Constructing the "good" mother: pride and shame in lone mothers' narratives of motherhood

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to explore how lone mothers define "good" mothering and outlines the extent to which feelings of pride and shame permeate their narratives.

Design/methodology/approach – The empirical data on which the paper is based is drawn from semi-structured interviews with 32 lone mothers from Northern Ireland. All the lone mothers resided in low-income households.

Findings – Lone mothers experienced shame on three levels: at the level of the individual whereby they internalised feelings of shame; at the level of the collective whereby they internalised how they perceived being shamed by others in their networks but also engaged in shaming and at the level of wider society whereby they recounted how they felt shamed by government agencies and the media.

Originality/value – While a number of researchers have explored how shame stems from poverty and from "deviant" identities such as lone motherhood, the focus on pride is less developed. The paper responds to this vacuum by exploring how pride may counterbalance shame's destructive and scarring tendencies.

Keywords Poverty, Northern Ireland, Welfare, Pride, Shame, Lone motherhood

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Being on welfare benefits and not having enough money to meet one's needs has always produced feelings of indignity, humiliation and shame, and there is a huge literature identifying shame as a common factor in how poverty is experienced across and within a range of countries around the globe (Walker *et al.*, 2013; Jo, 2012). In his seminal work on capabilities, Sen (1983, p. 163) suggests that the goal of welfare support structures should be providing individuals with "the capability to go about without shame". In relation to the UK, Walker (2014, p. 55) equates shame with claiming welfare benefits that represent the "stigmatising badge of poverty", while Scrambler (2018) sees the shame associated with claiming benefits as a form of "enacted stigma". But limiting shame to economic factors undermines its potentially corrosive impact on other social roles that individuals occupy. As Bourdieu (1999, p. 4) puts it, "using material poverty as the sole measure of all suffering keeps us from seeing and understanding a whole side of the suffering characteristic of the social order". Drawing on these insights, Frost and Hoggett (2008) argue that people's lived experiences of economic hardship combined with feelings of powerlessness leads to social suffering with its associated traits of shame and humiliation being experienced on a daily basis across a variety of social roles that people occupy.

In a similar vein, in her study of poverty, Lister (2004, p. 7) characterises poverty not just as material disadvantage but as a "shameful and corrosive social relation" characterised by lack of voice, disrespect, humiliation, indignity and lower self-esteem. Scheff (2000, p. 84) goes further and identifies shame as a "premier social emotion". He suggests that shame is not just

individually felt but reinforced through the social bonds that characterise daily life. Yet despite its importance, Scheff argues that shame remains a slippery concept that is often ill defined. He draws on the contribution of a number of core theorists whose research could be seen as illuminating shame but who use other adjectives to discuss their work. Retzinger (1995, p. 1107) refers to these varying terms as "colloquialisms of shame". Goffman (1963), for example, uses the term embarrassment but fails to connect the emotion to shame even though in Scheff's view the connection is obvious. Scott (1990, p. 53) reminds us that "whenever one encounters euphemism in language it is a nearly infallible sign that one has stumbled on a delicate subject".

One way out of this confusion is to see shame as a class name for a wide variety of emotions or to use specific adjectives to illustrate the intensity of the feelings produced, thus Scheff (2003, p. 254) suggests embarrassment could be seen as weak and fleeting compared to shame which is likely to be stronger compared to humiliation which is likely to be more powerful and durable. The latter emotion also suggests that while shame may be experienced individually, humiliation involves the input of others who may humiliate those whose behaviour they deem shameful. When individuals assume they are judged shamefully, the impact is often deeply hidden but permeates almost every aspect of daily life (Goffman, 1967; Lynd, 1958). Individuals become aware that they are not matching the "normal" social identity required of certain roles and failure to meet these often locally produced and the internalised standards mean that they face the possibility of being discredited (Frost and Hoggett, 2008).

Drawing on Cooley, Scheff (2003, p. 244) also brings in pride as one of "the master emotions of everyday life". However, while Scheff's work on shame has been widely cited by a number of researchers exploring how shame stems from poverty and from particular "deviant" identities such as lone motherhood, the focus on pride is less developed. For example, Cooley (1922) argues that while every social interaction has the potential to incur shame, so too has every social interaction the ability to facilitate the opposite emotion of pride. Indeed, Cooley's (1922) discussion on the social nature of "self-sentiments" mentions both pride and shame as the two most significant core emotions, each being intimately connected. Both are generated, internalised and sustained at the level of the individual and collective. Both arise from self-monitoring and reflect the tendency of individuals to internalise how they assume they are perceived by others. In other words, whether or not individuals internalise feelings of pride or shame depends on how they imagine others perceive their possession of these traits. Cooley (1922, p. 184) argues that how individuals judge the perceptions of others gives rise to "some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification". Hence, while pride is sometimes regarded as an individual trait like shame, it is more generally motivated by external triggers emerging from how individuals see themselves in the minds of others. However, unlike shame, the individual internalisation of social indicators of pride may not only lead to the development of a positive self-image, but it could also enable shamed individuals to counteract their shaming. This pride–shame nexus has been insufficiently explored in the literature on how lone mothers on low incomes and/or welfare benefits cope with the challenges they face in their everyday lives. While the dehumanising features of shame and its corrosive impact on lone mothers' everyday lives have increasingly been recognised, the individual and social workings of pride and its role in counterbalancing shame's destructive and scarring tendencies have been less explicitly addressed. This paper responds to this vacuum by exploring the relevance and impact that the twin emotions of pride and shame have on lone mothers' conceptions of how they perform motherhood.

In welfare discourses, being a "good" mother is intricately linked to being a moral citizen with both being subject to politically and socially constructed ideologies. Since motherhood is aligned with moral judgements, ability or failure to meet taken-for-granted yardsticks of what the role implies can give rise to feelings of pride or shame. While lone mothers were

traditionally recognised and supported as full-time child-carers, the recent widening of conditionally has led to lone mothers being reconfigured as unemployed individuals who need to be "activated" to enter the labour market and become role models for their children. One of pride's triggers is paid employment. Hence, lack of employment even if coupled with caring for one's children has the potential to become a shameful identity. Yet, a host of research suggests that lone mothers' decisions on whether or not to enter the labour market are primarily linked to the perceived impact that working outside the household will have on mothering inside the household. Mothers' conceptions of pride and shame cannot be narrowly reduced to whether or not one engages in paid employment but taps into more pervasive discourses around how motherhood is defined and accomplished. This is not to suggest that "good" mothering is subjected to one overarching definition as Christopher (2012) reminds us that motherhood is socially, politically and culturally constructed. But understanding how lone mothers themselves define "good" mothering and the extent to which their definitions are endorsed or challenged by others needs to be taken into account. This paper adds to these debates by considering how mothers recount their experiences of shame across three domains: at the level of self, at the social level in terms of how they perceive they are defined by others in their social networks and at the level of wider society in terms of how welfare agencies and the media view mothers as "less than good" mothers. This is followed by a discussion on how mothers actively challenge these feelings of shame by maintaining pride in their attitudes towards their mothering abilities.

Background to the study

This article originates from interviews with 32 lone mothers with low household income, carried out in 2017–2018. Mothers shared their experiences of parenting alone at a time when labour market activation amongst the unemployed (including lone mothers) was an emergent strategic government target. A literature review of labour market activation policies and two focus groups with lone mothers were carried out first, so the perspectives of lone mothers as well as the current policy direction on labour market activation could inform the structure of the qualitative interviews. The names of all participants are anonymised and pseudonyms are used throughout.

Queen's University Belfast's School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work Research Ethics Committee granted ethical approval. The work also received separate, additional ethical approval from Barnardo's Research Ethics Committee. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Analysis was predominantly thematic, drawing on the framework approach (Spencer *et al.*, 2003) and involved three main stages: (1) data management (e.g. indexing, familiarisation with the raw data, descriptive coding of a set of themes, sub-themes and concepts); (2) descriptive accounts (e.g. refining the thematic framework, in-depth conceptual analysis of the interconnections between key themes and dimensions of analysis and typology development) and (3) explanatory accounts (e.g. exploring patterns of association, identifying linkages and exploration and explanation of why they exist). NVivo software and Microsoft Excel was used to manage and code the data. Two researchers checked the extent to which coding choices were agreed or replicated, indicating high interrater reliability.

Self-shame

In this section, the focus is on mothers' internalisation of feelings of shame. However, this is not to suggest that shame is an individual emotion that originates in the consciousness of the self. This approach that is prevalent in psychology identifies shame as primarily a "self-conscious emotion", which involves individuals engaging in self-reflection

(Tangney *et al.*, 2007). However, following Sheff (2003, p. 240), we argue that shame illustrates the "intimate links between self and society" and that it is both a psychological and social phenomenon. To Scheff, shame is a major aspect of conscience but it signals moral transgression, and therefore it emanates from social relationships and from the often unconscious norms that permeate those relationships. While motherhood remains a contested terrain and is subject to considerable public and political scrutiny and expert opinion, it results in the application of a range of prevailing social norms that often reflect assumptions about normative motherhood. According to Fine (2001), norms are rules that are tied to values but they are "ultimately performed by individuals within a social system" (Fine, 2001, p. 140). In other words, norms are not just followed and taught; they only become fundamentally meaningful when enacted within locally constituted environments. Goffman (1963) illustrates this in his work on stigma pointing out that while stigma may be experienced as an individual emotion, it emanates from the tendency for stigmatised individuals to share the same belief systems. This leads to individuals experiencing feelings of stigma or shame when they are unable to perform roles to the acceptable standards and levels they perceive that are held by their local communities and wider societies.

In this research, some lone mothers suggested how they internalised feelings of shame for simply being lone mothers and in the case of Susan whose husband died from motor neurone disease two years before the interview engaged in "impression management" (Goffman, 1967) by concealing her identity as a lone mother by continuing to wear her wedding rings:

> You're judged differently. I actually didn't take my wedding rings off even though I am a widow because people actually do look to check your hands.

In a similar vein, Geraldine, a lone mother of a four-year-old child talked throughout the interview of the stigma associated with lone motherhood and the strategies she utilised to try to dilute the stigma:

> I didn't want to be a single mother so that really affected me as well, the stigma and all. When I was out, I wanted to wear a ring on my finger because I was paranoid but it was just in my head and getting to terms with it. It took me a while to feel confident

Hence for some mothers, lone parenthood was regarded as a "spoiled identity" (Goffman, 1963), and some lone mothers attempted to avoid being stigmatised by engaging in avoidance tactics. This perceived negative assessment by others manifested itself in personal feelings of inadequacy, whereby some respondents tried to avoid being linked by association by disguising their lone parent status. Wedding rings provided visual signals of having a partner and avoided perceived negative assessments by others. While Geraldine suggests that she gradually gained confidence in being comfortable with her inability to display one of the most common visual markers of marital identity, the example reminds us of how shame is also an embodied experience.

Scheff (2003) argues that shame combines with other emotions such as resentment and guilt. These reactions, to some extent, mask and overshadow feelings of shame. For example, Julie is a 23-year-old lone parent with a child born prematurely who laments the loss of identity she has experienced since becoming a lone mother and expresses resentment at her inability to carve out an independent role:

> I'm a mammy and a worker and sometimes I'm going "Who's Julie". There is no Julie until Gerard (son) is 18. My whole life is just on hold.

For Julie, an important factor in avoiding shame was to demonstrate one's identity as a worker but being separated from her child led to her experiencing guilt overplacing economic gain over childcare responsibilities:

When I am going to work, Gerard is crying for me. It breaks my heart. I've been going to work for over a year and he's still crying and it makes me go into work in a bad mood because I'm going "God I'm such a shit mammy". I'm doing this all for money

Her narrative questions the simplistic assumption that values endorsed by the wider society are internalised by individuals regardless of their individual circumstances. In this example, Julie attempts to incorporate welfare ideologies around how work provides a good role model for children but experiences disquiet and guilt around being economically rational at the expense of developing a strong emotional bond with her child. This approach is also reflected in the work of Duncan and Edwards (1999) who argue that lone mothers are motivated by "gendered moral rationalities". Their rationality is not based on individualism but is linked to their interdependent relationships with others. The decisions they make on whether or not to enter work rests not only on economic incentives but also on how their children will be affected, what kind of childcare will be available and what kind of sacrifices working might entail for family life. Overall, lone mothers perceived that there was stigma attached with lone parenthood and several individually internalised this self-image, but these self-concepts, ultimately, emanated from how they saw themselves perceived immediately by others and those in the wider community.

Social shame

Shame is profoundly social involving judgment that acts as a key device in determining "person value" or person deficit (Skeggs, 2011). It involves "combining an internal judgment of one's own abilities" with "an anticipated assessment of how one will be judged by others" (Chase and Walker, 2013, p. 740). Since groups of individuals may find themselves in similar circumstances, collective shame could act as a bonding mechanism enabling stigmatised clusters to form barriers to the shaming practices of others. To Scheff (2008), this does not happen in practise because shame often goes unacknowledged, hence the web of social relationships connected through shaming remains invisible. While Scheff suggests this leads to shame producing alienation rather than solidarity, the analysis needs to go beyond this to account for the tendency of individuals who are shamed to engage in shaming others. In other words, there is also a bonding that takes place between those shaming that results in the alienation of those shamed. As Van Laar and Levin (2005) point out, those with a shared, shamed identity may hold negative stereotypes that back up and reinforce social stigma.

Susan, in the example discussed above, decided to keep wearing her wedding rings to show that she was a widowed lone mother rather than a never married lone mother. To her, the distinction was important but her reaction was premised on how she perceived never married lone mothers:

When you're standing at the school gates and there's women standing cursing and swearing and they're not married and they're on their own and they're shouting at their kids. . ..I don't want to be that stereotypical woman standing at the school gate with a fag hanging out of her mouth, chewing gum. That's not me. I just want to be left alone and not judged

Yet, Susan appears unaware that her desire not to be judged is based on how she judges other lone mothers. Hence, some lone mothers reproduce these discourses through attempts to distance themselves from these descriptions in which they specify that they are not like that but they know others who are. By distancing themselves from these stereotypical others, they seek to reclaim a respectable position but in the process reinforce the legitimacy of these deviant and shameful identities. This is exemplified in the contradictory positions taken by Louise, a mother of three children. She married at age 16 and talks about how she saw marriage as a life-long commitment and always envisaged that she would be married for life. As she puts it "I never set out to be a single mother". However, her husband had an affair and

now lives in England with his girlfriend, so he sees his children very irregularly. She has no job and struggles with health issues. She talks about how before her marriage breakup she would have judged lone mothers as making conscious decisions to become pregnant:

> Honestly, from I was growing up, if you'd see a wee girl pregnant you'd have thought obviously she's done that to get a house or if she's in a flat, "oh, she's had another one to get a house". Everybody talks about somebody. It's all "she's getting that and I've to go to work". That's the attitude I would have had because as I say I was working from I was 14. I wasn't entitled to anything but somebody who wasn't working seems to be getting things a hell of a lot quicker. . ..It's not that everybody's lazy. Some people are, in fairness, but not everybody is like that. I don't think it's fair that single mums get judged in a certain way.

Struggling to live on benefits and provide for her children's needs with minimal economic and social support from her former husband enabled Louise to re-evaluate her opinions, but she goes on to negatively discuss her sister who is also a lone parent for being seemingly content to live on benefits:

> You see, at the beginning, everybody makes an opinion on something they know very little about. . ..my sister went on Income Support. She had two kids. She always seemed to have money. She never had no struggles and I was working all the hours God sent. . .so I was looking at it then. I was saying, this is a frigging joke. It's alright for you. You sit there and don't have to worry. . ..I was envious. I was saying I wish I could sit about the house and get all the benefits you get and not have to worry about anything

While these discourses refer to the importance of paid employment, they also refer to how motherhood is understood and performed. Louise goes on to say as follows:

> Personally I never saw the benefit of paying somebody to mind my kids . . .. to me, if you have your children, you look after your children.

This attitude emerged as a common theme across the interviews. Mothers struggled with balancing the esteem to be gained through paid employment with the esteem to be gained from prioritising caring over earning. Making a "right" decision was subject to varying levels of social stigma and encouraged lone mothers to engage in discourses of distancing rather than solidarity. Working lone mothers distanced themselves from non-working mothers. Previously married mothers distanced themselves from never-married mothers. Mothers with one or two children distanced themselves from mothers who had larger families. Collectively, lone mothers discussed being subjected to societal shame, but rather than shame acting as a unifying factor fostering social solidarity, some mothers engaged in shaming others. As such stereotypes of lone mothers were reinforced rather than challenged.

Societal shame

The previous section suggested that shame is co-constructed (Kent, 2016). It is internally felt through feelings of inadequacy but externally imposed through public policy discourse, which can, in turn, undermine human dignity and social solidarity. This wider societal framing manifests itself in popular media discourses and is often institutionalised and legitimised within dominant neo-liberal welfare ideologies (Tyler and Slater, 2018). Lone mothers are aware of how they are often judged negatively by government agencies and the media (Harkness and Skipp, 2013). In a study carried out by Gingerbread (2009), 80% of lone mothers who were interviewed suggested that they saw themselves depicted as "bad mothers". Many attributed this to media portrayals of stereotypical lone mothers where lone motherhood is depicted as a homogeneous negative identity. Ella, one of the younger lone mothers with one child, discussed the impact of a popular television programme "*Little Britain*" depicting lone motherhood as a shameful identity through the "comic" character of Vicky Pollard:

Try and get rid of that stigma; that would be a good thing. You know I think people just think people are single parents, the Vicky Pollard thing you know. They watch all those programmes and that's what they see – well we're not, we're not like that at all. Most single parents aren't. Most people I know are not like that, they want to work but they can't because they've no childcare or they can't get a job that suits them.

Tyler (2008) argues that such programmes present lone mothers as a threat to the moral order, a threat to family values and a catalyst for the state to intervene to turn around their chaotic lives. For Tyler, the Vicky Pollard character is the embodiment of the term CHAV as a derogatory term for single mothers who are teenage pram pushers with an excessive appetite for consumer goods such as cheap jewellery. She argues (2008, p. 31):

"Chav slumming" doesn't pretend to be sociological, there is no ethnography, no gathering of knowledge about the poor, no charity, no reaching out to touch and no liberal guilt; there is nothing but disgust and pleasure.

The feelings of disgust and ridicule cultivated by the Pollard character feed into the popular imagination and depict lone mothers as having weak morals. Jensen (2014) refers to this kind of television as "poverty porn". She argues that their function is to "embed new forms of commonsense about welfare and worklessness". She draws on Bourdieu (1999) notion of "doxa" making the social world appear self-evident and requiring no interpretation. Hence, these programmes are not simply an aspect of voyeurism but they perform an ideological function in which they create a new commonsense around the need for welfare reform based on shaming the poor with lone mothers specifically targeted. Some of the lone mothers who took part in the research argued that these media portrayals led to them feeling degraded, looked down upon and judged negatively by others. These kinds of images serve to distance lone mothers from others. They create an "othering" of motherhood (Lister, 2004). They suggest that lone mothers are not like us. They have a different value system compared to the rest of us. Collectively, shaming such groups facilitates and reinforces the individual internalisation of shameful emotions.

Lone mothers are often subject to stigmatising welfare policy discourses that position them as shameful welfare subjects even when they are only partially dependent on benefits. This "stigma power" (Link and Phelan, 2014), suggests that some stigmatising processes are more effective than others. Lone mothers discussed their experiences with community support groups or welfare agencies that some described as dehumanising. Martha, a lone mother of two children, one aged two and the other aged seven months ,who has a part-time job talked about telephoning her local Citizen's Advice Bureau for advice on whether or not she would be entitled to sickness benefit as she was experiencing pregnancy sickness. The woman answering her call was unable to help and give her the information required and advised her to contact her employer. Martha was less concerned with the inadequate information she received than from the perceived negative attitude of the person who answered her call:

And it was like an older woman and I explained my situation. I just think they look down their nose at you sometimes. It's as soon as they hear my age (20) and like I'm sitting here with two kids and I'm 20, they just look down their nose at you so they do.

She goes on to talk about her transfer to welfare benefits and the shame she experienced when visiting the welfare benefits' office:

I even hated going into the benefit office. I just hated the thought of anyone knowing or seeing me. It was awful. I almost think when you go in they look down their nose "ach that wee girl's pregnant and she's in here claiming her bru" (welfare benefit) you know and it's not that situation at all

In a similar vein, Colette who is a lone mother of four children with no paid employment talks about being labelled at the outset as someone who did not want to work when her decision was based on the perceived negative impact that her former job had on her kids particularly her youngest daughter who cried after her when she left for work. She discussed how the "terrible guilt" she experienced caused her to give up her job. However, she perceives the personnel she interacts with in the welfare benefits office as regarding her decision as shameful:

> Then it's the way you are treated as well "oh you don't want to work then? Why not, why not?" You know, they're questioning you like they're looking down on you. That's how I feel anyway.

Geraldine, who was referred to earlier as feeling such shame on being a lone parent that she contemplated wearing a fake wedding ring discussed how she turned her life around by going back into education and how the "cultural capital" she gained enabled her to understand the sometimes complex language used by welfare support personnel:

> I think for stigmatisation and even sometimes the way you're spoken to. Because I remember one time ringing (welfare office) about the HB (Housing Benefit) last year and enquiring about getting rent for a deposit because I was moving. Whenever I phoned and the way I was spoke to "well it has to be for detrimental reasons". She wasn't really cheeky. It was just they don't have a way with people. I was thinking, like I'm ringing and I'm in poverty and don't have any money and maybe I don't have the ability to speak for myself let alone understand what detrimental means. You know to use that word. That really annoyed me too because I felt for people that say don't have the capability and don't know.

Wright (2013, p. 832) argues that these attitudes are not surprising. In her view, front line workers are "active moral agents who accomplish policy intersubjectively and interactively". Since these processes are social and related to shared moral frameworks, distinctions between the deserving and underserving poor are as likely to inform activation workers' everyday thinking as much as the general population. McDonald and Marston (2005) go further and argue that in the current climate, it would be much more surprising to find examples of front-line workers who refuse to adopt these dominant discourses. In a similar vein, Standing (2011, p. 35) argues that these discourses justify conditionality and weaken solidarity by implying that those on welfare are partly to blame for their situation due to behavioural traits such as irrationality and irresponsibility. While these perceptions typify attitudes towards welfare recipients in general, they also support popular notions around the type of parenting that will have beneficial consequences for children. The lone mothers who took part in the research suggested that their lone mother status was judged negatively and was regarded as likely to account for poor outcomes for their children.

Pride: moving beyond shame

Pride has the potential to dilute the impact of shame but, as outlined earlier, while the centrality of shame in research on welfare recipients has received widespread coverage, pride remains relatively unexplored. This section focusses on pride as a potential coping and resilience mechanism that can lead to a positive self-identity that can help counteract the negative impact of shame. It reflects the tendency for those shamed to engage in perpetual "struggles for value" (Loveday, 2016, p. 40). It also acknowledges that while individuals may be constrained in their ability to act, agency is always present. Pride enables lone mothers to resurrect a positive self-concept. It enables lone mothers to counterbalance the negative judgements accorded to them by others. Rather than accepting the blame that comes from shame, pride enables lone mothers to contest and challenge wider negative viewpoints that highlight their shortcomings rather than their strengths.

While pride operates across the three dimensions outlined above, the ability of the self to reshape and reclaim moral personhood illustrates how some lone parents' self-belief in their worth as mothers can counteract the lack of respect accorded by others within local networks and wider society (McDermott and Graham, 2005). While women continue to strive for recognition (Honneth, 1995) for their mothering role, they can influence the landscape where motherhood is practised, and in the process, they can enhance their self-respect through their perceived positive performance of their mothering role. Meeting the obligations of mothering around care for children enabled some lone mothers to demonstrate their capabilities as "good mothers" and enhance their self-belief that they were doing a good job (Smyth, 2012). Mothers pointed to their success in raising their children with a source of pride. These aspects of mothering enabled them to attach value to their caring practises and this acted as a defence against misrecognition. Some mothers questioned traditional notions of parenting as requiring two people suggesting that one of the core attributes of parenting was showing a good example and loving one's children and this could just as effectively be performed by one parent:

> My motivating factor is to be some kind of role model for Debbie (child). Better than her father will ever be. She needs one good parent (Lorraine, focus group interview).

> I want my son to know that I love him and he can talk to me about anything. I don't want him to get hurt, then questioning, do they not love me or what's wrong with me. I don't want him to be asking himself these questions. He can come to me and know that he's loved. He only needs me (Julie).

Mothers talked about their children in the present and future tense and their narratives express their hopes for their children's futures and how their performance as good mothers during their children's childhood paves the way for their future stable adult lives. In these ways, mothers through reconstructing these future orientated narratives demonstrated their present worthiness as caregivers. Emphasising one's personal qualities as "good mothers" was a strategy endorsed by lone mothers to reject or challenge the negative judgements of others.

Several lone mothers acknowledge that as a group, lone mothers were accorded a lack of respect. This was challenged in a number of ways. Paula, a lone mother with one child felt that there were negative connotations to the word "lone" and felt that the term "single" instilled a more positive image:

> I do n't like the term lone parent. I'd rather be called single parent. I had a daughter when I was 20 and her dad wasn't around for very long after that and I remember getting a letter from the hospital. I think it was sent out from Gingerbread, the lone parent group. And I remember being raging at being described as a lone parent because I didn't feel I was alone. I had friends and I had family and I didn't want to be described as that. You don't go around calling people married parents or divorced parents. I'm just a parent that's single.

In her view, lone parent was a form of shaming language carrying with it a "definitional implication for identity" (Lister, 2004, p. 113). Paula's preference for the term "single" has the potential to alleviate her subjective notion of shame through the focus on "single" as one type of parenting with the term change being a form of "naming tactics" (deCerteau, 1984) whereby individuals develop strategies to carve out alternative identities.

This notion of using a term such as "lone parent" to describe lone parents as if they were a homogeneous group was also challenged. For example, Louise, a lone mother with three children pointed out that many lone parents were previously married.

> It's important to get through to people that not everybody should be tarred with the same brush. It's not fair. You become a single mum and you're not as good as somebody else. You become a single mum and you're not a nice type of person, that you're lazy, that you only just don't want to work, that

you've only had kids because you want a house, you've only had kids because you want to sit on benefits. I think single mums are looked upon that they're all the same and we really aren't all the same. I've never met anybody else that's in the same boat as me, everybody's circumstances are different.

In this quote, Louise implies that these attitudes are commonplace. However, in challenging this viewpoint and drawing on her personal experience and the challenges she has had to overcome, she demonstrates that these portrayals should not be accepted uncritically. In a similar vein, Lily, a lone mother with two children, when asked if she had a chance to talk to politicians about lone parenthood said as follows:

I do think they (politicians) think of single mums as sitting in their houses on benefits, "she's lazy, she's this and that". And it's not like that at all. Yes, of course, there will be people like that, there's people like that everywhere but I'm not one of them people. I don't want to be sitting in my house for the rest of my days happy enough scrounging off benefits. That's not me. . . . . stop looking down your nose at us, everybody's different. Everybody has different situations going on in their lives and we're not all lazy scroungers. We do want to better ourselves. You're just making it too hard for us to be able to do that. . . . . I would say come and do my job and see how hard it is. It's not sitting in your house all day long watching TV. I would say maybe if you done what I did on a daily basis, you wouldn't be saying what you are saying.

These quotes suggest that lone mothers face an uphill struggle in their attempts to claim self-respect and recognition for their value as lone mothers. Their attempts to reclaim respectability were often expressed defensively rather than possessively. They were continually aware of how they were judged by others and hence had to repeatedly confront and challenge dominant negative discourses around the supposed negative character traits commonly associated with lone motherhood. In practise, this often translated into a form of "othering" whereby they emphasised that they had different moral values, and while this suggests their internalisation of wider popular and political rhetoric, they were able to turn these discourse around and transform themselves into "redeemable" selves capable of "re-engineering their personhood" (Skeggs, 2011). Mother–child relationships were central to their attempts to reclaim respectability. These relationships brought value into being. By emphasising their personal integrity as good mothers evident into their inter-personal relationships with their children, some lone parents were able to achieve self-pride. The performance of motherhood translated into a constant struggle for self and social esteem, and while mothers often failed to achieve validation from others, both within their social networks and wider social systems, their ongoing attempts to reaffirm their identities as good mothers acted as a mechanism to counteract the shame and stigmatisation that is often associated with lone parenthood particularly where this is performed in contexts of high unemployment or precarious employment.

Conclusion
This paper outlined how the twin concepts of pride and shame characterised lone mothers' accounts of their conception and performance of the mothering role. This pride–shame nexus has been under-researched and this paper offers important insights into the relationship between the two. Lone mothers experienced self, social and structural stigma in contexts where their moral worth was seen as shameful and these shaming processes were legitimatised and institutionalised through political narratives, welfare policy framing, media and popular discourses. However, pride and shame are dynamic emotions. They are subjected to being accepted, challenged, contested and transformed. Some lone mothers contested wider discourses by reframing their moral worth through valorising the often unrecognised value of their work as mothers. This is not to suggest that self-pride negates social shame. Pride and shame become strengthened and pervasive when they are

encouraged by the perceptions of others in one's local networks and wider institutional environments. At the same time, self-pride illustrates the ongoing agency of individuals to contest and dilute dominant discourses.

While shame can lead to the erosion of dignity, self-pride has the capacity to negate shame and contribute to and enhance dignity. Pride affords individuals an element of control over shaming. It enables individuals to contest and challenge wider negative viewpoints that highlight shortcomings of the self. While Goffman (1963) and Chase and Walker (2013) outline how being shamed and feeling shamed are intimately connected, they place core emphasise on the profoundly social nature of shame and pay less attention to how individual emotions such as pride may enable individuals to turn "person-deficits" into "person-values" (Skeggs, 2011). Some lone mothers employed pride in their role as mothers and in the process injected "some degree of positive feeling towards what is lacked" (Sayer, 2005, p. 160). This does not mean simplistically equating pride with the capacity to obliterate shame. While some lone mothers exhibited resilience in their rejection of the claims made by others in relation to their performance of good mothering, others were continually engaged in a search for respect as they actively faced everyday humiliations and struggled to maintain pride in the face of being considered as shameful by others. At the same time, pride enables lone mothers to be located as agentic selves with an element of power and control in terms of being able to stand up for themselves in the face of wider social judgements. Lone mothers can draw on their achievements as mothers to counterbalance the shaming aspects of lone parenthood.

While individual shame is often self-destructive, individual pride can enable powerless individuals to actively challenge the dominant discourses they are subjected to. Hence, while both pride and shame emanate from the social, their individual impacts are qualitatively different. Lone mothers talking with pride about how they bring up their children are not displaying arrogance but an ability to challenge neo-liberal ideologies that position them as having lesser value. While shame acts as a threat to the social bond by encouraging those labelled as shameful to garner respect through distancing themselves from others similarly labelled, pride can act as a buffer to the social shaming by others. While this may not lead to strengthened social bonds in that a process of distancing through pride was also apparent, nonetheless pockets of individuals challenging dominant discourses reduces the saliency and potency of these discourses to subsequently define how lone mothers are portrayed in the popular imagination. Chase and Walker (2013) for example, lament that the "othering" tendencies for those shamed to engage in shaming leads to a fragmented "us". But this fragmentation may enable powerless individuals to individually and actively challenge the dominant discourses they are subjected to.

There are lessons here for social policy-makers. All the women in this research, at one time or another had to engage in policy interventions to make them "work-ready". Neo-liberal welfare ideologies often see shame as having a positive rather than negative influence on welfare subjects as it can promote socially responsible behaviour particularly around encouraging individuals to demonstrate a strong work ethic through commitment to paid employment as an indicator of responsible citizenship (Van Vliet, 2008). Hence, shame can be utilised instrumentally to discourage the claiming of welfare benefits (Spiker, 1984). These neo-liberal paradigms that highlight the moral deficiency of welfare subjects illustrate the role of power in transforming self and social shame into institutional components (Eriksen, 2019). Hence, shame has strong moral undertones and performs a regulatory moral function. Yet, if self-pride in mothering was supported and endorsed through public and policy discourses, lone mothers could be more effectively enabled to confront self and socially perceived personal failings than current responses, which for the most part continue to stigmatise and shame them as particularly problematic welfare subjects.

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