

DIGITALES ARCHIV

ZBW – Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft
ZBW – Leibniz Information Centre for Economics

Baldwin, Kylie

Book Part

Chapter 4 Performing Parenthood

Provided in Cooperation with:

ZBW LIC

Reference: In: Egg Freezing, Fertility and Reproductive Choice (2019). Emerald Publishing Limited, S. 55 - 68.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78756-483-120191003>.

doi:10.1108/978-1-78756-483-120191003.

This Version is available at:

<http://hdl.handle.net/11159/664350>

Kontakt/Contact

ZBW – Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft/Leibniz Information Centre for Economics

Düsternbrooker Weg 120

24105 Kiel (Germany)

E-Mail: [rights\[at\]zbw.eu](mailto:rights[at]zbw.eu)

<https://www.zbw.eu/>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieses Dokument darf zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen. Sofern für das Dokument eine Open-Content-Lizenz verwendet wurde, so gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte. Alle auf diesem Vorblatt angegebenen Informationen einschließlich der Rechteinformationen (z.B. Nennung einer Creative Commons Lizenz) wurden automatisch generiert und müssen durch Nutzer:innen vor einer Nachnutzung sorgfältig überprüft werden. Die Lizenzangaben stammen aus Publikationsmetadaten und können Fehler oder Ungenauigkeiten enthalten.

Terms of use:

This document may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes. You are not to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public. If the document is made available under a Creative Commons Licence you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the licence. All information provided on this publication cover sheet, including copyright details (e.g. indication of a Creative Commons license), was automatically generated and must be carefully reviewed by users prior to reuse. The license information is derived from publication metadata and may contain errors or inaccuracies.



<https://savearchive.zbw.eu/termsfuse>

ZBW

Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft
Leibniz Information Centre for Economics

Mitglied der

Leibniz
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Chapter 4

Performing Parenthood

Drawing on theories and concepts from the sociology of the family and parenting culture studies, alongside a discussion of the accounts of women who have undergone social egg freezing, this chapter examines how ideologies of parenthood, in particular the expectation of engaging in practices of ‘intensive motherhood’, shaped women’s perception of motherhood and thus whether they felt prepared to perform the parenthood role. This chapter also examines the reproductive intentions and hopes of the research participants and explores their attitudes towards alternative modes of family building, including the use of donor sperm to pursue so-called ‘single motherhood by choice’. Here I explore how the possibility of pursuing such a route to parenthood was shaped by women’s wider kinship relations and networks but how for some the potential use of donor sperm was the source of much sadness and disappointment.

4.1. Intensive Motherhood and Mothering Practices

The parenting practices of men and women have been of much interest to researchers, practitioners and policy makers in recent decades, with considerable attention paid to how the actions of parents, but most often mothers, shape the lives of their offspring (Clarke & Younas, 2017; O’Connor & Scott, 2007; Wastell & White, 2012; Wastell & White, 2017). Such a widespread and sustained interest in the practices of parents is relatively novel as are the contemporary expectations about how one is expected to go about parenting. Compared to the parenting activities of contemporary parents, the practices of childrearing promulgated in the 1920s and 1930s are understood as being typified by formality, emotional distance and authoritarianism no doubt spurred on by the behaviourist approach which dominated psychology at the time. Self-appointed experts, including the infamous American psychologist John Watson, advised parents in the early years of the twentieth century to eschew physical affection in favour of detached ‘objective’ parenting. In his book *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* published in 1928 Watson directed parents to:

Never hug and kiss [children], never let them sit in your lap. If you must, kiss them once on the forehead when they say good night [...] in a week’s time you will find how easy it is to be perfectly objective with your child. (1928, p. 81)

However, and perhaps fortunately, parenting advice and parenting styles shifted dramatically in the 1950s and 1960s with the rise of psychological, cognitive and popular conceptualisations that stressed the importance of maternal care and attention which centred on the emotional development of the child (Bowlby, 1953; Bowlby, Robertson, & Rosenbluth, 1952). In contrast to the work of Watson, which argued a mother's love to be a 'dangerous instrument' (1928, p. 87), authors such as John Bowlby (1951) emphasised love and care as central to a child's development, likening a mother's love to essential vitamins for good mental well-being. Bowlby, like many others, argued mothers to be central to a child's development, with fathers and extended family members providing only a supporting role — a view which remained unchallenged for some time and which perhaps even endures today. The role of the mother as the guardian of her child's emotional well-being has been further entrenched by the growing 'scientisation of parenting' which has transformed the need for a secure maternal bond to 'optimise' emotional and psychological health to something seen as crucial to the development of the physical architecture of a child's brain (Gerhardt, 2004; Wall, 2018; Wastell & White, 2017). The pressures of scientific articulations such as these are a growing part of modern-day parenting culture, which in recent decades has seen an intensification in the role of the mother.

'Intensive motherhood' was first described by Sharon Hayes in the late 1990s in her book *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (1998). Hays described intensive mothering as child-focused and expert-driven and noted how it was often a labour-intensive, emotionally absorbing and financially expensive ideology which required women to place their child's needs and well-being ahead of their own. Whilst there are several competing ideologies surrounding contemporary motherhood, the intensification of mothering has been identified as the most pervasive (Miller & Tina, 2005), with its hallmarks observable in parenting magazines (Wall, 2013), blogs, websites as well as on social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest (Lakämper, 2015). Commonly seen as indicative of good parenting, intensive motherhood is often reified and normalised as something all mothers should aspire to (Caputo, 2007). However, as Vincent (2010) has noted, mothering practices are not simply a shared experience common to all women with children but are instead shaped by class and educational status. Indeed, the practice of intensive motherhood in particular often requires women to be well educated, willing and able to engage with expert advice, and have economic resources available which they are able to devote to mothering. The practice of intensive mothering is therefore significantly gendered and privileges the role of mothers over that of fathers, thereby perpetuating a situation of unequal parenting wherein men's responsibilities lie in providing financial support, with the adoption of the role of an 'involved father' being one which is virtuous but ultimately optional (Vincent, 2010). This has led authors such as Dermott (2014) to describe contemporary fatherhood, or 'new fatherhood', as intimate rather than intensive. The unequal distribution of labour in parenting, whilst not new, has perhaps been deepened with the additional mental and emotional load mothers

carry in order to meet the demands of intensive motherhood and the maternal sacrifice this often entails (Lowe, 2016). Given the increased opportunities for women to experience fulfilment outside of mothering, it is important to consider the ways in which the pressures and burdens of intensive motherhood may be shaping women's thoughts and decision-making about the pursuit and timing of parenthood.

4.1.1. *Ambivalence and the Intention to Mother Intensively*

The transition to motherhood had been a lifecourse expectation for many of the participants in this research, some of whom, as described in Chapter 3, felt they had come off course from the expectations they had for themselves about how they had anticipated their lives would unfold. These women often had a strong desire to become a mother, which in many cases had been felt for several years, even prior to their engagement with egg freezing. For these participants the possibility of imagining a future where they did not become a mother was highly distressing and disappointing. As Jen and Hayley told me:

I always wanted to be a mother; I mean always, my whole life!
I've spent my entire life just hanging out with kids.

— Jen (39 years)

I would be devastated if I couldn't be a mother, and I don't know how, yes, I definitely need to deal with those sentiments because I haven't dealt with the idea of not being a mother. I would be absolutely devastated.

— Hayley (38 years)

However, whilst most of the participants reported being firmly committed to becoming a mother, around a fifth ($n = 6$) of the interviewees disclosed more ambivalent feelings towards motherhood and some questioned whether it was something that they were sure they wanted to pursue. These participants were less convinced about the role motherhood would play in their lives and instead questioned whether their feelings with regard to motherhood stemmed from their own personal desires or from societal expectations. As Johanna and Katie asked:

I have even thought recently; do I actually even want to have kids anymore? Am I just, are we just intellectualising this and leaving doors open because they are there?

— Johanna (42 years)

I really had to think about, well is this something that I just think I want to do because that's what I think I'm supposed to want to do, or do I actually want to do this?

— Katie (38 years)

This uncertainty may have stemmed from the fact that, despite increasing numbers of women and couples choosing to live childfree (Berrington, 2017), hegemonic notions of femininity remain inextricably linked to biological motherhood which valorises a successful family life as central to the normative female lifecourse (Letherby, 2002). This motherhood imperative or mandate for motherhood (Russo, 1976) was something which was experienced more acutely by women such as Preeti and Kanta whose family backgrounds meant that their non-motherhood status was perceived as particularly unusual for women of their age. However, even though some participants reported not feeling under any pressure by friends or family to become a mother, some nevertheless sought to freeze their eggs to keep the option of motherhood open should they ever change their mind. Thus, what egg freezing appeared to offer these women was the possibility to retain the potential option of motherhood in the future should their ambivalent feelings change. Keeping the possibility of motherhood open in the future was also important for women such as Johanna, who explained that whilst motherhood was not something she currently felt a strong desire for, it was something that she thought she might want in the future, particularly should she meet a partner who wanted to become a parent.

I came to the conclusion that I am actually going to know if I really, really, how much I want it when I meet that person.

— Johanna (42 years)

I think ultimately again I kind of fall down on the side of with the right partner I think this is probably an experience that I still think I want to have, but that's not to say that I don't have a lot of fears about it.

— Katie (38 years)

Compared to the women who reported a significant desire to pursue motherhood, the possibility of a living childfree was less daunting for many of these participants who hoped and anticipated that, should they remain childless, they could achieve fulfilment in their lives through other means. Instead, what was most important was retaining the possibility of motherhood should their feelings or circumstances change.

So, I am in no hurry and if things didn't work and if I didn't have a kid it wouldn't be the be-all and end-all of life.

— Shu (39 years)

I'm ok if I meet a person that has children and they do not want children. I would be ok with that, but I am not ok with giving up my option of choice.

— Charlotte (42 years)

Thus, for these women, motherhood and their feelings about becoming a mother appeared contingent on future relationships with male partners, and it was important for some of the women to be able to 'offer' the possibility of genetic parenthood to a potential partner in the future. As Johanna put it, she did not want to: 'turn up to that party and not have anything to offer'. Thus, by freezing their eggs women such as Johanna were hoping to retain a degree of reproductive 'value' which could be drawn upon in future relationships.¹ As such, this research found that despite the high cost of the technology, the low rates of success being observed and the risks and pains of the procedure (which are explored in more detail in Chapter 6), egg freezing is being used not only by women who feel a strong commitment towards becoming a mother but also by those who hold more ambivalent feelings towards motherhood.

The ambivalence which a fifth of the participants expressed about motherhood appeared to be linked in part to their perceptions of how they expected they would want, or need, to go about 'mothering'. This was because despite not yet being mothers, being ready, or even being sure they wanted to become a mother, the majority of the research participants had very clear ideas about how they would want to 'do motherhood', under what circumstances, with whom and when, and were committed to 'doing motherhood properly', as they saw it. 'Proper motherhood' was perceived as with a committed partner who wanted to become a father and who would be engaged and active in both the woman's pregnancy and the upbringing of children. Such desires mirror normative expectations around motherhood and heteronormative ideals of the family. However, the participants' accounts also reflected the ascription to certain cultural, but also gendered, values around parenthood, specifically the expectation or desire to engage in 'intensive mothering' practices (Hays, 1998).

The participants' expectation to mother 'intensively' was reflected in the way they described motherhood as necessitating a complete reorientation and reorganisation of their lives. Many also suggested how they believed motherhood to be an all-encompassing emotional and physical investment often associated with personal sacrifice and altruism. However, the expectation to engage 'intensively' in motherhood with the associated requirements and sacrifices led women such as Holly and Olivia to question whether they were ready to become a parent.

It [motherhood] inevitably it impacts your life massively, so today we got up at 9.30 am and then we sat around in our dressing gowns for two hours and then booked a weekend away for next weekend and then we went to play tennis and so we couldn't have done those things with a baby.

— Olivia (37 years)

¹This issue and the role of men as intimate (non)reproductive partners is explored in greater detail in Chapter 7.

I moved around a lot in my life and I have really done whatever I have wanted to do, pretty much, and so in that way, not in a bad way, I have been quite selfish. I have only had to think about myself and I had never wanted to have children because I didn't feel like I could give enough of myself to them.

– Holly (38 years)

However, other women like Aleen described how they felt ready for motherhood in part because they believed they 'were' willing and ready to leave behind their own desires and make what they saw as the necessary sacrifices motherhood required. Furthermore, they described being willing to make these sacrifices knowing, or at least believing, that they would not resent such decisions in the future.

I have travelled a lot. In the work I have done a lot of stuff, been to a lot of places, seen a lot of things. I feel like I have experienced a lot of life, so it doesn't bother me that I won't be out every Saturday night down the pub, so in that respect I kind of feel I am ready.

– Aleen (35 years)

I don't have that feeling, like if I have a baby and I can't go to a party for two years – who cares? I am partied out! I have visited 40 countries; I am not going to feel like I am sacrificing by having a child.

– Claudia (41 years)

I am 41, I have travelled enough, I would be happy if I didn't have a foreign holiday for the next 10 years. I earn substantially more money than I did when I was 31, I have got a lot more patience than I had when I was younger, and I feel I have gone out enough been to parties; I am really quite ready to change my lifestyle to have a child rather than feel any resentment about that.

– Patricia (41 years)

The participants' expectation to engage in intensive mothering was heavily mediated by their socio-economic status, their high levels of education and the fact that many had come from privileged middle-class backgrounds. Furthermore, as the participants themselves noted, their older age had also brought them greater financial and professional security which would enable them to perform parenthood in a way that would not have been available to them earlier in their lives. However, to achieve the ideals of intensive mothering, to have the time, energy and resources to invest in motherhood, the participants also required a committed partner equally engaged in fatherhood (Fox, 2009).

Having a partner fully committed to parenthood and for parenthood to be a mutual desire and joint endeavour was therefore very important to all the participants. However, whilst by freezing their eggs the participants hoped to keep the option of genetic motherhood with a partner open in the future, many had considered alternative means by which they could, and may one day need to, pursue motherhood.

4.2. Women's Attitudes towards Single Motherhood via Sperm Donation

Many of the participants described spending a significant amount of time, often months or even years, considering whether to undergo social egg freezing. Aware of their advancing age many of the participants also investigated and considered other routes to motherhood before as well as after engaging with the technology. These alternative routes to motherhood included co-parenting, fostering and adoption, and single motherhood via sperm donation. The use of sperm donation to achieve solo motherhood is often referred to as 'single motherhood by choice' (SMC) which compared to 'single motherhood by circumstance' is when the woman knows that she will, at least initially, parent a child without a partner (Graham & Braverman, 2012). There are several routes a woman may take to achieve SMC: she could pursue pregnancy through natural conception, via donor insemination at a clinic, self-insemination with a known or anonymous donor, as well as through adoption or fostering (Hertz, 2006; Pakizegi, 2012). Whilst the latter options are sometimes perceived as the morally superior routes to single motherhood (Morrissette, 2008), research indicates that the most common method is via sperm donation (Jadva, Badger, Morrissette, & Golombok, 2009). Indeed, since the UK Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act Association 2008 relaxed the rules enabling clinics to more easily treat single women with donor sperm, the number of SMC has risen sharply (Golombok, Zadeh, Imrie, Smith, & Freeman, 2016; Graham, 2012).

Single mothers by choice often share a very similar demographic profile to users of social egg freezing. They are most often heterosexual, in their late 30s and 40s, highly educated and financially independent (Graham & Braverman, 2012). Furthermore, like users of social egg freezing, single mothers by choice often only turn to IVF technologies (in their case, sperm donation) to conceive when they believe that they have very limited prospects of finding a partner with whom to have a child before the end of their fertility (Graham, Braverman, 2012). Indeed, research shows that most single mothers by choice would have preferred to have had a child in the context of a secure, loving relationship (Bock, 2000; Hertz, 2006; Jadva et al., 2009). As such, whilst the terminology 'single mothers by choice' infers that women have chosen to pursue motherhood by donated sperm, many only attempt this route to motherhood as a last resort due to their lack of a suitable partner (Murray & Golombok, 2005). Several participants in the present research stated that prior to undergoing social egg freezing they had considered pursuing single motherhood through a variety of

routes, including sperm donation and adoption. Yet at the time of freezing their eggs these women were not willing to relinquish the possibility of sharing genetic parenthood with a partner and thus rejected such options in favour of egg freezing. For many of them, social egg freezing was a means by which they could delay making any decisions about how to go about pursuing motherhood in the present, instead hoping that they would become a mother in the future with a partner.

The women who participated in this research had engaged with egg freezing as recently as a few weeks prior to the interview taking place and as much as seven years earlier and as such held a broad spectrum of experiences in relation to the technology. Twenty-six of the participants were single at the time of freezing their eggs; however, several of them had since entered into new relationships and had begun to pursue motherhood with these new partners. Despite the shared desire of all the participants to find a partner and potentially pursue motherhood, over two-thirds of the sample ($n = 20$) were still single. When asked, seven of these participants stated they were considering pursuing single motherhood via sperm donation; four of these women stated they were actively pursuing the procedure currently or would be doing so in the very near future; and one additional woman (Leona) had already had a daughter using donor sperm. Of the remaining participants, five stated that they might consider single motherhood in the future, five said they would not and two participants stated that they were unsure of whether they would want to become a single mother. The most common reason provided by the women as to why they would not want to use donor sperm to conceive was because they still wanted to have a child with a partner as part of a committed relationship, and believed they still had time to do so.

I don't think I'd be a single parent by choice, raising a family is very much something that I would want to do with somebody.

— Effsie (40 years)

I come from quite a traditional background. I had always thought I would raise a child with somebody else, with a male partner, and that whole conception of what life would be like; having a child by myself without a partner was just too big a question.

— Ellen (45 years)

Other factors which led the participants to reject the possibility of single motherhood included the perceived emotional, physical and financial challenges of bringing up a child alone. This led some of the participants to suggest that to become a mother via sperm donation they would first need to move closer to their own families or close friends in order to access the support they believed they would require once the child was born. As a result, for several of these women their proximity to their own mothers and extended family, and whether

they were able to (or wanted to) move, was integral to whether they felt they would be able to become a single mother.

Financially it would be quite hard, and I would probably have to move back to New Zealand and my whole lifestyle would have to change [...] I would move back probably to be closer to my mum and dad. Where they live in New Zealand is quite a small town and to be closer to my sister [...] I think you need someone who you can just leave the baby with, that you can really rely on, and that really is a mother, sister or partner.

– Claire (41 years)

I wanted to move somewhere where I could create a more of an environment where it would be more feasible for me to do it on my own rather than in (home city). I would rather be somewhere which is more community focused and I would have more support.

– Lacey (40 years)

However, for some women, particularly those who had ageing parents, the possibility of single motherhood seemed less viable.

I thought about having a child alone, but I don't really have much support from my parents [as] they are too old to take the baby for a while and so I probably wouldn't be able to do it on my own without an au pair or a nanny.

– Mary (49 years)

I do think that maybe if I had a different family setting, like if I had a family that was really, really supportive of what I was doing then who knows, maybe I would decide maybe I would be a single parent [...] but yeah, I just don't have that relationship with my mum.

– Effsie (40 years)

Thus, the participants appeared to highly value the support that they believed wider kinship and familial networks could provide, and without access to such networks did not perceive single motherhood via sperm donation to be possible. Other concerns the participants raised included whether they had the financial resources they believed they would require to pursue SMC, particularly if they may need to buy-in the support of a third party such as nanny or au pair to help in the care of the child.

In addition to considering the practicalities of SMC, several of the participants also suggested that it was in the best interests of a child to grow up with both a mother and a father who were committed to one another, and as

such, by using donor sperm to conceive they may be being 'selfish' by depriving their child of a father.

I also wondered whether it was, it's maybe a selfish thing to do, to want to have a child of just me.

— Preeti (37 years)

I personally I grew up in a very dysfunctional family and I don't ever want to bring a child into just a single-parent household and that's just my decision. I mean we don't know, people get divorced all the time, but I would want for it to start knowing I was in a committed relationship with the child's father first you know.

— Charlotte (42 years)

I know people have single-parent families, and maybe I will end up doing that, but my ideal would be to have both sets of parents looking after the child as a unit.

— Aleen (35 years)

However, as Charlotte and several other participants noted, they could be in a relationship with a male partner and have a child and that partnership could still result in an acrimonious separation or divorce with the resulting negative effects on the child. This led Rachel and Claire to note the potential benefits of using donor sperm to conceive, including how it could enable them to meet a partner in the future who could one day take on the role of stepfather to a child by filling the vacuum left by the donor.

With donor sperm, if you do meet someone after (having the child), then that child doesn't really have a father, which could be easier for a male coming in to your life.

— Claire (41 years)

To be honest, it's much better to use donor sperm and then meet your partner later on in life than it is to, sorry, with the risk of not wanting to sound really graphic, but getting knocked up on a Saturday night by a stranger who you've got no information about [...] or you have a failed relationship with someone and you end up being with him for two years and then you break up because it was never really right between you. To be honest I think it's actually more sensible and more fair to the child and to yourself to not risk it. I wouldn't want to be divorced, I mean that would be even worse [...] because (with a donor) there's no ex-husband around, there's nobody that you have to share that child with, there's nobody that every other weekend you've got to

manage that, or you've got to have potentially a difficult relationship with them, or things go wrong or legal fights or anything like that. And for the potential man who takes on a child, it must be a lot easier because that child doesn't have a father. So, therefore, if they're able to step into that role then fabulous, you know?

— Rachel (34 years)

Such comments from the participants reflect the findings of previous research which have shown that whilst women may enter into solo motherhood knowing that they are going to parent without a partner, for many women single motherhood is regarded as a temporary status, with many solo mothers anticipating or hoping to form relationships with male partners in the future (Murray & Golombok, 2005). Nevertheless, women using donor sperm to conceive at least initially embark on parenthood alone, and the participants in this research shared the concerns of other single mothers by choice about the effect of such a decision on their potential child.

There are a lot of decisions to be made about that (use of donor sperm) and is it the right thing to do? Particularly when I see my little niece and nephew with their dad I just know how important that for them it is to have a female and male (role model) but then you know you start thinking that well if you've got good, like if you have got good men in your life that could be more like father figures.

— Claire (41 years)

Thus, contrary to the view that the decision to pursue single motherhood via sperm donation is a selfish and reckless choice, this research like others (Graham & Braverman, 2012; Jadva et al., 2009) found that the women who pursued or were considering pursuing this option often spent a great deal of time considering the implications of such a choice for both themselves and their potential offspring.

Research has suggested that children born and raised within single-mother households may show higher levels of aggression, anxiety and depression than children who live with stable married parents (Osborne & McLanahan, 2007). However, research indicates that these negative outcomes are most often linked to higher levels of financial instability and stress experienced by such families (McLanahan & Beck, 2010). By contrast, research examining the outcomes of children born to single mothers by choice have found them to have no greater risk of emotional, behavioural or psychological problems than those born into two-parent families (Chan, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998; Murray & Golombok, 2005; Weissenberg, Landau, & Madgar, 2007). Indeed, research by Golombok et al. (2016) identified similar levels of parenting quality in solo mothers as married or cohabiting mothers and identified lower levels of conflict between mother and child in solo-mother families. This led Golombok to conclude that family process and dynamics were more important than family structure on

children's adjustment. In the light of such evidence, it is possible to see how the pursuit of single motherhood may be preferable for some women compared to searching for a partner in the face of dwindling fertility.

Research by Graham (2012) examining the experiences of SMC identified how the dual pressure of finding a partner whilst facing advancing age-related fertility decline led some of her research participants to report that they had found 'dating' difficult as their desire to pursue motherhood meant that they judged men not as potential partners but as potential fathers, sometimes forcing the discussion of parenthood very early in relationships. This led some women to deem the search for a partner incompatible with the realities of dwindling fertility. Graham described how some of her participants perceived their 'dating lives' to be longer than their reproductive lives and therefore chose to pursue motherhood alone hopeful that they may find a partner in the future without the pressure of declining fertility interfering with the process of relationship building. Similar parallels between the findings of Graham (2012) and this study are unpacked and explored in more detail in Chapter 7.

Despite the perceived benefits of single motherhood via sperm donation, solo mothers and women considering this route to motherhood have reported the decision to become a single mother by choice to be characterised by much ambivalence and uncertainty (Graham, 2012; Graham, 2018). Like these women, the participants in this research were not only ambivalent about engaging with social egg freezing (see Chapter 6 where this is discussed further) but also found the possibility of single motherhood via sperm donation difficult to consider. One participant, Leona, underwent a round of intrauterine insemination (IUI) with donor sperm shortly after freezing her eggs. She described the decision to pursue SMC as a 'battle' which was emotionally challenging not only due to the potential ramifications for herself and her child but also because she described there being a degree of 'stigma' associated with 'having to have a child' through sperm donation. She told me:

I really battled with that yeah, it's the whole stigma of I can't believe this has happened to me [...] the fact that I was single for so long, number one, and then this issue of, are you actually telling me that I have to have a child this way? It seemed so just really weird to have to say that the way I conceived my child was through using sperm which got couriered across America.

— Leona (39 years)

The emotional strain and disappointment associated with the possible use of donor sperm were present in the accounts of other participants such as Aleen and Amber who commented that they too would find conceiving with donor sperm hard to 'accept' as it would make them feel like a 'failure'.

It would be hard for me to accept that I am going to have to get and use a sperm donor or do it with a friend or something like that. I would feel like such a failure if I had to do something like that.

— Aleen (35 years)

It was really like, because there is a real, oh I'm getting all emotional talking about it, there is a real quite sense I feel of failure about using donated sperm personally.

— Amber (39 years)

This sense of failure appeared to be linked to the sadness brought on by closing down the possibility of pursuing genetic parenthood with a partner which was a particular construction of parenthood which the participants had long desired. Furthermore, participants reported feeling a sense of loss, of grief, as well as 'shame', as Melanie described it, for departing in such a way from heteronormative lifecourse expectations of marriage and motherhood.

I feel a little bit of shame about the whole thing and I was thinking about that, and I was like why do I feel this way, and it's really, I think it's a societal issue. When you are in your mid-30s and you are not married everyone's like: what's wrong with you?

— Melanie (36 years)

I think everybody goes through a bit of a grieving process if they go forward with that (donor conception) and it's certainly not the sort of thing I would have dreamed about when I was a little girl.

— Rachel (34 years)

Whilst, as Rachel notes, motherhood via donor sperm was not something she 'would have dreamed about' as a child, SMC does nevertheless offer some women the possibility of salvaging at least some of the nuclear family ideal they imagined for themselves, especially if they meet a partner in the future (Graham, 2012). Furthermore, the often highly planned and considered nature of their child's conception, as well as the class and financial privilege of many solo mothers, means that these women are often able to align themselves as much as possible with the nuclear family ideal and engage in intensive mothering practices often seen as indicative of good parenting.

This chapter has explored how the participants' expectations of engaging in practices of intensive motherhood led them to perceive parenting as an all-consuming pursuit requiring high levels of personal sacrifice and altruism. It has noted how such a perception of parenting led some women to suggest that they were not ready to become a mother but how for others a willingness to make such sacrifices was seen as indicative of their suitability for motherhood. Whilst a small number of the participants disclosed ambivalent attitudes towards becoming a mother, this research has identified how it was most often the women's lack of a partner with whom they could pursue parenthood which had prevented them from yet having children. In addition to exploring women's attitudes and intentions with regard to motherhood, this chapter has also examined the alternative models of family building women considered drawing on in their pursuit of parenthood. In particular, this chapter has examined women's attitudes towards single motherhood via sperm donation, noting how

for some such a route to motherhood was characterised by much ambivalence and uncertainty, with others describing sadness, disappointment and even shame associated with the use of donor sperm.

It appeared that women drew on egg freezing not only to have more time to find a partner but also to allow them to put off pursuing motherhood in circumstances which they perceived as less than ideal, such as via the use of donor sperm.

Thus, women's use of the technology was not just about enabling genetic motherhood in the future but appeared to be employed by women almost as a temporary measure to prevent them from needing to use sperm donation to conceive in the present. Thus, egg freezing as a form of fertility extension was about maintaining the possibility of pursuing the particular construction of motherhood and kin making that they most desired: genetic motherhood with a chosen partner who is also genetically related to the child. It is important to therefore note how technologies of egg freezing which 'conserves' genetic relatedness work to valorise heteronormative ideals of the 'traditional' family to the exclusion of other 'non-traditional' family forms such as single parenthood or co-parenting arrangements. Furthermore, like its parent technology IVF before it, fertility extension technologies such as egg freezing which have the potential to enable self-donation also reify the gold standard of genetic parenthood over and above other forms of parenthood such as via reproductive donation, adoption or step-parenting and as seen in this research curb the enthusiasm of women considering these alternative routes to motherhood.