Constructions of 'Gendered Agency': Perspectives from a Multi-ethnic Sure Start Programme

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Abstract

Theorists such as Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim have presented an 'individualisation thesis' which states that in our 'de-traditionalised', globalised world of late modernity, identities are now fluid and individual trajectories no longer fixed; as 'reflexive agents', we must choose from an array of lifestyles and assemble our own 'life projects'. This emphasis on active agency is reflected in constructions of welfare users in 'Third Way' and New Labour policy in the UK. Policy discourses depict welfare agents as aspirational and responsible decision-makers, simultaneously downplaying structural differences and presenting 'families' and 'communities' as consensual and motivated by shared interests. Sure Start, an area-based New Labour programme for families with young children can be seen as exemplifying many of these characteristics, and can be viewed also as a 'Third Way' initiative, reflecting in particular, a focus on a 'social investment' perspective.

This thesis, based on a study of a Sure Start programme in the multi-ethnic area of Brambleton, considers the extent to which policy and theoretical assumptions about parental agency are reflected in constructions of mothers and professionals. The qualitative case study approach emphasises the contextualisation of findings in 'time' and 'place', in particular depicting Brambleton as a 'racialised space' through which understandings of 'need' and agency are constructed. It explores the social processes through which mothers are able to act in the family, the community and within the Sure Start programme. This is done using an epistemology which combines both constructivism and phenomenology and a theoretical framework that incorporates aspects of Bourdieu's 'theory of practice'. The methodology used includes a focus on the life stories of white and Pakistani mothers, interviews with professionals and a narrative approach to analysis.

Research findings suggest that agency should be understood as shaped by identity within the family and through cultural practices. In addition and in a reflection of this, they point to the differential access to and impacts of Sure Start use for white and Pakistani-origin mothers in Brambleton in this period, highlighting the varied 'rationalities for action' that welfare users have. These findings have significant implications both for theoretical models of agency and for policy, in particular, suggesting that policy needs to incorporate a more nuanced understanding of human agency which prioritises a recognition of difference and constraint.

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Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

1.1 Identifying the research problem

The Sure Start programme was announced as part of Labour's Comprehensive Spending Review in 1998 and the programme implemented from 1999. Brambleton Sure Start was a 'fourth wave' programme established in Autumn 2001.

A year later, in October 2002, I accepted a studentship at Brambleton Sure Start that was partly funded by the programme in conjunction with Sheffield Hallam University. It was agreed by both parties that the research that I was to conduct would examine an aspect of parental engagement. I began to familiarise myself with the workings of the programme, to observe some group activities and meetings and to conduct initial interviews with a small number of staff, and in parallel, to get to grips with the policy programme itself through its 'discourses', evident in objectives, targets and guidelines.

During this process, I very quickly became aware of the highly 'racialised' and gendered character of the multi-ethnic area of Brambleton. I also became increasingly curious about a gap between 'Third Way' and New Labour rhetoric and programme discourses of parents as active, purposeful and aspirational - particularly given developments in the Sure Start policy area in this period - and the way that the capacity of local parents, primarily but not entirely mothers of Pakistani-origin, was described. While a level of diversity within this group of mothers was generally acknowledged, a significant number within their midst, including many who had come to the UK to marry British-born Pakistani men, were seen to be restricted in their choices by their families and sometimes to be actively prevented from using services, including those delivered by Sure Start.

Given this apparent paradox between conceptions of parents within Sure Start policy and those promoted by professionals in Brambleton, I decided to construct a research focus around the agency of mothers. This would entail analysis at three levels that included the assumptions within policy discourses and those evident in the perspectives

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of local professionals and parents. I would contextualise empirical findings using Third Way and New Labour policy discourses as well as perspectives from individualisation theorists - such as Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck - about 'reflexive agency'. I decided that the study would address two central research questions. The first concerned how agency was constructed in theory, discourses and 'on the ground' and asked *'to what extent do policy and theoretical assumptions about the agency of parents reflect constructions of parents and professionals?'* With this focus, I would explore understandings about agency drawing on the life stories of a sample of white and Asian mothers, as well as their perceptions and uses of the Sure Start programme. In addition, in order to provide a further dimension to the case study, I would also examine aspects of the implementation of the programme from the perspectives of professionals. Using this approach, I aimed to answer the second main research question which was to identify *'what the findings added to understandings about Third Way and social investment policy and to theoretical understandings of agency'.*

1.2 Outline of the thesis

The empirical research is contextualised within Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 locates Sure Start in its policy settings while Chapter 3 constructs a conceptual framework for the research. There was little existing research evidence from other studies at this point about Sure Start implementation, its impacts or the ways that parents were engaging with the programme (although some early local findings had begun to appear in health journals and were emerging from the National Evaluation of Sure Start, NESS[1]). Relevant literature relating to early evidence from the relatively new Sure Start programme and to other key elements of the study is incorporated into both of these two chapters.

Chapter 2 locates the key policy areas and discourses of Sure Start. Of primary importance for the thesis is the identification of Sure Start as part of a Third Way framework which includes a 'social investment' dimension. This notion of social investment is characterised by the linking of social and economic goals, the

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[1] Based at the Institute for the Study of Children, Family and Social Issues, Birkbeck, University of London, and led by Professor Edward Melhuish.

development of human capital, and by a focus on children as 'emblems of the future'. In this chapter I also explore other important, related policy areas, the moral agency given to 'family' and 'community' and the translation of this into new policy and legislation. Given the multi-ethnic characteristics of the population of my case study area, in this chapter, I also examine New Labour's approach to 'gender', 'ethnicity' and to 'difference', identifying tensions between a greater recognition of 'diversity' which runs alongside the attempts to develop shared, national values and new citizenship identities based on 'family' and community'.

Conceptions of agency within policy discourses and those advocated by individualisation theorists form the basis of Chapter 3, which provides a conceptual framework for the thesis. The chapter begins by considering theoretical perspectives on increasing individualisation, including those of Giddens and Beck, evident in greater mobility and autonomy, and the decline of gendered and other power relationships which have been premised on the notion of 'post-traditionalism'. The chapter then examines how the policy area of parenting is conceptualised within New Labour discourses, including in the objectives, targets and guidelines of Sure Start itself. In the second section of the chapter, key, overlapping themes stemming from these theoretical and policy assumptions suggest important conceptual questions for the study. In the first of these, contesting the premise of 'post-traditionalism', an important objective of the study is identified as the exploration of the agency of parents as shaped by their family lives and histories, using concepts of 'autonomy', and of 'relational' and 'collective' agency'. In addition, as part of this of an exploration of agency, important conceptual insights from recent study of 'culture', 'identity' and 'gender' are highlighted. In a second key area, assumptions about narrowly-defined 'rationalities' as the drivers of action in policies and theory are problematised as a basis for analysis in the context of this research. Within this theme also, a short summary is provided of Bourdieu's 'logic of practice' which I came to see as contributing a useful perspective to my evolving analytical framework.

Chapter 4 provides a reflexive account of the methodology used in the research. Reflecting the case study approach, the empirical work in this qualitative, inductive study brings together observation and interviews with parents and professionals. A life

story approach which enables an understanding of the connections between the biographical and social history of individuals is described as part of the focus on agency, reflected too in a narrative method of analysis which was adopted as the study progressed. The basis of the study was an epistemology which incorporated social constructionist and phenomenological perspectives, enabling the understanding of how identities are discursively formed and simultaneously accepting a 'reality' of 'lived experience'. The reflexive character of the study is embodied, in various ways, for example, by a discussion of the impact of my relationship with Brambleton Sure Start staff on the shaping of the research, and by a detailed consideration of interactions with participants, including issues arising from my role as a white researcher working with Asian parents.

Chapter 5 explores the construction of identity and agency within the family and represents the first empirical chapter within the thesis. The chapter directly addresses the ontological basis of the study which is that agency is integrally shaped by the contexts within which we live and the norms learned in childhood and families. The focus of the chapter is largely on the life stories of a sub-set of Asian mothers in the wider sample of parents and explores the following conceptual questions: *What is the impact of 'tradition' ('religious' and 'cultural practices') on life stories? How have individual and collective goals been reconciled? How can 'autonomy' be understood in this context? What is the relevance of concepts of 'relational' and 'collective' agency? What do life stories tell us about 'identity'? What do life stories tell us about how change occurs for individuals?* These questions are addressed in sections which explore the role of the daughter in traditional family life, post-school trajectories for Asian and other women in the sample and an analysis of the 'stirrings of change' in this community. Key findings from the chapter concern the level of continued family imposition on daughters, leading to the use of the concept of 'constrained agency', and evidence of gradual change revealed through an analysis of the nuanced interplays of agency and structure.

Chapter 6, which is centrally concerned with the 'policy story' of Brambleton Sure Start, explores professional understandings of the 'social investment' needs of the area. Here, the social policy story of the design and implementation of Brambleton Sure Start

during the period of the fieldwork is told. Emphasising a premise of the case study approach which is the need to recognise the research findings as connected integrally with contexts of 'time' and 'place', the following questions are explored: *How did professionals construct the area, its residents and the needs of parents? What was the relationship between conceptualisations of the area and its parent groups and the Sure Start programme? How did staff see the relevance of the (developing) policy agenda in terms of local parents?* The sections through which these questions are addressed include conceptualising Brambleton, understanding the needs for a Sure Start programme and reflections on policy change. Key findings addressed the evidence of a narrow association of 'need' for services with those of Pakistani-origin, and the concerns about the perceived direction of Sure Start policy which arose from a view of the constrained agency of this parent group.

Chapter 7 which explores the experiences of Brambleton Sure Start users again returns to the theme of social investment, but from the perspective largely of parents. Here, in sections that examine conceptualisations of core Sure Start services and parental involvement forums, the following conceptual questions are addressed: *What were mothers' understandings of the purposes of Sure Start? In what ways did they use services? How could their motivations and decision-making about services be understood? What were the meanings given by 'activists' (those involved in parental involvement forums) and 'non-activists' to 'parental involvement' or non-involvement? How were the processes and outcomes of parental involvement understood by staff and parents?* Among the key findings reported in this chapter were that most parents did not construct themselves as the active and aspirational agents of policy discourses. Another important finding from this chapter was the evidence of significant differences in the experiences and outcomes for 'activist' (almost all white) and 'non-activist' (Pakistani-origin) Brambleton mothers.

In Chapter 8, the conclusions to the thesis are presented. This chapter addresses both central research questions and the subsidiary conceptual questions emerging from the framework developed in Chapter 3, highlighting key findings and reviewing their implications both for policy and for theory. In the first two sections of the chapter a discussion is provided which centres on the two themes brought together in the study:

the constructions of agency as 'constrained' through its mediation in the family and understandings and uses of Sure Start, as shaped in part by this process. The implications of these findings for a policy discourse which 'flattens out' structural differences and downplays the diversity of family life, and which in recent years has attempted to shift understandings of social citizenship are considered. Key conclusions also concern the continuing place of 'tradition' in communities and the need for social policy to recognise the different rationalities which shape the agency of welfare users. In a final section, the chapter reflects on theoretical, epistemological and methodological issues raised in the course of carrying out this study, including the interesting possibilities it has highlighted for further research to be conducted in this area.

2. Locating the Sure Start programme in the discourses of New Labour

2.1 Introduction

This chapter has two objectives, to identify key Sure Start policy agendas and discourses and to examine the treatment in policy of 'ethnicity' and 'gender'. The understanding, treatment and therefore the epistemological implications of 'discourse' for this study is addressed again in Chapter 4. Following Foucault (in Mills, 2003, p. 54) discourse is seen here both broadly, as a 'regulated set of statements which combine with others in predictable ways' and as structuring the way that we perceive reality (ibid, p. 55).

After a brief description of the origins of Sure Start, the main agendas in which the programme can be located are examined. These promote particular understandings of parental agency that inform the conceptual framework (developed in Chapter 3) and that are explored through the empirical research. New Labour's social policy is characterised by tensions and contradictions, but also by certain consistent themes. It is argued that Sure Start can be located within three broad, interconnected agendas: firstly, a focus on the child and on human capital as part of a Third Way Social Investment perspective, secondly, a preoccupation with 'family', and thirdly, with 'community'. These are recurrent themes across policy areas, also deriving from Third Way approaches and from new Communitarian ideas.

In the second part of the chapter, guided by a recognition of the case study locality as a highly 'gendered' and 'racialised' space, the policy treatment of two overarching themes, 'ethnicity' and 'gender' is examined. Consideration of the treatment of 'difference' in Sure Start and wider policy discourse is very important as part of an approach, which, following Pawson and Tilley's (1997) CMO (Context, Mechanism, Outcome) model, identifies that outcomes are integrally related to the particularities of both the contexts and the mechanisms that are applied.

2.1.1 The origins of Sure Start

The Sure Start programme was announced in July 1998 as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. One of the six cross-cutting reviews included in this addressed services for young children and incorporated evidence from research, an innovation for social policy at this time (Melhuish, 2007). This was research primarily from the United States of America (USA) which included evidence from randomised control trials (e.g. in Ramey & Campbell, 1991; Schweinhart et al, 1993) and quasi-experimental studies of early intervention. The review also highlighted evidence that the earlier interventions took place, the greater the likelihood that future problems could be averted. It suggested too that the unevenness and lack of co-ordination of current services, a focus on older rather than younger children and the variability in quality reinforced the need for joint planning by relevant agencies (HM Treasury, 1998).

After the Sure Start programme had been announced, £542 million became available over a three-year period, with most of the funding to be used in England. The programmes were to be targeted at the 20% most deprived areas; two hundred and fifty programmes were planned for 2001-2, with each intended to support about 400-800 under four year olds. Brambleton Sure Start was part of the fourth wave of programmes.

The Sure Start Unit (SSU) responsible for administering the programme was a cross-departmental initiative run by a steering group. The level of the inter-departmental co-operation involved would not have been possible without the influence of the Treasury (Melhuish, 2007). Designated by the Treasury as a Public Service Agreement, there was emphasis on measurable outcomes, with targets set for each objective (Moss, 2000). The Treasury also used its influence to insist upon a rigorous evaluation and in 2001 the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) was commissioned to undertake a multi-stranded evaluation of Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) which included a investigation of the communities in which SSLPs were situated as well as process, impact and cost-effectiveness studies. This evaluation as well as the early decision to base the programme itself on research evidence could be seen as part of New Labour pragmatism and its managerialist emphasis on 'what works' (Lister, 2001).

SSLPs were to deliver a number of core services - outreach and home visiting; support for families and parents; support for good quality play; learning and childcare experiences for children; primary and community health care and advice about child health and development and family health; and support for children with special needs. Within this context however, guided by partnerships of local stakeholders which included parents, programmes would have autonomy in terms of the model within which services would be delivered. Sure Start was also envisaged as having a strong community development dimension.

2.2   The agendas of Sure Start

2.2.1 Poverty, social exclusion and New Labour

Tony Blair's (1999) pledge to abolish child poverty marked a departure for New Labour, which until that point had talked almost entirely about social exclusion (Deacon, 2000). Although the Third Way emphasis within New Labour politics has overall given greater weight to providing opportunities than material resources or benefits, tapping into a discourse of social exclusion rather than poverty, re-distribution has played an important role in policy. Writing in 2002, Goldson pointed out that there were thought to be at least 50 different funding streams associated with anti-poverty schemes. Sure Start fitted clearly into this agenda, speaking, as Moss (2000, p. 75) has said, 'of an administration prepared to recognise poverty as a legitimate and major issue for social policy'. This was particularly evident in the dynamic role of the Treasury (and the personal commitment of then Chancellor, Gordon Brown) in relation to Sure Start and other anti-poverty initiatives.

In New Labour's first administration, there was welcome support for Blair's pledge to end child poverty and also, in the first few years, acknowledgement of a degree of progress, albeit significantly less than anticipated by the Government (Piachaud and Sutherland, 2001). There was also widespread support for Sure Start itself among those who were often critical overall of New Labour's social policy. Moss (2000) for example, welcomed the importance in the Sure Start programme on the 'community in need', a

contrast with the individualist Children Act (1989) which emphasised instead, the 'child in need'.

However, despite the level of investment and the multitude of new initiatives, many difficulties were also described. Coverage of poorer children was limited and it was also felt to be problematic that fixed-term funding formulae applied to most of these projects, with clear restrictions on the ability to plan much-needed longer-term support (Goldson, 2002). Sure Start, planned as a ten-year programme, in fact represented an exception to this. In addition, many practitioners delivering the government's social justice agenda for children were overwhelmed by the number of new initiatives emerging and by the difficulties in co-ordinating them, particularly in the context of a swiftly changing policy agenda (Community Care, 2003).

Various factors including an unwillingness to recognise the importance of persistent structural inequalities and related, ongoing attempts to retain the electoral support of 'Middle England', led, arguably, to an ambivalence in wholeheartedly embracing an anti-poverty agenda (beyond the poverty of children) despite claims to a social justice commitment (Lister, 2001). Instead New Labour has ostensibly preferred to emphasise what it sees as the problems caused by social exclusion. While poverty is usually narrowly equated with inadequate income, to be addressed traditionally by redistribution, in the discourse of social exclusion, poverty or income deficit is seen as one effect among others, with the emphasis being on exclusion from participation in a number of spheres, including the economic, social and political (Percy-Smith, 2000). Giddens (1998) used the term to suggest a detachment, both of the 'rich' and the 'poor', from the mainstream, where the focus of New Labour has been largely upon the poor (Ellison and Ellison, 2006). Narratives of social exclusion and the welfare discourses accompanying them, shaped by Third Way ideas and new Communitarian philosophy, have also contained understandings that those who are 'excluded' have agency and can use welfare services to ameliorate their circumstances.

2.2.2 The 'Third Way'

In 1997, Tony Blair described the aim of the Third Way as to marry 'an open, competitive and successful economy with a just, decent and humane society' (Blair 1997, cited in Driver & Martell 2000, p. 148). For Driver and Martell:

> Third way thinking supports the view that globalisation brings with it greater risk and insecurity and that the role of policy makers is not to shield individuals from them but to provide the 'social capital' and 'proactive welfare states' which enable them to respond to them and prosper in the global age .... Government promotes economic growth by creating stable macro-economic conditions; and its supply-side social interventions enhance individual opportunity (social justice) and increase non-inflationary growth, which together bring greater social cohesion by reducing social exclusion (Driver & Martell, 2000, p. 150).

Many writers have attempted to define the Third Way (see Deacon, 2000; Powell, 2000), with Driver and Martell (2002) identifying the term as 'one of a number of attempts by modernizers to find a label to capture New Labour politics and New Labour itself' (p. 78). Driver and Martell (2000) also point to the four Third Way values identified by Blair himself in a pamphlet for the Fabian Society (1998) - 'equal worth', 'opportunity for all', 'responsibility' and 'community'. These describe the role of the state to provide equality of opportunities rather than outcomes, an interest in how opportunities are offered and taken up, and the mechanisms through which this occurs. These features - the redistribution of opportunities, an emphasis on responsibilities alongside rights, and the moral role of families and communities in society (and see below p. 17) - encapsulate key elements of the Sure Start programme. They also shape how notions of human agency have been constructed within government welfare discourses, forming part of the basis of the conceptual framework for this study which is further examined in Chapter 3.

It is perhaps most useful to envisage the Third Way as a broad framework within which social policy has been designed and implemented - one which has certain unifying values, features and even policy tools and instruments, rather than a narrow ideological ('Right' or 'Left') base. Here Powell has identified *dimensions* of the Third Way, which can be compared with those of the Old Left and New Right.

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Table 1:   Dimensions of the Third Way

Dimension	Old Left	Third Way	New Right
Approach	Leveller	Investor	Deregulator
Outcome	Equality	Inclusion	Inequality
Citizenship	Rights	Both	Responsibilities
Mixed economy of welfare	State	Public/private civil society	Private
Mode	Command and control	Co-operation/ partnership	Competition
Accountability	Central state/upwards/ National	Both?	Market/downwards/ local
Social expenditure	High	Pragmatic	Low

Source: Powell, 2000 p. 42

2.2.3 Sure Start and the 'social investment' perspective

The guideline is investment in human capital wherever possible, rather than the direct provision of economic maintenance. In place of the welfare state we should put the social investment state, operating in the context of a positive welfare society (Giddens, 1998, p. 117, emphasis in original).

[The social investment perspective] frames social policy expenditures as investments rather than expenditures, forecasting future dividends from spending now, and describes social policy as supporting larger objectives – namely, propelling economies into the 21st century, and positioning states as innovative and competitive players in the global marketplace. The claim is that good economic outcomes depend on good social policy. The core concern is creating incentives for most adults to enter the labour market. Income supplements, particularly those that make work pay - popular and described as 'investments' [and] less costly than social assistance payments, also foster a culture of inclusion and break the cycle of poverty. At the same time, however, the social investment perspective makes individuals responsible for 'investing in themselves' and their children (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2005, p. 203).

In locating Sure Start as a Third Way initiative in this study, the most important of Powell's 'dimensions' above is that of the Investor State. The quotations above encapsulate the key components of the social investment perspective: the overarching economic goals of the state and the linking of these to social goals, the centrality of work, the framing of expenditures as future-orientated investment, the focus in policy on human capital and on the responsibility of individuals. In Giddens' interpretation of the 'Third Way', a social investment state *replaces* the welfare state:

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'The guideline is investment in *human capital* wherever possible, rather than the direct provision of economic maintenance. In place of the welfare state we should put the *social investment state*, operating in the context of a postive welfare society' (1998, p. 117).

Giddens' notion of the replacement of the welfare state by the social investment state above, suggests a transformation in understandings of social citizenship, and reflects the shift from a 'passive' to an 'active' welfare society described by Walters (1997) (and see Chapter 3 for more about 'positive welfare'). This social investment perspective has been identified by Giddens as integral to Third Way politics and its origins traced (for example, by Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2005) to the mid-1990s, particularly to the work of The Commission for Social Justice in the UK which reported in 1994 and to an OECD (1996) conference 'Beyond 2000: The new social policy agenda'.

New Labour's emphasis on social investment is often attributed to the work of the Commission on Social Justice. The remit of the Commission that was set up by then Labour Leader of the Opposition, John Smith, in 1992, which included input from academic institutions and from religious and campaigning organisations was to undertake an independent review into social and economic policy. Although Tony Blair (then an MP) is cited on the cover of the report as describing the work of the Commission as 'essential reading for everyone who wants a new way forward for our country', as Prime Minister, he rarely acknowledged any particular debt to it (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2005).

In the Commission's report, the requirement for a 'new direction for the country' is described. The direction proposed by the Commission, the 'Investor's Britain', is compared with the 'Deregulator's Britain' (associated with the New Right) and with the 'Leveller's Britain' (associated with the Old Left). The Investor's Britain seeks to combine 'the ethics of community with the dynamics of a market economy' (Commission on Social Justice, 1994, p. 95). Where a 'Deregulator's Britain' is associated with dynamic entrepreneurialism, relentless competitiveness 'through ever-cheaper production' and with reduction of public services, a 'Leveller's Britain' is linked to the distribution of wealth but not its production, with social justice obtained through the benefits system (pp. 96-97). The report claims that an Investor's Britain

will ensure social justice as well as economic prosperity, as 'security' is deemed to be the 'foundation of change' (p. 95). While Levellers are also interested in '*security* but seek to achieve it primarily through the redistribution of income, both positions diverge from that of the Deregulators who regard *insecurity* as the 'spur to change' (ibid, p. 95, emphasis in original).

The focus of the investment proposed by the Commission is upon the provision of individual opportunities for children and adults. The report of findings highlights policy strategies in the areas of skills development through lifelong learning, the importance of paid work, the building of an 'intelligent' welfare state, the development of 'responsibility' including through community regeneration and principles for improved taxation.

Examination of the development of the social investment perspective in the last decade has been carried out by a number of analysts with interest in children and early years policy. Dobrowolsky and Jenson have remarked that '... after more than eight years of Labour government, much of the social investment perspective has been institutionalised' (2005, p. 223), although in an apparent qualification of the 'certainty' of such claims, Lister has warned of the dangers of interpreting 'all policy developments in terms of the social investment template' (2003, p. 438). The state is not monolithic, and New Labour policy is contradictory, reflecting different traditions and influences. Not all policy shifts are reducible to this template, she notes, even if they are consistent with it. Given these qualifications, however, Lister has summarised the key features of the social investment state.

- Investment in human and social capital: children and community as emblems.
- Children prioritized as citizen-workers of the future.
- Future-focused.
- Redistribution of opportunity to promote social inclusion rather than of income to promote equality.
- Adaptation of individuals and society to enhance global competitiveness.
- Integration of social and economic policy, but with the latter still the 'handmaiden' of the former' (2003, p. 437).

In a social investment state, spending is selectively targeted towards health, education and children (Dobrowolsky and St-Martin, 2005). While not ignoring those deemed to be ('genuinely') in need, the imperative is to prevent exclusion, through promoting *educability* and *employability*. Alongside the promotion of a learning and skills agenda, there has been a major focus on paid work as the key route to inclusion; in the UK this has been evident in many initiatives such as the New Deals, designed to assist particular groups such as lone parents into employment, but also in a reframing of social policy on various levels towards employment – for example, tax credits providing incentives to low-earning families, and the shift of the Department of Social Security (DSS) to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in 2001. These developments - and others in other policy areas - incorporate Third Way assumptions about welfare users as 'responsibilised' agents (Rose, 2001) who are willing or if unwilling, can be persuaded or coerced, into using welfare interventions to improve their circumstances.

The unprecedented investment in children and young people from 1997 seems to represent a major underscoring of the commitment to a social investment perspective. Specific economic initiatives in this area for example, are in part re-distributive, in part Third Way 'incentivising' - the increase in child benefit an example of the former, tax credits and the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) (introduced in 2004), the latter. Some of the other developments such as the focus on Looked After Children (LAC) in 'Quality Protects' and in legislation addressing education and other areas (DfES, 2000; DfES, 2004) grounded in evidence that this group are less likely to continue in education, more likely to be unemployed, to experience teenage pregnancy, to become involved in anti-social behaviour and criminality etc (Chase et al, 2006) also reflect broader social exclusion discourses about the severe penalties resulting from non-participation in education and the paid labour market (PLM).

In addition, reflecting Dobrowolsky and Jenson's (2005) claim above that the social investment perspective has become 'institutionalised' in the UK, fundamental changes in *how* policy for children and young people is designed, connected inextricably with the *mechanisms* through which such policy and services are delivered, have taken place. This is seen in a transformation of national and local institutions. At the level of government, this is seen in initiatives such as the National Service Framework for

Children, Young People and Maternity Services (Department of Health, 2004) and in the development of childcare as a major policy area in a range of childcare policy and strategy which includes the Extended Schools agenda (HM Treasury, 2004; Office of Public Sector Information, 2006; 4Children, 2007). The transformation of the policy area is encapsulated by the institutional changes introduced in the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003b) which has been described by Fiona Williams (2004, p. 406) as the 'biggest shake up of statutory children's services since the Seebohm Report of the 1960s'. The Green Paper introduced a new Directorate for Children, Young People and Families, to be based in the DfES, with a full-time Minister and a Children's Services Commissioner, as well as the 'five outcomes' framework which was to apply across national and local policies for children. At the local level, the Green Paper brought about the radical integration of local authority and other services for children, as well as the requirement for local plans; these developments reflected the need for 'joined up', multi-disciplinary working which had prompted the Green Paper following the death of Victoria Climbie.

Saint-Martin (2000, cited in Dobrowolsky and Jenson 2005, p. 205) has said that 'in ideational terms, children matter because human capital matters'. As Lister illustrates (2006), investment in the child as 'future citizen-worker' and as 'emblem of the future' in her terms is repeatedly demonstrated in the language used, for example in childcare policy:

> It is in the nation's social and economic interests that children get a good start in life for children are the citizens, workers, parents and leaders of the future (HM Treasury, 2004, para 2.11).

While it is acknowledged that there exist other interpretations of the interest in this policy area which can be put forward *alongside* the social investment perspective, and also that the level itself of the funding involved allows possibilities for other kinds of actions and developments, there is a pessimism about this representation of the child as potential adult or as 'becoming' rather than 'being' (Fawcett et al, 2004, p. 17). As Lister (2006) points out:

> ... paradoxically, the iconization of the child in the "social investment state" has involved the partial eclipse of *childhood* and the child *qua* child (p. 321, emphasis in original).

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From its introduction Sure Start has been centrally about the development of human capital in children, with a focus on preparing the child for school.

> [The aim of Sure Start is] to work with parents-to-be, parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of babies and young children - particularly those who are disadvantaged - so that they can flourish at home and when they get to school, and thereby break the cycle of disadvantage for the current generation of young children (DfES, 2002, p. 3).

Early descriptions of the programme, for example in political speeches, repeatedly emphasised its focus on joined up services for family support and on community empowerment, and the role of Sure Start to 'meet the needs' of local parents has always been a part of its discourses. However, arguably a social investment perspective came increasingly to influence its direction, a shift that can be seen in a number of related developments. One of these, occurring in early 2003, came in the move of the programme from the complicated accountability to the Department of Health (DoH) and the then Department of Education and Employment (DfEE), to a new larger Sure Start unit incorporating early education, childcare and the local programmes. This was located between new Departments for Education and Skills (DfES) and Work and Pensions (DWP). This was paralleled by an amended aim for the unit as a whole to:

> *Increase the availability of childcare for all children*, and work with parents-to-be, parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of babies and young children – particularly those who are disadvantaged – so that they flourish at home and when they get to school, *enabling their parents to work and contributing to the ending of child poverty* (DfES, 2004, p. 21) (emphasis added, highlighting key changes).

This new emphasis within the Sure Start discourse, on paid work as a key way of resolving the problem of child poverty and on childcare as the means to facilitate this was also found in an additional objective, listed *above* the initial four - 'Improving the availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of childcare'. The purpose of these changes and the 're-balancing' of the Sure Start focus, were described by Naomi Eisenstadt, Director of the Sure Start Unit in April 2003.

> Sure Start has always been positioned within the child poverty strategy; however, our initial work was primarily about reducing the impact of poverty on children, rather than reducing the actual numbers of children living in poverty. This closer relationship with the DWP allows us to do both.

... Most of the families in touch with Sure Start programmes are living in poverty. Unemployment rates in Sure Start areas are high, and many children are living in households where no one works. Sure Start aims to stretch people's aspirations both in terms of what they want for their children and what they want for themselves. *By working with the community, building skills and self-esteem, Sure Start helps local parents become "work ready". Building confidence, taking up training, and particularly adult literacy, all build skills useful for parenting and for work. And good quality child care is essential to offering real choices in employment* (Eisenstadt, 2003, p. 26, emphasis added).

The Children's Centres initiative, introduced in the 2002 Interdepartmental Childcare Review (Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, 2002) and due to be implemented from 2006, was also the subject of critique. Although promoted as a way of mainstreaming and bringing the success of Sure Start to larger numbers of children, introduction of the initiative caused concern on various counts. Among other things there was disappointment that the promise of a ten-year Sure Start programme would not be kept, anxiety that incorporation of the Children's Centres into local authorities would threaten the strong parental involvement ethos of Sure Start, and concerns too that although the new Centres were expected to reach many more children, there would not be a proportionate increase in funding (Glass, 2005; The Guardian, 2005). Some were suspicious too, that the family support emphasis of Sure Start would be replaced by a stress on childcare for work, with Norman Glass, the Treasury Civil Servant and so-called 'architect of Sure Start', famously voicing his own fears that the programme would become a 'New Deal for Toddlers' (Glass, 2005)[2].

2.2.4 Sure Start, families and communities

I have argued that a social investment perspective increasingly shaped the Sure Start policy which was manifested in a notable shift in the focus of objectives and targets, and in the location of the programme itself in Government, as well as in the move towards Children's Centres. Highly important also in terms of this study has been the construction of families and communities in the Sure Start programme and in New Labour policy.

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[2] A recent letter in *The Guardian* concerning evidence about 'under-5s' failing to meet reading targets notes (ironically!) that 'These toddlers will be forming part of the nation's workforce and it is surely vital that their present sluggish academic progress be accelerated. Would it not be possible to extend the length of the pre-school day? It is worrying, too, to hear no mention of work experience in the Sure Start programme [...] (Charman, 2007)

Although 'family' and 'community' have different symbolic and explanatory meanings within Sure Start and other policy areas, there are also similarities in that they are both discursively addressed as *key mechanisms* through which agency is or should be exercised and through which potential exclusion is to be avoided.

In his Third Way thesis, Giddens identified that the 'overall aim of third way politics should be to help citizens pilot their way through the major revolutions of our time: globalisation, transformation in personal life and our relationship to nature' (1998, p. 64). The differences between the narratives developed by New Labour and by Giddens about families and – to a lesser extent - about communities are influenced by their attitudes towards social change. Whereas Giddens and other post-traditionalists are seen to be neutral, even positive, but essentially pragmatic for example, about changes in the family, New Labour appears to be more ambivalent (Deacon, 2000). New Labour's Third Way, as presented by Blair himself (1998), suggested that the family has been left unsupported through a period of sustained social change.

Part of the divergence between Blair and Giddens also concerns a difference in attitude towards individualism. For Giddens, growing individualism in society is seen as a symptom of post-traditional modernity that has led to greater choice, reflexivity and control (Deacon, 2000). Blair's attitude towards individualism is less clear. On the one hand, it has been argued that the individualised model of 'rational, economic man' and 'his close relative the "rational legal subject" who makes individualistic, cost-benefit type decisions about how to maximise their own personal gain' is a predominant theme in New Labour social policy (Duncan, 2000, p. 1). Blair's Third Way thesis (1998) also acknowledges aspects of social change, such as greater equality between women and men which reflect aspects of Giddens' (1998) 'democratic family'. However, alongside this, the idea that a greater emphasis on the values of family and community is needed to offset the harsh individualism seen to be the legacy of Thatcherism (in which the market was 'king' and there was 'no such thing as society') has led arguably to a new Communitarian-inspired social moralism (Etzioni, 1993), particularly associated with Blair himself, that has shaped the range of policy aimed at eradicating social exclusion and cementing social cohesion. This moralism, characterised by a profound concern

about an assumed degeneration of poor families and communities and the implications of this for social exclusion, is reflected in a narrative that seeks to *re-moralise families and communities.*

A range of new Communitarian thinkers are identified as influences upon New Labour (see Driver and Martell, 1997, p. 28) and Giddens' own (1998) text, *The Third Way - The Renewal of Social Democracy*, provides an important link between new Communitarian philosophy and New Labour policy. Blair himself identified the strong influence of Scottish Christian socialist philosopher, John Macmurray on his thinking, although commentators such as Sarah Hale (2002, 2006) dispute the similarities between their 'communitarian' visions.

A new Communitarian dimension of New Labour policy has most frequently been identified with the work of Israeli-American, Amitai Etzioni. A founder of the Communitarian Network, and the journal *Responsive Community: Rights and Responsibilities*, (new) Communitarianism is seen as a 'movement' which readers are entreated to join (1993, p. 18).

Ideas of 'old Communitarianism', Etzioni says, can be found in the work of many earlier thinkers (he lists Aristotle's exploration of life in the small city and the large metropolis, the Old and New Testaments and the work of sociologists such as Tonnies and Talcott Parsons (Etzioni, 1998, p. ix). New Communitarianism has as its rationale, the belief that, as a result of 1960s Liberalism and the reaction of the Thatcher-Reagan period, social values had lost their meaning (Heron, 2001). New Communitarians – like their earlier counterparts (above) – are also interested in social forces, community, and social bonds, but seek in addition to explore and critique the balance between social forces and the person, between community and autonomy, between the common good and liberty, between individual rights and social responsibilities. Etzioni is concerned with the 'social deficit' in society which has led to an increase in crime and disorder, to the weakening of the family, and to the loss more broadly of moral values. Although, as Heron points out (2001, p. 65), the new Communitarian rhetoric stresses the importance of finding a balance between rights and responsibilities, in practice, the emphasis of

Etzioni and others is on responsibility and on exploring how it can be instilled through a restored, reinvigorated 'community'.

Although Etzioni is clear to refute accusations that new Communitarians wish for a return to the traditional values of the 1950s (1993, p. 25), a moral voice of community and family which will nurture stronger social controls and support structures is at the centre of this analysis. Etzioni's 'moral voice' of community will over-ride self-interest (or bigoted actions such as racial hatred) and provide the 'social glue' that maintains order. The role of community in re-establishing civic institutions and the emphasis on voluntary work as part of mutualism are part of this. Within this analysis, the importance of the community is far greater than that of the state, upon which a minimal dependency is expected. In terms of the family specifically, Amitai Etzioni's description of 'making a child' as a 'moral act' (Etzioni, 1993, p. 54) characterises his position. In his view, a parenting deficit has become commonplace. Arising from the prioritization of parental needs for employment and self-fulfilment, this has led to a failure to provide the commitment and attention that children need and to their institutionalization through childcare (1993).

(Early) intervention in the family

The 'moralism' that has been described was apparent in the focus and mechanisms of intervention, as well as in the discursive treatment of the family. Interest in the family was evident early in New Labour's first administration, with the introduction of the Consultation Paper *Supporting Families*, in November 1998. The Consultation Paper made proposals in a number of areas: support and advice for parents; improved financial support; support for a better home/work balance; strengthening marriage; and addressing the problems of family life. However, despite expressing the need to approach the family with 'humility' (Home Office, 1998, p. 3), it can be argued that New Labour has intervened more directly than previous governments and moreover, changed both the conceptualisation of the family in policy and perceptions of appropriate forms of intervention.

Examining the discourse of *Supporting Families,* Val Gillies (2005) noted that parenthood has been constructed not as an 'intimate relationship' but as a set of

competences and as a vehicle of social cohesion, echoing comments made by Norman Fairclough that the family was represented by Blair as a 'sort of public space ... through a discourse that is more usually applied to public institutions such as schools' (2000, p. 43).

> ... much of the support discussed centres around making all parents into 'good' parents *through a process of re-education*. Although the suggested measures are presented as a neutral attempt to promote families and benefit children, the document is structured around a distinct, value-laden vision of how responsible, competent parents should behave. The term 'parenting support', in particular, describes the method by which parents are encouraged to reflect on and regulate their performance, through reference to 'expert' advice and training (Gillies, 2005, p. 77, emphasis added).

The term 'support' for parents, as Gillies says, traditionally used to signify material benefits or services, is directed towards the moral obligation to work and avoid child poverty, but is also now linked to 'empowerment' or empowerment to be good parents. This emphasis upon re-education is also addressed by Sharon Gerwitz (2001) writing about the schools context, who identifies New Labour's attempts to 're-socialise' working class parents by giving them the values and facilitating the behaviours of middle class parents.

As indicated earlier, the provision of opportunities is an important Third Way value but these are 'opportunities to do the right thing' in Heron and Dwyer's (1999) words. Although the equation of 'responsible' behaviour with welfare entitlement has always been a rationale of the Welfare State (and see Flint, in press, on previous historical precedents), the current emphasis on conditionality has been seen to reflect a re-conceptualisation of social citizenship, and part of a period of 'welfare resettlement in which certain welfare rights and responsibilities are effectively being redefined' (Dwyer, 2002, p. 277). As part of this shift, an element of authoritarianism and of compulsion can be found in many new initiatives which reinforce the responsibility of parents towards their children. These measures, as the work of Gillies and Gerwitz above suggest, also reflect a cultural politics, promoting particular messages about correct behaviour and about 'good' and 'bad' families. For Driver and Martell:

> Whatever the actual policies, and whatever other progressive agendas there are in Labour discourse, there is a cultural politics going on, of validation and

disapproval. New Labour's often conservative rhetoric on the family is significant to the extent of constructing particular sorts of preferred subjects in society and demonising others; and in doing so, promoting particular kinds of behaviour (2002, p. 51).

In identifying its aim as working with the family 'to break the cycle of disadvantage', the early Sure Start discourse drew on a theme about transmitted family deprivation. This notion was reflected in Blair's (1999, p. 16) pledge to eradicate child poverty within a generation 'so that children born into poverty are not *condemned* to social exclusion and deprivation' (emphasis added). This emphasis spoke of a moral imperative to intervene, providing an additional dimension to the social investment perspective, and an explanation too for policy interest in early intervention (as opposed to the family or the early years *per se*).

A number of examples of family intervention projects premised on the idea of trans-generational transmission of social exclusion had preceded Sure Start (Clarke, 2006). Theories about transmitted family deprivation had also been put forward, controversially, by Conservative Sir Keith Joseph (1972). But while Deacon (2002) has downplayed any suggestion of a direct link between New Labour interest in the idea and Joseph's thesis, he has identified three broad themes common to both: the importance of the family as the forum within which children develop moral sentiments and learn moral practices; the unique importance of what society does to and for children in the first five years; and a preoccupation with the ways in which disadvantage is transmitted from one generation to the next.

There has, for the most part, been an uncritical acceptance of the New Labour 'mantra' on early intervention, the evidence for its effectiveness being based largely on the apparent success of various initiatives from the USA. Moss (2000) claims that the child has been used in particular periods to symbolise the need for society to improve itself. Underlying such approaches is the notion of the 'universal child, an essential child who is objectively knowable irrespective of time or place, context or perspective - a child who can be made subject to precise interventions based on objective scientific knowledge' (Moss, 2000, p. 82). Thus Sure Start and other early childhood services have been:

... driven by the desire to reduce early childhood to a technical undertaking and to constitute the young child as a subject for the application of ever more powerful and normalising human technologies. The consequence is that the implementation of policy is dominated by a search for universal answers and solutions to what are treated as essentially technical problems, summed up in the dominance of one question, 'what works?' one model of evaluation and unproblematised use of terms such as "quality", "excellence" and "best practice" (ibid, p. 85).

Initial Sure Start objectives were to improve social and emotional development, improve health, improve children's ability to learn and to strengthen families and communities, with a large range of targets set against each. In her critical examination of Sure Start, Karen Clarke (2006), like Moss above, has conceptualised the programme as a technical project, involving a 'what works' approach, and mechanistic forms of intervention with the parent to ensure successful developmental outcomes for the child. Examining the programme objectives, and targets, Clarke has critiqued the focus on 'proximal' rather than 'distal' outcomes in Sure Start (where distal refers to demographic variables such as income and proximal refers to the effect of distal variables when filtered through particular chains of events). Thus intervention is concerned for example with:

> ... provision of toys or books in the home, but without addressing the more complex and diffuse effects of low income, whose relationship with reading ability may be less obvious. ... The need to address underlying issues, such as the effects of poverty on self-esteem and depression and the impact of these on parenting capacity, are acknowledged in some of the background papers, but these present more complex and intractable problems than the provision of toys or reading materials, which can then come to be seen as easier and more measurable aims when setting targets and then implementing policy (p. 708).

In this way, poverty is linked to a deficit in parenting and is also seen as 'simply another environmental influence', as Clarke says (p. 708) which can be addressed through technical intervention. Using Levitas' (1998) typology of New Labour discourses, the SID (Social Integrationist Discourse), RED (Redistributionist Discourse) and MUD (Moral Underclass Discourse) Clarke illustrates how the Sure Start discourse 'slips from social integration through education as the foundation for future labour market participation', to one 'that is couched in terms of the culture of the excluded, and which aims to change the culture of parenting (mothering in particular) and promote a particular model of the family' (2006, p. 710).

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Community and parental involvement

> [Alistair Darling] asked me a shrewd question … 'how can you assure me', he asked, 'that this programme will not lead in 10 years' time to a lot of boarded up, fly-blown family centres such as I have seen in my own constituency and elsewhere?' I had a number of responses, but the one I was most insistent on was that this programme would be "owned" by local parents, local communities and those who worked in the programme. Because those who benefited would be able to shape it to do what they wanted, rather than it being done to, or for, them. It would not be seen as just another initiative by Whitehall to do something about the feckless proles. (Glass, 2005).

The focus of 'technical' (professional) intervention in Sure Start discourse and policy was the 'family'. However, as an area-based initiative, the notion of 'community' and in particular, the strategy of community involvement, was conceptualised as one of the most important mechanisms for effective delivery of the programme, ensuring ownership among parents and appropriateness of service provision. Investigating constructions of agency in the area of parental involvement was one specific focus of the empirical work in this study.

Under New Labour, 'community involvement' has played a growing part in public policy (Marinetto, 2003). Increasing interest in community involvement began in the 1980s under Conservative administrations, but New Labour added to this a Third Way interest in active citizenship as part of 'democratic renewal'. As indicated, new Communitarian ideas also shaped these agendas, infusing 'community' with moral purpose and giving it an instrumental role as a vehicle of social cohesion and inclusion (Fremeaux, 2005).

In UK policy, parental involvement is usually associated with the context of education, but although 'parental' and 'community involvement' are both used in Sure Start policy documents and sometimes interchangeably, its use here fits understandings of the latter. Especially in its early phase, Sure Start was characterised by a particularly Third Way mix which emphasised the benefits to families of joined up services provided by experts, combined with a 'bottom-up' community-based approach which would both define the design of the programme and ensure the ongoing appropriateness of services. In a speech to the first Sure Start conference in 1999, Gordon Brown addressed this expert-led and community-driven blend, saying that the programme would help:

By strengthening community support for children; by providing one-to-one help through personal contact; by recognising that solutions do not come top down from government, but bottom up from the community itself: co-ordinating locally the best education and health and child care services; by bringing government and voluntary action together (Brown, 1999).

Community and parental involvement were treated as integral to the process of acquiring and delivering the Sure Start programme. Successful bidders were given a grant of up to £10,000 'towards the cost of consulting and involving parents and the wider community and of building your partnership' as part of producing a Delivery Plan (Sure Start, 2001, point 1.7). The need to 'consult and involve' parents and community groups was repeatedly emphasised in this early guidance and the 'lack of parental involvement' included in a section of 'Risks to Consider' (Sure Start, 2001, point 3.21). There were also extensive 'technical' tips on how to involve parents and community groups.

In the early days of Sure Start, there was immense optimism about the potential of parental involvement, especially given that Sure Start had been announced as a ten-year programme, unusually long for such an initiative. Despite widespread political and media assertions in the early days of the programme that the much-trumpeted popularity - and, at the time, the assumed success - of Sure Start could be attributed to its parental involvement ethos (Community Care, 2001; Glass, 2005) the only required output was a delivery target, with no percentage attached, that all programme boards were to include parent representation[3]. This apparent paradox - the rhetoric about the 'exceptional' value of parental ownership combined with a lack of enforcement - was found frequently in area-based and other regeneration initiatives, reflecting Chanan's (2003 p. 15) observations about the 'unique but somewhat puzzling position of community involvement' which, on the one hand is a requirement in many public policy arenas, but on the other, is often 'vague and ambiguous' and absent from 'outputs, outcomes and budget categories'.

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[3] It should be noted however, that Brambleton Sure Start inserted their own Service Delivery Target of 50% parent representation on the Management Board by the end of Year 1 into their Delivery Plan (Brambleton Sure Start, 2001).

As the Sure Start policy evolved, these tensions were highlighted, and overall, a 'downgrading' of the importance given to involvement can be observed. As indicated earlier, it was not clear what role parental involvement would play, if any, in the Children's Centres that were set to replace Sure Starts (Community Care, 2005). In addition, within policy documents themselves, there is also a notable difference in tone between planning guidance on this topic in the early and later years of Sure Start. Although part of the empirical focus of this study was on those parents who participated as 'activists' in parental involvement forums, the thesis is not centrally concerned with the shift in this aspect of Sure Start policy which is addressed elsewhere (Hamm, 2007).

2.3 Sure Start, 'difference' and discourses of welfare

Sure Start programmes are located in a range of different types of communities where they may provide services to very different resident populations. Whether or not programme areas have large proportions of minority ethnic families has been recognized as a significant identifier in differentiating Sure Starts, with important implications for service provision (Barnes et al, 2005). The multi-ethnic character of Brambleton, as the case study area in this research, represented a key aspect of the context in which Sure Start users from different ethnic groups engaged with the programme. Given this, as well as the dominant and recurring theme of Brambleton as a highly gendered and racialised space, shaping the way that parental agency was seen by professionals and the way that the local programme was designed, it is important to address the construction of 'race', 'ethnicity', 'gender' and notions of 'difference' more broadly in the Sure Start programme and in associated discourses of welfare.

2.3.1 'Race', 'ethnicity' and 'culture'

It is now recognised that 'race' is predominantly a social construct, with genetic differences between human beings known to be extremely small. The term 'racialised' (and the notion of 'racialisation') is useful as a discursive concept, in suggesting how 'racial' dimensions are socially constructed, given to or imposed upon entities (such as 'place' or 'space' etc.) (Smith, 1989). It is useful as an explanatory tool to deconstruct processes and mechanisms such as the operation of discrimination, and is particularly

valuable for this study in illustrating how the construction of the locality as 'Asian' was reflected in professional assumptions about what the need for services was and how the local programme should therefore look.

'Ethnicity' has been defined as:

> ... the way in which social and cultural difference, language and ancestry combine as a dimension of social action and social organization, and form a socially reproduced system of classification (Fenton, 1999, p. 62).

Although ethnicity does not have the same 'essentialist' connotations of 'race', it has been used in other, less 'neutral' ways, for example by majority populations and within popular as well as 'official' (e.g. within health) policy discourses that construct those of minority ethnic origin pejoratively as 'other' (Kellerher, 1996) or by minority groups themselves as part of confronting their invisibility (Afshar and Maynard, 2000). The terms 'culture' and 'cultural practice' are used throughout this research. Brah (1996) suggests that when we consider culture:

> We will probably find ourselves thinking about the whole spectrum of experiences, modes of thinking, feeling and behaving; about the values, norms, customs and traditions of the social group(s) to which we feel we belong (p. 17).

'Culture' has tended to be viewed as unchanging and static within populist discourses and even within academic disciplines. However, there is now a far greater emphasis on its evolving, dynamic and relational qualities (Brah, 1996; Hall, 1992, 1996). These aspects of 'culture' are further explored in Chapter 3, as part of the conceptual framework for the research.

As in other areas, the contradictions of Government policy and rhetoric in relation to issues of 'race' and 'ethnicity' have been noted (e.g. Back et al, 2002). Early suggestions of a strong commitment to tackling structural inequalities and discrimination around 'race' and 'ethnicity', apparent in the Government's response to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (MacPherson, 1999) for example, appeared quite quickly to be compromised, or at least qualified, by a 'de-racialised' or 'colour-blind' approach in other policy areas such as education (Burden and Hamm, 2000). In recent years,

emotive national debate concerning race and ethnicity, prompted by the terrorist attacks in the US and the UK, and by urban unrest in the UK in 2001, has focused on expectations of citizenship and on British multiculturalism; policy responses have been dominated by tough immigration and asylum legislation and initiatives concerned with fostering 'community cohesion' (Back et al, 2002; Cantle, 2001; Shukra et al, 2004).

There is considerable evidence that some ethnic groups are severely disadvantaged in the various welfare arenas, experiencing educational under-achievement, relatively poor housing and labour market 'penalties' whether these are caused by discrimination or by a combination of factors (Modood, 1997; Social Exclusion Unit, 2000). For Gary Craig (2007, p. 617) the British State 'acts energetically only in response to serious crises, such as occasional urban disturbances, or the vigorous campaigning of minority organisations', as in the case of the Stephen Lawrence Campaign. In his view an overarching narrative about the negative impacts of immigration, has tacitly encouraged the neglect of the welfare of minorities. This is in the face of overwhelming evidence about differential outcomes, often obtained over a long period of time, which includes significant evidence of structural discrimination for example, in education, social security and health. Craig also notes that the 'neglect of the issue of 'race' is not confined to social policy as *political practice*; it is shared by the *academic discipline of social policy*' (emphasis in original).

> This is striking considering that the social policy discipline is concerned centrally with issues of citizenship rights, welfare, equality, poverty alleviation and social engineering [and] extends to the practice of social research, where many proposals, proposers, funders or commissioners still treat the dimension of ethnicity as too complex, too expensive or too marginal to be worthy of serious attention (Craig, 2007, p. 610).

Issues of ethnicity and culture are addressed in Sure Start planning documents (e.g. Sure Start, 2001) and a specific set of guidance was produced early in the programme's creation, entitled *Sure Start for All, Guidance on Involving Minority Ethnic Children and families* (Sure Start, 1999). In acknowledging the relative socio-economic disadvantage within minority ethnic communities and the likelihood therefore that many programme areas would include large numbers of minority ethnic families, there was an implicit recognition of inequalities, but no further exploration of structural factors or differences between groups. This document is essentially technical, providing a 'step-

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by-step guide': identifying need and existing good practice; planning inclusive services; implementation of culturally appropriate services; and monitoring and reviewing procedures (Sure Start, 1999, p. 4). In the main, it is concerned with ensuring firstly that Sure Start services are accessible and secondly, that they are 'culturally sensitive'. Below, in the only reference to the target framework of Sure Start, minority ethnic families are associated with those who are 'hard to reach'. The Guidance points out that out of twelve targets associated with the Sure Start Public Service Agreement (PSA), three are 'specifically concerned with reaching *all* families within the catchment area' and that 'to meet these targets':

> Efforts must be made to ensure that traditionally hard to reach families are made aware of, and encouraged to use, Sure Start services. Services need to be designed to meet the particular needs of individual families, minority ethnic families, mixed race/heritage families, faith groups, and any other kind of family for whom the use of mainstream services may be problematic (ibid, p. 2).

In policy documents overall, there was little substantive recognition of difference. This was despite empirical evidence about different aspects of the policy area, for example, that female employment patterns were markedly different across ethnic groups (in Barn et al, 2006; Clark and Drinkwater, 2007). Findings about difference were reinforced within a small number of Sure Start-specific research and evaluation studies about the effectiveness of the programme for minority ethnic communities. A 2005 study for Sure Start (Bryson et al, 2005) for example, found different patterns of childcare use, suggesting that white and black Caribbean families were most likely to use childcare, and that Pakistani and black African families were least likely to do so. A recent NESS report concerned with the programme itself, entitled 'Sure Start and Black and Minority Ethnic Populations' (Craig et al, 2007) has made serious criticisms of delivery, staffing and strategic issues. The authors concluded that:

> ... in significantly more than half of those SSLPs examined, there did not appear to the research team to be what might be regarded as a strategic and effective approach to working with BME communities. As a result, despite the many interesting and important areas of work identified, the National Sure Start programme – and its associated National Evaluation – may represent a major missed opportunity as far as the enhancement of the lives of marginalized minority communities goes (Craig et al, 2007, p. viii).

2.3.2 Gender

A 'policy optimism' about men in the home and a 'policy pessimism' about them outside the home has been described by Scourfield and Drakeford (2002) who suggest that the reverse is true for women. In the first years of the New Labour administration, it was felt that the Government had given significant attention to 'masculinity', on the one hand expressing concerns through various policy initiatives targeting the 'problem' of (young) men and crime, and the under-achievement of boys at school, and on the other, portraying men positively, for example, as a necessary resource for children. In the case of Sure Start, is interesting to note that though the first batch of programmes funded in England made specific mention of interventions geared towards fathers, this was not the case for subsequent rounds. Involvement of fathers has however been emphasised in guidance including for Children's Centres (DfES, 2005) and a themed study on 'Fathers in Sure Start' was produced by NESS (2003) as part of their implementation module.

A lack of gender analysis has been identified in Government thinking (Featherstone, 2006; Lister, 2006). As part of this, it has been argued that social policies are presented in a gender-neutral way, but that they carry profoundly differential impacts for women and men.

> While governments may talk of 'parents', the impact of policies that impose home-school agreements, fine the parents of truants or require the parents appearing before the courts to attend parenting classes falls quite disproportionately upon mothers not fathers (Scourfield and Drakeford, 2002, p. 627).

Featherstone (2006) acknowledges the shift away from an earlier simplistic model - in which the 'oppressor' is defined automatically as male and the 'victim' as female - towards a more complex understanding of gender relationships. This does not mean in her words, that 'power and oppression disappear in a mishmash of relativism' (2006, p. 296). Referring to the work of Fairclough (2000), she points to what has happened to the 'language of power' under New Labour. Giving the examples of equal pay and persistent violence against women, and noting that 'both are intrinsically bound up with a gendered power relations at a range of levels', she states that New Labour has 'largely eschewed a language of power in their rejection of an 'old' language that mobilizes

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concerns around gender, class and "race" in the context of exploring structural inequalities' (Featherstone, 2006, p. 299).

2.3.3 The Third Way, diversity and difference

> We seek a diverse but inclusive society, promoting *tolerance within agreed norms* ... Strong communities depend on shared values and a recognition of the rights and duties of citizenship – not just the duty to pay taxes and obey the law, but the obligation to bring up children as competent, responsible citizens (Blair, 1998, p. 12, emphasis added).

Gail Lewis (2005, p. 543) describes a tension between 'tolerance of diversity' and a 'desire to instil a disciplining and normalizing regime of governance', which runs through the 'whole panoply of social policy in the UK' which can be seen in the quotation from Tony Blair above. As part of the New Labour modernization agenda, in ideas about 'active citizenship' and the need to develop a participatory democracy, there is a far greater requirement for consultation and inclusion of 'marginalised' groups than previously (Monro, 2003). However, one of the interesting tensions within New Labour policy is the way it draws on apparently oppositional ideas about the need to value differences between citizens - for example, around ethnicity and culture - but the need also to construct new citizenship identities based on notions of 'family' and 'community', which are required to transcend and to blunt those differences (this is in part, a new Communitarian reclamation of 'old' values of family and community in a very different context of individualisation, social fragmentation etc.).

Overall, it can be argued that the key imperatives of social policy under New Labour have been directed by the need to eradicate social exclusion, and to construct a society characterised by the integrally linked goals of social cohesion and economic efficiency. The Third Way and new Communitarian strategies felt necessary to achieve these goals rely on discourses which play down structural inequalities; in such discourses, differences of 'class', 'race', and 'gender' are usually translated into pragmatic, essentially technical 'how to do' approaches, rather than focused on more fundamental inquiry into the reasons for persistent inequality.

The socially cohesive and economically efficient and competitive state envisaged privileges uniformity and consensus over difference. Thus, area-based policy which requires community involvement tends to assume that communities are or can, with technical assistance, be consensual, inclusive and dialogic (Imrie and Raco, 2003). In addition, part of the 'resonance' of 'community for Claire Worley whose research has examined the 'community cohesion' agenda, is its de-racialised character. Thus 'talking about "community":

> ... enables practitioners and policy actors to avoid 'naming' which communities they are referring to, even though the reference points are clear (Worley, 2005, p. 487).

National discourse, reflecting anxiety about the 'War on Terror' and the racial disturbances of 2001 has demonstrated a nervous preoccupation with searching for shared values to establish a 'new' contemporary kind of British identity and citizenship. In this context, there have been ongoing concerns, as Cheong et al have said, with 'the dangers of too much ethnic and cultural diversity, with diversity and difference posed in opposition to unity and solidarity' (2007, p. 27). In their work they demonstrate how a shift away from multiculturalism and towards a social capital approach that 'assumes that everyone counts the same as everyone else' has involved the 'sidelining of economic, material and structural inequalities and the interventions needed to mitigate them (ibid, pp. 28-29).

An instrumentalist approach that treats the family as a base from which children can learn appropriate values is also problematic, in assuming that the family is a homogeneous unit and in failing to recognise competing needs within it, not to mention power differentials between women and men (Featherstone & Trinder, 2001; Warin, 2006). This failure to differentiate between (groups of) adults has been recognised as a limitation in a child-focused social investment perspective. As Dobrowolsky and Saint-Martin say '[a] focus on children can ... conveniently avoid invoking specific collective identities, be they those of gender, race or class' (p. 8). This fits with a Third Way world peopled by:

... self-actualizing individuals ... concerned with individual freedom and choice [where there are] no women, no men, no people of colour, and no workers (Yates, 2002, p. 125, cited in Dobrowolsky and Saint-Martin, 2005, p. 8).

This has been conceptualised as a reframing process, in that a focus on the needs of specific groups of children, coupled with an under-emphasis on structural determinants reframes the issue as one of personal responsibility (Hendricks 2005, cited in Lister 2006). This, as Lister says, will have major implications for the ability to deal with the poverty of children.

2.4   Chapter conclusions

This chapter began by outlining the main policy agendas and discourses in which the Sure Start programme can be located. It has focused on three overarching and overlapping agendas, the Third Way and its social investment perspective, and the approaches to families and communities. Notions of 'family' and 'community', derived from new Communitarian ideas bring together assumptions about key mechanisms for addressing social exclusion, as well as about qualities presumed to be embedded in families and communities which members are expected to be able to draw upon. Analysis that employs a social investment perspective is also particularly helpful, as this seems to encapsulate both the child and future-orientated focus of Sure Start and especially to characterise the *development* of the policy discourse in the period in which the study was conducted (a shift which was reflected in interviews with professionals). The notion of *investment* itself is also helpful as it provides a descriptive and conceptual means of differentiating between how need for services has been constructed, firstly, within the national discourse and secondly, at ground level, by local professionals.

In the second part of the chapter, reflecting the 'gendered' and 'racialised' character of Brambleton, I have explored New Labour's approach to 'ethnicity', 'gender' and 'diversity'. The chapter overall has stressed various contradictions of and tensions within New Labour policy and the need to recognise a variety of influences on policy development. This is an important feature of the treatment of 'diversity' 'race', 'ethnicity' and 'gender' in policy. Here, greater acknowledgement of difference within

the population has run alongside a push towards uniformity, with separate, but dovetailing currents in evidence. Thus, for example, discourses which emphasise individual responsibility, equality of opportunity and a pragmatic 'what works' approach in policy development have replaced 'Old Labour' attempts to address structural inequalities and the struggle to respond to perceived 'threats', has led to various initiatives that prioritise notional shared national values and new citizenship identities of 'community', 'family' and even 'parent'. These shifts and the agendas highlighted above, all have implications for how agency is conceptualised in New Labour policy and how this is then translated into policy and its implementation. This will be further examined in Chapter 3, which will set out the conceptual framework for the study.

3. Towards a conceptual framework

3.1. Introduction

I began this study with a broad brief to examine the experience of parents of Brambleton Sure Start. Early in the process I carried out several exploratory interviews with staff and observations of group events (such as Programme Management Group and team meetings) for the purpose of more narrowly focusing the study.

These early interviews primarily concerned the origins of and the perceived need for a Sure Start programme in the area. Responses from (almost entirely) white practitioners discussed the 'need' for Sure Start in terms almost exclusively of the Pakistani-origin Muslim mothers in the area[4]. This was part of a 'racialised' construction of the area which had various effects that are discussed later in this thesis. Practitioners viewed many of the Pakistani mothers as being desperately in need of local services which would offer them opportunities to participate in courses as well as social and leisure activities.

In these early interviews with professionals, a consistent theme was that many of these mothers were severely restricted by their families and that in some cases they were 'not allowed out of the house' at all. There appeared to me to be a striking contrast between the portrayal of Pakistani-origin women in some cases, as 'victims', or as struggling against family and cultural confines, and the national Sure Start discourse which depicted parents as 'naturally' active, aspirational, and knowing what was best for their children albeit sometimes requiring particular kinds of support to achieve this. At this early point I made the decision to focus on how parents (mothers) in the area engaged with Sure Start, using a framework centred on concepts of human agency to do so. I proposed to address two main research questions in the course of the study. The first of these asked, 'to what extent do policy and theoretical assumptions about the agency of

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[4]   Towards the end of my fieldwork, I became aware as a result of my attendance at Programme Management meetings of some work being carried out with several Slovenian families who had very recently settled in Brambleton (having obtained and then lost their jobs at a company in Podsham). I did not follow up issues relating to this group.

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mothers reflect constructions of parents and professionals?' and the second, 'what do the findings add to understandings about Third Way and social investment policy and to theoretical understandings of agency?'

The term 'agency' is highly contested. The objective here is not to review its varied conceptualisations, but to highlight my own uses of it for the purposes of this study. I have defined agency in a way that includes both its explanatory purpose as the capacity to act (by implication, the *possibility* of choice) and an indication of the forms that it may take. Both are addressed in this definition from Deacon and Mann, who view agency as:

> actions, activities, decisions and behaviours, that represent some measure of meaningful choice. That does not mean that such choices are free floating of any structural restraints, but rather that some other option existed, albeit also restrained (Deacon and Mann, 1999, p. 413).

Harrison (with Davis) refers to 'structure' as the 'ongoing effects of the aggregation of human actions of the past, in intended and unintended consequences of such action, and is manifested through agency in the present' (2001, p. 36). The structure-agency dynamic is central to sociological theories. In more recent times, debate has concerned the extent to which the relationship can be seen as a 'dualism', or as Giddens' structuration theory (1984) proposes, a 'duality' in which structures do not exist independently beyond the way in which they are reproduced in social action. For Harrison and Davis, debates about 'agency' and 'structure' (including the parameters of each) can point to a choice 'between emphasising methodological individualism or voluntarism, as against structural determinism' (ibid, p. 38). These authors however, emphasise the need to avoid becoming 'immobilised by overlaps between the two sets of elements' (ibid, p. 38). In my research, I am primarily interested in constructions of agency and the interplay of agency and particular forms of structure – discourses, institutions, and 'culture' and cultural practices.

In this chapter, I begin by assessing key features of agency within individualisation theory and then move on to present an analysis of its conceptualisations within policy. I then identify two broad and overlapping themes, the first which identifies concepts to enable the exploration of agency as shaped within its social contexts, and the second,

that looks at understandings about 'drivers' of agency. These themes will provide the conceptual focus for the study.

3.2 'Individualisation' and 'agency': key features

While social policy is clearly separate from sociological theory, there are also linkages and overlaps. Theories of individualisation bring to this study a sociological perspective that has claimed to describe society or trends in its development and the relationship between the individual and the social (and thus between agency and structure). In this section, I provide an account of the key ideas of individualisation theorists Anthony Giddens (1991, 1992, 1994a, 1994b) and Ulrich Beck with Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1992, 2002) considered to have increasing salience in Western societies that are of relevance to this study[5]. The concepts that I investigate, alongside ideas from the Third Way, New Labour and Sure Start discourses examined below, have been subject to considerable critique, some of which is drawn on in the development of my conceptual framework in Section 3.4.

Individualisation theorists suggest that the demands of modern living and their reflection in institutional practices create a new kind of *identity* that *requires* individuals continually *to choose and to respond*.

> Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question, 'How shall I live?' has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat - and many other things - as well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self-identity (Giddens, 1991 p. 14).

> We live in an age in which the social order of the national state, class, ethnicity and the traditional family is in decline. The ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society. The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of an individual identity is the central character of our time (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 22-3).

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[5] It should be noted that in this section, I have chosen to address the shared or overlapping perspectives of Giddens and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim on post-traditionalism, reflexivity and identity, but do take Lash's point (in his 'Foreword' to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's 2002 text) about the different sociological origins of Giddens and Beck and the difficulty therefore of comparing them.

This new identity is premised upon the 'reflexive agency' deemed to be a particular characteristic of late modernity. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim for example, distinguish between the 'reflection' of the period of 'first modernity' and the 'reflexivity' of our current 'second modernity' (2002, p. viii). Reflexes, Lash identifies in his 'Foreword' to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) text, are 'indeterminate. They are immediate. ... Reflexes cope with a world of speed and quick decision-making' (ibid, p. ix). For Giddens, whose notion of 'reflexive agency' represents a development from his theory of structuration referred to earlier, there is 'no choice but to choose' (1991, p. 81). Reflexivity for him is 'more or less' universal' (ibid, p. 85), so that even those who are economically disadvantaged, such as the 'black single parent' that he describes as an example, are aware of all possible options, even if she feels unable to act to change her circumstances (ibid, p. 86). For Giddens, such reflexivity means that we are knowing actors and can always account for and explain our actions.

For Giddens, the decline of tradition precipitates the proliferation of *choice*. In his view 'life styles' and the necessity to be involved in 'life planning' arise out of the array of choices that we are offered. Life style is defined as a:

> ... more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity (1991, p. 81).

'Life styles', in his view, are not compatible with tradition and are adopted rather than 'handed down' (ibid, p. 81). Alongside the adoption of lifestyles, we are required to be continually involved in 'life planning' as part of the 'colonisation of the future':

> In a world of alternative lifestyle options, strategic *life-planning* becomes of special importance. Like lifestyle patterns, life plans of one kind or another are something of an inevitable concomitant of post-traditional social forms. Life plans are the substantial content of the reflexively organised trajectory of the self. Life-planning is a means of preparing a course of future actions mobilised in terms of the self-biography (1991, p. 85, emphasis in original).

However, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim emphasise, the 'reflexive biography' or the 'do-it-yourself biography (2002, p. 3) is not necessarily successful; it is always a 'risk-biography' and can easily become the 'breakdown biography'; such a biography might include the risks of choosing the wrong career or the private suffering of divorce, these

experiences reflecting another feature of modernity and individualisation which is impermanence, or the difficulty of sustaining projects long-term.

The process of individualisation is seen to be embedded within institutions. For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) modern institutions, including rights, and employment and training are targeted to the individual rather than the group. In his Third Way project, Giddens conceptualises a role for the state and institutions as facilitating the development of particular *attitudes* and *behaviours* necessary in contemporary 'risk societies' and encapsulated by the notion of 'positive welfare'. Asserting that the state does not provide 'enough space for personal liberty', he depicts 'effective risk management' not just as 'minimizing or protecting against risks; it also means harnessing the positive or energetic side of risk and providing resources for risk taking' (1998, p. 116). Welfare should therefore be a *psychic* rather than an *economic* concept:

> We should speak today of *positive welfare*, to which individuals themselves and other agencies besides government contribute - and which is functional for wealth creation. Welfare is not in essence an economic concept, but a psychic one, concerning as it does well-being. Economic benefits or advantages are therefore virtually never enough on their own to create it. Not only is welfare generated by many contexts and influences other than the welfare state, *but welfare institutions must be concerned with fostering psychological as well as economic benefits* (1998, p. 117, emphasis added).

As indicated, such conceptualisations of late modern societies are premised on the post-traditional nature of late modern societies, although it is acknowledged that even in the most modernized societies 'traditions do not wholly disappear' (Giddens, 1994b, p. 100). Giddens' assumptions about 'post-traditionalism', reflected also in the work of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, pp. 1-21) form a central conceptual focus of this study.

In *Living in a Post-Traditional Society* (1994b), Giddens identifies the elements that constitute 'tradition'.

> Tradition ... is bound up with memory, specifically what Maurice Halbwachs terms 'collective memory'; involves ritual; is connected with what I shall a *formulaic notion of truth;* has 'guardians'; and, unlike custom, has binding force which has a combined moral and emotional content (ibid, p. 63, emphasis in original).

The associations that Giddens makes between tradition and authority are also important in my research, used as part of the analysis of how individuals interact with and are affected by cultural practices. For Giddens, ritual is a 'practical means of ensuring preservation' and 'firmly connects the continual reconstruction of the past with practical enactment and can be seen to do so' (p. 64). Only certain individuals have full access to 'guardians' and 'formulaic truth'. 'Status' rather than 'competence' is the prime characteristic of a guardian. Guardians have 'privileged access to truth; truth cannot be demonstrated save in so far as it is manifest in the interpretations and practices of guardians' (p. 79). Tradition, also has normative moral imperatives, as Giddens also says, it not only represents what 'is done' in a society' but 'what should be done' (p. 65).

The 'localism' of tradition, contrasted with a 'de-centred' expertise of late modernity, is associated with the persistence and 'naturalization' of power relations (1994b, p. 104). The conditions of late modernity subvert and 'open up to scrutiny' such naturalized power relationships, notably, gender roles and the realm of intimate relationships. In the past, the very absence of women from the public sphere precluded this possibility.

> No longer can someone say in effect, 'I am a man, and this is how men are' ...
> Behaviour and attitudes have to be justified when one is called upon to do so,
> which means that reasons have to be given; and reasons have to be provided,
> differential power starts to dissolve, or alternatively power begins to become
> translated into authority. Post-traditional personal relations, the pure
> relationship, cannot survive if such discursive space is not created and
> sustained (ibid, p. 105-6).

The emphasis above on 'localism' and its association with 'naturalised' power relations are also central themes in my research (in the latter case, specifically gendered power relationships). Elsewhere Giddens describes linkages between 'democracy', 'autonomy' and the realms of intimacy and family life. In *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992) the 'possibility of intimacy' in late modernity is said to signify 'the promise of democracy' (1992, p. 188). Using the ideas of political theorist David Held (1986), Giddens identifies that democratic relationships are premised upon the principle of autonomy, itself key to the 'successful realisation of the reflexive project of the self'. The 'democratic family', although acknowledged as an ideal, is also promoted as an inherent part of the Third Way political project.

> Democratisation in the context of the family implies equality, mutual respect, autonomy, decision-making through communication and freedom from violence (1998, p. 93).

In Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's analysis, the role of individualization in transforming identity from a 'given' to a 'task' relies on a *de jure* autonomy although not necessarily *de facto* one (2002, p. xiv) and elsewhere they state that individualisation of society has not necessarily produced autonomy, freedom and liberation of individuals. They also strongly distinguish the individual of individualisation theory from the self-sufficient rational 'man' of Neo-Liberal economics in emphasising that the individual is 'self-*in*sufficient' (p. xxi, emphasis in original). However, in their view, identity and community now rest, not on established traditions as before 'but rather, on a paradoxical collectivity of reciprocal individualization' (p. xxi) and in this context, a high degree of social sensitivity is needed.

For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, the forms of social connection that result from individualisation, such as networks, alliances and deals, are more precarious than those that preceded them. The process that they describe, in which identity - previously derived from position and birth - is now more fragile, is encapsulated in their phrase 'disembedding without re-embedding' (p. xxii). As part of that process, as social connectivity is defined by the demands of the individualising process itself, individualization is accompanied by the 'corrosion and slow distintegration of citizenship' for 'if the individual is the citizen's worst enemy ... it is because the concerns and preoccupations of individuals qua individuals fill the public space, claiming to be its own legitimate occupants and elbowing out from public discourse everything else' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. xviii). This is a dilemma about the tension between the needs of the individual and society, that Giddens has perhaps attempted to address through his Third Way interest in 'ethical citizenship' enacted through 'community' (in Rose's 2001, terms, see p. 61).

3.3   Conceptions of agency in policy discourses

While sociologists have described society and its currents, policy makers have assessed how individuals act (or should act), in order to decide on the focus and mechanisms of

policy intervention. As Chapter 2 has suggested, new conceptualisations of the welfare subject in the UK in the last 10 years draw particularly on Third Way and new Communitarian notions of the individual's relationship to society. This section presents an analysis of the construction of agency in policy and discourses concerned with parenting, the early years and in Sure Start itself.

Julian Le Grand has said that 'Assumptions concerning human motivation and behaviour are key to the design of social policy' (1997, p. 153). If understandings about what motivates behaviour are integral to policy design, so too, social policy must decide, as Alcock (2004) states, whether it is of greater benefit to change structures or to change individuals. Reflecting the emphasis in theory outlined above about the *institutionalisation* of individualisation, he says that in the last decade-:

> Social policy has sought increasingly to shift the balance of policy intervention towards ... an agency level, seeking to change life chances by influencing the decisions which individuals make about their life courses. This is part of a more general drift away from policies of redistribution and institutional change and towards a focus upon support and promotion of individual responsibility and positive life course planning (Alcock, 2004, pp. 396-397).

Analysts have described this change of emphasis from structure to agency in welfare policy as part of a shift in ideas about social citizenship, manifested in a requirement that *responsibility* be demonstrated alongside the rights that, it is assumed, welfare users have come to take for granted (see also Chapter 2). This is part of a broader shift in the understandings of the purpose of welfare which has resulted from a range of inter-related developments including the rapid social, economic and cultural change and the decline Keynesian welfare state model, a Neo-Liberal advocacy of the self-responsible and self-sufficient subject, and the evolution of social movements articulating specific welfare demands (Williams et al, 1999).

3.3.1 Constructing agency in parenting and the discourses of Sure Start

It is important to return again to Lister's (2003) comment (noted in Chapter 2), which warned against the dangers of assuming that there is a monolithic state which acts in a unified way, while recognising nonetheless that there can be presumptions which

underlie policies. In this section, I identify consistent themes within New Labour rhetoric and policy that emphasise the need for parental responsibility, identify state dependency as a negative, and highlights a *balance* of roles between government and parents.

In the first of the quotations below, Jack Straw emphasises the reciprocal relationship between Government and parents, and the fine balance the former has to strike between providing support and nurturing dependency. In the second, taken from the 10 year Childcare Strategy of 2004, an aspect of this relationship is highlighted which is the theme that Government must 'follow' the lead of parents who want and know what is best for their children.

> We want to support parents as they bring up children, while encouraging parents fully to appreciate their responsibilities. We do not want to get to the situation where, by offering more support to parents, they become less responsible and more dependent on the State. That is the opposite of our intention (Straw, 1998).

> Parents want to secure the best for their children, and to see them fulfil their potential in later life. They will frequently make large personal sacrifices to ensure that this is the case. *Parents are the best decision makers about the interests of their children. The role for government is to support parents in the choices they make* (HM Treasury, 2004, p. 5, emphasis added).

The kind of rhetoric above, used frequently in political speeches and in policy documents of the first and second New Labour administrations, refers to parents as 'naturally' well-intentioned and aspirational for themselves and their children *and* to a correspondingly 'natural' and shared government support for this. In the context of the range of policy directed at parents and parenting however, such an optimistic tone can appear disingenuous. It is apparent that this casting of parents as 'naturally' wanting the best is not unqualified; if parents demonstrate that they, in fact, cannot reach this 'standard', government 'support' can take on a more punitive guise (Goldson, 2002). Helen Seaford has said that:

> The child moves through Whitehall growing and shrinking like Alice: in the Department of Health she is a small potential victim, at the Treasury and

Department of Education a growing but silent unit of investment, but at the Home Office a huge and threatening yob (2001, p. 464-5)[6].

Seaford's quotation describes the relationship between children and different Government departments as a series of manoeuvres, with the child changing form at each turn. In the chapter concerned with 'Supporting Parents and Carers' in *Every Child Matters*, the introduction outlines a 'long-term vision to improve parenting and family support through':

> **Universal services** etc such as schools, health services and childcare providing information and advice and engaging parents in supporting their child's development, where such support is needed or wanted
>
> **Targeted and specialist** support to parents of children requiring additional support
>
> **Compulsory action** through Parenting Orders as a last resort where parents are condoning a child's anti-social behaviour such as truancy or offending (DfES, 2003, p. 39).

Here, in a twist on the quotation above, a relationship between parents and Government which seems to suggest a negotiated agreement between two parties is described. Parents are depicted at the first (universal) level in a 'neutral' tone, as automatically receiving various services, at the second (targeted) level, in a 'supportive' tone, as entitled to additional support as needed, and finally, at the third level, in a 'castigatory' tone, as meriting punishment for having *reneged* on their side of the agreement, that is, their parental obligations, not just to children, but also to the state.

Sure Start can be seen as positioned on both the first and second levels of the typology that *Every Child Matters* offers (from 'universal' to 'compulsory action' above). On the one hand, as suggested, it is on the 'benign' end of the New Labour early years and family support policy, with no enforcement to become involved and with the Children's Centres development promoted as a step towards the universal provision of children's services; on the other hand, as Clarke identifies, the focus in targets suggests that parenting in Sure Start areas is deficient and requires targeted intervention (Clarke, 2006).

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[6] Department names and functions have changed since her paper was written.

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In policy documents, and again, in Ministerial speeches about the programme, Sure Start is often described as *bringing services together* in order to meet the *natural* and *legitimate* aspirations of parents more effectively.

> Every family should get access to a range of services that will deliver better outcomes for both children and parents, meeting their needs and stretching their aspirations (DfES, 2003a, p. 4, emphasis added).

> Outcomes and options for children, families and their communities will be enhanced by increasing the availability of high quality integrated childcare and early learning, health services and family support services. We want to see services brought together at neighbourhood level to support parents/carers both *in their parenting and in their aspirations towards employment* (DfES, 2005a, p. 2, emphasis added).

The word 'aspiration' itself has become very important in New Labour discourse, with the 'politics of aspiration' applied to different areas (Blair, 2005; Happold, 2004). Increasingly also, it has been associated by politicians with the Labour 'vision' in the idea of an 'aspiration society' (Brown, 2007; Purnell, 2007). In the context of policy targeting areas of deprivation, 'aspiration' ostensibly signifies a 'natural' desire to improve personal and family circumstances and potential; however, its use also suggests that current ambitions are deficient, set at too low a level, particularly when, as in the extract above, the implication is that parental aspirations need to be 'stretched'.

As the policy documents emphasise, an important aspect of the aspiration and action of parents is an assumed desire on their part to gain employment or to make themselves 'work-ready'. A key thrust of New Labour discourse as Chapter 2 suggested, is an overlapping moral and economic imperative to participate in the labour market in order to avoid poverty and exclusion. In Chapter 2 also, the incorporation of a new, fifth Sure Start objective concerned with the provision of childcare to enable parents to take up employment was described and attributed to the promotion increasingly of a 'social investment' perspective (in which social investment, a key social policy goal, was characterised by the priority given to the development of human and social capital. The 'natural' aspiration of parents to work to avoid poverty is an example of Rose's 'ethical citizenship' in this policy area (see further, p. 61).

These 'positive' depictions of parental agency are also reflected in the programme emphasis on parental and community involvement. As Chapter 2 suggested, parental involvement was treated in rhetoric as emblematic of the programme itself, and in the first few years - reflecting the new Communitarianism of early New Labour - often as *the* reason for Sure Start's (at that point) presumed success. A stress on parental involvement in the management and development of the programme in the *Strengthening Families and Communities* objective suggested that parents were 'capable, reflective and aware of their own and their children's needs and able to articulate these needs effectively' (Clarke, 2006, p. 171).

However, alongside this positive depiction of agency as Clarke says, and as identified earlier, there is a parallel suggestion of parental incompetence and ignorance. Above, I illustrated how the depiction of parents as 'aspirational' was double-edged. While some targets and objectives (such as the objective described above) portray parents in clearly positive terms as knowing what is best and able to act upon this, others, as Clarke comments, suggest more negatively that parents-

> ... need to be educated and changed – fathers need to be engaged in caring for children, mothers need to be encouraged to breast feed and need to be educated about hygiene and safety. Knowledge of what is required to be a good parent comes from outside, from experts and from professionals rather than parents themselves (Clarke, 2006, p. 717-8).

It is evident that Sure Start promotes different and potentially contradictory conceptualisations of parental agency. Policy documents overall depict parents positively as active, moral agents who - naturally and self-evidently - share the Government's vision about what constitutes the best kind of parenting and family life, and who wish also to contribute towards the regeneration of their community through involvement in the programme. However, many of the targets and objectives which form the framework of the programme, define the scope of the evaluation and thereby how Sure Start is measured, simultaneously portray a negative image of parental agency, suggesting that the behaviours of poorer parents (or parents living in poorer areas) may be deficient and require rectifying.

3.4 Developing a conceptual framework

In Sections 3.2 and 3.3 of this chapter, I outlined key assumptions about agency within the individualisation theories of Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim and in Third Way, New Labour and Sure Start discourses. Below, using critiques from empirical and theoretical work that addressed these assumptions, and referring back to the findings from my early fieldwork. I identify the key themes that guided the development of the study.

3.4.1 Focusing on agency in context

As Section 3.2 and 3.3 illustrated, in both sociological and social policy models, active, rational and reflexive agency is assumed; it is seen to belong to increasingly atomised individuals with unprecedented levels of personal autonomy, choice and freedoms although in the policy discourses, individual choice and action are discursively directed towards self-responsibility and obligations towards family and 'community'. In the work of Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, the 'reflexive agency' of late modernity is equated with identity itself, replacing 'static' identities of birth and position that were created and sustained in highly structured, traditional societies. These assumptions about post-traditionalism and the conflation of identity with agency in individualisation theory appeared in some ways to be paralleled in the focus of Third Way frameworks and policies which also played down structurally-defined group identities – class, gender, and ethnicity - while invoking those of the 'ethical citizen' the 'family' and 'community', as described in Chapter 2.

Exploring agency as 'relational'

Exploration of agency as shaped by cultural and religious identifications and practices is a central theme within this research. Yip (2004) identifies that marriage, family and the maintenance of family honour, *izzat*[7], are central to Islam and to Muslim cultures. As he states (p. 338), 'altruism, care and respect towards parents and elders, strong family ties and loyalty are inextricably linked to one's expression of religious faith'. These are

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[7] Azim (2007) identifies that '"Izzat" meaning "honour" is [...] a lovely word and a noble concept. Izzat could be said to be the cornerstone of the British Asian community. It goes to the very heart of an individual's standing, that of his family and the community itself'.

moral principles, supported by the *Qur'an*, the *Hadith* and the *Shari'ah*[8]. The grounding of these values in collective obligation, and the emphasis within theoretical models on the individual, highlighted an immediate tension that I felt critical to explore within the research.

The shifts towards individualisation, in Giddens' terms, have been manifested in a greater diversity of family forms and changing attitudes to marriage and parenting. This is reflected in the growth of research exploring 'family practices' (e.g. Jagger and Wright, 1999; Neale, 2000). Within this body of literature however, a number of studies have questioned the extent of individualisation which is claimed by Giddens and Beck to have transformed family life. A finding running through the range of research projects conducted within the Care, Values and the Future of Welfare ESRC Research programme (CAVA) for example, was that people were '"energetic" moral actors, embedded in webs of valued personal relationships' (Deacon and Williams, 2004, p. 387)[9]. As part of the objective to explore the capacity to act in context, I drew on literature which examined the 'relational' aspect of agency.

As part of this development, Jennifer Mason has argued for the need to understand agency both as individualised and relational. Her research suggested the need to apply a lens to the 'the processes of relating' as much, if not more than to the individual or the self. The emphasis here, as she says, is markedly different to that of individualisation theorists such as Giddens.

> [The emphasis is] 'qualitatively and substantially different from the idea of individuals *with* relationships and responsibilities (and rights) that underpins, for example, Giddens' reflections on family democracy (Mason, 2004, p. 177, emphasis in original).

Some of this empirically-based research, which claims that *interdependence* remains a social norm, has also sought to argue against the prevailing negative discourse of 'dependency', for example, in the areas of disability and ageing (e.g. Fine and

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[8] The *Qur'an* is the central religious text of Islam, considered to have been revealed to the Prophet Muhammed by the Angel Gabriel. The *Hadith* is the oral tradition of the words and deeds of the Prophet and the *Shari'ah*, the body of religious law.

[9] The Care, Values and the Future of Welfare ESRC Research Group (CAVA) was a five-year programme based at the University of Leeds from 1999.

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Glendinning, 2005; Lloyd, 2004) with Williams (2001) suggesting that the New Labour 'ethic of paid work has to be balanced by an ethics of care' (p. 468).

As many authors have emphasised, a key feature of individualisation theory, the promotion of a narrowly rational, reflexive and autonomous agent downplays the impacts of structural differences on the capacity to act (e.g. Hoggett, 2001; Mason, 2004; Reay, 2003). Mason has said that:

> The individual, reflexive author of their own biography, identity and self, or the individual in command of the exercise of their own rights and responsibilities, has ... been argued to be a lived reality for only a small and highly privileged minority of white middle class men, apparently unencumbered by kinship or other interpersonal commitments (Mason, 2004, p. 163).

Various studies in the field of higher education have claimed that 'gendered' narratives articulate different kinds of experience for men and women (Britton and Baxter, 1999). In Reay's (2003) research for example, the motives that the working class women she interviewed had for pursuing further education, were new Communitarian rather than individualistic, the project a 'social' rather than an 'individual' one. In economically advantaged middle class families, as Reay also observed, amid the 'continuous juggling of divergent multiple ambitions' that Beck (1992, p. 89) refers to, childcare and housework can be delegated to outsiders; in poorer families, these increased responsibilities and tasks may be assigned solely to mothers, reinforcing gender divisions.

In my research focus on agency in context, I also wished to explore how parents managed or accommodated both 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' values and practices in their lives, reflecting Mason's expressed interest in how 'individualistic and relational discourses and practices are interwoven' (Mason, 2004, p. 163). In other studies, Smart and Shipman's (2004) study of marriage among Indian, Pakistani and Irish families in the UK had identified marriage as a 'system of obligation' which is acted upon in different ways, with individuals seen to be committed both to tradition and to change. Yip, referred to above, (2004) had looked at how British non-heterosexual Muslims 'managed' their 'dissident' identities in the face often of very traditional community life, in which marriage and family were seen as 'imperative to

social stability' and maintaining family honour of paramount importance. He suggested that the identities of younger generations of Muslims drew on a range of cultural repertoires, incorporating their own cultures and that of the host society (p. 339), with participants 'bridging' different modes of individualism and collective obligation.

'Autonomy' and 'collective agency'

As indicated, individualisation theorists identify unprecedented levels of personal autonomy as a *crucial condition* of the agency that can be exercised. For Giddens, autonomy is seen as integral to democracy and an important element of the increasingly 'democratic family'.

> Self autonomy permits that respect for others' capabilities which is intrinsic to democratic order. The autonomous individual is able to treat others as such and to recognise that the development of their separate potentialities is not a threat. Autonomy also helps to provide the personal boundaries needed for the successful boundaries of relationships (Giddens, 1992, p. 189).

Third Way, New Labour and Sure Start discourses do not emphasise autonomy as such, but assume that individual decision-making will be unencumbered; policy guidance treat parents as a homogenous block, failing to acknowledge that family members may have different interests and that decision-making may not be shared or consensual (see also Chapter 2). The concept of 'autonomy' as a fundamental part of parental agency seemed to be important for me to understand in my research, as the capacity for action in this context - and specifically to make use of particular Sure Start services concerned with improving parenting and training for work - appeared to be highly dependent on the ability of parents (mothers in particular) to make decisions for themselves (as well, of course, as the desire to bring about those particular changes).

My starting point in looking at 'autonomy' is the definition provided by Wray (2004) following Friedman (1997), as 'self-government or self-determination' (p. 23). In relation to her own area, ageing and ethnic groups, Wray (2003a, 2003b, 2004) has pointed to a lack of critique of 'western' assumptions that self-determination and independence are crucial elements of agency; this can result in a failure to understand the different meanings attached to agency or action. Such accounts suggest that autonomy is:

> ... linked to detachment from others and to self-reliance. In this, dependency and social contact are positioned as oppositional to autonomy so that power is associated with independence and powerlessness with dependency (Wray, 2003a, para 2.1).

Wray's research points to a wider problem which is the treatment of concepts as 'universal' and a correspondingly (self-evident) failure to recognise their cultural specificity. As Adams (2003) has argued, reflexivity itself can only be understood within the context of cultural tradition, not outside of it' (p. 224) and dominant understandings of reflexivity are shaped by a 'neo-modernist' normative take on culture, which values rationality, teleology, voluntarism and instrumentalism' (p. 225). In terms of the centrality of gender, ethnicity, class and locality to this study, such observations about the failure to interrogate assumptions about concepts as universal are critical.

In her research above, Wray was able to contrast meanings associated with 'autonomy' with those linked to the empowering impact of *collective* identity and practices. Arguing for an understanding of *collective agency* which acknowledges the 'centrality of collective social practices and knowledge', she notes that 'This type of collective agency is continuously transformed within and across the spaces of cultural and ethnic identity' (2004, p. 24). Among her sample, religious activity produced a sense of belonging, generating 'collective agency' which could then be transferred to everyday life. A sense of collective identity and agency was also important for those who had struggled against racism as they became older. However, from another perspective, it was seen that the agency of individuals could be limited by particular cultural values which circumscribed what constituted 'suitable' choices for older women in particular communities. On a related though separate point, others (such as Meyers, 2000) have pointed out that oppression can affect the agent's ability to develop the skills needed for making autonomous choices (in Kalbian, 2005). Using these concepts, this research will explore the impact of collective identities and practices on the agency and autonomy of individuals.

Exploring agency through 'culture' and 'identity'

In their work on a new framework for welfare research, Williams and Popay (1999) identified the need to 'recognise individual variability and creative human agency

without losing sight of the dynamics of social structure' (p. 159). As part of this approach they explored the development of 'mediating concepts' through which agency and structure could be linked. The research focus above led me to an interest in 'identity' and 'culture' that represented the 'mediating concepts' in Williams and Popay's terms, through which I proposed to explore agency. This choice had methodological implications, in particular, directing me towards the use of a life story method (see Chapter 4) which included questions about research participants' family backgrounds and other aspects of their lives before becoming parents, as well as their uses and understandings of Sure Start.

Various perspectives on 'culture' and 'identity' guided my research focus. One of these was a conceptualisation of 'culture' itself as fundamentally relational and continually in flux, with these understandings providing me with frameworks through which processes of change could be explored. For Avtar Brah (1996) 'cultural differences between groups are 'constituted within interstices of socio-political and economic relations' (p. 19).

> Culture may be viewed as the symbolic construction of the vast array of a social group's life experiences. Culture is the embodiment, the chronicle of a group's history. Since the group histories of different sections of society differ in important ways, their 'cultures' are correspondingly different. Further, group histories are inextricably linked with the material conditions of society, so that cultures are marked by the social and economic conditions of a group at the various stages of its history. Cultures are never static: they evolve through history. That is why the process of cultural reproduction is, in part, a process of cultural transformation. At any given time a group will inherit certain cultural institutions and traditions, but its acts of reiteration or repudiation, its everyday interactions and its ritual practices will serve to select, modify and transform these institutions (Brah, 1996, p. 18).

There is also, in Brah's words and as others have demonstrated, an 'inextricable link' between 'culture' and 'identity' as identity is both subjective and social and, as she says, is 'constituted in and through culture' (Brah, 1996, p. 21). Stuart Hall (1992, 1996) has been influential in exploring culture and identity in specific contexts of race and ethnicity. He describes emerging cultural identities that are in transition, and uses the notion of 'translation' to describe those migrants who retain strong links with their places and cultures of origin, but develop a 'hybrid' identity:

They are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely. They bear upon them the traces of the particular cultures, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped. The difference is that they are not and will never be unified in the old sense, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several 'homes' (and to no one particular 'home'). People belonging to such cultures of hybridity have had to renounce the dream or ambition of rediscovering any kind of 'lost' cultural purity, or ethnic absolutism. They are irrevocably translated ... They are the product of the new diasporas created by the post-colonial migrations. They must learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them (Hall, 1992, pp. 309-310).

A related perspective addresses the *dangers* of assumptions that 'cultures' or 'identities' are static or fixed, routinely seen in certain academic disciplines and within social policy research (see for example, the work of Waqar Ahmad 1996, who discusses its impact in epidemiology and health research). This also relates to understandings about the 'racialisation' of identities. Malik (2006) suggests that identities are racialised by majority cultures through a process in which:

Culture and religion ... become superficial essentialized markers of difference rather than deep or meaningful categories that are *embodied* by both majority and minority groups (Malik, 2006, p. 93, emphasis in original).

Alongside the tendency towards a racialisation of identity that Malik refers to, there is, simultaneously, an increasing emphasis on theorising intersectionality and on contesting 'singular' constructions of identity (Ray, 2003). Related to this, some researchers have examined the interaction of 'gender' and 'culture' from a perspective that seeks to problematise racialised assumptions. For example, Claire Dwyer examined how young Muslim women use traditional dress, arguing that dress was a 'powerful and over-determined marker of difference' and contesting the prevalence of the 'cultural conflict' model in which young women are defined as being 'caught between two cultures' (1999, p. 7). In other research which looked at attitudes of British Muslim women towards academic achievement, Fauzia Ahmad (2001) questioned assumptions about the categories of 'traditional' or 'independent' women'. For those she interviewed:

Agency was a process of negotiation and renegotiation, through which social, cultural and religious identifications (amongst others) were expressed. Aspects of social life and the 'self' that were 'colloquialised' as either 'traditional' or

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'modern/Westernised' were often overlapping, suggesting their inadequacy and rigidity as descriptive concepts (p. 139).

Amartya Sen also explores identity as multi-faceted but in a broader, globalised context. In *Identity and Violence* (2006) he has explored a very current threat of how the 'illusion of [a] unique identity', often ethnic or religious, is being used to sustain global conflict and violence. An important premise of his thesis is that identity is *context-dependent* - thus an individual can be:

> ... without any contradictions, an American citizen, of Caribbean, with African ancestry, a Christian, a liberal, a woman, a vegetarian, a long-distance runner, a historian, a schoolteacher, a novelist, a feminist, a heterosexual, a believer in gay and lesbian rights, a theatre lover, an environmental activist, a tennis fan, a jazz musician, and someone who is deeply committed to the view that there are intelligent beings in outer space ... (p. xii-xiii).

In a recent 'blog' debate, a commenter ('Haris') concurs with Sen's thesis above, identifying that 'on a Saturday afternoon my most important identity might be that I'm a Man U supporter, but come Friday my Muslim identity is strongest'. The commenter also highlights how individuals from minority groups may be essentialised by those in the 'majority' in order to facilitate interaction, with the effect that complex identities are not recognised:

> As a human being it is perfectly natural to have a composite identity. However, it is much harder for minorities to express these composite identities as the majority tend to focus on one particular identity to make their interaction with them easier. So the Muslim component of my identity becomes elevated to my be and end all – in essence it means the only way I can communicate to the majority is as a Muslim (Pickled Politics, 2007).

Some of the ideas above about assigned and experienced identities and identifications are addressed in the emerging theoretical social policy literature (Hunter, 2003; Taylor, 1998; Williams, 1999, 2000) with Taylor's work seen to be particularly influential in this area. Guided by the need to identify the role of categories of social identity within welfare, he has developed a dual conceptualisation of identity. In this binary, 'categorical' identity represents an ascribed social categorisation, and 'ontological' identity, the unique sense of 'self' that individuals attribute to the range of experiences and identifications they have. Williams uses this model to configure the relationship between these two components, noting that identity 'faces two ways: on the one side it

looks to, indeed, shapes, the self; on the other, it looks to the discourses which place us as social beings' (2000, p. 6). This conceptualisation is seen to be particularly helpful, as Hunter says, in illuminating the relational dimension of the individual and the social:

> If the sameness (categorical) and difference (ontological) aspects of identity are placed on the same axis, the recognition of difference is impossible without sameness and the recognition of sameness impossible without difference. Identity construction becomes interdependent (Hunter, 2003, p. 325).

I felt that Taylor's conceptualisation would be particularly important for my study in providing a focus on parental agency as shaped both by the expectations of others (through categorical identity) and by desire and aspiration that is felt to be personal to the self (ontological identity) leading to questions about how individuals reconcile these different aspects of their identities. More generally, the observations above about ways of conceptualising identity – the dangers of racialisation and essentialism, the need to understand *intersections* of identity as well as the range of *identifications* that individuals might have - was important in my research. This was, among other reasons, because the initial interest in my research focus was driven by the construction of Pakistani mothers in the area by white professionals as 'constrained' and 'victimised' and because it was important to understand how change occurred. Producing nuanced research that contextualised agency as part of identities and cultures that were themselves complex, dynamic and multi-faceted, was critical.

Exploring agency through gender

An exploration of how Brambleton mothers engage with the Sure Start programme forms the central focus of this study. In this section, I explore recent theoretical work concerning gender that highlights important conceptual dimensions for the study.

The growth of divergent political campaigns and a wealth of academic study arose from the so-called 'second wave' of feminism that began in the late 1960s. The focus on 'patriarchy' in that period, associated primarily with radical feminism, and epitomised, in Bryson's (2003) view by Kate Millett's 'Sexual Politics' (1985, first published in 1970), saw patriarchal power as fundamental to the functioning of societies and as overriding other social divisions of 'class', 'race' and sexual orientation. Accusations

concerning the essentialism of this emphasis were made by other feminists including Black and working-class critics who challenged the lack of recognition of different experience and of the 'nuances of power between different groups of men and women' (London Feminist Salon Collective, 2004, p. 29).

The growth of postmodern ideas within academia (and other fields) paralleled this period of feminist resurgence. The relativism of a 'strong postmodern' position and rejection of fixed identities however, risked countering the stress within feminist movements on political action, providing as it did, a 'powerful rationalization for doing nothing/ protecting the status quo' (London Feminist Salon Collective, 2004, p. 26). More recently there has been significant exploration of issues of gender and agency within a feminist scholarship that has drawn on the ideas of structuralists and post-structuralists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault (e.g. in Adkins and Skeggs, 2004), with some aspects of this work contributing towards the conceptual framework for my study.

In Chapter 2 and earlier in this chapter, I have highlighted some of the gendered dimensions of this study arising from the New Labour treatment of gender in policy and also aspects of gender addressed within theories of individualisation. Terry Lovell (2004) has pointed to the apparent attractions for feminists of individualisation theories, for example, in the extension of the social status of 'individual' to women (p. 38); in the emphasis on consumption rather than production 'in relation to the formation of subjectivities and identities'; and in locating the main source of women's oppression in the nature of these 'zombie' collectivities and in the secondary position of women in the labour market (ibid, p. 38). Despite this promise, various challenges have been made to theories of individualisation on the basis of how gender is *lived*, as identified earlier in the chapter, with empirical work pointing to the persistence of a gendered agency which remains 'relational' as well as 'individualised', in addition to its construction within (shifting and overlapping) racialised, classed and gendered dynamics.

An examination of the recent interest in agency as 'embodied', explored in a range of areas of feminist scholarship has been critical for my study in terms of understanding

gender as shaped both by discourses and 'biology', and in considering the symbolic production of gender roles and their material expression.

One example of this interest in embodiment can be found in the relatively new field focusing on the study of 'place' and 'space', which has been drawn on by commentators from feminist and other (e.g. post-colonial and 'queer' studies) backgrounds (e.g. De Welde, 2003). This is a useful perspective for my research. The strong narrative emerging early in my research which linked the physical restrictions of many Pakistani-origin women and their confinement to the home with other aspects of their constraint, highlights the importance of a perspective on how female bodies occupy or relate to 'public' and 'private' space. For Susan Gal:

> The public/private dichotomy is best understood as a discursive phenomenon that, once established, can be used to characterise, categorize, organize and contrast virtually any kind of social fact: spaces, institutions, bodies, groups, activities, interactions, relations' (2002, p.3, in De Welde, 2003, p. 5).

Foucault's emphasis on the need to provide a 'historically dynamic account of the manner in which the micro-political operations of power produce socially appropriate bodies' (Gatens, 1999, p. 229) has had a major influence in the study and theories of embodiment. Judith Butler's concept of 'performativity' (e.g. 1990, 1993) can be seen within this paradigm. Performativity represents a discursive process in which our subjectivity is inscribed on the body.

> As we become subject – as we learn to identify with places in discourse – we do so as the effects of our subjection to normalisation. Our subjectivity is the nature of our capture by power (Hey, 2006, p. 446).

Butler's 'performativity' entails the repetition of actions which create and reinforce gender roles. For Butler, who stands *against* identity as foundational and therefore against 'identity politics', 'there need not be a "doer behind the deed" (1990, p. 25). In this 'thorough ontological critique of subjecthood' (Nayak and Kehily, 2006, p. 460), identity is the result of a *scripted* performance, rather than the cause of it:

> The reality of gender is not to be found in feminist accounts of differently socialised and encultured bodies or in psychoanalytic dispositions formed in Oedipal dramas, but is the result of an illusion sustained by incessant replication of norms that materialise that which they govern. These norms of

behaviour (e.g. how girls [ought to] walk and talk) or how they (should) take up dress as a gendered aesthetic (e.g. looking like a 'normal' woman) operate ideologically to structure the fictive solidity (Hey, 2006, p. 440).

Just as for Foucault, power is diffuse and can produce resistance, so for Butler, while the process of repetition inscribes norms upon the body, it also allows for a subject which can resist those norms. As an example of this, in the mode of 'girling' that Butler describes, the state of 'femininity' produced by the actions of a girl applying lipstick is subverted when she applies black lipstick and calls herself a 'goth' (Butler, 1993). In addition, the *process* of performing gender renders it an impossible task:

> The need to perform, embody and anxiously repeat at once undermines and makes implausible gender accomplishment. Because gender is a rule that can only ever be approximated, these stylisted enactments fall short of the ideal they seek to inhabit (Nayak and Kehily, p. 469).

Some feminist critics have drawn on the work of Pierre Bourdieu to address both the emphasis within theories of reflexive modernisation on a 'self-fashioning of identity' in late modernity and what Lois McNay (e.g. 2003) describes as the negative paradigm of subjectification within the work of Foucault and Butler (as well as within the psycho-analytically-based work of Jacques Lacan) against which identity is understood to be formed. McNay and others such as Beverley Skeggs (1997, 2004) draw critically on the function of embodiment in Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' as partially addressing this limitation and to think through the uses of gender.

For McNay, the 'embedded and embodied' aspects of identity emphasised in Bourdieu's understanding of agency as practice serves to explicate the unevenness of 'ongoing de-traditionalization', and the inability therefore for many to participate in the reflexive 'project of the self' described by individualisation theorists. Giddens' consideration of identity, in McNay's view for example, 'emphasises existential corporeal foundations' and fails to examine 'the deeply entrenched bodily basis of sexual identity'.

> The failure to fully consider sexuality as embedded in inculcated, bodily predisposition underestimates the relatively involuntary, pre-reflexive and entrenched elements in identity underestimates the relatively involuntary, pre-reflexive and entrenched elements in identity. Without having to resort to bioligistic notions of maternal instinct, the inscription of the mothering role

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upon the female body is fundamental in the inculcation of emotional and physical predispositions that maintain gender inequality around child-rearing. It is not clear how such forms of identity, which are overdetermined both physically and emotionally, can be that easily dislodged (McNay, 1999, p. 98).

McNay also highlights the *mediating* function of embodiment:

> At the point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the sociological, the body is a dynamic, mutable frontier. The body is the threshold through which the subject's lived experience of the world is incorporated and realized and, as such, is neither pure object nor pure subject. It is neither pure object since it is the place of one's engagement with the world. Nor is it pure subject in that there is always a material residu that resists incorporation into dominant symbolic schema (McNay, ibid, p. 98).

McNay describes as similar, the conceptualisations of Bourdieu and Foucault of how social inequalities are reproduced through the inculcation of power relations upon the body (in Bourdieu's terms, through a process of symbolic violence in which the individual is complicit). However, as McNay sees it, Foucault's 'docile body' is an atemporal *'tabula rasa'*, 'essentially a passive, blank surface upon which power relations are inscribed' (McNay, 1999, p. 96). By contrast, Bourdieu's emphasis on embodiment *as social practice* is temporalized, as it is understood to express not only the body's retention of norms, but also the 'anticipatory dimension of protension, or the living through of those norms' (2003, p. 143). In her view, this leads him 'to speak of social agents rather than subjects' (McNay, ibid, p. 143) permitting an understanding of identity and agency as generative, rather than merely as responses (or acts) of subjection or resistance to discourses. Thus, while she is sympathetic, for example, to Butler's perspective on the 'compulsory' element of gender acquisition, she insists that:

> the reproduction of normative identities cannot be understood simply as question of positioning within language but as a *lived social relation* that necessarily involves the negotiation of conflict and tension' (McNay, 2004, p.185, emphasis added).

Similarly, while McNay sees Bourdieu's emphasis on the pre-reflexive drive of embodied practice as useful in highlighting the entrenched elements of gender identity, she disputes his own understandings of a 'gendered' habitus which relies on the dialectic of masculine domination and female complicity (through the process of 'symbolic violence') (McNay, 1999), a position reinforced by the theoretical and

empirical work of Beverley Skeggs (1997, 2004) and others (e.g. Callaghan, 2005; Reay, 2003). Further perspectives on Bourdieu's attitude to 'gender' are addressed below on p. 67. .

3.4.2 'Drivers' of agency: explorations of 'rationality'

Both individualisation theories and New Labour and Third Way discourse suggest that agency is action-orientated and directed towards (self-evidently) 'rational', and purposeful outcomes. My early fieldwork provided an account which appeared to question this. In the second theme, concerned with the drivers of agency, I attempted to construct a framework that would enable me to examine whether assumptions were mirrored in understandings of parents and professionals.

Agency as 'ethically' or 'rationally' motivated

Various analytical perspectives concerned with the discursive shifts in ideas about social citizenship have been developed to examine New Labour welfare policy (Clarke, 2005; Dwyer, 2000; Lister, 2001, 2003). In his 2005 paper, John Clarke, for example, points to New Labour citizens as discursively 'activated', 'empowered', 'responsibilised' and abandoned' in different contexts and - reflecting the warning of Lister (2003) - cautions against the adoption of a one-dimensional view which misses the 'contradictory formation and development' of New Labour as a political project (p. 447).

I used these concepts as part of my analytical framework to explore how parents themselves constructed their own motivations to act. The first 'driver' that I considered was the notion of agency as 'ethically' motivated. The critique of Sure Start (as part of Third Way and New Labour discourse) given above, fits within Nikolas Rose's (1996, 2001) conceptualisation of Third Way citizenship, which, from a *governmentality* perspective, seeks to demonstrate the discursive recasting of agency as self-regulating and ethically-orientated. Rose sees in the Third Way a shift from a social to an ethical citizenship which he names 'ethopolitics'; this approach has been used to examine the discourse of various policy areas including housing (Flint, 2004), and parenting (Gillies, 2005). For Rose, 'ethopolitics' can be set alongside Foucault's concepts of

'disciplinary power' (concerned with maximising the utility and docility of individuals) and 'biopower' (concerned with maximising health and welfare), with ethopolitics suggesting that, in contrast to earlier conceptions of people as motivated by social, rational or psychological forces:

> Human beings are now considered to be, at root, ethical creatures. The problems that human societies are undergoing are increasingly made intelligible as ethical problems, and new ways are emerging for governing the behaviour of individuals through acting on this dimension of ethics (Rose, 2001, p. 4).

Rose highlights in the Third Way a 'double move' of 'responsibilisation' and 'autonomization' of individuals; ethopolitics is concerned with instilling into individuals 'responsible self-government and the management of one's obligations to others. In ethopolitics, life itself, in its everyday manifestations, is the object of adjudication' (p. 5). An attempt is also made here to create links between the personal and political in the exercise of ethical citizenship through the community:

> The stake has to be generated in the community-based ethic that shapes the values that guide each individual. This is to be accomplished through building a new relation between ethical citizenship and responsible community fostered, but not administered, by the state (ibid, p. 4).

Given New Labour interest in the family and its new Communitarian influences, it is not surprising that a governmentality perspective which has notions of ethical citizenship at its centre, has also influenced analysis of policy concerned with parenting and parental agency. The discussion in Section 3.3 (including my own analysis of Sure Start discourses) largely fits within this perspective. For Val Gillies:

> The government constructs the worthy citizen as a self-determining, agentic individual who accepts their obligation to act morally. For parents this entails ethical self-management within the moral parameters of normative definitions of 'successful parenting'. Reasonable, rational, moral citizens, by New Labour definition, seek to do the best for their children, and according to policy doctrine, government should play an active role in guiding and supporting them to do so (Gillies, 2005, p. 76).

Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2005) review the shifting conceptions of parenthood, illustrating its 'slipperiness' across different policy contexts. They note that parenting capacity and behaviours are presented differently in different policy areas – for

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example, that some areas present a negative image of parents as citizens as deficient in parenting and human capital and on the other, a more positive image, for example, in terms of choosing childcare or considering themselves as 'market players'. This same double-edged and apparently contradictory conceptualisation of parental agency is seen in Clarke's (2006) critique of Sure Start discourse, noted earlier, in which parents are simultaneously lauded as knowing what is best and wanting to do the best and depicted as deficient, needing professional 'expert' help to change their behaviour.

As well as looking at whether parental decisions and behaviours reflected the 'ethopolitics' that Rose describes, I also wanted to consider a second driver of agency, prominent within individualisation theory and in Third Way and New Labour discourse, which was that of a narrowly defined 'rationality'. Theorists have examined different aspects of 'rational agency' in the context of New Labour policy. Those associated with the CAVA Research Group have identified 'rational choice theory' as central to the New Labour welfare subject (Deacon and Mann, 1999)[10]. Researchers have problematised assumptions that parents will make decisions and take action which lead to particular, 'rational' economic outcomes. For example, in an empirical study which investigated childcare decision-making by mothers, Simon Duncan and colleagues highlighted a 'rationality mistake' on the part of Government, in which 'rationality' was equated with a narrow individualism and the prioritization of economic outcomes over other goals which relate to caring and to broader perceptions about the needs of children and parents (Duncan and Edward, 2003; Duncan et al, 2004). In other empirically-based research, Dwyer (2000) examined the views of disparate groups about perceptions of welfare rights and responsibilities in the context of shifting conceptions of social citizenship. These and other studies describe the range of rationales given by individuals to explain their welfare behaviours, decision-making and assumptions.

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10 Rational Choice Theory is described as 'encapsulating a family of models that share certain suppositions: namely, behaviours [...that] are typically goal-oriented and – through reflective, voluntary and purpose reasoning – tend to be chosen for their future ability to yield aimed-for-benefits that exceed the costs' (Buetow, 2007, p. 594).

Perspectives on the association of agency with 'rational action'

As part of this theme, I also wished to unpick assumptions about 'rationality' itself. The concept of 'rationality' has been shown to be highly problematic. As Buetow (2007) says, in his area of research, non-attendance for health care, behaviour could be seen simultaneously as 'rational' and 'irrational'. He listed various points about this which included disagreements about definitions of 'rationality', the absence of a 'single truth', the 'fuzziness' of linguistic categories of 'rational' and 'irrational' and the inconsistent positions of patients and professionals who adopted different positions about what constituted reasonable action at different times and in different places (p. 597).

In Sure Start, 'rational' behaviour is defined (by implication, and in a circular, self-fulfilling way) by the discourse itself, as involvement in Sure Start to develop the programme and to contribute to the regeneration of the area, as accessing professional expertise to improving parenting, and to take up training or work opportunities to avoid child poverty.

In developing a framework in which to explore the drivers of agency, I was drawn to the 'non-unitary' conception of the self that Paul Hoggett (2000, 2001) has developed. His perspective which emphasises psychological, emotional, and 'rational' (including cognitively driven) motivations for action and *inaction* is very useful for my study. In his earlier (2000) paper, Hoggett describes himself to be 'perplexed and frustrated by the seeming inability of the social sciences to move beyond what seems to be the rationalist models of the human subject' (p. 142). This is attributed to a dominant social constructionist approach to social policy which leads to the risk of 'over-socialized' accounts (in the words of Shilling, 1997), which in some cases he says, presents a 'socially constructed body ... preoccupied with the way in which society inscribes its disciplinary codes upon a passive corporeality' and in which cognition and language are privileged above 'emotion and effect' (Hoggett, 2000, p. 142).

Arguing from a psychosocial perspective, Hoggett expresses the view that social policy needs a subject in 'which mind and body, reason and passion, self and other, agent and object are held simultaneously in mind without splitting from the other' (2000, p. 143). In his 2001 paper, this argument for a more complex understanding of the self is used in

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a critique of the model of rational agency advocated by Giddens and New Labour and in the presentation of a typology of the self and reflexivity in a social policy context. In this model, Hoggett positions the self in four quadrants – as reflexive subject (in the Giddens and New Labour mould), but also, critically as *non-reflexive* subject, and as reflexive and non-reflexive *object*. An example of someone demonstrating non-reflexive agency might be a man who batters his partner but sees himself as a victim; the self as reflexive object is exemplified by someone who is experiencing racism, but unable to do anything about it. A non-reflexive object may be subject to the domination of others, producing a powerlessness which impacts upon their 'capacity to find words to think about their experience' and therefore upon their identity:

> The experience of powerlessness which results from poverty, marginalisation and the exercise of domination by others also impacts upon one's psychical integrity' ... this is when the other, whether a powerful parent or parent or a dominant cultural group or class, invades the subject, gets inside their head, 'tells' them what they are thinking or 'feeling' (Hoggett, 2001, p. 49).

As Hoggett suggests, the self as reflexive subject reflects the claims of Giddens' structuration theory which states that people act rationally because the 'rules' allow them. Giddens' Third Way thesis, as indicated earlier, promotes forms of welfare which encourages individuals to respond to the challenges of contemporary society, using the notion of the 'autotelic self' ready to translate potential threats into 'rewarding challenges' (1994a, p. 192). Working with Hoggett's model, Greener (2002) further describes the *difficulty* of refusing this role, because this would mean admitting dependency:-

> ... especially upon the state - and that will never do. We can only be dependent upon the state in this brave new world when we have attempted an innovative employment risk and it has not come off. Under these circumstances, we can receive, for a limited time, assistance or retraining to allow us to secure employment elsewhere or to attempt another risk. We must never, however, become dependent. We cannot be disabled or suffer from mental difficulties, for admitting that agency might be constrained by circumstance is to allow dependency to be legitimised (p. 697).

Bourdieu's 'theory of practice'

As the process of analysis progressed, I also came to see aspects of Bourdieu's 'theory' or 'logic' of practice (1977, 1990) as contributing a valuable perspective. In particular,

I found this theory helpful in presenting an analytical counter to models of agency within individualisation theory and Third Way policy which had a primarily voluntarist emphasis. Below, a brief summary of his key ideas that were of use in this study is presented.

Bourdieu promotes a 'reflexive sociology' with theoretical ideas emerging from a significant body of empirical work. His major contribution to theory, the 'logic of practice' is seen to move beyond objectivist and subjectivist accounts of agency and structure.

In this conception, the social world is divided into relatively autonomous *fields* in which social relations are played out in struggles for resources. In the social space that he envisages, in which agents are understood to act *in relation* to each other, different types of 'capital' are deployed which may act on their own or together (May, 1996). The purpose of the habitus is to maximise value in the shape of different forms of capital. The main types of capital, representing different forms of power, are cultural, social, symbolic and economic. Symbolic capital is identified as the 'power to confer meanings upon social reality while also providing for a social recognition of one's place within social relations (May, 1996, pp. 125-6). Symbolic violence in which these meanings are internalized by dominated agents whereby they become complicit in their subordination involves a process that is referred to as 'misrecognition'.

Bourdieu's conception of agency identifies it as 'practice' that occurs in the interaction of 'habitus' (with capital) and 'field'. Habitus is a set of:

> ... systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (1990, p. 53).

Habitus is embodied in 'dress, habits, attitudes' and is understood to be largely pre-reflexive or unconscious (Greener, 2002, p. 692) and incorporates *doxa*, fundamental thought processes and beliefs emerging from it. The transcendent aspect of habitus as Reay (2004) observes, enables us to see the 'ways in which not only is the body in the

social world, but also ... the social world is in the body' (p. 432). The habitus is thus a form of 'socialised subjectivity' (in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 126) where history is re-enacted through the reproduction of social practices. As May puts it:

> It is a way of producing social practices and a way of perceiving and appreciating practices: the 'habitus implies a "sense of one's place" but also a "sense of the other's place" (May 1996, p. 127).

As the habitus is generative, it becomes active in relation to a field. Practice occurs 'in the relation between habitus and the specific social context, or field, within which individuals find themselves' (Greener, 2002, p. 692). Social relations in the field are affected by the ability of the habitus to be strategic or 'play the game' which in itself is also dependent upon the ability to acquire different forms of capital.

Bourdieu's emphasis is on the economic and his primary interest is in the reproduction of a classed system. However, for some feminist scholars who have chosen to work with the 'logic' of practice, significant difficulties are apparent in his treatment of gender, attributed to his failure to engage with feminist theory (Skeggs, 2004). In particular, little scope for movement of the feminine habitus is provided by Bourdieu. This is because in his understanding, an 'embodied gendered dialectic' which is 'structured through hierarchical relations of difference' (Skeggs, 2007, p. 7) means that 'masculinity' is associated with 'high' culture, the public sphere and the economic, and 'femininity' with 'low' culture and the private. Gender is treated as *mediating* class position and viewed as a 'hidden' and universal category. It is assumed that 'femininity' cannot accrue capital, and is particularly subject to symbolic violence and misrecognition. Nonetheless despite fundamental problems, Bourdieu's ideas have been used extensively to explore aspects of gendered and to a lesser extent 'racialised' inequalities (see Reay, 2003; Reay et al, 2001) and to shed light on apparent paradoxes in these areas. This emphasis became centrally important to my study, with accounts of agency as embodied practice enabling me to examine *constraint* as a fundamental dimension of action and decision-making and to explore the impacts of structural difference on the capacity to act.

3.5 Chapter conclusions

At the centre of this thesis is an empirical study that explores the agency of parents using a Sure Start programme within a conceptual framework which examines the relevance of assumptions within both social policy and its discourses and within current sociological thinking.

At the start of this chapter I looked at the conceptualisation of agency and identity within the work of individualisation theorists, Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim and then at Third Way, New Labour and Sure Start depictions of agency in policy discourses. I then identified two overlapping themes that would provide a conceptual focus for my research. The first was concerned with understanding agency as shaped by context. Here, I addressed particular concepts that would be explored through the empirical work, including autonomy, agency as relational and collective, and contextual frameworks of culture and identity. The second theme was concerned with what I described as 'drivers of agency'. While discourses in particular suggested that agency was (or should be) driven by 'ethical' or 'rational' motives, I proposed that my research would explore motivation in broader terms, which incorporated Bourdieu's concept of 'practice' as embodied, and which also included other 'non-rationalist' perspectives.

4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Jennifer Mason states that it is not enough for researchers to say they wish to describe something; rather, qualitative research should produce 'social explanations to intellectual puzzles' (2002, p. 18). As Chapter 3 identified, the 'intellectual puzzle' that interested me from the start of my involvement at Brambleton Sure Start, was a conflict or 'dissonance' between policy assumptions and local, professional descriptions of human (in this case, parental) agency. Where policy and more recent sociological constructions of human agency constructed it as active and rational, staff described local mothers - in striking contrast – as often constrained and passive in relation to their use of services and aspects of their lives more broadly. Attempting to understand and explain this puzzle, the qualitative, inductive, case study that I carried out was characterised by various elements:

- It had elements of a collaborative research approach and the relationship with my funder, Brambleton Sure Start (BSS), staff and mothers shaped its progress, focus and management.

- It was grounded in elements both of social constructionist and phenomenological epistemologies.

- It was characterised by ethnographic elements, primarily extensive observation, although the data on which Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are based, derive largely from a set of semi-structured interviews with mothers and staff.

- While a grounded theory approach was initially used, a method employing elements of narrative analysis was later adopted.

- A focus on reflexivity was an integral part of the process. Central to this focus were questions about how I as researcher was situated, for example, in my role as a white researcher engaging with Asian and white mothers and with (largely) white professionals.

In Chapter 3, two central research questions and a series of subsidiary questions emerging from the conceptual framework were outlined. This chapter provides a reflexive account of the research methodology through which those questions will be addressed. It does this by outlining important elements and stages of the research, although in practice, these were overlapping. The chapter begins by looking at key dimensions of the study in the early stages, then at aspects of the fieldwork including the methods and ethical concerns, and finally at the approach to analysis.

4.2 Setting up the study: key dimensions

4.2.1 A qualitative, inductive case study

Silverman (2000) says that there is no agreed doctrine underlying qualitative research but lists of a set of preferences outlined by Hammersley (1992, in Silverman 2000, p. 8) which includes the rejection of natural science as a model, the prioritising of words and images over numbers, of meanings over behaviour, and for inductive rather than deductive strategies. As Silverman (2000) adds, a long-held emphasis on qualitative research as 'subjective meaning' has broadened to include issues of 'language, representation and social organization' (p. 1). More recently, assumptions which saw the researcher as unbiased 'scientist' whose role was to uncover 'reality' are now increasingly dismissed. This is due to an acknowledgment that the 'knower' is implicated in the 'knowledge' which is 'produced' rather than 'collected' for 'it is the process of production that is fundamentally related to the product' (May, 2002, p. 1).

The focus in case study research is on *particularity* rather than *generalisability*. As Stake says: 'We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does' (Stake, 1995, p. 8). This leads to difficult questions about the ability of case study research to generalise (Silverman 2000), with Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggesting that it is not possible as phenomena are utterly contingent on context and on time. However, Mason has argued that (at least some degree of) generalisability is very important and that qualitative researchers should not be satisfied 'with producing explanations which are idiosyncratic or particular to the limited empirical parameters of their study':

Qualitative research should produce explanations which are *generalisable* in some way, or which have a wider resonance (2002, p. 8, emphasis in original).

In terms of these debates, the claims I will be making perhaps come nearer to reflecting the pursuit of 'working hypotheses' (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p. 238) than that of generalisability. In my research I suggest that a tension between national policy and local practice and experience is likely to apply to Sure Start and to other policy areas where there are assumptions about the agency of welfare users as undifferentiated by socio-economic difference. My emphasis moreover also reflects Bryman's view that in qualitative research, 'the issue should be couched in terms of the generalizability of cases to *theoretical* propositions rather than to *populations* or universes' (1988, p. 90, emphasis added).

4.2.2 Brambleton and its Sure Start programme

Brambleton is located at the eastern border of a northern English city, in this thesis named as 'Plowden'. A motorway runs through Brambleton, separating it geographically from the rest of the city. Brambleton has a residential border with a neighbouring town (named here as 'Podsham'), but not with any residential area of Plowden.

The location of the area between two rivers and Brambleton's location on a canal have formed its industrial history. Coal, iron and stone were worked in the Brambleton Park area before the nineteenth century but the Brambleton Park Collieries were closed in the mid 20th century (Wilson, 1994). Large numbers of migrants from Pakistan who settled in Brambleton in the 1950s and 1960s worked in local metal manufacturing industries. Much of this employment was lost in the following decades as a result of technological developments and changing markets.

The 2001 Census suggests that the proportion of Brambleton residents living in social housing (19.5%) was significantly smaller than the comparable figure for Plowden as a whole (30.3%) (Health Informatics Service, 2004). In addition, data from 2004 indicated that 28% of children lived in households receiving Income Support compared with 19% in Plowden as a whole (Health Informatics Service, 2004). The Brambleton

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Sure Start Delivery Plan states that the area had a very low rate of lone parenthood, with 12% of births born to teenage mothers; these were thought mainly to be married (Brambleton Sure Start, 2001). The Delivery Plan also identified that 45% of children at the Brambleton Nursery and Infants School were entitled to free school meals.

It has been said that many of the resident Pakistani families had lived in Brambleton for forty years, with the population being more stable than similar multi-ethnic neighbourhoods (Brambleton Sure Start, 2001). Although the racialisation of Brambleton as 'Asian' forms a central theme of the study, Census data (ONS, 2001) indicated that the area was broadly divided between white and Asian populations (the former around 52% and latter, 41%, with Pakistani-origin individuals forming 91% of this group). Brambleton Sure Start monitoring data and 2001 Census data suggested in 2004 that just over a half of Pakistani-origin families were registered with Brambleton Sure Start whereas the comparable proportion for the white population was under one-fifth[11]. These disproportionate registration levels are addressed in the empirical work of the study. The age profile suggests that Pakistani-origin children aged 0-4 represented 57% of this age group (just over 200) while white children represented 34% (just under 100).

Brambleton contained a small number of active voluntary and community organisations including the Brambleton Forum, the Brambleton Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Brambleton Childcare Project (BCP), but was said by local professionals in interviews to have inadequate statutory services input (see Chapter 6). BCP was the lead agency for Sure Start and had been set up in 2001 in response to the widespread demand for childcare in the area. The establishment of a Sure Start programme was viewed as an 'exit strategy' for BCP which had been mainly dependent on short-term Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding.

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[11] The figures are 54% of Pakistani families and 16% of White British families. These results were produced by calculating the number of registered families from monitoring data as a proportion of the number of 0-4 year olds (2001 Census) within each of the two groups. This may have been a significant under-estimation of registration (particularly of Pakistani families) as it assumed only one 0-4 year old per family.

The Brambleton Sure Start programme was one of the smallest in England (Brambleton Sure Start, 2001) as defined by the number of children aged 0-4 in the catchment area. Brambleton Sure Start provided the core services required by the national programme - outreach and home visiting, family support, provision for play, learning and childcare, primary and community healthcare and specialised services including special needs support. In addition, in building the Brambleton programme, particular emphasis was put on maintaining and expanding the BCP childcare provision, as well as on initiatives with a health focus – such as health walks, healthy eating sessions and breast-feeding support (Brambleton Sure Start, 2001). The capital funding provided as part of the national Sure Start arrangements was used to develop a Family Centre which was built on the Brambleton Recreation Ground while this research was undertaken, and opened as the Brambleton Park Children's Centre in 2006.

4.2.3 A collaborative research venture?

The studentship with BSS was established by my first supervisor who had been approached by a former student, a senior staff member at BCP. Roles and obligations of both parties were agreed in a contract which at a very basic level, addressed outputs, resources and ethical issues. When I began to meet with staff at BSS, I realised that the staff group and the university (of which obviously I was a part, although at this early point, very much sensing myself as the 'newcomer') had fundamentally different understandings of my role, with the former having an overriding interest in a study that was practice-orientated and the latter taking the firm view that while I should provide regular, formative feedback to BSS and some kind of final report, the focus of the research would be my decision.

The role that I adopted throughout my involvement at BSS was finely balanced; I was very aware that a significant amount of my bursary (40%) was provided by BSS, which was, as indicated, a small, and therefore relatively low budget Sure Start programme. An ongoing theme at BSS programme management meetings, the struggle to fund provision seen to be essential such as speech and language therapy and interpretation services, reinforced my sensitivity about this. Although staff were supportive and interested, the relationship was also characterised (at least for me) by largely 'unspoken' tensions that were manifested in particular ways.

I became aware from the outset that BSS had expected the findings from an in-depth piece of research to be delivered fairly early within the process (and certainly not after three years) which satisfied questions they had or confirmed and backed up their particular approach. Very early on, during a meeting at which the tensions concerning these different expectations were revealed, I agreed to carry out a small number of discrete pieces of research that staff identified as important to improve practice. This offer of further work was effectively 'compensation' for thwarted expectations. The additional pieces included a project about reasons for Sure Start registration and non-registration (Registration Project), some interviews with fathers as a possible precursor to undertaking concrete work (Father's work), and, later, a focus on the issues for volunteers in which I drew on my own fieldwork, as a contribution to a larger piece of work that was being done.

Early in the process, in considering how to address my concerns about BSS expectations, I considered using an action research methodology, an approach in which 'professional knowledge [merges] with local knowledge in a process of collaborative sensemaking' (Levin and Greenwood, 2001, p. 105). This I felt would 'systematise' the formative input I intended to provide and again, 'formalise' my commitment to the programme. However, the adoption of such an approach particularly when implemented in a systematic action research cycle (e.g. Kolb, 1984), I rejected as too demanding. In another aspect of this pursuit of a more 'committed' approach, I also considered adopting a participatory approach with mothers, but this was also felt to be too difficult. I acknowledged to myself, that given the complexity of the case study and in particular the differences between parents, using 'participatory' mechanisms such as returning transcripts and asking for comments would have been a token attempt to make myself feel that I was addressing the power imbalance with participants rather than a 'genuine' attempt to improve the methodology or to produce more 'truthful' accounts.

4.2.4   Issues of 'focus' and epistemology

There is widespread acceptance that research questions are likely to evolve or change in the qualitative research setting (Ezzy, 2002; Mason, 2002). It was certainly the case that from very early in the process, I had a strong interest in the tensions between

policy, practice and parental experience deriving in particular from my previous experience examining a similar policy initiative. However, a struggle to define my focus more precisely was a recurrent theme for the first two years of my studentship, in part stemming from my unease about the different needs of myself and BSS.

An advantage of the additional work I carried out for BSS was that further 'immersion' in the field, exploring it from unanticipated angles, was contributing to my theoretical conceptualisation of the area and the programme. Within the first few weeks and months of my involvement with BSS as indicated, I had also observed extensively in meetings and groups (including programme management, team meetings and parent groups) and conducted exploratory interviews with staff as part of the familiarisation phase. Themes that had emerged at this early stage, were further explored in both the Registration Project and the Father's work. In the former, the suggestion from some white non-registered mothers that Sure Start was 'not for us, it's for the Asians' was subsequently examined in professional interviews and carried into the main study; in the latter, the exclusion of many fathers from childcare and other aspects of their children's lives was described by some fathers in the area as well as by professionals, contributing to my conceptualisations of gender and agency in the area.

Despite the advantages of this conceptual development, the unplanned aspect of this additional work caused me to delay concretely focusing on design of the fieldwork that was to form the centre of the PhD research. Part of the delay reflected my struggle to reconcile the different interests of BSS and myself. As an experienced contract researcher/evaluator, I was very concerned for example, that the priorities of BSS would lead me to an evaluation-based study; I frequently commented upon this in my diary, at one point, in early 2004, fearing that if I did not sort out a theoretical framework, I would end up with a 'glorified piece of contract research'.

Related, the sense that I was being (albeit politely) pulled in an unwelcome direction - in particular towards a less explicitly theory-based evaluation of 'what works' - led to a prolonged 'fuzziness' on my part about where I stood in terms of the ontological and epistemological claims of my research. Layder (1993) points to a divide within social science between academics who stress the importance of, and those who reject the value

of theory; often a lack of concern for theory derives from the policy goals of research, where priorities have been empirical, for example, to feed into and inform policy formation. More recently, the importance of a theoretical underpinning within contract research and evaluation has been emphasised by some academics, particularly given the growth of public policy evaluation under the New Labour Government to accompany its new interventions (see for example, the application of 'theories of change' models in large-scale evaluation in Sullivan et al, 2002).

Despite my concerns about an imprecise focus and direction, certain themes preoccupied me intensely from the start. My interest in the areas of *agency* and *gender and 'race'/ethnicity* led me to an approach, influenced by Lisa Cosgrove's (2000) research, which combined social constructionism and phenomenology. Social constructionists (or constructivists) occupy a range of positions in relation to claims about the extent to which the world is 'constructed' although there is an underlying assumption that 'knowledge is not disinterested, apolitical and exclusive of affective and embodied aspects of human experience, but is in some sense ideological, political and permeated with values' (Schwandt, 2000 p. 198). A social constructionist perspective can critique traditional notions of the self as ahistorical and of 'gender' and 'race/ethnicity' as 'natural' or unproblematic (Cosgrove, 2000). From this position, gender and other 'categorical' identities or characteristics are 'accomplished' rather than innate and are constituted and actively produced. Integral to this approach is the notion that understanding of our experience is mediated through language and is never independent of language' (ibid, p. 252). For Hollway and Jefferson, the term discourse:

> refers *beyond language* to *sets of organised meanings* – [it] is used to emphasise the organised way in which meanings cohere around an assumed central proposition, which gives them their value and significance' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 14, emphasis added).

Examining the discourses of the Third Way and of New Labour and Sure Start policy was an important part of the study. The primary feature of Discourse Analysis used in this research in Gill's (2000) terms, was a concern with the 'action orientation' or 'function orientation' of discourse, in particular, the way that New Labour used language to conceptualise 'good' and 'bad' parents, to discursively remove parenting as a practice from the private sphere (Fairclough, 2000) and create new modes of

citizenship linked both with individualism and new Communitarianism (described in Chapter 2). Here the study builds on the Foucauldian-inspired critiques of Nikolas Rose (1996, 2001) and others who have used his notions of 'ethical citizenship' and of 'ethopolitics' in the context of parenting and services for parents (such as Edwards and Gillies, 2004; Gillies, 2005, see Chapter 3).

A social constructionist perspective focuses on 'meaning', though from this perspective, such meaning is assumed to be 'produced (or even policed) through discourses rather than revealed' (Cosgrove, 2000, p. 257). In my study it was important to analyse how the 'experience' of mothers was mediated through gendered and racialised discourses and using my chosen method of analysis, through the 'cultural narratives' described by parents and professionals. However, the disadvantage of this approach is that it does not provide a conceptually adequate account of individual agency, as Cosgrove identifies, for:

> Stated in the extreme, how can there be the possibility of agency, choice and resistance over our experiences, if all we are is the effect or product of discourse(s)? (ibid, p. 258).

In her own research which examined the mental health distress of women, Cosgrove highlighted the value of combining a social constructionist perspective, which would reveal the discursive production of power, femininity and how agency was constituted within this, and of a phenomenological approach which emphasised the 'richness and complexity of an individuals' lived experience' and which privileged agency (p. 247). A phenomenological perspective stresses the importance of the individual's lived world and the 'radically experiential nature of "reality"' (ibid, p. 255, after Husserl, 1962). While phenomenology is problematic in its lack of concern with structure and power relations and in its uncritical acceptance of the status of an individual account, it does allow for a nuanced examination of choice and resistance as part of a complex treatment of agency. For Cosgrove, in reconciling the use of these two (potentially contradictory) frameworks, it was necessary to reject the 'forced choice' of a 'discursively constituted subject or an agenic self':

> ... perhaps phenomenology needs the political awareness (that is, the attunement to power dynamics) of social constructionism so that it does not lapse into a naïve humanism and social constructionism needs phenomenology

so that questions of agency – and hence the possibility of real change in the real world – are not rendered moot. Without a more well rounded conception of agency, we have no way to theorize about (much less understand at an individual level) resistance. But we must be very careful that in privileging agency we do not sacrifice the socio-political grounding of subjectivity and experience or sacrifice an attunement to changes that need to take place at the macro/structural level (ibid, p. 259).

In my research, I wanted to understand how structures and discourses mediated understanding, experience and action, but I also wished to reflect on the tensions between these processes and the 'sense of self' that participants communicated. In doing this, it was important to recognise that their accounts reflected in part their 'lived experience'. While very aware of the warnings that Mason (2002) and others have given of the dangers of attempting to combine different (and potentially competing) interpretations of how social reality is constructed, I felt this was a useful - albeit slightly risky - approach.

4.3   Conduct in the field: methods and ethics

4.3.1 Observation and participation: aspects of early 'immersion' in the field

Atkinson et al (2004) describe ethnography as 'grounded in a commitment to the first-hand experience and exploration of a particular social or cultural setting on the basis of (though not exclusively by) participant observation' (p. 4). Although observation and participation represent the main ethnographic tools, other sources such as textual and visual materials are also used. While a series of semi-structured interviews formed the centre of the study, observation and participation played a key role, providing very important initial and ongoing theoretical direction for the study. This occurred in various ways, for example, enabling access to a form of 'insider knowledge' and adding depth and complexity to my interview data. For most of the period of the studentship, I was a frequent observer and participant at BSS groups and activities.

Denzin (1970, p. 162) has said that 'cultures do not provide within their social structures a role called participant observer. Thus you must create a role for yourself and simultaneously establish the legitimacy of that role'. Adler and Adler (1994) noting a

change in practitioner attitudes towards greater involvement have recast Gold's (1958) four-fold typology of 'complete participant' to 'complete observer', identifying that three membership roles now appear to predominate:

- The complete-member-researcher
- The active-member-researcher
- And the peripheral-member-researcher.

While at Brambleton, I found it difficult to narrowly define a participant-observer role for myself, adopting each of these three roles at different points. The level and quality of my involvement in different group activities was partly shaped by what was asked of me or what I perceived the expectations to be – this latter also reflecting the intermittent unease about the obligations I felt I owed to Brambleton Sure Start, described earlier. Generally, at first, I would attend staff and parent meetings (such as team meetings or parent groups) and take notes without contributing verbally, although the level of involvement increased as I became more familiar with the workings of the programme. However, in some cases I was, in Adler and Adler's terms, an 'active-member-researcher' or 'complete-member-researcher' from the start. In one of these cases, aware of my experience of evaluation, the Monitoring Officer asked me to join and help with the work of the Programme Evaluation Group. I was also an active participant-researcher in the Parent's Group; given one of my key theoretical interests, the concept and practice of 'active parental involvement', I felt it very important, not simply to observe these meetings, but to question and 'interrogate' if necessary. In the third case, fairly late in my studentship, I attended a series of Urdu classes as a student, like other participating (white) staff and mothers.

As suggested, it is commonly accepted now that researchers are an *integral part* of the research, contesting assumptions about their role as 'neutral' and the product as 'independent' of their impact. Thus Stake's (1995, p. 12) comment that we 'tout case study as being noninterventive ... we try not to disturb the ordinary activity of the case, not to test, not even to interview, if we can get the information we want by discrete observation or examination of records' appears an unlikely objective or at least a naïve position to take. I was continually aware that my presence and assumptions about me were part of the 'contingent' nature of the research and made observations about this in

my journal. As one (small) example, very early on in the study I had a discussion with two staff members about how I should be presented to parents:

> We talked about saying 'PhD student'. Janine said that she had thought I would be very clever (by implication before she met me). This made me think that it would be better if I were not introduced/presented in this way, as it might make people intimidated (at least initially?) - although presumably they would get used to the fact that I'm not like that (or that I'm 'clever', but other people are too, or that I'm 'clever' but nice as well or something). I'm not sure how this was resolved ... (perhaps it wasn't). (Research Diary 25.10.02)[12].

Covert research techniques have been used extensively by ethnographers (particularly in researching taboo or illegal activities) although their use has been heavily challenged by feminists and others (arguments are still made in its favour however, see for example, Ward, 2008). My intention from the start was to be completely open about my role. However, in practice, such a stance was difficult to sustain. In the context of observation specifically, as I attended certain meetings over a lengthy period, I sometimes wondered if a fairly large, disparate and changing group of practitioners and parents knew (or remembered) who I was as I was not always introduced and did not always therefore provide explanation or seek consent to observe. Like others (e.g. Luff, 1999) I was often concerned that my failure to be completely open at every point made the research 'semi-covert'. This is further examined later in this chapter, in relation to consent and other ethical matters.

4.3.2 Developing the 'central study': interviews with professionals and mothers

A theoretical sample; access and recruitment

A theoretical sampling strategy which involves selecting categories on the basis of their relevance to the research questions was used (Mason, 2002). Grounded theorists propose that the sample is not defined prior to the research but as it progresses and its theoretical dimensions emerge (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). They also use the concept of 'saturation' in which sampling occurs until theoretical issues are satisfactorily addressed

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[12] Interestingly in relation to this, Mirza (1998) felt that given the emphasis on marriage and family life by her interviewees (Asian girls and women), her lack of children and professional status as a researcher 'associated with a university, carried very little weight'. As a result, she says, 'I was thus perceived of as "statusless" ' (p. 86).

through the cases explored. This research used these techniques to a certain extent, for example, developing the sample to reflect emerging theoretical perspectives. However, the sample was identified as 'complete' on the basis of 'real world' eventualities, particularly time and capacity, rather than theoretical saturation.

Interviews for the main study with mothers and staff took place between January 2004 and June 2005. In the case of both sample groups, interviews usually lasted between one and two hours, with return visits to complete the interviews made for three participants. A small number of mothers and staff were revisited roughly a year after their initial interview to follow up emerging themes, reflecting the theoretical sampling strategy referred to above.

As indicated in Chapter 3, early in the research process, I conducted a number of exploratory interviews with staff, alongside ongoing observations. The sample of 17 workers in the central study that followed this exploratory work incorporated staff with a range of roles, reflecting the topics that I wished to examine (Appendices 2 and 3). The sample of Sure Start and BCP employees included managers, health visitors, community workers, and home visitors. The sample of four Brambleton staff who were not employees of Sure Start or BCP comprised three local authority workers including a teacher, and one professional from a voluntary agency.

The sample of 14 mothers was stratified by ethnicity (Pakistani-origin/non-Pakistani-origin) as well as by level of active involvement (Appendix 4). Three staff members were also parents who lived in Brambleton; interviews with them drew on their own life stories as well as their roles as workers in the area. These research participants were asked questions from both interview schedules and are included in both samples.

Access to mothers was obtained through a range of Sure Start groups that I attended (health visitor baby group, parent and toddler) and through BCP childcare provision. The choice of whether to hold the interview in the parent's house or in a Sure Start or BCP venue was given to participants, with the majority deciding to be interviewed at home.

Mothers were given a nominal re-imbursement for their time in the form of a £10 shopping voucher. Various arguments either in favour or against paying research participants have been made (outlined in Thompson, 1996), with concerns expressed in particular about the potential introduction of bias (see for example, Cook and Nunkoosing, 2008, on their perceptions of how payment affected the interview exchanges in their study). The case to pay participants has often been made on the grounds that it is one means of addressing the power differentials between researcher and interviewees, a position that I broadly subscribed to.

As there were large numbers of mothers in the area who had come to Brambleton from Pakistan as adults, I decided early in the process to use a Punjabi speaking interpreter to do a small number of interviews with women with limited or no English. On a personal recommendation, I met with an experienced interpreter from outside Brambleton as I had been warned that because of concerns about confidentiality, women were not likely to tell their personal stories to someone who was local. Researchers exploring these issues have stressed the importance of technical competence (linguistic accuracy), particularly in relation to wider risks of endangering research validity (Birbuili, 2000; Temple and Edwards, 2002). Given the themes that were already emerging from the study I was concerned that the strong religious views that the interpreter was expressing to me might inhibit some women. I felt that this issue, alongside other practical, methodological and epistemological implications of incorporating interpreted data, was likely to add unnecessary complexity to the project and decided not to proceed.

Although my research is centred on constructions of parental agency, the interviews in the main study were only with mothers. I had carried out some work with fathers early in my studentship (see earlier) but there was no formal father involvement in Sure Start during this period despite intermittent efforts to initiate work in this area[13]. In this sample, there were some differences between the mothers of Pakistani-origin and other mothers that I interviewed. The former group were slightly younger and more likely to

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[13] During a study I carried out after my studentship finished (Hamm, 2006) a Sure Start Plus father's worker suggested to me that Sure Start, although 'supposedly for parents', was in practice 'wrapped in pink packaging', a comment which reflected the view of Featherstone (2006) and Scourfield and Drakeford (2002) that while many New Labour policies are presented in gender-neutral terms, they had very different implications for women and men.

have a larger number of children. Most had grown up in Brambleton. None of the latter group had been raised in Brambleton and almost all of them had some experience of Higher Education.

The interviews: focus and conduct

Semi-structured interviews were used with both professionals and mothers, offering the facility to ensure coverage of a number of topics, and also to develop and explore ideas raised by participants. Two schedules were used for professionals, the second for a group of local professionals who were not BSS or BCP employees.

Shona Hunter has critiqued a tendency within policy research in which a relatively new focus on the *identities* of welfare users contrasts with the treatment of welfare professionals. Assumed to reflect the interests of the dominant policy-making discourse welfare professionals 'for the most part, remain unidimensional' (2003, p. 332). For Hunter, it is therefore important to explore their relational identities. In my study, the treatment of welfare professionals was essentially about providing a professional 'perspective' as a counterpoint to the 'perspective' of discourse. This could be seen as a limitation within the study in Hunter's terms, contrasting with the more in-depth study of mothers (which did indeed focus on (relational) identity and agency).

The topic guides used with professionals were brief (see Appendices 2 and 3) and focused on perceptions of need, the direction of policy and services. The schedule used with mothers was much longer (Appendix 1), with additional prompts, and interviews ranged from one to two hours (repeat visits to complete the interview were made in two cases). The mother's schedule was very wide-ranging, covering childhood and family, living in and being a parent in Brambleton, use of, involvement in and views about Sure Start, and perceptions of its impact. The life story method used is compatible but not synonymous with narrative analysis which makes *ontological* claims about the storied character of social life). The life story method enables exploration of the intersection of agency and structure, an individual's biographical history and the social history of their life span (Hubbard, 2000; Plummer, 1983; Reinharz, 1992). As Plummer also indicates, the method contain assumptions that life is process-oriented, 'full of ambiguities and changes' (1983, p. 67) and should pay tribute to 'human subjectivity and creativity –

showing how individuals respond to social constraints and actively assemble social worlds' (p. 14).

The schedule also included a section of questions about parental involvement. This had been identified as of interest by staff, and in addition, I had become increasingly curious about its particular significance in the Brambleton context. From my extensive observation of programme management meetings and frequent attendance at the Parent's Group, I had been exposed, in Mason's words, to another 'intellectual puzzle' (2002 p. 18) that was baffling me but that I also felt 'symbolised' the racialisation in Brambleton and its Sure Start programme. Specifically, it had become apparent that - with the exception of two occasional 'activists', one of Pakistani-origin who attended the Parent's Group periodically but was rarely at programme management meetings and another who was Asian but not Pakistani and was only briefly involved - the three mothers who were continually most vocal, most active at all levels and most known as 'involved parents', were white. Given the low level of white Sure Start registration in Brambleton, I felt that this was very striking and required further investigation.

Holstein and Gubrium's (1997) account of 'active interviewing' in part describes my style of interviewing. As these authors observe, following Briggs (1986) and Cicourel (1974), interviews are very specific kinds of interactions. Interviewing is 'unavoidably collaborative' and attempts to ignore or remove the interactional elements of interviews are pointless. Moreover, as reality is continually 'under construction', rather than adopting a neutral position, the interview must 'incite respondents' answers, virtually activating narrative production':

> The consciously active interviewer intentionally provokes responses by indicating - even suggesting - narrative positions, resources, orientations and precedents - in the broadest sense, the interviewer attempts to activate the respondent's stock of knowledge and bring it to bear on discussion at hand in ways that are appropriate to research agenda (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997, p. 123).

This position is certainly contentious. Ezzy for example, suggests that as 'the aim of a good in-depth interview is to obtain the story or interpretation of the person being interviewed':

It is important not to try to suggest to the person how you, as the interviewer, might expect them to respond. This is not an argument for being neutral, it is an argument for ensuring that the interviewer genuinely listens to the voice of the interviewee (2002, p. 68).

Of course, Ezzy's position raises its own questions about how 'genuine listening' is achieved or demonstrated. In my own research I was aware of the collaborative endeavour of the interview and the process of joint meaning-making that Holstein and Gubrium describe, particularly in certain interviews. A memo on the transcript of an interview with a BSS practitioner for example, included the comment that I was 'leading here, but trying to get her to talk about this'. With this particular participant, following her lead, I raised what could be seen as 'high level' policy and theoretical issues in order to push for her perspective, in a way that I did not always do with her colleagues. I was using the same interview schedule for participants but the content of follow-up questions and the level at which they were pitched depended on my judgement of the ability and 'robustness' of the individual to engage (see below for how this applied to interviews with mothers).

My approach also reflected Holstein and Gubrium's position that rather than adhering to the ideal of 'letting the data speak for themselves', the active analyst should demonstrate empirically how meaning was constructed through the interview (1997, p. 127). In my research, this was assisted by my use of narrative analysis in which, rather than presenting data which has been divided and fragmented through coding, it is often displayed in the form of large extracts of dialogue between researcher and participant.

The interview as contingent: relating to mothers

While emphasising that each interview represents a specific interaction, Holstein and Gubrium discount the notion of 'bias', suggesting that it is meaningful 'only if the subject is preformed, purely an informational commodity that the interview process might somehow taint' (ibid, p. 126). However, recognition that there are inevitable differences in the researcher's approach and response to participants surely qualifies this or requires the concept of 'bias' itself to be further interrogated.

In the case of my research, a clear example of differences which impinged upon the interaction were the two interviews which took place with parents who had come to the UK as adults and whose limited English affected the flow of conversation and the scope for the development of more abstract ideas. In addition, as I have indicated in relation to dialogue with staff (above), my judgement about the ability and what I have called the robustness of the interviewee to engage at a particular level, fundamentally shaped the interaction and its outcomes. For example, both 'Shamim' and 'Khalida' told stories of ongoing problems with family, but the former's projection of herself (to me at least) as 'fighting back' and the latter's, not as 'weak', but certainly as vulnerable, and without much personal scope for action, shaped my quite different responses to them[14]. This was noted in my diary:

> Now transcribing Khalida - it occurs to me that a lot of judgement required in dealing with some of these sensitive issues - e.g. sure that I felt able to 'push' Shamim more on certain things - felt that she could deal with them. When I interviewed Khalida, I felt that she was quite fragile (also less used to articulating in certain ways?). [With Khalida] I sound very gentle, reassuring, sympathetic, quiet - picking up on her fragility - might be interesting to listen to myself in all the different interviews (Research Diary, 29.5.04).

As well as adapting my responses to participants, I was very aware of my own emotional responses during the fieldwork. For Amanda Coffey this is a crucial dimension of the research:

> We always have feelings about our research setting, peoples and experiences. We can and do feel joy, pain, hurt, excitement, anger, love, confusion, satisfaction, happiness and sadness. Emotional connectedness to the processes and practices of fieldwork, to analysis and writing, is normal and appropriate. It should not be denied, not stifled. It should be acknowledged and reflected upon and seen as a fundamental feature of well-executed research (Coffey, 1999, pp. 158-9).

After one interview I wondered in my diary how my difficulty in 'clicking' with the participant had impacted upon how well I had interviewed her. The extract below followed the first few interviews I had carried out for the main study, and was a 'cathartic' expression of the many emotions I had experienced during those initial interactions.

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[14]   All participant names were changed in this research.

> My reaction to these women in my heart - I feel a huge loyalty (among other things) - partly about how oppressed they seem to be - almost a love for them/big emotional thing for me - wonder if this is the feeling expressed by Janine when she said she wouldn't want to work anywhere else (Research Diary, 29.5.04).

These responses are again part of the contingency of the research. Commenting on the positionality of the researcher from a phenomenological perspective, Allen (2005) accepts that not only the 'interpretative moment' during the research interaction, but even 'posthumous acts of reflexivity that seek to understand how social researchers take "background thinking" into the field' are 'partial':

> This is because the inevitability of social researchers' *constant* "being-in-the-world" (rather than apart from it) provides limits to their ability to "detach themselves from their own researcher practices and thereby objectify their own practices of objectification (Allen, 2005, pp. 1004-1005, emphasis in original).

In my own case and reflecting Allen's comment above, the heightened emotions that I had documented in the diary extract above were not sustained; similarly the commitment that the worker 'Janine' who I referred to had described as having to local women and her feeling that because of it, she would not want to work anywhere else, were also transient, as by the time my studentship finished, she had moved to a job elsewhere.

The uses of 'rapport' and the interview as 'therapeutic experience'

Contesting proscriptions about researcher neutrality, feminist researchers (including Finch, 1984; Oakley, 1981) have advocated that interviewers deliberately develop rapport with participants as a way of addressing unequal power relationships and improving the quality of the interview data.

> This, it has been claimed, encourages a non-exploitative relationship, where the person being studied is not treated simply as a source of data. Research becomes a means of sharing information and, rather than being seen as a source of bias, the personal involvement of the interviewer is an important element in establishing trust and thus obtaining good quality information (Maynard, 1994, p. 16).

More recently however, 'rapport' as a positive in itself, has been opened up to critique including by feminists (e.g. Birch and Miller, 2002; Duncombe and Jessop, 2002; Luff,

1999). In their own research, Duncombe and Jessop recognised that rather than communicating rapport as a 'natural' part of the interaction which reflects the 'emotional work' that women are assumed to do in their daily lives, they were consciously 'doing rapport' in order to elicit participation:

> We found that in order to persuade some of our women interviewees to talk freely, we needed consciously to exercise our interviewing skills in *'doing* rapport' with - or rather *to* - them. Uncomfortably, we came to realize that even feminist interviewing could sometimes be viewed as a kind of *job* where, at the heart of our outwardly friendly interviews, lay the instrumental purpose of persuading interviewees to provide us with data for our research, and also (hopefully) for our future careers (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002, p. 107, emphasis in original).

An implication of 'doing rapport' is the emotional disclosures that can emerge. Although Kvale (1992) has said that the interviewer will know when a topic is 'too emotional to pursue in the interview' (1992, p. 149), as Duncombe and Jessop note, 'even skilled interviewers may find it hard to draw neat boundaries around "rapport", "friendship" and "intimacy", in order to avoid the depths of "counselling" and "therapy"' (2002, pp. 111-112). This calls into question also the meaning of 'informed consent' as these authors note, for if interviewees are encouraged to reveal more than they had anticipated, how far can it be said that they have consented to the interview?

This critique of 'doing rapport' resonated strongly with my experience. On a few occasions, for example, I was uncomfortably aware of the lack of clarity of my role – was I a researcher, a friend, a counsellor? Birch and Miller have commented that research relationships 'may involve, disguise, use and create many differing aspects of social interaction, such as power, friendship, reciprocity and shared understandings (2000, p. 190). The 'blurriness' of my role was reinforced with some parents with whom I had frequent contact – for example, those who were Parent's Group activists and who also attended programme management meetings, one of whom in particular, treated me at points as a confidante who would automatically want to be updated on the latest 'outrageous' incidents at Brambleton Sure Start[15]. Donna Luff (1999, p. 698) worried that the 'simulated friendliness' that she demonstrated in her research might

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[15] This was also a consequence of my ethnographic approach – I was often around, sometimes interacting informally, always interested in what was happening.

appear to support the views of the right-wing women she was interviewing; similarly, expressing interest, and by implication, support for the devoutness of the Muslim participant that I was interviewing, I felt hypocritical and a little deceitful as I anticipated that I would be critiquing aspects of her 'culture' (or sometimes the way the religion was interpreted in the form of 'culture').

I felt particularly concerned about the direction that a small number of interviews took in exposing the painful histories of the participants; that some interviews became emotionally charged was not really surprising given the life story focus of the schedule, although my research diary indicates that I was surprised at points. However, clearly, I was not a therapist or counsellor, nor would it have been appropriate for me to offer those skills even if I had them. In Birch and Miller's account, the researcher describes leaving an interview feeling that she had 'unleashed' rather than 'collected' the participant's experiences (2000, p. 195), a position with which I could identify. After one of my interviews in which the participant had strongly suggested that the parental coercion she experienced as an adolescent was still continuing even though she was now an adult, I communicated my concern to a member of staff, obviously compromising the assurances I had given of confidentiality (albeit that I did not pass on any details of the interview itself).

Birch and Miller (2000) raise another aspect of this kind of personal 'therapeutic' interview. They informally judged an interview to be 'successful' if participants constructed emotional narratives of experiences which may or may not have been voiced before and if these were reflected in other accounts:

> That is the telling of experiences, which must be more "real" if there are feelings and emotions behind such an account. In addition to judging the authenticity of narratives as the presentation of an individual "self", we found that this sense of self was also more compelling if it was found to resonate with those of other participants (ibid, p. 194).

In their research, narratives which 'challenged culturally acceptable ways of talking about motherhood' were seen as '"better", more interesting data' (ibid, p. 194). In my research too, I was aware of the danger of making the stories of those participants who had been 'persuaded' (or actually forced) into marriage by means effectively of their

removal to Pakistan more important than other stories featuring more 'usual' (to me), 'everyday', teenage unhappiness. This was in part, a result of the adrenaline-inducing impact of hearing dramatic stories, in part, of my own impulses towards intense sympathy and a 'heroic' desire to 'expose injustice', as well, perhaps, of the implications of my own confrontation with a world I was not a part of, and the 'othering' (Phoenix, 1994) which accompanied that.

(Further) ethical dilemmas and the issue of 'same' or 'different' 'race' interviewing

Martyn Hammersley has been critical of the 'ethicism' in contemporary qualitative research which suggests an inclination 'to see research almost entirely in ethical terms, as if its aims were to 'achieve ethical goals or to exemplify ethical ideals' leading the research endeavour itself to be seen as 'the promotion of social justice' (1999, p. 18, in Edwards and Mauthner 2002, p. 16). This position is challenged by Edwards and Mauthner, for whom ethics in the context of social research 'refers to the moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of researchers throughout the research process' (ibid, p. 14). While the treatment of ethics is usually associated with adherence to guidelines or obtaining approval from professional bodies before data collection, these matters for Birch et al:

> ... are empirical and theoretical and *permeate* the qualitative research process. The complexities of researching private lives and placing accounts in the public arena raise multiple ethical issues for the researcher that cannot be solved solely by the application of abstract rules, principles or guidelines. Rather there are inherent tensions in qualitative research that is characterized by fluidity and inductive uncertainty, and ethical guidelines that are static and increasingly formalised (Birch et al, 2002, pp. 1-2, emphasis in original).

In this chapter various issues with an ethical dimension have been addressed as part of a reflexive account of the research process. The reflexive depth is particularly important in demonstrating the co-productive, evolving and contingent character of the research. In this study, the issue of *maleficence*, the need to avoid harm, was particularly important. I was aware of the risks of reinforcing the vulnerability of some of the participants, as discussed above, in raising psychological and emotional issues through the interview which they had not anticipated and might find difficult to deal with outside the research setting. Once revelations were made, I also had to decide - despite

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anonymity - whether publication might cause an unwanted response or retaliation of some kind (including for Brambleton Sure Start) and therefore consider the kind of 'truths' that I was prepared to expose and in what circumstances (this was not just about the abuse of some women, but also for example, the predominance of the 'informal' economy in the area).

Earlier I raised concerns about the difficulty of gaining consent in an ongoing observation role and also about the meaning of 'informed consent' given before interviewees were aware of the directions that interviews would take. Noting that the course of a project may 'only be guessed at initially', Miller and Bell state that:

> The precise nature of 'consent' for the participants might only become clear eventually, at the end of a study, when the researchers' impact on shaping the study is visible. This raises questions about what is it that the participant is consenting to (Miller and Bell, 2002, p. 54).

Researchers (such as Miller and Bell, above, and Duncombe and Jessop, 2002) stress the need for ongoing negotiation of consent as a means of addressing this predicament, including during the interview itself. My approach to 'checking out' consent for the main interview study was in three stages: firstly when I informed individuals about the study and asked them if they were interested in becoming involved; secondly at the point of telephoning to arrange the interview, at which point, they were given further information; and thirdly at the start of the interview[16]. This approach was not straightforward despite its comprehensiveness. Miller and Bell have observed that the requirement in research guidelines that consent be 'voluntary' is misleading, ignoring potentially complex power dynamics including with gatekeepers, and 'especially where issues of gender and ethnicity manifest' (2002, p. 55). I questioned at one point, given the imperceptible pressures on mothers to agree to participate, whether the idea of an 'assertive' or 'confident' consent should be developed. However, I also felt that the very act of repeatedly checking out that consent was 'real' might be counterproductive.

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[16] This was not the case for the User Registration study (which preceded the main study) where an opt-out method of gaining consent in which a letter was sent saying that a researcher would come to the address on a certain day, was used. I felt this to be problematic ethically but agreed to it on practical grounds (and when I turned up at people's houses, many felt able to tell me to leave!). Obtaining a significant response would have been very difficult using the opt-in method that I would have been happier with.

Interviewed Kerry yesterday - it's quite difficult to check out consent to actual interview at interview itself as have checked it out several times before (and might put someone off/worry them unnecessarily) (Research Diary, 25.3.04).

As suggested earlier, although I told prospective participants that I would be asking them about their family backgrounds and about the years before they had their own children, this in itself did not necessarily make explicit the kinds of issues that might emerge. Here I experienced conflicting instincts, and the sense, expressed earlier (p. 80) that my research was 'semi-covert'. I felt it very important to be open about the research topics, but also needed to develop the sample and to find out if the narratives that had emerged within the first few interviews were replicated and remained significant across larger numbers. Like Didi Herman, I might have said that 'I was not engaging in covert research, but neither did I wish to jeopardise the project. I did not lie, but I did not tell the whole truth' (1994, pp. 14-15).

Some of these issues were undoubtedly intensified by the social gap between myself and the larger subset within the parent sample, the women of Pakistani-origin. Fawcett and Hearn (2004, p. 21) ask ' Is it possible to research "others"? If so, how is this to be done?' A number of feminists and those speaking from black standpoint positions have argued that the social identities of researcher and participant should be shared in order to minimise exploitative power relations. Some who have carried out research in the UK with minority ethnic communities have identified a preference among a majority of their participants to be interviewed by an interviewer from their own ethnic group on the basis of an assumed shared experience (e.g. Archer, 2002; Bhopal, 2001). However alongside a critique of assumptions about a 'natural' rapport between women (and the greater access consequently to the 'truth' of women's lives) so the automatic benefit of 'same race' interviewing has also been challenged. John Carter (2004) and Mehreen Mirza (1998) both questioned assumptions about the benefits of 'symmetrical interviewing'. For example, initially concerned that his identity might represent 'a highly problematic methodological issue' in his research with NHS minority ethnic nurses, Carter felt more comfortable about this once participants saw him as a credible researcher and independent from the Trust which employed them.

There is far greater acknowledgement now that identity is not singular but located on intersecting axes of difference (Brah, 1996) and that it includes not just categorical identification(s) but shifting interests (Archer, 2002; Sen, 2006). As Fawcett and Hearn point out:

> When one does research, one is not, at least not usually, in only one social relation with the researched. There is not only one existent, dominant or possible form of 'otherness'. People with disabilities are not only that; they are black, middle class, Jewish and so on. There are, at least in most researches, multiple forms of social relation involved between researchers and researched. ... Furthermore, one can clearly be a member of a dominant group in one situation or society, and be an 'other' in a different situation or society (2004, p. 202).

This does not detract from a recognition of the persistent structural inequalities between men and women, white people and those of minority ethnic backgrounds (etc.) or from the importance of examining how power is produced/re-produced within the research process. In the UK 'whiteness' is made invisible against the visibility of minority ethnic 'difference', but discursively and actually, as Bhopal, following Frankenberg (1993) points out, it has 'a set of linked dimensions; it is a location of structural advantage, of 'race' privilege; it is a "standpoint", a place from which white people look at themselves, others and society and whiteness refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed' (2001, p. 280)[17].

'Representation' is an important aspect of this body of literature, addressing a key aspect of the relationship between researcher and researched. Fine (1994) suggests that a 'colonizing discourse of the 'other' has been produced by white researchers interviewing black participants. bell hooks, speaking about difference of various kinds, has likewise said:

> This speech about the 'Other' often annihilates, erases: 'no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to hear your

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[17] This view is problematised currently by the stance of some white working class communities – exploited by the far right – in which a perception about white *disadvantage* is attributed to institutional discrimination in favour of particular minority groups (see Dench et al, 2006, about perceptions of housing policy in the East End of London). A perception from some mothers and staff that Sure Start services were 'for' Asian communities was evident in my own research (see Chapter 6).

story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine ... I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speak subject and you are now at the centre of my talk' (hooks, 1990, pp. 151-2, in Crozier, 2003, p. 83).

Some researchers have attempted to address the issue of representation by incorporating aspects of participatory or emancipatory research into the process. While the intention of Crozier's (2003) research had been to give black parents a 'voice' she came to see this as difficult, given that as the researcher, the decision about whose 'voices' to include and in what form would be hers. The alternative, which was to give the participants 'control over the research and enable them to have an equal say in whose voice is heard' would present major practical, methodological and epistemological challenges. More strikingly, the disability researcher Mike Oliver (1990, 1992) has argued that the only way to avoid reinforcing existing inequalities is for the researcher to relinquish their status as expert, passing on responsibility for decision-making as well as the use of their own skills to participants (in Archer, 2002, p. 129). However, some have accepted that inevitably, there will be limitations to this. As Griffin has said:

> Researchers are always 'speaking for' Others. This is not something to be denied or avoided: it is a (potential) power and a responsibility (Griffin, 1996, p. 189, in Archer, 2002, p. 128)

As Archer says, most researchers are not able to adopt the position that Oliver advises (above); certainly in my own case, applying an emancipatory paradigm would have meant undertaking a different kind of study. In terms of her own work Archer accepted that through her 'selective interpretation of the data, it is inevitable that I will mediate and control the representation of respondents' voices' (p. 128). She tried to understand the role of her own 'race' and gender in the production of accounts, 'to acknowledge that different voices are produced in different contexts', and that 'voices' are produced within racialised, sexualised interactions' (p. 128). I also attempted to pay detailed attention to the interactions between myself and white and Asian women (as well as the way in which they interacted with and described each other), particularly as the racialised and gendered constructions of Brambleton, its populations and its Sure Start programme were both important *context* and *concepts* within my research.

Crozier (2003) says that the trust that participants need to have of researchers when access is negotiated may be greater when those interviewed are not white, especially if the research focus includes a personal element. Non-white participants in research have expressed concern about misrepresentation by white researchers (in Archer, 2002) and in Archer's own study, Asian young people identified white racism as a reason for their preference for an Asian interviewer. Another study has suggested too that black people have expressed more radical views when interviewed by a black rather than a white interviewer (May, 1993). Below I want to address some of the ways in which racialised interactions shaped the research conduct and product of my own study.

Unlike Louise Archer, I did not ask participants for their views about being interviewed by a same or different 'race' interviewer (this would have been hypothetical for many participants in any case) and it is not possible for me to identify if there were certain topics that were either discussed or not discussed because of my ethnic background. However, indirect evidence from the study strongly suggests that my 'whiteness' and my status as someone who did not live in the area, made it more likely that Asian women *would* address certain personal topics. Concerns about the need to maintain *izzat* (see Chapter 3, p. 48) in the Pakistani community were a strong feature of narratives about adolescence and beyond, for example, in relation to young women having secret, unsanctioned relationships. Some participants emphasised the closed nature of the Pakistani community, the level of gossip and fears that promises of confidentiality from workers belonging to the community could not be guaranteed. This last finding is reflected in other research (e.g. in Hennink et al, 1998, and in my own previous work Hamm, 2001), as well as in comments by Brambleton practitioners that Pakistani-origin mothers very often expressed a firm preference for a white rather than an Asian home visitor for this reason[18].

Reflecting the dynamics of the area (as well as the focus and topics of our discussions), my interactions with Pakistani-origin and white mothers and staff were highly racialised. One aspect of the interactions with Asian mothers was the attempt by some to provide 'cultural' explanations to me as an outsider (discussed in Chapter 5). Here I

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[18] The home visiting team included five staff (all of whom lived in the area) of which one was Asian and the others were white.

often assumed a stance of ignorance or naivety. This was sometimes disingenuous on my part and was aimed to elicit further information. There were also points when a 'knowingness' of our differences and what this might mean for our different relationships to racialised discourses were strong subtexts within the interactions. In the extract below, my leading question and subsequent discomfort, Nazia's irony-inflected final response, and our mutual evasiveness dominate the interaction. The extract begins at the point when I had asked Nazia whether Sure Start had given mothers greater opportunities to socialise.

Nazia	Yeah definitely. I think that's the only way they get together really, is having these groups. Otherwise they're more or less in their own sort of er- you know, picture.
Tricia	Do you think that can often happen with Asian women, that they're kind of in their house, that it's maybe harder to do all the things they need to do in the day and to get out and mix with other mums?
Nazia	Yeah, I think so-
Tricia	Sorry, I don't want to put words into your mouth-
Nazia	No it's alright (laughs). I know what you mean-
Tricia	No, but I don't want to assume that you think that-
Nazia	Yeah, chained to the sink (laughs).

My relationships with the mothers that I interviewed were friendly and warm and there were no apparent tensions. I noted in my diary, however, that by comparison with the white women, 'With the Pakistani origin women, our social distance sits between us' although I did wonder if this related 'to culture/religion or more to class/education etc.' (Research Diary, 12.3.04) as the class and educational backgrounds of the white women were more similar to my own.

Participants often conceptualised the area in binary terms (Asian/white or Pakistani/white, Muslim/non-Muslim or religious/non-religious); when this was done by white participants it tended to be much more explicitly loaded with judgement. While the tone of Asian participants describing white parents was neutral (for example, never negative) - possibly in part reflecting their assumptions about my feelings as a white person - this was not the case for their white counterparts. Throughout my observations and interviews, discourses about the Asian community, while often couched in 'friendly' and 'welcoming' terms and rarely explicitly racist, operated at different levels. The substantive content of these discourses forms part of the analysis in

Chapters 5, 6 and 7; here I attempt to look at aspects of my own role in their construction.

At some points I was very concerned that I was becoming too associated with white staff and mothers. As stated previously, I was aware that Asian mothers were the primary focus of the programme's design. Discussions with management and professional staff were often oblique, coloured by the language of a politically correct 'respect for other cultures', but where these same topics were discussed with other white staff or parents, the tone could be quite different. My allusion to 'whispering discourses' in the diary extract below referred to comments made by two unqualified white staff about rumoured religious extremism in the area and about the perceived unfairness of a particular course (delivered in Punjabi) that was being provided exclusively for the Pakistani-origin mothers. The term 'whispering discourses' referred to the content of the discussions, but also to the manner of communication, which I attempted to describe in my diary:

> Whispering' because said almost behind the hands ('don't tell anyone') and reflects popular (white) opinion in the area. Said a bit guiltily – 'I'm being politically incorrect but I think it's true' is implicit. These discussions not really out in the open partly because of political incorrectness and partly because of the presence of Asian staff (Research Diary, 18.9.03).

My sense that I was party to this kind of communication on the assumption that shared whiteness gave me 'insider' status which signified that I would understand and support these views, also characterised my involvement with the Parents' Group. Over a certain period, during which I observed frequently, considerable resentment was expressed at several of the meetings about the lack of involvement of Asian women and about provision which appeared to be targeted specifically at Asian mothers (including the example above). At one point, I wondered whether, in view of the possible implications of my association with certain white staff and parents, I should attempt to make a stronger connection with an Asian worker to provide some balance[19]. Certainly because of the role that I adopted with the Parent's Group, I was able to collect a large amount of data concerning how Asian mothers and the Asian community were seen by white parents; I was not in a position to do anything comparable with Asian parents.

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[19] This would have been difficult in practice, for various reasons.

In terms of a particular aspect of representation, which is the focus chosen or the 'lens' that is applied by the researcher, I was aware of the dangers of objectifying or reifying behaviours or actions of 'Asian women' or 'the 'Asian community' described by Asian and white participants in this sample. Mirza (1998) has said that 'South Asian women come into view at particular points' particularly in relation to 'arranged marriages', tending to be seen as 'caught between two cultures' and thus 'often made invisible or are constructed as "other" in research, as well as "dehumanised" and "pathologized" in the research process' (1998, p. 80; see also Ahmad, 2001 and Dwyer, 1999 on this issue). In my research, these kinds of dangers were made more likely by the strength and similarities of the narratives of white professionals and parents that emphasised the 'oppression' of the Asian mothers. In displaying the narratives, I have attempted to show the complexity of women's lives, to examine resistance (and its effects), to demonstrate the dynamic, evolving character of 'culture', as well as to emphasise that not all mothers in this sample exhibited particular characteristics or had particular experiences.

The narrative approach to analysis that I adopted (see below) was another important aspect of representation. On the one hand, the ontological and epistemological premises of narrative analysis problematise 'voice' as a reflection of reality (Lawler, 2002); on the other hand, the visual display of narratives, the use of large extracts of dialogue between researcher and participant to show story development, provide a mirrored representation of the voices and of how conversations and stories are constructed (although of course, the choice of which extracts to include are still the researcher's).

4.4 Analysis: from grounded theory to narratives

4.4.1 Tools of analysis

As suggested earlier, when I began the study I adopted some of the principles and techniques of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) Grounded Theory. In particular, it was very important for this research that analysis was carried out in conjunction with the

fieldwork for theory development. This was done through the use of fieldnotes and a research diary and through my work on the transcripts.

Fieldnotes

I wrote fieldnotes frequently during and after meetings, interviews and other events or simply while 'hanging around' in Brambleton. As Mason (2002) suggests, fieldnotes can be used in various ways. In my research, they functioned principally as a means to record certain kinds of detail (such as particularly 'interesting' comments, exchanges in meetings or non-verbal communication) and ideas which occurred to me while in the field, which might have lost their 'freshness' and resonance - or which might have been lost completely - with the passing of time. Thus the fieldnotes functioned partly as an *aide memoire* to enable easier recollection of particular emergent findings, insight and feelings which had occurred during observations and interviews or in meetings. These were also reinforced by my treatment of the interview transcripts (see below).

Research diary

Ezzy (2002) has said that some researchers advocate the development of a 'sophisticated filing system from the beginning of data collection as the foundation of the data analysis process' (p. 71). My research diary, written extensively over the period of my studentship, can be seen in this way and had a number of important functions. It brought together my reactions from the field, in the form of fieldnotes as indicated above (sometimes further analysed in the diary), as well as commentary addressing theoretical, policy and other material that I was drawing on as the research progressed. As such it represented a connecting 'thread' that integrated my intellectual and emotional responses to the research. As this chapter has demonstrated, the diary was simultaneously a source of data in its own right and a means for me reflexively to explore my own role and responses (as an example, see earlier, reflections on my reactions to different participants) and the relationship of these to the methodology and to the research 'product'. Reflecting understandings about the relationship between writing and conceptual development (e.g. Olson, 1994), the diary provided theoretical development for the study. This occurred in different ways at different points. For example, initially diary extracts contained many questions which reflected the

'newness' of issues that were arising and my attempts to classify these in terms of my existing knowledge; at later points, I related developing concepts with specific comments made or narratives that were emerging from the fieldwork. The mode of reflection that I engaged in represented my attempts to get 'close' to my experiences but also as an effect of the *process* of writing, allowed a 'distancing' which enabled me to create coherence from these experiences. I felt thus that the diary operated as a *layer* of reflection, clarification and development below the thesis itself, which helped to define its parameters and direction.

Transcripts

While Silverman says that like 'the writing of fieldnotes, the preparation of a transcript from an audiotape or a videotape is a theoretically saturated activity' (2000, p. 131). Fieldnotes and transcripts moreover should include 'what you can see (as well as hear)' and 'how you are behaving and being treated. (ibid, p. 126).

Gill (2000) has described a 'good transcript' for discourse analysis:

> A good transcript should be as detailed a record as possible of the discourse to be analysed. A transcript should not summarize speech, nor should it 'clean it up' or correct it; it should record verbatim speech with as many features of the talk as possible. ... One of the things that strike new discourse analysts most forcefully when they look at - or, better, have to produce - a transcript is the sheer messiness of speech. Aspects of speech that are so familiar that we often literally do not 'hear' them, become visible in transcripts. This includes multiple 'repairs' to speech, changes of gear or topic, pauses, overlaps, interruptions and liberal use of phrases such as 'you know' etc. (p. 178).

I attempted to follow conventions for detailed transcription as Gill advocates (and see Silverman 2000, pp. 130-135), including verbatim speech, signalling silences, particular expressive tones or emphasis used either by myself or the participant. In the extracts of interview conversation that I have included, the underlining of text indicates that the researcher or participant had emphasised a particular word, and silences in interviews are signalled by bracketed numbers e.g. (3.0), where the number indicates the seconds of silence. I also included on the transcripts a column on the right side of the page in which I could comment – for example, on conceptual directions that the dialogue suggested or practical points to follow up.

4.4.2 A narrative analysis approach

My fieldnotes, transcripts and diary led me initially to a thematic coding approach that could be seen as similar to the preliminary stages of grounded theory analysis. This entailed a process of 'open coding' which involves 'breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 61) and then of 'axial coding' in which coded data are re-connected in new ways which identifies relationships between them. However, as the interviews and coding progressed, I decided that a narrative approach in which identity construction is seen as central, and which would enable me to focus on the stories being told, appeared to be a more appropriate way of understanding participant accounts.

For Somers and Gibson (1994), social life itself is storied, thus narrative is *ontological*. Central to *ontological narrativity*, the term that they use, is the concept of *emplotment* (White, 1973). A philosophical rationale can be found in the work of Paul Ricoeur (1984, 1991a, 1991b) for whom a narrative constitutes 'a category by which people make an identity', and which, rather than being isolated from the social world', is, rather, 'intimately bound up' with it (in Lawler, 2002, p. 245). For Ricoeur, narrative must include various elements - transformation, plot line and characters - all brought together within an overall plot (in Lawler, ibid, p. 245).

One of the ways in which narrative enables us to create coherent identities is by providing connections in time, linking our pasts, presents and futures. Lawler emphasises the constant interpretation and re-interpretation of life events and the production and re-production of life stories on the basis of memories 'interpreting the past through the lens of social information and using this information to formulate present and future life stories' (ibid, p. 251). Narratives also connect us to other people and the world around us, in Lawler's words, '[they] are a central means with which people connect together past and present, self and other' (ibid, p. 242-243). Therefore they provide a means for examining the relationship between the individual and the structures around them.

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Researchers identify two types of interlinked narratives, the individual and the cultural (called 'collective stories' by Richardson, 1990, p. 25). However, as Somers and Gibson say, people do not have the freedom to create narratives at will; individuals will therefore incorporate *available* cultural narratives into their own stories. These are shaped by current discourses; moreover, their very expression is delimited by the ways in which experience can be interpreted and presented to others at any point (Foucault, 1972, in Britton and Baxter, 1999). Narratives are also fundamentally 'dialogical' as Carolyn Taylor puts it, 'constructed in accordance with particular sets of purposes and interests' (2006, p. 193). These points reinforce the notion that research is 'contingent', also allowing understandings that the accounts we provide are driven or shaped by the need to justify ourselves in different contexts, and that in interactions (in this case a research interview), such accounts are a collaborative outcome.

Particular kinds of cultural narratives about identity characterise 'late modernity' (Berger and Quinney, 2005). A contemporary 'therapeutic' culture which stresses the dangers of 'bottling things up' also reinforces our willingness to tell 'our stories' (Birch and Miller, 2002). Prominent contemporary narratives include the importance of childhood as shaping adult psychology (Lawler, 2002) and, as Chapter 3 suggested, that of a late modern identity as a reflexively organised endeavour (Giddens, 1991; Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

Recently, narrative analysis has been used extensively to examine and contest particular tenets of individualisation theory. As Chapter 3 indicated, Mason's (2004) study on residential histories illustrated how agency and identity were both individualised and relational. Britton and Baxter's (1999) research on the decision-making of mature students concluded that the different stories men and women told about their lives were grounded in the material reality of different life experiences, and argued that the gender-neutral reflexive self was in fact gendered, with individualism relating more clearly to the greater autonomy of men. As this suggests, narratives are not only contingent on historical location, but also on social positioning. Lawler's own research revealed stories 'saturated with classed meanings' (2002, p. 253).

The relationship between a narrative and 'truth' or 'reality' is also addressed by analysts. As the repertoire of available stories is limited and as narratives are constructed in different ways to different audiences (Miller and Glassner, 1997), so 'the 'truths' people produce through such stories are not 'truths' as conventionally understood in positivist social science: nevertheless, they do speak certain 'truths' about people's (socially located) lives and identities' (Lawler, 2002, p. 254). As 'social products', narratives are thus 'related to the experience that people have of their lives, but they are not transparent carriers of that experience' (ibid, p. 242).

Although I did not set out to undertake a narrative-based study, I found that this approach suited the kinds of interviewee accounts that emerged as well as my epistemological position[20]. It was evident that - within the context of my questions which shaped and bounded their stories - the parent interview lent itself readily to narratives concerned with the complexities of identity and action, expectations and constraints, aspirations and desires. The notions of 'cultural' and 'individual' stories were very useful here (also mirroring Taylor's (1998) conceptualisation of 'categorical' and 'ontological' identities), with the former reflecting what was 'expected' and in some cases, the perceived obligations of group membership, and the latter, the sense of one's (often thwarted) 'real' self, as well as the dynamic resistance and tensions between the two. Although the professional interviews were less 'personal', the schedules and interviews themselves were also orientated towards story-telling, with staff positioning themselves in particular ways in relation to the Sure Start policy and the communities that they were working with.

4.5   Chapter conclusions

In this chapter, I have described the design and implementation of a qualitative, inductive case study which aimed to explore the tensions between policy and theoretical understandings of human agency in relation to the constructions of professionals and

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[20] My interview schedules did use open questions and were interviewee-guided but did not subscribe to the criteria advocated by some narrative researchers (see for example, Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, who suggest the use of particular question forms to elicit stories and the avoidance of 'why' questions).

Brambleton mothers. Reflecting a characterisation of the research process as 'messy' and 'complex' (Spandagou, 2003, p. 105), an area that presented immediate challenges was the relationship with Brambleton Sure Start which had part-funded the bursary. The epistemological position that I came to adopt incorporated perspectives from both social constructionism and phenomenology which enabled an examination of agency as both constructed by discourses and as 'resistant', creative and dynamic.

The second section of the chapter focused on the methods used in the study and on some key issues arising in the field. Participant observation formed an ongoing feature of the research, but the central element of the study was a series of interviews with professionals and mothers. The sample included professionals from Brambleton Sure Start and practitioners and managers from other local agencies while the sample of mothers was stratified by ethnicity and by 'activists' and 'non-activists'. In this section, I also examined important issues arising in the fieldwork, which may be categorised as 'ethical', but which are also seen to be linked fundamentally with the processes and outcomes of the research and which reinforce the characterisation of the research in this chapter as 'contingent'. In particular, I looked at the implications of certain aspects of my research relationships with parents including, very importantly, a consideration of the effects of same and different 'race' interviewing.

The final section of the chapter addresses my approach to analysis. Some aspects of a 'grounded theory' approach were evident, particularly early in the study, in my use of certain techniques such as theoretical sampling and the start of analysis alongside the collection of data. The treatment of transcripts and the use of fieldnotes and a research diary represented a very important part of this. A narrative approach to analysis was also adopted during the research as it was felt to reflect more closely the 'life story' orientation of the interview with mothers, the way in which 'experience' and 'understanding' of various kinds - including the social policy 'story' - was represented and the emphasis given to agency and identity within these accounts.

5. Negotiating identity within the family: exploring women's agency through stories of adolescence and family life

5.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which the constructions of parental engagement with Brambleton Sure Start reflected policy assumptions about human agency, with an important objective being to add to understandings of the relevance of theory and policy in this area. This chapter deals primarily with the roles and identities of Pakistani-origin women in their families in Brambleton, addressing particular conceptual questions presented in Chapter 3.

Different experiences of childhood and adolescence were described by white and Pakistani-origin mothers in the sample. However in this chapter, I have chosen to focus principally on stories from significant numbers within the sample of Pakistani-origin mothers. This choice was made because these stories highlight the constrained character of agency and allow an in-depth analysis of how women manage the expectations and obligations placed upon them. These stories point to the central narrative of the thesis which is the disjuncture between the lived experience of many Pakistani-origin mothers and policy assumptions about an undifferentiated capacity of parents to engage with welfare services. The life stories of some white women interviewed are addressed in Section 5.3 as a means of providing a limited comparison between the two sample parent groups of a key aspect of agency which is the differential levels of autonomy experienced at a particular point in their life trajectories.

In this chapter, I draw on the life stories of a significant sub-set of women to suggest that 'traditional' gender roles that are materially and symbolically distinct are still inscribed in family relations[21]. These roles incorporate expectations, obligations and distinctive practices for women and men. The degree of adherence to 'traditional' roles

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[21] It should be noted that the interview was framed in such a way that if participants did not raise issues around these themes, they were not pursued.

and practices in Brambleton is likely to vary hugely from family to family and to be dependent on a range of factors – such as recent or distant immigration to the UK, socio-economic position, 'ethnic'/'cultural' or religious identifications. While the relationship of these different factors to a greater or lesser adherence to different aspects of 'tradition' for individuals and families are important as part of the life stories told, they are not in themselves a focus of analysis within the study.

Countering assumptions by individualisation theorists about the prevalence of reflexive agency in which there is 'no choice but to choose' (Giddens, 1991, p. 81) I highlight the normative values embodied in these accounts, concerned with *how girls and women should behave* and *how these values are enacted through family and community proscriptions*. The accounts in this chapter suggest that 'choice' cannot be seen, as individualisation theorists imply, as somehow free-floating or detached from the demands of and obligations to others. In addition, the accounts also problematise assumptions within Third Way and New Labour policy that families operate on a consensual basis, that family decisions and action in this way are therefore unproblematic and straightforward. Diverging from current understandings that agency is always reflexive and that the self is an active subject, my analysis in this chapter is guided by a multi-dimensional models such as that developed by Paul Hoggett (2001) who sees agency as 'non-reflexive' as well as 'reflexive', and the self as object as well as subject.

Focusing on common narratives emerging from interviews, Sections 5.2 and 5.3 of this chapter address the role of the daughter and post-school trajectories for a significant subset of participants. While these sections depict the agency of many women as fundamentally constrained, gradual shifts in the lives of families and communities are also recognised. In the final section, the chapter examines processes involved in the 'stirrings of change' – as the attempt to combine the fulfilment of family obligations with the pursuit of personal interests and aspirations show a shifting relationship between agency and structure.

In this chapter I am making ontological claims about the conditions in which agency as narrowly defined by theory and policy is exercised (and the meanings of agency as

context-bound). While this chapter centres principally on narratives produced about capacity and intention to act as *rooted* in family life, these findings have major implications for assumptions about agency in current social policy including Sure Start.

5.2 Playing the 'daughter role'; narratives of possession

The theme of *immersion in their wider family life* characterises the life stories of the UK-born Pakistani-origin women in my sample. This provides an absolute contrast to the stories from their white counterparts, although it should be stressed that where almost all of the Asian mothers had grown up in Brambleton, and lived near or with family or in-law families, none of the white parents had been raised in the area or had family there.

While relationships between the Asian daughters and their families were almost always described in warm and loving terms, in some cases, participants simultaneously expressed negative or conflicted feelings about earlier and ongoing family intervention in their lives. Shamim (now in her mid thirties) emphasises the control that her brothers and her father have had and continue to have over her life. She and her sister were the only daughters and the youngest in a family of six children; the brothers (the oldest of whom is 20 years older than she is) were born in Pakistan.

Shamim	My brothers were like a big influence on me, we had it quite hard, me and me sister, you know, when you've got four [brothers] in the house, they had, you know, a big - control over our lives.
Tricia	The brothers?
Shamim	And my Dad, yeah. I think they were a bit (3.0) too over-obsessed with us, you know, being the only two girls, after being born after a long time-They had more say on me life, than, you know, me Dad or me Mum.

For Shamim, the restrictions imposed upon her were seen to present huge obstacles to the fulfilment of her personal aspirations. This extract arises from a question about whether she thought when she was growing up that she would work.

Shamim	I was gonna become something. I always wanted to be a nurse. Anyway, I had this vision - 'when I leave school I'm gonna go to college, my parents will approve' - I mean, I had to struggle to <u>even</u> get permission to

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apply - they wouldn't let me go at first. And when I did start, me Dad was one of <u>them</u>. He'd go on the bus with me, take me all the way to college and wait for me when it was time to finish, just to - watch every move. I wasn't given that freedom to go with my friends. But I was willing to do that as long as I could go and further my education. Even when it was work experience for school, I wasn't allowed to do that, me Dad wouldn't approve of me being away from a school setting -'oh, she's gonna get a bad influence, she'll get up to something'. That's how bad it was. So I thought 'I've got no chance of going to college', but when I did convince them, it was under a lot of (laughs) - tight security, like - me Dad would escort me there, bring me back. Even when I started working, there'd be someone taking me, picking me up, I weren't allowed to socialise with anyone or anything like that.

Like Shamim, Amina and Saira also described the restrictions on their movements prior to marriage. Some of the restrictions imposed upon all three reflect a fear of failing to maintain *izzat*, family honour. Highlighting her own lack of freedom as a teenager, Amina explicitly, but with discomfort, distances herself from her family and community culture and her ascribed identity, suggesting that families who object to western norms should not live in the UK. Here, her words mirror the racist slogan - 'go back to where you come from' - particularly in her qualification of them -'I'm not being racist to my own self'. Reflecting aspects of Shamim's experience (above), her indignant reference to her father's refusal to allow her to go to the nearby shopping centre in case she gets lost, suggests that control of daughters includes an element of infantilisation.

Amina	It's different for you [English girls], you can have boyfriends, it doesn't matter, your parents aren't- For us, it's different, they think it's a bad thing, it's a bad name for 'em, even talking to boys, they used to think that was bad and- They don't realise that if they're living in this country, then they <u>are</u> going to do that. If you're that worried, then you shouldn't be here - basically. Don't live here then. Go where you want 'em to be brought up basically. I mean, I'm not being racist to my own self or anything. It's just that, if they're gonna think like that - backwards, then they're gonna have to go back to where they think the kids might be brought up right and stuff. It's different here. Parents - parents with daughters, I've always thought that, they have to make the decisions for girls, girls don't have freedom - basically. I mean, I couldn't go to the shop on my own.
Tricia	Before you-
Amina	Before I got married. I couldn't go to the [shopping centre] on my own-
Tricia	Really-
Amina	I had to have my Mum with me. At one time I went and my Dad was like, he wasn't scared that 'she's gonna to do something wrong', he was

scared that 'God, she's gonna get lost, she doesn't know what stop to get off' and things like that'. Because they'd never let us do it-

The movements of Saira are also severely restricted and this forms part of her characterisation of herself as an object of her father's control. The story below demonstrates Saira's ongoing attempts to negotiate with her father, to insist on her rights to more 'freedom'. It is interesting that while she bitterly opposes the right of her father to maintain control of her as an adult daughter, she does not appear to feel any unease in passing this control to her husband. This conversation came out a question about whether or not she is working.

Saira	I don't do nothing no, because my husband doesn't agree with it. He says 'if you work, work in infant's school, but not out of Brambleton'.
Tricia	Locally?
Saira	Yes, not out of Brambleton, so (laughs). He said 'if you do work, ask your Dad because I don't want to get in trouble by your Dad'
Tricia	So your Dad, even though you're married, your Dad still sort of-
Saira	He does - he does say some things, 'oh don't go out, don't do this, don't do that', but I always (say) 'look, I'm a married woman, if I want to do something I'll ask my husband, if I want to go out, I'll ask my husband's permission, I'm married now, I'm not single anymore'.
Tricia	It must be hard.
Saira	My Mum's on my side. My Mum says 'if you always stay in, you don't learn nothing', you know what I mean, you need to be clever, you need to go out and about, do some job, do something, but to be honest with you, my Mum can do nothing, because my Dad's too, too strict. He's olden days, that's the problem, he still wants me to put a scarf on my head and my husband says 'look yeah, he's olden days, that's the problem', you know what I mean? That's what they used to do olden days, before we were born, but my Dad, he still needs to change himself, but he hasn't (laughs).
Tricia	Do your brothers have a different kind of relationship with your Dad or are is he quite strict with them too?
Saira	No, boys are different, they go out two nights, three nights a week, but my Dad don't say nothing to them. It's just me, I'm the only girl, even though he used to do lovely- he used to give me money, everything, but in a way he used to restrict me too, he never used to let me go to here from doctors, not even to chemists, but now, I have got a bit of freedom now.

There is a perception that aspects of family change such as divorce and inter-marriage (outside traditional custom) are becoming more common in the Asian community in Brambleton. In this sample of nine Asian mothers, one was divorced; of the white

women interviewed, one was married to and another, a worker, was divorced from an Asian man. As this section has suggested however, even in this changing environment, family interference in their adult children's lives persisted for some participants. For Amina, family interference appears frequently to severely curtail the emotional well-being, autonomy and 'integrity' of individuals and couples. Now that she is married, how she acts is 'up to her', or, as Saira says above, 'up to her husband'; in attempting to impose her will on her daughter, her mother is therefore 'breaking the rules'.

Amina   She [my mother] does not realise that now I'm married, I'm supposed to do what I want to do, or what my husband wants me to do. My sister has done what my Mum's told her to do. She <u>was</u> married, she's married again now, she's had a baby as well and er, she's done what my Mum wanted, that's why she's in Mum's good books. And my Mum's the one that told her to divorce my husband's brother. My Mum told me to divorce my husband as well and I says- 'Why? You hate him, I don't hate him'. She told me 'if he leaves you, it doesn't matter, the Government's here to support you' and I went '[if that happens] there's no father for my child, there can't be a father to my child'. And because I said that, that's why I'm bad. She's said these things to my brother now, she's said 'you leave your wife', he says- 'I'm not leaving my wife for nobody'.

The impact of interference may be magnified for those living in close proximity or in the same accommodation with extended family. In this study the impact of extended family living was discussed in both positive and negative ways. Here, Zainab's story is presented. At this point a BSS employee, Zainab contrasts her own experience of freedom in her extended family with the major practical and psychological burden imposed on other women. The sense of injustice that she communicates – in which the role of 'oppressor' is taken by the mother-in-law - highlights her own location as relatively advantaged, as well as her own reflexivity and ability to 'stand outside' and resist a particular 'traditional' role. Zainab's description of life in the extended family taps into a narrative widely used by staff and parents who speak of some Asian women as if they are 'trapped in the house' (their difficulty in leaving it presenting an absolute barrier therefore to using most of the Sure Start or indeed any other services, see Chapter 6).

Zainab   You still have a lot that live with extended families. [They have difficulties] accessing Sure Start activities because their workload at

	home is too much, is too demanding for them to take those couple of hours out.
Tricia	Because they're doing stuff for their parents-in-law?
Zainab	The extended family, parents-in-law, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, God knows how many people might be in that house. As far as mothers-in-law's are concerned, well, there's a daughter-in-law in the house, well-that's her job, that's what she's there for. She did her stint and now it's your turn-
Tricia	Is this the way-?
Zainab	It's true believe me, it's true (laughs). But my mother-in-law never, ever got any of us out of bed, she was good like that. We all live on one street, we sort of live in five houses, we all actually had our own home. And you've got these, women, start visiting 9.00, half-past nine in the morning. Because they're up, they've got their daughter-in-laws up to get their work done. My mother-in-law, she made her own breakfast, she made me father-in-law's, she washed up, she cleans up after herself - she's different like that. And then you'd have the 'your daughter-in-law's still in bed, how can you allow that? Well, that's it, you're asking for trouble with these girls of yours' (Tricia laughs). And you know, sometimes, I'd come in on it and I'd hear it and I'd think 'what the hell has it got to do with you?' Some girls - she does all the housework during the day, she's got three younger brother-in-laws, whatever time of day they come in, if they want dinner, they have to be fed. She got her own children, mother-in-law, herself, visitors constantly on the go, because you've got all these old biddies coming to pass the time of day (Tricia laughs) and she goes to bed for about half past eleven, by 12.00 she's out of it. Her father-in-law works in a- the daugher-in-law has to get up at whatever time, whenever she-hears-that-door-open, she has to be downstairs to make the chapattis. She's got three children and she has to get up for half-past seven in the morning and yet the mother-in-law's done nothing all day.

Above I have outlined a theme from the accounts of several women, which is their immersion in wider family life; a subsidiary narrative within this spoke of daughters as objects of *possession* and *control*, for whom desire and aspiration was subordinated to a perceived collective (family) need.

5.3   Post-school trajectories for Asian and other women

In this section, I look at narratives produced by a subset of Asian and white women revealed in response to a question addressed to all mothers about what they expected to do when they left school. Placing these two sets of stories alongside each other is for indicative rather than directly comparable purposes: these groups, as noted in Chapter 4,

were different in broader socio-economic terms. However, the key features of the Asian women's narrative which concerned the interception of their own post-school ambitions by unwanted or unexpected early marriage, were an express *denial* of their agency by their families, a veto on their ability to choose and an enforced interruption of their own plans. While it is clear from other parts of interviews that family life for white participants was not necessarily 'happy' or without conflict at different points, this level of family encroachment on their capacity to act and to make decisions did not feature in their stories.

The first interviewee within this group is Nazia. In her relationship with me, Nazia often attempts to explain the cultural norms that permit or circumscribe behaviour. Reflecting the earlier example given (in Chapter 4 p. 97), her tone as well as her non-verbal interjections often suggest ambivalence, a slight embarrassment, and an ironic 'take' on community expectations.

Nazia   We've lived with our parents until - until basically we got married basically. That's how it works (laughs).

In this extract, she again takes on a role as cultural educator, moving from describing firstly, community norms ('in a normal situation'), then to expectations within her *own* family and finally suggesting the point at which this had become problematic for her personally, that is in a marriage which had taken place too early.

Nazia   In a normal situation you know, you stay with your mum and dad until you got married or whatever, unless you went to study somewhere else, you know, things like that.
Tricia   And you know, in terms of that kind of lifestyle, in terms of getting married and having children. Is that what was expected of you and is that what you expected for yourself?
Nazia   That's probably what was expected of me (slight laugh), but I didn't think it was going to happen a bit sooner than what I'd imagined.
Tricia   As soon as it did?
Nazia   Yeah, but you know - that's how it happened I suppose.

Nazia reveals some discomfort here and the sense too of being 'pulled' into a narrative pathway which was not (or not quite) of her choosing. Her own self-reportedly passive

reaction to events is attributed to a 'youthful ignorance' seen to be 'universal' ('you don't really ...') and personal ('I didn't know what I wanted').

Tricia   So, what did age did you marry?

Nazia   Eighteen. A bit young.

Tricia   Yeah.

Nazia   I didn't think I'd get married a bit younger, I thought I'd probably get married a bit later, but I didn't think I'd get married 'til what - in my twenties, late twenties or something? And because I was so young, you don't really - at that time, I think I didn't know what I wanted anyway, so I think I kind of went along with it, sort of thing

Much later in the interview, Nazia provided a further explanation for this unexpectedly early marriage which was her parents' discovery that she had begun a relationship. In telling this part of the story, reflecting her other interactions with me, Nazia is characteristically oblique; again, her words are suggestive of what is not said ('once they found out, they obviously decided that we were going to Pakistan and then, maybe arrange for something to be done').

Nazia   My parents found out, his parents found out, they were totally against it, my parents were totally against it ... We ended up going to the same college, and from there really. And er, I don't know, we weren't from the same area, we knew that, it was kind of wrong, but I don't know, somehow, you just kind of felt okay, so you just kind of went along with it. And er- once they found out, then they obviously decided that we were going to go to Pakistan and then, maybe arrange for something to be done so that I didn't go completely out the window or I didn't get pregnant or (laughs), I don't know or run away, or something like that. I was very young and I didn't know what to think at one point, I didn't want to do it.

In the subsequent extract, the frustration of Nazia's own aspirations by this early marriage are made more explicit. Here, she emphasises the frustration she feels that she has not 'got a lot further', by providing evidence of her commitment and ability to achieve more in different circumstances.

Tricia   So when you say you expected to get married a bit older, what did you expect? Did you expect to go and have a career or-?

Nazia   Did I? Oh yeah, definitely. I expected to get a lot further than what I am now. Yeah (laughs) but that's just not the way it happened. I mean, I did go to college and everything, I've got an advanced level GNVQ.

Tricia   Oh right.

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Nazia   But then you know, because my husband was from abroad, I had to like
·work, and then call him over.

Saira contrasts her own plans for college and work ('I wanted to do this'), with what
actually happened to her, describing the process of events leading up to her marriage
and the marriage itself as if they were entirely imposed upon her. Like Amina (below),
for her, it is not the choice of husband or the marriage itself which is seen as
problematic - at other points in the interview she gives the impression that she is happy
with her husband. The dismay communicated by Saira here centres on the timing of the
marriage and the way in which her desires and plans are treated as unimportant in the
process. For her, a cultural narrative about the strictness of some Asian families and
about the fear of losing *izzat*, is used to explain these events. While marriage is the
conclusion to this story, a period of what is made at one point to sound like
imprisonment ('he kept me in for a year') is described as preceding it. Saira's evaluation
of the story, that if her father had not been so strict she would have 'got somewhere in
life' has a bitter overtone, suggesting resentment that family expectations have prevailed
over her own.

Tricia   What did you expect that you'd be doing when you grew up?
Saira   I wanted to - do sixth-form, for at least two years, I did just go for one
                 year-
Tricia   To sixth-form-
Saira   Yeah, just one year- yeah. And then I wanted to, two, three year and then
                 go to college and look for a job, but then after that, I stayed at home for a
                 year and then after that I got married (laughs).
Tricia   So, why didn't you, go to college or carry on-
Saira   My Dad was too strict.
Tricia   Okay, did he want you to get married?
Saira   Well he did, yeah. Because he were like 'it's best if she gets married now,
                 then [otherwise] she would do something wrong', and then, you know
                 what I mean, because that's what happens, if Asian girls run away yeah,
                 then parents, they'll have no respect.
Tricia   In the community?
Saira   In the community, yeah. But then they weren't able to face, you know,
                 talking to people without- because they'll say, 'you can't talk, because
                 look at your daughter, she's run away'. Know what I mean, so it's a bit
                 bad, in't it? So that's why he kept me in for a year and then after a year,
                 just got married.
Tricia   So if your Dad hadn't been so strict, would you have-
Saira   I would have got somewhere in life, yeah.

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Several of these elements are also contained in Amina's story. Like Saira, Amina appears to have been happy in the choice of her husband and at various points in the interview she speaks positively about their relationship. Like Saira too, when I asked her what she had expected to do when she was older, she describes a process in which her active planning of her future is sharply interrupted by marriage arrangements. In her narrative, her own planning is contrasted frequently with decisions made on her behalf; despite her attempts to negotiate with her mother, her plans appear to carry no weight and are immediately supplanted by the interests of her family and the family of her in-laws. At the end of this extract, she provides a powerful picture of herself as an unhappy and resentful 17 year-old mother. In this picture, a reference to her peers who are at college, is contrasted with her self-portrayal - weighed down by the responsibility of having a child (and reinforced metaphorically by the carrying of nappies) and by the feeling that her life is no longer in her control.

Amina	I just thought that I'll go to school, I can go to college, I'm not going to go to university 'cause I'm not clever enough, I used to think that, and I'll get a job. But it was (2.0), the way my parents had decided, my life wasn't [going to be] like that.
Tricia	So what had they decided?
Amina	They decided for me to get married at 17, straight away.
Tricia	How did you feel about that?
Amina	Er, they asked me, er and I says to them 'look, I've just finished one year at sixth-form, passed my course, I wanna carry on what I've done, I've got another two years, they [her prospective husband's family] can wait, that's all I can say'. ... And I says to my Mum 'I got two options, 'cause I've just done one year's course and they're still willing to give me a job, either I do a job, or I carry on with my education and for calling him over, I'll need a job anyway. But no, er 'your father-in-law's wrote a letter and he's written that because my husband had gone to Saudi Arabia - he was working there for two years - and he's come down on holiday, he's got eight weeks holidays, er, he comes, 'you come now and we do the wedding'. And I thought - 'but Mum, you know, I do want to do something' and- but it was like the decision was made for me anyway.
Tricia	Right.
Amina	I mean, it's not like I didn't wanna get married to him, I did want to get married. I would have got married two years later.
Tricia	It was the timing-
Amina	The time was too quick, yeah er, it was decided, so we left in early September and I'd just turned 17 in August and got married at end of September. It just like happened so quickly and er, when I did come back, I can remember, I had my daughter and - I went shopping to get some nappies and I come home and I smacked the keys down, and I

cried, and I was so miserable and my father went: 'What happened to you?' you know, 'who's bitten your head off?' And I went, 'you've destroyed my life, I've got a girl at my age, [other people are] going to college and university and I've got to carry nappies, you know, what life do I have?' I used to have moments, thinking 'you've ruined my life' and this and that, and- 'I don't have a life anymore, I'm only 17', you know, 'my freedom's been taken away from me', and stuff like that. It was like just moments, tantrums.

Unlike the other mothers in this group of four, Shamim clearly identifies herself as being in an unhappy marriage. For Shamim, the marriage seems to take on a symbolic power as an *integral part* of the family norms that she has to accept. Thus, in her stories, the marriage which she has not chosen is part of a wider narrative in which she as a daughter and sister has very little say about what happens in her life. Although Shamim now has a job where she receives respect and has a public persona as a 'strong individual', she constructs herself as being at the mercy of others' expectations and her ability to act as diminished by this.

Despite these differences, there are many similarities with the other stories from other Asian women in this subset of the sample. Having to work in order to comply with immigration policy and demonstrate that a spouse coming into the country will be financially supported, was a key reason for the inability of Nazia to pursue her education. Shamim describes finding work to bring her Pakistani husband into the UK, as representing the point at which her family *allowed* her to seek employment.

Shamim   They didn't never want me to work, but when it come to time when I had to get married and married to someone from abroad, I had to be working to get him over so that was one of the reasons they let me work. So I went to college and did my NNEB, I wanted to be a nursery nurse, I got me qualification but then me parents and brothers wouldn't allow me to work. Then suddenly I had to get married from Pakistan, and I came back and 'oh yeah, you can work now'.

Like Nazia, Shamim describes herself passively in relation to the process of going to Pakistan in order to get married. Her comment in the above extract ('suddenly I had to get married from Pakistan') is almost 'dream-like' in suggesting an image of a life rapidly and almost randomly unfolding - as if her 'self' and the life she was living had little connection.

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Shamim's narrative description gives a sense of 'being pulled along' a pathway that she has not chosen. Like Nazia, she also attributes her own compliance in part to a youthful naivety, a sense that she was too young 'to know her own mind'. In this extract, she describes herself in the passive tense as utterly acted upon; in her telling of the story, the second visit to Pakistan which culminated in her pregnancy is constructed as producing a 'successful' outcome *for her parents*.

Shamim	I was 16, I didn't know, I didn't have a clue, I didn't wanna marry him, I had no choice and at the age of 16, I had to marry him whether I liked it or not. And I don't want any of my kids going through that, going to a foreign country, not knowing someone, never met him in your life, two months later you're married to him-
Tricia	Yeah, that's hard isn't it-
Shamim	And it's worse when you know you don't get on with him and- you've got nothing in common, and then you're stuck, you've got no choice and - they don't bring you back into this country until, unless you're pregnant, knowing that that's only way that marriage is gonna work. I was kept there, made sure I got pregnant and not allowed to come back, I was 16 when they took me to Pakistan and got married. I came back straight away, I wasn't pregnant then, when I went back the second time, I got caught, with my son.
Tricia	Oh right.
Shamim	I was when I came back, I didn't really wanna marry him. And my parents started panicking, thinking 'she's gonna do something stupid', so they took me back to Pakistan and made sure I was pregnant, so that- through the child I would stay in that marriage, which I have.

The narratives from white women about this period in their lives are framed quite differently; despite difficulties in achieving goals, unexpected obstacles and delays, the interviewees direct and are the lead actors in their stories. In Nicola's story, the decisions she seems to be making about her future are thwarted in her story by her own actions (changing her mind about the school subjects she will take and failing her 'A' levels). Having made a decision not to pursue her original career choice, she is then unclear about *what* it is she will do. Despite setbacks and a lack of clarity over her objectives, throughout this narrative, Nicola constructs herself as an active, autonomous agent, supported in this role by a family that accepts whatever decisions she might make.

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Tricia	When you were growing up, what did you think you would do when you were-
Nicola	I was actually planning on being a pharmacist (laughs). I was really interested in chemistry and biology and-. The thing that put me off, was when I was going to do biology A level and I got told that I had to do dissecting. And that put me right off.
Tricia	So what did you think you'd do instead?
Nicola	I didn't know, I really didn't know. I did a couple of A levels but I didn't get them, so I went to college and did an OND, because I'd done short taster sessions sort of thing in college, and I really enjoyed that, did the OND and then I went to university to do the HND
Tricia	In terms of your family background, was it expected that you worked, had a career or-
Nicola	No, because when I came to 16 - Mum and Dad both said to me 'it's your choice, if you want to stay on at school, we're behind you 100%, if you wanna leave school and get a job, we're behind you 100%', so it was my choice, it was my decision but - knowing that my Mum and Dad were behind me all the way helped a lot.

There are similarities between the narratives of Nicola and Emma with both emphasising their own aspirations in adolescence and the support of family in this. In her story, Emma describes with passion the 'dreams' she had as a teenager; her story is also shaped by academic setbacks (mentioned only briefly here) that are later described as being of her own making. At other points in the interview, Emma suggests that her childhood was not happy. In this story however, she foregrounds a particular strength of her family culture, highlighting a strong link between the attitude of her mother (in which 'achievement' is primarily defined as being outside the home and family) and her own desires for herself.

Tricia	When you were a child, did you have any expectations about what you'd do when you grew up?
Emma	Yeah (laughs).
Tricia	What were they?
Emma	God they varied. I mean I was always gonna do something really, my Mum's always pushed me, erm, she always wanted us to achieve things, she really pushed us, so I mean, I thought from a young age, before I had the understanding of university really, that's where I was going. And I always wanted to be - a writer. Until I was about 14, 15. And then when I took my GCSE's, I got into psychology, and that was what I wanted to do. I failed me 'A' levels, (laughs), erm, I went into the environment degree instead. But as a child, it was between journalism really and - and then psychology as I got older. But it was always really professional, but then I was encouraged to do that as a kid. Never marriage or a family. Because I think - just the way I grew up in my

	family, I was never going to get married, and I was <u>never</u> gonna have children.
Tricia	That was very clear to you
Emma	<u>Really</u>, <u>really</u> (emphasised). I was never really into dolls or any of those things. And I had the odd teddy bear, but I was more a - a reader, or a go out and doer. So I've never had even that maternal, kind of thing really-
Tricia	Okay, so you had these aspirations to, kind of be a psychologist-
Emma	Yeah, go and do those things. And because I figured, I'd be able to do all these things, because I wouldn't be tied down by a family (laughs) or anything else either. Yeah, professional was what I really wanted to do, have the money and live the life.

Family has as profound an influence on these trajectories as for the Asian research participants. In the accounts of Emma and Nicola, family influence in this context at least, is constructed as benign and supportive. In Kerry's story, the construction of 'family' is more problematic, in that it is apparent that conflict precipitates her leaving home. However, in the way the story is told, family does not appear to challenge her self-presentation as an autonomous agent.

Tricia	So what did you think you'd do when you got older?
Kerry	I wanted to be a hairdresser. Went for an interview, didn't get the job, that was it, ended. And I was just a sales assistant, shop assistant
Tricia	Was that in Reading?
Kerry	Yes, in Reading, when I was 15. I left school at 16, this was like a Saturday job and I was there for 5 years and then when I left school I started full-time there and then they expanded and I moved to the shop where they expanded too
Tricia	Yeah.
Kerry	And then things happened at home, I got asked to leave, so- ... We only had a two-bedroom maisonette and my sister- And things come to a head at work, and you were on a lot less and because I was younger I said 'give me a pay rise' and they said 'no', and so I left. It was probably just a dispute between them and me and I just felt I couldn't work there any more.

In the construction of her story, Kerry always seems to be in charge of her journey, even when obstacles, such as being asked to leave the family home or 'falling out' with her boyfriend threaten to impede her progress. In some ways, her decisions at critical moments - for example, to stay in the north when she splits up from her partner Jon and to leave work because his parents cannot be relied upon to provide childcare – make her into an embodiment of Gidden's *autotelic self*, able to 'translate potential threats into rewarding challenges' (1994a, p. 192). As the account progresses however, the

straightforward autonomy that she describes and the (apparent) ease of earlier decision-making diminishes slightly, as, with children, her choices have become more limited.

Kerry	I met Jon, in Reading and then we moved in with his parents up here. Lived there for a bit, then I moved out, when I say 'moved out', me and Jon had a big fall-out, and I had to move out, and I think that was when I really started to get my independence because I could have easily moved back to Reading, but I didn't because I'd made friends where I was working, I was working in the market and I felt, I suppose I should just go for it up here and then me and Jon got back together and then we moved to Brambleton.
Tricia	Yeah-
Kerry	And then I left my job when I had [the baby].
Tricia	Right, so what were you doing up here, job-wise?
Kerry	I was working at a pet shop at Podsham market. And I was Assistant Manageress there which I enjoyed, I enjoyed the authority I suppose (laughs). Then I got pregnant with Tom, and I left, cause obviously maternity leave, then went back for a bit, and it just wasn't working out with baby sitting and stuff, Jon's parents weren't good, the fact that they couldn't really give me definite yes or no when I wanted them to baby sit. So at the end of the day it was just easier for me to leave, and Jon had got a different job, bit better paid, so it wasn't much of a loss of money.
Tricia	Yeah
Kerry	So that's it and I've become a housewife, house partner, whatever you want to call me.

Above, I have identified some key differences between the paths taken in adolescence by white and Asian mothers in this sample. White mothers in this group described themselves as autonomous decision-makers, confidently 'leading' their stories, even though there were often changes of direction and other obstacles in their way. By contrast, the stories about this period from this subset of Asian women reflected a severely constrained agency, as family imperatives concerned with ensuring that daughters complied with expectations around marriage cut short the possibility of realising personal plans and aspirations.

5.4 Then and now: understanding change through intersections of agency and structure

Previous sections have illustrated the level of family constraint faced by some Pakistani-origin women, which, it is suggested, mediates and shapes the agency that they can exercise. In this section, after looking at the impact of different aspects of 'tradition' on women, I examine the 'stirrings of change' as a slow, sometimes barely

visible process, which sheds light on the agency/structure relationship as dynamic and constantly shifting.

5.4.1 Safeguarding tradition; understandings of 'culture' and the connections to Pakistan

As indicated, whether origins of particular traditional practices were 'religious' (Muslim) or 'cultural'/'ethnic' (South Asian/Pakistani) was not in itself a detailed focus of analysis. However, I did attempt, often with difficulty, to understand the functions and meanings given to 'religion' and 'culture' for individuals in their lives[22]. The Pakistani-origin participants all identified themselves as Muslim, even though for some, this appeared to be an inherited identification, part of their upbringing and culture. However, it did not mean that they prayed five times a day or followed the other 'pillars' of Islam. Unlike in popular 'tabloid' discourse in the UK, Islam itself was not usually constructed as oppressive. Among those interviewed, one of the rare references to a repressive element of Islam was from Amina who demonstrated a somewhat stereotyped understanding of what her religion involved but like several others, stressed the 'cultural' character of the Brambleton community.

Tricia	Would you say your family was religious?
Amina	It's not religion, I wouldn't say religion, no [it's more about] culture yeah, they think what other people are gonna think.
Tricia	Is that what culture is?
Amina	Yeah. If it was the religion, I would not be sitting like this, I would only have to show my eyes. If we were to go properly in a religion way, I don't think I would even be let out, you know, on the streets or anything, it's just culture.

Religion was seen by most Pakistani-origin women (as well as by the white interviewee who had been brought up as a Christian), as providing 'guidance', 'values' and for some, a 'way of life'. For those who were particularly religious, an emphasis on education and learning, especially for girls, and on religion as *liberating individuals*, was stressed. 'Culture', by contrast, tended to be viewed negatively, as narrow and parochial (associated for example, with marriage within caste). It was often seen as a

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[22] This may be where my lack of knowledge in this area and my 'outsiderness' meant that either I did not or could not fully develop these ideas when they were raised in interviews.

malign influence on community life, and, as Amina suggests above, as threatening to the integrity of individuals, their ability to think for themselves ('they think what other people are gonna think') and to behave 'morally'.

In Pakistani-origin participants' accounts, religion and culture were sometimes intertwined in complex ways or, as below, depicted in opposition to each other. Culture was frequently associated with the restriction of girls and women. In Shamim's story below, it is associated with maintaining an image of respectability. In her telling, religious piety is dishonestly invoked when proscriptions are actually *cultural*: 'you're a proper Muslim girl, you must not do this'. For Safia as well, an attitude of *cultural groupthink* was seen as stopping her from expressing her religious identity in wearing the *hijab*. Reflecting Shamim's comment, the imposition of cultural restrictions in the guise of religion is also the theme of Zainab's story of the exclusion of women and girls from the mosque, who, like others, uses the word 'cultural' as an adjective describing 'community'. Her story here, constructs the men in her local mosque as 'claiming' in some senses, the status of the 'guardians' of tradition that Giddens describes (1994b, p. 79, discussed here in Chapter 3).

Shamim	My family was strict but not religious. My Dad's not the type who ever prayed, who ever fasts, who went to mosque. They weren't religious, it was just - cultural values, 'you know, your daughters are not allowed to- not for religious reasons, just 'don't bring shame on the family'.
Tricia	Is that how you're defining cultural really, you know, 'don't bring shame on the family'?
Shamim	To me, it is yeah, that's a big thing in culture, about shame, oh girls going out with boys and boys going out with girls or being seen doing the wrong thing. That is - thought worse - than not praying 5 times a day. They'd rather you didn't pray 5 times a day, but, but really kept a respectable image, that's how it works. That's what my parents were like, they weren't religious in that way, it's just that - thought of 'you're a proper Muslim girl, you must not do this, you must not do this, you must not do this'.

Safia	It's very difficult [to wear *hijab*] because erm, it's just not many people do that and I've never done it you know ... I'm trying to [but] it's so difficult to wear it here because, everyone's like 'oh, she's gone all religious again, she's going through a phase, yeah, she's gone all religious again' (Tricia laughs) 'so, what's she doing?'
Tricia	So is the culture, you know-

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Safia	Restrictive. It's very, very restric- it restricts you a lot, yeah. D'you know the elder people, if they saw me in a hijab and everything, they'd be over the moon, but the younger ones.
Tricia	Do you think this is a religious community?
Zainab	No, no, no, no, I've known it for 15 years and I'll stick by that. It's more of a cultural community than a religious one
Tricia	So, for example, d'you mean that they're not doing the sort of five times a day etc.
Zainab	Quite a few people are. You know that they are practising but ... their culture outweighs their religious practice and belief. I will not say they are religious because for the men in Brambleton [all they have to do is] say 'well we pray, we're religious, we're the ones with the beard' and the women cannot access the mosque (2.0) you know-
Tricia	Are the women not allowed to go to the mosque?
Zainab	It's not encouraged, I mean - it's not necessary for the women to pray in the mosque anyway, you know, but the men actually have a problem with it. ... I wanted to run a bit of a Sunday school, you know an Islamic Sunday school for Muslim children. ... I approached the guy who's mainly in charge of the mosque to say 'look you know, it's for our children, it's Islamic'. 'No, no, no we haven't got time for things like that, no we don't want that', 'yeah but, you know, it's not a youth club, they've come to learn about Islam'. He didn't want to know, absolutely didn't want to know, can't call him religious because he should have supported that a hundred percent and been part of it. And encouraged it, but he didn't want to know, so- This community is 95 per cent culture, 5 per cent religion.

In the accounts of the Pakistani-origin women I interviewed, continued family connection to Pakistan is a major element in the preservation of tradition and very much identified with 'culture'. An important manifestation of this is through marriage between UK and Pakistani men and women. Out of the seven UK-born Pakistani origin women interviewed, only Zainab had not married a Pakistani-born man (she was also the only one of this sub-group not in an arranged marriage). The matching of marriage partners by 'caste' was also an important part of this (and difference of 'caste' given as a reason by Nazia and Zainab for family disapproval of the men they fell in love with)[23]. The majority of the Pakistan-origin women, both those who were UK and Pakistan-born, had also married their first cousins, a common practice in Pakistani families

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[23] In this context, the 'caste' (also referred to as 'biraderi' or 'clan') is used to signify extended kinship networks based on 'blood and marriage ties' which have been transplanted from Pakistan to UK through immigration (Malik et al, 2005).

(Shaw, 2000). These traditional practices are seen as a means of 'sustaining and even of strengthening kinship ties' (Smart and Shipman, 2004, p. 496).

This synthesis of UK and Pakistan cultural backgrounds through marriage was regarded in different ways by those who discussed it. Below, Shamim attributes the difficulties in her marriage in part, to her husband's Pakistani upbringing and Amina, while able to discuss and negotiate with her husband, nonetheless describes herself as having to fight for her own beliefs on behalf of her daughter. In these extracts, both are insistent upon their equal status, on the legitimacy of their own 'being' (individuality, feelings, aspirations) and set themselves *against* what they see as the fixed and traditional attitudes of their husbands.

Shamim   I hope that [my children's lives will] be totally different from the kind of life I had, but then I think, what their father teaches them- it's worse when you've married someone from abroad, it's different when you're marrying someone and you're both brought up in the same country, but when you marry someone from abroad, there's a lot of conflicts all the time, because he'll never change his attitude and I'll never change the way I want to be.

Amina   Like I say, he's from Pakistan and in Pakistan, it's totally different. ... they're very strict on their daughters there, whereas it's different here, but I says to my husband 'you can't rule your own daughter's life basically, you cannot make decisions for her' and I know he wouldn't, he's not going to do anything like that, er, but he's knows that- if she wants to carry on with education, I'm gonna let her do it, if she doesn't, she doesn't. If she wants a job, I'm gonna let her do it. I'm not gonna sit her at home and let her have a life like me. At 17 I got married, I'm 26 and I've got 4 kids.

Unlike some other participants, Safia does not highlight tensions inherent in the combination of distinctive cultural influences, but seems to draw comfortably on them as different but compatible aspects of her identity. More than any other mother in the sample, Safia seems to embody Hall's (1992) notion of identity as 'translation' (see Chapter 3), with 'translated identities' suggesting those who 'are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely ... They must learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them' (Hall, 1992, p. 310). In

this extract, Safia – in stark contrast in particular to Shamim, above - emphasises a complementarity in the contributions of Pakistani and UK culture in her family, from herself and her Pakistan-born husband:

Tricia	D'you think that people of your generation who were brought up in England erm, have different expectations from women who were actually born and brought up in Pakistan and came over here?
Safia	Comparing our lives to our parents lives, they're definitely different because, then, you know, husband and wife were probably both from Pakistan. Whereas now, you know, it's like, even if the girls are from Pakistan, the guys would probably be from here. Or the guys are from Pakistan and the girls are from here, so there'll always be a mix you know, with a British person and a Pakistani person, so you're learning both really. So, it isn't much of a difference, because my sister-in-laws, they're from Pakistan. We've got a similar life to them, because my brothers are from England. And my husband's from Pakistan. And I rub off on my husband, my husband rubs off on me and it's really good because you don't forget your parents' culture. And your children aren't too backwards in this culture.
Tricia	You're getting a mix.
Safia	Yeah, a mix of both whereas I think if I married someone from here, I don't think we'd speak much Urdu at home and our children wouldn't know the language.

5.4.2 'It's how I learnt to live': accepting and resisting traditional norms in a time of transition

Below, Zainab provides a social history of the immigration and settlement of Pakistani women in Brambleton. In describing their arrival and their experience in Brambleton, she illustrates how lives were shaped by the importance of maintaining family tradition in the context of immigrant narratives of economic and social survival and interdependence.

Zainab	A lot of the older women in Brambleton came over either as very young girls or - married women with children. ... - It was unlikely that any of them probably even went to school. A couple might of, but they got the very basic Urdu education, I mean very basic. Got married at a young age, I mean we're talking sixties you know, started having children straight away, coming over here, completely alien country and basically all their needs were at that time survival, because the men were at work 24-7, and they had to deal with - the kids' school or whatever, they didn't have time to actually sit and learn anything and - the support system wasn't there - within the working organisation of [the city]. So they never got that opportunity, they had their kids and the kids went to

	school and grew up and then they, basically thought about buying their own property and then going back. They went back a lot, in them days, as soon as they saved up enough money, they went back - to visit family, or the money was spent saving up to bring somebody over. That was done for a long time.
Tricia	Yes
Zainab	Living in crowded houses, everybody just mucking in and whatever, erm and because these women weren't ever given that support in the first place when they were children, how important education is, because it wasn't given to them. To them you grow up, you get married, you go slaving around kids for the rest of your life. That is what they give to their kids - here. So this generation which is sort of - bit older than what I am, the people that were brought up from here, have still got that concept.

Explaining why education has not been important to the women of her parents' generation, Zainab might be describing various key elements of a 'traditional' society in Giddens' terms: the normative emphasis on 'what is done' as well as 'what should be done' (1994b, p. 65), with power, particularly in the form of distinctive gender roles, maintained from one generation to the next. It represents the inverse almost of Giddens' description of the 'charged reflexive settings of high modernity' in which 'living on "automatic pilot" becomes more and more difficult to do' (Giddens, 1991, p. 125). In this story, agency, both action and future intention - described by Zainab as strongly goal-orientated but *as if* automatic and unthinking - are shaped by past traditions as well as by the unrelenting demands of the present.

Reflecting Zainab's conclusion to the social history that she describes above – 'To them you grow up, you get married, you go slaving around kids for the rest of your life. This is what they give to their kids' – the stories told by women in this chapter suggest that cultural norms overwhelmingly orientated towards the care of family continue to limit the possibilities for the kind of individualised agency described by theorists, as well as keeping at bay the 'family democracy' which Giddens describes.

This chapter has illustrated the ways in which for some participants, personal desires and aspirations are set against and frustrated by cultural and family expectations,

leading to tensions experienced in different aspects of their identities, and sometimes to a sense of dissonance and depression[24].

Although this chapter is not centrally concerned with parental engagement with services there is an important issue emerging here about conceptualisations of agency and the use of welfare. Harry Ferguson (2003) who is broadly sympathetic to the individualisation theories of Giddens and Beck, argues that in his field (social work) those using interventions do so as reflexive agents; an integral aspect of 'reflexive modernisation', the opening up of professional expertise and knowledge systems means that most people, even those who are poor or excluded, occupy the same discursive space and 'can reflect on the structures and rules that govern social practice' (2003, p. 202).

My research also suggests that participants use welfare institutions (or in this case the Sure Start programme) to differing degrees as knowledgeable and reflexive agents. However, the operation of participants concurrently in *different* discursive spaces, which can suggest different and sometimes conflicting imperatives, means that what constitutes 'rational action', in relation to what institutions can offer, also differs. Alison Shaw points out that like 'most of us':

> Young Pakistanis negotiate several social worlds – those of their parents and grandparents, those of their 'white' peers - at school, college, or the workplace - and that of their South Asian peers. For most of the time, they move successfully from one to the other (2000, p. 7).

In my research, conflicting imperatives that shaped action were particularly evident in the narratives of Section 5.3, in which UK-born women who had been educated in schooling systems orientated towards fitting young people for further education or for employment, suddenly had to put aside the personal, academic or career 'journeys' they had begun in order to get married.

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[24] There is significant research evidence about proportionately high levels of depression, including self-harm and suicide, among women of South Asian origin in the UK (see for example, Anand & Cochrane, 2005; Husain et al, 2006).

Below, I examine the responses of the participants who reflexively grapple with the possibilities of change. As Brah (1996) and others have stated (as discussed in Chapter 3) 'culture' is not static, and is always in a state of flux. In my research, the accounts emphasise the transitional character of the culture - in which long-established practices still represent the backdrop to the lives of many, but where there is questioning of tradition as a rigid edifice and different attempts are made to accommodate it in contemporary life.

Some accounts illustrate a particular aspect of this transition, which is how exposure to and immersion in worlds which have different values to those promoted within the family and culture, have sometimes put women in a position of having to make hard choices. This is demonstrated below in the personal stories of Shamim and Leela. Both represent their 'true selves' as being in direct conflict with the will of their families, but each frames their own capacity to respond to this threat to their sense of 'selfhood' very differently.

The story that Shamim narrates, shadowed by despair and imminent, overwhelming rejection, suggests that she has found the risks of following her personal desires to be too great. A clue which foretells of her current despair can be found in her teenage years, when - in a story similar to Nazia's - the outcome of informing her parents that she had met someone she wanted to marry, seemed to demonstrate that autonomous decision-making was detrimental to her interests:

Shamim	I wanted to leave home, there was somebody I wanted to marry, but I wasn't allowed. That's why they took me to Pakistan.
Tricia	Yes.
Shamim	And then I had no choice. But then I wish I did take that step and leave. But I was daft enough to sit down and tell my parents 'there's somebody I want to marry'.

Elsewhere Shamim attributed her passivity to her subjection in childhood and into adulthood to the will of her father and brothers; in her words, 'that's how I was brought up, it's how I learnt to live'. Now, as an adult, the prospect of leaving her unhappy marriage seems to entail unbearable losses – the respect of those she works with, friends, family. Throughout the interview and within this extract, she repeatedly

describes herself as 'scared'. Her - highly uncertain and ambivalent - justification of the decision to stay is reinforced by the isolation of her sister, who has left her own marriage to live with a non-Asian partner. At the end of this extract, the disclosure that it is Shamim who stopped talking to her sister rather than the reverse, seems to indicate the extent to which she has internalised the norms that are so oppressive to her.

Shamim	You think when you're grown up and second generation will think differently, [but] if I ever left home, people my age'll think - 'oh she's done a bad thing' they'll think, 'how dare you do that, leave your marriage, leave your kids', you know what I mean?
Tricia	You're not leaving your kids, you would be leaving your marriage-
Shamim	Yeah. But I see it with my sister, she's totally isolated now, I don't know how she lives here, but she's - made that choice still to stay in the same community. A lot of girls do that but leave that area. She hasn't, no one speaks to her, no one talks to her. And that's scary as well, it's really scary. But then you see, you do have that influence of the community, you do think about what other people are going to think. ... It does worry you. And what I do in my job, I've got a lot of respect from these women. But if I ever did it, most of these women would never talk to me again. So it would affect my job as well, so that scares me as well. That's what I can't do, that's what scares me, I don't think I could totally isolate myself from the family, I could from the community, but not my family, that's what I'm thinking, I can't do that. She took that step, she wasn't bothered, she's isolated herself from the family, from the community
Tricia	But you would have her support wouldn't you?
Shamim	She's not talking to me-
Tricia	She's not talking to you?
Shamim	No, because of that pressure, because she was married to my husband's brother. Once she left, I've got no contact with her as well. I'm not allowed, I wish I could, but I'm not allowed. When I did, they found out, I was in big trouble so I caused a lot of trouble in the house. So - I see the kids, they come and stay over the weekends, but I'm not allowed to have contact with her.
Tricia	And is she happy?
Shamim	She is, she's happy, she's not bothered, she doesn't care what people say, what the family- It doesn't bother her. But she's a stronger person than me.

In her telling of this story, it is apparent that the implications of the choices she has made and the difficulties of reconciling two different identity narratives, continue to burden Shamim. Here and elsewhere, ambiguity, a lack of certainty about *who it is she wants to be*, often feature in her stories; at those times, she is unable to commit either to what is expected of her - the 'categorical identity' in David Taylor's (1998) terms - or to

her sense of who she 'truly is', her 'ontological identity', which does not appear to offer her enough of a solid alternative.

Shamim	Even though I'm married and everything, they [my brothers and fathers] have still got that thing where I still have to go through them when I wanna do things, it's not changed.
Tricia	Really-
Shamim	But then again, I think I like it as well, I don't mind it.
Tricia	Yeah?
Shamim	Up to a certain limit they will let us do things, there're certain things they wouldn't.

Paul Hoggett's model of agency and social policy (explored in Chapter 3) designed to suggest a way of considering 'the different subject positions that we all occupy at times rather than a typology for characterising particular individuals' (2001, p. 47) places Shamim often as 'object'. Frequently she is deeply reflexive, immobilised but simultaneously profoundly conscious of the choices she could make. Those in this position, as Hoggett says, 'acutely aware of their own powerlessness' can 'teeter on the boundary between anger and despair' (ibid, p. 50). Sometimes when Shamim expresses ambiguity as above, she seems to exhibit the characteristics of a 'non-reflexive object' position. This is evident, Hoggett says, when 'the exercise of domination by others ... impacts upon one's 'psychical integrity' - this is when the other, whether a powerful parent or partner or a dominant cultural group or class, invades the subject, gets inside their head, 'tells' them what they are thinking or feeling' (ibid, p. 49). Among this sample, it is Shamim and Saira who demonstrate the greatest ambiguity, as if the level of control exerted upon them has made them confused, unable at times to judge the moral rights and wrongs of their treatment.

Leela by contrast, is Giddens' 'post traditional' reflexive agent, acting on knowledge and information, weighing up positives and negatives, choosing and deciding. Raised in a Sikh family in the South of England, Leela left home as a teenager and lived in a hostel while she completed school before going into higher education; she now lives with her non-Asian partner with whom she has a baby. She has not seen her family for several years and they have not met her child. Unlike Shamim, Leela is insistent upon leading her story as its subject, having reconciled gaining the freedom to make her own decisions with the loss of her family: as she says in another extract, 'I know it sounds

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quite cold but I've grown used to it'. Where Shamim emphasises the intolerable risks of rebellion, for Leela, it is the dangers of conforming that threaten her. The tensions she describes in her adolescence are resolved in the telling of the story, and her primary commitment to her own rather than her family's (stated) needs is signified by the almost 'puzzled' references to her difficulty in 'picturing' her future in the way that her parents did.

Tricia	Was anything in particular expected of you as you grew up?
Leela	My parents believed that you know, you'd get married and live with your parents-
Tricia	Your husband's family?
Leela	Yeah, and they'd be like 'oh we're training you for later on in life', like, you know, showing you what to do-
Tricia	Right.
Leela	Their expectations of me was to prepare me, for like when I was older and things- [But] that wasn't what I pictured for myself. That was what they pictured for me, but I couldn't ever imagine it happening. I knew that's what they wanted, but I couldn't imagine it. You know when you think about something and you think 'oh yeah, you know, I'll go shopping next week' and you can picture that in your head -
Tricia	Yeah
Leela	But like, I couldn't picture that in my head, being like in an Asian family-
Tricia	So why do you think you weren't quite sure about that image of yourself?
Leela	I didn't think it seemed right really. I know, you know, your parents are your parents, but at the end of the day, you know yourself when things are right and things are wrong and being like, forced to do something for someone for their own opinion, I don't think that's fair.

The stories of Shamim and Leela above illustrate the difficulties of 'performing' the particular culturally-defined version of gender expected of them and the risks involved in challenging it. They also demonstrate the burdens and liberations of reflexivity and represent a form of the 'do-it-yourself biography' or 'risk biography' that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) describe.

> The normal biography ... becomes the 'elective biography', the 'reflexive biography', the 'do-it-yourself' biography ... The 'do-it-yourself' biography is always a 'risk biography', indeed a 'tightrope biography', a state of permanent (partly overt, partly concealed) endangerment (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 3).

For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, such biographies unfold in a late modern context in which the fixed points of tradition and its predictable trajectories no longer exist as 'For

modern social advantages, one has to do something, to make an active effort' (ibid, p. 3). By contrast, for these participants, tradition still defines their identities in the present, but they construct themselves as having to reject it – or significant aspects of it - in order to be 'true to themselves'.

Operating within 'discursive spaces' that are both traditional (collectively orientated) and individualist (personally orientated) has forced these particular participants to make painful choices. In this research, it is apparent too that cultural values are shifting as a wider set of choices slowly becomes, firstly more visible, and then more available. In part, this change results from the passing of time, as the period between the arrival from Pakistan and settlement in the UK lengthens, with impacts evident in the different generations and even more rapidly, within single generations of families (see also Pete's comment in Chapter 6, p. 151).

An example of this shift – and of the way that agency and structure interact - is given here again by Shamim whose focus is on the Pakistan-born women who have come to the UK to marry British husbands. The account that she provides reflects Bourdieu's 'logic of practice' (1977, 1990) in that in this picture, structural patterns are reproduced as if through behaviour that is 'automatic', until an apparent lack of fit between 'habitus' and 'field' leads to change. In this story, she depicts UK-born women as knowledgeable actors who, her account suggests, having grown up in Britain, tend to want to live separately from their families once they are married. By contrast, women who have grown up in Pakistan initially accept extended family living as this reflects their own childhood experience – this is the only way of life they know, and moreover, represents security in an unknown environment. It is as these women start to operate outside the private sphere of the home, to come into contact with women who are 'like them', but live in different ways, that they begin to question tradition and to want different things for themselves as individuals. Although British-born men are portrayed as gladly accepting (or even, actively desiring) wives who are willing to carry out traditional roles, over time, it is claimed that many come to support the women in pursuing their own interests alongside their family commitments.

Shamim	I think the women who find it hard are the women who come from Pakistan. It is difficult for these women who come from abroad who are not in happy marriages, they've got no choice, and they're living with their in-laws as well
Tricia	But they'll be living with English-born partners won't they-
Shamim	Yeah, exactly.
Tricia	So are the English-born partners, husbands more liberal, or-
Shamim	No, I don't think so, especially when the wives are from Pakistan. They will expect 'em to still be- very traditional, yeah. That's why a lot of them still marry from Pakistan, they could have the choice, but when it comes to marriage, they will do what their parents say, they want someone from Pakistan who'll come and cook and clean, will live with extended family. Because a lot of girls these days that are getting married that are from here, they want a house separate straight away, and a lot of in-laws don't like that, so they'd rather go back home, marry someone more traditional who believes in the same things as the in-laws. A lot of women from Pakistan, that's what they'd prefer though as well, they'd rather come here, live with the in-laws, look after the extended family, look after their husbands. But then, as years go by and they get into a routine where they start going to school, dropping their kids off and start mixing with the women, that's when they're realising that there is a different life. First couple of years when they come from Pakistan, that's all the life they know, is that life in the house.
Tricia	Yeah.
Shamim	It's only when they have kids and start [going to] school and mixing, and going to the doctors' surgeries and they realise, 'there is a life outside, I want it as well', that's when the problems start. Some men, they're not happy with women going to English classes 'cause, 'oh they're gonna get taught too much, they're gonna get too clever'. They don't like it, but there's some who will encourage their partners, saying 'oh go'. Sometimes you need to go to the doctors or the hospital, or you've got to catch a bus to town. They'll approve, they'll say 'yeah, it's fine'. There'll always be that mixture where they'll approve or disapprove, you get it all the time.

A theme in these participant accounts, as Shamim highlights, is that this is a period in which the 'rules' have become increasingly unclear. Thus, Shamim and Zainab, both parents and workers in Brambleton, who are most vociferous about constraints on women's agency, point to a lack of clarity about what is now permissible. Shamim, so fearful about prospects for change in her own personal life, applies this to her work with Asian women:

Shamim	At one time I wouldn't advise anyone to look for a job or something, but when I see what I've been through myself - Sometimes they sit and they chat and [they say] 'I'd like to do what you're doing, can I come and work

for you?' and then I just think, 'yeah'. I will encourage them, but I used to be scared, thinking, 'I'm not gonna encourage them because what are their husbands gonna think at home?' But now, I say 'yeah, go for it, stand up for yourself'. 'You have a right to your life as well, it's not always based around home, yeah, you have a home life, but you've got to have that time to yourself as well, do what you feel happy with', and sometimes it will cause problems in your house, it does, but then you've got to override that.

In another example, Zainab describes the length of time it took to inform her mother-in-law that she was working.

Zainab	For six months, my husband daren't even tell my mother-in-law I was working.
Tricia	Was that when you started work-
Zainab	At Rainbow Centre, it was an ILM post and he had to- he had to pluck up courage, call his Mum round and he didn't even dare say it in front of me because he didn't know what reaction was, he actually took her for a drive and told her (laughs).
Tricia	Right. She's presumably accepted it now.
Zainab	Well, she did say 'you know, [if] it's money, I'll give you money'. I mean, I live next door to her, we're in next door house.

Zainab also talks frequently about the uncertainty around whether women are 'permitted' to socialise outside the house or to use Sure Start or other services. Here, she is again referring to a culture in transition, in which some women 'dare' and others do not 'dare' in her words, to 'make a move'. These examples illustrate the 'push pull' relationship of agency and structure. Innovative actions, such as her own move out of the world of the family into employment, which appear to challenge rigid cultural norms, in time cause them to 'bend' and loosen. Thus, as the men see that her employment does not fundamentally threaten the family, so the scope for women to act and make different kinds of choices grows.

Tricia	Are people of your age bringing their kids up differently, significantly differently from your parents, that generation-
Zainab	Definitely, definitely. I mean there's quite a few- in the holidays, we'll meet up, we'll go to cinemas, we'll go for a meal. Erm, we'll take the kids out for the day. We'll phone round and say 'right come on', but not everybody, not everybody. Erm, we still have a lot of people that wouldn't dare, just make a move, even though - now, probably nobody will stop them from making that move.
Tricia	Yeah.

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Zainab	Erm, I mean, when I first got married I had to live like everybody else and I was stuck. Luckily they couldn't change me. Erm, and yet, because there's more leniency within the family now, there's more understanding, because the guys are older now, they've seen more and- they're saying 'she's working now, it's not changed anything, it's not made no difference to our family'. You know, fears that they had, never happened - 'Oh my God, she's gonna run off with another man'. She ran away from home and married him and she's gonna run off. They've always had that idea, you know, but they've realised - it's not like that. A bit of freedom actually would make the person appreciate what they've got.

5.4.3 Agency as future intention

In the section above a changing milieu is described in which there is both a lack of clarity about what is now permitted and evidence that different choices are becoming available to women. I have suggested that the repeated push of individuals against the structure (in this case, a particular form of patriarchy) causes that structure to bend and alter, reflecting some aspects of Giddens' (1984) notion of the structure-agency dynamic as a 'duality' rather than a 'dualism'. Here, time, not surprisingly, represents an essential ingredient (and key element of context) in the process of change. The importance of time is revealed when looking at future agency, that is, at *intention*. While participants often described the constraints on their own agency in the past and in the present, they were adamant that their own children would be given greater choices and freedoms. As examples, Amina and Saira both emphasise a respect for the autonomy of their children in relation to them, and the importance that they are allowed to make their own decisions.

Amina	I've got a daughter yeah. I wouldn't do that to her [make her marry young], no. Our generation, I could say - er knows how to respect their families. We've changed, totally changed. We're not the same anymore.
Tricia	In what way?
Amina	They like to rule you. Whereas we know that we have to give our kids their life, we can't- make their life. We can't make, you know, decisions for them. And our parents think, even if you're married, they still have to make your decisions for you. Which I think is totally wrong.

Saira	I'd bring [my daughter] up much different - not the way I was brought up, no, I wouldn't do that. I wouldn't threaten my daughter's life, not the way my parents did. I wouldn't do that. I'll make sure that when she grows up, she can go to school, it depends if she does - some sort of

course, see if she gets anywhere like, if she doesn't, then we'll make sure she - signs on or looks for a job or something, but I'm not going to keep her in, not the way I used to 'cause, I didn't know nothing, yeah. My husband used to always say 'look, your dad used to always keep you in prison' so 'do you want the same thing to happen to your daughter?' and I'll make sure she doesn't.

Tricia   You as a parent can be different to your parents and - things change-

Saira   Yeah, my Dad used to say 'today you're wearing Asian clothes, yeah? One day when your daughter grows up, she's going to end up in mini skirts', I go, 'who cares if she does?'

The extracts above illustrate how agency is mediated through generational relationships. My research suggests that these relationships function as a dialogue in which there is negotiation about the limits and possibilities of agency that continues from one generation to the next. Referring to their own findings (also reflected in my research) that individuals can have commitments to both tradition and change, Smart and Shipman (2004) explain that 'This has to be understood in terms of the way in which each generation is actually a bridge between other generations and thus is in a continual process of negotiation and realignment' (p. 507).

5.5   Chapter conclusions

This chapter contests assumptions about 'rational' and 'reflexive' agency within individualisation theories and Third Way and New Labour and Sure Start policy discourses.   Reflecting findings from family practices researchers that agency is essentially 'relational' rather than individualised, the concept of 'linked lives' (Elder, 1994, in Smart, 2005, p. 550) is helpful as Smart suggests, in indicating that our 'lives are influenced by the lives around us and lives before us' (2005, p. 550).   As well as addressing the notion of agency as a 'relational' process, identified by Mason (2004), the concept of linked lives also attends to the notion of 'collective agency'.   Here, relationships between the individual and the collective are seen to be complex, with collective practices and actions interacting with individuals in ways that are constraining, enabling or both.

The focus in this chapter has been on the lives of Pakistani-origin women in the sample and my objective here has been to explore the similarities, differences and complexities

within their accounts. I have looked briefly, but not systematically in this chapter, at the experiences of a small sample of white women during late adolescence. In addition, a fuller, more comprehensive and comparative account of processes of activism and participation within Sure Start of the two parent groups is provided in Chapter 7.

In the life stories portrayed, the Brambleton Pakistani community is seen to be 'traditional' in Giddens' terms, with the chapter reinforcing the findings of other researchers (e.g. Yip, 2004) that the extent of 'post-traditionalism' has been overstated. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's 'central character of our time', the 'choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life' (2002, pp. 22-3), is - despite evidence of a slowly changing culture - a distant figure in these stories in which choices and decision-making by women are structured and often actively restricted by cultural assumptions about gender roles.

Researchers (such as Dwyer, 1999) have warned against 'binary' constructions of Asian girls and women which promote a 'cultural conflict model'. The point that Dwyer makes that girls and women should be seen, not just within the setting of the (by implication, oppressive) 'Asian family' but also as 'shaped by racism and inscribed by gender relations and class structures' (p. 7) is important, and can only be addressed in part by my study.

Although some of those I interviewed expressed conflicted feelings and several described significant tensions between family expectations and certain personal desires or aspirations, their relationship with the norms of their culture was not centrally about a 'conflict between two cultures', and was much more nuanced than this[25]. A sense of conflict, where it existed, was not between one culture or another; for example, a religious identity was often, and retaining strong family connections was almost always, highly important and there was not a significant rejection of institutions such as arranged marriage. Like Smart and Shipman (2004) whose research was conducted

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[25] Shaw (2000, p. 7) highlights the complexity of this. When in Pakistan, she discovered that 'sometimes young adults run away from home or elope in order to escape an arranged marriage; I began to realize that similar incidents in Britain are not solely or necessarily the result of being in England and being influenced by a different way of thinking, by permissive western values. They can also be the products of tensions and dynamics that are internal to the biradari structure, played out in a Pakistani cultural idiom, while accommodating features of the new environment'.

with women and men from minority ethnic groups and concerned marriage, where this was discussed, the women I interviewed seemed to accept and reject different aspects of the traditions that had been handed down to them. However, those of this group who used what I have termed 'narratives of constrained agency', clearly and forcefully rejected the level of family imposition on them, the subordination of their own wishes to wider family demands, the different treatment given to boys and girls, and the restrictions on their movements.

As the chapter demonstrates, a theme within accounts also highlighted the dynamic aspect of 'culture', the growing possibilities for women to pursue individual interests alongside their family commitments. However, the major findings of this chapter, that agency may be severely constrained, undoubtedly has significant implications for a social policy which assumes both that welfare users have an undifferentiated ability to use services and that as 'rational agents' they will wish to engage with interventions in a particular way. These issues are further examined in Chapters 6 and 7.

6. Conceptualising Sure Start and the 'policy story': Professional and worker perspectives on Brambleton's 'social investment' needs

6.1 Introduction

Earlier, in Chapter 2, the notion of 'social investment' was described as an important dimension of a Third Way framework (Powell, 2000) with Sure Start itself in many ways epitomising a social investment approach. This chapter suggests that professionals implementing the programme in Brambleton have conceptualised the social investment needs of the area in a way that differs significantly from that within national policy discourses.

In Chapter 5, using the life stories of several Asian women in my sample, I proposed both that the premise of a 'post-traditionalist' society leading to active, reflexive and individualised agency and policy assumptions that families operated on a consensual basis had been hugely overstated. The construction of an agency that was often highly constrained and relational rather than individualised, I suggested, was likely to have implications for how agency was exercised in relation to welfare interventions, problematising assumptions within the policy discourse that *responsible* and *active* parents would both desire and be able to maximise the opportunities provided by the Sure Start programme.

Turning away from a direct exploration of individual life stories, my focus in this chapter is on the social policy story, using narratives principally from Brambleton workers. This social policy story has at its centre a particular vision of the Brambleton community and its needs for services to support families. However, while in Chapter 5, accounts from a significant sub-set of the Asian mothers revealed a narrative that was largely shared, here the voices are more varied. This reflects differences in the roles, histories and relationships of professionals with the area, leading to some divergence in attitudes to the programme focus and its implementation.

Reflecting my conceptual framework, parental agency is at the centre of this policy story. In Chapter 4, I noted Shona Hunter's (2003) point that in spite of increasing interest in the identities of welfare users, exploration of the identities of welfare professionals remained largely absent in research. I acknowledged that this could be seen as a limitation in this study in which the treatment of welfare professionals was essentially about providing a professional 'perspective' as a counterpoint to the 'perspective' of discourse. The literature of policy implementation studies represents another area in which the current research could be located. As Susan Barrett (2004) has said, previous assumptions about a simple, linear relationship between formulation of policy at the top and its implementation on the ground, have more recently been challenged, with implementation now more commonly understood as a 'negotiated order' involving 'bargaining and negotiation between semi-autonomous actors pursuing or protecting their interests' (Barrett, 2004, p. 254). It is important to recognise that the narratives of professionals, like those of parents, are not *transparent* reflections of 'experience' or simply, their 'views' (Lawler, 2002). Perspectives of professionals may draw on various individual and cultural narratives including their own 'identities' and personal histories, relationships with the area, and responses to an array of institutional demands and policy agendas. While this range of factors are recognised as integral to professional stories, it is not within the remit of the chapter to examine them in depth.

This chapter begins by examining 'racialised' understandings of Brambleton and how processes of inclusion and exclusion of white and Asian residents were perceived to operate. It then examines constructions of 'need' that have led to a programme which emphasises the provision of services that are accessible to a particular client group and pitched at a particular level. As part of the story, the chapter demonstrates how a narrow focus on this client group has implications for other parents in the area and for the overall delivery and impact of the programme. In the final part of the chapter, perceptions of the unfolding policy story, the greater emphasis on childcare and the introduction of the Children's Centres are investigated. Focusing on how interpretations of need in the primary client group are seen to conflict with the emphasis in the changing policy agenda, the chapter thus highlights the tensions between the assumptions of national policy and those of local actors in Brambleton.

6.2 Conceptualising Brambleton

In Chapter 2, I identified that the concept of 'racialisation' was useful in suggesting that 'racial' dimensions were socially constructed (Smith, 1989). In this research, racialised and gendered descriptions were frequently applied to Brambleton - its residents and their patterns of behaviour, the operation of its physical spaces as well as its institutions and services. In this section, I explore understandings about the area of Brambleton, as the context in which the needs for a Sure Start programme were conceptualised and its key dimensions identified.

6.2.1 The 'particularity' of Brambleton

Many accounts spoke of Brambleton as 'particular' or 'different' from other multi-ethnic areas of the city with similar socio-economic characteristics. This was often attributed to its geographical isolation, its location by the motorway, and proximity to residential areas of the neighbouring town rather than the city in which it was located.

Some of those interviewed linked the insularity of Brambleton with its perceived neglect by the local authority and other statutory services. The account from Pete, a local authority employee, below, links this with a sense of the wider 'invisibility' of the area.

Pete
Other people will tell you about the psychological barrier of the motorway and the fact that Brambleton - is it part of this city or not? The best example I ever had was about why Brambleton wasn't receiving a meals on wheels service for pensioners. Social Services don't deliver meals on wheels to Brambleton, they deliver to [other outlying areas of the city] and all kind of inaccessible places, but not to Brambleton. And the reason given, was 'well, by the time the meals get to Brambleton, well, where have they been cooked? Frequently because of the queues at the motorway junction, and the lead up to Christmas, the meals are cold by the time they get to the pensioners, so it's not really fair to provide a meals on wheels service' (Pete and Tricia laugh).

It was the absence of services - or indeed any activities - for women and children that prompted the establishment of Brambleton Childcare Project (BCP) in the late 1990s and subsequently, of the Sure Start programme in 2001. Below, a general withdrawal of

local authority services is described by Pete as hastened by the closure of the local secondary school. This event itself had apparently been triggered by increasing 'white flight', in this case, falling school rolls demonstrating the decision made by many white parents to send their children to school in neighbouring Podsham.

Pete   [When Rilhampton School closed in the 1990s] Brambleton kind of lost something that held it together. ... By the - late 80s onwards, particularly after Ray Honeyford's campaign at Drummond Middle School in Bradford[26], it was the choice of a number of white parents to have their children schooled in what they thought to be a more favourable atmosphere, a more mono-ethnic atmosphere, and that was also as we know, a feature of the Nursery and Infants and Junior school. But with Rilhampton closure, you know, it lost not only the Pensioners Lunch Club, it lost a youth facility, but it also began to lose something more important which was a belief that Council services for the people of Brambleton, were on the wane. It's the kind of psychological consequences of that decision that I think were really, really important, a belief that, well children from Brambleton have to go down to Shorlton Green School in the city and to Bucksley School in Podsham. And it was when the first sort of big retrenchment in local authority budgets started to happen, everything in Brambleton appeared to be slipping away, services were withdrawn, the housing department didn't visit the advice centre any more on a Friday, there was no youth club.

Another view about Brambleton as a 'different' kind of multicultural area referred to the particular conservatism of its Asian residents. Among those practitioners I interviewed, this was sometimes attributed to the 'village mentality' of the predominantly Mirpuri community, one of the manifestations of which was the *biraderi* system (see p. 123), thought to operate - at some level - in business and other local settings. A particular conformity was associated in part with Brambleton's *lack* of diversity and external influences. Zainab, brought up in a more mixed part of the city had moved to Brambleton when she married: 'I was brought up with a very western mind compared to some of the people in Brambleton. When I first came, it was really hard'. Helen's comment refers to the experience of delivering services in the area.

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[26] Ray Honeyford, Headteacher of Drummond Middle School in Bradford was widely condemned when he wrote an article for the *Salisbury Review* in 1984 which claimed that the education of white children was being adversely affected by the influx of Asian children into Bradford schools (Ward, 2003).

Helen	I believe it is more conservative in Brambleton than other areas, but that's only an observation. It's what I hear, from mothers, the work that's being done, what's worked, what hasn't, the way that some families will access activities, the way they won't. And you think 'oh you know, why is this?' ... We've thought of all kinds of reasons – and it's possibly because there is a level of - expectation or there is a level of behaviour, certain kinds of behaviour in Brambleton that is very conformist, quite conservative, not necessarily branching out as eagerly, as, say in [other areas] which are very cosmopolitan really, in terms of a mixed, diverse community.
Tricia	Less influences from – other?-
Helen	Yeah, nobody comes here, do they? It's (laughs) the end of the motorway isn't it?

6.2.2 Brambleton as a racialised space: narratives of 'exclusion'

As stated in Chapter 4, the most recent Census identified Brambleton's population as broadly divided between white and Pakistani residents (ONS, 2001)[27]. While further analysis provided evidence that the two groups had strikingly different age profiles, with the white population proportionately much more likely than the Pakistani community to be elderly, in terms of the Sure Start remit, data suggested that there remained a significant number of children aged 0-4, around a third of whom were white (34%). In discussions about the area and its residents however, the focus of answers was almost always narrowly upon those of Pakistani-origin, with constituent white groups tending to be discussed only when specific questions were asked. As such, on the whole, in discussions there appeared to be an assumption about the 'natural' 'Asian' character of the area, with the area dynamics discussed in relation to this 'default'.

One of the themes emerging from these discussions was the racialised (and often gendered) divisions and processes of exclusion which operated in the area. On one level, this was epitomised by the physical geography of the area, in which, for many years there had existed a symbolic but also, almost an actual boundary between the upper end which had previously been occupied almost entirely by white residents, (and referred to by some participants as 'nob end') and the poorer side of 'lower

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[27] It should be noted that the 2001Census is now very out of date.

Brambleton'. This was a steadily changing picture, with Asian families increasingly moving into what had been seen as 'white' territory.

Pete People have talked about Brambleton by virtue of looking at its ethnicity and therefore determined its character by its ethnicity and it looks like - what people call a multiracial area, well, it kind of is, it is a multiracial area, but it's also monoracial, in terms of the geography in Brambleton, it's kind of divided-

By comparison to the frequent characterisation of Asian residents as a 'community' as if a homogeneous bloc, there was little discussion about the white residents as an 'entity' or 'community', and as noted later in this chapter, little appeared to be known about white families with young children. However, in two accounts, those from Brambleton community and local authority workers, Steve and George, a picture of a close (ageing) white community with a history of mutual support and shared activities was provided. For Steve, a long-time worker:

Steve If you live over Brambleton, the image which the media or other people portray of it is quite different to what it's like meeting people or walking streets and all that kind of stuff. So there's a long history of kind of informal looking after each other in white community. Probably the over 60s club has been around since 1950, the Brambleton Vets have been around since first world war and there were stuff like you help with somebody's hair, do their shopping, visit in hospital, take people flowers, you know that kind of looking after each other.

While overall, a picture was provided of the relative harmoniousness and co-operation of two essentially separate, but amicable ethnic ('Asian' and 'white') groups, particular themes 'disrupted' this narrative. One such theme, identified by a small number of Asian mothers, was the ongoing occurrence of an 'everyday' white racism, usually experienced at the level of verbal abuse, which appeared to be part of the fabric of living in the area[28]. In some of these stories, explicitly racialised conflict was seen to

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[28] Early in my fieldwork, I experienced what I interpreted as a 'flavour' of this 'everyday white racism'. While walking in a residential street, I was approached by an elderly white woman who began talking to me about how the area had 'gone downhill with the foreigners'. She described an incident in which she said she had seen an Asian man, or possibly an asylum seeker, shoot an animal from a window. I felt disturbed by her hostility, but was not surprised by what she said or her assumption that I would automatically show my agreement. I described this incident in my Research Diary (24.2.04).

have erupted, as if suddenly, at secondary school. One mother, Safia, for example identified that she had not experienced racism in Brambleton, but that when she started school in Podsham-:

Safia We did experience a lot of racism, and what ended up happening was we always ended up playing with Asian girls and it just got worse because we'd all be together and they'd all be together and you know, we would never cause any trouble, but- It got to a point where all the guys used to get outside round the front of the school and they just used to fight, and there was this one white guy from er, thingee, from Brambleton and he was called Martin and because we'd all grown up together we all used to play together. But they beat him up so much at Pullington School for playing with us, that he was in hospital.

Tricia Who beat him up?

Safia The guys from Pullington, the English guys, calling him a traitor and all kinds of-. And I'm not saying that the Brambleton guys were any better, they was just as worse. But in Brambleton, you'd never find that, maybe if they went into a different area, they probably would be bad, but in Brambleton I don't think they are, you know, the people that are here, I think they're quite happy with each other.

Another theme, the activities of a small minority of criminalized youth was part of wider, gendered narratives which emphasised an *aggressive* male agency asserting itself in public space, particularly at night-time. This comment was from a parent, Emma.

Emma And you do get a lot of hassle - you can get intimidated and you do get verbal abuse from gangs of Asian lads. That happens at night. Under the underpasses to the shopping centre, there's drugs being sold. And Tony's been offered drugs quite a few times. But it does make you feel unsafe. A couple of doors down, a lad was beaten up a couple of months ago, because someone thought he was trying to steal their drugs patch down by Brambleton Post Office when he was just walking home from a night out. Erm, and it's things like that, and there are the boy racers screeching round in their cars and that's Pullington lads coming in and racing in with Brambleton lads and they sort of have a race off because there's a bit of tension between them.

The 'race-off' between Pullington and Brambleton lads, described by Emma above, was part of stories about *territorial conflict* between white and Asian young men. This is reflected in Steve's account, which suggested that the racialised history of the area, including the current, numerical dominance of Asian boys, continued to play itself out in sporadic confrontations.

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Steve   [When I first worked here] the Pakistani community would have been in a minority, and would have suffered all kinds of racism at the hands of white community. In a way it's complete role reversal, 'cause at a younger end, black lads control streets- There's 80% you know- And sometimes there's some retribution, you can describe it as white racism, because there's the power and prejudice there, but you've got power and prejudice in a role reversal way. The white racism's still around, but it's much more hidden, pure and simple. I think the days have gone when if you were white you could talk about 'them Pakis' or whatever, because they know that - lots and lots of people now wouldn't run with that, for whatever reason.

Particular incidents which involved violence, including battles for the Brambleton Co-op and the frequent firebombing of the Red Lion pub (which had finally closed at the point of the fieldwork), referred to by many participants, were also seen both as racialised and also more simply, as about territorial control. Although these events concerned prolonged conflict for control of previously white-owned institutions, some parents and almost all of the professionals who discussed them, downplayed a 'racist' motivation. While George, formerly a resident of Brambleton, also recognised the territorial basis of these incidents, the tone he adopted about this topic was more explicitly hostile.

George   And, attempts to burn down the erm, Red Lion and the hassle and harassment that they created with the Co-op - whether or not it were instigated by senior Asians in the community- There's a view, and it's been expressed in many meetings- Because it's synonymous with the fact that not long after it closed down, it was opened up by an Asian guy who set it up in exactly the same guise as it was before. And the attempts to burn down the Red Lion and close that down was always viewed by the community: 'They'll either resurrect it as a mosque or an Indian restaurant or whatever they want for themselves'- Anything that seemed to be peculiar to the British way of life and the Co-op was, and the pub was, you know, to an English person, it's part of their tradition and you were seeing a lot of this, I mean, destroying it, really, and it may not be for personal gain, they just wanted to destroy it. I've witnessed some quite - erm serious incidents with Asians on, not just white, but asylum seekers - so it wasn't just aimed at whites, it was anybody that was intervening in their process, their street, their houses or whatever.

The thrust of his narrative, the deliberate attempts of some Asians to outmanoeuvre white opponents and to wrest control of what were seen to be long-established, white-

held and 'traditionally' British institutions in Brambleton, featured frequently in his account. Although George periodically mentioned his good relationships with members of the Asian community, his respect for individuals and the essential 'decency' in his terms, of the majority, he returned repeatedly to this theme.

George   [The youth facility] has Asian youth workers who go on outreach ... but the only people they are attracting in are the gangs of idiots and yobbos, taking them to special facilities for them people alone. Because the outreach is not finding the white kid that's – doing his homework or – is excluded and is now using Pullington [instead]. Because if he sets foot inside that building he'll get threatened - You daren't say anything to anybody, but I know it's happening because I spoke to some of the kids. Teresa – she's a resident she has teenagers, and she says: 'Why is nobody telling me? Because I have teenage kids and there are things happening now that the youth service are putting on, but nobody else in Brambleton knows about'. I've been in that building, there's a Pakistani flag that dominates all one wall, and there's Pakistani literature all over the place, and it's totally wrong and it's out of order and it's got to stop. And somebody, and I suggest it might be me has got to say 'where's all the white kids?'

Bolstered by his professional role in the area, George often identified himself as a spokesperson for white residents. In addition however, he frequently referred to his passionate desire that activities be inclusive of both communities. Involved in the development of the Sure Start Family Centre and attempting to put this goal of inclusion into practice, George describes himself as thwarted by all sides:

George   I don't really think the problem is cracking the Asian community, I think the problem is cracking the elderly white population 'cause they've given up, they've packed in- [They say] 'What's the point? 'Why are you busting a gut to put a facility in for Asians?' 'It's for you'. 'Don't talk rubbish George, we'll not be able to set foot in there'. 'I won't allow it, I'll do something about it'. 'You won't George, you'll not be able to stop this machine', and I'm saying 'I think you're wrong in what you're saying'.

George's understanding of events is important as it reflects a commonly-expressed theme - discursively reinforced by his own experiences as a former long-time resident - about a deliberate marginalising of Brambleton's white population. This theme is reflected, to different degrees, in accounts from white Sure Start mothers as well as from a minority of other staff. It is important for my research, in suggesting a

disconnect between the focus of Sure Start and other perceptions, not just of the 'need' but also of the 'entitlement' of white residents, potentially with significant implications for the delivery and outcomes of services in the area.

Alongside these stories, a parallel narrative was set up which concerned the exclusion of Asian residents. As indicated, the predominant social policy story of professionals involved in work with families spoke of the depth of need for provision among Asian women, who they saw as being excluded from active participation in the area and from many aspects of public life, albeit primarily by what were seen to be repressive cultural and family norms. In other accounts, a larger picture of the exclusion of Asian residents was evident. This included some acknowledgement from George, for example, that attempts to maintain or gain control of institutions were not always one-sided:

George   Now [people at] the mosque are saying 'we would love to go to the [currently white] over 60s luncheon club' - which is free for everyone over 60 in Brambleton. I dread to think how they [the white elderly who currently attend] will react when that happens.

In addition, and in a more complex perspective on exclusion, across the interviews as a whole, there was evidence both of a significant drift of white residents to live in neighbouring Pullington (in Podsham), but also of the active choice of those residents that remained to use services and facilities there. The descriptions in some interviews of a level of withdrawal from participation in Brambleton, at points raised questions about the extent to which white residents felt an affiliation to Brambleton or identified themselves as belonging to the area. Ruth was a Sure Start employee.

Ruth   Some white families don't feel they're part of Brambleton and they see Brambleton as an Asian community, the ones on Ferrars Road and the Podsham side of Brambleton. They say 'we don't go down that end of Brambleton'. People have also said 'in that community, the Asian community get everything'. If they don't see themselves as part of the community, they're not likely to accept something that's <u>for</u> the community.

The withdrawal of significant numbers of white residents from services was particularly evident in relation to education, as indicated in a comment from Pete earlier. For one mother, Nazia, the education of white Brambleton children elsewhere reflected her own

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sense of the divisions in the area; the tone that she uses here, the uncertainty about whether the white community 'minded' living with the Asian community and her own repeated insistence that 'we don't mind', revealed some discomfort about this.

Nazia   Sometimes, I think Brambleton's a bit divided. I mean, I don't mind really, but I think sometimes it is a bit divided.

Tricia   Does that make any difference in practice? For example what does it mean for children growing up in this area?

Nazia   I don't know. I guess when they go to school, there's mainly Asians there. Do you get what I mean? I don't think that we mind, I mean I don't mind that we live as a mixed community but then I think sometimes you know, the white community might do. I mean they are sending their younger ones to Pullington Primary School now. Rather than sending them to the local school. I think that was an issue when we went to school actually. That's why they had to close the secondary school in Brambleton because there wasn't enough children going there. So I think that mainly, a lot of the white children were going to Pullington because of that. I don't know. I think it is still there. I don't mind, because, you know - I've worked with - white people really and I don't mind mixed communities, I don't know if even Asians mind. It probably works both ways. I don't know.

The key themes presented here included depictions of the 'particularity' of Brambleton which concerned its geography, neglect and the perceived conservatism of its Pakistani population. The construction of Brambleton as a 'racialised' space, highlighting the exclusionary processes operating within the area as described both by Asian and white residents, was also very important in the context of this research.

6.3   Understanding the need for a Sure Start programme in Brambleton

In this section, professional perceptions of the need for a Sure Start programme which primarily addressed the perceived difficulties of local Asian women are examined and the implications of this focus explored.

6.3.1 Need as 'racialised'

In early interviews, professionals were asked why a bid had been submitted for Sure Start funding and what the specific needs for services in Brambleton were. Reflecting the frequent characterisation of Brambleton as an 'Asian' area described in Section 6.2, 'need' for a Sure Start programme in Brambleton was usually associated with the Asian

population. In responding to questions about 'need', professionals in these extracts appear to be concerned with the parent population in general, but repeated 'cultural clues' indicate an almost singular focus.

Lyn	It's largely Pakistani Muslim, there's only one Bangladeshi woman in the area. Those in the community aren't visibly poor, they have standards, but there are issues of health and diet, some haven't got much extended family, the dental health is appalling, there's a lack of iron in the diet, but they're very open to ideas and they will come and find out about things. Drugs are a problem in the area, sometimes through spouses, the Pakistan connection, they're very available though not particularly for women.
Helen	Eighty percent of families with young children are Pakistani Muslim, the rest is more or less a mix of white communities. The BME community is very disadvantaged, the men from Pakistan came years ago, generations have stayed in Brambleton. They were fairly illiterate, they were from rural areas of Pakistan and came for a better life, but it's a different level of expectation because of where they came from. There's high unemployment, those who're employed mainly work in taxi businesses or restaurants, the Pakistanis, or [the local shopping centre] or building, white communities. People loved the educational and health opportunities provided by BCP [Brambleton Childcare Project] and what they wanted was childcare. Because of the language and culture, there's needs around diet, oral health, diabetes, Coronary Heart Disease, there's huge nutrition needs.

Reflecting the themes from Chapter 5, depictions of the agency of women as highly circumscribed by expectations dominated accounts. This did not mean that Asian mothers were viewed necessarily as 'passive' or as lacking in agency; agency was often seen as context-bound and dynamic, as shaped by and in turn, shaping a culture in constant flux, reflecting parent accounts in Chapter 5. This extract from Helen, a Sure Start professional, part of the discussion in which she described the particularly conformist character of the Brambleton Asian community, suggests that choices and actions are occurring in a context of competing sets of values and expectations.

Helen	... I've said to people 'it's like Pakistan 1960'. What I'm saying is, it's an ex-pat community. They've taken their way of life - and everybody does it - and they've brought it here, but, but for a lot of reasons it hasn't moved on and what we are seeing, I think, is conflict between generations that have been born here and those that came here. We still have people marrying over in Pakistan and bringing people back. Partly

because it's about maintaining that level of - stability of what Pakistan was like in 1960 (laughs). Now Pakistan's changed, of course Pakistan's changed! They have _email_ over there for God's sake! (both laugh). You know, there's this expectation that they will bring all those values with them, and they probably will, but they've also probably got a lot of expectations about coming to England, that might not be realised so there's a lot of conflict I think, within families around expectations.

This context of conflicting expectations is contained in the account below; in addition, evidence of the increasing acceptance of wider roles for women is addressed. In his account, Pete has begun by suggesting that culturally distinct male and female roles are reinforced by 'material factors', an example of which is transport: 'Young men frequently get hold of cars, and own cars and young women don't'.

Tricia	What do you think are the implications of that for the way that the family develops?
Pete	I think that the attempts to try and re-look at roles within the family, breadwinner, the family wage - are as prevalent within the Pakistani community as they are within the overall population. And I probably do think that the material factors at work within a Pakistani family make it more difficult for - mothers to, to think about ways of - widening the role of the father within the upbringing and family life within the home. I think the struggle's that much harder, therefore for a woman to think about, bringing up children and looking after her own personal interests. But we also know about- the beginnings of difference, very many different ways of family life beginning to be led. And the generational consequences of people choosing different styles of life than their elder siblings chose. So even within a generation there's changes that are observable.

Just as certain stories were often told to exemplify aspects of 'racial' or 'territorial' conflict similarly, two incidents demonstrating the determination, personal power and impact of particular women, were often described. These stories centred on two events, the first, a discussion between workers, parents and a local authority officer about the impending arrangements for the Children's Centre, and the second, a large meeting to discuss the threatened closure of a GP surgery in Brambleton.

Pete	... the women who have made certain choices for themselves and for their kids, with their partners or in some cases against their partner's interests, they seem a bit special. Like they kind of shine. And it's very hard not to see their shininess, the thoughtfulness and the determination that lies behind it. Like, there was an occasion recently when there was a

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BCP meeting and [someone] came down to do their bit about the Children's Centre. And the way which three - two Pakistani, one Algerian woman, kind of – they didn't go for him, but they just said very clearly 'look here, you should know that you come into a community where it's been really hard to achieve what we've done, and we're not gonna let this go, you can't tell us how we're gonna run something that we've created' and you thought 'gee', you know- Partly it's about the confidence that they've had with being with the kind of organisations that made Brambleton Sure Start what it is up 'til now, but the other part you saw, what they've been doing themselves.

In George's story, told in his characteristically candid manner, the impact of the women's resolve is similarly clear, despite the constraints under which they are operating.

George   I have never [before] seen a situation where 11 Asian ladies turned up on bloc but the disturbing thing about that was that they were shepherded by their men to the back of the room and they had to sit in a corner on their own. And they had to have interpreters- They came in, half an hour into it, which is typical, typical Asian, and erm, the whole thing then slowed down, while everything were related back and interpreted. But they were very vocal and they fought their corner.

The emphasis in these stories, their repetition by various participants - and even Pete's description of certain women as exhibiting a particular 'shininess' - suggests however, that these kinds of incidents, the ability of women to 'speak out', or to have visibility beyond limited arenas was still unusual in Brambleton. In contrast to depictions by some research participants of Asian men as highly active and visible (and in some cases, as aggressive and territorial), women were often seen as absent from public life and services or as on their margins. This was reflected in the overarching narrative about the need for Sure Start services.

Helen, like other staff, continually emphasised that difficulties for women in accessing services crossed different ethnic groups. However, the 'element of control' in the Asian family was seen as being comparatively greater.

Helen   There's the usual issues of coming out, of having to do your cleaning and your cooking before you go. Erm, what do you do with the children if you've not got childcare? And do you feel happy leaving your children? Are you allowed to leave your kids? All that kind of stuff. So there's

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those issues. So there's an element of control that comes from within the home.

This control was linked in particular to the demands upon women in the extended family, the complexity of which she felt had not been grasped by Government.

Helen   Well it's a Eurocentric government and I don't think they understand how strong family - family - life is the wrong word, the family ethos is in South Asian communities is, because it's incredibly strong, too strong sometimes. So much so, that in a place like this, you are actually living with your immediate family, then you've got your Grandma, your second cousin, your third cousin. And it's actually quite big within the community. And I do wonder whether the government understands about the extended family, how big it can be. And how strong that can be, for good or bad.

In Chapter 5, Zainab and Shamim described the major practical and psychological impacts for some women of living in extended families. Extended family living was seen both as supportive and prohibitive, but often overall, as a barrier to the use of services. In reference to the *supportive* quality of the extended family, one view was that the presence of family might appear to preclude the need for outside support, as Leela, a mother brought up in a Sikh family, but now estranged from her family, explains.

Leela   A lot of these people have got their extended family, so they lean on them, don't they, for support. And what they need, they seem to get off them. 'Cos I do know, if I did marry an Asian, say I married an Asian guy - and um - I'd probably be living with him and his family. And I don't think I'd go to these mother and baby groups, because um, I don't know, mother-in-law to lean on for support and things like that. So I guess in a way, they feel like, they don't need it.

Often the extended family was seen to represent the main (or only) sphere of adult female activity. The implications of this, as Leela says below, were not just that women would not become involved as their needs were assumed to be met within the family; some were also fearful about spending time outside the family, concerned about gender mixing and what was seen to be any 'official' intervention.

Leela   I think a lot of people, they've got a lot of issues haven't they, like some of these more cultural women, they're a bit more timid to go out, aren't they? If they think there's going to be men around, or if they don't know what to expect. And as soon as you start mentioning health visitor or home visitor, some start panicking don't they, thinking 'oh god, it's a health visitor' and it sort of worries them and they sort of try and keep their distance. But because they've got their mums and you know, grandmas to help them, haven't they, they don't really go out and make use of facilities really.

The need to maintain a 'respectable image' for the family in order to avoid dishonour, even to the extent of not risking public visibility, was often given as a reason for the difficulty women had in using services. In addition, as, in some cases, the family was seen as the realm through which women were expected to live out every part of their lives, so it was assumed that problems should be solved *through* the family. In the account of Anna, a Sure Start worker, the extent of family interconnectedness was also seen as increasing the sense of obligation to family members. Thus, professional involvement could appear as a threat to the *autonomy* and *self-sufficiency* of the family. Here, Anna is talking about women who experience domestic abuse.

Anna   I think there is more of an expectation that it [the marriage] has got to work, even regardless of the domestic violence, I think sometimes there is a lot of pressure from within the family that you keep going and you keep trying to make it work. It seems to take longer to get to the point where they're able to say to the family 'I've tried this so many times, am I at the point where this is enough now?' And because they're so interlinked - they often marry someone they're related to - so there's so much more input from the family because often almost everyone from the family's involved, which is quite different. So a woman in that situation might feel that she's letting herself and her husband down, but also several, wider family members down. So that's very much why there's a huge reluctance to accept outside help. Because it's seen as a problem that the family can sort out. [This is why] we've had a problem sometimes when women have come to us and they've wanted to access groups and things, where it's been made difficult by the family.

The suggestion that many women were 'stuck in the house' or – starker still – 'not allowed out', was a common narrative found throughout professional and parent accounts. These powerful, emotive descriptions were so commonly used in discussion about need, that confinement to the home often seemed to become the symbolic rationale for the programme itself, identifying its focus and the level at which it had to

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be pitched. In Chapter 5, stories told by Zainab and Saira suggested that during earlier periods in their lives, they had experienced a literal confinement within the home. Here, Anna describes the experience of home visitors in which use of services outside the home had to be negotiated with family against a backdrop in which the right of women to make decisions about their daily lives could not be assumed.

Anna	A lot of women that are confined to the house because of the pressure if you like from the extended family for the women not to become independent and not to leave the house, so they're restrained, they're having to stay in, look after the children, do the cooking, do the cleaning. So, sometimes, it's hard to – if they want to become independent-
Tricia	Is that something you've come across in your work?
Anna	Yes, quite a lot. When we go and we talk about Sure Start we say what we do, what we offer and what we can help with, erm, (2.0). We've had women that have said, they'd really like to do that, but they've whispered to us that it's not easy to talk if there're other members of the family there, or they've said 'I'd really love to do that but I'll have to ask my husband, I'll have to ask the family'. Erm, so sometimes, we get women, especially when we talk about some of the computer courses and some of the training that's available, they've said that they want to do it, but you know, it's difficult. And they have to get permission, and sometimes they don't get permission and sometimes they don't access it because of that.

The inability of national policy to recognise the strength of extended family living suggests that the kinds constraints on agency highlighted above - which as these accounts suggest, impact on the use of services - are also not acknowledged. The importance of extended family forms has also been examined in white working class communities (e.g. Campbell, 1993; Mitchell and Green, 2002); this suggests that some of these issues may also apply within those groups.

6.3.2 Brambleton Sure Start and white mothers

Within all the professional stories about need and about the focus of services, a lens appeared to be narrowly focused on the Pakistani-origin women. All families in the area received Sure Start health visitor input, all families were automatically offered home visits, and a small number of white women were highly active in the programme. However, in the period of my fieldwork, white women had little and often no visibility in other Sure Start (e.g. group) activities. Given the still significant number of young

white children in the area, this near-singular focus puzzled me and I attempted to explore with some professionals why there had not been a parallel targeting of white parents.

One of the themes emerging from this route of exploration was an apparent lack of knowledge about this group, reflected in this extract from Pete, a local professional with a Sure Start role. At the end of this extract Pete acknowledges that numbers of white families with children are likely to be significant; however, his tone suggests a sparse knowledge of their characteristics and needs.

Tricia	I wondered if you had any views about the ability of Sure Start or BCP to address the needs of those [white] families?
Pete	I don't know how current this is but [a worker] - this would have been about three or four years ago - she had a feeling that the Nursery and Infants School was picking up quite a number of children, white children who were coming into Brambleton for relatively short periods of time . And the children were quite hard work. She formed the view that a lot of the families were staying in housing association properties in Brambleton, [they were] on the homeless, families that were being re-housed because of domestic violence and therefore their situation might be particularly problematic and kids who were - clingy and aggressive and all the behavioural changes that come about through break up. And, I don't know whether that kind of subset of the white young people, the white under 5s, is still there or not. But it's possible. I think the other thing to say is that, there was a big forum meeting of about 250 people squashed into the community centre that was 98% white and I was surprised that there was so many - couples in their twenties and thirties, who were there and who weren't fearful of saying what I'd always understood to be the kind of view of the 50-60 year old white residents: 'This is the community that we've been brought up in, it's changing, there's people coming in here, they're doing things they didn't use to do, they're driving cars, they're -' It wasn't the 60 year olds talking, it was the late twenties, Mums as well as Dads - have they got kids? Yeah, probably have.

Another view, sometimes implicit, was that the *openness* of services to all parents in itself addressed the issues of access for different groups, summed up by Ruth, a professional: 'There's an assumption maybe that you provide services and everyone will use them'. This is reflected in Helen's comment below in which a universal accessibility is implied by her use of the term 'multicultural'.

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Helen	The services that we provide now are very multicultural, very - appreciative of all - areas in Brambleton, they're diverse and that's lovely. I think we embrace it all really and that's lovely.

Another example of this is given in a further conversation with Helen. In the extract below, the examples given as part of an approach of 'cultural appropriateness' did not appear to include specific attention to the needs of local white parents.

Helen	Cultural appropriateness is part of the model, it's not one of our stated aims, but whatever we do, we are inclusive.
Tricia	So what might that mean?
Helen	Language, women-only sessions, men-only sessions, respecting people's codes and culture, religion, food obviously, all that kind of stuff.

Various reasons were given for the low use of services by white parents, but the tone of professionals was sometimes unsure. Ruth for example had tried to persuade white women - concerned that they might be the 'only one' - to attend: 'I think they're conscious that it might be a room full of Asian women but I think that is something we've still got to get round'. Below, Steve speculates about low use of BCP by white parents.

Steve	I would argue a criticism of BCP, why don't white parents use it to the extent of Pakistani parents? And that can only be white racism or white fear. I don't know how big a step it is for some white parents having your kids looked after by black staff, I don't know. But it's a personal opinion again, you know what I mean.

The view that Sure Start was *perceived* to be providing services for Asian residents was acknowledged by some professionals. That this might be a commonly-held view was suggested very early in the fieldwork, when, as part of my research into reasons for non-registration (see Chapter 4), a white woman interviewed identified that she had not become involved as she thought Sure Start was 'for other ethnic groups'. It was also evident in Pete's (ironically made) completion of my sentence below, and in Ruth's comment on p. 148, which drew on wider narratives both about conflict over public provision and about the extent to which white parents might identify themselves as residents of Brambleton.

Tricia	-and something that's come up is the perception that Sure Start is for the-
Pete	Pakis.
Tricia	Asians, yeah.

Following on from this, a minority of staff as well as some white mothers, tapped into a narrative of 'unfair treatment' in which services were designed for Asian parents at the expense of their white counterparts (see the perceptions of white mothers in Chapter 7). In some cases, this slotted into a narrative that in Chapter 4 I have termed 'whispering discourses'. This refers to a commonly shared ('populist') narrative which, seen as 'politically incorrect', is nonetheless voiced frequently, but often with caution, as if in whispered tones. Although in my interview with him, George was often vociferous about what he perceived to be the injustice of Asian exclusion of white residents from local activities, in this extract, linking his perception of the oppression of local Asian women with the targeting of services, his tone was hesitant:

George	I don't know how you break down the cultural values that Asian women stick by, they come from a – very repressed – sort of- (5.0) I don't think it's the religion, but a culture and somehow we, we bend over backwards – and I know there's some disquiet within the Sure Start workers which is basically saying, white people saying 'why are they getting all this provision?' 'Why do they get all this- why can't we – all be together?'

This section has explored the professional focus of provision on Pakistani-origin mothers, large numbers of whom were seen to experience significant control from within the family and to have difficulties as a consequence in accessing services. An implication of this major focus was that professionals appeared to have less knowledge about and pay less attention to the needs of a sizeable group of white parents in the area. This study is not able to provide a full picture of the characteristics of white families in the area. However, findings did suggest that a narrow focus on the Pakistani-origin women as the 'hard to reach' group in the area may have represented an over-simplification.

6.4   Reflections on policy change

The identification of need with those women who had often had little access to facilities and limited opportunities outside the family defined the focus of the Brambleton Sure

Start programme. In the section below, professional narratives on the changing direction of Sure Start policy are examined. Here, perceptions of the 'appropriateness' of the early Sure Start national programme and 'inappropriateness' of later Sure Start reflect competing discourses of parental agency. As an example, the role of childcare in the new model, viewed as one of its key components, is examined alongside its actual uses in Brambleton.

6.4.1 The value of 'early Sure Start'

Helen   I think we really are trying to accept where people are coming from, and work with that.

Helen's statement that the programme is 'trying to accept where people are coming from' encapsulated a widespread perception of the ethos of Brambleton Sure Start and of the *national* programme in its early years. For Brambleton staff, this suggested a *focus* on ensuring access to the programme for Asian women, many of whom were seen to have little confidence or experience of life outside the family. It also suggested the *level* at which services should be provided and the *approach* to be taken, which involved both accepting and 'quietly' challenging the cultural norms that women lived by.

Helen   I think what we're doing partly is challenging the perception of Islamic culture in this community through the back door, in other words, about women not being allowed out, coming to things, and for it to be acceptable to attend and take part in some of the activities.

Anna   It's not about taking them off their families or giving them careers, we have to be sensitive about what their day entails.

At several points I have noted the importance of understanding the role of *place* and *time* as part of an approach which views context as inextricably linked to the intervention and its outcomes. The timeframe within which the interviews took place (2003-5), a period that included both the introduction of the new Sure Start childcare

objective and the Children's Centre initiative (explored in Chapter 2), shaped contrasting narratives of 'early' and 'late' Sure Start.

The value of early Sure Start, as indicated, was centrally about the focus and level at which the current provision was pitched. A crucial aspect of this was the emphasis given in the Brambleton programme to confidence and capacity-building. Many of these women, especially those who had arrived recently in the UK, as Helen identified, were not ready to seek employment or training; their needs were for more basic skills and input.

Helen   I'm a woman that has worked ever since I was 16 and had children late, so I did it very differently. The women here haven't had the kind of life experiences that I've had in terms of work and confidence-building and training, erm, so they come at it from a very different angle. And in terms of finding out their own - capacity, I suppose and building on their confidence and stuff, they need help, and I think that was what the early Sure Start was very much- trying to do, all these - parental activities. And sort of the courses and things, the gentle ones, and the support groups, and the home visiting, health visiting, midwives, coming out to support groups, and play groups, all that kind of stuff. Supporting. But the late stuff, I don't see it at all. I think the Government's making huge assumptions, if we go a few steps back, you've just had a baby, or even before you've had a baby, about your mental health, about your confidence, about your lifestyle even, in terms of your relationship with your partner and their family, especially if you've come into this country. I thought 'whoah, the bubble's burst here', you know, how harsh could this seem, you know, this pressure to get parents to work or into that way of thinking, when there is so much else they've got to deal with to make their own lives better.

The centrality of home visiting was seen as a key element of the level at which the programme needed to be pitched. This was often the only service a mother might be able to access; for others, their lack of confidence meant that they would need one-to-one support on their own territory before being able to go out to groups and other activities. Here Helen, again tapping into contrasting narratives of early and late Sure Start, pits the 'superiority' of local understandings against assumptions of government discourses; identifying that local cultural and religious norms define a particular relationship between women and the home, she again emphasises that professionals are

working with 'where people are coming from'. The extract begins as I ask her about the role of home visiting and outreach within the Children's Centres initiative.

Helen	Yeah, there is outreach, but basically to go and get people and bring them in (laughs). I mean it sounds dreadful and it won't be like that I'm sure. It will be better than that. We kind of call it home visiting and outreach or family support, and what we mean is it is primarily done in the home, people are then brought out to activities. And that could well continue, but the focus would be on the Children's Centre rather than the home and again there is that kind of - assumption? - I don't know if that's the right word - that is okay for people to do that. You know, actually it's not okay for some people. They have to have, the home visit, I can't remember what the word is, but the home is, the woman's, the home is where the family will live and grow up and the woman's place is to nurture that. And women, and we have some very devoutly Islamic people here, and they believe that, and it's their absolute right, and we respect that and that's their life, and we can't invade on that to say 'you will come to this, because you live in Brambleton' and that's a concern of mine.

Within all of these interviews, a significant sub-set within the Pakistani-origin community, women who had arrived as adults to marry British-born husbands, were often identified as those with the greatest needs and for whom the level at which Sure Start input should be pitched. These were the women in Shamim's account (in Chapter 5 p. 133) often most heavily restricted by the family they had married into, often with the least confidence, and initially at least, with few expectations about realisation of personal desires or interests. Their lack of English language and other basic skills, coupled with this lack of confidence reinforced the need for support which was very localised and easy to access, as Safia, a mother suggested below.

Safia	A lot of people, a lot of ladies from Pakistan, as you know, they all go into these computer courses now, and they're really basic, really basic - and then they know they can go to the next level and - learn basic English and they know they can go to the next level. And, you know, they can see that 'maybe we can do this, but we don't have to travel too far, we don't have to go to college, we don't have to worry about our children, and it's within the school hours as well, so it's all so easy to do'. And it doesn't seem like a headache and then your children get to play as well in the creche which is really good as well. But it doesn't seem like such a big step, d'you know, as when you have to go college and enroll and whatnot.

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6.4.2 Anticipating Children's Centres

As the section above suggests, concerns about the forthcoming policy developments usually centred on the *relevance* of the new model for Brambleton. For those in a position to comment, a number of advantages of the Children's Centre model were acknowledged, not least that its absorption into local authority control would represent the 'mainstreaming' of Sure Start that professionals had so eagerly sought. Here, casting doubt on the value of the model for Brambleton, Helen points to its relevance for other kinds of communities.

Helen
I think they've gone into the Children's Centre idea thinking about the majority of families that exist in Britain in disadvantaged areas. And the majority will be white, but they would be fairly disenfranchised, often headed by a single parent who may not be working, who may not have any support from the children's father- The Children's Centre model related to the needs of <u>that</u> community, I believe, offers a real stability, because it's there, because, if you're brave enough, you could go and access services from the beginning.

As part of this view of the *inappropriateness* of the policy direction, it was felt that the sudden change of focus would dilute one of the uniquely valuable features of Sure Start, its relatively long duration as a 10-year programme. In these accounts from BCP and Sure Start staff, Amanda and Helen, the gap is described between the New Labour discourse of agency - in which, with specific support, parents will be able to actively engage with interventions - and a professional conceptualisation of local mothers which foreground the constraints they face, and suggests that long-term (intensive and ongoing) input is necessary for the kind of participation that policy assumes.

Amanda
We're starting from a very low baseline, we've come an awful long way in four and a half years, but not as fast as the Government is driving us.

Helen
Great ideas, great, but it doesn't work for all communities, and the timescale isn't right. Because I would say how in the ten years of our programme, some parents might have just got there, by the end, and that's how it is. So the Children's Centres suddenly breeze in, four, five years later, and make huge assumptions that all parents are able to take part.

The ethos itself of Children's Centres was also questioned. Where the Sure Start programme, an initiative cutting across the statutory and voluntary sectors, and, principally a 'test-bed' in Helen's words, was seen to be characterised by flexibility and responsiveness, there was not the evidence that this would be carried through into the delivery of Children's Centres.

Helen   Sure Start's nicer, it's kinder, it's more er foggy at the edges and you can do gorgeous things, whereas - I don't know, I might be completely wrong Trish, but the Children's Centres, I don't see that there will be the freedom to do that or the manoeuvrability.

The mainstreaming of Sure Start and its incorporation into the public sector was seen to risk a defining element of the Brambleton ethos, its emphasis on community accountability. This was seen to be a key characteristic of the early national Sure Start programme but did not feature in the plans for Children's Centres. In this view, parental involvement was the link between the programme design and its delivery, with local accountability ensuring its credibility. For Amanda, from BCP, the risk was that the Children's Centre would become 'a vehicle to deliver council services without the local accountability'.

Amanda   There are obvious benefits for going to the Council, the fact that they don't have that complicated picture of funding and insecurity that we live with. So on that side, it's positive. But what the ethos will be? Will it be the building up of community capacity, of employing local people, of being flexible?
Tricia   You value the ethos that's around BCP and Sure Start, and you're worried about that-
Amanda   - being lost. It feels like a 'one size fits all'. This is the model that will be delivered in the city, which flies in the face of the work of the last five years really.

6.4.3 A 'disputed' narrative: the uses of childcare

A particular area of dispute about the direction of Sure Start concerned the *role of childcare* in the lives of Brambleton mothers. The policy focus on childcare as part both of 'social investment' approaches and of New Labour interest in rational choice theory has been addressed in earlier parts of this thesis. It has been argued that New

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Labour discourses evident in political speeches as well as a plethora of initiatives, culminating in this period in the National Childcare Strategy (2004), assumes that parents will use childcare *rationally* where rational behaviour is defined as the desire to seek employment in order to avoid poverty. This assumption has been contested, as indicated earlier, in other empirical research (Duncan and Edwards 2003, Duncan et al 2004).

Although in my study, those most likely to explore the implications of these developments were staff with a management role (Helen, Claire and Amanda), other workers also expressed concern. In the extract below from a group interview with health visitors, for example, staff stress that they are reliant on the efforts of Helen, who has a health background, to fight the 'battle' to maintain a broader Sure Start focus.

Sarah	Nationally, I think the stuff that's coming out is going more along the education for employment and childcare and the health bit seems to be losing its voice. People locally are trying to hold onto it.
Ruth	I think we've been very lucky in Brambleton, Helen's-
Sarah	If we didn't have a health person at the lead, I don't think we would have had the focus on health we've got. I think if she wasn't, I don't know how much support and funding we'd have towards those avenues in other areas, you know. But I think for the area, there are a lot of women in this area don't go want to go into employment. It's not the norm really, and yes, some of them might want to but there are a lot who won't. Am I right? (turning to worker, Iffat).
Iffat	Yes.
Tricia	This is something that has come up about norms in different communities, about women going back to work, I mean obviously some women <u>do</u> work (all laugh).
Iffat	But most of them prefer to say at home, don't they (laughs).
Sarah	You know, there are health issues within the community and other social issues and a lot of educational work can be done, so it's about not losing sight of that and aiming to provide that. And we are, and Helen, she's battling with the national policies to maintain that. We're lucky because she's doing that battle for us and she's the one who's saying 'I still think that's important'. But I think if somebody else is mediating that for us, it means we're not having the-
Ruth	-we're carrying on, but ignoring it-
Sarah	-doing what <u>we</u> want to do (laughs).

In this study, professional stories about why childcare is used function also as part of a *counter discourse* which is based on understandings of the constrained agency of this

group of mothers. This identifies flawed assumptions inherent in Government discourses and the reasons why policy based upon them is unlikely to produce its intended outcomes.

The new Sure Start objective introduced in 2003 required local programmes to contribute to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) goals, with a Public Service Agreement (PSA) of reducing workless and low income households by 12% through Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) targets of linking into Job Centre Plus and providing additional childcare. In Brambleton this was to be done through Sure Start's childcare provider and lead agency, BCP, which had secured Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative (NNI) funding for daycare places[29]. In both of the extracts below, a flaw in the central premise of these assumptions, that the provision of daycare itself would facilitate parental employment, is highlighted. Thus, while able to deliver on the SDA targets, it was felt that Brambleton Sure Start would nonetheless fail to meet the PSA goals of reducing workless households, highlighting the contradictions within the objective as a whole.

Amanda   [Neighbourhood Nurseries] is only sort of a short-lived blast of funding to help get childcare places in deprived areas in the hope that that will suddenly generate lots of working parents who now can access that. And we had reservations from the start that that the turnaround wasn't going to be that quick and also the funding is sort of like - 50% in the first year, 30% in the second year, 10% in the third year. So - after next March we'll get very little money at all from Neighbourhood Nurseries. And at the same time, we haven't had, you know, the dramatic increase in paying parents, we knew we probably wouldn't.

Helen   In terms of the national objectives, if the question was 'are Brambleton Sure Start meeting those?' we could happily say 'yes, we are', the majority, because we actually do provide an awful lot of childcare. My issue I suppose, is that the assumption that, by offering this, and by offering education, training opportunities, parents will want to take them up and go on to work and I don't want to sound derogatory, but I don't necessarily witness that.

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[29] The Neighbourhood Nurseries programme ran from 2001-2004 in 142 local authorities. Neighbourhood Nurseries provided full-time daycare places which were integrated with nursery education and support services to families and included training for parents. They were often linked with Sure Start local programmes.

Apprehension about the Children's Centre initiative was based on similar concerns. Here, the focus on childcare for work was expected to be more explicit; for Amanda and Helen, the additional dimension of 'reach', the proposal that the new Children's Centres which were based on existing Sure Starts must increase their user numbers by 30%, attracting parents and children from beyond the current programme boundaries, reinforced these concerns. On the one hand, bringing paying parents in from outside Brambleton would provide long-term security for the local childcare infrastructure; on the other, this strategy risked removing the services from its roots, and from its ability to respond to the particular needs of local parents.

Amanda   We're pushing away from our roots in reaching out to not to deprived
            parents but to parents in full-time employment.

Helen   They're being sold as being in the 20% most disadvantaged wards, it's
            obviously going to be more money for poorer kids, poorer areas. Erm,
            but there's a slight concern of mine, that it would then be overcome by
            parents who can pay, who want to have their kids in a nice new nursery.
            There's nothing wrong with that. It would actually be very helpful if
            everyone paid that came, because then you would make more money and
            it would be okay and you wouldn't go under. But that scenario wouldn't
            achieve the Children's Centre objectives, because that all the kids with
            the paid places wouldn't necessarily come from the 20% most
            disadvantaged wards.

Further stories similarly reflecting flawed assumptions apparently built into childcare policy were told. As a Childcare Development worker, Janine had recruited 12 women to a childminding course in 2001, of whom 11 had completed the course. Although three had registered as childminders, by 2004, when the interview was carried out, not one had taken on children. As Shamim indicates, it was not common practice for Asian women to childmind. When I asked why some had registered but not proceeded with the work, Janine identified that it was because of:

Janine   ... the grant for £600 (Tricia laughs). Because if they go through the
            process of registering as a childminder, they get a starter grant of £600,
            even though they might not necessarily be childcare providers. It's a
            national target, it's all to do with increasing childcare provision.
Tricia   So, what is the problem here? Is childcare not needed?
Shamim   I think it's definitely needed, but then, it depends on whether they come
            and childmind, it's up to them. I mean, a lot of Asian women I know

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have done the course, but I can't imagine any of their partners and families accepting other kids in the house as well. Which is very common, you don't get that kind of thing, Asian childminders who're willing to have other people's kids in the house, you know when you live in extended families and you've got in-laws living with you and everything.

Almost all of the Asian women I interviewed had been in work at earlier points in their lives. However, in the accounts of staff and some mothers, involvement in paid work for Asian women was dependent on family approval – albeit that this appeared slowly to be changing – with employment more likely to be sought at particular points, typically before marriage (often for immigration purposes, as noted in Chapter 5) or when children were older. As stated, an overarching narrative emerging both from life stories and professional accounts suggested that cultural norms identified the role of women primarily – or sometimes wholly - as being to raise children and care for the family and household. In the extract below, Helen says that the idea of seeking paid work had not been included in the 'life plans' of women when their children were young, with her use of the term providing a striking contrast with that of Giddens' (1991). For him, 'life planning' is identified as a crucial characteristic of the reflexive agency we exercise in late modernity; a life plan, for Giddens, is not the 'one-off' template implied by Helen, but rather a guide that is revised continuously in the light of new events and information.

Helen Culturally, I think there's an issue around having small children and going out to work, simple as that. In the Qur'an, the woman is expected to look after the children. That's fine, that's accepted, it's an accepted part of community life. Now the women might want a job and they may well undertake some of our courses which they are doing which is lovely, but (3.0) the idea for them to take on jobs now with young children, I've talked to quite a few women, mainly Asian, it's just not feasible for them. Because they really haven't written it into their life plan to work when their children are small, they may work when their children are bigger or when they have started school, but not necessarily now. So I do have a concern.

Accounts of staff and mothers about the *purposes* of childcare contest the New Labour discourse, characterised in part as enabling 'poor mothers' to work and avoid poverty (Penn and Randall, 2005, and see Glass, 2005, about Sure Start specifically in this context). One major theme in these accounts - reinforced by the story of the

establishment of BCP, see Chapter 7 - is the role of childcare in Brambleton as enabling at some level the 'escape' of the women from their constraints. Here Pete points to the profoundly powerful impact of childcare in facilitating, sometimes for the first time, a 'socialised' existence for women and for their children.

Pete   After the last enrolments with the college at Rainbow Centre, I think they said there were 50 women who they'd never provided childcare for before. Now it may be to do with all the naturalisation stuff and the demand for English literacy programmes, but even so, that kind of represents a major increase of education provision, the experience of having your kid in daycare, meeting with other kids and being in socialised environments, talking to nursery staff. All that kind of stuff is suddenly becoming part of the lives of a number of women that, certainly four years ago, wouldn't have enjoyed that, yeah- Erm, and it's the kind of invisibility of how people see opportunities, compared to 5 years ago that we're trying to capture and trying to bottle.

Several professional accounts emphasised the important *non-vocational benefits* of training and education for which childcare was provided. Below, Janine identified tangible social benefits to individuals and their families of women finding 'something that they really enjoy doing'; there is, in this narrative, a strong signal of support for women to access courses and use childcare, *whatever* their motives are.

Janine   I think there's a big focus on getting people to do vocational stuff, but in actual fact, it's nice for people to go out there and find something that they really enjoy doing, which makes them a better person which then, when they go back to their families, makes them able to deal with situations at home better.
Tricia   So it's not necessarily job-related stuff that they're doing?
Janine   No, we have the sewing class-
Shamim   - which is for their own personal experience isn't it-
Janine   Or we've got childcare course on this morning but that's for people wanting to become childcare workers after that, computers- For some local parents, they just want an understanding of computers don't they-
Shamim   So that they can help their children probably, at home.

As identified earlier, there was a high volume of demand for English language classes, particularly to meet the requirements for naturalisation. Steve, like Safia earlier, stressed that English classes represented a 'safe place'. However, unlike her, he was not sure whether there was in fact, significant progression from one level to the next. In his

account, classes were used by women above all as an opportunity to socialise: 'For some of the women, it's like a social club, you understand what I'm saying'.

In another yet more 'subversive' challenge to the discourse, in some accounts, the assumed relationship between childcare and its use to facilitate particular outcomes such as employment, was reversed. In an early interview, a worker, Anna, identified that 'a lot of parents come and say "what is there with childcare?" It's because they need a break to be refreshed'. In the extract below, discussing the decision of the city College to fund childcare for those attending classes, BCP employee Claire likewise inverts Government assumptions, in suggesting that the offer of childcare leads to interest in course attendance rather than the reverse.

Claire	And there is something around that they recruit to their course because they've got the childcare, and not the other way round. People aren't coming on the courses and then, incidentally getting the childcare. They're coming for the childcare 'oh well, to get childcare, let's go on this course'. So you know, it recruits for them as well.
Tricia	That's interesting though isn't it? Because that speaks about motivation to go on a course.
Claire	[It's part of] the need to get some time away, there's nowhere here to be sociable, you know, you can't sort of, you know, go in the pub and meet your friends.

The accounts suggest a range of reasons for the use of childcare as well as clear professional support for childcare use that is *not* daycare for the purpose of work, or the provision of sessions for employment-related training. They form part of a wider narrative about the needs of this particular group and their involvement in services and activities outside the home as an automatic good. They also contribute to conceptions of the way in which women engage *actively* with policy in exercising a self-interested agency, albeit that this self-interest is seen by professionals as fundamentally shaped by constraint.

A valuable perspective on this use of policy is provided by Marilyn Taylor's (2007) application of governmentality theory to the field of community participation. Taylor notes that although the new governing spaces 'can ... be characterised as arenas of co-option and colonisation, inscribed with rationalities, technologies and rules of

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engagement' that are internalised into the subjectivities of their non-state actors, there is, nonetheless, in Foucault's notion of power:

> the possibility of resistance which allows the articulation and implementation of alternative agendas. Self-steering actors outside the state can thus become 'active subjects' in the new governance spaces, not only collaborating in the exercise of government but also shaping and influencing it (Taylor, 2007, p. 302).

In using services creatively but for purposes not intended in policy, the group of Asian mothers in this research may be seen thus as 'active subjects'. This description can also be applied to professionals themselves. In contrast to Hunter's (2003) suggestion of a tendency for professionals to be depicted in research as reflecting the interests of the dominant policy-making discourse, here they present themselves often as resisting or pushing against its limits. This resistance of professionals is demonstrated in a range of ways, among others, by the repeated emphasis of their superior knowledge of local needs, by evidence in which funding has been sought despite awareness that policy goals will not be met, and in their explicit - sometimes emotionally-expressed - alignments with parents.

6.5 Chapter conclusions

The objective of this chapter has been to tell the social policy story of the design and implementation of Brambleton Sure Start, as seen largely through the accounts of staff in the period between 2003-5. An examination of Brambleton as a racialised and gendered space identified the context in which need for a Sure Start programme was conceptualised. This also demonstrated the competing narratives about 'need' and entitlement to services for the white and Asian residents of Brambleton. This tension is an important part of the Brambleton story of implementation with implications for how 'hard to reach' parents were conceptualised as well as for the overall impact of the local programme.

New Labour's Third Way politics have frequently been seen as exemplifying aspects of a 'social investment' state. Such an approach is seen to include certain key elements,

notably the funding of services for children, viewed as 'emblems of the future' and an emphasis on the development of human capital, particularly through initiatives to encourage educability and employability (Lister, 2003). While the emphasis in Brambleton Sure Start was clearly on the nurturing of human capital, professional understandings of the constrained agency of local mothers gave the programme a focus which prioritised confidence-and capacity-building, opportunities for mothers to mix and the provision of childcare to support their wider, non-vocational needs above and beyond the government's stated priority for Sure Start of increasing women's participation in the Paid Labour Market (PLM).

In this context, the shift in the direction of Sure Start policy was viewed with some unease. While the discourse of 'early' Sure Start was seen to reflect the needs of Brambleton parents, actual and impending policy changes suggested that the new model would have less relevance. A focus particularly on the role of childcare in Sure Start discourse and its uses on the ground highlighted the tensions between national and local understandings of parental agency and the contradictions within targets. In this analysis, it was suggested that parents were not simply 'constrained agents', but were also 'active subjects', able to exploit opportunities provided by policy. Focusing on parent accounts of engagement with Brambleton Sure Start, Chapter 7 will examine this and other aspects of participation in further detail.

7. Mothers' experience of Brambleton Sure Start: how the 'investment' is taken up and used

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 I characterised Sure Start as a Third Way 'social investment' initiative and argued that developments in the policy area, in particular, a greater emphasis on 'employability' and 'educability' in the stress on childcare for work, could be seen as evidence of the increasing influence of this perspective. In Chapter 6, I highlighted the concerns of Brambleton professionals about these developments, suggesting that their understandings of the capacity of mothers to engage with this level of intervention differed significantly from those of policy-makers. In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which Brambleton mothers themselves construct their perspectives on and uses of the Sure Start 'investment'.

Earlier I noted the importance of recognising inconsistencies within and across policy agendas concerned for example, with the family. Similarly, it is important to stress that the *discourse* of policy is not synonymous with the policy itself. Discourse in Sure Start policy - embodied in objectives, targets, and the language that is used including in political rhetoric - *constructs the problem* and *signifies the behaviour* that will rectify it. As Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated, 'social exclusion' was defined as 'the problem', to be remedied by assisting or if necessary coercing those who were 'excluded' to change the behaviour seen to be its cause. In the case of parents, the solution was seen to be in initiatives aiming to reduce family poverty and improve parenting, so ensuring that children would be raised to be productive citizens. In Sure Start by comparison to other policy fields, the relationship of discourse and policy implementation might be characterised as relatively 'light handed'. While as part of a government initiative, local Sure Starts were accountable to deliver on PSA targets and subject to regular 'risk assessments', the programme was, as identified in Chapter 3, arguably on the 'benign end' of family policy. This was both because local programmes had a relatively high degree of autonomy in how they delivered their services, and because there was no

enforcement of parents to become involved[30]. It is within this context that the findings of the chapter should be understood.

Recognising the contested nature of agency (see Chapter 3, p. 37), but with a starting point which defines it broadly as 'the capacity to act', I am drawing in this chapter on interview questions concerned with what services mothers used, and the reasons and manner in which they were used as well as perceptions of 'change' resulting from their use. In this analysis, I have attempted to understand 'what mattered' to mothers in their use of Sure Start; in addition, reflecting my construction of the case study area as a racialised space, I also explore whether understandings of the remit of the programme, capacity to engage with it or impacts experienced were mediated by the cultural backgrounds of parents.

In the first section of the chapter, widespread narratives of Sure Start use are revealed which depict the programme as 'additional provision', as meeting need and as promoting 'well-being', and which represent mothers predominantly as *receivers of services* rather than as the energetic and aspirational welfare users suggested by policy. In the second section, a micro case study of a particular aspect of Sure Start use in Brambleton, parental involvement, is provided. This section addresses more explicitly the construction of Brambleton as a 'racialised space'. While ostensibly, the agency of parent 'activists' (those participating in parental involvement forums) is seen to reflect more closely the assumptions of policy, this is problematised by evidence of a range of 'rationalities' which motivate parents to act. In addition, through analysis of the experiences of parental involvement, a further perspective is offered on the outcomes of Sure Start use for white and Asian mothers in Brambleton.

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[30] This is in contrast to other policies where benefits were explicitly tied to demonstration of 'good behaviour' e.g. Jobseeker's Allowance (introduced before the New Labour administration in 1996) and 'probationary' or 'introductory' tenancies (introduced in the Housing Act, 1996) and 'demoted tenancies' (introduced in the Anti-Social Behaviour Act, 2003). It should be added that entitlement to particular health and family benefits has also been linked to 'good behaviour' under New Labour. Access to 'Healthy Start' food vouchers (previously the Welfare Food Scheme), for example, requires professional involvement which includes professionals providing 'health and lifestyle advice' and signing the application alongside the parent applicant (Department of Health, 2008). Access to the Sure Start Maternity Grant is also conditional upon evidence of professional involvement. While rhetorically linked by its name to the Sure Start programme, the Sure Start Maternity Grant is available to any parents who are in receipt of benefits and not in practice connected to use of the programme.

7.2 Narratives of 'additional provision': mothers' perceptions and uses of Sure Start services

The social policy story of Chapter 6 conceptualised the professional focus of Brambleton Sure Start as being on the needs of the Pakistani-origin women in the area. Assumptions that many within this group were highly constrained and lacking in capacity and confidence led to the design of a programme with a particular focus and level of provision. Reflecting the emphasis of professionals, parent accounts across the sample as a whole, stressed the role of core services in meeting need, enabling parents to socialise and offering opportunities for learning. In characterising services in this way, most mothers identified themselves as receivers of services rather than the purposeful and energetic users of welfare interventions suggested by New Labour and Third Way discourses.

7.2.1 Mothers as *receivers* of services

An early question in interviews to establish perceptions of the purpose of Sure Start provided a route into understanding how mothers saw themselves in relation to the programme. This question about the purpose of the programme elicited quite different responses from 'activist' and 'non-activist' mothers. Below, two activist mothers highlight the function of the programme as helping parents return to work and in supporting 'good parenting'.

Nicola Well I thought the Sure Start was there to help with the childcare needs of under 4s, but it was also there to help the parents as well, in getting them back to work, giving them space from the kids, just generally helping the family.

Shabnam I personally think that they thought maybe a good mother can bring up good children, sound children, for primary school, because it's to do with the primary education and the needs I think, with zero to 5.

As part of conceptualising the interplay of agency and structure, the language used in activist parent accounts to describe their own agency in relation to the programme is further noted in 7.3. In these accounts, the incorporation of images of purposeful and instrumentalist engagement and explicit reference to aspects of policy discourse as above, are described as part of a changing 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). In this situation, the 'practices, perceptions and attitudes' that constitute habitus, as Greener

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describes it, shift as parent activists enter a new environment (or 'field' in Bourdieu's terms) which begins to re-orientate their 'actions' and inclinations' (Greener, 2002, p. 688).

In most accounts however, a more common response to the question about the purpose of Sure Start located mothers more clearly as *receivers* of help and support. In the responses of Khalida and Saira below, interpretation of the Sure Start purpose appeared to reflect their own perceived needs and uses of the programme.

Nazia	I think the purpose is just like to provide, like, facilities to like families and give a little extra help to 'em or if they need some advice or things like that.

Tricia	What do you see as the purpose of Sure Start?
Khalida	It's here to help, if you need any help for anything then they're there, or if you need a break, just for a couple of hou-, about an hour or summat, if you just need somebody to talk to, they're there, they're good, I'm really pleased.

Tricia	So do you have any sense of what the purpose of Brambleton Sure Start is? What it's there to do?
Saira	What d'you mean by that?
Tricia	Why d'you think you've got a Sure Start in this area?
Saira	Well, it's good, at least kids can go and play and - and they learn something don't they? 'Cause I take my daughter, she loves to go there- she doesn't want to come back. She's happy there, yeah? It's good, she doesn't want to come back.

Although as below, mothers recognised positive impacts of Sure Start involvement on various aspects of their parenting (and, in the case of activists, in their moves towards employment) and frequently emphasised effects on their confidence and capacity, most in this sample identified themselves as *needing* particular help or as *receivers* of services which had not been previously available. Here, the dominant narrative was of Sure Start as 'additional provision', services which added to individual, family and community well-being, or filled an important gap.

7.2.2 Services as 'meeting need'

As part of the narrative about Sure Start as 'filling an important gap', a number of participants described its role as providing assistance at times of particular need. For several, this was in the period when they were experiencing the profound effects of childbirth.

For most of the women interviewed, early contact with Sure Start had been through the home visiting service which was seen to be crucial in addressing the difficulties women faced shortly after giving birth[31]. For some women, the regular presence of a home visitor appeared to represent a turning point for them, easing the severe stresses of having a new baby, and the exhaustion and isolation that could result, and sometimes alleviating effects of depression. Several of these accounts use metaphors which suggest a physical and emotional unease, with some women describing themselves as if bodily immobilised or somehow 'out of place'. Emma for example, described herself as a new mother as 'absolutely, completely lost':

Emma   The home visiting was really good, I mean that did help out. Because - a first time Mum, with no support around me, I was absolutely, completely lost. And knowing that there was someone coming in once a week, and knowing that I could contact them again if I needed to. Just coming in for that little bit of time, really helped.

Similar descriptions are evident too in the accounts of Safia and Kerry who had both experienced depression following childbirth. Both describe the depression as physically impeding movement, with the home visitor input appearing to re-vitalise their own personal agency, enabling them to be active, or in Safia's words 'normal again'.

Safia   At the beginning I had a lot of help from Julie, she helped me to get out and you know, get back into the normal environment and be normal again. ... I did suffer from a lot of depression - I got post-natal - and then- I just got worse and worse and I wouldn't get out - at all. And she helped me a lot, she only came a few times, but, you know, she told me about all these groups and what not. She was really good. And you know, I always knew that even if I couldn't go, she would take my

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[31] As Chapter 4 states, this sample was accessed through Sure Start groups and therefore cannot draw on accounts of those who only accessed the home visiting service. It was noted by professionals that this latter group may have been a significant proportion of overall numbers registered.

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children out. And then gradually, I slowly started going [to the mother and toddler groups] and now I go quite often.

Kerry   I had Tom, then- I got really, really depressed because I was obviously active again-
Tricia   What, when you'd had Tom?
Kerry   Yeah. And I went on anti-depressants and stuff but Margaret was a right rock for me, bless her, yeah, and she got me out. I really didn't wanna do anything, I would prefer to stay in the house with Tom and watch TV.

The analytical concept of 'embodiment' is helpful here and elsewhere in the research in highlighting a critical 'gendered' dimension of agency. A predominant theme in Chapters 5 and 6, which could also be seen as contributing to a conception of agency as embodied, linked the restrictions on the movements and physical exclusion from public spaces of some Asian women with their 'constrained agency'. For Lois McNay (1999) the concept of embodiment offers a means to understand the *mediation* of mind and body: 'As the point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the sociological, the body is a dynamic, mutable frontier':

> The body is the threshold through which the subject's lived experience of the world is incorporated and realised and, as such, is neither pure object nor pure subject. It is neither pure object since it is the place of one's engagement with the world. Nor is it pure subject in that there is always a material residue that resists incorporation into dominant symbolic schema (McNay, 1999, p. 98).

Some writers have identified a failure of theorists to recognise embodiment as part of agency. This has been attributed to the influence of a Foucauldian emphasis on 'over-socialised' constructions of agency (in Shilling's 1997, words) which, for Hoggett, tend 'to privilege cognition and language above emotion and effect' (2000, p. 142). Here, disputing Giddens' claims about the extent to which personal lives have been transformed, McNay describes the link between the 'entrenched' and 'pre-reflexive' elements of gender and the persistence of gender inequalities.

> The failure to fully consider sexuality as embedded in inculcated, bodily predisposition underestimates the relatively involuntary, pre-reflexive and entrenched elements in identity. Without having to resort to bioligistic notions of maternal instinct, the inscription of the mothering role upon the female body is fundamental in the inculcation of emotional and physical predispositions that maintain gender inequality around child-rearing. It is not clear how such forms of identity, which are overdetermined both physically and emotionally, can be that easily dislodged ... It is in the light of such concerns that Giddens' claim

that 'revolutionary processes are already underway in the infrastructure of personal life' seem to require much qualification' (1999, p. 98).

The most significant example of gender identity as embodied that McNay refers to, the – inescapable - grounding of the role of mother in the often arduous *physicality* of pregnancy, childbirth and childrearing is an important theme in this research, with the extracts from interviews above highlighting the profound need of women for support at this point in their lives and their self-portrayal sometimes as *unable* to exercise agency in a reflexive or purposeful manner.

As previous chapters have suggested, the demand for childcare and its range of uses form a predominant motif of the research. As part of this depiction of Sure Start as filling an important gap, several women pointed to a key element of the Brambleton approach which was the function of childcare in responding to parental need. Below, demonstrating a further aspect of agency as constrained, Nazia's use of childcare enables her to respond to the needs of both of her children, one of whom has communication difficulties and needs additional language support.

Nazia   If I do need something, the Rainbow Centre is starting to help a lot more and I find that the services here are starting to help me as I need them.

Tricia   Right, so do you mean that if you need something-

Nazia   Like, I had to take my child to a language group yesterday and I didn't have no one to look after my other one and I was able to drop her off at the Rainbow Centre for an hour.

Emma   There wasn't any childcare provision before, or very little. And the fact that it seems so open now – it's not something I have to worry about. I know that if I've got enough notice, I can get childcare or if I need to see a home visitor because things are falling apart and I could do with someone just helping me out with the children for an hour, I can get that help.

In some cases, more acute needs for respite arose from the psychological and emotional pressures on mothers experiencing significant levels of stress. Nicola had separated from the father of her child some time before; here, she describes the importance for her and her daughter of being able to meet up with other parents and children. In the second extract, Khalida, also a single parent and the mother of two children including a daughter who was disabled, identified how the provision of childcare had enabled her to cope, providing a picture of her own capacity 'before' and 'after' the intervention she

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had received. Reflecting again an agency that is experienced as embodied, her description of her circumstances and state of mind before the support was provided is characterised by a sense of a discomfort that is simultaneously physical, practical and emotional ('I was always stuck in with her, I didn't wanna go out and I didn't wanna take her out, I didn't care'). Like Nazia above, the input that Khalida receives enables her to exercise agency constructively, to shop or carry out household tasks while her daughter is being cared for elsewhere. Here the *dependence* on childcare that she describes is seen to produce a sense of *independence* which is also associated with the ability to be a more effective parent - 'since I've had the help, I'm standing on my own two feet, I'm thinking about my children'.

Nicola	[Sure Start is] providing - adult conversation, because that's something that I really, really needed, especially when we split up. It was a very difficult time and if it hadn't been for my health visitor at the time, I would never have known about the Rainbow Centre, she said 'oh take her to the Rainbow Centre, she'll have fun playing with the other kids and you'll be able to talk to the mums', I've been involved ever since-
Khalida	And I told [the health visitor] that I were suffering from depression and I were on sleeping tablets and all sorts, so- when she put me through to the Rainbow Centre, it was like one day a week and then, I told [health visitor] again, I said 'one day a week's not enough for me', you know-
Tricia	Do you mean to get the childcare?
Khalida	Nursery, yeah. It was like one afternoon a week, and then we got two and then we got three and then er, they put more hours into it and it were really good ... and that really helped me, because I can do things that I couldn't do before. Afternoons when she's in here, I can go shopping and pick some stuff up what I need, or I can go out, or I can do some housework, before I couldn't. I was always stuck in with her. I didn't wanna go out and I didn't wanna take her out, I didn't care. But since they've come into it, both (the health visitor) and the Sure Start, it's really helped a lot for me. ... Since I've had the help, I'm standing on my own two feet. I'm thinking about my kids. If I need any help, they're there.

In earlier chapters, the concept of 'constrained agency' was associated with cultural norms that structured both the role and day-to-day lives of many Asian women in Brambleton; here, it is often the demands of children that - implicitly and explicitly - drive the narratives. In these accounts the use of Sure Start was articulated not principally as helping women to be 'good mothers', but as enabling them, as the parent

carrying the bulk or all of the childcare, psychologically and practically to *manage* these demands.

Paul Hoggett (2001) suggests that the notion of the reflexive agent runs alongside a contempt for 'dependency' which is reflected in the focus of social security and welfare policy. He argues for an 'appreciation of the passive voice', which may:-

> enable us to develop a more nuanced and gendered account of the stressful and disempowering environments that many welfare subjects experience, where individuals are surrounded by real demands and real constraints which cannot simply be turned into resources (Hoggett, 2001, p. 45).

Hoggett's 'passive voice', a lack of desire or perceived inability to act, is evident in some of these stories, though passivity in this particular context where the need for support can be profound, is usually seen as temporary. Reflecting findings highlighted in Chapter 5 (e.g. p. 126), Giddens's comment about the difficulties of living on 'automatic pilot' in late modernity, (1991, p. 125) is problematised by the stories from these women of the motherhood of young children, in which life can seem as if it *is* lived on automatic pilot, relentlessly bound to the needs of others, heavily routinised and repetitive, often tedious and with little stimulation.

7.2.3 'Places to go'

Safia   D'you know people, ever since this Sure Start- has come about, people are starting to change a lot. Like the swimming that I go to. There is a lot of women there and d'you know, after the swimming, they all go for walks and they know it's because it's good for them. And d'you know whereas before all the women'd just stay at home and they wouldn't like, have much to do and now they have got a lot to do.

Another important aspect of the narrative of Sure Start as 'additional provision' and one often depicted as addressing the (sometimes) relentless, routinised tedium of childrearing described above, was its association with providing mothers with 'opportunities to get out of the house' and 'places to go'. This narrative provides a striking contrast to professional conceptualisations in Chapter 6 of many Asian mothers in Brambleton mothers, as 'not allowed out' or 'stuck in the home'.

The function of the home visiting service and of childcare provision in facilitating the ability of women to 'get out' or to have 'time for themselves' has already been described in this chapter. In addition, women accessed a range of group activities such as Mother and Toddler, regular Health Visitor-run post-natal groups, 'Cook and Eat' and other topic-focused sessions. Below, Amina, who at 26 has four children, compares her current levels of activity and positive state of mind with her inactivity and unhappiness in the period before this provision existed, when her other children were young. Here she emphasises the impact of the programme on her own well-being and that of others - increased confidence, new friendships and greater connections in the area – gained from services which facilitate contact between mothers. These same elements are contained in the extract from Zainab - herself both a parent and a worker – whose account illustrates the scope of provision now available, and also emphasises the wider benefits gained from services which have a focus on social interaction at their centre.

Amina	At one time, I used to be sat at home all the time and now I've got my baby and toddler groups. I go every Wednesday afternoon- ... With me other kids, I never used to do that, I used to be sat at home doing nothing. Now I go out there, have a chat with my friends and cup of tea or something. I love it, I come home and I'm happy. Otherwise, sitting at home, you're just miserable all the time. I know there's lots of other parents that tell me they do this, 'we go there', 'they take you swimming', there's exercise classes and all sorts. There's lots to do now. At first, there was nothing! You know, before it was really hard to do something.
Tricia	How did it make your life different to have those kinds of services?
Amina	It gets you out of the house, you can make new friends. I know so many people now, it's unbelievable. I can stop and say hello to everyone now. At first dropping kids off school, go back home, that's it. Now, I can't sit at home, I'm always out and about, you know.
Zainab	The sort of support is there now, with BCP, childcare and well, Sure Start definitely and you've got the bookclub at the library. You've got somewhere to go and sit. You go with your children and have a cup of tea and a yarn with somebody as well. Because before, what would they have? He's sat in the living room going round and round in a baby walker probably while Mum's getting all of her housework done, and I think that's every, every community. Because, same with me, kids were little, because I had nothing better to do, just carry on with your work, you don't take time out, because - day in, day out, it's just the same life. And erm, kids are just whizzing around in baby walkers, hope that the

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teletubbies keep them occupied whilst you get cooking done, washing done, ironing done, on the phone to a mate or whatever. But because people are going out their way and <u>using</u> the venues that are provided, using the facilitation that's provided, the groups where you can go and have a bit of a gossip, find out what's going on, what's been happening, kids are interacting with other kids. It's <u>so</u> important. And your kids are learning, but you're learning at the same time.

Although on the whole, accounts from mothers about use of core services were not specifically racialised, in some cases - in a reflection of professional perspectives - a narrative that Sure Start was providing 'somewhere to go' was identified as having particular benefits for Asian women. Below, Shabnam identifies that the availability of these activities had countered the isolation of many Asian women, enabling them to mix with women from different communities. In Emma's account, echoing professional rationales in Chapter 6, the impact of mixing is also mentioned as part of a 'grander' story of the role of Sure Start in providing opportunities for Asian women to 'better themselves' in a 'safe environment'.

Shabnam   You get together with other women, you talk about things. It's good, positive things for you know, our community like this, because loads of Pakistanis, they don't talk to many other, you know, cultures, or other ethnic background people. Where we're concerned, we are very isolated people, woman especially don't tend to go out, do not try to mingle with other people.

Emma   I've seen, from being at courses two years ago to courses I'm doing now through Sure Start and everything, that you've got ladies that could hardly speak English that are now, you know, quite conversational in their English. They've got their confidence and they're mixing with their children and they're playing and they're really enjoying it and it's, and it's - what's brought them out of the house is Sure Start, because without anything to go to, without the toddler groups, or anything, they'd have no reason to leave their house, because they understand that's their role. [If it weren't for the groups] there'd be no opportunity for the white people to mix with them and the children wouldn't mix 'til they got to nursery. But now, they can go and do these groups, with the blessing of their community, because they're bettering themselves in a safe, all-female environment and there's nothing for their husbands or anyone to worry about.

These accounts reflect feminist scholarship concerned with the dynamism of 'place', 'space' and embodiment. As De Welde suggests, discursive treatment of the public and the private is often associated with normative discourses on gender:

> ... feminine embodiment, in its current manifestations, is a barrier to women's equal participation in social life. Demands for women to take up minimal space by encouraging thinness, quiescence and submission work against many women in the public sphere ... (2003, p. 5).

As from a Foucauldian perspective power is productive, and provides space for resistance, so the public and private are co-constitutive. In my research, an increased physical capacity to move about in the local area, facilitated through the provision of 'places to go', is paralleled by a growth in confidence and well-being. Action through the body and its physical expansion in the locality, increases agentic potential, opening up material possibilities and a psychological sense of entitlement.

7.2.4 Support with parenting

An important part of the Sure Start approach was the provision, in conjunction with other Brambleton agencies, of a range of learning opportunities. In an early interview, Lyn, a long-established Brambleton worker and a major force in establishing BCP, had identified a 'hunger and thirst' for courses among the women in the area and in Chapter 6, as part of an examination of the varied use of childcare in Brambleton, the range of courses undertaken by Brambleton parents was noted.

As part of this, a minority of mothers described their specific use of Sure Start-run courses to support parenting. Three of this group, Amina, Nicola and Kerry had attended the intensive, 10-week 'Supporting families, strengthening communities' course led by Sure Start Health Visitors[32].

Amina   I'd say with my first 3 children, there wasn't much going on, I never used to spend time with them, I used to let them do what they want ... We did

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[32]   It was noted by professionals that despite initial popularity, the course had subsequently failed to run through lack of interest. However, in professional interviews the general interest in childcare courses in Brambleton was frequently noted, although, it was said that parents did not necessarily use them at this point to seek work.

	the 'Family Strengthening' course and it taught us so much. And you do think 'what's this course gonna do for you?' It does, it teaches you a lot, and then when you go home, and do it with your children, it really does work, it makes a difference.
Tricia	What kind of things?
Amina	I couldn't ever sit down and listen to them, 'cause they all used to start in my face and I used to think 'I don't want to listen to nobody, just sit down', and I used to ignore 'em basically a lot, and I can remember at one time, we had a session going on and it was about telling your children how much you love 'em, you've got to tell 'em and I went home that day, and I thought 'let's try it' and I says to my daughter 'I love you, and my other one 'I love you', I said it to all of them. Oh God, they were (exclaims) 'Mummy, we love you too' (both laugh), I was like, oh God, it's made such a difference, just by saying that to my son, it was like 'Oh Mummy we love you too, we love you too', and I thought, 'it does make a difference, you know if you don't say it to a child, they don't feel loved and stuff.

Kerry	Some things work, some don't. It's good to have a different way to do things. But you can do things anyway without realising that you're doing it. But the course has been good to - to know these different ways, the different ways to do things, so, I don't necessarily always do them, but you don't have to do them, they're only giving you ideas.

The value of more informal ways of learning about parenting and childcare was frequently highlighted in accounts. Within the primary narrative about the function of services as enabling connection between mothers, sometimes a subsidiary theme emerged about the role of this kind of provision in facilitating learning. This may be seen as implied in Safia's answer to my question about the purpose of Sure Start.

Safia	It's there for, is it to erm- I don't know (1.0) to help people socialise and take their children out more and get out more I think. It's things to do and it makes you - think in a different – way.

Several mothers highlighted the benefits of an approach in which learning occurs in an environment of mutual support. This points again to an aspect of the *level* of provision, which is that Sure Start input about parenting appears to be particularly valued where instruction is not overt or heavily directive, but is informal or operates through mothers learning together with professionals acting as facilitators.

Emma	I've got more confidence as a parent than I would have had otherwise. I didn't have much time being a parent without Sure Start, but they've

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given me the confidence, and I think as each stage goes on, you know, going to parent and toddler group, I can see the stages he's going to, and there's someone on hand, whether it be Karen or somebody who'll like, go, 'that's perfectly normal', when you're beginning to think 'should he be doing that?' you know. And you've always got advice, you've just got someone to give you a bit of reassurance, and I think it does give you confidence, it's helped me be more confident as a parent that I'm doing the right thing.

Here, Leela emphasises the personal benefits for her of contact with other mothers, but also the value of informal learning which occurs in this environment. Leela, who has a South Asian but not Pakistani background, and often used the similarities and differences of her experience to comment on the Pakistani-origin community around her, discusses the particular value of this approach for women who may be fearful of 'official' intervention.

Leela	I think - it's definitely helped because if I didn't go these groups, I'd be at home, bored. I wouldn't get out, I wouldn't talk to people, I think it would make me less confident, shy and everything. But because I go out to these groups, talk to people, I'm not scared to ask people questions. It helps your mind as well, so that you can compare their child to your child, just little things like, trying to feed them and things, little tips, it helps - you know, sort of give each other support in a way and it doesn't feel like it's pressurised by an official body.
Tricia	Right, is that important then?
Leela	Yeah, I don't mind, but I think a lot of these women sort of feel - probably feel less confident talking to someone that, say like a doctor or health visitor or somebody. But when you're just talking to another mother, it's easier isn't it really?

7.2.5 Uses of Sure Start: the focus on 'well-being'

Adam Dinham (2007) identifies 'well-being' as a highly contested concept, and as one of a range of 'hurrah' words: 'they are good things, engendering a warm glow and drawing people to them' (White and Pettit, 2004. p. 2 in Dinham, p. 181). Noting that though the term 'lacks definition' it is 'heuristically useful', Dinham then suggests that:

> the idea of well-being is generally helpful in providing us with a glimpse of something important: the basic conditions for happiness and fulfilment as of right (ibid, p. 183).

Parent accounts emphasised that increased activity and connections with others had led to greater confidence and happiness and sometimes to improvements in family relationships. This emphasis in their accounts suggests that what many mothers 'sought' and 'gained' from Sure Start services in Brambleton may be understood - albeit cautiously given these significant definitional difficulties - as 'well-being'.

These findings are mirrored in professional conceptualisations of an appropriate focus for services in this area outlined in Chapter 6. In that chapter, professionals suggested that the direction of Sure Start policy towards a greater emphasis on childcare for work represented a fundamental misreading of the capacity and intentions of many parents. For those professionals, the flexibility of early Sure Start, its 'gorgeousness' and 'fogginess' as well as its stress on 'gentle' activities, was contrasted with the much more instrumentalist approach of later developments. In Chapter 6, the early Sure Start focus was seen by professionals both as enabling parents to be supported to the point where they *would* be able to participate at the level suggested by policy discourses, but also as representing a valuable end in its own right.

7.3 Agency and parental involvement

In Section 7.2, I pointed to a tension between the depiction of parents in discourses of Sure Start as 'rational', 'responsible' and 'purposeful' citizens and the ways in which Brambleton mothers characterised their own agency in relation to the services provided.

In this section, I look at agency as exercised in the context of 'parental involvement'. As suggested in Chapter 2, parental involvement was positioned as an important part of the programme - and often heralded in political rhetoric as emblematic of it – but was also seen as external to the core Sure Start services. As Chapter 4 indicated, early contact with this aspect of the programme's work had intrigued me and further highlighted the value of exploring Brambleton as a 'racialised space', for while the large majority of those using the core services of Sure Start were of Pakistani-origin, almost all of the 'activists', in fact the three who were most active and most vocal, were white.

In Brambleton, there were three main avenues for parental involvement. During the fieldwork phase, the first of these, the Parent's Participation Group (PPG), had various roles – functioning as a social and discussion forum, trying at points to initiate new Sure Start groups, developing a range of activities to draw in a wider section of parents. The Programme Management Group (PMG) was the regular decision-making multi-agency meeting which included a slot for feedback from the PPG. Parent attendance was patchy at both of these groups - despite ongoing attempts to increase it - particularly at the PMG meetings where, on occasion, there would be no representation at all. In the second half of my fieldwork period, these board meetings were regularly chaired by one of two white mothers, although attendance by other parents remained very low. For a short time also, three of the white activist mothers became volunteers in core service areas of the programme.

As part of further explorations of how 'agency' was constructed, this section explores perceptions of the motivations of those who were and were not involved. It then looks at the processes of involvement and at the outcomes for those who participated at this level. Finally, I suggest that rather than conceptualising agency in the highly voluntarist terms of individualisation theories and as embodied within Third Way discourses, it may be more helpful to use as a model, Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) analysis of 'practice' as the interaction between 'habitus' and 'field'.

7.3.1 Perspectives on the motivation of 'activists' and 'non-activists'

Moral discourses of Sure Start: involvement as 'ethical citizenship'

In Section 7.2, a narrative explicitly linking Sure Start with a particular notion of 'moral improvement' is evident in a small number of parent accounts. Associations of the programme with the opportunity to 'better oneself', through 'learning', becoming a 'better mother' or through employment, were made in comments by some 'activist' mothers (see for example, comments from Nicola and Shabnam on p. 174 and from Emma on p. 182). This narrative can also be seen in activist responses to a question about the effects of the programme in Brambleton in which the benefits for individuals were seen to trickle down to families and subsequently to the area itself.

Nicola   If there are better facilities for the children, parents are going to be happier. If there's childcare, then more parents will be more likely to go out to work, or do courses to help them get back to work, which is what I'm doing, which I think is good, because more money will be coming into the community so therefore the community will get better.

Emma   I think because Sure Start's helped to bring much more childcare into the community, you've got more opportunity for women to work, whether it be part-time or full-time. And I mean, that in itself is going to change Brambleton, because the more working people Brambleton's got, you know, the more improvement it's gonna see.

The idea of 'moral purpose' was also used to explain activist participation in Sure Start. In this case, decisions to participate were identified as 'the right thing to do', reflecting notions of a particularly Third Way and Giddensian 'ethical citizenship' (Rose, 2001).

Nicola   I want to influence what happens in my community, because I want to make it better and if I can make it better, then I'll be doing something good for my kids and I'll be doing something good for all the other children.

For both Leela and Emma involvement formed part of a reciprocal relationship with Sure Start, in which the 'right' and 'duty' to 'have a say' and the ability to input into the improvement of services were balanced by the input parents and children were receiving. Kerry's perspective on this was slightly different, in that for her, 'having a say' was seen as her 'right' and as part of an 'opportunity' provided by the programme which, by implication, she might as well make use of.

Emma   I think, it's good to have a say in what's happening in Sure Start, but I think also it shows willing, it shows that you're supporting them, because I get so much from them for absolutely nothing, you know, the least I can do is go along once a month for a couple of hours and show some- you know, if I can have an input that will do anything, I'll do it, you know. And it does help, I think it helps us to understand, because we can say 'we want this, we want that', and if Sure Start can go 'it's not within our control to do that', or 'yeah, that's a good idea, we'll do it', and I think 'you know, it's a good chance for parents to give some feedback really'. Yeah, I mean, I do like a feeling of being more involved and having a bit more say in, in a provision that's been there for my children anyway.

Leela   I try and go to as many of the meetings as I can ... I _can_ comment on things that I think, you know, need improvement or you know, areas that

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need concern, things like that. I think I can give positive feedback in that
way.

Tricia   Why is it important that you and other people are involved?

Kerry   Because we're living in this area, we have a right to decide what can
happen in the area, what we want to see, so why not? Why not say what
you want to see happen? You've got the opportunity to say, so say it.

Involvement as racialised

While various reasons were given for non-involvement by mothers who were not
activists, across the interviews as a whole, explanations were often racialised, both by
professionals and by activist parents[33]. These discussions often concerned the
difficulties Asian women experienced in using services generally, reflecting a dominant
narrative of the study which was the construction of Asian women as burdened by
overwhelming obligation to others. Below, Helen, a professional, talking about the
absence of Asian women from Sure Start parental involvement forums, roots many of
these women firmly within the traditions of family and community obligations; their
capacity to act, is, in her view, significantly delimited by what they have to do for others
(and see also, for example, Zainab's comment about the time demands on many women
living in extended families, in Chapter 5, p. 110-11). In Helen's opinion, with Sure
Start fairly recently established and offering support that has not previously been
available, women are using their agency to protect themselves from further demands.

Helen   Culturally, many women, especially Asian women, have never really had
much for themselves, and along comes Sure Start, offering time out,
offering this, offering that, in return we'd like to have thought for
parental involvement, but in fact these women have very little left,
they've got nothing else to give. What they need is time for themselves,
in order to kind of re-charge their batteries and that may well take three
years. Then they'll get involved. What I'm trying to say is that I don't
think that there's either a culture or - for many, you can just see that can't
feature in their lives, because there's that one tiny bit of time for

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[33] It should be noted that investigating the issue of 'active involvement' was problematic on various
levels. In interviews with non-activists, it was important to try to avoid discussing the subject as if
involvement was the norm, a stance which was both morally loaded and potentially misleading, given
the very low numbers of activists. In addition, given the differential use of parent involvement
forums already referred to, it also meant effectively that white and Asian women participants were
asked different questions about this topic. Put simply, white women were asked why they were
involved; Asian women were asked why they were not involved

themselves, and they've the kids in the creche, and they've got an hour. That hour means that they can stay sane, and they can't come to a group where they might have - some other local parents - mouthing off about this, that and the other, and they just couldn't hack that ... in terms of their sanity and survival.

For mothers too, the weight of family and household obligations was identified as one of the reasons for lack of participation, with Nicola, a white activist, suggesting that declining numbers of involved parents could be attributed to this.

Nazia   I don't know if it's our cooking that takes a long time or what it is. It might be that they want to come but they don't know English, you know - they want to put their voice across but they won't know if there's anyone to put their voice to. Or they've never been and they don't know how to go.

Nicola   There were about seven or eight parents for the first couple of meetings and then it just sort of – dwindled.
Tricia   Do you know why that was?
Nicola   I don't know, I know this is something we spoke about. Some of the younger mums are expected to do the housework and cooking and cleaning, and the mother-in-law doesn't, so maybe we need to change the attitude of the older generation, or maybe not change the attitude but maybe see if we can say to them 'you know, look this is good for - your family and it's good for you as well'. Maybe we need to get a bit more information - aimed at them.

Stories from participants about parental involvement in Sure Start's 'sister project' and lead agency, Brambleton Childcare Project (BCP), offer an additional perspective. As Chapter 4 indicated, BCP was established in 2001, a result of the demand for childcare in the area and of the efforts of professionals and local parents. Many Asian women were actively involved in BCP, a striking contrast to the picture in Sure Start, with large numbers for example, joining its Management Committee at its inception. Above, Helen's comment suggested that many Asian women were so constrained by the demands placed upon them and by the lack of time available to them, that they did not have the capacity to *give* anything else. In Shamim's account of her involvement in BCP however, a sudden availability of time, with children now at school, had triggered the desire to do something purely for herself.

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Shamim   I think the majority of the women who were round at my time, they didn't have kids at home right, it was just time on their hands for themselves, they'd their housework but they still had a lot of time. Once my kids went to school I was looking for somewhere where I could socialise, just go out and have a nice chat with friends, you know, do swimming, you know. I wasn't thinking about - you know, going back into work or furthering my education or going and doing training. I just wanted some time out to myself, that was all I was looking for. We said 'look, we've got this time on our hands, we want to do something positive', why can't we do something' yeah?

For Zainab (below) however, involvement in BCP had been motivated by the need to have time away from her children, with the benefits of a better relationship with them an apparent by-product of this. Such stories resonate with an important professional narrative described in Chapter 6 about the ways that childcare was used in Brambleton. Zainab's comment is reinforced in the observation below from BCP worker Claire, who – besides suggesting elsewhere that parents could be put off by the 'official' status attached to Sure Start - says that parental involvement in her organisation was more successful because it was directed towards 'child-free' time. As Chapter 6 has suggested, professional narratives stressing the legitimate needs of mothers to take 'time out' for themselves, forms part of conceptualisation of the welfare needs of women in the area and counters government discourses (including those about the purposes of childcare).

Zainab   Initially, the only reason I ever went was, you know, to pass me time, you know, to have a break from the kids because there was a creche available. That was the only reason I started doing anything and ... it made me value the kids more. I believe that, because I had a break from them. I was a full-time Mum. Nobody ever looked after my kids. There was no support for me there with my family, in-laws. So I valued the time I did have with the kids more because I had a bit of a break. And I think that was a really important start for my children as well.

Claire   It is a pull that they see it as childcare in BCP, where they can leave their children, and then go and do something else, whether it's training or being a volunteer, being part of the Management Committee, being involved in meetings while your child is - doing their own thing. At Sure Start, I think it's perceived to be different, most of their meetings will offer childcare but I think it's the things that might come from that, it's all with your children.

A different narrative used to explain the absence of Asian women from parental involvement forums in Sure Start was provided by some white mothers and staff who characterised these mothers as *making use of services but giving nothing back*. The comments of a worker, Lisa, below represent a variation of this; backing up her claim by referring to what 'Asian colleagues' have said, her tone is not judgemental, but it does suggest a tentativeness and uncertainty about how 'other' lives are lived.

Lisa I supported a parent with her job application, and I'll be a referee. I've also got another parent I've been taking training, you know, to build up their confidence really, to sort of get involved, but, these are actually white parents, and the Asian parents, I mean, I can only sort of see this 'cause I spoke to colleagues who are Asian that live in the community. They've said, 'when it's just something like a meeting, they're not going to want to get involved'. If it's something nice, it's a group, you know, where - where you can take the children to get a break, or it's something they're getting out of it, you know, then they'll do it.

This theme was fairly frequently replayed in 'complaints' sessions at some of the Parent's Participation Group meetings that I attended and reflected a wider dissatisfaction about the perceived orientation of services towards Asian women in the area (see also Chapter 6). In a diary extract following one of these meetings, I noted that Nicola (who, as I indicated above, appeared in an interview, to understand the barriers that some women faced in becoming involved), echoes this narrative, saying ' "We had this problem with the last Open Day - they came and ate and left" (very critical tone)[34].'

A strong sense of grievance is evident from Kerry, whose tone was less restrained. It is interesting here that her description of the women (as selfish, 'moaning to their husbands') contrasts significantly with that of some of the white and Asian staff who speak of Asian women in very different terms – as selfless, uncomplaining, passive.

Kerry People moan and complain about what doesn't happen in Brambleton, what's wrong with Brambleton, 'there's nothing for kids', 'I want to see this happen'. Well we have the opportunity to come and put things forward, but people don't come. But they are willing to take the trips up, the courses up, everything, but they're not willing to give any input back

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[34] Research diary, 4.11.03

	into it. They're probably moaning, they'll go home and they'll say to their husbands 'oh God, I wish there was this' or 'I wish there was that' or 'I didn't like the way this trip was run'. Well if you didn't like it, then you have the opportunity to come along and say, but - people don't.
Tricia	So why d'you think people don't get involved then?
Kerry	Can't be arsed? Quite happy maybe to let other people do it? You know - the parents' group has been running now for a year. Me and Nicola have gone to every single meeting and not missed one. We think it's our duty to come, because we are active parents in Brambleton and we have a voice and we have an opinion. And we know, that our opinions count.

In both constructions of Asian women above, the first about women needing to protect their time, and the second more simply about 'selfishness', refusal or inability to become involved was attributed to the pursuit of self-interest, albeit that in the former, this was understood as a necessary response to the constraints of cultural norms. In different ways these constructions problematise assumptions of policy and theory that agency is exercised by autonomous and rational decision-makers and also that, with specific intervention, it can be channelled straightforwardly in a particular direction, in this case towards a narrowly defined 'responsibility'.

7.3.2 Outcomes of parental involvement

Explaining her concern that the focus of Children's Centres on 'childcare for work', had failed to understand the *capacity* of parents, a professional participant, Helen commented that '... everyone's trying to get on, and everyone knows their parameters really'. Parental accounts suggesting that women often demonstrated their agency by choosing *not* to use services or participate in parental involvement forums appear to reinforce this perception. Here and in other depictions of Sure Start use, accounts suggest both a capacity to engage that is differentiated and also that different 'rationalities', bound to circumstances, norms and expectations, drive the decisions and actions of welfare users.

While activists often described their motivation in terms of altruism and moral responsibility (as above), other more 'self-interested' reasons were also noted. Activists said that involvement kept them 'busy' and 'sane', that meetings were 'fun' and attended by 'like-minded parents'. Below, Leela and Kerry describe the satisfaction

gained from being able to 'have a say' and 'make things happen', with Kerry identifying herself as an important stakeholder in Brambleton.

Leela   It makes me feel good in a way cos you're thinking 'oh you know, I'm doing something'. I know it's little [but] it's helping towards something.

Kerry   The Open Day that was mine and Nicola's idea, and it was really good and it gives you a sense of 'that was down to us', that were really good. The Halloween party, that was my idea and I was really, really worried that the fact that maybe some people wouldn't come and it would be a total disaster. It wasn't. People came. Tumble Tots that was our idea, and it just gives you a sense of authority- not authority, that's the wrong word I'm looking for, that's our word that-
Tricia   It's something you've achieved.
Kerry   Yeah definitely. And we have as much an involvement in Brambleton as the people that work here.

Elsewhere (Hamm, 2007) I have argued that the treatment of parental involvement essentially as a technical task and the lack of accountability and of clarity about its aims at the national level, were reflected locally in insufficient resourcing and unclear goals. In making this claim, I have concluded by suggesting that the major emphasis of parental involvement structures in Brambleton in this period on individual capacity-building rather than other goals such as governance, led to significant benefits for white activists.

Different aspects of participation as activists brought benefits not available to other Sure Start users. Here Kerry described how participation in these activities had transformed both her awareness of her own capabilities but also, fundamentally, her sense of what 'kind of person' she was.

Kerry   Going to the Programme Management meetings, my God, I never thought I'd go to something as official as that in my life. Never have voiced my opinion like that as much as I'm quite a mouthy person. But it's taught me a lot more about people, how to take people sometimes, how not to take people. ... But no, I'd have never done anything like that before, before Sure Start. I don't think I'd have been sitting here, say, three years ago, I'd never have thought 'God a one-to-one interview'. I never would have walked into a room, with people that were - not authority, but people who - gobbledy-gooked as such ... I'm not blowing my own trumpet, but I think I've got so much more confidence now, with doing all of these things. I've never have gone to a fundraising meeting -

ever - why would I want to go to a fundraising meeting? In May, we're doing an all-day chairing meeting. I know the benefits of being able to chair a meeting properly. Well I will know the benefits of chairing a meeting properly after I've done it.

The incorporation of activists into a 'quasi-management' role in the programme and as an apparent consequence of this, their adoption of more 'strategic' and organisational modes of thinking was evident from such accounts. Here, Lisa, a worker, contrasts the 'ignorance' of non-activist mothers on an organisational issue of sustainability, with the mindfulness displayed by newly knowledgeable and responsible activist parents.

Lisa   If parents say 'we want trips to- ', they [the activist parents] know the cost because we've discussed the cost and a few of them have asked to do some risk assessment training. And erm, you know, I think it's a lot easier to discuss subjects. Whereas you know, there was no understanding of it before, it was 'why can't we have it?' and funnily enough, at the last course, somebody had done a poster, - and it said 'free entry', and one of the parents said 'yeah, well you couldn't really have it free, you could have it free initially, but you couldn't have it free long-term, because it would have to be sustainable at some stage'. And one of the [other] parents said 'well no, it's not fair on the Asian mums, we can't afford this, that and the other', and one of our parents from the parent's group says 'no, it has to be sustainable.'

These benefits were further reinforced for Nicola and Kerry who were able to use their experience and contacts at the programme to gain placements as Sure Start volunteers during this period. The suggestion from Helen below, that volunteering is explicitly directed towards developing work-related skills is reflected in Nicola's account of her experience.

Helen   It's very much about developing capacity, they get a chance to see people at work, they see the work environment and know how that feels, they get to know some of the systems, meetings. We expect a certain kind of professional behaviour and that's been achieved in many ways.

Nicola   I've got more confidence now – through chairing the meetings. And the parents' group, with Lisa being off ill before Christmas, I actually held three of the meetings myself, I was organising them, doing the budgeting, getting everything sorted, they worked really well. And I've been budgeting for different courses, and I'm actually applying for funding and doing project proposals.

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Mothers who had become volunteers also identified that the experience had precipitated their interest in looking for paid work, and moreover, employment in a Sure Start-related field. In the comment from Lisa, links between parental involvement, volunteering and the impetus to seek employment are made.

Lisa   I think a lot of progress made by the Parent Participation Group happened because of the volunteering opportunities. ... They've obviously took more ownership and wanted to get more involved and they've been asking for things like confidence training and they're developing to the stage where they're sort of, even if they're not ready to apply for a job which some are, they can see that's that not really far off now, the children are getting to school-age and they're really sort of wanting to sort of embrace and take everything on, get involved, start running groups, do this, that and the other. We've had jobs advertised recently, nearly all those parents applied for those jobs.

Nicola   Six months ago, before I started volunteering, there was no way I would have thought about applying for a job.

Tricia   Has it changed the way you look at future work?

Nicola   Definitely, definitely. I mean now, if I don't get [the job that I've applied for at Sure Start], I will definitely be looking for other work in similar areas. But if I don't get it, then I will keep looking.

Kerry   If there was a position here, in two months time, then of course I'll go for it. I've got the experience now, this has built my confidence up.

The use of social capital theory is helpful in explaining these changes for individuals. The concept of 'social capital' is highly contested, its meanings disputed amid debates about whether it actually has any value at all (Johnson and Percy-Smith, 2003). However, with this strong qualification, understandings of different 'types' of social capital (summarised by Kearns, 2004, pp. 8-9) are felt to be useful in explaining the benefits of activist involvement. Where 'bonding capital', is seen to represent strong social ties between like individuals such as family or an ethnic grouping and 'bridging capital', weaker ties which cut across social groups, the concept of 'linking capital' (attributed by Kearns to Woolcock, 2001) is understood as enabling vertical connections, such as relationships between social classes, and the powerful and less powerful. This research suggests that in this period, parent activists, particularly those who became volunteers, gained access to this most powerful form of social capital, linking capital. Through their activities, they received intensive input and experience

which gave them specific skills and enabled them to develop important relationships with professionals in Brambleton which placed them in beneficial networks. Indeed, four out of the five activists that I interviewed had gained employment by the end of my three-year period in Brambleton, with Nicola and Emma finding jobs in local community projects and Kerry and Leela obtaining work outside of Brambleton and moving from the area.

Just as in Chapter 6, I identified an apparent professional 'obliviousness' to the (relatively) large numbers of white parents in Brambleton who were not using core services (or registered with Sure Start) because of the dominant association of 'need' with Asian women, so here, there appeared to be the same kind of lack of awareness that it was this small number of activist *white* mothers who are the beneficiaries of this kind of input, *as if* they were associated automatically with these kind of outcomes.

This research cannot demonstrate that the attainment of paid work on the part of these activist mothers was purely the result of Sure Start participation, but does suggest that involvement is likely to have contributed to this. While there may well have been as many differences in certain ways *within* the activist and non-activists groups as between them, on the whole, what women *could do* or *chose to do* in relation to the programme appeared to have been shaped, in part, by culturally-influenced expectations and constraints.

Theories of individualisation and Third Way and New Labour discourses have different emphases (with the new Communitarianism inherent in the latter stressing a *re-moralisation* of welfare users and communities), but both make assumptions that agency can be exercised by self-governing individuals and in 'post-traditional' 'democratic families', in Giddens' (1998, p. 93) terms, where interests are shared and decisions taken together. As Chapter 5 suggested, an analysis which is felt to reflect parent and professional accounts more closely in this research is provided by Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990) in his conceptualisation of agency or 'practice' as the interaction of 'habitus' and 'field'. In particular, the notion of 'habitus' as containing its 'structural inheritance' is valuable, as it foregrounds the relationship between individuals and the *structural contexts* which have shaped them. An understanding of this relationship is

not possible within the emphasis given to voluntarism in Giddens' account of reflexive agency (e.g. Giddens, 1991), and the key premise upon which his theory rests, that of late modern societies as 'post-traditional'.

During the interviews it became evident that there was a difference in the 'habitus' of activists and non-activists in Bourdieu's terms. By comparison to non-activists, who were much more likely to live in 'traditional' settings which continued by and large, to emphasise strictly defined gender roles and particularly, the primary responsibility of the mother for children and the household, activists – through their own cultural backgrounds and experiences – had come to the programme with a greater openness to a role outside the home and a sense of their 'natural' entitlement to a range of options including employment while their children were young. As a result of this, in terms of the policy aims, activists were able to exploit the opportunities the programme offered, acquiring different forms of 'capital' including 'linguistic capital' (Atkinson, 1999) evident in the particular narratives and the language that they used, that functioned as part of their development of 'higher level' (including job-related) skills. The notion of 'habitus' may also be seen as similar conceptually, or as parallel to the understanding of the different 'rationalities' which drove motivations, decisions and actions of mothers, discussed earlier, albeit that there is in the idea of 'rationality', a far greater attribution of intent. The value of Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' in understanding agency in the study as a whole is further considered in the conclusions to this thesis.

7.4   Chapter conclusions

Reflecting findings from chapter 6, this chapter has contested the policy premise about the type of social investment needed by parents in Brambleton. Assumptions in the Sure Start policy discourse that parents would make particular choices – to seek out ways to improve parenting or to improve their skills to become better providers through activity in the PLM - were critiqued by the stories of most mothers in this sample. The predominant narrative about what Sure Start was 'for' and what its primary benefits were, could be summarised as 'additional provision' - to fill an important gap in existing services by providing help for those with particular needs, facilitating contact between women and children and offering support with parenting. Those aspects of the

programme highlighted in objectives and targets tended to have little visibility in accounts concerning perceptions of the purposes and uses of the programme, with mothers in this sample more likely to construct themselves as 'receivers' of services with needs for support, rather than as the active, energetic and purposeful welfare users of policy discourse.

The chapter suggested that many parents sought and gained from service use, a sense of well-being, defined loosely in Dinham's (2007) terms as the conditions for 'happiness' and 'fulfilment'. There is not a necessary incompatibility between the promotion of 'well-being' and of the 'independence' and 'responsibility' embodied within discourses and theory. However, it could be argued that these objectives are located in potentially competing paradigms of welfare, the one emphasising an instrumentalist and individualist 'autonomy', the other, a more affective, 'happiness' in which individuals are located first and foremost as social beings.

Examination of agency in the context of parental involvement provided further complexity to this picture. Constructions of parental involvement of the mainly white activists as motivated by 'moral improvement' (which more closely reflected policy discourses) and of non-involvement by mainly Asian mothers as driven by 'self-interest' were problematised, in particular, by evidence of the benefits available to the former group who were able to gain new skills and knowledge and access advantageous networks through their closer relationships with Programme staff.

These findings suggest different 'rationalities' behind welfare use, which appear to be absent from policy discourses and theory and may be taken into account only partially by professionals. The theoretical contribution of Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' is useful in understanding such 'rationalities', connecting as they do, the actions of parents with their 'structural inheritance'. The value of Bourdieu's understanding of 'practice' by comparison with models of agency shaping policy discourses is further considered in the conclusions.

8. Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the key findings and issues in relation to my two central research questions: 'To what extent do policy and theoretical assumptions about the agency of mothers reflect constructions of mothers and professionals?' and 'What do these findings add to understandings about Third Way and social investment policy and to theoretical understandings of agency?'

Sections 8.2 and 8.3 discuss and develop the main findings from the study outlined in the three empirical chapters, with reference to the conceptual framework in Chapter 3. In Section 8.2, findings concerned with the shaping and mediation of agency within the family are provided, while in Section 8.3, a discussion about the evidence from the study about different rationalities for Sure Start and welfare is presented. In Section 8.4, reflections on the theoretical, epistemological and methodological implications of the study are outlined.

8.2 Agency as 'differentiated': the context of the family

Given the findings from my fieldwork about the difficulties that significant numbers of Asian mothers experienced in accessing services, an important conceptual area highlighted in Chapter 3 was the exploration of agency as contextual, mediated through the family and 'culture'. Understandings about the relationship between mothers and their families were conceptually developed, in particular through the focus on the life stories in adolescence and family life of a number of the Pakistani-origin women in the research sample. These life stories as well as accounts of professionals which articulate a vision of Brambleton Sure Start defined in large part by the equation of 'need' with this parent group suggest that a persistent presence of structure in the form of cultural traditions continues fundamentally to constrain the agency that is exercised, contesting the emphasis of voluntarism within individualisation theory and Third Way policies. It is on these accounts that the following conclusions are based.

8.2.1 Dimensions and properties of agency

Individualisation theorists, Anthony Giddens (1991, 1992, 1994a, 1994b), Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1992, 2002) claim that in post-traditional societies, we are 'reflexive agents'. Increasingly detached from the structures of birth and position that shaped the life trajectories of previous generations, we must now be involved in continuous 'life planning', in Giddens' (1991) terms. In the individualisation thesis, identity itself is equated with agency. As part of this conceptualisation, theorists claim that family has changed from an institution of hierarchical and fixed roles to an arena of negotiable practices associated with empowered agency and family democracy (Yip, 2004). Minority ethnic communities are either excluded from such analyses or assumed 'to follow the same trajectory in due course' (Yip, p. 337). Below, problematising assumptions in theory and policy and following my conceptual framework in Chapter 3, I use parent and professional accounts drawn on in the empirical chapters to develop the concepts of 'relational' and 'collective' agency and to explore findings about 'autonomy', which is usually assumed to be a pre-condition of agency.

The definition of agency that I have used identifies it as comprising concrete action and intention but also the *potential to do something different* (see Chapter 3, p. 35). The agency that this group of Pakistani-origin women exercised in both the public and private domains was often seen to be constrained, highly dependent on what was permitted within their own family or the family they had married into, and by wider cultural mores. Decision-making and action for many was therefore fundamentally related to social rather than individualised processes. These ontological understandings of agency as grounded in hierarchical and gendered families and collective networks and therefore as a *negotiated process*, represent a central finding of this research.

My analysis was influenced by the work of Mason (2004) about agency and the self as 'relational'. In the life stories uncovered through my research, individual attempts to act 'innovatively' in terms of family norms were often thwarted or expectations that this would occur could prevent women from even initiating such actions. In some accounts, family decisions made on behalf on daughters, particularly in cases when marriages had been arranged earlier than the (then) teenage girls had anticipated, were described as immobilising individual agency. In some cases, this could have the effect of

emotionally 'crushing' the individual, even if temporarily, reflecting Kabeer's interpretation of agency as incorporating an explicitly psychological 'sense of the power within' (1999, p. 438).

As part of my conceptual framework, and following Jennifer Mason's (2004) emphasis, I sought to explore how individual and relational narratives were integrated in parent accounts. As Chapter 3 demonstrated, some studies have examined how individuals in minority ethnic communities integrate personal aspiration and desire with continued commitments to traditional practices. The findings from my research support those of Yip (2004) about the lives of gay Muslims, and from Smart and Shipman (2004) about marriage practices, which illustrate how collective obligations and individual goals are negotiated and accommodated in 'traditional' communities.

In my research, the integration of pathways that could be termed 'individualistic' in this context – the pursuit of employment or education at particular points, making personal choices about marriage partners or opting to delay marriage – with the fulfilment of defined family obligations, was often conceptualised as a fragile process, fraught with difficulties and as risking great losses for young women. The precarious accommodation of different elements of what were sometimes articulated as 'Asian' and 'English' ways of living were also evident in these stories, seen for example in descriptions of how UK-born mothers of Pakistani-origin had negotiated (unsuccessfully in most of these cases) with parents in the past about their own choices and how they did so in the present with Pakistani-born spouses about the choices that their children would have in the future.

The analytical focus on a sub-set of life stories during late adolescence suggested that for some women, this period had brought family - and sometimes internal - conflict arising from the personal need to pursue 'individual' goals (particularly related to education or employment) and, the obligation, described in some cases as imposed, to fulfil gendered, collective expectations.

Although the life stories of the white women interviewed were also relational in these terms, profound impacts of others on their agency were more evident at a later point in

their narratives, particularly where an earlier 'easy' autonomy was compromised by the arrival of children, especially if there was no family support[35]. Overall however, the life stories of white and Pakistani women in the period of late adolescence were quite different in that white women were more likely than their Asian peers to construct themselves as autonomous self-determining agents, despite also facing obstacles caused by personal 'errors' or 'failures' or family conflict. In this particular set of narratives, the white mothers conceptualised themselves as protagonists or as 'lead actors' in their stories, this theme providing a striking contrast with stories from this group of Pakistani women, in which they seemed often to see themselves as having been 'pulled along' in a journey defined by others.

Cigdem Kagitcibasi (2005) views both 'autonomy' and 'relatedness' as basic social needs. Although claiming that both traits are embodied in all societies to some extent, she observes that one or the other tends to be prioritised. The greater emphasis in the Brambleton Pakistani community on 'relatedness' in this study contrasted with the focus of New Labour policy on 'autonomy' and 'independence' (albeit alongside a new Communitarian-inspired emphasis on family and community). This suggests that social issues or 'problems' in particular areas and strategies to address them may be understood quite differently by policy-makers and practitioners or residents of communities, with implications for policy effectiveness.

As Chapter 3 suggested, an examination of autonomy defined as 'self-government or self-determination' (Wray, 2004, p. 24), assumed to be increasingly prevalent within late modern, post-traditional societies and implicit too within the promotion of 'independence' (albeit usually considered in economic terms) within Third Way policy discourses was integral to an exploration of agency. The consideration of agency as 'relational' above has already suggested that the ability of the agent to shape their own actions and decisions is fundamentally constrained and/or enhanced by others.

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[35] As earlier chapters have made clear, comparisons between the group of Pakistani-origin women and the smaller sample of white women interviewed are limited, in particular by their socio-economic differences (including differences in levels of education and connections to Brambleton).

For Kagitcibasi (2005, p. 405, following Piaget, 1948), autonomy in which one is subject to one's own rule, is contrasted with heteronomy where one is subject to another's rules. Where individuals are subject to the rules of others, power relationships that in a given context may be seen as detrimental to self-interest may be internalised and autonomy threatened or denied. As the analysis of life stories in my research suggests, *internalisation of particular norms*, in this case those reflecting patriarchal and gendered power relationships, encroached on individual autonomy and the ability to make decisions independently.

Stories about the internalisation of norms deemed to be self-oppressive in this research also reinforce evidence that, besides being a cognitive process (which allows the individual 'rationally' to make choices even within given parameters), autonomy necessarily includes the psychological condition of self-efficacy – the belief that one can produce an effect. For Bandura (2002), this is viewed as:

> rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce desired effects by one's actions, otherwise one has little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Self-efficacy beliefs regulate human functioning through cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes. They affect whether individuals think in self-enhancing or self-debilitating ways; how well they motivate themselves and persevere in the face of difficulties; the quality of their emotional life, and the choices they make at important decisional points which set the course of life paths (Bandura, 2002, pp. 270-271).

In my research, absence of self-efficacy as part of a compromised autonomy, was manifested at points in a 'knowing' or 'unknowing' *relinquishment* of particular kinds of responsibility and decision-making. Here, Hoggett's (2001) conceptualisation of agency in relation to social policy (explored in Chapter 3), which identified the self as 'reflexive subject' (reflecting Giddens and Third Way/New Labour discourses), but also as 'reflexive object', and *'non-reflexive* subject' and 'object' was found to be very useful.

These positions, which Hoggett makes clear are not fixed but occupied at different points, are evident in the accounts of some of the research participants. In Chapter 5, an example is provided of one participant's apparent abnegation of responsibility for herself in certain areas as she assumes that since her marriage, decisions related to her

must be taken by her husband. This represents an example of Hoggett's 'non-reflexive object' position, which happens when a powerful 'other', whether this is a parent or other dominant force 'gets inside their head' and 'tells them' what to think and feel. This kind of *self-obstruction* (and the psychological impossibility therefore of self-efficacy in certain areas at least) is also evident in the often anguished accounts of the profoundly reflexive 'Shamim', about her inability to leave her marriage and her continued but unhappy acceptance of control by her father and brothers, which is attributed to 'how I learnt to live', the internalisation of norms which she can recognise are destructive to her. Here, she can be seen as occupying Hoggett's 'reflexive object' position, exemplified, as reported earlier, by someone who is 'acutely aware of their own powerlessness [and] teeters on the boundary between anger and despair' (ibid, p. 50).

These narratives can be contrasted with other accounts from research participants who demonstrated a less conflicted or more 'whole' sense of self in these terms, for example those who had also continued to experience family constraints on their own decision-making, but were able expressly to separate out norms which were experienced as oppressive from their own sense of what was 'right' for them. Thus, for example, while one mother railed against those from her parents' generation who chose to live in the UK yet continued to deny girls their 'freedom', she stressed nonetheless that she was 'not being racist to my own self'. Similarly, the need of another mother to separate physically from her family by moving away as she could not 'picture' the life that her parents had envisaged for her, also demonstrated her striving for, and achievement of, a more 'whole' and autonomous sense of self.

An examination of 'collective agency' and of its relationship with the agency of individuals was also highlighted as part of the conceptual framework in Chapter 3. This concept is linked to 'relational agency', having as its centre, the idea that people operate not intrinsically as individual agents but as part of social units. However, where I have used 'relational agency' to refer to the construction of agency as a negotiated process, the idea of collective agency has a greater emphasis on the relationship between the actions of individuals with their collective *identities* and *practices*.

An important element of this intricate picture of the relationship between the individual and the collective was a portrayal of the *isolation* of many Pakistani women, particularly recent arrivals from Pakistan or those without extended family. This was identified as an important part of the rationale for the Brambleton Sure Start programme and its focus on bringing mothers together, reflected in the comment of 'Nazia' (Chapter 4, p. 96) about the immense value of group activities because without them, parents existed 'more or less in their own ... picture'. These findings problematised assumptions about the unity of 'Asian communities' underlying some literature concerned with 'community cohesion'.

In her research with older women from minority ethnic communities, Sharon Wray (2004) sought to understand the relationship between collective experience (for example, of racism or of shared religious identities) and how individuals were able to act in 'everyday life'. In her work (and following Brah, 1996), Wray highlights the dynamic character of agency in minority communities which reflects the 'multitudinous' power relationships which operate in such spaces.

> What constitutes agency changes continuously within shifting cultural and political spaces, it cannot be assumed that the experiences of agency are somehow fixed and unmarked by diversity. Instead the multitudinous power relations operating within particular ethnic and cultural localities create different ways of thinking about agency and empowerment (Wray, 2004, p. 24).

The relationship between collective and individual agency, a particular form of the structure-agency dynamic, was shown to be complex in my research, and reflecting findings from Wray's research, as dynamic and marked by shifting power relationships. One aspect of this was the depiction of agency as manifesting a 'temporal' dimension. In my research, the capacity and power of an individual in relation to others was seen to change at different points of the life course. Thus when South Asian daughters married, rather than gaining independence from the parent generation, they sometimes remained subject to them, particularly where they lived with or near extended family. Here, women's agency was often constrained, not simply as it had been in the past by fathers or brothers, but also by the demands of mothers and mothers-in-law who had acquired a culturally-sanctioned authority upon the marriage of their sons. This is addressed by Kabeer (1999) as a feature of patriarchy in South Asian cultures, viewed as a

manifestation of 'behaviour in which women's internalisation of their own lesser status in society leads them to discriminate against other females in that society' (pp. 440-441). This cultural practice is certainly changing and likely to change further. This is evident from parent accounts emphasising the *intention to act differently* in relation to their own children, and apparent in other stories of the adjustment of particular cultural norms as settlement in the UK lengthens (seen, for example, in the greater resistance to extended family living).

My research highlighted the reflexive relationship between individual and collective agency, in which actions or decisions were continuously considered in reference to cultural norms and in which the collective was constructed as both *empowering* and *constraining*. Several women were profoundly reflexive about their circumstances. One participant in particular, despite expressions of bitterness, and her knowledge of others who had chosen to live differently, was unable to deal with the huge losses that she anticipated, and 'called to order' (in Bourdieu's terms) by powerful norms learned in childhood and re-enacted into adulthood. The reactions of 'Shamim' demonstrate Wray's (2004) claim (and reflect theories of Bourdieu's 'habitus') that 'choices' are made within the parameters of what is seen to be possible in particular cultures and localities. This kind of reflexive relationship between the individual and collective found in my study is also evident in Gill Callaghan's (2005) research which illustrated that despite resentment felt by the working class women in her focus groups about the uneven, gendered division of housework, a 'collective habitus' about the 'proper way to behave' and concern about the costs to family stability of subverting this, limited their ability to deal with the problem.

While sometimes this relationship between the individual and the collective was constraining, at other times it enabled and energised. One of the most commonly cited stories about this community of women concerned the fervent efforts mainly of Asian mothers, to set up the childcare project, BCP, which led to many of those involved gaining employment as a result. As Chapter 5 illustrated, and as highlighted above, other examples of this were found in stories told about those individuals from Pakistan who had been happy to live in extended families on their arrival into the country, but wished to make different choices as they witnessed their UK-born peers living

differently, and about other women who, heartened by their involvement with Asian workers had approached them to seek experience as volunteers. Although these stories to some extent reflect Bourdieu's theory of practice (1990) in demonstrating the possibility of change where the habitus interacting with the field is transformed by acquisition of useful forms of 'capital', in other ways they provide a more optimistic view than his account (or that of Callaghan, 2005, above). As Chapter 5 suggested, in demonstrating how rigid cultural norms as a form of structure could actually begin to disintegrate or 're-structure' when repeatedly challenged by individuals, this process more reflected a Giddensian 'duality of agency and structure'.

8.2.2 'Traditional practices' in 'late modern' societies

Throughout the research process, I have been aware of the warnings of Claire Dwyer (1999) and others (such as Fauzia Ahmad, 2001) about the dangers of the reification of this group of South Asian parents, who tend to be viewed as embodying 'cultural conflict'. An inclination to regard agency as *merely* constrained is challenged by a body of literature concerned with how 'identities' are actively exploited or manipulated in different ways – for example in Dwyer's own research which identified how 'dress' was used by young Muslim women to generate 'alternative femininities' and in Malson et al's (2002) study which also examined the constitution of gendered, sexualised and racialised identities produced through 'appearance'. In my research, the dangers that Dwyer refers to are contextualised by descriptions of the 'very many different ways of family life beginning to be led' (Chapter 6, p. 151) as well as by various accounts of how change is negotiated between individuals, families and the wider culture, and across generations. These particular narratives are also recognised as 'classed' amid statistical evidence of the growing profile of Asian (including Pakistani-origin) girls in Higher Education (Bagguley and Hussain, 2007).

It is important to recognise that choices are always constrained, although different structural positions (class, gender, ethnicity, disability etc.) and the modes in which they intersect, will continue to constrain in specific ways in different contexts. These findings strongly contest assumptions about the extent of 'post-traditionalism' in 'late modern' societies (from individualisation theorists) and the prevalence too of consensual, 'democratic' families (within Third Way and New Labour discourses). In

so doing, an impact of certain practices seen in many ways to be detrimental to the interests of young women must be recognised as continuing to shape the constrained agency of many within this group.

Given this premise, and reflecting findings from other research (Smart and Shipman, 2004; Yip, 2004) it should be emphasised that within my study, traditional practices were not rejected wholesale. While several of these mothers expressed bitterness about the unequal treatment of boys and girls and emphasised the need for girls and women to be given choice and 'freedom', other 'traditions', such as the practice of arranged marriage, was not in itself dismissed in accounts and of those who discussed their marriages, most appeared to be happy, for example.

While this research does indicate the persistence of 'traditional' practices particularly in small and insular communities, it highlights simultaneously their – at least – partial, gradual decline. This is signified here, by an emphasis on the lack of clarity of the 'rules' that currently prevail, and also, as indicated above, in the expressed *intentions* of mothers to raise their children differently. Change on a large scale is, moreover, likely to be swifter in environments that already see significant mobility as a result of education and shifts in class identities. However, in a 'twist' to this story, these tendencies towards individualism and indications of the decline of 'traditional practices' are also accompanied by a re-conceptualisation of tradition as a 'liberation' from the chaotic, risky character of individualisation. Recently, the case *for* 'modern' arranged marriage has been made, for example by Ziauddin Sardar (2008) in an article which cited a young Asian woman who described herself as unwilling to 'dance to the tune of the dating game' and in a 'Reality' TV series "Arrange me a marriage", shown in 2007, which used an Asian 'marriage arranger' to match professional white men and women on the basis of compatibility of 'class, education, family and life goals' (Taylor, 2007).

8.3 Understandings of Sure Start agency and the implications for policy

It is important to emphasise the premise on which these findings should be understood, which is Dwyer's (1999) point, made earlier, that the agency of girls and women should

be seen as shaped by sets of gendered and classed processes as well as by the impacts of racism in society. Within this context, my study makes an assumption based upon strong empirical research about the link between a constrained agency produced through identity within the family and the capacity to act, including in relation to welfare interventions. In this research, a weakness of policy in this area was attributed by one professional participant to a 'Eurocentric' government, incapable of grasping the strength of family life in communities in which extended families were still commonly found. As also noted in Chapter 6, while this research was focused on a particular cultural group, the characteristics and particular effects of extended family networks in other communities, for example, in some white working class populations (see Mitchell and Green, 2002) also need to be recognised.

As Chapter 2 suggests, the discourse of Sure Start, observable in policy frameworks, guidelines and political rhetoric, treats the engagement of different parent groups in the programme primarily as a matter of providing appropriate support, acknowledging difference mainly through providing 'technical' advice to facilitate the access to services of different groups, including those from Black and Minority Ethnic communities. Where in addition, Third Way policy tends to conceptualise social policy intervention as supporting change in willing, active and responsible agents, this study suggests that circumstances, norms and expectations as well as the personal needs and desires of users, shape the kinds of engagement that are possible, identifying that there are different 'rationalities for action' in relation to social policy.

8.3.1 Uses of Brambleton Sure Start: levels of participation

My research explored 'drivers of agency' in relation to the uses of Brambleton Sure Start and considered the implications of this for policy. I present a characterisation of *levels* of use of the programme, and suggest that agency in this context can be seen on a continuum, but also that welfare users may simultaneously be 'constrained agents' and 'active subjects'. The role of Brambleton professionals in constructing their particular programme is addressed as well as the implications of the findings of my research for 'social investment' policies.

Table 2, below, presents a broad typology of the levels of engagement with Brambleton Sure Start produced from the accounts of professionals and mothers, with consideration given to each level of participation. The representation of these levels of engagement in quotation marks signifies that the typology should be seen as a loose characterisation of how Brambleton Sure Start is used. This typology enables analysis of differential access to, experience of, and impacts of the programme that are understood to be informed in part by different 'rationalities for action'.

Table 2: **Constructions of the agency of mothers and the Brambleton Sure Start programme**

Parental engagement with Sure Start	Focus of services
1. 'Accepting support'	One-to-one support and childcare enabling women to 'get out of the house' or 'do other things'
2. 'Taking steps to "self-empowerment"'	Confidence-building through group activities and courses
3. 'Moving on'	Parental involvement and volunteering, education for work, job-seeking skills

At the first level of **'accepting support'**, parents described responding to the offer of help from the home visiting service provided to mothers who had recently given birth and to the offer of childcare support in times of profound need. Here, mothers represented themselves often as 'passive', as 'not coping', or 'not managing', with Sure Start home visitor input or assistance through childcare enabling them to 'stand on their own two feet' or 'be normal again'. These stories constructed mothers not as 'choosing, deciding' subjects, but as 'embodied agents' (McNay, 1999). This concept places as central, 'bodily' and 'emotional' aspects of identity and agency (that in some cases are 'entrenched' as McNay, p. 98, puts it) alongside those that are 'cognitive' and 'rational'.

Although constructions of agency in the research overall were highly racialised, these particular narratives were constructed both by white and Asian women and can be seen primarily as gendered accounts reflecting experience of motherhood. States such as

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depression and a perceived inability to leave the house that mothers described at this point arose from the arrival of a new baby, from profound changes in circumstances or from having to deal with major difficulties of other kinds. These stories related to the experience of post-natal depression or simply sheer exhaustion, relationship breakdown, the lack of family support, the demands of responding to more than one child or to the particular needs of different children. However, although these accounts of parental action or inaction are implicitly 'moral discourses' in that they are driven by responses to others, Third Way notions of agency as ethically- or morally orientated (Rose, 1996) and the 'creative, moral agent' that Deacon and Williams (2004) and Williams and Popay (1999) refer to are absent. For in these circumstances, in which action (or inaction) is experienced often as automatic or instinctual and *not* as reflexive or purposeful (in a considered way), the care that mothers must provide is not guided principally by moral choice but by a more complex combination of motivations, in which coping and even the sense of 'surviving' is key.

At the second level (often, but not always overlapping with the first), which I have termed **'taking steps (to "self-empowerment")'**, women were able to draw on group activities and courses, enabling them to socialise, and to access learning opportunities, although not necessarily 'education for work', including input concerned with parenting, often provided informally. A group of mothers, those women recently arrived from Pakistan were a significant focus of services. In many cases, these women lacked basic skills (including English language) and also had little confidence and mobility outside the home. At both of the levels above, Sure Start services were focused on 'well-being', on countering the 'atomisation' of many women's lives and supporting them to develop themselves outside the family. The focus of services was largely about supporting the development of skills and confidence-building in 'socialised environments'.

Those highly agentic mothers using Sure Start (and other services) at the third level of this typology which I have described as **'moving on'** most closely reflected the purposeful, moral and action-orientated parents within discourses of Sure Start as well as those within wider narratives of 'active citizenship' (Marinetto, 2003). During the period of the fieldwork, those using the programme at this level were a group of (almost

all white) mothers who became activists in parental involvement forums. These mothers also took advantage of the range of courses provided in Brambleton (and a number beyond the immediate area), and were able through their activism to become volunteers, gain job-related skills and also within this period, to access employment.

As Chapter 7 illustrated, the 'positioning' of these women was seen to be fundamentally different to that of other mothers in Brambleton. In Chapter 7, it was also stated that their attitudes to employment, as an example, were quite different from those of their Asian peers. The view of the world or 'habitus' of these parent activists, the sense they had of their entitlements, options and their relative autonomy, suggested that - although they had not anticipated the speed of change in their lives or the kinds of activities in which they now participated - certain outcomes, paid employment in particular, were always 'only a step away'. While neither group can be seen simply as either 'empowered' or 'disempowered', either before becoming involved in Sure Start or as a result of it, the *relative* positions of the two parent groups are encapsulated in Kabeer's understanding of the meaning of 'empowerment'.

> My understanding of the notion of empowerment is that it is inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. In other words, empowerment entails a *process of change*. People who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be very *powerful*, but they are not *empowered* in the sense in which I am using the word, because they were never disempowered in the first place' (Kabeer, 1999, pp. 436-437, emphasis in original).

8.3.2 Agency as a continuum and Sure Start mothers as 'active subjects'

In this research the capacity to act is seen to be on a continuum. At one end of this – and used frequently, as has been stated, as a rationale for the focus and level of the Brambleton Sure Start programme – a group of women, seen to be heavily restricted in their choices, and in some cases as prevented from making decisions for themselves outside the home, was described. In these circumstances, and following Hoggett's (2001, p. 45) point, it is hard to see how the constraints under which such mothers operate can become resources, as suggested within Giddens' (1994a) notion of the

'autotelic self'; for the presence of structure, in this case in the form of current cultural practice, represents an absolute impasse for some women which cannot be breached.

However many women, despite being 'constrained agents', were also 'active subjects' (Taylor, 2007), able to exploit the opportunities provided by the programme in their own interests. Examples of this were those Pakistani-origin women who were seen to use their agency in choosing which services to access, but also in choosing which parts of the programme to avoid. In professional accounts, the decisions of many Pakistani women not to participate in parental involvement forums were constructed as 'rational', made as they were in a context in which women were often already burdened by obligation to others. Similarly, the uses of childcare, not for education as a precursor to work, or for employment itself, but instead as a means of better supporting children, or even as a way of having time away from children were seen in these terms as 'rational' and 'legitimate' and were accepted and endorsed by staff.

8.3.3 Interpretations of the 'investment' needs in Brambleton

In 2003-5, when the conceptual framework for the study was developed and the fieldwork carried out, the influence of 'Third Way' thinking on Government social and economic policy – and in particular, its association with Tony Blair, then Prime Minister – was seen to be extensive. In Chapter 2, I identified Sure Start as an initiative of the Third Way whose characteristics were identified by Blair himself (1998) as including a focus on equality of opportunity rather than of outcome, an interest in how opportunities were offered and taken up, and in the mechanisms through which this occurred. Further, Sure Start was described as exemplifying a 'social investment' approach, identified by Powell (2000) as an important dimension of the Third Way. This 'social investment' perspective was described as concerned with the linking of social and economic goals, with the development of human capital through an emphasis on *educability* and *employability*, and with a particular investment in children as 'emblems' of the future (Lister, 2003).

During the period in which my research was carried out, I argued, a social investment perspective could be seen increasingly to be driving the direction of the Sure Start policy agenda – in particular, through the Children's Centres development (announced

in late 2002 and implemented from 2006) and in the introduction of a new childcare objective (in 2003). This shifting focus of Sure Start was acknowledged at the policy level (Eisenstadt, 2003; Glass 2005) and perceptions of its importance provided a major professional narrative within this research. Although I have recognised the contribution of other agendas, both overlapping and distinct, in the policy areas of Sure Start, I have used the notion of 'social investment' or simply 'investment' as an analytical motif, particularly in Chapters 6 and 7, to contrast the understandings of professionals and mothers in Brambleton about 'need' and parental agency with those within Sure Start and related discourses.

Various points about this shift, in policy and as reflected in these findings, are worth reiterating. Firstly, as noted, although assumptions about motivation and behaviour underlie the focus of policy (Le Grand, 1997) these assumptions and the discourses they create which are then given shape in policy, are not synonymous with the policy itself. This is particularly important in the case of Sure Start where there was no enforcement for parents to become involved. Related, as Lister (2003) makes clear, just as the state is not monolithic, acting consistently in a unified way, so Sure Start itself was shaped by various influences and agendas including the goal of 'meeting need'.

Reflecting the focus of social investment policy, the approach of Brambleton Sure Start was on the development of human capital. However, the focus of the Brambleton programme was set at a relatively 'low' level, reflecting professional perceptions of the needs of this group of mothers, many of whom had arrived as adults into the UK. As Chapters 2 and 3 illustrate, policy documents described Sure Start in various ways, with two principal goals seen to be 'meeting need' and 'stretching aspirations', the former fitting within a 'needs' discourse and the latter within a discourse of 'social investment'. In their narratives, professionals constructed themselves as struggling to maintain an appropriate balance between these two goals. The perceived value of the 'gentle' 'supportive' activities of early Sure Start, centred largely on confidence-building, was seen to be jeopardized by the new developments, felt to be directed *inappropriately* towards employment and the provision of childcare for work. Here, local staff constructed themselves, as they did in other instances, as allied to mothers, implicitly challenging the appropriateness of a Third Way 'social investment' perspective for this

particular group of parents. In challenging this emphasis and striving to maintain the existing ethos and approach, these professionals, like the parents referred to above, constructed themselves as 'active subjects'. The strength of these narratives across both parent and professional samples also suggest the need for a broader, more differentiated understanding of 'family' (as well as of 'community') within social policy design. As part of this, it is necessary to recognise that parenting itself will reflect different structural contexts, and that narrow technically-based interventions to achieve particular goals may have limited success.

8.4 Reflections on the research process: theoretical, epistemological and methodological implications

I conclude by reflecting on the development of the theoretical framework, and on aspects and implications of my methodological approach, including thoughts on possibilities for further research.

8.4.1 Agency, social policy and context: conceptual development

As sections 8.2 and 8.3 have demonstrated, a dominant theme within the empirical research is that differential uses of, and outcomes from, Sure Start could be seen as reflecting different 'rationalities for action'. The major limitation of theories of agency advocated by Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim and within Third Way and New Labour discourses, was found to be the absence of *context*, or the failure to recognise, in Greener's (2002, p. 688) words, how 'behaviour varies according to structural and cognitive constraints'. In developing the conceptual framework during the research process, I looked for models that would theoretically link individual agency and the contexts in which it was produced, with uses of welfare or responses to policy interventions.

A conceptual link to the notion of 'rationalities for action' was found in the work of a group of family practices researchers from the CAVA Research Group (see p. 49). One example of this work described earlier focused on the decision-making by mothers about childcare (in Duncan and Edwards, 2003, Duncan et al, 2004). Here, the concept of 'gendered moral rationalities' suggested how understandings about 'the right and

proper thing to do' were negotiated in the context of variable social networks, groups and settings, so that different people have different understandings of the proper course of action within the same state welfare regime' (Duncan and Edwards, 2003, p. 3). In addition, as their research identified, social policy and the welfare state regime constituted one 'normative' with its own resources and sanctions, with the social relationships and networks of mothers providing an alternative 'normative' (Duncan and Edwards, 2003, p. 20). In my research, culturally-based rationalities for action, subject though they were to intense internal dispute and negotiation, contained their own 'moral' bases that countered those of state discourses. These incorporated strong messages, not just about what was appropriate, but also about what was permissible. In addition, this research demonstrated that the 'real life' implications of cultural norms led communities to give different meanings to different state normatives. In this research, this was seen in relation to discourses concerned with employment. Thus, for example, while some accounts highlighted a cultural opposition to female employment (particularly when children were young), the requirements of immigration policy that incoming spouses be financially supported often meant that at the point of marriage, different attitudes prevailed.

As I indicated in Chapter 3, I also incorporated aspects of Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' (e.g. 1977, 1990) into the analysis as the study progressed. As the empirical chapters and the sections above illustrate, Bourdieu's primary understanding of agency is that of 'practice' as embodied. In this concept, action is structured by *history* which is itself generative of further action, for:

> The *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices - more history - in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences ... [which tend] to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54, emphasis in original).

The concept of 'constrained agency' that I have used reflects the 'theory of practice' and its dominant characteristic, an insistent reproduction of structure. In the stories from this research, cultural practices are described as if automatic, driven by what has 'always been done', encapsulated for example, in an account of the unrelenting struggles of the parent generation and the characterisation of mothers in the words of the

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Asian staff member quoted in Chapter 5: 'To them you grow up, you get married, you go slaving around kids for the rest of your life. That is what they give to their kids'. The 'habitus' is represented here in a set of normative behaviours that impose boundaries on action; these boundaries or proscriptions are defined by collectives of 'family', 'community' and 'culture', but because structure is embodied, also by individuals themselves.

The 'logic' or 'theory of practice' counters the voluntarist emphasis within Giddens' structuration theory, and the equation in his and other theories of individualisation of 'agency', in 'post-traditional' societies, with 'identity'. The ability of Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' to foreground how inequalities are reproduced where structure is enacted through embodied agents is very useful in my study. For the emphasis in 'habitus', which, as Greener (2002, p. 694) says, places 'actors in a position that is rather harder to escape from than that of Giddens' is very important in suggesting why policies – in this study, for example, around 'childcare for work' - may be inherently flawed and are unlikely to be effective in certain circumstances. This is because, as Greener says, it reveals a serious miscalculation within individualisation theories and third way policies about the arenas in which action and decision-making take place:

> ... many decision-making settings are so far from [the ideal of rational, pluralistic decision-making] that to pretend that we have empowered actors allowed to behave in a reflexive way may serve to conceal the deep-seated structural power relationships that exist (Greener, 2002, p. 697).

As Chapter 3 illustrated, the 'logic of practice' has been used extensively to explore 'puzzling' aspects of persistent inequalities, by 'highlighting the rootedness of class, gender and ethnic divisions' as McNay puts it (1999, p. 106). Thus for example, in Mickelson's (2003) examination of 'the anomaly of women's achievement' in which the educational attainments of women and girls are paralleled by the persistence of gender segmented occupations and lower earnings, analysis that places the notion of habitus as central, illuminates how men and women evaluate the gains of education in different ways. The focus of McNay herself on embodied aspects of gender such as maternal love and sexual desire, as identified in Chapter 7, similarly explains why habitus may continue to work 'long after the objective conditions of emergence have been dislodged' (p. 103). In my research, involvement in different parts of the Sure

Start programme and different attitudes towards employment while children were young were explained by the different positionings or 'habitus' and 'cultural rationalities' identified above, of white and Pakistani-origin mothers.

The case has frequently been made that although habitus is theoretically conceived of as generative and productive, its application even within Bourdieu's own terms, is overly determinist and his account of change – as a product of a lack of fit between habitus and field – limited (for example, in Adkins, 2004). Thus while useful in explaining why *patterns* of culturally-based or indeed other collective practices have implications for policies based on individualised and voluntarist understandings of agency, in this research, the 'theory of practice' cannot account satisfactorily for the variation of responses from mothers who appear to have had similar experiences, for differences of 'personality', for the extent of (successful) resistance to cultural practice and the level of change observed.

As Reay (2004) notes, while the habitus 'allows for individual agency it also predisposes individuals towards certain ways of behaving' (p. 433), with the focus upon constraints and demands[36]. Moreover, in Bourdieu's conception of gender, as indicated earlier, there is little scope for change and a particular vulnerability to symbolic violence and misrecognition. In my study, 'misrecognition' was evident, for example, among a small number of Pakistani-origin mothers who had internalised and colluded with certain traditional norms and practices (for example, according privilege to the rights of their parents or husbands to make decisions on their behalf). Overall, however, reflecting other empirical research such as Skegg's (1997) study of 'femininity' and 'class', there was from the mothers in my study, a highly reflexive critique of cultural and gendered expectations, even if this had not led to a transformation in their lives. In addition, Lisa Adkins' observation about the centrality of *ambivalence* in identity on the grounds that '... subjects never fully occupy or identify with norms' (2004, p. 36), is helpful here. It is related to the point made by Sen (2006) and others, discussed in Chapter 3, about the range of identifications that individuals can have. With respect to

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[36] Reay (2004) also points out that in Bourdieu's later work, (e.g. *The Weight of the World*, published in 1999) there is greater emphasis given to the possibilities of social change.

my findings, it reflects the complexity of the relationship between individuals and the (sometimes competing sets of) norms that have shaped their lives.

Finally on this issue, it should be said that beyond commenting on the *general* utility of the 'theory of practice' to my findings in relation to social policy assumptions (especially by comparison with other models of agency referred to) it has proved to be difficult to apply it empirically to this set of complex accounts as *'lived experience'*. As Duncan (2005, p. 74) says in relation to his own work, '... we must remember that Bourdieu's concepts are perhaps more metaphorical than analytical – it is necessary to actually work through how social processes work out in practice'.

8.4.2 Further epistemological and methodological issues

This study can be seen as contributing to understandings of theory and policy, and as adding to existing research literatures in the fields of agency and social policy, and family practices. As demonstrated, its findings challenge assumptions that underlie theoretical models about 'reflexive agency' and a dominant feature of current social policy in the UK that downplays the importance of structural differences. In so doing, the study provides a rich and textured account of the relationship between agency, gender and ethnicity in the context of a particular policy initiative. In this section, particular implications of some research choices are explored, including areas where further research may be valuable.

I have treated this case study, in Stake's (1995, p. 2) terms, in an 'instrumental' way, using it to address particular research questions. In bringing together different perspectives and voices to represent my narrative of the 'Brambleton Sure Start story', again citing Stake, I have treated the 'case' as 'a specific, complex, functioning thing' (p. 2). As stated in Chapter 4, the central purpose of a case study is *particularisation*. This of course, does not diminish the importance of considering the potential within this research for generalisability or at least for the 'wider resonance' of the findings (Mason 2002, p. 8).

The conceptual model underlying this research enabled a robust comparison of the universalist assumptions within policy discourses with the constructions of particular

'realities' at ground level. In the context of research concerned with participatory governance, Fischer has highlighted that:

> In addition to the institutional rules, regulations and policies within a given territory or space we need to understand the sociocultural practices that give meaning to these spaces for the social actors in them (2006, p. 24, in Palmén, 2008, p. 57).

In my research, this focus led to an account that highlighted the relationship of mothers and professionals to underlying social processes that were both localised and associated with wider cultural norms, illuminating the appropriateness (or otherwise) of centrally designed policy interventions. Fischer's approach above, which emphasises the 'sociocultural practices' that give 'meaning' in the case of this research, to different actions or decisions, enabled a conceptualisation of mothers as objects of discourses, but also as adopting active subject positions in relation to welfare provision and other structures. It is through using this framework in other policy or geographical areas and spaces that claims of wider resonance of these particular findings may be considered.

The methodological choice to combine a life story focus with questions about parent uses and understandings of the Sure Start programme was fundamental to this approach. The decision to bring together two quite different sets of research issues in the parent interview stemmed from my ontological claim, based on observations and interviews carried out as part of my familiarisation phase in Brambleton, that human agency should be understood as mediated by family and cultural experiences. This 'dual focus' and the underpinning of these life story accounts by the stories of professionals enabled a nuanced understanding of the links between experience and identities within the family and capacity to act in relation to Sure Start and to other welfare services.

The conceptualisation of Brambleton as a racialised space was an important part of the particularity of this case study, also countering the de-racialised approach to 'community' in policy discourses referred to by Worley (2005), noted in Chapter 2. In this study, use of this concept enabled the exploration of how professionals and mothers constructed 'need', 'entitlement' 'inclusion' and 'exclusion', and highlighted also how access to services and outcomes of their use, were, in this period, associated with different groups of mothers. While some of the findings in this area, for example about

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perceptions of the exclusion of white residents, could not be fully developed within the conceptual framework of this study, they raise important issues for agendas concerned with 'community cohesion' and contribute to ongoing debates about the complexity of 'race', 'ethnicity' and institutional processes.

An important part of the case study as 'particular' relates to its location in time and (and to a lesser extent in 'place' where there was arguably less flux). The period in which the fieldwork was carried out (2003-5) is very important in shaping the research. When fieldwork began, Brambleton Sure Start had been in existence for less than two years. More importantly perhaps, interviews took place at the point of policy change; concerns about the implications of these shifts dominated interviews with professionals, with this feature steering the particular story of Brambleton Sure Start that I have chosen to tell.

Various other issues of representation arise from my methodology and the construction of my particular research story. In Chapter 4, I pointed to the tendency to value certain types of narrative more highly than others (also highlighted by Birch and Miller, 2000). In this study, it was difficult to avoid being drawn, not just to narratives that described 'painful pasts' (and presents), but to those where narrators expressed themselves particularly eloquently or dramatically. Certain individuals, both mothers and professionals, took on strong roles as narrators of social and cultural history and I drew on these aptitudes in interviews. Another very important aspect of representation was my decision to focus on a significant sub-set of narratives where particular kinds of stories of constrained agency were told. While the decision to do this is justified by the frequency of these kinds of narratives and their reflection in professional accounts about the rationale for the programme, this focus can be seen to marginalize more 'ordinary' life stories, and those, for example of the white parents in the area. In Chapter 6, I asked if the narrow association of need with mothers of Pakistani-origin represented an oversimplification of who were the 'hard to reach' in Brambleton; this topic would merit consideration as part of further research.

In the process of carrying out this study, various other topics of further research interest emerged. One of these concerns the relationship between 'well-being' (identified in Chapter 7 as a focus and impact of the Brambleton programme), and the more

individualised outcomes of a 'social investment' approach. Another avenue of further research concerns the roles of professionals. The limited theorisation of professional perspectives (by comparison with that of parental agency and identity) was acknowledged as a potential weakness of the study in Chapter 6. Given this premise however, there is in my research narrative an implicit conceptualisation of the 'Brambleton Sure Start story' as a set of relationships (between Government and professionals, and between professionals and mothers) that were both symbiotic - mutually dependent and constituted - and guided by imperatives specific to individual or group interests. The alignments of staff largely with mothers (referred to earlier in the chapter) reflected other accounts (by Morgen, 2001, and Muncie, 2008, referenced by Flint, 2009, in press) of how impacts of policy on welfare users may be mediated by professionals. The construction of professionals in my study as 'arbitrators' between parents and Government, acting to 'filter' certain aspects of policy, is worthy of further research within the Sure Start and Children's Centres contexts.

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[37] As indicated on p. 71, place names have been changed for this thesis. This is reflected in the references section.

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Appendix 1 - Parent Interview Schedule

Introduction

1. Firstly I'd like to find out about a bit about the family you grew up in and where you grew up.

a) Where did you grow up?

b) Tell me about your family or who you lived with when you were growing up.
- Parents, siblings, extended family etc.
- Religious background?
- Did you have any expectations about what you would do when you grew up?
- What did you want to do/what do you think was expected of you (if anything)?

c) Can you tell me a bit about school.
- How did you find the school experience?
- What did you do after school?

2. Can I ask you about living in Brambleton.

a) Firstly, how did you get to Brambleton?
- Tell me about how you came to Brambleton?
- What was it like growing up in Brambleton?

b) What's it like living here now?
- 'Good' and 'bad' things about living here?
- Intend to stay in Brambleton?
- Part of a community? What does that mean for you?

3. Being a parent here.

a) Who do you live with?

b) Bringing up children in Brambleton
- What is it like bringing up children in the area?
- Do you get any help with the children/the family - from family etc.
- What do you as a parent feel that you need in the area?

c) Do you think that your background (religious/cultural) has had any effect on your family life and they way that you bring up your children?

4. Brambleton Sure Start.

a) I'm going to ask some questions about your contact with Sure Start.
-What do you think the purpose of BSS is?
- How did you first come into contact with Brambleton Sure Start?
- Which BSS services are you using? Views about them.
- Are there any services that you think BSS should be providing but isn't?

b) Now some questions about the level of involvement you have with BSS.
- What kind of involvement do you have with BSS.
- Just receive services? Involved in parent's group, on PMG?
- What does this mean that you do? Would you like to be more involved? In what ways?

c) About involvement/lack of involvement
- Reasons for active involvement/for not wanting to be involved
- Involvement different or the same as expected?
- What do you get out of being involved? Has being involved been different to what you expected?
- Benefits for you of involvement? (personally, your children, your family?)

5. Impact of BSS

I want to ask a question about changes since becoming involved in BSS
a) Personal changes?
b) Family changes?
c) Area changes?

Appendix 2 - Staff Topic Guide

Introduction

1. Perceptions of the area.

2. Issues for families with young children in the area.

3. Perceptions of national Sure Start programme and the local (Brambleton) programme.

4. Issues raised for BSS as a result of working in this particular community.

5. Parental involvement: importance of, processes used to facilitate it, implications for work practices.

6. Impact of Brambleton Sure Start.

7. Perceptions of the barriers to change.

Appendix 3 - Topic Guide for Local Agencies

Introduction

1. Needs of area.

2. Issues relating to agencies working together.

3. Impact of Sure Start/BCP

4. Perceptions of policy direction.

Appendix 4 - Research Samples

Sample 1) Parents and parents/staff

Involvement level	Pakistani-origin	White/other
Staff/parents*	2	1
'Activists'	1	4
'Non-activists'	6	-
Total	9	5

* Three staff were parents who lived in Brambleton and these individuals are also included in the staff sample.

Sample 2) Staff

Role	Pakistani-origin	White/other
Sure Start/BCP managers/strategic	-	4
Sure Start/BCP frontline staff	3	6
Other Brambleton agency staff	-	4
Total	3	14