

# Surveillance of Modern Motherhood: Experiences of attending a Universal Parenting Course. Dr Helen Simmons

Surveillance of Modern Motherhood:  
Experiences of attending a Universal Parenting Course.

Dr Helen Simmons  
University of Derby, UK



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## Content

- Research Aim and Objectives
- Dominant Discourses
- Conceptual Framework
- Methodology
- Emerging Themes
- Key Findings / Recommendations
- References



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## Aim

- To gain a deeper understanding of, through feminist post-structuralist analysis, the experiences of mothers that have attended universal parenting courses.



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## Research Objectives

- To explore the experiences of mothers that have attended universal parenting courses.
- To consider the constructs of modern motherhood in relation to different levels of surveillance (Henderson *et al*, 2010).
- To produce a greater understanding of some of the pressures within modern motherhood in the UK today.



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## The Dominant Discourses

Historical Discourse of 'Expert' Advice



Online Social Networking

Political Intervention

The Rise in 'Parenting Culture'

'Good Enough Mother' Discourse

Parenting Courses and 'Neuroparenting'

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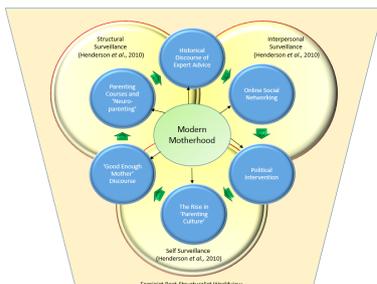
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## The Conceptual Framework



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## Qualitative Methodology

- Phase 1 - A survey with a range of qualitative and quantitative questions was used to generate insight into the experiences of mothers
- Phase 2 - Followed by qualitative interviews with a sample of mothers using semi-structured **photo elicitation interviews**



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## Emerging Themes



- Theme 1. Navigating the early days of motherhood**  
*You're constantly questioning yourself and your ability to do this job which is the most important thing ... you've ever done... and you're given no instruction on how to do it!!!* (Louise)
- Theme 2. 'Expert' advice and support for new mothers**  
*I think the problem with this country is, my husband's North African, they have, the family virtually live with you when you've had a new baby so you've got masses of support. We don't have that, so having the manuals and the guides and the help out there, it is a big help cos you can't always rely on your immediate family' (Clare)*

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## Emerging Themes



- Theme 3. Reasons identified for attending a parenting course**
  - I felt alone and in need to meet other parents for company and assurance. I didn't think my close friends and family would understand what I was going through but other new parents would. I also needed a quite space for my baby and me (ID83);*
  - It was a lifeline, cos it was somewhere to go for an hour or two (Gemma/P6);*
- Theme 4. Experiences of attending a parenting course**
  - You need someone who will give you that smile and tell you it's alright that that's happening (Kate);*
  - You do get the odd ones that just, they just want their child to be a little bit better than yours! (Priya);*

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## Theme 5: Feeling Judged

- I'd get anxious before I went (to the Children's Centre), in-case they asked me something about what he was doing and if he wasn't doing it. I'd start over thinking things and getting stressed out. I think if that pressure wasn't on, I think I maybe would have gone a bit more..... sometimes, I wouldn't even go..... (Priya);*
- When tired and you're emotional and you don't think about things rationally and you do get, get swamped with images of people doing things perfectly and doing it different to you. And you feel as though you're doing something wrong... and you're not! (Ruth)*



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## Theme 6. 'All consuming' pressure on self

- You put so much pressure on yourself and that 'mothers guilt' ..... I just never knew that something like that could exist! Or where it comes from, even when you're thinking about it really logically, it's just all-consuming isn't it? (Jenny).*
- Before I was like, as though, oh, you can't really say that, you're a mum, you're not allowed to say things like that... I feel as though ..... it's not just all flowers and hearts. It's difficult, it's the hardest thing you'll ever do. It's the hardest thing I've ever done (Clare).*



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## Theme 7. Reflecting on motherhood



*There's just so many people tell you so many different ways. Doctors that talk about it and these professionals that talk about it.....actually, one thing I have learnt to do a lot more than I did before is trust my instincts*

*I had instincts but my instincts went (and) my common sense went out the window when I first had him... I just didn't trust them at first, I was just like 'yeah, I'll try what you said cos you're obviously better at this cos you're a professional' but it's not true is it..... you don't believe it cos you've never done it, you've just never done it..... you're just like well, that's wrong, this is wrong, they're not doing this as they should do....*

*Well obviously somethings going wrong in that whole process that we've got to change (Louise).*

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Key Finding	Recommendations
Evidence of positive experiences of parenting courses	Practical, empathetic, flexible and localised support
Evidence of negative experiences of parenting courses	Well qualified, critically reflective early years practitioners and health professionals
Evidence of issues regarding wider 'parenting culture' and 'interpersonal surveillance'	Opportunities to foster truthful, non-judgmental support networks.
Self-surveillance is identified as the most powerful aspects of modern motherhood.	Reduce the damage that silences on taboo aspects of motherhood can have.
Evidence of agency and autonomy: through strong social networks, support systems	Further research: impact that social media and current breastfeeding support on the mental health of mothers.

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