

Timescapes Conference

Understanding & Supporting
Families Through Time

Research Policy & Practice

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Family & Parenting
Institute



timescapes

An ESRC Qualitative Longitudinal Study

Expectations and Realities: Rethinking choice for first time mothers

2 ESRC funded studies: MoMM DoM

Team: Rachel Thomson, Mary Jane Kehily, Lucy Hadfield, Sue Sharpe

Time period: Jan 2005 – Jan 2010

60 first time mothers, 12 family case studies, 6 longitudinal follow through

Making Modern Mothers Policy Press June 2011

Motherhood and social change

Increased participation of women in further and higher education and workforce

Changing shape of the female biography – from 'fate' to 'choice'. Hollowing out of the home

Fragmentation of motherhood as marker of adulthood: 'too early', 'too late', 'just in time'

Ambivalent intergenerational narratives: motherhood increasingly pressured, sociable, shared, commodified/easy

Motherhood as a site of solidarity and division

Diverse 'situations' that coexist - proximity and mixing

Destination point of social mobility - sedimenting and amplifying difference. 'Doing best for the child'

Impetus towards solidarity (collective solutions) and division (individual solutions)

Common culture of motherhood – commercial and public – with competing discourses of 'choice' and 'fairness'

New parenthood as a key moment in negotiating relationship with the 'public' and 'private' good.

Collision of expectations and realities: birth

- Choice and birth planning as the new orthodoxy
- Powerfully embraced by expectant mothers, often confounded by experience
- Older models of female solidarity, loss of bodily control, dependency
- Salience of ideas of respect, consistency, fairness, support

Case studies: Monica and Kim

- Monica: Dream of home birth/ own birth
- Elaborate birth planning.
- Couple event. Lack of intergenerational communication
- Unexpected trauma, lessons for the future – different kind of ‘choice’
- Kim: Expectation of difficulty, mother / daughter team and advocacy

‘when I got there she’s strapped onto this thing with a mask on. Have you seen *Blue Velvet*? That’s the image that came into my mind really. I was just going to start singing some sort of Bobby Vee song and then you’d have had the complete picture . They were just like really medieval and just ... not how it’s portrayed in NCT antenatal classes as this lovely natural moment... they ripped her..., slashing And then to see her afterwards .. you know, it was all ... it was just like the movie! But fortunately she didn’t really know..’

Kim: I needed the toilet and my mum went out to ask her and she was quite rude, and she said she had three patients altogether so she couldn't just come and see to me and then she changed my midwife which we were going to ask if she didn't change, to be changed.

Gillian: Its cos Kim was hooked up to monitors so the midwife had to come and take her off all the monitors before she could go to the toilet and the midwife had such an attitude. I mean all the others were really friendly, came in..hi I'm so and so I'm taking over..

Kim: I didn't even find out who she was. Yeah in the end..

Gillian: She was in charge of the shift.I said have you a problem or something cos you've been really rude and arrogant since you joined. And she said I've had three girls in labour. Yes but I asked you half an hour ago to please come and take Kim off the monitor so she can go to the toilet and you haven't come....

Kim: (she was sitting) right outside my room.

Gillian: Yeah and so in the end I said to her can I change midwives, so she gave us..

Kim: Alice .Who was quite nice

Conclusions

Temporal methods reveal the interplay of intergenerational and biographical time

New parenthood as a critical biographical moment: seeking of public and private solutions

Expectations of choice give way to regret and a longing for fairness and reliability.

Cuts to public services: private solutions for those who can afford them. Evaporation of shared spaces?