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The Creativity of Mothering: Intensity, Anxiety and Normative Accountability

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Chapter 11
The Creativity of Mothering:
Intensity, Anxiety and Normative Accountability

ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the question of how to explain agency in the context of motherhood. In so doing, it seeks to go beyond the tendency to focus exclusively on the burden of coordination which institutional structures generate for mothers, in order to examine the evaluative burden which normative structures demand of this role. Drawing on interview material with 40 middle class mothers across two research sites in the UK and US, the paper develops a three-part typology of maternal role performance. This relies on the insights of contemporary action theory, with its emphasis on emotionally configured intersubjective interpretation of normative structures, and more specifically on Joas's pragmatist theorisation of social action as a creative process. The paper argues that maternal agency takes three distinct ideal-typical forms, namely romantic expressivism, rational instrumentalism, and pragmatism. These are conceived as distinct creative responses to the evaluative demands of motherhood, as the agents go about interpreting situated norms, needs and interests.

INTRODUCTION

Explanations of the continued emotional intensity and strain experienced by mothers in an era of formal gender equality tend to focus on the ongoing difficulties of combining infant and child care with paid employment (for example, Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). The strains are explained as a consequence of ongoing expectations of the unencumbered, implicitly male employee, who prioritizes paid work over family commitments, and is available full-time, often for long-hours throughout the year (Hodges and Budig, 2010; Williams, 2010). Childcare presents a major challenge to this model of the ideal worker, given the relative unpredictability of children's everyday needs. Furthermore, the organization of children's education, involving short school days, long holidays, and irregular school closure days, tends not to fit easily with expectations of regular, unbroken involvement in paid employment. These conditions make the coordination of employment and family life especially cumbersome for those who continue to bear the burden of care, mostly women (Stone, 2007; Williams, et al., 2013). The underlying difficulty of subjecting the care of infants and children to the logic of rationalization makes it a problematic feature of a social world which is principally co-ordinated in this way.

Explanations of the strain of motherhood also tend to focus on the low status accorded to the work of human reproduction and care, a consequence of a gendered social order where women's work is often either invisible, regarded as a private choice, or carries low or negative levels of social esteem, depending on the context (for example, Aassve, et al., 2014; Benard and Correll, 2010; Ridgeway, 1997). Situations where women reproduce at a relatively young age, and without partners, for example, are explained as a reflection of these broader gender structures, as they intersect with class, race/ethnicity and other forms of inequality (Arai, 2009; Armstrong, 2006; Edin and Kefalas, 2005).

Analyses such as these focus on the strains generated by the gender dynamics of labour markets, as well as the effects of multiple intersecting forms on inequality on family life:

What exacerbates the strain in the working class is the absence of money to pay for services they need, economic insecurity, poor day care, and lack of dignity and boredom in each partner's job. What exacerbates it in the upper-middle class is the instability of paid help and the enormous demands of the career system in which both partners become willing believers. (Hochschild and Machung, 2003, p. 197)

Structural explanations such as this tend to support policy initiatives aimed at transforming labour market expectations, allowing for greater flexibility for involvement in paid work, so that parenting can more easily be combined with employment (for example, Crompton, et al., 2007; Hewlett, 2007; Lewis, 2009). Calls for high-quality, affordable childcare, flexible working and strong, non-gender-specific parental leave entitlements all provide important responses to the claim for gender equality in the context of coordinating employment and family life.

While this approach explains a great deal, the unpredictability of experiences of and responses to maternal strain, which go beyond the co-ordination tensions generated by the labour market, tends to be overlooked. The well-known struggle to live up to normative expectations of 'good' motherhood, as much from mothers themselves as from those around them, indicates that acting as a mother carries an evaluative, alongside a coordination, burden (for example, Silva, 1996; Warner, 2006). Can the tension associated with this experience, particularly the anxiety routinely associated with motherhood, be regarded either as an inevitable product of conflicting

institutional structures, or alternatively an effect of the idiosyncrasies of specific women's personalities? Is there something more fully social shaping the emotional dynamics of this gendered social role? Can we understand maternal role performance not simply as determined by structural pressures, but also as shaped by agency?

This chapter will draw on the insights of contemporary action theory, particularly as it has taken shape in response to the pragmatic turn in sociology (Bernstein, 2010), to answer this question. Consequently, the emphasis in what follows is on emotionally configured intersubjective interpretation of normative structures. The analysis aims to explore responses to the strain of contemporary mothering by focusing on maternal anxiety and pride as emotional indicators of the evaluative burden involved in performing this role. The major elements of pragmatist action theory, including the significance of the self as the locus of responses to perceived social evaluation, and Joas's model of the creativity of action, will initially be outlined. An ideal typology of the core logical features of three distinct norms of selfhood will then be developed, drawing on illustrative material from in-depth interviews with mothers across two research sites. Finally, the chapter will consider the value of pragmatist action theory for drawing attention to the patterned, yet non-determined, quality of maternal action, despite the intense structural pressures attached to this role.

ACTION THEORY

Weber's argument that the task of sociology is to explain meaningful action, and particularly its social quality, namely the 'orientation [of the agent] to the *expectation* that others will act in a certain way' (1978, p. 1375), has become central to contemporary action theory (Strand and Lizardo, 2015, p. 45, Joas and Beckert, 2001). While mid-twentieth century functionalism transformed this perspective into a behaviourist, static understanding of action as largely

determined (Coleman, 1986; Joas, 1993, p. 221), contemporary action theory rejects this, in two important ways. Firstly, the idea of the agent as either voluntarily pursuing preferences, or acting in ways that are governed, through early internalization of norms, by the functional needs of the social system, is rejected (Joas and Knöbl 2009, p. 41, 64). Instead, the social world, and the norms which drive it, is assumed to be complex and contested, and consequently demanding of agency (Silver, 2011). Rejecting a 'socialization' model of action, which assumes a high degree of agent conformity with static social norms, understood to be 'internalized' early in life, this perspective instead focuses on situated interpretation of the normative appropriateness of specific forms of action (Bicchieri and Muldoon, p. 2011).

Secondly, contemporary action theory rejects explanations offered by rational choice perspectives, where the focus is either on 'means-ends' rationality or 'desire, belief, opportunity' models (Hedström, 2005, p.44,). These approaches tend to rely on an assumed rational actor, who devises her goals, and calculates the most efficient means to reach them, prior to engaging in action. Thus, rational actor perspectives tend to rely on problematic distinction between thinking and acting (Joas 1996, p. 157). The rational actor model carries a number of other controversial assumptions, notably a mind/body dualism which treats the body as a tool of the will, in the pursuit of goals; and a moralized distinction between rational and non-rational action (1996, p. 184).

Instead, the pragmatist turn in contemporary sociology has sought to develop a non-teleological approach, which does not assume, as a rationalist approach does, that action is always oriented towards and motivated by pre-established goals (Bernstein, 2010; Emirbayer and Goldberg, 2005; Silver, 2011). Goals are understood here instead as emerging through the normative dynamics of action and interaction, as agents seek to act appropriately, for the situation and the

normative attitudes in question. From this perspective, an agent's goals are understood not to be a necessary effect of preferences established through early socialization. Neither is social action assumed to be principally oriented towards conforming with the functional requirements of the social system. Similarly, motivation is not understood to be found in the rationally calculated interests of the actor.

A pragmatist perspective instead returns to a Weberian sociology of interpretation, taking the perspective of the actor, rather than, for example, examining statistical regularities and relations between factors, in order to explain social action not only with respect to structures but also to subjective meanings and motivations (e.g. Martin, 2011; Reed, 2011; Strand and Lizardo, 2015, p. 44). The relationship between agents, norms, roles and positions are central to this approach. Social action is assumed to be neither determined by structures nor motivated by a simple desire to conform, but instead is driven by an effort to 'express[...] to one another, [...] what matters to us, who we take ourselves to be, and how we see ourselves and others' (Brennan, et al., 2013, p. 37). It is through this process of seeking recognition for our normative attitudes that social evaluation takes place, as we 'hold one another to account and [...] demand and expect things of one another', as well as of ourselves (Brennan, et al., 2013, p. 36; see also McBride, 2013, Silver, 2011). The ways in which agents interpret and act in relation to normative structures and situated perceptions is the central focus of this type of analysis.

What constitutes appropriateness is, of course, neither entirely self-evident nor structurally determined, but depends on the dynamics of the specific situation, the variety of normative claims in play, and the commitments of interactive partners. This uncertainty and struggle for appropriateness demands agency, as the actor is faced with competing expectations, both from the situation they find themselves in and from their own expectations and evaluations of

themselves, as they seek to move with some consistency from one situation to another. The agent is assumed to be capable of responding intelligently to situational dynamics, as she copes with the complexity of social life, and seeks to act in a way that is meaningfully oriented towards others. In so doing, the agent is understood to be necessarily engaging in interpretations and evaluations of situational and dispositional social norms, as well as perceived interests and needs (Joas, 1996; Bernstein, 2010).

In this way, contemporary action theory seeks to explain the patterned, yet non-determined and unpredictable quality of social life (Martin, 2011; Reed, 2011; Strand and Lizardo, 2015). Emphasis lies on the need for normative interpretation and judgement, as the agent copes with situations often characterized by competing expectations (Burke and Stets, 2009; Joas and Knöbl, 2009, p. 123). This process of acting through interpretation and evaluation in turn reproduces, modifies or contributes to the transformation of structures of expectations. Thus, the analysis of social action provides the route into an examination of normative structures, as actors account for themselves in terms of their interpretations of situated expectations (Brennan, et al., 2013; Mills, [1940] 1963).

Through these dynamics, the self takes shape. Rather than conceiving the self as an autonomous, pre-social substantial entity, characterized by an instrumental attitude to the world, it is understood instead to be a product of situated interactions, and a focus of continuous reflexive attention (Burke and Stets, 2009; Dalton, 2004). This reflexive quality, or ‘self-dynamics’, provides the primary motivation for agency of any sort (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 974), registered through ‘self-feeling’ (Denzin, 2007; Turner and Schutte, 1981). The struggle to be recognized as a coherent, competent and accountable agent constitutes the central

mechanisms of social action from this perspective, and it is through this process that specific motives emerge.

Creative Action.

Joas (1996) has developed this approach into a specific theory of social action as creative in character (see also Elliott and Turner, 2012). From this perspective, actors draw on their dispositional normative commitments as they respond to situational dynamics (1996, p. 161). Action is understood as corporeal, interactive, and informed by specific biographical and historic contexts. Creativity is demanded as new situations arise or problems develop which require a non-routinized response (1996, p. 197).

This is close to what Emirbayer and Mische (1998) identify as the ‘practical-evaluative’ element of agency, which they place alongside ‘iterative’, or routinized and ‘projective’, future oriented, elements. The ‘practical-evaluative’ element can be understood, in Joas’s terms, as creative. It is defined as ‘the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations’ (1998, p. 971).

However, unlike the latter model, Joas rejects a sharp distinction between routine (‘iterative’) and creative elements of action. Instead, routines are understood as the result of creativity, ‘a dimension that is present in all human action’ (Joas 1996, p. 197). For example, partners to interaction may develop new definitions of the situation they find themselves in, which in turn will require a creative effort to revise previously established intentions, for instance, or to alter the relations between means and ends (Joas and Knöbl, 2009, p. 522). This approach to action views intentions as taking shape through situated, self-reflective interaction.

THE CREATIVITY OF MOTHERHOOD

The evaluative burden shaping experiences of motherhood will be explained in what follows through this model of creative social action. The ways in which women, interviewed for the *Demands of Motherhood* study (Smyth, 2012), related their experiences of mothering in situated, emotionally laden terms will be explained. This study involved interviews with forty mothers, mostly middle-class and white, across two research sites in Northern Ireland (22) and Southern California (18). The mothers were on average aged in their early thirties, of mainstream white ethnicity, with one or two children under 5 years old, and either married or in long-term partnerships. The majority were either in full-time or part-time employment in middle or upper-middle class careers. While most were actively mothering babies and young children, a small number had older children. To support involvement in paid employment, mothers in the US tended to rely on private day care in their own homes, whereas mothers in Northern Ireland tended instead to use group child care provided by private nurseries, as well as help from their own mothers.

As a qualitative study, this was not designed to be representative or strictly comparative, but instead to gather material from two distinct research sites in order to develop a richly informed typology of the action orientations relied on by middle class mothers, in response to the evaluative demands of this role. These sites shared remarkably similar traditionalist value patterns, including belief in God, respect for authority, nation and the patriarchal family, while differing significantly in attitudes to diversity, equality and self-expression (Inglehart, et al., 2000).

The patterns of similarity and difference in the social values of both contexts promised access to a range of normative structures including, but going beyond, those identified by previous research into maternal action orientations in Southern California (Hays, 1996). Hays argued that middle class women have significantly intensified their involvement in maternal caregiving, and consequently have become enmeshed in highly strained lives. Based on her study, which included an analysis of both historical and contemporary popular ideas about childrearing, as well as qualitative interviews with 38 mothers in San Diego, Southern California, during 1991, she claims that ‘the contemporary cultural model of socially appropriate mothering takes the form of an ideology of *intensive* mothering’ (1996, p. x). This is explained as ‘an explicit and systematic rejection of the logic of individualistic, competitive, and impersonal relations’ which operate in the labour market and the wider culture (1996, p. 154). She argues that ‘intensive’ mothering has come about as a response to instrumentalism in the wider society.

This is an important effort to explain middle-class mothering as a practical-evaluative form of agency, against a background where labour market and state institutional pressures generate particularly difficult co-ordination and evaluative burdens for employed mothers. However, the singular model of ‘intensity’ offered is somewhat unconvincing in its lack of complexity, as is the portrayal of motherhood as a site where instrumentalism is rejected. A more fully creative interpretation of the dynamics of maternal agency would identify a wider variety of available types of action orientations. This requires taking analytic account of normative complexity, situational dynamics and perceptions of needs and interests.

This study aimed to do precisely this, by developing an ideal typology of maternal action (Weber, et al. 1978, p. 20), beyond Hays's the singular 'intensive' explanation. The analytic approach adopted here rejects '[t]he widespread empiricist tendency to think of the scientist's mind as a passive instrument for the registration of sense impressions' (Parsons, 1990, p. 325), and instead aims to identify the core logical features, rather than the average or typical elements, of each type. Weber explained this analytic approach as 'the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct' (1904 [1949], p. 147).

This non-positivist methodology involves a process of abstraction aimed at building sociological theory, without relying on the empiricist assumption that absolute certainty can be achieved (e.g. see Dewey, 1905, p. 393). This process instead seeks to highlight the essential features of a phenomenon, in broad brush-strokes (Aron 1998, p. 207). Ideal type analysis accepts that 'it is probably seldom or ever that a real phenomenon can be found which corresponds exactly to one of these ideally constructed pure types' (Weber, et al., 1978, p. 20). This approach offers an interpretation of the phenomenon in question, beginning with untheorized observations, and then working to conceptualize the underlying core features into an ideal type (Abend, 2008, pp. 177-8).

The ideal types developed through this analysis identify three distinct norms of selfhood, as they inform various orientations to mothering. Norms of instrumental rationality and romantic expressivism have been identified as significant in landmark studies of selfhood and social action (for example, Bellah, et al., 1996; Taylor, 1989; Turner, 1976; Weber, et al., 1978).

Instrumentally rational action tends to refer to a type of action that aims to set and pursue goals through efficiency calculations (Weber, et al. 1978:24), while romantic expressivism prioritises the full articulation of the agent's natural impulse, or 'inner voice', as the source of moral action (Taylor 1989, p. 374; see also Turner, 1976). This analysis adds a third selfhood norm, namely pragmatism, to these two orientations, to develop a fuller typology which captures the dynamics of interview material more fully. Pragmatism emphasizes situated problem-solving and adaptability over the calculated pursuit of plans or the expression of impulse or emotion (e.g. see Joas, 1996, p. 127).

The purpose of developing these abstract types is to allow for an analysis of the creative dynamics of agency as mothers cope in patterned, yet undetermined, ways with this gendered social role. Patterns of emotional intensity and tension will be commented on as important aspects of these creative responses to the evaluative demands mothers routinely face.

Emotions, particularly self-feelings, are treated here as indicators of perceived evaluations of the quality of the agent's mothering. 'Self-feelings', identified by Cooley as central aspects of the 'looking glass self' (1902) (Denzin, 2007, p. 3). As Cooley explains it, we imagine how we appear to an interactive partner; we imagine their judgement of that appearance; and we consequently experience 'some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification' (1902, p. 152). Self-feelings thereby provide crucial feedback signals concerning evaluative interactions (Turner and Schutte, 1981, p. 3), and so guide further action (Burke and Stets, 2009, pp. 32, 50).

The creative, evaluative quality of maternal action, as it is guided by self-feeling, is the focus of attention in what follows. The discussion examines how mothers demonstrate what matters to them, and in so doing, make themselves accountable, to themselves as well as to others, through their orientation to this role.

The Ideal Types

a) Rational Planners

The first type of maternal self is oriented towards instrumental rationality. This involves, as outlined above, a purposeful and industrious attitude to the pursuit of goals (1978, pp. 24, 26). The actor expects to orient their life through an early establishment of general life goals, and then to engage in careful calculations of the optimal means by which those goals can be pursued. This sort of planning rationality is applied both to the external world and to the inner life of impulse and emotion. The self is consequently highly disciplined in the struggle to realize goals. Partners are carefully chosen for their potential as future parents, and the number, timing and spacing of babies is calculated and agreed upon in advance. Unplanned pregnancies, for instance, are regarded as potentially disastrous for the achievement of life goals.

Childcare routines and regularity are highly valued by this type of mother, an attitude which is strongly reflected by one strand of the advice literature for new parents (for example, Ford, 2001). Discipline, both of the self and of one's children, is crucial in controlling impulses which threaten the achievement of goals, and tends to be managed by the promise of small interim

rewards. For mothers raising infants and young children, rewards such as time off are highly valued.

Brenda¹ (US), a solidly middle-class professional white woman, involved, at the time of our interview, in caring for her young baby and working part-time from home, exemplifies this type to a significant degree. Daily routines are carefully constructed to make sure that she can manage the various tasks she has committed to, and also to build towards the longer-term achievement of her life goals.

Lisa Had motherhood always been part of your life plan?

Brenda Yes, yes, exactly. So it's funny because [...] the day I met my husband, [...] I actually said [...] 'What are you looking for in a woman?' and he lists these things. I said 'Oh that sounds a little bit like me, and maybe we should date?' And he said 'Oh, well okay!', and I said, 'But I really need to ask you something, do you want to have kids?' And he said 'Yeah, with the right person.' And I said, 'okay then, we can start dating'. So I mean it was like, you know, at that point, when you're late, you know, late twenties, you don't even want to go on a date unless you know this person is heading in the same direction as you are. [...] I think it was about 18 months later that we actually got married, and then it was another 18 months before we had [our son].

[...]

¹ All respondents have been anonymized by the use of pseudonyms and by changing other identifying features of their stories.

[E]verything was smooth, and, no stress, and I had been doing reading, and of course all my girlfriends, like I was the last in line, so I've talked to all them, and got a lot of hand-me-downs, I knew exactly what I needed here and everything. So it was a very easy transition.

Pride in one's success at reaching one's goals is a major reward of instrumental planning, the self-feeling evident in Brenda's explanation of her life as a mother. However, the priority accorded to calculation, planning and self-discipline has the consequence that the actor regards herself as primarily responsible both for the achievement of chosen goals, and for any failures encountered along the way. The effort to maintain discipline in order to avoid failure creates significant anxiety for this type of mother.

For example, Rachel (NI) commented on her high levels of anxiety about how to care for her baby daughter:

... well I definitely think, you know, [...] 'am I doing this right', [...] you do sort of criticise yourself a lot. 'Am I doing this right?', or 'Should I be lifting her, you know, every time she cries?' or, you know, 'Should we be doing this?', or 'Should we be doing that?'

The struggle to carefully calculate how best to care for a baby in a context of uncertainty, given the lack of professional consensus (Ramaekers and Suissa, 2012), caused significant anxiety for Rachel. One response was to deliberately train herself to control her anxiety and become calm, and so fit better with her conception of how to mother:

... I couldn't relax, but I [...] I did a lot of reflexology and, alternative therapy to make things, you know, to keep myself calm and [to try to be positive]. I was you know, very relaxed and, just obviously had panics now and then.

Rachel's rational planning attitude meant that impulses should be controlled, as potential threats to good mothering. She recalled her pride in resisting her desire to comfort her baby daughter when she cried during the night:

... she woke up once in the middle of the night, and, you know I jumped out of bed and I was like [whispered] 'Don't lift her, don't lift her, she's just awake, don't lift her, she's fine, she's grand. She's around beside me, just awake, she's not hungry' you know. And [...] I just wanted to lift her and give her a cuddle. And I didn't, I just, you know, she was awake, and she was, you know, talking to herself, in her sleep, making noises. And I was just so, I was proud of myself, that I had done the best for her rather than, you know, doing what was best for me, you know which was, to give her a cuddle.

This impulse control can be understood as a creative form of action, as Rachel's response to her self-feeling (anxiety) signalled her evaluation of her instincts as potentially undermining her intention to prioritise her perception of her daughter's needs over her own. So while her general life goal was to have children, a goal which she had achieved, her specific intentions concerning how to actually care for her baby were worked out through embodied situations such as this, as she interpreted her own instincts and evaluated them against her wider dispositional commitment to instrumental planning. Her basic distrust of instinctive forms of action, and her preference for detached calculation of the best means to achieve a specific goal (for instance, that her daughter learns to sleep for long stretches at night), led her to restrain herself in this way, and to feel proud of her effort. This sense of pride then informed her subsequent care-giving.

b) Romantic Expressivists: Authentic Mothers

The second type of mother considered here relies on the Romantic tradition, with its emphasis on living an authentic life, which will give full expression to individual uniqueness. As Taylor explains, '[t]he notion of an inner voice or impulse, the idea that we find the truth within us, and in particular in our feelings - these were the crucial justifying concepts of the Romantic rebellion [against rationalism] in its various forms' (1989, p. 368-9).

The expressive attitude to the self views the detachment necessary for calculated reason as stifling authenticity. Instead, the true, natural self is realized by expressing the 'inner voice', which in turn will reveal, and so give form to, otherwise fairly inchoate emotional responses

and desires. In this way, the inner voice guides the individual to take a 'proper moral stance towards the natural order' (1989, p. 370). It is only through the effort of expression that we realize our authenticity, albeit in partial, incomplete ways. As Taylor explains, 'there is always, inescapably, something beyond our articulative power' (1989, p. 390). The inner, authentic self is never simply transparent and available to the agent as a source of action. Instead, the agent must continuously give voice to their impulses, desires and feelings, if they are to come to understand, and so realize, their inner authenticity.

Mothers who adopt this radical form of individualism prioritise freedom and choice over any idea of duty and responsibility. By freely choosing motherhood, they give expression to their natural, nurturing self. It is this act of expression itself, rather than the substance of what is expressed, that indicates to the actor that they are living an authentic life. Expressivists consequently understand family commitments as enhancements of their individuality, rather than as moral imperatives in their own right (Bellah, et al. 1996, p. 48).

The goal of motherhood, for this type, is to express the authentic character of the mother, and facilitate the expression of the child's authenticity, in turn (Bellah, et al. 1996, p. 50). Expressivist mothers prioritise spontaneous, impulsive and emotionally-driven action, and reject the strictures of routine and calculated, scientific care-giving, as unnatural (Apple, 2006). This attitude often entails a strong attachment to gender, perceived as a naturally occurring difference which should be given full expression. This is quite different from rational planners, who instead regard gender as incidental to parenting. Indeed, rational planners tend to resent gender as an irrational block to their ability to achieve their life goals, for example because of an unequal division of labour, or the operation of gender norms in employment.

In choosing motherhood as an expression of natural gendered impulses, expressivists tend also to choose to engage in devoted, attentive and highly responsive care-giving. This reflects, for example, the ‘attachment’ method of parenting found in childcare advice literature, characterized by constant physical contact with and responsiveness to infants and toddlers (Hardyment, 2007; Sears and Sears, 1993). Impulses should be given free reign, and fun, for example, provides a strong motive for acting in specific ways.

Expressive mothering, like rational planning, can entail a large degree of confident, positive self-feeling. As one interviewee, Terri, commented, ‘I think I just am very gifted with intuition’ [...] I also just believe that [motherhood] was my spiritual gift. Like, I, I’m not a bragful person, but I don’t beat myself up. I mean I know I’m a good parent, I just know I am.’

However, the instinct-orientation also gives rise to negative emotions, including depression and anxiety, when the relationship between mother and child does meet expectations of closeness and intuitive understanding.

For example, Sophie’s son didn’t settle in his Belfast play group, when he began attending at age 4. Sophie and her partner then decided not to send him to a state school, which he would have been expected to begin from that age. Instead, they sent him to a small private liberal school, but also encountered difficulties there:

[W]e took him up to [private liberal] School, which in some ways was good, but they were saying 'He is not normal. He is not normal. He doesn't want to play 'house', he doesn't want to like, do any of these things.' And I was saying, 'Alright, he loves to run, like he just wants to be outside running'. And he's aligned himself with a child in the class who has severe emotional and behavioural problems and, you know, there's like, the cement between the two of them now. And the other kids are starting to ostracise him now because he's friends with this other kid. And I was like, 'Oh!' So this went on for the year. And then I was like, 'What is really wrong with me and my child?'

Other expressive mothers recalled experiencing lasting depression in response to what Bellah et al. describe as the 'the lack of fit between the present organization of the self and the available organization of work, intimacy, and meaning' (1996, p. 47). The effort to act spontaneously, choosing to give free reign to one's instincts in having and raising children, in a context where rational planning is expected, can result in job or career loss and damaged relationships with partners, friends, and with children themselves.

Sandy, for example, experienced significant post-partum depression as she struggled to mother authentically. Strongly committed to this type of mothering, yet finding involvement in intensive infant care deeply unsatisfying, she experienced an emotional crisis in her daughter's early years. She developed a situated, creative response to her depression, through the highly individualistic, introspective method of therapy, described by Bellah et al. as teaching clients to perfect their expressive ability, for instance by becoming independent from anyone else's

judgements (1996, p. 139). In this way, Sandy began to act expressively in her wider life, embarking on an artistic career following the loss of her previously established professional life, while hiring a nanny as an expressive 'shadow' mother (Macdonald, 2011, p. 2011), and gradually developing a stronger interest in and attachment to her daughter as she left her infancy behind.

c) Pragmatists

The third type of mother this study is concerned with can be described as pragmatic. This involves treating intentions and strategies as provisional responses to specific situations, rather than either as the best, because most rational, way of acting, or as an expression of authentic individuality. Motherhood is regarded instead as requiring adaptation to ever-changing circumstances and needs, rather than a mode of action based on prior certainties, whether about the value of acting on impulse and feeling, or on scientific calculation. Practical know-how, familiarity with tasks and problems developed from past experience, provides a primary guide for mothering.

This is not an unprincipled form of action, simply aimed at adapting to circumstances to get results, or 'muddle through' (Joas 1996, p. 127). Instead, the pragmatic actor is both future oriented, like the rational planner, but also past oriented, engaging in reflection and revision of intentions in the light of past experience. 'As any good pragmatist knows, nobody has the final word' (Bernstein 2010, p. 124). Goals are discovered through action, rather than pre-established, inflexible choices or expressions of inner feeling.

Like other types, pragmatists also respond to self-feelings such as pride and anxiety. For example, Maxine (US), a busy mother of four who works full-time in a job that involves a long commute, reflected that she tends to feel proud of her mothering when she and her husband manage to successfully get through a busy weekend. The ability to simply cope with the variety of demands involved in family life is sufficient grounds for feeling proud. She recalled the struggle of getting ready for Christmas:

I had like bags and bags and bags and I was like 'Oh my gosh' cause I try to accumulate you know, over a couple of months in advance, and then, when I actually, I took the mini-van to a parking lot, and I turned the radio up, and had a soda, and had the wrapping paper, and just, assembly line. I sat in the parking lot! And this man comes walking by, and he goes 'wow, I love your system!' I'm like 'I know this is actually kinda nice! I'm just out in this parking lot by myself, wrapping presents. I know it looks strange, but, it's working!' So yeah, after Christmas, that night after Christmas, I was like, 'Wow! That's cool that I got all that done, I can't believe I got everything wrapped', and the kids were all happy.

Pragmatists are not free from anxiety, but this is less focused on whether or not their planning has adequately calculated risks and put contingency plans in place in order to reach specific goals, nor is it focused on whether spontaneous impulse-driven mothering might generate expected results. Instead, it focuses on the dynamics of specific situations:

... there's so much now, these days [to feel anxious about], just you know, kids being snatched and stuff, and I've lost a couple of them some times, at the zoo. I lost [my eldest] at the zoo [...]. It is very scary. And [...] I hear of different things in the news that happen to families, you know, with their kids, and you know you say 'gosh, how could that happen, and could that happen to one of my kids?' you know, could they end up being so mean to do that, or, could they end up, you know, running in front of a car and getting hit, you know there's just so many variables, and there's so many scary things that could have, you know, this could have happened, you know, think about what could have happened. We took our bikes out on 4th of July, and [my son] just bumped off a curb, and he started heading out, and you know cars were coming head on, and just at the last minute he swerves, and he didn't even, really pay attention. And I was just like 'Oh my gosh!!' I mean and I guess you can't, well you can't really live your life in fear every day. I mean I think about it at night a lot but, you know.

Maxine perceives these anxieties as potentially overwhelming and largely beyond her control, so rather than attempting to carefully predict and control every possible risk her children may encounter, she instead focuses on trying not to let the multitude of fears she experiences, not only about her children's safety but also about their developing personalities, dominate her mothering. Like rational planners and expressivists, the creativity of pragmatic mothering lies in the responses to self-feeling. Maxine tries to keep her anxiety under control, for instance, to allow her son to take risks as he grows, intending that he will learn how to navigate the world independently.

While self-feelings such as pride and anxiety are experienced by pragmatists, they are less intense, because they are less all-encompassing reflections of the mother's self, and more focused on specific, situated actions. Maxine, for instance, took offence at my question about whether she takes personal pride in her children's achievements at school, apparently regarding such an attitude as self-serving and unfairly overshadowing the children's own efforts and talents. Motherhood is not treated as a route to goal achievement or self-realization, but instead, as she put it, as 'a role that you find yourself in, a routine that you've gotten used to'. This scaled-back, flexible and revisable approach to motherhood makes it easier for pragmatists to share both authority over children and responsibility for their development with others, including partners and other child-care providers.

Pragmatists understand the appropriateness of mothering in terms of meeting the varied needs of family members, including themselves, without undue strain. Consequently, these are the very opposite of the intensive mothers identified by Hays.

Conclusion

The ways in which women mother can be understood, from the perspective of action theory, as intensely strained not only because of coordination difficulties generated by conflicting expectations of maternal and employee roles, but also because of the significance of this role as a mode of evaluation. This chapter aimed to reconsider Hays's explanation of the experience of contemporary middle-class motherhood as relentlessly more intensive, by virtue of a rejection of instrumental rationality in this role. Through the development of a typology of

action orientations, this chapter has demonstrated the variety of ways in which mothers creatively respond to evaluative demands.

It was somewhat surprising not to find a strong pattern of expressivism in Southern California in contrast with Northern Ireland. Instead, the full range of action orientations were drawn on across both sites. However, a larger study would be necessary to explore patterns of action orientation more systematically. It is important to bear in mind, however, that '[i]t would be very unusual to find concrete cases of [...] social action, which were oriented only in one or another of these ways' (Weber, et al., 1978, p. 26).

Selfhood norms provide the basic tools which mothers rely on to claim recognition for the value of their role performance. A rational planning action orientation appears to carry with it quite intense experiences of anxiety, as the agent struggles to predict and plan for risks which may block the achievement of goals. Expressivism similarly carries with it a tendency to feel anxiety and depression, particularly when expectations of a 'natural' closeness between mother and child seem to be unfulfilled. Pragmatism appears to be more weakly associated with anxiety, as the agent expects to routinely revise plans and strategies. Pragmatism, as an action orientation, responds to the evaluative burden of motherhood by emphasizing the specific problems and situations within which it is performed.

Through their actions as rationalist, expressivist or pragmatist mothers, women convey what matters to them, what they expect of themselves and others, and in so doing, hold themselves and others to account. The self-feeling of pride indicates that their mode of mothering is the

most appropriate one, whereas anxiety suggests uncertainty, whether about their ability to live up to their own expectations of themselves, or about the effects of their mode of action, whether on their children or on other influential figures in their lives.

The model of creative action focuses on the situated, corporeal and interpretive quality of action, as a source of new capacities, generating new forms of practical competence. The emotional intensity of motherhood, which involves paying close attention to the feedback provided by self-feeling, often under highly strained practical conditions generated by coordination problems, makes this mode of action routinely, necessarily, creative.

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