Challenging the stereotype?

An analysis of the social and educational outcomes of the children of lone parents in the UK.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature: ....

Acknowledgements

Summary

This thesis presents the results of a mixed methods study investigating the truth behind media claims that lone parenthood is detrimental to the social and educational outcomes of children. The research is informed by intersectionality theory, which I seek to apply to both methods used in the study, as well as theories about the power of the State from Marxist theorists Althusser and Gramsci. The first part of the study is a discourse analysis of how lone parenthood is discussed in the media, using articles referring to lone parents in *The Times* and *The Guardian* in 1993 and 2013. The analysis shows that while policy and media contexts use generic terminology to refer to lone parents, the more specific focus of the negative discourse on lone parenthood is on white, unmarried, young mothers who live on benefits and in social housing. These findings are reflected in the selected variables for the second phase of the research.

The second part of the research investigates whether there are any differences in the outcomes of the children of lone mothers when compared to peers who have not experienced lone motherhood. The outcomes studied are two subscales from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and Key Stage 4 (GCSE) results. The United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Survey and British Household Panel Survey datasets are used for the analysis, together with linked National Pupil Database data. A series of multiple regression models investigate any association between lone motherhood and the outcome measures, with the inclusion of covariates which mirror the key identity factors uncovered in the discourse analysis. The models are additionally run controlling for demographic factors such as maternal education, household size and young person's age and gender, with the addition of the IDACI and free school meals indicators for the educational outcomes analysis.

The results of the quantitative analysis show that while there are initially some differences between the outcomes of children of lone mothers and their peers whose mothers have not experienced lone parenthood, this association lessens as additional factors are added into the model. Additionally, of the factors deemed important in the media discourse, marital status is not significant in any models, and maternal age in all but the Total Difficulties Score. Ethnicity is not significant for social outcomes, but is for educational outcomes, with White children performing worse at GCSE than children from other ethnic groups. In all models, social housing is associated with worse outcomes; that is, children whose mothers have ever lived in social housing achieved lower grades at GCSE and showed more behavioural difficulties than their

contemporaries whose mothers had never lived in social housing, whether they were lone mothers or not.

The possible reasons for these results are discussed in the final chapter, focussing on how lone mothers are unfairly blamed in media and policy circles for the antisocial behaviour and educational attainment of children in modern society. The study shows children from lower income families have poorer social and educational outcomes. Women, who are already disadvantaged due to an inherent gender bias in society, are at a greater risk of economic instability and uncertainty, particularly women who are single-handedly raising families. In conclusion, there is no evidence for the pervasive and perpetual stereotype of lone motherhood as a deficit model of parenting; poverty is more important in determining young people's social and educational outcomes.

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Introduction

> "(I)t may not be true that single parenting inevitably leads to delinquency and crime. But if everyone believes it to be so, and punishes single parents accordingly, this will have real consequences for both parents and children and will become 'true' in terms of its real effect, even if in some absolute sense it has never been conclusively proven." (Hall, 1997; p. 49)

This statement, made twenty years ago, is as relevant today as it was then. In the English riots in the summer of 2011, lone parents were blamed for the violence, assumed by some to be caused by a neglect of parental duty (Brown, Sherman and Asthana, 2011). In recent months, lone parents have even been blamed for the rise in terrorism in the UK (Gibb, 2017).

Several factors have combined to situate lone parents negatively in a 'deficit model' of parenting (Canvin, Marttila, Burström and Whitehead, 2009). Firstly, a dominant middle-class discourse in the media and in politics 'others' alternative ways of being, such as those of the working-class (Gillies, 2007; Hollingworth and Williams, 2009). Secondly, late modern theories of individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) and neoliberalism have enabled a discursive shift from societal rights and responsibilities to "a neoliberal programme of individualization, autonomous self-hood and self-responsibilization for either success or failure" (Ringrose, 2007; p.480). That is, individuals are portrayed as responsible for their own successes and failures, with little consideration for the inequality of advantage occasioned by people's starting points in life. Instead, successive governments, including Blair's New Labour (Tyler, 2013) and the Conservatives have espoused the myth of meritocracy, that your future does not depend on where you start in life (Cameron, 2012; May, 2016). The result of the meritocracy discourse is that the blame for social problems is placed on individuals, while socio-economic conditions are ignored as irrelevant to an individual's life chances. The 'deficit model' consists of a homogenous and unfair image of lone parents as living on benefits and producing and nurturing future generations of social problems (Social Justice Policy Group, 2007). Meanwhile, marriage is championed by the Government and incentivised with tax breaks (Probert and Callan, 2011) while being evidenced as more stable than cohabitation (Wilson and Stuchbury, 2010), which is on the rise (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2013). The dominant discourse of the nuclear family as an ideal norm positions lone parenthood as an undesirable and deviant 'other' which in turn results in stigma and the stereotyping of a heterogeneous population (Wilson and Huntingdon, 2006).

Lone parenthood is not a modern-day phenomenon, linked to the decline in marriage and the increase of individualization and choice in recent decades. Historically, women who had

children 'out of wedlock', together with their 'illegitimate' children, have either hidden within family myths of daughters growing up as sisters or were sent away to spare the family their supposed shame, with lower-class children often adopted by middle-class married couples (Thane and Evans, 2012). In more recent times, with greater variety in family formation and more acceptance of cohabitation as an alternative to marriage, with or without children, such terminology and views seem outdated and out of place. While there was a substantial increase in the number of lone parent families from seven percent in the 1970s to twenty percent in the 1990s,the proportion has barely changed since then (see Figure 1), with the number varying between 1.6 and 2 million families (ONS, 2016). The same period has seen a decline in the number of married couples with dependent children (from 70 to 60 percent), but this is almost entirely due to a rise in cohabiting parents rather than of lone parent families.

Figure 1: Percentage of families with dependent children by family type, 1996 - 2016
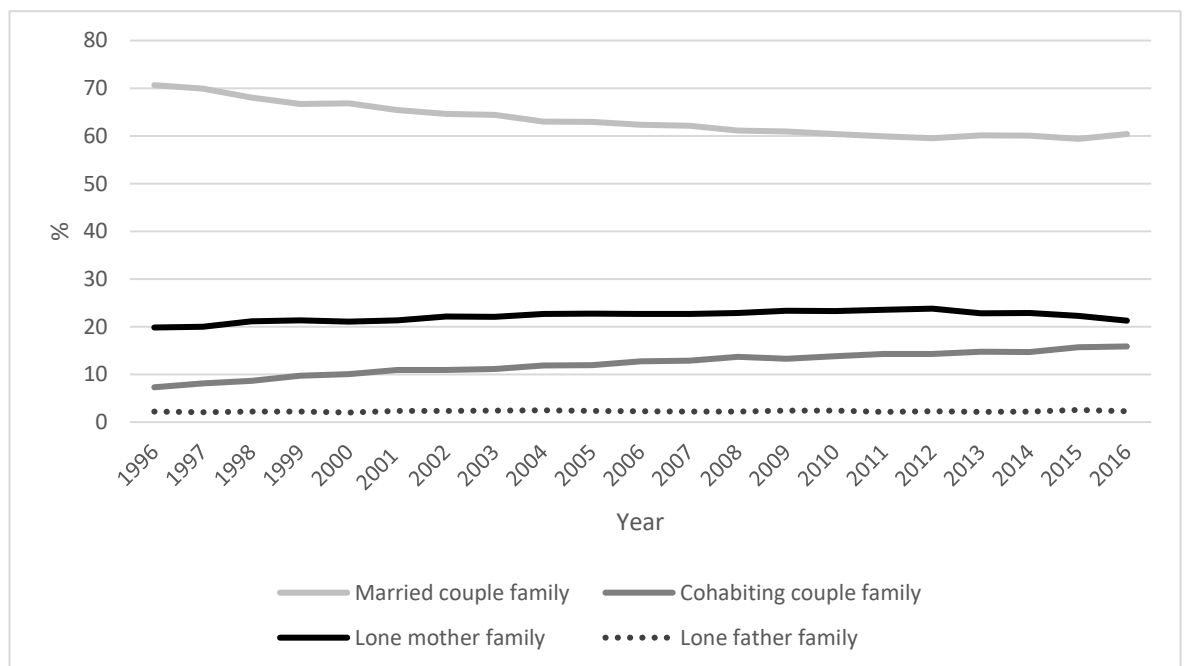
Source: ONS, 2016

However, lone parents remain highly stigmatised in the United Kingdom (Hinton-Smith, 2015) to the extent that lone parents themselves make a concerted effort to self-identify as 'good mothers' to distance themselves from the 'bad' sort (Phoenix, 1991; May, 2008; Mollidor, 2013). Similarly, the children of lone parents may choose not to be forthcoming about their parents' status (Gagnon, 2016), conscious of the shame and stigma attached. Where this stigma is internalised, it can have a detrimental effect on the children and young people

concerned (Chapple, 2009). One of the most surprising elements of undertaking this thesis was the number of times I found myself summarizing my subject matter to a fellow student or a friend, to be greeted by the response, "Oh, so you are writing about me!"; I had previously been unaware that any of these people were the children of lone mothers. In the 21st Century, it seems archaic that bringing up a child on one's own, especially as a mother, is something that not only the mother is made to feel shame about, but also their children. Why this was still the case and what I could possibly do to shed light on the matter were what propelled me to embark on this thesis.

A key factor is the pervasive, negative and stigmatizing discourse that emanates from journalists and politicians; a discourse that not only reflects but reinforces the opinions of some sections of society as to the impropriety of lone parenthood and in doing so, self-perpetuates. The status of lone parenthood is seen by some not only to endanger the morals of society by not following the conventional ideal of dual parenthood, but to endanger society itself through the breeding of the "delinquents and denizens of our Borstals" (Keith Joseph, quoted in *The Guardian*, 1993a). There are two main issues with the prevailing discourse on lone parenthood. The first is its homogeneity, the second, its lack of empirical foundation. I shall look at each of these in turn before outlining the content of the thesis.

Firstly, lone parents are often discussed in such generic terms by politicians, journalists or even academics, that all lone parents and their families appear to have the same experiences (May, 2006). Yet, lone parents are a heterogeneous social grouping (Klett-Davies, 2016), differing by factors such as gender, ethnicity, social class, age and cause. While most lone parents in the United Kingdom are women, men currently comprise ten percent of lone parent families with dependent children (ONS, 2016). However, there are several key differences between the average characteristics of male and female lone parents. Men are twice as likely as women to be lone parents due to widowhood (Gingerbread, 2017). This difference in the causality of lone parenthood results in lone fathers being older than lone mothers; with an average age of 45 compared with 38 for women (Gingerbread, 2017). Paternal employment rates are higher than those of mothers, and fathers are more likely to work full-time (ONS, 2017c). This coupled with the fact that employment rates for all lone parents increase with the age of the youngest child makes it more likely that lone fathers are in full-time employment (Chzhen and Bradshaw, 2012). While a change in circumstances may entail an increased dependency on informal or formal childcare to enable his full-time employment to continue, he will generally be in a far better position economically than a lone mother of a primary or pre-school-age

child, half of whom are not employed and many of whom are employed part-time (ONS, 2017c).

Despite advances in gender parity, bringing up children is still seen in the UK as a primarily female role (Hinton-Smith, 2015; Park et al., 2013). This has major implications for how lone parents are viewed: as lone fathers are seen to be taking on a non-normative role of child-rearing, they tend to receive greater support from family and community in helping them with their (female) task (Coles, 2015). In contrast, lone mothers are expected, as women, to bring up their children, so do not tend to receive this support. Lone mothers are also more likely to have younger children (Klett-Davies, 2016) and therefore have taken time out of the workforce to raise them. The nurture of young children is regarded as an appropriate role for mothers in society's eyes, that is, until the mothers are without a partner. Then their role is problematic, as it is now seen as imperative that they provide for their family and not rely on the State for support. Yet as I show in Chapter 2, returning to work after a career break, in a job flexible enough to work around school hours and respond to child illnesses, school holidays and other unforeseen circumstances is hard enough as a second wage earner; it is nigh on impossible as the sole wage earner in the household, especially in a job that pays enough for a family to survive (Hinton-Smith, 2015).

While initially I had intended to focus on all lone parents, whether fathers or mothers, the more I read about the gendered roles that persist in society and the differing circumstances of men and women who are lone parents, the more I was struck by the truth of Hobson's (1994) observation that lone mothers are the litmus test of the position of women, and specifically mothers, within UK society. Despite gradual changes in societal perceptions in the female/male division of labour (Young, 2017), there is still more progress to be made in the extent to which these perceptions are being realised. A gender pay gap still exists in the UK (Graham and McQuaid, 2014) from those in the lowest paid jobs, where women have a larger proportion of both full and part-time jobs (ONS, 2016a) to highly paid media roles where top female presenters do not command the same earnings as their male counterparts (Ruddick, 2017). When children are involved, the picture is even worse for women and for lone mothers worse still: double the proportion of lone mothers work lower skilled jobs than couple mothers (ONS, 2014). They are more likely to drop out of the labour force for several years while their children are pre-school age or to reduce the number of hours they work, both of which incur an economic impact not just temporarily, but with far-reaching consequences for future career and earning potential (Young, 2017) and even a reduced pension. Men on average earn 50% more in their pension than women (Prudential, 2011). Women suffer greater economic

hardship post-divorce than men, taking about 5 years for their income to recover to pre-divorce levels, longer if there are young children in the household (Mortelmans and Jansen, 2010).

The second issue with the mainstream discourse is that it is not true. The prevailing themes of the lone parenthood discourse are about 'bad' mothers who scrounge off the state (Graham and McQuaid, 2014), having babies to get council houses (Carabine, 2001). and more babies to get bigger houses or claim more benefits (Gillborn, 2010). Yet as will become apparent in Chapter 4, at the same time as such pronouncements were being made by Conservative politicians in 1993, research and Cabinet reports were being produced that discounted each of these negative portraits (Brindle, 1993b). Unfortunately, by then, the discourse was established and has persisted to this day (Carroll, 2017).

The discourse surrounding the children of lone parents is equally harsh, portrayed as the delinquents and teenage mums of the next generation, with the blame placed squarely on the lone parents in question (Mann and Roseneil, 1999; De Benedictis, 2012). Yet, as I will show in the next chapter, the empirical evidence on the truth of these claims is mixed. Some researchers identify other demographic factors as more relevant predictors of adverse outcomes (McMunn et al., 2001; Collishaw et al., 2007), while others claim that the mere existence of more children of lone parent families in a school increased the risk of a young person exhibiting more delinquent behaviour whether they come from a lone parent family themselves (Anderson, 2002). Similarly, there are studies which have shown that the length of time spent in lone parenthood has a bearing on the outcomes for children (Amato, 2005) still others have refuted this, saying that stability in any family form leads to more positive outcomes for children than those who have experienced many changes (Hampden-Thompson and Galindo, 2015).

I felt that a focus on lone mothers would allow me to look in greater detail at the multiple identity factors of lone mothers as they are portrayed in the media discourse and to discover if such discourse had any foundation or if other factors than family structure were more highly associated with better and worse outcomes for their children. Choosing to interrogate the discourse and empirical evidence on lone mothers and their children rather than all lone parents fitted with my feminist standpoint on the status and treatment of women in modern society, as well as recognising the gender bias inherent in the political and media discourse on lone parenthood evidenced thus far, in which lone fathers are largely absent. It was additionally a pragmatic choice. The respective numbers of lone mothers and lone fathers in

the longitudinal datasets would not have led to any meaningful comparisons, while the discourse analysis (see Chapter 4) on which I then based my quantitative analysis, reveals the media's tendency to conflate lone motherhood and lone parenthood. For the remainder of the study I will therefore focus on the experiences of lone mothers and their children, since they are differently impacted by the gendered nature of societal expectations and judgments than lone fathers.

The research questions I wanted to answer then were twofold in response to these two key issues. Firstly, what lies behind the homogenous discourse on lone parenthood presented by the media? That is, is it as homogenous as it first appears, or are certain 'types' of lone parents the specific focus of such discourse? Secondly, does the media discourse have any foundation? Does empirical investigation corroborate or refute the stereotypes propagated in the media?

To answer these questions, I set out to conduct a discourse analysis of newspaper articles from 1993 and from twenty years later, in 2013. The rationale for choosing 1993 as the first year of interest is that it has been dubbed, the 'year of the lone parent' due to an increased policy and media interest in the number of lone parent families (Mann and Roseneil, 1994). 2013 marks the end of a period where the numbers of lone parents had plateaued at around two million (ONS, 2014), but also the year in which families were back in the media spotlight considering debates around the benefit cap and welfare reform (Jensen and Tyler, 2015). By dissecting the media discourse through an intersectional lens, I hoped to uncover the true identity of the media discourse and use the most pertinent identity factors from such analysis in quantitative analysis of two largescale datasets, the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS). I chose to focus on a measure of social outcomes, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and a measure of educational outcomes, Key Stage 4 results, to determine if these children and young people were being negatively affected by their experience of lone motherhood.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. CHAPTER 1 reviews the literature on lone motherhood, looking first at how lone motherhood is and has been defined in the last century and the changing social context in which this has occurred. I discuss the way lone motherhood is positioned as opposite to the ideal of the nuclear family and the relevance of Foucault's discourse of deviance and othering to lone motherhood. I then look at how previous researchers and sociologists have framed lone motherhood; in particular the different typologies that have been set up to understand lone motherhood, as well as the way that lone motherhood is used in sociological research as the 'other' to compare to the 'norm' of the

nuclear family. I next discuss issues of stereotyping and stigma around lone motherhood before outlining previous empirical research on the social and educational outcomes of the children of lone mothers. I look in more detail at some of the identity factors that influence the lived experience of lone mothers, such as their gender, ethnicity, class and causes of lone motherhood before outlining the relevant literature on lone mothers in the media discourse.

CHAPTER 2 sets out the social and policy context relating to lone parents from 1991 to the present day (2017). This period mirrors the time during which the data for both the discourse and quantitative analysis were collected and analysed and therefore situates the analysis that follows in its social context. The policy chapter focuses on those policies which have had the greatest impact on lone parents and their children or which have been directly aimed at them, especially under the Blair government. I look at these policies with reference to the financial constraints in which lone mothers live and the changes to the welfare state which affect them. I outline factors which can cause increased instability in the lives of lone mothers and their children, for example housing policy and the introduction of Universal Credit.

CHAPTER 3 introduces the methodology, methods and data used for this mixed methods study. I first discuss the main theories which were relevant to my understanding and standpoint on the topic and for my choice of methods and data. These include Marxist theorists such as Althusser and Gramsci as well as the feminist theory of intersectionality. I then discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a mixed methods study, before outlining each of the selected methods in turn. I introduce the sources selected for the discourse analysis and the sampling process followed to create the analytical sample, before detailing my analytical approach to the discourse analysis stage. Finally, I introduce the quantitative analysis which has two foci: social and educational outcomes. Two interrelated datasets are used to undertake the analyses, so I outline the two datasets used for the quantitative analysis, followed by the process and decisions taken in my sample selection for each dataset. I define the key variables to be used in each analysis before setting out my analytical strategy, which is broadly similar across both datasets and analyses.

CHAPTERS 4 to 6 form the data analytical core of the thesis. CHAPTER 4 presents the results of the analysis of the media discourse using an intersectional lens. I outline the results for each of the key identity factors in turn, that is, gender, ethnicity, social class, economic factors, age and causes of lone parenthood. For each of these I illustrate my findings with relevant quotes from newspaper articles from both sources, *The Times* and *The Guardian*. I present any differences between the two sources as well as any changes over the twenty-year timeframe. I

present any instances of multiple usage of the selected identity factors before summarising how the findings taken together depict a certain type of lone parent in the media discourse. Finally, I explain how these results translated into the selection of variables for the subsequent quantitative analyses.

CHAPTER 5 presents the results of a series of analyses of the social outcomes measure for young people: two subscales of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, the prosocial score and the Total Difficulties Score. I begin with exploratory analyses of the key dependent variables, progressing to bivariate analysis of the dependent variable and main independent variable of lone motherhood. The focus of the chapter is on presenting the results of a series of multiple regression models for each of the SDQ subscales. The first model is parsimonious with the inclusion of the key independent variable. The second introduces the key identity factor variables singly then together. The third model is like Model 2, but with the additional inclusion of key background characteristics. Finally, Model 4 attempts to mirror the intersectionality of the discourse analysis with a series of models including interactions between lone motherhood and the identity factor variables.

In CHAPTER 6 I present the findings of analyses for the Key Stage 4 results of the young people in the dataset. The structure of this chapter follows that of Chapter 5, beginning with univariate and bivariate analyses of the key dependent variable of Key Stage 4 scores and independent variable, lone motherhood. I then present the results of a series of multiple regression models, which proceed as for the social outcomes analyses presented in Chapter 5.

The key findings of these three result chapters are summarised in CHAPTER 7 before discussing the results both in the context of previous research and the theoretical context outlined in previous chapters. I explore some possible explanations for the findings and what the findings may tell us about the social, educational and political contexts in which we live. Finally, I draw conclusions about the research study, discuss policy implications in several key areas of policy before reviewing the limitations of the study and suggesting possible avenues for future research.

Chapter 1: Literature review

The purpose of this review is firstly, to problematize the conceptualisation of lone motherhood and the ways in which it has been framed in the literature. Further, it will assess the empirical literature in the United Kingdom on the predicted outcomes of the children of lone mothers, before addressing issues around stigma and stereotyping. Finally, it will discuss the identity factors which impact on the lived experiences of lone motherhood and how they combine to compound disadvantage.

1. Defining lone parenthood(s)

Lone parent. Single mother. One parent family. Female headed household. Single custodial father. Non-intact family. Non-traditional family. Divorced. Separated. Widowed. Lone parenthood means many things to many people and hides a more diverse array of family types than it suggests. The Collins English Dictionary (2014) defines lone parent as "a parent who is not married and does not have a partner, who is bringing up a child or children" yet the diversity of families that come under the official term of 'lone parent family' is more far-reaching than this definition would imply. The reasons and causes of lone parenthood are multiple: divorce, bereavement, family breakdown or separation as well as children born to lone mothers (Cashmore, 1985). Wright and Jagger (1999) distinguish between 'lone mothers' who have experienced marital breakdown and 'single mothers' who are unmarried or never-married mothers although it is not clear from their research whether the women they refer to would make this distinction.

May (2006) suggests that we should be talking about lone motherhoods, such is the plurality of lone mothers' experiences, which differ by factors such as class, income and ethnicity singly and in combination. Not all lone parents are women, although they are still the overwhelming majority, with current estimates of the proportion of lone fathers at only ten percent (ONS, 2016). Given this small but extant proportion of lone fathers, it is surprising that researchers insist on exempting them from their discussions. For example, a paper by McKay refers throughout either to lone parents or to lone mothers, essentially equating lone parenthood with lone motherhood (McKay, 2003). Fathers appear in the study as either the father or ex-partner of the lone parent, yet their absence from the empirical research is unexplained. A recent report from the Policy Exchange on lone parenthood and employment contained not

one mention of lone fathers, although some data was presented specifically on lone mothers (Tinsley, 2014). If we are to recognise the heterogeneous nature of the lone parenthood population, we must acknowledge that lone fathers do exist, that their circumstances often differ markedly from those of lone mothers (Chzhen and Bradshaw, 2012) and be open about whether our research includes or excludes lone fathers from our exploration of lone parenthood. As I mentioned in the Introduction, while I had initially intended to talk about lone parenthoods, to emphasise the multiple different lived realities of people subsumed under a homogeneous label, it became apparent that my true interest lay with the experience of lone mothers and that this research would therefore take lone mothers and their children as its focus.

Classifying visible family structures is difficult enough, but some family types may exist below the radar of official data collection. One example is 'hidden' lone parents; lone parents who have moved back to the parental home either for economic or practical reasons (ONS, 2014c). Since the lone parents are not the household heads in these circumstances, the lone parent family becomes subsumed within a multi-generational household and therefore becomes invisible in official data collection, such as the decennial Census (ONS, 2014c). It seems that while family types are diversifying, official data are not in step with these trends and as a result neither is social policy.

Additionally, lone parenthood is not necessarily a static state. Families move in and out of lone parenthood, with the average length of time a child spends in a lone parent family estimated as between four and five years (Skew, 2009). A report from the Committee on One-Parent Families, set up in 1969 to investigate the situation of lone parent families in the UK, contains the observation that lone parent families are "an integral product of the normal working of the institution of marriage" (Committee on One-Parent Families, 1974, vol. 1; p.62). This statement appears to reveal both an acceptance of lone parent families as one of many possibilities of family composition and an inevitability about their existence as part of the framework of family breakdown and reconstitution. It is unfortunate that, decades later, the dominant discourse on lone parenthood does not reflect this openness.

As discussed in the introduction, the proportion of lone parent families has remained around 20-25 percent in the last two decades, although this period of stability follows a marked increase from seven percent of families with dependent children in the 1970s (Mooney, Oliver and Smith, 2009). However, the political and media discourses not only represent the nuclear family as being 'under threat' from the rise of less traditional family structures, but also

promote it as the exemplary model. As Chambers comments, "since 1950s…the family has been represented as both stable and deeply vulnerable" (Chambers, 2001; p.91). The key threat to marriage in the public discourse is not perceived as emanating from increasing numbers of cohabiting couples, but from lone parents, who, as we have seen, have not been encroaching on the territory of marriage over the last two decades (ONS, 2014). The fear that marriage will cease to exist as an institution because of the threat of lone parent families seems a disproportionate and inaccurate response while the discourse that the stable nuclear family is the only model for a successful society seems out of step with the actuality of modern times.

 The discourse of the disadvantage experienced by 'dadless families' (Social Justice Policy Group, 2007) for example, is targeted not at families where there are two mothers in a same sex partnership, but at female-headed single parent families. It is evidently not the absence of a father figure, but the absence of a second parent that is the issue; although there is no such discourse of disadvantage aimed at lone fathers. Similarly, research on family disruption and conflict has revealed the psychological effects of family breakdown and reconstitution on children (Reynolds et al., 2014), with little evidence to the contrary. Recent governments have developed policies and funds to tackle and even reverse relationship breakdown (Wilkinson, 2013; Centre for Social Justice, 2014) while marriage is promoted via tax breaks (Graham and McQuaid, 2014) and the legalisation of same-sex marriage (Wilkinson, 2013). Marriage is seen as key to improving outcomes; with a dismissal of the economic factors that may also have a role (Centre for Social Justice, 2014). The promotion of marriage as the normative 'bedrock' of society (UK Government, 2013) positions those who are not married as deficient in society's eyes.

Social theorists have commented on the increased fluidity of family forms and the diversifying nature of the family in modern times (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1992). Yet the multiplicity of family types is not a modern phenomenon. A history of the National Council for One Parent Families (now Gingerbread) catalogues multiple changes in family forms throughout the twentieth century, an era oft-cited as the 'golden age' of the nuclear family (Thane and Evans, 2012). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) are right to some extent that the individualization of society has led to more possible choices; families are fluid and a variety of options regarding cohabitation, marriage and child-rearing are now possible. They do not however engage with the idea that several of these family forms are presented as neither desirable nor beneficial to society.

Yet motherhood and fatherhood are not biological givens, but social constructs (Charles, 2003). Up until the nineteenth century, fathers were expected to nurture civic duty in their children and were responsible for their education and upbringing (Lupton and Barclay, 1997). The more modern construction of motherhood as a full-time (unpaid) caring role was imposed on working-class women as Britain became more industrialised, to enable children to leave the workforce and the breadwinner male to concentrate on his paid work (Charles, 2003). Consequently, women were placed in a subordinate position to their wage-earner husbands, dependent on him for financial security. In the post-war period, the welfare state was created, based on this breadwinner/carer partnership. Since then, women have re-entered the workforce, while often not being able to relinquish their responsibilities to the household (Young, 2017); as a result, women are left with a double burden of economic and household work, here as in many societies around the world (Walby, 1997). Even lone mothers of young children are expected to contribute to the economy, rather than bring up their children, with the threat of losing social benefits via a series of ever harsher sanctions if they do not seek work (Finn and Caseborne, 2012).

That the nuclear family remains the dominant ideal of modern society is evidenced by social policies advantaging the married couple, such as tax breaks and the repetition by policy makers and Conservative think tanks of marriage as "the most stable family form" (Centre for Social Justice, 2013; p.15). In the face of a changing societal mores, the way in which hegemonic masculinity can retain control over women is through the nuclear family (Connell, 1995); alternatives to this model present a threat and are therefore cast by the dominant power in society as deviant 'others'. The discourse of deviance was developed by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* (1981), with reference to society's treatment of homosexuals as deviant and perverse. This discourse is relevant to that of lone motherhood, since by choosing to live without a (sexual) partner, they too are perceived to be rejecting the norms of society and therefore labelled deviant or Other. Just as gay men might be situated as a threat to male heterosexuality and gay women as a threat to the future of society by not following the norms of societal reproduction, so too can lone mothers be seen as not fulfilling the normative role of wife expected of women, and mothers in particular (Social Justice Policy Group, 2007) and consequently be Othered. 'Othering' allows society to create boundaries between the acceptable and the non-acceptable, where acceptable behaviour conforms to the ideology of the dominant social group (Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin, 2010). Feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir (2009) and Judith Butler (1990) took up the Self/Other dichotomy in relation to gender, arguing that Western thought positions man as the subject and woman as

the other, with the result that she is always dependent on man and limited in her own freedom (Lloyd, 2007). Both Foucauldian and Feminist standpoints on normative behaviours have relevance to the discourse on lone motherhood.

In addition, the media and political discourse contributes to the positioning of lone mothers in British society. Foucault's writings on power invoked the power of discourse (Foucault, 1982), while his governmentality lectures referenced the "apparatuses of knowledge" employed by those in power (Foucault, 2003; p.38). I would argue that the media discourse in modern British society is an "apparatus of knowledge", a powerful tool owned by the dominant section of society, the white male middle-class. Since lone mothers are perceived as rejecting the discourse of hegemonic masculinity by asserting their independence from men, they are positioned as a threat to the norms of society (Klett-Davies, 2007) and consequently can be scapegoated for a range of social ills, such as nurturing future generations of deviant youth and teen parents (Rowlingson and McKay, 2005).

However, as Chambers (2001) asserts, it is not just politicians who view the nuclear family as the 'ideal' against which to measure all other family types. Even within sociology, the nuclear family is still the family formation most used by researchers as a reference category when investigating the differences in outcomes by family types. Some researchers differentiate between intact and non-intact families (Clarke and Joshi, 2003) where intact families comprise married or cohabiting birth parents, while non-intact families are lone or step families. Such a distinction serves to promote the stable two-parent family form over any other, including reconstituted families. Flouri (2004) extends the definition of non-intact families to include all families not headed by two biological parents.

2. Framing lone motherhood

Sociologists have framed lone motherhood in a variety of ways, ranging from 'choice' through 'social problem or threat' to 'alarm'. Fox Harding (1993) proposed a typology of the perceptions of lone parents as lying on a continuum: from alarm through concern and beneficial effects to liberation. In response, Duncan and Edwards suggested four categories of social threat, social problem, lifestyle choice and 'escaping patriarchy' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999).

The social threat discourse has been prominent since the 1980s with lone mothers cast as amoral and idle, as well as threatening the stability of society by rejecting marriage and the nuclear family (Klett-Davies, 2007). This discourse remains even though lone mothers are generally not the cause of divorces or family breakdowns, but rather the consequence. The social problem discourse gained prominence in the 1990s mainly in relation to the growing budgetary demands of the welfare state, but also, as already mentioned, for the supposed role of lone parents in nurturing delinquent children who in turn will be dependent on state resources (Murray, 1996). The escaping patriarchy discourse idealises lone parenthood and celebrates women for forging lifestyles beyond the constraints of patriarchal norms, for example, choosing to have children outside of a relationship by donor insemination (Hill, 2007).

Mädje and Neusüss (1994) discuss two approaches to the topic in the German context: the social policy approach versus the 'changing life-style' approach. The social policy approach is roughly coterminous with Duncan and Edwards' (1999) 'social problem' and Fox Harding's (1993) 'alarm' categories, where lone parenthood is seen as a social issue that needs to be addressed through policy changes or interventions. The 'changing life-style' approach is associated with the idea of lone motherhood as a means of escaping patriarchy within which lone motherhood is viewed as just one of several family formation choices. There is an overlap here with the 'pioneers' in Klett-Davies' research, who took a positive view of lone motherhood. In comparison, her 'copers' felt lone motherhood was temporary and therefore manageable, while 'strugglers' experienced more difficulties, financially and emotionally (Klett-Davies, 2005).

The discourse on lifestyle choice links to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's work (2002) on the fluidity of the modern family form and 'individualisation'. For them, the rise in lone motherhood resulted from the incompatibility of partners' needs and demands. Giddens also refers to a growing number of lone mothers who are 'single mothers by choice' (Giddens, 2006; p.226). 'Choice' is an interesting concept in the framing of lone motherhood, for two reasons. Firstly, women who make a positive choice to 'escape patriarchy' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) by bringing up children without a male figure comprise a small minority and are most often middle-class, successful women who wish to have children but are not in a relationship (Hill, 2007). Interestingly, Giddens had previously divided lone mothers into 'by choice' or 'in poverty' (Klett-Davies, 2005) which is perhaps an early indication of the greater level of 'choice' available for those less constrained by the economics of disadvantage. If women are 'choosing' to live without men, it may equally be due to dissatisfaction with a

relationship or to threatened or actual violence (Klett-Davies, 2005), as be a consciously politically-motivated impulse. No matter which circumstances precipitate this 'choice', the stigma attached to lone motherhood remains. Secondly, if the family form is becoming more fluid and it is a lifestyle choice, any of the multiple options for living as a family should be possible, however, not all family forms are welcomed by all of society: individualisation remains constrained by societal norms.

Usdansky (2009) divides social science discourse in the US on the causes of lone parent families into either a 'weakening of societal norms' of marriage or a 'heightening of marital standards and expectations', representing two sides of the same coin – marriage either being devalued or valued too highly as to be realisable. Interviews with lone mothers in the UK have revealed examples of the expectations viewpoint in young women who have become pregnant, but do not trust the father of the child with the responsibility, financial or otherwise, of bringing up a child, preferring to bring the child up alone than with an irresponsible partner (Rowlingson and McKay, 2005). Yet, rather than this being viewed as a rational choice by wider society, young mothers are accused of living off the state and getting pregnant either intentionally or, if unintentionally, due to a lack of education or knowledge about contraception and fertility (Arai, 2003). As to the rise of lone mothers resulting from a weakening of societal norms, we have already seen that the decrease in marriage is caused by a rise in cohabitation, not in lone parenthood (ONS, 2016).

3. Stereotype and stigma

Stereotypes are lay generalizations that are necessary in a very diversified society and are useful when they are more or less accurate. When they are not, however or when they are also judgmental terms, they turn into *labels*, to be used by some people to judge and usually to stigmatize, other people often those with less power or prestige. (Gans, 1990; p.274, italics in original)

Lone mothers have long been maligned as second-rate parents in British society. The consistent discourse on lone mothers creates an inaccurate stereotype which is used to stigmatise not only lone mothers, but also the children of lone mothers (Gagnon, 2016). A serious consequence of such stereotyping, putting aside the injustice of treating all those with a certain marital status the same way, no matter their personal circumstances, is that these views become internalised and the consequent shame and judgment may take a psychological toll. Research has revealed the very real impact that shame can have on depression and on parenting (DeJean, McGeorge and Stone Carlson, 2012). A filmed discussion between two

prominent American Black feminists, bell hooks and Melissa Harris-Perry, denounced the effects of shame: "shaming is one of the deepest tools because shame produces trauma and trauma produces paralysis" and attributed the shame of lone parenthood to the shame of poverty: "it's not really about being a lone parent, it's about being poor. The thing that you're supposed to be ashamed of is being poor" (The New School, 2013).

There are several possible reactions to negative stereotyping – to act to type, to resist or to find mechanisms to cope with them. Young (2012) finds evidence for the first of these in his research into 'Chav' stereotypes in the UK. He observed that there was a pride associated with being a Chav, an appropriation of the derogatory term by groups of people and the development of a subculture within which respect is earned through engaging in certain anti-social or criminal behaviours, much like in many gang cultures (Young, 2012). Certainly, there was no evidence in his study of a negative perception of the term Chav by those self-defining as Chavs, even while the activities engaged in by this subgroup served to increase the negative stereotyping associated with it. What Young uncovered appears to be a combination of both social dominance and social identity theory (van Laar and Sidanius, 2001). Social dominance theory posits that subordinate groups can produce stereotype-conforming behaviours as a reaction to their positioning which in turn serve to reinforce the stereotype and, thence, their subordination.

On a more individual level, the alternative theory of social identity was employed, that is, how people employ mechanisms to maintain a positive identity. Examples of social identity theory, such as minimising the importance of aspects on which a subgroup performs badly (for example, playing down the importance of academic achievement), changing the comparison group or distancing themselves from the subgroup itself, were found by Phoenix (1991) and Mollidor (2013) in their interviews with lone mothers.

The lone mothers distanced themselves from 'undeserving' lone mothers, while positioning themselves as good deserving mothers. Interestingly, they did not argue that undeserving lone mothers did not exist, such is the strength of an entrenched negative discourse, but were keen to position themselves as different from those who are stigmatised (Phoenix, 1991; Duncan and Edwards, 1999). The mothers also resisted stigma by not accessing services where they felt stigmatised, although this strategy could obviously have consequences if they were in fact in need of help from such services. While some women may choose lone parenthood as a positive lifestyle choice, the stigma of lone motherhood remains at societal levels, even if accepted within their immediate social circle (Hill, 2007).

Stereotypes can make homogenous what is not and in so doing, the stigma attached to a section of a population becomes attached by association with the rest. Stereotyping any section of a population reinforces the opinion society has of them and may result in their behaviour or abilities being judged differently (Lawler, 2004). Certainly, researchers have found substantial differences in the way health practitioners give advice to women seeking abortion based on their class, (Beynon-Jones, 2013) and the way health visitors treat mothers living in poverty (Canvin, Jones, Marttila and Burström, 2007). It is hardly surprising then, that research on women accessing services found them to be distrustful of engaging with public services and the potential consequences of such engagement, such as losing resources, or even a child (Canvin et al., 2007). In a more recent paper, the same authors rightly warn of the "potentially harmful effects of reinforcing stereotypes" (Canvin et al., 2009; p.244), particularly in relation to the aspirations and outcomes for young people living in poverty. While society blames the (supposedly) low aspirations of poorer young people for their lack of achievement, this pervasive myth creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. In fact, studies on children's aspirations have shown few differences in aspirations by background and have not found evidence for the 'poverty of aspirations' discourse (Kintrea, St Clair and Houston, 2011). Quantitative and qualitative studies on class and education have revealed that parental educational aspirations are important for a child's educational attainment (Strand, 2014) but that they are also based on parents' own experiences of school which are inevitably as classed as their children's (Lupton and Thrupp, 2013). Structural considerations are largely absent from political debates on aspirations, however, the fact is that "class inequalities persist because middle-class families have been able to mobilize and convert their resources to help ensure their children's educational and labour-market success." (Bottero, 2009; p.10)

Some have argued that a rise in the numbers of lone mothers would have the effect of normalising lone motherhood (DeJean et al., 2012) and in so doing, lessen the stigma attached to this family type. This formed the basis of Usdansky's hypothesis for her study, yet her analysis of the media and social science literature proved that while this was the case for divorce, the negative stereotyping of lone parenthood persisted even while the numbers of lone mothers grew (Usdansky, 2009). In the UK, the increased numbers of lone parents between the 1970s and 1990s did not result in a change in societal attitudes; instead, there was a huge backlash in the mid-1990s against lone parents. Perhaps rather than the normalisation theory, what is happening is more akin to what is known in psychological terms as the group threat theory, where small numbers of 'outsiders' are tolerated, but larger

quantities are viewed as a threat (Davidov and Meuleman, 2012). Certainly, since the 1990s, the proportion of lone parent families has remained constant, as has the associated stigma.

Not only social commentators, politicians and journalists are guilty of perpetuating stigmatising perceptions of lone parenthood. Academics too can be guilty of value judgments and a use of language that is unhelpful to lone parents. For example, researchers constructed an indicator of multiple disadvantage for their research into views on childcare provision which included firstly lone parent families, followed by employment, income, family size, education, housing tenure, disability (either parent or child) (Speight et al., 2010). Not only is the inclusion of lone parent families tantamount to asserting that all lone parent families are disadvantaged, but three other measures (out of a total of 9) relate to 'no parents' or 'at least one parent' having one of the following: a longstanding illness or disability, no or low qualifications at GCSE and 'no parents in paid employment'. These criteria make it far easier for a lone parent family to appear more 'highly' disadvantaged in their indicator than a two-parent family. Interestingly, the index did not include ethnicity since there was no way to "distinguish between White British groups and other White groups" in the data (Speight et al. 2010; p. 10). This seems like a rationale for explaining the reliability of any findings, but not for excluding it from the index, particularly when the authors note that ethnicity is associated with poverty (Speight et al., 2010; Lloyd, 2006).

The problematisation of lone parenthood is situated within a wider rhetoric of 'problem families', in which societal issues are blamed on a small percentage of the population, labelled variously the underclass, the undeserving poor and more recently 'troubled families' (Casey, 2012). The policy discourse is one of families who have no desire to work and who will pass on this attitude to the next generation (Levitas, 2012). The origin of the 'Troubled Families' programme was a response to the riots of 2011 (Shildrick, MacDonald and Furlong, 2016) but the numbers involved were loosely based on research into families who experience multiple problems (Levitas, 2012). The rhetoric then "discursively collapses 'families with troubles' and 'troublesome families'" (Levitas, 2012; p.8), thus portraying these families as creating and perpetuating their own problems, and consequently, problems for the rest of society, at huge cost to the taxpayer (Cameron, 2011). Such attempts to problematise families have been critiqued and refuted by sociologists (Shildrick, MacDonald and Furlong, 2016; Crossley, 2016; Levitas, 2012). Far from finding a culture of worklessness passed on from one generation to another, Shildrick et al found that the 'troubled families' they interviewed had experienced multiple problems such as childhood abuse, depression, violence and mental ill-health, often in combination or in quick succession, which "distanced them from the labour market". The

discourse of 'troubled families' enables a shift from the multiple problems that a small proportion of the population face, to pathologizing families, in particular families living in poverty (Shildrick et al. 2016), relieving the State of its responsibility for structural confounding factors such as rising unemployment and poverty (Levitas, 2012).

4. Research on the social outcomes of the children of lone parents

The number of quantitative studies researching children and young people's outcomes in the UK has increased since the millennium, mainly because of the emergence of more large-scale representative UK datasets, such as the Millennium Cohort Study and the Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England, as well as established datasets such as the British Household Panel Survey. Research on children's outcomes has focussed on educational attainment (Kiernan and Mensah, 2011; Scott, 2004), well-being (Robson, 2010; McMunn et al., 2001) and behavioural problems (Collishaw et al., 2007), although as these studies examine the impact of different family types on these outcomes, lone motherhood itself is not always clearly defined. Despite a growing interest in using large datasets for such research, a recent review of UK evidence on family structure and child well-being revealed that the bulk of the evidence still emanates from the US, with little up-to-date research undertaken in the UK (Robson, 2010). In the following section, I shall examine the existing British research.

4.1. Behaviour and wellbeing

Studies from the fields of psychology and sociology have focussed on the impact of family disruption and conflict on the subsequent behaviour of the children involved (Reynolds et al., 2014). The evidence suggests that while children in lone parent families have worse behavioural outcomes than those in two parent households, these differences can be partially explained by income inequality (Collishaw et al., 2007). In two of the three cohorts studied, children from stepfamilies had higher rates of problem conduct disorders than both intact families and lone parent families. Similarly, youth from father-absent families were more likely to end up in prison, although the outlook was worse for those in stepfamilies, particularly within father/stepmother families (McLanahan, 2004). The discourse of dadless families producing children who are have more delinquent behaviour is disproved by these findings; the family disruption theory however holds true.

The focus on mental health outcomes in the UK in relation to family type tends to be on family breakdown. A review of evidence on mental health and family breakdown in the UK reveals that many studies show detrimental effects for children in lone parent families and in

'reconstituted' families (McMunn et al., 2001). In their own analysis of the Health Survey for England, initial findings of an association between lone parenthood and worse mental health in children disappeared once socio-economic variables were included. An association between poor psychological health and reconstituted families remained, presumably indicating greater upheaval in the lives of children who have not only experienced family breakdown but also need to readjust to life within a second family structure. The authors concluded that poverty and maternal education were key factors in the mental health of the children of lone parents, particularly lone mothers.

A more recent study by Robson (2010) used the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) to investigate the effect of family type on well-being. Hers is one of few studies to use the Youth Panel of the BHPS for this purpose, capturing information on happiness and self-esteem provided by the young people themselves, rather than their teachers or parents. The research revealed that living in a lone parent family of either gender, or in a stepfamily, had a detrimental effect on both self-esteem and happiness, although living with a lone father was worse than living in a lone mother family. Robson argued that the findings supported four theoretical explanations: economic hardship, stigma, downward social mobility and stress theory, suggesting that the mechanisms by which the effects of family change are transmitted are complex and interconnected.

There has been a large amount of research on the blurring of boundaries between parents and children in lone mother families, with children expected to share some of the workload for the functioning of the household, or relied upon for emotional support (Hetherington, 1999). The resulting adultification of children in lone parent households has been viewed as both a positive (Weiss, 1979) and negative (Nock, 1988) result of a change in family type. Nixon, Greene and Hogan (2012) however, question the prevailing thinking on this topic in the circumstances of children who have always been in a lone parent family. In these situations, mothers have not adapted from two-parent to one-parent and consequently the dynamics appear to be different from those families who have gone through separation or divorce. However, Nixon et al. (2012) found that the children in these households were still likely to help with household tasks and to be less reliant on their mothers. A conceptual model by Burton (2007) on the adultification of children in low-income families reached similar conclusions. She found that the adultification of children can have positive benefits for their behaviour, self-confidence and life skills, but may have detrimental effects on schooling and mental health.

4.2. Education

The educational outcomes of children and young people have been the subject of much research in the last two decades, whether quantitative or qualitative, across disciplines. Researchers have focussed on the predictors of educational attainment, for example, parental aspirations (Gorard, Huat See and Davies, 2012) and income (Blanden and Gregg, 2004). Additionally, levels of education have been linked to improved outcomes in domains as diverse as health and well-being (Cutler and Lleras-Muney, 2006), social capital (Schuller et al., 2004) and crime (Sabates, 2008).

There has been far less research in the UK on family type and educational outcomes. One study found that educational attainment at GCSE was higher in children from two parent families than from lone parent families, while children from lone parent families outperformed those from stepfamilies (Scott, 2004). A more recent study found a similar pattern in early educational attainment (Kiernan and Mensah, 2011). Parenting quality mediated this effect across all socio-economic groups; evidence that there are multiple factors to consider when looking at causality in people's lives. For example, a study by Joshi et al. (1999) found that scores for reading and maths were negatively associated with living in 'non-intact' families. However, once maternal education and income were added to the model, the effect of family type was reduced and became non-significant. It appears from these results that family type is not necessarily the cause of any difference in attainment, but rather factors such as lack of income.

4.3. Multiple outcomes

A couple of studies have analysed children's outcomes by family type across several domains; the first used the BHPS (Ermisch, Francesconi and Pevalin, 2004). They found that parental joblessness and childhood in a non-intact family were associated with a range of negative outcomes including lower educational attainment, increased likelihood of smoking, early birth, joblessness and psychological distress. The authors found that family structure had more of an effect than joblessness and that the effects were greatest if the time spent in a non-intact family was between birth and age five. However, no comparisons were drawn between those who had lived in non-intact families throughout their childhood and those who had experienced more transitions between family types.

Spencer (2005) used the UK Family and Children's Study to investigate whether material disadvantage explained the effect of family type on health, education and anti-social behaviour. While he initially found negative outcomes associated with lone parenthood, these

were eradicated once a hardship index, housing tenure and hardship interacted with lone parenthood are added to the model, except for parental reports of child's health. Once again, the economic disadvantage associated with lone parenthood in the UK has more explanatory power than family type itself.

Finally, a meta-analysis of studies on the effect of lone parenthood on child well-being across OECD countries was undertaken with a fifth of these studies coming from the United Kingdom (Chapple, 2009). The report concluded that while lone parenthood was consistently negatively associated with outcomes in childhood and adulthood, the effect sizes were small and diminished or disappeared in the more complex statistical studies.

5. Factors which impact on the lived experiences of lone parents

As stated in the Introduction and earlier in this chapter, the lived experiences of lone mothers depend not simply on their family structure, but the other identities that they embody. Likewise, these identity factors may in turn affect the outcomes of their children. The heterogeneity of lone mothers needs to be acknowledged since the experience of lone motherhood might be very different for a wealthy middle-class White woman who has chosen to become a lone parent via IVF than for a Black woman with fewer resources. This section focusses on several of the key identity factors identified in the literature, as well as two additional factors related to a family's human and economic capital: maternal education and household size.

5.1. Gender

I have already raised the issue of gender and its significance, not only in how parents are perceived and judged, but in the societal pressures placed on them. Although I have chosen to focus on lone mothers, I wish to examine some of the major differences between the treatment of lone mothers and lone fathers. Firstly, the way in which lone fathers are referred to in the media and in the literature is often very different to that of lone mothers. As Anderson has commented, "single mothers tend to be criticized; single fathers tend to be seen as noble" (Anderson, 2005; p.400). This is for several reasons. Firstly, lone fathers are perceived as taking on a role that is not normally deemed to be in their remit and are therefore viewed as 'noble'. A second reason is that they are not viewed as a burden on the public purse since they are fewer in number and have historically been more likely to be in full-time work than lone mothers (Popay and Jones, 1990; Chzhen and Bradshaw, 2012). In 2010,

35 percent of lone fathers were 'workless' compared to 43 percent of lone mothers (DWP, 2011). Although this is not a substantial difference, since lone fathers make up only ten percent of all lone parent families, there are far more 'workless' lone mothers in comparison with lone fathers. Recent figures show that as the age of children in the home increases, so does the employment rate of lone parents (ONS, 2014). By the time that children in lone parent families are secondary school age, the employment rate for lone parents is only a few percentage points behind that of 'couple parents' (ONS, 2014). Unfortunately, employment statistics for lone parents are currently not disaggregated by gender.

The 'appropriate' role for a parent remains largely divided on gender lines in the UK (Young, 2017). Stay at home fathers (whether in partnerships or not) are in the minority and seen as non-normative, which, as stated above, positions them as heroic for performing outside of gendered expectations.

Mothers, conversely, are expected to look after their children, but in the case of lone parents, are required by society to be in paid employment, a contradiction of which lone mothers are all too aware:

> On the one hand we are demonised and blamed for all the problems in society but then you're not allowed to make sure that you are there for your children… (Alison, Gingerbread, 2010; p.18)

Such perceptions are gendered, referring to the expectation that a mother should be there for her young children, but conversely, should be out earning a wage and not using the welfare state as a replacement breadwinner. While lone fathers should have the same issues, in general they do not have the same pressures placed on them to remain at home and care for their children; for them returning to work is more acceptable, even if it remains logistically difficult (Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper and Sparrow, 2015). A study which found a detrimental effect on children's educational attainment of full-time working mothers is said to have "reopened debates about whether women who juggle full-time jobs and motherhood are being 'selfish'" (Scott, 2004; p.4). It is unlikely that such a value judgment would be applied as readily to a full-time working father, indeed, the mere fact that 'working father' is not a concept that is as widely used in society as 'working mother' (Page, 2003) is more evidence of the gendered expectations of a work-family balance.

Researchers in the United States, who compared the outcomes of children in lone parent families by parental gender, found worse outcomes for the children of lone fathers compared to those of lone mothers in terms of educational attainment (Biblarz and Raftery, 1999) and

'behavioral and academic problems' (Pong, Jonkers and Hampden-Thomson, 2003). However, other researchers found poorer performance for both genders in comparison to two-parent families (Downey, 1994). He explained the poorer performance of children from lone mother families by 'economic deprivation' and from lone father families by 'interpersonal deprivation' i.e. paternal absence. Such an explanation makes clear the gendered differences between parental expectations: a lone mother is present for her children but is unemployed and poor while a lone father is in employment and therefore absent from the family.

Relatedly, maternal education and interest in the child's schooling have been found to be more important than the influence of fathers in the educational attainment of children in all family types. The mechanisms by which the influence is transmitted are a subject of debate (Chevalier, Harmon, O'Sullivan and Walker, 2013) but it may be that mothers more generally take on the role of school engagement than fathers (Hinton-Smith, 2015).

5.2. Ethnicity

Parenting practices and identities are inevitably influenced by not only the number of parents in a household, but also by other factors such as class and ethnicity. Black mothers, for example, are more likely to be employed than White mothers (Phoenix and Husain, 2007), yet as a result of racism, they are more likely to be in lower-skilled, lower-paid jobs and therefore have more in common with White working-class families than the White middle-classes (Phoenix, 1987). Similarly, the societal positioning of Black children and White working-class children can render them invisible (in comparison to the normative White middle-class), what Phoenix calls a 'normative absence' (Phoenix, 1987). However, these same children and their families are rendered present in relation to pathologized concepts such as the 'father-absent' households (Phoenix, 1987).

As I explain in the Methodology, the use of Whiteness in this thesis as the primary ethnic category of interest is based on the prominence of Whiteness in the context of the media discourse on lone parenthood. However, it also serves to ethnicise White families (Phoenix and Husain, 2007) rather than regard Whiteness as the norm against which other ethnic groups are compared. Ethnicity and 'race' and the categories employed to describe them can be emotive but also change in their use and scope over time (Phoenix and Husain, 2007). Throughout this thesis therefore, I have used in each case the terms used to describe ethnicity as they appear in their context, whether in statistical datasets, newspaper articles or research papers. For example, in the newspaper articles, the term Afro-Caribbean is used in 1993 while African-Caribbean is employed in 2013.

There is a plethora of research and commentary from the United States on Black and Minority Ethnic lone parent households, but markedly less so in the United Kingdom (Mokhtar and Platt, 2010). Statistics from the 2011 Census revealed that White British adults headed 79 percent of lone parent households with dependent children in England and Wales, with Black African-headed households comprising the next largest proportion at 4 percent, followed by Other White (3.5 percent) and Mixed and Black Caribbean (2.9 percent). In comparison, Black African households made up 1.5 percent of *all* household types and Black Caribbean and Mixed households 1.3 percent, indicating that these ethnic categories are over-represented in lone parent households in the UK (ONS, 2017). When the composition of lone parent households is examined within ethnic categories, the differences are more striking. While 29 percent of households headed by a British Family Reference Person[1] were lone parent households, 61 percent of families headed by an FRP from Somalia were lone parent households, followed by Other Central and Western Africa (56%) and Jamaica (55%) (ONS, 2014a).

Researchers have commented on the misrepresentation of Black female-headed households in mainstream discourse and the reproduction of cultural stereotypes, such as the strong Black matriarch or the Black 'babyfather' who has babies by many different women (Chambers, 2001; May 2006). As May (2006) notes, the representation of the Afro-Caribbean female-headed household is generally more positive than that of the White lone mother, but it too involves simplistic cultural stereotyping while continuing to situate the matriarchal model as less desirable than the nuclear family.

An analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study found ethnic differences in family composition at birth and between birth and age 5 despite an overwhelmingly White British majority in the sample (89%) (Kiernan and Mensah, 2011). Asian women were most likely to be married and least likely to be cohabiting, while in Black and mixed origin families, women were as likely to enter 'non-partnered' parenthood as to be married at the birth of their child. Marital breakup was a more common cause of lone parenthood among Black African (17%) and Black Caribbean (20%) mothers than among White (8%) mothers (Kiernan and Mensah, 2011).

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[1]Family Reference Person (FRP) is "identified on the basis of economic activity and age characteristics (lone parents are automatically the FRP)" (ONS, 2014a; p.2)

5.3. Social Class

On becoming Prime Minister in 1990, John Major spoke of his desire for the UK to become a classless society (Major, 1990). Over twenty years later, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, echoed Major's words at a Conservative Party conference, pledging that your background or who your parents were "would make no difference" to the opportunities available (Barnes, 2013). This is in stark contrast to the statement that in the UK today "a child's chances in life are now more determined by where (and to whom) they were born as compared to any other date in the last 651 years" (Dorling, 2007; p.5). Class remains an organising feature of life in British society: identifiers such as accent, dialect, clothing and even jewellery, assign class to people in the UK and in so doing, create stereotypes (Lawler, 2004; Tyler, 2008). With the middle-class dominant in society, the actions of the working-class are often seen from a 'deficit' point of view – less class, less education, fewer aspirations – while the 'poverty of aspiration' discourse reflects dominant middle-class beliefs about the working-class, rather than any reality of working-class aspirations (Canvin et al., 2009)

Class can affect the decisions women make about motherhood, for example, more middle-class women, particularly younger women, choose to have an abortion than women from a working-class background (Rowlingson and McKay, 2005; Arai, 2003). Far from becoming mothers by accident, Arai (2003) found that early motherhood was a rational choice for those from working-class backgrounds; there was less benefit in delaying motherhood perceived by working-class women than middle-class women. Class has also been shown to shape how medical practitioners react to requests for abortion, with requests by working-class young mothers largely unquestioned, while requests by older middle-class women are seen as more challenging (Beynon-Jones, 2013).

Women of all backgrounds have similar aspirations for the 'ideal' of marriage and children, even if this is not what transpires. Unplanned pregnancies happen to people from all backgrounds, but how they are viewed may differ depending on their circumstances (Beynon-Jones, 2013). Women from lower socio-economic groups may choose not to involve the father, yet this is not necessarily due to values of marriage being absent but is a rational choice not to involve an unreliable father in their child's life (Rowlingson and McKay, 2005).

However, studies have found that women from different classes may have varying experiences of lone motherhood. Middle-class lone mothers do not experience lone parenthood in the same way as working-class lone mothers, since their social and economic capital is such that they have more in common with two parent families of their own class than with each other

(Rowlingson and McKay, 2005; Klett-Davies, 2007). Middle-class lone mothers have been shown to use State benefits as a short-term strategy since they have the economic and social capital to find alternative solutions; at the same time, they can shield themselves from the dependency notion and the connected stigma (Klett-Davies, 2005). Middle-class lone mothers were more likely to remarry (Skew, 2009), while relationship breakdowns were more common among working-class mothers, caused by the financial impact of long-term unemployment or low wages on the family (Cabinet Office, 2008).

A sign of the continuing importance of class in our society is how people from different classes are portrayed in popular culture, especially comedy (Gillies, 2007). Commentators have discussed the caricatures in sketch shows such as *Little Britain*, with its stereotyped portrayal of Vicky Pollard, a loud, sexual and unapologetic teenage mother (Tyler, 2008). This sexualisation of the White working-class woman is not limited to a caricature on a sketch show. Feminist theorists have reinvigorated the class discourse and have shown that the portrayal of working-class White women in the UK is based around the body, whether through comments on their sexual morals or their appearance (Skeggs, 2005a; Gillies, 2007).

Additionally, it has been argued that the white working class in the UK has been 'racialised' by political discourse (Haylett, 2001). Terms, such as 'underclass', that have been applied to poor Black communities in the United States have been employed in the UK to define a subpopulation of the White working-class (Murray, 1996). A further example of the racialisation of class is the sexualisation of women, particularly working-class women in the UK (Skeggs, 2005a; Tyler, 2008; Lawler, 2005) and Black women in the US. Crenshaw (1989) wrote how, in rape cases in the US, Black women were assumed not to be chaste, unlike White women. This viewpoint is mirrored in the discourse around working-class White women, who are sexualised in a way that middle-class women are not (Skeggs, 2005a). While this racialization of the White working-class is a useful way of conceptualising issues around class in the UK, there is a danger that it simultaneously diverts attention from the very real racism that Minority Ethnic communities are still subject to, whether by official bodies such as the police (Home Office, 2012) or the general public.

5.4. Poverty

A recurring theme, intersecting with discussions of class and gender on lone parent families is poverty or economic disadvantage. The literature does not have a clear position on whether disadvantage exists prior to lone parenthood or because of it, partly because it is hard to establish causality with even the most sophisticated datasets but predominantly, because both

are true. Clarke and Joshi (2003) have noted that half of all children living in poverty live in lone parent households and more than half (59%) of children in lone parent households live in poverty. The impact of poverty on lone parenthood in the UK is such that young women who were living in disadvantage or were unemployed were more likely to become lone mothers than those from more affluent backgrounds (Rowlingson and McKay, 2005; Marsh, 2001). Conversely, lone parents and lone mothers in particular, are more likely to be living in reduced economic circumstances (Chzhen and Bradshaw, 2012).

Women are at an economic disadvantage, here as elsewhere in the world (Walby, 1997). In the UK, women earn less than men earn for doing the same job and work disproportionately in the lower paid professions, the 5C's of catering, cleaning, cashiering, caring and clerical work (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009).   Additionally, mothers are at a financial disadvantage by taking time out of work to have and raise children, which can affect their job prospects, salaries and pensions. Women are worse off post-divorce than men (Mortelmans and Jansen, 2010) and will lose out when they reach retirement age, receiving two-thirds of men's retirement income (Prudential, 2011).

Lone mothers, therefore, as both carer and breadwinner, are more disadvantaged than most women (Gillies, 2007) since they are expected to perform both roles and are castigated for failing in either one (Hinton-Smith, 2012). A policy shift from mothers as 'citizen-carers' to 'citizen-workers' (Klett-Davies, 2016) which I discuss in Chapter 2, both places unrealistic demands on a lone mother and restricts her options for raising her children. The focus of successive governments has been contradictory; the importance of families is emphasised while lone parents are sanctioned if they do not engage with welfare-to-work programmes. The individualisation discourse of late modernity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) has enabled politicians and the media to place the blame for poverty on individuals, ignoring the historical and contemporary structural factors which have contributed (Murray, 1996; Gibb, 2017).

5.5. Causes of lone parenthood

Lone parenthood has multiple causes, whether divorce, separation, abandonment or widowhood, whether by choice or by necessity (Giddens, 2006). The average time spent as a lone mother is five years (Skew, 2009), indicating that for many lone motherhood is a temporary not permanent status.

An analysis of the family structure in the first five years of a child's life revealed that while nearly three-quarters of family structures stayed unchanged over the five years the remainder experienced one or more changes during that period (Panico et al., 2010). Seven percent were lone parents for the whole five years, while six percent were lone parents who married or cohabited in that time. A further eight percent who were married or cohabiting at the child's birth were lone parents by the child's fifth birthday (Panico et al., 2010). While lone parenthood is often portrayed as the undesirable family form in contrast to a married nuclear family, nearly half of all lone parents had their children within a marriage (Gingerbread, 2017).

Lone parenthood has been linked to social class, with more women from lower socio-economic groups becoming a lone mother outside of a partnership than women from higher social classes (Rowlingson and McKay, 2005). Economics also plays a role in partnership dissolution, which occurs most frequently in families where one parent is unemployed or where there is a financial shock, such as unemployment (Cabinet Office, 2008).

Before turning to the media discourses on lone parents, there are two additional factors that are prominent in the literature on children's outcomes: the level of maternal education and family or household size.

5.6. Maternal education

Maternal education is a significant factor in the literature in improving the educational and behavioural outcomes of children (Joshi et al., 1999; Scott, 2004) including the children of lone mothers (Amato, Patterson and Beattie, 2015). The mechanisms through which this occurs have been proposed as a mixture of economic or human, cultural and social capital (Harding, Morris and Hughes, 2015). Parents with higher levels of education (human capital) are more likely to be able to obtain better paid jobs, which in turn provides more money to spend on accessing education or tutoring (economic capital), but also on wider education such as cultural visits, or extra-curricular activities such as music or other lessons (cultural capital). Such activities are considered "relevant for educational success because they are sanctioned in a particular society's educational settings" (Harding et al., 2015; p.66). Researchers found that children of mothers with higher degrees performed better in the Early Years Foundation Stage than their peers whose mothers had lower levels of education (Chevalier et al., 2013).

There is also the issue of class, since further and higher education is more accessible to the middle-class, while schools are easier for middle-class parents to negotiate (Bottero, 2009). Additionally, younger lone mothers may be disadvantaged educationally, as they are less likely

to have accessed education while having a young child (Hawkes and Joshi, 2011; Hinton-Smith, 2012) so there is likely to be some collinearity between maternal age and levels of maternal education.

5.7. Household size

Finally, there is evidence that household size and sibship (the number of siblings a child has) may have a negative impact on the educational outcomes of children (Downey, 1995), particularly those in large families, due to a dissolution of resources theory (Blake, 1986). The reasons behind this are several: more children may mean less space in the home and therefore no quiet place to study; financial resources have to be shared between more children resulting in less money for educational trips and resources such as books and computers, which may need to be shared by children. Children are likely to have less time with their parent(s) who are more thinly shared between a larger number of siblings so have less time to attend to the educational needs of each child (Blake, 1986). Although it has been argued that there may be advantages for younger children in larger households to have older children to learn from (Feinstein, Duckworth and Sabates, 2004), on the whole, the evidence shows that children from smaller families tend to achieve better educational outcomes (Pong et al., 2003).

One issue with looking at household size instead of sibship is that the household size does not necessarily represent the number of siblings, as a large household could signify a multi-generational family. There has been a rise in the number of multi-generational families in the UK in recent years; eight percent of children in the UK currently reside in a multi-generational household (Pilkauskas, Garfinkel and McLanahan, 2014). A large household could be beneficial to a child's outcomes or disadvantageous, depending on the circumstances of the shared household. Where a parent is providing care to their parents and their children, the so-called sandwich generation, there may be fewer resources in terms of time and energy (Agree, Bissett and Rendall, 2003). Conversely, the presence of more adults could result in more attention and more economic resources (Pilkauskas et al., 2014). These issues need to be borne in mind should the results show any difference by household size and will be returned to in Chapter 7.

6. Prior research on media discourses on lone motherhood

The relationship between the public, the media and politicians is complex and intertwined. As early as the eighteenth century, the press was viewed as influential in the formation of public

opinion. Edmund Burke who was first credited with naming the press the Fourth Estate (Carlyle et al. [1840] 2013), indicating the potential power of the printed word. There are mixed opinions however, on how the relationship between politicians and the press works. Hall et al. (1982) caution against conspiratorial claims that the media is owned by those with political power. Instead he suggests that journalists need to rely on accredited sources, including politicians, for their stories to have influence. This creates a situation in which the media "help to reproduce and sustain the definitions…which favour the powerful" (Hall et al., 1982; p.65) and have "the possibility of directing the public conversation" (Fenton, 2014; p. 6). By creating a frame, even counter-arguments need to be situated in the frame or will be discounted from the discussion. In attempting to counter the initial definition they are constrained within it and "obliged to subscribe, implicitly" (Hall et al., 1982; p.59) to the framing of the debate. Similarly, as stated in Chapter 4, even when the discourse on lone parenthood is being refuted by journalists, it is situated in the initial framing and in so doing, reproduces the ascribed discourse while rebutting it. The following section reviews research into the framing of lone parenthood in the media.

May writes that while there are 'counter-discourses' which "present lone mothers as strong, independent and autonomous women" (May, 2006; p. 4-5), they are in the minority and lack the "impact and authority" (May, 2006; p.5) of the more negative discourses. However, she does not provide any further details of the counter-discourses, reinforcing their invisibility in the public domain.

While selected examples from newspapers and politicians have been used to illustrate the dominant view in the popular press (see for instance Chambers, 2001; Rowlingson and McKay, 2005; Phoenix, 1996; May, 2006; Atkinson, Oerton and Burns, 1998), a systematic discourse analysis of media and political portrayals of lone parents, or their children, particularly in the UK is absent. Usdansky (2009) reviewed both magazine and social science journals' depictions of lone parents in the United States in the 1990s. She found that lone parent families were still portrayed unfavourably; around two thirds of magazine articles and a similar number of journal articles talked about lone parent families as being 'harmful' to individuals, institutions or society. Her research shows that the negative connotations associated with lone parent families are so ingrained that they have not changed, in either the media or the social science community, despite lone parent families becoming more commonplace.

This lack of analysis of the media discourse on lone parents does not negate the importance of the way the media and politicians portray lone parents. Duncan and Edwards present a useful

summary of the different ways lone mothers appeared in the media in the 1990s and note that "in all these cases lone motherhood was used as a concrete symbol, or rallying point, for wider debates about the nature of society and how the state should react" (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; p.23). For this reason, perhaps, while the pervasive discourse has not been analysed in the literature, it is often referred to as a means of contextualising the position of lone mothers in society and the misconceptions that result.

While there is a lack of discourse analysis on lone parenthood, there has been analysis on related subjects, such as motherhood (Hadfield, Rudoe and Sanderson-Mann, 2007; Shaw and Giles, 2009), class and motherhood (Lawler, 2004; Tyler, 2008), stigma (Baumberg, Bell and Gaffney, 2012) and moral panics (Lundstrom, 2011). All of these contain elements which overlap with the lone parenthood discourse so warrant a closer examination.

The analysis of the media discourse on motherhood reveals two major themes: maternal age and the concept of choice. There is an anxiety in the media about the 'ideal' age to be a mother; women should not have their babies too young, as they are too inexperienced and lack the resources necessary to be a mother. Nor should a woman be too old, which is characterised as selfish and 'unnatural' (Shaw and Giles, 2009) and risky for both mother and child (Hadfield et al., 2007). Women who 'delay' childbirth are perceived as wanting "to have it all" (Shaw and Giles, 2009; p.230) with the implicit criticism that they should not. Both studies uncover a classed aspect to the discourse, with older mothers almost entirely represented as middle-class.

Lawler (2004) takes a different angle on class and motherhood. Her subjects are two groups of mothers campaigning that sex offenders not be housed in their areas; one led by middle-class mothers, the other by working-class (Lawler, 2004). Newspapers, both broadsheet and tabloid, published contrasting coverage of the two protests. Details of the love lives, homes and clothing of the working-class mothers were published, and their involvement of children at the protests were criticised. Conversely, little personal information was revealed about the middle-class mothers, who were lauded in the media as using their children as mute symbols of purity at the protests. While the two groups of mothers shared the same aims, they were seen as working to different sets of norms which resulted in divergent approaches to the same issue. The protest closest to the (middle-class) norms of the media was praised, while that of working-class mothers was mocked.

Similar attitudes exist in academic literature regarding lone mothers. Anderson (2002) in a US study on lone parent families and delinquency talks in terms of 'exposure' to lone parent

families, as a shorthand for the length of time spent in a lone parent family, but it sounds as if it is a virus. When it is applied to the effect on others outside the family, it appears that lone parenthood-related delinquency is contagious: "it matters how many single-parent families a student is exposed to, regardless of whether the student has one or two parents in the home" (Anderson, 2002; p. 585). Equally, she finds a 'buffering effect' of being surrounded by intact families for some types of offending (Anderson, 2002; p. 585). This type of language is misguided and harmful to the families under consideration. Furthermore, she does not consider structural disadvantage, only controlling for the proportion of minority ethnic students and maternal education as variables to measure disadvantage. It is clear that other factors may be affecting the levels of delinquency in some schools which coincidentally (perhaps due to the economic circumstances of the neighbourhood) have more lone parent families, but this is not discussed.

This review of the literature shows that there is still more to be understood about the relationship between lone motherhood and the outcomes of the children of lone mothers in the UK. Lone parenthood is a complex category, encompassing parents of both genders from all sections of society, yet the discursive use of 'lone parents' implies a homogenous population and in some cases conflates lone parenthood with lone motherhood or teen parenthood.

The relevant empirical evidence shows that while the outcomes of the children of lone parents are worse than for children in two parent families in several domains, these effects tend to disappear or lessen once income is included. Parental gender has an effect, with children in lone father households often experiencing worse outcomes (Robson, (2010); yet this does not form part of the dominant discourse on lone father families. Further, in several studies, the outcomes for children in stepfamilies are likely to be as negative as, or worse than, those of children in lone parent families (Scott, 2004; McLanahan, 2004). This again is a less prevalent discourse than that of the 'harmful effects' of lone motherhood that pervade political and media commentary. The empirical evidence does not support the gendered nature of the dominant negative discourse and the disparity between the 'noble' lone father and the highly criticized lone mother.

There is a lack of research on the views and opinions of the children of lone mothers themselves, with most empirical evidence relying on adult reports. Additionally, there is a lack of consideration within the quantitative studies of the multiple identity factors which define and impact the lived experiences of lone parenthood, which may help to unravel the complex

dynamics within the lives of lone mothers and their children in the UK. While there has been some analysis of the discourse on lone parenthood, it is limited and has not been linked to empirical evidence. The purpose of this study therefore was to address these gaps, by interrogating the media discourse to understand the key identity factors in the context of lone motherhood before using these aspects of identity in analyses of the social and educational outcomes of the children of lone mothers in the UK.

However, before presenting the research methodology and analysis, I next examine the policy context of the period in which this research was set.

Chapter 2: Policy context

In this chapter, I examine the policies which had direct relevance to lone mothers between 1991 and the present day (2017), to situate my research in the social and political context of the timeframe within which my data were collected and data analysis undertaken. Many policies have affected lone mothers to some extent as members of UK society, however, there were policy changes and initiatives in this timeframe aimed specifically at lone parents, although in most cases, as noted in the previous chapter, it was lone *mothers* who were the real targets.

UK policy and, consequently, the welfare state is premised on the 'norm' of a two-parent family and specifically a breadwinner/carer model (Brooks, 2013). The range of policies I discuss in this chapter are based within this framework, for example, attempting to re-form the two-parent family physically through the promotion of marriage, or financially, via the Child Support Agency. At the same time, there are contradictions in the policy discourse between employment and family, with the promotion of employment for lone parents, while championing the 'choice' of mothers to stay at home and raise children.

In terms of the potential impact of these policies on the social and educational outcomes of the children of lone parents, I would argue that the complexities of the benefits system and the myriad changes to rules and regulations regarding employment, tax credits and benefits over this period, place two additional stresses on parents: financial and emotional. Emotional and financial stresses have been shown to affect the health and wellbeing of parents and their children (Cooper and Stewart, 2017). These effects are likely to be more marked in lone parent families where there is not a second adult to shoulder such strains and whom, as we shall see, disproportionately bear the financial burden even of policy changes not targeted at them.

One of the chief areas of policy affecting lone parents since the 1990s has been on 'activating' lone parents into work, via the expansion of childcare, the introduction of programmes such as the New Deal for Lone Parents and tax credits such as the Working Families Tax Credits.

1. Employment

One of the main policy areas related to lone parents in the last two decades has been 'activation strategies', also known as welfare to work programs. These programmes use what Wax has termed "condition reciprocity" (Wax, 2003; p.3) where benefits are given to

individuals if certain conditions are being met. The following section examines the main schemes set up to facilitate this process while also looking at the economic reality of work for lone mothers.

The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) was first introduced by the Labour Party in their manifesto as a solution for the "one million single mothers … trapped on benefits" (Labour Party, 1997; p. 19). This is a clear example of policy discourse conflating lone mothers and benefits as well as using the generic 'lone parents' of policy discourse to target "single mothers". The NDLP was proposed as a personalised "package of job search, training and after-school care" to help lone parents into work, once their youngest was in the second term of full-time schooling (Labour Party, 1997; p.19) and was rolled out nationally a year later. The programme was voluntary, which prompted criticism as to the New Labour government's lack of clarity about the expected role of lone mothers. While the programme was designed as a welfare-to-work policy for lone mothers, its voluntary nature enabled lone mothers in the early stages to choose to stay at home to bring up their children instead (McCulloch, 2006).

By 2000, the NDLP had been heavily criticised by the Conservatives and others, who stated that the parents who appeared to have benefitted from the programme by finding suitable employment, were those most likely to have returned to employment and sought jobs voluntarily (Graham and McQuaid, 2014). While two-thirds of those who were on the programme gained work, there were many lone parents who did not join the programme, either from lack of knowledge that it existed or perceived irrelevance to their circumstances (McCulloch, 2006). An evaluation of the NDLP estimated that 24 percent of lone parents found employment through the programme (Lessof et al., 2003). However, it is not clear to what extent the employment rate increased due to the NDLP, to increased employment generally or due to concurrent government strategies such as increased access to childcare (see section 2) or the introduction of changes to the tax credit system (see section 3.4).

Perhaps in response to these criticisms, when Labour set out its employment policy priorities in *Towards full employment for a modern society*, they announced a target of 70 percent of lone parents in employment by 2010 (HM Government, 2001). Simultaneously, greater conditionality, in the form of Lone Parent Obligations (LPOs), was attached to the programme, which I address in Section 3.2.

Lone parent employment increased more during the existence of the NDLP (1997-2008) than in the period of LPOs (2008 onwards) when it plateaued (ONS, 2017b), although this may have been due as much to the recession as to policy changes. Lone parent employment rates

increased again under the Coalition Government to 60 percent in 2013 and further during the current Conservative Government, with data for 2017 placing lone parent employment at close to New Labour's 70 percent target (ONS, 2017b). However, while such increased figures can be taken as signifying successful policy-making, such targeted 'activation strategies' project a misconception that lone parents would not otherwise seek work and feeds into the myth of conflating lone parents with the folk demon of the 'undeserving' poor, who need to be incentivised to find work. In fact, most non-working lone mothers want to find paid work but are hampered by a lack of flexible jobs and childcare (Barnes and Tomaszewski, 2010). Several questions therefore remain as to how effective these policies were for improving the lives or economic circumstances of lone parents.

Firstly, employment rates are crude measures of employment. Just as Hinton-Smith (2012) criticises the Widening Participation numbers for prioritising quantity over quality, so these employment statistics do not differentiate by the number of hours worked (ONS, 2017b) or the type of job. Evidence suggests that many lone parents become 'stuck' in low-paid part-time jobs (Graham and McQuaid, 2014).

A 'successful' job outcome in the Work Programme consisted of a "13 or 26-week job outcome in a 12-month period" (House of Commons Library, 2013; para 17). Moreover, that outcome could be achieved "in a single job or in a series of short-term jobs" (House of Commons Library, 2013; para 17). To minimise 'churning' between low paid jobs or the 'low pay, no pay' cycle (McKenzie, 2015), it would seem more appropriate to find longer-term solutions for unemployed lone parents, which would help both in arranging childcare and with navigating the impact on benefits or tax credits (see section 3). The 'successful' outcomes of the Work Programme would not appear to meet the needs of anyone returning to work, least of all lone parents, who have reported being employed on multiple short-term contracts or work opportunities, interspersed with spells on Job Seeker's Allowance (Gingerbread, 2012).

While programme advisers are incentivised via a payment by results system there, there is a danger either that lone parents will be pressurised into accepting any job, whether or not it is suitable, or, that more difficult cases are 'parked' while easier candidates are 'cherry-picked' by advisers in order to benefit more swiftly from the incentive system (Rees, Whitworth and Carter, 2013). Consequently, those people who are hardest to match with employment opportunities due to a lack of skills or education are most likely to remain unemployed, while the more easily placed are found opportunities sooner. As a result, the lone parents finding employment are likely to be those who would have found employment without the help of the

Work Programme; indicating that the programme did not reach those parents most in need of support in re-employment (Lessof et al., 2003).

Secondly, "work is not a guarantee against poverty" (McKnight, 2009; p.107). In 2014/15 over three million adults living in households where at least one person was working were living in relative poverty (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2016a). Between 2008/9 and 2014/15, the number of people living below the Minimum Income Standard (MIS), a measure based on public perceptions of the minimum required for an acceptable standard of living, increased to 30 percent of the population (Padley, Hirsch and Valadez, 2017). Three-quarters of lone parent households had incomes that placed them below the MIS, including forty percent of lone parents in full-time work and nearly three-quarters in part-time work (Padley, Hirsch and Valadez, 2017). Financial necessity and its accompanying stresses are real implications for those working in low-paid jobs and attempting to survive on less than the MIS. Such stress is hard to keep from children, which may impact on their wellbeing, while economic constraints can affect the family's access to decent housing or to resources that support their children's education.

Finally, these increased employment rates may have come at considerable cost to the lone parents in question, particularly under the LPOs, placing them under further pressure to gain any employment to avoid sanctions, rather than obtain the most suitable employment for their circumstances and skills. The burden is often on women to make compromises in returning to work after children, in terms of loss of pay or reductions in working hours which can result in a loss of status and career opportunities (Young, 2017); issues which affect lone mothers as much as mothers in a couple (Gingerbread, 2012). The impact of additional stress in job-seeking or juggling the demands and logistic arrangements of working and childcare on a mother, especially when a child is young, should not be underestimated (Hinton-Smith, 2012). It is likely that such stress is evident in the household and will have repercussions for the time and energy that a mother and more specifically a lone mother, will have for her children, including supporting them in their homework or other educational activities. A further consequence in lone parent households is that an older sibling may be leant upon more for support than they perhaps would in two-parent households. Depending on the extent to which this happens and the relationship between parent and child, there is a danger of children growing up too early, premature 'adultification', where they bear the burden of their parent's worries as well as helping with practical aspects of the household (Burton, 2007). This may negatively impact a child's school performance and their general wellbeing.

A final issue regarding employment for lone mothers, is the availability of flexible employment, to fit around childcare provision or school hours and holidays (La Valle et al. 2002). While employees now have a right to request flexible working (*Children and Families Act 2014*), the request can be denied by an employer, with such requests welcomed in some industries more than others (Young, 2017). The right to request also only exists for those who have already been employed for six months; it therefore does not apply to mothers who are re-entering the workforce after having children or would apply to those women who were 'successfully' re-employed into a three to six month contract via the Work Programme. Without a complete change in the working culture in the UK, it is still difficult to enter the employment market in a flexible way. The main route into such work is to choose a lower-skilled and lower-paid position that is either part time or offers shifts that can fit with childcare, whether formal or informal.

2. Childcare

One of the main constraints for lone parents with pre-school-age children in accessing employment or education is the cost and availability of childcare (Ridge and Millar, 2008). From Major's government to the current Conservative government led by Teresa May, successive policies have sought to expand the provision of childcare for nursery age children and to subsidise the cost to parents through a range of schemes. Early years' provision and childcare has been shown to improve children's development and life chances (Speight et al., 2010).

At the 1994 Conservative Party Conference, the then Prime Minister, John Major, announced the expansion of nursery provision "for all four-year-olds whose parents wish them to take it up" (Major, 1994) and a voucher scheme was piloted two years later. The scheme was criticised as vouchers could only be spent in nurseries which had joined the scheme while regional differences in childcare costs enabled parents in some areas to buy more provision than in others (Abrams, 1997).

The framing of nursery provision changed with the advent of New Labour in 1997. While Major's initiative was proposed in the context of nursery education, New Labour's National Childcare Strategy would "plan provision to match the requirements of the modern labour market" (Labour Party, 1997). The focus since New Labour has tended to be more about

expanding childcare provision to encourage parents, and mothers in particular, back into work (Labour Party, 1997), rather than presented as an educational 'good'.

Initially, Local Authorities had a statutory obligation to provide nursery places to all four-year olds for 12.5 hours a week, for 33 weeks a year. In 2004, the scheme was developed to include three-year olds, and in 2008, the number of weeks was increased to 38 (Waldegrave, 2013). While the provision of free childcare is an enabling factor in seeking and maintaining employment, the provision of childcare on this basis was at odds with the criteria for Working Tax Credit, available to low-income families working 16 hours or more, which created a shortfall between free nursery hours and allowable working hours (Lewis, 2003), without even considering the additional time for commuting between work and childcare. Lone mothers would have to choose between working fewer hours, finding informal childcare to bridge the difference or have their wages swallowed up by childcare payments over and above the subsidised hours (Gingerbread, 2012).

Under the Coalition, the provision was enhanced further: in 2010 the number of hours a week was increased to 15 (Waldegrave, 2013), and in 2013, free provision on the same basis was expanded to two-year olds from disadvantaged and low-income families (Department for Education, 2013). It is likely that this was in response to lower levels of take up in nursery provision by families in lower income groups; as free childcare provision has tended to be utilised more by households with higher incomes (Speight et al., 2010). Some have argued that such programmes are an attempt to re-socialise these children, whose parents were viewed as not providing adequate pre-school childcare (Gewirtz, 2001). Most recently, in September 2017, 30 hours free childcare for three and four-year-olds was rolled out nationally for working parents working more than 16 hours a week (Department for Education, 2017). This provision appears to be more in line with the needs of working parents, although there are still issues regarding the availability of childcare and the types of childcare covered; for example, it is still not possible to use the vouchers for informal childcare arrangements, which fit better with the non-standard work patterns of many lone parents (Hinton-Smith, 2012).

Despite the expansion, there are still too few registered places for pre-school children: two-thirds of English local authorities in 2017 had sufficient formal childcare places for three and four-year olds; although this varied from 42 percent in the South East to over eighty percent in the North East (Family and Childcare Trust, 2017). Lack of available, suitable provision minimises the options for all parents, but lone parents are disproportionately affected, as they do not have the option of shared care or 'shift parenting' utilised by two-parent families as one

of many varied solutions to maximising work opportunities with young children (Hinton-Smith, 2012). The lack of provision not only limits the options for the many lone parents who would like to work but also the logistics of organising alternative childcare arrangements with friends, family or via after-school clubs or childminders places additional stress on working lone parents (usually mothers); stress which can be felt by their children.

A second problematic element of childcare provision, is the unnecessary complexity of the multiple systems for childcare payments in the UK. The supply-side scheme (the government subsidy discussed above) is complemented by two demand-side schemes: a tax-free childcare voucher scheme and the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Both demand-side schemes can be claimed but having one reduces the amount that can be claimed on the other with some confusion as to which is most beneficial (Waldegrave, 2013). In 2005, a scheme of tax-free childcare vouchers was introduced which could be used on any Ofsted-approved childcare provider (Rutter, 2015). In two-parent dual-earner families, both parents could claim, doubling their saving capacity; however, a lone parent or single-earner family was not able to double their claim to compensate for the lack of a second parent or earner, thereby disadvantaging lone parents, who would welcome the additional savings. While this scheme had the potential to provide a significant saving for parents, as a discretionary benefit, it tended to be implemented by larger employers; employees of smaller firms were less likely to have access to the scheme and the self-employed were excluded. In fact, only five percent of employers offered the voucher scheme (Rutter, 2015). Additionally, as an in-work benefit, it was inaccessible for any job-seeking parent to help in the initial stages of finding employment.

To address some of these concerns, a new scheme was phased in from 2015, no longer through employers, enabling the self-employed and many employees who did not previously have access to the scheme to now benefit. It is open to all families with children under the age of 12 with a joint income of less than £300,000 (or £150,000 if a lone parent) (Rutter, 2015). There were concerns that the new system remained too complex, as benefitting from the childcare voucher scheme reduced the childcare element of Working Tax Credit so eligible parents had to decide which was more beneficial to them (Rutter, 2015). As it is calculated on a family basis, this scheme does not discriminate against lone parent families as with the previous voucher scheme, however a major flaw with all these schemes is where the money can be spent.

As mentioned above, not all childcare providers accept payments from all voucher schemes, so enrolment in any scheme has an impact on the choice of childcare provider. In 2014, just over

half a million employees were thought to have access to both the scheme and matching childcare providers (Rutter, 2015). While formal childcare provision is of course easier to regulate than informal, the restricted hours that most childcare providers operate, usually closely to aligned to the school day or the 9-5 working pattern, mean that many parents, including lone parents, require a mixture of formal and informal childcare to cover different shift patterns (Hinton-Smith, 2012), patterns which are more usual in the 'female' industries, such as care work and cleaning work. The availability of childcare for 'atypical' hours varies considerably in the UK; from a maximum of a third of local authorities in the North East, compared to none in regions such as Inner London, the South East, West Midlands and East England (Family and Childcare Trust, 2017). Parents working 'atypical' hours in many areas of the UK then need to rely on other forms of support, such as friends and family, who cannot be paid through government schemes.

What is additionally problematic about the incentivised increases in formal childcare is that it is positioned as preferable to the unpaid childcare provided at home. The gross valued added value of unpaid childcare in the UK was calculated in 2014 as over £320 billion (ONS, 2016a), contributing one third of all "home produced services". Yet people, in particular women, are not paid or valued by society for taking on such work in the home; instead their provision of childcare not only restricts their ability to engage in paid work, but in well paid work and in jobs that offer greater security and benefits. Looking after your own children is morally valued, but is not economically rewarded, until it is provided outside of the home. In the marketplace, childcare has a financial value, yet society is content for it to be provided for free within the family if it is the 'right' type of family (Gewirtz, 2001). As having children is presented as a choice, this enables society to absolve itself of any sense of responsibility for the upbringing of its citizens (Fineman, 2004). In the UK, there has as yet been no family policy aimed at paying those parents who are "working at home bringing up children" (Brown, 1998; cc1107) as is the case in Austria and Norway (Hampden-Thompson, 2013).

While childcare provision has improved and assistance with childcare costs has been broadened, there is still a large disconnect between the availability of provision in the right place and the right time and the needs of working lone parents. Lack of provision restricts opportunities for finding work, placing a greater financial burden on lone parent families, while childcare arrangements outside of standard hours not only increase the cost of childcare, but increase the mental load for lone parents (Hinton-Smith, 2012). For those lone parents unable to find work or who choose to stay at home and bring up their children, there is a further complex system to navigate, that of benefits and tax credits.

3. Benefits and tax credits

3.1. One parent benefit and its demise

In 1996, the then Secretary of State, Peter Lilley (1992-1997), announced amendments to the social security benefits for lone parent families. One parent benefit was to be subsumed into child benefit and lone parent premium into family premium. Both lone parent rates were then frozen at the 1996/97 rate while that of two-parent families increased in line with RPI. In so doing, lone parent families had their overall benefits reduced, with plans for the gap between lone parent and two parent family rates on both benefits to close until the amounts met. These policies were implemented despite growing evidence from researchers that lone parent families need more financial assistance than two-parent families (Strickland, Cracknell and Vidler, 1997).

However, it was Harriet Harman, Lilley's Labour successor, who announced that the Conservatives' intention to remove the lone parent rates for new claimants would become law the following year, despite the promise contained within the Labour Party's manifesto "to ensure that they (benefits and tax systems) are supportive of families and children" (Labour Party, 1997). The proposed changes to lone parent benefits went beyond those proposed by Major's government and were vigorously debated by ministers from all parties before they were passed, with a sizeable Labour rebellion after seven hours of debates (HC Deb, 1997)

In the following year's Budget, Gordon Brown stated that "there is no case for a one-parent benefit and we shall not return to that. Additional support should be provided on the basis not of family structure but of family need" (Brown, 1998; cc1107). However, aside from increasing Child Benefit, it was not clear how families in need would be identified and supported.

3.2. Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support and Lone Parent Obligations

The *Jobseekers Act 1995* laid the foundations for a fundamental shift in welfare policy and sought to change how the benefit system was perceived. Many of those who were not in employment, would no longer be eligible for Unemployment Benefit but instead would receive Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), which, as its name suggests, would be paid conditional on being both available for and actively seeking work. Failure to meet either condition would result in economic sanctions: for minor offences, JSA could be withdrawn for six weeks, but in the most serious circumstances, this period could be extended to three years (Rabindrakumar, 2017). When it first came into being, lone parents were still eligible to claim Income Support, which did not have the same conditionality attached.

However, there was a change of approach under Gordon Brown, potentially influenced by the Freud Report *Reducing dependency, increasing opportunity* (Freud, 2007) promoting the neoliberal idea of individuals being responsible for their futures. 'Dependency' on welfare was presented negatively, while 'opportunity' was presented as available to all who wanted it. As a result, LPOs were introduced, which removed the entitlement to Income Support as a lone parent, if the youngest child was aged 12. Perhaps in response to signs that the target of 70% of lone parents in employment by 2010 was not going to be met, these recommendations forced lone parents not in employment to apply for JSA (unless they qualified for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) due to illness or disability). Consequently, they would now be subject to the conditionality attached to JSA that was still absent from Income Support. Subsequent amendments have gradually transferred lone parents onto JSA, by decreasing the eligible age of the youngest child to seven, then to five and most recently under Universal Credit, to the age of three (Rabindrakumar, 2017). Figures from the DWP show that the percentage of claimants on JSA who are lone parents increased from less than 1% in 2004 to 11% in 2014 because of these measures. Currently, if a lone parent's youngest child is of nursery school age, they are no longer entitled to claim Income Support and as such are subject to the conditionality of JSA. Lone mothers, unlike the mothers within two-parent families are not given a choice about whether they stay at home to bring up their children. The rhetoric of "Employment for all" again prioritised paid employment over the unpaid work that many mothers do, whether looking after their own children, the children of others (informally) or other voluntary contributions to society which are undervalued (McKenzie, 2015). The lack of choice is unfairly distributed and the pressure to seek work or lose out on financial support increases stress and insecurity for lone mothers and their families.

The conditionality of JSA and the sanctions that can be applied are of evident concern to lone parents and those working to support them. According to the 2010 Regulations, lone parents with school-age children can restrict their work availability to within "normal school hours" and have greater flexibility for example regarding the roles they apply for and their timescales for attending interview (Gingerbread, 2012). However, whether this flexibility is offered in practice depends both on the individual's advisor (Johnsen, 2014) and to a parent's knowledge of their rights. Research has shown that lone parents are disproportionately sanctioned under these regulations; estimates suggest approximately 160,000 lone parents have been sanctioned, by having their benefits stopped, affecting around a quarter of a million children. The proportion of these sanctions that are overturned on appeal suggest that advisors are over-referring lone parents (Rabindrakumar, 2017). Appealing such a ruling is time-consuming

and emotionally exhausting which might put off many parents from even attempting it. Furthermore, the financial impact on lone parent families has already taken effect by the time the ruling is overturned.

Although initially, Income Support payments were free of conditions, work-focussed interviews (WFIs) were introduced in 2001 for lone parents claiming Income Support, indicating a concerted policy emphasis on returning to work. Non-attendance at such interviews could result in sanctions of up to 20% of Income Support, until the parent attended an interview. In the period 2004-2014, only six percent of claims were sanctioned on average each year but the threat remained and again was largely at the discretion of the assigned Job Advisor (DWP, 2014). As with JSA, mandatory attendance at these WFIs was linked to the age of the youngest child which also gradually decreased - from age 13 in 2001 to 0 in 2008 (DWP, 2014). Initially, the requirement was for an annual WFI, but in 2007, this changed to twice-yearly interviews for parents with a child aged over five despite representatives of lone parents urging against it (Work and Pensions Committee, 2007). In 2014, a more flexible scheduling approach to WFIs was introduced for parents with children aged between one and four, which reduced the proportion of sanctioned claims. Simultaneously, however, parents of three and four-year olds could now also "be required to undertake work related activity if appropriate" (DWP, 2014; p.8), again with the risk of sanctions for non-attendance.

As with the stipulations of the JSA, it is hard to see the utility of these interviews when there is little chance that a suitable work position would be found for a lone parent with such a young child. While subsidised formal childcare was now available for two-year olds of low-income parents, there is no such financial assistance for children younger than two, nor as discussed above, is formal childcare necessarily available for jobs which do not fit the 9-5 model.

Further discrimination against lone parents and their children exists in the rate of Income Support. In 2017, Income Support payments for young lone parents (aged 16 or 17) were the same as for a single person aged 16 to 24. It is hard to imagine why this would be the case, unless as a policy disincentive for young women, based on the pervasive myth from the early 1990s that young women became pregnant to gain extra benefits (Webster, 1993). Perhaps the assumption is that young parents would be living with their families, but it seems unlikely either that this is always the case or that there was sufficient evidence for such a policy decision. It is an unfair practice that punishes young parents who are not economically active due to their status as a mother, at a time when additional funds are necessary for a young child. The discriminatory practice continues even for older lone parents: lone parents aged

over 18 receive the same as a single person aged over 25, despite being unlikely to have the same financial needs. Even more markedly, couples with children are eligible for a 'higher rate' for having responsibility for a child, but this is not available for lone parents (UK Government, 2017b). Given that the research points to a greater financial need among lone parents than for couple parents, the discrepancies in these amounts is evidence of unfair discrimination against lone parents.

3.3. Child Benefit

Similar discrimination is evident in Child Benefit rates. In 1997, Labour had promised "to retain universal Child Benefit where it is universal today - from birth to age 16" (Labour Party, 1997). The claim of universality of Child Benefit is questionable however, since it is deducted from Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance (Greener and Cracknell, 1998) and in these circumstances alone is counted as income, while it is not included in the personal tax allowance of anyone in paid employment.

In 1998, the lone parent rate of Child Benefit was abolished with new claimants now receiving the same amount as couples, while the first child rate was increased. Existing claimants had the lone parent element frozen in 2000 until the couple rate increased to match it, after which there was only one rate for both lone parents and couples despite, as discussed above, evidence of the greater financial burden on lone parent families. In 2011, Child Benefit, historically uprated in line with inflation, was frozen for three years, then increased by one percent. Meanwhile, the cost of living has increased resulting in benefits decreasing in value (Schmuecker, 2017). These changes have been calculated as losing a two-child family approximately £1,500 between 2010 and 2017 (TUC, 2015).

There is again a disconnect between the 'choice' discourse and lone motherhood. When Gordon Brown raised the 'first child' rate for Child Benefit in 1998 he said it "allows us to do more for mothers who choose to be at home, working at home bringing up children" (Brown, 1998; cc.1107). While the increases in Child Benefit undoubtedly helped two-parent families, they were no help to lone parent families and were not enough to allow all mothers to "choose to be at home" when there was no other income coming in to the household. The idea of a lone mother "working at home bringing up children" is the antithesis of New Labour's 'work first' policies and attracts no financial reward.

3.4. Tax Credits

As part of the incentivisation of the unemployed and economically inactive into work, the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) was introduced by Labour in 1999. It replaced Family Credit and was more attractive to working families due to increased earning thresholds, the ability to claim 70 percent of childcare costs and, importantly for lone mothers, was unaffected by child maintenance payments (Brewer, Duncan, Shephard and Suarez, 2005). Additionally, it was administered through the employee payment system rather than the Benefits Agency and as such, it was hoped, would be free of the stigma of 'state dependency' and encourage uptake of the credit. A final evaluation showed that due to the WFTC five percent more lone parents had become employed, divided equally between part-time and full-time employment (Brewer et al., 2005).

It was reformed in 2003 into two parts, Child Tax Credit for families with children and the Working Tax Credit for lower income working households, with or without children. While lone parent families were not the focus of these interventions, they were able to apply for both elements of the tax credits if they were in employment and the Child Tax Credit element if they were not in paid employment.   Evaluations of the impact of tax credit initiatives showed an increase in the employment rates of lone parents of between three and four percent, amounting to 50-60,000 additional lone parents in employment (Cebulla, Flore and Greenberg, 2008). Although, as discussed earlier, increased employment rates are not always an indication of increased financial stability and can put a different type of pressure on mothers and families even if the financial burdens are eased.

The new tax credits were not as effective as hoped, due to confusion about eligibility and around reporting changes in circumstances (Ridge and Millar, 2008; Graham and McQuaid, 2014). The literature accompanying a tax credit claim reiterates the potential fines for the misreporting or non-reporting of changes in circumstances; currently these fines stand at £300 for the non-reporting of a change of circumstances within one month and up to £3,000 for a deliberate or negligent error (HMRC, 2017); not insignificant amounts for those who are eligible to claim. As a lone parent, a reduction in hours to fewer than 16 a week would be a potential circumstance for a fine if not reported within a month. For parents whose income or hours are not regular, the uncertainty about changing eligibility, concerns about paying back any overpayments have put people off making claims or led to strategies such as over-reporting income to avoid overpayments occurring, which in turn reduces the amount of tax

credits that can be claimed (Ridge and Millar, 2008). As stated above, such anxieties about income do not just impact on the parent but can be shared by children in a household.

In direct contradiction of the 'work first' policy, the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair said that "the working tax credit enables half a million mothers to choose to stay at home" (Blair, 2004). Once again, not only is the gendered nature of parenthood apparent, but so too is the evident 'norm' of the breadwinner/carer model of the two-parent heterosexual family within UK policy. It may seem laudable to give mothers a choice to stay at home, but the working tax credit would only 'enable' such a choice for those mothers in a partnership where their partner is working; Blair's statement does not apply to lone mothers. Despite stressing the importance of a parent's involvement with their child elsewhere, there is no recognition of this importance when circumstances are other than those of a two-parent family. The inherent discrimination in such statements does not help lone mothers who are trying to be both worker and carer for their children. By "enabling" mothers to "choose to stay at home", Blair is situating this as a positive option for mothers who can choose, which negatively positions those mothers who do not have the luxury of such a choice.

3.5. Universal Credit

As of 2013, a new benefits system began to be rolled out across the UK: Universal Credit (Klett-Davies, 2016). The aim of the new Credit was to "replace the current system of benefits and tax credits, simplifying the system to offer a fast, modern, seamless service" (DWP, 2011; p.9). It has been applauded and welcomed for such aims as the simplification of a complex system would aid claimants in claiming the benefits they were entitled to (Schmuecker, 2017). Unfortunately, it has not yet proved to be as fast or as seamless as promised, with delays not only in roll-out, affecting parents' ability to access free childcare (Gingerbread, 2017b) but more importantly in the time taken to respond to individuals' changes in circumstances (Schmuecker, 2017).

A monthly payment replaced the previous weekly payments, causing issues for those parents who were unused to budgeting over a month, rather than weekly (Klett-Davies, 2016). As with the other benefits discussed above, the Universal Credit brought with it increased conditionality, with claimants now needing to show that they are spending 35 hours a week looking for jobs (Klett-Davies, 2016). This is considerably more difficult when you have school-age or nursery-age children without either impacting financially through buying additional childcare, or temporally as parents spend time and energy looking for work when their children are at home. It is even harder when there is only one parent in a household with the

other demands of a household and family competing to take up their time and energy (Hinton-Smith, 2012).

More importantly, the structure of the Universal Credit system means payments are not received by claimants for at least five weeks from the time they claim, with some waiting as many as three months (Schmuecker, 2017). Such delays necessitate those most in need to find financial assistance elsewhere, in some cases causing people to get into debt for the first time (Drake, 2017), or face increased levels of poverty and potential eviction (Work and Pensions Committee, 2017). Such circumstances are highly stressful for anyone, but particularly for parents and is bound to have a financial and emotional impact on lone parent families.

Not only are there financial ramifications for lone parents and their children with the delayed roll-out and payments for Universal Credit, but, the ideological consequences affect lone parent families too. The Universal Credit policy documents have been criticised as they "marginalize the structural aspects of persistent unemployment and poverty by transforming these into individual pathologies of benefit dependency and worklessness" (Wiggan, 2012; p.383). It seems that Universal Credit is undoing any of the progress that the introduction of Tax Credits made in destigmatising the receipt of state support.

3.6. Benefit cap

In addition to these policy changes to tax credits and benefits, a benefit cap was introduced in 2013 to incentivise people into work, which capped the total amount of benefit that could be claimed by someone of working age. Its introduction was met with dismay by anti-poverty campaigners (Child Poverty Action Group, 2013; The Children's Society, 2013). A further reduction to the cap in 2017 disproportionately affected lone parents and their children, with three-quarters of those affected being lone parent families, most of whom were looking after young children or were unfit to work, so could not escape the cap by finding employment (DWP, 2017). Four lone parents took the matter to the High Court who ruled that the inclusion of lone parents with children under two in the benefit cap was 'unlawful'. Despite this, the Department for Work and Pensions has continued to apply the cap to those families (Clarke, 2017). Amongst its many issues, the cap included Child Benefit in its calculations, even though Child Benefit is not linked to (un)employment and parents not on benefits are able to claim Child Benefit unless they earn £50,000 or more (UK Government, 2017b).

The stated aim of the policy changes discussed thus far was to reduce child poverty through 'activating' parents into employment. But a further, implicit aim was to make savings in the

social security budget. A prime example of the government's attempts to recoup money paid out in benefits came with the introduction of the Child Support Agency.

4. Child Maintenance

A key intervention by the Conservative government in 1991 was the implementation of the Child Support Agency (CSA). Its stated purpose was:

> the assessment, collection and enforcement of periodical maintenance payable by certain parents with respect to children of theirs who are not in their care. (Child Support Act 1991: Introduction)

In other words, it was designed to recoup from non-resident parents (NRPs), usually fathers, the costs of bringing up children by the parents with care, usually mothers. The expected result was a reduction of the budget needed for state benefits, since where the mother was on Income Support, every penny from the father would in effect go to the Treasury, since it was deducted from the mother's benefit. There was no incentive for non-resident fathers to volunteer to pay maintenance, since none of it was reaching their children. There was equally no incentive for mothers claiming benefits to engage with the system since they and their children would not receive any money. However, mothers could be penalised through the welfare system for not naming their children's absent father (Hill, 1999). As a result, the burden lay heavily on the mother who could choose to provide information but not gain any financial reward or not provide information and be financially penalised. The father could be absent and remain untouched by the scheme.

The issues of implementing the new agency were many and varied. The system of calculating the maintenance due was complex, necessitating more than 100 pieces of information (Davis, Wikeley and Young, 1998). As the Agency was set targets the initial focus was on recovering monies from employed parents, who were easier to locate and to collect payment from since this could be achieved at source (Davis et al., 1998). But there were issues with the amounts some of these parents were being charged. The CSA had the power to overrule maintenance agreements made in court which may have accounted for any decisions on property between separating parties, or the travel costs involved in a non-resident parent seeing their children, or even the impact of a second family's costs where a father had repartnered (Hill, 1999). This lack of flexibility in the CSA's calculations often increased the bill for non-resident parents and led to a huge backlash from (middle-class) fathers, who mobilised to lobby Parliament on the unfair practices of the Agency (Hill, 1999).

In 2003, a simplified calculation scheme was introduced, together with harsher penalties for non-compliance. For new cases only, parents with care on income support were now allowed to keep "up to £10 a week" of monies recouped from non-resident parents (Work and Pensions Committee, 2004). The remodelled scheme did not therefore help those mothers who were struggling financially.

More recent changes to the system brought the CSA in-house as the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) and have placed more emphasis on helping families organise their own maintenance arrangements. Parents who are not in contact, or who are unable to agree on maintenance, can still turn to the CMS to calculate these payments, for a fee. From 2014, parents (with two exceptions: cases of domestic violence and teenage parents) had to pay £20 to access the CMS to mediate a financial agreement (CMOptions, 2015). If the service was additionally used for administering payments, non-resident parents were charged 20% on top of their maintenance payments and parents with care would have 4% deducted (DWP, 2013). These additional costs were designed to encourage families to make their own arrangements, but in fact act as a disincentive for both sides to engage with the service, thus depriving lone mothers of maintenance payments or any means of recouping them.

Although the main aim of the CSA was to recoup monies from absent parents to reduce the amounts being paid in State benefits to lone mothers, the reality was that many of these absent parents were unable to pay any maintenance, due to poverty of their own (Work and Pensions Committee, 2004). To date, £3.8 billion of claims have not been collected (Klett-Davies, 2016) and many of these have been deemed "uncollectable" (National Audit Office, 2006; p.14). Although some parents have benefitted from the CSA, the various issues with the agency mean that it is hard to see that the implementation of the CSA was anything other than an expensive exercise with little or no financial benefit for those mothers and their children who needed it most. Instead, it may have resulted in increased stress for families.

5. Education

Despite education being new Labour's "number one priority" (Labour Party, 1997; p.7), accessing education and training opportunities for lone parents has not received the same policy emphasis as access to employment. As stated earlier, the primary policy focus on lone parents has been about returning to work, with education above a certain level not perceived as a viable reason not to be seeking employment. This is despite research that suggests that

higher levels of education lead to more and better labour market opportunities (Buscha and Unwin, 2013). Funds are available for attending further and higher education, although more so at the lower levels where students under 24 are exempt from fees if they have no qualification at that level (Gingerbread, 2017a). Parents older than 24 can access Level 1 or 2 courses if they are claiming JSA and be exempt from fees but this is not the case for courses at Level 3 and above which do not constitute work-related activity in the eyes of the government (Hinton-Smith, 2012).

Full-time courses are incompatible with claiming JSA, while part-time students must continue to seek work and take up work should an opportunity come available; failure to do so would result in sanctions. Under these conditions, it would not make sense to commence a course of study while on JSA, as there is little chance that it would be completed (Gingerbread, 2012). The prioritisation of employment over education is clear in these 'work first' policies of successive UK governments, in contrast to the human capital approach adopted in the US, where education and training are valid outcomes in the return to work strategy (Cumming, 2011).

Aside from the costs associated with further or higher education, such as course fees and travel, the biggest obstacle to undertaking further or higher education for lone parents is the issue of affordable and accessible childcare (Hinton-Smith, 2012). Help with childcare is available in England for under-20s under the Care to Learn scheme, up to a maximum of £160 outside London, £175 a week within London per child (UK Government, 2017a). A childcare grant is available for full-time students which covers up to 85% of childcare costs (Family and Childcare Trust, 2017). Since the recent increased provision for pre-school children only applies to working parents, higher education student parents would have to fund any pre-school childcare over the 15 hours limit, or after-school provision for older children. The costs of pre-school childcare mean that even with grants, prohibitive spending on childcare renders study unaffordable for many lone parents.

In addition, the childcare grant suffers from two of the same issues as the childcare schemes discussed above. Firstly, the childcare grant is not doubled for the second child, even though the costs of childcare provision tend to be the same for each child. Secondly, these grants only provide costs for Ofsted-approved childcare providers, resulting in informal or unregistered childcare being exempt, which, as discussed above, might be more flexible and affordable for the needs of lone parents (Hinton-Smith, 2012).

Full-time students who are parents can receive a grant (the parent learning allowance) worth around £1500, but calculations for Gingerbread have shown that childcare costs can amount to almost the entire value of the allowance. There are considerable amounts of money available for a full-time student who is a single parent, such as a maintenance loan and special support element on top of student finance loans. However, as these are loans they would need to be repaid after the end of the course, increasing the financial burden on the family of a newly-qualified student (Gingerbread, 2017a).

An employment-only policy is prescriptive, short-termist and potentially unsuited to parents returning to paid work after several years caring for their children who want or need to retrain or to update their skillset for the labour market. For parents in this situation, a more flexible policy approach, allowing for either education, training or employment as potential outcomes of a jobseeker's interview plan could better accommodate their needs. In upskilling lone parents via training and education, their opportunities for better-paid employment would increase, reducing the financial strain on the family. Re-employment policy needs to embrace education and training and take a longer-term view if employment is to reduce poverty in the UK.

The final policy area to address affecting lone parents and their children is housing.

6. Housing and homelessness

Poor housing is detrimental to the health and wellbeing of parents and their children, while overcrowding can deprive children of space to study, play and socialise (Walker, Crawford and Taylor, 2008). Repeated disruption to living arrangements, such as frequent moves between short-term rented accommodation, affects children's wellbeing and their education, especially if such moves result in the need to change schools (Rice, 2006). Unfortunately, housing policy over the last decades has not protected families from such circumstances.

The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 listed people deemed to be in 'priority need for accommodation' as pregnant women, people with dependent children, vulnerable individuals and those made homeless by an emergency.   Accordingly, these regulations placed expectant lone mothers and lone parents with dependent children as eligible for priority need. Concerns about the increasing rate of homelessness prompted a response from the Department of Environment that the rise was largely due to the "rate of growth of single person households and lone parent families" (Wilson, 1994; p.23). In 1993, legislative changes were proposed;

rather than a statutory duty to provide permanent housing to those in priority need, the duty was reduced to providing temporary accommodation only and for a minimum of one year, reviewed after two. The reasoning behind this policy shift was based on research which showed that permanent housing was increasingly and, in some areas, solely, being allocated to those who were homeless rather than to people on housing waiting lists (Wilson, 1994). The new system would now provide temporary housing for those 'in priority need' who would join the housing list but not have any additional priority over those already on the list.

Concerns raised in the consultation process included the mental and physical impact of the insecurity and instability of temporary accommodation, on parents and children together with the stigma attached to living in such accommodation (Wilson, 1994). A further issue was the potential of a cycle of temporary accommodation and short-term tenancies, with a "revolving door" of housing deemed "almost inevitable" for families with children (Wilson, 1994; p.37). "Mothers and their children" were specifically mentioned as the population most likely to be negatively impacted by the new legislation (EDM 441, 1993-94). Nonetheless, the changes to policy were implemented.

In 2004, the use of B&B accommodation for families with children was prohibited except in an emergency and then for less than six weeks *(Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2003 SI 2003/3326)*. Government statistics show that although the number of families with children who were housed (even temporarily) in B&B accommodation reduced, in 2014, 2,000 families with children were nevertheless housed in such accommodation and a quarter of these for longer than the six -week recommendation (UK Government, 2015). Although these figures are not disaggregated by household type, since 46 percent of homeless households in priority need in 2014 were headed by lone mothers (House of Lords, 2014), it is likely that lone parent families were well-represented among those being placed in such unsuitable accommodation.

The policies discussed thus far have practical and financial implications for the lives of lone parents and their children. However, the basis of many, if not all these policies, is the belief that marriage is a social 'good' (Wilkinson, 2013), with the welfare state explicitly based on the breadwinner/carer 'norm' of a two-parent family. The adhesion to such norms disadvantages lone parents and specifically lone mothers, as they are seen to be lacking, not just economically, but lacking a partner, which is seen as the fault of the women, not the men involved (McFadyean, 1993). Several policies in recent decades have cemented these

assumptions about what is a family and further advantaged, financially and ideologically, the two-parent family over the lone parent model.

7. Promotion of marriage and 'the family'

The marriage transferrable tax allowance was first mooted in the Conservative Party Manifesto for the 1997 election (Conservative Party, 1997). Since they lost that election, it was finally introduced in April 2015. The policy allowed married persons who earned less than their personal tax allowance to transfer their unused personal allowance… to a working spouse, with a maximum benefit per couple of £200 (Cameron, 2013). In effect, this benefit only applied to married couples following the main breadwinner model, that is, with a main earner and a partner earning significantly less, despite this no longer being the dominant model in the UK (Lewis, 2001). Although the tax allowance only benefitted a small proportion of married couples, its introduction served to bolster the rhetoric about what constitutes a 'proper' family and thereby further stigmatised 'improper' families, such as the lone parent family. Additionally, it discriminated financially against lone parent families, who are already disadvantaged by having to manage on one salary, who would also welcome an increase to their personal tax allowance. It is not just the Conservatives who are guilty of such marriage-centred rhetoric however. New Labour's *Supporting Families* paper had a mixed reception in the Home Office's Consultation in 1999. While some proposals within it were well-received, an emphasis on strengthening the institution of marriage as preferable to other family forms was not (Wilkinson, 2013).

Parenting and the importance of positive relationships in a child's earliest years have been consistently emphasised. A cross-party manifesto stated that their goal was "for every baby to receive sensitive and responsive care from their main caregivers in the first years of life" (Leadsom et al., 2013; p.8). Yet, at the same time, the government expects lone parents to consider work from the time their child is one and to engage with work programmes as soon as possible. The two competing discourses of employment and early years' care reveal "contradictory motives underlying the government's approach to lone parents" (Hewitt, 2002; p.200). Parents are regarded as important for their children's wellbeing and mothers should have the choice to stay at home to care for their children, *except* when those parents do not fit either with the breadwinner/carer model and/or when they are not, as discussed above, considered capable. In such circumstances children are deemed to be better off in formal childcare supervised by professionals than nurtured in their home environment. Implicit in the

notion of 'families' then is the normative two-parent model, with policies from all political parties more fitting for couples than for lone parents. Such cementing of the idea of the 'normative' two-parent family in government policies, rather than an acknowledgement of the variety of family forms in the UK, serves only to discriminate against lone parent families and stigmatise them as non-normative.

This chapter has sought to outline and review the policies most salient to the experiences of lone parents from 1991 to the present. This period saw several changes of political leadership, both of Prime Ministers and party dominance. Yet, with few exceptions, the policy thrust continued and developed from one government to the next. A focus on marriage and the family privileged the 'norm' of the two-parent family, over a lone parent family and thereby reinforced the stigma attached to lone parenthood. Additionally, child maintenance schemes, such as the CSA, attempted to "reconstitute the single-parent family…into an entity that resembles the traditional two-parent idea" (Fineman, 2004; p.185). Contradictory policy messages place undue pressure on lone mothers to perform the dual roles of carer and breadwinner. Such pressure can increase the stress on the family as well as diminish the amount of mental and temporal resources that a lone parent may have to spend on the needs of her children (Hinton-Smith, 2012).

While governments have implemented a raft of policies which have impacted on lone parents, these policies have not resulted in reducing child poverty or improving the economic circumstances of many lone parents. Cuts and freezes to benefits have disproportionately affected lone parent families. Policy discourse championed the role of the stay-at-home mother while activating lone parents into work when their children are at ever younger ages. Working lone mothers are reliant on an inadequate and unstable range of resources, including wages, tax credits and child maintenance (Ridge and Miller, 2008). Paid employment has not ensured an exit from poverty while financial sanctions have affected lone parents in areas from child maintenance to universal credit. These stresses impact not just the parents but the children in these families, affecting their health and wellbeing as well as potentially having repercussions for their education (Cooper and Stewart, 2017). Policies aimed at supporting lone mothers should not just be "about income levels, paid work and state dependency" (Klett-Davies, 2005; p.13), but should instead focus on "educational and vocational training, child care and social stigmatisation, social networks" (Klett-Davies, 2005; p.13) if the economic circumstances and health and wellbeing of lone parent families are to improve in the UK.

Having outlined the policy landscape affecting lone parents and their children in the timeframe of the study's data, to contextualise the lived experiences of these families, the following chapter will now detail my methodological approach, theoretical framework and the data before proceeding to the results of the data analysis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter sets out the methodology and methods I chose for my doctoral research. I outline my theoretical framework and discuss mixed methods research, before presenting the methodology and methods I used for my discourse and quantitative analyses and how these interlinked. Subsequent chapters will set out in detail the analytical results and a discussion of the findings.

1. Theoretical framework

In framing my research, I have embraced a number of theories, which have informed my approach. While the focus of my research on lone mothers and their children positions me as a feminist researcher, I am not entirely comfortable with this label. The reasons for this are twofold, firstly, the connotations with feminism when I was growing up and secondly, my belief that social injustice does not just lie on gender lines. These two reasons have shaped my decision-making processes in different ways, so I will take a moment to reflect on them here.

Firstly, then, I am apparently a feminist. I say apparently, because it seems obvious to me that people should be treated equally and should have equality of opportunity, no matter their gender (ethnicity, sexuality, age, religion or any other factors that result in people sadly still experiencing discrimination). I did not consider myself a feminist for many years mainly due to the fact that when I was growing up in the 1980s, feminists were caricatured as women who burned their bras and sat in protest outside Greenham Common and, as a child and young teen, I did not identify with them. However, my academic and professional life has often returned to the theme of gender, whether in my work with women and their children in domestic violence refuges or my MA in Gender Analysis and Development. When deciding on an area of study for my thesis, I chose the experiences of lone mothers and their children. In the process I have gradually come to terms with the label of feminist.

In which case, as feminism also encourages reflexivity, a questioning and stating of our relationship to our research (Harding, 1987) it is appropriate to admit here that I am conducting this research as a complete outsider: I am neither a lone parent, nor the child of one. However, I have spent time working with families living in poverty in the UK, many of whom were headed by lone mothers and none of whom matched the media portrayal of lone mothers. They may have been claiming benefits and may have lived in housing schemes, but they wanted a better life for their children and many of them saw education as the best route out (ATD Fourth World, 2000). This got me wondering how lone parents could be blamed for

the ills of society – did I only know the 'good' lone mothers? Or was this a media myth propagated by the government assigning lone mothers the role of scapegoats for troubles that were societal and structural? When the riots happened in 2011 and once again, 'fatherless families' were blamed for the youth being on the streets, it became clear that this scapegoating had not ended with the previous Conservative government.

Having reconciled myself with being a feminist and wanting to take a feminist standpoint to the research, it was a foregone conclusion that I would use feminist theory. Prompted by my interest in the social injustice that occurs based not just on gender, but on ethnicity, class, religion, sexuality and in the multi-faceted nature of identities, the obvious choice for a unifying theory to the different elements of my research was intersectionality theory.

The term intersectionality first gained recognition in Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1991 article in the *Stanford Law Review*, however, the concept was in existence years before as a response by the Black Feminist Movement in the 1960s to the White, middle-class domination of feminist theory. The criticism was, rightly, that although (predominantly White, middle-class) feminists were fighting for the rights of women; they were not representing the needs and issues of all women, but their own concerns, rather than for example, those of women from the working-class or from other ethnic groups. Crenshaw, a lawyer, wrote that while sex discrimination law safeguarded the rights of White women and race discrimination law protected Black men there was no legal protection where these identities overlapped, leaving Black women without legal protection (Crenshaw, 1991). Rather than visualising disadvantage as consisting of multiple layers, Crenshaw (1989) used the analogy of traffic going through a crossroads (intersection), in all directions. When an accident happens at the intersection, that is, a Black woman is injured, the cause might be due to race, or due to sex, or to a combination of the two. A Black woman is not Black and a woman, but is Black, a woman and a Black woman and therefore likely to face discrimination on all three fronts. Like others before her, for example Deborah King's 'multiple jeopardy' (King, 1988) or Patricia Hill Collins' 'matrix of domination' (Hill Collins, 1990), the emphasis was on sites of multiple oppression and the negation of ideas of additive disadvantage; rather they argued, these disadvantages were multiplicative.

The theory of intersectionality was initially developed to recognise the multiple disadvantages of Black women and it is important to recognise the social context that necessitated such an approach. That said, intersectionality has value in other contexts, helping us to locate ourselves within society and be aware of our own positions of advantage and disadvantage (Ali, Mirza, Phoenix and Ringrose, 2010). For me, choosing to utilise this theory encourages me

as a researcher to be aware of both the advantages and disadvantages of my position in society. I was born in the UK to White middle-class parents, which I know has afforded me certain advantages in society, in terms of my access to education and employment among others. I am unlikely to be discriminated against for the colour of my skin or for the way I dress or speak. I have not, to my knowledge, experienced barriers to education and higher education, which in turn has undoubtedly opened doors for me professionally. At the same time, I am a woman and a mother to two daughters, in a society in which it is still advantageous to be a (White, middle-class) man and which still organises along gendered divisions which impact on me and my role in society and the family.

While initially the social markers of gender, race and class were the main foci for intersectional scholars, subsequent development of the theory of intersectionality has broadened the categories to include others such as sexuality, age or ability. Each combination of these identifiers positions us on what Yuval-Davis terms a 'power axis of difference' (Yuval-Davis, 2006). As Yuval-Davis points out, official statistics tend to assign people to one of these power axes, but everyone is in actuality situated on multiple axes, which, depending on the context, assign more or less power to the individual. For example, in the UK, being a member of the privileged categories of male, White, heterosexual and middle-class brings certain advantages, while if even one of these categories changed, whether in terms of gender, class, sexuality or ethnicity, this would affect the cumulative advantage. The resultant disadvantage would differ according to which social marker was changed.

I was struck therefore by the utility of intersectionality theory, for two reasons. Firstly, because it would help to make sense of the multiple identities personified by lone parents and would problematise the notion of a homogenous population of lone parents. Secondly, because it would enable me to look beyond issues of gender in relation to the social injustice dealt to lone parents in our society.

Intersectionality is important in the examination of media portrayals of lone parenthood as it allows us to investigate not only the identity factors that are used in relation to lone parenthood by the media but the intersections of these factors. For example, whiteness can be a signifier of privilege, but such privilege depends on its interaction with other factors such as gender, age and class. Modern Britain is not an equal society on many levels (Hills, Sefton and Stewart, 2009), with those who are outside the norm often constructed as deviant (Wilson and Huntingdon, 2006). As Garner has noted, these norms are "usually class-based, gender-biased and ageist" (Garner, 2007; p.6). Intersectionality as an analytical approach enables the

identification of the multiple and interconnected social positions of the media's portrayal of lone parents and, consequently, where they are perceived to be in the hierarchy of modern British society.

In addition to the role of intersectionality theory in my approach to the discourse analysis element of my research, I was influenced by the works of the Marxist philosophers Althusser and Gramsci in relation to the power of the media to influence public perceptions. I was aware of the importance of the media in propagating constructions of lone parenthood to such an extent that lone parent themselves had internalised these, feeling it was necessary to distance themselves from such accounts to validate their experiences (Phoenix, 1996). Additionally, I was exercised by the links between the media and politicians and the extent to which these institutions were intertwined, as evidenced in the Leveson Inquiry into "the relationship of the press with the public, police and politicians" (Leveson, 2012).

However, well before the Leveson Inquiry, Marxists theorised about the mechanisms through which power is wielded in societies, through the concept of the State Apparatuses. Althusser distinguishes between two types of state apparatus, the Repressive State Apparatus, which included the Government, Army, Law and the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) such as communications, legal and political which have power and influence but do not exert violence (Althusser, 1971). Althusser argues that a State cannot dominate without having control of both types. This develops Marx's statement that "the ideas of the ruling class…are in every epoch the ruling ideas…the class which has the means of material production at his disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production" (Marx, 1996; p. 64). Gramsci (1916) develops these views further, "everything that is published is influenced by one idea: that of serving the dominant class and which is ineluctably translated into a fact: that of combating the laboring class." Gramsci propagated the concept of cultural hegemony, by which he meant the process by which the views and ideals of the ruling class become normative: "power…is lived by the oppressed as a form of commonsense" (Jones, 2006; p.6), that is, the ideology of the ruling classes is so pervasive that it becomes the norm, our 'commonsense', which makes it harder to challenge. The easiest way for such ideology to become pervasive is through the communication of ideas, which in modern times means controlling the media. This is pertinent to the media portrayal of lone parenthood and to the general public's acceptance of the myths around lone motherhood in particular.

Returning to Althusser, he proposed the idea of 'interpellation', whereby entities are constructed by ideology: "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete

subjects" (Althusser, 1971; p.163). While he uses religion as an example, if all ISAs interpellate individuals, then the communications ISA is as capable of interpellating individuals as the religious ISA. Naturally, the entity of the single mother exists in her own right, in her persona as a mother who is raising her children alone. However, the constructed identity of a 'single mother' by the media and politicians interpellates the lone mother into a concrete subject.

Connecting the interpellation theory of Althusser and the issues of class discussed above, is Wacquant's theory of *structural violence.* Although this theory is based in the field of urban analysis and was a result of Wacquant's analysis of a summer of riots in the UK, US and France in 1992, I feel that it is relevant to this thesis, although women barely feature in Wacquant's account. Structural violence consists of three elements: mass unemployment and "labour precariousness", "relegation to decaying neighbourhoods" and lastly, "heightened stigmatization in daily life as well as in public discourse" (Wacquant, 2008; p.25). I would argue that each of these relate to the positioning of lone mothers in the UK. I have already discussed the difficulties faced by lone mothers in accessing stable and secure employment, leading to their spending longer periods of time unemployed. Thus, lone mothers can be said to be experiencing structural violence in terms of unemployment and labour precarity. The stigmatization of lone mothers in daily life has also been evidenced, with lone mothers absorbing and resisting the stigma placed on lone mothers by distancing themselves from it. Chapter 4 will address the second of Wacquant's strands of *structural violence* in the pervasive association of lone mothers with council housing in the public discourse, which is also associated with Wacquant's third element of "stigmatisation in daily life". Before I turn to this analysis, I will outline my methodology and data.

2. Mixed methods approach

I chose a mixed methods approach for this research. While initially I had intended to undertake a quantitative analysis, once I became more aware through the literature of the pervasive nature and power of the media discourse on lone parenthood, it felt appropriate to have two related methods. I became increasingly aware of the widespread use of the generic term 'single parent' alongside a realisation that the authors were not referring to all lone parents. I wanted to explore which specific identities lay beneath the generic term and to investigate whether employing these identity factors in the quantitative analysis of a large-scale dataset would support or challenge the dominant stereotype. Consequently, I changed my approach to consist of a first stage analysing the media portrayal of lone parents and a second phase which employed the findings of the first stage within statistical models.

Before outlining my rationale for a mixed methods design further, it is useful here to outline the main differences between the quantitative and qualitative methods and where feminist standpoint research fits within these approaches.

Quantitative and qualitative methods have their history in two different paradigms: positivism and constructivism (Bergman, 2008). Positivism (and with it the quantitative method) has a longer history in the social sciences, as methods and philosophies were adapted from the natural sciences. These methods initially took the form of experiments which were used to test a hypothesis, with one group acting as a control group and another tested. With the advent of large scale surveys and more advanced means of analysis, quantitative analysis was applied to surveys, again with the idea of testing out hypotheses, or discovering the relationships between variables (Creswell, 2014). Large-scale surveys can now be designed to be representative of the general population, so that findings from a nationally representative survey can be extrapolated to the wider population. When it is not possible to interview every person in the UK, a dataset such as the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS) is as close as social scientists can come to gaining an insight into aspects of the general population, whether their attitudes, relationships or wellbeing. Equally, the National Pupil Database now provides researchers with data on the educational attainment of all English state school pupils (Hampden-Thompson, Lubben and Bennett, 2011). While the scale of survey data can provide a breadth of information over populations, or over time, it is not as useful for an in-depth understanding of a topic or people. Quantitative research has tended to use deductive reasoning, which "builds upon previous theories that have been systematically confirmed or rejected, rather than theories that emerge from the data" (Hartas, 2010; p.18).

In the mid-twentieth century however, other types of inquiry, developed in fields such as anthropology and sociology, became more widely used. These were qualitative methods, based in the constructivist worldview, where lived experiences are valued as the focus of inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Qualitative methods, which encompass case studies, interviews, ethnographic studies and participant action research tend to provide a more in-depth understanding of the issue being researched, than can be understood from a survey. Rather than a deductive approach, qualitative research has tended to use inductive reasoning, that is the development of a theory from the data, for instance, the approach of grounded theory where the researcher is led by the data rather than having preconceived ideas about what the data will reveal (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

These two approaches have tended to be seen as polar opposites but, although debates between the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative persist (Burns and Schuller, 2007), there are some who argue that the two approaches do not necessarily exist at opposite ends of the spectrum (Brannen, 2005) but can be viewed as being on a continuum (Newman and Benz, 1998). For example, quantitative studies analyse numbers, but those numbers can be provided by enumerating people's lived experiences and can be based on words, for example responses to survey questions. Qualitative interviews therefore can become the basis for quantitative studies. Equally, qualitative methods such as discourse analysis could be said to be nearer the quantitative end of the spectrum, when large corpus linguistic methods are used which quantify the number of occurrences of a certain word in a large collection of texts (Bednarek and Caple, 2012).

Additionally, quantitative research is not always as objective and value-free as it is perceived. In an approach such as survey design, a secondary data analyst can choose from a plethora of existing datasets comprising thousands of variables. Each choice is likely to be based on the researcher's own worldview and approach to the topic; there is room for influence and bias in quantitative research (Westmarland, 2001) and I would argue that this does not make it less scientific but recognises the human element of social science research.

The so-called 'paradigm wars' over the relative superiority of positivism and constructivism and the methods with which each paradigm was associated were waged within social sciences in the second half of the 20th Century (Bergman, 2008). In the 1990s, however, there was a third approach that arose, the pragmatists' view, that there were advantages to using both methods and they could perhaps be used together rather than remain exclusive (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). There is a growing school of thought that researchers should use the best and most appropriate methods for answering the research question and not be constrained by the somewhat false binary distinction between quantitative and qualitative (Gorard and Makopolou, 2012). Unsurprisingly, there has been an increased interest in combining different methods within social science research, with the aim of combining the best of each approach (Creswell, 2014). Mixed method or multi-method research has additionally been promoted for its use in triangulation; using a combination of methods to maximise their strengths and minimise their weaknesses (Bryman, 1988).

As stated earlier, I have taken a feminist standpoint to this study, so an immediate issue to address is my decision to include quantitative inquiry in my research design. In the 1960s, feminists challenged the masculine nature of research in academia, criticizing existing

methodologies for the invisibility of women (Oakley, 1998). Since feminists perceived quantitative, positivist research as being closely tied to objectivity and the male gaze, it was logical for a feminist approach to adopt qualitative research as more subjective and appropriate for examining the lives of women in more detail (Hughes and Cohen, 2010). In doing so, however, many feminist researchers perpetuated the dichotomy of quantitative and qualitative approaches, rather than question it (Hughes and Cohen, 2010).

Other feminist researchers have noted that there are benefits of quantitative methods for feminist research: it has been claimed that much of what we know about the scale of gender inequalities has been produced from quantitative analysis (Scott, 2010) and also that numbers and figures are powerful tools with which to influence policy and policymakers (Hughes and Cohen, 2010).

One charge levelled at quantitative research was that women were often invisible (Griffin and Phoenix, 1994; Jayaratne and Stewart, 2016). This is one rationale for choosing a household panel survey for my data; the data is collected about all individuals in the household and the main respondent can be a woman or a man, rather than the 'head of the household' who is often assumed to be the resident male. Indeed, analysis of attrition in surveys has found that women are more likely to cooperate with interview requests than men in mixed sex households and are less likely to be lost from panel surveys (Uhrig, 2008).

Feminist researchers should question how their research "has potential to help women's lives and what information is necessary for it to have such impact" (Jayaratne and Stewart, 2016; p. 53). I needed a better understanding of the media discourse to interrogate some of the judgments made about lone parents and their children. Understanding the true subject of the media discourse by deconstructing these generalities would inform the selection of variables used in my analytical models. It emerged from the literature that issues of income or class, ethnicity and, in particular, gender were central to how lone parenthood was experienced and judged in the United Kingdom. As the media has a role not only in reflecting public opinion, but in shaping it (Bednarek and Caple, 2012), an analysis of references to lone parenthood in the news media would uncover more about how not only the media, but also the public, viewed lone parents.

Having outlined the benefits of undertaking a mixed methods study it is important to note that the mixed methods approach has been subject to criticisms, such as a lack of sufficient understanding of the methods employed, an increased likelihood that neither will be well employed and a disjuncture between the two methods and sets of results (Bryman, 1988). It is

key therefore to be precise in the use of each method and to demonstrate a clear understanding of how the two processes and results fit together to avoid such criticisms.

Creswell (2014) constructed a typology of six different models of mixed methods research in terms of how the quantitative and qualitative elements of a research design are used. The typology identified three sequential approaches, where one aspect of the research takes place before another and three concurrent approaches, where both qualitative and quantitative data are collected at the same time. Once I had decided on my approach, it was clear that the discourse analysis would need to occur before the quantitative analysis, so my approach was sequential. In terms of a specific sequential approach, Creswell identified three: exploratory, explanatory and transformative. According to his typology, an explanatory approach is one in which quantitative data is collected, for instance in the use of a survey, which is then followed up with interviews from survey participants as a qualitative phase to elucidate the survey findings. An exploratory approach is the opposite, in which the qualitative data collection occurs first and is analysed, and the analysis of these data informs the quantitative phase of the research (Creswell, 2014).

My approach for this study was therefore a sequential exploratory mixed methods design. I first undertook the discourse analysis to understand the media depiction of lone parents so that I could implement key elements of the discourse through the choice of variables in the quantitative analysis. Additionally, a sequential exploratory approach fit with the units of analysis in this study; in the discourse analysis, the lone parent was the unit of analysis, since I wanted to unpick the identity of the lone parents portrayed as being a threat to society and to their families. In the secondary data analysis, the unit of analysis was the young person. The purpose of the discourse analysis was to look at the context in which these young people are perceived to be growing up while the secondary data analysis investigated what associations these contexts had on young people's life outcomes.

As Brannen (2005) has stated, deciding to mix methods can impact on different phases of the research process, from the design to the interpretation of the results. My choice of methods affected the research design as the discourse analysis would inform the variables included in the subsequent quantitative analysis.

The following sections outline the methods used in each stage of these analyses in turn in their sequential order, with details of the selected samples and the analytical strategy for each phase of the analysis.

3. Discourse analysis

"a close examination of discourse will thus reveal implicit aspects of an underlying ideology" (Fineman, 1991; p.289)

The term discourse analysis encompasses numerous different approaches to the analysis of texts and images including scrutiny of genre, language, social context and temporal changes using a variety of sources including news media (Bednarek and Caple, 2012). Some key approaches within discourse analysis are the diachronic approach, which examines discourse over time, the sociolinguistic approach, which analyses the socially constructed nature of discourse and the corpus linguistic approach, which looks at larger scale collections of text, called a corpus, most often with the help of specific computer software (McEnery and Hardie, 2011). While there are some who remain strictly within one approach, many discourse analysts combine different approaches in their analysis and I am no different. While I have taken a largely corpus linguistic approach to the media discourse, I have also taken a diachronic approach, examining the corpus for any changes in the discourse on lone parenthood over time. Researchers working within the corpus linguistic approach differ in terms of the scale of the corpus under analysis and their reliance on software to perform the analysis. According to Bednarek and Caple's terminology (2012) my approach was corpus-assisted discourse analysis. I initially used Nexis, an online database of newspaper articles from the UK and across the globe, to search specific media and identify the texts to be studied. I then imported these texts into NVivo where I hand-coded the corpus, using the NVivo software to store the corpus and the coding that I assigned to texts. I ran additional automatic searches, using NVivo, for certain key words to ensure that I had not missed references or to verify that a concept I had expected to find was not present.

My corpus for analysis consisted of newspaper articles from two sources, *The Times* and *The Guardian*, from two years, 1993 and 2013 which frame two decades in which the numbers of lone parent families have stabilised in the UK (ONS, 2016).

As discussed in the literature review, the media has a role in shaping public opinion (Fenton, 2014) and in representing the views of those in power (Hall et al., 1982). Within the media, however, there are many voices and ways of presenting 'news' (Hall et al., 1982). In my choice of media for the discourse analysis, I was persuaded to use broadsheet newspapers rather than tabloids for several reasons. Firstly, tabloids present a hyperbolic (Conboy, 2006) chauvinist (Fairclough, 2001) viewpoint on the news which could result in inherent bias in articles concerning lone motherhood. Secondly, tabloid newspapers have been shown to have

a less balanced reporting style than their broadsheet counterparts, more often presenting one side of a story than the broadsheets (Tiffen et al., 2014). In light of these aspects of tabloid journalism, I opted for two broadsheet newspapers as my sources, although aware that they too are not without reporting bias (Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery, 2013). The potential limitations of this approach are discussed in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

The selected sources are national broadsheet newspapers representing two political stances in the UK. *The Times* is a right-of centre newspaper, while *The Guardian* is viewed as the most left-wing of the broadsheets (Smith, 2017). Although their distribution figures are smaller than those of the tabloid newspapers (*The Guardian,* 2013a), as broadsheets they were more likely to present a more formal coverage of lone parenthood rather than the populist style favoured by tabloids (Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery, 2013). It is worth noting that the readership of these two newspapers is proportionally more middle-class than the general population. The National Readership Survey (NRS) uses social grades such as A, B, C1, C2, D and E to grade the occupations of the Chief Income Earner in households. According to the NRS (2017), 54 percent of the UK population is ABC1, that is in non-manual occupations. An analysis of *The Guardian*'s readership reveals that 76 percent of its readership was ABC1 in 2016, with *The Times*' ABC1 readership higher at 82 percent (Statista, 2017). These sources are therefore not representative of the opinions of the general public. However, as the middle-classes are, in political and media terms, the ruling classes (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014), these sources should reflect the opinions of the decision-makers in the UK.

There were several reasons for selecting sources from these years for analysis. Firstly, 1993 has been described as the 'year of the lone parent', a key year in the 'moral panic' surrounding lone parents (Mann and Roseneil, 1994). A combination of factors not only put lone parent families in the spotlight but blamed them for both the burden on the public purse and the perceived upsurge in juvenile crime. An increase in the numbers of lone parent families was seen as one of the key reasons for an escalation in the social security budget (Fox Harding, 1993). In addition, lone parenthood was linked with prevalent concerns about juvenile crime and poor parenting in the light of the murder of the two-year-old James Bulger in February 1993 by two ten-year olds, both of whom were from lone parent families (Faux, 1993).

The first stage of my analysis was to contextualise the analysis by forming a wider picture of the newspaper coverage on lone parents across the two decades under consideration, within these sources. I used Nexis to count the number of references to lone parents for the two newspapers between January 1990 and December 2014. Since 'lone parent' is a term more

often used in policy and academic circles, but not usually by journalists, I used the search term "single parent*" which would locate any instance of single parent, single parenthood or single parents anywhere in the text. I did not search at this stage for references to lone mothers as I wanted to capture the coverage of lone parents of both genders before analysing the references by gender in the subsequent analysis. It can be seen from Figure 2 that in 1993 the coverage of lone parenthood increased in these two sources, particularly in *The Guardian*. The interest in lone parenthood then fell away before a further upsurge in 1997/98, again more obviously in *The Guardian*, which coincided with the arrival of the Blair government and the policy initiatives focused on lone parents, detailed in Chapter 2. Lone parenthood was subsequently little mentioned in the run up to the millennium but re-emerged as a topic of concern a decade later, with the highest number of more recent mentions occurring in 2013. As discussed in Chapter 2, the introduction of Universal Credit and the benefit cap in 2013, both of which have been shown to disproportionately penalise some sections of the population, including lone parent families (DWP, 2017), contributed once more to bringing lone parent families to the media's attention. These factors combined to identify 2013 as an appropriate time point at which to examine whether the discourse around lone parenthood was similar to that twenty years previously. As the numbers of lone parent families had plateaued over the intervening period it might be hypothesised that this would result in a more accepting attitude towards lone parenthood in the recent articles.

Figure 2: Number of articles with single parent* mentioned "anywhere in the text" in *The Times* and *The Guardian* (January 1990 – December 2014)
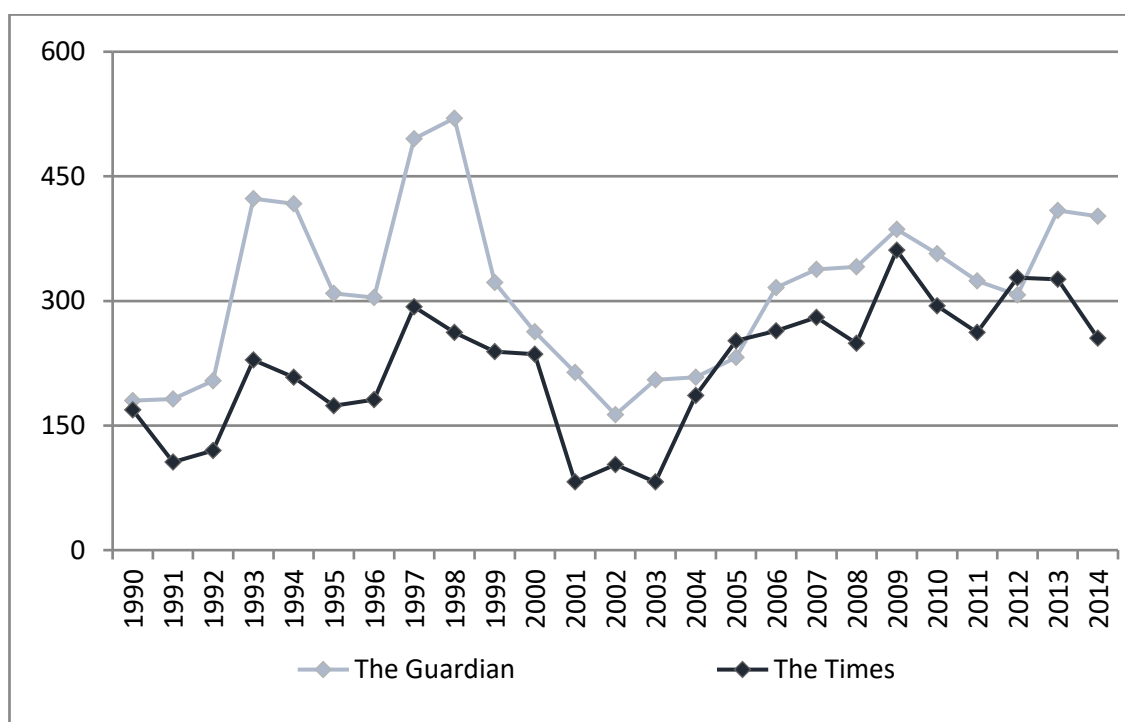
The next stage was to identify the analytical corpus, using Nexis to search the selected sources for articles relating to lone parenthood in the two years, 1993 and 2013. Specifically, all articles containing major mentions (that is references which appear "in the headline, lead paragraph or indexing" (LexisNexis, 2015)) of the following terms: single parent, one parent, lone parent, single mother, single father, single mum and single dad were identified for analysis; resulting in 1081 articles (see Table 1). Subsequently, all duplicate articles were deleted, as these were primarily a result of different editions of the newspaper being archived. All non-news articles, for example, those discussing books, films or television programmes that concerned lone parenthood were also removed from the corpus. This caused the total for the 2013 corpus, in particular, to drop considerably, indicating that even if lone parents were not making the headlines to the same extent twenty years on, they remained a subject of considerable interest as the topic of novels and on-screen dramas. Finally, only articles that discussed lone parenthood in the UK were retained, resulting in a final corpus for analysis of 631 articles, across both sources and both years**.**

Table 1: Numbers of articles resulting from Nexis search and included in analysis, by source and date

	Number of articles resulting from search	Final number of articles used in analysis
The Guardian		
1993	390	293
2013	239	93
The Times		
1993	211	169
2013	241	76
Total	1081	631

As can be seen from Table 1, there were considerably more articles that fulfilled the search criteria from *The Guardian* in 1993 than its right-wing counterpart, both initially and in the final analytical corpus, whereas the totals are more comparable in 2013. It remains to be seen whether the discourse on lone parenthood is similar in the two sources and whether there is continuity over time.

As mentioned above the corpus was next hand-coded using the NVivo software. In line with the intersectionality approach, I initially coded the articles for references to gender and ethnicity and class. In the process of coding these initial factors, it became clear that other social locations were relevant to the depiction of lone parents within the discourse. Factors

such as age, income, marital status and the causes of lone parenthood were used within the corpus to identify a certain type of lone parent, so these factors were additionally included in the analysis.

This preliminary analysis revealed that the term 'class' was rarely used explicitly within the corpus. An additional coding phase was therefore necessary to reveal what characteristics of lone parents were most prevalent in the selected corpus. Having imposed limits on the first coding phase, I widened the analysis to include all references to, for example, benefits, council housing or poverty rather than direct references to class. The problematic of class in its modern sense meant that I concentrated not only on explicit mentions of class (such as middle-class and working-class) but also on proxies for class, such as benefits receipt and living in council housing. These proxies are more about lower income families than perhaps traditional notions of what it is to be working-class, but in modern times, much of the traditional working-class is now housed in social housing and may be claiming some form of benefits or tax credits, with the rise of the 'working poor' (McKenzie, 2015).

Table A3 in the Appendix presents the number of references found for each of these social locations, disaggregated by newspaper and year. A full description of the results of this analysis can be found in Chapter 4, together with a summary of the findings which determined the variables to be used within the quantitative analysis. It is to the methodology for this second stage of analysis to which I now turn.

4. Quantitative analysis

The second stage of my research was secondary data analysis, since I analysed data that I had not collected myself. There is some debate about the exact definition of secondary data analysis, that is, whether the 'secondary' element applies to a new purpose, a new researcher or a new method (Smith, 2008). However, secondary analysis is 'an empirical exercise carried out on data that has already been gathered or compiled in some way' (Dale, Arber and Procter, 1988; p.3). The data in question can be numeric or non-numeric (Smith, 2011); indeed, it could be said that the discourse analysis phase of this study was also secondary data analysis, since the data, the newspaper articles, had already been collated by Nexis.

Advocates of secondary data analysis within the social sciences (Gorard, 2002) and specifically education (Smith, 2011) have commented on the surprising lack of such analysis; although this

is predominantly due to a lack of knowledge around statistical techniques in the social sciences in the UK (HEFCE, 2016). The analysis of secondary data has several benefits. In terms of large-scale longitudinal datasets, the most obvious benefit is the free access to a large-scale dataset, collected over many years, a feat impossible to achieve as a doctoral student. Additionally, the data collection process is rigorous, for example, sampling techniques to ensure as far as possible that the sample population is representative of the general population.

The UK Data Archive currently has over 7,000 publicly available datasets in its archive (UK Data Service, 2017), both qualitative and quantitative, covering all aspects of our social world, from infant health to elderly care and everything in between concerning life in the 21st century (Smith, 2011). A growing recognition of this wealth of extant data is evidenced by the ESRC's funding stream, the Secondary Data Analysis Initiative, now in its fourth round (ESRC, 2017).

Further, secondary data analysis has been cited as a useful tool in mixed methods research (Smith, 2011), presumably as it is a time- and cost-effective method to use alongside a more in-depth qualitative study. Secondary data analysis is not without its challenges, however. The needs of the researcher may not be met precisely by the chosen dataset, so compromises may have to be made (Yorke, 2011). Data may have been collected for a purpose other than that of the secondary data analyst and there can be issues in data quality or in categorising data, for example in ethnicity or social class (Smith, 2008).

The data

I used three datasets for this research: two publicly available longitudinal datasets, the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and its continuation the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS), together with a linked dataset provided under secure conditions containing the educational attainment of young people, the National Pupil Database (ISER, 2015). There are many other longitudinal datasets which measure aspects of life in the UK, the most well-known being the British Birth Cohort Studies which collected data on the households of babies born in a particular week in a specific year and then followed them every few years into adulthood (Feinstein et al., 2008). While these have been widely used in educational research, I wanted to use a survey that captured data annually, that included youth data and that fit with the timeline of the discourse analysis. The dataset which best matched these criteria was the BHPS and its successor the UKHLS.

British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS)

The BHPS began in 1991, two years before the first year of the discourse analysis corpus (1993) and continues to this day, beyond the second timepoint used in the media corpus (2013). Rather than following people from birth every seven years, as with the Birth Cohort Studies, the BHPS consists of data collected annually, which improves respondent recall (Grotpeter, 2008) and increases data accuracy. Secondly, although the data is primarily collected from adults, there is also a youth questionnaire, which elicits data from young people themselves. There are to my knowledge no other datasets that would have allowed me access to detailed annual information from adults to form the background variables in the study as well as information gathered from young people themselves. Additionally, within the timeline of my PhD research, the UKHLS was linked to the National Pupil Database, enabling a third strand of data to be used: collected from schools about pupils' educational attainment. Having stated my rationale for choosing this dataset, I now outline the datasets in more detail and set out my decision-making process for the construction of my analytical samples.

The British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) is a publicly available longitudinal household dataset. The data has been collected on an annual basis since 1991, when 10,264 individuals from a nationally representative sample of 5,505 households were first interviewed (ISER, 2006). Individuals from all participating households are followed when they move into new households. These new households are then incorporated into the survey. Similarly, additional household members such as partners, flatmates and children enter the survey when they join participating households (ISER, 2006).

In 2009, "the largest household panel study in the world", the UKHLS began (Gray et al., 2008; p.1). All participants in the final year, wave 18, of the BHPS were invited to participate in the UKHLS. Over 80 percent of BHPS participants in wave 18 accepted and joined the second wave of the UKHLS (Understanding Society, 2017). There were two main reasons for the loss of participants: changes in fieldwork agency and timing. Using a different fieldwork agency for the UKHLS meant a change of interviewers across Great Britain, from those with whom households had become familiar (Lynn et al., 2012). There was also a longer gap between the two surveys. The BHPS survey data was collected annually between September and December, with the final BHPS data collection undertaken in December 2008. The first wave of the UKHLS data collection which included BHPS households took place over a twelve-month period, with

BHPS households randomly allocated across the timeline. Most households were therefore contacted for interviews at a different time of year from the BHPS, which may have made them less likely to respond. The allocation of interviews over twelve months, coupled with the BHPS households being introduced into the second wave of UKHLS, resulted in at least 16 months between data collections with a maximum of 27 months. Consequently, attrition increased across the twelve-month period of data collection, with BHPS households allocated to the later months less likely to complete the survey (Lynn et al., 2012)

Nonetheless, 79.4% of BHPS respondents who completed a full interview in wave 18 also completed a full interview in wave 2 of UKHLS (Lynn et al., 2012). Those who were less likely to respond were male, aged under 30, unemployed, living in private rented accommodation and in very poor health. Those who were separated or never married were less likely to complete the interview than those who were in a couple, were divorced or widowed. People who expected to move in the following twelve months were more likely to drop out, however, income and qualification levels did not influence completion rates (Lynn et al., 2012). It is important to bear in mind these attrition factors when discussing the results later. Conversely, the attrition rate was counteracted by the larger scale of the UKHLS which comprised interviews with 50,944 individuals in the first wave and over 54,000 individuals in the second wave which was the first wave to include the BHPS sample (ISER, 2016).

For each wave of data, UK Data Service holds numerous data files, each of which contain specific elements of the interview responses. Full information can be found in the documentation for the BHPS and UKHLS respectively, but for the purposes of this research, it is necessary to be clear about the data sources of the variables included in the analysis.

The datafiles used for each wave for the maternal data were the *indall* data file, the *indresp* data file, the *egoalt* data file and the *hhresp* data file. The *indall* file contains the information for each respondent on whether they completed an interview or someone else in the household; a proxy. The *indresp* file comprises the full interview responses to the adult questionnaire, for all topics. The *egoalt* file details the relationships between all members of the household from the completed household grid. The *hhresp* file contains data on a household level, for example household size and income. The data for the youth responses is contained in the youth file. Variables were taken from each of these files to create the dataset. A full explanatory table of the source and recoding of each variable can be found in Table A1 in the Appendix. To establish the longest histories for the mothers in the data, I used information on all mothers from all waves of the BHPS and from the first five waves of the UKHLS.

Youth Survey

In 1994, a Youth Panel was added to the dataset, gathering information annually from 11-15-year olds in participating households. These data were collected using a method which minimised the risk of response bias from the censuring of information in front of interviewers or parent(s). The young people listen to questions via an electronic device and respond by choosing answers in a questionnaire, in which only the possible responses, but no questions appear, leaving their choices confidential to any observer. Once participants reach the age of 16, they can choose to become adult respondents in the main survey, so they can be followed into adulthood, giving a rich source of data.

In the first wave of the Youth Panel, 773 interviews were completed; by the 18th wave, there were 1,222 respondents aged 11-15. On joining the UKHLS, the larger survey enabled the collection of nearly 5,000 responses from young people. A young person should appear in a maximum of five waves (ages 11-15) but depending on when a person's birthday falls and when in the year the interview occurred, they might appear as many as six times before moving to the adult survey. Due to the larger sample afforded by the UKHLS and the availability of appropriate social outcome variables I decided to focus my analysis of the Youth Panel on respondents in the UKHLS.

All respondents, whether adults or youth, are assigned a cross-wave personal identification number (*pid* in BHPS and *pidp* in UKHLS). Additionally, within the youth files, the parental pids (*fnspid/p* for fathers and *mnspid/p* for mothers) are included where known, so it is possible to link the parents' data with that of their children. This was not straightforward due to the different *pids* used in the two surveys so required the creation of a new cross-wave identifier to ensure as many young people and their parents were linked.

UKHLS linked to National Pupil Database

The National Pupil Database (NPD) is compiled by Central Government from Local Authorities and schools in England based on School Level Census and Key Stage data and is the most extensive dataset of its kind. It includes the examination performance of all state school pupils in England, together with pupil characteristics such as gender, free school meals eligibility and ethnicity (Department for Education, 2015). The School Level Census began in 2002, as part of

the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) and then superseded the PLASC from 2006 onwards, recording demographic and attendance information on children and young people in an educational setting aged between 2 and 19. Data is collected from nurseries and primary and secondary schools in England, including academies and special schools.

Schools and awarding bodies supply pupil attainment data for Key Stage results. The Key Stage tests are administered to pupils at the end of Year 2 (Key Stage 1), Year 6 (Key Stage 2) and Year 9 (Key Stage 3). Additionally, data on GCSE and GCSE-level exams are provided for pupils at the end of Year 11 (Key Stage 4) and A-level and equivalents at the end of Year 13 (Key Stage 5). Since it is an England-only database, it was not possible to analyse sample members from other countries in the United Kingdom.

In 2012 the National Pupil Database was linked to the UKHLS using information on postcodes and individual's names. Sixty-three percent of the data was matched accurately, with an additional ten percent linked through 'fuzzy' matching[2] resulting in a match of 72 percent of the data (ISER 2015, p.155). Access to the linked dataset is available via Secure Access only. Researchers seeking access to the dataset must apply to use it and attend a day's training about confidentiality and the constraints on the data that can be released via the Secure Lab. The Secure Lab is a remote access desktop which can only be accessed via a specific desktop computer, with a secured ISP. Several checks are made, and information requested from a university IT department before such access is allowed.

Data analysis and write up of results must be undertaken via the Secure Lab, with no data copied or noted from it. STATA programming files (do files) can be uploaded as can other files, but these must all be sent to the UK Data Archive to upload. Once data has been analysed, it must be written up in sufficient detail that the data checkers can understand the context before being saved in a specific folder on the Secure Lab desktop. Twenty-four hours later an Output Release is requested by the researcher with details of the file, its contents and its usage. Two people from the UK Data Archive separately check the output and decide if it can be released, or if there is anything potentially disclosive according to internationally agreed guidelines (Bond, Brandt and de Wolf, 2015). If the latter is the case, the changes must again be made via the secure desktop before notifying the checkers who then check the amendments. When the documents are deemed to pass the disclosure checks the output is released via email. Outputs will only be released "that are suitable for draft or final

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[2] 'Fuzzy' matching refers to comparing the first few characters of the names and postcodes. The results were then manually checked.

publication/presentation; results should therefore be readily understandable and fully-labelled" (UK Data Service, 2017a). As a part time researcher who can only be onsite at the university two days a week, this level of security has posed additional challenges in terms of progressing with the analysis of the NPD data. However, it also made me acutely aware that the data in these datasets represent people and their lives and therefore should be treated with such stringent measures of confidentiality. As a result of this level of security, there are occasions in the NPD analysis when I have not been able to present everything that I would have liked to, in particular to reflect what I have presented for the social outcomes analysis. These occasions have been noted as following the restrictions of the Secure Access Agreement I entered into before gaining access to the data.

I now turn to a description of the sample and key variables for each of the analyses before proceeding to the results in subsequent chapters.

4.1. The sample: Social outcomes analysis

Final sample

The final analytical sample for the social outcomes analysis consists of the merging of two samples constructed from the files of the BHPS and UKHLS datasets discussed above. I detail below how these two samples, the *youth sample* and the *maternal sample*, were created. Once the samples were prepared, I used the maternal pids supplied in the youth data to link the *youth sample* with the maternal demographic information in the *maternal sample*. A flowchart describing the process of constructing the final sample is provided in Figure 3**.**

A second stage merged this analytical sample with the NPD data available for the educational data analysis. This is discussed in more detail in Section 4.2.

Youth sample

The *youth sample* refers to the young people who responded to the Youth Panel in at least one wave of the UKHLS between 2009 and 2014. These waves were selected since they have recently been linked to the National Pupil Database (ISER, 2015) so can provide actual data on educational outcomes, which lessens the risk of reporter bias (Grotpeter, 2008). Additionally,

the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, a measure of emotional behavioural issues, was only included in the UKHLS.

As can be seen from Figure 3, some of these young people had to be dropped from the study as there were no maternal identification numbers associated with their records. This left a total of 9,392 young people who formed the *youth sample*.

Maternal sample

The *maternal sample* refers to the sample containing the mothers of the *youth sample*. As discussed earlier, the gendered roles of our society which disadvantage women, and mothers, persuaded me to focus on the situation of lone mothers and their children in my study. Furthermore, the number of lone fathers in the dataset would have been too small for meaningful analysis even within the UKHLS. I decided to concentrate on the outcomes of the children of lone mothers, comparing them with the outcomes of children whose mothers had never experienced lone parenthood. Before removing fathers from the dataset however, I needed to gather as much information as possible about the parental composition of the participant households.

Firstly, I created a sample which included all the adults in the eighteen waves of the BHPS and the five waves of the UKHLS (see Figure 3). Next, I coded the household grid information to establish how many parents were resident in each household, to identify the occurrence of lone parenthood. I address this stage in more detail when outlining the key variables in the next section. Once this information was coded, I checked the consistency of data given on sex (male vs female) across waves and removed all men from the dataset. In several cases mothers also had to be removed as there was only proxy data on them, resulting in incomplete information. This dataset was then merged with the *youth sample* to produce the master dataset for analysis.

The dataset was then cleaned to ensure that there were no anomalies, for example mothers giving birth to children when under or over child-bearing age. This involved returning to the *indall* and *egoalt* datafiles, to ascertain if the mothers in question were natural mothers, foster mothers or stepmothers. Correcting these anomalies, in addition to discovering some adult respondents had not completed full interviews, resulted in some additional cases being dropped from the sample, reducing the total number of young people to 9,304. In line with an approach used by Nepomnyaschy and Donnelly (2015) among others, I used a pooled sample.

The advantage of this approach is that the analytical sample is increased from 9,304 individuals to 20,813 person-years of information, as it takes advantage of the longitudinal nature of the dataset, by including all the available waves (or years) of data for each young person, which in some cases was six waves. This pooled sample results in a combined total of 20,813 person-years for the 9,304 young people identified as the final analytical sample for the social outcomes analysis.

Figure 3: Flowchart to show sample creation

```
┌─────────────────────┐  ┌─────────────────────┐  ┌─────────────────────┐
│        UKHLS        │  │        BHPS         │  │        UKHLS        │
│     2009 - 2014     │  │     1991 - 2008     │  │     2009 - 2014     │
└─────────────────────┘  └─────────────────────┘  └─────────────────────┘
```

```
┌─────────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────────┐
│     Youth Panel     │              │    Adult survey     │
│                     │              │                     │
│     Age 10-15       │              │  All adults aged 16+│
│    2009 – 2014      │              │    1991 – 2014      │
│     N=9,859         │              │     N=95,592        │
└─────────────────────┘              └─────────────────────┘
```

```
┌─────────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────────┐
│   Youth sample      │              │  Women aged 16+     │
│                     │              │    1991 - 2014      │
│ Young people with   │              │    N=50,271         │
│ identified mother   │              └─────────────────────┘
│    with data        │
│    2009-2014        │
│    N=9,392          │
└─────────────────────┘
```

```
                      ┌───────────────────────────────────────┐
                      │        Final analytical sample        │
                      │ Youth with identified mothers with data│
                      │ N= 9,304 young people (with 6,281 mothers)│
                      └───────────────────────────────────────┘
```
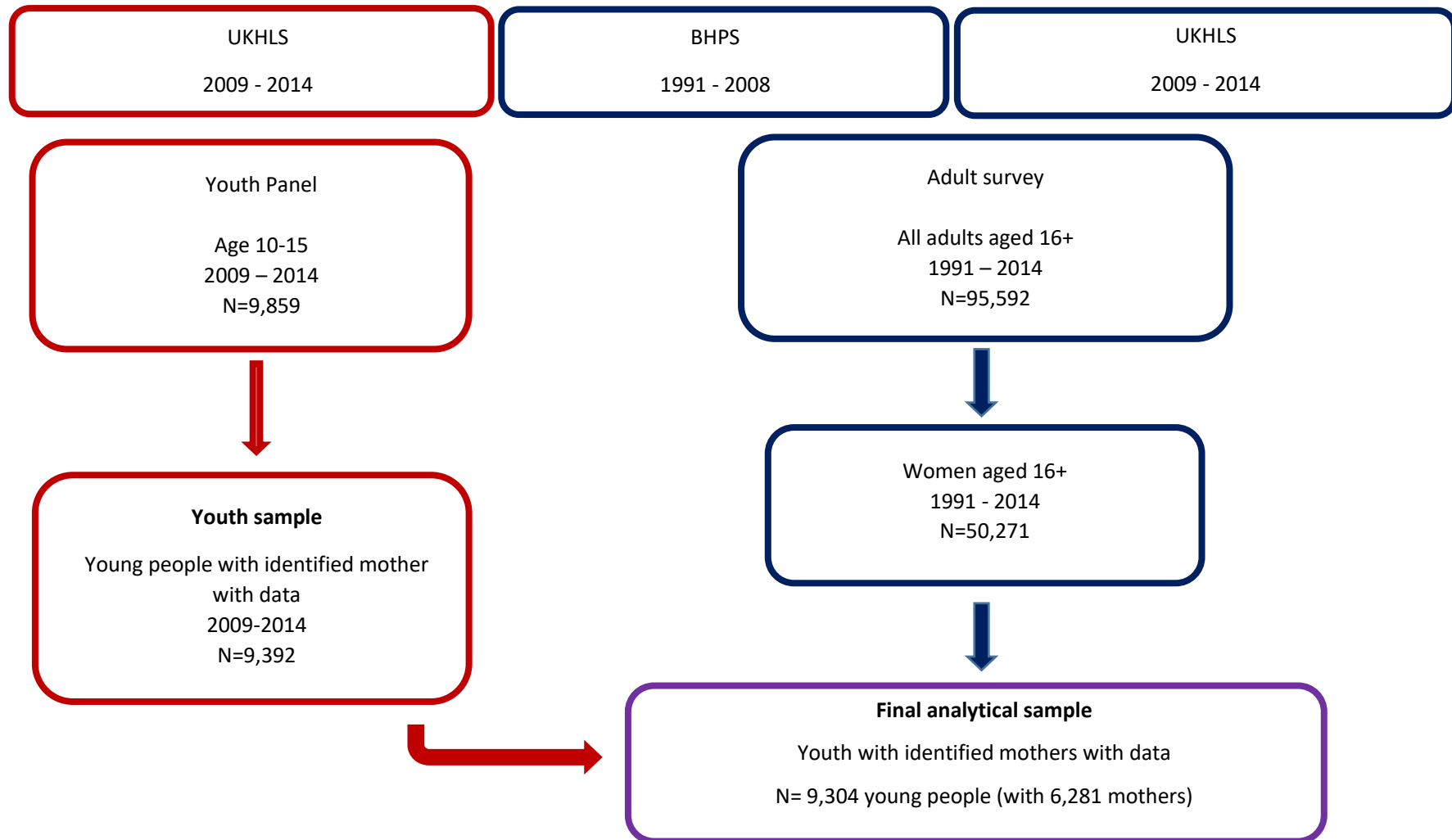
Key variables

Key independent variable: lone motherhood

The key independent variable in these analyses defined whether the mothers of the young people in the youth sample were ever a lone parent. As I was concerned with whether lone motherhood had the detrimental effect on young people's social and educational outcomes that politicians and the media portrayed, it was key to ensure that lone motherhood in any form and for any duration was captured by this variable.

An initial analysis of the transitions into and out of lone parenthood conducted at a preliminary stage of the research revealed that mothers in the dataset who had ever been a lone parent had experienced a range of different transitions into and out of lone parenthood throughout their participation in the study. There were over 600 different sequences identified, with many mothers having unknown parenthood status for some years. Of the twenty most prevalent sequences, in eleven cases mothers were lone parents in every year of data they supplied, but this varied from one to eighteen years and three of these sequences included missing years of data. Four sequences showed a move out of lone parenthood and five a move into lone parenthood. These twenty most prevalent sequences comprised only two thirds of mothers who had ever been a lone parent, indicating that there was still more variation in the rest of the sample. For the purposes of the statistical analysis, to represent all or even some of these transitions into and out of lone parenthood would complicate the interpretation of any results and potentially affect their statistical significance (Gordon, 2010). Additionally, including multiple transitions as separate categories in the analysis would imply that a mother who becomes a lone parent is essentially different for example from a mother who stops being a lone parent or who has multiple moves in and out of lone parenthood. These considerations provided pragmatic reasons for my choice of a dichotomous variable. The final decision was additionally based on the findings of the discourse analysis. Although the duration of lone parenthood has been seen as important in other studies (Ringback Weitoft et al., 2003; Amato, 2005; Fergusson, Boden and Horwood, 2007; Gagnon, 2016), as we will see in Chapter 4 the media discourse does not distinguish between the length of time a mother is a lone parent. In fact, lone parenthood is not portrayed as a temporary situation at any point in the media discourse, despite the average length of time spent as a lone parent in the UK being five years (Skew, 2009).

Since the duration of lone motherhood can vary, preliminary analysis had revealed numerous different patterns of mothers moves in and out of lone parenthood, and I did not have

complete life histories for all the mothers in the youth sample, I chose to use a measure of 'ever a lone mother' as my key independent variable. Some mothers appear only once in the dataset, some in every wave of data. Using 'ever' captured the mothers' experience of being a lone parent but also allowed for the fact that these situations may have changed outside of their participation in the survey. A similar strategy was used in a study of the experience of social housing (Feinstein et al., 2008).

I had initially planned to base the lone motherhood variable on the marital status of the mothers in the sample, but this did not give me sufficient information to construct the lone motherhood measure, as marital status only gives part of the picture. Instead, I used the *egoalt* files which enumerate all members of the household, whether they are present at the time of the interview. Using this information, I identified the parents of children and whether there were one or two parents in the household. These included stepparents, natural, foster and adoptive parents in both the BHPS and the UKHLS. Using the household grid to identify sets of mothers and children, rather than relying on head of the household data, meant that even in cases of 'hidden' lone parents (ONS, 2014c), that is, lone parent families living in multi-generational households, the family unit could still be identified. If only one parent was identified, this parent was deemed a lone parent for that wave of data. The process was repeated with all waves of data, so that as full a picture of the potentially changing family structure as possible could be determined. Finally, a variable was generated capturing whether in one or more waves, the mother of the young person in the sample was a lone parent or whether there was no record of any experience of lone motherhood. This variable, *mum_ever_lp* was coded dichotomously: 1 for ever a lone mother, 0 for not.

Key dependent variable: The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

For the social outcomes analysis, I chose the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) as my key dependent variable. The SDQ is a twenty-five item questionnaire, developed by Robert Goodman as an updated self-completion measure comparable to the Rutter scales which had been in widespread use for the measurement of psychological wellbeing from the 1960s to the 1990s (Goodman, 1997). The perceived benefits of the SDQ are manifold. Aside from being shorter in length and relevant to children and young people from 4 to 16, the questions also focus on a mixture of positive and negative behaviours and traits, unlike the Rutter scales which concentrated on negative behaviour (Goodman, 1997). Goodman took the five dimensions that the Rutter parent questionnaire covered and designed the SDQ so that there

were an equal number of questions for each sub-scale. When the SDQ was tested alongside the Rutter questionnaires, the scores were highly correlated, indicating the validity of the SDQ as a worthy successor. Since the 1990s, the SDQ has been used by researchers in health, education and psychology (McMunn et al., 2001; Hawkes and Joshi, 2011; Collishaw et al., 2007) and is now used as the measurement tool for the psychological wellbeing of Looked After Children by the UK Government (Department for Education, 2012a).

In much of the literature on children's mental health and family structure which uses the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, the questions are answered by the mother (Hawkes and Joshi, 2011; Kelly et al., 2012; Kiernan and Mensah, 2009). In many cases the reliance on maternal reports is likely to be due to the availability of data, however, there is a danger of results bias due to the mother's own mental health or behaviour resulting in an inaccurate reflection of their child's psychological wellbeing (Fomby and Cherlin, 2008). To counter this, one study includes maternal and child-reports of emotional distress (Owen, Thompson and Kaslow, 2006) although they do not discuss any differences between these reports, even though a correlation matrix indicated a considerable mismatch between them.

Literature from health disciplines has raised the issue of parental self-reports, finding that parents constantly underestimated their child's physical, social and psychological wellbeing compared to the children's scores (Sheffler et al., 2009; Lim, Velozo and Bendixen, 2014). The authors concluded that while the parental ratings can act as a counterbalance to the children's reports, "the child's or adolescent's report is the gold standard" (Sheffler et al., 2009; p. 2852). In a study using the SDQ, young people aged between 11 and 15 filled out the SDQ, as did their teachers and parents (Maughan et al., 2008). However, their discussion focussed on parent-reports since these showed the largest changes over time. In general, the youth self-reports were more negative than those of their parents or teachers. Young people's mean score on total difficulties was higher than parents' or teachers', as were their ratings for conduct problems, hyperactivity and emotional problems.

The questionnaire consists of twenty-five questions which are grouped into the following sub-scales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems and prosocial behaviour (see Table A2 in the Appendix for the full content of the questionnaire). For each question, the respondent can respond certainly true, somewhat true or not true. These take the values of 0, 1 and 2 although how these scores are allocated to the

items depends on the item[3]. These scores are added together to create a total on a scale of 1 to 10 for each subscale. In all but the prosocial score, a higher score reflects more problematic behaviour. Additionally, a Total Difficulties Score is calculated by adding all the subscale scores except the prosocial subscale, resulting in a scale of 1 to 35.

Key covariates

The key covariates chosen for the analysis are primarily based on the findings of the discourse analysis. As previously mentioned, by analysing the media discourse through an intersectional lens, I wanted to explore which specific identities lay beneath the generic term of 'lone parents' and to investigate whether employing these identity factors in the quantitative analysis of a large-scale dataset would support or challenge the dominant stereotype of lone parents being detrimental to their children's outcomes. As will be detailed in Chapter 4, the portrayal of lone parenthood, which emerged most strongly from the discourse analysis, was that of a White, unmarried, young mother, who was claiming benefits and living in social housing. I will now outline how each of these identity factors were coded in order to be operationalised within the quantitative analysis. Detailed information about the files and waves in which the original variables were found, and the different stages of recoding are presented in Table A1 in the Appendix.

Gender

As discussed above, as part of the preparation of the sample I identified the parental gender of respondents and removed all men from the dataset, so the sample only consisted of mothers.

Ethnicity

As will be seen in Chapter 4 ethnicity in relation to lone parenthood in the media discourse was almost completely absent, except to provide a contrast, usually for statistical purposes, to the unnamed category of White lone parents. As I discuss in Chapter 4, there are two possible explanations for this absence: either ethnicity is not relevant to lone parenthood in the UK or "whiteness as a descriptor for whites often goes unnamed, unnoticed and unspoken" (Mazzei,

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[3] More details can be found at www.sdqinfo.com.

2006; p.1129). I argue that how ethnicity is used in the discourse leads me to believe that it is the second explanation: what was pertinent in the discourse in terms of ethnicity and lone parenthood was Whiteness as an unnamed category.

However, I decided to code two different variables to capture ethnicity in the analysis. One was a 'Whiteness' variable, based on the finding in the discourse, which recoded the variables on ethnicity (*race* and *racel)* into a dichotomous variable which coded 1 for White and 0 for all other ethnic groups. Although the inclusion of this variable was designed to mirror the media discourse, it is highly problematic in that it not only homogenises the experiences of people from Black and Minority Ethnic groups but also could be seen to privilege White experience over the experiences of people from BME groups. In Critical Race Theory terms, such a process would be 'white supremacist'; that is "a comprehensive condition whereby the interests and perceptions of white subjects are continually placed centre stage and assumed as 'normal'" (Gillborn, 2006; p.318) which was not my intention. However, a contrary opinion, as detailed in the Literature review is that looking specifically at Whiteness serves to ethnicise White families (Phoenix and Husain, 2007) rather than regard them as the norm against which families from other ethnic groups are compared. Additionally, Black children, as well as White working-class children suffer from a pathologized presence/normative absence, in that they tend to be missing from discussion unless they can be presented as abnormal (to the norm of White middle-class). A focus on Whiteness, together with the introduction of socio-economic variables, may render present those White children who are often normatively absent. However, since the use of a dichotomous variable of Whiteness would mean the outcomes for children from Black and Minority Ethnic groups would remain hidden, I decided to run the models a second time, with the inclusion of a more nuanced variable on ethnicity.

Two variables in the BHPS and UKHLS measure ethnicity and coding for one of these changes between the two surveys. Data on ethnicity was initially collected in waves 1 to 12 in a short eight-category variable (*race*) which among other omissions, did not include the option for a mixed-race category – anyone who fit this ethnic category, together with those from all other ethnicities which did not fit into the eight available choices were put in the 'other ethnic group' category. From Wave 13 of the BHPS, ethnicity data were collected in a variable with more categories (*racel*). Although it was collected from all respondents in wave 13 whether or not they had participated in the previous waves, not everyone who had already supplied ethnicity data in the previous twelve years took part in Wave 13 or beyond. This resulted in the existence of two variables with differing levels of detail each with missing data. Furthermore, the ethnicity variable in the UKHLS changed again, but more closely followed the categories

used by the ONS (2017d). While I initially wanted to recode the BHPS ethnicity variable to match the more detailed UKHLS version, for practical reasons, I recoded into a slightly expanded version of the initial BHPS variable as this reduced the amount of missingness. It also created sufficiently large cell sizes for ethnicity to be included in the regression analyses. For example, prior to collapsing the categories there were only 35 people with Chinese mothers and 39 with Mixed Race, White and Asian mothers in the analytical sample.

Becoming a mother before the age of 20

The inclusion of the variable for maternal age is based on the predominance of youth in relation to lone motherhood in the discourse analysis. I used two variables, one giving the mother's age (*age12* in the BHPS and *age_dv* in the UKHLS) and a second giving the year her first child was born (*ch1by* in the BHPS and *ch1by4* in the UKHLS) to create a variable reflecting maternal age at child's birth. This was combined longitudinally into a variable *youngmum* that was coded 1 if she had become a mother before she was 20 and 0 if she had become a mother aged 20 or over.

Unmarried/never married

Despite the fact that lone parenthood can be caused by a number of different life events, including widowhood, divorce, separation or abandonment, in the media discourse the main preoccupation with marital status was with the unmarried or never married status of the mothers in question. The full marital histories of the maternal sample were coded in each wave to reflect the marital status of the mother in each wave of the data she participated. The categories for marital status were married/civil partnership, cohabiting, widowed, divorced, separated and never married. This annual data was then combined longitudinally into a dichotomous variable *ma_nevermarr* which was coded 1 for those who had stated "never married" in each wave of the data and 0 for those who had not.

Socio-economic status

Historically socio-economic status in large-scale surveys such as the British Cohort Studies utilized measures of social class such as the Goldthorpe, RGSC and NS-SEC class systems. However, it has been argued that the type of jobs our fathers did when we were 14 no longer

signifies our social class (Savage et al., 2013) but class is shaped more by people's actions, locations, clothes and language (Skeggs, 2005; McKenzie, 2015). Recognition of the changing and multi-faceted nature of class in the modern day has led to the UK Great British Class Survey, with the aim of measuring class in a more Bourdieusian manner based on economic, cultural and social capitals (Savage et al., 2013). In the context of lone parenthood, particularly lone motherhood, neither occupation nor income are appropriate variables for measuring class, as there may be a large proportion of lone mothers who are not able to combine work and family care, or who are underemployed in order to fit around their family's needs. Standard measures of social class, such as father's occupation, may therefore under-represent the economic circumstances of the family, while others such as income, may not apply to all households, who would then be excluded from the analysis. Social researchers have therefore utilized other socio-economic variables in their analyses of the social outcomes of children such as housing tenure (Spencer, 2005; McMunn et al., 2001) and receipt of benefits (McMunn et al., 2001).

As will be seen from the discourse analysis in Chapter 4, explicit mentions of working-class or middle-class were almost entirely absent from the media discourse. Instead, other socio-economic markers were used, such as references to benefits receipt and social housing tenure. In order to mirror the findings from the discourse analysis, as well as echo the studies of Spencer (2005) and McMunn et al. (2001), I included two socio-economic variables in the analysis: receipt of benefits and living in social housing.

Receipt of benefits

As detailed in Chapter 2, the benefits landscape in the UK is not static, with successive governments changing the type or name of different benefits that can be claimed, together with amending who can qualify for them. In line with previous studies (Feinstein et al., 2008), I chose to include all means-tested benefits in my analysis, some of which were available in every wave, some in as few as seven waves, depending on policy changes (see Table A1 for further details). A dichotomous variable was created to capture the receipt of any of these benefits in each year, which was then combined longitudinally into a second dichotomous variable *mum_ever_ben* coded 1 for receipt of benefits and 0 for no receipt of benefits.

Living in social housing

Social housing, more specifically council housing tenancy, emerges from the discourse analysis as closely linked to lone motherhood, particularly in the 1993 corpus. To reflect this, I created a variable which captured whether the mother has ever lived in social housing, that is, has rented from a local authority or housing association. The information was derived from two variables, *tenure* in the BHPS and *tenure_dv* in the UKHLS, which had identical coding with distinct categories for renting from a local authority or renting from a housing association. I created a dichotomous variable for each wave which indicated whether or not a mother was renting social housing. This information was then combined longitudinally into a variable *mum_ever_laharented* coded 1 for a mother who had rented from a local authority or housing association in at least one wave of data and 0 for a mother who had never rented social housing.

In addition to the five factors that emerged from the discourse analysis, several other demographic variables were included in the analyses based on previous studies on the educational and/or social outcomes of young people. These were the gender of the young person, household size and the level of maternal education.

Gender of young person

A *ypsex* variable was available in the *youth* file, coded 1 for male, 2 for female. I recoded this into a dichotomous *ypfemale* variable, 1 for female and 0 for male.

Household size

The variable for household size was based on the *hhsize* variable in the *indresp* files in the BHPS and in the *hhresp* file in the UKHLS which gives the number of people currently residing in the household. As discussed in the literature review, household size can be an important factor in the life chances of young people, due to the sharing of resources, including rooms, space and time (Blake, 1986; Downey, 1995). I mentioned previously that there are some issues with using household size as a background variable as there are reasons for larger households which this simple count of the number of residents does not capture. These factors are relevant in discussing results relating to this background characteristic. As the household size could fluctuate between waves, rather than creating a constant as I did for the other

background variables, the household size variable was merged into the final sample according to the wave of data to which it applies.

Maternal education

Two variables measure maternal educational qualifications: *qfedhi* in the BHPS and *qfhigh* in the UKHLS. These are measured slightly differently so were first recoded into a variable that simplified the coding structure. I then derived a longitudinal measure to capture the highest level of education achieved. This longitudinal variable was then used to create three binary variables for inclusion in the analytical models: no qualifications, school level qualifications and higher or further education qualifications where in each case 1 indicated having this level of qualifications and 0 indicated not.

Descriptive statistics

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the key variables in the final sample. Following Nepomnyaschy and Donnelly (2015) and Pilkauskas et al. (2014) the table shows descriptive statistics for the pooled sample, which is to say that although the number of young people in the sample is 9,304, since over half of the sample appears in more than one wave, the number of observations are 20,813.

As can be seen in Table 2, 30 percent of the sample had a mother who has ever been a lone parent. While this is higher than the ONS estimate of 25 percent, it is important to remember that the ONS figure captures the stock of lone mothers, whereas the variable I have included includes those who have ever been a lone mother.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for the social outcomes analytical sample (N=20,813)

	Frequency	Mean	Std. Dev.
Lone motherhood			
Ever a lone mother	20,813	.30	.46
Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire			
Emotional symptoms	12,045	2.76	2.19
Conduct problems	12,043	2.19	1.80
Hyperactivity/inattention	12,042	3.91	2.31
Peer relationship problems	12,043	1.73	1.63
Prosocial behaviour	12,051	7.71	1.84
Total Difficulties Score	12,033	10.60	5.63
Key covariates			
Ethnicity of mother			
Whiteness (1=white)	20,688	.79	.41
Ethnicity of mother (expanded)			
White	16,272	.79	
Mixed	283	.01	
Indian	749	.04	
Pakistani	977	.05	
Bangladeshi	601	.03	
Black Caribbean	411	.02	
Black African	738	.04	
Any other ethnicity (including Chinese, Other Asian, Other Black, Arab)	657	.03	
	20,688		
Maternal age at birth			
Mother age<20	20,813	.05	.21
Receipt of benefits			
Ever received benefits	20,715	.78	.41
Marital status			
Never married	20,769	.12	.33
Housing tenure			
Ever rented social housing	20,809	.27	.44
Background characteristics			
Gender of young person			
Female	20,813	.50	.50

	Frequency	Mean	Std. Dev.
Age			
10	3,266	.16	.36
11	3,445	.17	.37
12	3,570	.17	.38
13	3,599	.17	.38
14	3,518	.17	.37
15	3,415	.16	.37
Maternal education			
No qualifications	3,184	.15	
School qualifications	9,380	.45	
Further/higher education	8,212	.40	
	20,776		
Household size	20,810	4.44	1.36

Note: unweighted data

The different directions of the SDQ subscales noted above, with only the prosocial scale indicating a higher score associated with positive outcomes, can be observed in the means for the subscales. The prosocial scale has a mean of 7.71, while the four other subscales have means ranging from 1.73 (peer relationship problems) to 3.91 (hyperactivity and inattention). The sample mean for the Total Difficulties scale (10.6) is close to the normative mean for British children of 10.3 (Youth in Mind, 2001). The standard deviations of these subscales show that the emotional symptoms subscale and the hyperactivity/inattention subscales have the most variance between individuals.

In terms of ethnicity, the sample is overwhelmingly white (79%) although this is a little lower than recorded in the 2011 Census (ONS, 2012). Five percent of the sample had mothers who were aged under 20 at the birth of their first child. Government statistics show that the proportion of births to mothers under 20 has dropped in recent years to just over three percent in 2016, but the average percentage over the timeframe of 1991 to present is approximately six percent, so the analytical sample appears representative of the population average (ONS, 2017).

Over three quarters of the sample have mothers who ever received any benefits. While this may appear high, it is in part due to the decision to include tax credits in the variable. Only eight percent of working age adults in receipt of any state benefits are classed as unemployed, while 55 percent are classified as employed (DWP, 2016). Furthermore, as with the lone motherhood variable, the *ever* element to the variable means the percentage is higher than

the proportion in receipt of benefits at any one time. Twelve percent of the mothers were unmarried in every wave that they appeared, although as discussed earlier this could represent one wave or many more. Over a quarter of the sample had mothers who had ever rented social housing. Government estimates state that in 2010, eighteen percent of households rented from a council or housing association (ONS, 2012a).

The *youth sample* is split in almost equal proportions of male and female respondents. The age of participants ranged from 10 to 15 years as expected since these are the target age groups for inclusion in the Youth Panel, with almost equal proportions of young people at each age. Fifteen percent of the mothers in the sample had no qualifications. Data from the 2011 Census revealed that a quarter of the UK population had no qualifications, but that women and under 50s were more qualified (ONS, 2014b), so the sample statistic is likely to be similar to the national picture. The average household size was over four people.

4.2. The sample: Educational outcomes

The sample for the educational outcomes analysis is a subsample of the social outcomes data. Firstly, respondents in the first wave of the UKHLS were asked for their consent to link the survey information with their child's educational data. Of the 9,304 young people in the final sample, 5,078 had parents who gave their consent, while 1,780 did not with missing data for a further 2,449, mainly due to the fact that consent was requested in the first wave of the UKHLS, which did not include BHPS respondents. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, the matching that was undertaken between the two datasets in 2012 by CapGemini resulted in only 60% exact matching of pupil information to survey information with a further 12 percent of 'fuzzy' matching (ISER, 2015).

The youth sample from the UKHLS/BHPS consists of 20,813 person-years or observations for 9,304 young people. Combining the National Pupil Database files for Early Years, Key Stages 1 to 5, and the Census using individuals' identification numbers resulted in a dataset consisting of educational data for 7,525 young people. Merging these two datasets resulted in an analytical sample of 3,657 individuals. This means 1,421 (or 28 percent) of individuals for whom linkage consent had been granted did not match with the NPD, that is, there was a 72 percent match. This is the exact proportion of matched data stated in the documentation on NPD/UKHLS linkage (ISER, 2015). The final analytical sample for the educational outcomes

analysis was comprised of 3,657 young people; approximately a third of the number of young people in the social outcomes sample.

A potential concern was that the parents who gave their consent for the linkage of educational data might differ on important characteristics from the larger sample, meaning that the NPD subsample was not representative of the youth sample. I conducted an analysis of educational consent by lone motherhood status for the 9,304 young people in the youth sample, which revealed that the proportions of lone mothers were similar. A Pearson Chi-squared test gave the non-significant result of 1.15 (Pr=0.28) indicating that there were no significant differences between the youth and NPD subsample by lone motherhood.

It was no longer necessary to treat the data as a panel dataset, since there were only one set of observations for each individual, so the NPD sample was treated like a cross-sectional sample, albeit one which included data from different time points. I detail below the key variables for this sample before outlining my analytical strategy.

Key variables

The key independent variable for the educational outcomes analysis remains the same as for the social outcomes analysis: lone motherhood. Similarly, the key covariates remain largely unchanged. This section therefore focuses on the key dependent variable as well as two additional covariates which were unavailable in the BHPS and UKHLS.

Key dependent variable: Key Stage 4 attainment

The key dependent variable in the educational outcomes analysis is pupil attainment at Key Stage 4. The Key Stage 4 scores exist in four forms in the dataset, the summary statistics of which are presented in Table 3. Two variables represent the Key Stage 4 threshold measure of 5+ A*-C GCSEs, one for any subjects and another which includes English and Maths (DCSF, 2009). The mean for the 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths measure indicates that 57 percent of the sample achieved this, which fits with the national level which varied between 56 and 60 percent in the period 2012 – 2015 (DfE, 2016). Two further variables present Key Stage 4 results converted into scores, with approximately six points representing a difference between two grades at GCSE (DfE, 2013). The benefit of using one of these in my analysis, was that any differences that appeared could be translated into an understandable form, for example, six points is equal to the difference between achieving a B and a C at GCSE. There

were two types of Key Stage 4 scores to choose from, a total score; and a capped score, which takes into consideration the 'Best 8' GCSE grades (Strand, Malmberg and Hall, 2015). I chose to use the uncapped total score in my analyses for three reasons. Firstly, the score had a more normal distribution than the Best 8. Secondly, as can be seen from Table 3 there were more observations in the sample for the scores than for the number of GCSEs. Finally, the total uncapped score has been cited as the "most inclusive measure of attainment at age 16" (Strand, 2014; p. 139).

Table 3: Frequency, Means and Standard Deviations of Key Stage 4 scores (total and capped) (N=1,509)

Score	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.
Total GCSE and equivalents new style point score	1,509	480.24	161.90
Capped GCSE and equivalents new style point score	1,509	346.51	84.28
Achieved 5 or more A* - C	1,267	.62	.49
Achieved 5 or more A* - C including English and Maths	1,267	.57	.50

Covariates

The covariates in the NPD analysis are largely the same as those used in the social outcomes analysis with a few exceptions. Key Stage 1 scores were included in the models to control for prior attainment together with two socio-economic measures that exist in the NPD but were unavailable in the UKHLS: Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) and eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM). These have been named the "main measures (of deprivation) used in educational analysis" (DCSF, 2009; p.8) and provide a measure of deprivation at both a family level and an area level.

Key Stage 1

Key Stage 1 (KS1) tests are taken by children in England at age 7, at the end of Year 2 in Reading, Writing, Maths and Science. The Key Stage 1 results are usually given in terms of levels of attainment, from 1 to 4. However, it is not a simple numerical scale as the full range of Key Stage 1 results are 1, 2C, 2B, 2A, 3 and 4 and W. Level 4 is the highest level of attainment, Level 1 the lowest and a W denotes "working towards level 1" (DfE, 2012; p.2). For the purposes of statistical analysis, a numerical scale is easier to analyse and interpret but Key Stage 1 point scores are only available in the NPD for those respondents who took the tests post-2005. Since I was interested in pupils with Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 1 data, I needed the

Key Stage 1 data from before 2005 and therefore recalculated the relevant Key Stage 1 levels into scores, using the conversion provided by the Department for Education (2005) in Table 4.

Table 4: Key Stage 1 levels and their relevant point scores

Level	W	1	2C	2B or 2	2A	3	4
Points	3	9	13	15	17	21	27

An analysis of the data showed that 1,434 pupils in the sample took their Key Stage 1 test between 2000 and 2005 *and* took their Key Stage 4 exams between 2009 and 2013. These pupils were the focus of analysis within the NPD sample.

While I had the advantage of other socio-economic indicators due to the linked data from the *youth sample*, previous education studies using solely the NPD have not, so have used the socio-economic indicators within the NPD in analysis of children's outcomes by income. The two available indicators are the IDACI (DCSF, 2009; Strand, 2014; Strand et al., 2015) and the Free School Meals (Sigle-Rushton, 2005; Strand and Demie, 2007; Plewis, 2011; Duckworth and Schoon, 2012) although both of these measures have their detractors.

Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)

The IDACI "measures the proportion of children under 16 in each area that are eligible for certain income-related benefits" (DCSF, 2009; p.8). The NPD provides a rank and a score for each of the Lower Layer Super Output Areas, which each comprise around 1500 households. Rank 1 denotes the most deprived (although the first rank in the sample is 2), with the highest rank of 32,478 the least deprived. The score in the sample runs from 0 to .988 where a higher score indicates a more deprived community. Since the score is on a smaller scale than the ranking it was more practical to use the IDACI score for the analysis. One issue with the IDACI is that although it represents the level of disadvantage at a local level, the level is large enough as not to be indicative of the deprivation affecting all children in that area; not everyone within these areas will experience the same levels of disadvantage.

Free School Meals (FSM)

The Free School Meals measure applies to pupils recorded as ever eligible for FSM over a six-year period (ISER, 2015). A third of all pupils within the NPD youth sample have ever been eligible for FSM with missing data for 14 percent. Eligibility for free school meals is based on income levels and is available to children in families in receipt of a number of benefits

including Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Child Tax Credit and Universal Credit (UK Government, 2017)

As with the IDACI measure, there are issues with the use of FSM as a predictor variable, as researchers have found differences in the relationship between FSM and school achievement and that between net household income and school achievement (Hobbs and Vignoles, 2010). There are also issues with how the data are collected as well as the take up of free school meals by those who are eligible, due to potential stigma (Storey and Chamberlain, 2001). More recently with the introduction of free meals in September 2014 for Reception to Year 2 children there has been a reduction in the number of parents declaring their children as eligible for free school meals, now known as pupil premium (DfE, 2017a).

Descriptive statistics

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for the NPD sample. Since the NPD sample represents a subsample of the *youth sample*, it is important to ascertain if there are any important differences between the two. A comparison of the statistics in Table 2 with those in Table 5 shows that despite the reduced number of observations, there are few differences between the main independent variables of interest. The proportion of children whose mother was ever a lone parent is the same at thirty percent, while the proportions for the key covariates of ethnicity, maternal age, benefits receipt, marital status, and social housing tenure and are all within a couple of percentage points of the same variables in the larger youth sample. The only variable which has a discernible difference is maternal education: in the NPD sample, seven percent fewer mothers have further or higher education qualifications.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for the NPD sample (N=3,657)

	Frequency	Mean	Std. Dev.
Lone motherhood			
Ever a lone mother	3,657	0.32	0.50
Key Stage 4 uncapped score	1,509	480.2	161.9
Key covariates			
Ethnicity of mother (whiteness)			
Whiteness (1=white)	3,656	0.77	0.42
Ethnicity of mother (expanded categories)			
White British	2,798	.77	
Mixed	61	.02	
Indian	153	.04	
Pakistani	192	.05	
Bangladeshi	112	.03	
Black Caribbean	90	.02	
Black African	135	.04	
Other ethnic groups	115	.03	
	3,656		
Maternal age at birth			
Mother aged under 20 (1 = yes)	3,657	0.05	0.22
Receipt of benefits			
Ever received benefits (1 = yes)	3,654	0.78	0.41
Marital status			
Never married (1 = yes)	3,657	0.15	0.35
Housing tenure			
Ever rented social housing	3,657	0.28	0.45
Background characteristics			
Gender of young person			
Female	3,657	0.49	0.50
Maternal education			
No qualifications	592	.16	
School qualifications	1,857	.51	
Further/higher education	1,205	.33	
	3,654		
Household size (scale from 2 to 16)	3,656	4.40	1.34

	Frequency	Mean	Std. Dev.
Key Stage 1 score	3,510	15.67	3.71
IDACI score	3,650	0.24	0.19
Ever received Free School Meals	3,151	0.34	0.47

4.3. Analytical strategy

Having outlined the two samples for the quantitative analyses, I conclude this chapter with an overview of my analytical strategy which is broadly the same for both samples. The results are presented in Chapter 5 for the social outcomes analysis and Chapter 6 for educational outcomes.

I employed a three-part strategy for the analysis. Firstly, I investigated the nature of the key variables in each sample using univariate and bivariate analysis. This involved exploring the descriptive statistics for all variables before cross-tabulating the key dependent and independent variables. These analyses allowed me to understand the data and the relationships between the variables under analysis.

In a second stage I used random effects regression analyses to explore these associations further with and without the inclusion of the covariates. I used random effects rather than fixed effects since I needed to include time invariant variables such as gender, which would be absorbed by the intercept in a fixed effects model (Torres-Reyna, 2007). I performed three regression models, but within the second and third model, I entered the identity factors from the discourse analysis singly, then together. The first model was a parsimonious model containing simply the key dependent variable for either social or educational outcomes and the key independent variable of lone motherhood. A second model included the key covariates which mirrored the factors emerging from the discourse analysis. In a third model I included the background controls which had emerged from the literature review as important to young people's outcomes, namely, the young person's gender, household size and maternal education for both analyses, with the additional inclusion of KS 1 scores, the IDACI score and FSM measures in the educational outcomes analysis.

The third stage of my analytical strategy was to implement the intersectional approach within the regression models. This is done in quantitative analysis through the use of interaction terms, which essentially multiply one variable by another, thereby mirroring the multiplicative nature of intersectionality theory. Previous research on educational attainment has identified

interaction terms as a future avenue for research to move away from the additive aspects of indexes of disadvantage often used (Duckworth and Schoon, 2012). An intersectional approach avoids the issues implicit in an additive approach, which gives equal weight to each dimension of identity but ignores the potential combined weight of these factors (Levitas et al., 2007). Others have argued that additive models can have as much explanatory power as intersectional models (Berthoud, 2003) but this seems methodologically incorrect when taking an intersectional viewpoint of the topic. Initially, my intention was to operationalize the intersections of different identities by including interaction terms for multiple identity factors. It was not possible to include all interactions between the five identity factors in the models as the models became too complex and some cell sizes were not large enough to be acceptable (Bond et al., 2015) particularly in the educational outcomes dataset.

Instead, I introduced interaction terms in the model for each of the five factors interacted with the lone motherhood variable. This had the advantage of identifying if any of the discourse analysis factors when interacted with lone motherhood had a multiple effect on outcomes. That is, that while the previous regressions may have identified associations between e.g. Whiteness and educational outcomes and between lone motherhood and educational outcomes, the use of interaction terms would indicate any association between White lone motherhood and educational outcomes. All analyses were undertaken using STATA version 14.

The results of these regression models are set out in Chapters 5 and 6, but first I present the results of the media discourse analysis used to inform the choice of variables for the quantitative analyses.

Chapter 4: Discourse analysis

This chapter presents the results of an analysis of newspaper articles from two years spanning two decades to uncover which identity factors were most commonly assigned to lone parents in the media.

As discussed in the Introduction, lone parents are not a homogenous group; differing in gender, age, education, income and class. However, all too often the terms 'lone parents' or 'single parents' are used by politicians and journalists, without recognising their heterogeneity. Since the dominant media discourse on lone parents is negative, such grouping thereby classifies all lone parents as problematic. Tom Sackville (as junior Health Minister in 1993), for example, labelled lone parents "one of our greatest social problems" (White, 1993) while elsewhere they have been identified as the targets of a Conservative backlash (Moore, 2013b). It is unlikely in either case that such a statement was intended to encompass all types of lone parents, of all backgrounds, ethnicity, age and gender, yet this lack of distinction appears to be commonplace in ministerial pronouncements and newspaper articles.

As a result of this generic discourse, I felt it was important to analyse the media discourse. I intended to discover what identifying factors were commonly attributed to lone parents and, as a result, associated with the pervasive view of resultant negative outcomes for their children. I would then be able to use these identity factors in my quantitative analysis, mirroring the prevailing discourse to discover if there was any truth to it. As outlined in the Methodology, I followed an intersectional approach: identifying the social locations associated with lone parents in the discourse, while looking for instances where more than one of these social locations intersected, in order to construct a picture of the lone parents targeted by the media. The identity factors used for analysis followed the key axes of intersectional analysis such as gender, ethnicity and class, together with additional factors such as sexuality, age and marital status which are included in wider discussions of intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

The chapter examines the identity factors in turn. Each section presents the results of an analysis of the 1993 corpus for both sources, followed by the findings of the 2013 analysis, noting any similarities and differences between the two sources and time periods. While I expected there to be substantial differences both between the sources and over the twenty-year period, I discovered more parallels than differences, on both areas of comparison. Details of the number of references for each identity factor are presented in Table A3 in the Appendix.

As noted in the Methodology, the 2013 corpus contained a fifth of the number of references to lone parents compared to the 1993 corpus.

1. Identity factors

1.1. Gender

When lone parenthood is mentioned, inevitably women are at the forefront of the discussion, since they represent the overwhelming majority of lone parents (ONS, 2016). It was anticipated therefore that an analysis of the corpus would reveal a significant number of references to lone mothers, single mothers and single mums and proportionally fewer mentions of single fathers, lone fathers and single dads. Since the gender of lone parents in 1993 is reported variously within the corpus as 90 and 95 percent female, it is understandable that there would be a greater focus on lone mothers than on their male counterparts. This was indeed the case; there were over 600 references to 'single mothers' or other feminized references to lone parents in 1993, compared with 17 to lone fathers. It is clear that lone parenthood is quasi-synonymous with lone motherhood.

Despite the scarcity of references to lone fatherhood, these articles provide some noteworthy details about lone fatherhood in the early 1990s. The UK had one of the highest incidences of single father families in Europe in 1993 (Carvel, 1993), a fact that is neither referred to anywhere else in the corpus, nor resulted in a raft of policies to alter the trend. Survey results reported in another article revealed that a third of British women felt that a lone mother could bring up their child as well as two parents, while fewer British women and men agreed that a lone father could do likewise (McKie, 1993) These findings indicate that when it comes to raising children, people's attitudes tend to follow gender 'norms'; perhaps this gender normativity explains why the incidence of lone fathers was not addressed with the same concern as that of lone mothers.

The majority of references to lone parents were made in gender-neutral terms, with references such as lone parent(s), single parent(s) and one parent occurring more frequently than their gendered counterparts in both sources and time periods. While this was explained in part by references to lone parent benefit and other gender-neutral policy terms, the practice also extended to discussions of the lives of lone parents by journalists and politicians. Most female and gender-neutral references occurred separately from one another, that is, an article generally contained only one of these to refer to lone parents. Nevertheless, over ten

percent of articles used references to lone parenthood and lone motherhood interchangeably or used 'lone parent' in reference to a mother. Articles and quotes from politicians slipped seamlessly from gender-neutral to feminised depictions of lone parents. For example, "The controversy's roots go back to government attacks on single mothers during the Conservative Party conference ... A parade of ministers lined up lone parents as the villains of welfare spending" (M. Phillips, 1993) and, "Margaret Thatcher said it would ''give the lone parent back *her* morale and *her* confidence''" (*The Times*, 1993b; my italics).

The same phenomenon occurred in headlines in the 1993 corpus of *The Guardian*; on three occasions the gendered nature of lone parent descriptors changed between the headline and subheading, thereby revealing that it was in fact lone motherhood that was the article's focus (Hetherington, 1993; Griffin and Younge, 1993; Weston, 1993). In contrast, there were only a few cases where elision occurred between 'single fathers' and 'single parents'; references to lone fathers tended either to be the focus of an article or in response to one, rarely were they explicitly included in wider discussions of lone parenthood.

Two decades later, there were noticeable differences in how gender was referenced in relation to lone parents. Lone fathers made up a larger proportion of the references in 2013, although still not commensurate with their proportion in the population. There were twice as many references to lone fathers in *The Times* as in *The Guardian* with only four mentions of lone fathers in *The Guardian.* Lone mothers were discussed in nearly two-thirds of references used in *The Guardian*, with the remainder largely gender-neutral, while *The Times* used gender-neutral and feminine terms fairly equally. There were few elisions between lone parents and lone mothers in the 2013 corpus, with their usage almost completely distinct.

Overall, the quantity of direct references to female lone parents in the corpus, coupled with the number of occasions where gender-neutral terms morphed into female through clarification or juxtaposition, indicates that when these sources discussed lone parenthood, their focus was lone mothers rather than lone fathers. Accordingly, the negative stereotyping of lone parents is centred on lone mothers and consequently, any supposed negative repercussions to their children's outcomes. These findings formed part of my rationale for focussing the quantitative analysis on the experiences of lone mothers and their children.

1.2. Ethnicity

In the UK, the use of ethnic descriptors tends only to be used to identify people who differ from the majority ethnic group of White British. Whiteness is an assumed, unmarked

category, by nature of its normativity (Garner, 2007). I therefore did not expect White lone parents to be identified as such; rather that ethnic markers were used for minority ethnic groups.

The identification of lone parents in ethnic terms was indeed largely absent from the corpus. Whiteness was referenced nine times across sources and years, compared to thirteen references to 'African-Caribbean' (in 2013) or 'Afro-Caribbean' (in 1993) lone parents and twelve to 'Black' lone parents. *The Times'* coverage in 1993 additionally referred to more ethnic groups than *The Guardian*'s, which only referred to 'Asian mothers' in one article (*The Guardian*, 1993), while *The Times* referred several times to Asian populations and additionally to Indian and Pakistani families.

With very few exceptions, ethnic identities were mentioned in both sources and years as the explicit focus of an article or when comparisons were being made between the proportions of lone parenthood in ethnic groups. African-Caribbean families were most often presented as the comparative category, primarily because "in comparison with a 14 percent figure in the general population, single mothers accounted for 51 percent of all Afro-Caribbean births" (M. Phillips, 1993). That 'Afro-Caribbean births' are compared with births in the 'general population' is indicative of the normativity of White ethnicity, with other ethnicities situated outside. Likewise, *The Guardian's* single reference to 'Asian mothers' was in comparing the smaller proportion of Asian lone mothers with the White British population (*The Guardian*, 1993).

Aside from referring to ethnicity in the context of comparative statistics, articles mentioning ethnicity in 1993 in a substantive way in relation to lone parenthood all focussed on the issues the Black community faced. Journalists debated the challenges of changing cultural habits in the Black community such as men with several 'babymothers', with whom they had children but whom they may or may not support (Ford, 1993) and questioned the stereotype of whether Black lone mothers were the passive victims of such Black male behaviour (M. Phillips, 1993). In the few instances where ethnicity and lone parenthood appeared together, the norms and behaviours of an ethnic group (in all cases the Black, or more specifically, African-Caribbean population) were the main subject of the article, with other ethnic groups only mentioned for comparative purposes. Interestingly, while African-Caribbean lone mothers were seen (stereotypically) as 'strong' (M. Phillips, 1993), their White counterparts were not given any such positive attributes.

Whiteness was referenced only three times in relation to lone parenthood outside of the articles comparing the proportion of lone parents in different ethnic groups. On two occasions the article was penned by the single parent in question who self-identified on ethnic lines, yet in both articles, whiteness was not mentioned incidentally, but in order to make a point. In the first, the writer was a White middle-class male who on becoming a single parent, suddenly found himself "to be a minority within a minority" (Bovill, 1993), the irony being of course that this is unusual for someone with his intersections of class, gender and ethnicity. In the second, a White single parent to two mixed race girls wrote about racial identity and dealing with the cultural diversity of her family (Gosnell, 1993). In the third article, the similar situations of two lone mothers were discussed: one White and the other Jamaican (Norman, 1993). Whiteness was therefore explicitly stated on a few occasions where the fact of being White mattered to the piece as either a counterpoint to a different ethnicity or to emphasise the irony of a situation. Otherwise, Whiteness was unmarked.

In 2013, *The Times* does not discuss lone parenthood in ethnic terms at all, a contrast from the 29 references in 1993. *The Guardian*'s nine references to ethnicity were predominantly for the same reasons as in 1993: to compare the incidence of lone parenthood in the White population with that in other ethnicities. There was again a focus on the African-Caribbean population, who were "twice as likely… to grow up in a single-parent household" (Corner and Normanton, 2013). One exception was an article about three lone parent families appealing the introduction of the Benefits Cap (Butler, 2013b), two of the mothers were identified as being respectively Roma and Orthodox Jew, while the third was not assigned any ethnic identity; the assumption being that she is the unmarked category of White British.

In sum, the majority of lone parents in the corpus were not ethnically identified, except where the cultural stereotypes of an ethnic minority were being discussed, with a focus on African-Caribbean families. Whiteness was asserted when it is necessary as a juxtaposition to other ethnicities, or as an ironic aside, otherwise it is absent from the debate. I concluded from this that the unmarked category of Whiteness was the assumed normative ethnic identity of the lone parents being discussed, so remained unstated in the corpus. Consequently, I included a variable for Whiteness vs other ethnic groups in the regression analyses, although, as discussed in Chapter 3, I also ran models which included a variable which allowed for a more detailed examination of ethnicity in the context of lone motherhood.

1.3. Class

As mentioned in Chapter 1, a discussion of social class has been largely absent from the media and academia in recent years. Class is more likely to be referred to implicitly via clothing, language and behaviour (Skeggs, 2005a; Tyler, 2008). It was supposed therefore that the corpus analysis would reveal few direct allusions to class. In fact, there were fifteen explicit references to class in the 1993 corpus, almost uniformly distributed between the two newspapers, and three in the 2013 corpus. Of the fifteen in 1993, only three referred to middle-class lone parents, the remainder referred to lone parents in the lower classes or working-class. For example, in *The Guardian*, "most lone parents tend to belong to social economic groups 4 and 5" (McGlone, 1993) and "a working class estate with high unemployment and a high proportion of single parents" (Katz, 1993). Additionally, there were a couple of indirect references to the classed nature of lone parenthood, for example, the following from a letter in relation to fathers rallying against the Child Support Agency: "The mighty middle classes flex their muscles and the Government considers a U-turn. A pity single mothers don't have that sort of clout" (Russell, 1993) which implies that single mothers are not middle-class since they are do not have the influence of the "mighty middle classes". In *The Times*' coverage from the same year, a slightly different emphasis emerged. Discussion of class was still largely absent, comprising only six references, but four of these six applied the term 'underclass' specifically to lone mothers. The term was introduced to the UK by the American social theorist Charles Murray in *The Sunday Times*, to refer to those people who exist at the lowest level of society, so it is perhaps foreseen that the term would be taken up by its sister publication in this context. The other two references were to class in general and to "young working-class women living on low incomes" who were identified as comprising the largest proportion of lone parents in contrast with a "small percentage…accounted for by widows and middle-class divorcees" (Dynes, 1993).

In 2013, articles from *The Guardian* included three references to class and lone parenthood. In each of these, lone parents were identified as working-class (Butler, 2013c) or part of the working-class, for example, "increasing numbers of working-class residents, especially single parents and large families" (Butler, 2013). There were no direct references to class and lone parenthood in the 2013 corpus for *The Times*.

One explanation for the lack of explicit references to class, is that, "Class hatred has been siphoned off on to chavs, scroungers, benefit fraudsters, single mothers, all the new untouchables" (Moore, 2013c), indicating that different people in society are now presented

as emblematic of a certain class. Associating single mothers discursively in this way with scroungers and benefit fraudsters places them by implication in the same economic category, that of being dependent on the state.

While class is not widely referenced, when it is mentioned lone parents are more often associated with the working-class, lower classes or underclass. Although explicit references to class were few and far between, it became evident while coding the corpus that socio-economic indicators, such as receipt of benefits, housing tenure or income levels were more prevalent in the discussion of lone parenthood. For this reason, an explicit measure of social class per se was not included in the quantitative analysis. Instead, I explored the use of other socio-economic indicators in the corpus.

1.4. Socio-economic factors

It is unsurprising that Social Security received a great deal of media attention in 1993, since the main thrust of Conservative policy at that time was the reduction of the Social Security budget. It is unfortunately also the case that relationship breakdown often results in a large and sudden reduction in income, particularly for women (Mortelmans and Jansen, 2010) leading to a need for recourse to public funds and resources, even if temporarily. These two factors meant that in 1993 there was a political, and as a result, media focus on lone parents' dependence on state support, and specifically on lone mothers.

There were over 500 references in 1993 to socio-economic factors, namely benefits (362) and council housing (150) in relation to lone parenthood, not least due to the proselytizing of Conservative ministers at their Party Conference that these were motivating factors for the increased numbers of lone parents in the UK. Articles in both sources not only reported these speeches but continued to do so even once it was revealed that a Cabinet paper with evidence that such associations were unfounded had circulated weeks before the conference (Brindle, 1993b). Meanwhile, every repetition of such unfounded statements, even if refuted, only served to reinforce this inaccurate stereotype.

Some journalists took a different approach, with a focus on the issues of benefit dependency and lone parenthood and the need for greater Government spending on childcare in order to provide "a pathway out of the poverty trap" (Taylor, 1993) and enable lone parents to (re)enter the labour market. However, there were very few articles in the corpus, even from left-wing journalists, which criticised the raft of policy proposals made by the Conservative Government aimed specifically at lone parents. Such proposals included the phasing out of

lone parent benefits, cutting benefits to lone parents who had additional children while claiming benefit (Brindle, 1993c), limiting access to council housing (Wintour, 1993), cuts to education funding in those councils with larger numbers of lone parent families (Wainwright, 1993) and finally, penalties for lone mothers who refused to inform the Child Support Agency about the father of their child, whose benefits could be cut by a fifth for 18 months (Baxter, 1993). The only notable criticisms were that the Government and the Child Support Agency were ignoring the impact of such policies on the children of these families, but even these critiques came from external sources, not *Guardian* journalists. For example, the Child Poverty Action Group are quoted as saying that the Child Support Agency had "one rule for the rich, another for the poor" (Hughes, 1993) since penalties such as a reduction in benefits for not naming the absent father would (and presumably could) only be imposed on lone mothers who were benefit claimants.

This discussion of differentiation by wealth is found in two articles in the 2013 corpus, which reveal that little has changed in this regard in the intervening years. In one, Suzanne Moore writes on the Government's 'moralizing' about lone parenthood, remarking that in the view of the Conservative government, lone parenthood is tolerated if you can support yourself, but if you are on benefits, then you are a "subspecies in need of help" (Moore, 2013a). In the other, Zoe Williams (2013) reinforces this opinion, accusing the Conservatives of only taking issue with poor lone parent families, while disregarding the behaviour of the rich.

Another theme which emerged from both papers in the 1993 corpus was a propensity to link lone parenthood with deprivation and poverty. Journalists reported statistics, for example, "seventy-five percent of single parent families live in poverty" (Moore, 1993), but also used turns of phrase which implied that the proportion of lone parent families were a "hallmark of inner-city deprivation" (Thomson, 1993). A further example goes so far as to place lone motherhood on an equal footing with 'economic deprivation' and 'bad housing', stating that, "we can argue all around the houses about the relative effects of these three factors on the behaviour and development of young people" (A. Phillips, 1993). Other articles reported the inclusion of lone parenthood as one of six indicators in the Government's social deprivation index (Brindle, 1993a) and one of three "traditional needs indicators" for apportioning education funding to councils (Wainwright, 1993). It appears that lone parenthood and poverty had truly become synonymous.

In 2013 although the number of articles referring to economic factors in relation to lone parenthood are far fewer, these connections between poverty and lone parenthood remain:

"the poorest households - such as single parent households with children" (Butler, 2013c). In fact, despite fewer references in the later corpus, children of lone parent families were "twice as likely to live in poverty" in 2013 than those from two-parent families (Paton, 2013).

While there are strong links between lone parenthood (and lone motherhood in particular) and poverty, there are considerable numbers of lone parents who do not live in poverty, but these lone parents are absent from the corpus. Instead, lone parenthood is presented as incontrovertibly linked to poverty as though the two always coexist. The subtext is that parents in such circumstances cannot provide an adequate upbringing for their children.

These findings resulted in the inclusion of two variables in my analyses to represent the dominant discourse on economic status in relation to lone parenthood: benefit receipt and social housing tenure. I further included the Free School Meals measure and a neighbourhood deprivation index in the educational outcomes analysis, since both have been used in educational research as proxies for economic disadvantage. The inclusion of such measures would enable me to discover if economic factors coupled with lone parenthood were affecting the "behaviour and development of young people" (A. Phillips, 1993).

1.5. Age

Age may not often be the most prominent identity factor when considering the social locations of individuals, but in relation to women and childbearing, it is vitally important. The age of a woman when they have their first child is under constant scrutiny: too young and it is considered a public health problem (Lawlor and Shaw, 2002), too old and it could put mothers and their babies at risk medically, while socially, it can be viewed as selfish (Hadfield, et al., 2007). That age represents an important issue within the discourse of lone parenthood is supported by the prominence of statistics on the Gingerbread website debunking the conflation of lone and teenage parents, by stating that the average age of a lone parent is 38 while the proportion of teenage parents is fewer than two percent (Gingerbread, 2017). Both facts are aimed at rebutting the common misconception that lone parenthood equals teenage parenthood.

In the context of lone parenthood, therefore, age is an important issue. Among the demographic characteristics within the corpus, age, or more specifically youth, is the most frequently associated with lone parenthood, second only to gender. In the 1993 corpus, youth was mentioned 60 times in *The Times* and 81 times in *The Guardian*. Although there was one mention within the 1993 corpus of a significant drop in the numbers of teenage lone parents

by 1993, most articles reflect an emphasis on the youth of lone parents in the UK. The repetition of the then Social Security Secretary Peter Lilley's parody which stated that teenage girls were economically-motivated to get pregnant certainly increased the attention paid to younger mothers. *The Guardian* quoted several research reports quashing that notion (Brindle, 1993b) but still felt the need to reiterate the trope that they were contradicting, helping to establish it in the common conscience in the process.

Not only were these women young, but they were also contradictorily portrayed both as becoming pregnant on purpose to receive benefits and preferential treatment for council housing and falling pregnant by accident as in this quote from Sir George Young, then Housing Minister:

How do we explain to the young couple who want to wait for a home before they start a family that they cannot be rehoused ahead of the unmarried teenager expecting her first, probably unplanned, child? (Brindle, 1993)

As youth is subjective, it might be argued that the numerous references to young mothers (there was no reference in the 1993 corpus to young fathers) were not necessarily a fixation with the teenage years. However, a further examination of the corpus revealed that, apart from one statistic denoting the proportion of lone mothers under the age of 30 (*The Guardian*, 1993), age was otherwise referred to via a number of descriptors, all of which positioned young parents in the teenage years. Examples such as "under 20" (*The Times*, 1993), "before they are old enough to vote" (Hill, 1993) were found, as well as less arbitrary descriptors such as 'gymslip' (M. Phillips, 1993), 'schoolgirl' (Hetherington, 1993) and 'teenage' (*The Times,* 1993). One article even differentiated between those who conceived and gave birth as teenagers, "research suggests that 25 percent started as teenagers and 33 percent first became pregnant when under 20" (*The Guardian*, 1993).

In 2013, there were fewer mentions of age, yet, as in 1993, aside from a couple of features about older lone parents – all of whom were successful career women - it was primarily the younger members of the lone parent population who were identified in age terms. The references appeared in relation to two main issues, firstly, budget cuts to hostels for the under-25s in a London borough, with the potential for young parents to be moved hundreds of miles from home (Butler, 2013a). Secondly, and somewhat ironically considering the 1993 rhetoric on young mothers and council housing, in relation to a report on proposals by a group of Conservative MPs which threatened to deny social housing to "Britain's youngest single mothers …as part of a new drive to reduce teen pregnancy" (Paton, 2013). Under such proposals these young mothers would be forced to live either with their parents, or in the

hostel accommodation (currently having its budget cut) or risk having their benefits removed. While the age of lone parents in 2013 was not the overriding concern in the corpus that it was in 1993, there were signs that teenage mothers had remained as a focus of policy-makers, twenty years on. The issue of age and lone parenthood rarely referred to fathers: in the 2013 corpus, young fathers were mentioned in one article specifically on young, Black fathers (Corner and Normanton,2013). White young fathers were entirely absent from the corpus.

The results of this analysis show that the most pertinent feature of age and lone parenthood in the discourse is that of early motherhood. That the average age of lone parents has been placed at 38 is in contrast to the way the media portrayal of lone parents. As discussed in Chapter 1, youth in parenthood is viewed as a negative quality, unsuitable for the successful raising of children. To reflect the media discourse, a variable denoting whether or not a mother was older or younger than 20 was included in the quantitative analysis to see if maternal age had any effect on child outcomes.

1.6. Causes of lone parenthood

The causes of lone parenthood are multiple, whether from separation, divorce, desertion, domestic abuse, choice or necessity. I was interested, therefore, to discover which of these were most mentioned in the corpus, by journalists and politicians, since as we have already seen, the homogeneity of the discourse can belie the multiple identities contained within.

On occasion, politicians were quoted as being aware of the heterogeneity of lone parenthood and pledged that they had differentiated between these categories, for example, this from John Redwood, the then Welsh Secretary:

I was very careful to distinguish between different types of single parenthood. I've always felt extremely sympathetic to those who are widowed, to mothers who are beaten up or abused, or to fathers and mothers who are on the wrong side of a losing relationship, often through no fault of their own. (Redwood quoted in Hetherington, 1993)

Redwood's comment was in response to allegations that all lone parents were being labelled in the same way. While he expressed sympathy with those he includes above, he went on to say that "society has a role to play in encouraging young girls to knuckle down at school, to think about a stable relationship before having babies" (Hetherington, 1993). Such a statement indicates that this trope about young girls having babies outside of marriage, or even a stable relationship, was a key concern in relation to lone parents.

His remarks were indicative of the stance of the Conservative Right at the time; lone parents as a whole were not seen as a problem, just a subsection, yet they still used generic terminology

as shorthand, even if they "know...how furious it makes the divorced, widowed and deserted, struggling alone, when headlines say ''Ministers attack lone parents''" (Peter Lilley, quoted in Grove, 1993).

Beyond the quotes included above, the broader causes of lone parenthood were little discussed within the corpus. There were only a handful of other mentions of "deserted/ abandoned", or "abused" lone parents, leaving the majority of references to causes of lone parenthood to focus instead on marital status or family transitions. One example, from *The Guardian*, discussing research using the National Child Development Study: "The children can be divided into four groups: those in two-parent families, or the three forms of single parent families: never married; single but divorced; single by the death of a partner" (Dean, 1993). Another from *The Times*: "In the past decade the number of births outside marriage has more than doubled to one in three, a rise produced by the growing number of single, divorced and separated mothers" (Dynes, 1993).

In fact, the discourse on types of lone parenthood in the corpus reflected the emphasis of Redwood's statement. Over half of the references to lone parents' marital status in the 1993 corpus defined them as 'unmarried', although surprisingly *The Guardian* articles included twice as many references as *The Times*. The unmarried mother was variously "married to the State" (a phrase from the American social theorist Charles Murray (1996) adopted by the Conservative Right) or responsible for 'spawning' a "welfare-dependent underclass" (Baxter, 1993). Separation and widowhood were mentioned but infrequently. References to divorce tended to appear less in regard to defining the cause of lone parenthood, but more often were positioned alongside lone parenthood in discussions of family trends, for example, "the combined force of single motherhood, children being born out of wedlock, divorce, remarriage and the rest" (Wicks, 1993). Aside from the difference noted above in the number of references to unmarried lone parents between the two sources, a more nuanced distinction can be seen in how statistics on the circumstances of lone parenthood were reported. In 1993, in *The Guardian*, the latest statistics were reported as follows, "Welfare groups last night pointed out that the political concern with single mothers, who have never married, obscured the fact that about two-thirds of lone mothers are divorced, separated or widowed" (Wintour, 1993a), the same facts were reported in *The Times* with a change of emphasis, "Single parents include widows and divorcees, but the fastest growing group are the ''single, never partnered'', who account for more than a third of all lone parents" (*The Times*, 1993).

Analysis of the 2013 articles revealed very few mentions of the causes of lone parenthood, in either newspaper. There were so few references even to marital status that it was hard to draw a conclusion about the discourse; it appeared that the causes of lone parenthood or the marital status of lone parents was no longer of interest in 2013, which, it is hoped is a positive step towards a more tolerant discourse. Interestingly, there was no discussion in the corpus on the temporary nature of lone parenthood. Analysis puts the average length of time a child spends in a lone parent family as five years (Skew, 2009) yet the way it was discussed by journalists on both sides of politics lends lone parenthood a greater sense of permanency.

Taken as a whole, the most important cause of lone parenthood in the corpus was the unmarried mother, even though fewer lone parents are unmarried, with the vast majority having separated, divorced or been widowed. However, the media depiction of lone parenthood did not reflect this and therefore adds to the stereotype of the lone parent, who is deficient in not having a stable partnership within which to bring up their children. It was evident from the corpus that being unmarried was closely associated with the need to claim benefits; an additional 'deficiency' on the part of the lone parent. Being unmarried was therefore included as a variable in the regression analysis to investigate whether it was associated in any way with the outcomes of the children of lone parents.

2. Intersectional identities

I set out to discover whether the generic category of 'lone parent', that is, the lone parent population as a whole, was the intended focus of political and media interest in the early 1990s and 2010s, or if a more nuanced picture would emerge from a detailed analysis of articles in two broadsheet newspapers across two decades. I chose an intersectional lens in order to look not just at single identity factors but at the intersections of those factors in relation to lone parents included in the corpus. Having identified the prevalence of different identity factors, as discussed above, I then explored the corpus for instances where these factors intersected.

In fact, there were very few occasions where intersectional identities were applied to the lone parents under discussion. An attempt to identify instances of an intersectional identity, that is where even gender and ethnicity at least are specifically addressed together, returned only three results, all of which were discussed in the ethnicity section: one, the self-identified

middle-class White male (Bovill, 1993) and the second and third, the two lone mothers, one White and one Black whose similar situations were discussed (Norman, 1993).

This was probably largely due to the lack of references for some social locations, for example, the absence of markers for ethnicity and class, together with the prominent usage of gender-neutral terms for lone parents. When the analysis was widened to encompass the other social locations discussed such as income, age and marital status, there were a handful more, most focusing on a combination of youth, unmarried and female as identifiers, with additional allusions to benefit receipt or council housing, or for example "young working-class women living on low incomes" (Dynes, 1993).

The purpose of the discourse analysis was to identify the particular lone parents discussed in the media and by politicians, who are usually concealed beneath the prolific usage of gender-neutral and identity-free terminology such as lone parents, single parents and one-parent families.

Despite the lack of intersectional identities within the corpus, my analysis revealed that the identity of the media's portrait of a lone parent in 1993 was defined in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, income, age and marital status. She, for it is a she, was White, from the lower classes and economically reliant on the state. She was young, a teenager even and unmarried. In 2013, this pen portrait was just as apposite; although the corpus of articles was smaller than in 1993, the results of the analysis revealed the same picture (excepting any discussion on marital status), twenty years on.

The application of an intersectional standpoint was intended to increase awareness of the multiplicity and intersection of identity factors, which together would provide a more complete picture of the lone parents subject to media focus. For example, Whiteness, which was the unspoken primary category for ethnicity in the corpus, is usually seen as privileged, yet in this instance, such privilege is not a given, since the other factors in the portrayed lone parents' multiple identity are less advantageous. To be female places a lone parent at a social disadvantage, to be young is to be disempowered, to be working-class (or part of the underclass) is to be in a socially inferior position, to be unmarried, is to be without the economic support of a partner and therefore stigmatised by reliance on the State. Together these identity factors result in a multiply disadvantaged social positioning. The analysis has

revealed that the specific identity of lone parents, beleaguered by politicians and the media, is representative of some of the most vulnerable people in UK society, both in 1993 and 2013.

Having discovered the key identity factors of the 'lone parent' discussed in the media, I next applied these in multiple regression analyses on the social and educational outcomes of the children of lone parents. The aim was to discover whether lone parenthood itself was associated with differences in outcomes and whether the identity factors of Whiteness, marital status, maternal age, benefits receipt and social housing tenure in relation to lone mothers were as crucial to the success and failure of their children as the media discourse implied. The following two chapters present the results of these regression analyses of lone motherhood, starting with social outcomes in Chapter 5, followed by educational outcomes in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5: Social outcomes: findings

This chapter outlines the findings of analyses of the two social outcomes measure, the prosocial subscale and the Total Difficulties Score. In each case, I first conducted exploratory analyses, before progressing to multiple regression analysis. The chapter follows this structure for each measure in turn before turning to the educational outcomes in Chapter 6.

1. Exploratory analysis: prosocial subscale

The focus of this section is an exploratory analysis of the social outcome variable, the prosocial subscale from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). I investigated whether there was any skewness in the scale, to understand the variance within the variables as well as informing the choice of the correct test for any statistical differences by the key independent variable: lone motherhood. An initial exploration of the data showed that the frequency distribution of the prosocial score was negatively skewed. The skewness reveals how the subscale is distributed around the mean and therefore how much variance there is in the variable. As can be seen from Figure 4, over half of the sample scored 8 or above on the subscale (on a scale of 1 to 10).

To determine if there were significant differences by lone motherhood, a Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test was performed, due to the skewed nature of the distribution (Bryman and Cramer, 1990). The results of this test for the lone motherhood variable indicated that young people whose mother was ever a lone parent had a slightly but significant lower prosocial score on average than their peers from two parent families ($z=4.982$, $p<0.010$).

Figure 4: Distribution of frequencies for the Prosocial subscale (N=12,051)
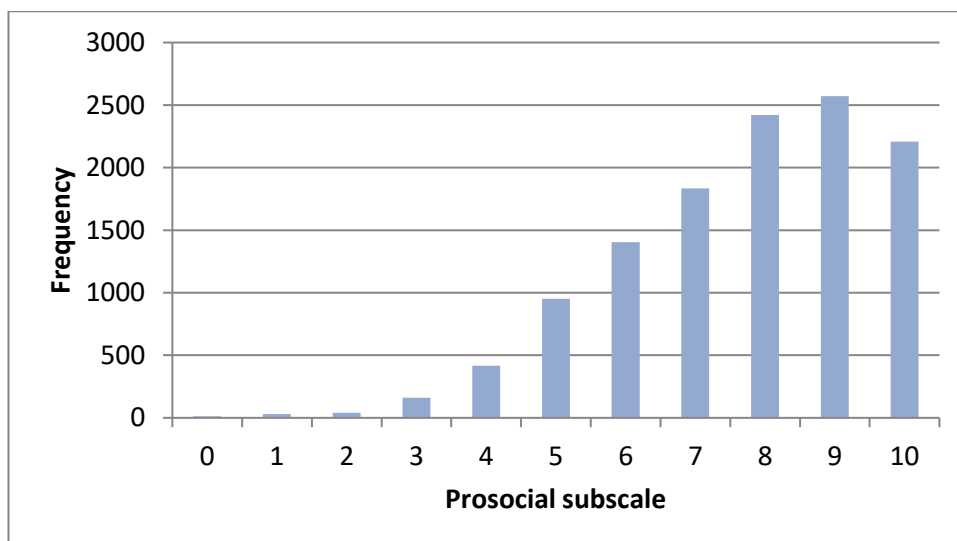
As a next step, I explored the bivariate relationships between the prosocial subscale and the key covariates: the variables mirroring the identity factors from the discourse analysis and the selected background control variables. Table 6 shows the relationships between the prosocial subscale and the independent variables of interest: lone motherhood, the characteristics associated with lone motherhood elicited from the discourse analysis and additional background factors (age, household size and maternal education) as discussed in the Methodology. T-tests were carried out to test statistically significant differences in means for all dichotomous variables, while one-way ANOVAs were used to detect similar differences in categorical variables, such as maternal education. Pearson's correlations were employed for the same purpose with continuous variables, such as young person's age.

It can be seen from the table that children whose mothers were never lone parents scored higher on the prosocial score (t=4.50, $p<0.01$). Prosocial scores did not differentiate by ethnicity, marital status or maternal age at birth. However, children whose mothers had ever received benefit had slightly lower scores than those who had not (t=4.52, $p<0.01$). Similarly, children whose mothers had ever rented social housing reported fewer prosocial behaviours than those who had not (t=6.99, $p<0.01$).

In terms of background characteristics, girls showed higher prosocial behaviour than their male peers (t=-27.45, $p<0.01$) while younger children exhibited higher prosocial behaviour than older children (r=-0.14, $p<0.01$). Finally, there were differences in prosocial behaviour according to levels of maternal education ($F_{2, 12026}$, =15.53, $p<0.01$). A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that young people whose mother had school qualifications ($p<0.01$) or further or higher education qualifications ($p<0.01$) reported higher prosocial behaviour than those whose mothers had no qualifications.

These exploratory analyses revealed some initial associations between lone motherhood and the prosocial score as well as between socio-economic factors of benefits receipt and social housing tenure. It is already evident that some of the factors deemed most important in the media discourse have no statistically significant relationship with prosocial behaviour (or a lack of); marital status, maternal age and ethnicity all emerged as having no significant results. However, in order to see how these factors work with each other, it was necessary to undertake multiple regressions, and it is these results that are presented in the following section.

Table 6: Means, Standard Deviations and Frequencies for the Prosocial subscale by key variables

	Prosocial		
	Mean	SD	N
Lone motherhood			
Ever a lone mother	7.6	1.8	3549
Never a lone mother	7.8	1.8	8502
			12051
Discourse analysis variables			
Ethnicity			
White	7.7	1.8	9316
Other ethnic groups	7.7	1.9	2648
			11964
Ethnicity (expanded)			
White	7.7	1.8	9316
Mixed	7.5	1.7	167
Indian	7.8	1.8	449
Pakistani	7.6	2.0	570
Bangladeshi	7.6	2.0	377
Black Caribbean	7.7	1.8	254
Black African	7.8	1.8	449
Other	7.6	1.8	382
			11964
Maternal age at birth			
Mother age<20	7.6	1.9	582
Mother age 20 or over	7.7	1.8	11469
			12051
Receipt of benefits			
Ever received benefits	7.7	1.9	9274
Never received benefits	7.8	1.8	2705
			11979
Marital status			
Never married	7.7	1.9	1546
Ever married	7.7	1.8	10476
			12022
Housing tenure			
Ever rented social housing	7.5	2.0	3193
Never rented social housing	7.8	1.8	8854
			12047
Background characteristics			
Gender			
Male	7.3	1.9	6033
Female	8.2	1.7	6018
			12051
Age			
10	8.2	1.8	1951
11	8.0	1.8	1945
12	7.7	1.8	2088
13	7.5	1.8	2045
14	7.4	1.9	2046
15	7.5	1.9	1976
			12051

| | Prosocial | | |
	Mean	SD	N
Maternal education			
No qualifications	7.5	2.0	1878
School qualifications	7.7	1.8	5493
Further/higher education	7.8	1.8	4658
			12029

2. Regression analysis: prosocial subscale

In this section, I present the results of regression models undertaken to investigate the relationships between lone motherhood and the SDQ prosocial subscale. It is worth noting here that a large sample in the following analyses tends to increase the chance of statistically significant results, so small differences may end up statistically significant, even when there is little discernable difference. Conversely, as the sample size tends to overestimate the significance of even small associations, a lack of statistical significance is a clear sign of an absence of association between two variables in a sample of this size. For the same reason, all results discussed in the following two chapters are highly statistically significant ($p<0.01$), unless indicated otherwise.

Four OLS regression models were specified. I first performed a parsimonious regression model with the inclusion of the single predictor variable of lone motherhood (Model 1). I then introduced the five discourse variables in Model 2, first singly and then together, before conducting a further regression analysis with the inclusion of key background variables (Model 3), again introducing the discourse variables singly and together. A further model, Model 4 investigated the interactions between lone motherhood and the discourse analysis variables for any multiplicative effects, in an attempt to operationalise intersectionality theory and to investigate any relationship between the mothers' multiple intersecting identities and their children's outcomes. Sections 5 and 6 of this chapter present the results of a similar analytical strategy for the Total Difficulties Score.

The results for Model 1, presented in Table 7, revealed that children of mothers who were ever a lone parent showed lower levels of prosocial behaviour than their peers who had not experienced lone parenthood (-0.17, s.e. 0.04). However, there are two important points to consider. The size of the coefficient was minimal on a scale of 1 to 10; a difference of this size is not meaningful. Secondly, the model fit (R^2=0.00) indicated that despite the significance of the negative coefficient for lone motherhood, having a mother who has ever been a lone parent did not explain *any* of the variance between individuals on the prosocial score.

Table 7: Multiple regression results for the prosocial subscale (scale from 1 to 10) using random effects estimation

	Model 1	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 2c	Model 2d	Model 2e	Model 2f
Lone motherhood (ref: mother never lone parent)							
Mother ever lone parent	-0.17***	-0.17***	-0.16***	-0.14***	-0.17***	-0.10**	-0.09**
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Ethnicity (ref: other ethnic groups)							
White		0.02					-0.01
		(0.05)					(0.05)
Maternal age at birth (ref: mother aged>20)							
Mother aged <20 at birth			-0.09				-0.03
			(0.09)				(0.09)
Receipt of benefits (ref: never received benefits)							
Mother ever received benefits				-0.13***			-0.09*
				(0.05)			(0.05)
Marital status (ref: ever married)							
Never married					0.01		0.06
					(0.06)		(0.06)
Housing tenure (ref: never rented social housing)							
Ever rented social housing						-0.24***	-0.22***
						(0.05)	(0.05)
Constant	7.75***	7.74***	7.76***	7.85***	7.75***	7.80***	7.87***
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.05)
N of pooled sample	12,051	11,964	12,051	11,979	12,022	12,047	11,951
N of individuals	8,347	8,267	8,347	8,278	8,319	8,343	8,255
R²	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01

Robust standard errors in parentheses, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Model 2 in Table 7 introduced the discourse analysis variables into the model. With the inclusion of these variables, the coefficient for lone motherhood decreased further in size and significance. These results indicate that even the small association between lone motherhood and more negative prosocial scores found in Model 1 are mediated by other factors, such as the identity factors which emerged from the discourse analysis, in particular the social housing measure in Model 2e. These results indicate that the pervasive discourse which blames lone motherhood for the anti-social behaviour of children was not evidenced in this data. Conversely, it also disproves the alternative hypothesis that the children of lone parents may be more prosocial due to earlier maturity or adultification. The model fit (R^2=0.00) indicates that prosocial scores are not influenced by factors within the model, but by external factors.

A second purpose of the regression model was to identify if any of the identity factors that were attached to lone motherhood in the media analysis had associations themselves with the prosocial subscale, independent of lone motherhood status. As expected from the exploratory analysis, despite the media's focus on unmarried and young lone mothers, neither marital status nor maternal age at birth were significant in the model, either when entered singly or with the other discourse analysis variables. Similarly, Whiteness was also not a significant factor and a further analysis with the ethnic group variable (see Table A4 in the Appendix) revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between any ethnic categories and Whiteness on the prosocial score.

As emerged from the exploratory analysis, two factors from the discourse analysis were significantly and negatively associated with prosocial behaviour scores when entered singly into the model: receipt of benefits (-0.13, s.e. 0.05) and social housing tenure (-0.24, s.e. 0.05). When both were included in the full model (Model 2f), the social housing tenure variable remained highly significant (-0.22, s.e. 0.05), while the benefits measure did not. This suggests that the social housing variable captured much of the association of the receipt of benefits variable with prosocial behaviour, that is that the majority of people who have rented social housing also receive benefits. While it is clear that there was some association between these two variables and the prosocial score, whether or not the mother has been a lone parent, the R-squared was still only 0.01 in Model 2f, indicating that lone motherhood and the five discourse analysis variables still only explained one percent of the variance in prosocial scores between individuals. It seems that other factors not included in the model must account for any difference.

Table 8: Multiple regression on prosocial subscale including background controls (Model 3)

	Model 3a	Model 3b	Model 3c	Model 3d	Model 3e	Model 3f
Lone motherhood (ref: mother never lone parent)						
Mother ever lone parent	-0.25***	-0.24***	-0.21***	-0.22***	-0.18***	-0.17***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Discourse analysis variables						
Ethnicity (ref: other ethnic groups)						
White	-0.06					-0.07
	(0.04)					(0.05)
Maternal age at birth (ref: mother aged>20)						
Mother aged <20 at birth		-0.05				0.01
		(0.09)				(0.09)
Receipt of benefits (ref: never received benefits)						
Mother ever received benefits			-0.10**			-0.08*
			(0.04)			(0.05)
Marital status (ref: ever married)						
Never married				-0.08		-0.05
				(0.06)		(0.06)
Housing tenure (ref: never rented social housing)						
Ever rented social housing					-0.18***	-0.16***
					(0.05)	(0.05)
Background characteristics						
Age	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.16***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Female (ref: male)	0.90***	0.90***	0.90***	0.90***	0.90***	0.90***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Household size (scale)	-0.09***	-0.09***	-0.09***	-0.09***	-0.08***	-0.08***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Maternal education (ref: no quals)						
school level qualifications	0.08	0.09	0.06	0.07	0.05	0.05
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
further/higher education	0.15***	0.15***	0.12**	0.14**	0.10*	0.08
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Constant	9.65***	9.57***	9.68***	9.62***	9.62***	9.79***
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)
N of pooled sample	11,946	12,029	11,959	12,002	12,025	11,933
N of individuals	8,253	8,329	8,262	8,303	8,325	8,241
R²	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09

Robust standard errors in parentheses, *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

Model 3, shown in Table 8, was a repetition of Model 2 but with the inclusion of key background variables, as discussed in the Methodology. The inclusion of background variables (age, gender, household size and maternal education) improved the model fit (R^2=0.09) now explaining nine percent of the variance between individuals and indicating therefore, that these background factors have more explanatory power than lone motherhood or the five identity factors included in Model 2.

In Model 3, lone motherhood remains significant throughout the model, although as before, the coefficient indicated a small difference in the prosocial subscales for children of lone mothers; a maximum of a quarter of a point in Model 3a, decreasing to less than a fifth of point in Models 3e and 3f. As expected in light of the exploratory analyses, gender and age were significant in the model. Controlling for all other variables, girls scored almost one point higher on the prosocial scale than boys of the same age (0.90, s.e. 0.04) while younger children again reported higher prosocial behaviour than their older peers (-0.16, s.e. 0.01).

Maternal education emerged as a statistically significant factor initially (0.15, s.e. 0.06), with children of higher or further educated mothers reporting more prosocial behaviour than their peers whose mothers left school with no qualifications. The statistical significance of this relationship lessened however, once discourse analysis variables were introduced and was no longer statistically significant in the full model (Model 3f). This is likely to be due in part to a negative correlation between maternal education and these socio-economic factors. Mothers who have ever rented social housing, have never married or have ever claimed benefits have lower levels of maternal education.

3. Regression analysis with interactions: social outcomes

The models thus far have looked at the individual contribution of the key independent variables to changes in the prosocial subscale.

In this section, I present the results of a further analysis, which attempted to mirror the intersections between lone motherhood and other identity factors in the discourse analysis by interacting lone motherhood with each discourse analysis variable in a multivariate regression. This was an attempt to operationalise the intersectionality approach but also to better reflect the media discourse by combining the discourse analysis factors with the lone motherhood variable.

Table 9: Multiple regression on prosocial subscale including interaction terms (Model 4)

	Model 4a	Model 4b	Model 4c	Model 4d	Model 4e
Lone motherhood (ref: mother never lone parent)					
Mother ever lone parent	-0.09	-0.15***	-0.09	-0.22***	-0.22***
	(0.09)	(0.05)	(0.17)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Ethnicity (ref: other ethnic group)					
White	-0.04	-0.07	-0.07	-0.06	-0.07
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Maternal age at birth (ref: mother aged 20 or over)					
Mother aged <20 at birth	0.02	0.11	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.09)	(0.13)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Receipt of benefits (ref: never received benefits)					
Mother ever received benefits	-0.08*	-0.09*	-0.08*	-0.08*	-0.07
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Marital status (ref: ever married)					
Never married	-0.05	-0.05	-0.05	-0.28***	-0.06
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.06)
Housing tenure (ref: never rented social housing)					
Ever rented social housing	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.23***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Background characteristics					
Age (scale)	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.16***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender of young person (ref: male)					
Female	0.90***	0.90***	0.90***	0.90***	0.90***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Household size (scale)	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Maternal education (ref: no quals)					
school level qualifications	0.04	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.04
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
further/higher education	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.08
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Interactions					
Lone mother and white	-0.09				
	(0.09)				
Lone mother and mother before age 20		-0.19			
		(0.17)			
Lone mother and ever in receipt of benefits			-0.08		
			(0.17)		
Lone mother and never married				0.38***	
				(0.12)	

	Model 4a	Model 4b	Model 4c	Model 4d	Model 4e
Lone mother and ever rented social housing					0.16*
					(0.09)
Constant	9.76***	9.79***	9.78***	9.78***	9.79***
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
N of pooled sample	11,933	11,933	11,933	11,933	11,933
N of individuals	8,241	8,241	8,241	8,241	8,241
R^2	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09

Robust standard errors in parentheses, *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

I initially intended to interact all five factors that emerged from the discourse analysis, simultaneously, but this became problematic for two reasons. Firstly, the sample size decreased considerably by the time there were more than three factors included and secondly, it became difficult to disentangle the relationships between the interactions when there were multiple interaction terms added into the model and interpret the results. Instead, in order to model some of the intersectional nature of lone parenthood, in line with the media discourse, I re-ran Model 3, but additionally included an interaction term in each version of the model which interacted lone motherhood with the five discourse analysis variables in turn.

Table 9 presents the results of each of these interaction models for the prosocial subscale. The only statistically significant interaction term was for lone motherhood and marital status. The net effect of this interaction (Miller, 2005) is that while the child of a never married lone mother would score slightly less (-0.12) on the prosocial subscale than a child from a married two-parent family, they score more than their peers from either a lone parent family or a never married two-parent family. In direct contradiction of the media discourse, there is no combined detrimental effect for the children of never married lone mothers. Furthermore, the lack of statistical significance for the interaction terms relating to the other identity factors which emerged from the discourse analysis (whiteness, maternal age at birth, receipt of benefits and social housing) indicates that these results also do not support the prevailing discourse; lone motherhood combined with any of these attributes did not result in statistically significant differences for children's prosocial scores.

These analyses for the prosocial subscale have shown that there is little evidence to substantiate the media discourse relating to the children of lone mothers. Prosocial scores were initially significant for the children of lone mothers, but became less so as other factors were introduced in the model. More importantly, lone motherhood and the discourse analysis variables explained at the most one percent of any variance in prosocial scores between

individuals. The introduction of background controls such as age, gender and maternal education increased the explanatory power of the model and indicated that these have more influence on prosocial scores than lone motherhood. I will now turn to the Total Difficulties Score to investigate whether the same pattern emerges.

4. Exploratory analysis: Total Difficulties Score

The Total Difficulties Score, as noted in the Methodology, is the sum of all but the prosocial subscale (see Table A2 in the Appendix for details). Since the distribution of the score appears normally distributed (Figure 5), the independent groups t-test was appropriate for testing whether there were significant differences between the means of children of lone mothers and children who have grown up in two parent families. The test for statistical differences by lone motherhood indicated that the scores were significantly different; young people with mothers who had ever been lone parents scored higher on the Total Difficulties Score than their peers from two-parent families (t=-9.25, p<0.01), signifying a higher level of reported behavioural difficulties in children from lone parent families.

Figure 5: Distribution of frequencies for the Total Difficulties Score (N=12,033)
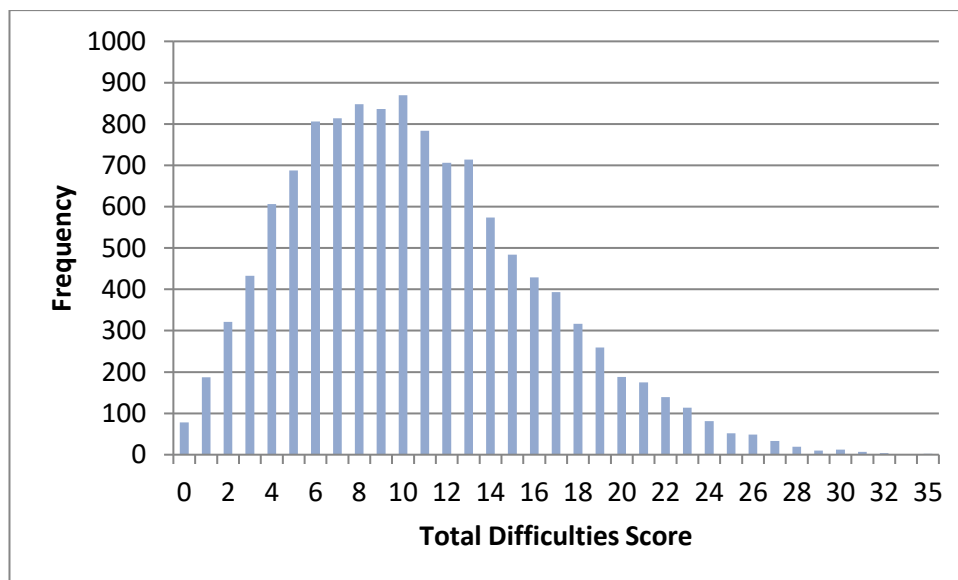
Bivariate relationships

As with the prosocial subscale above, I explored the bivariate relationships between the Total Difficulties Score and the key covariates, the results of which are presented in Table 10. There were considerably more statistically significant relationships between variables than found

with the prosocial subscale. Children of White mothers reported more behavioural issues than their peers from other ethnic groups (t=-8.49, p<0.01). Using a one-way ANOVA, I investigated this difference further, using the expanded ethnic category variable. A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that children of Indian, Bangladeshi and Black African mothers had statistically significantly lower behavioural issues than their peers with White mothers (*p*<0.01 in all cases).

Children of older mothers displayed fewer behavioural issues than their peers whose mothers had a child under 20 (t=-6.31, p<0.01). Having a mother who had ever been on benefits was also associated with worse behaviours (t=-8.73, p<0.01) as was having an unmarried mother (t=-4.43, p<0.01) and having a mother who had ever rented social housing (t=-11.34, p<0.01).

Unlike with the prosocial subscale, the gender and age of young people were not statistically significantly associated with differences in behavioural difficulties. In terms of maternal education, a one-way ANOVA revealed statistically significant differences between levels of maternal education and behavioural outcomes. A Tukey post-hoc test further revealed that these differences existed between children of mothers with higher or further education and those whose mother had school level qualifications or no qualifications (p<0.01 in both cases). There was no statistical difference between children whose mothers had school level and no qualifications.

These exploratory analyses revealed that there were more significant relationships between the dependent variable, the Total Difficulties Score and key covariates than had been found in the analyses for the prosocial subscale. Although these explanatory analyses help to identify relationships between variables, they do not reveal how these variables interact with each other and how their relationships change. I proceeded therefore to the multiple regression analysis, expecting to find, not only an association between lone motherhood and the Total Difficulties Score, but also a relationship between most of the discourse analysis variables and the behavioural outcomes measure. I was interested to see how these relationships would change once the variables were included together in a model. The following section outlines the results of the multiple regression analyses.

Table 10: Means, Standard Deviations and Frequencies for the Total Difficulties Score by key variables

	Total Difficulties		
	Mean	SD	N
Lone motherhood			
Ever a lone mother	11.3	5.7	3542
Never a lone mother	10.3	5.6	8491
			12033
Ethnicity			
White	10.8	5.7	9304
Other ethnic groups	9.8	5.3	2642
			11946
Ethnicity (expanded)			
White	10.8	5.7	9304
Mixed	10.9	5.5	166
Indian	9.3	5.0	447
Pakistani	10.1	5.8	570
Bangladeshi	9.5	5.3	376
Black Caribbean	10.4	5.0	254
Black African	9.1	5.0	447
Other	10.2	5.2	382
			11946
Maternal age at birth			
Mother age<20	12.0	5.9	581
Mother age 20 or over	10.5	5.6	11452
			12033
Receipt of benefits			
Ever received benefits	10.8	5.7	9261
Never received benefits	9.8	5.2	2701
			11962
Marital status			
Never married	11.2	5.7	1542
Ever married	10.5	5.6	1462
			12004
Housing tenure			
Ever rented social housing	11.6	6.0	3185
Never rented social housing	10.3	5.5	8844
			12029
Gender			
Male	10.6	5.7	6026
Female	10.6	5.6	6007
			12033
Age			
10	10.8	5.8	1945
11	10.4	5.8	1943
12	10.4	5.6	2084
13	10.5	5.6	2043
14	10.7	5.6	2044
15	10.7	5.4	1974
			12033

| | Total Difficulties | | |
	Mean	SD	N
Maternal education			
No qualifications	10.9	5.6	1872
School qualifications	10.8	5.8	5484
Further/higher education	10.2	5.5	4655
			12011

5. Regression analysis: Total Difficulties Score

The same series of models were applied to the Total Difficulties Score as to the prosocial subscale, the results of which I outlined in Sections 2 and 3 above. The Total Difficulties Score, as detailed in the Methodology is a supplied scale that comprises the total scores of all SDQ subscales, with the exception of the prosocial subscale. The score is measured on a scale of 1 to 35 with higher numbers indicating increased behavioural and emotional difficulties.

Table 11 presents the results of Models 1 and 2 for the Total Difficulties Score. As can be seen from the table, whether a mother was ever a lone parent had a positive and significant association with the Total Difficulties Score in Model 1 (1.02, s.e. 0.13). This indicates that children of lone parents scored one point more on the Total Difficulties Scale, meaning that they exhibited more difficulties than their peers whose mothers were not lone parents. However, the model fit is again low (R^2=0.01) indicating that lone motherhood explained only one percent of the variance between individuals, leaving much unexplained.

In Model 2, the discourse analysis variables were introduced singly and then concurrently. An observable effect of their introduction is that the lone motherhood coefficient halved from 1.02 (Model 1) to 0.55 (Model 2f), indicating that other factors were mediating the association between lone motherhood and the Total Difficulties Score, although it remained statistically significant.

In contrast with the results from the prosocial scale, and as expected from the results of the exploratory analysis, several of the variables from the discourse analysis were significantly associated with the Total Difficulties Score. Children of younger mothers (1.30, s.e. 0.28), White mothers (1.14, s.e. 0.13) and mothers who had ever rented social housing (1.09, s.e. 0.14) had scores of around one point higher on the Total Difficulties Score than their peers whose mothers did not have these characteristics. Children of mothers who had ever received benefits scored on average three-quarters of a point higher than those children whose

mothers had never received benefits. While this indicates worse behavioural problems, a difference of one point on a 35-point scale is slight. Although the R-squared increased in Model 2f, with the introduction of all the variables which emerged from the discourse analysis, the model still explained only two percent of the variance between individuals' Total Difficulties Scores, seven percent less than the variance explained in the same model for the prosocial subscale.

I re-ran Model 2 with the inclusion of the expanded ethnic group category variable for a more nuanced picture of the relationship between ethnicity and Total Difficulties Score (see Table A4 in the Appendix). The results showed, in line with the exploratory analysis, that children of Indian mothers (-1.44, s.e. 0.27), Bangladeshi mothers (-1.25, s.e. 0.31) and Black African mothers (-2.08, s.e. 0.27) scored lower on the Total Difficulties Score than their White peers, indicating more positive outcomes for these young people in comparison to their White counterparts. Additionally, a similar relationship was found for the children of Pakistani mothers (-0.76, s.e. 0.27).

Table 11: Multiple regression results for the Total Difficulties Score (scale of 1 to 35) using random effects estimation

	Model 1	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 2c	Model 2d	Model 2e	Model 2f
Lone motherhood (ref: mother never lone parent)							
Mother ever lone parent	1.02***	1.04***	0.95***	0.81***	0.95***	0.68***	0.55***
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Ethnicity (ref: other ethnic group)							
White		1.14***					1.31***
		(0.13)					(0.14)
Maternal age at birth (ref: mother aged>20)							
Mother aged <20 at birth			1.30***				0.92***
			(0.28)				(0.29)
Receipt of benefits (ref: never received benefits)							
Mother ever received benefits				0.74***			0.54***
				(0.14)			(0.14)
Marital status (ref: ever married)							
Never married					0.25		-0.15
					(0.19)		(0.19)
Housing tenure (ref: never rented social housing)							
Ever rented social housing						1.09***	1.10***
						(0.14)	(0.15)
Constant	10.30***	9.41***	10.26***	9.79***	10.29***	10.11***	8.69***
	(0.07)	(0.12)	(0.07)	(0.11)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.16)
N of pooled sample	12,033	11,946	12,033	11,962	12,004	12,029	11,934
N of individuals	8,336	8,256	8,336	8,268	8,308	8,332	8,245
R^2	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02

Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** significant at the p<0.01 level **p<0.05 *p<0.1

I next ran Model 3, as for the prosocial subscale, including the background variables of gender and age of young person, maternal education and household size, all of which have been shown to be significant factors in a young person's wellbeing in previous studies. The results (in Table 12) revealed that lone motherhood was statistically significantly associated with a slight increase in behavioural difficulties, varying from 1.15 (s.e. 0.14) in Model 3a to 0.70 (s.e. 0.15) in Model 3f. Even with the introduction of background factors, the same discourse analysis variables as in Model 2, that is Whiteness, maternal age, benefits receipt and social housing tenure are significant and indicative of worse behavioural outcomes for the children of mothers who have these attributes. The differences by ethnicity seen in Model 2 remained similar in Model 3 (see Table A5 in the Appendix for details). Once again, whether a mother was never married has no significant association with the Total Difficulties Score.

Unlike in the results for the prosocial subscale, and as foreseen in the exploratory analyses, the young person's gender was not significant in these models, indicating that boys and girls were likely to score similarly on the Total Difficulties Score. Age too did not appear to be a contributing factor to the young people's scores. As with the prosocial scale, maternal education was initially significantly associated with improved outcomes in Model 3a (-0.67, s.e. 0.18), but decreased in size and significance with the inclusion of other discourse analysis factors in the model, becoming insignificant in Models 3e and 3f. This is an indication that levels of maternal education were not strongly correlated with Whiteness, which was included in Model 3a, but did have an association with the other discourse analysis variables. Household size was significantly associated with greater difficulties in all models except Model 3e although at a tenth of a point on average, for every additional household member, it would take a large increase in household size for there to be any real implications for the Total Difficulties Score. The model fit barely increased with the introduction of the background variables (R^2=0.03) indicating that most of the difference between young people's behavioural difficulties is perhaps better explained by factors external to the model.

The models thus far have looked at the individual contribution of the key independent variables to changes in the Total Difficulties Score from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. As with the prosocial subscale, I was interested in investigating how these individual characteristics affected the data when entered in a more multiplicative way via interaction terms. The following section reveals the results of the final models of the social outcomes analysis, before summarising and turning to the educational outcomes analysis in Chapter 6.

Table 12: Multiple regression on Total Difficulties Score including background controls (Model 3)

	Model a	Model b	Model c	Model d	Model e	Model f
Lone motherhood (ref: mother never lone parent)						
Mother ever lone parent	1.15***	1.02***	0.91***	1.03***	0.75***	0.70***
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.15)
Ethnicity (ref: other ethnic group)						
White	1.36***					1.42***
	(0.14)					(0.14)
Maternal age at birth (ref: mother aged 20 or over)						
Mother aged <20 at birth		1.20***				0.87***
		(0.29)				(0.29)
Receipt of benefits (ref: never received benefits)						
Mother ever received benefits			0.60***			0.44***
			(0.14)			(0.14)
Marital status (ref: ever married)						
Never married				0.24		-0.11
				(0.19)		(0.19)
Housing tenure (ref: never rented social housing)						
Ever rented social housing					1.02***	0.99***
					(0.15)	(0.16)
Background variables						
Age	-0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Gender of young person (ref: male)						
Female	-0.07	-0.08	-0.08	-0.08	-0.08	-0.08
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Household size (scale)	0.19***	0.10**	0.10**	0.12**	0.06	0.14***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Maternal education (ref: no quals)						
school level quals	-0.14	0.17	0.14	0.17	0.36**	0.05
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.18)
further/higher ed	-0.67***	-0.34*	-0.30*	-0.37**	-0.08	-0.26
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Constant	8.74***	9.89***	9.44***	9.78***	9.68***	8.13***
	(0.48)	(0.47)	(0.48)	(0.47)	(0.47)	(0.50)
N of pooled sample	11,928	12,011	11,942	11,984	12,007	11,916
N of individuals	8,242	8,318	8,252	8,292	8,314	8,231
R^2	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.03

Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** significant at the $p<0.01$ level **$p<0.05$ *$p<0.1$

6. Regression analysis with interactions: Total Difficulties Score

In this section, I present the results of a further iteration of Model 3, which additionally included interaction terms, interacting lone motherhood with each discourse analysis variable in turn.

As can be seen from the results of Model 4, presented in Table 13, two of the five interaction terms were highly statistically significant: receipt of benefits and social housing tenure. While the individual coefficients for lone motherhood, receipt of benefits and social housing tenure were associated with increased scores on the Total Difficulties scale, the interaction terms, which were also statistically significant, were negative. When these coefficients are combined, the following results emerged.

Children of lone mothers who had ever received benefits scored over one point higher on the Total Difficulties Score (1.15) than their peers whose mothers had neither of these characteristics. Children whose mothers had ever received benefits as a two-parent family scored on average half a point more than children whose mothers had never received benefit. However, children whose mothers had ever been a lone parent but had never been in receipt of benefits scored nearly two points more on average than their peers whose mothers had neither attribute. These results indicate that while benefits receipt and lone motherhood each had a negative association with behavioural outcomes, the combination of both benefits receipt and lone motherhood is not multiply detrimental.

A slightly different scenario emerged in relation to social housing. In this case, children of lone mothers scored about a point more on the Total Difficulties Score in relation to their peers from two-parent families. Children whose mothers had ever rented social housing had slightly more behavioural difficulties (1.38) in relation to children whose mothers had not. However, children whose mother had ever been lone mothers and ever rented social housing had slightly more behavioural difficulties (1.5), again in relation to children from two-parent families who had never rented social housing. This time, therefore the interaction of these two variables does create a slightly worse outcome for these children. However, the change in scores is not as dramatic as the media portrayal of lone mothers would have predicted and, as with previous models, much of the explanation of these differences lies outside the models since the model fit is still low (R^2=0.03).

Table 13: Multiple regression on Total Difficulties Score including interaction terms (Model 4)

	Model 4a	Model 4b	Model 4c	Model 4d	Model 4e
Lone motherhood (ref: mother never lone parent)					
Mother ever lone parent	0.29	0.69***	1.96***	0.83***	1.03***
	(0.26)	(0.15)	(0.50)	(0.16)	(0.18)
Ethnicity (ref: other ethnic groups)					
White	1.25***	1.42***	1.43***	1.40***	1.42***
	(0.17)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Maternal age at birth (ref: mother aged 20 or over)					
Mother aged <20 at birth	0.86***	0.75*	0.86***	0.87***	0.86***
	(0.29)	(0.40)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)
Receipt of benefits (ref: never received benefits)					
Mother ever received benefits	0.44***	0.45***	0.53***	0.43***	0.38***
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.15)
Marital status (ref: ever married)					
Never married	-0.10	-0.11	-0.10	0.41	-0.07
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.30)	(0.19)
Housing tenure (ref: never rented social housing)					
Ever rented social housing	0.99***	0.99***	1.01***	0.99***	1.38***
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.20)
Background characteristics					
Age (scale)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Gender of young person (ref: male)	-0.07	-0.08	-0.08	-0.08	-0.08
Female	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Household size (scale)	0.13***	0.14***	0.14***	0.13***	0.13***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Maternal education (ref: no quals)					
school level qualifications	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.06
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
further/higher education	-0.24	-0.26	-0.26	-0.26	-0.25
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Interactions					
Lone parent and white	0.53*				
	(0.29)				
Lone parent and mother before age 20		0.24			
		(0.56)			

	Model 4a	Model 4b	Model 4c	Model 4d	Model 4e
Lone parent and ever in receipt of benefits			-1.34*** (0.52)		
Lone parent and never married				-0.86** (0.38)	
Lone parent and ever rented social housing					-0.91*** (0.29)
Constant	8.27***	8.13***	8.08***	8.15***	8.12***
	(0.51)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)
N of pooled sample	11,916	11,916	11,916	11,916	11,916
N of individuals	8,231	8,231	8,231	8,231	8,231
R^2	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03

Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** significant at the $p<0.01$ level **$p<0.05$ *$p<0.1$

To sum up, although lone motherhood was significant in the initial models, the model fit showed that lone motherhood did not explain any differences in prosocial behaviour between individuals and only one percent of any variance in the Total Difficulties Score. Family type explained very little of the variance between individuals, indicating that lone motherhood was not the most important factor. This is in contrast to the media depiction of lone motherhood which blames lone mothers for the anti-social behaviour of their children. In addition, the size of the lone motherhood coefficient declined in size and/or significance as discourse analysis and background variables were introduced into the subsequent models, indicating that any association that exists between lone motherhood and social outcomes is mediated by socio-economic and demographic factors.

The models also revealed which of the identity factors from the media discourse proved to be statistically significant in the regression analysis. Benefits receipt and social housing tenure were significantly associated with worse outcomes in prosocial behaviours while all discourse analysis variables, except marital status, were significantly associated with increased Total Difficulties Scores. Children from some ethnic backgrounds, namely, children of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Black African mothers had better outcomes than their peers of White mothers. In all cases the model fit was low, indicating that other factors external to the models were more important to the social outcomes of these young people than lone motherhood or the identity factors included. I will discuss the ramifications of this in Chapter 7, but in the next chapter will focus on the analysis of educational outcomes.

Chapter 6: Educational outcomes: findings

As with the social outcomes analysis in Chapter 5, this chapter first outlines the results of an exploratory analysis of the educational outcomes dependent variable and its relationship with the independent variables of interest. I then turn to the results of the multivariate regression analyses, the strategy for which is, as discussed in the Methodology, largely similar to that used in the social outcomes analysis.

1. Exploratory analysis

This section focuses on the dependent variable of interest, Key Stage 4 scores, which was introduced in the Methodology. I conducted univariate and bivariate analyses of this variable to look at the characteristics of the Key Stage 4 scores and any associations with the key independent variables, lone motherhood, the discourse analysis variables and the background characteristics used in the regression models. These exploratory analyses provide a context for the multiple regression analyses which follow in the subsequent section.

Key Stage 4 scores

I outlined in the Methodology my rationale for choosing the uncapped total score variable to represent the Key Stage 4 results for the sample. It was not possible to present a histogram of skewness for this variable as with the social outcome variables, as the small size of some of the frequencies meant this information could not be released from the Secure Lab (Bond et al., 2015). However, I outlined the summary statistics for the different Key Stage 4 measures, in the Methodology, which indicated that the total uncapped score was the least skewed of the options available. As shown in Table 3 in the Methodology, the Key Stage 4 scores in the sample had a mean of 480.2 and a standard deviation of 161.9.

The next stage in the exploratory analysis was to investigate the relationships between the key independent variables that would be entered into the regression model and the Key Stage 4 scores (see Table 14). As noted previously, the sample size for the educational outcomes analysis is a fraction of that for the social outcomes analyses, although the key characteristics appeared similar on examination.

Table 14: Means, Standard Deviations and Frequencies of Key Stage 4 total uncapped scores by independent variables (N=1,509)

	Key Stage 4 total uncapped score		
	Mean	SD	N
Lone motherhood			
Ever lone mother	441.8	168.7	474
Never lone mother	497.8	155.6	1035
			1509
Discourse analysis variables			
Ethnicity			
White	478.1	163.5	1169
Other ethnic groups	488.1	156.3	339
			1508
Ethnicity (expanded)			
White	478.1	163.5	1169
Mixed	417.3	186.7	18
Indian	513.7	181.6	64
Pakistani	485.8	126.3	74
Bangladeshi	468.2	159.9	48
Black Caribbean	490.9	175.9	40
Black African	475.9	158.2	43
Other	510.6	123.1	52
			1508
Maternal age at birth			
Mother aged under 20	439.8	167.8	65
Mother aged 20 and over	482.1	161.5	1444
			1509
Receipt of benefits			
Ever received benefits	464.4	166.9	1142
Never received benefits	530.3	133.9	365
			1407
Marital status			
Never married	433.4	174.9	174
Ever married	486.3	159.2	1335
			1509
Housing tenure			
Ever rented social housing	409.5	181.2	417
Never rented social housing	507.3	145.1	1092
			1509
Background characteristics			
Gender			
Female	501.5	153.7	756
Male	458.8	167.1	753
			1509

	Key Stage 4 total uncapped score		
	Mean	SD	N
Maternal education			
No qualifications	421.8	179.5	271
School qualifications	476.5	160	767
Further/higher education	521.4	140.6	469
			1507
Receipt of free school meals			
Ever received free school meals	409.1	176.2	379
Never received free school meals	487.4	154	648
			1027

As can be seen from Table 14, having a mother who has ever been a lone parent was associated with a lower average score at GCSE (441.8) compared to peers whose mothers were never lone parents (497.8). In GCSE terms, this difference of 56 points is equivalent to a discrepancy of a grade in nine subjects.

The differences for ethnicity or maternal age were not significant, however, there were statistically significant differences in Key Stage 4 scores by marital status, benefits receipt and social housing tenure. In terms of the background characteristics, as expected from the literature, girls on average performed better than boys, while children with mothers with higher levels of education had better GCSE results on average that than those with lower levels of education. Similarly, pupils who had ever received free school meals performed less well than their peers who had never received free school meals.

These exploratory analyses have uncovered some of the statistically significant relationships between the key variables in this dataset and the dependent variable of Key Stage 4 scores. In order to discover how these associations change in relation to other variables, it is necessary to perform multiple regression analyses. The following section will outline the results of such multiple regressions.

2. Regression analysis – educational outcomes

In this section I present the results of regression models undertaken to investigate the relationship between lone motherhood and the Key Stage 4 total score. As with the social outcomes variables, I ran a series of models to include the key variables, firstly those variables which emerged from the discourse analysis followed by other background variables which

have been widely used in the literature (maternal education, household size and young person's gender), as detailed in the Methodology.

Four regression models were specified. I first performed a parsimonious regression model with the inclusion of the single predictor variable of lone motherhood (Model 1). I then introduced the five discourse variables singly (Models 2a-2e) and concurrently (Model 2f). A third series of models followed the same pattern as Model 2 but with the inclusion of key background variables, again introducing the discourse variables singly and together (Model 3). Finally, a further model, Model 4 investigated the interactions between lone motherhood and the discourse analysis variables for any multiplicative effects on educational attainment, in an attempt to operationalise intersectionality theory and to investigate any relationship between the mothers' multiple intersecting identities and their children's educational outcomes. This final model will be discussed section 4.1. Despite the smaller sample size, all results discussed are highly significant ($p<0.01$) as with the social outcomes analysis, unless indicated otherwise.

As can be seen in Table 15, in the parsimonious Model 1, lone motherhood had a negative relationship with the Key Stage 4 point scores (-56.04, s.e. 8.87). Children of lone mothers scored 56 score points fewer than children whose mothers had not been lone parents. This point score difference equates to the children of lone mothers achieving one grade lower in nine GCSE subjects than their peers from two-parent households. At first glance, it appeared that lone motherhood had a negative impact on educational attainment at Key Stage 4. However, with an R-squared of 0.03 for the model, lone motherhood explained only three percent of the variance between individuals.

When the discourse analysis variables were introduced into the model in Model 2, the size of the lone motherhood coefficient decreased. This was particularly the case for receipt of benefits and social housing (Model 2c and Model 2e). One interpretation of these results is that receipt of benefits and social housing are stronger predictors of lower educational attainment than lone motherhood at GCSE. An analysis of correlations between background variables revealed that the correlation coefficients between benefits receipt and social housing and Key Stage 4 scores were larger than the corresponding coefficient for lone motherhood and Key Stage 4. Looking at the standardised coefficients for these two models, we can see that in Model 2c receipt of benefits has a standardised coefficient of -0.14, compared to that for lone motherhood (-0.12). In Model 2e, the standardised coefficient for social housing is -0.24 compared to -0.09 for lone motherhood. These results would indicate that receipt of benefits and social housing have stronger relationships with lower educational attainment

than lone motherhood. However, as we have seen from the literature, due to the economic disadvantage experienced by lone mothers, they may be well-represented in the social housing and benefits receipt variables. Introduction of these variables into the model, therefore, accounts for some of what was previously seen as a lone motherhood effect, when in fact, it is more likely due to economic and social constraints.

Model 2f included all the discourse variables. This resulted in a further weakening of the association between lone motherhood and Key Stage 4 attainment, in both statistical significance and coefficient size. The standardised coefficients in Model 2f showed that social housing tenure had the strongest association with lower attainment at Key Stage 4 (-0.23), followed by being in receipt of benefits (-0.09), whiteness (-0.06) and lone motherhood (-0.06). The unstandardised coefficient for social housing tenure of -83.01 is broadly equivalent to a drop of two grades in each of seven subjects at GCSE. The full Model 2f explained nine percent of the variance between individuals, an improvement on the parsimonious Model 1 (0.03), although still not a large R-squared. The inclusion of the housing tenure variable in Model 2e and 2f contributed to the increased R-squared, pointing to the importance of this variable as a predictor of lower educational attainment.

As with the social outcomes analysis, the same models were run with the inclusion of the expanded ethnic categories, the results of which can be found in Table A6 in the Appendix. As might have been predicted by the exploratory analysis, of the ethnic categories included in the regression analysis none were highly significant, either with or without the inclusion of other factors, indicating that there were no statistical differences between ethnic categories in Key Stage 4 attainment.

The next stage of the analysis was the inclusion of background variables to see how these modified the associations between the key variables and Key Stage 4 results.

Table 15: Multiple regression on Key Stage 4 total uncapped scores, Models 1 and 2

	Model 1	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 2c	Model 2d	Model 2e	Model 2f
Lone motherhood (ref: mother never lone parent)							
Mother ever lone parent	-56.04***	-56.12***	-54.72***	-40.62***	-49.60***	-31.83***	-20.80**
	(8.87)	(8.87)	(8.91)	(9.32)	(9.27)	(8.99)	(9.59)
		-0.16	-0.16	-0.12	-0.14	-0.09	-0.06
Discourse variables							
Ethnicity (ref: all other ethnic groups)							
White		-9.21					-21.67**
		(9.86)					(9.64)
		-0.02					-0.06
Maternal age at birth (ref: mother aged 20 or over)							
Mother <20			-29.41				2.46
			(20.37)				(20.07)
			-0.04				0.00
Receipt of benefits (ref: mother never received benefits)							
Mother ever on benefits				-51.40***			-32.54***
				(10.10)			(10.14)
				-0.14			-0.09
Marital status (ref: mother ever married)							
Mother never married					-31.54**		-13.64
					(13.47)		(13.30)
					-0.06		-0.03
Social housing tenure (ref: mother never rented social housing)							
Mother ever rented social housing						-88.42***	-83.01***
						(9.33)	(9.76)
						-0.24	-0.23
N	1,509	1,508	1,509	1,507	1,509	1,509	1,507
R^2	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.08	0.09

*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$; standard errors in parentheses; standardised coefficients beneath

As can be seen from Table 16, the results for Model 3 were slightly different, however since they are based on a sample size two-thirds the size of that used in Models 1 and 2, it is not possible to compare them directly with the previous results. The Key Stage 4 coefficient for lone motherhood was -38.47 (s.e.11.20) in Model 3a, equating to one grade lower on six subjects at GCSE. However, as with the previous model, this coefficient reduced to -29.6 (s.e. 11.54) in the full Model 3f, and decreased in significance, as other factors were introduced into the model. This again indicates that the initial perceived contribution of lone motherhood to lower attainment at GCSE can largely be explained by other socio-economic factors. The coefficient of -29.6 in Model 2f still equates to a grade lower in five GCSEs compared to children who have not experienced lone motherhood.

Social housing and ethnicity were the only discourse analysis variables which were statistically significant in Model 3. The result for social housing (-52.36, s.e. 12.20) equates to a grade lower in eight GCSE subjects. It can be seen from the sizes of the standardised coefficients in Model 3f, that social housing had the strongest association with lower attainment at Key Stage 4 as well as remaining highly significant while benefits receipt and lone motherhood are no longer as highly significant. This indicates that despite the introduction of other factors seen as key to a young person's educational attainment, social housing remained the most important factor amongst the discourse analysis variables.

A change from the previous model was that in this sample, Whiteness was now highly statistically significant in Model 3a, although it drops in significance in the full model (Model 3f). The results for the expanded ethnic category variable in Table A6 in the Appendix reveals that this finding was largely driven by a better performance at Key Stage 4 by the children of Bangladeshi mothers, who scored 92.57 points more on average than their White peers, equating to two grades higher in seven subjects at GCSE. None of the other ethnic categories had significantly different scores at GCSE from their White peers.

In terms of the background variables, Key Stage 1 scores had the strongest positive association with Key Stage 4 attainment (0.43 or 0.44 in all models, equating to a grade higher in seven subjects at GCSE for each additional point at Key Stage 1). The explanatory power of Key Stage 1 results on attainment at Key Stage 4 is reflected in the R-squared which is between 0.28 and 0.30 in all models, showing the importance of prior attainment in explaining attainment later in a school career. Of course, this also means that lower educational attainment at Key Stage 1 is a predictor of lower educational performance at GCSE.

Gender also had a positive association with Key Stage 4 attainment. Being female resulted in between 27 and 30 points difference in Key Stage 4 scores, equivalent to a grade higher in five GCSE subjects. Maternal education had a slightly stronger association than gender (β=0.10 rather than 0.09), with pupils who had a mother with further or higher education qualifications likely to score between 33 and 38 Key Stage 4 points higher than those whose mother has no formal qualifications, equating to 5 or 6 grades higher at GCSE.

Finally, receipt of Free School Meals had a negative association with Key Stage 4 attainment. In Models 3a and 3d, the Free School Meals measure was highly statistically significant, with coefficients of -30 and -29, indicating that a child in receipt of Free School Meals would score a grade lower on five subjects than a child not in receipt of Free School Meals. The association disappeared in Models 3e and 3f where social housing tenure was included, which would indicate that the Free School Meals variable and the social housing tenure measure are capturing similar attributes as proxies for straitened economic circumstances.

Household size was not significant in any of the models, which contradicted the hypothesis that children from larger families do less well at school as a result of a lack of economic or time resources. However, it may be that this effect has been captured by other variables in the model. The IDACI score was also not significant, perhaps due to the large amount of variance within any IDACI area discussed previously; it may be that a variable representing a smaller geographic area would have been more significant in the model.

3. Regression analysis with interactions

As with the social outcomes analysis in Chapter 5, I ran the final model once more with the inclusion of interaction terms for each of the identity factors and lone motherhood. The results are presented in Table A7 in the Appendix as none of the interactions were significant. The model was run again without the inclusion of prior education in case this had affected the results. However, the interaction effects were also not significant in this model. These results indicate that there is no empirical evidence for the media portrayal of lone motherhood, as lone motherhood in combination with any of the discourse analysis variables produced no statistically significant results.

Table 16: Multiple regression on Key Stage 4 scores including background controls (Model 3)

	Model 3a	Model 3b	Model 3c	Model 3d	Model 3e	Model 3f
Lone motherhood (ref: mother never lone parent)	-38.47***	-37.58***	-33.66***	-38.41***	-32.97***	-29.60**
Mother ever lone parent	(11.20)	(11.29)	(11.47)	(11.39)	(11.23)	(11.54)
	-0.11	-0.11	-0.10	-0.11	-0.09	-0.09
Discourse variables						
Ethnicity (ref: all other ethnic groups)						
White	-42.36***					-32.12**
	(13.03)					(13.19)
	-0.10					-0.08
Maternal age at birth (ref: mother aged 20 or over)						
Mother aged less than 20		-22.13				-10.20
		(21.00)				(21.06)
		-0.03				-0.01
Receipt of benefits (ref: mother never received benefits)						
Mother ever on benefits			-28.24**			-23.79*
			(12.50)			(12.42)
			-0.07			-0.06
Marital status (ref: mother ever married)						
Mother never married				-1.27		3.81
				(14.10)		(14.10)
				-0.00		0.01
Social housing tenure (ref: mother never rented social housing)						
Mother ever rented social housing					-52.36***	-44.95***
					(12.20)	(12.45)
					-0.15	-0.13
Background variables						
Age of young person (scale)	-5.69	-5.97	-6.53*	-6.11	-6.09	-6.08
	(3.94)	(3.96)	(3.96)	(3.96)	(3.93)	(3.92)
	-0.04	-0.04	-0.05	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04
Gender of young person (ref: male)						
Female	29.97***	30.32***	30.14***	30.15***	27.41***	27.78***

	Model 3a	Model 3b	Model 3c	Model 3d	Model 3e	Model 3f
	(9.07)	(9.11)	(9.10)	(9.12)	(9.06)	(9.03)
	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.08
KS1 attainment (scale)	19.65***	19.61***	19.41***	19.59***	19.15***	19.12***
	(1.29)	(1.30)	(1.30)	(1.30)	(1.29)	(1.29)
	0.44	0.44	0.43	0.44	0.43	0.43
Household size (scale)	2.37	5.29	5.10	4.87	5.35	3.85
	(3.95)	(3.91)	(3.88)	(3.95)	(3.86)	(4.01)
	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03
Maternal education (ref: no qualifications)						
School level qualifications	23.78**	22.23*	24.43**	22.35*	18.05	21.53*
	(12.10)	(12.15)	(12.15)	(12.17)	(12.09)	(12.09)
	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.05	0.06
Further/higher education	38.30***	39.18***	37.38***	39.11***	34.51**	33.18**
	(14.20)	(14.27)	(14.28)	(14.28)	(14.19)	(14.18)
	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.09	0.09
Pupil ever recorded as FSM	-30.17***	-28.89**	-26.65**	-29.75***	-8.68	-9.11
	(11.27)	(11.36)	(11.39)	(11.43)	(12.26)	(12.37)
	-0.09	-0.08	-0.08	-0.09	-0.03	-0.03
IDACI score (scale)	10.95	47.37*	53.59*	47.19*	70.78**	45.04
	(29.58)	(27.58)	(27.71)	(27.83)	(27.89)	(30.71)
	0.01	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.08	0.05
Constant	243.85***	192.94***	221.45***	196.74***	207.16***	260.15***
	(64.08)	(62.81)	(63.79)	(62.78)	(62.21)	(64.96)
N	975	975	974	975	975	974
R²	0.29	0.28	0.29	0.28	0.29	0.30

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1; standard errors in parentheses; standardised coefficients beneath

Chapter 7: Discussion of results

In this chapter, I first briefly outline the summary findings of the discourse and regression analysis, before discussing the findings in relation to prior research and theory. The discussion chapter is followed by a conclusion which provides an overview of the thesis, policy implications related to the research findings and limitations of the study and suggestions for future avenues of research.

1. Discourse analysis: key findings

The discourse analysis detailed in Chapter 4 revealed that while lone parenthood is discussed in generic terms, through the use of 'single parents' and 'lone parents', a closer examination showed that single mothers are conflated with single parents, with single fathers rarely mentioned (see Table A3). Ethnicity was generally absent from the discourse, except when distinctions were to be made on the proportions of lone parents in other ethnic groups compared with the White British population. I therefore concluded that Whiteness was the unmarked category of ethnicity (Garner, 2007) assumed to apply to the lone mothers in the discourse. The causes of lone parenthood were rarely mentioned in the discourse, but marital status, in particular, being unmarried, was the most often referred to status for lone mothers. Maternal age was a concern of politicians and journalists alike, with a number of terms used to describe women who became mothers before the age of 20. Otherwise, age was barely mentioned. Finally, socio-economic variables were more prevalent than explicit references to any particular social class; particularly being on benefits or living in social housing.

2. Quantitative analysis: key findings

2.1. Social outcomes

Prosocial subscale

While lone motherhood initially appeared to be associated with young people's lower prosocial scores, there was in fact little discernible difference between the children of lone mothers and those from two parent families. Both the small size of the association and the measure of model fit indicated that lone motherhood did not explain the difference in prosocial scores between young people. Of the factors identified in the discourse analysis, ethnicity, maternal age at birth and marital status had no association with differences in prosocial scores in any of the models. It would appear that the media discourse that blames

lone parenthood and a particular type of lone parenthood for increased anti-social behaviour has little foundation.

Living in social housing was associated with less prosocial behaviour, as was receipt of benefits, but as with lone motherhood, these were small associations and the model fit indicated that these variables did not explain even one percent of the differences between individuals. It was only when background factors (age, gender, household size and maternal education) were included as a block in the model that the model fit increased above one percent, to nine percent. It seems therefore that these background factors have a larger role in explaining the differences between individuals than the family structure factors that some politicians and journalists would have us believe.

Total Difficulties Score

As with the prosocial subscale, the results for the Total Difficulties Score indicated that lone motherhood was not related to more behavioural difficulties in young people. Although there was initially a statistically significant association, the coefficient was small and halved in size when the discourse analysis factors (ethnicity, marital status, maternal age, receipt of benefits and housing tenure) were introduced. Of the discourse analysis variables, marital status was not significant. The other discourse variables while significant were only associated with small increases in the Total Difficulties Score. As the full model still only explained two percent of the variance between individuals, clearly, the factors which emerged from the discourse analysis are not the primary factors in explaining behavioural problems in young people.

When background factors (age, gender, household size and maternal education) were included in the model there was little difference in the model fit, so these factors also did not explain the differences between young people's behaviour. Having a White mother or living in social housing were associated with increased Total Difficulties Scores, although again, the size of the association was small. These results indicate that there are other factors outside the model that explain the differences in Total Difficulties Scores between individuals.

2.2. Educational outcomes

In an initial model with no controls, children whose mothers have ever been lone parents had lower scores at Key Stage 4 than their peers from two parent families. However, this sizeable difference diminished as each discourse analysis factor was introduced, particularly the receipt of benefits and social housing tenure. In the final model, which includes all identity factors, the difference in scores between the children of lone mothers and the children from two parent

families was not significant. Children whose mothers have ever received benefits and have ever rented social housing had significantly lower scores than their contemporaries whose mothers have experienced neither of these. These results are evidence that it is not the family type that matters to educational attainment but the economic situation in which the family is living.

With the introduction of background controls, the main story was the same. Children of lone mothers had lower GCSE results than their peers from two parent families, but the difference in scores was not as large and again, the result became non-significant when all other factors were included. Having a White mother was significantly associated with a worse performance at GCSE than pupils with mothers from other ethnic groups. Further analysis disaggregated by ethnicity showed that Bangladeshi and Black African pupils performed better than their White peers. However, this difference reduces in significance in the full model with the inclusion of all factors. Children of mothers who have ever rented social housing are again educationally disadvantaged.

3. Discussion

Taking these results as a whole, the most important finding is this: the pervasive myth that lone motherhood negatively affects the life chances of young people is unfounded. There is no evidence in these results to show that lone motherhood itself is detrimental to young people's educational or social outcomes. Furthermore, several of the characteristics which emerged from the discourse analysis as part of the media portrait of lone motherhood are also not associated with worse outcomes; namely the age at which a woman becomes a mother and her marital status. Additionally, the results of the analytical models which included interaction terms produce further evidence of the incorrect nature of the media myth as none of the interactions (between lone motherhood and each of the identity factors) were associated with worse outcomes, whether educational or social.

These findings therefore reveal the interpellated nature of lone motherhood in the media; the figure of the single parent blamed for the breakdown and corruption of society, for terrorism even, is an imaginary scapegoat created to absolve the state and the media consumers of their role in the inequity of modern day society. These findings indicate that lone mothers, are indeed subject to the 'structural violence' (Wacquant, 2008) discussed in Chapter 3; not only are many economically and socially disadvantaged by a lack of access to the labour market and a resultant need for social housing, but *all* lone mothers experience "heightened stigmatization in daily life as well as in public discourse" (Wacquant, 2008; p.25) due to the interpellation of

this mythical figure. Even if there are a handful of lone mothers who fit every one of the media's descriptors, the results of this study show that it is neither their lone parenthood status nor many of these often-cited characteristics that are responsible for any behavioural issues or lower educational outcomes of today's youth.

Why is it then that the lone mother is singled out as a figure of blame and reproach for society's failings? The work of Scambler (2018) is relevant here, in his discussion of "the weaponising of stigma", where blame is added to shame, enabling those in authority to take no responsibility for what are presented as the failings of individuals. The lone mother, as outlined in Chapter 1 has been a figure of shame for many centuries, whether hidden within families, sent away from the family home or institutionalised to hide the shame of being unmarried and with child (Thane and Evans, 2012). Modern society has not enabled this sense of shame to disappear, despite growing numbers of people having children outside of marriage, increased divorce rates since the 1970s and a substantial proportion of lone parent families among UK families. Instead, the figure of a "single mother" is recreated by the media with a modern twist, still presented as shameful, due to their unmarried status, their 'dependence' on benefits and state resources and typically their youth. As such, they are presented as a threat to society's morals and placed in a deficit model where the mother must be the problem. As a widowed mother interviewed for *The Guardian* said, "It is assumed that family breakdown is something done from choice, as if the widows have killed off their husbands or the divorced women were so impossible to live with that they drove the men away - it's always something to do with the woman getting it wrong or making the wrong choice" (McFadyean, 1993). What the media chooses to ignore is the options available to women who find themselves single and a mother. The structure of society imposes childcare responsibilities on mothers via the gender dynamics of our society; a role which is encouraged when mothers have a co-parent to provide for them, but which becomes problematic when they do not. The welfare state was set up to help precisely those members of society who were unable to work and provide for themselves and their family and ironically was intended to remove the stigma attached to means-tested public assistance previously (Bell and Gaffney, 2012). Instead, such reliance on the State, however temporary, has been depicted as dependency and scrounging and as such has been made to feel shameful. "Some single mothers are more acceptable than others. Unacceptable single mothers are non-working and teenage mothers. The acceptable single motherhood norm therefore is the professional working post-teenage single mother" (Carabine, 2001; p.309). Others such as Gagnon (2016), Phoenix (1991) and Mollidor (2013) have raised the issue of acceptable and respectable lone

motherhood, noting that lone mothers and their children may themselves internalise the negative stereotypes propagated in the media and in political discourse and stake their claim as 'Other' to those stereotypes.

It is clear from the media discourse that the media focus is on the more 'unacceptable' aspects of lone motherhood in the UK and on the impact of such parenting on their children. While the media uses the 'lone parent' label, this is, returning to Althusser, an interpellation, a construction of a subject within the media. This subject, bolstered by the occasional story about people who have been found to match the constructed subject, usually chosen for the extreme nature of their situation, becomes interpellated through repetition into a subject that the reader believes they recognise:

It is a feature of modern living that a few individual stories, possibly contrived to illustrate an argument, become 'facts' and then all-too-soon 'widely acknowledged social issues'. Even when they contradict our own direct experience of people experiencing poverty, we seem nevertheless to subscribe to them. Then in no time at all, they become features of political life about which 'something must be done'. (Stoller, 2012)

Neither politicians nor journalists *need* to use identity factors when describing lone mothers, as the mere use of "single mothers" has become recognised as a descriptor for a certain type of lone mother in the UK. It is journalistic shorthand for a subsection of lone mothers, specifically younger, unmarried, White, mothers who claim benefits or live in social housing. Unfortunately, the generic use of "single mother" without more specific characteristics results in all lone mothers feeling targeted and stigmatised by the pervasive trope.

The discourse around lone mothers is therefore closely linked with the discourse of the 'benefit scrounger' (Baumberg, et al., 2012) or the 'underclass' (Tyler, 2013). As we saw in Chapter 4, these terms are used concurrently with single parents so that they become almost synonymous with them. What these interpellated subjects have in common, apart from their caricatured nature, is that families in each of these discourses are living on limited resources and are reliant on the State to help provide for themselves and their families. It is therefore the poorest in society that are being stigmatised in this way by politicians and media. Among today's poorest are lone parents, the majority of whom are lone mothers. As Barbara Hobson (1994) has said, lone motherhood can be viewed as the 'litmus test' of society's treatment of women and mothers. It serves to highlight not only the contradictory expectations placed on women and mothers discussed in previous chapters, but also the negative discourse to which they are subjected if they fail to live up to one or both expectations. I would argue further, that lone motherhood in the context of the UK media, is more than that, it is a litmus test of how

society treats women *living in poverty*. Lone mothers are stigmatised because they are poor and because they are women without partners. In both senses they are presented as having 'failed' in their roles as citizens and mothers, by being reliant on the State, rather than providing for their children themselves. The importance placed by the media on the unmarried status of lone mothers that emerged from the discourse analysis is presented as further proof that they do not have someone else on whom to 'depend', as well as somehow placing the fault with them for not having a partner.

The use of the term 'dependency' in relation to welfare, rather than reliance or support, is designed to indicate an individual weakness or lack, rather than a wholesale failure of society to provide a necessary safety net. Claiming benefits and/or living in social housing is portrayed as a deficiency within certain individuals, rather than a response to the economic and structural conditions through which some areas and sections of society have been impoverished.

"Specifically in our political rhetoric and policy we stigmatize with the label "dependent" the welfare mother who is unemployed and trapped within poverty" (Fineman, 2004; p.32). Policy solutions to such 'dependent' women are remarriage or paid employment, but these are themselves problematic. The first of these options merely replaces the 'dependency' on the State, with 'dependency' on a male breadwinner, making the non-normative, normative, by recreating the 'ideal' family model. Marriage or remarriage is not necessarily the best option for children in lone parent families, with a growing body of evidence that finds reconstituted families are associated with worse outcomes for children and that the instability of changing family dynamics can be more detrimental to children then a constant of one family type (Hampden-Thompson and Galindo, 2015).

The second solution, that of paid employment, was discussed at some length in the policy context chapter, but it is equally problematic in that it prioritises a citizen-worker identity over that of citizen-carer, resulting in the undervaluing of unpaid care work and voluntary or community work and the overvaluing of participation in the labour market. What is striking about both 'solutions' however, is the need to solve a problem, with the problem being the woman in need. The reason for this focus on the individual 'failings' of lone parents and the supposed passing on of such failings to their children, is a means for the media and for politicians to place the blame for the poverty in which many lone parent families live, squarely on the lone mothers who head them. Such a discursive move simultaneously removes the blame from the government for any role in the creation or support of existing structural

inequalities, enabling the government to sidestep any accountability for such social inequality as well as any responsibility for reversing it, as Fineman states:

Blaming the plight of children on their parents' marital status without seriously considering how governmental and employer actions (or lack thereof) contribute and compound that plight is just bad policy analysis (Fineman, 2004: xviii).

That this is possible is due to the neo-liberal discourse which pervades political speeches and the media, portraying a meritocratic society in which anyone can be who they want to be. As Eton and Oxbridge-educated David Cameron (Prime Minister 2010-2016) has stated, "what counts is not where you come from, it is where you are going" (Cameron, 2012). The current Prime Minister, Theresa May also trots out the same fiction: "Britain where advantage is based on merit not privilege, talent not circumstance, hard work not background" (May, 2016). Exemplified in the American Dream narrative, the pervasive nature of such a discourse is problematic as it negates any discussion about equality of opportunity. The former Prime Minister, Sir John Major stated in 2013 that "in every single sphere of British influence, the upper echelons of power…are held overwhelmingly by the privately educated or the affluent middle class" (Hope, 2013). While only seven percent of the public attended independent schools and fewer than one percent attended Oxbridge, the powerhouses of the UK are dominated by their alumni (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014). At the time of the research, two thirds of the Conservative Cabinet and a third of the Shadow Cabinet were educated at Oxbridge, along with almost half of all newspaper columnists. This indicates that where you start in life has a definite impact on your future career and it is likely that those who grew up in privilege are the least qualified to understand the lives of people who grew up in poverty. Many are unaware of the level of privilege that their education or background gave them, or the opportunities that it has afforded to them. Instead, they talk about the meritocracy of UK society, as if someone born into a disadvantaged household, where the primary concern is being fed and clothed (Lupton and Thrupp, 2013), rather than how many extracurricular activities they do, has the same chances in life as their own children. Such a discourse is problematic, not only because it is false, but because it sets up the individual as entirely responsible for their success or failure. In turn, blaming the individual removes any responsibility from government for the structural inequalities that exist in society and the odds that are stacked against any child born into poverty in modern day Britain.

Instead "meritocracy remains a powerful myth that helps hold the social hierarchy in place" (Reay, 2006; p.295). Not only are independence and self-sufficiency social ideals in political discourse, there is an "illusion that independence is attainable for all" (Fineman, 2004; p.32)

which results in those who do not attain independence being viewed as responsible for their situations, for 'choosing' to be in the situation they are in (Jensen, 2012). A YouGov poll found that "there is a widespread belief that there are adequate opportunities to earn a reasonable income and that benefit recipients will not contribute to society" (Stoller, 2012). Yet analysis of employment figures by Leaney has revealed that in some areas, there is only one job for every 30 residents (Leaney, 2016). That the public perception is not in tune with the reality indicates how closely the media and politicians' interests and discourses are aligned; which in turn influence public perception. The move in 2015 to drop the 2020 child poverty eradication target and instead to report on measures of worklessness, addiction and educational attainment is further evidence of the focus on individualisation of people's experiences rather than viewing child poverty as a social issue (Wintour, 2015). Once again, family structure was seen as key:

We know in households with unstable relationships, where debt and addiction destabilise families, where parents lack employment skills, where children just aren't ready to start school, these children don't have the same chances in life as others. (then Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan-Smith (2010-2016) in Wintour, 2015)

It is not that politicians are unaware that there are structural issues that cause poverty. As Haux (2011) identifies, even when issues such as lack of employment opportunities and impact of financial concerns were identified in the Conservative think tank's report on *Family Breakdown*, the policy recommendations still focussed on the individual level, for example supporting marriage and parenting practices, rather than on structural or economic reforms.

While the results of my research showed definitively that lone motherhood is not associated with poorer social and educational outcomes, it is clear that other factors are. For educational attainment, these were living in social housing, being in receipt of benefits and having a White mother, with similar results for the analysis of the Total Difficulties Score. It must be stated that the associations between Whiteness and living in social housing and worse outcomes are not proof of a causal link; I am not saying that social housing causes lower achievement at GCSE, or that having a White mother leads to worse behaviour. What emerges from these analyses is that young people from some ethnicities perform better on average than their White peers and that young people whose mothers live in owner occupied housing do better on average than their contemporaries whose mothers have lived in social housing. In this section therefore, I will focus on how my study relates to previous research, before exploring some possible explanations for these findings.

As discussed earlier, the hypothesis that children of lone mothers may be prematurely mature, or more prosocial due to the additional demands of being in a lone parent family, or the closer relationship they might have with their parent, is disproved. I had expected to find a positive association between lone parenthood and young people's prosocial scores, based on the adultification theory discussed in Chapter 1, that greater and earlier maturity can result from growing up in a lone parent family (Burton, 2007; Weiss, 1979). The media discourse would lead one to believe that the converse was true: that children in lone parent families were more likely to exhibit anti-social behaviour. There was in fact no evidence to support either hypothesis in my findings; lone motherhood had no statistically significant association with behavioural outcomes when other factors were considered. As such, these findings are not without precedent. Analysis of the Health Survey for England revealed that the "high prevalence of psychological morbidity among children of lone-mothers was a consequence of socio-economic effects, disappearing when benefits receipt, housing tenure and maternal education were taken into account" (McMunn et al, 2001; p. 423). Spencer (2005) found that material disadvantage explained the negative association between lone parenthood and health and education, while Biblarz and Raftery (1999) found that the adverse effects of lone motherhood on children's educational attainment could be explained by "higher rates of unemployment and lower-status occupational positions" (Biblarz and Raftery, 1999; p. 321); economic positions that are the reality for many lone mothers.

In terms of ethnic differences, a 1999 study, which assessed the mental health of children and young people in the UK (although using a different measurement tool, not the SDQ), revealed ethnic differences in the prevalence of mental disorders. Among 11 to 15 year olds, eleven percent of White children were found to have a mental disorder, surpassed only by their Black peers (16 percent) (Meltzer, et al., 1999). Indian children had the lowest percentage (three percent). As the sample was ninety percent White, the authors did not feel that the small sample numbers of children from other ethnic backgrounds lent themselves to interpretation. Their findings are similar to my own, since I found that being White is negatively associated with psychosocial wellbeing in comparison to other ethnic groups. My analysis by ethnic groups found that almost all the ethnic groups analysed showed a lower score on the Total Difficulties scale in comparison to White children, with the children of Black African mothers scoring the lowest in comparison to their White peers. The difference between my analysis and that of Meltzer et al. could be explained by the sample sizes or expanded categories I used in my analyses. A further explanation may be that my results were based on self-reports, whereas their report was primarily based on teacher and parent reports, which as I discussed

in the Methodology chapter may under or overestimate the extent of young people's emotional and behavioural difficulties.

In the results for educational outcomes, White pupils performed worse overall at GCSE than their peers from other ethnic groups, although this relationship was not significant until background controls had been included, indicating that this is not the case for all White pupils, but is affected by the inclusion of measures of gender and socio-economic status. In fact, a more nuanced ethnic analysis of educational attainment showed that the high performance of Bangladeshi pupils was probably driving much of this difference as no other ethnic group was statistically different from White pupils.

Free school meals were significant in the models in which benefits receipt or social housing status were excluded, agreeing with the findings of researchers and Government that pupils in receipt of free school meals perform less well at Key Stage 4 (Gillborn, 2009; Department for Education, 2016). Much was made in the media in the mid-noughties, about the success of pupils from certain ethnic backgrounds, while those (particularly boys) from White backgrounds were deemed to be disadvantaged in the school system due to their poorer school performance (Gillborn, 2009). It remains a current concern as evidenced by its inclusion as one of the key targets of HEFCE Widening Participation funding (HEFCE, 2018). The relationship between ethnicity, gender, disadvantage and educational attainment is complex; in fact, it appears that the intersection of ethnicity and disadvantage result in very different outcomes than an additive approach to such data would produce. It is certainly true that in my results, Whiteness was statistically significant and negative when the free school meals measure was in the model, but Whiteness was no longer significant when social housing tenure was included, although gender was consistently significant even when socio-economic factors were controlled for. As such, these findings agree with Strand (2014) who found that the relationship between ethnicity, socio-economic status and gender were complex and need to be viewed through an intersectional lens as an additive approach is "insufficient" (Strand, 2014; p. 131). In Gillborn's study (2009), White pupils not on free school meals performed better than their peers from other ethnic groups, while White pupils on free school meals performed worse than some ethnic groups, but not others. What is not clear is why some ethnic groups remain unaffected by this relationship with socio-economic status, although Reay (2009) has argued that Black and Minority Ethnic pupils may bring a different set of expectations of the transformative power of education into social mobility, than their White working-class peers who have not had this experience.

Social housing and benefits receipt however, were significant for educational attainment in all models, with and without background controls. In the final model including all variables, only social housing, gender and prior achievement were statistically significant. This is not the first study to find associations between housing tenure and worse outcomes in the life course. A report for the Smith Institute looked at the associations between social housing tenure and life chances over the previous five decades using four of the British Birth Cohort Studies (Feinstein et al., 2008). They found that while social housing initially had no correlations with poorer life chances in the post-war era, as the decades have progressed, social housing has become more closely associated with poorer health, education and employment outcomes. Similar results were found in a comparative analysis of the 1970 British Cohort Study and the LSYPE; the later cohort growing up in social housing were 90 percent more likely than their peers not in social housing to be NEET (not in education, employment or training) while the risk for the earlier cohort was 40 percent (Duckworth and Schoon, 2012). Tunstall et al. (2011) found that there was a gap in test scores at age 5 between the children of social housing tenants and those of owner occupiers, a gap which researchers have shown to widen not narrow throughout schooling (Schoon, 2006; Jerrim and Vignoles, 2011).

Some possible explanations for an association between social housing and lower educational attainment include the impact of the physical state and geographical positioning of social housing as well as the stigma attached to living in social housing. Shifts in housing allocation policies over the decades have also resulted in a selection effect into social housing; these are families in need, on low incomes, many are elderly or disabled (Harkness, Gregg and MacMillan, 2012). As discussed in Chapter 2, changes in housing policy have resulted in increased instability for families, including temporary accommodation or housing moves, both of which are disruptive for children's schooling. In a survey of families living in homeless accommodation, such as bed and breakfasts, ten percent did not have school places for all their children (Mitchell et al., 2004). Children surveyed about issues with their schools cited moving schools, having somewhere quiet to do homework and travelling to and from schools as issues which affected their engagement with school and educational achievement. Children who are moved into temporary accommodation may either have to undertake long journeys to keep attending their existing school (Rice, 2006) or change schools, with the attendant disruption to their social relationships and schoolwork (Strand and Demie, 2007).

The standard of housing in the social housing sector and the consequent implications on health or space resulting from overcrowded or unsuitable accommodation can also be detrimental to

children's outcomes. A report for Shelter found that 1.4 million children were living in 'bad housing' in England, which they categorised as overcrowded, temporary or unfit (Harker, 2006). Not all social housing is 'bad'; current government statistics show that only two percent of social housing does not meet the Decent Housing Standard (DCLG, 2017) but this still means that nearly 90,000 homes are providing sub-standard accommodation for families.

The research by Shelter found that children in 'bad housing' placed great importance on the need for education, yet their aspirations were being hampered by their living circumstances. This is further evidence against the 'poverty of aspirations' myth propagated in media and policy circles to 'explain' the lower educational attainment of working-class or poorer pupils. The research showed that children in this type of housing were more likely to miss school, or be excluded, leading to substantial gaps in their education. They were also five times less likely to have a quiet place to do homework, again with repercussions on their learning.

Lack of space is obviously crucial for children needing to do homework or to study for exams, but it also plays a part in their social lives. Children spoke of not being able to or wanting to invite friends home, due to lack of space or unfit housing (Walker, Crawford and Taylor, 2008). Damp or sub-standard housing also has implications for children's and parents' physical and mental health, which in turn impacts on schooling, in terms of attendance, friendships and behaviour.

In addition to the physical condition of social housing, there are concomitant issues that can affect children and parents' engagement with schooling and their wellbeing. Social housing is often situated outside or on the edge of towns, thereby spatially excluding the residents from the rest of society, leaving them reliant on inadequate transport links to access facilities that are more accessible for those in more centrally-located privately owned or rented accommodation (Leaney, 2016). This can impact on their choice of school which itself will be hampered by its stigmatised location in its recruitment of teachers. In the public imagination, not helped by characterisations in television programmes such as *Little Britain* and *Shameless*, social housing has become inextricably linked with the benefit scrounger trope, stigmatising those who grow up in social housing.

Although as the then Secretary of State, Sajid Javid stated in 2017, in the 1950s "social housing carried no stigma, no shame, quite the opposite, in fact. For many, it was seen the gold standard for accommodation" (UK Government, 2017c), it is clear that this is no longer the case. Qualitative research on the St Ann's estate in Nottingham found that residents "suffer from negative stereotypes and stigmatization because of the notoriety of the estate, because

they are working class" (McKenzie, 2013; p.1342). Similarly, a teacher in a post-industrial town speaking about a rundown neighbourhood said, "people don't come and live there…by choice…a lot of the people that live there kind of feel that this is a dump and they kind of feel a bit like rejects themselves" (Lupton, 2009; p.9). While residents can find respect and value and community within their local neighbourhood, they are aware of the stigma they face in wider society. Again, it is inevitable that their children are also only too aware of any such stigma. Stigma can be internalized and experienced (Broussard, Joseph and Thompson, 2012) with both mechanisms affecting the engagement of stigmatised people with others, for example, not engaging with certain services either because of the stigma associated with that service (internalised) or a fear of being judged by those providing the service (experienced). Researchers have similarly found that stigma is associated with the non-take up of benefits (Baumberg et al., 2012). It is easy to see how a similar process could affect some parents' level of engagement with education providers and the impact this could have on their children, particularly if those children needed additional support with their education (Horgan, 2007).

While some of the above factors, such as quality, location and instability of social housing, could explain some of the association of the social housing variable with educational outcomes in these models, as discussed above the residualisation of social housing has resulted in large areas where the poorest members of the population are housed (Clarke and Monk, 2011). Twenty-eight percent of five-year-olds in social housing were living in the most deprived deciles of small neighbourhoods compared with five percent of children from owner occupied households (Tunstall et al., 2011). Social housing is predominantly lived in by the poorest members of our society, who are disadvantaged economically and culturally with regard to the UK's education system: "Parents, no matter how good or effective they are cannot overcome structural problems of poverty to maximise their children's educational opportunities and life chances" (Hartas 2012; p.3).

There is a great deal of literature showing the links between poverty and educational outcomes (Blanden and Gregg, 2004; OECD, 2012). Studies have shown that children from poorer backgrounds are educationally disadvantaged when they arrive at school, which resulted in the New Labour initiative *Sure Start* (4Children, 2014). As the then Education Secretary, Michael Gove said, "Rich, thick kids do better than poor, clever children before they go to school." (Shepherd, 2010). Researchers have additionally shown that any educational disadvantage at an early age can increase through the life course (Feinstein, 2003; Schoon,

2006; Jerrim and Vignoles, 2011) resulting in greater discrepancies, or achievement gap by the time they reach GCSE level.

Poverty can impact on the most basic needs of pupils, placing them at a physical and mental disadvantage:

Once you start delving deep you have no idea how some of these children come to school, you only have to look at them, they are small, they are thin, they are pasty, they don't get good food in their bodies, some of them sleep on floors. (Headteacher on the effect of poverty on pupils at her school (Lupton and Thrupp, 2013; p.775)).

Pupils living in such circumstances barely have the energy to attend school, let alone to thrive educationally. They are disadvantaged before they even arrive at the school gates, prompting schools to provide breakfast clubs just to ensure their pupils have had breakfast before starting their school day (Lupton and Thrupp, 2013). Education, is seen by disadvantaged parents as a route out of poverty (ATD Fourth World, 2000); a way of breaking the so-called 'cycle of deprivation'. However, as stated above, our current education system does not appear to be narrowing the achievement gap between rich and poor (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018) so is not performing the role that families living in poverty are seeking.

It can be no coincidence that as the inequality gap between rich and poor in the UK has widened, so has the achievement gap (Spitzer and Aronson, 2015). Wealth can buy a better standard of education, either through private schooling or via external resources, such as private tuition or extracurricular activities which can help pupils to advance their understanding of subjects learned in the classroom (Brooks, 2013; Cooper and Stewart, 2017). It is not just a parent's financial resources or economic capital that aid children's academic careers, but also their social and cultural capital. This is also true of parents' ability or desire to deal with teachers and schools. Parents who themselves had unhappy experiences of schooling are less likely to want to engage in their child's schooling: "a lot of our parents are single parent families with bad experiences of their own education so they don't feel fully equipped to be able to support their kids as they go through" (Lupton and Thrupp, 2013; p.774). The authors found that far from having some sympathy for these negative prior experiences of education, headteachers saw it as an individual problem, not a structural one with one head declaring, "Yes, a lot of them had bad experiences at school and everybody's been bullied apparently" (Lupton and Thrupp, 2013; p. 779). Other researchers however have discovered that for many, school was a 'degrading' experience (Tan, 2009). Such parents are less likely to want to engage with the school experience, while middle-class parents, with their

cultural capital, find it easier to navigate the system and are more likely to be involved in parent teacher associations and to talk to their child's teacher (Whitty, 2001).

We know from the literature that when people are in a position of advantage, they are less likely to see or label that advantage. Politicians and the media rarely speak about class, unless they are referring to the most disadvantaged, as I found in the discourse analysis. It has been said that the educational system in the UK is built on "unacknowledged" middle-class norms (Reay, 2006; p.289) and "valorizes middle rather than working class cultural capital" (Reay, 2001; p.334). It is designed by policy makers and politicians (who are almost without exception from upper middle-class backgrounds) and delivered by teachers who tend to be from middle-class backgrounds (Social Mobility Commission, 2014). This becomes problematic when children are made to feel that they do not fit or belong in the education system or when teachers make assumptions about ability according to their background.

Researchers have found evidence of assessment bias by ethnicity (Burgess and Greaves, 2013). Black Caribbean, Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils were the ethnic minorities most likely to be under-assessed, especially for English and Science while ten percent of White, Chinese and Indian pupils were over-assessed. The cognitive ability at age five of these same under-assessed ethnic groups were revealed in another study to be underestimated in teacher assessments (Hansen and Jones, 2011). A similar process was found at GCSE level for Black pupils (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). Two thirds of Black pupils were entered into the lowest tier of GCSE exams where they could not even achieve a C grade, no matter how well they did. As noted by Burgess and Greaves (2013), if teacher assessments inform class streaming or other groupings by perceived ability, such biased judgments could affect not only children's self-perceptions but their ability or motivation to achieve.

As unconscious bias has been found in terms of ethnicity in education, it is possible that the same process also happens with regard to class or family type. Researchers found that low-income pupils were rated less able by teachers for both reading and maths scores at age 7, than they were when such tests were taken anonymously (Campbell, 2015). This is concerning when results at such an early stage may underpin both pupils' and teachers' assessments of students' future ability. The researcher identified that bias was strongest at the average level where there was least teacher knowledge about pupil attainment (Campbell, 2015). Burgess and Greaves (2013) found evidence of over- and under-assessment by teachers at KS2 based on ethnicity, SEN and free-school meals receipt. While the largest proportion of under-

assessment was for pupils with SEN, teachers also under-assessed a fifth of pupils on free school meals for Science and English, over-assessing only five percent in each subject.

Bias has not only been found in rating children's achievements, but also in how underachievement is assessed. While teachers viewed the underachievement of working-class pupils as due to the home environment, they situated middle-class underachievement at the school level (Dunne and Gazeley, 2008). Such differences will inevitably translate to different approaches to address perceived underachievement for pupils from different backgrounds, which in turn positions these children and their families differently, since this comes close to a narrative of blaming the family in poverty and feeds into the 'poverty of aspirations' discourse.

Despite the empirical evidence relating to class in the classroom, class is rarely explicitly addressed by teachers since "contemporary initial teacher training rarely engages with it as a relevant concern within schooling" (Reay, 2006; p.288). Class is rarely voiced by teachers or teacher trainees (Gazeley and Dunne, 2007). Lupton and Thrupp (2013) found no acknowledgement by headteachers of the middle-class nature of the education system itself and its alignment with middle-class values, although they did acknowledge the role of poverty and disadvantage in their pupils' lives. This absence of a class discourse creates an invisible presence, the "zombie" in the classroom (Reay, 2006), unacknowledged but dangerous. That it is not addressed in teacher training or explicitly discussed by teachers, does not mean however that they are unaware of class differences, or the impact on their treatment of pupils from different backgrounds:

This seems to highlight a general feature of the problem of class definition; it is something we all do internally/unconsciously, yet are often less than comfortable admitting although it plays an important part in the way we position others. (Teacher trainee in Gazeley and Dunne, 2005; p. 9)

Unconscious bias on the part of the teacher may be one explanation for the difference in attainment found in my findings, since as discussed it can feed into pupils' own sense of ability as well as influence what exams teachers enter children for. Another explanation may be on the pupil's side, in terms of belongingness. Belongingness has been defined as "students' sense of being accepted, valued, included and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class." (Goodenow, 1993; p.25). The issue of school belongingness has been much researched, providing evidence that belonging is associated with engagement and motivation in the classroom, particularly for more disadvantaged pupils (Becker and Luthar,

2002). Consequently, belongingness is important for educational attainment (Flook, Repetti and Ullman, 2005; Spitzer and Aronson, 2015).

As mentioned above, the classed nature of our education system means that a middle-class pupil 'fits' or 'belongs' from the first day they go to school, which is partly because, being from a middle-class family, they are familiar with the cultural values and social norms associated with the educational context. Middle-class children recognise the behavioural and social expectations of their educational environment, partly as it is run according to middle-class norms and partly as fewer children who experience disadvantage attend pre-school provision (Speight et al., 2010). Children from working-class backgrounds that do not necessarily subscribe to these social 'norms', are at an immediate disadvantage. Qualitative research with pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds has shown that pupils see themselves as separate or different from middle-class ways of being, for example, being told off for how they speak (Reay, 2006). They are also aware of a teacher's bias (unconscious or otherwise) in picking certain children to answer questions (Reay, 2006).

Social identity processes like stereotype threat and belongingness uncertainty create markedly different subjective experiences for students targeted by stereotypes, which in turn can lead to significant differences in performance despite being in an objectively similar environment (Spitzer and Aronson, 2015). Several theories have been proposed in relation to stereotype threat. Social dominance theory proposes that people may conform to type (Van Laar and Sidanius, 2001). Others have proposed several responses to the avoidance of stigma: imitation, compensation and delimitation (Zartler, 2014). She finds that strategies employed by children and parents in lone parent families included presenting an image of a two-parent family, for instance bringing separated parents to school events, seeking to repartner to form a two-parent unit and not discussing their family set up at school or in public. Delimitation was found among parents in an American study who tried "very hard not to look outwardly impoverished" (Broussard et al., 2012; p.196) when dealing with social services. There is evidence that people may embody the stereotypes set out for them, due to sustained belief in their abilities compared to others. Researchers have found that for example, girls did not perform as well at maths as their male peers (Pronin, Steele and Ross, 2004) and African Americans did not perform as well in tests as their White peers, particularly when such differences are made clear to them (Steele and Aronson, 1995). Effort spent on trying to fit in or feelings of unbelonging can negatively impact on children's experience of education and may be one explanation for the achievement gap observed in the findings between children

who have lived in social housing, that is the more disadvantaged pupils and their more advantaged peers.

How well children 'fit' in the educational space of a school can be vital not just for their immediate educational career but for their longer-term goals:

Childhood is, simultaneously, the cultural space within which children learn not only what they were but also what they are not and what they will become. (James,1993, p. 29)

In a recent survey of Early Years and Key Stage 1 teachers, two thirds felt that their pupils were aware of ability grouping, even if groups were given neutral names (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017). Not only were they aware, but teachers felt that such awareness hampered self-esteem and confidence, as well as impacting on teachers' expectations of the children. Children have been found to internalise their 'ability', viewing it as fixed rather than fluid, while research has shown that these groupings may in fact not change through their school career. Whether this is as a result of teacher or pupil expectations is hard to untangle, as both undoubtedly have a role. Yet, as discussed above, if children from lower income families are (unconsciously) placed in lower ability groups when they begin school, they appear to have little chance of changing their educational trajectory. This may contribute to the achievement gap at GCSE in my results.

While the 'poverty of aspirations' discourse blames children or parents for a perceived lack of future aspirations, the negative impact of policies such as early ability grouping will undoubtedly play a role in limiting their aspirations from a young age. A similar pattern of individualisation and blame, as found in media portrayals of benefits claimants, emerges in the debates on working-class 'failure' in education, where the aspirations of children or parents are blamed, or a lack of parental involvement with the school or schoolwork (Gillies, 2005). Rather than seeking to find the source of any such claims, or structural explanations, the well-rehearsed 'cycle of disadvantage' theory is presented (Wintour, 2015). There is qualitative evidence that has exposed these supposed low aspirations as a myth (Kintrea et al., 2011) with aspirations among disadvantaged primary school children no different from their wealthier peers. There was some evidence that children in more advantaged schools were more likely to choose higher paid jobs like lawyer or doctor, presumably as they had a greater awareness of these jobs from parents or acquaintances (Horgan, 2007). The myth of 'poverty of aspirations' is still widely accepted and reproduced by politicians and the media, becoming fact in the process (Stoller, 2012).

There is no recognition in education policy of the advantaged position of being born into a middle-class household, instead, the economically disadvantaged are labelled and stigmatised for their lack of achievements; with no acknowledgement of the fact that they have started from a disadvantaged position. Any 'failure' then can be levelled at the individual. But empirical research has shown that there are other possible explanations for the association between poverty and educational outcomes. Stigma can be felt by children at school in relation to their poverty, with children concerned about the stigma of not being able to afford the right uniform, to go on school trips, receiving school meals and being able to afford books (Ridge, 2009). Additionally, children can feel the stress of their family's poverty (Walker et al., 2008; Burton, 2007). Some children are so aware of the additional burden on their parent of not being able to afford a school-related activity that they do not even tell their parents about it, even though in some cases the school might be in a position to help financially: "The trips are real expensive and we haven't got the money so I don't tell my Mum. I bin the letters, she doesn't need the stress." (Select Committee on Work and Pensions, 2003; HC 85 II, CP06).

I discussed above the stigma and blaming aimed at lone mothers in the media and political discourse. The same shame and consequent blame is also found among school pupils, stigmatised for speaking or acting differently, or for being poor. While the impact of such stigma on children is in itself damaging, the inability to afford basic items for school can lead not just to embarrassment but also to bullying (Holloway et al., 2014). This not only impacts on the mental health of young people but their school attendance and educational progress. The role of poverty on societal perceptions of young people is also not lost on the young people concerned: "you could be [rich and a scally] but they'd only *call you* a scally if you're poor" (Sutton, 2009; p.284, italics in original).

This process has been used over several decades in connection with family breakdown and lone motherhood, by the media, politicians and academics. It is a consequence of 'othering' that once 'othered' by the dominant social group, the group marginalised through discourse can then be considered blameworthy for all or any social problem (Foucault, 1982). Lone mothers become themselves a social problem "about which 'something must be done'" (Stoller, 2012) leading to policies aimed specifically at them, with little thought to the impact of such stereotyping on lone mothers and their children.

Having discussed my findings in relation to the empirical and theoretical literature, I will now proceed to conclude my thesis. The conclusion comprises an overview of the research, a

discussion of the potential policy implications of the study, the limitations of the study and possible avenues for future research.

Conclusion

I set out in this study to investigate empirically whether there was any truth to the pervasive myths associated with lone parenthood and the supposed repercussions for the children of lone parents and as a result society at large. This led me to develop a mixed methods study, combining discourse analysis with quantitative analysis, to unpick the most important characteristics linked with lone parenthood in the media discourse, then use them in statistical models to establish if there was any foundation to the stereotypes around lone mothers and their children's outcomes.

I used a sequential mixed methods design, using the results of a discourse analysis to inform the choice of variables in my quantitative analysis. To my knowledge this is the only study of its kind to combine the two analytical techniques in this way. This study adds to and updates the quantitative research undertaken largely in the 1990s when there was a surge of interest in lone parenthood.

For the discourse analysis phase, I unpicked the specific characteristics associated with lone parenthood in the media discourse, in two newspapers at two time points (1993 and 2013). The results of this analysis not only showed that the media depiction of lone mothers has remained largely unchanged over twenty years, but also revealed that the generic use of 'single parents' by the media and politicians, does not apply unequivocally to a homogeneous population of lone parents but hides a more nuanced picture of the lone parent that is 'failing' their children. The pen portrait that emerged was that of a young and unmarried lone mother who was White, claiming benefits and living in social housing. While the media and political discourse appears aimed at lone parents, it is not really about lone parents but about the poorer parts of society, about class, with lone parenthood a convenient screen behind which to hide what amounts to class discrimination.

I then conducted a series of OLS regression models to discover if there were any associations between the parent characteristics from the discourse analysis and lower educational and worse social outcomes of the children of lone parents as the media would have us believe. Applying these characteristics within regression analyses on social and educational outcomes, I did not find evidence in my regression analyses to support the pervasive discourse of lone motherhood as a 'deficit model' of parenting, as socio-economic factors were more strongly

associated with social and educational outcomes than family type. Lone motherhood was not itself associated with worse educational or social outcomes for children. Neither was being unmarried or having children at a young age. What did emerge as significant were economic factors such as receipt of benefits and living in social housing, as well as ethnicity, specifically Whiteness. The discourse analysis uncovered five identity factors most usually connected with lone parenthood in the discourse, but of these only living in social housing and ethnicity were found to be negatively associated with the outcomes of children. Furthermore, the use of interaction terms to operationalise an intersectionality approach found that none of these identity factors had a negative association with social or education outcomes, when interacted with lone motherhood. Not only therefore, is there no association between lone motherhood as a homogenous grouping and poorer social and educational outcomes, but also specific types of lone mothers perceived as 'failing' mothers in the discourse are not negatively associated with poorer outcomes for their children.

The contribution of this research is therefore both empirical and methodological. Empirically, I have shown that lone motherhood is not associated with lower educational attainment or behavioural problems in children. This means that the depiction of the single parent/mother in the media and in particular their supposed role in causing social unrest or societal breakdown is false. The prevailing trope of the 'single mother', widely used by politicians and journalists, has no foundation. Such a discourse is not only stigmatising and discriminatory towards lone mothers and their children, but has been internalised by the general population, which in turn increases the widespread stigma of lone motherhood and negatively affects their life chances. 'Lone mothers' have been falsely interpellated into a knowable subject, as a consequence of a neoliberal society that places the blame on the individual, not the structural inequalities in society. Demonised for not fitting with the normative assumptions of what constitutes a family they are seen as lacking, not only father figures, but morality and citizenship. Their gender sets them up to 'fail' in the eyes of society, either for neglecting their children by going to work or not contributing to society should they choose childcare over paid employment. 'Lone mothers', along with 'benefit scroungers' and 'chavs' are used in discourse to represent the poorest members of society while simultaneously hampering their progress through the stigma this produces.

Instead, my findings indicate that structural and social inequalities are associated with the futures of children in the UK, certainly by the time they take the GCSEs, but probably, given the strength of association between prior attainment and GCSE results, by the time they are formally assessed at the age of seven. That children's results and consequent opportunities

should be mapped out at such an early stage in a developed country such as the UK is immensely sad, as well as problematic for society. If nothing is done to change the current trend, the divide between the have and have nots will become even greater; which is likely to result in increased discontent and consequent social unrest.

Methodologically, as discussed in Chapter 3, while mixed methods studies are becoming more commonplace, I am so far unaware of any study that has combined the methods of discourse analysis and quantitative analysis in this way. This combination of methods is an innovative approach to testing the veracity of such a pervasive discourse by employing the results of the discourse analysis as variables in the quantitative analyses.

However, there are some limitations to the research as well as potential avenues for further research. I shall discuss these in turn before looking at the policy implications and conclusions of the research study.

1. Limitations of the study and opportunities for further research

As with any research project, when the plans are put into practice, there can be unforeseen challenges and limitations to the final result. As stated above, it is the only mixed methods study that I am aware of which combines an analysis of the media discourse with statistical analysis. While this has not been without its challenges, the choice of methods has enabled me to test out not only whether the pervasive discourse on lone motherhood has any foundation, but also to investigate the more specific identity factors that are applied to lone motherhood within the media discourse.

The advantages of using secondary data in quantitative analysis were discussed in the Methodology; one of the issues of using data that has already been collected is that it does not always have all the elements that it might, were you to conduct primary research of your own. In the context of this research, I relied on three sources of data: the newspaper corpus, the publicly available British Household Panel Survey and UK Household Longitudinal Survey and the linked National Pupil Database. Each of these sources enabled me to access a large amount of data that it would not have been possible to collect myself, but they come with the drawback of having to make use of what is available, in terms of sample sizes, range and consistency of variables.

My choice of timeframe and sources for the discourse analysis worked in concert with the period of quantitative data but there are a couple of potential limitations to the choice of sources. As discussed in the literature review, the media, including the press, have a role in imparting information and knowledge to the general population, and rely on accredited sources such as politicians and 'experts' to provide the content and framing of that information (Hall et al., 1982). While I decided to use two broadsheet newspapers as my sources, rather than tabloids, for reasons stated in the methodology chapter, I am aware of potential limitations in this choice. Firstly, the distribution figures of *The Times* and *The Guardian* are lower than those of their tabloid counterparts (*The Guardian,* 2013a) so their audience is consequently not as large. Secondly, the middle-class nature of their readership as discussed in the Methodology also means that their audience is not representative of the general population. In counter argument, however, the middle-class readership is representative of teachers, judges, politicians and other authoritative figures (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014) that is, people who are in positions of power and influence themselves. It may be that the selection of newspaper sources less highly skewed towards a middle-class readership would produce different results. However, research has shown that tabloid newspapers tend to be harsher than broadsheets in their depiction of people in stigmatised groups, such as teenage parents or people in receipt of benefits (Hadfield et al., 2007; Baumberg et al., 2012).

In terms of the data for the quantitative analysis, it may be that a different dataset, such as one of the Birth Cohort Studies, would have given me a larger choice of social outcomes. Though if I had, for example, chosen one of the Cohort Studies, the benefits of this would have been balanced by a loss of annual data and data collected from young people, due to their data collection taking place every seven years. A possible alternative would have been the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), which would potentially have more information on the young people I was interested in and, like the UKHLS is linked to the National Pupil Database (UK Data Archive, 2017). However, it is more limited in terms of the family histories and marital status of the parents of the young people, so I would have had to compromise on the level of detail I had available for that aspect of the study. One potential for future research would be to replicate this study with another dataset such as the LSYPE as it may contain more explanatory variables relating to social outcomes than I had available in the data sources I chose.

I chose specifically to compare the outcomes of children whose mothers have *ever* experienced lone parenthood with those who have *never* lived in a lone parent household. This

decision was a considered one as I am aware that there are several aspects of this that are problematic. Firstly, the length of time spent as a lone parent may have a cumulative effect on the financial and other resources available in the house, for example, a short-term period as a lone parent may not incur the same economic burden as a longer period, depending on how their earning potential is affected by being the sole carer of their children. I originally included a variable to capture lone parents who had spent five or more years as lone parents, since this five year figure is widely used in the literature to indicate longer-term lone parenthood (Skew, 2009; Gagnon, 2016). However, initial analyses indicated that this variable was not significant for the outcomes of children and young people, perhaps reflecting the fact that a longer period of time spent in a lone parent family may be associated both with greater stability and fewer economic resources, so it was dropped from the model.

Secondly, households that are not lone parent households are as diverse as lone parent households, since they include reconstituted families as well as two parent households, among which are cohabitees and married couples. As Hampden-Thompson noted, lone mother households and two-parent families are "significantly different" from other families such as stepfamilies, lone father families or guardian families (Hampden-Thompson, 2013; p. 808) and therefore distinctions should be made between these other family types. While her point is valid, for the purposes of this thesis, I was concerned to reflect in my analysis the discourse on lone parents that situates lone parents as the deficit model of parenting, to all other types. It is hard to say whether the results would have been different had I followed the model that Hampden-Thompson used in her paper, looking at the differences between lone mother and two-parent families when compared to mixed families. It is evident that using an 'ever lone parent' variable could include divorced, separated, reconstituted and always lone parent families. As the dominant discourse situates two always married parent families as the gold standard, then my analysis is likely to have created that as the reference category by default. Since other research has found evidence that the children of reconstituted or stepfamilies may have worse outcomes than either two-parent or lone parent households (Scott, 2004; Brown, 2006; Robson, 2010) it is possible that my results would have shown even better outcomes for the children of lone parents if my 'ever' lone parent variable had instead been an 'only ever' lone parent category. Finally, in connection with this point, while the 'ever' category meant that every instance of lone parenthood was included, it also means that lone parenthood of any length of time was captured, from one year to 19 years. This also may have affected the results. Perhaps unpicking some of these issues is an avenue for future research.

I initially set out to create interactions in the dataset to put the intersectionality theory into practice. I was unfortunately not able to perform these to the extent that I would have liked, as sample sizes prevented me from creating interaction terms which included all five of the identity factors. However, the lack of statistically significant findings in the intersectional analysis show that a more nuanced analysis including more identity factors would have been unlikely to elicit any statistically significant interaction terms. However, such limitations to the intersectional analysis meant I more closely reflected the results of the discourse analysis in which I discovered only a few occurrences of intersectional identities.

Researchers have previously found a stronger relationship between lone parenthood and the behaviour of school-age boys than on girls of a similar age (Bertrand and Pan, 2013). My findings showed that there was a gender dimension to both the educational and behavioural outcomes. A potential avenue for future research could be to develop my models to include interactions between young people's gender and lone motherhood, or to disaggregate the models by gender to investigate if similar results emerge. It would be a useful extension to this research either to disaggregate the educational outcomes analysis by the gender of the young person or to interact gender, income and ethnicity since prior research has shown that they work together and against each other in relation to educational attainment.

Finally, the large contribution of Key Stage 1 scores to the model makes the analysis of prior attainment, whether Key Stage 1 or 2, a logical next step, to see if the findings of this research are more or less apparent at an earlier age. This would in turn inform where policy interventions need to take place, whether at the beginning of formal education, during primary or secondary, or at all three phases, to ensure that lower-income families are not additionally disadvantaged by some of the systemic issues discussed above. A further development would be to undertake qualitative analysis looking at these intersected identity factors to better understand how some ethnic groups are affected differently by economic disadvantage and gender than others.

2. Policy implications

The potential policy implications of my research are wide ranging, since these findings prompt questions about the areas of family policy and education, as well as calling into question the neoliberal discourse that dominates the current political discourse (Boddy, 2013). This discourse enables the blame to be laid on individuals and families, particularly those living in

poverty, as discussed in the literature review, rather than taking responsibility as a society for the consequences of past economic and policy decisions.

There are several areas of policy about which the findings of this study prompt questions, including education, gender and family policy. In this section, I shall look at each of these in turn.

2.1. Education

It is clear from this study that there are disparities in educational attainment according to socio-economic circumstances and ethnicity. The free school meals indicator, linked to additional funding for schools with higher proportions of pupils on free school meals, now called the pupil premium, has given more disadvantaged schools additional funds. But it will take more than money to close the attainment gap between income groups (Education Endowment Fund, 2018; Lupton and Thomson, 2015). Educational policy does not work in a vacuum but is affected by the contribution of policies in other key areas, such as housing, health, family income (Lupton, Heath and Salter, 2009; Goldthorpe, 2016). A concerted effort to address inequality in all these areas is vital for educational policy to have the impact that is necessary.

One of many issues in the education sector is the marketisation of education, which enables better-resourced middle-class parents to make strategic choices about their child's education that a working-class family may not (Brooks, 2013). Although, 'better' schools have been shown to have little influence in attainment at A-level, researchers have found that the benefits grow exponentially within higher education (Whitty, 2001). The inequity of choice available to the middle-class or working-class family in turn creates greater disparities between the educational experience of people from different backgrounds.

There needs to be a greater acceptance of working-class values in the classroom. Education should not be about "cloning the Blairs" (Gewirtz, 2001; p.365) but about giving each pupil the same opportunities no matter their background, which inevitably means greater inclusivity of the values each pupil brings to the classroom. Valuing these differences will aid children from different backgrounds to feel as if they belong (Snell, 2013), with positive consequences for their investment in their education (Flook et al., 2005).

There is a need for educationalists, teacher trainees and policy makers to address the social determinants of educational attainment, from the earliest years. The New Labour push for *Sure Start* centres (over a fifth of which have now closed, with further closures imminent

(Ryan, 2018)) and nursery provision were attempts to even out the differences that exist when children start school, by providing educational spaces for people from all backgrounds at an early age so that they were not disadvantaged when they began school. However, this was problematic for two reasons, firstly, that many of the Sure Start centres and activities were used more by middle-class parents than by disadvantaged families (De Benedictis, 2012) and secondly that the provision of free childcare provision for lower income families carried the implicit assumption that these families could not look after their children without middle-class interventions (Gewirtz, 2001). Further, as discussed earlier, childcare provision has fallen short of what is needed. More needs to be done to enable children from any background to have the same opportunities (Reay, 2013). One possibility is to focus more during teacher training on the trainees' unconscious bias on ethnic, class or gender lines (Gazeley and Dunne, 2007), so that teachers enter the classroom aware of strategies they can employ to reduce such bias, or simply be aware of their own biases (Fiarman, 2016).

A greater understanding and appreciation of the lives of children who are not middle-class and the skills and culture they can offer would be a step towards de-stigmatizing their circumstances and, as a consequence, the children themselves (Gazeley and Dunne, 2005). Their experiences, culture and language could be not just tolerated but more widely accepted in classroom interactions: "educational responses which problematise non-standard voices risk marginalising working-class speech and may contribute to the alienation of working-class children, or significant groups of them, within the school system." (Snell, 2013; p.110)

Myths of the 'poverty of aspiration' among the working-class need to be continually challenged, so that children's educational careers are not mapped out for them by negative middle-class judgements about the way they and their parents talk and dress, from initial contact with a school. A more widespread use of 'growth mindset' interventions (Dweck, 2006), such as mixed ability groupings at an early age may remove the early barriers to achievement discussed above and help pupils to see ability as flexible and achievable. Finally, a greater understanding is needed of parental prior experiences of education and the barriers that these may create for their engagement with schools and their children's education. While parents feel marginalised and devalued from their own educational experience, they are more likely to find encounters with their child's school difficult and therefore avoid them. Recognising this and finding ways "of fully involving as partners the parents of children who are struggling with school, to strengthen ties, build bridges and foster trust between marginalized communities and professionals in education" (ATD Fourth World, 2017) may help to change parental and therefore familial attitudes towards education. All or any of these

measures would be marked progress in providing all children an equitable start to their educational careers.

2.2. Family and employment policy

The success of countries such as Finland, who used tax policy to reduce the impact of poverty on schooling, suggests that significant redistribution of wealth could narrow our academic achievement gaps as well. (Spitzer and Aronson, 2015; p.2).

The findings of this study point to a need for a paradigm shift from the current breadwinner/carer model to one that enables both roles to have more gender parity, in the true sense that both men and women could benefit. This could happen in two ways: firstly, enabling mothers to return to work without having to resort to zero hours contracts and loss of career years, that is by remaining a breadwinner and secondly, by placing a greater value, economically and politically, on the role of carer. I shall look at each of these in turn.

An increased awareness by employers of the importance of flexible working practices and a better work-life balance would benefit all employees, but for lone mothers of young children, would mean that employment opportunities that fit around childcare or schooling do not have to be poorly paid or undervalued. Rather than a culture which expects mothers either to settle for underemployment, or lose out on career and pension prospects, more flexibility in working time and place would be beneficial to mothers wanting to combine childcare and work without being forced into zero-hour contracts or suffering the 'motherhood penalty' for taking time out of a career (Young, 2017). As Klammer states we need "a paradigm shift…in which each employee is automatically seen as a caregiver" (Klammer, 2006; p.239). If flexible working practices were available for all, it would prevent them being viewed as a problem for and about mothers (Gingerbread, 2017) and may even create jobs as more part-time work opportunities became available.

As it stands, job flexibility tends to be less available to those in lower socio-economic groups (Graham and McQuaid, 2014) and as stated in Chapter 2, is generally more available for those currently employed, rather than those seeking employment. Parents require more work flexibility if they are to re-enter the workforce after having children. This is even more important for lone parents, who assume the competing demands and responsibilities of childcare and work. In countries such as the Netherlands well over a third of the working population were in part-time jobs in 2015 (OECD, 2017), compared to a quarter in the United Kingdom. A change in the prevailing work culture to increase the flexibility of hours in the workplace would enable lone mothers to work around the needs of their children or other

dependents, while pursuing careers rather than a succession of 'mini-jobs' or zero-hour contracts. At the end of 2016 over 900,000 people were on zero-hour contracts in the UK (ONS, 2017a) an increase of 30 percent from 2014 (Resolution Foundation, 2017). While the flexibility of zero-hour contracts can be advantageous for some, it can also lead to increased job insecurity and uncertainty, with spells of employment interspersed with spells of unemployment, the 'low pay, no pay' cycle which traps families in poverty (McKenzie, 2015; Shildrick et al., 2016). As discussed earlier, financial instability is harmful to the mental health and wellbeing of lone mothers and their children. Greater financial stability should therefore have a positive effect on the psychological wellbeing of lone mothers and their children, as well as preventing disruption to schooling through frequent residential moves.

Additionally, viewing educational and training opportunities as equal to accessing employment for those who are claiming benefit would enable those women, for example younger lone mothers who missed out on further education when they had children, to re-engage in education and not suffer economically. The provision of education and training for people claiming benefits, together with the provision of suitable childcare, is a longer-term solution to the lack of education for many living in poverty. Certainly, it is preferable to a system that forces people to take up any job to meet quotas when that job may be unsuitable, temporary and so low-paid as to only benefit the unemployment figures, not the families involved.

Secondly, carers' roles need to be valued, economically and socially; we can no longer take advantage of the free delivery of a multi-billion pound informal childcare service (ONS, 2016a). Childcare provision that is more flexible to the needs of the job market could be encouraged which would create more jobs as childcare provision is extended. Alternatively, informal childcare could be recognised by the State and financially rewarded, giving lone parents more options if family members or friends could be paid to look after their children. However, the most significant shift would be the introduction of a scheme such as in Sweden, of a caring allowance for mothers who wish to remain at home with their children rather than returning to work when the children are young, which may enable families to escape the poverty trap. Such a scheme would give lone parents the choices that many mothers in two-parent families have; to be a citizen-carer or citizen-worker (Fraser, 1994) especially if such an allowance was sufficient to be viewed as a wage rather than a benefit. This would have the added benefit of removing the stigma of lone parenthood and associated ideas of 'scrounging off the State'. Family-level policies such as this have been shown to benefit the children of lone mothers. Hampden-Thompson (2013) found no educational achievement gap between the children of lone parent households vs two parent households in countries such as Austria which has

policies that favour low-income lone parent families. Conversely, the results for the United States, with the worst benefits packages for lone parents had the largest achievement gap. The introduction of such schemes would also give greater importance to the carer's role and in so doing, help to equivalise the roles of citizen-carer and citizen-worker, of any gender.

A combination of valuing the carer's role and creating a more flexible workplace would help to remove the structural barriers for women returning to work after having children. This in turn, not only increases the financial gain and security of the family but can also alleviate the stigma of being in poverty and any attendant bias by teachers or other professionals, as discussed above. These factors can only contribute to a better educational experience for young people, since raising the income of families in poverty can improve children's educational outcomes (Gregg, 2008).

2.3. Poverty

The evidence therefore suggests that it is not being a lone parent itself that is problematic but rather … the financial consequences that often follow (Cabinet Office, 2008; p.86).

A commitment to eradicate poverty and particularly child poverty, is needed if our society is not going to become increasingly divided by wealth, with consequences for the outcomes of future children. As discussed in the literature review, the political rhetoric around poverty is focussed on blaming individuals and families living in poverty not only for their circumstances but for causing problems for the rest of society (Levitas, 2012). The problematization of a certain type of family, including lone parents, is based primarily on their income level, with no evidence to support the discursive shift from families with troubles, to families which cause trouble as captured in the 'troubled families' rhetoric (Casey, 2012). In order for a more equitable society to be possible, there needs to be a shift in the discourse from a blame and shame culture, to a realisation at all levels of government of the impact of poverty on future generations. While children attend school, who are unable not only to pay for school meals, but have no access to a computer, cannot afford school trips or to provide additional materials for coursework and other projects (Holloway et al., 2014), we cannot expect them to keep pace with their peers. Although research has shown that some schools and/or teachers take steps to alleviate such issues (Lupton and Thrupp, 2013), an oversight of the widespread nature of such interventions would perhaps persuade government that poverty in this country is a real phenomenon, being lived every day by children in our communities.

However, it is not going to be possible for the government to tackle poverty until it is prepared to make a shift in thinking from the neoliberal discourse of individualism and meritocracy, to

an explicit awareness of the importance of the circumstances of our birth, in the UK, to our later life outcomes.

A key implication of these findings is the fallacy of the discourse myths used by politicians and the media, which perpetuate the false myths of the failing lone mother, linked to ideas of deservingness and scrounging. Since these findings show that there is no truth to these myths, then the discourse needs to change, to prevent such stereotypes being further prolonged and creating stigma as a result. Experiments into myth-busting, by presenting facts to counteract such myths, have revealed that they are rarely successful (Geiger and Meueleman, 2016). Instead, there needs to be a change in the discourse, providing the general public with a more balanced and accurate picture, rather than reproducing the same tropes. As Baumberg states: "public debate about benefits emphasises the negative side … at the expense of the positive side and emphasises undeserving claimants over deserving ones." (Geiger and Meueleman, 2016; p.301). A more balanced debate would eradicate the stigma of benefits and reform the idea of a welfare state that supports the vulnerable in our society.

Similarly, there needs to be less emphasis on the *who* and more on the *how* or *why*. For example, rather than focussing on the lone mother as the source of social problems, politicians and journalists should be identifying the real causes of such problems so that solutions can be found. Rather than blaming lone mothers for the riots in 2011, there should be a greater emphasis on the structural inequality which enables young people to grow up feeling excluded from society. Rather than blaming lone mothers for educational failure, there should be a greater emphasis on the level of poverty that many lone mothers live in and the consequences of such poverty on the educational outcomes of their children. These are structural issues and should be debated as such, rather than looking to blame on a personal or familial level.

Instead of talking about a 'poverty of aspirations' among working-class pupils, there needs to be a greater understanding about the reality of unemployment in many areas of the UK, which not only increases the likelihood of neighbourhoods being impoverished but also reduces the exposure that young people have to future careers. It is not surprising that researchers have found that children from independent schools are more likely to name higher status jobs; they are reflecting the jobs of their own parents or their peers' (Kintrea, St. Clair and Houston, 2011). It is easy for (middle-class) policy makers to say that people need to move for their jobs, but there needs to be greater understanding that people may need to stay in their communities for other commitments and the extent of the risks involved in moving to another area for work for those people without a financial safety net to fall back on. In an era when

companies can be based anywhere in the world, through advances in technology, there could be incentives for companies to invest in poorer areas of the country, such as coastal towns and post-industrial areas. If newspapers featured stories about the lack of jobs rather than high unemployment in areas, there could be a shift in the discourse. Likewise, if politicians were seen publicly to discuss the skills shortage in the UK and be visible in looking for solutions, the discourse could again change.

Finally, and most importantly, we need to stop blaming sections of society for situations that they have not caused. As discussed in the literature review, there is no evidence that lone mothers breed terrorism, or rioters, but that does not stop the media and political discourse from blaming them, rather than seeing that social polarisation and inequality is more likely to result in societal disintegration (Dorling, 2007).

The results of this study have made it clear that more research is needed on the impact of poverty on women as mothers and more on how poverty, in its different forms, affects the life chances of children and young people, particularly in the education system. Even as I write this, there appears to be momentum gathering in discussions about gender, class and poverty, certainly by charities and left-wing journalists, if not yet by politicians. Poverty needs to be pushed up the government's agenda so that we stop talking in euphemistic terms laying the blame and shame on selected individuals and families and start finding ways of changing the rhetoric before future generations suffer the stigma of poverty current today.

The evidence for the association of economic factors with educational attainment rather than family type is so compelling, that it calls into question whether as academics we should focus less on family type. Whatever family structure an individual grows up in, whether lone parent or two-parent, whether divorced, reconstituted, or always married, there is such heterogeneity within each of these family forms, that perhaps it is the economic conditions or living circumstances of such families, rather than marital histories or number of parents that should be the focus of future research. Just as the use of 'single parent' in the media discourse hides a socio-cultural and political preoccupation with the morals and behaviours of poorer women, perhaps a focus on lone motherhood conceals the more pertinent question: poverty. As families have become increasingly more diverse in our society, it would perhaps be more beneficial to look at other aspects of the large population of working and caring poor in the UK to study their impact on educational outcomes. Rather than concentrating on individual or family characteristics, perhaps we have a responsibility as academics to change the focus from the individual to the more macro factors impacting on people's lives.

That said, as long as the government and media discourse continues to blame lone mothers for worse outcomes, to problematize families rather than to investigate the deeper reasons for the economic circumstances that many families live in, there will be a continued need for research such as this study to challenge the pervasive stereotype of 'single parent families' used as a shorthand for deprivation in political and media circles.

To conclude, the results of this research challenge the popular myths around lone motherhood, situating disadvantage at the structural and economic level rather than as a result of family structure itself. My research has shown that it is not family type that is associated with worse social or educational outcomes and I am not the first to provide evidence that socio-economic circumstances are associated with worse outcomes, not lone motherhood. Yet while the interpellated 'single parent/mother' of media and political discourse is allowed to persist, these individuals and their children will continue to bear a stigma that can only hamper their life chances. Despite evidence that it is not parenthood but economics that lies at the heart of educational disparities, the problematisation of certain types of families is an easier policy response than solving the structural and economic inequalities in our society. As long as euphemisms for the poor are employed, which disguise the huge disparities in income in our society and which enable individuals and families to be blamed not only for their circumstances but for wider societal problems, there will not be the necessary focus on changing those structures and attitudes that trap children in poverty by limiting their life chances.

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Appendix

Table A1: Details of sources and recoding for variables included in analysis

	Original variables			Analytical variables	
	Variable name	Coding	Dataset, file and waves	Variable name	Coding
Mother ever lone parent	*pid* *opid* *hid* *rel*	Adult id number Other household member's id number Household id number Relationship of other household member to reference person.	BHPS (*egoalt*) all waves	*mum_ever_lp*	1= mother ever lone parent 0=mother never lone parent
	pidp *apidp* *hidp* *relationship_dv*	Adult id number Other hhold member's id number Household id number Relationship of reference person to other hhold member.	UKHLS (*egoalt*) waves 1-5		
SDQ Prosocial subscale	*ypsdqps_dv*	Prosocial subscale 1 to 10 (derived variable in dataset)	UKHLS (*youth*) waves 1, 3 and 5	*ypsdqps_dv*	Prosocial subscale (1 to 10)
SDQ Total Difficulties Score	*ypsdqtd_dv*	Total Difficulties Score 1 to 35 (derived variable in dataset)	UKHLS (*youth*) waves 1, 3 and 5	*ypsdqtd_dv*	Total Difficulties Score (1 to 35)
Ethnicity	*race*	1=White 2=Black-Caribbean 3=Black-African 4=Black-Other 5=Indian 6=Pakistani	BHPS (*indresp*) waves 1-12	*white*	1=White 0=Other ethnic group

	Original variables			Analytical variables	
	Variable name	Coding	Dataset, file and waves	Variable name	Coding
		7=Bangladeshi 8=Chinese 9=Other ethnic group		*race_con*	1=White 2=Mixed 3=Indian 4=Pakistani
	racel	1=White British 2=White Irish 3=White Welsh 4=White Scottish 5=Other white background 6=Mixed White and Black Caribbean 7=Mixed White and Black African 8=Mixed White and Asian 9=Other mixed background 10=Asian/British Indian 11=Asian/British Pakistani 12=Asian/British Bangladeshi 13=Other Asian background 14=Black/British Caribbean 15=Black/British African 16=Other Black background 17=Chinese 18=Any other	BHPS (*indresp*) waves 13-18 UKHLS (*indresp*) waves 1-5		5=Bangladeshi 6=Black Caribbean 7=Black African 8=Other (which includes Chinese, Arab, Other Black, Other Asian, Other ethnic group)
	racel	1=British/English/Scottish/Welsh/ Northern Irish 2=Irish 3=Gypsy or Irish traveller 4=Any other white background 5=White and Black Caribbean			

	Original variables			Analytical variables	
	Variable name	Coding	Dataset, file and waves	Variable name	Coding
		6=White and Black African 7=White and Asian 8=Any other mixed background 9=Indian 10=Pakistani 11=Bangladeshi 12=Chinese 13=Any other Asian 14=Caribbean 15=African 16=Any other Black background 17=Arab 97=Any other			
Maternal age at child's birth	*age12* *year* *dvage* *dvage*	Maternal age on 1.12 in interview year Year of interview Maternal age on 1.12 in interview year Youth age on 1.12 in interview year	BHPS (*indresp*) all waves UKHLS (*indresp*) waves 1-5 UKHLS (*youth*) waves 1-5	*youngmum*	1= mum under 20 0=mum aged 20 and over
Receipt of benefits	*f131* *f132* *f133* *f136* *f137* *f139* *f140* *f141* *f142*	Unemployment Benefit and Income Support Income Support Unemployment Benefit One Parent Benefit Working Family Tax Credit Housing Benefit Council Tax Benefit Other State Benefit Job Seeker's Allowance	BHPS (*indresp*) waves 1-7 BHPS (*indresp*) all waves BHPS (*indresp*) waves 1-7 BHPS (*indresp*) waves 1-16 BHPS (*indresp*) all waves BHPS (*indresp*) all waves BHPS (*indresp*) all waves BHPS (*indresp*) all waves BHPS (*indresp*) waves 6-18	*mum_ever_ben*	1=ever on benefits 0=never on benefits

		Original variables		Analytical variables	
	Variable name	Coding	Dataset, file and waves	Variable name	Coding
	f143	Child Tax Credit	BHPS (*indresp*) waves 13-18		
	btype1	unemployment-related benefits or national insurance credits	UKHLS (*indresp*) waves 1-5		
	btype2	income support			
	btype6	tax credits			
	btype7	any other family related benefit or payments			
	btype8	housing benefit			
	btype9	income from any other state benefit universal credit			
Marital status	*mastat*	1=married 2=living as couple 3=widowed 4=divorced 5=separated 6=never married 7=civil partnership 8=dissolved civil partnership 9=separated from civil partnership 10=survive from civil partnership	BHPS (*indresp*) all waves from wave16 from wave 18	*ma_nevermarr*	1=never married 0=ever married
	marstat	1=single, never married or in civil partnership 2=married 3=civil partner (legal) 4=separated 5=divorced 6=widowed 7=separated from civil partner 8=a former civil partner	UKHLS (*indresp*) waves 1-5		

	Original variables			Analytical variables	
	Variable name	Coding	Dataset, file and waves	Variable name	Coding
	livewith	9=surviving civil partner 1= living as part of a couple 2=not living as part of a couple	UKHLS *(indresp)* waves 1-5		
Housing tenure	*tenure* *tenure_dv*	1=owned Outright 2=owned with Mortgage 3=Local Authority rent 4=Housing Association rented 5=rented from Employer 6=rented private unfurnished 7=rented private furnished 8=other rented	BHPS *(indresp)* all waves UKHLS *(hhresp)* waves 1-5	*mum_ever_lahar ented*	1=ever rented social housing 0=never rented social housing
Young person's gender	*ypsex*	1=male 2=female	UKHLS *(youth)* waves 1-5	*ypfemale*	1=female 0=male
Young person's age	*dvage*	Age on 1.12 in given year	UKHLS *(youth)* waves 1-5	*ypage*	value between 10 and 15
Household size	*hhsize*	Value equal to number of people in household	BHPS *(indresp)* all waves UKHLS *(hhresp)* waves 1-5	*hhsize*	Value equal to number of people in household
Maternal education	*qfedhi*	1=Higher Degree 2=First Degree 3=Teaching Qualification 4=Other Higher Qualification 5=Nursing Qualification 6=GCE A Levels 7=GCE O Levels Or Equivalent 8=Commercial Qualification, No O 9=CSE Grade 2-5,Scot G 10=Apprenticeship	BHPS *(indresp)* all waves	*ma_highest_ed*	0=no qualifications 1=school qualifications 2=further/higher education

	Original variables			Analytical variables	
	Variable name	Coding	Dataset, file and waves	Variable name	Coding
		11=Other Qualification 12=No Qualification 13=Still At School No Qualification			
	qfhigh	1=university higher degree 2= 1st degree 3=diploma in higher education 4=teaching qualification 5=nursing qualification 6=A level 7=Welsh baccalaureate 8=International Baccalaureate 9=AS level 10=higher grade 11=certificate of sixth year studies 12=GCSE/O level 13=CSE 14=standard/ordinary grade 15=other school 96=none of the above	UKHLS *(indresp)* waves 1-5		
National Pupil Database					
Key Stage 4 uncapped total score	*ks4ptstnewe*	Total GCSE and equivalents uncapped score (numeric)	NPD wave 1 linkage	*ks4ptstnewe*	Total GCSE and equivalents uncapped point score (numeric)
Key Stage 1 score	*KS1_aps*	Average attainment point score (3 to 22.5)	NPD wave 1 linkage	*KS1_aps*	Average attainment point score
IDACI	*idaci_s*	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Indices score (numeric) (0 to 0.99)	NPD wave 1 linkage	*idaci_s*	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Indices score (numeric)
Free School Meals	*ever_fsm*	1= yes 0=no	NPD wave 1 linkage	*ever_fsm*	1 = yes 0 = no

Table A2: Details of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and how subscales were derived

Variables included in prosocial subscale (*ypsdqps_dv*)

Variable name	Question	Subscale
ypsdqa	I try to be nice to other people, I care about their feelings	
ypsdqd	I usually share with others (food, games, pens, etc.)	
ypsdqi	I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	Prosocial
ypsdqq	I am kind to younger children	
ypsdqt	I often volunteer to help others (parents, teachers, children)	

Variables included in Total Difficulties Score *(ypsdqtd_dv)*

Variable name	Question	Subscale
ypsdqb	I am restless, I cannot stay still for long	
ypsdqj	I am constantly fidgeting or squirming	
ypsdqo	I am easily distracted, I find it difficult to concentrate	Hyperactivity
ypsdqu	I think before I do things	
ypsdqy	I finish the work I'm doing	
ypsdqc	I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	
ypsdqh	I worry a lot	
ypsdqm	I am often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	Emotional problems
ypsdqp	I am nervous in new situations. I easily lose confidence	
ypsdqx	I have many fears, I am easily scared	
ypsdqe	I get very angry and often lose my temper	
ypsdqg	I usually do as I am told	
ypsdql	I fight a lot. I can make other people do what I want	Conduct problems
ypsdqr	I am often accused of lying or cheating	
ypsdqv	I take things that are not mine from home, school or elsewhere	
ypsdqf	I am usually on my own. I generally play alone or keep to myself	
ypsdqk	I have one good friend or more	
ypsdqn	Other people my age generally like me	Peer problems
ypsdqs	Other children or young people pick on me or bully me	
ypsdqw	I get on better with adults than with people my own age	

Table A3: Number of times identity factors were coded in discourse analysis corpus, by year and source

	1993		2013		Total
	The Times	*The Guardian*	*The Times*	*The Guardian*	
Gender					
Gender-neutral	312	479	67	48	906
Female	242	386	64	85	777
Male	3	14	8	4	29
Total	557	877	139	137	1710
Ethnicity					
White	6	2		1	9
Black	9	2		1	12
African-Caribbean	5	5		3	13
Black other	1				1
African	1				1
Mixed race		1		2	3
Asian	4	1			5
Indian	1				1
Pakistani	1				1
Orthodox Jew				1	1
Roma				1	1
"All ethnic"	1				1
Total	29	11	0	9	49
Class					
Generic	1			1	2
Middle-class	1	2			3
Working-class	1	2		2	5
Lower class[1]		3			3
Underclass	4	1			5
Total	7	8	0	3	18
Economic factors					
Council housing	67	83	4	1	155
Benefits	139	223	18	16	396
Age					
Young	60	81	3	14	158
Causes of lone parenthood					
Abandoned/deserted	4	5		1	10
Abused		2			2
Unmarried/never married	32	63	2	2	99
Divorce	27	26	3	1	57
Separation	9	7	2	0	18
Widowhood	5	7	3	0	15
Total	73	103	10	3	189

[1]Variously defined as lower orders, Socio-Economic Group 4-5 and lowest social grouping

Table A4: Results of multiple regressions on prosocial subscale and Total Difficulties Score with expanded ethnic categories (Model 2).

	Prosocial subscale		Total Difficulties Score	
	Model 2a	Model 2f	Model 2a	Model 2f
Lone motherhood (ref: mother never lone parent)				
Mother ever lone parent	-0.18***	-0.10**	1.05***	0.55***
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.13)	(0.15)
Ethnicity (ref: White)				
Mixed	-0.20	-0.19	-0.55	-0.64
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.50)	(0.51)
Indian	0.07	0.05	-1.44***	-1.31***
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.27)	(0.28)
Pakistani	-0.08	-0.06	-0.76***	-0.85***
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.27)	(0.28)
Bangladeshi	-0.09	0.04	-1.25***	-1.93***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.31)	(0.32)
Black Caribbean	-0.00	0.02	-0.69*	-0.82**
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.36)	(0.36)
Black African	0.17*	0.25**	-2.08***	-2.45***
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.27)	(0.28)
Other	-0.13	-0.11	-0.73**	-0.83***
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.30)	(0.31)
Maternal age at birth (ref: mother aged 20 or over)				
Mother aged <20 at birth		-0.02		0.88***
		(0.09)		(0.29)
Receipt of benefits (ref: never received benefits)				
Mother ever received benefits		-0.08*		0.51***
		(0.05)		(0.14)
Marital status (ref: ever married)				
Never married		0.07		-0.21
		(0.06)		(0.19)
Housing tenure (ref: never rented social housing)				
Ever rented social housing		-0.24***		1.23***
		(0.05)		(0.15)
Constant	7.76***	7.85***	10.55***	9.99***
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.12)
N of pooled sample	11,964	11,951	11,946	11,934
N of individuals	8,267	8,255	8,256	8,245
R^2	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.03

Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A5: Results of multiple regressions on Prosocial subscale and Total Difficulties Score including expanded ethnic categories (Model 3)

	Prosocial Subscale		Total Difficulties Score	
	Model 3a	Model 3f	Model 3a	Model 3f
Lone motherhood (ref: mother never lone parent)				
Mother ever lone parent	-0.25***	-0.17***	1.16***	0.71***
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.14)	(0.15)
Ethnicity (ref: white)				
Mixed	-0.17	-0.14	-0.69	-0.77
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.51)	(0.51)
Indian	0.14	0.12	-1.53***	-1.38***
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.27)	(0.28)
Pakistani	0.07	0.05	-1.20***	-1.11***
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.28)	(0.29)
Bangladeshi	0.13	0.19	-1.84***	-2.21***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.33)	(0.33)
Black Caribbean	-0.07	-0.03	-0.60*	-0.76**
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.36)	(0.36)
Black African	0.23**	0.27***	-2.28***	-2.53***
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.28)	(0.29)
Other	-0.09	-0.08	-0.82***	-0.87***
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.30)	(0.31)
Maternal age at birth (ref: mother aged 20 or over)				
Mother aged <20 at birth		0.02		0.83***
		(0.09)		(0.29)
Receipt of benefits (ref: never received benefits)				
Mother ever received benefits		-0.08*		0.43***
		(0.05)		(0.14)
Marital status (ref: ever married)				
Never married		-0.04		-0.17
		(0.06)		(0.19)
Housing tenure (ref: never rented social housing)				
Ever rented social housing		-0.18***		1.10***
		(0.05)		(0.16)
Background characteristics				
Age	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.00	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.03)

	Prosocial Subscale		Total Difficulties Score	
	Model 3a	Model 3f	Model 3a	Model 3f
Gender of young person (ref: male)				
Female	0.90***	0.90***	-0.07	-0.07
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Household size (scale)	-0.10***	-0.09***	0.22***	0.16***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Maternal education (ref: no qualifications)				
school level qualifications	0.09	0.06	-0.21	-0.02
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.18)	(0.18)
further/higher education	0.16***	0.09	-0.72***	-0.32*
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.18)	(0.19)
Constant	9.60***	9.72***	10.05***	9.51***
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.47)	(0.48)
N of pooled sample	11,946	11,933	11,928	11,916
N of individuals	8,253	8,241	8,242	8,231
R^2	0.09	0.09	0.02	0.03

Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

Table A6: Results of multiple regressions on Key Stage 4 uncapped scores including expanded ethnic categories (Models 2 and 3).

	Model 2a	Model 2f	Model 3a	Model 3f
Lone motherhood (ref: mother never lone parent)				
Mother ever lone parent	-56.55***	-22.12**	-37.72***	-29.55**
	(9.07)	(9.72)	(11.32)	(11.63)
	-0.16	-0.06	-0.11	-0.09
Discourse variables				
Ethnicity (ref: White)				
Mixed	-41.11	-24.80	-5.03	-15.80
	(38.09)	(37.16)	(43.41)	(43.40)
	-0.03	-0.02	-0.00	-0.01
Indian	22.02	10.98	33.49	22.84
	(20.63)	(20.01)	(25.87)	(25.89)
	0.03	0.01	0.04	0.02
Pakistani	-1.90	-2.55	36.10	21.30
	(19.22)	(18.82)	(22.79)	(23.25)
	-0.00	-0.00	0.05	0.03
Bangladeshi	-17.21	31.59	92.57***	80.75**
	(23.57)	(23.43)	(31.42)	(31.52)
	-0.02	0.03	0.09	0.08
Black Caribbean	31.59	42.91*	47.69*	43.28
	(25.88)	(25.14)	(28.61)	(28.41)
	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.04
Black African	7.43	49.36**	43.28	36.23
	(24.87)	(24.78)	(35.55)	(36.32)
	0.01	0.05	0.03	0.03
Other	35.25	39.74*	46.59*	37.66
	(22.66)	(21.95)	(26.74)	(26.64)
	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.04
Maternal age at birth (ref: mother aged 20 or over)				
Mother <20		3.64		-9.48
		(20.11)		(21.09)
		0.00		-0.01
Receipt of benefits (ref: mother never received benefits)				
Mother ever on benefits		-31.47***		-23.59*
		(10.26)		(12.51)
		-0.08		-0.06
Marital status (ref: mother ever married)				
Mother never married		-13.54		6.64
		(13.45)		(14.29)

	Model 2a	Model 2f	Model 3a	Model 3f
Social housing tenure (ref: mother never rented social housing)		-0.03		0.01
Mother ever rented social housing		-86.69***		-45.62***
		(10.11)		(12.64)
		-0.24		-0.13
Background variables				
Age of young person (scale)			-5.51	-5.95
			(3.97)	(3.95)
			-0.04	-0.04
Gender of young person (ref: male) Female			29.52***	27.45***
			(9.11)	(9.07)
			0.09	0.08
KS1 attainment (scale)			19.66***	19.10***
			(1.30)	(1.30)
			0.44	0.43
Household size (scale)			1.42	3.18
			(4.03)	(4.08)
			0.01	0.03
Maternal education (ref: no qualifications)				
school level qualifications			24.15**	21.63*
			(12.23)	(12.25)
			0.07	0.07
further/higher education			39.63***	34.08**
			(14.36)	(14.34)
			0.11	0.09
Pupil ever recorded as being FSM			-31.46***	-10.41
			(11.40)	(12.52)
			-0.09	-0.03
IDACI score (scale)			6.36	39.33
			(29.93)	(31.00)
			0.01	0.04
N	1,508	1,507	975	974
R²	0.03	0.09	0.29	0.31

Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A7: Results of multiple regressions on Key Stage 4 uncapped total score with interaction terms (Model 4).

	Model 4a	Model 4b	Model 4c	Model 4d	Model 4e
Lone motherhood (ref: mother never lone parent)					
Mother ever lone parent	-49.36**	-29.84**	-54.40	-28.66**	-36.11**
	(23.56)	(11.87)	(43.37)	(12.16)	(14.05)
	-0.14	-0.09	-0.16	-0.08	-0.10
Discourse variables					
Ethnicity (ref: all other ethnic group)					
White	-40.72**	-32.15**	-31.76**	-32.40**	-31.06**
	(15.93)	(13.21)	(13.21)	(13.25)	(13.26)
	-0.10	-0.08	-0.08	-0.08	-0.07
Maternal age at birth (ref: mother aged 20 or over)					
Mother <20	-10.87	-12.19	-10.49	-10.50	-10.00
	(21.07)	(30.74)	(21.07)	(21.11)	(21.07)
	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
Receipt of benefits (ref: mother never received benefits)					
Mother ever on benefits	-23.90*	-23.73*	-25.65**	-23.95*	-22.65*
	(12.42)	(12.44)	(12.81)	(12.45)	(12.50)
	-0.06	-0.06	-0.06	-0.06	-0.05
Marital status (ref: mother ever married)					
Mother never married	4.91	3.83	3.87	8.30	2.64
	(14.15)	(14.11)	(14.11)	(23.18)	(14.18)
	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01
Social housing tenure (ref: mother never rented social housing)					
Mother ever rented social housing	-43.76***	-44.91***	-45.29***	-44.89***	-52.83***
	(12.51)	(12.46)	(12.47)	(12.46)	(15.79)
	-0.12	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	-0.15
Interactions					
Lone motherhood and whiteness	23.54				
	(24.46)				
	0.06				
Lone motherhood and maternal age		3.70			
		(41.42)			
		0.00			
Lone motherhood and ever on benefits			26.63		
			(44.87)		
			0.08		

	Model 4a	Model 4b	Model 4c	Model 4d	Model 4e
Lone motherhood and never married				-6.97	
				(28.55)	
				-0.01	
Lone motherhood and social housing tenure					16.75
					(20.61)
					0.04
Background variables					
Age of young person (scale)	-5.98	-6.07	-5.97	-6.09	-5.98
	(3.93)	(3.93)	(3.93)	(3.93)	(3.93)
	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04
Gender of young person (ref: male)					
Female	27.83***	27.74***	27.89***	27.80***	27.34***
	(9.03)	(9.05)	(9.04)	(9.04)	(9.05)
	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08
KS1 attainment (scale)	19.19***	19.12***	19.14***	19.13***	19.11***
	(1.29)	(1.29)	(1.29)	(1.29)	(1.29)
	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.43
Household size (scale)	3.48	3.83	4.12	3.79	3.86
	(4.03)	(4.02)	(4.04)	(4.02)	(4.01)
	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
Maternal education (ref: no qualifications)					
School level qualifications	22.07*	21.57*	21.62*	21.48*	21.66*
	(12.11)	(12.11)	(12.10)	(12.10)	(12.10)
	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.07
Further/higher education	34.35**	33.18**	33.25**	33.07**	33.83**
	(14.23)	(14.18)	(14.18)	(14.19)	(14.20)
	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09
Pupil ever recorded as FSM	-9.32	-9.14	-9.41	-9.03	-8.70
	(12.38)	(12.38)	(12.39)	(12.38)	(12.39)
	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03
IDACI score (scale)	44.57	45.09	45.12	45.13	47.55
	(30.71)	(30.73)	(30.72)	(30.72)	(30.87)
	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
Constant	265.87***	260.17***	258.18***	260.53***	258.54***
	(65.24)	(65.00)	(65.07)	(65.01)	(65.00)
N	974	974	974	974	974
R^2	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30

Note: Results are presented as unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in brackets and standardised coefficients below. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1