A PLURALISTIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

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ABSTRACT

The newly enabled position of a single mother by choice (SMC) sits at the margins between constructions of 'good' and 'bad' mothering. SMC describes women who choose to parent without a cohabiting partner, which is increasingly often done using alternative reproductive technologies.

This research examines personal narrative newspaper articles featuring SMCs from the UK. The data was selected in two tranches and offers an exploration of present constructions of the subject position, as well as a historical variability. I have chosen to look at newspaper articles as a key site where power is circulated and where dominant discourses are both reflected and constituted. This research asks how discourses have been negotiated to enable SMC to resist being constructed as 'bad' mothers and avoid the repercussions which this would entail. A combined approach of Foucauldian discourse analysis and discursive psychology was used to give a macro and micro perspective, focusing on power and legitimisation. Three discursive sites were identified: constructing single parenting as problematic, constructing single parenting as viable, and a modern family form.

I have argued that in order to validate taking up the subject position of SMC, it was produced as an avoidance of other subject positions that could be constructed as riskier to maintain or assume. These included the 'childfree woman' and the 'divorced mother'. Most significantly, the SMC construction was understood as being distinct from the common pejorative construction of the teenaged lone mother. As such, SMCs were produced as good neoliberal citizens, with a focus on planning, preparation, and responsibility. A postfeminist version of mothering was also constructed, which paradoxically encourages an intensive self-surveillance by mothers in terms of their personal status, and with an emphasis on a child-centred, selfless approach to parenting. As such, constructions of heteronormativity were seen to coexist with constructions of celibacy and sexlessness. In addition, the position of SMC was understood to have become increasingly coupled with assisted reproductive technologies as a route to conception, reinforcing the construction of SMC as sexless, and producing SMC as a

consumer position. In some instances, SMC was seen to be constructed as the ideal parenting position with a focus on control, intensive mothering, and individualism.

This research has interrogated how power operates to constrain mothering subject positions discursively. The constructions drew attention to a range of institutional and self-disciplinary practices, which suggested conformity to and resistance of norms. The pervasiveness of the ideologies of neoliberalism and postfeminism within the context of ideal motherhood were challenged, whereby autonomy, self-reflexiveness and individuality are privileged qualities. This thesis suggests that clinicians do the same, both in practice and as part of their commitment to social justice, in order to evaluate how circulating ideologies oppress certain mothering subject positions.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ART: Assisted Reproductive Technology

BPS: British Psychological Society

CBT: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

DI: Donor Insemination

DP: Discursive Psychology

FDA: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

HFEA: Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

IVF: In Vitro Fertilisation

NHS: National Health Service

SMC: Single Mother by Choice

UEL: University of East London

UK: United Kingdom

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

To a large extent, discussions either praising or condemning single parenthood focus on legitimacy: sometimes on the legitimacy of the child, at times on the legitimacy of the mother, but more often on the legitimacy of the decision to have a child without the presence of a father (Bock, 2000, p. 64).

Reproductive freedom has always been at the heart of the feminist agenda (Gordon, 1986) whereby women have fought hard to gain ownership over their own procreation, allowing them the freedom to pursue both education and careers (Gordon, 1986). Developments in technology, policy, and cultural norms have been understood as creating new possibilities for women, enabling practices such as contraception, abortion, IVF, and artificial insemination (Gillespie, 2001). One such freedom (as it can be constructed) arising in the last twenty years or so is the option to conceive, birth, and raise a child alone. This is known as the single mother by choice or 'SMC' (Bock, 2000; Mannis, 1999; Murray & Golombok, 2005). Despite the increase in reproductive possibilities, researchers have suggested that the accepted construction of motherhood has become narrower with distinct demarcations between understandings of 'good' and 'bad' parenting (Assarsson & Aarsand, 2011; Smajdor, 2009; Ylänne, 2016).

At the age of 30, I was single and starting to think about having a child. I began to research online what life is like for a single mother by choice. It did not take extensive research to realise that this is a position that strongly divides opinion. It seemed clear at the time that whilst it is scientifically and legally possible, culturally there seemed to be a lag in its acceptability. This was not the path I took in life in the end, as I met someone and became part of a heteronormative family unit. The liminality of the subject position stayed with me, though, as a fertile place for exploration. I felt that meeting the attributes of the SMC as it is commonly constructed (and having considered it) positioned me as an insider/outsider researcher.

1.1. Thesis Overview

Discourses of motherhood in Western society have been dominated by constructions of the 'good mother' — a white, middle-class, heterosexual woman in a stable relationship who is of an 'appropriate' age (Abetz & Moore, 2018; Forna, 1999; Letherby, 1999). Research has suggested that since World War II there has been an intensification of the

‘mother’ position (De Benedictis, 2012; Hays, 1998). The mother trope has been thought of as steadily morphing into a construction of ‘perfect mothering’, where mothers are assessed by an increasingly extensive criterion (Geinger et al., 2014). Women who cannot or will not identify with the good/perfect mother tropes can be positioned as deviant and will suffer from various consequences that accompany this positioning (De Benedictis, 2012). In particular, the teenaged lone mother on welfare benefits has been epitomised as the ‘bad mother’. Mothers constructed as such have been accused of perpetuating a ‘cycle of degradation’ and held as responsible for moral failings in society (De Benedictis, 2012).

The key distinguishing element that marks out the SMC is the concept of choice. Choice is a complex construction to negotiate as it can position SMC as taking a deviant path away from the hegemonic ‘good mother’. However, ‘choice’ is understood to be a watchword of postfeminism, demonstrating the apparent autonomy and agency that women in Western societies are constructed as having (Holmes, 2018). Thus, how the concept of choice is negotiated plays an important role in whether the position is understood as legitimate. This is particularly prescient given the fluctuating role of choice in the construction of the stigmatised, usually teenaged, lone mother. In other words, the stigmatised lone mother has been constructed as making an active choice by ‘choosing’ pregnancy for the welfare entitlement, whilst conflicting discourses also construct her pregnancy as feckless and accidental and therefore lacking any active ‘choosing’.

To understand current motherhood constructions in relation to the SMC, I aim to establish the context in which today’s mother exists. My understanding of this is neoliberalism. Originally an economic project, neoliberalism has arguably become more pervasive and has been considered as the ideology that defines this era (Tyler, 2011). The deconstruction of neoliberal society offers a lens through which to critically assess the literature. Postfeminism is a construct which encapsulates how female subjectivity is positioned in the neoliberal age. According to the postfeminst sensibility, liberal feminism has achieved its objective of creating parity between the sexes. Critics such as McRobbie (2013), and Gill (2017), however, have suggested that this does not account for intersectionality, where certain identities achieve gender equality at the expense of others.

The epistemological basis of this research is moderate social constructionism. I am concerned with how power is operating through discourses in order to privilege certain ways of being.

This thesis is of relevance to counselling psychology, which has a commitment to social justice at its core. Both in our practice and in our wider position, we can contribute to discourses that unite and support mothers whilst considering how our own assumptions might be contributing to a 'hierarchy' of mothers which privileges certain forms of motherhood over others. Assumptions informing common sense, such as a belief in a meritocracy and the perceived connection between individual moral failings and welfare benefits, are pervasive. By having a more rounded picture, counselling psychologist practitioners can help clients to understand options that might be outside of their current field of vision. In our wider capacity as advocates and policymakers, we can endorse freedoms and opportunities that will enrich the lives of all women, not just an elite group.

In the next chapter, I review the literature pertaining to mothering constructs, keeping in mind the context of neoliberalism. The literature that addresses SMCs directly is then assessed.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will assess the constructs of good, perfect, and bad motherhood with regard to the ideologies of neoliberalism and postfeminism. The power structures that these constructions serve to propagate will be considered. Finally, I will discuss the literature that addresses single mothers by choice (SMCs) specifically, with considerations about how the above constructions have impacted on this burgeoning family form. I will assess what is known about the area and where there are possible gaps in the knowledge. Following on from this, I offer the rationale for my own work, including the research questions devised to guide the analysis.

2.1. Context, Neoliberalism, and Postfeminism; Embedded Assumptions

Parenting must be understood from within the context in which it lies; one such lens through which to do so is neoliberalism. Originally an economic concept relating to the deregulation of the markets and privatisation, neoliberalism can now be considered as a pervasive ideology that influences every aspect of life including the domestic sphere (McRobbie, 2013). Neoliberalism has two defining beliefs: the supremacy of the market and an assumption of liberty as the ultimate social and political value (Cummins, 2018). Liberty, in this context, is understood as freedom from intervention by the state or other such institutions and the promotion of individualism. It is argued that citizenship in neoliberal society is valued on consumer power and the ability to work (Tyler, 2011).

Neoliberal narratives suggest that restrictive class binds have evaporated and that the individual has the freedom to elevate their position in society through education and a work-based identity (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). Critics of neoliberalism, however, have refuted this, stating that neoliberalism is in fact a class-based economic project in which assets are systematically stripped from the poor and placed in the hands of a tiny global elite (Harvey, cited in Tyler, 2011).

Foucault describes neoliberalism as the ‘conduct of conduct’ whereby social control is indirectly asserted (McNay, 2009). Being middle-class is considered a central tenet for the neoliberal citizen, a principle that serves to de-proletariatise society, vanquishing any coherent sense of working-class identity and struggle (Hall, cited in Chen &

Morley, 2006). This is despite the breakdown in the stability of a system where the trajectory was education followed by a 'job for life'.

Fraser (2013) has described the current economic sphere as increasingly 'feminised'. This means short or no-contract work, no stability of unions, and regular periods of unemployment (Fraser, 2013). Survival in such a system suggests the need for a 'reflexive' personality with qualities such as flexibility, adaptability, and self-invention (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). Individuals are encouraged to view themselves as an enterprise and their value is dependent on their economic worth (McNay, 2009). In addition, strong bonds of class and kinship are seen to have disintegrated. Thus, each individual must form their own supportive community (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008).

The parameters that describe what it means to be a woman within neoliberalism are thought to be encapsulated by postfeminism (Gill, 2007; Gill, 2017; McRobbie, 2013). Gill, for instance, understands postfeminism as a contradictory 'entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist themes' (2007, p.149). According to Gill, there are at least three contradictory understandings of the term postfeminism. This consists of a theoretical perspective, a third-wave concept of feminism, and a backlash against feminist principles; however, it is the latter two understandings that have come to dominate (cited in Liu, 2019). The third wave understanding suggests that within neoliberalism, certain female subjectivities can thrive in the work, domestic, and parenting spheres (Liu, 2019). Under this framework, contemporary women are understood to benefit from the work done by the second-wave feminists, while believing that feminism has now served its purpose and has ceased to be of use (Ortner, 2014). Thus, women today are considered (and consider themselves to be) unburdened by the constraints of inequality, where they are free to make choices autonomously.

At the same time, however, gender differences are constructed as biological, which serves to maintain pre-existing inequalities (Gill, 2007). Discourses of self-care and self-regulation dominate, whilst collective ideas of struggles for social justice have diminished (Liu, 2019). The notion of postfeminism as a backlash suggests that there is a stigma attached to the concept of feminism rendering it 'unfeminine' and 'unappealing'. Notions of political correctness are thought to restrict women and limit their ability to express 'femininity', for example, whilst subjectification has become 'voluntary' (Liu, 2019). Alternatively, for some, 'feminism' seems to have become

'cool' but has been described as a tool to develop an identity with which stylish young women can make use of to develop their personal 'brand' (Gill, 2017).

An alternative form of feminist discourse has focused on intersectionality (Liu, 2019). Intersectionality suggests that gender inequality is now intertwined with other forms of inequality such as class, race, and sexuality (Ortner, 2014). Whilst traditional notions of the patriarchy as a system that oppresses women and privileges men have been constructed as outmoded, other forms of inequality and subordination are seen to be thriving (Ortner, 2014). Intersectionality looks at postfeminism critically, suggesting that whilst some privileged, white, middle/upper-class women can have a degree of autonomy on par with men of a similar status, many other women (and men) do not, and this is without considering non-Western societies (Liu, 2019).

This does not mean that middle-class white women have the freedom to act as they choose. For those who can self-govern, coercive power is thought to have moved internally and operates as a technology of self (Rose, 1998). Women are shown to be subjected to a culture of surveillance, whereby their bodies and physical appearance are constantly assessed (by themselves and others) in relation to the 'ideal' (Ahl & Marlow, 2019; Gill, 2017). This ideal is conveyed by the media where women are judged on their appearance and then 'made-over' in a way that is more congruent with neoliberal standards (McRobbie, 2013). Endless magazine articles alert women to new 'problem' areas of their bodies and provide information on how to rectify them (McRobbie, 2013). This knowledge is digested by women who engage in a vigilant scrutiny of their peers and the self (Gill, 2017). Women are simultaneously positioned in increasingly sexualised ways (for example, in pregnancy and later life) and infantilised, whereby 'postfeminism seems uncomfortable with female adulthood' (Negra, 2009, p.14 cited in Littler, 2013a, p.11).

From a neoliberal perspective, 'good parenting' is seen as one component in an overall system of being understood as a 'good citizen' (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). Childhood is viewed as the site where the child is socialised into an autonomous, self-regulating adult, who can themselves be identified as a good neoliberal citizen (Geinger et al., 2013). From a Foucauldian perspective, the family acts as a regulatory technology of power where policies can be deployed as tools to manipulate the conduct of families from a distance (Foucault, 1994). Images of good parenting profligate in the media,

however, as standards of parenting are maintained by the individual's surveillance of self and through a surveillance of peers (Henderson et al., 2010). To this end, middle-class parenting practices which encourage perfectionistic and intensive standards are privileged over a less intensive working-class approach (Perrier, 2013). Those who do not or cannot conform to such standards will be punished, a message which is also transmitted via the media (Henderson et al., 2010). (These ideas will be elaborated on in section 2.4.).

It could be argued that underpinning the constructions of all three parenting tropes are two deeply embedded, yet contradictory, narratives. These are attachment theory and the emphasis on the role of the father. Stemming from psychoanalytic ideas, attachment theory foregrounded the relationship between the mother and child in infancy as being of paramount importance (Bowlby, 1998). A strong infant-mother bond was thought to benefit the child with emotional security and the ability to cultivate healthy and satisfying adult relationships (Bowlby, 1998). Even though later studies have shown that the secure attachment figure need not be the mother or even the main care giver, and recognised the benefit of multiple care-givers, the cultural impact of attachment theory in implicating the mother with the responsibility for the child's psychological well-being has remained (Birns, 1999). Additionally, more recent studies have emphasised the period from conception as crucial in infant development, whereby the mother's stress, nutritional intake and emotional state will impact on the foetal development (Gerhardt, 2015). These constructions are backed up by neuroscience, as well as neoliberal ideology which promotes affect regulation as a key skill for mothers to pass to their children (Thornton, 2011). (See section 2.3. on intensive mothering)

Feminists including Franzblau (1999b) have critiqued attachment theory as being embedded in, and emerging out of, misogynistic discourse. As well as a gendered inequity, Franzblau identified classist and racial term biases in the application of the theory. White middle-class mothers have been encouraged into the stay-at-home-mother position, but this is not the case for working-class and non-white women (1999b). Franzblau also highlighted an essentialist foundation to the theory whereby all women are attributed with nurturing and caring qualities (1990a). (This is explored further in section 2.3. below.) In addition, the emphasis on mothers, and mother 'blaming' can mean that other psychosocial factors are overlooked 'To believe that being a loving, sensitive mother to an infant can protect a child for life against the adversity of poverty,

abuse, poor schools, uncaring neighbourhoods and violent television, is both a theoretical and a practical mistake' (Birns, 1999, p.19)

The second assumption focuses on the importance of the structure of the nuclear family, and in particular, the salience of the father within it. The role of the father is embedded in Western society structured by patriarchal ideology and is thought to embody the qualities of protection and benevolence as well as domination and control (Ortner, 2014). For Foucault, the father maintains a sovereign authority, disciplining family member 'subjects' so they can conform to societal norms (Foucault, 1975, cited in Taylor, 2012). Additionally, the father as breadwinner keeps the family independent of the state (Donovan, 2000). In the case of adoption, it has been argued that knowledge of the biological father is essential for identity formation (Donovan, 2000). The institute of marriage has been the sanctioned family construction irrespective of whether the husband is abusive or neglectful (Bock, 2000).

In traditionalist rhetoric, the father's stabilising presence is considered necessary to tame the 'disruptive' energy of the son, or it is thought he will engage in criminal activities (Murray, 2005, cited in McIntosh, 1996), while daughters will likely become 'illegitimate' mothers (Roseneil & Mann, 1996). These discourses can also be seen as taking an essentialist position as they are based on assumptions that men are dominated by sexual urges, and women by the urge to procreate (Roseneil & Mann, 1996). In addition, there is a renewed interest in genetic essentialism overvaluing genes in the formation of disease, behaviour, and capabilities (Michelle, 2006).

Feminists have contested such discourses as patriarchal rhetoric, whereby women and children are constructed as being dependent on a male to the benefit of men and the detriment of women (Friedan, 1963). Any move away from the heteronormative family has been seen as against the patriarchy and, therefore, constructed as immoral (Bock, 2000). Where the position of the man within reproduction (through assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs)) and therefore the home is no longer embodied, there is a 'renewed cultural emphasis on the centrality of fathers to the identity of their children' (Michelle, 2006, p. 117). The (re)promotion of the heterosexual nuclear family and paternal importance has been viewed as an anti-feminist backlash (Roseneil & Mann, 1996).

The three motherhood tropes of good, perfect, and bad, will now be unpacked. I will explore their origins and functions with consideration of the two assumptions outlined above.

2.2. Good Mothering

Western society has been described as 'implicitly pronatalist' (Smajdor, 2009, p.107). Ideological importance has been placed on the role of motherhood, with the assumption that it is a 'magical kingdom' (Donath, 2015) and every woman's ultimate goal (Letherby, 1994). Dominant discourses relating to motherhood have established the construct of the 'good mother' as a white, middle-class, heterosexual woman in a stable relationship who is an 'appropriate' age, with a pleasing physical appearance' (Forna, 1999; Letherby, 1999; Hadfield et al., 2007; Abetz & Moore, 2018).

The myth purports that motherhood comes naturally to women and is wholly fulfilling (Woollett & Marshall, 2001). Motherhood has been described as 'the apex of feminine achievement and a celebration of romantic coupledom for women who have put education and career first' (Nayak & Kehily, 2014, p. 1339). The good mother calls forth the Virgin Mary and, as such, has traditionally been considered asexual and devoid of sensuality (Rich, 1976). Mothers who struggle with the role, or who feel a natural element of ambivalence, have found that available discourses to express these feelings are limited (Choi et al., 2005; Shelton & Johnson, 2006).

Motherhood is thought to have changed status at the end of the 18th century, from a perfunctory act to a 'special duty or sacred calling' (Tobin, 1990). This change has been reported as providing women with a distinct role, sanctioning the separation of the public and private spheres of men and women, and serving patriarchal capitalism (Tobin, 1990). Sociologist Parsons (1955) considered the division of labour to provide the ideal basis for industrial society with roles that are different but equal in value. The post-1945 boom in Western nations expanded this structure, with the 'Fordist' family (describing a liveable wage provided to the male-headed breadwinner of each family) considered as bringing unionized working men into the middle classes (Cooper, 2017). This was instigated by a rise in wages for white men, which became possible with the support of unpaid women maintaining the home (Cooper, 2017).

Second-wave feminists exposed the isolation and dissatisfaction felt by housewives, as

well as their exclusion from the political sphere (Friedan, 1963). Parsons' notion of equity within families also failed to account for the fact that as women take up more and more work outside the family, men generally do not take up more of the home and childcare responsibilities (Dryden, 2014). The addition of paid labour to domestic and childcare duties undertaken by women became known as the 'triple burden' (Friedman et al., 1987). Additionally, both Tobin and Parsons based their understanding of mothers on middle-class, white women. Franzblau (1999b) emphasised that since the beginning of industrialisation, there has been a two-tier system whereby middle-class women have been expected to stay at home and working-class and non-white women have had no option but to work.

Motherhood can be seen as having become entwined with femininity in the 19th century (Arendell, 2000). Qualities assumed to be natural to women such as patience, emotion, and self-sacrifice became synonymous with the role of the good mother (Weedon, 1993). The myth of the good mother emerged at a time when women were gaining more freedoms in the social, sexual, financial, and political spheres, and served to ensure that women felt permanently inadequate as mothers (Arendell, 2000). This construction was underpinned by three grand narratives: psychoanalysis, evolution, and positivism, which, by the 20th century, had combined to form attachment theory (Franzblau, 1999a). Bowlby's attachment theory has been used to motivate women to devote themselves to their children (Cox, 2006). Bowlby (1998) explained how an insecure attachment with the mother or 'primary caregiver' could result in problematic adult relationships. The theory has been criticised for diminishing the needs of mothers and resulting in a culture of 'mother blaming' (Cox, 2006).

Oakley (1974) explained how essentialist assumptions of a 'natural calling' and a 'maternal selflessness' underpinning motherhood have been used to serve the patriarchy and disadvantaged women by restricting their options. Additionally, Oakley argues that the myth of biological motherhood is sustained by the assumption that all children need their mothers (1980). Thus, the family has been viewed as a source of oppression to women (Hare-Mustin, 1978). Motherhood has been interpreted in opposing ways by feminists who have suggested that it should be avoided by women so that they retain the full capacity to engage in society (Firestone, 1970) or celebrated in light of the uniqueness of the experience which is available to women (Rich, 1976).

Thus, we can see that the term 'motherhood' is laden with assumptions reaching far beyond the biological process. From this perspective, motherhood can be understood as a complex hegemonic construction, which emerged from patriarchal society and has been used as a force to oppress women. The 'good' mother trope cannot exist in isolation; rather, it is thought to be brought into focus through the vilification of the lone mother (McIntosh, 1996). In the next section, I will explore the construct of perfect mothering which looks at the effects of neoliberalism and postfeminism on maternal subjectivity.

2.3. Perfect Mothering

It is argued that neoliberalism evaluates citizens according to their ability to shop and work (Tyler, 2011) and that motherhood is not exempt from this judgement. Mothers are thought to be assessed by factors such as financial independence, 'middle-classness', and autonomy from the state (Geinger et al., 2013). 'Middle-class' is a complicated term to unpack but it can be understood through the concept of inequality and seen as interchangeable with the values prized by neoliberalism — namely, consumer power, autonomy from the state, and self-governance (Tyler, 2015).

Describing the conceptualisation of class by Skeggs, Tyler paraphrased that '[t]his normative middle-class self is the neoliberal subject *par excellence*, mobilized as a form of governmentality through (and against) which judgements about class-others are produced 'within popular and political' imaginaries' (2015, p.500). In a neoliberal, postfeminist landscape, maternal subjectivity has been described as being judged on an increasingly demanding field of criteria (McRobbie, 2013) including areas outside the direct realm of mothering, such as career, sexuality, and physical fitness (as expanded upon below). Arguably, within this culture, women are encouraged to strive towards being 'perfect' in their mothering (Abetz & Moore, 2018). Therefore, henceforth, the terms 'perfect' mother and 'postfeminist' mother are used interchangeably.

Feasey (2013) has illustrated how the image of motherhood is conveyed to women through the media, where images of the mother who 'has it all' proliferate. Self-help and advice literature corroborate this, maintaining that the ideal mother remains constantly vigilant and attentive to her child's every need (Feasey, 2013). Additionally, the perfect mother has been constructed as having a beautiful home, yet in media representations of mothering, there is no place for drudgery and chores. The tropes of

the middle-class mother are coffee shops, play dates, and jogging buggies (McRobbie, 2013).

Littler (2013) has also described how the new mother is incited to consume extensively, buying intensively produced, new, non-co-operative items. Such media representations have overlooked the outsourcing of the inevitable chores to working-class, and often non-white, women (Fraser, 2013). They have also positioned ideal parenting as out of reach for working-class women who cannot afford the lifestyle of the 'perfect-mother' as articulated by the proliferation of such images (McRobbie, 2013).

Unlike the asexual 'good' mother, the postfeminist mother is expected to exude physical fitness and sexual attractiveness summed up in the monikers, 'yummy-mummy', and 'MILF' (Mother I'd Like to Fuck) (Littler, 2013a). Pregnancy used to offer women some respite from constant scrutiny, but it is now thought to be subjected to the same surveillance culture that pressurises young women (Tyler, 2011). Littler has asserted that the postfeminist mother is expected to vigilantly maintain sexual desirability both during and after pregnancy (2013a).

It has been argued that at the same time as mothers have been encouraged to be more self-focused, the expectations on how they parent have been stepped up. Termed 'new momism' and 'intensive parenting' (Hays, 1998; Henderson et al., 2010) these concepts suggest that beyond meeting a child's basic needs for food, shelter, and affection, mothers must additionally take full responsibility for their child's development 'physically, intellectually, emotionally and psychologically' (Sutherland, 2010, p.314). Intensive parenting has constructed parenting as a 'profession' with clear goals and objectives, in contrast to the perceived idleness of the working-class mother (Orgad & De Benedictis, 2015). Whilst such time-and money-orientated parenting is clearly not accessible to all, it has been considered hegemonic, whereby it has arguably become accepted as the dominant construction of good parenting practice (Taylor, 2011).

Importantly, whilst being subjected to the surveillance of self and peers, the privileged status of white, middle-class parents renders them free from state interference. Their ability to self-govern grants them autonomy and independence from welfare assistance and intrusive home visits into their private sphere from social workers (Warner, 2013). In a study of abuse reporting in hospitals, class and race were found to be the biggest

factors affecting whether a case was reported or not (Hampton & Newberger, 1985). This suggested that personal characteristics rather than behaviour influenced who the reporters classified as an abuser. The perception is that it is middle-class culture as opposed to middle-class resources that enables self-sufficient communities (Gillies, 2005).

Middle-class parenting has been described as 'concerted cultivation', whereas the working-class alternative is 'natural growth' (Lareau, 2003, cited in Perrier, 2013). Concerted cultivation describes a type of parenting where the parent is more involved, and the child's activities are structured. Natural growth describes a childhood centred around freedom and spontaneity, where the child is able to play and explore as they see fit. Increasingly, these two philosophies are seen not as viable alternatives, but as rivals, and working-class practices have become increasingly pathologised (Perrier, 2013). Childhood has thus become a process where children are socialised into a good neoliberal citizen; they are autonomous, self-regulating, and independent (Geinger et al., 2013).

Furthermore, middle-class parenting is seen to be governed by mothers themselves in a process of 'mommy [*sic*] shaming' whereby they are disgraced either publicly or online for an area of parenting that is perceived as misguided (Abetz & Moore, 2018). Such practices are indicative of a Foucauldian 'disciplinary technology' and show how power is circulating between mothers (Hook, 2007). Abetz & Moore (2018) have suggested that they also minimise the potential for vulnerability, and therefore, support between mothers. This fragmentation of womanhood has been constructed as benefiting the patriarchy (Abetz & Moore, 2018).

When it comes to work, it has been noted that women have been subjected to confusing and contradictory messages (Abetz & Moore, 2018). Women's magazines of the 1950's, for example, warned that 'a "half-time" mother was "half-a-mother" to her deprived children' (Curran, 2000, p.12). The current neoliberal economic climate and materialistic nature of society encourages women to work, yet, paradoxically, women have also been led to believe that they should devote themselves fully to their child. The perceived antagonism between mothers who choose differently has been dubbed the 'mommy [*sic*] wars' (Abetz & Moore, 2018). Attachment narratives can still be thought of as dominating, with the implication that nobody can do as good a job caring for the

child than the mother (Sutherland, 2010). This has also endorsed a fetishisation of the stay-at-home mother.

The 'modern' stay-at-home mother, having been cast differently from both her 'traditional' counterpoint and the 'idle' working-class mother by foregrounding the element of 'choice', is now thought to accompany the role in the middle-classes (Orgad & De Benedictis, 2015). Littler (2013) argued that the revitalised image of the stay-at-home mother coincides with the dwindling of childcare provision. However, female labour power has been considered as a crucial component of the neoliberal economy (McRobbie, 2013), whereby women who do not work are viewed as economically 'unproductive' through a neoliberal lens (Orgad & De Benedictis, 2015). Where white, class-privileged women do work, this has been constructed as having a positive bearing on their parenting style, with professional mothers transferring the negotiation and innovation of their workplace into their parenting (Taylor, 2011).

Perhaps the perfect neoliberal solution has been encapsulated by the 'mumtrepreneur'. This term describes the mother who establishes a successful business whilst on maternity leave, apparently allowing her to both work and be a stay-at-home mother (Littler, 2013). More importantly to neoliberal ideology, the mumtrepreneur needs no state assistance with childcare and therefore lives independently. However, media portrayals of the mumtrepreneur often downplay the all-consuming nature of caring for an infant. This may be an option well suited to the older mother who is on hiatus from a successful and long-standing professional career and who has various forms of support, but it is clearly not a possibility for all mothers. Unsurprisingly, many women are left feeling conflicted as to what the 'correct' choice is regarding work (Letherby, 1999). The result of this dilemma is that when mothers *do* work, they feel guilty about it (Vicedo, 2011). Guilt, however, is constructed as an indicator of 'good mothering' as it demonstrates separation anxiety (Sutherland, 2010). Rather than question the ideology that demands these punishing standards, modern mothers have been seen to simply accept that guilt is part of the role (Sutherland, 2010).

We have seen from the literature on perfect (postfeminist) mothering that the construct of the good mother can be thought of as having morphed in line with larger ideological shifts endemic in neoliberal society. Under neoliberalism, mothers that may have been previously outside the good mother remit, such as gay or divorced mothers, have

become acceptable insomuch as they can be identified with middle-class values of stability and financial independence (McRobbie, 2013). McRobbie (2013) has suggested that whilst this gives the appearance of societal flexibility and tolerance, women are expected to conform to increasingly punishing and competitive regimes of perfection.

Mothers are seen to be confronted with constant and contradictory pressures, whereby they must be simultaneously self-focused and child-focused. In other words, they must both have considerable consumer power and yet be selflessly omnipresent for their children. Being well-groomed and sexually appealing are not constructed as choices for the mother, but as imperatives (Littler, 2013). In order to function amongst such a confusion of discourses, it has been argued that guilt becomes a habitual state, and, in and of itself is a marker of good parenting (Sutherland, 2010). Guilt, alongside the competitive shaming that exists between mothers can be thought of as acting as 'disciplinary technologies' (Abetz & Moore, 2018).

In the next section, I will explore what life is like for women whose lives takes a different path, either through choice or circumstance.

2.4. Bad Mothering

So far, I have shown how women have been constructed as being expected to conform to increasingly demanding definitions of motherhood in order to be classified as good or perfect. For obvious reasons, these categories are not accessible to all, and women who do not or cannot conform to the ideal may be constructed as marginalised (Bartlett, 1995; Letherby, 1999). An exploration of discourses of 'bad mothering' is crucial to understand how 'abnormal' mothering is legitimised, as the way it is 'problematised' will influence the attempts made to 'rectify' the problematisation (Evans, 2016).

Existing outside the normative position has been seen to have created serious consequences for mothers ranging from feelings of shame and guilt, increased support from external agencies, to the removal of children (Sutherland, 2010). Sarafino (2006) has suggested that this can result in mother-blaming, leaving non-conforming mothers vulnerable to developing health conditions such as anxiety, depression, chronic fatigue, and fibromyalgia. At the most extreme, 'deviant' mothers have often been constructed as playing a role in the degradation of society (Arendell, 2000; De Benedictis, 2012).

Dualistic thinking has been applied to human behaviour since ancient times and is now reflected in the binary distinctions separating good and bad mothering practices (Wilson & Huntington, 2005). There is no objective way to establish what a 'good' mother is, so it is, therefore, always a subjective issue that is dependent on norms. After all, deviant perceptions of motherhood are culturally and historically specific (Wilson & Huntington, 2005). Whilst all types of non-normative mothers may feel marginalised, one group in particular can be thought of as more maligned than any other, and that is the unmarried teenaged mother (De Benedictis, 2012). In a paradigm where a mother can be labelled a 'slummy mummy' for failing to achieve the standards of beauty, fashion, and sexual attractiveness that the position 'yummy-mummy' necessitates (Littler 2013b), the repercussions for the teenaged welfare-dependent mother can be viewed as dire. Through political and cultural discourse, this small group has come to have huge significance in Western society (De Benedictis, 2012).

A brief look at how the literature understands other forms of deviant mothering follows below. Child-free women and older mothers will be briefly explored before a more extensive review of the 'feckless' lone mother and what this position has come to represent in neoliberal society.

2.4.1. Child-free Women

For women who take a non-normative direction — such as those who choose to abstain entirely from motherhood — the path has never been easy (Bartlett, 1995). The connection between motherhood and femininity has been perpetuated both in the medical and psychiatric fields (Gillespie, 2001). In his 1931 paper, 'Female Sexuality', Freud (1989) explained his understanding of the unconscious desire for women to give birth as related to penis envy, suggesting that women who do not seek fulfilment through childbirth and childrearing risk becoming neurotic.

Additionally, psychoanalysis has defined parenthood as a developmental stage that is necessary in order to achieve emotional maturity (O'Sullivan, 2012). Whilst these concepts have been critiqued by feminists (Parker, 1997), they can still be thought of as contributing to our cultural climate and the stigmatisation and stereotyping that child-free women face (O'Sullivan, 2012). Women who are either unable or un-desirous of having children are variously seen as not fulfilling their 'biological destiny' (Barlett,

1995, p16), and are childlike (Letherby, 1999; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991), selfish, angry, undesirable, and even schizoid (Rice, 1994).

In a society where the heteronormative nuclear family is constructed as the optimal family form, any alternative to this is constructed as deviant. Single women, who either do or do not have children are constructed as a threat to the status quo and are expected to justify their single status (Holmes, 2018). Child-free women face the possibility of being negatively stereotyped as determined and ambitious careerists or lonely women who turn to cats for company (Barlett, 1995; Lahad & Hazan, 2014). Traditional gender roles have ascribed the role of caring both in public and private to women; a career focus, rather than a maternal instinct, in other words, can threaten this assumption (Hadfield et al., 2007). Additionally, evidence has shown that women can face discrimination on the grounds of motherhood whether they are actually mothers or not, due to the potentiality of becoming a mother and the perceived impact that could have on their position (Wetherell, Stiven & Potter, 1987).

2.4.2. Older Mothers

The age span of biological fertility is thought to be widening, whilst simultaneously, the parameters of social acceptability are becoming narrower (Smajdor, 2009). Medical experts have recommended women give birth between the ages of 20 and 35 (Budds, Locke, & Burr, 2013); however, middle-class women are typically having babies later in their 30s (Littler, 2013). As a trend, later birth suits a neoliberal sensibility as it enables higher education and expanding rates of women in the workplace as per government policy for economic growth (Tyler, 2008). However, women who are considered outside the acceptable parameters can face stigmatisation. Women over 39 who need IVF treatment, for example, are not entitled to get help from the NHS, but they have the option of the costly private route (Hadfield et al., 2007). This further exacerbates the polarisation of age and socio-economic status.

Several studies have concentrated on the way that the media frames older mothers. These have shown that the mother can be constructed as selfish for delaying childbirth in order to focus on education and career (Shaw & Giles, 2009), and as putting their own needs first by 'leaving it too late' (Tyler, 2008, p.30). This represents another contradiction of the neoliberal age, whereby women are caught in a double bind of needing to be career focused, but not excessively so. Budds et al. (2013) suggested that

the lack of status afforded to motherhood may mean women feel pressured to be well established in their chosen field before taking a break, or they may struggle to return to work. Postmenopausal pregnancy is discussed in particularly dismissive terms, finding that it is 'another threat to the "ideal" family type and image of "ideal" motherhood' (Letherby, 1999, p. 368). Health risks for older mothers are emphasised (Hadfield et al., 2007) as is 'choice' (Budds et al., 2013). This suggests that these women are carelessly opening themselves up to greater risk (Budds et al., 2013). External circumstances that may affect 'choice', such as financial limitations, are rarely mentioned.

2.4.3. Lone Motherhood

I have chosen to use the term 'lone mother' to characterise women who began the process of mothering with a partner but ended up alone at some point after conception. This term is not neutral, but rather 'conjures up a deprivation model, a second-best alternative when the two-parent nuclear family is not available' (Lapidus, 2004, p. 228). This work does not intend to reinforce prejudiced assumptions of this group, but rather it highlights the discourses which have been utilised to stigmatise and subjugate this subject position, some of which I have discussed below.

As with every domain of motherhood, the construction of single motherhood is subject to the capriciousness of fashion (Smart, 1996). Prior to the 1970s, a mother expressed love for an illegitimate child by giving it away to be raised in a hetero-normative environment. Whereas after this time, it was expressed by raising the child herself (Smart, 1996). Alternatively, women may have been forced to marry or live with a concealed identity (Mazor, 2004). The terms 'lone' or 'single' mother may account for women with differing circumstances, such as through divorce, widowhood, or choice; however, the term is used indiscriminately (Salter, 2018).

Bock (2000) described a hierarchical construction of single mothers where they are ordered in proximity to the 'good' mother. The 'accidental' singlehood of widows is thought to place them at the top of the hierarchy. Divorce has become so commonplace that prejudice towards this group has been diminishing. McRobbie (2013) has suggested that high divorce rates have encouraged women's continued involvement in the workplace, as it reduces the need for welfare assistance and enables independence. Unlike other lone mothers, Bock (2000) suggested that divorcees and widows are excused from needing to legitimise their position, due to having once been in the

sanctified institution of marriage.

At the bottom of the mothering hierarchy, teenaged lone mothers are thought to represent 'disaffection from education, lack of opportunity, poor socio-economic circumstances and excessive sexuality' (Nayak & Kehily, 2014, p.1333). The apparent and possibly accidental fertility of the teen 'chav' mum is seen as an affront to the increasing fertility problems of middle-class women who are reproducing later in life (Tyler, 2008)[1]. They represent a 'less desirable' form of reproduction (Tyler, 2008, p.29) and therefore strengthen the concept of 'ideal motherhood' through their exclusion from it.

In contrast with the complementary term 'yummy mummy' for white, middle-class, heterosexual mothers (Nayak & Kehily, 2014), they have been ascribed various pejorative monikers. 'Pram face' (Tyler, 2008), 'chav mum' (Tyler, 2008), 'feckless mothers' (Phoenix, 1996), 'feral parents', and 'dysfunctional families' (De Benedictis, 2012) are just some of the examples. Young mothers can be thought of as representing a 'failed femininity' through a neoliberal lens, as it is a subject position that demonstrates an unwillingness to work and thus an inability to shop (Tyler, 2011). The vilification of this subject position represents an outpouring of 'sexist class disgust' (Tyler, 2008, p.26). Tyler (2008) has suggested that the act of being constructed as a 'chav mum' incurs the disgust of the middle-classes and serves to restrict social mobility. Working-class women are seen as both unable and undesirous of the intensive parenting that the middle-classes aim for. Elliott, Powell, & Brenton (2015), however, found that the black, working-class mothers they interviewed did strive for intensive mothering, but also discovered that a lack of structural support and resources worked against them.

Culturally, our understanding of disadvantage can be seen to have shifted over time from systemic inequality to an individualised focus (Fraser, 2013): 'On a political level, issues of social injustice such as poverty and deprivation are separated from determining structural factors and construed as a problem of irresponsible self-management; the poor are stigmatised as the "other" of the responsible, autonomous citizen' (McNay, 2009, p.64). Perrier (2013) suggests that working-class parenting

[1] Chav' is a pejorative term which is used to demonise the working class originating from the Romany word for child, but in popular imagination it is understood as an acronym for 'council house and violent' (Jones, 2011)

practices have become pathologised. There is a widely held assumption that such mothers are problematic to the state. Firstly, they are considered to be a drain on economic resources through welfare provisions (Phoenix, 1996). Secondly, their supposed lack of parenting is thought to incite criminality in their sons and perpetuate teenaged pregnancy in their daughters (Henderson et al., 2010).

After the 2011 UK riots, patriarchal discourses of lone mothers and absent fathers were deployed by politicians as the cause of 'Broken Britain' (De Benedictis, 2012). Surveillance of women who are considered to be ill equipped to cope with modern-day parenting is seen to occur at earlier and earlier stages of intervention. Pregnant women whose unborn children are deemed 'at risk' from social exclusion have been assigned a nurse to teach them parenting skills (De Benedictis & Gill, 2016). Media representations of teen mums has shown a tendency towards a normalised absence/pathologised presence, whereby individuals with successful outcomes are left out in favour of troubled cases (Phoenix, 1996). Underpinning this construction of the lone mother is the notion of meritocracy. This suggests that success is available for anyone if they work hard enough. However, critics of the term have indicated that inherited opportunity such as wealth and social connections have a bigger impact than hard work (Littler, 2013a). Additionally, the concept of meritocracy serves to weaken community and make the existing hierarchy palatable (Littler, 2013a).

Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon (Fraser, 2013) have provided a genealogy of 'dependency' to critique this common-sense term. In pre-industrial times when there was a clear hierarchy between landowners and wage labourers, almost everyone was a dependant, and therefore the term carried no stigma. With the advance of industrialisation, dependency became an unnatural, shameful position for men, but it was appropriate for women and non-whites. Increased rights won by working men meant that the wage labourer was now considered independent along with the self-employed and property owners. Dependency could now be used to refer to an individual character trait as well as a social relation. This was brought into focus by images of dependency as depicted by the pauper, the slave, and the housewife, whereby the former two represent a 'bad' dependency and the latter a 'good' one.

The term 'dependency' became increasingly pejorative in its usage and fears about developing 'habits of dependence' were expressed in political parlance. Those claiming

welfare were segregated into the deserving and the undeserving with vigilant surveillance to attempt to decipher which was which. Post-industrial capitalism brought another shift in understanding the term whereby there are no natural and deserving recipients of welfare. Dependency is still a feminised and racialised term but is now solely identified with individual psychology rather than subordination. This is in part because industrial restrictions to the labour force that restricted women and non-whites have ostensibly been removed. Additionally, the family wage is no longer hegemonic, resulting in the diminished existence of the housewife. The worker has become the universal social subject. Primary parents and those with more limited access to well-paid jobs are therefore at a disadvantage. Political rhetoric on both (neo)liberal and (neo)conservative sides holds the assumption that independence is desirable and welfare recipiency is indicative of dependency and an undesirable position whereby; 'the political rationality of neoliberalism is expressly about winners and losers based on entrepreneurial skill, and the political rationality of neoconservatism is about preserving what you've got and protecting your own' (Brown, 2006 p.701).

The shift from understanding welfare receipt as a systemic position to an individual one, serves to close down discourses that could bring power imbalances to light. McRobbie (2013), for example, has cited the lack of nursery provisions for babies and toddlers, and after-school clubs for older children, as a factor in exacerbating inequality in maternal subjectivities. High-quality state-funded nursery care would afford all mothers equal opportunities to participate in the labour market as well as offering a stable, supportive environment for the children. According to McRobbie (2013), this is politically unpalatable in the current age due to an association with socialist ideology and the perceived cost to the communal purse. This means that mothers with less means feel ambivalent about prioritising paid work over childcare. McRobbie (2013) has proposed that private childcare in the form of nannies has been elevated over nurseries as a way of keeping the conversation about a universal provision closed.

Choice and agency are problematic discourses where the lone mother is concerned. Through being wantonly sexual or overly maternal, the lone mother has been constructed as becoming 'accidentally' pregnant (Tyler, 2008). In doing so, she is thought to have made no consideration of the impact her 'failure' to provide a consistent male role model could have on her child/ren (De Benedictis, 2012). Additionally, liberal thinkers wishing to refute individualistic discourses have diminished young mothers'

agency by suggesting that a lack of education and future options were implicated in their pregnancy (Roseneil & Mann, 1996). This line of thinking, therefore, positions agency as exclusive to educated, middle-class women (Roseneil & Mann, 1996). However, a competing discourse serves to construct the teenaged mum as making a deliberate choice to get pregnant in order to receive benefits (Murray, 2005). Both discourses are derisive, however, as the lone mother is constructed either as a hapless victim or a benefits scrounger. Any positive discourses of a lone mother consciously choosing to have a child for reasons other than to receive extra welfare benefits are silenced discourses, whereby things that go unsaid may be forbidden or taboo (Foucault, 1979).

The lone mother as understood by this narrow and pejorative definition is constructed as antithetical to the 'good' or 'perfect' mother position. They have been constructed as having 'failed' to provide a nuclear family and father figure. Additionally, they have been viewed as either 'choosing' to be on benefits (which enables the consistent maternal presence that attachment theory necessitates) but positions them as a 'bad' neoliberal citizen — or the other way around. The position they find themselves in is constructed as an entirely individual occurrence, with no recognition of larger forces that may have shaped their circumstance. This constructs them as the 'underserving poor' as opposed to the 'deserving poor', such as the elderly or those with a disability (Dixon, 2012).

Any self-sacrifice that they might undertake is thought to be dismissed, as it does not fit with middle-class conceptions of 'concerted cultivation' (Elliott, Powell, & Brenton, 2015). There is no consideration of the man who impregnated them, and as is the norm in reproductive matters, it is seen as the woman's responsibility. Such constructions can be considered to serve as a constant reminder of what awaits the 'good' mother who does not conform to prevailing norms (Henderson et al., 2010).

In the next section, I will look at the existing literature on SMCs, examining how they are positioned in relation to the good, perfect, and bad motherhood tropes.

2.5. How SMCs are Positioned in the Literature

Women having a child out of wedlock is not a new thing; however, how this act is perceived by society has radically changed. The decline in religiosity in Britain in the

middle of the twentieth century, coupled with an increasingly individual outlook, led to a liberalisation of laws regarding the domestic sphere such as divorce, homosexuality, and abortion (Curran, 2000). Attitudes shifted and pre-marital sex was no longer considered a 'sin' (Curran, 2000). Increasing educational attainment and workplace opportunities meant women no longer relied on marriage for financial security. In addition, ARTs (assisted reproductive technologies) have broadened in scope and availability (Michelle, 2006). This selection of political and social changes, amongst others, has meant that women can make a conscious choice to procreate without a romantic partner, i.e., single mothers by choice.

The term 'Single Mother by Choice' was coined by a support group for such women established by American psychotherapist, Jane Mattes, who became an SMC herself in 1981 (Mattes, 1994). The group wanted a moniker that clearly emphasised the element of choice in their position and therefore distinguished them from divorcees and widows (Mattes, 1994). Other terms used are 'choice mothers', 'solo mothers' (Graham, 2018), and 'elective single mothers' (Rose, 1992). As the concept has evolved, it has become clear that there are certain elements that can be thought of as implicit in the construction: SMCs are generally highly educated and financially secure (middle-class), older (30 plus), and obviously always single (Bock, 2000; Layne, 2009; Mannis, 1999; Murray & Golombok, 2005). Ethnicity is not defined, but so far, the SMC has been found to be a position predominantly associated with white women (Bock, 2000; Hertz & Ferguson, 1998; Holmes, 2018).

Likewise, the term has been associated with heterosexual women whereby single lesbian mothers can feel that they are unseen (Lapidus, 2004). Bock (2000) identified a hierarchy of single parent, suggesting that where SMCs have been recognised as a distinct group, they have been compared favourably to the stereotypical teenage and welfare dependent mothers, due to their economic self-sufficiency. However, the element of choice can be considered to put them beneath divorcees and widows, with some people holding them responsible for contributing to 'moral decay' (Popenoe, 1996). Single women who choose to mother alone have been depicted as pathological examples of nature going 'too far' (Zadeh & Foster, 2016), or 'maternal egoism' which can impact negatively on the child's emotional health (Michelle, 2006, p.112). Alternatively, they have been constructed as a favourable family form because unlike

other single parent unit (such as resulting from divorce or death), there has been no change to the family structure from its outset (Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020).

The literature regarding SMCs mostly comes from the perspective that it is a position that is unfairly stigmatised. I have synthesised the literature into three groups based on the methodologies employed, the outcome studies, and subjective voice studies and media representations. Outcome studies predominantly compare children and mothers from SMC families with the heteronormative 'ideal' on a range of different variables. Subjective voice studies have interviewed SMCs on a range of subjects including how they made the choice, their identity as a user of ARTs, how they construct themselves with regards to feminism, and how men feature in their discourses. Media representation studies have shown that SMCs are ambivalently represented; they are depicted as being simultaneously viable yet deviant.

2.5.1. Outcome studies

By deviating from the norm, female-headed families have been targeted as inviable where attention is focused on the 'form and not the content of family life' (Hertz & Ferguson, 1998, p.35). Outcome studies have sought to readdress this (e.g. Golombok et al., 2016; Murray & Golombok, 2005; Siegel, 1995; Siegel, 1998). By comparing the 'outcomes' of mothers and children from different family forms, these kinds of studies have served to normalise the SMC subject position by constructing it as 'good' as or even 'better' than the heteronormative nuclear family at 'measurable' factors. Siegel (1995; 1998), for example, compared women who had become single mothers through either sexual intercourse, adoption, or DI. The major factor in coping with motherhood was found to be whether the choice to become a single parent had occurred before or after conception.

Similarly, Murray and Golombok (2005) looked at the quality of the parent-child relationship and the wellbeing of the mother in women who used donor insemination (DI) by comparing SMCs with married mothers. The study aimed 'to examine the motivation and experiences of women who choose to become single mothers through DI' (p.244). As such, the research constructed SMC's as precluded from the damaging impact of an absent father. Rather, this is constructed as a product of divorce or separation. Their findings described equal outcomes for the solo DI mothers and married DI mothers on the categories of psychological well-being and adaption to

motherhood. Like Siegel, discourses of planning and preparation were drawn upon to construct the SMCs as responsible and considered in their choice. Other discourses were also utilised to legitimise the choice, including the 'ticking of the biological clock' and a failure to be situated in a much-desired romantic relationship (Murray & Golombok, 2005).

Ten years on, Golombok et al. (2016) conducted a follow-up study, with a different cohort. As some of the SMCs had a child aged between 4 and 9, child adjustment was included as a variable. They found similar levels of child adjustment, parenting quality, and maternal psychological wellbeing between SMCs and two-parent families. They also found lower levels of conflict between SMCs and their children. Again, drawing on discourses of planning and choice, SMCs were constructed as having parity with the heteronormative nuclear family, whilst unmarried single mothers with 'unplanned' pregnancies were hypothesised to be the source of attachment issues and negative 'outcomes' for the child. 'Thus, it is conceivable that the intention to be a single parent contributes to positive mother– child relationships and, consequently, to positive child outcomes. In contrast, more negative mother– child relationships and child outcomes may result from parenting alone when single motherhood had not been planned or desired' (Golombok et al, 2016, p.416).

The outcome studies cited have foregrounded discourses of choice as constructing SMCs as a distinct sub-sect of single mother whose actions impacted on neither their parenting style, nor the psychological wellbeing of their child(ren) (Jadva et al., 2009). The years of planning and preparation it takes to achieve parenthood in this fashion (cited as an average of four years by Robinson, 1997) have been constructed as commitment and dedication, which, in turn, is cited as evidence of good parenting. Robinson (1997) suggested that the steep price tag of ARTs in the US acts as helpful filter ensuring that only those with the educational and financial means to support their new family can achieve SMC status. According to this system, the markets are left to decide who can and cannot have access to motherhood in this way. This fits with the principle of neoliberalism which suggests that 'economic rationality should be used to correct social dysfunctions' (McNay, 2009, p.58). (Choice is explored further below, in section *2.5.2.1.)*

The necessity of outcome studies to contribute to the legitimise the position of SMCs is clear with regards to the tenuous position that SMCs hold in society — as the cusp of acceptability. NHS funding for single women to access ARTs remains a contested area (Zadeh & Foster, 2016). Clinicians still doubt the efficacy of single women to parent, resulting in a higher level of 'welfare of the child' scrutiny (Lee et al., 2017). More recently, an NHS Clinical Commissioning Group in South East London has stopped providing public funds for single women to make use of ARTs on the grounds that the outcomes for the child will be poorer for this group (Willows, 2019). Thus, the discourses that address outcomes for the child offer an opportunity for practices to be facilitated or constrained through the operation of power.

However, outcome, (or comparison) studies have also been viewed as problematic by feminist critical psychology for reflecting a liberal equality perspective (Clarke, 2008). Research of this nature is underpinned by a realist stance and is therefore broadly uncritical of the structure of society. Rather, the aim is to make minor improvements that would enhance the quality of life for those living within it (Fox et al., 2009). The outcome studies discussed can be considered as underpinned by the dominant assumptions discussed in the introduction, the perceived supremacy of the heteronormative nuclear family, and attachment theory. By aligning the SMC with the heteronormative nuclear family, SMCs have been constructed as being on the 'right side' of the good/bad mothering dividing practice. Such dividing practices exist to legitimise power imbalances (Foucault, 1982).

Comparison studies have frequently been employed in the service of demonstrating the viability of lesbian parenting. Prior to such research, it was common for lesbian mothers to have their children removed from them in custody battles (Clarke, 2008). Lesbian mothers who kept their sexuality private, and therefore displayed more similarity to the heteronormative mother, were more likely to be successful in retaining their children. Additional credit goes to lesbian couples who mimic heteronormativity by maintaining a middle-class, independent unit, preferably with one breadwinner and one stay-at-home parent (Michelle, 2006). This resulted in a good/bad divide between discrete and militant lesbians. This distinction can be considered to enforce assimilation as a means of control, prescribing a very narrow understanding of what a homosexual identity must conform to (Richardson, cited in Clarke, 2008). Therefore, it can be considered that

studies of this nature serve to reinforce the dominant group and increase the marginality of the other by

> '[steering] attention away from the institutional, ideological and material validation and support that is bestowed on heterosexual families. Although it may help to extend our rights in the world as it is, it provides little resistance to the primacy of the nuclear family and little opportunity for instituting long-term social change' (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2004 p.205).

Likewise, it can be considered that in presenting the SMC as on a par with or even superior to the desired norm, the outcome studies serve to further marginalise the lone mother. Through foregrounding discourses of planning and responsibility the SMC is positioned as middle-class, and, as such, demonstrating good neoliberal citizenship (Perrier, 2013). The institutional and ideological support that underpins the middle-class, heterosexual, white parent remains unchallenged.

2.5.2. Subjective Voice Studies

Through interviewing women who are SMC, or one day hope to be, subjective voice studies have explored the concept of choice (Bock, 2000; Graham, 2012; Holmes, 2018; Mannis, 1999; Renvoize, 1982). Other research has focused on feminism (Hertz & Ferguson, 1998; Holmes, 2018; Layne, 2009), the use of ARTs (Michelle, 2006; Robinson, 1997) as well as how men feature in SMC discourses (Hertz, 2006; Holmes, 2018; Layne, 2009; Renvoize, 1982).

2.5.2.1. Choice

As in outcome studies, many subjective voice studies have foregrounded the concept of choice in their research (Bock, 2000; Holmes, 2018; Mannis, 1999; Zadeh, Freeman & Golombok, 2013). SMCs in this context were seen to acknowledge that the decision could construct them as 'selfish' for depriving the child of a father, and therefore incompatible with the 'selflessness' associated with the 'good mother' trope. This negative self-view was attributed to both external and internal judgement (Graham, 2018). To this end, a process of 'damage limitation' (Graham, 2018) was executed with regards to legitimising the choice (Bock, 2000). This was shown to be achieved in two conflicting ways, through distancing themselves from the choice by indicating that it

was a born out of limited options, whilst concurrently emphasising the positive aspects of making a 'choice'.

Discourses were drawn upon to distance the SMC from ownership of the 'choice'. A combination of individual and contextual factors was drawn upon to show how the decision-making process was negotiated (Mannis, 1999). Discourses suggesting that options were constrained included failed romances, the pressure of the biological clock ticking (Bock, 2000; Graham, 2018; Holmes, 2018; Layne, 2009; Murray & Golombok, 2005) and the desire to nurture (Mannis, 1999). As such, it was both a choice and not a choice. By highlighting the factors which restricted their options, SMCs were able to resist being constructed as non-normative. Rather, they have been described as women who 'cling to hegemonic fantasies of normative family structures' (Bock, 2000, p.70).

SMC is frequently described as 'plan B' after the heteronormative ideal failed to materialise (Graham, 2012; 2018; Hertz, 2006; Layne, 2013; Manzor, 2004). The decision-making process can involve complex emotional processes encompassing grief and mourning for the desired family form and envious feelings towards others who have it (Manzor, 2004). Graham's (2012) interviewees described being single as a temporary state and perceived the pressure of pursuing motherhood with time constraints to be incompatible with looking for a mate. Rather than settle for an inferior relationship with a high likelihood of divorce, the mothers hoped that a future partner might adopt the child, bringing them into line with the nuclear ideal without the complications of an ex-partner (Graham, 2012).

Lapidus (2004) suggested this might be an easier process for lesbian would-be SMCs, who have already had to come to terms with their position as 'outsiders' to mainstream norms. Roh-Spaulding (2001) has suggested that the narrow parameters that confine women in patriarchal society limit their choices, imploring the reader to

> 'not imagine that women choose this life *instead of* "married with children". They choose the best life they can within a cultural framework that provides most women with a still rather limited array of socially acceptable options regarding marital status, sexuality and parenthood' (p. 44).

Simultaneously and paradoxically, (as already seen in outcome studies) the element of choice is highlighted as a major asset for SMCs, constructing them as 'pre-conception' parents (Faircloth & Gürtin, 2018). Discourses of choice serve to both distinguish SMCs from other single mothers, but it also suggests that they have an advantage over traditional heteronormative families whereby planning when to have children, and how many to have, is not a given (Faircloth & Gürtin, 2018). Choice, in this instance, indicates a serious commitment to parenting made long in advance of the actuality of becoming a parent. This may include components of mental and emotional preparation as well as practical and financial readiness.

Discourses of being middle-class and financially secure were the foremost qualities that were employed to secure their place as legitimate parents (Bock, 2000). A hierarchal distinction was made by some participants between those who had made ample preparations prior to conception, and those who had come to parenting spontaneously (Graham, 2018; Hertz & Ferguson, 1998; Siegel, 1998). This was particularly important in the USA where state resources to assist are extremely scarce (even if it was deemed morally acceptable to be a beneficiary) (Hertz & Ferguson, 1998). This resulted in SMCs feeling duty bound to find a way to maximise their income and minimise their working time prior to becoming a mother (Hertz & Ferguson, 1998). Whilst research showed variation in terms of the SMC's financial standing, with some being prepared to go into debt, participants agreed that taking state benefits would be seen as unacceptable (Graham, 2018). Hertz and Ferguson (1998) found that more than half their sample benefited from a non-wage income, such as an inheritance, a rental income, or financial gifts. Therefore, either through good fortune or entrepreneurial skills, the mothers were able achieve sufficient amounts of 'mother-time' to align themselves with the dominant assumption of attachment theory (Hertz & Ferguson, 1998).

As such, SMCs are shown to demonstrate the qualities of good neoliberal citizenship including responsibility, self-reflection, emotional maturity, and financial capability (Bock, 2000; Graham, 2018; Hertz & Ferguson, 1998; Holmes, 2018; Mannis, 1999). They are shown to explain how they have undertaken introspective work prior to making the choice, either alone using available resources, or with their support network or therapist, thus demonstrating the reflexive 'technology of the self' tenet of neoliberalism (McNay, 2009).

These discourses enabled the SMCs to avoid being positioned as a 'stereotypical' single mother (Mannis, 1999). Graham (2018) suggested that whilst her interviewees deferred to the heteronormative as the 'ideal', they believed single parenting to now be an accepted position. Lesbian and gay parenting discourses were drawn upon as serving to help normalise alternative family formations (2018). Bock (2000) found contradictory discourses at work whereby SMCs expressed a desire for different family forms to be accepted, and yet simultaneously resisted being positioned as a 'problematised' family type. The SMCs, therefore, used discourses of othering, suggesting that there was a problematic type of single mother, but it was not them (Bock, 2000).

As well as implicating the unprepared teen mother, SMCs have suggested that divorce or death could mean that the mother might end up alone, but without the security that the preparation and planning undertaken by the SMC grants (Graham, 2018). Additionally, discourses were employed to suggest that conflict in heteronormative relationships could impact negatively on the child or mother (Graham, 2018). SMCs have also indicated that their single status has forced them to build stronger community ties than they might have had if they had a partner, and this exposes their child to many different personalities (Graham, 2012). (The idea of SMC as a 'temporary' status, with future relationship plans, will be discussed later in the thesis in section 4.1.1.)

2.5.2.2. The Impact of Feminism on the Decision

Critics have expressed concerns that the ability of women to become SMCs endangers the position of the father resulting in a 'cultural patricide' (Blankenhorn, quoted in Layne, 2009). Required neither for their sperm (in a direct capacity) nor for their breadwinning abilities, their position in the family is no longer implicit (Hertz, quoted in Layne, 2009). The freedom for women to create a family alone is often attributed to second-wave feminism; however, Layne (2009) suggested that a parallel men's rights movement advocated for men to free themselves from the 'parasitic burden' of the nuclear family. Arguably, this led to an uptake of single men living alone and in a delayed infantilised fashion free from responsibilities, whilst narrowing the pool of available and willing father material. Additionally, feminism has had a complicated relationship with motherhood, initially viewing women's emancipation as coming from a separation of women from motherhood (Renvoize, 1985).

As already discussed in fictional representations, recurrent discourses in the research indicate that women have reluctantly become SMCs, viewing it as 'Plan B' where the heteronormative 'Plan A' has eluded them (Bock, 2000; Graham, 2018; Holmes, 2018; Layne, 2009). SMCs have largely resisted being constructed as feminists (Siegel, 1995). For example, Bock (2000) referred to SMCs as 'unwilling warriors'; women who have embarked on a feminist act whilst conforming to heteronormative discourses. Whilst feminism has been acknowledged as influencing the cultural shift that led to the possibility of the SMC in both fictional representations and in interviews with SMCs, in typical postfeminist fashion it is regarded cautiously (Holmes, 2018) or ironically (Maher, 2014). Holmes (2018) found that participants who took up feminist discourses, as well as those who rejected them, constructed feminism as 'outdated' and 'excessive', stating it had mostly achieved its goal of equality. These discourses support the construction of the mothers as normative, as feminism is constructed as a subversive position where men are rejected in binary opposition to heteronormativity (Holmes, 2018). This follows the postfeminist zeitgeist, where individualism and entrepreneurialism are foregrounded (Gill, 2017). Indeed, any struggles faced by SMCs are seen as personal, with no notion that they may be systemically disadvantaged by the way families, workplaces, and state childcare facilities are structured (Hertz & Ferguson, 1998). Likewise, individual self-sufficiency is privileged over family ties and community support (Hertz & Ferguson, 1998; Roh-Spaulding, 2001).

2.5.3.3. ARTs

The development and availability of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) has raised ethical questions as to whether single women (and lesbians) should be granted the same access to these technologies as heterosexual coupled women (Michell, 2006; Robinson, 1997). This is born from further hierarchal thinking whereby biological infertility within heterosexual couples is perceived as worthier of assistance than the 'social infertility' experienced by single women and lesbians (Graham, 2012). As well as concerns about the quality of parenting single women and lesbians can offer, ARTs can produce fears about the redundancy of men and the traditional family unit (Graham, 2012; Michelle, 2006). Whether single women are constructed as being able to provide a viable upbringing or not, will influence the law, and, in turn, access to reproductive technologies (either via insurance companies or through the state health services) (Robinson, 1997).

In the UK, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology act of 1990 was reformed in 2008 to grant equal access to lesbian and single women on the basis that they were unfairly discriminated against when seeking ARTs. This led to a change in the wording of the act from clinicians needing to take into account 'the need for a father', to 'the need for supportive parenting' (Lee, Macvarish, & Sheldon, 2014). However, this change in law was theoretical and did not necessarily have a big impact on practice as SMC was already in existence. In the UK, state assistance through IVF is limited to women under the age of 43 with a restricted number of between 1-3 cycles offered depending on age and other factors. (see p. 2.5.1. above regarding NHS restrictions on offering IVF). This is not the same worldwide, however, the pronatalist ideology in Israel, for example, means that women get almost unlimited free access to fertility treatment up to the age of 51 (Weissenberg & Landau, 2012).

Initially, feminists were critical of ARTs, believing them to be a patriarchal method for the mechanisation, control, commodification, and exploitation of women's reproductive capabilities (Michelle, 2006). However, postmodern feminist thought identifies that whilst these technologies were developed within a patriarchal system, this should not dictate how they are used (Michelle, 2006). This concedes that such technologies can enable certain freedoms for women. Conceiving in this way, for example, avoids an ethical dilemma of not telling the father that conception has occurred, or it prevents unwanted input from the father who is aware of the situation. In contrast, a study of Spanish SMCs found adoption was the preferred route to motherhood (Jordana-Pröpper, 2013). The participants felt concerned that the biological father might at some point want to make contact. Additionally, as older women, they saw pregnancy as a risk (Jordana-Pröpper, 2013).

Women who use ARTs can feel ambivalent about their situation, feeling pulled between hegemonic discourses of 'tradition' and dominant discourses of individual agency and freedom (Zadeh et al., 2013). Some mothers chose not to disclose their use of donor insemination to others, allowing the assumption that they have become mothers within the context of a relationship which then broke down (Zadeh et al., 2015). As a strategy, however, this can prevent solidarity between mothers of this type and perpetuate confined notions of good mothering (Zadeh et al., 2015)

There are global and individual differences of opinion as to how much information about the sperm donor is desirable, and the impact this may have on identity formation. Michelle has identified a 'creeping genetic essentialism' whereby a genetic base is increasingly identified as accounting for a range of 'diseases, capacities, behaviours, and social problems' (2006, p. 115). This downplays other influences (social, environmental, cultural, etc.), plus, according to Michelle (2006), overvalues the 50% genetic contribution of the father above the embodied 50% share from the mother.

This may contribute to an explanation of why, in 2005, the UK moved from anonymous to identity-release donation, something that is becoming increasingly common in the USA as well (Zadeh et al., 2015). Graham's (2018) UK participants, for example, struggled to reconcile the use of ARTs with their self-perception as a 'good mother'. Fearing that their child would struggle with identity formation, the mothers felt that identity-release donation sperm would be desirable over anonymous sperm, giving the child the option to gather valuable information should they choose to do so. Founded on the assumption that a father is an essential component in a healthy upbringing, the mothers feared judgement or reprisal from their child in later years. However, in Israel, the anonymity of the donor is preserved with only non-identifying information provided and no current or future access to the donor provided (Weissenberg & Landau, 2012). Where sperm donation is identity-release, it only becomes available to the child after the age of 18, which is arguably too late to be considered as serving a role in identity formation (Graham, 2012).

For SMCs who use donor sperm, the conceptualisation of the donor varies between individuals and can fluctuate over time (Zadeh et al., 2015). For some recipients, the donor became a significant presence in their lives, regardless of whether any information about his identity was known or not (Layne, 2009; Weissenberg & Landau, 2012). Prior to the birth, some participants drew comparisons between dating and selecting the sperm from the sperm bank, and some attached romantic feelings to it (Layne, 2009, Zadeh et al., 2015). For others, the process resembled consumerism where the 'buying' of sperm was akin to shopping for goods (Graham, 2012; Layne, 2009).

2.5.2.4. The 'Daddy Issue', Discourses of Men in SMC Narratives

Discourses relating to men in SMC narratives were featured prominently. Studies have

looked at how SMCs relate to the donor themselves, how they subsequently explain this to their child (Layne, 2009; Weissenberg & Landau, 2012; Zadeh et al., 2015), and how the child makes sense of the 'father absence' as they grow up (Rose, 1992; Zadeh et al., 2017). For an SMC, the process of explaining her choice is simultaneously the justification and legitimisation of a decision to procreate without a man (Bock, 2000).

The process of discussing the child's origin has been termed, 'daddy discussions', either because the child has posed this line of questioning, or because the mother pre-empts it (Zadeh et al., 2017). Studies of adults who were conceived via donor conception have shown that age is a factor in how the information is accepted; those who were told at an older age were more likely to feel negative about it (Jadva et al., 2009). Additionally, children who do not fully understand the situation may feel that they are to blame for their father's absence (Rose, 1992). Rose (1992) found that because some mothers felt uncomfortable bringing it up with their children, they waited for a signal from the child.

However, researchers have also found that children can seem disinterested about their donor conception (Rose, 1992; Zadeh et al., 2017) Suggested interpretations of this include: the child picking up on their mother's discomfort and therefore feeling unsafe to discuss it (Rose, 1992), feeling uncomfortable discussing it with researchers as unfamiliar adults, an idea that it would be disloyal to their family to discuss their donor, or genuinely finding it less interesting than other aspects of their life (Zadeh et al., 2017). Conversely, Weissenberg and Landau's 2012 study of Israeli SMC found that '[t]he children seek every piece of information about the donor they can find' (Weissenberg & Landau, 2012, p. 527). Whilst donor conceived children of SMCs are likely to feel positive about their family circumstance, Zadeh et al. (2017) found that they were disadvantaged by societal assumptions about what a family should look like. They suggested teaching resources for parents and teachers could help.

As their child grew, they discussed making a conscious effort to include male role models in their family life (Layne, 2009). In an effort to broaden the parameters of the child, some SMCs have formed relationships with siblings created from the same sperm donor, and occasionally with their mother (known as 'sister moms *[sic]*') (Layne, 2009). Weissenberg & Landau (2012) suggest that Israeli SMCs may have multiple children in part to compensate for the lack of a father and associated paternal kin. Some SMCs were also keen to incorporate the cultural heritage of the father into their child's

upbringing (Layne, 2009). Layne (2009) suggests that these discourses have enabled SMCs to incorporate men into their lives in a safe and empowering way.

2.5.3. Media Constructions

Other research has explored the ways SMCs have been constructed in the media, through both fictional representation (Maher, 2014; Silbergleid, 2002) and non-fiction journalism (Correia, & Broderick, 2009; Zadeh & Foster, 2016). Michelle (2006) has suggested that the media could have a big impact on redefining motherhood; however, 'some circumstances are rendered more visible, possible and indeed more *desirable* [italics authors own] than others within media content and public policy' (p. 111). Roh-Spaulding (2001) has agreed that media portrayals of SMCs indicate that for a certain demographic (educated, self-supporting, older, etc.) 'single motherhood is supposed to be not only do-able, but downright desirable' (p. 42).

However, researchers have argued that the position can be shown in a positive light, whilst simultaneously serving to validate the patriarchal heteronormative family model (Maher, 2014; Silbergleid, 2002). As with subjective voice studies, Silbergleid (2002) has shown how fictional depictions of SMCs in the US media have foregrounded discourses of SMCs as 'plan B' (an inferior option) reinforcing the traditional family as the ultimate goal. In a world where women are no longer dependent on men for financial survival, Silbergleid (2002) has suggested that narratives are used to diminish any threat that new reproductive technologies pose to the heterosexual male and his place in the reproduction of society.

In the same vein, Maher (2014) has looked in depth at three out of the many recent Hollywood films which feature an SMC as the protagonist. Maher found that whilst the films opened with the women taking a progressive step that was evocative of second-wave feminist principles, by the end of the films, the mothers had formed a traditional heteronormative union with a (white) man. Like Silbergleid, Maher also suggested that the films serve to neutralise any threat posed by the 'radical potential of reproductive technology' (2014, p. 853) and reinforce postfeminist notions that the modern woman needs the husband, child, and career.

Non-fiction representations in the media have identified that single women who used DI could be constructed as 'unnatural' and 'untraditional', again drawing on discourses of

immorality connected to the absence of a father figure (Michelle, 2006; Zadeh & Foster, 2016). In a study of New Zealand media, Michelle (2006) found that 'unnatural' reproductive technologies could be legitimised through their use of assisting with 'natural' reproduction — i.e. heterosexual nuclear families (2006). Thus, in discursive terms, the 'ends' have become more important than the 'means' (Michelle, 2006).

To present alternative family form in a positive light, personal narratives are sometimes used (Zadeh & Foster, 2016). Personal narratives can help the reader identify with the situation in an emotional, and therefore, empathetic manner (Michelle, 2016). The use of discourses such as love, effort, and commitment were drawn upon, which evokes notions of 'good parenting' regardless of family form (Correia & Broderick, 2009). However, Zadeh and Foster (2016) found that despite the use of personal narratives, the right-wing media in particular still represent single women using ARTs as un ultimately deviant position.

2.5.4. SMC Literature, in Conclusion

The literature on SMCs has shown how research has been employed to legitimise their problematised positions. They have been shown as having as good as, and in certain areas, better outcomes than the heteronormative family. They have been found to be positively represented in both fictional and non-fictional depictions in the media, and in interviews, they have been seen to employ discourses that position them as normative, successful, individualistic citizens. Whilst SMCs could not draw upon discourses of traditional family construction congruent with the 'good mother' — in particular, the heteronormative nuclear family — they were able to show themselves as active financial contributors and consumers, in line with the self as enterprise discourses of neoliberalism (McNay, 2009). Discourses of attachment have been used to legitimise their parenting with the aspiration of warding off criticisms of selfishness and incompetence. The concept of choice has been used flexibly to suggest that whilst they could exercise their active citizenship (Rose, 1989), they only did so when every other option had been closed off to them.

Yet, at the same time, I have shown how the two-parent norm is reinforced through much of this work. The heteronormative family is culturally and structurally embedded as the 'gold standard'. In Weissenberg et al.'s study (2007), SMCs are measured by criteria that heteronormative mothers are predominantly free from, such as whether

underlying health affects their ability to parent, or if they ever lose control or try to hit their child. Additionally, whilst technological options increase, the norms against which people are judging users of them, and against which they judge themselves, are contracting (Michelle, 2006).

New subject positions have become available for women such as 'an infertile mother' a 'postmenopausal mother', or a 'virgin mother', whilst simultaneously coming under tighter social control (Michelle, 2006). Those who do not fit the mould for contemporary motherhood must face the repercussions and accept any difficulties as personal failings. Thus, as an SMC become an increasingly accepted position, it seems it does so partly through perpetuating the construction of the 'wrong' type of single mother. This parallels the situation of the LGBTQ community whereby replicating the behaviour, culture, and values dominant in society 'serves to both reinforce familial ideology and further maginalise those unable or unwilling to conform so successfully due to their socio-economic class, ethnicity, lifestyle choices, or political beliefs' (Michelle, 2006, p.120).

2.6. Rationale and Aims for Current Study

Critical and feminist thinkers have contended that whilst postfeminism purports that women have more choices, the discourse that governs the choices we make limits available choices (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2013; Rottenberg, 2017). Equally, the academic literature explored above suggests that whilst we have more reproductive freedoms, 'women's fertility choices are increasingly called into question' (Hadfield et al., 2007, p.255). Women are often judged for their 'choices' without considering that extenuating circumstances may have shaped their decision-making (Budds et al., 2013). In other words, an SMC may be becoming regarded as a 'selfish' choice, but this is a double bind as they could also be constructed as 'selfish' as a childfree woman (Renvoize, 1982). Where state assistance is required, a mother will be constructed as a 'bad' mother, and narratives of the damage generated through the absence of a father figure will be evoked. It is clear that the non-normative subject positions explored present an uncomfortable reality for women. Those in such a position must work hard to negotiate their place in society.

Neoliberal, postfeminist culture simultaneously promotes concepts of choice and autonomy with 'surveillance, discipline and vilification for those who make the

“wrong” “choices”’ (Gill, 2007, p.163). Those who willingly put themselves at risk invite scrutiny and must take moral accountability to demonstrate rationality and responsibility (Graham, 2019). Research has shown that SMCs draw upon discourses of neoliberalism whereby ‘citizenship is active and individualistic rather than passive and dependent’ (Rose, 1989, p.165) and comprises individual freedom, personal choice, self-fulfilment, and initiative.

For some SMCs, this was negotiated via class construction whereby ‘middle-class status, in their perception, compensates for the stigma of illegitimacy’ (Hertz & Ferguson, 1998, p. 14). As such, it can be understood that an SMC’s viability depends on her ability to replicate dominant norms. This emphasis of the private over the public can be understood as ‘the growth of individualism that contributed to greater social tolerance also gave rise to a less cohesive society’ (Curran, 2000, p.26). In other words, any failure is constructed as the responsibility of the individual which must be rectified by continuous self-development (Turken, et al., 2016). Neoliberal society can ‘seemingly tolerate a wide array of practices and values as long as they are compatible with a consumerized notion of self-responsibility’ (McNay, 2009, p.63).

Through taking a combined discursive and Foucauldian perspective, I aim to identify some of the wider discourses of power circulating around the subject. Through analysing newspaper articles as a technology of power and self, my research questions are constructed as such:

1. **What are the subject positions available to SMCs and how do these impact on ways of being?**
2. **How is language used in the data to legitimise the SMC?**

2.7. Aims of the Research

The aim of this research is to explore how discourses and subject positions in newspaper articles construct SMCs as a warranted practice and what techniques of language are used to constitute them. This orientates my methodology around a combined discourse analysis using Foucauldian-informed discourse analysis (FDA) and discursive psychology (DP).

The media has been described as both a reflection and constituent of discursive practices (Sheriff & Wetherell, 2009), which is why print articles have been selected as the data. From a Foucauldian perspective, subject positions are understood as ways of being in the world and seeing the world facilitated and constrained by discourse: 'Identifying subject positions allows the analyst to investigate the cultural repertoire of discourses available to speakers' (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p.118). In FDA the analyst attempts to make links between discursive constructions and their implications for subjective experience. The term "ways of being" is often used to denote Foucault's understanding of experience as an interrelation between knowledge, 'types of normativity' and subjectivity in a particular culture at a particular time. Thus, deploying a macro FDA lens will enable an exploration of available and silenced discourses and the impact of these on those taking up this subject position.

The second research question is underpinned by an assumption which is both substantiated and challenged by the literature; which is that the position of SMC is legitimised in newspaper articles. This assumption has been formed via preliminary data searches. It has also guided my choice of data collection with regards to articles featuring personal narratives, which have been discussed as providing more favourable constructions (Foster, 2006) albeit within nuanced and sometimes conflicting contexts (Zadeh and Fosters, 2016). (See section 3.5. for more on this.) Thus, while there may be an (infinite) array of discourses to be found in the data, my focus here is on those that work to construct the position as legitimate, and how they do this. As explained by Willig (2008);

> 'The need for coding before analysis illustrates that we can never produce a complete analysis of a text. Our research question identifies a particular aspect of the discourse that we decide to explore in detail, coding helps us to select relevant aspects of the texts that constitute our data, there are always many aspects of the text that we will not analyse. This means that the same material can be analysed again, generating further insights' (p. 100).

In combination with this, a micro DP lens will be deployed to look at the specific language techniques used to offer an indication of how legitimisation has been operationalised. In addition, a historicity aspect has been incorporated, with the inclusion of a second data set spanning a period of three decades. This will provide the

opportunity to show present day constructions of the position and the historically situated discourses which have enabled these constructions. The context for this research is a neoliberal and postfeminist society, where mothers are thought to be judged according to the values of perfection, individualism, and consumer power. It is expected that counter discourses and resistance to hegemonic neoliberal discourses will also be located in the data and included in the analysis.

Additionally, I constructed two analytic foci to guide the research:

a) What technologies of governmentality are evidenced in the newspaper articles and what are the implications of these processes for the enabled subject positions?

b) What social practices comprise and/or are warranted by the constructions of SMCs found in the articles?

Technologies of governmentality can be understood as both technologies of power and technologies of the self. Technologies of power operate to regulate the conduct of people at a distance. These can be understood as formal sites of monitoring and control such as the law, and institutions such as the police, hospitals and schools. Technologies of the self are understood as the various '"operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and ways of being' that people make either by themselves or with the help of others to transform themselves to reach a 'state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality'" (Foucault, as cited in Besley, 2005, p. 78). There is a theoretical overlap between technologies of governmentality and social practices, however, I have understood social practices as social structures in action (such as othering).

In the next chapter, I will elucidate my methodology, clarifying the epistemological underpinnings that informed the design decisions I made. I also consider reflexivity and the impact of my subjectivity on the work.

CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter, the rationale for undertaking this study was explored. By researching existing motherhood positions and examining the literature on single mothers by choice (SMC), I identified gaps in the knowledge of SMC construction, from which I based my research questions.

In this chapter, I will outline how I have chosen to implement this study. Firstly, I discuss my methodological rationale, briefly considering my personal values and those of counselling psychology. I then expand on the philosophical underpinnings of my methodologies, leading to a discussion of the pros and cons of using a combined approach. Next, I aim to demonstrate how this conceptualisation informed my design choices and methodological decisions. I then discuss reflexivity. Following this, I explain my methods describing data collection, ethics, and the analytic steps. Finally, I illustrate how the analysis was presented and explain how qualitative work can be evaluated.

3.1. Methodological Rationale

By undertaking a literature review, I was able to establish that my interest revolves around the hegemonic motherhood position and the implications of this for women, specifically SMCs — in other words, 'destabilising prevailing systems of meaning' (Jørgensen, & Phillips 2002, p. 178). The commitment of counselling psychologists to social justice leads us as professionals to 'work to change social structures, not just individuals' (Goodman et al, 2004, p.795). As such, the power circulating in social structures needs to be uncovered, in order for the problems to be understood. Therefore, as a counselling psychologist and a feminist, it is paramount to understand the capacity for oppressive systems to impact on individual difficulties, calling forth the feminist phrase 'the personal is political' (Goodman et al, 2004). From this perspective, Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA), as a form of analysis focusing on power relationships in society, became a clear choice for methodology. Furthermore, I was interested in how language was used to construct the position of SMC, and the techniques that were used to legitimise it. Thus, I chose to do a pluralistic study combining two types of discourse analysis which would offer both a macro and micro

view of the subject matter. In addition to FDA, I included a discursive psychology (DP) component, as I felt these would allow me to do this. Discursive psychology's 'primary concern is about how people construct versions of themselves, how they build defensible identities, how they present versions of themselves and events as factual and how they legitimise their actions' (Burr, 2015, p.163). FDA and DP share an epistemological stance but differ ontologically. Unlike other theoretical backgrounds and methods, epistemological considerations are inexorably linked to method in discourse analysis (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). In light of this, it is key that as a researcher I maintain conceptual clarity between the philosophical underpinnings of each chosen methodology (Colahan et al., 2012; Willig, 2013). Additionally, I needed to be reflexively engaged with how the epistemological position of my research melds with the axiology of counselling psychology (namely humanism, pluralism, and reflexivity) (Kasket, 2012).

I chose to analyse newspaper texts, as I was interested in texts produced for general consumption, which would offer a context for the constructions as located within broader moral, political, scientific (etc.) discourses. (see section 3.5.1. for a more detailed rationale of data selection). This is congruent with the preference within discourse analysis for naturally occurring texts (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007). This is also compatible with a critical stance towards postfeminism, whereby the media has been foregrounded as the primary site for the construction and surveillance of femininity, womanhood, and motherhood (Kasket, 1997, Assarsson & Aarsand, 2011; McRobbie, 2013; Gill, 2017). Popular culture is also thought of as a privileged domain for the production of neoliberal values (McRobbie, 2009).

Additionally, I consider myself a poststructural feminist, with a recognition that inequity exists between men and women, and a desire to bring these to light. From this perspective, intersectionality becomes foregrounded, whereby gender is considered in the way it interacts with other identities such as ethnicity and age (Sarup, 1993). The philosophical underpinnings of social constructionism are explored in detail below.

3.2. Epistemology and Ontology

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and it asks how we come to know what we know (Burr, 2015). Ontology is concerned with being and existence and attempts to discover fundamental categories of what exists (Burr, 2015). Epistemological positions

can be constructed as existing on a spectrum from realist at one end to relativist on the other (Willig, 2008). Empiricism is at one end, underpinned by the ontological assumption that there is a stable reality and that this reality is available to us through measuring and observing it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Taking a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge, social constructionism occupies a position at the other end of the continuum (Burr, 2015).

To further complicate things, even within frameworks such as social constructionism, a variety of ontological and epistemological positions are held (Burr, 2015). A moderate (or dark) social constructionist stance can also be thought of as critical realism. Critical realism combines a relativist epistemology with a realist ontology to suggest that while discourse constructs our reality, it also has material implications (Parker, 1998). This chimes with Foucault's philosophical base, which asserts that certain discourses enable practices of power (Hook, 2007) and therefore underpin FDA. DP, on the other hand, takes a radical (or light) social constructionist position with a relativist outlook for both epistemology and ontology (Willig, 2013). From this perspective, any reality outside of discourse is unknowable.

My aim in the section below is to differentiate between light and dark social constructionism, as the tensions and areas of compatibility between these two are at the heart of my research. These have been divided into sections that look at *realism/relativism, subjectivity and agency, language and power.*

3.2.1. Realism / Relativism

Light social constructionism with a relative stance for both epistemology and ontology, ascertains that there are many, equally valid realties (Burr, 2015). Extreme relativism, which asserts that there is not one 'truth', cannot make a judgement on one account over another, and is therefore incompatible with a critical, feminist agenda (Burr, 2015). Dark social constructionism, by contrast, takes the ontological position that structures in society, within a social and historical context, become concrete over time (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Because of our shared acceptance of these structures, they can exert a 'real' influence over us, and through investigation, we can understand this 'reality' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

3.2.2. Subjectivity and Agency

Intertwined with the realism/relativism debate is the notion of subjectivity. In essence, this is the shift from the positivist approach of doing research 'upon' people, to doing research 'with' people (Danziger, 1997). Empiricism rests upon the assumption that the phenomenon under investigation exists independently of the objective, value-free researcher (Willig, 2009b). Alternatively, social constructionism is considered anti-humanist, denying essentialism in favour of the interpersonal (Billig, 2009; Danziger, 1997). Subjectivity is thought to develop as a process of external dialogue moving inside (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Light and dark social constructionism also differ regarding their views on agency. For light social constructionists, agency accounts for the multifarious nature of human interaction, which shifts and mutates depending on the context (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). For dark social constructionists, agency is constrained by the limited discourses we have at our disposal (Willig, 2008). These can be reconciled by compromising that 'while we may choose from an array of discourses when accounting for ourselves, it is not an infinite array' (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007, p. 107).

The subjectivity of the researcher is a high priority of phenomenology and social constructionism (Willig, 2008). The implicit values and assumptions of the researcher must be made explicit through reflexivity and the researcher's subjectivity is the tool that is used to do the work (Parker, 2013) (See section 3.3. below for a more in-depth discussion of reflexivity). This reflexive stance is congruent with the 'reflective practitioner' value of counselling psychology (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010; Kasket, 2012).

The aforementioned anti-humanism of social constructionism, however, presents a tension between the two, where counselling psychology was developed from a foundation of humanism (Kasket, 2016). This is less prescient in my research as I made use of found texts; therefore, any ethical tensions of minimising human participants' subjectivity have been mitigated. There is still an argument to be addressed, however, which is that my research is poorer for the omission of the subjective, experiential account. (This is discussed in section 3.2.6. below.)

3.2.3. Language

Language is a component of differentiating epistemological positions and is understood on a spectrum from 'we talk because we can think' to 'we think because we can talk' (Billig, 2009, Paragraph 29). Adhering to the former, empiricism considers language to be a tool that allows us access to reality (Ponterotto, 2005). Language is a central tenant for all social constructionists with a post-structural rejection of the idea that language reflects a pre-existing reality (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Broadly, discourse is understood by social constructionists as 'the fixation of meaning within a particular domain' (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.141). However, understanding of the domain varies.

Light constructionism sees discourse as spoken exchanges between people (Burr, 2015), whereas dark constructionism understands discourse as ways of explaining objects within a socio-historical context (Billig, 2009). For light social constructionists, nothing exists outside of the text; language does not merely represent the world, it constitutes it (Danziger, 1997). The non-discursive holds no meaning for light social constructionists until it is transformed into discourse and analysed as such (Edwards et al., 1995). Also, light social constructionists are interested in the microstructures of language. For dark social constructionists, on the other hand, the macro dimension is foregrounded, examining how discourse operationalises power structures (Burr, 2015). They ascertain that language can construct reality and exert a 'real' influence on us. Critical realists, in particular, argue that materiality, power, and embodiment are extra-discursive and therefore need to be considered (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007).

3.2.4. Power

Power is a facet that can be overlooked from both a realist and a relativist position. Mainstream empirical psychology takes no account of power dynamics and social injustice (Fox et al., 2009). Research stemming from the realist paradigm is broadly uncritical of the structure of society but seeks to make minor improvements that will enhance the quality of life for those living within it (Fox et al., 2009).

Acknowledgement or rejection of power constitutes the main difference between light and dark social constructionism and is a source of tension. Light social constructionism rarely considers power, and where it does it views it as an effect of discourse (Danziger, 1997). A radical relativist position does not privilege one account over another and is

therefore unable to take an agenda of social justice (Danziger, 1997), thus exposing a tension between relativism and feminism/social justice (Gill, 1995). Alternatively, for dark social constructionists, all text and talk are imbued with manifestations of power (Danziger, 1997).

Power was a central concern for Foucault (Burr, 2015). He described how discourse enables us to have knowledge of The World; however, some social constructions will be understood as more truthful than others. These will vary according to the historical moment, the location, and the structure of the society (Foucault, 1979). For example, in Western societies at this current time, rationality and scientific discourses are privileged. These privileged constructions become knowledge and define what individuals have the power to do or not to do. According to Foucault, this power is thought to be regulated by the individual who has internalised prevailing norms and thus practices self-discipline or governmentality (1977). Psychology, like other 'psy' disciplines including psychiatry and psychotherapy, is thought to play a role in the surveillance and regulation of people (Rose, 1998).

3.2.5. Implications of Epistemology and Ontology on My Research

By looking at the facets of epistemology and ontology above, it becomes evident that a light social constructionist perspective alone would be incompatible with my personal axiology of feminism and social justice. A pluralistic methodology is compatible with the pluralistic value of counselling psychology. It is also welcomed from a poststructural feminist view whereby pragmatism is advocated, with a tailoring of methods to suit the task (Sarup, 1993).

From the perspective of DP, my research can show how discursive resources are employed to manufacture a particular version of reality (Willig, 2008). I am also interested in which versions of reality are available and what power dynamics these might exert, as this orientates me towards FDA. This would enable a consideration of embodied experiences (e.g. miscarriage), materiality (e.g. financial status), the power of institutional practices (e.g. childcare provision), and practices such as a speaker's enduring orientation to dominant social accounts (e.g. neoliberalism and postfeminism). My research questions were devised with the twin foci of the 'construction and function' in mind (Potter & Wetherell, 1987):

1. **What subject positions are available to SMCs and how do these impact on ways of being?** *FDA, Dark constructionism*
2. **How is language used in the data to legitimise the SMC?** *DP, Light constructionism*

3.2.6. The Pros and Cons for using Pluralist Discourse Analysis

The idea of combining light and dark constructionist methodologies is by no means original. Whether they should constitute separate methodologies or different foci within a synthesised study has been a source of debate in the field (Wetherell, 1998; Parker, 1997). Burkitt (1999) considers that either dark or light social constructionism is insufficient on its own; both display fundamental weaknesses. Light social constructionism is criticised for being a purely academic endeavour, which serves as a critique for mainstream psychology, but does not generate its own concepts (Willig, 2009a). Equally, by being concerned with the macro, dark constructionism is not able to explore how individuals shape and choose discourses to overcome oppression. Overall, social constructionism welcomes a pluralistic approach, as it recognises that equally valid knowledge can be generated in different ways (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Burr (2015) suggested that the debate between realism and relativism is an unhelpful dualism typical of patriarchal society, and that transcending the either/or dichotomy could be a more helpful way to approach epistemology. By accepting that there are some culturally derived shared values, a pragmatic approach can take an explicitly value-based approach to research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Discourse analysis does not provide a fixed, static methodology so much as guidelines where combining strands from different approaches is welcomed (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Parker (2013) explains that while we can be informed by existing methodologies, we should strive to be creative and innovative. Reflexivity and a knowledge of internal contradictions from prior methodologies can combine to create new methodologies. Jørgensen & Phillips (2002) illustrate how the interplay between different understandings of the same text can pose interesting questions regarding the uptake of one meaning over another.

Wetherell (1998) advocates a combined light and dark social constructionist approach to discursive research, enabling us to ask both ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions concerning discourse construction and use. Kincheloe constructs the pluralist researcher as a

'bricoleur' derived from the French word for a handyman/woman, who uses the tools available to undertake a task (2001, 2005). With this in mind, multiple perspectives and dimensions in a text can be illuminated simultaneously to create innovative research. Researchers are freed from the assumptions that underpin each discipline by being forced to compare methods (Kincheloe, 2001).

Bricolage is a controversial concept in academia. Clarke et al. (2015) have warned that pluralist analyses come at the risk of producing complicated findings while saying nothing of value. Other critics suggest that insufficient attention to the knowledge base results in superficial research (Kincheloe, 2001). By gaining a deep understanding and ongoing reference to epistemology throughout my research, I hoped to generate clear and distinct knowledge with specific aims, avoiding vague eclecticism (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

It could be argued that using methodologies that concentrate on interpretation over experience limited my ability to understand why individuals would choose a scenario that may not be in their best interest. Weedon (1997) understands poststructural feminism 'as a way of conceptualizing the relationship between language, social institutions and individual consciousness' (p.19), the latter of which my project does not fully represent.

Although a phenomenological component would bring new tensions, such as the denial by social constructionists that it is possible to capture the individuals' experience (Merriam, 2002), it would provide additional value in demonstrating the meaning that individuals attach to certain discourses. Social constructionists all share a belief that the receivers of a text are active participants in its construction (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Additionally, adding another element can be used as an evaluative measure providing triangulation (Clarke et al., 2015). Phenomenology cannot be applied to found texts, however, so to make use of it, I would need to extend my data collection to include focus groups or interviews. This was beyond the scope of this project and will be considered as a direction for further research.

3.3. Reflexivity

From a social constructionist perspective, the researcher and the research that they create cannot be disentangled. The researcher has a visibility and centrality to the work,

and must, therefore, be self-aware (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001). Reflexivity as a term can indicate a realist notion of a static self, incompatible with the mutable, incomplete, relational self as understood by social constructionists (Burr, 2015). Therefore, the aim of reflexivity here is not to make me absent from the research, but rather to locate me within the prevailing discourses pertaining to motherhood and SMCs. This has been conceptualised by Willig (2008) as personal reflexivity. Willig also suggested an epistemological reflexivity, whereby any assumptions that have informed the undertaking of the research should be reflected upon (2008). How I feel I have been changed through the undertaking of this work is reflected upon in my discussion chapter (see section 5.6.).

As was briefly discussed in the introduction, SMC was a position I considered some years ago. As part of that process, I undertook research online and immediately encountered a forum whereby some very strong opinions, both for and against, were expressed. From the 'against' side, the position was constructed as 'selfish' citing the purposeful denial of a father as a way to fulfill the personal ambitions of the mother, as the reason. While I did not take this path, having eventually met someone and arrived at the 'heteronormative ideal', the liminal status of this position stayed with me. When I had been considering this position, one of my first steps had been to make calculations and consider my living arrangements, which would allow me to be financially self-sufficient from state support. I did not consider state support as a viable option. Without being aware of it, I had been guided by the dichotomy that constructs those that can meet the criteria of how an SMC can achieve 'good mother' status, whereas any inability to indicates the 'bad mothering' of the stereotypical lone mother (and all the negative connotations associated with this position).

Other than my non-single status, I meet all the rest of the criteria for an SMC as constructed in the academic literature (Bock, 2000; Layne, 2009; Mannis, 1999; Murray & Golombok, 2005). In other words, I am white, middle-class, well-educated, and financially secure. Therefore, I consider myself an insider/outsider researcher. I am subjected to the same neoliberal/postfeminist pressures of perfection, both in myself and as a mother. I strive to 'have it all', whereby 'having it all' indicates a comprehensive and demanding checklist of items (e.g. career, fitness, looks, beautiful home, fashionable clothes, etc.). Like most people in this current age, I generally see the world through an individual lens, foregoing the macro picture which could illuminate

structural inequalities. From this vantage point, any failure to 'have it all' is constructed as my personal failing. In order to undertake this research, I had to attempt to construct the world through a different lens and understand any inability to achieve perfection as part of the punishing and unachievable standards the postfeminist subjectivities are expected to demonstrate.

A post-structuralist approach to reflexivity recommends the application of a critical gaze towards one's self. From a Foucauldian perspective, this involves questioning my own position within the research and resisting discursive norms which have informed various truths and givens (Foucault, 1979). As Foucault explained, 'The work of an intellectual is not to mould the political will of others; it is, through the analyses that he does in his own field, to re-examine evidence and assumptions, to shake up habitual ways of working and thinking, to dissipate conventional familiarities, to re-evaluate rules and institutions' (Foucault, 1989, p. 462).

While I live most of my life guided by the pervasive and all-encompassing principles of neoliberalism, I also identify with a different, contradictory set of values. From an early age, I was drawn to a social justice agenda. This motivated my choice of undergraduate degree in sociology and my decision to become a counselling psychologist. I adhere to a humanistic outlook and have a desire to impact positively on the world as I understand it. I therefore exhibit an 'ideological dilemma' whereby contradictory discourses conflict within me (Billig, 1991).

Critical language awareness also forms part of reflexivity (Fairclough, 2001). The past tense has been used to move away from positivist notions of repeatable generalities, indicative instead of my unique construction of the data.

3.4. Methodology

In the following two sections, I apply the philosophy discussed above to the methodology, explaining in detail how they have been made sense of in this research. I have referred to 'discourse' analysis throughout, although I am aware that for some 'purists' naturally occurring texts are defined as 'textual analysis'. Additionally, as a full FDA would involve a genealogy, my analysis can be more fittingly described as 'discourse analysis informed by Foucauldian principles'.

Undertaking this research using a twin focus necessitated pragmatic decisions (Colahan et al., 2012). The research questions were designed to maintain the epistemological assumptions of both methodologies. Another consideration was the procedural sequence for analysing the data (Colahan et al., 2012). Unlike positivist psychological research, discourse analysis methodology acts as a loose guideline and should not be followed too rigidly (Billig, 1997). Potter and Wetherell (1987) further suggest that analysis and writing should not be understood as separate, as the analysis will develop and alter the process of writing. Rather than hold two perspectives in mind simultaneously, I chose to 'bracket' the DP stage until the extracts had been selected. This enabled me to start with the macro viewpoint and hone in on the specific language for a micro view. In this way, I was able to maintain rigor while accessing as much as possible from the data (Clarke et al., 2015).

3.4.1. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) is a poststructuralist methodology based on the work of Foucault, which seeks to understand how subjectivities are constituted through discourse within relations of power (Burr, 2015). Subjective experience is influenced and regulated through language and the available subject positions. Within this, individual subjects have the power to resist positioning by drawing upon contradictory discourses, but only insomuch as alternative discourses exist (Burr, 2015).

FDA is interested not only in how prevailing discourses represent subjectivity, but also in the practices which such discourses make available materially and socially. Discourses dictate what people may do, what they should do for others, and what they expect others to do to them (Burr, 2015). The principle concern of FDA is to identify power that is embedded in, and constituted by, discourses in a text. Foucault did not prescribe a specific technique for undergoing analytic work, rather, he advocated that his ideas should be used like a 'toolbox'. As such, I used Willig's six-step model (2013) as a guide to ensure that my analysis was rigorous and included all the key components. (See section 3.7 for a description of the analytic process).

The key Foucauldian concepts used in the analysis are explained in the table below.

Table 1: Key Foucauldian concepts used

Foucauldian concepts Used	**Definition**
Discourse	What can be said (or not said) within a particular culture, and in turn, the

	subject positions that are made possible through this language.
Subject positions	Ways of being in the world and seeing the world facilitated and constrained by discourse.
Truth games	Linguistic practices used to assert that the speaker or the writer of a text is making a specific claim about the nature of truth.
The Panopticon	The Panopticon was a prison in which all prisoners could be seen by a central guard who was hidden from view. In this system, the prisoners, unaware if they were being surveyed or not, began to self-surveil and self-regulate. Thus, the Panopticon is a metaphor for the internalisation of norms and adaption of self to fit with.
Technology of power	A practical form of rationality that both constitutes subjectivity and regulates the conduct of people at a distance.
Technology of self	Techniques through which people work on themselves to achieve conformity with (or means of resistance to) the prevailing norms.
Biopower	A particular political form of technology of power used to regulate entire populations.
Governmentality	Governmentality describes techniques and procedures designed to govern the conduct of both individuals and populations at every level, incorporating technologies of self and technologies of power.
Discipline	One way in which power can be enacted to enforce the regulation of individuals within society.
Docile Bodies	Docile bodies describe compliant citizens who operate under the observation and control of disciplinary institutions.

3.4.2. Discursive Psychology

One of the aims of my research was to draw light on how a subject position that can be understood as un-palatable, with regards to single motherhood, can be constructed from a positive perspective. For this, I was drawn to discursive psychology, which aims to examine how discursive recourses are employed by people in order to achieve

interpersonal objectives (Willig, 2013). The following conceptual tools were employed in the analysis:

Stake and Interest Management

The terms 'stake' and 'interest' refer to what a speaker may have to gain or lose discursively (Potter, 1996). Techniques explore how personal interests are claimed or reported. Discourses are analysed looking at rhetoric, thus examining how reports that appear to be factual are written in such a way that actual and possible alternatives are undermined (Edwards and Potter, 1995). It demands of the text the following question: 'what are the resources through which controversial reports are constructed so as to appear reasonable and robust and to anticipate sceptical responses' (Wooffitt, 2005, p.93).

Extreme case formulations, lists of three, stake inoculation, and consensus construction are devices that serve this purpose. An example of stake inoculation can be taken from Article 14, whereby the author poses the question, 'Whatever next? A woman who is proactive, who chooses this for herself?'. The 'stake' the author must lose is her non-marginal standing in society. Anticipating that feminist discourses will be used to position her as non-conforming and threatening, an ironic, mocking tone is used to acknowledge and (later) refute such positioning. (The ironic tone is indicative of an ideological dilemma, see below).

Membership Categorisation Devices and Category Entitlement

As is congruent with a social constructionist perspective, categories are not seen as natural, but rather as complex and subtle social arrangements (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). There are many different categories that we can all identify with such as daughter, student, mother, psychologist, etc. When we choose to place ourselves (or others) in one category over another, we do so purposefully to frame a story in a particular way.

For example, I would choose to foreground my identity of psychologist in a professional context. Sacks suggests that categories are not neutral, and moreover, we judge people on the basis of normative expectations of particular groups (Wetherell, 2001). This device questions why this social identity has been employed in this particular way at this particular time. Category entitlement refers to the extent to which

membership can be achieved or denied (Potter, 1996).

In the following quote from Article 18, the SMC is constructed ambivalently as a single mother: *'Teacher Jennifer Coy, 44, never intended to have a family this way'*. In this statement, membership categorisation has been offered by constructing her profession as a teacher, therefore alluding to education and respectability. In addition, her age has been provided, suggesting that this woman had exhausted her other options before becoming an SMC. The ambivalence constructed towards the uptake of the subject position prevents her from being understood as non-normative or radical in a way that could be construed as threatening to society. This puts a question mark over her entitlement to being categorised as a lone mother as it is understood pejoratively.

Externalising Devices

This is an idea that the 'thing' discussed resides outside our personal experience of it. This can be achieved using epistemic discourses. These draw on the perceived wisdom of 'experts' and 'research' to construct legitimacy and 'out-there-ness' or 'truth' (Potter, 1996). Such discourses are founded on a dominance of rationality in Western society (Potter, 1996). For example, 'studies show that children born to elective single mothers perform slightly better in tests than other children' (Article 40). The article does not provide the details of these studies; it is considered enough for the reader to be informed about the existence of such research and to trust the publication to be able to decipher and interpret it on their behalf.

Ideological Dilemmas

Ideological dilemmas describe the process of negotiating two or more competing discourses. Moving on from a Marxist conception of ideology as a coherent and unified set of ideas, ideological dilemmas suggest that lived ideologies are inconsistent, fragmented, and contradictory (Billig, 1991). Within any ideology, the dilemmatic opposite is contained, therefore enabling internal debate — essentially allowing us to think. An example that relates to this research are the competing ideologies of attachment theory and neoliberalism. These suggest that women should work and that a child will only thrive under the care of its mother — a belief which dominates in Western societies.

3.5. Corpus

My data was divided into two data sets, A and B. Data set A was formed from 27 articles systematically selected to give a specific look at constructions of SMC at a given moment. Data set B was comprised of 13 articles purposefully selected to offer a historicity dimension to the analysis. For both data sets, personal narrative newspaper articles from UK publications were selected, using the online databases, Nexis, and the search engine, Google. Further rationale for each inclusion/exclusion of articles decision is provided below in sections 3.5.1 to 3.5.5.

3.5.1. Rationale for Data Source Choices

I selected media representations of SMCs as my data, specifically from newspaper articles. Zadeh and Foster (2016) have suggested that media representations of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) may be more impactful on the public than representations of other phenomena due to limited availability of information from other sources. Moreover, '[n]ewspapers serve as a critical means of both broadcasting this debate and effecting a representation of this user group within the public sphere' (Zadeh & Foster, 2016, p.551).

Mass media are understood as a network of sites where discourses are both reflected and constructed (Türken et al., 2016). This represents a tension between liberal and radical traditions of media analysis: 'whereas liberal orthodoxy portrays the media as reflecting and serving society, its radical counterpart maintains that the media are implicated in the management of society' (Curran, 2000, p.132). A Foucauldian understanding, however, points to a disjointed sense of power with a blurring between the political, economic, and cultural realms (Curran, 2000). I chose print media (including content created by established newspapers solely for internet display) as I was interested in the layering of the SMC interviewee, the author, the editor, and the political reputation of the publication.

Social media were discounted as they can enable dialogue between users and a blurring of producers and consumers. The internet can be thought of as transcending time and space allowing inter-global communication between like-minded individuals (Curran, 2000). Hailed as a site of 'cyberdemocracy', the internet is arguably a place where geopolitical influence and control can be bypassed (Curran, 2000). (This is not to say that there is no censorship and control at work on the internet. For example, Facebook

has a ‘set of rules’ that guides which content is disallowed. Unlike government agencies, they need not disclose these rules (Heins, 2013)). However, cultural norms and political ideology are less apparent in social media than in print media, where editorship is standard practice.

In contrast to social media, print media represent a ‘one-sidedness’ with a sharp divide between producers and interpreters of text (Fairclough, 2001). Newspapers reflect cultural norms, as they are created with a national identity in mind (Curran, 2000). Fairclough (2001) has suggested that not knowing exactly who the consumer of the text will be means that producers of print media texts must create content with an ‘ideal subject’ in mind. The actual consumer must negotiate this ideal when interpreting the text. However, it is important to acknowledge that interpreters of text do not necessarily take up the text in one particular way, and they may have a variety of responses to it (Barthes, 2001; Foster, 2006). In this regard, print media can be considered a site where technologies of power and technologies of self intersect.

An additional inclusion criterion was the use of personal narratives within the newspaper articles. This was either through the author writing an account of her own experience of being an SMC, or interviews of personal accounts mediated through a journalist. Personal narratives can help the reader to identify with the subject of the article, offering a compelling and relatable viewpoint (Michelle, 2006). Michelle (2006) has suggested that ‘it is highly significant that only certain *kinds* [italics author’s own] of subjects and situations are offered to readers to identify with’ (2006, p.112).

I felt that this would enable me to see which social practices were warranted and how meaning-making was presented as being undertaken. Foucault’s concept of governmentality offered a lens in which to consider this. Personal narrative accounts play an increasingly dominant role in the reporting of this subject matter and can be used as a way of generating sympathetic perspectives (Foster, 2006). However, Zadeh and Foster’s research (2016) indicated that despite the inclusion of personal narrative stories, right wing media still portrayed SMCs as an ultimately deviant subject position, therefore indicating an important tension. They suggested that representations of SMCs go against traditional understandings of family formation and therefore evoke fear. It will be interesting to see if this research generates similar understandings.

3.5.2. Publication Location

Even though much of the media materials regarding SMCs are from the USA, (including the nomenclature (Mattes, 1994)), I made the decision to use media sources based specifically in the UK. The main reason for this is that it has been argued that neoliberalism (see section 2.1.) is more advanced in the USA, and therefore, discourses legitimising the position of SMCs will contain subtle differences, depending on their place of origin.

Esping-Andersen (1989), for instance, constructed three classifications of welfare states identified as liberal, conservative, and social democratic. The liberal model is where markets dominate, benefits are means-tested and stigmatised, and there is no 'free at the point of delivery' universal health care provision. The USA is an example of this type of system. The conservative model is shaped by traditional family values insomuch as the social system steps in only when the family cannot manage to resolve the situation itself — with Germany being an exemplar. The social democratic system describes an all-encompassing welfare system with equal access, as seen in Sweden.

The UK, on the other hand, is seen as a hybrid, being a liberal-leaning welfare state combining targeted welfare provision, with an emphasis on market and individual responsibility (Mau, 2015). However, the UK is steadily moving towards a liberal (or neoliberal) model, with 'the growth of more individual, less solidaristic values' (Taylor-Gooby, Leruth, & Chung, p.99, 2019).

3.5.3. Time Frame

I determined that out of the 670 articles that were initially drawn, 29 met the inclusion criteria (this was later refined to 27, where 2 were subsequently discounted as not meeting the criteria). Nineteen were from tabloid newspapers (The Sun, The Mirror, The Daily Mail, The Express). The rest were from broadsheets (The Guardian, The Independent, The Telegraph, The Times, The Irish News, and 'I'). Online-only articles from the above publications were also included as I deemed the editorship and influence of the publication to be the important elements, rather than the format. I excluded slightly different articles from similar publications (e.g. The Daily Mail and Mail Online) if the author and date were the same. Articles written for different publications by the same author from a similar timeframe were included (e.g. Genevieve Roberts) as different discourses might have been employed according to the political orientation of

the publication. Article 9 was later discounted as the content was based on an American mother and focused on the 11th birthday of her children, rather than about her position as an SMC. Also, Article 23, which featured celebrity singer Cheryl Cole, was discounted because it was an exploration of her life generally (with her thoughts about possibly becoming an SMC in the future).

The time frame selected for data set A was 1/3/2019 to 1/3/2020. Braun and Clarke have ascertained that questions regarding sample size in qualitative research often stem from a positivist mentality. (Their writing focuses on thematic analysis (TA), but their work is relevant to all reflexive qualitative work). They have suggested that (they) 'detect the lingering presence of positivism around discussions of sample size in TA — large or probabilistic is best' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.10). Braun and Clarke have instead offered that a consideration of what is pragmatic is a more honest and realistic way to ascertain a sample size (2019). Crucially, time frame and budget constraints are determining factors in any piece of research. The aim is to build a corpus that is rich and complex, yet manageable.

Braun and Clarke (2019) recommend starting with a provisional sample size which is then monitored for richness and complexity. This includes a constant consideration of the need to address the research questions. To this end, I started with a provisional minimum and maximum number of articles in mind; in this instance, it was roughly between 20 and 30. I chose to work from the date of collection (01/3/2020) backwards systematically, until I felt I had enough articles to address my research question with a focused data set that was as current as possible.

I found that a one-year period gave a sufficiently large yet manageable quantity. It also allowed for articles prompted by a variety of different events (e.g. the launch of Genevieve Roberts book, Cheryl Cole's decision to become an SMC, the birth of pop star Natalie Imbruglia's child, and an 18-year-old becoming an SMC prior to an operation which would leave her infertile). These were from a mixture of broadsheet and tabloid papers offering a corpus of statements 'across different institutional spaces' (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008).

This offered a systematic view of the present, but not a variability of statements: '[g]iven the historical dimension of Foucauldian work, a corpus of statements would not

only include a variety of discourse samples that will generate answers to our questions about the present, but also incorporate samples that are historically variable' (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p.100). For this reason, I included a second data set, B, in order to add an element of historicity to my research.

Originally, I took a more generalised and less focused approach to data collection. Having no restrictions on time, geographic location, and publication source, gave me an opportunity to understand the types of data that existed and provided a starting point from which to develop a tighter, more focused inclusion criterion. This initial corpus was comprised of 21 articles ranging from 1996 to 2019. The articles originated in either the USA or the UK and were sourced from a variety of newspapers, magazines, blogs, and websites.

From this original data set, 5 were deemed to meet the new refined inclusion criterion for Data set B — being UK-based and sourced from an established print newspaper. These five were retained and any associated analysis incorporated into the new analytical work. An additional 8 articles were sourced to integrate into Data set B to give a total of 13 articles in this data set. I selected 13 as I wanted to maintain Data set A as my key focus. Also, 13 articles offered nearly half the number of the 27 articles included in Data set A.

To obtain my additional material for Data set B, I focused on the term 'single mother by choice' which drew 260 articles in Nexis, with the earliest being dated 1985 (the first personal narrative account, however, was not until 1993). I chose to use the term 'single mother by choice' as this matched my original data search from the earlier version of this thesis. It also provided the most specific term and offered a way of controlling the range of material to find relevant data, which in this case, was focused on covering a specific period. As my goal for this data set was not to capture everything written on the subject, but a range of discourses that offered variability, the data was not systematically deciphered.

Instead, I purposefully selected my data for this data set, aiming for an even coverage throughout the years starting with the earliest dated article (1993) and ending shortly before the start of Data set B (1/3/2019). 'This temporal variability is an important way of showing how a given object (...) has been spoken about differently in the past and

exposed to different forms of regulation, punishment and reform' (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p.100). Whilst a full genealogy was beyond the scope of this research, I hope to have demonstrated and commented on how different discourses have worked over different times, showing how certain discourses have been privileged and others silenced, and what kind of subject has been made possible.

3.5.4. Search Terms and Sites

I have used a combination of systematic and purposeful data collection, the steps of which I have outlined below.

Graham has identified three terms that women in this position go by: 'single mothers by choice', 'solo mothers' and 'choice mothers' (Graham, 2018). I focused my search on the first two as the term 'choice mothers' was not specific enough to capture the experience and resulted in 300K plus results on Nexis. Other search terms, such as the combination of 'unmarried' and 'insemination' would be expected to produce a wider range of discourses (Zadeh and Foster, 2016). However, the terms above would be more aligned to political and scientific discourses (Zadeh and Foster, 2016), whereby my research aims were to focus on legitimisation through personal narratives.

To undertake my data search, I focused on Nexis and Google. I used Nexis because as a repository for all newspaper articles, it enabled me to systematically scour data within my search terms. In addition, I used Google, which gives a much less focused search, to try to identify any articles which may have evaded my searches on Nexis. Following that, I then took the keywords of any such articles found back to Nexis. When no new data was retrieved on Nexis, the same terms were put into Google. I then searched through the first 5 pages of Google. If this brought up something new, I took the keywords of the article back to Nexis to see if this brought up anything additional.

The Initial search terms were **Single Mother by Choice** (21 results, of which 6 were deemed to meet the inclusion criteria) and **Solo Mother** (41 results, 5 of which were not captured by the previous search and met the inclusion criteria). I then Googled **Single Mother by Choice UK newspaper** and **Solo Mother UK newspaper** with the same time period going back 5 pages each time. From this, I retrieved two original applicable articles, '*Going Solo: Why I Became a Single Mum by Using a Sperm Donor'*, and *'Mum Knows Best, Single Mum Says She Doesn't Need a Husband to be a Good Parent*

After Using Sperm Donors to Get Pregnant'. From this, I went back to Nexis with the 2 new search terms: **solo mum sperm** which produced 573 results, 14 of which were new, and **single mother donor sperm,** which yielded 35 results, 4 of which were original and included.

The purposeful sampling was achieved by selecting articles at random from the available selection, and the aim was to cover the time span as evenly as possible. (The search term used to locate each article is shown in Appendix 2: Table of data).

3.5.5. Rigour

Saturation of the data is often cited as evidence of rigour in data collection (Fusch & Ness, 2015, cited in Braun and Clarke, 2019). Braun and Clarke, however, take issue with the terminology, suggesting that, 'data saturation is not a particularly useful, or indeed theoretically coherent concept' (2019, p.12). Saturation is not a straightforward term to interpret, but it is often taken to be the point to where no new concepts can be found in the data, or when the study could be replicated by another analyst with access to the same corpus (Fusch & Ness, 2015, cited in Braun and Clarke, 2019).

This poses a problem in reflexive research where the analysis is dependent on the researcher's use of self. Due to the inherently subjective nature of such reflexive research, there can be no objective saturation point. As Braun and Clarke put it, 'meaning is not inherent or self-evident in the data (…) meaning resides at the intersection of the data and the researcher's contextual and theoretically embedded interpretative practices — in short, (…) meaning requires interpretation. On this basis, new meanings are always possible' (2019, p. 10). Braun and Clarke (2019) argue that saturation is a concept better suited to neo-positivist approaches and propose that the term 'information power' is more appropriate for reflexive, constructionist approaches.

This is similar to Morse's (cited in Braun and Clarke 2015) suggestion that rigour is about selecting rich, adequate, and appropriate data. This approach to data selection is commensurate with the ontological and epistemological position adopted for this study.

3.6. Ethics

Ethical considerations were guided by the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2014, 2017) and the University of East London's code of practice for postgraduate research

degrees (UEL, 2015). I obtained approval from the University of East London's School of Psychology Ethics Committee (see appendix one). All research was undertaken with the Director of Study's full knowledge and approval.

When retrieving material online, I followed the BPS ethics for working with internet-mediated research (2017). While there is some debate as to the ethics of using online material, I collected only non-reactive, pre-existing, readily available data which is in the public domain. Online articles can be considered 'public acts' deliberately intended for public consumption, which means that the researcher need not take more than 'normal precautions' (Rodham & Gavin, 2006, p.94). If there was ambiguity as to whether the material was in the public domain, it was not used.

3.7. Analytic Procedure

Having identified the material that would form the data set, I began the process of analysis by actively engaging with the data, reading and re-reading the articles (Arribas-Allynon & Walkerdine, 2008). I then worked through Willig's (2013) steps for Foucauldian-informed discourse analysis, with the exception of step 3, which was my discursive psychology stage. These enabled me to see how SMC is objectified, what wider discourses were employed, what subject positions were available, which practices were enabled and disabled by the construction, and if there were possible subjective experiences. A description of the analytic process is provided below.

Beginning with Willig's first stage, I read through articles identifying all the discursive constructions I could find pertaining to SMCs, both implicitly and explicitly, and put them into a table. I then went back through the articles to locate the discursive constructions I had identified (step two, discourses) paying particular attention to postfeminist and neoliberal discourses where I saw them. The fourth step (positioning) involved identifying discursive locations where SMCs could be placed in. Stage five (practice) focused on exploring the relationship between discourses and practice. This step focused on what could or could not be done from the different subject positions identified. The sixth step (subjectivity), was the most speculative, as it focused on exploring the consequences of taking up different positions; here I explored what could be thought, felt, and experienced from each.

Once I selected the extracts to use, I applied stage three. Willig's third stage, 'action orientation', looks at the discursive contexts in which discourses are deployed and asks what they are trying to achieve (2013). This became my DP stage and was informed predominantly by the works of Potter (1996) and Billig (1991). Discursive psychology is concerned with what people do with language — the specific formulations that are constructed to convey ideas and instigate action (Willig, 2013). As such, I drew a concern for how dilemmas of stake were managed from these texts.

For example, 'dilemmas of stake' suggests that discursive constructions are used by individuals to manage stake and 'inoculate' against possible compromises of it (Potter, 1996). These are identified through discursive techniques such as ideological dilemmas, category entitlement, and externalising devices. This enabled me to construct a picture of how language was being employed to orientate the author towards particular interactional effects. (See Appendix 3 for an illustration of the analytic process and Appendix 4 for a coding sample).

3.8. Presentation of the Analysis

The analysis was presented in 'discursive sites', which reflects the research questions and the emphasis of the research (Willig, 2013). I have also chosen to write in a narrative format, which helps with the cohesion and accessibility of the material. Writing in this style adheres to my position of moving away from a positivist perspective and allows for a less reductive and more nuanced reading of the data (Frost, 2010). Each discursive site has been illustrated by extracts from the data. I have then discussed the Foucauldian-informed steps and discursive psychological techniques, as evident to me in the extract. Finally, I have drawn upon the literature to discuss the context and wider implications of the extract.

3.9. Evaluative Criteria

There are no set guidelines on how to conduct discursive research, and as each study is unique, evaluating research is complex (Merriam, 2002). Reflexivity is a central tenant of social constructionist research and it can increase the rigour of the research by asking how personal assumptions shape the research (Kasket, 2012). Reflexivity is therefore included in this chapter (section 3.3.), and again in chapter 5 (section 5.6.)

As discourse analysis makes no 'truth-claims', it is assessed for its usefulness rather than accuracy (Frost, 2010). Yardley (2000, 2008) provides an evaluative criterion which was considered throughout this research. These include sensitivity to context, which suggests consideration of the sociocultural setting, and ethical sensitivity, which was understood in this case as the deployment of this work. Additionally, commitment to the subject matter is suggested, along with rigour in the analytic procedure, transparency of the work undertaken and coherence. Coherence is evidenced by a lucid argument wherein all elements are epistemologically and methodologically compatible. These are discussed in detail in chapter 5 (see section 5.3.)

The next chapter will discuss the outcomes of the analysis in the context of four key 'discursive sites', which aimed to answer the research questions: Constructing Single Parenting as problematic, Constructing Single Parenting as Viable, and A Modern Family Form.

Table 2: The Convention Used in This Analysis

The Convention Used in This Analysis

To avoid any confusion that could arise from my use of newspaper 'articles' and academic journal 'articles', I have used the following convention throughout this analysis:

I have used the word 'article' only to refer to newspaper articles. Academic 'articles' are discussed as 'research' and 'academic literature'.

Any quotations from an academic journal or book, or academic concepts, have been underlined.

All quotations from the data set of newspaper articles have been *italicised*.

My own commentary is in standard type.

Data set A refers to 28 UK newspaper articles dated from 2019 to 2020 and are included to give a detailed look at a specific moment.

Data set B refers to 13 articles dated from 1993 to 2016 and are included for historical variability.

Whilst the term 'lone mother' can be used with reference to women whose lone status arose from a number of different circumstances, one construction has come to dominate in understanding this subject position. This is the much-stigmatised teenaged single mother who is reliant on state benefits. Unless specified, I have used the term 'lone mother' to draw upon this stereotype.

The terms 'good mother' and 'perfect mother' are broadly interchangeable; however, I have understood 'good mother' to construct a 'traditional' version of motherhood. In other words, that of a stay-at-home-mother within a heteronormative family unit (selfless and sexless). 'Perfect mother' is thus a construction of postfeminist motherhood where women are expected to excel in a greater number of domains, including intensive parenting, physical attractiveness, and career attainment.

I am aware that by my use of the term 'fatherlessness' (adopted from Extract 1) I am colluding with a pejorative construction of a family form without a father that expresses that there is a deficit inherent in this subject position. However, as it is this specific pejorative construction that I am seeking to convey, I have used the term but placed it in quotation marks to indicate its assumptive nature.

As previously discussed in section 3.2.2. FDA holds a non-agentic perspective, therefore even though some SMCs have been identified by a name (for example, Mel and Genevieve in section 4.3.2.) they have not been treated as individuals in the process of analysis; rather they are understood as discursive constructions, formed out of available circulating discourses. It is this discourse which is of interest to this study.

CHAPTER FOUR - ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the literature review, I discussed the historical and cultural discourses that have shaped the position of single mother as problematic and the implications this has had on the relatively recent subject position of 'single mother by choice' (SMC).

The literature review brought to light two dichotomous subject positions which dominate the way motherhood has been constructed — the bad mother and the good mother. The bad mother has historically been constructed as a lone mother who, owing to recklessness and impulsivity with regards to her sexuality, has been unable to suitably meet the physical and emotional needs of her child or children. By contrast, the good mother has historically been constructed as a woman in a conventional heteronormative relationship, whose husband maintained the economic affairs of the household. This enabled the woman to devote herself selflessly and totally to the needs of her children.

The literature review also showed how the construction of the good mother has been morphing into a construction of a perfect mother. In this iteration, the mother does not devote herself entirely to childcare but is also seen to be thriving in other domains including, but not limited to, personal appearance, physical fitness, and successful career outcomes (whilst still undertaking childcare in a manner more intensive than at any other time). The SMC construct shares a commonality with the bad mother construct in that she is single — the same attribute which precludes her from classic constructions of a good mother. Given the serious implications that can result from being constructed as a bad mother (from social work interventions to child removal), in order to be understood as legitimate, the SMC depends upon being constructed away from the bad mother subject position and towards the perfect mother subject position.

Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) is concerned with 'the discursive resources that are available to people, and the ways in which discourse constructs subjectivity, selfhood, and power relations (Willig, 2013, p.117). Budds et al., (2014) have suggested that FDA could go further in understanding the agency which individuals have in negotiating discourses, and that a combination of FDA and discursive psychology (DP) offers scope to do this. For this reason, a combined methodology was selected based on

Willig's six-step model for FDA (2013), with step three, being action orientation, extended, and informed by DP. (See Section 3.7. for analytic procedure, Appendix 3 for an Illustration of the analytic process, and Appendix 4 for a coding sample).

The analysis is presented in three discursive sites. These sites have been constructed with illustrative extracts from the data and have been written in narrative form to offer a lucid and coherent account. Extracts from the data allow the reader to understand my analytic process, as well as form their own interpretations. Throughout the discursive sites, I have offered commentary on how subject positions have been taken up, how power is seen to be exercised, and how social actions have been warranted, in line with my analytic foci. The extracts below do not show all the available discursive constructions in the data set, but all the discursive constructions shown are represented. The selection of discursive constructions was made with my research questions in mind.

a) What technologies of governmentality are evidenced in the newspaper articles and what are the implications of these processes for the subject positions enabled?

b) What social practices comprise and/or are warranted by the constructions of SMCs found in the articles?

The discursive sites that I have constructed show a changing narrative of single parenting. This demonstrates an adjustment from emphasising the potential pitfalls of 'fatherlessness' to a position of legitimising single parenting, through to a construction of an SMC as an optimal parenting position. The titles of the discursive sites along with a summary of each section follows:

Table 3: Discursive Sites

4.1. Constructing Single Parenting as Problematic	This discursive site is underpinned by the assumption that a mother alone is insufficient to raise a child. The SMC is constructed as someone who satisfies her own desires to be a mother at the expense of the wellbeing of her child. Where these discourses are challenged, they are also perpetuated.
4.1.1. Constructions of 'Fatherlessness' Impacting Negatively on the Children	Fatherlessness is explicitly constructed as a harmful subject position for children and SMCs are constructed as having no regard for the mental wellbeing of their children.

4.1.2. 'Fatherlessness' Constructions Attributed to SMC	SMCs are constructed as fearing judgement regarding fatherlessness from others.
4.1.3. Judgement of others	SMCs are constructed as having an awareness of how this position is constructed more broadly, which shows them to be self-regulating.
4.1.4. Constructing 'Fatherlessness' for the Child	SMCs are shown to be concerned about how their child will judge them regarding their family positions, and how they are constructed in preparing for this.
4.1.5. Mothers as Fathers	Essential understanding of the positions of 'mother' and 'father' are produced through discourses of SMCs taking on 'both' roles to provide a 'normal' upbringing for their children.
Conclusion of 4.1.	
4.2. Constructing Single Parenting as Viable	Single Parenting is constructed as viable whilst alternative subject positions (such as childless woman) are constructed as unfeasible.
4.2.1. Defining the Parameters	Shows hegemonic qualities that have been attributed to the SMC construction and how these have resisted.
4.2.2. Drawing on Academic Research	Academic studies deployed to produce SMCs as a distinct category of single mother, unaffected by the factors constructed as limiting the lone mother such as divorce and drop in income.
4.2.3. Not a Choice - Extenuating Circumstances	Discourses are drawn upon to construct the 'choice' as being forced by factors outside the control of the SMC.
4.2.3.1. Bereavement	Death of someone close to the SMC is constructed as acting as a catalyst.
4.2.3.2. Mandated Motherhood	Mandated Motherhood discourses are used to construct motherhood as a lifelong goal and intrinsic to womanhood.
4.2.3.3. Romance	Produces relationships as sought but not working out.
4.2.3.4. Biology	Constructs medical justifications for taking the action of becoming an SMC.
Conclusion of 4.2.	
4.3. A Modern Family Form	SMC is constructed as a parenting position equal to and superior to the heteronormative family unit discourse.

4.3.1. Pre-conception Parenting	Discourses of planning and preparation constructed as elevated, drawing on neoliberal discourses and the social practice of othering.
4.3.2. Capitalising on the Position of SMC	Constructions showing SMCs who have been able to monetise the position offering it as an ideal neoliberal position.
4.3.3. ARTs	Constructions shown linking the use of ARTs with the subject position of SMC.
4.3.4. SMC as Optimal	Relationships constructed as problematic and individualism discourses promoted constructing SMCs as the ideal family form.
4.3.5. The Virgin Mother	Sexual identity of SMCs found to be a silenced discourse for echoing 'good' mother discourses and constructing SMCs as 'selfless'.
Conclusion of 4.3.	

4.1. Constructing Single Parenting as Problematic

'DADDIES BE DAMNED' Article 42, 2009, Daily Mail, Data set B

As seen in the literature review, fathers have historically been constructed as essential to the rearing of disciplined, law-abiding, moral citizens. Constructions of their absence in the family structure has been found to be a truth game within the articles, with suggestions of a moral failing in the part of the mother, and in the supposed creation of ineffectual future citizens. 'Truth games', as understood by Foucault (1988), are linguistic practices used to assert that the speaker or the writer of a text is making a specific claim about the nature of truth. Through a discursive psychology lens, truth games can be understood as formed through rhetorical devices which are employed to orientate readers towards a particular reality.

The following five sections show how discourses have been mobilised to construct SMC as a problematised subject position, particularly with regards to 'fatherlessness'.

4.1.1. Constructions of 'Fatherlessness' Impacting Negatively on the Children

Whilst assumptions regarding 'fatherlessness' can be understood as being implicitly present in any conversation regarding single motherhood, the extracts below showed a more explicit use of such constructions regarding SMCs.

'*It is very hard to defend fatherless families when so many of our most disaffected, directionless adolescents have grown up without fathers in their lives*' (Extract 1, Article 30, 1993, Daily Mail, Data set B).

'*But, of course, not everyone welcomes the changes. Sociologist Patricia Morgan, of the Institute for Economic Affairs, describes the new Act as "dreadful. It's the feminist dream come true", she says. "I don't think we've ever had this in history – the removal of the need for the father. What are men meant to do now? If they're not needed as responsible fathers, as providers, what is their role in life now? What is their status? And even if these women can financially support themselves, what kind of family is it when the mother is out at work all day? The implications of this law changing are momentous. Nobody seems to have thought of the child here and what kind of future he or she will have*"' (Extract 2, Article 42, Daily Mail, 2009, Data set B).

In Extracts 1 and 2 above, the most explicit constructions of 'fatherlessness' were found in the data set, producing it as a dangerous position. The use of the phrase, '*fatherless families*', in Extract 1 can be understood as constructs families with single mothers as deprived by focusing on what is not there (as opposed to 'motherfull' families). The sentence '*disaffected, directionless adolescents have grown up without fathers in their lives'* has constructed a correlation between impropriety and aimlessness, and father absence, and used it to construct a causation. The implication is that it was the state of being 'fatherless' that exclusively caused the disaffection, not other variables such as poverty.

Other possible constructions, such as disaffected adolescents who have a father and fatherless adolescents who are not disaffected, have been excluded. Referring to patriarchal discourse, this reasoning draws upon the construction of fathers as disciplinarians, without which children are thought to have poor life chances (Henderson et al., 2010). This has also been made possible through patriarchal, political, and moral discourses that have constructed fathers as essential as role models and for providing stability. Historically, whilst fathers have been constructed as sacrosanct, it has been produced as the responsibility of the mother to ensure there is one (Morris & Munt, 2019).

DeBenedictis, (2012) described the constructed lone mother thusly: '[s]poken through lack, the "feral" parent is positioned as failing to give her children a stable father figure by selfishly placing her will to parent alone or sexual desire above them' (2012, p.13). Additionally, it involves knowing one's father is increasingly being constructed as an imperative for identity formation in what has been termed a 'creeping genetic essentialism' (Michelle, 2006, p115).

'*Fatherless families*' have been produced in Extract 1 as a homogenous group, irrespective of class, financial status, and the circumstances from which their fatherlessness arose. The academic literature on SMCs, however, has understood the aforementioned attributes as variables that can be constructed as producing differing results (Golombok et al., 2016; Murray & Golombok, 2005; Siegel, 1995; Siegel, 1998). These results were produced by comparing solo mother families and heterosexual two-parent families, measuring factors such as 'mother child relationships', 'children's psychological adjustment' (Golombok et al., 2016), and 'experience of motherhood' (Siegel, 1995).

Factors such as poverty and the trauma of divorce were produced as impacting negatively on children of single mothers. However, women who purposefully entered single motherhood were constructed as showing similar levels of parenting 'quality' as two-parent families with higher levels of warmth and interaction with their child (Golombok et al., 2016). The common construction of SMCs positions them as single, financially stable women (Bock, 2000; Layne, 2009; Mannis, 1999; Murray & Golombok, 2005); therefore, the implication is that neither divorce, nor subsequent changes in financial circumstances that occur following divorce, will impact on them. Thus, they have been produced as being precluded from two of the aspects of 'fatherlessness' that have been constructed as negatively impacting on the wellbeing of children. As such, and in opposition to the discursive construction presented in the extract, SMCs can be understood as a warranted family form, whereby it has been constructed as equal to, and in some regards as, 'outperforming' the heteronormative family form.

Similar in tone to Extract 1, Extract 2 offered suggestions for how the position of SMC came to be and what the long-term implications could be for men and children. This has been constructed through the social action of expertise — in this case, by way of

sociologist Patricia Morgan of the Institute of Economic Affairs. The use of experts, studies, and facts contributes to an empiricist discourse, and is thought to be used as an externalising device to construct 'out-there-ness' or 'truth' (Potter, 1996). By being constructed as a social scientist, Morgan's discourse is understood as being imbued with a professionalism, backed up by rigour and objectivity. This echoes Foucault who has argued that scientific discourse has been privileged in Western societies (1970).

Three questions in a row have been formulated in Extract 2, asking, '*What are men meant to do now? If they're not needed as responsible fathers, as providers, what is their role in life now? What is their status?*'. 'A list of three' (Jefferson, 1990) is a common language technique that is often used to indicate that these adjectives were selected from a possible larger group. In this instance, the device also served to linguistically convey the sheer hopelessness men will experience, confronted with a deep uncertainty regarding their future role.

Drawing on a patriarchal discourse, the extract implies that the nuclear, male-headed family is the only morally acceptable family form. Additionally, this patriarchal discourse constructs the removal of the father role and provider as leaving men adrift. Absent is the feminist discourse that outlines centuries of oppression of women by men and asserts that the structure of the nuclear family has been constructed as a source of oppression for women (Friedan, 2010). The implication here is that without women maintaining traditional family structures, no man would choose to partake in family life and the fabric of society would collapse.

By constructing the claim that an SMC is a '*feminist dream come true'*, all the different strands of feminist scholarship have been reduced into one united group, with the abolition of men as its goal. However, contrary to this statement, both the data in this study and the academic literature overwhelmingly construct SMCs as a 'plan B' for women who strongly desired a heteronormative coupling, but for whom it eluded (see section 4.2.2.3., as well as academic research by Graham, 2012; Graham, 2018; Hertz, 2006; Layne, 2010; Mazor, 2004). The *'feminist dream come true'* statement, however, can be equated with a postfeminist construction of society whereby feminism is produced as both extreme and outmoded positions (Ortner, 2014). (See section 2.1 for a more detailed description of postfeminism).

By emphasising one particular form of (radical lesbian) feminism over all others, all feminists can be produced as 'man-haters' who would actively choose to parent alone. This is implied by the description of SMCs as a '*feminist dream come true'*. By implication, SMCs are constructed as automatically feminist in the extract, whereas the academic research has produced SMCs as having an ambivalent outlook towards feminism (Holmes, 2018; Zadeh et al., 2013; Seigel, 1995). Indeed, many women were constructed as selecting an SMC as a way to put them back on a conventional path regarding normative milestones (Holmes, 2018). Another counter discourse to radical feminism in one study produced the idea that some women became an SMC due to the extent in which they valued men; in other words, by not wanting to marry without love, or 'trick' a man into impregnating her (Layne, 2010). This discourse was found in this data set whereby an SMC was produced as stating, '*I could have had a one-night stand but that's not fair on the guy if he doesn't want a baby*' (Article 17, The Sun, 2019, Data set A).

The binary subject positions of female mother/male breadwinner have been drawn upon in Extract 2 by constructing *fathers* as *providers*. However, by asking, '*[a]nd even if these women can financially support themselves, what kind of family is it when the mother is out at work all day?*', it is acknowledged that these women are not necessarily depending on the state for financial security (whilst still positioning a self-supporting woman as a rarity). Irrespective of this, as already noted, the subject positions of mother and provider are constructed as antithetical. Furthermore, the construction, '*[n]obody seems to have thought of the child here and what kind of future he or she will have',* implicitly indicates that the only possible outcome for a child raised in these circumstances is bleak.

This has been made possible by drawing on the constructed theories of attachment and intensive mothering, as well as the constructions of 'fatherlessness' discussed above. Attachment theory produced the idea that children who do not have their primary caregiver looking after them for the majority of the time will have negative outcomes (Bowlby, 1998). However, this discourse has been mobilised (both generally in society and more specifically in this extract) to construct women as the primary caregiver and endorse the position of the stay-at-home-mother (Franzblau, 1999a).

Similarly, intensive mothering constructs the modern mother as responsible for their child thriving in every domain including (but not limited to) physical and mental health and academic attainment (Hays, 1998). Arguably, drawing on these constructed theories in the extract serves to bolster the construction of the heteronormative family structure through the implication that it is the only viable family form. In addition, it has been suggested in the academic literature that the legitimate heteronormative family has been constructed as middle class (McRobbie, 2013). In light of this, a possible answer to the posed question, '*what kind of family is it when the mother is out at work all day?*', would be any family from the lower classes and increasingly, all families.

Both attachment theory and intensive parenting have been understood as constructs that negatively impact on lower classes by not accounting for the notion that for women from lower socio-economic strata and minority groups, stay-at-home (and intensive) mothering has never been an option (Franzblau, 1999a; Taylor, 2011). Additionally, in our current neoliberal society, most families cannot survive on a single wage to maintain their living standard; therefore, many heteronormative mothers either choose to (or have to) work (McRobbie, 2009). McRobbie (2013) has also suggested that 'female labour power is far too important to the post-industrial economy for anyone to be an advocate of long-term stay-at-home wives and mothers' (p.121). Thus, the assumption of a 'family wage' where the (male) breadwinner earns enough to support the other family members is no longer financially viable (Fraser, 2013).

In addition to drawing on attachment theory and intensive parenting discourses, the sentence *'[n]obody seems to have thought of the child here and what kind of future he or she will have'*, also constructs the mother as unconscionable. It also suggests that the absence of a father in a child's life is problematic. In contrast to the former, the academic literature and data in this study have constructed SMCs as engaging in considerable forethought regarding the child prior to becoming a mother, including the constructed risks of being raised by a single mother and not knowing their father (see section 4.3.2. as well as Golombok et al., 2016; Graham, 2018). This is particularly with regards to the use of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) which position SMC as 'pre-conception parents' (Faircloth & Gürtin, 2017) due to being constructed as being taxing emotionally, financially and physically (Robinson, 1997).

Additionally, as with other forms of lone parenting, SMCs have been constructed in Extract 2 as a static state. However, as seen in the academic literature, periods of lone parenting have been constructed as lasting about five years before lone parent families changed status, either through re-partnering or death (Skew, 2009). Similar research specific to SMCs is yet to be undertaken.

However, there have been discourses that construct SMCs as hoping to have a relationship in the future (see section 4.3.5.). In addition to new partners, the possibility that the role of 'fathering' can be undertaken by other key people in the child's life such as grandparents, uncles, or friends, has been excluded from the construction of 'fatherless families'. However, such discourses are constructed as perpetuating the subject position of father as intrinsic in a child's upbringing (Clarke and Kitzinger, 2005).

Clarke and Kitzinger (2005) have suggested that discourses equating fathering with good outcomes for children are so deeply embedded within common sense that justifications for the necessity of a male role model are not usually provided. Indeed, for Foucault, the construction of the (male headed) nuclear family can be understood as the foundation of civilisation, wherein the process of normalisation is seen as the key responsibility of the family (Taylor, 2012). Those operating outside the nuclear family are constructed as abnormal and pose a risk from which society will defend itself (Taylor, 2012). From this perspective, both Extracts 1 and 2 can be understood as a warning to anyone considering taking up the subject position of an SMC. Thus, even if women are financially and legally able to become an SMC, the extracts inform us that they pose a moral threat to their child, and more broadly, to society.

Extracts, 1 and 2 were both selected from Data set B, included for historical variability. There were no examples in Data set A which explicitly constructed 'fatherlessness' as a dangerous position. Nor did it indicate a difference in the way single parenting has been constructed between the two data sets. The following extracts from Data set A were more implicit in their constructions of 'fatherlessness'.

4.1.2. 'Fatherlessness' Constructions Attributed to SMC

The following extracts were selected to show constructions of 'fatherlessness' that were attributed to SMCs themselves. By being attributed an SMC, the language deployed in

these extracts can be understood as being given priority, as having been constructed through an expert by reason of experience. How SMCs themselves are constructed as viewing fatherlessness is an important component in building a case for the position as legitimate.

'*When I first had Olivia, I worried about what to say to people when they asked about her father. But now I'm a lot more open about it. There are so many different ways to have a family today. When the new neighbours recently moved in, I introduced myself as a solo mum. I like to tell people upfront'* (Extract 3, Article 18, 2019, Mail Online, Data set A).

*'I announced on social media that I made the decision to be a solo mum by choice. I was prepared for there to be some backlash about children needing fathers, but I received nothing but support and encouragement' (*Extract 4, Article 8, 2019, Mail Online Data set A).

The SMCs above are constructed as expecting a negative reaction from others upon revealing their family circumstance. This is shown by the formulations of having been *'worried about what to say to people when they asked about her father'* and being *'prepared for there to be some backlash about children needing fathers'*. Patriarchal discourses regarding the importance of the role of the father, as well as the omniscience of the nuclear family, are understood to have warranted these constructions. Imbricated with these discourses is the concept of shame that has historically been attached to the position of a single mother. Historically, women have been understood to gain respectability through marital status, with shame being conferred on the unregulated sexuality of single women (Smart, 1996; Taylor, 2012).

Through a Foucauldian lens, the pervasiveness of this ideology can be understood as internalised by women, and as such, underpins the fear of judgment expressed in Extracts 3 and 4. This was explained by Foucault through the analogy of the Panopticon. The Panopticon was a prison in which all prisoners could be seen by a central guard who was kept invisible. In this system, the prisoners, unaware if they were being surveyed or not, began to self-surveil and self-regulate (Foucault, 2008).

Accordingly, the prisoner in this system (or in this case, the SMC) is both the oppressor and the oppressed. As such, it can be understood that SMCs monitor their own behaviour in accordance with the prevailing societal norm — in this case, the dominance of the heteronormative nuclear family. In the extracts above, the patriarchal discourses which could be drawn upon to condemn the SMC have been constructed as submitted to by the SMCs, arguably reinforcing their dominance through their expectations that such discourses could be applied to them. Thus, the SMC in the extracts have been constructed as pre-judging (and then mitigating) their own actions.

One such social practice employed in the extracts to legitimise their subject position is othering. Othering describes a process of the construction of an 'in-group' and 'out-group' defined through the association of the out-group with an undesirable characteristic and/or the in-group with a desirable one (Brons, 2015). In an academic study, Morris and Munt (2019) suggested that the middle-class single mothers they interviewed perpetuated a stigmatisation of lower-class single mothers in order to construct themselves as having an elevated status.

Arguably, the SMCs in the extracts have been produced as doing this by choosing to identify as a '*solo mum*' and a '*solo mum by choice*', respectively. These terms (particularly the latter) can be seen as producing a more respectable single mother who is older and financially independent, serving to distinguish them from the 'less desirable' forms of a single mother. The employment of the word 'solo' draws forth constructions such as 'solo expedition' or a 'musical solo', emphasising the bravery and exceptionalism in undertaking a task alone. It is suggestive of a task that was intended to be carried out alone from the onset.

Additional means of legitimising their potentially shameful 'fatherless' positions were also identified in these extracts. Countering patriarchal discourses, in Extract 3 it was suggested that '*[t]here are so many different ways to have a family today'.* This statement does not directly justify alternative family forms, but it does offer a legitimisation through consensus — a consensus of opinion deemed to offer a more convincing opinion than an individual (Potter, 1996). Also, in Extract 3, the SMC was constructed as dealing with her worries regarding her position by changing herself. At first, the extract tells us she '*worried about what to say to people when they asked about*

her father'. Over time, however, the SMC became '*more open about it*' and started telling '*people upfront*'.

This can be thought of as employing neoliberal and perfect mothering discourses by producing the SMC as exhibiting the qualities of flexibility, confidence, and self-regulation privileged by these ideologies. As such, the woman was shown to be in control of her own affect, progressively increasing in confidence over time. Likewise, the SMC in Extract 4 has been constructed as displaying confidence by publicly announcing her SMC status on social media. Using a public forum to discuss becoming an SMC is indicative of neoliberal culture whereby 'few aspects of everyday life and working life are now exempt from this requirement to self-promote' (McRobbie; 2013, p.130). In a highly consumerised society such as ours, there is arguably a blurring of spheres, and even pregnancy and childbirth become an opportunity to develop a personal 'brand'.

Gill and Orgad (2015) have focused on how 'confidence' is constructed in neoliberal society, suggesting that it can be understood as a gendered technology of self in a Foucauldian sense. In other words, a 'technology of self' is a Foucauldian concept (1977) that describes the intersection between regimes of power and individual agency. It suggests that people can individually interpret discourses in ways that offer both resistance to prevailing ideology and assists them in achieving deeper conformity with the normative culture. Confidence acts as a technology of self, according to Gill and Orgad, whereby people are 'exhorted to think about, judge, and act on themselves' (2015, p.7). As such, individuals are expected to change themselves in order to better assimilate with the world around them.

However, they go on to say that this becomes a problematic discourse in that it can be understood as a technology that unequally operates on women. As such, the problems that women are seen to face are constructed as being located within their psyches and bodies; and likewise, solutions are not structural, but require 'self-transformation'. The extracts above, from this perspective, show the SMCs as feeling the need to both change themselves by increasing in confidence, as well as managing the way their family is made sense of by others (for example, by controlling the nomenclature).

Both extracts have constructed the reception of their SMC status as being positively received by others. In Extract 3, this has been constructed implicitly, with the SMC's

increased confidence in sharing her position indicating a reception of tolerance. In the second extract, the SMC has been constructed as '*receiving nothing but support and encouragement'* in response to her subject position. Being confident and '*open*' therefore, can be understood as social practices which get results (social practices being social structures in action). 'Fatherlessness' as a negatively impactful force is not dismissed by these extracts (and in the data at large). Rather, it is shown to be something that can (and must) be overcome. This has been spelled out clearly in the next extract, where the SMC has been constructed as being explicit about compensating for 'fatherlessness'.

'*Single mums shouldn't be stereotyped as benefit mums. I chose to be a single mum and give my child the love, support and guidance he would receive if he had a dad*' (Extract 5, Article 12, The Sun, 2019, Data set A).

In Extract 5, it was suggested that '*Single mums shouldn't be stereotyped as benefit mums*'; however, what the extract seems to convey is not that the construction is inaccurate or unfair, but that this SMC should not be characterised as such. Thus, this extract can also be understood as employing <u>othering</u> as a social practice (see section 4.1.2. for a definition of othering). This has been produced by drawing on a discursive construction that suggests that a benefit mum is a bad mum. Otherwise, one might ask the question of why single mums shouldn't be stereotyped as such?

From a discursive psychology perspective, it could be said that the stake of the SMC has been managed by avoiding the categorisation of *'benefit mum'*. Moral, political, and religious discourses have all played a part in forming this negative construction; however, in this construction, and more generally in current times, the key discourse that can be understood as negatively positioning '*benefit mums'* is a neoliberal one. This would suggest that through needing financial assistance from the state, this mum has failed in her obligations as a self-regulating neoliberal citizen (Rose, 1998). This has been made clear through the use of the moniker '*benefit mum*' (as opposed to a mum who relies on benefits to survive, for example), which served to foreground this one aspect of her personage into the key identifier. The implication is that the '*benefit mum*' is a drain on society, and her future offspring will be too (deprived of *'love guidance and support'*).

In contrast to the irresponsible *'benefit mum',* the SMC in the extract has been constructed as someone who actively 'chose' her path to motherhood. The possibility that she *'chose'* to be a single mum suggests that other single mums had no agency in their position. Drawing on postfeminist discourse produces her as a woman who can assume responsibility for her decisions, made to maximise her own happiness (McNay, 2009). Additionally, it was seemingly her 'choosing' that has enabled her to '*give (her) child the love, support and guidance he would receive if he had a dad*'. This is another use of a 'list of three', indicating that these adjectives could have been selected from a larger available pool (Jefferson, 1990). The implication is that either these are attributes that dads typically provide or that the unstable circumstances of the benefit mum will inhibit her from providing. In contrast, the SMC has been constructed as being able to seize and make use of available resources for the benefit of her child. As a result, 'fatherlessness' will have been mitigated, serving to warrant her choice.

'Choice' has been highlighted as a key concept in postfeminism. Its use here possibly serves to construct this SMC as a woman who seemingly has the freedom and aptitude to take advantage of various available opportunities (McRobbie, 2009). This foregrounding of choice was also found in the academic literature relating to SMCs, where it has been produced as a key component to position SMCs as the 'top of the single parent hierarchy' (Bock, 2000, p.64). However, for critics of postfeminism and neoliberalism, the 'choice' and 'empowerment' women are constructed as experiencing, is understood to be illusionary. Arguably, these concepts serve to further bind women to hegemonic power structures through delineating tighter control on 'correct' choices and steeper repercussions for failing to fall in line (McRobbie, 2009; Rose, 1998).

In contrast to the extracts above, the following shows how a discourse of resistance has been constructed. Here, 'common sense' understandings of the role of the father have been rejected, producing 'fatherlessness' in a positive way.

'I was raised by a single mum and didn't meet my dad until two years ago, so I never placed massive emphasis on needing a man to bring up a child. I had a wonderful childhood, so the idea of having to find a man to have a baby was annoying' (Extract 6, Article 17, The Sun, 2019, Data set A).

In Extract 6, patriarchal, political, and psychological discourses have been drawn upon and subverted. Whereas the aforementioned discourses construct fathers as essential for a stable upbringing and identity formation, being raised by a single mum has been constructed in Extract 6 as a *'wonderful'* experience. As a result of her own *'wonderful'* childhood, the SMC has been produced as '*never placing massive emphasis on needing'* the presence of a man. Through this lens, the subject position of single mother can be understood as warranted, making it logical that she, too, would seek to follow this path. Dominant romance discourses which frame romantic relationships as the overall goal have also been eschewed, and finding a man to have a baby with is constructed as *'annoying'*. This construction was unique in the data set, where the emphasis was overwhelmingly focused on constructing the SMC as morally aligning with the heteronormative family form (see section 4.2.2.3).

This extract draws forth discourses of radical feminism which suggest that the primary function of the family is to socialise the young into patriarchal ideology (Millet, 2000). However, the opposite has been constructed as occurring in this extract (with the replication of the matriarchal family form). Having survived the potential poverty and stigma historically conferred on single parent families (Taylor, 2012), this daughter has been constructed as understanding that a single mother family structure is preferable and therefore chooses it for herself. Whilst a moral discourse has commonly been employed to suggest that single mums beget single mums (Roseneil & Mann, 1996), this is generally constructed in such a way that the lack of opportunity and uncontrolled sexuality attributed to single mums are passed down generations. This discourse has been resisted through the production of this woman's childhood as *'wonderful'*. Moreover, becoming a single mother has for her been constructed as an active choice, not an accident.

The radical feminist perspective of the patriarchal family as a source of oppression and control for women and children (Millet, 2000) concurred with Foucault's understanding that the family acts as a regulatory 'technology of power', with the father at the top in the manner of a sovereign (Taylor, 2012). A 'technology of power' describes a practical form of rationality that both constitutes subjectivity and regulates the conduct of people at a distance. That it is possible to construct 'fatherlessness' in such an optimistic tone in Extract 6, in comparison to the negative construction in Extract 1, shows that different discourses are circulating regarding it.

Taylor (2012) suggested that the subject position of father has experienced a reduction over time in the amount of power attributed to it. Whilst the family arguably still maintains a normalisation function, neoliberal ideology has been attributed with showing more flexibility in the acceptable family structures (Foucault, 2012). (This is explored further in section 4.3.6.). Despite resisting hegemonic constructions of single motherhood, the construction in Extract 6 can still be positioned as colluding with the assumption of 'fatherlessness' as a compromised position — hence, the need for the position to be justified and legitimised.

4.1.3. Judgement of Others

Whilst fatherlessness may be implicit in any judgments regarding the subject position of the SMC, in the following extracts this construction was not explicitly drawn upon. Variation in the circulating discourses was found between the two data sets. In the earliest article, the position was constructed as deviant yet brave (Article 30, 1993 Data set B). In the contemporary data, it is constructed as legitimate yet '*unconventional'* (Article 3, 2019 Data set A). The different discourses are explored in detail below:

'Her fears that she would be condemned as "immoral", "irresponsible" and "selfish" were right on each count. One of her friends even urged her to have an abortion. But she has strong allies. Some doctors, pregnancy advisory counsellors and even churchmen are praising single DI mothers for their "moral courage" and "responsibility" (Extract 7, Article 30, Daily Mail, 1993, Data set B).

Drawing on a morality discourse, the SMC in Extract 7 has been constructed as fearing '*that she would be condemned as "immoral", "irresponsible" and "selfish"'.* The 'list of three devices' is used again here to indicate that these adjectives were selected from a potentially larger group. This, in combination with the strength of these words, builds a picture of an SMC as a dangerous and risky subject position for any woman to assume. The construction of SMCs as an *'immoral'* subject position was later reinforced by the assertion that an SMC needs to display *'moral courage'*.

As such, the subject position of an SMC can be understood as a woman who wants to fulfil her own desire for a child without any regard for the impact this would have on them. Underpinning this construction is the assumption that children are disadvantaged

by being brought up without a father. According to Rose (1998), parenting in neoliberal society is thought to be the place where norms and values are instilled in the young and any malfunctions in this process could produce incivility, mental illness, and criminality. The adjectives in the extract can also be seen as antonyms for what neoliberalism suggests a normative mother should be — i.e. moral and responsible and selfless (Rose, 1998). Academic, feminist literature has posited that good mothering is traditionally associated with 'selflessness' (Oakley, 1974). Whereas women who pursue a goal of motherhood despite 'risks' (such as older mothers and lesbian parents) are constructed as 'selfish' (Budds et al., 2013).

The subject position of SMC was constructed in the extract as provoking a very strong reaction in one of her friends. The formulation of 'even' in the sentence '*[o]ne of her friends even urged her to have an abortion'* alerts us to the fact that the unpalatable option of an abortion was considered a more desirable subject position than single motherhood to this particular friend. However, contrary to the layperson's opinion, the extract informs the reader that there are alternative discourses at work. The extract mobilises the professionalism of '*doctors, pregnancy advisory counsellors and even churchmen'* to counter the views of others that it would be '*immoral' and 'irresponsible'*.

The second use of the word 'even' in the extract, in the formation '*even churchmen'* reminds the reader that churchmen are not expected to hold this opinion, and therefore it is framed as being particularly valuable in reshaping the construction. The noted professionals are described as her '*allies*', a word associated with war, indicative of the 'battle' she will face for legitimacy. The use of experts can be thought of as serving as an externalising device to construct a 'truth' (Potter, 1996). The use of these experts draws upon discourses of medicine, psychotherapy, and religion, and takes advantage of the high-status positions of these professionals. The professionals cited can be considered 'pillars of the community', and as such, at the crux of shaping the morality of our society and enacting the regulatory control of disciplinary power. Therefore, this extract confers to the reader that the judgments of others (presumably friends, family, and acquaintances) do not hold much weight in lieu of the fact that it has been sanctioned (even praised) by official state representatives.

It is interesting to note that in the extract the SMC has been constructed as having '*fears*' about the position of being '*condemned*', which have then been shown to be realised. This serves to produce the SMC as someone who is able to self-regulate and accurately understand the impact of her actions on others. Foucault termed this process, 'internalized personal discourse', which outlines how individuals regulate to a prescribed set of social norms (1982). Self-scrutiny has also been foregrounded as a predominant feature of the postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2017). Whilst this is considered important for all mothers, it is perhaps more so for SMCs who are working against the norm and have more to prove. It is considered the work of the 'outsider' to pacify any animosity felt toward them, even if the categorisation is socially constructed (Bauman, cited in Letherby, 1999).

The second extract draws upon different circulating discourses to construct an SMC less as a deviant position and more as a curiosity:

'*My Milanese flatmate finds the whole thing intriguing and loves looking through the profiles with me. In Roman Catholic Italy, a single person trying to get pregnant by a sperm donor would be breaking the law, so the whole thing is alien to her — and utterly fascinating*' (Extract 8, Article 2, 'I' 2019, Data set A).

In Extract 8, cultural and religious discourses have been deployed, whereby SMCs have been produced as a subject position which is alien to other cultures and yet fascinating to them. Membership categorisation has been deployed to position her flatmate as '*Milanese'* from which an identity has been constructed that incorporates religious and legal discourses. From this perspective, a judgment of SMC was enabled which is seemingly separate ('*alien'*) from the SMC herself. Potter has explained that constructions such as this act as 'externalising devices', and as such, 'these procedures draw attention away from concerns with the producer's *stake* in the description — what they might gain or lose — and their *accountability* or responsibility for it' (italics author's own, Potter, 1996, p.150). This suggests that in the SMC's own sphere of reality, the legitimacy of an SMC is not up for scrutiny. Therefore, the fact that an SMC is differently shaped elsewhere can be understood as serving to reinforce the position as normalised within the culture of the featured SMC.

Despite the use of legal discourse to explain that an SMC in the flatmate's native culture would be '*breaking the law'*, the flatmate has not been constructed as perceiving it negatively. Rather, in hyperbolic formulation, she has been constructed as finding it '*utterly fascinating*', '*intriguing*' and that she '*loves looking through the profiles*'. Thus, even the explicitly stated illegality of SMCs has not been enough to curb the flatmate's interest and excitement in the subject position. It could be hypothesised that this construction suggests that if the Milanese flatmate can overcome discourses of institutional technologies of power to support the subject position of SMC, the reader should also be in a position to overcome any doubts they may have regarding the legitimacy of SMCs.

4.1.4. Constructing 'Fatherlessness' for the Child

The following section offers examples found in the data set of SMCs constructing 'fatherlessness' with regards to their children:

'*There are moments when I think: "God I hope she doesn't react badly when she finds out". I'm hoping it won't be detrimental to her personality, but I come from quite a grounded family and I'm hoping that her surroundings and her upbringing will help her'* (Extract 9, Article 42, Daily Mail, 2009, Data set B).

In Extract 9, the SMC has been constructed as hoping her family circumstance would not be *'detrimental to her* (daughter's) *personality'*, and as something that may cause her to *'react badly'* upon finding out. The problem, as produced in the extract, can be understood as resting upon the assumption that one parent is not enough. This calls forth the construction of 'fatherlessness' as delineated in Extract 1 which results in '*disaffected, directionless adolescents'.* Brought into being through political, moral, patriarchal, and religious discourses, this construction maintains that fathers are 'essential for authority and stability' (DeBenedictis, 2012). In contrast, the single mother family is constructed as unstable and problematic for society, as seen in political discourse which has used terms such as 'broken society' to attribute the riots of 2011 to fatherless families (Former Prime Minister David Cameron, cited in DeBenedictis, 2012).

However, after the problem has been set up in the extract, the solution has then been provided. The implied solution constructed through the discourse is that having come

from a *'grounded'* background herself, this SMC will be able to create the right sort of environment to overcome any possible negative outcomes inherent in her choice of single motherhood. Whilst the terms *'grounded'*, *'surrounding*s' and *'upbringing'* have not been clarified, the literature gives an indication of what might be being conveyed through the deployment of these terms. Analysts of neoliberalism such as DeBenedictis (2012) have suggested that parenting, or more specifically mothering in neoliberal society, understands parenting as 'the creation of the "good" citizen, placing parents as responsible for their offspring, the economy, the locality and the prosperity of society overall' (2012, p.1). Thus, this extract implies that this woman will be able to raise a child in line with modern parenting expectations. Additionally, in constructing this SMC as coming from the 'right sort of family' to navigate the uncertainty of 'fatherlessness', the opposite construction is evoked. Suggesting that for this 'other' sort of mother, the impact of 'fatherlessness' might well be detrimental to the child's personality.

The mother in Extract 9 has been constructed as someone who is contemplating the idea of her daughter *'finding out'* as opposed to being told. It is possible that the '*finding out'* occurs as she is informed by her mother and that this construction was chosen to highlight the reaction of the child rather than the mother; however, the fact that she could *'react badly'* suggested she will be at an advanced level of understanding at the point it happens. The construction of the child finding out at a later stage draws forth (outdated) morality discourses which suggested that single parentage should be kept secret from the child (and wider community) due to the shame which historically accompanies the subject position (Morris & Munt, 2019).

This situation was previously dealt with by a married family member assuming the role of a mother for the child, or by putting the child up for adoption. Once adopted, it was common for the 'truth' of their origin to be kept from the adopted child. This concealed the fact that the adoption was constructed as allowing the child to bond with adoptive family members and avoid social stigma and isolation (Michelle, 2006). This was produced via religious and moral discourses which constructed illegitimacy as stigmatised. However, a subsequent change of direction in the 1970's reconstructed family secrecy as psychologically damaging (Michelle, 2006).

Modern middle-class parenting techniques advocate openness and honesty when relating to children. It privileges communication and dialogue between parents and children and constructs lies (or lies by omission) as being damaging to children (Perry, 2019). In Mattes' (1994) forerunning guide to becoming an SMC, advice has been given to mothers such as practicing answering questions aloud and using terms like 'donor insemination' around the child from the beginning.

Several extracts in Data set A constructed SMCs as conforming to advice to be open with their children about their family circumstances from a young age, as shown in the examples below.

'*Jacob is now five and Claire is bracing herself for the questions she knows are bound to come, like why he doesn't have a brother or sister. And where his dad is. I haven't really got an answer prepared; perhaps I should. I plan to tell Jacob everything, but only when he asks, as then he will be ready to know'* (Extract 10, Article 18, 2020, Mail Online, Data set A).

'*At first, I felt awkward about telling people, but now I don't care. With Katie, I would talk to her even when she was too young to really understand, explaining that I had her by myself with a special seed from the doctor. Katie took it in her stride, and I've even heard her say to people at school that she simply doesn't have a daddy'* (Extract 11, Article 7, 2019, The Sun, Data set A).

'*Astrid is not yet old enough to understand how her family might be any different to another, but the subject will not be new to her when she is. Her early "da-da-da" babbling — a natural development, rather than daddy related, experts believe — provided an opportunity. I would echo it back to her, but I would explain that she doesn't have a daddy, she was made by a donor who was a very kind man who gave me a special ingredient'* (Extract 12, Article 6, 2020, The Daily Telegraph, Data set A).

In Extracts 10 and 11, the SMC has been constructed as a controversial subject position. This can be seen as evidenced by the formulation that the SMC in Extract 10 *'is bracing herself for the questions'* her child might ask, whilst the SMC in Extract 11 previously felt *'awkward about telling people'* about her situation. These constructions position the SMCs as ill at ease with the subject position they have been constructed as taking up.

This calls forth an 'ideological dilemma', a situation where two or more 'common-sense' discourses are competing (Billig, 1991). This tension can also be understood as induced by the conflicting circulating discourses of compulsory romance and female empowerment (Morris & Korobov, 2020). Compulsory romance discourse, alongside moral and patriarchal discourses, positions the heteronormative family structure as the only appropriate one for a woman. Anything outside this is considered shameful.

As such, the SMC has been constructed as expecting negative judgement from other people, drawing forth a construction of stigma associated with illegitimacy. In this respect, other people can be understood as 'social gatekeepers', influencing decisions with regards to prevailing norms (Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020). Simultaneously and contradictorily, feminist, postfeminist, and neoliberal discourses construct a position of female empowerment that suggests women are free to pursue individual goals regarding sexuality and reproduction. It is unsurprising then, given the dominance of both conflicting discourses, that women taking up this subject position would be constructed as feeling some ambivalence. Furthermore, the discomfort that has been attributed to them has been extended to create concern about how they will be judged by their child and how their child will be judged by others.

In Extracts 11 and 12, the SMCs have been constructed as being open with their children at a young age: '*even when she was too young to really understand'* and *'not yet old enough to understand'* respectively. As such, the SMCs were constructed as acting in accordance with 'expertise', informed by modern parenting ideology (Perry, 2019), SMC self-help material (Mattes, 1994), and academic research (Jadva et al., 2009; Rose, 1992). These have variously constructed the idea that being informed about their circumstance from a young age will bode well on the psychological health of the child.

The psychological, moral, and political discourses which have been drawn upon to form this construction of expertise have produced the concept of intensive parenting, whereby the ability to decipher and implement advice is deemed a key tenet of parenting: 'In this sense, the parent today is not a person who, in their informal, everyday interaction with their child, teaches and guides the child about the world, on the basis of their own experience. Rather, the idea of "education" associated with "parenting" is a far more formal one, coming from the outside' (Lee, Bristow, Faircloth,

& Macvarish, 2014, p.8) Reinforcing this construction, the SMC in Extract 12 has been produced as explicitly referring to what *'experts believe'*. This constructs this SMC as an intensive parent who does not operate on instinct but follows the diktats of prevailing wisdom.

The SMCs in Extracts 11 and 12 have been constructed as introducing their family structure to the child before they can speak or '*really understand'*. However, in Extract 10, the SMC has been produced as taking a different approach. In this instance, the mother has been constructed as planning to wait until her son asks, '*as then he will be ready to know'*. Either way, each of the mothers has been constructed as having taken account of the significance of their actions and how it might psychologically impact on their child.

In Matte's (1994) guidebook written for women who are considering becoming an SMC, it has been indicated that '[i]t is important to try, if you possibly can, to resolve whatever anger or disappointment you may have about the child's conception before she is old enough to start asking questions. That way, when the questions start, you can respond to and hear the *child's* needs rather than respond out of your own conflicted feelings, and you can be relatively neutral in tone and positive in the interpretation of the facts' (italics authors own) (p.125). Patriarchal, and romance discourses have been deployed in this quote to suggest that the SMC will feel resentment at not reproducing within a heteronormative family unit.

In addition, the mother is being asked to work on herself so that the resentment she will most likely feel does not impact negatively on her child. In neoliberal ideology, it has been proposed that the family is obligated to maintain the social adjustment of the child. As such, any anxieties not dealt with by parents could be passed to the child and result in maladjustment (Rose, 1990). In consideration of the manner and stage in which they will share their family set-up with their child, all these extracts construct the SMCs as women who are taking responsibility for the emotional health of their child.

Furthermore, the consideration that the SMCs have been constructed as giving the task of explaining their situation to their child has been produced in Extract 11 as having paid off. The daughter has been produced as being unfazed about her lack of father by *'taking it in her stride'*, and that, '*I've even heard her say to people at school that she*

simply doesn't have a daddy'. This serves to formulate the SMC as an unproblematic subject position that has had minimal impact on the child (or a problematic subject position that has been successfully negotiated). Unlike the mother in the extract who was depicted as feeling awkward about telling people, her daughter has been constructed otherwise, suggesting that the awkwardness has not been transferred to her. This construction positions the mother as a 'successful' neoliberal parent who has been able to ensure that her neurosis (and possible resentment!) have not fed through to her daughter. It also positioned her as someone who has been able to instil confidence in her daughter and enabled her to withstand potentially awkward situations. This has been elaborated on in the next extract.

'*I think that it's really important to make sure that your child feels that the way he or she came into this world was a positive and happy thing. And so, you need to have that attitude yourself. Also, in speaking to other people, if you present it as a weird, questionable thing, you're more likely to get a negative response'* (Extract 13, Article 39, 2007, The Guardian, Data set B).

In the above extract, a postfeminist discourse of confidence was deployed to construct the SMC as entirely in control of how their subject position is understood by themselves, by their child, and by others. By shaping their own view of the position to produce it as a '*positive and happy thing',* it is constructed as something that others will follow suit with. As discussed above in section 4.1.2. above, Gill & Orgad (2015) suggest that confidence can be understood as a technology of self, encouraging women and girls to 'act upon themselves' (p.2).

Within neoliberal ideology, and hyper-individualised culture, any problems are constructed as stemming from the individual, as are any solutions. Thus, by working on their internal landscape, the SMC has been produced as being able to 'fix' any residual feelings of disappointment or shame she might have about taking up the subject position, as well as how to 'manage' the way others understand it. This is also indicative of post-structuralist self-surveillance, where pressure, anxiety, and worth are not applied by formal social institutions; rather, they are untraceable and (re)located within the individual (Henderson et al., 2010).

These extracts have shown how some SMCs have been constructed as formulating 'fatherlessness' for their child. In the following section, 'fatherlessness' has been accounted for in detail regarding the specific roles that fathers are understood as fulfilling.

4.1.5. Mothers as Fathers

To address the criticism that SMCs deprive children of the opportunity to grow up with a father, some articles employed discourses to construct the mother as embodying both parental roles. In other articles, constructions of specific parenting techniques were not clarified.

'*A friend of mine referred to single parenting as double parenting as you are both mum and dad, nurturer and disciplinarian, fun parent and working parent, home maker and wage earner*' (Extract 14, Article 30, The Telegraph, 2015, Data set B).

'*I think I have a well-adjusted daughter. Some people say I deprived my child of a loving father but these days, lots of children grow up in single-parent families. I'm the good cop and bad cop. I play silly games with Hannah but am also strict with routines like bedtime and meals*' (Extract 15, Article 12, 2019, The Sun, Data set A).

'*Amanda does things with Joshua that a dad might do, like play rough-and-tumble or football. There is a chance that Joshua will be sad he doesn't have a dad but I've no regrets — a marriage ending in divorce would've been worse*' (Extract 16, Article 12, 2019, The Sun, Data set A).

In Extract 14, mother and father subject positions have been produced by drawing on attributes that are commonly conceived as gendered. Mums have been produced as *nurturing, fun, homemakers,* whereas dads are *disciplinarian, working, wage earners*. Likewise, in Extract 16, dads have been constructed as being more physical than mums, through engaging in *'rough and tumble'* and *'football'*. In Extract 15, the construction attributing different roles to the different genders is less explicit, but still produces parenting as a two-(wo)man job, with the articulation of a '*good cop and bad cop',* one who plays '*silly games'* and one who enforces '*strict routines'.* In these extracts, SMCs have been constructed as replicating the heteronormative status quo by casting themselves as both mum and dad, rather than attempting to challenge the reader's

construction of these subject positions. The disciplinarian mother or the nurturing father, as examples, are produced as inconceivable constructions.

Gendered constructions of parenting can be so culturally embedded that they generally become accepted. As such, by drawing upon these binary distinctions, it can be considered that they have been reinforced (Graham, 2018). As non-normative parents and users of ARTs, there has been some overlap in academic literature in the analysis of SMC mothers and lesbian mothers (Lapidus, 2004; Layne, 2013; Michelle, 2006). In other words, academic literature has suggested that in order to be constructed as 'good parents', lesbian parents have attempted to promote an image of family that replicates the heteronormative, middle-class, idealised form (Michelle, 2006).

Arguably, in doing so, they have further reinforced the idealised construction, making it more difficult for those who cannot simulate the appearance of it to survive (Cooper and Herman, as cited in Michelle, 2006). The implication here is that it is imperative to be constructed as close to the idealised family form as possible and that the attributes of 'male' and 'female' combine to form ideal parenting. From this angle, the replication of heteronormativity constructed in these extracts acts as a technology of self, deployed to reinforce the legitimacy of the position.

As well as offering compensation for the lack of a father in their families, the SMC in Extracts 15 and 16 have been constructed as offering a further rationale to defend their decision. In Extract 15, a consensus has been drawn upon to suggest that '*lots of children grow up in single-parent families'*. This implies that if many people do it, it is a normalised action. That is, her daughter's subjectivity has been constructed as *'well adjusted'*. Alternatively, the mother in Extract 16 has been produced as speculating that her son may feel *'sad'* about not having a dad. Her (constructed) lack of regret about this possible future sadness is explained by the statement '*a marriage ending in divorce would've been worse'*. This corresponds with academic and political discourse which constructs divorce as impacting negatively on children who can experience 'disruption, parental conflict and "father loss"' (Graham, 2012, p.99). In contrast, this woman has been constructed as assessing the risk of her actions and has taken responsibility for them. In a neoliberal society, taking a risk can be constructed as a 'failure to take care of self' (Greco, 1993, p.357, as cited in Graham 2018, p.260) and invite moral judgment. Thus, by taking responsibility for their actions — here shown by adopting all 'requisite'

parenting roles, accounting for their decision and considering the mental state of their child — they can be understood as successfully operating a technology of self.

This need to account for one's choices is not specific to parenting but has been constructed as permeating all aspects of neoliberal citizenship (Rose, 1990). Likewise, risk management has not been equated solely to single parenting; rather, it has been constructed in such a way that 'good parents' are currently 'risk managers' who must assess all situations with regards to their child's development (Lee, Mcvarish & Sheldon, 2014).

Conclusion of Section 4.1.

Through the extracts in section 4.1., constructions of 'fatherlessness' have been shown in relation to SMCs. First, explicitly negative constructions were shown. Then, this problematised version of fatherlessness was deployed and re-constructed as if through those adopting the role, the associated children, and others. Finally, constructions were introduced to show how the 'father role' will be performed by the mother.

Two main underlying assumptions regarding fatherlessness were identified as circulating in the data. The first was the construction of 'fatherlessness' as a position that has the potential to cause emotional damage to men and to children (and by extension, society). The second was a construction of gendered essentialism which positioned 'mother' and 'father' as distinct positions offering parenting qualities that are exclusively linked to sex (mothers are caring, dads are strict, etc). This was not found to be resisted discursively, but rather constructions of 'mums being dads' served to reinforce this position.

Only one example (Extract 6, Article 17) offered resistance to the assumption that fathers are necessary to the wellbeing of the child, whereby being raised by a single mother was constructed as producing a '*wonderful childhood'*. A counter-discourse that was not located in the data is the subject position of the father who has the potential to be damaging, and as such, purposefully avoided. This construction was posited by the radical feminist Bell who suggested 'the sovereign power an incestuous father wields is not of a different order from the power of other fathers, but is the exploitation of the kind of familial power that we routinely cultivate and accept' (1993, as cited in Taylor 2012, p.213). When discussing a particular type of incestuous father, Bell makes the

point that the sovereign power he is wielding is no different from the power of other fathers.

From an FDA perspective, the constructions of SMCs in these extracts can be thought of as demonstrating self-regulation within a panopticon (see section 4.1.2). For Foucault, individuals self-regulate to avoid becoming the 'undesirable Other', who is subject to disciplinary control through being different (Shannon, 2015). Over time, Foucault maintains that dominant norms become internalised by individuals who then self-monitor in order to adhere to them (1977). Through this lens, these extracts show constructions of the women as having internalised the assumption that fathering is an essential component of child raising, and they seek to address this in the manner of a 'technology of self'.

This assumption can be understood as reinforced in constructions that explicitly produced fatherlessness as damaging, and equally, by those who were produced as arguing that it was not. Likewise, according to discursive psychology, those claiming there is a social problem, and those refuting the problem are all involved in the co-production and maintenance of the social problem (Steir & Blomberg, 2016). Overall, the women in these extracts were not constructed as using radical political discourses which sought to shock or shake things up; rather, they were constructed as women who were keen to be accepted and cared about how they were judged by others. In a panopticon, 'Standing out is dangerous as it marks somebody as different, which equates them as Other' (Shannon, 2015). Therefore, given the stigma and shame that has been discursively conferred upon the position of a lone mother, the safest position for the SMC to assume is one of invisibility.

Thus, in this section, the problem has been constructed and established — i.e. fatherlessness. Whilst some techniques and social practices for mitigating this problem have been touched upon (othering, normalising, technologies of self) these are expanded upon in the following discursive site.

4.2. Constructing Single Parenting as Viable

BECOMING A SOLO MUM WAS A NO-BRAINER (Extract 25, Article 3, The Telegraph, 2019, Data set A)

In the previous discursive site, the position of an SMC was shown to be problematised due to the pervasiveness of patriarchal discourses which constructed fathers as an essential component of good family 'hygiene'. In the following discursive site, the construction of SMCs is shown to be shored up, both through defining what it is, and what it is not. It is produced as a distinct category of single mother, guided by its own parameters. It is also constructed as a subject position taken up due to mitigating circumstances that were beyond the control of the SMC, such as an inability to secure a romantic partner, and as a response to time pressure resulting from physical health problems.

4.2.1. Defining the Parameters

In the following extracts, SMCs have been constructed as subject positions primarily associated with middle-class, financially independent, older women.

'I saved hard and sacrificed everything, from holidays to a new car, to fund the £20,000 necessary' (Extract 17, Article 18, Mail Online, 2020, Data set A).

The mother in Extract 17 has been constructed as being able to raise the considerable funds of '*£20,000*' needed by having '*saved hard and sacrificed everything*'. This construct draws on notions of self-sacrifice as commensurate with perfect mothering discourses (Feasey, 2013). The potential mother is shown to have sacrificed consumer items that could have contributed to her own happiness. Despite telling the reader that '*everything*' was sacrificed, the two examples of '*holidays'* and *'a new car'* constructed the mother as wealthy enough to view these items as ordinary (rather than expendable luxuries that are out of reach for many).

Additionally, the extract implies that the mother must earn a considerable wage so that by '*saving hard',* she was able to accrue a considerable sum of *£20,000*. This would be an impossible feat if you lived on the breadline. In this extract, short as it is, this SMC has been constructed as a self-supporting and self-sacrificing (yet, ultimately privileged) woman. In short, she is someone who fits the construction of a legitimate, intensive,

perfect mother. These parameters of the subject position of an SMC are considered further below.

'"Single mother"' — I toyed with the phrase and didn't like it. It had a victim ring to it. Sad, lonely female with screaming infant and no visible means of support. I saw myself more as a strong, independent career woman with baby as accessory, sort of Bridget Jones with child. In America I'd be called an "SMC", single mother by choice. I looked up the term on the internet and found it referred to thirtysomething, professional women "who choose to become mothers knowing from the outset they will be parenting alone". According to the US census the birth rate for university-educated, unmarried, white women between 35 and 39 has risen by 78 per cent in ten years' (Extract 18, Article 32, The Times, 2000, Data set B).

'You never go out because all your money is spent on childcare — a nanny, if you have to hold down a career, like many women. You lose touch with your single friends, and the married ones don't want to know any more. You don't fit in. If I hadn't gone ahead with the birth, I would still be shopping at Harvey Nichols and socialising after work. As it is, I have been out in the evening six times since my son was born' (Extract 19, Article 37, The Sunday Times 1996 Data set B).

You might assume that they are high-achieving, career-focused women, but there is no template for these solo mothers. They come from all social classes, and the only thing they have in common is that they have grown up in the post-feminist era knowing that they have choices. They see independence as preferable to an unhappy relationship, and they see plenty of those around them. For many of them this means that when they reach their mid-thirties and realise that their time to have children is running out, they have the freedom not to seek a partner, but to go for a child because this is something that they believe they can do. We are not talking about teenagers who don't see a future for themselves and think a baby might fill the gap, but about women who are independent, mature, resilient and realistic, and who have worked out that the romantic dream is probably just that (Extract 20, Article 36, The Times, 2005, Data set B).

This picture of an SMC as a subject position available to privileged women has been built upon in Extracts 18 and 19. The women in the extracts above can be understood as good neoliberal citizens who have been constructed as able to thrive in a competitive

(apparent) meritocracy. The extracts also construct what the SMC is not — a *'sad, lonely' 'victim'*. Likewise, SMCs are further produced in the extracts as postfeminists, for whom being a woman has not evidently provided a hindrance to her career prospects or lifestyle.

As such, the mothers in Extracts 18 and 19 have both been constructed as '*career'* women; the use of the word 'career' as opposed to 'job' is an indication of qualifications and advancement. Through the construction, '*I saw myself more as a strong, independent career woman with baby as accessory, sort of Bridget Jones with child*' the process of being a mother has been produced in Extract 18 as a (non-interfering) adjunct to a career. This construction suggests that the SMC is independent of requiring state intervention, in the form of benefits, social support, etc. Drawing on neoliberal and postfeminist discourses, she has been constructed as acting in an entrepreneurial fashion, conducting her life in the manner of a business (McNay, 2009).

Becoming an SMC has been produced in Extract 19 as necessitating a lifestyle change: '*You never go', 'You lose touch with your single friends', 'You don't fit in'*. Motherhood has also been constructed as curtailing her ability to engage in the consumer and recreational activities of *'shopping at Harvey Nichols and socialising after work'*. However, these changes have not impacted negatively on her career; rather, these 'sacrifices' have been produced as necessitated in order that she could afford to hire a nanny to continue working.

This construction can be understood as serving several purposes: it indicates that this mother is self-sacrificing, whilst also showing her to be starting from a position of above average privilege. Additionally, (as in Extract 18), it produced the women as self-supporting and independent. Class signifiers have constructed a picture of an upper middle-class woman, indicated by the employment of a nanny, as opposed to relying on grandparents (free), or nursery (cheaper). This has been emphasised by positioning her as somebody who chose to shop at the exclusive department store, '*Harvey Nichols'*, rather than the high street or market, for example.

It has been constructed in the academic literature that there are 'essential personal attributes for the pursuit of single motherhood: age, responsibility, emotional maturity, and fiscal capability' (Bock, 2000, p.70). The constructions of SMCs found in Extracts 18, 19, and 20 broadly support this dominant construction, explicitly with regards to

fiscal capability and responsibility. It is also implicitly suggested regarding age and emotional maturity, whereby they have had the time to sufficiently develop their career. (Although emotional maturity and responsibility can be understood as undermined by the *'baby as accessory'* quote in Extract 18, which constructs the baby as a handbag or pair of shoes and reduces the emotional and physical toll that comes with raising a child).

In Extract 20, whilst purporting to refute the dominance of a specific construction of SMC, it has none-the-less been reinstated. Specifically, whilst noting that there is *'no template'* for SMCs, they have been constructed as sharing key attributes. For instance, *'many'* are in their '*mid-thirties'* and all are '*independent, mature, resilient and realistic'*. The academic research has suggested that the relative homogeneity of the constructed SMC offers this group legitimisation, whilst also serving to differentiate them from the 'illegitimate' mother who cannot be constructed in these terms (Bock, 2000). This 'other' type of mother subject position has been drawn upon in Extracts 18 and 20, as discussed below.

Lone mothers have been constructed in Extracts 18 and 20 respectively as, '*Sad, lonely female(s) with screaming infant(s) and no visible means of support'* and *'teenagers who don't see a future for themselves and think a baby might fill the gap'*. These constructs draw on the prevailing negative construction of single mothers. The comparison drawn in Extract 18 between the single mother '*with screaming infant'* and the '*career woman with baby as accessory'* constructs a dichotomy between out of control and in control, enabled by the discourse of bad mothering versus perfect/intensive mothering.

Equally, the construction *'no visible means of support'* draws upon the notion of lone mothers relying on the state as a benefactor of 'invisible' support. Turning to the academic literature, Morris & Munt (2019) suggested that 'shame' has been associated with single mothers and has, in turn, been construed as 'contagious'. A suggested 'antidote' is to create as much distance between the middle-class, single mother and the commonplace construction (Morris & Munt, 2019). Accordingly, these extracts can be understood as demonstrating the social practice of othering, whereby a dichotomy has been created to produce two distinct subject positions of single mother. (See section 4.1.2. for a more detailed explanation of othering as a social practice).

To strengthen the constructions of two different groups of single mothers, it can be suggested that 'extreme case formulations' (Robles, 2015) have been deployed. This is where the expression of an extreme term enables discourses of legitimatisation or defence to be employed. Arguably, this has been achieved by offering a version of motherhood that is the furthest away from how the reader is meant to construct the SMC featured in the article. Thus, a division has been created in Extract 20 which produced *'teenagers who don't see a future for themselves and think a baby might fill the gap'* as incompatible with and in opposition to *'women who are independent, mature, resilient and realistic'*.

Many possible and probable outcomes for single parents have not been presented in these extracts, such as separated partners who co-parent happily, or lone parents who manage well in their changed circumstances (McIntosh, 1996). Additionally, the constructed lack of *'choice'* afforded to the teenaged mother has not been structured through a compassionate lens. The misfortune of this group seemingly serves purely to bolster the construction of the SMC, who has been produced as *'mature, resilient and realistic'* (using a list of three). Again, the construction has been brought about by explicitly drawing upon '*postfeminism*', a type of feminism that has been defined as 'unapologetically middle- class feminism, shorn of all obligations to less privileged women or to those who are not 'strivers' (McRobbie 2013, p.120). The language deployed in Extracts 18 and 20 can be understood as ideal exemplars.

Here, the SMCs have been constructed as taking advantages of opportunities that are there for the taking as *'high achievers'* with *'freedom'* and *'independence'*. However, as with most postfeminist discourse, there is no acknowledgement that the *'freedom'* experienced by these women might not be equally available to all. The work of Rottenberg (2017) highlighted this inequality, stating that 'neoliberal feminism simultaneously—and frighteningly—helps to produce a small class of aspirational subjects who self-invest wisely and augment their capital value and a large class of women who are rendered expendable, exploitable, and disposable' (p.345, 2017). Thus, Rottenberg suggested that the ability of middle-class women to thrive is predicated on a lower stratum of women undertaking care and domestic work.

However, these were not the only constructions of SMCs found in the data set. Notions of young, working-class, and state dependent, were also located. For example, in Article 29, a mother was constructed as choosing to become an SMC following a lottery win,

and in Article 27 below, the 19-year-old SMC has been constructed as a benefit recipient.

'*The first couple of months I stayed at mum's. Then I applied to government support to get my own one bedroom flat. I'd saved money but needed help and every other mum in the UK is entitled to the same help. I didn't fall pregnant to get government aid and I am going to pay my way. I am returning to part-time work in two months as a barista. In September I will start my mid-wife course*' (Extract 21, Article 27, Mail Online, 2019, Data set A).

Despite meeting some of the criteria for the common construction of the 'teen welfare mum' (as a teenager receiving welfare), the formulation of the SMC in Extract 21 can be understood as resisting this positioning. Through drawing on neoliberal and postfeminist discourses, the mother has instead been constructed as someone who has engaged in forethought and self-regulation. This is seen in the production of the mother as having *'saved mone*y' and that she is '*going to pay (her) way'*. Notwithstanding this, she has been constructed as still needing assistance and is therefore applying for government support to get a one-bedroom flat. The construction, *'I'd saved money but needed help and every other mum in the UK is entitled to the same help'*, can be viewed as defensive, and seems indicative of an 'ideological dilemma' (Billig, 1988).

As previously discussed, an ideological dilemma suggests the presence of two or more competing discourses; in this case, it is a tension between the need for government aid and the widespread stigmatisation of it. Under neoliberal ideology, welfare receipt has been constructed as a shameful position whereby it is understood as the responsibility of the individual to support themselves (Littler, 2013a). The assertion in the extract of government help as being equally available to all can be understood as an attempt to legitimise and normalise this course of action. Additionally, the resistance of the constructed stereotype has been reinforced by the statement, '*I didn't fall pregnant to get government aid and I am going to pay my way'*.

As such, othering has been deployed to contrast this 'self-regulating' SMC with the lone mother who chose to get pregnant just for government aid and supposedly has no intention of paying their way. Turning to the academic literature, Jones et al. (2019) found that othering was a technique used by some teen mothers regarding their

contemporaries in order to maintain their own positive self-representation. To reinforce this SMC's (noble) intentions, a plan of action has been constructed, including her short- and long-term work plans: first, as a part-time barista and later, training to become a midwife. Thus, as is consistent with neoliberal and postfeminist ideology, the SMC in the extract has been produced as viewing her circumstances as individualised and any solution also of her own making. In light of this, given that the mother is constructed as being on benefits, the construction of an action plan can be understood as a technology of self. This offers a creative resistance to the pitfalls of being negatively constructed as 'dole-scrounger' as the lone mother so often is (Tyler, 2008).

This construction above reflects the contradictory nature of the stereotyped teen mum which alternates between 'accidental' impregnation and planning the pregnancy to obtain benefits, depending on the context. The constructed division between single mothers who have 'chosen' their position and those who have not has been further clarified in the extract below:

'The word "choice" in our title has two implications: we have made a serious and thoughtful decision to take on the responsibility of raising a child by ourselves, and we have chosen not to be in a relationship rather than be in one that does not seem satisfactory' (Extract 22, Article 11, The Guardian, 2007, Data set A).

The 'choice' to become an SMC has been constructed in Extract 22 using a discourse of rationality, suggested by the description of a *'serious and thoughtful decision'*. This can be understood as a comparison to the lone mother, which academic literature has noted is often constructed as becoming impregnated due to her unbridled sexuality: 'the 'feral' mother is constructed as uncontrollably and immorally breeding' (DeBenedictis, 2012, p.11). However, as has also been asserted in academic literature, an alternative discourse positions teen mums as making an active choice, albeit negotiated through a lack of viable alternatives, such as education and work opportunities (Roseneil & Mann, 1996) (as seen in Extract 20 above).

Thus, the lone mother has either not made a choice, or not made a worthwhile choice. In contrast, the SMC has made a *'serious and thoughtful decision'* and recognised the *'responsibility of raising a child by ourselves'*. Again, drawing on neoliberal discourses, this construction serves to position the SMC as having assessed and accounted for the

risks inherent in the subject position prior to taking it up (Lee Mcvarish & Sheldon, 2014). The '*seriousness'* and '*thoughtfulness'* reinforce the constructed '*responsibility'*— a key tenant of neoliberal discourse. Responsibility can be understood in Foucauldian terms as 'conduct of conduct' (Rottenberger, 2017), and offers a construction 'which holds individuals accountable for their own fates' (Stuart & Donaghue, as cited in Holmes, 2018, p. 46). This extract therefore shows a construction of the SMC as unproblematic to society.

Also drawn upon are feminist discourses of liberation and emancipation which suggest that women should not have to make do with a relationship that '*does not seem satisfactory'*, purely for the purposes of reproducing. This construction indicates it was not a choice made between two viable alternatives, as feminist discourses state that no woman should have to endure an unsatisfactory relationship in societies where women have access to the workplace and are no longer financially dependent on men (Friedan, 2010). Likewise, whilst not directly drawing on the academic research, the sentence '*we have chosen not to be in a relationship rather than be in one that does not seem satisfactory'* can be linked to studies that suggest that divorce can be more harmful to children than a family which originates with one parent (Golombok et al., 2016; Murray & Golombok, 2005).

However, the construction of relationships that were unsatisfactory, rather than oppressive, can be understood as more indicative of postfeminist or human rights discourse, than second-wave feminism. Here individual happiness is understood to have become privileged over any collective forms of social organisation (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). Indeed, the word *'choice',* as highlighted in Extract 22 has been hailed as a watchword of postfeminist culture (Holmes, 2018; Rottenberg, 2017). Where choice can be interpreted as freedom, a critical, feminist position contests this construction as a 'negotiated choice which is constrained by traditional and ideological structures and judgements' (Holmes, 2018, p.41). Thus, whilst the SMC can be constructed as making a choice, that choice can be understood as embedded within constraints. Additionally, there is an implication that the choice is available for anyone to make, which discounts any possible and probable structural inequalities.

4.2.2. Drawing on Academic Research

Extracts 23 and 24 show the use of expert testimony to construct SMCs as a distinct, problem-free form of family unit:

'*Professor Susan Golombok of the Centre for Family Research at Cambridge University and author of Modern Families: Parents and Children in New Family Forms, thinks she knows why:* [children born to elective single mothers perform slightly better in tests than other children]. *"The traditional idea that children of single parent families don't do well is based on single mothers bringing up children after divorce or unplanned pregnancy. These women typically experience a considerable drop in income, which can cause problems for children as well as stress for the mother. "Unelected" single mothers are more at risk of mental health problems, because of the stress of splitting up or financial anxiety, and often face conflict with their former partner, which can impact on the children. But single mothers by choice are spared all this", says Golombok*' (Extract 23, Article 40, The Guardian, 2015, Data set B).

'*I met up with Dr Sophie Zadeh, research associate at the Centre for Family Research at Cambridge University, when I was working on my book, Going Solo. She has interviewed many families where children are born by sperm donor, and found that one thing the mothers share is that they are all good parents. "But that's probably true of all parents who use assisted reproduction methods," she says. Every child born of donor sperm or eggs is wanted and planned.*

She's looking into whether coming from a one-parent family is destabilising for children. In the case of parents divorcing, children can suffer because of parental conflict, from their main carer being depressed and from a drop in financial circumstances. To my relief, Dr Zadeh told me that it is divorce itself that causes the problems (not that anyone believes parents should stay unhappily together, which I suspect brings its own problems) and that coming from a solo family is not the same: there's no difference between children in one-parent and two parent families. Factors that can contribute to a slightly raised level of problems are increased financial stress and increased levels of parenting stress that mums feel, but this is irrespective of being in a one- or two-parent home' (Extract 24, Article 19, The Independent, 2019, Data set A).

Category entitlement has been used in Extracts 23 and 24 to alert the reader to the fact that the quotations are from a professor in Extract 23, and a Doctor in Extract 24; therefore, these opinions can be constructed as holding significant weight (Potter, 1996). This was further emphasised by the mention of their positions at a prestigious university, Cambridge. The inclusion of these details has contributed to a rhetoric of epistemic discourse which positions the academics as experts by reason and knowledge, and positions the quote as an objective truth (Potter, 1996) There are some significant differences in the way the extracts construct single mothers that are worth exploring in further detail.

In Extract 23, the difficulties faced by lone mothers have been located as within the mothers themselves. Divorce or unplanned pregnancy is constructed as causing '*stress for the mother*' who is '*more at risk of mental health problems'.* Additionally, the mother has been produced as someone who may experience a '*considerable drop in income'*, '*financial anxiety'* and '*conflict with their former partner'* after a break-up. They have not been constructed, for example, as badly treated by ex-partners or lovers or inadequately supported by the welfare state. As is consistently constructed within discourses of neoliberal ideology, their problems have been constructed as individually pathologised (Fraser, 2013). Furthermore, no solutions were constructed and nor were discussions opened into how the problems facing lone mothers (*poverty, mental health issues,* etc.) could be addressed.

It is notable that any impact on the child has been constructed as operating through the mother, producing an assumption that she will be the main carer following the family break-up. It is the women who have been produced as experiencing '*the stress of splitting up or financial anxiety, and often face conflict with their former partner, which can impact on the children'.* This construction draws on the ideologies of attachment and intensive parenting to position the mother as the key constituent in a child's life, with the ultimate responsibility over their mental wellbeing.

Rose (1998) suggested that in neoliberal society, 'parents and teachers were now to take responsibility for regulating not just their habits and morals, but their feelings, wishes, and anxieties, if they were not to produce troubled and troublesome children' (Rose, 1998, p.160). Furthermore, as suggested by DeBenedictis (2012), feminists have argued that the bulk of care work and responsibility for children is still undertaken by the

mother. The implication is that the both the physical circumstances and the affective life of the mother must be brought under control for the sake of the child. Simultaneously, the lack of discourse concerning the father in Extract 23 suggests that subsequent to the break-up, (and excluding indirect impact by way of the mother) the father has been produced as having very little influence on their child.

The contrast between the two types of single mother found in Extract 23 can be understood as a deployment of the social practice of othering (see section 4.1.2.). The construction of single-parent families not doing well was termed *'the traditional idea'*. This was offered in contrast to the SMC, who can therefore be understood as the non-traditional or modern idea of a single mother. The suggestion is that this new variety of lone parent is challenging the constructed stereotype by breaking the association of negative outcomes for children of single-parent families.

SMCs have been situated as elevated in status due to being *'spared'* poverty, mental health issues, and the stress and potential conflict that can be associated with divorce. The phrasing of the sentence *'but single mothers by choice are spared all of this'* does not specify who is doing the sparing, but it can be hypothesised that it is through the 'electedness' of their circumstances. In other words, it suggests that SMCs are 'sparing' themselves. By drawing on the academic literature (including the research by Golombok herself) we can understand that through choosing the subject of a single mother, the SMC is constructed as self-regulating and responsible, and thus not blighted by the same misfortunes as the lone mother (Golombok 2016; Murray & Golombok, 2005; Siegel, 1995; Siegel, 1998).

Whilst the language in Extract 24 makes broadly the same points, the constructions do not explicitly stigmatise lone mothers. The terms '*one-parent family*' and '*main carer*' have been selected rather than 'single mothers', suggesting that the child might live with either the mother or the father following a divorce. (Although this can be understood as a moot point where the term 'parent' has been constructed to be a neoliberal concealment that most parenting is undertaken by women (DeBenedictis, 2012). Whilst parenting has been produced as unequally distributed — as suggested by the '*increased levels of parenting stress that mums feel'*— this has not been challenged. As in Extract 23, divorce has been constructed as a factor that can cause problems, with the specific indicators of '*increased financial stress*' and '*increased levels of parenting*

stress'. However, these have not been constructed as exclusive to single parents, rather they can be experienced '*irrespective of being in a one- or two parent home'*. Additionally, it has been suggested that regarding divorce, sometimes it can be the better solution when staying together unhappily can bring its own problems.

Unlike Extract 23, there is no mention of 'unelected' single mothers in Extract 24, and the lack of agency this assumes. However, planning and preparation are again privileged constructions, mobilised to suggest that their presence is indicative of optimal parenting. This is seen in the formulation that '*one thing the mothers* (of children born by sperm donor) *share is that they are all good parents*' and the reason given is that *'Every child born of donor sperm or eggs is wanted and planned'.* Thus, drawing on neoliberal discourses of responsibility, the constructions of being 'wanted' and 'planned' are deployed as privileged.

This corresponds with the academic literature where discourses pertaining to planning and preparation have been cited as indicators of perfect parenting (Faircloth & Gürtin, 2018; Golombok et al., 2016; Graham, 2018; Hertz and Ferguson, 1998; Robinson, 1997; Siegel, 1998). These discourses still serve to 'other' through the implication that those who do not 'plan' or 'want' their child are 'bad' parents. In this case, the othering is not referring to single mothers specifically, as women (and men) in relationships can also have children without planning and preparation. The othering in this instance is implicit rather than explicit as the focus is on those who have engaged in planning and preparation, rather than those that have not. Thus, there is a binary distinction formed between planners and non-planners; whereby the former can be understood as more closely conforming to neoliberal values.

McRobbie (2013) suggests that neoliberal society 'encourages family life to be considered in terms of an enterprise or small business led by the wife and mother who provides strong leadership and demonstrates the right kind of managerial skills' (2013, p.135). Within this context, the potential issues that non-planning can result in (a drop in income, stress, marital problems, etc.) shows a lack of the requisite managerial skills. It can also be inferred that parents who do not plan their pregnancy cannot be good parents in terms of raising the child after the fact, as the planning (financial security, home ownership, living in a safe neighbourhood, etc.) can be understood as laying the groundwork for future parenting 'success'.

The sections above have highlighted how a construction of 'choice' has been privileged. This serves to distinguish the SMC from the lone mother. Furthermore, implied within a discourse of 'choice' are associated constructions such as responsibility, maturity, and self-regulation. In the following sections, that same 'choice' is shown to be negotiated by factors outside of the control of the SMC.

4.2.3. Not a Choice - Extenuating Circumstances

Where the stigmatised lone mother is constructed simultaneously and contradictorily as having made a choice (for the benefits) and not made a choice (with an uncontrolled sexuality) depending on the context, similar contradictory discourses can be considered to be at work with the SMC. Despite having made a 'rational' choice, the SMC is also constructed as having restricted opportunities, thus impeding her available 'choices'. These include bereavement, mandated motherhood, a lack of romantic relationship, and biological catalysts.

4.2.3.1. Bereavement

In several articles (Article 38, Data set B, Articles 24, 3, Data set A), the death of someone 'close' to the SMC was constructed as impacting on the choice to become an SMC.

'*Before my father Shaun died of lung cancer, I asked him a series of questions, one of which was, "What do you envisage my life to look like in 10 years' time?" His greatest hope, he told me, was that I'd experience parenthood. I was 32 and single but I'd always wanted children, so soon after he died I began planning to have a baby solo, using donor sperm'* (Extract 25, Article 24, The Sunday Telegraph, 2019, Data set A).

'*For me, becoming a solo mum was a no-brainer. Motherhood was non-negotiable, and in the back of my mind I knew that if I reached a certain point, I'd do whatever I had to do, to have children of my own. Within a fortnight of my bereavement I went to my doctor and told him, "I would like to have children, please. But I will have to get pregnant using a sperm donor. Help me"'* (Extract 26, Article 3, The Telegraph, 2019, Data set A).

In Extracts 25 and 26, existential discourses are mobilised to legitimise the decision to become an SMC following the death of the woman's father and 'someone' close, respectively. In Extract 25, the SMC is produced as investigating this route '*soon after he died',* while in Extract 26, we are told that the SMC went to the doctor, '*within a fortnight'*. In both extracts, a pre-existing pronatalist discourse is established, offering a foundation from which to build upon following the bereavement.

In Extract 25, this was constructed by the explanation that she had '*always wanted children'*. In Extract 26, it was produced by the tautological construction of motherhood as a *'no-brainer'* and *'non-negotiable'*. To a reader coming from the West, this discourse would resonate as motherhood is constructed as an essential component of women's identity formation (Smajdor, 2009). Involuntary childlessness, on the other hand, has been described in the academic literature as a significant personal crisis (Faircloth & Gürtin, 2018).

In Extract 25, it was constructed as the '*greatest hope'* of the SMC's dying father that she should '*experience parenthood'*. The 'dying wish' is a familiar trope in Western society and carries considerable weight. To ignore the wish of the dying person would be to disrespect them in death, and therefore constructs this woman as having no choice but to see his wish come true, in whatever form possible.

After making the decision, a biomedical discourse was deployed in both extracts, whereby donor sperm was constructed as the route to motherhood. The privileging of biomedical discourses here can be thought of as supplanting the romance discourses that would typically be employed, with pregnancy being the result of a loving heterosexual union. In Extract 26, the SMC has been constructed as being clear that a sperm donor is the path she will '*have to'* take, producing this as the only available route to pregnancy for single women. (This will be explored further in section 4.3.4). Her request at the end for the doctor to *'help me'* constructed the doctor as the co-partner in this woman's endeavour to become pregnant.

The vulnerability suggested by the request for help indicates that the doctor has been produced as holding institutional power with regards to whether he chooses to assist the woman or not. This construction is invoking the disciplinary technology in which ARTs are regulated through the government. Whilst the ideology of neoliberalism purports

that the family is a private sphere free from public interference, this is refuted: 'The state establishes the legal framework for conducting legitimate sexual relations and for procreation' (Rose, 1989, p.127).

This is particularly pertinent where ARTs are involved. In other words, the state not only makes legal decisions about who is entitled to make use of such technology, but also who will be given financial assistance through the NHS. Without such assistance, the steep costs of ARTs have been positioned as an option exclusively for the privileged (Faircloth & Gürtin, 2018). Thus, whilst the SMC may have been produced as confidently deciding that donor sperm is the course of action for her, this construction reinforces that (unless she can find the means to go privately) she is at the mercy of her (male) doctor.

In both extracts, neoliberal discourses of individualism and autonomy can be understood as being deployed to construct the SMCs as women who independently pursue their goals with entrepreneurial skill. The selection of the word 'solo' rather than 'alone' in both extracts served to emphasise their bravery and initiative (as discussed in section 4.1.2.). Both women have been constructed as having a 'can do' attitude, with little prevarication once they have reached a decision. In Extract 25, we are told the woman *'began planning'* soon after her father's death, whilst in Extract 26, the woman would *'do whatever I had to do'* because motherhood was *'non-negotiable'*. The confidence and decisiveness with which the women have been constructed can be traced to feminist discourse, or more specifically, postfeminist discourse, which suggests that women have the freedom to achieve goals that contribute to their own happiness on an individual level.

Commentators of postfeminism have critiqued the culture of individual attainment as such: 'the confidence culture is closely tied to the fantasy of happiness proposing a positive version of feminism that goes along with rather than challenges existing structures and rules' (Gill & Orgad, 2015, p.17). This suggests that while Extracts 25 and 26 construct SMC as a natural conclusion to the loss, they have shown the experience of unequal privilege that would enable them to assume that the position of SMC has not been taken into account.

4.2.3.2. Mandated Motherhood

The assumption of pronatalism which was discussed in the section above is further constructed in the extracts below, along with possible consequences for not taking up a mother subject position.

'*I felt I had so much love to give, and I yearned to watch a child of my own grow and explore the world. Every time yet another friend told me they were expecting a baby, I'd be delighted for them, but would also wonder when it would be me who would get to experience the feeling of a baby growing inside me, and then watching them grow towards independence*' (Extract 27, Article 2, 2019, 'I', Data set A).

In Extract 27, discourses of love, mandated motherhood, and neoliberalism have been brought together, constructing a picture of a woman whose childlessness caused her suffering. The SMC has been constructed as having *'yearned'* — which is a more evocative word than desiring or wanting —and indicates a physicality. A nature discourse has also been employed, offering an embodied sense of motherhood, of being able to feel the baby *'growing inside (her)'*. These images remind the reader of the constructed naturalness and purposefulness of the female ability to develop and nurture a baby (Oakley, 1980). Such discourses construct reproductive desire as natural and essential; thus, the mother's actions to become an SMC are warranted through being produced as her fulfilling her natural calling.

However, Rose has suggested that '[t]he mundane tasks of mothering came to be rewritten as emanations of a natural and essential state of love' (Rose, 1989, p.161) in order to fulfil a neoliberal agenda. 'Love' here is understood as a technology of governmentality. Governmentality describes techniques and procedures designed to govern the conduct of both individuals and populations at every level, incorporating technologies of self and technologies of power. Such governmentality was also constructed in Extract 27 through the construction of motherhood as an entanglement between a route to personal fulfilment (*a yearning)* and as a means of developing well-adjusted future citizens who will '*grow towards independence'.* Independence in this context suggests the child's independence from the mother, but also operating as a key concept in neoliberal ideology to indicate independence from state support.

The following extracts show possible consequences to the subject position of the childfree woman.

'I have always been maternal since I was a kid when I used to play with dolls, I knew I wanted to be a mum so finding out I might not be able to have children was heart-breaking' (Extract 28, Article 28, Mail Online, 2019, Data set A).

'I've battled depression because of wanting a child, so going it alone was the best thing I ever could have done' (Extract 29, Article 13, Express Online, 2020, Data set A).

In Extract 28, a discourse of mandated motherhood has been mobilised through the construction of the woman being '*maternal since (she) was a kid'* and *'playing with dolls*'. This has drawn upon a patriarchal discourse to suggest that motherhood is a position that, for females, is either innate, or instilled into during socialisation. Either way, it is constructed as a long-standing desire. The use of the word *'always'* in conjunction with constructing this desire as stemming from childhood, formulated a construction whereby length of time is seen as indicative of importance; this is not a spontaneous flight of fancy, but something that she has been in training for her whole life.

On these grounds, combined with the potential *'heart break'* of potentially not being able to have children, any action to achieve the motherhood position can be understood as warranted. Similarly, the position of '*wanting a child'* was constructed in Extract 29 as the cause of the SMC's depression. Rottenberg (2017) suggested that despite the emphasis on 'choice' constructed in postfeminist ideology, '[w]omen's value as women, and thus their individual futures and returns, are still linked to being able to have children' (p. 340).

The position of childlessness has been constructed as problematic in the three extracts above. Letherby has suggested that 'women who choose to remain childless are often considered selfish, deviant and unfeminine, whilst women who are unable to have children are pitied and considered desperate and unfulfilled' (cited in Budds et al., 2013, p.135). Both positions can be understood as undesirable and in opposition to the morality, self-regulation, and positivity expected of the postfeminist woman (Skeggs, 2005). Considering this, taking action to avoid the position of childlessness and to deal with the negative affect linked with *'heart break'* and *'depression'* can be understood as

a technology of self, demonstrating self-regulation. Gill and Orgad (2015) have suggested that neoliberal society privileges positive affect and it is the individual's responsibility to ensure their own happiness. The implication of this is that any action taken to achieve these ends can be as justified.

4.2.3.3. Romance

All of the SMCs in the data set of newspaper articles, were constructed as either heterosexual or not disclosing a sexuality, which is usually read as an assumed heterosexuality (Kitzinger, 2005). SMCs were constructed as understanding their situation within a romantic discourse that offered a heteronormative ideal. The loss of this ideal was produced by formulations such as *'letting go of the fairy tale that you grew up with*' (Article 16, Data set A). The women were mostly positioned as being clear that they did not seek to disrupt normative convention but that they ended up with a series of failed relationships, were unable to meet '*Mr Right*' (Articles 36, 42, Data set B; Article 13, Data set A), or '*the man of my dreams'* (Article 4, Data set A) disallowed this practice. A more detailed version of this construction is shown in the extract below.

'*I dated on and off throughout my thirties and tried online dating but could never find that "spark". I met some great guys, but I think you get to a point where you know what makes a great relationship, so why settle until you find it?*' (Extract 30, Article 8, Mail Online, 2019, Data set A).

The SMC in Extract 30 has been constructed as having particular standards when it comes to romantic relationships. Phrases were deployed to produce her as *'never find(ing) that spark'* and seeking *'a great relationship'* where she is not prepared to *'settle'*. This constructs her as someone who had relationships, albeit ones she did not find to be worthy of maintaining. These constructions point to a variance in circulated discourses regarding marriage and relationships over time. Unlike other points in history, women do not need to marry for reasons such as financial security or to enable political alliances. Instead, these constructions help to position the SMC as a 'customer' who can choose (or not) a relationship based on how much happiness it brings her.

Correspondingly, the academic literature has shown romantic alliances as a facet of neoliberal consumer-based culture, whereby individuals weigh up the cost/benefit of a relationship in much the same way they might any other product available to purchase:

'In order for something to be worthwhile it needs to offer a good return in exchange for what is put in or given' (Fromm, cited in Tofts & Collins, 2013, p.23). The woman in Extract 30 has been constructed as having weighed up the cost/benefit of the relationships (lack of spark/desire to be in a relationship) and decided that the benefits were not significant enough to continue. From this point of view, SMCs become a rational subject position to assume.

Turning to the academic literature, Rottenberg (2017) has suggested that ideal postfeminist subjects are encouraged to engage in casual sex and egg freezing in their twenties and thirties to invest in their education and career more fully. Through the uncoupling of reproduction and relationships that have been enabled due to scientific and cultural changes, women can be understood as under less pressure to secure a husband than in the past. This is shown in Extract 30 by the formulation '*so why settle until you find it?'* If an SMC is a possible route to motherhood, and relationships are constructed as not '*great'*, then why not enjoy the company of some *'great guys'* whilst pursuing other goals? Yet, at the same time, the SMC's position as somebody who believes in romance constructs her as normative. In fact, her belief in romance has been constructed as so considerable that she will settle for nothing less than a *'great relationship'* with a *'spark'*.

This construction of SMCs as valuing the heteronormative family structure despite ultimately taking a different path has been noted in academic studies (Bock, 2000; Holmes, 2018). Moreover, it has been suggested as demonstrating the ongoing resonance of 'traditional family discourse' (Zadeh et al., 2013, p.113) on shaping the subjectivity of females. From a Foucauldian perspective, this can be understood as the panopticon effect, whereby women internalise the male gaze, offering compliance to a patriarchal male agenda (Shannon, 2015).

Equally, any outward rejection of the normative can be understood as a dangerous subject position, whereby 'anyone who resists being part of such a family or who undermines its ruse of inevitability in the eyes of children must be abnormal and poses a threat to society' (Taylor, 2011, p.215). Where the construction of one set of values accompanied by a contradictory behaviour could be understood as a resistance to normative structures — through being produced as having values that align with those of broader society — the SMC's non-normative path can be understood as legitimate.

4.2.3.4. Biology

Further distancing from the active element of 'choice' was constructed using biological discourses, in the form of physical health concerns. These were then produced as the final catalyst for the decision. Whilst the sub-theme, 'mandated motherhood', also constructs biological factors as impacting on the choice, these are understood as cultural constructions that shape the socialisation of girls (such as a motherhood instinct).

In contrast, the articles here produce SMCs as arising in response to various health diagnoses. For example: '*endometriosis*' (Article 33, Data set B, Articles 7, 16, 28; Data set A), '*fibroids and ovarian cysts*' (Article 4, Data set A), '*polycystic ovary syndrome*' (Articles 39 Data set B; Article 12, Data set A), '*a miscarriage*' (Article 10, Data set A), '*fertility MOTs'* showing declining fertility (Article 5, Data set A), and '*Pre-cancerous cells in her cervix*' (Article 29, Data set A). The construction of an SMC through a biological discourse has been produced more fully in the extract below.

'*I was 37, single and found out I had low fertility. In my 20's and 30's I'd always imagined I'd have children with a boyfriend as a deliberate consequence of a loving relationship. But when I learnt my fertility was dwindling, I found the thought of not at least trying to become a parent heartbreaking. So, with no time to lose, I decided to do my best to become a parent — and then hopefully meet a partner later down the line'* (Extract 31, Article 14, Mail Online, 2019 Data set A).

In Extract 31, '*dwindling'* fertility has been constructed as providing the impetus for the decision to become an SMC. Biological discourses were deployed to construct the circumstantial pressure that impacted upon the decision made by this woman. As such, the woman is constructed as having taken advantage of scientific developments in the form of 'fertility MOTs' that allow increased knowledge about reproductive functioning and reduce the element of chance. By signifying that the woman was 37 at the time she made her decision, the construct of the biological clock has been evoked, whereby medical experts are constructed as recommending that women give birth between the ages of 20 and 35 (Budds et al., 2013). This serves to construct a time pressure that positions any subsequent action as legitimate.

The woman has been constructed as being surprised by her position after imagining she would *'have children with a boyfriend as a deliberate consequence of a loving relationship'*, but her circumstance can be constructed as part of a broader pattern impacting on women in neoliberal societies. Neoliberal commentators have suggested that certain women are increasingly expected to delay motherhood in order to work. Therefore, 'encouraging upwardly mobile women to build their own portfolios and to self-invest during the years once thought of as the most fertile suggests that neoliberalism is increasingly interpellating women—particularly middle-class women—as human capital' (Rottenberg, 2017, p.332).

The woman constructed in Extract 31 can be understood as having followed this trajectory — investing in herself through education and career advancement prior to motherhood (the article constructs her as a journalist). Whilst this could be constructed as restricting her chances to meet a partner, it also arguably opened the possibility for her to become a self-supporting SMC. Therefore, the mother is constructed as taking advantage of developments in reproductive technologies and accessed them to pursue her individualistic goal of motherhood in a manner that is only available to an elite group (Faircloth & Gürtin, 2018).

The constructed '*low fertility'* in the extract can be understood as a call to action, whereby the woman has been produced as someone taking control of the situation by the formulation *'with no time to lose, I decided to do my best to become a parent'*. This constructs her as having agency and autonomy, which, in turn, identifies her as a good neoliberal citizen (Gill, 2017). Drawing on postfeminist discourses, the SMC has been shown as active in achieving her goals, rather than passively waiting to be 'rescued' by a man (Gill, 2017).

However, unlike second-wave feminist discourse which would reject romance as a tool to coerce women into oppressive marriages (Friedan, 2010), the mother has been constructed as a romantic. This is shown by the construction that informs the reader she spent the best part of twenty years hoping that children would be the '*deliberate consequence of a loving relationship'.* Additionally, the mother has been constructed as someone holding on to her romantic desires, through suggesting that she will '*hopefully meet a partner later down the line'.* As such, this construction is imbricated with the academic literature which has suggested that there is an ambivalence toward SMCs

being constructed as a feminist subject position. Holmes (2018) suggested that by being aligned with feminism, SMCs can be constructed negatively as a subversive act of 'deliberately setting out to go it alone' (Holmes, 2018, p. 46) (as seen in Extract 2).

In contrast, drawing on romance discourses can be understood as perpetuating the continued strength of normative feminine subjectivities (Holmes, 2018). However, according to postfeminist ideology, there would be no conflict between romance and feminism discourse, where the role of feminism was understood to offer women increased availability of choices (Butler, 2021). That the woman in the extract has been constructed as free to pursue single motherhood whilst maintaining romantic ideals could be seen as evidence of the success of feminism. In other words, that being a 'feminist' does not mean having to forgo 'feminine' pursuits such as motherhood and heterosexual romance.

Conclusion of Section 4.2.

In the discursive site above, SMCs were constructed in contrast to the stigmatised lone mother. It was seen to be the product of a logical and rational thought process, yet simultaneously negotiated by factors that were constructed as being outside the control of these women. The constructions of SMCs seen in this section indicate that the 'choices' made by women with privilege are valued more than the 'choices' made by women without. By being positioned as financially solvent, responsible, mature, and serious, they can be understood as women who will apply these qualities to parenting.

As neoliberalism differs from conservatism, it has been constructed as not supporting heteronormative family structures from a value-based position, but from an economic one. Through this lens, single mothers who are dependent on the state for financial support are understood as problematic, and in this instance, women must first seek support from an absent father supported by the Child Support Agency (Cooper, 2017).

However, a self-supporting single mother does not present a challenge to neoliberalism. Economic discourses which serve to construct SMCs as self-supporting, therefore, serve to warrant the position. For those that cannot be positioned as financially solvent (as shown in Extract 21), legitimacy can be constructed through alignment with the above and distance from the 'other' reckless and selfish mother. The suggestion is that through

not becoming pregnant 'just for the benefits' but using the benefits as a temporary means to an end, the 'morality' of this woman has not been compromised.

The articles can be viewed as technologies of selves, thus serving a performative function. Skeggs (2005) has suggested that in neoliberal societies, 'it is up to the individual to "choose" their repertoire of the self. If they do not have access to the range of narratives and discourses for the production of the ethical self they may be held responsible for choosing badly, an irresponsible production of themselves' (p.973). Thus, by 'choosing' the repertoires of a '*serious and thoughtful'* choice (Extract 22), but nonetheless 'a constrained choice', SMC can be understood as an ethical position, in which the greater good is taken into consideration over individual needs. Therefore, they avoid punitive repercussions of being positioned as someone who defies conventional norms. In the following discursive site, this construction is taken further through the production of an SMC as an optimal position.

4.3. A Modern Family Form

'BRIMMING WITH LOVE' Article 14, 2019, The Sun, Data set A

The following discursive site builds on the construction of SMCs as a completely 'new' type of family form with the capability to thrive in neoliberal society. Under neoliberal ideology, the concept of stay-at-home-mothering as the optimal family scenario is thought to have receded, replaced by a focus on women obtaining an ideal 'balance' between career and parenting.

For example, Rottenberg (2017) has asserted that 'middle-class stay-at-home mothers are out, while self-identified feminist go-getters with children are in' (p.335). Drawing on this construction helps to position SMCs not only as legitimate, but in some regards as a superior family setup. From this point of view, women are free to concentrate on developing a career prior to having a child, without having to 'waste time' finding and nurturing a relationship. After this time, they can 'choose' to have a child without the encumbrance of a relationship.

4.3.1. Pre-conception Parenting

The construction of planning and preparing for parenting far in advance of the arrival of a child seen in section 4.3.1. above, was located in other extracts as shown below. In the

academic literature, Faircloth & Gürtin (2018) suggested that the prevalence of this construction is such that it is useful to use the term 'pre-conception parents' when referring to this tendency (p.8), as seen in Extracts 32 and 33.

'*Christensen, Rehlsdorph, Fjord and Buur all spent years researching the pros and cons of single parenting and its impact on children before starting treatment*' *(*Extract 32, Article 40, The Guardian, 2015, Data set B).

'*Becoming a parent on my own was never my fairytale wish. But I've never wished I'd done it differently either. Every solo mum has thought hugely about becoming a parent – it's part of the territory with fertility treatment*' (Extract 33, Article 15, Mail Online, 2019, Data set A).

In Extract 32, the four SMCs have been constructed as having spent *'years researching the pros and cons'*. The length of time indicates it was not something they have taken lightly and produces an idea of commitment and responsibility. As part of *'researching the pros and cons'* of single parenting, the women have been constructed as looking into the impact on children. This formulation suggests that they would not have gone ahead with the plan if they had found anything untoward. The reader is expected to trust that these women were able to meaningfully interpret data and adhere to rationality, which is made to be a privileged discourse (Foucault, 1990).

The act of planning has been produced as even more firmly tethered to SMCs in Extract 33, whereby it is said to be something *'every solo mum'* has '*thought hugely about'*. As constructed elsewhere in this analysis (see sections. 4.1.5 and 4.2.2.3.), the SMC here has been constructed as aligning with heteronormative values in that it was not her '*fairytale wish'*. However, the mother has also been constructed as having no regrets, suggesting that, whilst she is reflective, she is also in control. These are qualities that serve to construct her as a good postfeminist whereby, 'normative and moralistic expectations around reproduction create individuals who need to be ever more reflexive and accountable for their reproductive actions and decisions' (Faircloth & Gürtin, 2018, p.2). These qualities have been particularly associated with *'solo mums'* in this extract, for whom reflexiveness has been produced as '*part of the territory with fertility treatment'*.

This construction served to link solo motherhood with fertility treatment, which it offered as the only possible route to conception (this will be explored further in section 4.3.4 below). Whilst Faircloth & Gürtin (2018) have suggested that planning and preparation can be understood as important for all parents, they suggest it is arguably more so for the involuntary childless 'who are explicitly required to jump through a series of hoops as they prove themselves deserving recipients of treatment, or adoption procedures, aligning themselves much more closely with the ideals of an intensive parenting culture than many actual parents do' (p.8).

Given that SMCs are subject to disciplinary control in the form of medical gatekeepers who can decide whether or not to allocate funding to assist their reproductive journey (Zadeh et al., 2013), being constructed as a pre-conception parent becomes even more prescient. Such constructions were found in the data set as shown in the following excerpts:

'*When I was 16, I started looking into sperm donors. I started with the NHS but online it said they only provide the service to couples and women with fertility issues'* (Article 17, The Sun, 2019, Data set A).

'*There is no guarantee they will then qualify for free treatment in the NHS, as not all clinical commissioning groups follow NICE guidelines'* (Article 15, MailOnline, 2019).

Both excerpts show that the control for access to ARTs is in the hands of the NHS who can decide who is 'worthy' of treatment. And even then, decisions are constructed as arbitrary.

Looking through a lens of implicit othering, the formulation of pre-conception parenting can also be understood to offer a contrasting view of the SMC from the common construction of the lone mother, whose pregnancy is resolutely 'unplanned' (unless it is selfishly planned for welfare support) (Tyler, 2008). This serves to construct the SMC as legitimate.

4.3.2. Capitalising on the Position of SMCs

The SMCs in the extracts below have been constructed as capitalising on the subject position of an SMC in an entrepreneurial fashion:

'*While she was pregnant with Daisy, now two years old, Mel started a blog. She called it The Stork and I, hoping it would help other single women considering IVF who felt as alone as she did. The response was overwhelming. Today more than 650 women have joined 41-year-old Mel's online community: she set up her coaching business in response to their clamour for reassurance and guidance*' *(*Extract 34, Article 22, Scottish Daily Mail, 2020, Data set A).

'*A graduate in business studies who also has a qualification in life coaching, Mel works four days a week as global HR manager for a telecoms company, and fits in her coaching, for which she charges £65 an hour, during evenings and weekends'* (Extract 35, Article 22, Scottish Daily Mail, 2020, Data set A).

By setting up a '*coaching business'*, the mother in the extract above has been constructed as finding a way to monetise the subject position of an SMC. This has been produced in academic literature as an important feature of neoliberal society which has seen, according to Rottenberger 'the conversion of everything into capital and the infiltration of a market rationality into all spheres of life, including the most private ones' (Rottenberg et al, 2020, p.9). However, the extract does not construct making a business out of her experience as the mother's main goal, whereby 'Mel' has been produced as being altruistic in her intentions. This can be seen by the formulation that she was '*hoping'* to *'help other single women considering IVF who felt as alone as she did*'. The construction *'helping other single women'* is suggestive of an act of charity.

However, where the 'help' is a transaction offered as part of a business, the term 'service' might be seen as more applicable. A construction of the blog as a helpful and supportive resource for Mel has not been deployed; rather, the formulation of an '*overwhelming*' response positioned Mel as having to start a coaching business to help these other women. As such, Mel has been produced as passive in the act of starting a business. It is as if because of the (hyperbolic) '*overwhelming*' response by '*more than 650'* women who were '*clamouring for reassurance and guidance'* Mel had no choice but to oblige them.

The use of hyperbole can be understood as acting as an 'extreme case formulation' (Robles, 2015, see section 4.2.1. above for a more detailed explanation), which constructed Mel as having very little agency over the situation. Through a neoliberal

lens, Mel has been positioned as reacting to the demands of the market in which a niche has opened up that she was perfectly placed to fill. However, a more critical reading of the situation would suggest that, in fact, Mel could be constructed as a savvy business woman who has obtained free advertising for her service through the article (with the inclusion of a hyperlink to direct online readers to her blog). There is no suggestion that Mel could use her experience to offer free support to other women in the same position, eschewing any second-wave feminist discourse of a 'sisterhood' of woman lending each other mutual support.

Thus, by positioning the SMC as a reticent business woman, the construction can be thought of as managing competing discourses of good mothering and good neoliberal citizenship. Rottenberg (2017) has suggested that in a postfeminist climate, women are encouraged to strike a balance between work and family life: 'On the one hand, the balance discourse encourages women to invest in and cultivate a career as well as to develop one's sense of self, which has long been a liberal feminist objective. Yet, on the other hand, the balance discourse reinscribes the normative expectation that women should have—and should want to have—children (Rottenberg 2017, p.331).

This suggests that in order to be a successful postfeminist subject, Mel must be depicted as neither too maternal nor too business orientated. As a woman who could be constructed as 'successful' in both domains, Mel has been produced as taking it upon herself to *'coach'* other potential SMCs so that they may be successful, too. For these women, as well as the wider readership, the message is that an SMC is a difficult subject-position and must be adopted cautiously (necessitating *'reassurance'* and '*guidance'* as it has been produced to). Such guidance, presumably, will help to maintain these women as what Foucault would term unproblematic 'docile bodies' (1977). Docile bodies describe compliant citizens who operate under the observation and control of disciplinary institutions. By seeking guidance, these SMCs can be interpreted as wanting to adopt the subject position of single mother in a normative way, acting responsibly and with forethought.

In a similar fashion to the mother constructed in Extracts 34 and 35, the SMC in Extract 36 has also been shown as finding a way to monetise the subject position of SMC — in this instance through writing a book.

'*On one level, Going Solo* (a book detailing the experience of becoming an SMC) *is a love letter to my daughter. I hope if she reads it when she's grown up, she'll feel the love for her on every page. Secondly, I want people to know they always have a choice. It's good for everyone to know about types of family which don't follow the conventional form but are brimming with love*' (Extract 36, Article 14, The Irish News, 2019, Data set A).

Regarding Extracts 34 and 35, the motivation for the book in Extract 36 has been framed through altruistic intensions as both a '*love letter'* to her daughter and an opportunity to educate wider society about non-conventional *'types of family'*. It's worth noting that in the late nineteenth century, love became a privileged discourse and developed into an intrinsic part of selfhood (Langhamer, 2012). Morevoer, Correia and Broderick (2009) have suggested that discourses of love can be drawn upon with the purpose of diminishing prejudice and oppression experienced by non-normative families. This has been indicated in this extract by a second reference to love, with the construction that, '*It's good for everyone to know about types of family which don't follow the conventional form but are brimming with love'*. In this phrasing, love can be understood as being offered as compensation for the non-conventional family form, with the word *'brimming'* suggesting a surplus of this key ingredient.

In the second motive provided for writing the book, altruism has again been drawn on, with the mother constructed as wanting *'people to know they always have a choice'*. As previously discussed (see analysis of Extract 22 above), focusing on the word 'choice' as a watchword, postfeminists have offered a critical look at this formulation. Where 'choice' has been positioned as available to all (in the extract and more broadly), postfeminists have argued that the 'choice' is unequally distributed privileging certain identities over others (Butler, 2013; Rottenberg, 2017). This choice to become a single mother, for example, is less available to young mothers who can experience stigma.

Jones et al. (2019) have framed the consequences of this stigma as including 'peer isolation, lowered self-esteem and alcohol' p.761). Additionally, as has been well documented in academic literature, there is a class component to appropriate motherhood, with working class or underclass single mothers experiencing class hatred, shame, and disgust (DeBenedictis, 2012; Morris and Munt, 2019; Tyler, 2008). As Rottenberg has formulateed, 'balancing a high-power career and family is attainable for

(perhaps) the top 1 percent' (2017, p.333). Maher (2014) further suggested that in representations of SMCs in films, 'choosing pregnancy is akin to choosing their career path, while one might have delayed the other, they are of the same piece of (white middle class) female entitlement borne of individual gumption, rationality and hard work' (p.856). This construction has been ideally illustrated by the 'mumtrepreneurs' in Extract 34 and 36 for whom career advancement and SMCs are imbricated.

A silenced discourse in Extract 36 is the personal benefits that the mother herself will get from writing this book in the form of financial remuneration, but also in terms of career advancement. Within neoliberal culture, any aspect of one's subjectivity can be understood as contributing to self-development (McRobbie, 2013). As such, the position of SMC can be understood as contributing to the woman's personal 'brand'; therefore, this extract can be understood as constructing the SMC as a good neoliberal citizen and ideal mother. Discourses of love and social justice help to construct her as selfless, and yet simultaneously, she has been produced as a competent business woman who will be able to provide for her children.

4.3.3. ARTs

As already shown in section 4.2.2.1., discourses were found to be circulating which positioned the use of ARTs as the only possible route to becoming an SMC. In Article 36, Data set B's conception through a one-night stand was constructed as *'sordid'* in comparison to the *'clean and sterilized'* process of IVF. This construction has been elaborated on in the extract below.

'*Some people have asked me why I didn't just "go out and get pregnant". The answer to that is an easy one: I knew from the start that at some point I would need to explain to my children where they came from. I did not want to have to tell them, "well Mummy went out and got drunk." I want to tell them they were the most wanted children in the world'* (Extract 37, Article 3, The Telegraph, 2019, Data set A).

In Extract 37, any shame that could be associated with the subject position of an SMC has been constructed as being linked to the method of conception. Here donor sperm is framed as legitimate, whereas in contrast, intercourse with a stranger or friend has been stigmatised by being imbricated with excessive alcohol consumption. Intercourse was described euphemistically in the extract as to '*go out and get pregnant,'* and coupled

with the idea that in order to do so, *'Mummy went out and got drunk'*. The construction of this extract can be considered an extreme case formulation (Robles, 2015). In this instance, the worst possible outcome of a situation is forged to build a case against it. There are many other ways intercourse outside a relationship could be constructed for children — for example, 'a stranger donated a gift', or a '*very kind man who gave me a special ingredient'* (seen in Extract 12 above).

Such examples were also noted in the academic research as common metaphors used by donor sperm recipients (Zadeh et al., 2015). Focusing on the (optional) alcohol intake makes the act seem spontaneous, reckless, and irrational. Arguably, this is because the method of conception could subsequently be constructed as an accidental pregnancy following a one-night stand. On the other hand, discourses of planning and preparation can be seen as creating a greater distinction between the different 'types' of single mother. Thus, the SMC can be understood as responsible whereby discourses of planning are privileged, as seen above (Faircloth & Gürtin, 2018). This can therefore be understood as othering, distinguishing the 'reputable' SMC with the 'reckless' lone mother.

The woman in Extract 37 has been constructed as building her future child's curiosity about their conception into her strategy to conceive, in order to minimise the chances of a negative response from them. In light of this, donor sperm was constructed as offering an indication that *'they were the most wanted children in the world'*. Employing this (hyperbolic) construction helped to produce this SMC as a 'good' mother who prioritises the needs of her yet-to-be-born children. Drawing on neoliberal discourses, by being constructed as a woman who carefully thought out her actions and considers the future wellbeing of her children, we can hypothesise that this woman can undertake 'care of self'; hence, neither her nor her future children will be likely to draw heavily on state resources (Rose, 1998). In other words, *'wanted'* can be understood as imbricated with care, love, and attention resulting in well-balanced children. Looking through the lens of implicit othering, this formulation can be seen in contrast to the constructed 'unplanned' and 'unwanted' child of the lone mother, whose subsequent disaffection necessitates state intervention (DeBenedictis, 2012).

The use of the hyperbole *'they were the most wanted children in the world',* and a silenced medical discourse, however, suggests that whilst the woman has been

constructed as preferring this route to conception, she has not been produced as embracing it. This ambivalence could be understood as evidence of an ideological dilemma. This is where two or more competing 'common-sense' narratives are conflicting (Billig, 1988). Turning to the literature, we can hypothesise as to the circulating discourses from which this ambivalence has been produced. Maher (2014) has suggested that different discourses are in circulation regarding the use of ARTs, including that they are a 'perversion of the natural order' (p. 860). As such, it could be proposed that in Extract 37, there is a tension between a constructed desire to act appropriately combined with the 'unnaturalness' presented using technological reproduction. In contrast, in the extracts below, a biomedical discourse has been clearly drawn upon.

'*Susie says she thinks there's no longer a huge stigma in admitting you've had solo IVF — but admitting to regrets is a different matter*' (Extract 38, Article 7, The Sun, 2019, Data set A).

'*When I realised the NHS won't even consider helping someone my age get a donor — and the cost of going private was too much — I knew finding a willing donor was up to me. I chose a reputable Facebook page and spoke to other women who had done it this way. I met the donor at a hotel, he showed me his 'all clear STD paperwork', went and deposited his sperm and left*' (Extract 39, Article 17, The Sun, 2019, Data set A).

In Extract 39 the subject position of 'solo IVF user' has been constructed, suggesting that unlike in the past, it is *'no longer a huge stigma'* to admit to. This formulates the idea that constructions of the acceptability of IVF for single women circulating differently over time, whereby IVF was previously constructed as the preserve of heterosexual couples to assist such 'legitimate' parents in situations where 'nature failed' (Michelle, 2006). Alternatively, drawing on postfeminist and neoliberal discourses of empowerment, reflexivity, and accountability, '*admitting to regrets'* has been produced as something that is now (at the point of writing) stigmatised.

As constructed in Extract 39, the NHS can be understood as constructing an 'appropriate age' for an SMC. In this instance, at 19, the woman has been produced as too young, although the academic literature also points to a construction of an upper age limit (Budds et al., 2013; Shaw & Giles, 2009). In particular, the use of ARTs to allow

post-menopausal women to get pregnant has been constructed as stigmatised (Shaw & Giles, 2009). As such, technology and societal norms can be understood as juxtaposed, whereby the former is controlled by the latter — whilst it has been simultaneously used to justify the latter (e.g. you are too old to have the technology, which could make you pregnant, free on the NHS).

However, as has been understood in neoliberal societies, societal norms are thought to be shaped by the economic market, not by governments (Butler, 2013). As suggested in Article 18, Data set A, *'Yet for those single women with enough cash, there is always hope'*. Thus, even if the NHS refuses to assist an individual, a private option might still be open. Some SMCs were constructed as travelling abroad to go private at a lower cost, such as in the Czech Republic (Article 18, Data set A).

Alternatively, as shown in Extract 39 above, a construction of entrepreneurialism showed the SMC to use resourcefulness to replicate the medical route without the cost. After being constructed as rejected by the NHS, the mother has been produced as someone who is 'shopping around'. In other words, she considered using a private service but is finding the financial costs restrictive. As such, a neoliberal discourse of individualism was deployed to indicate how she would take matters into her own hands by finding a '*willing donor'* herself.

The woman has been constructed as engaging in research and planning by seeking a *'reputable'* Facebook site through which to locate a donor, and then speaking to *'other women who had done it this way'*. On meeting the donor, she has been constructed as checking his '*all clear STD paperwork'* before the sperm (product) was deposited (consumed). As a 'young' SMC, it could be understood that it was fundamental for her to be constructed as differently as possible from the negative picture of parenting that is commonly considered to be associated with young single mothers (and the associated disciplinary mechanisms (Morris & Munt, 2019). In contrast to the constructed accidental teen pregnancy, the use of ARTs serves to indicate rigorous thought and planning, positioning her as a 'pre-conception' parent (Faircloth & Gürtin, 2018).

The uptake, and even in some cases, cementing of ARTs and SMCs can on some levels be understood as surprising, given the threat to patriarchy it can be seen as presentings. Discussing the role of ARTs in popular culture, Maher (2014) suggested that they have

the potential to profoundly reconfigure the relationship between men and women under the patriarchy. There is also an immense cost associated with ARTs, whereas intercourse is free. As constructed in Article 15, single women '*are required to have 12 cycles of artificial insemination before being eligible for NHS fertility treatment'* (Article 15, Mail Online, 2019 Data set A). Other articles constructed the cost as £2,000 - £3,000 at the lower end (Article 7, Data set A) to £7,000 -15,000 (Articles 3, 18, 21, Data set A), right up to £54,000 (Article 12, Data set A).

Additionally, it can be understood as opening greater levels of monitoring, regulating, and control of women's reproduction, in the manner of a disciplinary technology (Michelle, 2006). Indeed, according to Foucault (1979), the medicalisation of certain areas of life brought it under bio-scientific control — a technology Foucault referred to as a biopower (1979). Biopower describes a particular political form of technology of power used to regulate entire populations whereby the resultant knowledge is understood as an instrument of power.

'It took a few weeks to find a donor who was as like me with blonde hair, blue eyes and tall — I narrowed the three-page spread sheet down to two donors. I was then given a five-page document on the donor's medical history including their families' which made it even harder as I wasn't willing to have a child from a family of poor health' (Extract 40, Article 10, MailOnline, 2019, Data set A).

In the extract above, the SMC has been constructed as describing her process for selecting a donor. Her criteria included the characteristics, '*blonde hair, blue eyes and tall'.* This 'list of three', indicative of a shopping list, is connotative of the commerce discourse underpinning this consumerism of sperm. The fact that these characteristics can be understood as having been privileged in Western societies, and could represent a racist discourse, has been mitigated by the inclusion that these characteristics are *'like me'.* In the manner of a neoliberal citizen, who is constructed as someone who should treat their life like a business (McNay, 2009), the woman has been produced as using a '*three-page spread sheet'* to help her whittle down potential donors. Following that, a biomedical discourse has been shown to be privileged whereby she would not be *'willing to have a child from a family of poor health'.*

As such, the woman has been produced as minimising any future risk. In this case it could be hypothesised that a child with poor health might compromise her and the society financially and emotionally. As suggested by Rose (1998), in neoliberal society 'through the ministrations of expertise in the service of health, hygiene, and normality, the family would be returned to its social obligations without compromising its autonomy and responsibilities for its own members and destiny' (p.131). Thus, the extract above can be understood as having constructed a technology of self. The SMC has been produced as acting responsibly and proactively to ensure her and her child's autonomy with regards to not being over-burdensome on the NHS or state support. Through this construction of ARTs, accepting sperm donation from a person who does not submit a '*five-page document on the donor's medical history including their families'* can be understood as reckless. Falling in love with someone with poor health can similarly be taken to be irresponsible.

As shown in the extract above, ARTs can be constructed as offering certain benefits to SMCs (sperm screened for STDs, a wide choice in donor, control over the process, etc.), although arguably the greatest advantage is the degree to which the use of ARTs can be understood as distinguished from the commonplace construction of the lone mother. Equating the use of ARTs with neoliberal discourses that suggest planning, choice, and consumerism, distances SMCs from narratives of over-sexed, underprepared lone mothers depending on state support. Even with NHS support, the process of using ARTs positions the woman as a consumer and the sperm as a commodity, proposing the ideal status within the neoliberal ideology: *'Sperm, like books or DVDs can be bought online at the click of a mouse'* (Article 35, Data set B). Maher (2014) who has studied representations of SMCs on films suggests 'proactive reproductive moves of successful neoliberal career women are neither morally corrupt nor socially irresponsible but rather a logical extension of gender-neutral capitalist individualism' (p. 855).

Although constructions of SMCs using ARTs dominated the data set, other constructions were also located, such as in the extract below.

'*Admin worker Shannon set out to get pregnant and had unprotected sex with a man she met on a night out. She now lives in Billericay, Essex, with five-year-old daughter Hollie. She says: 'At 36 I still hadn't found Mr Right, so I decided to take matters into*

my own hands. I didn't want a long-term relationship, I just wanted a baby, but I needed sperm' (Extract 41. Article 12, The Sun, 2019, Data set, A).

In contrast to the other extracts, the SMC in Extract 41 has been constructed as having intercourse with a stranger in order to conceive. A moral discourse has been eschewed, and there is no suggestion as to how this act was understood by the man in question. The formulation '*but I needed sperm'* constructs sperm as a separate entity from the man and produces it as a commodity in much the same fashion as donor sperm. In her academic research, Maher (2014) has suggested that whilst the isolation of body parts has been normative in discourse of female-embodiment (abortion, sterilisation, sonograms, etc.), its application to masculinity can be understood as a threat to the patriarchy.

Justification for this (potentially morally dubious) act was provided by implicitly drawing on a biological discourse through providing her age (*at 36)* indicating she could be at the later stages of her fertility window — the implication of this being that acting quickly and decisively was necessary. Also seen was a romance discourse (*I still hadn't found Mr Right*) constructing her as an unlucky victim, but also as someone who worked to try to achieve heteronormativity. In addition, she can be understood as a postfeminist who made an independent choice and proactively acted to achieve her goal: she '*set out to get pregnant'* and '*decided to take matters into (her) own hands'*. The SMC was constructed as producing a discourse of individuality using a list of 'I' statements, such as '*I still hadn't found/ I decided/ I didn't want/ I just wanted/ I needed'*.

Thus, this extract implies that after trying to do the right thing (find a relationship) and experiencing the pressure of the biological clock, the SMC was justified in taking any path possible that could lead to her own personal happiness and fulfilment. Whilst this woman cannot be understood as exercising ethical self-responsibility as has been identified of the good neoliberal citizen (Rose, 1999), the construction may be 'emphasizing the needs of the individual to the exclusion of the social' (Morris & Korobov, 2020); or to put it another way, being selfish (and self-centred) as also understood in neoliberal society.

Turning to the academic literature, Michelle, (2006) suggests that '[s]elf insemination resists what some regard as the unnecessary level of medicalisation of DI and frees

women from growing levels of intrusive state regulation and professional surveillance of their reproductive capacity, and can thus be viewed as a political nexus of feminist resistance to increasingly oppressive state controls' (p.121). However, other than the extract shown above, and one other where women hoping to become pregnant from a one-night stand were constructed as *'sperm catchers*' (Article 33, Data set B), this construction was not the dominant one of this data set, whereby a medical route was prioritised. Several reasons could be constructed as precipitating this change.

For some SMCs, it may be that their older constructed age means that IVF is produced as a necessity. In addition, the disenfranchisement of the various elements of reproduction (egg, sperm, womb) has been noted as allowing greater possibilities for marketisation (Faircloth & Gürtin, 2018). On the other hand, it could also be hypothesised that in a neoliberal society where commerce is a privileged discourse, things are valued more the greater the cost. As in other academic studies, the SMCs constructed in this data set were not produced as identifying as feminists, and therefore would not be positioned as identifying with a discourse of feminist resistance (Holmes, 2018). For others, such as the 19-year-old SMC in Extract 39, it could be hypothesised that being constructed differently from the lone mother was the overriding priority, which the medicalised route served to construct.

4.3.4. SMCs as Optimal

Extracts were located in which SMC was constructed as an optimal parenting position over the heteronormative nuclear family:

'Having a baby this way makes me independent. I don't have to deal with the threat of a possible failing marriage or relationship, and I know I can rely on myself to properly parent' (Extract 42, Article 27, Mail Online, 2019, Data set A).

'But as I've discovered, there's a simplicity to being a solo parent. I now find myself in a situation where I don't have to consider another point of view about how to bring her up. With no partner to worry about neglecting, I'm able to focus solely on my daughter and not worry, as many of my friends do, about how parenthood is affecting my relationship' (Extract 43, Article 15, Mail Online, 2019, Data set A).

In both the extracts above, it has been constructed that when it comes to raising a child, it is easier for one person to do it alone, as competing views can complicate things. This production enabled the mother to be *'independent'* (Extract 42) emphasising that '*there's a simplicity to being a solo parent'* (Extract 43). The underlying assumption is that a father's *'point of view'* regarding child-raising will be different to the mother's and will therefore complicate things unnecessarily. Additionally, the mother in Extract 42 was constructed as knowing that she could *'rely on (her)myself to properly parent*'. This resists the fundamental parenting assumptions of the necessity of two parents and the intrinsic value of the father. Faircloth & Gürtin (2018) have suggested that under the ideology of intensive parenting 'parents (or, mothers) are understood to be the only ones capable of caring for their own children, *everyone* else is treated with suspicion (grandmothers and fathers, as much as other relatives or childcare workers)' (p.14). This constructs the father as an unnecessary inconvenience when dealing with the overwhelming levels of complexity suggested by intensive parenting discourses.

Additionally, intimate relationships have been cast as problematic: something to *'worry about'* with the *'threat of a possible failing marriage or relationship'* have been constructed as ongoing issues. This construction has also been noted in the academic literature whereby drawing on the difficulties inherent in relationships 'facilitated mothers' positive depictions of themselves as having chosen a non-traditional path to parenthood' (Zadeh et al., 2013, p.26). Thus, the 'hierarchy of single mothers' (Bock, 2000, p.64) has once again been invoked. This is supported by discourses circulating in the academic literature on SMCs in comparison studies, which have emphasised 'family process' over 'family structure' (Layne, 2010). For example, Golombok et al. (2015) found that when SMCs who used donor insemination were compared to two parent families who also used donor insemination, they were found to have lower levels of conflict with their child, and similar levels of 'child adjustment'. The implication is that it is possible to raise a 'well-adjusted' child without the input of the father.

Furthermore, drawing on intensive mothering discourses, it was suggested in Extract 43 that an intimate partner relationship would draw the mother's attention away from the child. In other words, not having a partner has been constructed as enabling the mother to '*focus solely on my daughter'.* This construct, therefore, serves to legitimise the potentially unpalatable position of an SMC by suggesting that it enables a deeper level of maternal devotion than even the idealised heteronormative family structure — with

an intimate partner reconstructed as a distraction. Likewise, romance discourses which suggest that romantic relationships offer the ultimate fulfilment are absent. These discourses echo those found in the academic literature also, whereby it has been suggested that due to the ephemerality of romantic relationships and kinship structures, love for a child has been reconstructed as the only consistent and meaningful relationship there is (Faircloth & Gürtin, 2018).

The construction of a woman who can independently operate a family unit runs contrary to patriarchal and conservative discourses. These would suggest that it is the father's breadwinning capacity that offers the mother the ability to focus on child raising (Donovan, 2000). However, most people would agree with the construction that a stay-at-home-mother subject position is no longer financially viable for most people, and indeed, was never an option for certain classes and racial groups (McRobbie, 2013).

Postfeminists have argued that despite women being recast as human capital through their position in the labour market, the responsibility of care work and reproduction still 'falls squarely on the shoulder of so-called aspirational women' (Rottenberg, 2017, p.9). Other commentators have suggested that in neoliberalism, 'in order for something to be worthwhile it needs to offer a good return in exchange for what is put in or given' (Fromm, cited in Tofts & Collins, 2013, p.23). From here, it can be hypothesised that the additional labour resulting from being in a couple, as well as the potential loss of 'independence', might render it a bad deal for women.

In the extract below, the subject position has been constructed as optimal in contrast to the risk of waiting for fate.

'*People say: "You're so brave." But I would have been braver if I'd left having a baby to fate. I was getting the only thing I really wanted, rather than risking waiting longer'* (Extract 44, Article 7, The Sun, 2019, Data set A).

In Extract 44, having a baby as an SMC has been constructed as an avoidance of risk, without which the woman would have to sacrifice '*the only thing I really wanted'*. The traditional means of conception — meeting someone, falling in love, and letting nature 'take its course' — has been produced as fate, whereby the formulation '*I'd left having a baby to fate'* constructs fate pejoratively, as an indication of inactivity characterised by 'waiting'. To stand by and passively wait for *'fate'* has been constructed as requiring

'bravery', drawing on a lack of control and the possibility of things not going the way she has been produced as desiring.

This construction has again been made possible by postfeminism and neoliberalsim, suggesting that women should be proactive by acting in ways that can maximise their individual happiness, and that not do so would be problematic. The implication of this is that in a society where an SMC is a possible subject position, a single woman of a certain age who wants children but does not take up this subject position, would be more problematic than one who does.

4.3.5. The Virgin Mother

Building on the construction of fathers as an unnecessary inconvenience in the raising of a child, the following extracts were located in which relationships were shown to be deferred.

'*But if another man came into my life, I'd worry he would be jealous of my love for my child. So now, by choice, I am completely celibate'* (Extract 45, Article 37, The Sunday Times 1996 Data set B).

'*And while she recognises that a "relationship will come along in its own time", she wants people to know that she's "content" to be single and focusing on her children'* (Extract 46, Article 26, The Sun, 2019, Data set A).

'*A new baby demands so much attention and I don't have a relationship to worry about, so I can focus 100 per cent on Lochlan. I'm not looking for a relationship. I have everything I need. But if I meet someone in future, great*' (Extract 47, Article 21, The Sun, 2019, Data set A).

In the three extracts above, the SMCs have all been constructed as prioritising mothering and delaying romantic relationships. The mother in Extract 45 was produced as specifying that '*now, by choice, (she is) completely celibate'.* Whether the women in Extracts 46 and 47 can also be constructed as celibate has not been specified. However, the implication is that they are '*content to be single'* and *'not looking for a relationship'* respectively.

In each of the extracts, loving and caring for an infant has been positioned as all-consuming, such as requiring '*100 per cent'* of the mother's focus (Extract 47), whereby

the needs of a romantic partner would present a distraction that could present as '*jealousy*' (Extract 45) and something to *'worry about'* (Extract 47). This constructed maternal self-sacrifice positions the mothers as engaging with intensive mothering practices by producing them as devoting themselves entirely to the cultivation of their children (Feasey, 2013). In addition, the mothers can be understood as having been constructed in an 'asexual' fashion (through the absence of any indication of a sex drive), whereby asexuality has historically been associated with good motherhood (Rich, 1976).

Turning to the academic literature, the constructions shown in the extracts of SMCs having a non-sexualised identity can be considered at odds with commonly circulating discourses of the sexualised mother in postmodern ideology. Domains that were previously considered 'outside' the sexual domain, such as pregnancy, motherhood, and older women are produced as being ascribed a new sexual identity (Gill, 2017; Littler, 2013b). However, on closer inspection, the 'yummy mummy' and 'MILF' (mother I'd like to fuck) have been constructed as operating to produce sexually desirable women over sexually desiring women (Littler, 2013b). The aforementioned constructions are noted to be tools of consumerism and aspiration that encourage spending on clothing, beauty, and childcare products as well as encouraging self-surveillance (Gill, 2017; Littler, 2013b).

Additional complexity comes from competing discourses of compulsory romance and female empowerment (Morris & Korobov, 2020): 'Compulsory romance is understood as an implicit component of compulsory heterosexuality and refers specifically to the ways in which young women are inscribed by the demands for romance' (p.3). Feminist empowerment describes the individual acting on her own individual desires, apparently unencumbered by patriarchal systems. Arguably, these competing discourses have been well negotiated in these extracts, whereby both have been demonstrated. The women shown can all be understood as achieving their individual goal of motherhood in a manner of female empowerment. In addition, all of them have been constructed as valuing relationships (although heterosexuality has not been specified), of which they have been produced as delaying for a future time.

The area of sexuality, then, can be seen as a complex terrain to navigate. Whilst feminist discourses regarding sexual liberation suggests that the women would be free (and according to postfeminism even expected) to be constructed as having sexual

needs (Butler, 2013), to do so could align the SMC with the 'other' 'quintessential sexually excessive, single mother: an immoral, filthy, ignorant, vulgar, tasteless, working-class whore' (Tyler, 2008, p.26). This would imply that taking up the subject position of a sexualised individual could be particularly harmful for the SMC, who as we have constructed throughout this analysis has been assiduously constructed as distinct from the 'bad' single mother. In contrast, the SMC has been produced with a restrained sexuality, who whilst achieving individual goals, is still respectful of the heteronormative patriarchal order.

Conclusion of Section 4.3.

In summary, it can be understood that by drawing on postfeminist and neoliberal discourses, the SMC was shown to be a subject position that can move beyond legitimate to 'ideal'. Discourses of planning and preparation have been shown to be elevated to the extent that a child born to a single mother who has been constructed as adequately planning, can be understood as superior to an unplanned child from within a heteronormative family unit. An elegant option for demonstrating planning and preparation was constructed as the use of ARTs. (*Every child born of donor sperm or eggs is wanted and planned'*, Article 19).

Postfeminist and intensive mothering discourses were shown to dominate constructions of ideal femininity, with romantic relationships recast as problematic and interfering with the demands of 'balancing' a career and parenting for the SMC. The extreme pressure of intensive mothering ideology has been thus constructed: 'With intensive mothering, everyone watches us, we watch ourselves, and we watch ourselves watching ourselves' (Michaels, 2004, cited in Henderson et al., 2010, p.241).

This offers an insight into the panoptical nature of mothering, shaped by internal and external surveillance. Romantic relationships were not dismissed outright (by most); however, they were constructed as deferred to a time when they might impinge less on the other two foci. Despite being understood as a component of a postfeminist identity, sexuality was found to be a silenced discourse in the data, suggesting this is not a subject position open to the SMC. This was understood as a distancing strategy from the excessive sexuality of the lone mother, also reinforced by the use of ARTs to conceive.

Summary of Chapter

In neoliberal society, it has been constructed as the individual's responsibility to avoid risk and account for their choices (Graham 2018). Whilst it could be understood that taking up a non-normative subject position poses a risk, I would argue that the discourses selected for analysis from this data set work to show the opposite — that taking up the subject position of an SMC is an act of avoiding risk, constructed in multiple ways as delineated below.

The constructed risk of remaining in or taking up undesirable subject positions was shown to have been avoided. The risk of being positioned as non-normative, radical, or (excessively) feminist was shown to be negated in the data. Taking up the subject position of an SMC was understood as a way of circumventing the child-free subject position and the risk of not fulfilling the 'biological destiny' and 'mandated motherhood' produced as expected of women. There was also the constructed risk of having a relationship that does not work out — resulting in the subject position of 'failure' suggesting greater risk — in that the children will experience difficulties in their wellbeing produced as resulting from divorce and a possible drop in income level. Arguably, most significant was the risk of being constructed as the 'undesirable' lone mother who has been produced as responsible for the moral failings of society.

Biomedical discourses were deployed to construct ART use as a privileged method for conception. Taking this route was produced variously as avoidance of the risk of introducing unverified sperm with possible undisclosed genetic medical problems. In addition, it offered a constructed circumlocution of the risk of not having total control over the process, including the timing, methodology, and procedure. Drawing on a construction of the biological clock, ARTs could be understood as excluding the risk of not being able to get pregnant. Therefore, placing trust in 'science' is to ensure conception rather than 'nature', thereby enabling a deferment of reproduction.

The risk of being constructed as not conforming with the ideologies of neoliberalism and postfeminism was also produced. This included the constructed risk of having someone other than the (intensive) mother caring for the child whereby even fathers are treated with the suspicion of not being capable enough. Additionally, there could be a constructed risk for a woman of not being able to develop her education and career fully before becoming a mother. Alongside this is the constructed risk of not being able to manage the competing demands of relationships/intensive parenting/demanding career,

plus all the other facets as expected within postfeminist culture such as looks/physical fitness/perfect home. As such, delaying a relationship can be understood as a way of simplifying the levels of complexity.

These ideas are explored further with regards to the next chapter, summary, evaluation, and implication.

CHAPTER FIVE - SUMMARY, EVALUATION, AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I discuss how my data analysis has answered my research questions. I then describe how I have evaluated my work according to Yardley's criteria for assessing qualitative work (2000, 2008). This includes a discussion of how this work might impact on the field of counselling psychology. I then consider reflexivity, specifically looking at how I believe I have changed through undertaking this work. Following this, I illustrate implications for further research.

5.1. Research Questions and Analysis Summary

This research aimed to explore how discourse constructs single mothers by choice (SMC) in relation to the pervading 'good', 'perfect', and 'bad' mother subject positions in the context of neoliberalism and postfeminism.

Newspaper articles were chosen as the data source, as the media are considered to be a key place where female subjectivities are constituted (Gill 2017; McRobbie, 2013). These articles also provide a rich source of naturally occurring texts where different ways of constructing phenomena can be found and analysed (Sheriff & Wetherell, 2009). The media as a tool for communication, however, are not considered to be available to all; rather, access is said to be granted to 'unequally equipped agents (Jovchelovitch, 1997, cited in Zadeh & Foster, 2016, p.553). This provided an opportunity to explore how discourses of power are operating in this domain. (As discussed in more detail in 2.5.1.)

My work was framed with guidance from the following research questions:

1. **What are the subject positions available to SMCs and how do these impact on ways of being?**
2. **How is language used in the data to legitimise the SMC?**

1. Subject positions of the SMC were found to be nuanced and varied and included a spectrum from selfish to brave. One response to technologies of governmentality was understood to be constructions of the SMC as an ideal

neoliberal citizen — privileging constructions of restrained sexuality, self-reliance, planning, and preparation. This contrasts with the undesirability of the lone mother subject position; supposedly excessively sexual, lazy, and reckless.

2. Discourses that located the SMC within the 'perfect' motherhood position were identified (amongst others) as offering legitimacy to the subject position. Discursive tools (such as stake inoculation and externalising devices) have been shown as managing the construction while strengthening the case for legitimisation. Ideological dilemmas have been identified as indicating where discourses of prevailing common sense compete, such as taking up the subject position of the SMC but worrying what other people would think of it.

I was also guided by the following analytic foci:

a) What technologies of governmentality are evidenced in the newspaper articles and what are the implications of these processes for the enabled subject positions?

b) What social practices comprise and/or are warranted by the constructions of SMCs found in the articles?

a) Both technologies of power and technologies of self were shown as constructed in the newspaper articles. Regulatory power was indicated through legal, political, and moral discourses. These were deployed with the effect of constructing single motherhood as viable or unviable, depending on classifications such as age, financial self-sufficiency, and responsibility.

Additionally, regulatory technology was shown in the form of judgement from others. This was understood to be mitigated through technologies of self, specifically in terms of adherence to neoliberal and postfeminist discourses emphasising an individualised outlook and self-regulation. This was foregrounded through discourses of planning and preparation and choice. These processes imply that the position of SMC can be increasingly understood as a viable position, but only within the parameters of 'good' neoliberal citizenship.

Likewise, the implication is that single mother positions that cannot conform to these parameters are further alienated and penalised.

b) The main social practices identified were implicit and explicit othering whereby the 'independence' of the SMC was contrasted with the constructed dependency of the heavily stigmatised lone mother. In neoliberal society, autonomy, self-regulation, and consumerism are constructed as privileged discourses. Therefore, applying these to the SMC could be seen as bolstering their legitimacy. Judgement of SMCs was constructed as another social practice (by neighbours, family members, the child) and was often shown as overcome through discourses of intensive 'perfect' mothering. Self-reflexivity is understood as a social practice that is increasingly privileged in neoliberal society, of which the articles as a whole demonstrated. Additional reflexivity was constructed through discussions of planning and preparation during which any 'risk' was shown as accounted for.

Some differences between the constructions of SMCs were identified between the two data sets. In Data set B, discourses of strong disapproval produced SMCs as dangerous, selfish, and immoral. In Data set A, however, it was more frequently produced as a curiosity, or an act of bravery to be admired. This suggests there is a difference in the legitimacy of the subject position over time which can be hypothesised as attributed to the increased dominance of neoliberal/postfeminist ideology in Western societies. From this point of view, diversity of family form can be understood as tolerated, but adherence to neoliberal/postfeminist qualities such as individualism, consumerism, and autonomy have been constructed as elevated.

In accordance with other academic research on SMCs, the notion of 'choice' was shown to be constructed ambivalently in these data sets (Bock, 2000; Graham, 2018; Holmes, 2018; Layne, 2009; Murray & Golombok, 2005; Zadeh et al., 2013) by being positioned both as an 'empowered' choice and one 'constrained' by uncontrollable factors. This was constructed as a consequence of variables such as bereavement, an inability to find a 'satisfying' relationship, mandated motherhood, and biological limitations.

As such, this can be understood as enabling the construction of the subject position as both neoconservative and neoliberal, straddling a tension between two dominant, yet competing, ideologies (Brown, 2006). In addition, this construction fits with

postfeminism as a complex phenomenon where feminism is seen to be both incorporated and attacked (Gill, 2007). As such, SMCs can be thought of as undertaking an act that could be constructed as feminist, whilst simultaneously maintaining a heteronormative outlook. Additionally, the lone mother is constructed as both recklessly acting without making a choice, and as making a conscious choice to procreate for the benefits in different contexts. The flexibility granted by the choice/not a choice construction of the SMC, I would argue, enables the two 'types' of single mother to be positioned as distinct.

These ideas are expanded on below, drawing on the theory and literature that has informed this research.

5.1.1. The Hegemonic SMC Subject Position

Discourses circulated differently between Data sets B and A. For example, constructions alluding to 'essential personal attributes' (Bock, 2000, p.70) for SMCs were found to be constructed with a greater prevalence in Data set B. These constructed stipulations were for the ideal SMC based on 'age, responsibility, emotional maturity, and fiscal capability' (Bock, 2000, p.70).

However, in Data set A, constructions of SMCs showing adherence to these attributes were less prevalent, whereby constructions of the SMC subject position seemed to be increasingly predicated on the use of donor sperm. This was demonstrated by the constructions of SMCs who did not conform to the typical requirements for an SMC of age and fiscal capabilities, but who were produced as choosing to conceive alone using donor sperm.

For example, 18 and 19-year-old SMCs were constructed in Data set A of articles 17, 27, and 28. This indicated that two or more different objects were constructed within the subject position of SMCs. As such, the construction of using donor sperm and the associated planning/preparation/costs can be understood as having been co-opted to enable legitimacy. Additional discursive constructions were located in which donor sperm was produced as the only possible route to motherhood for a single woman (Extracts 25, 26, 37). From this, I understood the use of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) to be increasingly intrinsic to hegemonic constructions of SMCs in newspaper articles. I will explore the power dynamics that could be circulating in the

formation of this construction below. It is important to recognise that there may be particular reasons for constructions of ARTs to dominate in newspapers. For example, SMC via donor insemination may be constructed as more 'newsworthy' than adoption or chance pregnancy, as well as the moral/legal implications of 'chance' pregnancy, which might prevent the circulation of these narratives. Therefore, as with any discursive work, any discussion of the hegemonic construction of SMC and ARTs refers specifically to the context studied.

The use of donor sperm has been viewed ambivalently by feminists. Initially some feminists expressed concern that it would be used as a patriarchal means to 'control, exploit and eventually appropriate women's reproductive capacity' (Michelle, 2006, p.119). Similarly, men's rights activists believed it threatened the role of men in society (Maher, 2014). In 2008, a change in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act meant that clinicians in fertility clinics no longer had to consider a child's 'need for a father'; rather, this became the 'need for supportive parenting' (Zadeh et al., 2013). This change in wording constructed ARTs as easier and more acceptable for single women to obtain.

My understanding of the linkage between SMCs and ARTs is that amongst other things, it can be produced as offering a neutral, sexless version of the mother, true to the original 'good mother' construction (Rich, 1976). Whether the mothers are virgins or not following conception, it seems prudent for SMCs to be constructed as such, given the dangers of being constructed as a stigmatised 'promiscuous woman'. This suggests that the 'virgin mother' discourse is circulating differently. Zadeh and Foster (2016) linked the term to an 'unnaturalness' that was constructed as being used to stigmatise and 'other' SMC in articles between 1998 and 1992. In contrast, the usage of the concept in this study relates more closely to the traditional subject position of the 'Virgin Mother' which constructed a paradox whereby it would be conveniently forgotten that it was sex that enabled the maternal state (Pascoe, 1998). Likewise, the subject position of SMC enabled by single women using ARTs, renders the 'Virgin Mother' as possible, promoted by constructions in the analysis such as the 'celibate' SMC of Extract 45.

Additionally, the objections of feminism and men's rights have both been partly nullified. Feminists have reconstructed ARTs as offering women greater choice and control (Michelle, 2006), while men's rights groups have been understood as

ameliorated by the constructions which show most SMCs as longing for a heteronormative union. This would satisfy a readership which Maher (2014) has suggested is 'liberal when it comes to women's "choices" and conservative in its view of new white masculinity's role in the "natural" family' (p.863) (suggestive of the tension between neoliberalism and neoconservatism discussed below).

As such, the subject position of the SMC as constructed in the analysis can be seen as not offering any serious opposition to the heteronormative family structure. Many of the mothers were constructed as wanting a relationship but were unable to find one, or they hoped to find the desired partner subsequent to becoming an SMC. The women were also depicted with an assumed heterosexuality and desire for monogamy which positioned them as ultimately heteronormative, despite being single (Layne, 2013). Thus, the newspaper articles can be understood as reinstating 'the "natural" romance of the patriarchal family' (Maher, 2014, p.855) in much the same vein as Maher has suggested Hollywood romantic comedies about SMCs do.

ARTs were also shown to be constructed with other key values pertaining to neoliberal discourse. That is, it has frequently been constructed that 'neoliberal rationality is producing subjects as entrepreneurial actors who are calculating and self-regulating' (Rottenberg, 2017). For example, their use of ARTs was constructed as enabling SMCs to avoid any moral uncertainty brought about by 'using' a stranger for sperm, indicating self-regulation.

In addition, it was constructed as offering benefits such as screening for disease, with regards to producing a healthy child and someone who can subsequently give to society rather than take. It has also been constructed as an act of consumerism in terms of the considerable amount of money that it usually costs, whereby spending is considered evidence of good citizenship in neoliberalism. Also, this enabled a degree of control over the characteristics of the potential child in a society that values qualities such as attractiveness, toned physique, height, high IQ, etc.

Thus, according to neoliberal definitions, this control constructs the SMC as ensuring that her child will have the best chances of success. As Brown (2015) has constructed, within neoliberal ideology, 'all conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetized' (p.10). Constructions of planning and preparation with regards

to SMCs using ARTs showed the women to be capable and self-sufficient (like neoliberal citizens should be), able to make bold choices relating to their happiness and follow them through (like a postfeminist should be able to). This was understood to be in contrast to the lone mother who is frequently constructed as accidently getting pregnant and putting no forethought into motherhood and how she will fund the future for herself and her child.

Rottenberg (2017) has posited that the neoliberal foregrounding of futurity in young women has encouraged a postponement of relationships in order to focus on self-investment and that this is replaced by a culture of casual sex 'hook-ups'. However, whilst being encouraged to delay motherhood to focus on their personal development (to the extent that egg freezing is being offered to female employees of companies such as Facebook), motherhood is still arguably being constructed as intrinsic to femininity (Rottenberg, 2017). Thus, it is suggested from this analysis that for some women, romantic relationships have diminished in importance when compared to other priorities.

As such, Morris & Korobov (2020) constructed women as having to 'evaluate the burden of a relationship against work, school, etcetera, as it becomes construed as another job or undertaking' (p.14). In addition, ARTs have been constructed as uncoupling reproduction from relationships. Thus, regarding the heteronormative family through the dual lenses that construct women as undertaking the bulk of the familial responsibility whilst working — and relationships offering an impingement on an individualised trajectory — the SMC can be understood as a family form more befitting of neoliberal society. From this perspective, ARTs can be constructed as offering women 'freedom' in early adulthood, allowing them to pursue other goals (more specifically, education and career goals) with the knowledge that science and technology will enable them to reproduce at a time that better suits them (or, more pertinently, that better suits neoliberal society).

Thus, by understanding ARTs as entwined with hegemonic constructions of SMCs (in newspaper articles), it is the construction shown in Extract 41 that can be understood as offering resistance to the hegemonic SMC position. Here, an SMC was constructed as engaging in a one-night stand to become impregnated. Whilst pursuing individual goals pertains to neoliberal and postfeminist discourses, a neoconservative, pro-morality discourse has here been side-lined. Brown (2006) has described the tension between the

two ideologies as being a site where 'the upright, patriotic, moral, and self-sacrificing neoconservative subject is partially undone by a neoliberal subject inured against altruism and wholly in thrall to its own interest' (p.699).

In this example, the woman's constructed desire to become pregnant, irrespective of the man's view, showed her as a neoliberal thinker, eschewing the careful bridging between the two ideologies that the constructions of SMC can generally be understood as forming. This suggests that in terms of legitimisation, adherence to neoliberalism can be constructed as overriding adherence to neoconservatism.

5.1.2. Technologies of Power

The ideology of neoliberalism purports that the family is a private sphere, free from public interference. This has been refuted by critics such as Rose, who has suggested that the perceived privacy of the family is a disciplinary technology constructed to serve the patriarchal ruling elite (1989). Rose (1989) has suggested that 'the state cannot avoid intervening in the shaping of familial relations through decisions as to which types of relation to sanction and codify and which types of dispute to regulate or not to regulate. The state establishes the legal framework for conducting legitimate sexual relations and for procreation, and privileges certain types of relation through rules of inheritance' (Rose, 1989 p.127).

This was constructed with regards to SMCs and ARTs where, as seen in the analysis, discourses deployed made legal decisions and state intervention seem reasonable. In light of this, it was constructed in terms of who would (and would not) be entitled to financial assistance through the NHS. However, in neoliberal society, it is arguably the economic market that has more power to shape values and norms than governments. As such, constructing NHS assistance as unavailable does not preclude (most) as being produced as going privately, although the steep costs of ARTs have seen them constructed as an option exclusively for the privileged (Faircloth & Gürtin, 2018). The fact that access to ARTs is unequally available to those in the UK (with access even more unequally distributed on a global scale), has been constructed as representing 'stratified reproduction' whereby '[n]umerous "arenas of constraint" or structural, ideological and practical obstacles and apprehensions, serve to limit access to these technologies' (Inhorn, 2003, as cited in Inhorn & Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2008).

However, from a neoliberal perspective, where 'middle-classness' is understood as privileged in parenting, prohibitive costs have been constructed as the market's selection process to filter out unsuitable parent types (Robinson, 1997). The fact that IVF is extremely physically and emotionally taxing has also been drawn upon to contribute to neoliberal intensive parenting discourses that foreground maternal self-sacrifice and preplanning as indicators of good parenting (Correia & Broderick, 2009). Maher (2014) has constructed the willingness of the private sector to step in as a provider of ARTs as logical from a business point of view. ARTs have been constructed as a 'high cost/low success' procedure and an enormous profit-making industry. The apparent autonomy of those who can spend their way out of involuntary childlessness suggests that it is the fault of the individual if the vast sums needed for ARTs are unachievable for them. Taking action and being proactive regarding procreation are seen as evidence of a capitalist mentality of liberalism and agency (Maher, 2014).

Foucault suggested that within neoliberalism, '[i]ndividuals are forced to assume responsibility for states of affairs for which they are not responsible' (McNay 2009, p.65). In this line of thinking, achieving the state of pregnancy itself is not an act of mystery and wonder, as once believed (Rich, 1976), but something for the individual to work at (and spend on) until the desired goal is attained. This was shown in Article 17 where an SMC was produced as developing her own route to an SMC via donor sperm located on Facebook. Despite being constructed as 'too young' to receive NHS assistance or use a private service, the woman was still constructed as becoming impregnated in an entrepreneurial manner befitting of neoliberal ideology. This was shown by self-regulatory constructions such as checking the donor's documentation to verify the sperm was screened for disease. As such, the woman was constructed as both resisting (NHS and private constraints on who should be an SMC) and conforming (with neoliberal values).

Thus, the analysis of ARTs with regards to SMCs has provided an opportunity to see the complex operation of power stemming from; the production of knowledges (legal decisions that have been warranted), the oppressive power in which deployment of these decisions have real effects on real lives (such as no NHS support granted), and resistance of this oppression (in a way which ultimately can be understood as conforming, such as using Facebook to obtain a donor). As such, a picture of how the state has attempted to shape constructions of 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' SMCs was

produced, whereby 'illegitimate' potential SMCs can be too old, too young, or just unlucky about the NHS clinical commissioning group in the area they live in.

In addition to a construction of discipline coming through official channels of state control, in my analysis I have looked at constructions of judgement that indicate 'policing' by peers. SMCs were constructed as fearing judgement from others including neighbours, friends, and family, and their children. This portrayal depends on a construction of fatherlessness as posing a risk to the child and consequently to the society that harbours them. Historically, women's sexuality outside marriage has been constructed as something that can be legitimately judged as immoral. An unmarried woman was deemed to be outside of control, and therefore, considered dangerous, and stigmatisation was a way of limiting this (Pascoe, 1998). One of the functions of marriage was thus to control the sexuality of women; women were chaste, and in return, men offered them financial security, fidelity, and paternity for their offspring (Pascoe, 1998).

Foucault traces this to the early Greeks by quoting the text, 'Against Neaera', which states that '[m]istresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households' (Buker, 1990, p.817). Judgement is addressed in several ways through the texts, both directly and indirectly. The confessional nature of the texts can be understood as a constructed response to judgement in themselves. By discussing the judgement of other people, SMCs were produced as understanding and having taken into account the constructed riskiness of their position. By considering the judgement of their future child they could be construed as intensive parents who were concerned about their child's mental health and wellbeing.

5.1.3. Technologies of Self

According to Foucault, judgement comes not only through external channels but is internalised, and individuals must conduct and govern themselves through the application of technologies of power to themselves (Foucault, 1994). Through reflexivity, the articles construct the SMCs as exercising the kind of self-care that befits a responsible neoliberal citizen. Rose (1989) suggests that within neoliberal society, 'the self is not merely enabled to choose, but obliged to construe a life in terms of its choices, its powers, and its values' (p.231). Thus, the newspaper articles themselves can

be understood as a constructed platform through which SMCs can publicly remonstrate their choice and the rationale for it.

Through a discursive psychological lens, certain constructions were understood as stake inoculations (Potter, 1996). By this, I mean that the SMCs were constructed as being aware of any criticism that might be levied against them and they addressed these points pre-emptively. Thus, SMCs were understood as demonstrating that they are not selfish, subversive, feminist, or anything else that could be read as a challenge to the accepted status quo. The construction of SMCs as non-subversive has also been identified in the academic literature, whereby, they have been termed 'unwilling warriors' for a reluctance to be produced as taking a feminist stance (Bock, 2000).

In the understanding of technologies of self as social practices deployed to maintain the legitimacy of the individual, the key technology of self identified in this analysis was othering, both implicitly and explicitly. Neoliberal ideology has been constructed as an ever-continuous search for the identification of new markets (Skeggs, 2005). As such, sexuality, once thought to be associated with lower class women, has now been linked with the postfeminist middle-class identity. According to Skeggs (2005), this could result in a blurring of moral and immoral, good and bad: 'The boundaries of the lascivious, dangerous and contagious are therefore no longer absolutely clear' (p.969).

Because of this, Skeggs has argued that 'bad' needs to be immediately and clearly recognisable. From this, we can make sense of the circulating discourses regarding the teenage, working-class, lone mother. Because of the similarities shared by SMCs and lone mothers, being constructed as a lone mother presents a danger to the SMC (even/especially by the teenaged SMCs who was in receipt of benefits as constructed in Extract 21). Thus, whilst it may be acceptable and even necessary for the postfeminist woman to express a casual nonchalance to relationships and an open and exploratory mindset regarding casual sex, arguably this subject position is not open to the SMC. Therefore, the construction of SMCs achieved through ARTs offers a contrast to the 'excessive sexuality' of the lone mother, and in adherence with the 'good mother', it takes sex out of the equation altogether, positioning them as chaste and in control.

5.1.4. Summary

Overall, my research has constructed neoliberal and postfeminist discourses as privileged within newspaper articles that feature personal narratives of SMCs. In line

with other research which focuses on neoliberal subjectivity and intersectionality, this research has constructed power as having shifted as such diverse family forms can be understood as legitimate, but only insofar as they meet with neoliberal standards (Ludwig, 2016). Taking up the subject position of SMC was constructed as enabling women to avoid the stigmatised 'childfree' position (Lahad & Hazan, 2014) and maintain the postfeminist dream of 'having it all' (McRobbie, 2013), with a career and a baby, and hopefully a relationship further down the line. A definition of postfeminsm as provided by Gill and Orgad could equally be read as a definition of the privileged construction of SMC as 'an individualistic, entrepreneurial project that can be inculcated by the self' (cited in Liu, 2019, p.24).

Whilst society can be constructed as having become more tolerant in certain regards, inequalities can be understood as being more deeply entrenched in others. The 'operation of normalization consists in establishing an interplay between these different distributions of normality and [in] acting to bring the most unfavourable in line with most favourable' (Foucault, cited in Ludwig, 2016). The dominant characteristic of good neoliberal citizenship is understood as consumer power, and all other characteristics being utilised in the service of achieving this (class, independence, autonomy).

In a paradoxical message, 'autonomy is foregrounded while rigid understandings of personal responsibility and ethical practice are imposed to regulate choice and action' (Gillies, 2005, p.86). The assumption of meritocracy suggests that we all have access to equal options; however, meritocracy can be considered a mechanism through which social and cultural inequalities are both created and perpetuated (Littler, 2013b). Those mothers who are unable or unwilling to demonstrate good neoliberal citizenship are increasingly subjugated, such as the white working-class single mother and the Muslim woman (Scharff, 2011). Therefore, through offering a confessional text in the form of newspaper articles, SMCs can be understood as being rendered 'docile bodies' and thus a viable family form.

The key findings from this research are:

1. Whilst ARTs have broadly been constructed as offering single women greater freedom, control, and independence over their reproduction, this construction

can simultaneously and conversely be understood as a way of implementing discipline over single motherhood, in that they are controlled, monitored, and regulated. They can also be constructed as a way of protecting men who are 'spared' from being put in a difficult position both financially and morally.

2. The articles constructed other subject positions as 'riskier' to take up than SMCs, such as the childfree woman, the divorced single mother, and a mother from an accidental pregnancy from which the SMC is produced as the least 'bad' option. Embedded in this is the postfeminist subject position within which women are expected to thrive in every domain, including motherhood, which is still constructed as entwined with femininity.
3. The constructed life trajectory from which SMCs have been produced as a logical conclusion (health problems, relationship difficulties, etc.) were constructed as an individualised outcome; however, it can be understood as fitting in with a larger picture of neoliberal ideology in which women are a required component of the workforce and therefore increasingly expected to spend early adulthood in education and career development.

5.2. Significant Differences Between this Research and the Existing SMC Literature

There are relatively few studies that have focused on non-fictional mass media representations of SMCs resulting from women using donor sperm (Correia & Broderick, 2009; Michelle, 2006; Zadeh & Foster, 2016). Furthermore, there are no known studies that focus on personal narrative newspaper articles of SMCs. The use of the combined methodology of FDA and DP adds an extra element of originality to this research, offering both a micro and macro perspective as well as extending the knowledge regarding pluralistic qualitative research. The epistemological relativism of this research understands that there is a wealth of different constructions available regarding the subject matter. By taking a bound sample of data, my intention was to highlight discourses serving to construct the position of SMC as legitimate, and the techniques of language that had been mobilised to make these possible. In addition, the aim was to explore the underpinning power, which privileges some groups, whilst disadvantaging others.

In Zadeh and Foster's (2016) research into SMC representations in newspaper articles, SMCs were constructed as deviating from 'traditional' reproduction, with the term

‘virgin birth’ being used to negatively position SMCs as ‘unnatural’. Whilst the term ‘virgin birth’ was not found to be drawn upon directly in my data, I understood it to have been constructed implicitly by the deferment of romantic relationships and the concept of ‘celibacy’. It was not deemed to be pejorative in this research, however, as it was understood as aligning the mothers with ‘selfless’ notions of the good mother and away from the risky ‘over-sexed’ lone mother subject position. Differences between these findings could be thought of as stemming from Zadeh and Foster’s research constructed as attributed to ‘experts’, and in mine through personal narratives and therefore drawing on different discourses. As such, ‘experts’ may be understood as drawing on discourses such as medical and political (with constructions such as ‘stretched’ services, (2016, p556)) whereby personal narratives were constructed as to drawing upon discourses of love and intensive mothering (such as the construction ‘brimming with love’ cited in section 4.3.). As such, the women were constructed in this present study as positioning the choices they had made in the best possible light. For example, the constructed ‘unnaturalness’ of ARTs was understood to have been recast as desirable; as evidence of an empowered choice, emblematic of control and planning, befitting of neoliberalism. This contrasts with the negative portrayal of ‘unnaturalness’ constructed in Zadeh and Foster’s (2016) study, which positioned single women using ARTs as ‘obsessive’ and ‘desperate’ and linking it to an excessive consumerism (p.559-560). In addition, the newspaper articles in Zadeh and Foster’s research spanned a period of time from 1988 to 2012. It could be speculated that as access to ARTs for single women has become easier to obtain (for example with the 2008 change in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act discussed in section 5.1.1), it is being constructed differently. This study has also suggested a shift in the dominance of neoconservative discourses toward neoliberal ones, whereby the prominence of the nuclear family structure has been constructed as receding with individualised consumer culture ascending. From this perspective of individualism, the family was found to be constructed in the present research as a potential liability, whereby divorce could severely impact the child; as well as parenting being simplified by not having the interference of competing parental views (see section 4.3.4.)

Contradictory constructions of choice and tradition were discussed constructed in another piece of research by Zadeh et al. (2013). In their research, the SMC was understood as taking up an ambivalent subject position with regards to ARTs, invoking contradictory meanings associated with choice versus tradition. This ambivalence was

also constructed in this study where constructions of choice were seen to coexist with constructions of the position of the SMC as 'not a choice' (Bock, 2000; Graham, 2018; Holmes, 2018; Layne, 2009; Murray & Golombok, 2005; Zadeh et al., 2013). Thus, whilst postfeminism purports that women have 'choices', they are also understood to be constrained in how they take up and negotiate these. Furthermore, where Holmes (2018) understood that some of her participants did broadly identifying as feminist, she simultaneously constructed the 'brand' of feminism to be non-threatening to the neoliberal agenda, focusing on postfeminist constructions of 'choice' and 'empowerment' rather than emphasising radicalism and solidarity. Discourses that explicitly positioned SMCs as feminist were noticeably absent from this study; however, key postfeminist concepts of choice and empowerment were repeatedly drawn upon. Likewise, as in this research, Holmes's participants were produced as attending to 'compulsory romance' by being constructed as reluctant in their uptake of the position of feminist, whereby the 'traditional' route (i.e. heterosexual relationship and `natural' pregnancy) would have been preferred.

Absence of feminist discourse can be understood in this present study, in the context of the press being constructed as a patriarchal institution (Sultana, 2010), whereby the language drawn on would be deployed to service a particular editorial policy. Likewise, studies of fictional representations of SMCs in USA film and TV (Maher, 2014; Silbergleid, 2002) found constructions of the subject position of SMC to be positive, whilst simultaneously serving to validate the patriarchal heteronormative family model through this being constructed as the ultimate goal, and often achieved subsequent to becoming an SMC. Where feminism was represented on film, it was shown ironically as excessive and extreme (Maher, 2014). Social media constructions of SMC would have undoubtedly offered a different set of constructions with regard to feminism, whereby social media has been understood as the predominant site for fourth-wave feminism (Zimmerman, 2017). However, it was the language produced in a dataset constructed within a broader societal context and power circulation, which was deemed of interest to this research.

Whilst this present work concurred with previous studies which constructed a 'hierarchy of motherhood' that differentiated SMCs from unelected single mothers (Mannis, 1999; Bock, 2000), the terms of this hierarchy were understood differently in the latter of the two data sets analysed. Qualities such as age, educational attainment, and even financial

standing seemed less prescient (or more implicit) on the later data set, whereby use of ARTs was subsequently drawn upon as the key signifier to differentiate the 'types' of single mother. Where other studies have looked at elements of neoliberalism and postfeminism with regards to SMCs (Holmes, 2018; Maher 2014; Michelle 2006) this study has gone much deeper into how these ideologies have impacted on the subject position. In particular, the original contribution of this study has been understood as the construction of SMC as affiliated with ARTs and SMC constructed as an optimal parenting subject position (as discussed in section 5.1.).

5.3. Evaluation

In the following section, I have evaluated my research following the characteristics of good qualitative research outlined by Yardley (2000, 2008). Sensitivity to context has been considered, followed by commitment, rigour, transparency, and coherence. I have then discussed further considerations for this research, followed by the impact and importance of this work to the field of counselling psychology. I have also discussed reflexivity before finally offering my suggestions for future research.

5.3.1. Sensitivity to Context

I have tried to maintain a sensitivity to context throughout my analysis. This included a consideration of sociocultural settings and ethical sensitivity (Yardley, 2000). For this reason, I have included the newspaper that each extract was selected from. Limitations of scope meant I was unable to fully explore this avenue of analysis; however, the publication type serves to provide a context in which to situate each extract.

Where FDA has been criticised for not dealing adequately with agency, this was addressed in this study by incorporating a discursive framework that understands the speaker (or writer) of text as an 'active agent, who uses discursive strategies to manage stake in social interactions (Willig, 2008, p,127). Thus, this work is not suggesting that SMCs have no agency; however, it seeks to understand ways in which discourse limits available choices.

As suggested by Willig (2001), I have reflected on who might benefit from this work and how individuals and institutions might make use of these findings in Section 5.5. Impact on the Field of Counselling Psychology, below. I hope that this work provides a positive contribution to the domain of women's studies and opens discussions that are

beneficial to mothers — both SMC and otherwise. Additionally, I hope this work adds to a discourse regarding women in neoliberal society and questions the 'freedoms' that women are perceived to be enjoying in the domain of fertility. I aim to challenge the notion of hegemonic SMCs as is currently understood by institutions, such as the NHS and private fertility clinics, by questioning the constructions from which the fertility of one woman can be sanctioned and another condemned. As these positions are enabled by discourse, I have unpacked these constructions to show these discourses in action.

I am aware that this research also has the capacity to problematise the position of the SMC. There is the potential that the data could be misinterpreted or taken out of context. My role as a psychologist positions me as an 'expert' and therefore constructs me as a 'servant of moral orthopaedics' (Foucault, 1977) — something Foucault understood as those holding a position with the responsibility of aligning others to the dominant norms. However, my desire is not to endanger the position of the SMC. Rather, I want to point out that the notion of 'choice' embedded in the moniker of SMCs can suggest a misleading freedom. While misuse of my research is beyond my control, I have made every effort to be rigorous to demonstrate that my interpretations are grounded in the data.

5.3.2. Commitment, Rigour, Transparency and Coherence

Commitment has been shown by my immersion in the subject area for several years (Yardley, 2000). Rigour has been demonstrated by a thoroughness in data collection, whereby every best effort was made to collect all articles featuring SMCs from 1/3/2019 to 1/3/2020. However, more presciently, the term 'information power' (Braun and Clarke, 2015) was deemed ontologically and epistemologically applicable to this work whereby rigour has consisted of the selection of rich, adequate, and appropriate data. (See section 3.5.5. for a more detailed explanation of this).

In a previous iteration of this research, Google was used to identify articles. This was later understood as a problematic tool for data collection, primarily because the filters for refining the searches are not nuanced, and content can fluctuate overtime, where search algorithms are constantly updated. As such, a search for 'single mother by choice UK newspaper' yielded results from magazine articles, articles from American newspapers and academic articles as well as British newspaper articles. This means that the search was unsystematic and could not easily be replicated by another researcher. In

light of this, Nexis was selected as the primary means to identify articles. This offered more rigour to the process of data collection, and helped me to identify all the relevant material captured by my search terms. Google was used as a back-up, to help identify key words that I could take back to Nexis to find any articles I may have missed with my original search terms.

The analysis was undertaken in a considered manner by working through the texts thoroughly and by having frequent discussions with my supervisors for guidance on technique. Yardley suggests that transparency can be achieved via the existence of a 'paper trail' (2008). The unpublished paper trail should be available to anyone who requests it. In this research, information on the data has been included in the appendices. (see Appendix 2 for a table containing each of the articles analysed with the search term used to retrieve it). Alternative readings to the data set are invited and encouraged.

The coherence of the research has been constructed by the interrelation of the theoretical approach, research question, methodology, and analysis (Yardley, 2008). A tension exists between the weak social constructionist epistemology and the critical realist ontological position required by FDA, and the radical social constructionist position with a relativist outlook for both epistemology and ontology underpinning DP (Willig, 2013) (see section 3.2.). As discussed in the methodology section, a radical social constructionist position has been critiqued as insufficient for understanding 'why' individuals may choose one form of discourse over another, and failing to generate any original concepts (Willig, 2009a). Therefore, the tension was resolved through use of a bricolage method, underpinned by a moderate social constructionist position. In order for the SMC to be constructed as a valid subject position through language, there has to be the assumption that positions are in flux and that discourse has the power to create and shape them. A moderate social constructionist perspective is congruent with a feminist discourse which asserts that social constructions can exert 'real' power over people. Overall, social constructionism welcomes a pluralistic approach, recognising that equally valid knowledge can be generated in different ways (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

5.4. Further Considerations

Very few constructions of racial and sexual orientation intersectionality were found in this study, whereby my dataset predominantly constructed the subject position of SMC

as taken up by white, heterosexual women. The SMC is an object that is differentially constructed by different discourses; as such, to comment on who might take up this subject position requires a complex explication of interpellation. Material-discursive practices are profoundly constitutive of the way individuals become situated into various subject positions, but how that happens is more complex than discussing race and prejudice.

Butler's concept of precarity offers a lens through which to think about this, as it describes a 'politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support more than others, and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death' (Butler & Berbc, 2017). Therefore, by being guided by the literature, I have been able to offer tentative hypotheses as to some of the materio-discursive constrictions on what the subject position might be.

While the SMC is not a subject position that is exclusive to white women, I would propose that their dominance in my dataset stems from the focus of white women in the media, as well as white women identifying with the term 'SMC' as opposed to other nomenclature. In fact, demographics collected by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in 2018 (HFEA, 2021) constructed black and mixed ethnicities to have the highest proportions of IVF and DI without a partner.

The subject position of SMCs was also constructed as strongly associated with heterosexuality (none of the SMCs in the data set were produced as LGBTQ+, although there is nothing that explains or clarifies why this is in the data). Lapidus's (2004) research has shown how single lesbian parenting is produced as a non-visible family form, and as such, goes unrecognised in political, educational, and social discourses. Equally, Kitzinger (2005) has suggested that where sexuality is not specified, heterosexuality will be assumed. Indeed, the sexual orientation of single mothers was not a demographic that was deemed important to the HFEA in their 2018 report (2021) and has not been specified.

This reflects a broader narrative in society whereby postfeminist discourse exclusively focuses on women who meet the following criteria at the expense of intersectionality: presumed whiteness, presumed heterosexuality, and presumed Western-ness (Gill, 2017). As constructed by Jess Butler (2013), 'as women come forward in education and employment and gender equality is allegedly achieved, and as women of colour become

increasingly visible in the academy and the public sphere, contemporary discourses must adapt in order to reinforce gender and racial hierarchies and ensure that the systems of compulsory heterosexuality and white privilege remain intact' (p.46). This produces an idea that power is still circulating discursively to safeguard white heterosexual privilege. In this study, that idea has been shown through the subjectivity that is considered worthy of featuring by the UK press.

I am aware that the data that I selected could be interpreted differently, either by a different researcher using the same methodology or by using a different methodology altogether. As such, it is useful to consider how my interpretations may have been different had they been informed by alternative theories used in other SMC research. For example, from a realist epistemological stance, this data set may have shown that whilst there is a lack of variety in the race, heterosexuality, and socio-economic status shown, these women are vanguards leading the way for others. Additionally, it is important to reiterate that the constructions identified are context specific. Newspapers have an agenda behind the articles that are produced. The ones that are put forward are the ones which are selected to do something. Mass media choose certain types of discourses over others. A forum where SMCs could communicate privately with other SMCs, for example, would be expected to yield very different constructions. In other words, this offers another way of accounting for differences between my findings and previous research (i.e. the differences may not just be in the data, but also in the way the data has been analysed).

5.5. Impact on the Field of Counselling Psychology

In this research, I have taken a critical perspective on SMCs and reproductive technologies in the context of newspaper articles, analysing the circulation and production of meaning around these technologies in a novel way. This work has implications for counselling psychology in terms of theory, methodology, and practice. My work suggests that counselling psychology should hone its reflexive gaze, for example, by focusing on the prevalence of neoliberal values and how these constrain subjectivity. 'Rational' practices were shown as delimited, and some subject positions as 'othered', thus causing distress.

The originality of this work and its potential impact on the field of counselling psychology can be viewed as stemming from my choice of methodology and its

implications for enhancing our understanding of the complex nature of subjectivity and power. Counselling psychology advocates for social justice, and in trying to understand the practices of oppression, a Foucauldian approach is allied to that. Whilst a tension can be constructed between the humanistic value that is understood as an embedded component of counselling psychology, and the anti-humanist stance of FDA (see section 3.2.2), I feel this can be legitimised in several ways.

Firstly, this can be understood as overcome in part through my use of a twin methodology. Incorporating a DP element attributed agency to the SMCs in the articles, asking how language has been used to achieve certain goals. Secondly, the pluralism of my methodology aligns with the pluralism of counselling psychology, insofar as it advocates for the exploration of what it means to be human from a range of approaches. Thirdly, counselling psychologists are understood as 'scientist practitioners'. Cooper (2009), for example, suggested that post-qualification, this element is often left behind. By emphasising the humanistic value, practitioners can become immersed in the individual, thus struggling to see the need or possibility for patterns that link difficulties together. As Cooper asserts,

'there is another way of thinking about empirical research — including studies of a highly quantitative, controlled, experimental nature — that is very consistent with a commitment to welcoming Otherness. While it is true, as argued above, that empirical research might lead us to impose nomothetic assumptions upon individual clients; the reality is that we will always come to our clients with certain assumptions about why they are the way they are and what is likely to help them. Research, then, also has the potential to challenge our pre-existing assumptions — presenting us with an 'otherness' that is unexpected, 'infinitely distant,' 'irreducibly strange' — and thus helping us to be more open-minded and responsive to the actual Other that we are encountering' (Cooper, 2009, p.18).

Consistent with counselling psychology, this suggests that practitioners should be able to look for broad uniting patterns whilst holding on to their humanistic outlook. As such, maintaining tensions represents another key area for counselling psychologists who are trained in modalities with competing and conflicting epistemological and ontological bases, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and psychodynamic approaches.

Thus, I hope that this study has brought to light an awareness of the impact of neoliberal and postfeminist values in the domain of reproduction and motherhood. By bringing to the surface these embedded values, therapists can be mindful of how they may influence what happens in the therapy room. This is challenging, as '[n]eoliberalism has managed to make itself invisible by becoming common sense' (Sugarman, 2015, p. 103). To this end, certain discourses may be privileged, where others are silenced. For example, the constructions located have indicated that SMCs have silenced discourses of sexual desire, where perhaps this is seen as incompatible with a good mother subject position.

As therapists, can we help women to hold the identities of sexuality and motherhood simultaneously? Additionally, it could be argued that we are in a position to question hegemonic constructions — for example, the 'right age' to be an SMC and the 'right method' to have less constrained exploration of possibilities. Moreover, by analysing the power structures that are at work, this helps to shift focus from the micro to the macro. For example, within the individualised culture of neoliberalism, decisions such as the choice to delay motherhood could be understood as an individual's personal choice; however, neoliberal commentators have suggested that this 'choice' is a product of a system that benefits from women developing their education and career before motherhood.

Similarly, a macro picture would suggest that the 'failure' felt by many women who struggle with the competing demands of work/childcare/housework — alongside all the other criteria constructed for women — is not a failure of the individual, but of the system under which such constructions are commonplace. As such, women have been understood to be 'oppressed by both the pressure to have children and to be perfect mothers' (Henderson et al., 2010, p.233) whereby power relations can be constructed as internalised by mothers.

In identifying the use of othering to construct the SMC as legitimate, a picture of the 'othered' mother was developed. This negative construction was shown to be widespread and pervasive and another area whereby counselling psychologists can propagate positive change and social justice. By challenging this construction both in those who apply it to others and those who apply it to themselves, we can seek to reconstitute the lone mother in less harmful and pejorative ways, holding in mind systemic challenges they may face.

Likewise, the 'perfect mother' subject position (with a focus on intensive mothering practices) was shown as privileged through my analysis. The punishing and unachievable criteria suggested by this construction were not found to have been critiqued in the data; rather, the message is that 'if a single mother can manage it, it is more achievable than ever'. Any inability to manage 'it all' is therefore constructed as a personal failing rather than a structural lack of support. As is considered normative in neoliberal discourses, any systemic facets that might limit possibilities are silenced discourses (Holmes, 2018). In particular, it could be suggested that the position that SMCs inhabit at the margins of acceptability potentially makes resistance to hegemonic motherhood constructions untenable. This is also something that can be explored in a therapeutic setting.

Counselling psychologist straddle the two domains of personal and political, in the therapy room and with a commitment to social justice. The interplay between the two helps with the development of both, whereby individual distress should be understood in the context of oppressive systems. 'Feminist psychotherapy differs radically from traditional psychotherapy in that the role of the therapist is not to soothe, but to disrupt, not to adjust, but to empower' (Brown cited in Goodman et al, 2004, p.805). As well as our role in the therapy room, counselling psychologists have a part to play in influencing social policy. This is one of the primary values underpinning counselling psychology and it is key to our professional identity (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014). In their work, Morris & Korobov (2020) have pointed to a construction that suggests 'that the very foundation of psychology is complicit with the ethics of neoliberalism, emphasizing the needs of the individual to the exclusion of the social' (p.3).

As I have shown, disciplinary power can impact on political and moral decisions regarding who is entitled to have support in becoming an SMC. The use of ARTs and access to them will increase in scope and importance going forward, as women are having children later in life and thus conceiving less easily (Inhorn & Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2008). Stratified access favours those in the West, and more specifically, the white, middle-class, heteronormatively-coupled (Inhorn & Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2008). As social justice purports that individuals should have equal opportunities regardless of individual characteristics (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014), access for single women to have reproductive assistance where desired seems to strongly fit with this mandate.

In addition, this work has drawn upon critiques of postfeminism such as Gill, McRobbie, Tyler and Rottenberg. As suggested by Banet-Weiser, 'popular feminism rarely critiques neoliberalism and its values. On the contrary, these values — economic success, new market growth, self-entrepreneurship — are all part and parcel of popular feminism. Thus, we cannot analyse popular feminism in isolation; rather, we need to understand it as co-constitutive of capitalist practices, values, and divisions of labour' (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020, p.13). By focusing on neoliberal and postfeminist discourses, I hope I have done justice to this.

Furthermore, I hope to add to these voices in this study, in therapeutic practice, in the context of a multi-disciplinary team, in an employment setting, and in a social justice capacity. Discursive constructions that promote individualised success for women at the expense of other women, or that produce feminism as redundant after having achieved its goals, need to be challenged.

5.6. Reflexivity

When I first considered this topic, I was interested in how SMCs were in a marginal position and what the implications of this would be. While in my reading of the texts SMCs are constructed as broadly legitimate, it has been eye-opening to explore the parameters within which it is constructed as so. While I feel like SMCs do represent progress for women, hegemonic constructs of heteronormativity, femininity, and neoliberalism curb the freedom granted.

In undertaking this analysis, it has been important to unearth and challenge my own assumptions. Since my undergraduate degree in sociology two decades ago, I have always had a liberal, feminist outlook and a leaning towards social justice. I am critical of the idea of meritocracy in that I do not believe that an individual's success in life is simply a matter of hard work and determination. The assumptions I hold, such as those regarding deeply embedded societal inequalities, and structural disadvantages, are fundamental to how this thesis reads. Other assumptions (sometimes contradictory to the aforementioned ones) only surfaced during the creation of this work. For example, when I considered taking up the subject position of an SMC myself some years ago, my first thought was how I would finance it, as I saw taking benefits as a moral failing. Since undertaking this project and becoming a mother (not as an SMC), my perception

has shifted. I believe that motherhood should be valued and supported, and the state should be implicated in this.

Undertaking research from a Foucauldian perspective represented a shift for me, whereby I initially struggled with the understanding that language that 'does things' — not people. As discussed, the lack of agency in the methodology presents a tension with the humanism of counselling psychology and it felt at odds with my position as a practising psychologist. In the process, I feel I have had the opportunity to develop both as a researcher and a practitioner. I now have an ability to think critically about what language is 'doing' in text and speech, and the power that is circulating within them. If I had to offer any advice to a researcher undertaking a similar piece of work using a similar methodology, it would be to always hold the statement 'death to the author' (Barthes, 2001) in mind.

During my literature research and exploration of intensive mothering, I have become aware of the punishing and unachievable standards mothers are held to. Thurer has described the good mother ideology in Western societies to be

'so pervasive that, like air, it is unnoticeable. Yet it influences our domestic arrangements, what we think is best for our children, how we want them to be raised, and whom we hold accountable' (Cited in Feasey, 2013, p. 334).

However, I find that becoming aware of this has not changed my personal stance. I still want to be the mother who 'has it all'. This is perhaps indicative of the neoliberal facet of irony, whereby the ideology is so inescapable that it is possible to simultaneously hold a critical stance and aim to fully embody it without concern.

5.7. Suggestions for Future Research

Through this research, I became interested in the act of confession as a lens for understanding conception narratives and I feel this is a fertile area for further study. Whilst confession (in some form) is understood to affect all neoliberal subjects (Gill & Scharff, 2013), it could be that there is an unequal expectation between men and women to confess. Gill and Scharff have contended that postfeminism and neoliberalism call upon women more than men to 'work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen' (2013, p. 7).

With regards to SMCs, this was constructed via the cultivation of a positive outlook regarding the uptake of the subject position (as shown in Extract 13) which has the effect of constraining any collective thinking or exposing any systemic issues. The area of self-disclosure is a complicated one for feminists who have felt that it can both enable the silenced voices of oppressed women to be heard, but also subject them to control, vulnerability, and manipulation (Baker & Benton, 1994). With regards to this analysis, this could have been shown through the comments provided by the public on the online versions of the articles; for example, a comment beneath Article 15 offered, '[a]s long as they can afford to bring up their children and keep down a full-time job to pay for them, I couldn't care less!'. Whilst this was beyond the scope of this research, the imagined readership that the articles were constructed with in mind was implicitly discussed with regards to reflexivity and judgement. An exploration into the role of confession, with regards to blogs, articles, and social media sites devoted to reproductive narratives, would provide fertile ground for study.

Another thing that came out of this research was that discourses in the articles created dominant subject positions that rendered the SMC as sexless. Discourses around sexualised women were noticeably absent and this could be understood as a performativity of 'sexlessness', constructed for the benefit of the reader. Instead, what was present was the construction of a self-sacrificing SMC. Whilst the articles showed high levels of self-disclosure regarding conception and conception choices, there was very little to indicate that SMCs are women with sexual desires. Discourses of self-sacrifice were located with the idea that their children must come first at this stage in the mother's lives and that romantic relationships could wait.

Thus, reinforcing the subject position of the SMC as a mother not a lover is a construction firmly linked to the 'good mother' discourse. As such, 'love' discourses were expressed as privileging the pure and all-encompassing love between a parent and child. An interesting angle for future research would be the extent to which assumptions of women as 'tainted' through non-marital sex are pervading, thus underpinning this current construction of the 'virgin' SMC. It also begs the question of whether the increasing legitimisation of the position of SMC is connected to it being detached from sex. Even though postfeminism constructs the modern woman as enjoying sex (although arguably this is an internalisation of men's desires (Gill, 2009)), the constructions in the data suggest otherwise — namely that SMCs are 'happy to be celibate' (Extract 45,

Article 42) during their child's younger years and that they will delay gratification (sexual or otherwise) in order to focus fully on motherhood.

I think a textual analysis, from an FDA perspective, of longer-form guide books and websites on becoming an SMC would offer further insight into the governmentality of the subject position. As such, the research questions I would advocate would be focused on power and sex. For example,

- **How do SMCs become constituted in self-help guides to become an SMC? Is it through the government of regulatory powers and discipline of the self?**
- **What subject positions are enabled and what are the implications for these subject positions, particularly in relation to sex?**

5.8. Final Thoughts

By exploring the subject positions available to SMCs in newspaper articles, this research has performed a post-structural Foucauldian investigation in order to interrogate power at a discursive level. As such, this research offers an example of how the lived experience is constrained by discursive constructions. Use of a combined methodology enabled an exploration of how 'we do things with language, produce effects with language and we do things to language, but language is also the thing that we do' (Bulter, 2013, p.8). This suggests that whilst we have agency, that agency is constrained. This research sought to understand what those constraints were and how they were dealt with.

I have produced an idea that the hegemonic subject position connected with SMCs (age, financial status, education level, etc.) as shown in the academic literature has shifted, with ART use becoming embedded with their construction. As ARTs have become easier to obtain (for certain demographics), they have become affiliated with the position of SMCs. The inclusion of women who did not meet the conventional criterion for an SMC (in terms of age and financial standing) has shown how the different circulating discourses are providing different constructs of SMCs. As such, alongside the 'single-parenting-as-last-resort' (Lapidus, 2004, p.229) construction, another circulating version of 'the single-parent-as-the-optimal-parenting-position' was located.

Also noted were absent subject positions, such as a single mother who lovingly devotes herself to her children and draws upon welfare support to be able to do so. This would be antithetical to the embedded 'truth' that anyone who needs welfare support is lazy and selfishly relies on others to fund their existence. The articles can be collectively read as repositioning the single mother trope — in this case, 'the viable single mother'. In Foucauldian terms, to produce a new 'truth', power must be exercised (1980). In this analysis, power was shown to be exercised through technologies of governmentality, combining technologies of power — such as through the deployment of legal, political, and moral discourses and judgement — and technologies of self, such as discourses positioning SMCs as self-reflexive, responsible, and intensive parents.

Language was also used to construct SMCs as conforming with neoliberal and postfeminist ideology. Arguably, neoliberalism has been noted to tolerate diverse family forms, as long as 'care of the self' (Foucault, 2012), or more aptly, 'care of kin' (Cooper, 2017) are adhered to. Gill (2017) has suggested that radicalism is incorporated where there is a conflict with the hetero-patriarchal order, in order to empty it of its threat. As such, qualities such as pre-planning and reflexive parenting were shown to be privileged by aligning SMCs to the neoliberal citizen subject position. In line with constructions of postfeminism, SMCs have been understood as 'double entanglement' of feminist and anti-feminist ideas (McRobbie, 2004, p.255). In other words, female empowerment and choice coexist with constructions of heteronormative coupling as the gold standard.

While the concept of choice positions SMCs outside the heteronormative ideal, it has also been used to position them as enterprising neoliberal subjects (Holmes, 2018). However, the constructed alignment with 'compulsory romance' discourses can be understood as positioning the SMCs as neoconservatives, straddling a wider societal tension between neoconservatism and neoliberalism (Brown, 2006). Whilst broadly implicit in its nature, othering the lone mother was understood as a dominant social practice that constructs the SMC as legitimate.

As has been noted more broadly within postfeminism, SMCs are constructed as an individualistic undertaking, whereby any feminist discourses pertain to collectivisms, sisterhood, or community parenting, are noticeably absent. This was discussed as one of the key implications that this research can have on the field of counselling psychology:

challenging the circulating power to privilege certain subject positions and oppress others is essential both in therapeutic work and as part of our social justice agenda.

As social media becomes increasingly embedded into society, power can be understood as shifting further away from formal regulatory bodies and into peer-to-peer judgement. As seen in the extracts of women for whom the subject position of SMC was entwined with their respective careers as a journalist and life coach, the blending of private and professional is understood as a facet of neoliberalism, where the individual's survival becomes dependent on the 'self as brand'. From this position, the necessity of presenting and defending oneself publicly, demonstrating allegiance with dominant values relating to postfeminism and neoliberalism, can be understood as intrinsic to survival. As Curtis has argued,

> 'One of the guiding beliefs of our consuming age is that we are all free and independent individuals. That we can choose to do pretty much what we want, and if we can't, then it's bad. But at the same time, co-existing alongside this, there is a completely different, parallel universe where we all seem meekly to do what those in power tell us to do' (2013).

Drawing this idea from my research means that power operates in unequal ways, and thus, an exploration of this power allows opportunities for resistance.

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APPENDIX ONE: Ethics Form

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates

REVIEWER: Neil Rees

SUPERVISOR: Martin Willis

COURSE: Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

STUDENT: Anita Rickwood

TITLE OF PROPOSED STUDY: A pluralistic discourse analysis of media representations of single mothers by choice

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.

2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY
(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

APPROVED

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

Major amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEARCHER *(for reviewer)*

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

	HIGH
	MEDIUM
X	LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any):

Reviewer *(Typed name to act as signature)*: Neil Rees

Date: 12.01.17

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments *(for students)*:

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name *(Typed name to act as signature):*
Student number:

Date:

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

PLEASE NOTE:

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, travel approval from UEL (not the School of Psychology) must be gained if a researcher intends to travel overseas to collect data, even if this involves the researcher travelling to his/her home country to conduct the research. Application details can be found here:
http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/fieldwork/

APPENDIX TWO: Table of data

	DATA SET B					
No	**Article name**	**Website/ location**		**Date retrieved**	**Author (SMC Y/N)**	**Type of article**
30	So who needs a father anyway?; Baby J is a child born of our times. His mother decided he doesn't need a father, so she was artificially inseminated. Now she is using state benefits to bring him up	Daily Mail	John Illman, Jessica Davies	February 19, 1993	LexisNexis 6/8/2020	Single mother by choice
31	Career girls opt for donor motherhood	The Sunday Times	Cherry Norton	August 24, 1997,	LexisNexis 6/8/2020	Single mother by choice
32	Bridget Jones - with child	The Times	Kirsty Lang	March 29, 2000	LexisNexis 6/8/2020	Single mother by choice
33	Going solo	The Sunday Times	Zoe Brennan	June 4, 2006	LexisNexis 6/8/2020	Single mother by choice
34	And baby makes two...; Families Newly single, nearing 40 and longing to be a mother, Karin Thayer decided to go it alone. But little did she know how difficult her journey to parenthood would prove to be	Independent Extra	Sophie Morris	September 6, 2011	LexisNexis 6/8/2020	Single mother by choice
35	BE MY BABY; Thanks to advances in medical science, professional women are using sperm banks to fulfil their dreams of motherhood. Casilda Grigg reveals the human stories behind a reproductive revolution	The Daily Telegraph	Casilda Grigg	September 20, 2014	LexisNexis 6/8/2020	Single mother by choice

36	Going solo: why fathers are out of the picture	The Times	Penny Wark	January 14, 2005	LexisNexis 6/8/2020	Single mother by choice
37	Mum's the word	The Sunday Times	Sue Reid	August 25, 1996	LexisNexis 6/8/2020	Single mother by choice
38	Forget the tired 'single mother' stereotype. All hail the rise of the new Solo Mum	The Telegraph	Victoria Lambert	12 Aug 2015	Google	Single mother by choice
39	There's no shame in going solo, says mum	The Guardian	Amelia Hill	4/11/ 2007	Google	Single mother by choice
40	There's no stigma': why so many Danish women are opting to become single mothers	The Guardian	Helen Russell	14/09/2015	Google	Single mother by choice
41	What I'm really thinking: the single mother by choice	The Guardian	Anonymous	9/07/2016	Google	Single mother by choice
42	Daddies be damned! Who are the British women who think fathers are irrelevant?	The Daily Mail	Barbara Davies	31/10/2009	Google	Single mother by choice

	DATA SET A					
No	**Title**	**Publication**	**Author**	**date**	**Source**	**Search term**
1	Denying single women IVF is a cruel policy that belongs in the past; The idea that solo mothers are a 'burden on society' is morally bankrupt, bigoted and flagrantly incorrect	The Guardian	Genevieve Roberts	August 20, 2019	Nexis 24/1/2020	SMC
2	Sweet child of mine; At 38, and single, Genevieve Roberts realised she wanted to be a mother - but her fertility levels had other ideas. Here, she explains what happened when she made the decision that changed her life	i-Independent Print Ltd	Genevieve Roberts	April 15, 2019	Nexis 24/1/2020	SMC
3	Welcome to the solo motherhood club; Natalie Imbruglia, 44, is pregnant with her first child thanks to IVF and a sperm donor. Nicole Ryer knows what's in store	The Sunday Telegraph (London)	Nicole Ryer	July 28, 2019,	Nexis 24/1/2020	SMC
4	Cheryl is showing that would-be mothers need not compromise	i-Independent Print Ltd	Genevieve Roberts	April 19, 2019,	Nexis 24/1/2020	SMC

5	As a solo mother who chose to become a parent using a sperm donor, Cheryl is my hero; The X Factor star has shown women that we have freedom: that we can be unlucky in love and don't have to compromise on our families or our futures	The Independent	Genevieve Roberts	April 18, 2019	Nexis 24/1/2020	SMC
6	I'm having a second baby with my donor's sperm; Without a partner on the horizon or the luxury of time, Genevieve Roberts decided to add to her family, she tells Giulia Rhodes	The Daily Telegraph	Giulia Rhodes	April 18, 2019	Nexis 24/1/2020	SMC
7	WHAT IT'S REALLY LIKE TO BE A SOLO MUM; As the number of women using sperm donors rises, Fabulous investigates the struggles and triumphs of IVF and IUI motherhood	The Sun	JENNY STALLARD	December 8, 2019	Nexis 30/1/2020	Solo Mother
8	'I'm raising my son as a solo mum': Executive assistant, 39, who struggled to find 'the one' decides to be a single mother and have a baby through IVF	MailOnline	Media Drum World	April 9, 2019	Nexis 30/1/2020	Solo Mother
~~9~~	~~'Octomom' Nadya Suleman shares rare snap of miracle octuplets on their 11th birthday;; The proud mother has shared a heartfelt tribute to her eight 'miracle' children as they celebrate their eleventh year~~	~~Mirror~~	~~Susan Knox~~	~~January 29th 2020~~	~~Nexis 30/1/2020~~	~~Solo Mother~~
10	'I'm proud to be doing this on my own': Single mum, 39, gives birth to a baby boy after deciding to undergo IVF solo instead of continuing her search for the 'right man'	Mail Online	Caters News Agency	2nd September 2019	Nexis 30/1/2020	Solo Mother
11	Mum's powerful explanation to baby son about why she became a single parent age 39; "It is all I have ever known so I just get on with it"	Mirror	Zahra Mulroy	August 31, 2019	Nexis 30/1/2020	Solo Mother
12	We chose to become single mums like Natalie Imbruglia instead of waiting around for Mr Right	The Sun	Lynsey Clarke and Georgette Culley	25 Jul 2019	Google 21/2/2020	Single mother by choice UK newspaper
13	Dear Cheryl, Going solo: why I became a single mum by using a sperm	Express online	Lucy Laing	February 2nd 2020	Originally found in Google 28/2/2020 Then located in LexisNexis	single mother by choice uk newspaper

					28/2/2020	
14	A single mum tells all about choosing to have children without a partner	The Irish News	Lisa Salmon	30 April 2019	LexisNexis 28/2/2020	solo mum sperm
15	Why being a single mother makes me a BETTER parent: Woman who opted to have two children with a sperm donor after getting divorced aged 30 reveals the benefits of NOT having a partner	MailOnline	Genevieve Roberts	April 21, 2019	LexisNexis 28/2/2020	Solo mum sperm
16	Going solo: why I became a single mum by using a sperm	The Sun	Jenny Stallard	December 8, 2019	LexisNexis 28/2/2020	Solo mum sperm
17	I used sperm donor to have a baby at 18; Fabulous DAILY ANN IS ONE OF YOUNGEST MUMS EVER TO GET PREGNANT VIA DIY KIT	The Sun (England)	JENNY FRANCIS; ALLEY EINSTEIN	June 4, 2019	LexisNexis 28/2/2020	Solo mum sperm
18	Why ARE so many midlife women having children alone? In the past five years Britain's seen a boom in solo motherhood, fuelled by the lucrative fertility industry - Here, four mums share their very different experiences	MailOnline	Samantha Brick	February 19, 2020	LexisNexis 28/2/2020	Solo mum sperm
19	Becoming a parent on your own terms is not 'selfish'	The Independent	GENEVIEVE ROBERTS	April 19, 2019	LexisNexis 28/2/2020	Solo mum sperm
20	What Natalie Imbruglia can expect in her first year as a solo new mum (by someone who's been through it)	The Telegraph	GENEVIEVE ROBERTS	October 11 2019	LexisNexis 28/2/2020	Solo mum sperm
21	BIG NEWS ... Natalie; DAILY ; NEW MUM OPENS HER IVF DIARY AFTER GOING SOLO LIKE NATALIE	The Sun		August 28 2019	LexisNexis 28/2/2020	Solo mum sperm
22	For me it was a last resort...now I coach other women how to do it	Scottish Daily Mail	FRANCES HARDY	February 20, 2020	LexisNexis 28/2/2020	Solo mum sperm
23	~~'If I was in my twenties, I'd wait for someone who was right. But there's never a guarantee'; Since the age of 19, when she joined the girl band Girls Aloud, her marriages and divorces have been tabloid news. Now 36, Cheryl Tweedy tells Louise Carpenter why she is searching for a sperm donor~~	The Times	Louise Carpenter	January 4, 2020	LexisNexis 28/2/2020	Solo mum sperm
24	I was raised by a single father. After he died, I decided to have children alone too	telegraph.co.uk	Holly Ryan	January 20, 2019	LexisNexis 28/2/2020	Solo mum sperm
25	'I TOOK MY THREEMONTH-OLD BABY TRAVELLING'	The Sun		November 17th 2019	LexisNexis 28/2/2020	Solo mum sperm

26	MUM KNOWS BEST Single mum says she doesn't need a husband to be a good parent after using sperm donors to get pregnant; Author Genevieve Roberts, from London, gave birth to one-year-old daughter Astrid via a donor, and she's now eight-months pregnant with her second baby	The Sun	Jess Lester	April 23, 2019	originally found in google 19/6/2020 then LexisNex is search 19/6/2020	Single mother sperm donor
27	Youngest ever woman to use a Facebook sperm donor to get pregnant at 18 reveals she's already planning baby number two - and refuses to wait around for Mr Right	MailOnline	Alley Einstein	03 Jul 2019	LexisNex is 19/6/2020	Single mother sperm donor
28	Teenager chooses to become a single mother at just 18 with IVF before surgeons have to remove her womb	MailOnline	Connor Boyd	June 6th 2019	LexisNex is 19/6/2020	Single mother sperm donor
29	NHS nurse, 39, gives birth to IVF baby she funded with share of family's £1million lottery win after fearing she would never become a mother	Mailonline	Sebastian Murphy-bates	January 30, 2020	LexisNex is 19/6/2020	Single mother sperm donor

APPENDIX THREE: Illustration of Analytic Process

Example extract from the data taken from Article 21, The Sun, 2019 *With no new man in my life, I'd done a lot of research. I just thought: "What is normal now?" In any classroom, the majority of children would be from a home where their mum and dad don't live together.*			
Stage	**Function**	**Examples drawn from the extract**	**Specific part of the extract**
Stage 1: Discursive Constructions How is SMC objectified?	These begin to provide a picture of the marginal status of the position and how it can be problematized, and how the problematization can be resisted.	*A heteronormative thing* *A complex thing* *A normal thing* *A thing that won't impact the child*	*no new man in my life* *done a lot of research* *What is normal now? majority of children* *majority of children would be from a home where their mum and dad don't live together.*
Stage 2: Discourses *Wider discourses beyond the text*	Alternative ways of constructing the same discursive object which will be drawn upon depending on the context for different functions.	***Heteronormative*** *Wanted a heterosexual relationship but it alluded her* ***Normativity/ tradition*** *Constructs SMC as non-threatening yet rebellious* ***Neoliberalism*** *Constructs SMC as conforming to good citizenship, planning and preparation* ***Postfeminism*** *Constructs SMC as adhering to feminist ideology, drawing on empowerment and choice*	*With no new man in my life* *In any classroom, the majority of children would be from a home where their mum and dad don't live together.* *I'd done a lot of research* *With no new man in my life, I'd done a lot of research*
Stage 3: Action Orientation	How are the discourses employed to	A consensus of opinion deemed to offer a more convincing opinion	*What is normal now?*

DP stage	validate the position of SMC? Use of discursive devices such as- *Stake management category entitlement Externalizing devices*	than an individual (Potter, 1996). Stake inoculation, predicting criticism that could be levied and pre-empting it	*In any classroom, the majority of children would be from a home where their mum and dad don't live together.* *"What is normal now?"*
Stage 4: Positioning *The roles people can be placed in*	A discursive location from which to speak and act.	Non-normative subject position – 'Perfect mother' subject position, neoliberal, and postfeminist	Someone who deliberately chose a non-normative path Considers child's future positioning, proactive and empowered. Engages in research before taking action
Stage 5: Practice *How does discourse prevent or make possible possibilities for action*	What possibilities for action are opened or closed by the subject positions and discursive constructions identified?	SMC a position open to those able to demonstrate good neoliberal citizenship qualities of self-reflexivity and autonomy, therefore self-regulating, Individual outlook, (not community minded) Must align with Postfeminist sensibility Must have the prerequisites to be able to negotiate the complicated terrain of a non-normative choice	
Stage 6: subjectivity *What can be thought, felt and experienced from this position*	A speculative stage about what might be the subjective experience. Thinking about what kinds of feelings, thoughts and experiences might be made	**Fear** of being rejected or there being future consequences for the child **Anxiety, Need for control**, seen by the undertaking of research into how her child might be constructed	

	available by the subject positions.	**Desire** to be accepted and validated	

APPENDIX FOUR: Coding Sample

1. Article: Letter from Emily	https://www.dcnetwork.org/letter-emily Donor Conception Network
Stage 1: Discursive Constructions *All the different ways the object is constructed (within the text)*	A non-normative thing, a bold/decisive thing, a negative thing, hard thing, complex, potentially regrettable, open to disapproval, something that requires thought, preparation and planning, something fear inducing, a shameful thing, a privilege
Stage 2: Discourses *The differences between the constructs and the discourses used to describe it (wider discourses beyond the text)*	ROMANCE Mr Right **As children most of dreamed of the day we'd have children of our own and somehow things haven't worked out like the fairy tale.** FEMINISM Active vs passive women **There comes a point when you realise that if you want something, it's no good waiting for it to happen, you've got to make the moves yourself** MORAL Negative assumptions of single parents **Single parenting is at least talked about these days, if rarely in very positive terms; we all know it can be dome, but it's against the norm, it's hard, and how about the children?** **You hear a lot about the risks to children in one parent families** MORAL **SMC hierarchy** **Most of us will have more comfortable circumstances than the stereotypical lone mother. We have chosen our situation and don't need to expand any energy on blaming, resenting, protecting or trying to pay back an abandoning father or partner** (what about women who leave the marriage) NORMATIVE Pressure to fit hegemonic template **Don't get me wrong, I don't regret a second of it, but I do think that I was frightened of disapproval and pressure to change my mind, and so I avoided facing up to some important aspects of what I was doing.** MORAL **Institutional negativity** **you can contact the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority for information about clinics in the UK (although they won't tell you the ones that are friendly to single women)** **And if you're worried about the registry office, let me put your mind at ease, they're perfectly used to it, and just put a line through the box marked 'father'** NORMATIVITY **Biological clock** **I started treatment at 38**

	NORMATIVITY Internalised negativity my own fears of being judged (by a counsellor) led me to see it as a hurdle rather than an opportunity **I have always believed that secrets don't keep well, and that I'd rather my son knew from the beginning, to the best of his understanding, how he was made.** **I believe that we can make it easier for our children by being open from the start, so they don't have to cope with the realisation they have been deceived by those they should have been able to trust.** **NEOLIBERAL Surveillance Don't fear raising vague thoughts, fears and questions with the clinic counsellor** **NORMATIVE Something that needs to be justified you may well have to answer to your child about the same issues** **GOOD MOTHER Support network** **Important to emphasise to kids they are wanted (justify) they know that they are all much wanted children by donor conception** **NORMATIVE/ NEOLIBERAL** **Justification/figuring out your story for the kid you're not going to be able to conceal single mothering once it becomes a reality, and even if you don't come across anybody indiscreet enough to ask outright, it's useful to work out how to explain things. It helps if you can be proud and positive, which can disarm even the most judgmental person** **HETERONORMATIVEfather figure You need to work out exactly what you think 'dad' means, and whether a sperm donor fits the bill: does your child have no father, or an unknown father?**
Stage 3: Action Orientation (DP stage) *Stake management* *Membership categorization devices and category entitlement* *Externalizing devices*	Idelogogical dilemma **Don't get me wrong, I don't regret a second of it** **As far as I know, no counsellor has ever barred anyone from treatment** **MCD Finally keep it all in perspective: people in two-parent families have regrets too** **Stake management I can't pretend it's all been easy, but I wouldn't believe any parent who did. I know many children of donor conception, and I can't think of a better group of kids for my son to meet up with every month, and feel like he belongs to.** The whole article is structured as a letter to potential SMC to assist with the planning

Stage 4: Positioning *The roles people can be placed in*	People in this position will face pressure from others to abandon this line of thinking and adopt a more heteronormative path Will be judged by others Will face awkward questioning from others and the child Positioned negatively, put in the same category as other single parents and the potential outcome of your children questioned SMC does not have the same freedoms as 'good mother' for example expressing fears and doubts Risk giving your children a bad start in life Putting yourself in a negatively viewed position You may be pressurized into doing things you don't feel comfortable with. Some people will support you, others will not.
Stage 5: Practice (power) *How does discourse prevent or make possible possibilities for action*	SMC will have to battle against their own prejudice about this position in addition to external prejudice Fear that the counsellor (symbol of the institution) could bar a woman from becoming an SMC
Stage 6: subjectivity (power) *What can be thought, felt and experienced from each position*	If life doesn't give you what you want, take control and make it happen yourself You must be '**proud and positive'** (although this is tricky given the judgement you may face)

APPENDIX FIVE - Structuring the Analysis

Discursive Sites

- First Draft – April 2019 **CHOICE**

This draft centred on the concept of choice as the defining characteristic as SMC. Loosely understood in terms of past / present / future. Offered an opportunity to include almost everything I found interesting in the data. In the end proved too unwieldly and unfocused. Enough scope here for a book!

1. Making the choice

This was not really a decision; circumstances conspired in such a way that this was the only option open to them. External and internal self-justification for ideological dilemma

a) mandated motherhood, encompassing discourses of biology
desire, craving, life-long dream READ literature on mandated motherhood, socialisation
b) romance
Failed relationships, struggle to meet Mr.right. Men want different things from life.
READ How Neoliberalism has changed life goals for men and women
c) biology
Women waiting until they're older. Fertility problems, time running out. Extra justification
READ biological clock as a social construct. Neoliberal- Women waiting until they're older because of pressure to have a stable career.

2. planning and preparation which enable them to give their child optimal life chances.

a) management of 'the self' psychology, worrying about being good enough
Read Nikolas Rose
b) Journey to acceptance
letting family and close friends know. Stake inoculation. Narrative to tell a story of how others came to accept them- allows the reader to do this too.
c) Protected qualities
Making sure you meet these. Good neo liberal citizen, male attributes.
d) support networks, putting father figures in place
build your own support network, no expectation of state support

2. Managing the choice

1. Why is identity management necessary

selfishness, bad outcomes for the kids, lose friends, disapproval. Single mothers, worst position to be in. Read find study about how poor people more likely to have state intervention from social workers
(Things not suggested, state intervention, losing kids, not coping financially, emotionally)

2. How is Identity Managed

a) Deciding how much to share with others

what do you tell others, what do you not tell? Missing discourses about feeling guilty about working Read find stuff about mothers feeling guilty about working. Limited scope to say you are finding it difficult

b) Science, research and the use of 'experts' Showing that this group is growing in number - normalising

c) Othering

Single mothers. Read about othering. Trivialisation (internal self-justification)- being a single mother is not so bad these days

d) Things are actually better this way- don't have to share decision making Read self-justification theory

e) Good mother 'love'

Read how the concept of 'love' has become elevated in society

3. How will the choice impact on the future?

a) heteronormative discourses - How you will deal with the kid's questions

b) Hope to meet someone and have a normative family set-up this marginal position is a temporary state (saying this is partly identity management)

- Second Draft – June 2019 – **MOTHERING TROPES**

The second draft was more focused but replicated my literature review too closely. Did not represent my own original angle and it felt like there was a lot of overlap between the good mother and neoliberal citizen sites.

1. SMC as Good mother

a) Middle-class, education

b) race

c) Preparation

d) Support network

2. SMC as Bad mother

a) Single mothers

b) Age

3. SMC as Good neoliberal citizenship

a) Finance

b) Working – guilt about working not mentioned at all

c) Autonomous, individual, self-satisfaction

d) Choice- parenting is hard discourses are quickly resolved

- Third Draft – July 2019 **OTHERING**

Focusing on Othering enabled me to set the problem up, show how power was circulating and how discourse was employed to validate the position of SMC. It allowed me to concentrate on the areas that I found most stimulating – in particular to see the data through a neoliberal / postfeminist lens. Later reorganised as examples of explicit othering were found less frequently in the more contemporary data, therefore the structure did not seem nuanced enough.

1. Awareness of Threats

Shows up-front what the difficulties might be with assuming this subject position. Sets up why vigilant stake management is so crucial.

2. Implicit Othering

How discourses are drawn upon to construct SMC as good neoliberal citizens at the same time referencing the Other…then normal as defined by the 'abnormal'. Drawing on key neoliberal qualities – autonomy from the state, individualism, middle-classness, self-regulation etc.

a) Class and Finance
b) Choice

Mandated Motherhood
Biology
Romance

c) Planning

3. Explicit Othering

More directly referencing the 'bad' type of lone mother. Discourses employed to show that they are so different that they cannot even be categorised together. Done in subtle and more obvious ways.

a) Positive
b) Neutral
c) Negative

4. Resisting Dominant Discourses

Shows how they can validate their position without Othering. Creating new discourses which suggest that they can actually be positioned as 'better' than the norm due to proximity to neoliberal/ postfeminist ideal. Not an option available to everyone – only those with status can shape common sense discourses.

- Fourth Draft – September 2020
  RECONSTRUCTING SINGLE MOTHERHOOD FOR THE NEOLIBERAL AGE

Looking at constructions of fatherlessness found in the text and the implications of these on constructions of SMC. Focusing on how the data goes beyond legitimisation towards SMC as optimal by emphasising neoliberal and postfeminist discourses.

1. Constructing Single Parenting As Problematic

'DADDIES BE DAMNED'

This discursive site is underpinned by the assumption that a mother alone is insufficient to raise a child. The SMC is constructed as someone who satisfies her own desires to be a mother at the expense of the wellbeing of her child. Where these discourses are challenged, they are also perpetuated.

Constructions of 'Fatherlessness' Impacting Negatively on the Children
'Fatherlessness' Constructions Attributed to SMC
Judgement of others
Constructing 'Fatherlessness' for the Child
Mothers as Fathers

2. Constructing Single Parenting as Viable

'BECOMING A SOLO MUM WAS A NO-BRAINER'

Single Parenting is constructed as viable whilst alternative subject positions (such as childless woman) are constructed as unfeasible.

Defining the Parameters

Drawing on Academic Research

Not a Choice - Extenuating Circumstances
Bereavement
Mandated Motherhood
Biology
Romance

3. A Modern Family Form

'BRIMMING WITH LOVE'

SMC is constructed as a parenting position equal to and superior to the heteronormative family unit discourse.

Pre-conception Parenting
Capitalising on the Position of SMC
ARTs
SMC as Optimal
The Virgin Mother

APPENDIX SIX - Extracts from Reflexive Journal

Throughout the process of research, I kept a reflexive journal. Following supervision sessions, relevant clinical work or after reading material that particularly inspired me, I wrote up notes. These were particularly where I felt the I had changed somehow or my work was moving in a different direction.

April 2018
I have been thinking about SMC a lot over the last few months since giving birth in January. In the first few months I think it would have been enormously difficult. It is not only the practical support that I get from my partner, (which is obviously incredibly important), but the emotional support after the traumatic birth and problems trying to breastfeed. I guess you can buy practical support but good emotional support is trickier to purchase. In many of the articles they talk about needing to build effective support networks, and I think if I had become an SMC (or should I become a single mother in the future), this is something I would have struggled to do. None of the articles discuss birth complications or post-partum depression and how this can be dealt with. This would be really interesting to know. This goes to show how homogenous the data set is in terms of putting a positive spin on SMC. Now that things are getting easier with the baby, it seems like a more feasible option, but I also know how relieved I feel at 7 when my partner walks in every day and I have help and (adult) company.

March 2019
Reading the literature about how mothers are classified as either good or bad has made me reflect on my clients who are mothers and how my embedded assumptions might be influencing my work with them. For example, my client 'T' is a working-class woman with a diagnosis of EUPD whose three children are in care. She would like more than anything to be able to get her children back and sees her work in therapy as a stepping stone to being able to achieve this goal. My own feelings about whether this is a good idea or not vary considerably depending on T's mood and the content she brings to therapy. When I reflect with the insight from the literature on motherhood, I wonder if I am holding her to the prevalent, punishing middle-class parenting standards which I hold myself to. When T told me that she only eats junk food, I found myself wondering if she would provide her children with a balanced diet, and whether she would provide appropriate nutritional role modelling. Whilst healthy eating can be understood as good 'common sense', it is not a legal requirement. Discourses around healthy eating suggest that healthy food alone is insufficient to show 'good mothering', time and effort in creating dishes from fresh ingredients from scratch, are required. These contribute to discourses favouring middle-class practices, where resources such as time and money are more readily available, further subordinating working class-mothers. I talked this through with my supervisor - her thoughts were that T could be depriving herself of nutritious food as a way of punishing herself for the fact that her children no longer live with her. This led to a useful discussion of what we pathologise as therapists, what we might understand as a cultural norm, and what we can attribute as belonging to the individual.

July 2019
I have really been enjoying reading about postfeminism. I feel like there is so much to explore in this area and it gives me a lot of work for future projects if I ever get around

to it. What is strange is that despite having the ‘lens removed’ from my eyes regarding the punishing standards I am expected to achieve as a woman and as a mother, this does nothing to diminish my feelings that 1) I want to meet them, and 2) Any inability to meet these gruelling standards is still constructed as a personal failing on my behalf. I cannot believe that second wave feminists would have recognised the oppression that the patriarchal institution of marriage inflicted upon them but wanted it more than ever. I have noticed that in order to give an appearance of ‘perfection’ there are certain elements I will relax but not others - and these relate to visibility. For example, If I ever post a picture that features my home on social media, it will look perfect but out of shot it will be chaos. I am even aware that there is a high probability that most mothers on Instagram ‘fake’ there pictures to show a perfectly curated world yet I still constantly buy into the myth day dreaming about how wonderful their life must be. Such a clear demonstration of Foucault’s internalization of authority.