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'I Think I Stick Out a Bit': The Classification of Reproductive Decision-Making

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Abstract

This article provides an empirical insight into the operation of neoliberal, postfeminist, and middle-class norms which intersect to classify reproduction as imperative for some women, while for 'others' it is classified as inappropriate and in need of regulation. This valuation constructs an idealized reproductive citizen and a hierarchy of decisions about having children, while the inequalities and different material conditions that structure reproductive decisions and trajectories are ignored. This article will therefore demonstrate how the middle-class, neoliberal, and postfeminist subject of value operates in relation to reproduction in a social, political, and gendered context that emphasizes choice, individual responsibility, and self-investment and future planning. However, evidence of resistance to classification will also be shown, which provides an insight into how this valued reproductive citizen is negotiated.

Keywords

class, femininity, gender, neoliberalism, postfeminism, reproduction

Introduction

The findings discussed in this article are taken from my PhD research which explored reproductive decision-making in the context of neoliberalism and postfeminism, therefore considering the current social, political, and gendered contexts in which reproduction is experienced and decided upon. In particular, this article will focus on how such contexts intersect with social class to position some decisions as more valuable and appropriate than others. Given the ever deepening inequalities between wealthy and poor that are exacerbated by neoliberal austerity measures which reinforce and intensify 'class disgust' (Tyler, 2008), it is important to consider how working-class women's reproductive decisions continue to be positioned as denoting the 'constitutive limit'

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(Skeggs, 2011) of appropriate personhood or femininity when held against valued middle-class, neoliberal, and postfeminist norms. By presenting accounts from middle- and working-class women and those working in reproductive and sexual health services, this article relates to empirical work that uncovers understandings of 'appropriate' reproductive trajectories and decisions which are closely linked to perceptions of being a 'good' mother, and to conceptual and activist accounts of stratified reproduction and reproductive justice. The findings also extend theoretical or discursive understandings of valued personhood and how this is inseparable from class (Skeggs, 2011; Tyler, 2008). After situating my research within existing literature that focusses on the idealized subjectivity produced by neoliberal ideology and the postfeminist sensibility, and the relationship between class and value, two broad themes that arose from the data will be discussed: the (de)valuing of reproductive trajectories – specifically teenage or younger motherhood, and the regulation of reproduction.

Constructing the neoliberal and postfeminist subject

Neoliberalism is a political ideology, the principles tenets of which are market freedom and minimal government intervention in the lives of citizens (Harvey, 2005). In what Davies (2016) refers to as 'normative neoliberalism', we see the extension of market principles into previously non-market areas such as education and health care as a means of maximizing consumer choice and competition among companies that is thought not to be present when receiving state services (Crouch, 2011). Market competition and choice are also implicated in the moulding of citizens who are constructed as freely choosing 'winners' and 'losers' competing on a supposedly level playing field, thus serving to mask structural inequalities (Davies, 2016) while securing 'support for the neoliberal project through offering to extend to social life the freedom and individual autonomy supposedly offered by the market' (Davidson, 2016: 58). These processes construct citizens as individually responsibilized consumers who are set free from traditional social categories such as class and gender, and are required to become self-sustaining and self-inventing (Bauman, 2005; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991). State accountability is reduced and free market rationality becomes taken for granted as citizens are instilled with choice, responsibility, and entrepreneurialism, while political and social problems are converted into individual issues to be solved privately (Brown, 2006).

Within the context of neoliberalism, women in particular have been positioned as able, no less required, to exert greater choice and autonomy over their lives due to the removal of gendered expectations around domesticity and family life, and the opening up of opportunities in education and paid work (Harris, 2004). The apparent increased capacity of women to choose and move from 'living a life for others to a life of one's own' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 54) makes way for the postfeminist sensibility. Gill et al. (2017) write that contained within this sensibility are a number of features that come to constitute femininity including: 'a focus upon empowerment, choice and individualism; a sense of "fatigue" about gender; and an emphasis upon surveillance and discipline' (p. 230). While this list is not exhaustive, it is evident that the features of postfeminism resonate with neoliberalism, constructing the unconstrained 'can do' girl

who no longer needs feminism but is empowered through choice to 'have it all' (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2004). Harris (2004) writes that women's enjoyment of freedom, choice, and the ability to live independent lifestyles is tied to a narrative of success that comes from education, paid work, and consumption. While femininity has always included the expectation of working on the self, this is now extended to careful and responsible life planning and self-investment so as to compete and succeed in education and the labour market, which requires delaying (but not forging) motherhood (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2007). The postfeminist subject who 'has it all' is often associated with the white, elite feminism of women such as Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, who emphasized the importance of planning well for work and motherhood, and encouraged women to 'Lean In' and take responsibility for the barriers they faced in the workplace and in managing childcare (McRobbie, 2013). However, this incitement to become a responsibilized subject is not restricted to wealthy women like Sandberg but, as I will argue, intersects with middle-class norms to set the standard for a femininity that all women are expected to engage with.

On class and value

In addition to neoliberal and postfeminist norms, the role of class is crucial to an understanding of a valued subjectivity. I am in agreement with Tyler (2015) who defines class as 'a description of a given place in a social hierarchy and as a name for political struggles against the effects of classification' (p. 507). Class is inseparable from the ability to produce a self that is valued through differential access to resources and material conditions (Skeggs, 2004), where the values and standards associated with the middle-class are presented as 'normal' and 'legitimate' (Gillies, 2005; Lawler, 2000; Skeggs, 2004, 2009). As Lawler (2000) argues, the working-class cannot get it right: they do not know, want, or value the right things.

Perceptions of value shape ideas about who matters, with the 'possessive individual' becoming the dominant model for proper personhood in neoliberal times (Skeggs, 2011). This possessive individual is acquisitive, future-oriented, and always accruing value through investment to enhance their future (Skeggs, 2011) – resonating perhaps with the postfeminist subject who accrues value through education, paid work, and consumption. Such individuals, according to Skeggs (2004), start from a position that allows them access to knowledge of, and the ability to accrue value which is based on the ideals and experiences of the middle-class: 'everything becomes something to be achieved e.g. travelling becomes an education' (p. 74). The working-class, however, start from a different position often with limited resources, and where knowledge of how to optimize their cultural capital is less accessible therefore limiting the ability to become a valued subject (Skeggs, 2004). Thus, the working-class are defined against this middle-class possessive individual and figured as lacking due to their perceived irresponsible refusal to accrue value to themselves and their families (Skeggs, 2011: 502). Lawler's (2000) research with working-class women who had 'moved' to a middle-class position draws attention to the way in which 'classed existences shape people's subjectivities and position them as "right" or "wrong"' (p. 16), demonstrating that class relations are more than economic, and are also relations of value and lack. To position themselves as 'right',

participants in Lawler's research drew distinctions between their own practices, and those of their working-class families, – particularly their mothers – which were often based on ideas of value/lack, and bound up with economic and cultural capital which shaped perceptions of being a 'good' mother. This distinction, Lawler agues, cannot be separated from the psychic effects of class experienced by participants who attempted to distance themselves from displaying the 'wrong' type of femininity, and from being seen as 'bad' mothers when viewed through the middle-class gaze. For Tyler (2015), this normalization of middle-class standards as valued and appropriate demonstrates how classifying judgements are 'implicated in the perpetuation of class power and privilege' (pp. 502–503).

However, in Skeggs' (1997) research with working-class women, participants were at times able to negotiate the negative value assigned to them and re-evaluate themselves as respectable within their local contexts. This was evident in relation to childcare, as middle-class mothers were judged for not spending enough time caring for their children due to working full-time. Skeggs (1997, 2011) notes that this moral value reversal was a means of working-class women defending themselves against the devaluation they were subjected to by a dominant middle-class value system, and an ever-present middle-class gaze. What is important to note, argues Skeggs (2011), is how the women's repositioning of themselves as valuable was not in line with the acquisitive, future-oriented claims associated with the subject of value, but involved making the best of the precarious circumstances in which they lived where 'their best chance of value was moral and affective not financial . . . where other people were supportive connectivities, not sources for self-accumulation' (p. 504). Valued practices are therefore linked to material circumstances and the shaping of lives by precarity and exploitation, which serve to produce different values regarding what/who matters (Skeggs, 2011: 507). The next section will consider these discussions around value in relation to reproductive trajectories and motherhood.

Reproduction and value

Important to discussions of (de)valued reproduction is the concept of 'stratified reproduction' which describes, 'the power relations by which some categories of people are empowered to nurture and reproduce, while others are disempowered' (Ginsburg and Rapp, 1995: 3). The appropriateness of reproduction has historically been decided by those that hold greater power such as policy makers and healthcare professionals, who often wish to restrict the reproductive decision-making of 'undesirable' mothers who are poor, disabled, and black and brown women (Lowe, 2016), leading to historical instances of forced sterilization, and forms of contraception being tested on women without informed consent (Ginsburg and Rapp, 1995; Lowe, 2016). At the level of policy in austerity Britain, the introduction of the 'family cap' – the limiting of child tax credits or the child benefit element of Universal Credit to two children – disproportionately impacts lone parents, poor, and disabled women, and 'families where larger numbers of children are more usual including some religious and faith communities, black and minority ethnic families, and refugee families' (Engender, 2017: 2). As a result of these injustices and processes of valuing/devaluing, many scholars and activists use the language of, and

advocate for, reproductive justice (see Kafer, 2013; Price, 2010; Roberts, 1997; Ross, 2006; Solinger, 2013).

Originating in black feminist activism, those advocating for reproductive justice crucially draw attention to: the right not to have children; the right to have children; the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments; and that these rights can be exercised without coercion (Price, 2010). Importantly for the present research, the reproductive justice framework is attentive to the social context and histories of marginalization that shape how women experience reproduction and make decisions (Ross, 2006). Reproductive justice can therefore shift the focus from neoliberal notions of individual choice to understand reproductive decisions as connected to the social world and other people, and therefore as facilitated or constrained based on access to resources, which the experiences of participants in this research speak to.

Valued reproductive trajectories

The neoliberal and postfeminist subjectivity operates alongside a valued reproductive trajectory women are expected to follow that also intersects with class. Teenage and younger motherhood has been problematized most forcefully in the UK since the introduction of the New Labour government's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS) in 1997, which targeted individual behaviour change as a mean of reducing teenage or younger pregnancy, for example, through sex education (Brown, 2016; Lowe, 2016). This can be read through the lens of neoliberal and postfeminist constructions of responsibility as young women were encouraged to self-mange the 'risk' of teenage pregnancy through correct use of contraception, and to behave as economically rational beings who delay pregnancy so as to achieve highly in education and paid work (Brown, 2016; Duncan, 2007).

Reproductive timing has also been linked to enduring class divisions and discourses of morality associated with respectability and responsible life decisions (Nayak and Kehily, 2014; Perrier, 2013). Such ideas are discussed by Tyler (2008) who highlights the construction of the 'chav mum', a stigmatized figure who in the context of neoliberal and postfeminist productivity is held in the public imagination as embodying a 'failed' femininity due to associations of not only excessive sexuality, but also economic dependency. This stigma has intensified as the neoliberal and postfeminist incitement for women and girls to be individually responsible, future-oriented, and self/family investing are considered incompatible with younger, working-class motherhood which is associated with irresponsibility and fecklessness. This was found in Francombe-Webb and Silk's (2016) research in which girls aged 12 to 13 from middle- to upper-class backgrounds viewed teenage pregnancy and motherhood as a moral failure associated with 'an embodied working-class subjectivity' (p. 666). This was in comparison with how they imagined their own trajectories, which were focussed on taking responsibility to avoid the 'risk' of teenage pregnancy and delay motherhood (Francombe-Webb and Silk, 2016). Teenage pregnancy was therefore understood to disrupt an idealized life trajectory that requires girls and women to be productive and self-investing by extending time in education and work before having children. Working-class transitions to adulthood which have

traditionally happened earlier are therefore discounted as valid decisions and instead constructed as irresponsible, individual failings (Francombe-Webb and Silk, 2016).

These discussions stand in contrast to social concerns around white, middle-class women's fertility, who are feared to be choosing careers over undertaking the responsibility of raising middle-class children (Tyler, 2008). Perrier (2013) argues that normative ideas of the 'right' time to have children suggest this decision is an individual choice that women can control. Such ideas are arguably exacerbated in neoliberal and postfeminist contexts where decisions are constructed as if free from social constraints (see also Baldwin, 2018) therefore obscuring 'the multiple facets of reproductive timing' (Perrier, 2013: 71). Participants in Perrier's research with mothers of various ages from middle- and working-class backgrounds found that multiple 'right' times existed, with the biological and psychosocial entering in to women's discussions of reproductive timing. Yet, normative ideas about the appropriate time for motherhood were also evident in participants' accounts, and middle-class mothers largely drew on the notion of 'readiness'. This was also found by Baldwin (2018) who explored reproductive delay and motivations for egg freezing, as participants felt 'readiness' and the appropriate time for motherhood to be associated with the accumulation of resources and self/future investment such as completing education; establishing a secure career/income; and the experience of living an independent, child-free life. The ideas underpinning appropriate reproductive trajectories resonate with neoliberal and postfeminist expectations of taking responsibility to invest in the self and future family, as well as the classed understandings of valued personhood found in Skeggs' possessive individual. As argued by Lowe (2016), and will be shown empirically in this article, those who are not able to adhere to constructions of 'readiness' or an appropriate trajectory are expected to delay or forgo having children – despite the centrality of motherhood to traditional conceptions of femininity – until meeting the normative standard, which I argue is middle-class, neoliberal, and postfeminist.

'Appropriate' motherhood

Moralizing judgements that suggest there is a 'right' time to have children are of course connected to perceptions that there is a 'right' kind of mother. These perceptions are deeply bound up with class, and can also be read through the lens of neoliberal and postfeminist norms of individual responsibility and investment, particularly in conceptions of intensive motherhood (Hays, 1996), which at its core involves the increasing amount of additional work and responsibility mothers are expected to undertake. Intensive motherhood requires women to be completely child-centred using their time, energy, and material resources to invest in their children's development, and to safeguard from risks as guided by expert opinion (Hays, 1996; Lee et al., 2014). For Phipps (2014), intensive motherhood is underpinned by the neoliberal privatization of responsibility and values of productivity and individual achievement, and is ultimately a classed construction. Marginalized mothers are often operating in different contexts and with different access to resources that are incompatible with intensive mothering practices and so are deemed irresponsible, making the 'wrong' choices and in need of education (Faircloth, 2013; Phipps, 2014).

Despite the links between middle-class values and dominant conceptions of the 'good' mother, Perrier's (2012) research found middle-class women at times expressed ambiguity about their own engagement with a form of motherhood that is intensive, investing, and responsibilized. While Perrier (2012) offers new insights into how middle-class mothers experience dominant parenting narratives and presents participants as more than 'capital-bearing and transmitting individuals' (p. 658), the role of middle-class women in the reproduction of privilege and how they are able to distance themselves from the 'wrong' choices is key to understanding the operation of power. There are certainly nuances in the dichotomy between the pathologized working-class mother and idealized middle-class mother, and Perrier is right to remind us of the effects of power on the privileged. However, middle-class women still experience relative protection from the pathology, stigma, and surveillance working-class women receive for their 'inappropriate' reproductive decisions that are devalued, and as the findings from this research will show, often restricted, and regulated.

Skeggs and Tyler argue that classificatory struggles must be exposed and critiqued, and that a greater understanding is required of how classifications become institutionalized and utilized to enable some and constrain others due to the values and norms they establish. The present research provides an insight into to these constraints and enablements, highlighting how certain reproductive choices are classified as valuable or lacking value, which will be shown as bound up with the intersecting norms of class, neoliberalism and postfeminism that produce a responsible, self-investing, and future-oriented feminine subject. Focussing on classificatory struggles also makes visible practices that differ from the norm resulting in struggles over the meaning of value and worth (Tyler, 2015), while crucially providing an understanding of how dominant values can be reproduced, resisted, or subverted.

Methodology

Twenty-two in-depth interviews[1] were carried out from September 2015 until November 2016 with those working in reproductive and sexual health, and maternal services (e.g. a doula; midwives; abortion providers; and services providing fertility, abortion, and ante/post-natal support), and women aged 21 to 60 in Scotland. The majority of service providers who agreed to be interviewed were located in Glasgow and the surrounding area, and these interviews lasted on average 1 hour. Interviews with women lasted between 90 minutes and 2 hours in duration. The women who participated in the study were mostly white and non-disabled (three participants stated mixed racial identities and two women discussed experiencing ongoing mental distress), all identified as cis-gendered, heterosexual, and were from both middle- and working-class backgrounds. Class is difficult to define for researchers and participants alike, as Skeggs (1997) reminds us, 'Who would want to be seen as working class? (perhaps only academics are left)' (p. 95). To help make sense of participants' class positions, I turned to the approach utilized by Gillies (2006) in her empirical research with working-class mothers, which was based on their access to capitals: social, economic, and cultural. For example, some participants in my research discussed the need to avoid budget supermarkets due to the perceived low quality of food, and the importance of having an au pair to culturally enrich their future

children's lives, whereas Stephanie discussed having 'no money' and felt a need to justify her spending to me during the interview. There was also evidence of the affective and psychic experience of class as some participants discussed feeling looked down upon by middle-class women, and their subsequent feelings of lack.

To recruit participants, I created posters asking women to, 'share your experiences of reproductive choices', which I placed in a variety of locations including around the university campus and in the surrounding communities. Service providers were also asked if they agreed to have recruitment posters on display via email, and at this time were made aware of the research and that I would also be interested in speaking with them. In an attempt to reach participants across Scotland, the research poster was placed under the: 'Volunteer Jobs' section of the classified advertisement and community website Gumtree. Those interested in participating were able to contact me via email, telephone, or using the website's mailing system. I endeavoured to reply to, and arrange interviews with all who responded to the advert, with more purposive sampling taking place as the research developed to reach those underrepresented in the sample, for example, a move to focus on recruiting more women with children.

In an attempt to minimize the hierarchical research relationship and uncover rich accounts of reproductive decisions, concept cards were used during interviews with women. These are cards printed with words related to reproduction and the key themes from the literature, for example, choice; responsibility; abortion; contraception; motherhood; and so on, with blank cards provided for participants to add what they felt was important or had been missed (Sutton, 2011). I believed concept cards would be an effective means of breaking down power in the research relationship as participants could take ownership over what they wished to discuss. This also made the cards an ethically attentive and effective tool for talking about potentially difficult and emotional topics, and subjects that are socially silenced. The cards became an important part of a feminist research project due to women's increased participation, and proved to be an effective interview technique that elicited rich details about participants' experiences as will now be discussed.

Reproductive trajectories: classifying teenage or younger motherhood

While teenage motherhood has long been constructed as abject, the data show that this is exacerbated by postfeminist and neoliberal ideals of productivity, 'having it all', planning, and self-investment. The valued trajectory of delaying motherhood so as to be economically active was assigned value by participants, with those who do not follow this trajectory judged as failing to appropriately plan for the future. Such ideas were expressed by middle-class participants who did not have children:

S: In my twenties I was just so engrossed with uni. I had to be the best, I had to be the best at *everything* I was doing. So my level of commitment was like, up at 5:30 in the morning, run – and of course I was also running half marathons – and then I was performing and it was just like . . . very, very full on and very unhealthy. Perfectionism like crazy.

I: And is that how it felt?

S: Yeah. And everyone would say, 'You're superwoman!' And I would be like, I know! But it was just insane and completely unhealthy. You're not just getting the degree, it's being like . . . the top! I was just so competitive! And so I felt I had to be very, very careful to avoid this (points to motherhood card). (Sara, mc, 41, no children, playwright)

Sara's account demonstrates engagement with the self-investing and future planning subject of neoliberalism and postfeminism who is competitive and invests in education, while avoiding motherhood at a young age – which she equates with appropriate life planning. As well as formal education, Sara reflects on the need to compete in extra-curricular activities such as sports and performing arts, allowing her to accrue value through demonstrating productivity and achieving in a number of areas. Evident also is the immense pressure and emotion work that comes with embodying responsibility so as to achieve and maintain the status of a 'top girl' who 'has' or 'does it all' while self-regulating to avoid young motherhood (McRobbie, 2007).

Lauren (mc, 21, no children, student) also discussed her views on what constitutes an appropriate life trajectory, which involved being economically active and having different life experiences before having children so as to 'live for myself rather than . . . just have a family'. However, Lauren also expressed anxiety about extending this period of exploration, and felt 'worried about if I . . . maybe if I'm enjoying travelling and having fun, and then I kinda lose sight of settling down and having kids and I never settle down'. Lauren exemplifies an individualized, postfeminist logic in her desire to live a life of her own; yet, her account also highlights that this is temporary and the expectation to have children remains central to a successful feminine trajectory and 'having it all'. Lauren's concern that she may not fulfil this expectation perhaps also points to the internalization of wider social anxieties around middle-class women leaving it 'too late' to have children, which contrasts with the classification of working-class women as excessively fertile (Tyler, 2008).

Julie, who had her daughter at the age of 35, also felt it necessary to avoid 'just' becoming a mum, placing high value on education and establishing a career before having children:

J: I wanted to do well. I had friends from all backgrounds and some people's parents were working like three or four jobs doing cleaning, working in the school canteen, waitressing, and I just thought, I don't want to do that. I wanted to have a career and I thought I'd love to be a business woman, and have a nice car and a nice house, and I knew I had to work to get all of that. There's people I went to school with who I'm not friendly with now, probably because they had children quite early, whereas my friends were in their thirties. I'm friendly with the ones that waited, because the ones that had them earlier never went to uni and *just* became mums and we all moved away from that. It seems that people who wanted a good career waited, because they wanted to get established and do well. (Julie, mc, 37, one child, Council Manager)

In a similar process to that described by the middle-class young women in Francombe-Webb and Silk's (2016) research, Julie appears to follow a trajectory characterized by productivity, educational attainment, and participation in consumer culture which results from establishing a career. This is then distinguished from the trajectories of those who had children at a younger age, and who in Julie's view have not 'done well', thus aligning herself with the valued reproductive citizen who plans appropriately to 'have it all'.

'For me being a parent was everything': alternative views on teenage and younger motherhood

Not all participants believed it was necessary to avoid teenage or younger motherhood. This was evident in the accounts of two working-class participants who left school at 16 and had children in their teens and early 20s:

> I think with everything that happened in that relationship . . . creating my own family and having a place full of love became really important to me. I've never had something that I thought, I want to do that. Even when I was younger . . . it was actually all about having a family. Not in the sense of, oh I want to get married and have kids and be a house wife, just . . . just wanting that for myself really. More than academic stuff. (Holly, wc, 27, 1 child, not in paid work)

> It was never an option for me to wait. I don't think I would have been able to be an older parent. I was never invested in education, ma mum never sent me to school a lot, it was never a big thing for them so that wasn't what I knew. For me, being a parent was everything. And to be everything ma parents weren't. So I had that over . . . kinda . . . overbearing urge to be a mum and do everything differently. (Stephanie, wc, 36, 3 children, not in paid work)

The above resonates with Braun et al.'s (2008) research which found that working-class participants were less likely to have a career or identify with a particular sector of the labour market, often lacking a clear plan as to how they could achieve their job aspirations, and/or did not possess the necessary qualifications or resources to study. This is contrasted with Braun et al.'s previous work which focussed on middle-class women, who – much like the participants in this research – demonstrated greater evidence of planning with regards to obtaining qualifications, establishing a career, then having children in their thirties. While Holly and Stephanie may be deemed as failing to plan their lives appropriately and making the 'wrong' choices within middle-class, neoliberal, and postfeminist constructions of femininity, their accounts demonstrate how value can be attached to motherhood from an early age. It is possible to view their decisions as a demonstration of alternative values and aspirations that are shaped by material conditions, where younger motherhood is viewed as a more secure and valuable option for some women (Allen and Osgood, 2009; Brown, 2016; Skeggs, 2011). While policy makers, neoliberal ideology, and the postfeminist sensibility may construct younger, working-class women as inappropriate or undesirable mothers, women's experiences and localities can assign value to different reproductive trajectories (Lowe, 2016).

Relational and emotional aspects are also involved in how certain trajectories are valued, as both Holly and Stephanie experienced abusive relationships growing up,

which perhaps led to importance being placed on creating positive and loving relationships from a young age that differed from their experiences. In spite of this, Holly believed her decisions were not aligned with the dominant expectations placed on women's reproductive lives and as a result, felt she may be judged by those following a more valued trajectory:

> I've never been one to really plan things, but I suppose the ideal situation would be to do what you want to do before having a child . . . I think people might have thought, 'oh you've not got a career and you're away to have a baby'. I think a lot of the mums round here . . . they've had their careers and they're lawyers or doctors or whatever, then they've had their kids, so I think I stick out a bit. And I wasn't sure at first about going to these mum and baby classes, because they're all a bit older than me. They're all very similar. (Holly)

Holly draws on specific and generalized others (Mead, 1934) to demonstrate awareness that she is 'positioned as matter out of place' (Douglas, 1996), and defined against middle-class women living in a nearby affluent area who engage with the requirements of the postfeminist subject. Holly appears to anticipate being judged due to her 'difference', and as having her ability to attend community groups restricted by classificatory practices. Similarly, working-class women in Perrier's (2013) research who had children at a younger age framed their trajectory as an alternative but equally valid path to follow. Where Perrier's findings differ is that participants still drew upon a socially valued engagement with education and work, albeit after having children as opposed to before, which working-class women in this study did not discuss, but instead demonstrated an awareness that their trajectories deviated from middle-class, postfeminist, and neoliberal norms.

The stigma associated with teenage/younger pregnancy and motherhood was also discussed by Helen, who worked for a service that supports young parents in a deprived area of Glasgow:

> Young people attend here for supports for various things and what they were tellin' us was that pre-natal supports in hospital were all geared towards older parents, and they felt stigmatised by midwives [. . .] A lot of them talk about if they see older mums out and about, giving them wee glances, or if they're walking about rubbing their bumps and people are a bit like . . . Oh, what's going on there? (Helen, support worker for young parents)

The valued reproductive citizen who is associated with delaying motherhood is institutionalized and reproduced through mainstream maternity services, causing young women to feel that they cannot engage with services due to their pregnancy being judged as 'inappropriate'. Young working-class women's bodies are classified as out of control, irresponsible, and promiscuous (Skeggs, 1997), which middle-class women who have planned for and delayed motherhood can define themselves against.

Restricting reproduction

While motherhood is considered central to femininity and the postfeminist subject who 'has it all', the reproductive justice agenda and the concept of stratified reproduction

have shown how motherhood is positioned as less appropriate and in need of regulation for some women. These ideas were most evident during an interview with a sexual and reproductive health doctor who reflected on referring women for second trimester abortions, which women in Scotland often face significant barriers to accessing (see Purcell et al., 2014). In spite of this, and though finding it difficult to refer, Dr McClean felt that second trimester abortions were more appropriate for some women:

> I do find it difficult to be honest, I don't like scanning with the later pregnancies and then referring on. But often it's a bit easier when they have such . . . they have quite . . . deprived social circumstances that you can see how it may actually be better that . . . you worry that if the child was to be born, you worry about what kind of environment it would be brought up in . . . so I think it's a bit easier to justify. (Dr McClean, sexual and reproductive health doctor)

While expressing discomfort at referring for abortion in the second trimester, Dr McClean is able to legitimize this decision when made by women living in deprivation. Similar findings were highlighted in previous research, where it was found that Scottish GPs did not problematize the abortion requests of women from deprived areas (Beynon-Jones, 2013). Regardless of the view that abortion transgresses femininity, it may, therefore, be felt more appropriate for those who are othered against the middle-class norm. Dr McClean then went on to classify older, educated women as appropriate and valued reproductive citizens:

> I find it surprising, sometimes we get students who are in their thirties and almost forty and they're still making that decision and I have to say, you're kinda thinking . . . hmm . . . are you running the risk of leaving your family too late? And I think it's a shame, they can do both with childcare support; they should be able to do both. (Dr McClean)

In comparison with those living in deprivation whose abortion requests were legitimated, for women of a particular age who are in education, the decision to have an abortion is difficult to understand and constructed as somewhat irrational. This was also found by Beynon-Jones (2013), as healthcare professionals viewed women seeking abortion in their thirties as ignorant about their fertility, and admitted to finding it, 'challenging when a middle-class couple with resources and money' request an abortion (pp. 516–517). Perceptions of 'good'/'bad' abortion may therefore be shaped by the prevalence or absence of poverty, age, relationship status, and 'aspirations' (Lowe, 2016). In addition to this, the extract above illustrates how postfeminist and middle-class norms intersect and may be engaged with by service providers, as it is suggested women of a certain age *should* be able to 'have it all' and have children, while continuing in education and taking responsibility to find private solutions to childcare, whereas working-class women are considered problematic for reproducing at a younger age due to perceptions of dependency and a lack of investment. This was reflected in Pam's discussion of who she felt should have children, which was heavily shaped by class and decisions about education and work, as she admitted to worrying that 'more . . . educated and . . . more . . . middle-class women [. . .] aren't having kids. Whereas the girls who haven't had the benefits of an education or a better upbringing, they're chucking out kids

left, right and centre'. Pam continued to express her views on appropriate/inappropriate reproduction:

> I think it would be a great idea if *everyone* was sterilised at birth? So they grow up, get married and then they *physically* want children . . . and they say, here's my plan: how I can afford to pay for it, here's how I'm going to look after it, it's not going to be a product of a one night stand . . . So emm [..] there's not going to be unwanted pregnancies, and there's going to be less of a drain on the state because we're not supporting somebody with 13 children – unless they can afford to support themselves. And like . . . pregnancies where . . . like with emm down's syndrome . . . disabilities . . . with the greatest will in the world, they're not going to be financially contributing to society and paying taxes and all these things. (Pam, mc, 41, no children, social worker)

Pam relies heavily on ideas of individual responsibility and draws attention to how value and worth are assigned to certain bodies. Conditions are outlined that Pam feels should be fulfilled before having children such as being middle-class; extended time in education; and that pregnancies should be planned and take place within relationships, therefore reflecting the future-oriented and possessive individual, while irresponsibility is assigned to working-class women who are viewed here as failing to plan. Pam's emphasis on the need to plan for pregnancy and the depiction of disabled people as not economically active is linked directly to perceptions of dependency which is stigmatized in neoliberal ideology and the context of austerity. Ultimately, Pam constructs the valued reproductive citizen as future-oriented; middle-class; individually responsible; able bodied, and whose main contribution to society is through participation in paid work.

The restriction of reproductive decisions was also experienced by some participants. Due to severe health problems when pregnant with her third child and finding it difficult to cope with raising two autistic children, Stephanie decided to be sterilized following her third labour even though she would have 'loved more children'. However, Stephanie felt there was inadequate support provided from healthcare professionals with regards to her decision:

> I feel a little let down by the doctors because they didn't try and talk to me more about it – bearin' in mind I was only twenty-two . . . no, twenty-three. I had made this decision based on the pregnancy I was having and . . . they kinda just went ahead and done it. They never suggested like . . . do you want to maybe think about it or anythin' like that. So I don't feel there was enough support there. Maybe if I had more time, more . . . information? Or perhaps saying, ok you can get sterilized but it's not ideal to do straight after you give birth. So I feel like . . . I had quite a lot of years I could've been . . . I feel like I had more to give to more kids. (Stephanie)

Though believing this to be the right decision during pregnancy, Stephanie appears to regret being sterilized and feels greater support and information should have been provided to her. For a young, working-class mother of three children who was not in paid employment, sterilization may have been viewed as appropriate by healthcare professionals, whereas it has been reported that middle-class women often have their requests for sterilization rejected (Nelson, 2003). The lack of information provided could also be related to a perception that working-class women are disinterested when it comes to

knowledge about their bodies and reproduction, arising from the classed concerns regarding the fertility/infertility of working and middle-class women (Bell, 2009). This too was discussed by Margaret, a volunteer at a fertility support service, who was surprised at the lack of 'educated' women accessing the support they offered compared with those from 'more simple backgrounds'.

The data in this section demonstrate the value placed on middle-class motherhood and postfeminist expectations, while also illustrating the responsibility instilled in educated middle-class women to 'bring forth neoliberal citizens' (Allen and Taylor, 2012: 1). The view that abortion or motherhood is more suitable for some but not others reinforces dominant ideas of appropriate trajectories, and perceptions of who is classified a valued reproductive citizen.

Conclusion

Previous studies have highlighted how reproductive trajectories and social and political constructions of the 'good' mother are bound up with class and assigned value or lack accordingly. This study extends previous understandings by considering how contemporary understandings of femininity as found in the postfeminist sensibility operates in relation to class and reproductive decision-making from the narratives of working and middle-class women and service providers. The research provides important empirical insights into how a gendered form of neoliberalism intersects with middle-class norms to construct a valued reproductive citizen who is self-investing and future-oriented, therefore, extending theoretical and discursive work on valued personhood (Skeggs, 2011; Tyler, 2008). It is against this construction which working-class women are often othered and devalued, and in some instances have their decisions restricted and regulated, uncovering the way in which postfeminist and neoliberal norms can maintain and reproduce class inequalities that are displaced by an appeal to 'choice'.

Following understandings of stratified reproduction and the concerns underpinning the reproductive justice movement, it is clear that there is less value attached to the expectation that working-class women will reproduce. This was evident when considering the classificatory processes engaged in by healthcare professionals and other women who were shown in this research to make class-based judgements regarding whose reproductive decisions are valued. Such judgements reproduce dominant ideas of appropriate trajectories and at times restrict autonomy, while enforcing the perception that the valued citizen is middle-class, economically active, and future-oriented. Yet, participants' experiences also challenged the universality of the valued middle-class, postfeminist reproductive citizen. This was shown where working-class participants drew upon gaps between their own decisions and behaviours and those relating to middle-class norms but did not view themselves as failing to live up to this ideal. The decisions and values of working-class women demonstrate how different material conditions produce alternative – not inferior – valued practices. This supports work that demonstrates the middle-class nature of valued personhood while also highlighting alternative classed values and trajectories (Skeggs, 2011).

This research provides an insight into how the neoliberal and postfeminist subjectivity are empirically lived and experienced in relation to women's reproductive lives,

presenting a struggle over the meaning of value and worth. New understandings have been provided of women's relationship to contemporary society and how they are positioned by their classed bodies, crucially demonstrating how classifications and political ideology can be written into women's reproductive lives to assign value to some decisions over others in a social and political moment where class disgust is exacerbated.

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Note

1. All participants have been given pseudonyms.

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