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Maternal outcasts: the governing of vulnerable mothers in advanced marginality

Larissa Povey

Introduction

This chapter extends and nuances Wacquant's framework of advanced marginality through a focus on the management of 'maternal outcasts', which to date has been under-researched and under-theorised (Broadhurst et al., 2015). It examines the role of the state in constructing and governing "bad" or "failed" mothers and their experiences of (in some cases) recurrent child removal. In giving voice to hyper-marginalized mothers, absent from Wacquant's writing, participants' accounts highlight the destructive cycle of successive pregnancies and child removals raising important questions around the ethicality and efficacy of these state interventions. This chapter presents empirical findings based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in two English cities between January 2016 and February 2017. From this broader study, it draws on the narratives of fifteen women at the penal-welfare policy nexus who have been involved in child removal proceedings.

Wacquant's (2009) thesis of the expansive penal state provides a useful framework to make sense of the technologies and techniques of child removal that vulnerable birth mothers are subject to. It builds on the conceptual tools of the 'centaur state' and draws out neglected gendered dimensions of the 'carceral-assistential net' (Wacquant, 2009). Flint (2018: 2) summarises these concepts as "deregulation for social and economic elites...contrasted with an expansive and disciplining 'mesh' thrown over marginalised groups to 'correct' their conduct". It thereby provides novel insights into the role of the state in these women's lives and the traumatic impact of such interventions. The chapter argues that the centaur state leaves maternal outcasts with no recourse for rehabilitation or restoration of their children, and exposes how the state (re)produces some of the most precarious factions of the working classes or 'precariat' (Wacquant, 2014).

In many developed countries there is increasing concern surrounding the number of children taken into care by the state (see Cummins' chapter in this volume) and the related, and often overlooked, problem of vulnerable mothers experiencing successive pregnancies and removals into care. This development is observable in the UK and states with cognate social-welfare systems, as well as those with differing approaches such as the Scandinavian countries (Fokken, 2016; Ubbesen et al., 2012). In the UK, a quarter of mothers who lose custody of a child through a court order will return to the family court with a case involving a subsequent child; younger mothers face a higher chance (one in three) of this happening (Broadhurst et al., 2015).

Child removal from "unfit" mothers is doxic¹; it takes place unchallenged by wider society. Indeed, the construction and mediatization of bad mothers and child abuse might suggest that the child protection system is not fervent enough. Much less attention is paid to the welfare of the mother and the trauma experienced in forced child removal. Many of the women experiencing this process have complex needs, often they have been subject to multiple interventions from both the penal and welfare branches of the state. Wacquant's theoretical

¹ Refers to Bourdieusian concept doxa (Bourdieu, 1977).

constructs therefore provide a useful mechanism to understand experiences both at the individual level *and* situated within the context of an austere, neoliberal state.

This chapter extends Wacquant's framework in three ways: it provides an empirical perspective of women *from below* (largely absent from Wacquant's ethnography); in doing so it develops the idea that the state perpetuates, reinforces and reproduces hyper-marginalization and 'injuries of the self' experienced by women drawn from the most precarious fractions of the working-class; finally, it highlights how symbolic state power is enacted against mothers through a classed discourse which informs policy and leads to a prioritisation of the 'best interests of the child'.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into five sections. First, I outline the theoretical framework with particular reference to the potential of Wacquantian concepts when applied to this particular group. Second, I provide an overview of shifting and intersecting public policy which impacts on women in conflict with the law *and* who access social assistance and marginal welfare services. The third section sets out the methodological approach. Fourth, I present contextualised data from three research participants in the form of vignettes. Next, I discuss themes which came out strongly in analysis of the data, namely the importance of early experiences in terms of cognitive and conative perceptions, the vaunting of children's needs over the mother and the 'life sentence' experienced by mothers whose children were forcibly removed. The final section discusses these findings with reference to the utility of Wacquantian concepts in understanding the specific techniques employed in the governance of vulnerable mothers.

Mothers as targets of the centaur state

Wacquant's treatment of women in key works such as *Punishing the Poor* (2009) has been reviewed by a number of feminist scholars. They are often appreciative of Wacquant's acknowledgement of the differential governance of women. He goes into some detail on women as recipients of social assistance payments, and, to an extent, the impact of the penal state, albeit relationally via the male prisoner or probationer. Wacquant's work has been used in interesting ways to look at 'young welfare mothers' (Measor, 2012) and to highlight the development of gendered justice in UK policy (Martin and Wilcox, 2012). More exacting critique highlights specific problems such as Wacquant's essentialist treatment of gender in assumptions underpinning his conceptual model of the feminine and masculine arms of the state (Bumiller, 2013). Similarly, Wacquant's ethnography of the boxing gym, *Body and Soul* (2004) is, by extension, male-dominated.

Largely, critics suggest that Wacquant deprives those subject to the 'carceral-assistential net' of agency. Piven (2010: 114) wonders "about the role of the people who were the objects of penal control. Were they merely the witless objects of social control, or were they also actors in the drama?" Similarly, Gelsthorpe (2010: 378) highlights that "we lack empirical detail on how the moves have been experienced by consumers...we need to hear more from women themselves". Indeed, under neoliberal individualism, individuals may be bereft of agency while simultaneously being responsibilised for their position. Micro-level data is required to explore this further and to counter the "privileging of macro-level, relatively monolithic analyses" (Lynch, 2011: 240).

Working-class women have long been subject to surveillance, moral judgement and tutelage (Gillies, 2007; Ball et al., 2016). However, the treatment of marginalised mothers within the

most precarious factions of the working classes remains under-researched despite the disciplinary and punitive methods they are subject to. Piven (2010: 111) argues that "neoliberalism means that politics and the State have become more important instruments in the age-old capitalist project of class domination". A gendered lens highlights this process starkly in the management of maternal outcasts. Social reproduction is exclusionary: "idealized notions of femininity and motherhood have always excluded certain groups of women considered to be unsuited for domesticity" (Roberts, 2017: 29). Non-working mothers are demonized, particularly if they depend on social security assistance (Wacquant, 2008). Criminalized women face a higher level of discrimination seen in the loss of the right to care for their children as an expression of their citizenship and the basic right to a private and family life² are denied (Lister, 2007).

Women in the 'carceral-assistential net'

Wacquant's work has provided novel, cross-disciplinary analyses of the evolving state apparatus over the last four decades. He explicitly links neoliberalism with the decline of the Keynesian welfare state and the rise of the penal state; social and penal policy work together as a means of regulating and incapacitating the disenfranchised poor (Wacquant, 2009). The carceral system simultaneously asserts itself as provider of 'law and order' while ensuring its inefficacy through the turn to the market which Wacquant (2009) terms the 'paradox of neoliberal penalty'. Borrowing Bourdieu's metaphor of the left and right hands of the state, Wacquant's model consists of the 'maternal' (welfare arm) and the 'paternal' (penal arm). The arms create a "carceral-assistential net" that traps "two gender sides of the same population coin drawn from the marginalized fractions of the post-industrial working class", women under 'workfare', men under 'prisonfare' (2009: 83-84).

Wacquant's analyses of both sexes is constrained by its placing of women under the management of the 'maternal' arm and men by the 'paternal' arm, reinforcing heteronormative gender roles, based on the assumption that men commit crimes and women claim welfare and care for dependents. In this sense women are affected by the penal system only *by association* as the mother, partner, or daughter of an offender, *contra* the dramatic rise in the number of women in the Criminal Justice System (CJS). Women constitute one of the fastest growing groups within prisons globally; increasing by 50 per cent since 2000 compared to a 20 per cent rise in the total world prison population (Huber et al., 2017). Wacquant (2009) effectively draws attention to the plight of women in the face of a retrenching social safety net, but fails to highlight the extent to which the 'maternal arm', is transforming into a "secret penal system" particularly in the UK context (Webster, 2014: 8). A gendered lens is useful as it reveals the different expectations that the state places on its male and female carceral subjects, uncovering the specific difficulties that marginalized women face as commodified citizens under market forces. Women who have been in the CJS face an even steeper challenge, as their offending breaks not only the law but societal gender norms, construed as 'troubled' rather than 'troublesome' (Lloyd, 1995).

² As per Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Feminist informed research: listening to marginalised voices

This chapter is based on data generated in two English cities through repeat interviews with 15 women who had been directly affected by both the carceral and assistential arms of the austere neoliberal state. Additionally, they are mothers who have been deemed too risky for their children to remain with them. Piven (2010: 114) highlighted a need to explore the role of those who are the 'objects of penal control' within Wacquant's work, to tease out whether they are merely 'witless objects of social control, or... actors in the drama'. This work responds to this through the collection of qualitative data via ethnographic and creative methods including auto-photography and photo-elicitation; useful research techniques with hard to reach groups (Johnsen, 2008). This allowed the foregrounding of women's voices and lived experiences; a key tool in constructing a theoretical understanding of the social changes taking place, as Wacquant (2008: 9) suggests:

"...ethnographic observation emerges as an indispensable tool, first to pierce the screen of discourses ... which lock inquiry within the biased perimeter of the pre-constructed object, and secondly to capture the lived relations and meanings that are constitutive of the everyday reality of the marginal city-dweller."

Feminist-informed research has the potential to complement Wacquant's work by foregrounding the experiences of maternal outcasts. While much of Wacquant's work focuses on the United States context, this chapter is based on data generated in the UK. Although these two countries differ greatly in social welfare provision, they have similarly strong child protection services and significant numbers of women subject to management by both arms of the penal-welfare state; there is therefore a marginalised population of maternal outcasts on both sides of the Atlantic.

Social profile of mothers in advanced marginality

Within the research sample there was a wide-range of relationships with penal and welfare arms of the state. Some women had long histories of persistent reoffending and multiple prison sentences behind them, others experienced non-custodial community-based sentences or fines. Offences ranged from serious crimes such as arson and accessory to manslaughter, to minor offences more commonly associated with female offending including possession of a controlled drug, sex work, theft or breaching of conditions (the majority of participants disclosed the latter). Some participants had recently been in prison; others who had not offended for a number of years. Many disclosed adverse childhood experiences (ACE) namely child neglect or abuse. Synonymous with the wider population of women in the CJS, many outlined poor mental health, histories of drug or alcohol misuse, experiences of domestic violence or sexual victimisation (Prison Reform Trust, 2017).

Participants were engaged with provision including day centres and specific support services when they were recruited to take part in the research. These comprised statutory, voluntary and private organisations including two women's centres, a homeless day centre and a domestic abuse service. Most of the women had left the education system without many formal qualifications. Participants were in receipt of social assistance benefits during the research period, namely Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), which is paid to people out of the labour market due to sickness or disability and is subject to a lower level of conditionality and sanctions than other employment-related benefits. Many participants had

used a food bank or accessed meals through day centres, further attesting to their financial precariousness.

The following section presents three participants' vignettes which provide micro-level empirical insights into the complex raft of governance that women navigate as they become maternal outcasts. These participants' circumstances represented the range of experiences within the sample; and across different life stages from 'young welfare mother' to 'maternal outcast'. All names are pseudonyms.

Motherhood vignettes: Amy, Carly, Sylvia

Amy

Amy, aged 18, lived in a secure Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) (blocks of self-contained flats) within a residential neighbourhood. Amy was placed at the MBU by Local Authority social workers, for intensive assessment, shortly after giving birth to her first child; "He came here when he [her child] was 10 days old". Her partner, the child's father, had been allowed to come and stay at the MBU with Amy, she said "I never give 'em a choice...I said if he's not I ain't fucking going". Amy knew other mothers who had not been able to bring their partners and she felt strongly that fathers should be around: "he'd be missing out on so many important things, all the firsts, he's [her child] grown so much in that time". The MBU was around 150 miles from where she lived, a long way from her home and social/familial network. She described herself as being "shipped from the hospital".

As a child, Amy had been in care due to her mother's alcohol and drug misuse, she felt let down by the state as she "was not looked after properly". Her own history of being a looked after child and her partner's experience of the care system were cited in the decision to assess whether their child should be taken into care: "it's like saying anyone who has been in care is not allowed to have kids".

Amy was placed into a self-contained one-bedroom flat within the MBU, and found it was equipped with 24-hour CCTV and audio surveillance in all rooms. Her placement was for 12 weeks to undergo a looked after child assessment. She was told that she would be able to access specific services to address risk factors raised in social worker assessments and her son's care plan. However, these services were not available on site; she was also unable to access the support that she required at the local women's centre (due to staff absences) that she was referred to, despite her being amenable to the care plan requirements.

There was a strict regime in place at the MBU; Amy was allowed to leave the unit for 3 hours on one day of the week, during this time window her child had to remain at the unit. She was allowed to leave the unit with her child for two hours on other days of the week. Visitors had to be approved prior to visits and were required to sign in and out. There was a high green fence circling the unit buildings with a code locked entrance gate. In order to leave the unit Amy needed to pass the main courtyard which was overlooked by the staff office, she likened it to a prison: "see the green fence outside, all you need is a bit of barbed wire above that". She talked about the lack of privacy at the MBU, in addition to the 24-hour audio and visual surveillance "people just walk in. I'm like there's a door, knock it". Amy was released from the MBU to her maternal grandmother's house and given custody of her child with ongoing monitoring by social workers in the community.

Amy had experienced a cycle of state abandonment and state intervention, from childhood into early adulthood. She felt betrayed by a social welfare system which failed to provide care or protection for her as a child and marked her for automatic surveillance once she became pregnant.

Carly

Carly, was 33 years old and had five children; four of whom were no longer in her care. The baby she recently had was in temporary foster care after being removed from her shortly after birth following a pre-birth assessment. She had supervised contact centre³ visits with him three times a week.

Carly had experienced abuse from her mother as a child and had witnessed domestic abuse "I've been brought up like that...around domestic violence". She had a troubled childhood: "My step-mum she used to batter us, she used to lock us in rooms with a bucket, we hardly got fed..." Carly ran away from home on a number of occasions and was eventually placed in a children's home at the age of 14. The children's home was where she first started getting into trouble for absconding and for using alcohol and drugs. At 16 she was placed in supported housing. On benefits and with few formal qualifications, she stated that she fell in with a "bad crowd" which led to her coming into conflict with the law on a more serious level and her drug use spiralled.

As an adult, her intimate relationships were often abusive and exploitative. She was persistently in trouble for theft and had multiple prison stays. Her last prison sentence was related to a very serious crime where she had been an accomplice with her partner in a burglary which resulted in her partner killing a man. This had been transformative for Carly:

"I thought...I don't want this lifestyle anymore...the routine of jail...I don't want this life anymore...You have to work yourself up to go onto this good girl unit...you have to like prove yourself...I got straight up, and then I was just good all the way through".

The relationship with the father of her latest child became abusive: "you love that person, you think they care about you and when they say sorry you think they mean it". When she was seven months pregnant he attacked her and she was hospitalized. Having failed to remove herself from the abusive relationship, this counted against her in the pre-birth assessment in addition to her history of child removal:

"I thought I were doing right by [baby] by staying in contact with him but then he did what he did when I were seven months pregnant...I was in the wrong cos I didn't think about [the baby] and I didn't think about meself...I should've just cut all ties, but I thought I were doin' right".

After she was released from hospital she fled to a new city to make a fresh start, secured local authority housing and engaged with support services. She hoped that showing behaviour change during the assessment period might result in a positive report of her capability to provide care for her youngest child. However, Carly struggled to maintain sobriety and she

³ Defined as 'a safe place where children and young people can see a parent who they do not live with. Usually, this allows for direct contact, supervised contact or supported contact' (Cafcass, 2017)

failed drug testing. As the research period was coming to an end she received the news that she would not be granted custody of her youngest child.

The experience of repeat removals, highlighted by this vignette, had been one traumatic experience among many throughout Carly's life. Repeat removals were incredibly traumatic for the research participants and they often dealt with these events without any form of support. The hope of keeping a child was a powerful motivation for reform, but once this purpose for reform was removed, this was regularly the catalyst for regression into previous patterns of problematic behaviour. Carly felt that the birth of her last child was transformative. During the assessment period she was accessing support to enable her to create a home and to maintain desistance from hard drugs. Yet she was not able to keep her child. The state had branded her as unfit for motherhood for a fifth time, after which she opted to be sterilised.

Sylvia

Sylvia, aged 54, had spent many years in prison: "I think I have got about 100 convictions and I have been in and out of prison...for over 20 odd years nearly". Among these was a nine-year imprisonment for public protection (IPP) sentence for arson; Sylvia's recollection of the incident was setting a fire to keep warm when sleeping rough. She had spent many years being homeless or in temporary accommodation, and was living in supported accommodation during the research period.

Sylvia had a troubled childhood:

"When I think of my mum I always feel sad because I miss her so much...I don't know if she is alive or dead...I feel very sad because I have never known if my mum loved me or not".

She was also abused by her step-father: "I was truanting from school...I started drinking when I was 13, I got easily led". She had complex needs, including mental health problems and alcohol misuse. Sylvia was in receipt of ESA Support though she had not always claimed benefits "because I have always been...in and out of prison". She had relied on food packages from homeless charities: "I used to get it either from the day centre or by other means...meaning shoplifting".

Sylvia had one child who she had initially given up to fostering and then adoption when she felt unable to cope:

"They fostered him first...he was fostered out like short-term, when he was...about I think he was about four or five months old when I was still living in the mother and baby home".

Her life could be described as "chaotic":

"I was still drinking at the time and I had other problems as well and I wasn't really settled anywhere... and I was on bail at the time as well for...about three offences and...Because going through the court case with my step-dad... it was bringing back painful memories...And [my son's] dad right, when he came out of jail he decided to take heroin because he had been off it for a while and he...died of a heroin overdose...".

Her son is now 24 years old, and although Sylvia has not had contact with him for 20 years, he remains integrally important to her life:

"Things that make me happy are knowing that I love my son even though he is not with me...My one big hope for the future is for me and [my son] to meet up and have a catch up and to get to know each other better, also to meet...his adopted mum and dad...to find out about his life since he was adopted".

During her time in prison she wrote about him. She talked of separation from her son as still being a cause of pain, and that this was more acute on certain occasions such as Mothers' Day. Sylvia's vignette shows that connections and disconnections are important for participants. The injuries to the self and identity are deep and long-lasting, the ghosts of the son she was not able to raise and of her own mother that she never knew haunt her; these state interventions have had a lifelong impact.

Bad starts and the myth of social mobility

The effects of traumatic experiences in childhood go beyond the events themselves and play a decisive role in how those affected understand and react to life events ahead of them. ACE negatively affects individuals' lives and it has been linked to 'risk behaviours' that have a significant impact on "overall health, well-being and social function" (Larkin et al. 2014: 2). This link between a lived experience and its impact on an individual's agency, perception and therefore their life course can be understood through the work of Wacquant. These formative experiences are "embodied in the cognitive, affective and conative categories that steer the practical strategies of agents in everyday life, in their social circles, on the labour market, in their dealings with public institutions (police staff, welfare offices, housing and fiscal authorities, etc.), and therefore shape their subjective relationship to the state" (Wacquant, 2014: 1699).

Individual agency, then, depends on both an individual's experiences and how this interplays with the structures around them, in shaping sentiments, orientations and behaviours. Participants who had ACE were more likely to partake in 'risk behaviours' which would impact on their health and social wellbeing. Moreover, participants were known to services and therefore subject to higher levels of surveillance which was multiplied as they came into contact with a web of state agents across the carceral-assistential net. Having been involved with the care system as children, Amy, Carly and Sylvia were all deemed risky as parents. This highlights that the care system frequently fails to equip those leaving care with the skills and social capital to live life independently and in such a way that surveillance is no longer deemed necessary. For participants, being in care cemented a socially and economically deprived start in life.

Grella et al. (2005) found direct links between out-of-home care, traumatic experiences, adolescent misconduct and adult offending; foster care was a precursor for involvement in sex work, and those witness to early traumatic events were more likely to be associated with violent crimes, as confirmed by my research participants:

"I wanted to try to keep warm...but...well they called it arson with intent...When I got to court the judge, he said, "well your solicitor and barrister were saying, you didn't intend to harm anybody", I said no I was just trying to keep warm...and I was angry about what my step dad did to me in the past...instead of talking about it, it

was making me angry and when I was angry I just wanted to take it, punish him but because I couldn't get to him I just used to, it was only like rubbish in the bin, I wasn't hurting anybody or anything, but...it was a criminal offence...I just stood there and watched the flames...the flames fascinated me...it was like the flames, like arms...reaching out..." (Sylvia)

The penal dragnet draws in gendered carceral subjects from the most vulnerable sections of the precariat, who are often failed by the state, as reflected in participants' accounts. For some, these experiences do not come to the surface until well into adulthood and in some cases after persistent criminalisation. Each participant who disclosed these experiences revealed diverse and complex ways in which they were reproduced in sentiments and related behaviours which harmed themselves or others. For Sylvia, the childhood abuse was not linked to her mental health problems and offending behaviour until much later. It manifested in problem drinking, rough sleeping and eventually arson. Only during her longest prison sentence did she undergo a psychiatric assessment which highlighted the complex factors underpinning her behaviour.

Survivors of such abuse are at an increased risk of a range of mental health problems throughout their lives. Murray et al. (2014: 5-6) highlight problems of child survivors such as: "anxiety, inappropriate sexual behaviour and preoccupations, anger, guilt, shame, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other emotional and behavioural problems" and as adults "alcohol problems, use of illicit drugs, suicide attempts, and marriage/family problems"...vulnerability to "later sexual re-victimization"...and "a clear correlation with high-risk sexual behaviours...and may have a connection with later abuse on others". The lingering impact of these experiences is a particularly strong theme in research on women offenders (Brennan et al., 2012). In reflecting on her experiences Carly was not surprised that she had ended up in abusive adult relationships, she had been "brought up like that" around domestic abuse and violence. This highlights not only the patchiness of state intervention, but also the failure to protect or to provide adequate aftercare for traumatic experiences when the state *does* intervene.

Exhibiting such behaviours is a 'normal' reaction to the immense trauma participants experienced: instead of being cared for they are marked for surveillance, set up to fail; and when they eventually come into conflict with the law they are criminalized for their complex needs in the 'vulnerability-transgression nexus' (Brown, 2014: 375). A bad start is difficult to escape from in spite of engaging with support services, as is clear in the life trajectories of Sylvia and Carly, the two older participants. Amy, the youngest, already has a criminal record though she has not served time in prison.

Larissa: You said that they said that there were some anger issues. Have they helped you with that?

Amy: Well that's why I was supposed to be going to that [women's centre], yeah? And I phoned them the other day, and that [anger management] worker's off til the 11th February... I don't really like her though...cause she was like [puts on higher pitched voice] "oh you need to take some responsibility for yourself for being here", cheeky little fucking bitch...what for being shipped here from the hospital cause of the social? Like fuck off.

Amy was engaging with services, but these were not fit for purpose and this may set her up for failure. She felt unfairly treated by the system and was angry about that; there is a resistance to authority in the way that she presents her story. Conversely, the older women

have been warehoused in the 'carceral-assistential net' for most of their lives and seem to have internalised the stigma associated with their failures; the centaur state has subdued and incapacitated them, thus producing self-regulating 'docile subjects' (Foucault, 1977). Sylvia had spent over 20 years in and out of prison, Carly had multiple prisons stays and both were deemed unfit to mother. Amy had to overcome immense odds to be socially mobile and to forge a different path.

Maternal outcasts and precious cargo

"I'm finding it hard, how am I gonna carry on without my boy? My heart's broke...I'm not gonna get through it." (Carly)

Like many of the women in the wider sample, the three participants presented in detail in this chapter were mothers whose ability to parent had been questioned. For those denied the right to care for their child this event (in some cases recurrent events) had a lasting impact which hung over them for the rest of their lives (Patrick, 2012). As Skeggs (2004: 138) outlines: "Working-class females were ... essentialized by gender, through their reproductive function, and their fecundity continues to be a problem for the state". The underlying poverty and social position relating to underpinning problems in risky parents is often ignored. Instead, the mother is the 'crucial variable' in cases of child welfare interventions, as Swift (1995, 89) lists: "Role rejection ... lack of nurturing knowledge ... immaturity of the mother ... and the poor nurturing of the mother herself ... all appear as variations on this theme".

Using a Wacquantian lens foregrounds the link between the management of pregnant women and the social (re)production of inequality and maintenance of a precariat. The experiences of Amy, Carly and Sylvia presented here highlight not only the fierce but also cruel gaze of the centaur state, which utilises child removal as a technique to govern poor and vulnerable women, creating maternal outcasts. Chided and disciplined during pregnancies and/or assessment periods, their treatment illustrates the imbalance of power between the state and hyper-marginalised women:

"After eight months of them working illegally...stopping me having a social worker. [I've got one again]. I've never spoke to him, never met him no, nothing. And he's just gona turn up to a meeting on Tuesday without even phoning... never spoke to him. Don't even know who it is... they were saying it'd be better if I only had Cian's cos it's too much professionals involved. But then I found out they were working illegally by stopping me having my social worker, so because of that I said I wanted one... So he's going to come on Tuesday... to my meeting when I haven't even met him." (Amy)

Amy had her own social worker prior to her pregnancy, a legacy of her own time in care. Within a few months her unborn child was assigned a social worker and she was told that she would not need to have her own. This shift highlights how Amy's needs were subsumed by her unborn child's who then became the focus for intervention; a tool of governance for state agents. Amy is then monitored by her unborn child's social worker to ascertain whether she will be able to provide adequate care as a mother. Deemed high risk she was required to undergo a three-month placement under close surveillance:

Larissa: You've made some friends here though, haven't you?

Amy: Shh! [nods towards surveillance camera] I'm not allowed to be friends with them. When I come here the social worker was like "you're not allowed to associate with anyone"...Then [staff ask] "are you coming in the playroom?" I was like "no", "oh well it goes bad in your assessment cos you're not interacting". I'm thinking, what the fuck?!...There's another girl here...I'd usually stand outside and go for a fag with her for a while... Katy's little boy was on camera so staff can see him, he's being supervised, and it's in the night time, it's not like we're spending all day, everyday...we wait til the night when they're settled. Now they've turned around and said only ten minutes to have a fag.

Larissa: But why?

Amy: Because of spending too much time outside and the babies are being left on their own. And I was like well give her [Katy] a fucking break, she's on her own ... she wanted her boyfriend here and they said no...

This account provides an insight into the intensive way in which maternal outcasts were managed in the community MBU. Friendships made independently were discouraged, time spent chatting over a cigarette outside the unit is a cause for concern for professionals. However, Amy was reprimanded for not interacting during the allocated times and settings where these behaviours *were* encouraged. These mothers have very little power, and they have much to lose if they receive a negative assessment. For Carly, an opportunity to remain with her child in an MBU was not offered; she had to make do with weekly visits with her baby in a contact centre. Sylvia had been in a MBU just over 20 years ago, where she struggled with problem drinking, came into conflict with the law and did not have secure accommodation. The resource was there to keep the baby safe and it highlighted that she could not provide adequate care for her child. However, her own 'multiple needs' were not a focus for intervention or support:

[The MBU] was in an area with a load of fighting ...so the council decided to close it, to move it to a different area...Before the adoption went through...the... social services department. It was me that approached them, you know like about like short term fostering, and see how that goes...And she said, you go with like short term fostering like from the Friday to the Sunday see how that goes, but in a way like I was glad of it, but like then, while [my son] was away and I thought well, you know like I am not being fair to him because like I am still, I am still drinking, because I was drinking, well you are not allowed to drink in the mother and baby home but I was still going out drinking...Yes and because I was going through this court case thing with my step-dad and then and I was on bail for some offences...Conditional bail that I had to reside at the unit... (Sylvia)

Carly has been through the child removal process five times, when she gave birth to her last child at the end of 2015, she decided that she would do everything in her power to retain parental rights:

"All way through my pregnancy I thought about giving him up for adoption because of all me other kids, I've let them down an' I didn't wanna put him through what they've been through, so I thought to meself, adoption'd be the best thing, give him to a family that can't have kids that will look after him. As soon as he were born he

changed me life, an' I thought I ain't doing that! ...I regret not changing fer me other kids, but when somebody don't wanna change they're not gonna change are they? ...Well I have changed an' I wanna carry on.

According to Carly, this was starkly different from her attitude with her previous children. She explained that she had now matured and *wanted* to change, this strong motivation was the main difference. She regretted not having made this transition in the past for her other children, but appeared committed to her current focus of maintaining a relationship with her latest child, desistance from crime and recovery from substance misuse. The hope that she would be a mother and rebuild relationships with her previous children and family members was an important factor in her continued desistance and recovery. As relational theory suggests, maintaining connections is a powerful tool in treating women with histories of trauma or substance misuse issues (Covington and Bloom, 2007).

“Sometimes I think they do...set you up to fail, social services ... they do ... my social worker says to me 'we try and keep baby safe'. No you don't, well, why aren't you workin' with me? You're workin' against me! If you wanted my son to come home you' be workin' with me to do all I can to do me best to get him back, but you just seem to be working against me!” (Carly)

As Carly's assessment period progressed, a rupture developed in her relationship with social workers involved in her case. She believed wholeheartedly that she was doing the best that she could to adhere to any requests from social services, to get her son back, and that this should be enough. During the research process she lost legal custody of her child. This came as a great loss to her; she had little planned beyond the court date and there was no specific support in place to help her deal with a potential negative outcome. During the looked after child process Carly had secured a flat, managed her bills and expenditures and made a big effort in continuing drug rehabilitation activities and was no longer offending or getting in trouble with the police. She was also attending counselling and various courses available at the women's centre, where I first came into contact with her. Carly was being the best that she could be, yet this was not enough to have her child returned to her. The state intervenes intensively to 'protect' a child, yet there is little in place for mothers following the trauma of child removal, or to prevent it happening again.

Child removal: a life sentence

First time mother Amy was forced to undergo intense surveillance for three months, but ultimately was able to keep her child. This may reflect that, although she was known to social services as a former looked after child and the police for low level, minor offences, she had not been through the prison system. For those, like Carly, who had been cycling around various agencies of social control for a long time, the chance to be a mother was taken away each time they gave birth. Carly was not given the chance to care for her child, to prove herself even under intense surveillance, as Amy was. Despite making progress and having good behaviours and attitude, Carly was labelled a failed mother and excluded from motherhood. Sylvia had never recovered from the trauma of giving up her child to adoption and decades later she was still haunted by this event.

This research provides insights into the micro-level experiences of poor and vulnerable mothers who have their children removed. It is important to place this in the context of rising

numbers of children in England's care system. Between 2010 and 2017 the number of children in care rose by 11 per cent from 64,400 to 72,670 (Department for Education, 2017). Unable to mother, these women lose access to an important if gendered dimension of working-class identity- care- as an expression of citizenship and an important means of gaining belonging in their community (Skeggs, 1997). Participants' felt ostracised, abandoned and stigmatised as maternal outcasts, the legacy of which casts a life-long shadow.

Utilising Wacquant's framework, the role and aims of the state's governance of mothers has been examined in this chapter. If the purpose of these actions is to prevent abuse and/or poor social outcomes then care statistics highlight that they are failing on this measure. For those deemed fit to keep their children, the state has backed away from its responsibilities (for example Sure Start centre closures), which within the context of austerity, is contributing to modern day pauperism (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017). Since the 2008 recession the UK - among other wealthy nations, notably the United States - has taken a 'great leap back' in terms of reducing child poverty (Adamson, 2014).

Extending Wacquant's conception of the centaur state, this research provides rich insights into the lived experience under the fierce gaze of the neoliberal state and how it manages poor, vulnerable mothers. It highlights a group treated in some ways worse than prisoners, because there is no rehabilitation attached to the punishment of permanently losing the right to care for one's child. At the micro-level, rather than supporting vulnerable mothers to become 'good' parents, the state forcibly removes their children, the macro-level impact of which amounts to the punishment and (re)production of socially abject and precarious populations at the bottom of society.

This analysis complements Wacquant's framework through the use of a gendered lens which reveals the different expectations the state places on its female carceral subjects, uncovering the specific difficulties that marginalized women face as commodified citizens under market forces. Women who have been in conflict with the law face the steepest challenge, as their offending breaks not only the law but societal gender norms. Their offending clashes with normative images of a 'good' mother; for participants' these two identities are - in the eyes of the state - untenable. This chapter nuances Wacquant's thesis by providing an empirical perspective of women *from below*; in doing so it develops the idea that the state perpetuates, reinforces and reproduces hyper-marginalization of working-class women; and finally, it highlights how symbolic state power is enacted against mothers through a classed discourse which informs policy and leads to a prioritisation of the 'best interests of the child'.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how vulnerable birth mothers in the UK are treated, currently and through the experiences of women that span the past 20 years. From these accounts it is clear that individual agency is not only bounded by structural forces but also by how individuals perceive their contextual environment. Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a 'structuring mechanism' that operates from within individuals is a useful conceptual tool here. For women managed by institutions and marginalised by society, their actions are "the result of the internalization of external structures...though it is neither strictly individual nor in itself fully determinative of conduct" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:18). How they navigate their life is ultimately shaped by very negative early experiences, exacerbated by being part of the most precarious factions of the working class. They experience intervention and are subsequently

cast aside once their child is removed - participants were not aware of any support for birth mothers following child removal. Through the process of repeat removals the state plays an important role in the social (re)production of the precariat.

The management of vulnerable birth mothers has remained hidden; they have little power or access to support and constitute easy targets. The surveillance and management of 'bad mothers' and removal of their children is doxic - unquestioned by wider society. The folk devil of the bad or unfit mother is not new, but it is important to shed light on the targeting of new groups and novel techniques through which mothers are managed. The (repeat) removal of children from poor mothers is growing and will continue to rise under the current UK social policy direction. Emerging projects focus on the prevention of pregnancy by promoting contraception or sterilisation (see Pause⁴ in UK or Project Prevention⁵ in the US). This raises many ethical questions and also highlights a flaw in how this issue is being problematised by practitioners and policymakers, in that it places little value on the life of the mother and her welfare.

When child protection intersects with welfare and criminal justice policy, poor and vulnerable mothers become maternal outcasts, of little value under market forces with no place in neoliberal society. A focal point for surveillance, intervention and punishment, their position is worsened by ongoing welfare retrenchment, rising inequality and deepening poverty. Sustained austerity hits working-class mothers especially hard, and is likely to continue to exacerbate these experiences for those on the urban margins.

⁴ <http://www.pause.org.uk/>

⁵ <http://www.projectprevention.org/>

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