surrey. My sister who's seven years younger than me was a senior crown prosecutor, she actually doesn't do that any more, but she's doing all kinds of interesting work in the legal profession, and then my youngest sister runs her own medical PR business. So I'm kind of the dunce of the family.<sup>88</sup>

Claire was an Oxford graduate who had five children between 1960 and 1972. Like Siobhan she felt inferior when comparing her achievements with her contemporaries. When asked whether she would have liked to return to work, she answered, 'Well the only difficult thing was that everybody else had important jobs that I felt that I should be doing something.'<sup>89</sup> Women at the end of the period were also keener to demonstrate that they did pursue intellectual stimulation. Ellen, who had her first child in the early-1970s, recalled how she became an Open University tutor after her third child was born:

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<sup>87</sup> Siobhan, BE1, p. 10.

<sup>88</sup> Siobhan, BE1, p. 4.

<sup>89</sup> Claire, NO1, p. 4.

A friend said to me, 'you ought to be an Open University tutor', she said, 'stop you getting intellectually stale while your at home with your children.' So I applied to become a tutor for the Open University, and I got the job in November 1978, and I've been a tutor for the Open University ever since.<sup>90</sup>

It seems to be generation rather than education alone that shaped this need for justification. Marilyn who left school at sixteen expressed similar feelings. She also had her children in the early-1970s and stressed how getting involved in playgroups meant she was more than simply a stay at home mother: 'I was involved with playgroups when they were young and that kept me out of the house and gave me something to do, so I didn't work when they were young but went back when they were at school.'<sup>91</sup>

Some class differences did emerge in the interviewees' attitudes towards the changing roles for women. Working-class women were more certain than their middle-class counterparts that the century had witnessed increasing opportunities for women, particularly in respect of employment. Ethel and Enid both left Benson school aged fourteen, Ethel in 1933 and Enid in 1939. They both thought job prospects were extremely limited for girls at this time; they either worked in a shop or in domestic service. They felt, therefore, that girls today had far greater freedom and the chance to choose their own careers.<sup>92</sup> Assessing the changing status of women over the twentieth century Deirdre asserted: 'well of course my generation didn't have the opportunities that even my children have had, and then my grandchildren you know.'<sup>93</sup> Tina concluded that the main change in the position of women is their growing independence: 'I think we were more independent [than her mother's generation], but I think today they're more independent.' However she also discussed how these increased opportunities for women were not without their consequences. She contrasted the life of her mother-in-law, who

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<sup>90</sup> Ellen, EW3, p. 12.

<sup>91</sup> Marilyn, BE13, p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> Ethel, BE6, p. 24; Enid, BE12, p. 3.

she felt was confined to the home 'twenty-four seven really', with women today who have the chance to both raise families and pursue careers:

I feel sorry for career women, because you think when's the right time to give up, and who's going to step into my shoes, and will I be able to get back onto the ladder again? So I think although there's a lot more opportunities for women I think it's still very scary and I think it's quite frightening. Coz before, because I'd had my children young I didn't feel I'd had to give much up, and I did what I wanted after...But I think for career women it's very hard to give up something. When you've got to a certain standard in life and you've got to the same level as a man. There comes a time when you've only got so many eggs and you've only got so many years to breed children. And I think that's a bit unfair and I don't really know what the answer is.<sup>94</sup>

The difficulties for mothers today who try to combine paid work with child-rearing was a constantly referred to theme by interviewees of all classes, educational backgrounds, localities and ages. Several of them made the same point as Tina that it must be hard for women to leave long-established careers in order to have children. For example Sharon had been happy to abandon her PhD and become a full-time mother, but felt:

if you've actually got an interesting job, to leave it for years and years is not a good idea, and so I would, to me the compromise would be to keep your foot in the labour market, to keep your job going, but not work full time...But to have kids and work full time and never see them, what's the point of it really? But some people are caught in that.<sup>95</sup>

Enid thought that because today's women were brought up with higher expectations of their professional lives than when she was growing up in the 1920 and 1930s they:

need more these days than what we did, we didn't know any different but they've had so much by the time they get married haven't they? You know a young person today, by the time she starts a family, she's had far more out of life than I did, we'd had nothing really, so there was nothing to give up. You see you know no different...you hadn't had money, coz you hadn't earned big money. But if you've a good job and it's an interesting job and you love it, and then you're going to be at home all day, and you're going to miss all that money, it takes a lot of thinking about, it's a lot to give up.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Deirdre, BA1, p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> Tina, BE3, p. 37.

<sup>95</sup> Sharon, EW9, p. 16.

<sup>96</sup> Enid, BE12, p. 23.

Enid's suggestion that mothers now faced financial pressures to work that her generation had not experienced was an issue that many of the respondents commented upon. Bethany thought that 'now with the cost of housing...people just can't afford not to go out to work.'<sup>97</sup> She believed that this dual-income came at a price with women losing the 'more leisurely' life she had enjoyed. Gloria also lamented that today couples felt they could not manage without the wife's earnings because she thought working mothers 'miss an awful lot.'<sup>98</sup> Lindsay explained that she felt this situation must be especially hard for those women who do not even like their jobs, stating:

I suppose the pattern which there is now, is simply that it's the norm for women to go back to work because they'll be in dire trouble if they don't...the need to work is being hung over women as a threat, and it seems to me that women who have not got satisfactory jobs, I think the pressures must be appalling.<sup>99</sup>

The interviewees felt that both full-time work and full-time motherhood placed women under stress. While they were not sure if there were any solutions to the problems they felt existed for mothers today, the provision of part-time work was one of the areas they were most concerned to see progress in and felt most strongly about. Ellen explained:

I've always been a great advocate of part-time work for mothers, really. Because it gives you an interest outside, and brings you some income. I think we've got a very bad situation in this country, where work tends to be very all or nothing, certainly from a financial point of view. If you've got a full-time job you get well paid, but you get worked off your feet and not a lot of time for yourself and your family. If you have a part-time job you don't get paid anywhere near as well, by and large, and you feel a second-rate person in the work force if you like. And I think that's a shame, I mean I think you ought to do more in the way of job-share. I think it's coming gradually, but we ought to do more of it really. So that people get the best of both worlds.<sup>100</sup>

Women like Ellen were not being conservative or reactionary in their attitudes to women working outside the home, but argued that they should do so on their own terms. Many

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<sup>97</sup> Bethany, EW4, p. 20.

<sup>98</sup> Gloria, BE14, p. 14.

<sup>99</sup> Lindsay, OX12, p. 19.

respondents thought the increased opportunities for women had to some extent been negated by the increased pressures upon them. They concluded that today's mothers were suffering because they had simply adopted male patterns of work when what was needed was a revision of working conditions for everyone to provide a better work- and home-life balance.

## **Conclusion**

The uncertainties and inconsistencies which existed in post-war thinking about the relationship of mothers to employment outside the home were reflected in the interviewees own experiences of work at this time. Respondents expressed some ambivalence in their attitudes to paid work and whether they thought it was beneficial for women.<sup>101</sup> Women who did combine paid employment with motherhood described the difficulties of doing so, the worry and guilt it brought, and the discrimination and disapproval they faced. While many enjoyed working before their children were born, and some were pleased to return once their children reached school-age, very few took a job while their children were under five except in cases of necessity. Many articulated concerns that it was bad for children's development if mothers returned to work earlier, reiterating the views of the childcare experts as discussed in the previous chapter. However the reality of being a full-time mother was not always easy for women and they expressed conflicting feelings about their domestic role. While the interviewees did not recall the blissful, uncomplicated relationship with their babies that childcare literature and popular culture portrayed, neither did most remember the levels of discontent and

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<sup>100</sup> Ellen, EW3, pp. 12-3.

<sup>101</sup> Dyhouse found a similar stance amongst the university graduates she questioned, concluding that the women were still haunted by the legacy of the controversies of the 1950s and 1960s. Dyhouse, 'Graduate Mothers', p. 333.

unhappiness that characterised the stereotype of the dissatisfied mother that existed at the time. There was no evidence that educated women suffered in their adjustment to motherhood any more than their less-educated contemporaries; instead they may have simply been more capable of bringing their concerns into the public sphere.<sup>102</sup> Indeed Lee Comer argues, ‘The only difference between Suzanne Gail and the working class housewife – the pattern of their daily lives is almost identical anyway – is that she has articulated what they know and feel.’<sup>103</sup> Motherhood was a contradictory experience for many women, bringing both pleasure and enjoyment, but also feelings of loneliness and constraint.<sup>104</sup>

The theme of independence was also a prominent feature of women’s accounts of their attitudes towards work inside and outside the home. Irrespective of their class or educational background the interviewees’ narratives were united by this quest for autonomy. The respondents were perhaps influenced by the discourses of second-wave feminism which prioritised women’s ability to take control over their own lives. However there was a general belief that women achieved this autonomy in different ways and that these could also change during the course of their lives. For example many interviewees, particularly those from working-class backgrounds, talked of being keen to leave school to gain independence through work. They felt that work would offer status, socialisation into the adult role, and the right to determine their own lives. For those who felt that the reality of their work-life did not meet these aspirations, marriage and

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<sup>102</sup> In the words of the Women’s Group on Public Welfare they were a, ‘small but vocal group of disgruntled housewives with professional training’. Women’s Group on Public Welfare, *The Education and Training of Girls* (London: National Council of Social Service, 1962), p. 99.

<sup>103</sup> Lee Comer, *Wedlocked Women* (Leeds: Feminist Books, 1974), p. 117.

<sup>104</sup> These views were articulated by women around the country. Of the Cambridge graduates questioned by Thane, very few expressed regret at having married and had children and Aiston found a similar set of responses in her study of women graduates from Liverpool. Indeed, she sums up what seems to be a common feeling among women at this time: ‘the majority of the respondents were not rejecting their role as

motherhood offered an alternative way of achieving these goals. They hoped to find freedom through being 'mistress' of their own household. However women also reported that they then sought independence, particularly financial independence, through paid work, most often once their children had reached school-age. It is interesting that respondents characterised both work and motherhood as ways in which freedom could be gained for women in the post-war period. By the early-1970s it seems women were becoming increasingly doubtful about whether their domestic role alone could be sufficient to provide this status, and women who had children at this time felt compelled to stress they were more than full-time mothers. It is clear from women's discussions of their daughters' generation that they were also uneasy about many of the changes taking place, particularly the growing numbers of mothers of young children in the labour force. Interviewees were trying to reach conclusions during the course of their narratives about how women's roles as workers and mothers could be reconciled, but the overriding impression to be gained from the interviews was the real difficulties they found in doing so.

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wives/mothers but simply critiquing aspects of that role.' Thane, 'Girton Graduates', p. 355; Aiston, 'Maternal Identity?', p. 425.

## **Chapter Nine: *Public and Private Conceptions of Motherhood: Nuclear Families, Dependent Wives and Breadwinner Husbands***

### **Introduction**

Post-war femininity has been viewed as intimately associated with domesticity, both by contemporaries, and in subsequent accounts. The ideal mother figure throughout most, if not all, the period 1945-1970 was a full-time homemaker dependent upon her breadwinner husband, who had two, three or four children, and lived within a nuclear family. In his comparative study of the St Ebbe's and Barton regions of Oxford in the early-1950s, John Mogeys stated: 'the family as we saw it consists of husband, wife, and their children. Occasional families may be called incomplete in that one parent is missing or that there have been no children. These are accepted as deviations from the normal state of the family, both by us as investigators and by our informants.'<sup>1</sup> Marriage was linked with children in popular conception, and being a wife with being a mother.<sup>2</sup> The nuclear family was a norm in British culture and society and it was widely experienced. It was assumed the contemporary model of family life would strengthen and continue, and many of the women interviewed recalled holding this belief when they entered into marriage and motherhood.

Dennis Dean believes that in the desire for post-war reconstruction 'a strategy had been evolved to present the home and family as the agents of social cohesion in a world of

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<sup>1</sup> John M. Mogeys, *Family and Neighbourhood: Two Studies in Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Slater and Mark Woodside, *Patterns of Marriage* (London: Cassell, 1951), p. 118. Josephine Klein, Ferdinand Zweig and Geoffrey Gorer made similar findings. Josephine Klein, *Samples from English Cultures* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 154; Ferdinand Zweig, *Women's Life and Labour* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1952), p. 27-8; Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character* (London: Cresset Press, 1955), p. 138, 161.

chance. This was promoted in schools, cinemas and magazines.’<sup>3</sup> While the ways in which films or magazines affected how women viewed themselves as mothers are difficult to quantify, they clearly did provide images of the ideal woman at this time. Marjorie Ferguson argues that women’s magazines are pervasive in the extent to which they act as agents of socialisation – ‘They tell women what to think and do about themselves, their lovers, husbands, parents, children, colleagues, neighbours or bosses.’<sup>4</sup> Magazines were a potent source of information for women on how a ‘woman’ was expected to behave and what was considered ‘good’ mothering practice. However, the interviewees spoke ambivalently about popular culture. While some did report reading magazines and finding pleasure in doing so they were reluctant to admit that they were influenced by their content.<sup>5</sup> The women liked to construct themselves as being unaffected by outside influences such as television and magazines. Their negative attitude may have been partly encouraged by the belief that women should not spend their time reading, watching television or listening to the radio as it meant they were renegeing on their other duties as wife and mother. Tina remembered how her mother-in-law thought reading books and magazines ‘absolute disgrace’. She said that if her husband came home and caught her reading he would complain to his mother that ‘there was a sink full of washing-up and she had her head in a book.’<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless the interviewees did refer to portrayals of motherhood they saw in popular culture and held a clear image of how a mother was supposed to behave.

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<sup>3</sup> D.W. Dean, ‘Education for Moral Improvement, Domesticity and Social Cohesion: The Labour Government, 1945-1951’, in Liz Dawtrey, Janet Holland and Merrill Hammer, with Sue Sheldon, *Equality and Inequality in Education Policy* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1995), 18-30, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Marjory Ferguson, *Forever Feminine: Women’s Magazines and the Cult of Femininity* (London: Heinemann, 1983), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Hayley, NO5, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Tina, BE3, pp. 20-1.

The expectations of the women interviewed did vary, however, according to when they were born. There were in actuality two different generations represented amongst the respondents: those who grew up before the war, and those who reached adulthood in the decades after. While substantial continuities were revealed in the interviewees' experiences, for example they all grew up with the assumption that motherhood was the adult woman's primary role, there were notable differences in the constructions of womanhood with which they were familiar. Describing girls who grew up in the 1930s, Pearl Jephcott noted how:

Girls are accustomed to read in the evening paper such an advertisement as this: 'Girl age 14 wtd. for warehouse. Wages to commence 14/-'; and to see in the next column, 'Boy wanted; just left school, for warehouse – to commence 20/-wk.' They grew up in the knowledge that the boy does not have to do any housework, and that he has a better wage and more pocket money than they have and they accept its concomitant that the woman is an inferior person to the man. Many of them also accept the belief, still prevalent in a great many working-class families, that the woman's responsibility ends with the home.<sup>7</sup>

Twenty years later aspirations were changing. Referring to girls growing up in the 1950s, Liz Heron states:

It seems also that as little girls we had a stronger sense of our possibilities than myths about the fifties allow. There was a general confidence in the air, and the wartime images of women's independence and competence at work lingered on well into the decade in the popular literature and the girls' comics of the day.<sup>8</sup>

As Judy Giles has shown, when women remember their lives they do so in ways that draw on cultural and linguistic resources available to a particular social group and a specific historical moment.<sup>9</sup> This chapter will explore the relationship between public conceptions of motherhood and women's private understandings of their identities, in

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<sup>7</sup> A.P. Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up* (London: Faber and Faber, 1942), p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Liz Heron (ed.), *Truth, Dare or Promise, Girls Growing Up in the Fifties* (London: Virago, 1985), p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Judy Giles, 'Narratives of Gender, Class, and Modernity in Women's Memories of Mid-Twentieth Century Britain, *Signs*, 28 (2002), 21-41, p. 25.

order to examine how women's narratives were shaped by the ideals of motherhood with which they were confronted. The chapter will investigate understandings of the family during the period 1945-1970, and how women related to these constructions in their accounts. It focuses on three models of family life that were dominant in the period: the ideal of the 'nuclear family', and the associated figures of the 'dependent wife' and 'breadwinner husband'. The chapter will also consider the influence of changing attitudes towards marriage and motherhood in the years after 1970, and will question whether the interviewees embraced or rejected these developments. Did women reassess their own attitudes towards marriage, the family and motherhood with the passing of time?

### **The Nuclear Family**

There were clear ideals of how families were supposed to behave in the post-war world. Films ranging from *Brief Encounter* (1945) to *Here Come the Huggetts* (1948) demonstrated a concern with the state of marriage and the family in the aftermath of the war, but ultimately offered a conservative portrayal.<sup>10</sup> The ideology of companionate marriage and the nuclear family was also a dominant theme of the women's magazines with husbands presented as breadwinners and wives as homemakers.<sup>11</sup> Despite the alarm about the state of the family which emerged in the last period of the war, it was still possible to think of lifelong monogamy as the norm and divorce as the comparatively rare

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Peplar, *Family Matters: A History of Ideas About the Family since 1945* (London: Longman, 2002), pp. 68-99; Melanie Williams, 'Women in Prison and Women in Dressing Gowns: Rediscovering the 1950s Films of J. Lee Thompson', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 11 (2002), 5-15; Landry, Marcia, 'Melodrama and Femininity in World War II British Cinema', in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 119-26; John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963* (London: BFI Publications, 1986), p. 159.

<sup>11</sup> Janice Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines* (London: Pandora, 1987), p. 50; Janice Winship, *Advertising in Women's Magazines 1956-74* (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1980), p. 15; Brian Braithwaite, *Women's Magazines: The First 300 Years* (London: Peter Owen, 1995), p. 73; Jill Allbrooke, 'Three Hundred Years of Women's Magazines, 1693-1993', *Serials*, 7

exception.<sup>12</sup> The women interviewed who reached adulthood in the late-1930s and 1940s spoke powerfully of the pressures they felt existed upon them to marry. Discussing the average marriage age of her contemporaries (she herself married at eighteen in 1943), Enid said, 'From the time you were eighteen onwards, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, most people were married. If you were about twenty-two and not married, I think they were a bit worried. Different now in't it?'<sup>13</sup> For girls from all class backgrounds marriage was viewed as an entry into adulthood with the benefits, including a sexual relationship, that it would bring. Molly married at twenty in 1946 while she was still an undergraduate at Oxford University. When asked why she had decided to marry so young she replied:

Well, that's to do with the days when you got married or nothing, you know, and I can remember that we very much wanted to go on holiday together and I remember saying to my parents, 'Well we're going on holiday together, so either you let us get married before hand or we're going anyway!'<sup>14</sup>

Ethel became pregnant when she was eighteen before she was married in 1937. When asked how her mother reacted when she told her of her pregnancy, she replied she was 'Not very happy, no'. In contrast Ethel was not displeased to find she was pregnant as it meant that she 'had' to marry. Consequently she was able to leave home and her parents' authority, and also a job that she did not enjoy:

Well we wanted to get married anyway, and even though I was only eighteen I was fed up with being cook, and well sort of in domestic service you're at everybody's beck and call whatever your position is, and I hated it. I loved cooking and having all the nice things to do but I didn't like being tied down. I liked being in the girl guides and all those kind of things, and so that was that. So I told her, 'Well now Mum, you're going to have to let me get married now aren't you?' [laughing]. That didn't go down very well.<sup>15</sup>

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(1994), 60-3; Mary Grieve, *Millions Made My Story*, Mary Grieve Editor *Woman 1940-62* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964).

<sup>12</sup> J.E. Goldthorpe, *Family Life in Western Societies: A Historical Sociology of Family Relationships in Britain and North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 42; John R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 233.

<sup>13</sup> Enid, BE12, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Molly, NO4, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ethel, BE6, p. 8.

Ethel saw her pregnancy and subsequent marriage as offering independence rather than worrying it would bring constraints. Marriage and motherhood were her dream of escape from an unhappy home life.

Interviewees who had their children throughout the period 1945-1970 believed that marriage and children were part of the 'normal' woman's life. They were intertwined in many women's eyes. This assumption was widely held and irrespectively of the respondents' class or level of education. Camilla married in 1960 and her daughter was 'there on my first wedding anniversary, she was a fortnight old'. She had two further children in 1963 and 1965. When asked if she had planned to have her children so quickly and close together, Camilla replied that she had just assumed when she married that children would follow. She stated: 'I mean obviously at the time if you got married you had children basically. This was the expectation. If you didn't it was either because you were pretty clever or you had a problem.'<sup>16</sup> Lisa married in 1959 and had four children between 1960 and 1967. There were eleven months between her marriage and her first baby. She explained that children were viewed as an integral part of marriage: 'one got married and one was going to have children you know.'<sup>17</sup> Respondents said they actively intended to have children so soon after marriage rather than simply being resigned to it. Claire had her first daughter fifteen months after her marriage in 1959. In total she had six children over the course of the next twelve years. When asked if the children were planned, she emphatically asserted, 'Oh yes, we'd planned to have children as soon as we got married.'<sup>18</sup> Phyllis married at the end of the war in 1945 and had her first child the next year. She also said that she and her husband had wanted to have a

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<sup>16</sup> Camilla, SO6, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Lisa, CO12, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Claire, NO1, p. 3.

child straight away: 'Oh yes. Yes, yes, we did.'<sup>19</sup> It is impossible to know whether these women really had intended to have their children so soon after marriage, or if it resulted from ignorance or failed attempts to make use of contraception. However women's portrayal of themselves as wanting children quickly after they had married reflects the strength of the association in their minds between getting married and starting a family.

Most of the Oxfordshire respondents revealed that they entered marriage with an ideal family size in mind. The average number of children for the group was 2.8 which directly compares to the national fertility rate which peaked at 2.8 for the years 1961-1965.<sup>20</sup> Having an only child was not considered to be desirable and only two women interviewed, Monika and Faith, did have just one child.<sup>21</sup> Interviewees who had been only children were particularly adamant that they did not want to have one child themselves. Marilyn, Hope and Nancy all stated that they had not minded how many children they had as long as it was more than one; they had been only children and did not want to repeat this.<sup>22</sup> These women felt the ideal family size for their own parents had been very different, with having one child being accepted in the inter-war period (particularly amongst the middle classes although not exclusively so). Rose was an only child born in 1932. She said that that in the 1930s 'only children were very common.'<sup>23</sup> Sarah was an only child born in 1912. She felt only children were increasingly prevalent throughout her childhood because she 'grew up in the age when cars were just coming in and you had one baby and a baby Austin you see.'<sup>24</sup> Glenda thought that her

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<sup>19</sup> Phyllis, WY3, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> David Coleman, 'Population and Family', in A.H. Halsey with J. Webb (eds.), *Twentieth-Century British Social Trends* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Monika, SO1; Faith, SO12.

<sup>22</sup> Marilyn, BE13, p. 12; Nancy, CO3, p. 1; Hope, CO11, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Rose, NO12, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Sarah, NO2, p. 18.

contemporaries were consciously trying to break with the past and were ‘a generation in revolt against the cult of the only child.’<sup>25</sup>

However as Penelope Mortimer suggested in her novel *The Pumpkin Eater* (published in 1962), society held definite ideas about the maximum size a family should be. Mortimer’s unnamed heroine has an ever-larger family, which everyone – her parents, her husband, and her doctors – see as a problem and leads to her being aborted and sterilised.<sup>26</sup> Violet had six children between 1953 and 1965. When asked if she had always wanted to have a big family she answered, ‘No I think, when we used to talk as children, ‘Oh I’m going to have three’, you know. But no, my mother, there was only two, my sister and I, my mother was sort of shocked.’<sup>27</sup> Ellen’s mother Ivy also expressed disapproval at Ellen’s decision to have six children. Discussing large families Ivy said, ‘It’s so irresponsible isn’t it? Just can’t understand it, still can’t. Well Ellen of course, our Ellen with her six kids has got the answer to all of this.’<sup>28</sup> While Ellen did not say that her mother had made such comments to her directly she was aware of a general social disapproval and recalled that she got ‘some quite funny looks when I went on to have my fifth child.’ She felt that having four children would have been acceptable but she faced condemnation for having more. She gave the example of a neighbour who had said to her, ‘Goodness me why do you want some more?’<sup>29</sup> This social disapproval extended to official policy. Claire had six children between 1960 and 1972. She explained how after her last child was born the staff at the hospital ‘came and lectured me on birth control.’<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Glenda, BA2, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Penelope Mortimer, *The Pumpkin Eater* (London: Hutchinson, 1962).

<sup>27</sup> Violet, BA7, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Ivy, BE4, p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> Ellen, EW3, p. 25.

<sup>30</sup> Claire, NO1, p. 7

The dominance of the nuclear family was also visible when women gave accounts of unmarried mothers. The uncertainty with which women told these stories indicates that they were unsure about the most appropriate way to do so. The interviewees' difficulties may have been a result of the taboo that surrounded the subject of unmarried motherhood for much of the period 1945-1970 and the ways in which single motherhood can still be seen as stigmatised.<sup>31</sup> A common feature of women's descriptions of unmarried mothers was their depersonalisation of events. The protagonists were always figures that were peripheral to their social circles. Ivy told an anecdote of a girl who went to the same grammar school as her daughter: 'She was about seventeen and she got herself pregnant, not married. This was you know, wasn't done. So [her mother] stood by her, I think she had the baby at home. But it was the sort of thing that was kept hush-hush. Especially in that sort of home.'<sup>32</sup> Her phrase 'that sort of home' is revealing as it indicates how she intertwined discourses of class and gender in her narrative. Ivy felt it was particularly shocking for a 'respectable' middle-class girl to have become pregnant. The age of the mother was also a factor in determining the interviewees' response to single parenthood, with teenage pregnancies perhaps evoking more sympathy. Recalling being pregnant with her first son in 1970 Siobhan said, 'the person I felt sorriest for when I'd had my baby was actually one of my students from the poly', who was pregnant at the same time. She said her student 'was only a little girl of sixteen' who 'hadn't got a husband and she

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<sup>31</sup> However, as Elizabeth Wilson has argued, there were women writers who were seeking to explore the relationship between sex and childbirth and the possibility of unmarried motherhood. Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain 1945-1968* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1980), p. 156. For example the heroines in Shelagh Delaney's play *A Taste of Honey*, Lynne Reid-Banks' *L-Shaped Room* and Margaret Drabble's *The Millstone* all have illegitimate babies. In Doris Lessing's *A Proper Marriage* (1954) the heroine Martha leaves her husband and young child. Joy, in Nell Dunn's *Poor Cow*, struggles to be sexually liberated. Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey* (London: Methuen, 1959); Lynne Reid-Banks, *The L-Shaped Room* (London: Vintage, 2004) (1960); Margaret Drabble, *The Millstone* (London: Penguin, 1968) (1965); Doris Lessing, *A Proper Marriage* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993) (1954) and Nell Dunn, *Poor Cow* (London: Bloomsbury Classics, 1996) (1967). For a more in-depth look at the construction of unmarried motherhood in the post-war decades see Kathleen Kiernan, Hilary Land and Jane Lewis, *Lone Motherhood in Twentieth-Century Britain: From Footnote to Front Page* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 98-123.

<sup>32</sup> Ivy, BE4, p. 19.

was on her own'. The image of this girl's plight had remained with Siobhan and she 'often wondered how she managed.'<sup>33</sup> Women were aware that legal as well as social sanctions applied to unmarried mothers. For example, referring to the 1940s and 1950s, Sarah said:

you couldn't afford to get pregnant if you weren't married because there wasn't this cossetting of the one parent family as there is these days. You got no maternity, no allowances, you were just a destitute woman really. I mean you were relying on charity if you had a baby before you, without a marriage.'<sup>34</sup>

The assumption that women needed husbands to support them and their children meant that many entered into marriage for pragmatic reasons. Working-class women in particular thought it would offer them security. Peggy's first marriage was not a happy one. She married at eighteen in 1951. In the course of her interview she had explained that her husband was a poor 'provider' who had spent his wages in the pub rather than giving the money to her for the family's upkeep. Describing why she gave up smoking she said that after her husband's death her doctor told her, "If you don't pack up those woodbines", he said, "You'll be joining him." I said, "I don't want to join him", I said, "I've only just got shot of him", that was it and I packed up my fags.' However, despite her own bad experience she went on to say, 'I believe in marriage'. Peggy was concerned that women today were left facing instability and uncertainty in their family lives because they did not marry their partners. She stated: 'you can be living together perhaps a year and you'll have a fallout over the silliest thing he'll be gone, you'll perhaps be left three or four babies, but if you're married it gives you security.' Peggy's attitudes were probably influenced by the situation of her own daughter, who was not married to her

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<sup>33</sup> Siobhan, BE1, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> Sarah, NO2, p. 14.

partner, and about whom Peggy was clearly worried.<sup>35</sup> Peggy's views were not unrepresentative with many respondents regretting the loss of the security of marriage. Gloria expressed a great deal of uncertainty in her sometimes contradictory account of her daughter who cohabited with her partner and 'started the rot'. While she said 'it doesn't worry me', she later explained that at the time 'I didn't think that was the right thing to do.' She indicated this was partly because she was anxious about the reaction of family members. 'Certainly my parents didn't think it was the right thing to do and my brothers weren't very happy with it either.'<sup>36</sup> The value women assigned to marriage may also be the result of hindsight. In their sixties, seventies and eighties the companionship marriage provided was, perhaps, particularly significant to them. They worried their children would not reap the benefits of long marriages in later life that they felt they had enjoyed.

The women interviewed were ambivalent about rising rates of cohabitation and divorce. Jessica got divorced after her husband left her. She thought that attitudes towards divorce had been one of the most dramatic changes during the post-war period. When she had divorced in the 1940s 'it was a very naughty and horrible thing to do but now it's common, it's uncommon not to have been divorced isn't it?'<sup>37</sup> Camilla who married aged twenty-three in 1960 and Bethany who married at twenty-two in 1966 both thought there had been a generational change in people's opinions of divorce. They felt their contemporaries had been prepared to stay in marriages which may have been at times unhappy in the hope they could work through their difficulties. In contrast they thought the next generation were quicker to end their marriages. Like Gloria they were uncertain, however, whether this was a 'good thing'.<sup>38</sup> Some women were more positive about

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<sup>35</sup> Peggy, BA9, pp. 7-8.

<sup>36</sup> Gloria, BE14, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> Jessica, BA8, p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Camilla, SO6, p. 15; Bethany, EW4, p. 21.

these developments. Talking about her daughters cohabiting with their partners Tina explained that she felt she had 'put them off getting married'. While she said she did not explicitly tell her children not to marry, she did warn them men 'change when you got married'. She explained: 'I couldn't let them go through, into the lions' cage, without telling them how I really felt.' Tina herself had separated from her husband for a few years although they had subsequently reunited. While Tina 'always respected him and he's always respected me' she felt she 'just didn't want to be married.'<sup>39</sup> Lindsay, who was born in 1935, thought that easier divorce was a great improvement and regretted that it had not been possible for her parents' generation. She said her parents were 'unhappy' to the extent that her she and her sister asked them why they did not divorce. She felt in today's climate they would have done so thereby preventing the years of dissatisfaction in their marriage they both clearly faced.<sup>40</sup> The interviewees thought there had been both gains and losses for women due to the increasing ease of cohabitation and divorce. Many welcomed the independence it had brought women, particularly those with young children, as it offered the possibility of escape from unhappy marriages, but there were others who were not sure these changes were without costs.

### **Dependent Wives**

Post-war society was founded upon the conception that a woman's principal role was in the home. Elizabeth Wilson argues the state's designation of woman's vocation as motherhood was central to the purposes of welfarism.<sup>41</sup> William Beveridge's report on social insurance and allied services was highly influential and formed the basis of the welfare state legislation introduced by the 1945 Labour Government. Beveridge

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<sup>39</sup> Tina, BE3, p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> Lindsay, OX12, p. 18.

prescribed a restricted role for married women in the post-war world. He stated: 'The attitude of the housewife to gainful employment outside the home is not, and should not be, the same as that of a single woman. She has other duties.'<sup>42</sup> Beveridge conceived of society in terms of a male citizen and breadwinner with women and children as his dependents. While women were acknowledged to perform 'vital unpaid service', it was taken for granted that 'the housewife's earnings in general are not a means of subsistence.'<sup>43</sup> It was expected this model applied to all women irrespective of their social background. Stephanie Spencer believes the Beveridge Report clearly presented 'women' as a universal grouping.<sup>44</sup> In the 1940s it was still assumed that wives only worked if their husbands failed in their duty to support them. Women who had married in the late-1930s and 1940s were familiar with such views. Mavis summed up the division of labour as she saw it in the post-war years: 'In those days the men went out to work, and you just sort of stayed and looked after the babies'.<sup>45</sup> Sarah, who married at the start of the war, thought 'it was pretty well supposed that when you married in my day you didn't work anymore, that was it'. She told the story of a conversation she had with her neighbour which exemplified this state of affairs: 'I said to her, "Did you ever have a job?" and she said, "Oh no, my parents could afford to keep me", so she'd never had a job ever, and then she'd married and a husband was supposed to be able to support his wife, if

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<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State* (London: Tavistock, 1997), p. 35.

<sup>42</sup> H.M. Government, *Social Insurance and Allied Services (The Beveridge Report)* (London: HMSO, 1942), p. 50.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50. The image of woman as housewife was common across the political spectrum. Elizabeth McCarty has shown that 'both the Conservatives and Labour parties represented women primarily in terms of their domestic roles; and images of women as housewives were prominent.' Elizabeth McCarty, 'Attitudes to Women and Domesticity in England, c. 1939-1955', Unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 1994, p. 175.

<sup>44</sup> Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 24. In actuality this maternal ideology did not extend to all groups. West Indian women who emigrated to Britain in the 1950s were characterised as economically independent workers, alongside their men. Wendy Webster argues that because of this association between immigrant women and work they were not associated with motherhood, family or domesticity. Wendy Webster, *Imagining Home: Gender, 'Race' and National Identity* (London: UCL Press, 1998), p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Mavis, EW10, p. 7.

she went out to work it was a disgrace.’<sup>46</sup> Similarly Juliet who married in 1942 said: ‘Before the war if wives worked it looked as if husbands couldn’t support them. But even of my friends not many had actual jobs.’<sup>47</sup>

This ideal of the dependent wife was well established in post-war culture. Women who worked when their children were young were either pitied, because it was assumed they would only do so if they did not have a husband who could provide for them, or condemned for jeopardising the health and happiness of their families. In a letter to the editor of *Woman* magazine in 1958, a reader wrote:

One of our neighbours, a woman of middle-age, works not only by day, but also at night. ‘How awful!’ I exclaimed when I first heard this. ‘It seems some people are never satisfied where money is concerned.’ Then I hear that she supports a crippled husband and disabled son. She never gets more than three hours’ sleep a night, and still manages to keep going in spite of this. I felt very remorseful. But is it pride that keeps such a deserving woman from asking for help?<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, the dominant and organising ideology of femininity in 1950s advertisements was motherhood. The central image was the mother as housewife, always wearing an apron, youngish, smiling brightly.<sup>49</sup> These representations of femininity were influential and interviewees used the discourse surrounding the figure of the housewife when describing their experiences of motherhood fifty years later. Glenda, who had two children in the 1950s, explained: ‘we belonged to a generation that felt you ought to bring your children up and they should come in from school and smell fresh hot cakes cooking and have television with mummy and daddy.’<sup>50</sup> Eve also used the language of housewife as worker in her narrative, stating:

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<sup>46</sup> Sarah, NO2, p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> Juliet, NO9, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> Letter to the Editor, *Woman*, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1958, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Winship, *Advertising*, p. 15; Braithwaite, *Women’s Magazines*, p. 73; Cynthia L. White, *Women’s Magazines 1693-1968* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970), pp. 65-181.

<sup>50</sup> Glenda, BA2, p. 12.

the housewife in those days, you sort of did your work in the morning, had your lunch, and husband came home for lunch so you'd got all that to do, it was really hard work, and then husband went back and you got the child ready, got the child in the pram and went out shopping and went to the park and met your friends and that was the life.<sup>51</sup>

However not all women identified with the images of womanhood presented in the adverts in such a positive way. When discussing adverts Siobhan stated that they:

all seemed very fairytale, which of course it is because advertising is always showing you the glamorous side of whatever it's trying to sell you...And life's not like that. One of my sisters...I think she's had a tough life emotionally. And I think she's always thought people's lives are like they are in advertisements. And therefore I think it's just been one long disappointment, and one long feeling of failure, because it's not like that. And I think you have to have an eye to reality, and you have to accept your own limitations as well. I think if you don't you end up being very unhappy.<sup>52</sup>

Deirdre thought advertising did 'a lot of harm' by creating a desire for consumer goods which were unaffordable for many people.<sup>53</sup> However while advertising may have made women regret the absence of goods, or feel pressure to obtain them, the impact labour-saving devices had on women's lives cannot be understated. Their joy on obtaining their first washing-machine was a feature of several interviewees' narratives.<sup>54</sup>

By the 1960s the figure of the dependent wife was beginning to be challenged as married women were increasingly participating in the labour force. Representations of the family and the role of women within it were also being modified.<sup>55</sup> Women reflected upon these changing understandings of the role of women in their accounts. Bethany was born and brought up in Wallingford moving to nearby Preston Crowmarsh when she married in

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<sup>51</sup> Eve, CO8, pp. 2-3.

<sup>52</sup> Siobhan, BE1, pp. 22-3.

<sup>53</sup> Deirdre, BA1, pp. 12-3.

<sup>54</sup> Theresa, BA10, pp. 8-9; Tina, BE3, p. 15; Ethel, BE6, p. 15; Gail, BE11, p. 7; Ellen, EW3, p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> For instance Brian Braithwaite has noted how the magazine *Nova* was launched in 1965, which proclaimed to be 'The New Magazine for the New Kind of Woman'. That 'new kind of woman' was designated as intelligent, thinking and worldly. She would be well-educated, radical, sceptical and definitely not the typical reader of the woman's weeklies, with their mundane concentration on shopping and cooking. Braithwaite, *Women's Magazines*, p. 79.

1966. She thought that there was a divergence in attitudes between her friends and relatives who married in the 1960s and those who married in the 1970s. Divorce was far more common in the latter group. When asked why she thought this difference occurred she answered, 'I suppose a lot of people would say it's the swinging sixties, but I mean morals did perhaps go out, it was considered fashionable to be divorced and all these things, free sex or whatever, you know you were a bit boring if you weren't into those things.'<sup>56</sup> Emily married in 1962 when she was twenty-four and had three children by the age of twenty-nine. She recalled how she found herself at the end of the 1960s with a husband and three children, and feeling that the social changes of the decade had passed her by. Emily thought this may have been a common experience for women at this time:

it wouldn't surprise me if a lot of people didn't think that they suddenly woke up at the age of thirty and thought, 'Mmm, there's a life ahead of us, there's things going on out there, this is the sixties', you know because we were tied up in the sixties giving birth when everyone else was having a cool time, I just I remember that so vividly you know the Beatles hitting the scene suddenly the world opened.<sup>57</sup>

It is interesting that Emily used expressions made popular in the 1960s, such as 'cool' and 'scene', at this point in her narrative, demonstrating how the period encouraged her to change both how she viewed her life and how she articulated these feelings. However while conceptions of women's role in the home were beginning to be remodelled by the late-1960s this did not mean a complete reconstruction had occurred at this time. Karen remembered a programme she had watched on the television in the late-1960s and the unease it had left her feeling. She said it was 'a kind of play documentary' about 'a terrible childminder who had babies stacked along the couch in rows.' When the programme was shown Karen had started leaving her baby with a neighbour who child-minded for her so she could continue as a student at Oxford University. She recalled how

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<sup>56</sup> Bethany, EW4, pp. 21-2.

<sup>57</sup> Emily, NO8, p. 6.

the programme 'made me feel dreadful.'<sup>58</sup> Karen's account demonstrated that even in the late-1960s it was still clearly implied that the place of a mother of young children was in the home.

Nonetheless some interviewees did recall how they responded to the changes that they perceived were occurring from the late-1960s. Hannah thought the feminist movement in the late-1960s and 1970s was enormously important to women at that time. While she had always considered herself a feminist she found she was in an isolated position in the 1950s and early-1960s. She explained:

I've been a feminist as far back as I can remember, a very strong sense about that I was entitled to everything that the boys were entitled to, but I have always lived in a largely male community, I mean you know the Physiology Department [at Oxford] for a long time there was only one other woman on the staff and I was the only married woman in the department.

Hannah stated that she had:

always fought for the rights of women and I've always tried to encourage my women students to expect more for themselves. What I found was many of them first of all lacked self-confidence, and secondly had much fewer aspirations than the boys, I mean for years, this is no longer so now, but at the interviews at entrance I used to say, 'What do you expect do to with your life?' One said, 'I'll work until I get married', I was absolutely staggered.

She believed it was the work of women themselves that had generated this change in attitudes and recalled being actively involved in the feminist movement. 'I belonged to the, a group called the women tutor's group here in Oxford, and we agitated for maternity leave, for a change in language, for a great deal that has been achieved.'<sup>59</sup> It was not simply educated middle-class women who supported feminist arguments. Tina left school at fifteen and married at eighteen and mainly worked as a cleaner when her children were young, although when they were adults she ran her own catering business. Throughout her narrative she advocated women's rights, for instance stating that, 'As far

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<sup>58</sup> Karen, SO4, p. 18.

as I'm concerned I'd give it all to women. I'd like women to do a lot more, myself.' Like Hannah, Tina also thought it was the efforts of women themselves that led to the increased opportunities that now existed.<sup>60</sup>

Many women expressed a more ambivalent relationship to the feminist movement though. Although the older interviewees were generally more conservative in their attitudes, their responses were not simply determined by age. Some older women championed the developments that had occurred while some younger women were more hesitant. For example when asked if she had been aware of second-wave feminism when she had her children in the early-1970s, Sharon replied:

It didn't impinge on me. It hadn't reached Wallingford. I was aware of the Women's Liberation Movement, but I was under no pressure from Women's Lib. And I actually am a feminist, but it took me a while to become a feminist. And I had a very good friend in Birmingham who was very much in with the Women's Lib. And the doctrinaire, dogma that they used to come out with I used to think, cor, can't do with all that. No I think it was a relief that I wasn't involved. You know, coz they'd have all this angst about oh what toys you were allowed to give boys and girls.<sup>61</sup>

It is also noteworthy that Hannah felt that there had been a 'backlash' against the efforts of the campaigners of the late-1960s and 1970s. 'I mean many women now always say, "Oh I'm not a feminist" as if that's some terrible label.'<sup>62</sup> Women were conscious that in the late-1960s the position of women in society was beginning to alter and some were keen to help usher in these changes. It is clear that others found it difficult to adjust to the transformations for women that have occurred over the course of the second half of the twentieth century and addressed them with mixed feelings.

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<sup>59</sup> Hannah, SO7, pp. 17-8.

<sup>60</sup> Tina, BE3, p. 38.

<sup>61</sup> Sharon, EW9, pp. 21-2.

## Breadwinner Husbands

As Spencer has noted, ‘the celebration of women’s domestic role was only possible if men’s breadwinner role was similarly constructed and prescribed.’<sup>63</sup> The breadwinner model depended upon a gendered construction of men’s principal role as being in the public rather than the domestic sphere. Indeed being a good father was dependent on a man’s ability to provide for his children. In Victorian England, as John Tosh puts it, ‘The convergence of fatherhood and breadwinning was widely recognized as a fact of modern life.’<sup>64</sup> The social order in mid-twentieth century Britain was still based on the fact men were breadwinners. In his 1942 report on social insurance and allied services, Beveridge stated: ‘On marriage a woman gains a legal right to maintenance by her husband.’<sup>65</sup> As shown earlier, there were social restrictions that prevented women with children from working, which demonstrate the conservative attitudes to female workers that still existed in the post-war decades.<sup>66</sup> It was not simply employment structures that assumed a sole male breadwinner. Only the husband’s earnings were taken into account when a couple applied for a mortgage, and Tina recalled how if wives wanted to buy goods through hire purchase they had to have their husband’s signature meaning that ‘the men still had quite a big influence on what you had or couldn’t have.’<sup>67</sup> This economic reliance of women upon their husbands gives an indication as to why they were keen to return to work once their children were of school-age and gain some financial independence. Indeed Elizabeth Roberts has noted how Lancashire working-class women became more dependent on their husbands in the post-1945 years as increased prosperity marginalised

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<sup>62</sup> Hannah, SO7, pp. 3-4.

<sup>63</sup> Spencer, *Gender*, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 85.

<sup>65</sup> H.M. Government, *Social Insurance*, p. 50.

<sup>66</sup> See pages 234-6.

<sup>67</sup> Siobhan, BE1, p. 10; Tina, BE3, pp. 16-7.

women's traditional management skills, wages were increasingly paid into bank accounts rather than given in cash to the wife, and there was an increasing belief that responsibility for the budget should be shared rather than left to the woman.<sup>68</sup>

The women in Oxfordshire were familiar with the ideal of the male breadwinner model and had grown up witnessing the pre-eminent status many men thought they should subsequently enjoy.<sup>69</sup> Domineering fathers were present in the narratives of the women interviewed in Oxfordshire. Madge grew up in Shipton-under-Wychwood between the wars and recalled the authority of her father. She left school at fourteen to work in the local telephone exchange. When asked how she found this job she explained her father had obtained it for her, Madge 'didn't have a choice'.<sup>70</sup> Moreover while they may have been in decline, patriarchal fathers were still present in the post-war world. Agnes was born in Berkshire in 1938 and experienced a difficult relationship with her dictatorial father. She explained:

He worked very hard in a factory, he was a store-keeper. We had a council house, and he worked in the garden, and his attitude to life and children was, don't waste your time reading, excuse me, bloody books because he swore profoundly. Because we only had the radio of course, don't read, don't waste your time, do the housework, do the shopping, do the gardening, and so I had to really work, and my brother, and we had a set regime. Thursday morning before I went to school strip beds get in soak, Thursday night soak the sheets in a big copper, Friday morning get up early get it boiled, rinsed out Friday night, dried over the weekend and Sunday was ironing.<sup>71</sup>

Women believed this conception of the man as breadwinner was under modification during the latter decades of the century as women were increasingly entering the labour

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<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 89-92.

<sup>69</sup> The breadwinner model was also reflected in the romantic fiction and films aimed at women. Bridget Fowler notes how romances took the structures of paternalism and the family which shaped women's lives and demonstrated how they could be used to promote the heroine's happiness. Bridget Fowler, *The Alienated Reader: Women and Romantic Literature in the Twentieth Century* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 175.

<sup>70</sup> Madge, WY8, pp. 3-4.

<sup>71</sup> Agnes, EW1, p. 2.

force. Doris summed up what she felt were the changes: 'years ago you just didn't go to work, you just had to rely on the man's wage didn't you, and then our generation went out to work sort of part time, but now they've got to work full time most of them.'<sup>72</sup> There had always been men who chose not to provide for their families, however. The ideal of father as the sole breadwinner was a fantasy for many working-class families throughout the period. Peggy had four children between 1951 and 1965 but although her husband was employed he did not give her his wages, keeping the money for himself, and she went out to work to support the family. She explained that she would have 'loved to have had a bit more money, and a husband that was a better provider. That was my bugbear.'<sup>73</sup>

While men were expected to be breadwinners, housework was conceived of as women's work and the home was viewed as a woman's domain. Sarah recalled the conduct of her male relatives in inter-war years:

I can remember, I used to go and stay with cousins and their two little children, they were the only children I really knew before I was married, and [my cousin] would never have wheeled the pram not even up a hill, couldn't have been seen wheeling a pram. And my uncle, my aunt was not very strong and so my uncle had to do a lot of housework but only if it wasn't seen, he wouldn't clean the windows in case somebody saw you were a sissy.<sup>74</sup>

Indeed these attitudes were not a thing of the past and were also seen after World War Two. Theresa found her neighbours in Edgecote were very disapproving when they saw her husband helping her in the home after her first baby was born in 1948. 'They didn't think it was right because my husband filled the copper for me, that was woman's work'. Theresa said it was the older women in the village who were most critical.<sup>75</sup> Although such views were softening, the women interviewed recalled how little their husbands helped in the home throughout the period. Tina's husband was incapable of even making

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<sup>72</sup> Doris, BE2, p. 39.

<sup>73</sup> Peggy, BA9, p. 21.

<sup>74</sup> Sarah, NO2, p. 17.

his own breakfast. When he was working on a milk-round she used to 'get up at three and cook him breakfast' because if she did not she would be considered 'a bad wife'.<sup>76</sup> It is noteworthy that even in the 1960s she still felt she would be reneging on her obligations in the home if she did not provide her husband with every meal, a similar situation to that described by Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter in Featherstone in the late-1950s.<sup>77</sup> Doreen and Peggy were asked if their husbands helped with childcare when they raised their families in the 1950s and 1960s. Doreen replied: 'Not a lot. I don't think my husband ever changed a nappy.' Peggy said her husband did nothing at all. "“Not my job”, he used to say, “Not my job, it's yours, yours”'.<sup>78</sup> The division of labour for many families was still rigid.

Not all women accepted that home and family were their responsibility alone. Winifred, who married for the second time in 1950, recalled how her 'hubby was hopeless', but she felt that this was because both his mother and his first wife 'had done everything for him' whereas she would not. She told an anecdote to exemplify how she educated her husband into a new way of behaviour:

he came in and he put his shoes in the hearth because we had coal fires then, and they stayed there, they stayed there all the week, I used to pick them up clean underneath and put them down again. Of course Sunday morning they were looking a bit grubby, the second Mrs Brown hadn't cleaned his shoes for him to go to church, mmm, that was a bit sad wasn't it? He learnt to clean his own shoes.<sup>79</sup>

Some interviewees had also been determined that their sons would not replicate traditional male attitudes towards housework. Siobhan explained how she brought up her

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<sup>75</sup> Theresa, BA10, p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> Tina, BE3, pp. 17-8.

<sup>77</sup> Featherstone housewives would 'boast of their attention to the needs of their husbands and of how they have never been late with a meal, never confronted a returning worker with a cold meal, never had to ask him to help in household duties'. Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter, *Coal is Our Life* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1969), p. 181.

<sup>78</sup> Doreen, BA3, p. 12; Peggy, BA9, p. 12.

<sup>79</sup> Winifred, CO4, pp. 19-20.

two sons born in the early-1970s 'to regard doing domestic things as being a perfectly normal part of their lives'. Initially she taught them how to cook and then as they got older they started doing their own ironing and washing as well. She thought her ambition to produce domesticated sons was realised because 'my daughter-in-law said to me one day, "it's absolutely wonderful having this person who can wash and cook, and sew".'<sup>80</sup> Florence ensured her three sons could cook when they left home, although, interestingly, her daughter could not.<sup>81</sup>

Many respondents also reported that their husbands were more than happy to help in the home. Queenie married in 1941 and said her husband 'would do anything, he absolutely idolised the children. Oh yeah he'd do anything, especially for them. He'd always help me, round the house.'<sup>82</sup> Hope's husband was responsible for cooking breakfast for their three children born between 1955 and 1960.<sup>83</sup> Tania said her husband was 'very supportive' and 'quite hands' on as a father and would help with cooking and washing when they had their four children who were also born in the 1950s and 1960s. Doris recalled that she never had to bath her two children born in the early-1960s because her husband always did it.<sup>84</sup> However as Ann Oakley has argued, it is not correct to speak of equality when men's role in the home was only that of helping their wives.<sup>85</sup> It was much rarer for women to say their husbands took an equal share. Hannah and her husband had agreed to divide childcare when their two children were born in the mid-1950s. She explained:

before I got married [my husband] and I discussed this at great length and I said, 'Look my career is as important as your career', and I've always had full

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<sup>80</sup> Siobhan, BE1, pp. 18-9.

<sup>81</sup> Florence, BE8, p. 15.

<sup>82</sup> Queenie, EW5, p. 17.

<sup>83</sup> Hope, CO11, p. 22.

<sup>84</sup> Doris, BE2, pp. 30-1.

<sup>85</sup> Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1974), p. 160.

support, I've kept my own name and so on and I've had really a great deal of independence. I'd say he had a very tough time when [my daughter] was born because his colleagues used to laugh at him because they saw him pushing the pram in the parks and so on, I mean it was very unusual in those days.<sup>86</sup>

It is significant that Hannah reported that she did not know any other couples who shared their domestic responsibilities in this manner.

The respondents thought the increasing role men played in the home was in fact one of the most significant changes in family life that occurred over the course of the century. Bethany summed up how she felt things had altered between her father's generation, her husband's generation and her son's generation – 'men are so different today. My son cooks and my husband is only just beginning to cook a bit really. My father obviously he never cooked or did anything like that.'<sup>87</sup> Enid also reflected upon this development:

fathers are good these days. Although they were, fathers were beginning to, were better when my babies were born. Because I don't know whether the war changed them or what, because my husband would bath the children, push the pram out, do everything. But say when I was a baby, the fathers then wouldn't have done anything.<sup>88</sup>

It is interesting that Enid thought World War Two had proved pivotal here, echoing Tosh's belief that men returning home from World War One embraced domesticity.<sup>89</sup> Enid was not alone in this view and Sarah also thought World War Two had precipitated a change in attitudes, stating, 'as soon as the war was over and men came back and women by that time had started being free and expected to share, and of course if you both have jobs'.<sup>90</sup> When asked what they thought were the important developments in

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<sup>86</sup> Hannah, SO7, p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> Bethany, EW4, p. 23.

<sup>88</sup> Enid, BE12, pp. 12-3.

<sup>89</sup> Tosh, *Man's Place*, pp. 195-196.

<sup>90</sup> Sarah, NO2, pp. 17-8.

women's lives over the course of the century, several women raised the issue of men's increasing domesticity.<sup>91</sup> For instance Jessica said:

I've got four great-grandchildren and it's marvellous how the men in the family take at least fifty percent of the baby care and it opens my eyes because my father never did. Although he was a lovely father he didn't even boil an egg and he never did any cooking or anything whereas now the men do just as much cooking as the women. And I've watched my grandson changing his baby's nappy and he was so sweet, he was talking to him all the time and talking to him as if it was man to man and it was really lovely to watch and that's very different.<sup>92</sup>

Unlike their uncertainty over the issue of women's increasing participation in the workforce, women were also confident in their belief that men's increasing role in the home was a positive development.

## **Conclusion**

Popular conceptions of motherhood in the decades after World War Two, with the associated ideals of happy nuclear families founded upon the companionate relationship between breadwinner husbands and homemaker wives, were deeply influential upon the ways in which the women interviewed constructed their narratives. When discussing their experiences of motherhood interviewees employed the discourses of marriage and family which dominated the post-war social and cultural milieu. However contemporary ideals did not remain static and the respondents were also influenced by changing attitudes towards the role of men and women within the home. This was perhaps seen most visibly in their views of fathers. Women advocated a more involved role for fathers in childcare than had been celebrated in the 1950s and 1960s. Their attitudes seemed to reflect later calls for men to take a more active role in the home, which were encouraged by the feminist arguments of the 1970s that the care of children should not be a woman's

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<sup>91</sup> Theresa, BA10, pp. 13-4; Joanna, CO5, pp. 13-4; Bethany, EW4, pp. 22-3; Jill, SO3, p. 11.

responsibility alone. The interviewees were less receptive to other changes as seen by their ambivalent attitudes towards cohabitation and divorce. They had grown up with a strong ideal that marriage and the nuclear family was the best and perhaps only form that families could take. The respondents often found it difficult to relate to the other arrangements with which they had been confronted, often through the experiences of their own children, in later life. Many did try to incorporate more recent understandings of the family in their accounts, but when they did so their narratives often became disjointed reflecting the problems they faced in these attempts.

Some interviewees also faced difficulties reconciling their personal experiences of motherhood with popular discourses. While they interweaved elements of these discourses within their accounts to validate their own life choices, for example that a good mother was one who stayed at home, there are interesting points in the women's narratives where the public and the personal diverge. The ideals women wished to endorse did not always fit their own experiences and interviewees could struggle to reconcile the two. For example Polly's portrayal of the 1960s as a golden age for the family was undercut by her own experience of divorce. She compared the past when families got 'together round the table, no television or anything like that just having a quiet meal and talking', with today when people 'just leave the kids to get on with it.' As she discussed this subject the flow of her narrative broke down. She was forced to address the fact that her own family life did not meet this model. Her husband left her when her children were small and she concluded: 'Yes life can be very, very difficult.'<sup>93</sup> Similarly in her narrative Bethany expressed strong support for the ideal of companionate marriage. She believed that a man's place was at work and a woman's place was in the

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<sup>92</sup> Jessica, BA8.

<sup>93</sup> Polly, BE7, pp. 20-1.

home, and considered herself 'very lucky' that this had been her own experience.<sup>94</sup> However when she raised her son's relationship with his family as an example of how things have changed for the worse – both he and his partner worked full time and shared childcare – she instead voiced her regret that her husband had not been similarly involved in the home:

My husband, he didn't, he didn't sort of change nappies or do anything like that. He was always fond of the children but he wasn't involved in that type of thing really, washing or washing up, he wasn't involved in household duties, I did most of it, whereas I know it's very different today...So I think, there is more of an equality between the sexes, which is probably a good thing.'<sup>95</sup>

Women were trying to tell their stories of motherhood using the narrative genres surrounding the family that were available to them, both in the period 1945-1970, but also those that subsequently developed. Through an analysis of the interviewees' narratives it seems that they did not always find reconciling these competing ideals to be an easy task, and many struggled to respond to the changing representations of women which they encountered.

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<sup>94</sup> Bethany, EW4, p. 9.

<sup>95</sup> Bethany, EW4, pp. 22-3.

## **Chapter Ten: *Conclusions***

Motherhood was a contested subject between 1945 and 1970 with mothers being celebrated, scrutinised and controlled. Women were making their choices surrounding motherhood in a new context during this period, with post-war welfare reforms, falling maternal and infant mortality rates, and rising numbers of married women in the workforce. These years also witnessed the post-war baby boom. Being a mother was therefore a role fraught with contradictions and ambiguities and these are reflected in the way women of this generation now articulate their attitudes to, and experiences of, motherhood. These complexities have been revealed in each of the thematic areas discussed in the preceding chapters.

Firstly the interviews with Oxfordshire women revealed how locality and the type of community in which women lived was a highly significant factor in their experiences of motherhood. It affected the level of support the women received and where it was likely to come from, usually family or friends. Locality influenced how they interacted with other mothers and the degree of isolation they faced – with living in supportive communities being one way of combating dissatisfaction with motherhood and vice versa. It also determined the facilities and services available to them. This study confirms some of the findings of the contemporary surveys. Class differentials could be marked, with the more geographically mobile middle classes less likely to receive support from family. In addition there was a pattern of neighbourliness centred upon street life in traditional working-class communities, whether urban or rural, which was not seen on new estates. However the picture of estate living found in this study, for both middle-class and working-class women, was not the bleak portrayal that was common in contemporary

discourse. This finding may indicate that post-war investigators were overly pessimistic about the new estates, tending to over-romanticise the old neighbourhoods. They did not take into account that while different to those seen in the old areas, new community structures could build up in the estates. Of particular importance they did not recognise the agency of women, especially mothers of young children, in striving to form bonds of friendship, and often assumed women were the passive victims of their environment rather than active participants within it.

There was a belief on the part of some commentators that, due to the perceived breakdown of the extended family, women were no longer being instructed in the arts of motherhood. The question of whether women should be educated for motherhood and where this education should take place was a subject of intense discussion in the post-war period, and it was one where a range of discourses met: sociological, educational, psychoanalytic and medical. From the interviews with Oxfordshire women it appears their experiences were affected by these national debates – for example women were receiving a domestically-orientated education at school, and were increasingly attending antenatal classes. Three principal discursive models emerged – motherhood as innate, commonsensical, or a skill that needed to be learnt. Women embraced elements of these discourses and incorporated both their ideas and associated language within their own narratives. They did so in complex ways, however, and borrowed different strands from the various ways of thinking in order to construct a model of motherhood that was acceptable to them. They endeavoured to unite the conflicting ideals of motherhood with which they were confronted. It also seems clear that this debate was intensely bound up with wider questions of how ‘normal’ women should behave. These were pervasive ideas, with interviewees from all types of background sharing an understanding of what

this norm should take. Women's fantasies of being 'natural' mothers demonstrate the pressure women felt in the middle decades of the century to fulfil the ideal of the 'perfect' mother who enjoyed full-time motherhood and found it came easily to her.

Women's accounts of the maternity care they received were also revealing of the popular discourses surrounding pregnancy and childbirth that existed in the years after World War Two. Questions of whether women should be taught about motherhood intersected with debates over whether maternity was a natural part of a woman's life or a medical event. The period between 1945 and 1970 has been characterised as one of increasing medical intervention within the spheres of pregnancy and childbirth as medical professionals sought to control women's reproductive capacity. The picture that has emerged from this study, however, is a more complex one. There was no unified position amongst health professionals with the period witnessing inter- and intra-professional debates between midwives, GPs and consultants. Developments in national and local policy sometimes took place in harmony with women's desires and sometimes in opposition to their needs and wants. In addition policies determined at the national level could conflict with current local practice leading to rapid alterations in the care offered, but also resistance to change. From the Oxfordshire interviews it is clear that the whole system of care women and their children received was shaped by the locality in which they lived, with regional practices and personalities being highly significant. The ways in which women told their stories of pregnancy and childbirth were also revealing. Informed by ideals of stoic and heroic womanhood that were present in the contemporary culture of Britain in the middle decades of the century (and those beyond), interviewees used these tropes in the construction of their own accounts of maternity.

In addition to being responsible for the physical health of their children, mothers in the post-war decades also found themselves answerable for their children's psychological wellbeing. Literature on childcare abounded throughout the twentieth century and ideas of how mothers should behave were hotly contested. Definitions of what made a 'good' mother were constantly in flux so women had to adjust to these changing requirements. For example what Benjamin Spock told women was good childcare practice was often in opposition to what Frederick Truby King had asserted a generation before. Women also found they could receive contradictory advice from different sources such as their mothers and medical professionals. Nonetheless childcare experts were deeply influential in shaping expectations of what mothers should be like between 1945 and 1970. This was the generation of mothers that Rhona and Robert Rapoport described as having had 'Bowlby on their minds'.<sup>1</sup> From the interviews with Oxfordshire women it is clear that mothers struggled to reconcile the demands that these experts were making upon them. While they could give women confidence and support, the pronouncements of the experts did not always have positive effects. Theories of child development and the role of the mother in ensuring the healthy growth of her children could be oppressive for women in the post-war decades. Those women who could not meet the ideal of 'good' mothering were left feeling anxious and guilty.

Working mothers had long been characterised as a problem for society and after the war childcare experts provided new rationales for why it was important that women remained in the home. However during these years mothers were increasingly participating in the workforce once their children reached school-age and they were being encouraged to do so. The result was that society was left struggling to come to terms with women who

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<sup>1</sup> Rhona Rapoport and Robert Rapoport, *Dual Career Families Re-examined* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1976), p. 306.

might want to combine motherhood with a career. This debate was seen in the controversy surrounding the stereotype of the dissatisfied educated mother. In reality, from the results of interviews with women, the picture was more complex. Women of all classes and backgrounds could feel the need to rebel against the domestic role assigned to them. At the same time, many respondents reported that they were more than happy to cease work and devote themselves to full-time motherhood. Their attitudes could also change at different points of their lives. The interviewees were aware they were living through a reconceptualisation of women's work, but they had ambivalent attitudes towards working mothers just as contemporary commentators had done, and this was clearly seen in their attitudes towards their daughters' generation. While paid work was viewed as offering a means of subsistence, a degree of financial independence, or a break from domesticity, few interviewees conceived of employment in terms of a career. They also displayed an interesting tendency to not think of themselves as members of the labour force, even if they had been employed outside the home, and they prioritised family in their accounts. However, perhaps influenced by the discourses of second-wave feminism, women spoke of their desire to gain independence through work, whether this was inside or outside the home. It is interesting that the women interviewed thought that both paid work and motherhood were ways in which autonomy could be gained for women in the post-war world.

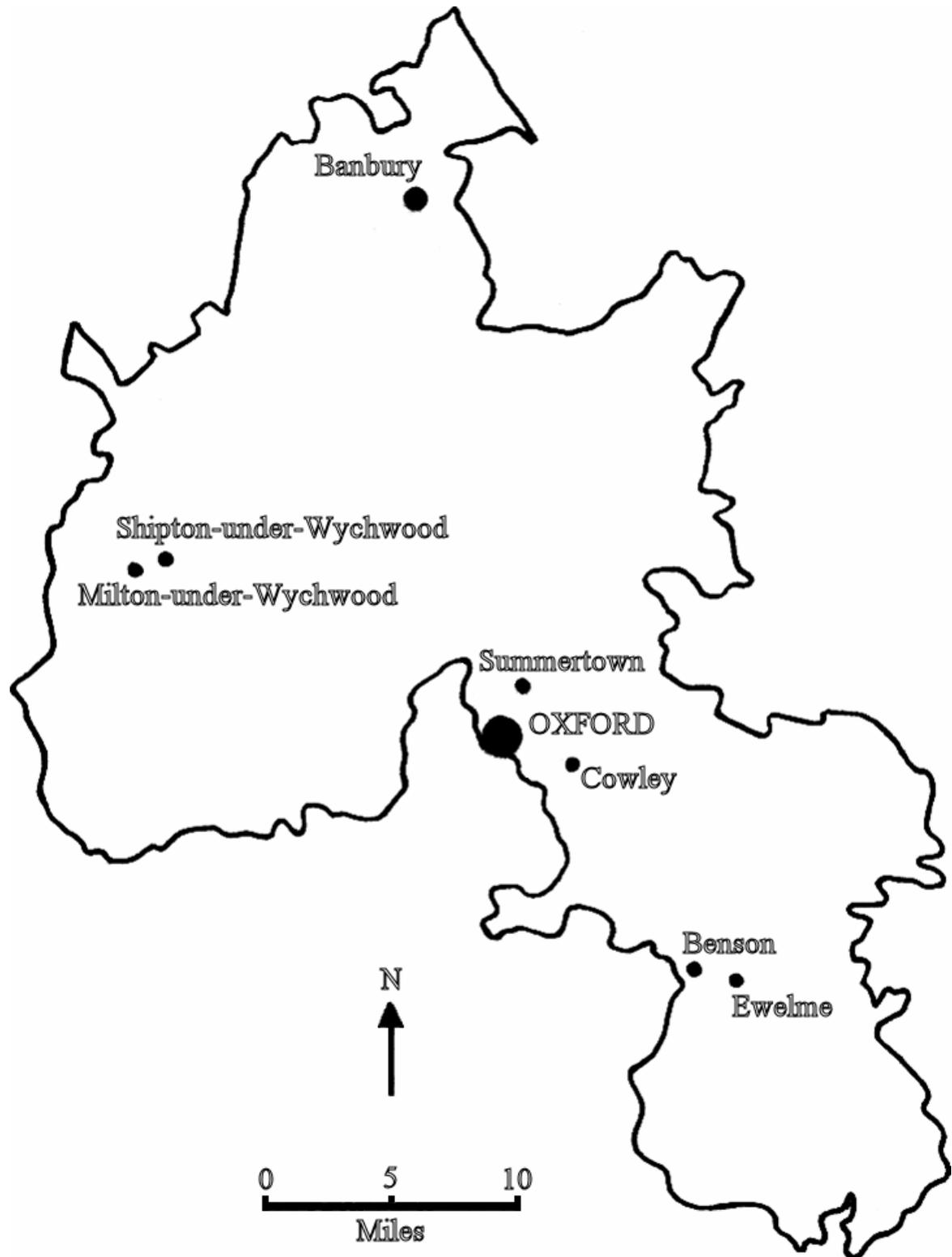
In reaching these conclusions women were influenced by the representations of mothers in popular culture. There were clear ideals of how families at this time were supposed to behave. The model family in the post-war decades was thought to consist of a mother as dependent homemaker, father as breadwinner, and two, three or four children. Couples without children or with only one child were regarded as selfish or abnormal. Families

with more than four children were viewed as ill-disciplined and without self-control. Women who worked when their children were young were either pitied, because it was assumed they would only do so if they did not have a husband who could provide for them, or condemned for jeopardising the health and happiness of their families. There were some notable changes in this ideal over time. Women were increasingly expected to play a more active role in the labour force and men to be more involved in the home. Lifelong marriage looked less secure. Feminist analyses of the family had challenged conventional understandings of the mother role. Women tried to respond to these changing representations in their accounts. They were trying to tell their stories of motherhood using the narrative genres surrounding the family that were available to them, and these were shaped by depictions of the family both during the period 1945-1970, but also beyond. However, the women interviewed had grown up with a strong image of what form the family should take and the accompanying ideals of homemaker wives and breadwinner husbands. They were familiar with this model of the family and felt comfortable when describing it – they had the language to do so. In consequence the interviewees found it more difficult to talk about the changes, often within their own families, that had subsequently occurred.

The preceding chapters of the thesis have therefore revealed two principal conclusions. The first is the real difficulties that mothers from all backgrounds faced during the period 1945-1970 and which were visible in all aspects of their lives. In relation to maternity care women often suffered from a lack of information and respect. They faced the arrogance of medical professionals who felt that they, rather than the women they attended, knew best. Interviewees also spoke of their guilt and anxiety if they did not live up to the ideals of good mothering with which they were confronted. It was assumed that

fathers would provide for their wives and children, which in turn meant that there was little support for those families who did not meet this ideal. The expectation that all women would want to be full-time mothers meant they experienced discrimination both at school and in work. The hardships and privations which respondents recalled they experienced during the years between 1945 and 1970 perhaps encouraged the feminist activity seen by the end of the period. The second conclusion, however, is that the stereotyping of the period as one of conservatism before the changes that began in the later 1960s and 1970s means that women's activism and the ways in which they were already organising themselves to improve their lives has tended to be disregarded. This lack of awareness has possibly occurred because these associations were often established on an informal basis, such as neighbours coming together to share childcare. They were important though, and interviewees recalled them as being extremely significant features of their lives. Women used their shared experience of being mothers of young children to develop social networks and form communities of women with the aim of alleviating some of difficulties and inequities they faced.

*Appendix One: Map of Oxfordshire Showing the Locations Where Interviews Were Undertaken*



## **Appendix Two: Respondents' Biographical Details**

### **Banbury Villages**

#### **BA1 Deirdre**

Born 1927 (Banbury). Two children born 1955 (Banbury, Elms Maternity Hospital) and 1958 (Banbury, Elms Maternity Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-eight. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. A pharmacist's assistant before marriage. Working class.

#### **BA2 Glenda**

Born 1927 (London). Three children born 1952 (London, nursing home), 1954 (London, home) and 1958 (Banbury, Elms Maternity Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A civil servant then a shipyard researcher before the birth of her first child; a (part-time) teacher when children were school-age. Middle class.

#### **BA3 Doreen**

Born 1929 (Lancashire). Two children born 1948 (Banbury, hospital) and 1951 (Banbury, hospital). Age at birth of first child, nineteen. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. In the Wrens before marriage; a school dinner-lady and voluntary work when children were school-age. Neighbour of Peggy (interviewed together). Working class.

#### **BA4 Carla**

Born 1942 (Oxford). Two children born 1971 (Banbury, Horton Hospital) and 1974 (Banbury, Horton Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-nine. Educational leaving-age, sixteen. A secretary before the birth of her first child and after her children were school-age. Working class.

#### **BA5 Nicola**

Born 1935 (Leicester). Two children (twins) born 1969 (Banbury, Horton Hospital). Age at birth of first child, thirty-four. Educational leaving-age, eighteen. An occupational therapist before the birth of her first child and after her children were school-age. Middle class.

#### **BA6 Rita**

Born 1933 (Brackley). Two children born 1961 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1963 (Banbury, Elms Maternity Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-eight. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. A seamstress before and after marriage. Working class.

#### **BA7 Violet**

Born 1930 (Oxford). Six children born 1953 (Oxford, home), 1954 (Oxford, home), 1955 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary), 1960 (Chipping Norton, hospital), 1963 (Chipping Norton, hospital) and 1965 (Chipping Norton, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-three. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. A secretary before marriage; a school dinner lady then ran a tearoom after her children were school-age. Working class.

**BA8 Jessica**

Born 1914 (Edinburgh). Three children born 1943 (London, hospital), 1945 (London, hospital) and 1947 (London, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-nine. Educational leaving-age, twenty-five. A doctor before the birth of her first child and after her divorce. Middle class.

**BA9 Peggy**

Born 1933 (Redditch). Four children born 1951 (Londonderry, hospital), 1953 (Londonderry, hospital), 1954 (Chipping Wardern, home) and 1965 (Banbury, hospital). Age at birth of first child, eighteen. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. Worked at Spencer's corset factory before marriage; domestic work, a post-woman then a factory worker after marriage. Neighbour of Doreen (interviewed together). Working class.

**BA10 Theresa**

Born 1925 (Lincolnshire). Four children born 1948 (Adderbury, home), 1950 (Adderbury, home), 1955 (Adderbury, home) and 1963 (Banbury, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-three. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. Worked in her parents' tearoom, then at Spencer's corset factory and then the NAAFI before marriage; domestic work and then a shop assistant after marriage. Working class.

**Benson****BE1 Siobhan**

Born 1945 (Abingdon). Two children born 1970 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1971 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, twenty-two. A lecturer before the birth of her first child; a teacher and dentist's receptionist after marriage. Working class.

**BE2 Doris**

Born 1937 (Watlington). Two children born 1961 (Wallingford, St George's Maternity Hospital) and 1963 (Wallingford, St George's Maternity Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-four. Educational leaving-age, fifteen. A milk-woman and bakery worker before marriage; domestic work after marriage. Sister-in-law of Tina (interviewed together). Working class.

**BE3 Tina**

Born 1945 (Hayling Island). Three children born 1964 (Wallingford, St George's Maternity Hospital), 1968 (Wallingford, St George's Maternity Hospital) and 1971 (Benson, home). Age at birth of first child, nineteen. Educational leaving-age, fifteen. A laboratory assistant before the birth of her first child; domestic work and then ran a catering business after marriage. Sister-in-law of Doris (interviewed together). Working class.

**BE4 Ivy**

Born 1921 (Walton-on-the-Naze). Two children born 1947 (Tunbridge Wells, nursing home) and 1950 (Tunbridge Wells, nursing home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-six. Educational leaving-age, seventeen. A civil servant and in the Wrens before marriage; a civil servant after her children were school-age. Mother of Ellen. Middle class.

**BE5 Ruby**

Born 1939 (Southampton). Two children born 1972 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1974 (Wallingford, Community Hospital). Age at birth of first child, thirty-two. Educational leaving-age, fifteen. Domestic work and a dispenser in Benson's doctor's surgery before the birth of her first child; domestic work after her children were school-age. Working class.

**BE6 Ethel**

Born 1919 (Benson). Two children born 1938 (Benson, home) and 1948 (Benson, home). Age at birth of first child, nineteen. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. Domestic work before marriage; a shop assistant then hospital cook after marriage. Working class.

**BE7 Polly**

Born 1943 (Aylesbury). Two children born 1968 (Wallingford, St George's Maternity Hospital) and 1970 (Wallingford, St George's Maternity Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, sixteen. A secretary and housekeeper before the birth of her first child; secretarial work after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**BE8 Florence**

Born 1932 (Benson). Four children born 1953 (Oxford, Churchill Hospital), 1955 (Wallingford, St George's Maternity Hospital), 1962 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1966 (Benson, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-one. Educational leaving-age, sixteen. A nurse before and after marriage. Working class.

**BE9 Amanda**

Born 1940 (Taunton). Four children born 1965 (Bristol, maternity hospital), 1966 (Bristol, home), 1968 (Solihull, hospital) and 1973 (Wallingford, Community Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A maternity nurse before marriage; a kindergarten teacher after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**BE10 Fiona**

Born 1941 (Shropshire). Three children born 1966 (Brighton, hospital), 1968 (Brighton, hospital) and 1970 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, twenty-two. A teacher before the birth of her first child and after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**BE11 Gail**

Born 1931 (Portsmouth). Three children born 1961 (Wallingford, St George's Maternity Hospital), 1964 (Benson, home) and 1970 (Benson, home). Age at birth of first child, thirty. Educational leaving-age, sixteen. A secretary before the birth of her first child; a shop assistant and voluntary work after her children were school-age. Working class.

**BE12 Enid**

Born 1925 (Benson). Two children born 1943 (Benson, home) and 1946 (Benson, home). Age at birth of first child, eighteen. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. Domestic work and a shop assistant before marriage; ran her own shop after her children were school-age. Working class.

**BE13 Marilyn**

Born 1946 (London). Two children born 1973 (Oxford, John Radcliffe Hospital) and 1976 (Oxford, John Radcliffe Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-six. Educational leaving-age, sixteen. A secretary before the birth of her first child; a playgroup helper and then a secretary after her children were school-age. Working class.

**BE14 Gloria**

Born 1939 (Benson). Two children born 1966 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1969 (Wallingford, St George's Maternity Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-seven. Educational leaving-age, sixteen. A secretary before the birth of her first child; a school dinner lady and then a secretary after her children were school-age. Working class.

**Cowley and Florence Park****CO1 Bet**

Born 1943 (London). Four children born 1968 (Wantage, cottage hospital), 1972 (Oxford, home), and 1975 (twins) (Oxford, John Radcliffe Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, eighteen. Worked in her parents' shop and as a school laboratory assistant before the birth of her first child; voluntary work after marriage. Working class.

**CO2 June**

Born 1931 (Oxford). Four children born 1959 (Oxford, Churchill Hospital), 1962 (Oxford, Churchill Hospital), 1964 (Oxford, home) and 1966 (Oxford, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-eight. Educational leaving-age, nineteen. A teacher before the birth of her first child and (part time) after her children were school-age. Working class.

**CO3 Nancy**

Born 1926 (Wantage). Three children born 1949 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary), 1956 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1965 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, twenty-three. Educational leaving-age, seventeen. A secretary at Cowley Works before marriage; secretarial work after her children were school-age. Friend of Deborah (interviewed together). Working class.

**CO4 Winifred**

Born 1917 (Edinburgh). Two children born 1946 (Hereford, hospital) and 1951 (Oxford, Churchill Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-nine. Educational leaving-age, twenty-two. A nurse before marriage and (part time) after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**CO5 Joanna**

Born 1937 (Royston). Three children born 1961 (Oxford, Churchill Hospital), 1963 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1965 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, twenty-four. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A teacher before the birth of her first child and after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**CO6 Deborah**

Born 1930 (Derbyshire). Three children born 1955 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary), 1958 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1965 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of

first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, sixteen. A secretary at Cowley Works before marriage; secretarial work after her children were school-age. Friend of Nancy (interviewed together). Working class.

**CO7 Penny**

Born 1937 (Lancashire). Three children born 1955 (Cambridge, hospital), 1957 (Reading, hospital) and 1964 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, twenty-eight. Educational leaving-age, sixteen. A secretary before the birth of her first child; worked in the Citizens' Advice Bureau after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**CO8 Eve**

Born 1927 (Wigan). Two children born 1957 (Liverpool, hospital) and 1960 (Liverpool, hospital). Age at birth of first child, thirty. Educational leaving-age, sixteen. A secretary before the birth of her first child and (part time) after her children were school-age. Working class.

**CO9 Cherie**

Born 1936 (Gillingham). Three children born 1963 (Oxford, home), 1965 (Oxford, home) and 1969 (Oxford, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-seven. Educational leaving-age, seventeen. A secretary before the birth of her first child and after her children were school-age. Working class.

**CO10 Judy**

Born 1932 (Oxford). Three children born 1959 (Oxford, home), 1962 (Oxford, home) and 1964 (Oxford, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-seven. Educational leaving-age, sixteen. A secretary before the birth of her first child; an insurance collector after her children were school-age. Working class.

**CO11 Hope**

Born 1930 (London). Three children born 1955 (Oxford, home), 1958 (Oxford, home) and 1960 (Oxford, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, seventeen. A laboratory assistant before marriage and (part time) after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**CO12 Lisa**

Born 1934 (Leicester). Four children born 1960 (Oxford, home), 1963 (Oxford, home), 1964 (Oxford, home) and 1967 (Oxford, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-six. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A statistician before the birth of her first child; a careers' advisor after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**Ewelme**

**EW1 Agnes**

Born 1938 (London). Two children born 1965 (Wokingham, hospital) and 1968 (Wokingham, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-seven. Educational leaving-age, twenty. A teacher before and after marriage. Working class.

**EW2 Diana**

Born 1931 (Southport). Three children born 1958 (Oxford, hospital), 1959 (Oxford, hospital) and 1964 (Yemen, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-seven. Educational leaving-age, seventeen. A playgroup helper then returned to university and worked as a teacher after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**EW3 Ellen**

Born 1947 (Tunbridge Wells). Six children born 1975 (Reading, Royal Berkshire Hospital), 1976 (Wallingford, Community Hospital), 1977 (Wallingford, Community Hospital), 1980 (Wallingford, Community Hospital), 1982 (Wallingford, Community Hospital) and 1985 (Wallingford, Community Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-eight. Educational leaving-age, twenty-two. A scientific researcher before and after the birth of her first child (although ceased before the birth of her second); a playgroup helper and part-time Open University tutor after her children were school-age. Daughter of Ivy. Middle class.

**EW4 Bethany**

Born 1944 (Wallingford). Two children born 1969 (Wallingford, St George's Maternity Hospital) and 1971 (Wallingford, St George's Maternity Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, sixteen. A secretary before the birth of her first child; a part-time book-keeper after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**EW5 Queenie**

Born 1919 (Eynsham). Two children born 1949 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1950 (Henley, hospital). Age at birth of first child, thirty. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. Domestic work before and after marriage. Working class.

**EW6 Lily**

Born 1924 (Ipswich). Five children born 1946 (Ipswich, nursing home), 1947 (Ipswich, nursing home), 1956 (Ipswich, home), 1958 (Ipswich, home) and 1961 (Ipswich, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-two. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. A nurse before marriage; a honey factory worker then a nurse after she was widowed. Working class.

**EW7 Stephanie**

Born 1938 (Sutton). Four children born 1962 (Munster, British Military Hospital), 1963 (Ewelme, home), 1965 (Ewelme, home) and 1972 (Ewelme, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-four. Educational leaving-age, twenty. A physiotherapist before the birth of her first child and after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**EW8 Tania**

Born 1931 (Hastings). Four children born 1952 (Hastings, hospital), 1953 (Ewelme, home), 1954 (Ewelme, home) and 1962 (Ewelme, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-one. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. A book-keeper then cinema cashier before the birth of her first child; a secretary in Ewelme honey factory after her children were school-age. Working class.

**EW9 Sharon**

Born 1944 (Prestatyn). Two children born 1972 (Reading, hospital) and 1974 (Reading, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-eight. Educational leaving-age, twenty-

three. An NCT breastfeeding councillor and then a medical researcher after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**EW10 Mavis**

Born 1931 (Crowmarsh). Three children born 1956 (Wallingford, St George's Maternity Hospital), 1960 (Wallingford, St George's Maternity Hospital) and 1967 (Wallingford, St George's Maternity Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-six. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. A shop assistant before the birth of her first child. Working class.

**North Oxford and Summertown**

**NO1 Claire**

Born 1933 (London). Six children born 1960 (Oxford, home), 1961 (Oxford, home), 1963 (London, home), 1965 (London, home), 1969 (London, hospital) and 1972 (London, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-seven. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A teacher before the birth of her first child; voluntary work after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**NO2 Sarah**

Born 1912 (Liverpool). Four children born 1940 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary), 1943 (Oxford, maternity hospital), 1948 (Oxford, maternity hospital) and 1950 (Oxford, maternity hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-eight. Educational leaving-age, twenty-two. A teacher before and after marriage. Middle class.

**NO3 Yvonne**

Born 1940 (Oxford). Four children born 1959 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary), 1961 (Oxford, home), 1963 (Oxford, home) and 1977 (London, home). Age at birth of first child, nineteen. Educational leaving-age, eighteen. Returned to university and then a university lecturer after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**NO4 Molly**

Born 1926 (London). Two children born 1952 (Durham, hospital) and 1955 (Oxford, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-six. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A secretary before marriage; a part-time teacher then part-time secretary after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**NO5 Hayley**

Born 1926 (Welwyn Garden City). Three children born 1956 (Royston, hospital), 1958 (Leeds, home) and 1959 (Dorking, hospital). Age at birth of first child, thirty. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A research chemist before the birth of her first child; worked in the Citizens' Advice Bureau after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**NO6 Cassie**

Born 1913 (Nottingham). Two children born 1946 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1952 (Oxford, nursing home). Age at birth of first child, thirty-three. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A civil servant and university tutor before the birth of her first child. Middle class.

**NO7 *Grace***

Born 1937 (London). Two children born 1965 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1967 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, twenty-eight. Educational leaving-age, twenty-two. A copy editor before marriage; a part-time library assistant after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**NO8 *Emily***

Born 1919 (South Africa). Three children born 1963 (Oxford, home), 1964 (Oxford, home) and 1967 (Oxford, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A teacher before the birth of her first child and after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**NO9 *Juliet***

Born 1931 (Southampton). Two children born 1945 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1946 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, twenty-six. Educational leaving-age, twenty-five. A doctor before and after marriage (initially part time after the birth of her first child). Middle class.

**NO10 *Marjorie***

Born 1917 (Southampton). Four children born 1959 (Oxford, home), 1961 (Southampton, home), 1964 (Southampton, home) and 1966 (Southampton, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-eight. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A teacher before and after marriage (initially part time after the birth of her first child). Middle class.

**NO11 *Janice***

Born 1932 (Newport). Two children born 1943 (London, hospital) and 1945 (London, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-six. Educational leaving-age, twenty-five. An academic researcher before and after marriage. Middle class.

**NO12 *Rose***

Born 1932 (Yorkshire). Two children born 1959 (Oxford, home) and 1961 (Oxford, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-seven. Educational leaving-age, twenty-two. A university tutor before the birth of her first child and after her children were school-age. Working class.

**Oxford City**

**OX1 *Esther***

Born 1930 (Portsmouth). Two children born 1959 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1963 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, twenty-nine. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A nurse before the birth of her first child. Working class.

**OX2 *Georgie***

Born 1936 (Surrey). Two children born 1961 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1975 (Oxford, John Radcliffe Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, twenty. A teacher before and after marriage. Working class.

**OX3 *Nora***

Born 1915 (Canada). Four children born 1941 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary), 1945 (Oxford, home), 1948 (Oxford, home) and 1953 (Oxford, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-six. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. Worked at Cooper's marmalade factory before marriage; a shop assistant after her children were school-age. Working class.

**OX4 *Fanny***

Born 1929 (Oxford). Two children born 1966 (Oxford, Churchill Hospital) and 1967 (Oxford, Churchill GP Unit). Age at birth of first child, thirty-seven. Educational leaving-age, twenty-five. A teacher before the birth of her first child and after her children were school-age (initially part time after the birth of her first child). Working class.

**OX5 *Laura***

Born 1940 (Swindon). Two children born 1963 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1965 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, twenty-three. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A teacher before the birth of her first child and after her children were school-age. Working class.

**OX6 *Olive***

Born 1916 (Oxford). Two children born 1945 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1950 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, twenty-nine. Educational leaving-age, twenty. A teacher before the birth of her first child and after her children were school-age. Working class.

**OX7 *Rachel***

Born 1930 (Ilford). Two children born 1957 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1960 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, twenty-seven. Educational leaving-age, twenty. A teacher before the birth of her first child and after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**OX8 *Michelle***

Born 1937 (Oxford). Three children born 1964 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary), 1966 (Oxford, home) and 1969 (Oxford, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-seven. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A teacher before the birth of her first child and (part time) after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**OX9 *Mabel***

Born 1920 (Croydon). Two children born 1940 (Croydon, hospital) and 1945 (Oxford, Ruskin College). Age at birth of first child, twenty. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. A shop assistant before marriage and after her children were school-age. Working class.

**OX10 *Rebecca***

Born 1929 (Burton-on-Trent). Three children born 1951 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary), 1954 (Oxford, nursing home) and 1961 (Oxford, nursing home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-two. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. Worked for the Citizen's Advice Bureau and Family Planning Association after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**OX11 Megan**

Born 1944 (London). Two children born 1971 (Oxford, Churchill GP Unit) and 1973 (Oxford, Churchill GP Unit). Age at birth of first child, twenty-seven. Educational leaving-age, twenty-five. An academic researcher before and after marriage. Middle class.

**OX12 Lindsay**

Born 1935 (Sudan). Two children born 1960 (Oxford, home) and 1962 (Oxford, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A secretary before the birth of her first child and (part time) after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**Somerville College, Oxford****SO1 Monika**

Born 1927 (Germany). One child born 1955 (Oxford, nursing home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-eight. Educational leaving-age, twenty-five. An academic researcher before the birth of her first child and after her child was school-age. Middle class.

**SO2 Claudia**

Born 1944 (Yorkshire). Three children born 1970 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary), 1972 (Australia, hospital), 1977 (New Zealand, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-six. Educational leaving-age, twenty-two. A doctor after her children were school-age. Working class.

**SO3 Jill**

Born 1936 (Southampton). Two children born 1966 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1970 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, thirty. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. An academic researcher before and after marriage (initially part time after the birth of her first child). Middle class.

**SO4 Karen**

Born 1945 (Middlesex). Four children born 1967 (Oxford, Churchill Hospital), 1970 (Sussex, hospital), 1984 (Warwickshire, hospital) and 1985 (Warwickshire, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-two. Educational leaving-age, twenty-seven. A writer after marriage. Middle class.

**SO5 Louisa**

Born 1939 (Latvia). Three children born 1968 (Oxford, Churchill GP Unit), 1972 (Oxford, Churchill GP Unit) and 1975 (Oxford, John Radcliffe Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-nine. Educational leaving-age, twenty-six. An academic researcher before the birth of her first child. Middle class.

**SO6 Camilla**

Born 1937 (Sheffield). Three children born 1961 (Oxford, Churchill Hospital), 1963 (Rugby, home) and 1965 (Rugby, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-four. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. A teacher before the birth of her first child; a part-time teacher after her children were school-age, then a full-time secretary. Middle class.

**SO7 Hannah**

Born 1924 (Romania). Three children born 1952 (Oxford, Churchill Hospital), 1955 (Oxford, Churchill Hospital) and 1956 (Oxford, Churchill Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-eight. Educational leaving-age, twenty-seven. An academic researcher before and after marriage. Middle class.

**SO8 Phoebe**

Born 1921 (Northern Ireland). Five children born 1948 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary), 1950 (Oxford, home), 1955 (Oxford, home), 1956 (Oxford, home) and 1957 (Oxford, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-seven. Educational leaving-age, twenty-four. A psychiatrist before and after marriage. Middle class.

**SO9 Bella**

Born 1927 (Monaco). Two children born 1953 (Oxford, home) and 1955 (Oxford, home). Age at birth of first child, 26. Educational leaving-age, twenty-five. A medical researcher (initially part time) after the birth of her first child. Middle class.

**SO10 Kelly**

Born 1935 (India). Two children born 1968 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1970 (Manchester, Royal Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, thirty-three. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. An academic researcher before and after marriage. Middle class.

**SO11 Ingrid**

Born 1932 (London). Two children born 1961 (Oxford, Churchill Hospital) and 1962 (Oxford, Churchill Hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-nine. Educational leaving-age, twenty-two. A teacher before the birth of her first child and after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**SO12 Faith**

Born 1944 (United States). One child born 1971 (Oxford, Churchill GP Unit). Age at birth of first child, twenty-seven. Educational leaving-age, twenty-five. An academic researcher before marriage; a shop assistant then finance officer after marriage. Middle class.

**Wychwoods****WY1 Joy**

Born 1924 (Birmingham). Two children born 1945 (Chipping Norton, hospital) and 1947 (Chipping Norton, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-two. Educational leaving-age, seventeen. A nurse before marriage. Friend of Celia (interviewed together). Working class.

**WY2 Alice**

Born 1939 (Gloucestershire). Three children born 1964 (Chipping Norton, hospital), 1966 (Chipping Norton, hospital) and 1967 (Chipping Norton, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, eighteen. Worked on her husband's farm after marriage and as a part-time classroom assistant. Middle class.

**WY3 *Phyllis***

Born 1925 (Burton-on-Trent). Four children born 1946 (Chipping Norton, hospital), 1950 (Chipping Norton, hospital), 1952 (Chipping Norton, hospital) and 1956 (Chipping Norton, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-one. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. A shop assistant and in the Land Army before marriage; a petrol station attendant after her children were school-age. Working class.

**WY4 *Maud***

Born 1921 (Churchill Heath). Two children born 1941 (Milton-under-Wychwood, home) and 1944 (Milton-under-Wychwood, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. Worked on her husband's farm after marriage. Middle class.

**WY5 *Celia***

Born 1924 (Chipping Norton). Two children born 1952 (Chipping Norton, hospital) and 1955 (Chipping Norton, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-eight. Educational leaving-age, seventeen. A journalist then in the Wrens before marriage. Friend of Joy (interviewed together). Middle class.

**WY6 *Maxine***

Born 1932 (Bolton). Three children born 1957 (Chipping Norton, hospital), 1959 (Chipping Norton, hospital) and 1962 (Chipping Norton, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, twenty-one. Worked in a hotel before marriage; a probation service volunteer then a magistrate after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**WY7 *Bobbie***

Born 1921 (Wales). Two children born 1955 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary) and 1959 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, thirty-four. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. A shop assistant and aircraft factory worker before marriage; a shop assistant after marriage until the birth of her first child. Working class.

**WY8 *Madge***

Born 1918 (Shipton-under-Wychwood). Five children born 1940 (Chipping Norton, hospital), 1941 (Chipping Norton, hospital), 1942 (Chipping Norton, hospital), 1943 (Milton-under-Wychwood, home) and 1948 (Chipping Norton, hospital). Age at birth of first child, twenty-two. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. A telephonist before marriage. Working class.

**WY9 *Daisy***

Born 1923 (Bradford). Two children born 1948 (Eynsham, home) and 1950 (Eynsham, home). Age at birth of first child, twenty-five. Educational leaving-age, fourteen. A secretary, in the Land Army and a farm labourer before marriage; worked on her small-holding then a milk-woman after marriage. Working class.

**WY10 *Jackie***

Born 1933 (London). Two children (twins) born 1965 (Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary). Age at birth of first child, thirty-two. Educational leaving-age, twenty-five. A teacher before the birth of her first child; a playgroup helper then voluntary work after her children were school-age. Middle class.

**Appendix Three: Summary Tables of Interview Data**

| <b>Biographical data:</b>       |             |                      |                        |                                     |                                    |                              |
|---------------------------------|-------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
|                                 | <b>Name</b> | <b>Year of birth</b> | <b>No. of children</b> | <b>Years of birth of child(ren)</b> | <b>Age at birth of first child</b> | <b>Education leaving-age</b> |
| <b>Banbury Villages</b>         |             |                      |                        |                                     |                                    |                              |
| BA1                             | Deirdre     | 1927                 | 2                      | 1955;1958                           | 28                                 | 14                           |
| BA2                             | Glenda      | 1927                 | 3                      | 1952;1954;1958                      | 25                                 | 21                           |
| BA3                             | Doreen      | 1929                 | 2                      | 1948;1951                           | 19                                 | 14                           |
| BA4                             | Carla       | 1942                 | 2                      | 1971;1974                           | 29                                 | 16                           |
| BA5                             | Nicola      | 1935                 | 2                      | 1969;1969                           | 34                                 | 18                           |
| BA6                             | Rita        | 1933                 | 2                      | 1961;1963                           | 28                                 | 14                           |
| BA7                             | Violet      | 1930                 | 6                      | 1953;1954;1955;<br>1960;1963;1965   | 23                                 | 14                           |
| BA8                             | Jessica     | 1914                 | 3                      | 1943;1945;1947                      | 29                                 | 25                           |
| BA9                             | Peggy       | 1933                 | 4                      | 1951;1953;1954;<br>1965             | 18                                 | 14                           |
| BA10                            | Theresa     | 1925                 | 4                      | 1948;1950;1955;<br>1963             | 23                                 | 14                           |
| <b>Average</b>                  |             |                      | <b>3</b>               |                                     | <b>25.6</b>                        | <b>16.4</b>                  |
| <b>Benson</b>                   |             |                      |                        |                                     |                                    |                              |
| BE1                             | Siobhan     | 1945                 | 2                      | 1970;1971                           | 25                                 | 22                           |
| BE2                             | Doris       | 1937                 | 2                      | 1961;1963                           | 24                                 | 15                           |
| BE3                             | Tina        | 1945                 | 3                      | 1964;1968;1971                      | 19                                 | 15                           |
| BE4                             | Ivy         | 1921                 | 2                      | 1947;1950                           | 26                                 | 17                           |
| BE5                             | Ruby        | 1939                 | 2                      | 1972;1974                           | 33                                 | 15                           |
| BE6                             | Ethel       | 1919                 | 2                      | 1938;1948                           | 19                                 | 14                           |
| BE7                             | Polly       | 1943                 | 2                      | 1968;1970                           | 25                                 | 16                           |
| BE8                             | Florence    | 1932                 | 4                      | 1953;1955;1962;<br>1966             | 21                                 | 16                           |
| BE9                             | Amanda      | 1940                 | 4                      | 1965;1966;1968;<br>1973             | 25                                 | 21                           |
| BE10                            | Fiona       | 1941                 | 3                      | 1966;1968;1970                      | 25                                 | 22                           |
| BE11                            | Gail        | 1931                 | 3                      | 1961;1964;1966                      | 30                                 | 16                           |
| BE12                            | Enid        | 1925                 | 2                      | 1943;1946                           | 18                                 | 14                           |
| BE13                            | Marilyn     | 1946                 | 2                      | 1973;1976                           | 26                                 | 16                           |
| BE14                            | Gloria      | 1939                 | 2                      | 1966;1969                           | 27                                 | 16                           |
| <b>Average</b>                  |             |                      | <b>2.5</b>             |                                     | <b>24.5</b>                        | <b>16.8</b>                  |
| <b>Cowley and Florence Park</b> |             |                      |                        |                                     |                                    |                              |
| CO1                             | Bet         | 1943                 | 4                      | 1968;1972;1975;<br>1975             | 25                                 | 18                           |
| CO2                             | June        | 1931                 | 4                      | 1959;1962;1964;<br>1966             | 28                                 | 19                           |
| CO3                             | Nancy       | 1926                 | 3                      | 1949;1956;1965                      | 23                                 | 17                           |
| CO4                             | Winifred    | 1917                 | 2                      | 1946;1951                           | 29                                 | 22                           |
| CO5                             | Joanna      | 1937                 | 3                      | 1961;1963;1965                      | 24                                 | 21                           |
| CO6                             | Deborah     | 1930                 | 3                      | 1955;1958;1965                      | 25                                 | 16                           |
| CO7                             | Penny       | 1927                 | 3                      | 1955;1957;1964                      | 28                                 | 16                           |

|                                    |           |      |            |                                   |             |             |
|------------------------------------|-----------|------|------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| CO8                                | Eve       | 1927 | 2          | 1957;1960                         | 30          | 16          |
| CO9                                | Cherie    | 1936 | 3          | 1963;1965;1969                    | 27          | 17          |
| CO10                               | Judy      | 1932 | 3          | 1959;1962;1964                    | 27          | 16          |
| CO11                               | Hope      | 1930 | 3          | 1955;1958;1960                    | 25          | 17          |
| CO12                               | Lisa      | 1934 | 4          | 1960;1963;1964;<br>1967           | 26          | 21          |
| <b>Average</b>                     |           |      | <b>3.1</b> |                                   | <b>26.4</b> | <b>18</b>   |
| <b>Ewelme</b>                      |           |      |            |                                   |             |             |
| EW1                                | Agnes     | 1938 | 2          | 1965;1968                         | 27          | 20          |
| EW2                                | Diana     | 1931 | 3          | 1958;1959;1964                    | 27          | 17          |
| EW3                                | Ellen     | 1947 | 6          | 1975;1976;1977;<br>1980;1982;1985 | 28          | 22          |
| EW4                                | Bethany   | 1944 | 2          | 1969;1971                         | 25          | 16          |
| EW5                                | Queenie   | 1919 | 2          | 1949;1950                         | 30          | 14          |
| EW6                                | Lily      | 1924 | 5          | 1946;1947;1956;<br>1958;1961      | 22          | 14          |
| EW7                                | Stephanie | 1938 | 4          | 1962;1963;19651<br>972            | 24          | 20          |
| EW8                                | Tania     | 1931 | 4          | 1952;1953;1954;<br>1962           | 21          | 14          |
| EW9                                | Sharon    | 1944 | 2          | 1972;1974                         | 28          | 23          |
| EW10                               | Mavis     | 1930 | 3          | 1956;1960;1967                    | 26          | 14          |
| <b>Average</b>                     |           |      | <b>3.3</b> |                                   | <b>25.8</b> | <b>17.4</b> |
| <b>North Oxford and Summertown</b> |           |      |            |                                   |             |             |
| NO1                                | Claire    | 1933 | 6          | 1960;1961;1963;<br>1965;1969;1972 | 27          | 21          |
| NO2                                | Sarah     | 1912 | 4          | 1940;1943;1948;<br>1950           | 28          | 22          |
| NO3                                | Yvonne    | 1940 | 4          | 1959;1961;1963;<br>1977           | 19          | 18          |
| NO4                                | Molly     | 1926 | 2          | 1952;1955                         | 26          | 21          |
| NO5                                | Hayley    | 1926 | 3          | 1956;1958;1959                    | 30          | 21          |
| NO6                                | Cassie    | 1913 | 2          | 1946;1952                         | 33          | 21          |
| NO7                                | Grace     | 1937 | 2          | 1965;1967                         | 28          | 22          |
| NO8                                | Emily     | 1938 | 3          | 1963;1964;1967                    | 25          | 21          |
| NO9                                | Juliet    | 1919 | 2          | 1945;1946                         | 26          | 25          |
| NO10                               | Marjorie  | 1931 | 4          | 1959;1961;1964;<br>1966           | 28          | 21          |
| NO11                               | Janice    | 1917 | 2          | 1943;1945                         | 26          | 25          |
| NO12                               | Rose      | 1932 | 2          | 1959;1961                         | 27          | 22          |
| <b>Average</b>                     |           |      | <b>3</b>   |                                   | <b>26.9</b> | <b>21.7</b> |
| <b>Oxford City</b>                 |           |      |            |                                   |             |             |
| OX1                                | Esther    | 1930 | 2          | 1959;1963                         | 29          | 21          |
| OX2                                | Georgie   | 1936 | 2          | 1961;1975                         | 25          | 20          |
| OX3                                | Nora      | 1915 | 4          | 1941;1945;1948;<br>1953           | 26          | 14          |
| OX4                                | Fanny     | 1929 | 2          | 1966;1967                         | 37          | 25          |
| OX5                                | Laura     | 1940 | 2          | 1963;1965                         | 23          | 21          |
| OX6                                | Olive     | 1916 | 2          | 1945;1950                         | 29          | 20          |

|                           |          |      |            |                              |             |             |
|---------------------------|----------|------|------------|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| OX7                       | Rachel   | 1930 | 2          | 1957;1960                    | 27          | 21          |
| OX8                       | Michelle | 1937 | 3          | 1964;1966;1969               | 27          | 21          |
| OX9                       | Mabel    | 1920 | 2          | 1940;1945                    | 20          | 14          |
| OX10                      | Rebecca  | 1929 | 3          | 1951;1954;1961               | 22          | 21          |
| OX11                      | Megan    | 1944 | 2          | 1971;1973                    | 27          | 25          |
| OX12                      | Lindsay  | 1935 | 2          | 1960;1962                    | 25          | 21          |
| <b>Average</b>            |          |      | <b>2.3</b> |                              | <b>26.4</b> | <b>20.3</b> |
| <b>Somerville College</b> |          |      |            |                              |             |             |
| SO1                       | Monika   | 1927 | 1          | 1955                         | 28          | 25          |
| SO2                       | Claudia  | 1944 | 3          | 1970;1972;1977               | 26          | 22          |
| SO3                       | Jill     | 1936 | 2          | 1966;1970                    | 30          | 21          |
| SO4                       | Karen    | 1945 | 4          | 1967;1970;1984;<br>1985      | 22          | 27          |
| SO5                       | Louisa   | 1939 | 3          | 1968;1972;1975               | 29          | 26          |
| SO6                       | Camilla  | 1937 | 3          | 1961;1963;1965               | 24          | 21          |
| SO7                       | Hannah   | 1924 | 3          | 1952;1955;1956               | 28          | 28          |
| SO8                       | Phoebe   | 1921 | 5          | 1948;1950;1955;<br>1956;1957 | 27          | 24          |
| SO9                       | Bella    | 1927 | 2          | 1953;1955                    | 26          | 25          |
| SO10                      | Kelly    | 1935 | 2          | 1968;1970                    | 33          | 21          |
| SO11                      | Ingrid   | 1932 | 2          | 1961;1962                    | 29          | 22          |
| SO12                      | Faith    | 1944 | 1          | 1971                         | 27          | 25          |
| <b>Average</b>            |          |      | <b>2.6</b> |                              | <b>27.4</b> | <b>23.9</b> |
| <b>Wychwood Villages</b>  |          |      |            |                              |             |             |
| WY1                       | Joy      | 1923 | 2          | 1945;1947                    | 22          | 17          |
| WY2                       | Alice    | 1939 | 3          | 1964;1966;1967               | 25          | 18          |
| WY3                       | Phyllis  | 1925 | 4          | 1946;1950;1952;<br>1956      | 21          | 14          |
| WY4                       | Maud     | 1921 | 2          | 1941;1944                    | 20          | 14          |
| WY5                       | Celia    | 1924 | 2          | 1952;1955                    | 28          | 17          |
| WY6                       | Maxine   | 1932 | 3          | 1957;1959;1962               | 25          | 21          |
| WY7                       | Bobbie   | 1921 | 2          | 1955;1959                    | 34          | 14          |
| WY8                       | Madge    | 1918 | 5          | 1940;1941;1942;<br>1943;1948 | 22          | 14          |
| WY9                       | Daisy    | 1923 | 2          | 1948;1950                    | 25          | 14          |
| WY10                      | Jackie   | 1933 | 2          | 1965;1965                    | 32          | 25          |
| <b>Average</b>            |          |      | <b>2.7</b> |                              | <b>25.4</b> | <b>16.8</b> |
| <b>Total average</b>      |          |      | <b>2.8</b> |                              | <b>26</b>   | <b>19</b>   |

| <b>Distribution of births:</b> |                             |                                 |                             |                           |                               |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
|                                | <b>No. home-<br/>births</b> | <b>No. hospital-<br/>births</b> | <b>Total no.<br/>births</b> | <b>% home-<br/>births</b> | <b>% hospital-<br/>births</b> |
| <b>-1955</b>                   | 27                          | 57                              | 84                          | 32.1                      | 67.9                          |
| <b>1956-1965</b>               | 37                          | 61                              | 98                          | 37.8                      | 62.2                          |
| <b>1966-</b>                   | 14                          | 61                              | 75                          | 18.7                      | 81.3                          |

## **Appendix Four: *Typical Interview Schedule***

### **1. Growing Up**

- Can you tell me when and where you were born?
- Do you have any brothers and sisters? Where did you fit into the order?
- (*If younger siblings*) Did you know your mother was pregnant? Did you help look after your siblings?
- How many people lived in your house?
- Did you live near any relatives?
- Did your parents bring you up to consider certain things important in life?
- When did you start at school, where did you go?
- Did you like school?
- (*If relevant*) Would you have liked to stay on longer?
- Were you taught things like cookery, childcare etc?
- Were you taught about pregnancy and childbirth?

### **2. After School**

- What were your hopes and dreams on leaving school?
- Were you expected to work or get married?
- Were you given any careers advice?
- (*If went to higher education*) Where/what did you do?
- What was your first job?
- Did you stay at work after your first child was born?
- (*If not*) Did you go back when your children were older?
- Was there any support for women who wanted to combine work and motherhood?
- How did you meet your husband, when did you marry, how old were you both?
- How long had you been married when you had your first child?
- How many children have you had?
- Was this the number you and your husband planned to have?

### **3. Pregnancy**

- Where were you living/working when you became pregnant?
- How did you feel when you found out?
- How regularly did you see your GP?
- Did you enjoy your pregnancy?
- Did you suffer from morning sickness etc?
- What arrangements did you make for your baby after delivery?
- Did you attend ante-natal and childbirth preparation classes? What did you learn, was it useful?
- Were there other sources of information like books and magazines, or other mothers?
- Would it have been better to know more or less?

#### 4. Birth

- Where was your baby born?
- Did you know what to expect in childbirth?
- What were your sources of information?
- How did delivery go?
- Did you know the doctor/midwife who delivered you? What were the medical staff like?
- How did you feel after delivery and during the next few days?
- What were your main concerns or worries after the baby was born?
- Did you breastfeed?
- (*If hospital*) How long did you stay in hospital, did you want to stay this long?
- How did you feel when you brought your baby home?
- Was anyone there to help you?

#### 5. Parenthood

- Did you find things came naturally to you? Did you worry about doing things wrong?
- If you needed advice who did you ask (ie. mother, friends, doctors, health visitors, clinics)?
- (*If relevant*) What were the differences between having your first child and later children?
- Did you follow routines/advice of childcare manuals, Spock etc?
- Did you try to be similar or different to your mother?
- (*If different*) What were the differences?
- Did you bring them up to believe that certain things are important in life?
- Do you have grandchildren?
- (*If yes*) How has your relationship with your children changed?
- What are the differences between how people used to raise children and today?
- What are the pluses and minuses of these changes?
- Why do you think the changes occurred?

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