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A Maternocentric Exploration of ‘Space’

Abstract

This exploration of ‘space’ and its meaning to mothers represents one response to the calls for space to be considered in all theories of subjectivities (Brown, 2001). It considers the normalisation of mothers that has arisen from psychological research in western culture. The paper draws on Winnicott’s notions of potential space and the ‘capacity to be alone in the presence of another’ (Winnicott, 1958) to consider the significance of space. It inquires into how narratives about space can inform us of the relationship between physical and psychic space and ways in which access to both can be restricted. The paper discusses the role of psychology and psychoanalysis in the formation of social support for mothers and in our understanding of mothers’ experiences. The paper seeks to question the role of normalisation as a way of portraying mothers.

Keywords: mothers, narratives, psychoanalysis, space, normalisation

Introduction

The investigation and portrayal of motherhood in psychology and psychoanalysis is the source of many of the contemporary everyday discourses about mothers. Notions of the ‘selfish’ mother, the ‘monster’ mother and the ‘greedy’ mother are underlined by an adherence to attachment theory and a focus on the quality of the relationship between mother and child (Alldred, 1996). The ability of well-educated mothers to speak eloquently of their experiences and to present themselves as they wish to be seen (Miller, 2005) has led to the creation of a ‘norm’ of mothers who are ‘fit to parent’ (Alldred, 1996). The focus of research on white middle-class families with

two parents develops the normalisation of the traditional family with mothers of certain age and class. Those that do not fit this norm are pathologised; as a focus on 'normalising absence/pathologising presence', such as those families from different ethnic groups (Phoenix, 1991a; Phoenix and Hussain, 2007), or by researchers 'looking in' at the experiences of and disseminating knowledge based on this, such as insider/outsider perspectives on young mothers (Phoenix, 1991b). The normalisation of motherhood in psychology gives rise to questions about its usefulness in understanding the experiences of mothers.

Challenges to the pervasive normalisation of the white middle-class woman as mother in western culture are emerging (e.g. Alldred, 1996; Burman et al, 1996; Reynolds, 2005; Phoenix, 2006). Research areas have broadened to include investigation of the experiences of ethnicity and parenting (e.g. Marshall, Woolett & Dosanjh, 1996; Phoenix and Hussain, 2007), of mothering more than one child (Munn, 1991) and of black mothers (Reynolds, 2005). There has been work on young mothers (Phoenix, 1991) and later motherhood (Berryman, 1991) and a burgeoning field of queer psychology includes research into lesbian motherhood (Roseneil, 2004). Theories of psychoanalysis have been unpicked and used to illuminate the experience of motherhood subjectively. The discipline is now used as a tool for developing enriched understanding of the subjectivity of the mother (e.g. Miller, 2005; Parker, 2005; Frost, 2006).

Such research allows psychology to begin to address its role in the development and perpetuation of 'norms' that can serve to oppress and exclude mothers.

Understanding experiences using 'space' and psychoanalysis

Feminist approaches to research in geography have explored 'space', 'embodiment' and spatial aspects of emotion as a way of gaining insight to women's experiences (Majumdar, 2007). These approaches call for space and embodiment to be included in all theories of subjectivities (Brown, 2001). They are based on the arguments that individuals speak, view and base their world in material space.

Using understandings and explorations of space and the way space is talked about can allow for less categorical and more flexible positionings in making sense of subjective experiences (Majumdar, 2007). By focussing on individuals' lived experiences within particular spaces, physical or psychic, ways of being that have been previously overlooked can be highlighted (Majumdar, 2007). This approach provides a way of challenging the coercive power of culturally accepted discourses that surround motherhood in western society.

The existence and acceptance of the discourses of 'ideal' motherhood, by mothers and those around them, can inhibit women from speaking freely about their feelings. They question their experiences that do not accord with prevailing beliefs of the importance of exclusive mother-child relationships and with their self-sacrificing availability. This can lead to a 'self-policing' of mothers' thoughts and words as they seek to present themselves in ways they think they should be seen (O'Grady, 2004).

Many cultural discourses embedded in traditional western thinking can be traced to the foregrounding in classical psychoanalysis of the importance of secure attachment

between mother and child. Now widely challenged by contemporary feminist psychoanalysts who hold psychoanalysis responsible for the simultaneous idealisation and denigration of mothers (Welldon, 1988), the pervasiveness of the prominence given to attachment theory can still be seen in social policy, media portrayal of mothers and in common discourses about ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothers.

Butler has considered embodiment as the notion of ‘passionate attachment’ (Butler, 1997). Her theory proposes that it is better for an individual to feel they exist in subjugation than not to exist at all. They embrace the subjugating power (of men, of others) that regulates them in order to persist in their existence. At once they are dependent on the power for their formation but seek to deny it in order to grow to independent being. For women this may be the colonisation of their psychic space by patriarchal oppression or by their omnipotent baby. A space between the mother and child is used by the child to work out its independent self and by the mother to enable the child’s separation from her. Their interdependence on each other is embodied in this psychic space between them.

The transfer of power from the mother to the father in order for the child to free itself from helpless subjection to the omnipotent mother is embedded in psychoanalytic thinking (Benjamin, 1995). Dinnerstein sees this separation as ‘part of a constellation that constitutes our cultural sickness’ rather than as a necessary process (Benjamin, 1995: 83). The intertwining of the ‘ideal’ mother with the ‘narcissistic’ mother who binds the child to herself to ensure its protected well-being or ignores her child as an act of self-preservation is also prevalent. Each of these mothering positions are created by and result from those around them. They arise from sites of power situated

in the mothering context and impact on the individual sense of space for identity formation that mothers have. The self-policing by mothers can be understood to operate as tool that restricts mothers' access to their psychic space.

Winnicott's 'third space'

Of the classical psychoanalysts, Winnicott in particular has been criticised for adopting a paternalistic approach to mothers. He binds the mother to her child in her pursuit of a secure attachment. To Winnicott, the mother is one with her child in much of her early mothering work, and no other desires and needs of hers are recognised. The exclusivity of the relationship is heightened before and after the birth by a 'primary maternal occupation' (Winnicott, 1956) in which, according to Winnicott, the mother becomes almost psychotic in her devotion to attending to the child's needs.

The notion of the existence of a primary maternal occupation can be perceived as oppressive to all mothers and particularly so to those who do not develop it. It raises questions about how an exclusive mother-child relationship can be maintained when there is an existing or subsequent child and it does not consider contextual or circumstantial factors surrounding motherhood. Perceived failure to conform, to the notion can lead to isolation for those mothers unable (or undesirous) to fulfil its expectations. They can find themselves labelled as showing pathologised mothering behaviour by operating outside this imposed 'norm'. Their experiences can be ignored except when issues seen as problematic are investigated (Phoenix and Hussain, 2007).

Winnicott's focus, like Klein's, is on the mother-child bond (Klein, 1937; 1946). He regarded the first relationship not as one of conflict, as Klein did, but one of reciprocity between mother and child. The child knows no boundaries between itself and other, the 'me' and 'not-me' and is exclusively focussed on the helping mother/breast (Winnicott, 1956). At the same time the mother's preoccupation ensures her attention is exclusively on the child. The child can only tolerate the mother's absence for certain periods of time, after which she is perceived to cease to exist. The infant finds the feelings of dependency and vulnerability hard to tolerate, struggles to hold itself together and is threatened with internal disintegration. The mother re-enters the child's world when she returns and only then exists again to tend to its needs and care for it.

According to Winnicott it is through recognition from its mother that the child comes to experience its own existence. The 'good-enough' mother creates a 'facilitating environment' in which she enables the child to gently discover itself and its boundaries (Winnicott, 1960a). She gradually introduces her infant to the external world in non-threatening and manageable doses by using the potential space as an area for symbolism and play (Winnicott, 1958). This 'third area' lies between the infant's boundaries and its mother. The processes of symbolism and play are used to enable the infant to tolerate separation from the mother. Her presence initially serves to protect the infant from impingement from the external world and then, when the infant is ready the mother works to gradually disillusion the infant of its own omnipotence (Winnicott, 1951; 1970).

The potential space between mother and infant, between ‘me’ and ‘not-me’ (Winnicott, 1951; 1958; 1967) is one of the mainstays of Winnicott’s theories and it is where many of the developmental processes of early infancy are believed to take place. Winnicott maintained that the potential space is important throughout life and comes to play a vital role in the experience of ‘being alive’. As an infant the potential space is used to explore inner boundaries and relations and to understand its relation to the external world. As an adult it represents a space in which individuals can strengthen existing self-structures and build up new ones in accordance with the ‘True Self’. (Fountain, 2000).

The infant achieves the ability to explore its inner world by developing the capacity to be alone in the presence of the mother (Winnicott, 1967). Entering a state of ‘unintegrated being’ (Winnicott, 1967) the infant is protected by its mother from impingement from the outside world. The mother’s presence is important to the infant but the two do not engage with each other. Instead the infant’s world is its inner self and it comes to identify its boundaries and internal relationships during this time. With development, the potential space becomes a place where individuals can learn to mourn lost objects, re-assimilate their attachments and emerge to reinvest in new objects. It is the place therefore where self-identity is understood, constructed, maintained, reformulated and developed throughout life.

Winnicott’s theories were developed from an infantocentric perspective. By using them to consider the maternocentric perspective new insight to the experiences of mothers can be gained (e.g. Parker, 2005). This approach is used here to explore meanings of physical space to mothers.

A mother's accounts of space

Consider this account from Lucy, a 32 year old mother living with her partner, a child of four years old and her baby of three months old:

“We could have a bigger house which would at least allow me to have a big room which is a children's toy room where I can keep all the stuff and have a designated adult space which we don't have you know at the moment. What drives me mad is having children's toys in my living space and never really getting to switch off from them. Always seeing their toys about. And um to have a bit more space”

The account describes Lucy's need for more physical space. She wants to have a “bigger house”, “ a big toy room” and a “designated adult space”. She describes a desire for compartmentalisation of her space with designated and separate spaces for children and adults. Her account tells us that she believes that having more space will enable her to switch off from her children. Not being able to switch off from them “drives (her) mad”. Lucy's references to having to compartmentalise – either by removing reminders of the children to a different space or by removing herself to a different space so that she can shut off her “Mummy brain” – informs us that to be around her children, or even evidence of her children, prevents her from accessing any part of her self other than the “Mummy” part.

Winnicott's notion that the infant grows when ‘alone in the presence of another’ can be used to consider Lucy's account. She is saying that she is unable to be alone in the

presence of her children. Even the sight of their toys means she is unable to switch off from them. Winnicott proposed that the infant can be soothed by the containing presence of its pram as a symbolic representation of its mother. Lucy describes how the reminders of her children leave her with the feeling that she cannot escape their presence and this “*drives her mad*”.

A link between physical and psychic space is made when Lucy talks about how she gains “*headspace*”:

“Strangely you would think having five babies would not give you any space but it did. We would put them all in a line there and whatever we were drinking tea or champagne and we would talk and we would listen hard to what somebody else was telling you. You do feel as though it’s head space because you’re not separated but head space is how I would describe it because that’s what you’re wanting”

This account describes Lucy being with other mothers and their children. It highlights her pleasure at being in the non-impinging presence of her infant. Winnicott’s ‘good-enough’ mother creates a ‘facilitating environment’ in which she enables her child to discover itself and its boundaries gently (1960a). She gradually introduces her infant to the external world in non-threatening and manageable doses and without impinging on the pace of its discoveries and expectations by use of the potential space. For Lucy, the non-impinging presence of her infant allows her to engage with others and gain “*headspace*”.

Feminist researchers (e.g. Parker 2005) have highlighted that mothers use other mothers as mirrors and measures of what they should expect of themselves. This can bring a fear of judgement and criticism but also contains potential for the recognition and acceptance of 'maternal ambivalence'. In order to separate from the infant the mother needs to recognise the child as autonomous and differentiated. When the infant asserts this autonomy she can feel frustrated and resentful of it. The baby's survival of these expressions of her hatred signals to the mother that it is external to her and exists in their shared reality. Only when she destroys the infant has she put it outside her omnipotent control; she can then begin relating to the child as a person that is increasingly separate from herself. For this destruction to remain non-retaliatory it has to be accompanied by love and so, Parker argues, maternal ambivalence is essential. The mother's awareness of her ambivalence has been raised and her concern for the baby ignited.

This can enable the mother-child relationship to become more meaningful. Parker argues that in this way the guilt the mother feels when the baby frustrates or enrages her can be used creatively and recognised as arising from the conflict of love and hate for her child. Her anxiety is 'depressive' so that her concern is of harm inflicted on the child through her hatred and she works to make reparation and for the hatred to be mitigated by the love she also feels. In this way the hatred remains psychic and does not become enacted in external reality- her ambivalence is managed. If the recognition of the love alongside the hate is not there because the undesirable feeling has been split off the baby is either idealised or denigrated by the mother. The splitting of the feelings means that love is not present to mitigate the hate. The

mother is at risk of re-experiencing persecutory anxiety and of perceiving the baby as a destructive threat to her (Parker, 2005).

From a maternal perspective the place of hatred in the mother's feelings for her baby can be understood to serve to enable her to differentiate herself from her child. She sees that the child can survive despite her hatred and learns that her love for her child can mitigate her feelings of hate. This understanding of herself and the ambivalence of her relationship with her child allows her to come to relinquish the fantasies of being the perfect mother to the perfect child.

To name these 'unacceptable' maternal feelings of ambivalence however can challenge women's fear of harsh moral judgement or criticism of their motherhood from others (O'Grady, 2004; Parker, 2005). Perhaps the significance of references to, descriptions of and quests for space by mothers, alerts the listener to the urgency of their need to access a place in which they can discover new boundaries and reformulate their sense of self – a headspace. The accounts of Lucy's daily life as a full-time mother provide a picture of necessary vigilance and attentiveness during which she is not able to focus on anything other than the children. They describe how this prevents her from achieving a sense of separate being, of being able to focus on her inner world and of using the potential space to effect separation from the children. The gratification expressed in Lucy's account may be because she has the opportunity to acknowledge the landscape of maternal emotions she is experiencing.

Lucy is a mother who represents the normalised 'good mother'. She had a profession as a TV producer, lived in a stable marriage in a middle-class urban environment.

She epitomised the group of women who are perceived as finding motherhood easy. However some of her accounts vividly illustrate the frustrations and the level of desperation she sometimes felt when she was with them:

“But when I feel that I’m being pushed, because I’ll give I’ll happily give everything to them that I have, but.... but then I’ve given and I’ve given and I’m RIGHT at the end of my tether. Just I’m there staring over the precipice and they’re MERCILESS. They just give you a good shove over the edge. They totally don’t care and they will watch you free-falling. You know, fascination.”

Lucy describes the children’s withholding of appreciation of what she gives them and that this stirs anxiety within her, almost beyond what she can tolerate: *“right at the end of my tether”*.

When a young infant’s ability to tolerate waiting for the breast to satisfy them becomes unbearable it perceives the breast as withholding. In a ‘will to substitution’ the infant perceives the breast as turning from benign to malign causing the child to feel anxious and threatened by it (Phillips, 1993). Lucy’s sense of falling into a precipice at the hands of her children might be understood as a macabre enactment of the ‘will to substitution’. She describes her resentment and lack of comprehension of the children’s demands:

“Look Mummy’s lost her rag completely. Isn’t that funny” Open mouthed
“Look Mummy’s throwing things at the wall, how funny” and that makes me

*even crosser. "HOW CAN YOU? Don't you understand how much I love you?
How much I will do anything for you? HOW CAN YOU TREAT ME LIKE
THIS?"*

Her words include her feelings of anger and love towards her children. The paradox of simultaneously loving and hating her children is clear.

Lucy perceives the absence of her children's expressed affection for her as a malign presence. Unable to retreat to the comfort of a secure inner world that does not need external stimuli, perhaps because of the relentless impingements of reality on her by the demands of the children means that Lucy describes that the capacity to be alone in the presence of her children is frequently denied to her. She can feel threatened when in their company. To redress this she seeks to be away from them. Lucy knows the benefit of physical separation from her children and has told of her sense of rejuvenation when she achieves it. However this can only be achieved by replacing her immediate environment with one in which there is separate space for her.

As a mother who had formerly worked outside the home, Lucy had the option of returning to work following her maternity leave. Financially the family would benefit but her income was not necessary to the continued running of the home and family lifestyle. This option was important to Lucy and she described what a return to work meant for her:

*" and that for me is partly what going back to work has given me, just a time
when I'm not worrying and thinking about them. I mean you have to*

compartmentalise in order to go back to work but I do find that whether whatever I'm doing is boring or tedious or otherwise whatever it is if it allows me to think with my brain and shut off the Mummy brain altogether it's massively rejuvenating"

Here Lucy describes her return to work as “*rejuvenating*” because it gives her space in which she can shut off her “*Mummy brain*”. Her account returns to the importance to Lucy of being able to compartmentalise in order to find space away from her children. In this account she compartmentalises her time and describes it as something she has to do in order to shut off the “*Mummy brain*”. By doing so she is enabled not only to create opportunity to be physically apart from her children but whilst in that separate space she is able to be other than a mother.

This opportunity may afford Lucy a ‘psychic retreat’ from being a mother. First described by Steiner (1993) as providing patients in analysis with an ‘area of relative peace and protection from strain when meaningful contact with the analyst is experienced as threatening’ (Steiner, 1993: 1). It is not difficult to compare this with the protection from motherhood that Lucy is describing. Although the process of regular withdrawal and the associated collection of defences, phantasies and object relations can be harmful to some people in the long term, the relief represented by the access to this area can be experienced too. Steiner reports that the retreat can be idealised and represented as a haven. A subsequent account from Lucy of her time at work includes a sense of freedom that perhaps supports this:

“ when I get to work and sit at my desk I admit to feeling a bit of freedom you know I quite like that I can go out at lunchtime to the shops and just look at whatever I want sparkly handbags for as long as work permits”.

Her use of the word “admit” with which to describe this feeling suggests a discomfort with this freedom and her enjoyment of it. Her description of aimless wandering through the shops in her free time is conveyed as a highly pleasurable experience for Lucy.

Winnicott’s notion of the importance of the use of the potential space to restore balance between the inner and outer world includes the need to attain a ‘non-purposive state’. This is the state achieved by the infant in its protected state of being in the potential space and is the equivalent to relaxation for the adult, according to Winnicott. Lucy portrays herself as a busy and alert mother who is far from a state of relaxation. Her awareness of her need to be able to enter this state (and her perception that she is prevented by the need for constant mental and physical vigilance of her children) can also be considered in her descriptions of wanting space away from them.

In our final interview Lucy told me that the family were going to move to a larger house out of the city and that although this would mean her driving the children everywhere she did not mind because she was able to focus on something other than her children and yet be secure in the knowledge that they were in her presence:

“I thought I need more space, I might as well go for it. I don’t mind. I actually don’t mind getting the children in the car and driving them places.”

(Lucy, 3: 29/L1407)

With these words Lucy suggests that a solution to being alone in the presence of her children is to create more space in her immediate environment. Perhaps she is describing driving the car as a way of being in the presence of her children but alone. It also seems possible that Lucy will not be able to create the desired psychic space by simply increasing her physical space. Will “*driving them places*” also “*drive her mad*”, as she told us before that being in their presence did?

Lucy’s accounts provide a way with which to examine how accounts of space and use of some of Winnicott’s theories can help to provide insight to mothers’ experiences. Although from the group that represents the ‘good mother’, this privileged insight to Lucy’s experiences shows us that they are fraught with anxiety, frustration and at times, despair. Her descriptions of how she gains from being alone in the presence of her baby and creates physical spaces away from her children provides insight to her lifestyle and psychic experiences. It illuminates the role that structural and other factors can play in the mothering experience. It shows the complexity of experiences within this ‘homogenous’ group of mothers.

Discussion

The origins of this paper lie in a wider study that investigated the transition to second-time motherhood amongst women living in London (Frost, 2006). The study used parenting networks to recruit seven women who were six months pregnant with their

second child to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each woman at three monthly intervals until the second child was nine months old. The women were encouraged to speak of events and experiences that were of significance to them during this period so that narratives about their expectations, hopes, fears and realities could be gathered. The narratives were explored using models of narrative analysis (e.g. Gee, 1991; Riessman, 1993; Emerson and Frosh, 2004). By exploring the descriptions of the ways in which space was significant to them, access to ways in which these women made sense of breaches in their subjective understanding of themselves as they became mothers to two children was sought. The study aimed to avoid imposing preconceived stories onto those of the women as far as possible by employing a pluralistic narrative analysis (Frost, 2009) and through careful researcher reflexivity. The Findings were discussed using psychoanalytic thinking applied to bring a maternocentric focus to the work.

Narrative inquiry is a method particularly suited to exploration of identity, owing to the encouragement of personal reflection and meaning making. It recognises that it is particularly at times of incoherence in events and breaches in the individual's sense of identity that the stories are useful and forthcoming in making sense of changes in the sense of self and in the narrator's relationship to their surroundings (Riessman, 1993; Emerson and Frosh, 2004; Bruner, 1987). Narrative analysis of the accounts of the mothers' descriptions of changes in external space allows for a detailed study of their content, form and context (Halliday, 1973).

Despite careful efforts to recruit broadly, select the most appropriate approach to eliciting, gathering and analysing the data and to pay attention to issues of reflexivity

and researcher impact, the fact remained that all the mothers recruited to this study were white, middle-class professional women. This can be attributed in part to the recruitment process that used particular parenting networks. It can also explain the findings that the majority of research is carried out with this group of mothers - perhaps because they are most willing to volunteer and to talk about their experiences. Several of the participants spoke of how pleased they were to contribute to research on the topic of second-time motherhood. They were a group of women with resources that enabled them to take part (none were working at the start of the research) and to consider what information was available to them as mothers. As a white middle-class researcher this group was relatively easy for me to recruit from.

Lucy's frequent references to space both before and after the birth of the second child provide a means to challenge the notion of the normalised mother. She sometimes spoke of space in concrete terms such as "*the things we could do if we had a larger house*", "*I don't know how I will cope with the amount of space the double buggy will take up*". She also recounted the importance of "*headspace*" to her, supported by references to herself as "*jelly brain*", having a "*fractured brain*" and of her brain feeling "*shredded*".

Interviews with other mothers sometimes had to be rearranged or were interrupted by unexpected intrusions of partners, babies, children or social and professional visitors to the interview space of the house. The mothers frequently referred to the lack of opportunity to carve out space for themselves. The foregrounding of accounts of space raised the issue that understanding the experiences of mothers may be enhanced by further exploration of their talk of space.

Research has focussed on gendered divisions of labour carried out by mothers in nuclear families with supportive partners. It has led to discourses of selfishness being used to describe mothers who work and so do not fulfil the gendered role of child care and household management and to those who raise children alone (whether by choice or circumstance). 'Selfishness' in motherhood has developed from societal concern to 'protect the child's best interests'. It has been founded on the pervasive ideology of attachment theory and is enshrined into Social Policy in the Children Act (1989; 2004) (Alldred, 1996). The 1989 Children Act was criticised as not being detailed enough about what was meant by the best interests of the child and of leaving unquestioned any 'common sense ideas' invoked by it (Alldred, 1996). The subsequent 2004 Children Act built on the importance of secure attachment for the child with the creation of a Children's Commissioner to 'promote awareness of the views and interests of children in England'(2004 Children Act :3).

The focus of these Social Policy structures on the importance of secure attachment highlights culturally and historically specific notions of what constitutes 'good' and 'bad' mothering. Using the psychological discourse of the importance of intense and prolonged maternal attention drawn from the work of psychologists such as Bowlby, Winnicott and Spock, they seek to regulate families and family life (Baraitser & Spigal, 2009). The emphasis they place on mothers not only continues to counterpose women's and children's rights (Alldred, 1996) but also places an intolerable burden on the modern mother: "She is duty-bound to love her child; and if she is not quite criminal for failing to do so, she is at least abnormal" (Miller, 2009). The question such policies pose seem to be how love for one's child is demonstrated to the observing state.

The discourse of selfishness accompanying the attachment undertones of these structures extends to all mothers – those in Lucy’s position, lone mothers, young mothers and mothers who work.

Research with mothers under the age of twenty years has highlighted the differences in ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ perspectives (Phoenix, 1991). It shows how the reasons for becoming pregnant under the age of twenty from the outsider perspective are frequently attributed to reasons that include accessing council housing or welfare benefits. From the insider perspective of the mothers themselves however these reasons seemed ‘laughable’ (Clark, 1989 in Phoenix, 1996:87). Instead young women spoke of choosing pregnancy and motherhood over uncertain employment prospects and of seeking to create a positive identity for themselves as mothers.

Phoenix’s study found that mothers under 20 years of age are predominantly from the working classes and are more likely than their peers to leave school with few educational qualifications, to experience periods of unemployment and to be dependant on welfare benefits (Phoenix, 1991). However it has also been found that most young women who experience unemployment do not go on to have children at a young age. It suggests that poverty can be correlated with young motherhood but is not a causative factor in it. Instead it can be seen that the benefits to young women from poor socio-economic backgrounds of deferring motherhood are few and they do not fit the conflictual model facing Lucy. They are likely to have little or poor labour market experience and few education qualifications. Their employment prospects are unlikely to be adversely affected by periods out of employment and the role models in

their mothers and fathers are likely to be of people employed in insecure poorly paid jobs. These young mothers are unlikely to enhance their ability to make independent provision for themselves and their children by deferring motherhood (Phoenix, 1991).

Conversely, mothers who are also career women have been branded in the media as selfish women who chose to position themselves outside traditional gendered roles of motherhood. The accusation levelled at them is through implied negative effects for the children in their care, although precisely what the effects are is often not spelled out (Allred, 1996). In contrast to this, research amongst different groups of mothers across the UK found that African Caribbean mothers in the UK often work full-time and believe this to provide a good role model to their children (Duncan & Irwin 2004).

For her the issue of returning to work was a choice she could make because her husband earned enough money to support the family. For women who are parenting alone or without a supportive partner, working to earn a living can be not one of choice but of necessity. Women who seek work when they have young children have to find employment that fits around childcare arrangements. This often relegates women who are mothers to poorly paid part-time jobs. Half of all women with pre-school children are in employment and the majority (65%) work on a part-time basis (Marks & Houston, 2002). This raises additional financial implications of paying for childcare or of relying on family and friends. These insights to the importance of employment outside the home as a way of being away from the children gives insight to the frustration that may be experienced by those that cannot access this opportunity.

For Lucy then the choice to move to a physically larger space in order to create more psychic space for herself was made. Contact with her was lost at that point but it can be presumed that her husband's income and the type of job he held enabled the new life to be developed and maintained. Lucy chose to give up employment and become a full-time mother.

The choice to change housing is not one open to mothers without sufficient financial resources. Research that examines how gender and social class intersect with ethnicity can highlight ways in which this becomes pertinent. One example is the role of kinship networks in childcare. Research shows the extent to which grandparents in many families provide short-term childcare (Chamberlain, 2003; Marshal et al, 1998). For mothers depending on this support the question of moving away from the location of the kinship networks' may be answered for them by considering the impractical implications of having to pay for childcare when it was previously provided by family members.

This study has suggested that focussing on mothers' lived experiences within particular spaces, by studying what they say about them and bringing psychoanalytic understanding to the account, may indeed have highlighted 'ways of being that have been previously ignored' (Majumdar, 2007). Mothers make up a diverse group that includes single women, women in same sex relationships and mothers of differing ethnicities and cultures along with white middle-class women in traditional families, who are perceived to be living up to the 'mother ideal'. Illuminating the meanings in Lucy's accounts this way serves not only to heighten insight to her experience but

also to shine a light on the lack of availability of some of these options to others. It allows us to consider the impact of these restrictions and outcomes on mothers who do not conform to psychology's norm. In doing so it outlines areas of further research that can be conducted through ongoing consultation with all representatives of mothers and careful, multiperspectival consideration of what they tell us.

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