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Young women negotiating maternal subjectivities: the significance of social class

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Introduction

This is a review essay of recent academic literature within the social sciences which examines how young women engage with contemporary discursive configurations of 'the maternal' and the ways in which social class is integral to this. This review is informed by our own recent research into young womanhood (Allen 2008, Osgood, 2008). The review begins with an introduction to recent feminist literature on the wider context of neo-liberalism within which new modalities of young womanhood have emerged in the last ten years. It is suggested these are oriented around the 'can do girl' and involve very specific regulatory caveats around young women's maternal desires and identities. This section is followed by a mapping of the discursive terrain upon which the maternal is currently constituted, with specific attention given to constructions of motherhood within welfare policy and then within contemporary popular culture in the UK. Two key configurations of the maternal are explored – the 'Yummy Mummy' and the 'Chav Mum'. The final sections of the paper engage with literature which mainly draws upon a psychosocial approach to understanding how these discursive configurations of motherhood are lived out by working and middle class women, and unearthing the costs and labour that accompany young women's negotiation of the maternal.

Young women as neo-liberal subjects: regulated motherhood

This article takes as its starting point ideas presented by feminist scholars such as Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey and June Melody (2001), Anita Harris (2004) and Angela McRobbie (2000, 2004, 2008), that the category of 'young woman' has been reconstituted within neo-liberal western capitalist societies. These authors suggest that young women

are increasingly being addressed across political and cultural discourse as ‘top girls’ or ‘can do girls’, attributed with freedom, independence and the capacity for success in education and the labour market. This discourse of female success draws, in part, upon the individualisation thesis – presented by Ulrich Beck (1992, 2002) and Anthony Giddens (1991, 1994) – which suggests that the economic, social and political changes of late modernity have given rise to increasingly individualised biographies and social agency, whilst the structural constraints of class and gender have weakened. However, feminist scholars have problematised the individualisation thesis, and its populist interpretations within neo-liberal policy discourses. It has been claimed that these mask the regulatory and disciplinary function of new categories of young womanhood: that is the ‘the shaping of being’ or inculcation of young women as self-governing individuals (McRobbie 2004; Blackman 2004). It is also suggested that there is an over-estimation of the extent to which gender (as well as class, ethnicity and other social markers) is less significant in structuring the opportunities and identities available to individuals, and that this masks the presence of inequalities which prevent some young women from entering the category of the ‘I can be anything girl’ (See Walkerdine et al. 2001; McRobbie 2008; Ringrose 2007). Hence, under neo-liberalism normative femininity is highly exclusionary, premised on middle-class ideals and experiences. Consequently, working-class women and girls come to occupy fragile and restricted positions in relation to the category of the ‘successful female subject’, where parts of their working-class self must be regulated, corrected or left behind (Walkerdine et al. 2001).

This critical work on the exclusionary nature of new categories of ‘young woman’ raises important questions about the place of ‘the maternal’. Identifying the ways in which young women have been reconstituted under neo-liberalism – and specifically within the policies of New Labour – McRobbie (2007, 2008) discusses the emergence of a ‘new sexual contract’ offered to young women which requests that they ‘come forward and make good use of the opportunity to work, to gain qualifications, to control fertility and to earn enough money to participate in the consumer culture’ (2008, p.54). Implicit in this new sexual contract are significant regulatory caveats, which, she suggests, enable the shift from a welfare to a *workfare* society, in which young women are seen to be at the forefront of the new economy. A key caveat is that young women ‘must not procreate while enjoying casual and recreational sex’ (ibid., p.85) and, in doing so, avoid the vilified and ‘harshly judged’ status of young motherhood. McRobbie illuminates how the new

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sexual contract regulates young women through the vilification of working-class motherhood as a form of 'failed femininity':

Young motherhood [...] carries a whole range of vilified meanings associated with failed femininity... Middle-class respectable status requires the refusal of early motherhood and much effort is invested in ensuring that this norm is adhered to [...] The concept of 'planned parenthood' emerges in Western liberal democracies as an address to young women so that they may postpone early maternity to accrue the economic advantages of employment [...] and thus contribute to the solving of the crisis of welfare. Single mothers are seen as feckless or are accused in the press and in other moralistic discourses of depriving a child [...] those young career women who have followed the advice of New Labour, and have postponed childbirth until they have secured wage earning capacity, become deserving subjects. (McRobbie 2007, p.731-732)

The reconstitution of young women under neo-liberalism, oriented around economic participation, consumer citizenship and self-regulation, can be understood as bound to wider social, economic and political shifts. Further, this reconstitution depends upon intensified regulation (of 'proper' and 'improper') selfhood along class lines. For example, McRobbie argues that in the contemporary landscape of neo-liberalism, those seen as peripheral to the autonomous, individualised and ambitious young woman (e.g. young and/or working-class mothers) are 'more emphatically condemned for their lack of status and other failings than would have been the case in the past' (2008, p.7).

Similarly, Walkerdine et al. (2001) suggest that teenage motherhood must be avoided in order to become the 'I can have everything girl' of neo-liberalism. They explain how young working-class mothers have become discursively constituted through negative discourses, which promote constructions of teenage mums as 'welfare scroungers' and carriers of sexually transmitted diseases. Teenage pregnancy is situated not only as incompatible with academic success, ambition and a professional career, as the markers of contemporary idealised femininity, but with unintelligibility.

The political and cultural context: the discursive framing of the maternal

We turn now to the political and cultural context in which young women are situated, to map a range of normalising maternal constructions that circulate within the fields of

government policy and popular culture in Britain. Both government policy (specifically that of New Labour) and popular culture operate as important sites in which emerging shifts in the norms and behaviours governing understandings of femininity, the maternal, and propriety crystallise, and that there are important relationships between these two discursive spaces (Bullen et al. 2000, McRobbie 2009). Thus, if we are to understand normative discourses of the maternal as ‘truths’ which gain their status through their cumulative effect, it is important to look at the ways in which discourses of the maternal are mobilised across different spaces.

To begin, as Elizabeth Bullen, Jane Kenway and Valerie Hey have demonstrated (Bullen et al. 2000), young mothers tend to be constructed in pathological ways within the policy discourses of the New Labour government. Teen pregnancy has long been held as an indicator of societal ills where parents, schools and others working with young women are seen to have failed. In the UK, as well as in other first world Western states in which there has been an identified shift from a welfare to workfare state (McRobbie 2000; Edwards 2000), government policies for reducing the risks of teenage pregnancy provide an illustration of neo-liberalism at work in the constitution of young women as subjects of welfare.

Teen mothers are less likely to finish their education, less likely to find a good job, and more likely to end up as single parents and bringing up their children in poverty, The children themselves run a greater risk of poor health, and have a much higher chance of becoming teenage mothers themselves (Tony Blair, Prime Minister, SEU Report on Teenage Pregnancy, 1999, p.4)

[Teenage pregnancy] leads to greater dependence, undermining potential achievement in education and in further employment, placing stress on the young person and their family, and denying choices available to others. (DfEE 2000, p.15)

Work of individualisation theorists (Beck 1992, 2002; Giddens 1991, 1994) can be traced through these examples of New Labour’s ‘Third Way’ social policies, which promote individual responsibility, active citizenship and economic independence. The government’s teenage pregnancy policies construct the ‘problem’ of young motherhood as an outcome of individual failing and ‘inadequacy’ (see Edwards 2000; Carabine 2007; Bullen et al. 2000), such as ignorance, ‘low expectations’ and ‘lacking’ knowledge’ (SEU 1999). As Bullen and colleagues argue, such discourses situate teenage mothers as morally and socially deviant, deficient and hazardous, in need of correction or

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transformation into economically active and self-reliant subjects via their (re)immersion into education or the labour market as quickly as possible (Bullen et al. 2000). They also demand that young women take up technologies of self-regulation and risk-management (Carabine 2007). In a workfare society in which there are “no excuses” for economic inactivity’ (David 2006) labour market participation is situated as an imperative for young women, and the most ‘effective’ defence against ‘social exclusion’, which, under New Labour, has become inextricably linked to teenage pregnancy (Thomson and Blake 2002). Simultaneously, full-time mothering is discounted as a valid ‘choice’ for young women (Kidger 2004).

Welfare policy discourse around pregnancy contains pronounced class constructions, having different effects on young women depending on their class location: Becoming pregnant at a young age is negatively constructed as a working-class phenomenon, requiring state intervention. It is thus working-class women who are most likely to be subjected to the disciplinary gaze of welfare policy and constituted as ‘constantly failing subjects’ (Walkerdine 2003, Edwards 2000). Young motherhood has been constituted as a ‘problem’ owned by working-class women. Subject to policy discourses that classify it as undesirable and outside of the realm of ‘good’ or ‘responsible’ mothering – constructed as the domain of the middle-class, older, and economically independent woman who ‘simultaneously works in paid employment and works to produce a successful child’ (Hey and Bradford 2006, p.61. See also McRobbie, 2000; Walkerdine et al. 2001) – young motherhood is a risky space for young women.

The pathologisation of working-class and teenage motherhood is similarly apparent within British popular culture, suggesting congruence between these two discursive fields in the shaping of maternal identities. Two dominant representations of motherhood have saturated the British mainstream media since the late 1990s. To begin, the ‘Yummy Mummy’ has emerged as a cultural phenomena and site of intense consumer activity (see www.mumsnet.com and www.yummymummy.org.uk). As McRobbie argues, market research companies have identified the ‘Yummy Mummy’, as a distinct consumer ‘tribe’ with significant spending power¹. They are described as affluent ‘older mothers, who have established a successful career before embarking on a family [...] influenced by the celebrity mother culture [and] willing to spend significant money on themselves, as well as insisting on the highest quality goods for their family’ (TGI Market

Research 2009, see McRobbie 2008). She has saturated popular culture and is represented across television programmes, the press and literature in the form of guidebooks and novels, including *The Yummy Mummy Manifesto* (Johnson 2009) and *The Yummy Mummy Survival Guide* (Fraser 2007). In these cultural texts, the maternal is symbolically loaded as a glamorous and aspirational ‘lifestyle choice’. Motherhood is a site of self-care (‘manicured hands’), consumer choice (‘sense of style’) and beauty (‘look and feel fabulous’):

Forget the frump. Wave goodbye to those leggings there's a new breed of mothers on the baby block. Yummy Mummies don't leave their sense of style in the maternity ward – the loving hands that rock today's cradles are manicured and moisturised [...] Help is at hand, with this no-holds-barred guide to surviving the biggest transition of your life [...] Because becoming a mother doesn't mean you stop wanting to look and feel fabulous – it just becomes a little trickier! (Johnson 2009)

The Yummy Mummy’s cultural significance is also related to rise of the ‘celebrity mum’ and the increasing media interest in celebrity pregnancies and mothering as a window into the ‘real’ lives of celebrities and a site of ‘authentic’ selfhood (Jermyn, 2008). This has included the launch of special edition ‘celebrity’ gossip magazines about celebrity pregnancy and motherhood, post-baby weight-loss regimes, and the publication of pregnancy and mothering guidebooks and autobiographies by famous mums².

In the figure of the Yummy Mummy, a very specific configuration of motherhood (occupied by white, heterosexual, middle-class professional women) is being celebrated as a desirable identity; one that embodies female choice, autonomy, consumerism and aesthetic perfection whilst denying a space for drudgery or confinement to the home. Diane Negra (2009) discusses this increasing fetishisation of the maternal within popular culture as a ‘master narrative’ of post-feminism, which offers the ‘promise of coming back to oneself in the process of coming home’ (ibid., p.7). She argues that ‘retreatism’ – or the ‘pull back of affluent women to perfected domesticity’ (2009, p.9) – falsely ‘presents the habits, interests and desires of the wealthy as universal’ (ibid., p.9) thereby reinforcing classed exclusions. Similarly, Jessica Ringrose and Valerie Walkerdine (2008) suggest that the discursive figuration of the Yummy Mummy functions to mask structural inequality within neo-liberalism. They argue that the Yummy Mummy falsely universalises middle-class femininity, reproducing the post-feminist myth of ‘have it all femininity’ where women’s ability to ‘opt out’ of the workplace for motherhood is taken

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as evidence that gender equality has been achieved. This, they argue, masks the structures of inequality that this very myth depends upon, specifically the reliance on the labour of other women: the abject, working-class woman:

The feminist political dilemmas of housewife versus career woman [...] have been replaced by narratives of renaissance women who juggle thriving careers (attained through the right modes of education) with motherhood. And although she may buy maternal services from the less successful and pathologised working-class woman, this depends on her own (or family's) financial power to do so, devolving responsibility increasingly onto the individual. (Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008, p.232)

The dominant, valued form of the maternal, embodied by the Yummy Mummy, not only presents and privileges the experiences of white, middle-class women to the exclusion of other maternal identities (e.g. working-class, lesbian, black, non-western) it also frames the maternal through a distinctly neo-liberal lexicon of choice, self-actualisation, and reinvention through the consumer marketplace. It also celebrates self-sufficiency, by promoting planned and professional mothering. In short, the Yummy Mummy symbolises the 'good' and 'responsible' mother of neo-liberalism.

It is to the other/ed mother within popular culture that that we now turn. As Imogen Tyler argues, the figure of the 'Chav Mum' has become a dominant popular cultural reference in the recent past, as a site of humour, disgust and moral outrage (Tyler, 2008). British celebrities such as ex-singer Kerry Katona and glamour model Jordan (also known as Katie Price) have become reference points for the Chav Mum (Moir 2009, Walford 2008, Tyler and Bennett forthcoming)³. British comedy television show *Little Britain* (BBC) features a character called Vicky Pollard. A tracksuit wearing teenage mum played by male comedian Matt Lucas, Vicky has come to embody the Chav Mum as a figure of mockery. Elsewhere, the pop cultural website 'Urban Dictionary' (www.urbandictionary.com) allows users to post content on various slang words. Definitions posted by users to describe the Chav Mum include, 'a girl who is a little rough around the edges and wouldn't look at all out of place at 14 years of age pushing a newborn through a council estate'.

The Chav Mum is thus constituted through discourses that have historically been drawn upon to construct working-class femininity in particular ways (Skeggs 1997, 2004): as excessive (sexually and bodily, e.g. fat), lazy (unemployed, 'welfare scroungers'), lacking taste (in their choice of clothes and culture), immoral and dangerous. Imogen

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Tyler (2008) argues that the discourse of ‘the chav’ represents a new and pernicious vocabulary of social class in the UK, and claims that the Chav Mum is the contemporary manifestation of a historical vilification and abjection of white working-class femininity and motherhood. The Chav Mum has, according to Tyler, become a vessel for contemporary concerns and anxieties around social and economic change, class inequality, femininity and sexuality. She argues that the Chav Mum plays a central role in contemporary processes of ‘class-making’, stating that the Chav Mum ‘represents a thoroughly dirty and disgusting ontology that operates as a constitutive limit for clean, white, middle-class, feminine respectability’ (ibid., p.30). Tyler directly relates the discursive construction of the Chav Mum to wider political agendas for higher labour market participation among women and a reduction in welfare provision:

The mass vilification and mockery of the Chav Mum [can] be understood in relation to [...] the emergence of a new set of norms about femininity, in which the ideal life trajectory of middle-class women conforms to the current governmental objectives of economic growth through higher education and increased female workforce participation (Tyler 2008, p.30).

The maternal subjectivities which have come to saturate popular cultural discourse over the past decade contain highly moralising discourses, inextricably linked to new formations of young womanhood which presuppose and demand a particular relationship to the labour market (intense economic activity) and the state (non-reliance on welfare). As with the policy discourses of New Labour, these popular cultural figures mark out the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way of being a mother and of being a young woman. While the Yummy Mummy embodies self-responsibility and self-sufficiency, where motherhood is postponed, planned and follows full participation in the labour market, motherhood for the Chav Mum is constituted as the unplanned result of improper and immoral behaviour that results in welfare dependency.

Having mapped the discursive terrain upon which contemporary configurations of the maternal are situated we now want to review literature that examines how these are lived out and negotiated by young women when encountering and constructing their subjectivities. This literature demonstrates how relationships to the maternal are highly ambiguous and heavily imbued by relations of class. It reveals the problematic and exclusionary consequences of contemporary regimes of governance that regulate contemporary femininity.

The authors in this field are *generally* drawing on psychosocial theoretical frameworks to understand and investigate how young women engage with and negotiate the maternal. This framework can be understood to bring together the social, cultural and *psychic* influences on human behaviour, and draws on psychoanalytic concepts and tools. It engages explicitly with the emotional mechanisms, defences and psychological work involved in the constitution of subjectivity and examines how these are located within, and informed by, wider social, cultural and economic structures. The subject of a psychosocial investigation is a 'more irrational anxious and 'defended' one (Holloway and Jefferson, 1997 in Walkerdine et al. 2001, p.84) than is presented by traditional social science. This demands an exploration of complex and often contradictory conscious as well as unconscious feelings of shame, anxiety, fear, desire, guilt and ambivalence. Furthermore, such an approach enables a greater exploration of the relational dynamics of identity construction, specifically the ways in which emotions circulate and have 'affects' within families. In examining young women's experiences of the maternal, this involves exploring the role that mothers in particular play in socialising particular femininities, and how young women (dis)identify with their own mothers as they construct their biographies.

Middle class girls: motherhood as non-ambition

Neo-liberal narratives of female success in 21st century Britain suggest that the inevitability of classed and gendered trajectories have been undone in the context of wider social change. Young women, it is suggested, are no longer directed into the traditional pathways of domesticity and motherhood but rather, into full and active labour market participation. Thus, observers have noted that while 30 years ago the home was conceived as the primary destination for women, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds (McRobbie 1992), there has been an important shift in the hierarchy between the home and workplace within young women's future biographies. As Lois Weiss (1990) found in her study of young women in de-industrialised cities in North America, young women are increasingly constructing their future selves around the labour market, using a post-feminist and neo-liberal vocabulary of choice, freedom and independence:

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Although some assert that they wish to have some form of home / family identity, it is never asserted first, and generally only as a possibility 'later on' when their own job or career is 'settled'. Some of the girls reject totally the possibility of marriage and children [...] the primary point, however is that they assert strongly that they must settle themselves first [...] in other words, the construction of a home/ family identity is secondary, rather than the reverse. (Weiss 1990, p. 65-66)

However, despite this shift authors have demonstrated that young motherhood continues to be very differently understood and experienced by working class and middle class girls. Walkerdine et al.'s (2001) study of young women suggests that motherhood is ruled out by middle class girls and their parents, because of the huge investment that is made in their academic success. They suggest that this positioning of young motherhood as essentially a 'non-ambition' for middle class girls, beyond contemplation, and as 'other' to a professional career, must be understood as part of wider processes through which they are regulated (and self-regulate) in order to reproduce their middle class status:

'Nothing is allowed to obstruct the academic path – certainly not motherhood which is seen as the ultimate failure, to be avoided at all costs...It has become clear that teenage motherhood cannot be allowed onto the agenda of most middle class girls in Britain today' (2001, p.194-5).

Walkerdine et al. (2001) go on to claim that working class girls experience motherhood in a different way. It is to these young women that we now turn.

Working class girls: negotiating the 'surveillant gaze'

Rather than being understood as a non-ambition, motherhood may be a valued and legitimate choice for working class girls. Walkerdine et al. (2001) suggest that, rather than delay motherhood, working class girls often desire integrating both having a family and having a later career, and their parents generally support this. They also demonstrate how having a baby can become a solution to difficult dilemmas for young working class girls. For example, they illuminate how it may represent a very safe and secure territory for working class girls, because other paths – such as moving into the unfamiliar and often 'hostile' world of higher education – bring many risks for working class women (ibid, p.195).

However, Walkerdine et al. suggest that '[while] middle class girls are self-regulating...the norms of regulation come down more heavily on working class girls who

become the object of a more obvious surveillant gaze' (ibid, p.210). They discuss how working class girls have to negotiate wider moralizing discourses that position the young working-class mother as 'the fecund Other' (ibid, p.187). Similarly, in their study of mothers involved in New Labour's 'Sure Start' programme (aimed at families in 'disadvantaged' communities in the UK), Hey and Bradford (2006) illuminate how working class mothers are acutely aware of being stigmatized as irresponsible and unable to provide for their children. The women in their research responded through mobilising a discourse of 'self-improvement' (2006, p.61). This reveals the ways in which young working class women self-regulate against normative discourses which continue to position them as unworthy or 'feckless' mums.

Though not the primary focus of this review, it is important to acknowledge how 'race' and ethnicity are also key mediators of young women's engagement with maternal identities. Young black women's negotiation of the maternal for example is differently informed by the historical legacy of resourceful, working black mothers. As Heidi Mirza explains 'black girls may not regard having children and continuing to work in the same way as their white peers [...] to work and bring up children is not so much a careerist choice as a historical necessity' (1992, p27). Similarly, Wendy Hollway and Ann Phoenix's study of first time mothers in East London (see Hollway et al. 2008) also demonstrates how ethnicity and 'race' influence how young women understand and experience the maternal. While they caution against 'reductive' categorisations of ethnic differences between young women's experience of mothering, they do highlight, for example, how a 'strong cultural sanctioning of marriage, coupled with extended family living arrangements' (2008:23), as well as religious commitments, contribute to a valuing of the maternal role among Bangladeshi women.

Intergenerational recuperation, social mobility and matrophobia

This next section examines how women's experiences of being mothered informs their negotiation and experience of 'the maternal, and points to the ways in which these are inextricably linked to gender and class transformations in women's biographies.

In their study of 'The Making of Modern Motherhood', Rachel Thomson and colleagues report a discourse of 'intergenerational recuperation' (Thomson et al., 2008) within the narratives of new and expectant mothers, where the women understood their biographies as an extension of their mothers. This included a sense among young women that they had to realise thwarted ambitions or repair some of the sacrifice and hardship that their own mothers endured. In our own research (Allen 2008, Osgood 2008), young women's rejection of young motherhood in place of an investment in education and a professional career appeared to be strongly informed by their experiences of *being mothered*, specifically the ways they had witnessed their own mother 'lose out' on a career because of her maternal commitments, and was characterised by a discourse of compensation. This was actively reinforced by their mothers themselves who were described as performing aspirational mothering and wanting better for their daughters.

The rejection of maternal subjectivities among socially mobile women can be understood to be deeply bound up in desires to transgress their working-class histories and to invest in new and improved classed subjectivities. Stephanie Lawler (2000) usefully extends Adrienne Rich's (1977) concept of 'matrophobia' to argue that it is embedded in classed processes of social mobility. Matrophobia is defined by Rich as the fear of closely resembling or becoming one's mother, rooted in a desire to break free from women's oppression. In her own research, Lawler examines how upwardly mobile women (women who were born to working class families but now defined themselves as middle class), constructed the self as autonomous, independent and individualised through a strong dis-identification with their own mothers. In her study, these women were deeply aware of normative discourses which pathologise working class mothers, and they marked their class movement through an ambivalent 'othering' of their own mothers.

Such desires to 'not be like my mother' were pertinent in the narratives of many of the young women in our own research (Allen 2008; Osgood 2008) who rejected their mother's biographies as 'teen mums' which they equated with struggle, sacrifice and stagnation. However, as Lawler explains, because of the fragility of their class position these dis-identifications are highly unstable and insecure, characterised by fear, anxiety and the risk of 'Otherness': for upwardly mobile women, whose mothers are of a different class position to themselves, the mother 'may come to signify a class position to which they fear returning... [they] may fear not just becoming their mothers but becoming their

working-class mothers' (2000, p.102-3). Thus, young women's dis-identification with their mother's maternal biographies is deeply problematic and highly ambivalent.

Conclusion

Through an exploration of classed constructions of young womanhood and their proximity to the maternal this article has illuminated the ambivalence and complexity that marks relationships to normative and non-normative configurations of femininity and motherhood.

This article began by introducing recent literature (e.g. Harris 2004; McRobbie 2008; Walkerdine et al. 2001) which is concerned with the modalities of young womanhood that have emerged in the West under neo-liberalism, and which are oriented around young women's capacity for success in education and the labour market. This literature suggests that such configurations bring with them new regulatory caveats associated with motherhood, through which class femininities are coded and pathologised.

By mapping the discursive terrain on which the maternal is constituted, we examined how class permeates the ways in which 'good' and 'bad' mothering is constituted within government welfare policy, and how this is reproduced within British popular and consumer culture via the figures of the Yummy Mummy and Chav Mum. The regulatory and exclusionary nature of these configurations of the maternal in relation to classed femininities was examined (e.g. Bullen et al. 2000; Hey and Bradford 2006; McRobbie 2008; Tyler 2008).

The remainder of the article reviewed literature exploring young women's engagement with 'the maternal' in the construction of their biographies, and the ways in which both social class and the experiences of being mother(ed) inform this. In particular, this literature exposes the different regulatory practices that young working and middle class women are subjected to in negotiating the maternal (e.g. Walkerdine et al. 2001; Hey and Bradford 2006). As demonstrated, the literature suggests that middle class girls' rejection of motherhood as a 'non-ambition' is central to securing their status as bourgeois subjects and that, while working class girls position the maternal as a valued life choice, they are the subject of highly regulatory discourses which constitute them as the abject

other: feckless, irresponsible ‘bad’ mothers. We have also examined the role of inter-generational desires for social mobility. Young women’s understanding of their own mothers’ navigation through education and work, as well as their desires to escape their working class status, have been shown to complicate how they position the maternal within their individual biographies (Lawler 2000; Thomson et al. 2008). This body of literature demonstrates the intense labour and self-regulation required by young women to constitute the self as a desirable and intelligible subject of neo-liberalism. It suggests that this ontological project occupies considerable emotional and psychic space for women attempting to renegotiate and rework classed identities. In a climate in which young women must be economically independent, flexible, autonomous and self-responsible, encountering and enacting maternal subjectivities is deeply problematic and ridden with conflict.

This article illuminates the continued importance of examining the place of ‘the maternal’ within the lives of young women in contemporary society, and how they negotiate its wider construction within neo-liberal discourses. The persistent vilification of working-class femininities, set against the prevailing hegemonic constructions of ‘the maternal’, warrant further debate.

¹ The term has also been endorsed by luxury goods brands, such as upmarket stationers *Smythson of Bond Street*, who sell a leather-bound ‘Yummy Mummy’ notebook.

² These include products include: a special edition of celebrity weekly magazine *Now*, entitled *Now: Celebrity Mum and Baby* (published by IPC Media), the latest of which was released for sale on 22 September 2009; DVDs include *Pre and Post Natal Workouts* (2007) by Davina McCall; and celebrity books to motherhood such as *Minus Nine to One: The Diary of an Honest Mum*, by TV chef Jamie Oliver’s wife, Jools Oliver (2006); and *My Bump and Me: From Morning Sickness to Motherhood - An Honest Diary of My Pregnancy* by pop-star and TV presenter Myleene Klass (2008).

³ Journalist Jan Moir described British glamour model Jordan (Katie Price), in an article for British newspaper *The Daily Mail*, as the ‘knicker-flashing, sex-mad, balloon-breasted, drunk and disorderly, great She-Chav mother-of-three’ (Moir 2009).

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