

PROJECT 3 - THE DYNAMICS OF MOTHERHOOD: AN INTERGENERATIONAL PROJECT

The Making of Modern Motherhood study began in 2005, and involved 62 interviews with a diverse group of expectant first time mothers, from which 12 family case studies were developed involving interviews with grandmothers, significant others and revisiting the mother after birth.

During the Dynamics of Motherhood phase of the research, researchers followed 6 of their case study families over time, using a range of innovative methods to explore the subtle ways in which family values repeat and roles shift.

The methods used in the Dynamics of Motherhood included:

A 'day in a life' observation.

Here researchers shadowed the mother as she went about a 'typical' day.

Object based interviews:

During interviews with grandmothers, they were invited to bring and discuss two objects, one representing their past and the other their present lives/futures.

Workbook interviews:

For the final encounter with the mothers a workbook was created into which images and extracts from previous interviews or observations were organised under different headings.

The workbooks capture a sense of both change and continuity over time, and allow the participant to see the perspective made possible by longitudinal research.



TIMELINE OF A MOTHER'S REFLECTIONS AND FEELINGS ON CHILDCARE



SEPT 2005

EIGHT MONTHS PREGNANT WITH FIRST CHILD

"If we can afford it, you know, I'd love it if he wanted to stay at home and, you know, be a full-time dad for a year or two, or whatever.

No I can't say I know whether it's better to be in a nursery or to be with a childminder, um I haven't really got views on that yet.

People at my – some of the people at my antenatal class, who were saying, "Oh I can't wait for my life to get back to normal" – and we're both saying, "Well we really want to have a big change, we want a change in our lives, and we want a completely different focus."

NOVEMBER 2006

RECENTLY BACK AT WORK AFTER 12 MONTHS MATERNITY LEAVE

"I just couldn't imagine being at work either, when you're immersed in something that's how I felt just totally immersed in it. As if I just, then to picture myself standing in an office and having meetings and stuff I just couldn't even comprehend it at the time.

I'm leaving him with his dad and as the weeks and months have gone on that he's been with his dad I'm just really happy about that. You know and it feels like a really good arrangement because like in the mornings if he's awake, I can have a cuddle with him, he's in his pyjamas playing on the bed, if he's not awake then obviously I don't see him in the mornings but at least I know he's with his dad he's comfortable in bed, it's not as if I have to get him dressed, take him round."

RESEARCH TEAM

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MONICA FORTUNE'S WORKBOOK

The extracts from Monica's workbook trace her feelings and practices in relation to childcare, from before she gave birth in 2005 to her reflections on the workbook in 2009 while on maternity leave with a second baby.

HOW MONICA REACTS TO SEEING THESE FRAGMENTS FROM HER PAST?

Monica and her partner have still not used paid childcare, and Monica still has no proper opinion on it. However in June 2008 when they realised that she was pregnant for the second time, they were planning to put Lucien into nursery. This is a plan and a version that she has now completely forgotten about. She reflects on how invigorating the practical challenge of having the 2 children is and how it forces you to make it up as you go along.

At the time of the 2009 interview, Monica was on maternity leave, from a secondment. The big disappointment for her was not getting the permanent job at the secondment, which she really liked and much prefers to the job that she will have to go back to. This was a big blow, the first time that she has failed an interview. The interview was on her final day before she left for maternity leave and she was too stressed and wanted it too much. Now being philosophical she believes that it makes something else possible – noting the value of not being completely in control.

Her husband Jamie was now in work full time, and she was at home for a year on maternity leave. She commented that the way that they have shared childcare is ideal, but that she gets the toughest part as she has the first shift, when the learning curve is at its steepest, and the chaos most intense. Their aim is to both work 3 days a week and to have 1 day overlap. There was also an interesting discussion about how they help each other in their parenting. For example, on holiday Jamie will watch her and give feedback on how she can get out of the trap of shouting at Lucien.

JUNE 2008: DAY IN A LIFE OBSERVATION

Jamie, Monica's husband, was planning to go back to work in October 2008, which left them with 2 months without childcare. The plan was for Lucien to have 2 days in nursery and then they would share the other 3 days childcare between them. During the interview we talked about work and about how it had been with Jamie looking after Lucien. Monica worried that Jamie did not like mixing and so spent most of his time at home with Lucien. She would have liked him to go to play groups but he was resistant. She worried that she did not have the time or energy to do all the work necessary to find out what was on and to become part of the networks. She felt that Lucien needed friends, yet she also worried about him having to negotiate new settings – something she felt was a 'projection' of her own, having struggled with all the moves that she had to make during her childhood. Jamie did not worry about these things and so she felt that he was probably better at being at home than she would have been.

