

Emulation, not identification: Sartorial styles, domestic skills and maternal discipline

Terrestrial television gives us access to numerous television channels, and the list of television stations in the United Kingdom available on satellite and cable systems offers more variety again, with many scheduling 24-hour programming. And in this steady stream of television coverage one might expect mothers in the audience to come across or seek out familiar, recognisable and relatable maternal figures. From this estimation then, it is crucial that we listen to these women as they describe the ways in which they relate to mothers on the small screen and listen carefully when they explain, in detail in many cases, why they do not and cannot identify with the fictional characters and factual personalities that are presented in the schedules. Responses in this chapter relate to a question that I posed in the middle of the questionnaire, namely 'Are there any mothers on television that you can relate to?' with the additional help text enquiring 'Do you feel that you are like these women or can think of experiences that you have seen reflected in the mothers that you see on television? Are you able to identify with their domestic space, relationships, friendships, mothering skills or working environment?'

No, not really and not at all: Struggling to relate to maternal depictions

A number of women blurred the lines between their favourite fictional mothers and their ability to relate to these women, with recognition being a key part of their investment in one character amidst the many and ostensibly

varied maternal protagonists seen on screen in the contemporary period. However, it was surprising to find that when asked more directly about any sense of recognition or identification, the majority of women in the audience said that they could not see their maternal choices and mother-work practices depicted on screen, and answered 'no' or a variation of that word when asked.

Many made it clear that they were unable to relate to televisual mothers because they saw these women as predictable stock characters and one-dimensional stereotypes who lived at either end of the maternal spectrum. Indeed, many respondents made the point that motherhood is rarely predictable, straightforward or constant, and that parental thoughts and practices have to adapt daily to changing sibling, family, educational, social, financial and physical dynamics, which were not, they suggested, being shown on contemporary popular programming. The overwhelming majority of women who completed this questionnaire made the point that there were no mothers on screen who could be said to reflect their experiences of motherhood. This is not to say that they did not watch maternal protagonists or that they were unable to take pleasure in viewing fictional mothers and television personalities, but rather, that their enjoyment was removed from any sense of personal identification or more meaningful investment. This question was answered by all women and in the majority of cases these women went on to describe, in some detail, the reasons why they were unable to, or felt discouraged from trying to relate to, mothers on television.

No.

None.

No, never.

Not really.

Not usually.

Not particularly.

It would seem not!

No, haven't found any.

Not that I can think of.

No one at the moment.

No, I can't think of any.

No, they're not realistic.

No, many are not achievable.

No, I think we're all flawed in some way.

Not particularly – realise they are manufactured!

No. No one person could ever get everything right.

No. There is not one mother that stands out to me.

I cannot think of any on screen mothers that I relate to.

No. Not really. That might be because I'm just a bit weird.

I haven't thought about this before. No one comes to mind.

No. Most of the time they are unachievable or unrealistic to me.

Mothers in TV shows are either portrayed as negligent or perfect.

None that I've seen but my viewing habits are perhaps a little narrow.

I can't think of any, which probably says a great deal about the topic.

I feel they bear no relation to my life so I am not interested in watching.

Nope, I usually find those kind of aspirational role models quite annoying ...

Most mothers ... are either too mumsy or trying too hard to look like teenagers.

American sitcom mothers are harassed, frazzled and normally play minor roles.

Not really, I think it depends on your own experience of having and being a mum.

I find most representations of mothers on television to be reductive or unrealistic.

Not on telly. I rather concentrate on real life mothers as I find telly mothers fictional.

I actually can't think of a fictional portrayal of motherhood that I identify with on television.

I can't instantly think of anyone; it may be that I relate more to a blend of different people.

I'm struggling to think of a mum on television that I actually like. They are all so unrealistic.

Women on television seem to lose their own sense of identity when they become a mother.

Many of the situations mothers are depicted in feel clichéd – going out covered in baby sick etc ...

Not off the top of my head, I can't really say that there is one person or character I can relate to.

No. I really don't feel there are any characters on television who reflect real modern motherhood on my terms.

I really don't like watching celebrity mums on TV as they can give an unrealistic view of what motherhood is like.

When shows undermine women and make it funny, it pisses me off. It reinforces negative stereotypes and agendas.

I generally feel like mothers on television are either stuck in a relationship, undermined, or left to clean up the messes.

No, I can't think of any such figures in the programmes that I watch. Perhaps because they would not be amusing characters.

None – not found anyone I can relate to. I can't think of any parents on television with a family similar to mine at present.

None. I believe we all plough our own furrows in life, and do not seek to compare my circumstances with those in the public eye.

Negative images of motherhood are everywhere on television, it somehow seems normal to watch women who are terrible caregivers.

... serves to fuel maternal guilt with the stereotype that women will always choose a family over her career ... as you can't have both.

No, not really. They either have cleaners, nannies, and lots of available money, or are portrayed as victims/stereotypical 'dippy' women.

No. I think my life is pretty common – two kids, I work part time while my partner works full time, but I don't see 'me' represented on television.

Most mothers on television are portrayed negatively, they are not showing the reality of what it is to have to care for young children, if at all.

... benefit families at one end then people like the Kardashians at the other. I don't remember seeing much about people I can relate to.

Most don't seem to be shown in a balanced light and are either far too 'good' and therefore hard to live up to or too 'bad' and therefore unrealistic.

Depends on my mood. Reminds me how these woman are set apart due to their enormous wealth. I don't think their lives relate to most women at all.

No. So little of the representations of mothers is about them being a mum – it's usually about being a household manager. They are two very different things.

Women are usually portrayed as home makers or domineering characters even if they also have a job. Either that or they are tough, unkind, business women.

... too unreal. Story lines have to be very exciting to keep viewers watching and do not reflect the average family at home. Things are always over exaggerated.

I have never thought about this before, but now that I do, I realise that most of the programmes that I watch tend to focus on women who are terrible mothers.

I think mothers are represented as extremes, either the extreme hippy, the extreme hands off mother. I don't feel that there is a true and honest representation on television.

I generally find portrayals of mothers traditionalist and unrealistic, stay at home mums or super-mums, not in between, there is nothing to relate to in such tired stereotypes.

... patronising and make inappropriate assumptions about how our roles are split and how we relate to our husbands. Many are also ridiculous with their attention to stereotypical concerns.

No, I take everything I watch with a pinch of salt and don't aspire to be like fictional/unreal expectations. I have always done what I think is right for darling son and I, not what I think others expect of me.

No-one jumps to mind sadly. There are people such as MPs who are seen on TV, who are rare examples of people who combine a good career, intelligence and motherhood... but no characters or presenters that I can think of.

You do see more parenting of teenagers on TV, and storylines of bullying ... but family life and motherhood has all sorts of other issues from birth until they fly the nest (including those that don't seem to want to leave home!) that are not reflected in fictional television.

No, I think that most people in the celebrity world either promote their ideal life in magazines etc. that in reality aren't actually like that or their lifestyle isn't achievable for me (I don't have the money/childcare to go on expensive breaks, do fitness classes/have beauty treatments).

At no time do we see families playing board games with the television off, having a Sunday roast dinner at the table, or making salt dough for the children, going for walks or visiting their grandparents. I wish there could be more love instead of cheating or fighting.

No, It can be misleading to look up to the idealistic view of the television mum as it is exactly that, television, and it is made with a view or target audience and with a narrative that is being told, I believe looking at family and friends will give you a better aspirational ideal.

No one comes to mind. I admire most mothers from all walks of life, those that have more challenging situations than most, the part time mum, the, stay at home mum, to the full-time working mum. I am more inspired by mothers I know rather than mothers I don't know on TV.

They are often unrealistically glamourised (e.g. played by actresses not actually old enough to be the mother of their character's children) and restricted to stereotyped clichés of 'the

working mother' or the 'stay at home mom'. If they get any storyline at all it's generally restricted to the old standard of the affair or almost affair.

Not really. Don't identify with their lives. Having teenagers, I feel they invariably get it wrong when it comes to mothers of teens in sitcoms, for example. They overdo the laughs. Every mother – whichever age group her children is in, has her own moments that, when I hear about them and experience them, make me laugh much more than those presented on television.

No. Where are the TV shows that show the reality of when your child screams their way round Tesco, or hits another child with a brick at the stay and play? Or even better, those lovely times in the woods or out and about when they do something so amazing you just have to stop and stare at their brilliantness? There's none of the highs and lows – just a whole load of bland.

With working mums in particular I feel television does carry on the very dangerous stereotype that the price for having it all (i.e. children and a job) is to do it all ourselves. That a man's working day ends when he gets home, but a woman's must be 24 hours a day. And even when the women are 'allowed' to do stuff outside of the home on television, you never actually see them outside of the four walls of the home.

Generally, no. These fictional television mothers generally never have to think about childcare or babysitters, their partner/husband will be back in time so they can go to whatever appointment they need to get to. You rarely see a fictional character trying to do the weekly food shop with two small children, trying to juggle work around home-life (and vice versa), struggling with car seats, coping with sickness bugs etc ...

No. I see very little on television that I identify with, or that reflects my experiences of motherhood. I work four days a week and my husband works five. We split the household and children tasks equally – it suits us temperamentally and practically. The only representations I see of working mothers are the harassed, overworked mum who works all day, and then comes home and does all the housework too while the husband hangs about being a bit useless. The implication being that she has an extra child to look after, manage and get under her feet, rather than a partner that she runs her life and home with.

Not really. Although perhaps this is because I tend to be watching Peppa Pig these days ... and no I do not identify with mummy pig. It winds me up that Miss Rabbit (the only character without childcare responsibilities) does EVERY single job available. And you never see daddy pig cooking. Am I off topic here?

For those readers unaware of the 200-plus episodes that make up the *Peppa Pig* (2004–) phenomenon, Miss Rabbit does indeed do every conceivable job in the cartoon swine world, including school bus driver, ice cream seller, supermarket checkout operator, museum worker, ticket seller at windy castle, shoe shop worker, operator of car crusher at the local recycling centre, dental nurse, train driver, firefighter, librarian, helicopter pilot, and no the respondent is not off topic here. *Peppa Pig* and its surrounding merchandising bring joy to toddlers and infants alike, but it is clear that traditional sitcom characters remain in play in this animated universe. The female character without dependents is the one who routinely contributes to the public sphere, and although both mummy and daddy pig are both seen working, it remains mummy pig who routinely takes control in the domestic arena.

Mothers in the audience appeared to speak in agreement when they commented that their day-to-day lives were not reflected in the shows on screen, be they children's programming, family texts or post-watershed titles; irrespective of genre, schedule or format. Women critiqued existing maternal representations in part because they refused to show the lived experience of early motherhood, and in part because they often removed children, and by default, the mothering role from popular programmes:

... mothers seem to have optional children, e.g. in dramas where the children are only present when relevant to plot but absent without explanation for the rest of the time.

I find it interesting how people in the public eye seem to be here there and everywhere without their kids. I find this difficult as a stay at home mum. There seems to be a lot of famous people who rely on a nanny. How our lives differ!!

I find that family life is not portrayed realistically in television at all. It might be to do with the complication of getting children to act, but children are not featured much ... characters often become mothers and still find time for the lives that they were living before ... who bears no relation to real mothers.

Characters are always unrealistic – the baby/child will be in the storyline at certain times but at other times, often for extended periods of time, the baby/child will be nowhere to be seen and not even referred to! Whereas all parents I know never have this luxury

– their baby/child is there or on their mind in terms of who is looking after them and when they need to pick them up etc. ALL the time!

... actor children just don't behave like the real thing as they are usually incidental to the story while for a real mother, her children are central to her story.

A number of women sought to make sense of the limited depictions, noting that their lives were not reflected because the subject matter was deemed too dull, repetitive or lacking in drama, glamour or escapism:

Real mothers' lives are not glamorous or interesting.

I am a married, full-time working mother with two children under five and each morning feels like a challenge in itself. I am constantly feeling guilty that I am a disappointment to my colleagues, children and husband. I rarely see mothers in this situation on television, or at least I have not come across any that I readily identify with. To be honest, even if I did see my own situation and stresses replayed on screen, I wonder if I would either recognise the similarity or relate to it. Perhaps I would find it unappealing to watch if it was too close to my own situation.

I could semi-relate to Miranda from Sex and the City even though her domestic and financial situation was far removed from my own, I empathised with the guilt and frustration that she expressed at having to compromise on what she saw as both her career and domestic duties. I have no housekeeper or nanny so my sympathies only went so far, and my sympathies morphed into frustration during the film of the same title when Miranda asks Charlotte 'How do mothers without help cope'. How indeed! I guess that a slightly more 'realistic' version of the career/domestic juggling act would be a little less glamorous and a little less of interest to a mainstream audience without the fabulous clothes, dwellings, lifestyle and social events.

I don't think that people really want to see the true face of motherhood, the two hours a night sleep, clothes that if you are lucky fit you let alone clean and roots that come down to your ears where you are deprived of money and time, something the portrayal of mums on television do not show.

Storylines may not be seen as interesting if focusing on the tasks a new mum has to carry out day-to-day ... Examples of this can be seen in Friends and How I Met your Mother.

These viewers experience frustration and disappointment because their lives are not being depicted on screen, and yet, they also acknowledge that their families' trials may not be deemed appropriate material for mainstream audiences. Some respondents went as far as to suggest that 'realistic' depictions of motherhood and motherwork might actually be off-putting for a mother experiencing her own chaotic domestic environment. The assumption here is that the minutia of domestic routines and maternal responsibilities is both unwelcome and unpalatable, which is surprising given the content of much critically and commercially successful programming that takes domestic concerns as their focus within a myriad of popular and niche genres and formats. One might go as far as to suggest that these women are devaluing their everyday skills and maternal competencies and overlooking the emotional narratives and continuous dramas that are played out in their seemingly mundane mothering practices. Indeed, commercial broadcasters might want to take note of all those maternal voices who are unable to find a mother on screen that they can relate to; after all, to offer these women an authentic rather than a one-dimensional stereotype could prove popular, and those women who seem convinced that they would neither recognise nor particularly enjoy watching more realistic maternal depictions might find themselves surprised by the fascination, interest and investment in the details of women's stories in contrast to those dramas on offer in extant family and domestic programming.

Moreover, while the paucity of recognisable maternal images might prove financially viable for commercial television, it is crucial that these women are fully represented on public service programming. The BBC, for example, tells audiences that they can expect their productions to 'reflect the many communities that exist in the UK' – be they based on faith, language, geography or shared interest (BBC 2014). Although the definition given in their example of 'shared interest' is sport, so too motherhood might be understood as a defined community with a particular focus, one which is currently not being appropriately or responsibly depicted according to numerous women in the popular audience. And although representing diverse communities to the broader nation is not considered the most important priority for licence fee payers according to the BBC Trust's recent research, it is said to remain a crucial part of their public purpose,

and as such, the corporation might do well to look again at its current representations of motherhood throughout their schedules.

Seminal research produced by the professional lobbying group and gay rights charity, Stonewall, highlighted problematic representations of homosexuality on the BBC. By conducting a detailed content analysis and subsequent focus group research, Stonewall discovered that there was a disturbingly small number of gay lifestyles or life experiences depicted on screen, and that those few representations that did exist relied on negative assertions and homophobic commentary, albeit presented under the guise of humour (Cowan and Valentine 2006). The suggestion here was that homosexuality was being ignored or negatively portrayed in public service programming, and one might suggest that many mothers who responded to my questionnaire felt similarly overlooked or misrepresented within and beyond the public service remit. It is both surprising and disconcerting to find that although motherhood remains the most common shared experience amongst women, the majority of these women found nothing and no one to identify with on the schedules. I am aware that as I write the words women, mothers, motherhood and motherwork there is the suggestion that I am referring to a single, monolithic and stable maternal figure that crosses all age, ethnic, class and geographic boundaries. I am not, of course, trying to suggest motherhood is a unifying experience or that there is not a myriad of maternal thoughts, behaviours and practices, but what is clear here is that women from a range of different age, economic and domestic backgrounds deem themselves invisible on screen.

Women made the point that the representations of motherhood on television were pitched at the extremes, with maternal figures being routinely written, and written off, as one-dimensional figures with little scope for growth and little room for complex characterisation. At one end we have the figure of the professional working women remaining just that, with storylines revolving around her working life with the occasional nod to the struggles of juggling the personal and professional arena. At the other end we have the well-meaning stay at home wife and mother who struggles to discipline her children and hapless husband with the occasional failed foray into the world of work. There is very little sense that these women might be, have been, or look to be both the stay at home and

the professional woman, with storylines exploring more seriously (with or without comedic relief) the difficulty of balancing a myriad of personal and public responsibilities. The television schedules do present varying levels of economic viability and family stability, showcasing differences in lifestyle, dress codes and parental conduct depending on the programme in question, with several shows foregrounding generational differences between grandmother, mother and daughter, but within the confines of the character biography for each show, there is often little in the way of complex character development for the mother. Storylines are introduced, characters move from a state of equilibrium to disequilibrium and back again as demanded in a linear narrative, but mothers rarely develop within or beyond their defined maternal role.

It is not uncommon for reality programming, situation comedy, lifestyle shows, dramedy or more traditional dramatic genres and formats to remain on our screens for several years at a time, and this is where television must embrace its distinctiveness as a mainstream entertainment medium. Writers have the luxury of time, time to develop fully rounded, multi-dimensional and multi-tasking women who are, at varying times, able to present their maternal instincts, motherwork efforts and broader professional ambitions or skills. Soap opera remains one of the few television genres that is routinely championed for looking beyond stock characters and predictable maternal stereotypes for the simple reason that popular characters are seen too frequently and for such an extended period of time that it actually makes it difficult to script within the confines of a strict and unchanging biography (Hobson 2003).

Although many respondents found recent maternal storylines on the soap opera to be too depressing, harrowing, troubled and traumatic to be understood as recognisable or even favourable due to the genre's recent attempt to attract a broader audience demographic, the genre's ability to write characters who are difficult to classify or categorise might be considered a useful starting point for programme makers keen to embrace more rounded maternal figures. Moreover, one might choose to look to what Amanda Lotz has recently referred to as the 'male-centred serial' for examples of character development and complexity. Representations of masculinity have historically dominated fictional entertainment, and

television is no exception; yet Lotz is not using the term 'male-centred' to simply foreground a set of shows that have a male protagonist or a slew of male characters at the forefront of the narrative, rather, she coins this term to refer to those contemporary cable productions that tell stories about men in both their personal and professional roles, in order to examine 'the entirety of men's lives' as they are presented in the text (Lotz 2014). Recent titles such as *The Sopranos* (1999–2007), *Scrubs* (2001–10), *The Shield* (2002–08), *Nip/Tuck* (2003–10), *Rescue Me* (2004–11), *Boston Legal* (2004–08), *Entourage* (2004–11), *Dexter* (2006–13), *Psyche* (2006–14), *Californication* (2007–14), *Sons of Anarchy* (2008–14), *Breaking Bad* (2008–13), *Hung* (2009–11), *Men of a Certain Age* (2009–11) and *The League* (2009–) are all said to focus on the changing and conflicted depictions of masculinity and indeed, in many cases, fatherhood, something currently said to be lacking in female defined texts. The fact that I struggle to write the phrase 'female-centred' drama is telling and may be an issue bound up with the lack of real, meaningful, difficult and complex representations of women as mothers, and of women as more than mothers in the contemporary television landscape.

I am not suggesting that women do not find pleasure, escapism or comfort in existing representations of motherhood on the small screen; indeed, the comments supplied by hundreds of women to my questionnaire and a cursory glance at the commentaries and reviews provided by mothers and audiences to television forums on maternal networking sites makes it clear that there is much to admire and amuse on screen, but there remains a proportion of the maternal population who remain unconvinced by, and cold towards such depictions. One might suggest that the lack of convincing, believable or realistic representations of motherhood might be consistent with a patriarchal set of creatives behind the scenes, and although this might seem a simplistic leap, it is worth noting that in American television women comprise only 27 per cent of all 'individuals working as creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors and directors of photography' with only one in four women taking on a writing position in prime time American television in the 2013–14 season (Lauzen 2014). Women comprise the majority of television audiences on both sides of the Atlantic (Ryan, cited in Ryan 2011), and as such, it is surprising to find that

men continue to outnumber women as writers. One might tend to think it an advantage to have equal numbers of men and women working on developing new and existing programmes in order to present a depth of personal and professional experience. And yet in reality the industry is anything but an equal opportunities employer:

Between 2006 and 2009, some 5,000 women (compared to 750 men) left the TV industry. This suggests that the demands of family life are convincing some women that their TV careers cannot continue. This is clearly unfortunate for those mums who want to carry on working in an industry they love, but it is equally concerning for the industry itself. The audience is not accurately represented, and it is also losing a considerable amount of valuable talent and experience. (Smith 2015)

And likewise,

... writers talk about how in tough economic times and with their business model up in the air, networks go for the familiar, which means more dudes. And some showrunners think having one woman writer is enough, though that's not easy on the sole woman in the room. One writer said she had worked on a show that fired the only woman on staff every few months, and compared her own experience to 'walking around with a target on your back'. (Carmon 2011)

When asked to comment on the reality of the gender bias in the industry, writers 'offered various interpretations, ranging from economic pressures to old-fashioned sexism. Taken together, their observations paint a nuanced picture of a professional environment that's as stubbornly resistant to change as any in America' (Ryan 2011). It has been suggested that job opportunities for writing staff have been decreasing since the writers' strike and the recession, and that 'when jobs are harder to come by, it's minorities, including women, who are disproportionately impacted' (ibid.). It is difficult not to make connections between the lack of female creatives and the lack of what some audiences see as convincing and relatable maternal figures on screen. However, this creative inequality is not restricted to the American networks; indeed, it is Britain where the gender disparity is more noticeable. Exhaustive research has looked at 'every scripted show that aired six or more episodes in America in the last three years on any broadcast network' and concluded that out of the 154 American television shows looked at, only

one employed no female writers, 0.6 per cent of programming' (Glymore 2013). The equivalent research on British television, namely, looking at each 'scripted show that aired six or more episodes in Britain in the last three years on ... BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Three, BBC Four, ITV, and ITV2' concluded that 'of the 34 non-auteur British television shows ... looked at, 7 employed no female writers at all' equivalent to 20.6 per cent (ibid.). And although American shows may produce more episodes in which to hire male or female writing staff, of the 154 American titles looked at 'only 11 took more than 6 episodes to get to their first female writing credit. In Britain, 13 shows took more than 6 episodes to get to their first female credit—and that's not counting the 5 shows that had more than 6 episodes but no female writing credits at all' (ibid.). What has caused genuine outrage amongst feminist television scholars in recent months is the fact that *Doctor Who* (1963–) show-runner, Steven Moffat has not hired a single female writer in his three-year, 42-episode tenure (ibid.; Baker-Whitelaw 2014).

I am not making any bold assertions that women are better writers or are more suited to writing about pregnancy or motherhood than men, but one might look to make links between the two. The fact is that women are greatly underrepresented in the television industry, and many women in the audience feel that their lived experiences of motherhood are not being realistically presented on screen. Indeed, popular and long-running screenwriter and television producer Shawn Ryan makes the point that in order to appeal to the female demographic, 'it would be an advantage to have greater numbers of women on staff' (Ryan, cited in Ryan 2011). This is not to say that motherhood is being ignored or that relevant themes or meaningful storylines are not being presented; rather, the maternal characters are not relatable or recognisable in and of themselves.

Women in the audience suggested, repeatedly, that they recognised maternal scenes, could relate to mothering conflicts and identified with specific motherwork situations as they were presented on television, but made it clear that they were unable to make sense of the character or wider narrative context. In short, they could identify with the representation of toddler tantrums and sleep deprivation for example, or the notion of 'having it all' as women struggle to combine professional success with maternal responsibilities, but it was the small-scale experience being presented, or

what one mother referred to as '*bits and pieces of programmes*' rather than any character or characters that they could relate to here:

No, not the characters, but some of the situations ... responsibilities, the frustrations and concerns.

I can't think of one mother in particular whom I can relate to but there are instances when watching a programme I feel a connection.

I can't say that I've ever especially related to any mother in any TV show, but there are small parts of many programmes that resonate.

It is less a relation to any character or programme, and more a relation to particular traits that I can acknowledge. Also if they have gone through a certain issue, i.e. sleepless nights, then you can see the similarities in how you deal with it and how they do.

Recognisable behaviours: Toddler tantrums

Mothers commented on their ability to recognise and on occasion relate to particular scenes, sequences, and storylines as they dealt with the theme of toddler tantrums and misbehaving children, with the suggestion that viewing children's (scripted or otherwise) antics made them feel comforted in terms of their own parental struggles with wilful children acting out the rite of passage commonly referred to as the 'terrible twos' (Sullivan 2014).

Although many parents and much parenting advice speak of the 'terrible twos' as a social and emotional developmental stage, there is said to be little evidence to support the notion of the 'terrible twos' *per se*. Tantrums and mayhem can begin at any age, and they do not end as a toddler reaches their third birthday, rather, experts tell us that 'most toddlers begin testing limits shortly after their first birthday and continue until about age four' (Onderko 2014). With this in mind, some parents experience years of toddler tantrums, and depending on the number of siblings, some mothers

might find themselves living with wilful children for over a decade as one child grows out of this phase and another, younger sibling, enters into it. In order to guide parents through these brief or drawn-out tantrum periods, well meaning manuals and online resources take the time to remind us of the joy that young children bring into our lives while offering helpful hints on how to put an end to problematic behaviour:

Toddlers get much bad press, with talk of tantrums, whining and the terrible twos. The truth is, most of the time they're terrific and kind. Here's how to cope with the bad times and make the most of the good. To help you get through the more difficult times, and to put things in perspective, think about all the wonderful aspects of toddlerhood. You could even write a list to refer to when tantrums and tears get you down ... Most toddlers cry a lot less than when they were babies. You should be getting a better night's rest as sleep patterns are established – although some sleep problems can persist during this time. You may have more time for yourself than you had when she was a baby. With your toddler around, you have an endless supply of cuddles and affection. Her zest and enthusiasm for new discoveries can be infectious. Watch her play with a puzzle and enjoy her delight as she manages to make a piece fit. Her perseverance, trying things over and over again, and her sheer determination to master new skills can be thrilling. Your toddler's love of silliness and laughter often allows you to be a child again. Her funny little sayings and expressions can be an endless source of delight. (BBC Parenting, cited in babycentre 2012)

Toddlers and young children are prone to tantrums as part of their development. After all, they are finding their independence and forming their own opinions while struggling to express themselves, which leads to frustrations for both parent and child. Although many parents might value and indeed seek out advice from childcare experts, experienced parents, friends and family, with the thread of mumsnet as just one example paying testament to that fact, other women, such as those who responded to my questionnaire take comfort in seeing children play out their toddler tantrums on screen, be they fabricated or part of a more realistic narrative. For mothers in the audience who have long ago experienced toddler tantrums, viewing such behaviours on television appears almost nostalgic, with women reminiscing about their own experiences of that parenting stage. For women who are currently experiencing this stage of toddler development, they appear to take comfort in what they see as real, authentic and believable tantrums

when they themselves are struggling with a stubborn child. Although many parents are keen to share stories of irritabilities at play-dates and tantrums in supermarkets, sometimes mothers can feel that they alone are experiencing difficult toddler behaviour, especially when no other children are causing a disturbance at the checkout. Therefore we can understand why these women are interested in seeing storylines that focus on this stage of toddler development. In response to the BBC's well-meaning advice that sees 'zest and enthusiasm' in place of flared tempers and tantrums:

BBC Parenting – they're kidding, right? This is not the truth for us at the moment!!! I've had mummiiiiiiiiii mummiiiiii all day getting annoyed because he can't get things right. Frustrated because I don't always understand him, upset because he wees and poos in his pull up by accident and wants me but then doesn't ARGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

And another:

He cried his way through his first hair cut which is understandable but that tired him out so when I had to nip to Sainsbury's and get flowers he had the biggest strop ever. He wanted to hold the basket. Fine. But he didn't want to go the right way. He wanted to hold the flowers. Fine. But he wanted to carry them by the stems and drag the heads on the floor behind him. Then he actually punched, hit and stomped on the flowers, threw them at me and screamed as if I'd just slapped him. This was all in the queue. I was obviously pretty embarrassed but I think held it together pretty well, I just ignored him while holding his hand so he couldn't bugger off. I let him drag the battered flowers back to the car then he threw himself in the middle of the carpark road twice. So he got shoved over my shoulder and practically thrown in the car. Then he cried so much he went blue. So I went for the best option of cranking the music up and leaving him to it, he stopped straight away lol, then cheered up as soon as we got home to daddy. Grrr.

The thread continues:

My son ... is a tantrum thrower and screams and cries at everything. He used to be a fantastic sleeper, 12+ hours solid from 3 months old, now getting him in to bed is the first struggle and now he gets up in the night too for some reason. More time to myself? Er no, he gets up earlier, doesn't nap and needs constant stimulation. Puzzles usually end up with him throwing it all on the floor in a huff because he can't do it. I would just love a nice kiss and cuddle but this kid doesn't sit still for a second and

would NEVER just sit there and cuddle. Yeah, so it's a load of tosh in this house as far as we're concerned!!

And continues:

... with my daughter doing anything involves 'mummy do it, mummy help little bit' when mummy really is trying to submit a vat return and a no is met with more fake tears than a TOWIE girl and a swoon on the floor followed by a delicate chin knock as she cannot commit to a full head bang bless her.

One blogger even went to the effort to correct the BBC parenting advice in line with her own maternal experiences:

Most toddlers cry *and moan* a lot *more* than when they were babies. You *should* be getting a better night's rest as sleep patterns are established – *although you are probably not*. You *will* have *less* time for yourself than you had when she was a baby. With your toddler around, you have an endless supply of *tantrums, snot, tears, slaps in the face and the occasional cuddle or kiss if you ask them enough times for one*. Her zest and enthusiasm for new discoveries can be *irritating when you just want to go for a wee*. Watch her play with a puzzle and *enjoy the five minutes of quiet* and her delight as she manages to make a piece fit after *repeatedly shoving it in the wrong place then throwing it in temper*. Her perseverance, trying things over and over again, and her sheer determination to master new skills can be thrilling. Your toddler's love of silliness and laughter often allows you to be a child again. Her funny little sayings and expressions can be an endless source of delight and *embarrassment*. (Babycentre November 2009 birth club 2012, italics in original)

Such comments are reminiscent of the delight, relief and camaraderie experienced by those mothers who completed my questionnaire, as they demonstrated an interest in viewing toddler tantrums and difficult behaviours on the small screen:

I do take an interest when seeing a mother dealing with a tantrum or kid behaviour problem.

Storylines that show a tantrum being set off by the tiniest thing are the ones that I can always relate to.

Desperate Housewives has shown some utterly convincing toddler tantrums, it's always the small thing that triggers them.

It is difficult for any child to act out a convincing tantrum, when you see them on those reality programmes you know that they are real upsets.

Outnumbered has shown some classic examples of children behaving badly over a range of ages, each one looks believable and something I can relate to over the years.

Seeing a full on tantrum is really reassuring, I know we all have our own horror stories, but seeing it played out on television makes me realise it is totally normal and nothing to be concerned about.

Some of the toddler tantrums on the 'nanny' programmes are staggering, watching them week by week is a guilty pleasure. I feel cruel finding pleasure in another mothers' difficulties but it makes me feel a little better when my own children decide to take a tantrum turn.

Toddler tantrums are played out in minute detail on parenting reality shows ... there is something entertaining in watching young children break into fits over the tiniest thing ... it reminds you of all those times that you accidentally used the wrong beaker or gave your toddler a different lolly to his sister ... all those things that caused tantrums in our house.

I sometimes feel like a terrible parent when my children are having multiple tantrums, without warning, in civilised public places. I am sure that most mums have been there but I never seem to see it happen to them. Watching toddler tantrums on television is like someone giving you reassurance that it is not just me, it is not anything I am doing wrong.

Whether mothers in the audience enjoy a sense of maternal superiority over other mothers whose children are acting up or take comfort in viewing those challenging behaviours that they too are experiencing, the notion of making such behaviour public is popular with many parents in the contemporary period. While the picture perfect family portrait clearly remains popular with many parents, albeit in an ostensibly 'candid' moment favoured by many studio photographers in recent years (Bartlett 2014), child shaming is a growing phenomena on and beyond the small screen. While fictional programmes script toddler tantrums and reality television films them as they happen, thousands of parents are posting photographs of their children mid upset for the attention of an interested public. Greg Pembroke's

multi-award-winning blog, 'Reasons My Son is Crying' has received over 14 million hits, the content of which is, quite simply, photos of his sons having temper tantrums and a short caption explaining the reason why. In relation to this recent representation of toddler tantrums we find that:

Greg provides relief by cheerfully cataloguing his failures, his bafflement at the illogical responses to ordinary situations of his children, Charlie, four, and William, two, and the myriad ways in which he has disappointed and distressed them ... Parents everywhere have gasped with joy the pictorial evidence that reveals, despite cultural differences, that the despotic nature of toddlers is universal. (Maxted 2013)

Pembroke posts a new toddler image and accompanying caption every day taken from the thousands now sent to him, and his desire to debunk the perfect family photo for something more real or relatable has proved popular with national and international audiences alike. The blog might be seen to echo the sentiment spoken of here in terms of finding more realistic and less romanticised depictions of early childhood for the mother in the audience experiencing the reality of those early developmental stages.

Recognising behaviours: Sleep deprivation

Like the representation of toddler tantrums, the theme of sleep deprivation came up repeatedly in the commentaries, with a number of women foregrounding *Sex and the City* (1998–2004), *Desperate Housewives* (2004–12) and *How I Met Your Mother* (2005–14). What is interesting here is the fact that mothers in the audience relate to the theme of sleep deprivation rather than relating to the particularities or peculiarities of a specific character in these popular texts:

Lily on How I Met Your Mother accurately reflects how tired new mums can be!

How I Met Your Mother *doesn't know what to do with the character of Lily now that she is a mother, her maternal role looks forced and awkward, not the acting, but the script*

and story. The only bit that seems remotely believable is how her and her husband are handling life with a newborn, or rather the lack of a normal social life and their lack of sleep.

Alison Hannigan's character in How I Met Your Mother. I like the more realistic and amusing representation of elements in her life as a mother, such as the tiredness, arguing about whose turn it is to get up, weaning, trying to get the baby to sleep. But it does seem unrealistic how often she is able to meet her friends at the bar, especially compared to my experience!

I loved the mums in Cold Feet; this was before I was a mother myself but they all seemed really true to life and I often think of Karen bursting into David's office with her kids demanding a nanny when my two are stressing me out!

Desperate Housewives – for example dealing with sleep deprivation

... one of my favourite lines is when Lynette finds out she is due to have twins not cancer and asks them to check again!

I like watching programmes that don't show Stepford Wife types and show women struggling with real world issues – even Miranda in Sex and City wasn't able to wash her hair for days and fell asleep in her law books!

It's not new, but I remember watching Miranda on Sex and the City struggle with sleep deprivation ... it made a lasting impact on me, the fact that it was in such a 'fabulous' show made me feel less weak when it came to my turn to experience that particular pain. I made a point of re-watching those far too brief scenes in the early days of motherhood. I was nothing like the character of Miranda, and had no real understanding of her privileged life, but I could relate to her lack of sleep.

What is clear here is that although audiences are able to loosely relate to the theme of sleep deprivation as it is presented by characters such as Lily (*How I Met your Mother*), Lynette (*Desperate Housewives*) and Miranda (*Sex and the City*), there is little else about these figures that they find relatable or realistic, either within or beyond their domestic role:

In reality most mothers – especially those who work outside the home – are permanently frazzled.

Sleep deprivation is genuinely traumatic and I am glad to see it acknowledged on television.

Not specifics, but I empathise with mothers who are having to work to provide for their children on so little sleep and even less family support. Even when it is played for laughs I still think of it as a serious scene.

I am always slightly relieved to see programmes acknowledge the reality of sleep deprivation for parents of new and young children, I don't care what genre, channel or time of day, just to see others, even fictional others, address this as a genuine problem makes me feel like I am not the only one suffering in my sleep deprived fug.

I know its not a soap or series, but I felt real empathy with Michael McIntyre during one of his stand-up routines when he was talking about his experiences of having young boys, he made the point that while childless couples wish one another goodnight, couples with small children wish each other good luck. I laughed to the point of tears. The fact that I can still remember it speaks volumes about its impact on me watching as a new mother.

Sleep deprivation generally, and sleep deprivation for working mothers in particular is understood to be a serious condition with harmful consequences, so much so that countless blogs, advice manuals and self-help guides exist to document this phenomena. Indeed, recent research tells us that 'the majority of mums in the UK today suffer from chronic sleep deprivation which affects every area of their lives' (Zur, cited in BBC 2002). Although most adults need between six and nine hours of sleep every night (NHS 2014c), new mothers get an average of four hours sleep and a mother of a toddler gets on average five hours. Unsurprising then that many women are struggling to cope, with consequences at home and work. The statistics tell us that:

... 56% of working mothers said weariness left them in a 'state of despair' ... 82% admitted a lack of sleep affected their performance at work ... 88% felt fed up, exhausted and pulled in too many directions ... 70% said their tiredness was so debilitating they felt unable to function properly ... 55% said lack of sleep made them irritated with their baby ... Eight out of 10 mothers with a baby aged up to two said a lack of sleep put their partnership under immense strain and caused rows ... Nine out of 10 said their relationship had been badly affected, 70% said they had gone off sex and 92% admitted 'feeling wrecked' at work. (Zur, cited in BBC 2002)

The notion of 'feeling wrecked' at work is interesting here as it chimes with the final theme addressed by mothers in the audience, themes that

they find they are able to identify with beyond a single character or title. Although a small number of women responded to representations of stay at home mothers, with Debra Barone/Patricia Heaton from *Everybody Loves Raymond* (1996–2005) being singled out for her believable depiction of the ‘*hardworking housewife*’, mothers spoke much more frequently about depictions of working motherhood. Whether this was because representations of working mothers outnumber their stay at home counterparts on screen or simply because the women who responded to my questionnaire were in the main speaking from their experiences of the double shift. Extant research routinely talks about the guilt felt by the working mother, both at home and in the workplace, and many women speak of the difficulty in combining these personal and professional spheres. And although we currently live in a society dominated by romanticised and idealised notions of the ‘good’ mother, it is important to consider the notion of the ‘good enough’ mother whereby women attempt to strike a balance between motherhood and other sexual, social and working commitments without guilt or self-judgement. Indeed, Debra Gilbert Rosenberg suggests that rather than trying to be ‘all things to all people, all of the time’ mothers should:

... strike a balance that works for you on all levels – financially and emotionally. Listen only to your needs and the needs of your family, to establish this balance, whatever it may be ... *Banish the guilt* ... If finances dictate that you work a full schedule, or if you need to work to maintain a healthy sense of personal identity, then good: Work. If this is what’s best for your family, accept it. Then find nurturing child care and let the guilt go ... *Be a ‘good enough’ mother* ... Your job as a parent is to provide your children with healthy food, safe shelter, good education, love, respect, and nurturing. But no one ever said it all has to come solely from you. (Kennedy 2011, italics in original)

Like sleep deprivation before it, representations of working mothers are on occasion spoken about in relation to a particular character, but there tends to be little else about the character that resonates with the viewer, and on other occasions the comments are spoken about in more general terms, removed from any single or defining television text. In terms of general respect and recognition about the working mother:

... just aspects of them, like if they are able to manage work life balance well etc.

... those who have a family but still a strong identity as a woman not just a mother.

I always like to watch programmes where mothers are trying to hold down a job and their home life and showing that even with strict organisation and planning it is a hard daily task with little in the way of thanks.

You see mums working hard to provide for their families and then coming home and taking on the domestic responsibilities, and even though I don't like it, I can see the realism here. It is good that it is seen but I wonder how many people other than working mothers even notice.

It is nice to see that some characters and real mothers mention that they actually want to return to work, I know this is true for some mothers but it is usually concealed in talk of financial necessity rather than an actual choice. I am able to identify with some of these stories.

Watching mothers balancing home and work and acknowledging that it can be at times difficult always strikes a chord with me and I am glad to see that it is acknowledged in the programmes I watch. It isn't exactly part of a major storyline or important to the plot, but it is there, and I notice it.

Mothers who work always fascinate me, and I semi-relate to some of their struggles and plights. The fact that the professional mothers can usually rely on private childcare is not something that I can relate to exactly, but the feelings of guilt about going to work is recognisable whatever the work and whoever the childcare professional.

Other women in the audience spoke of an acknowledgement of and respect for television presenters and fictional characters who attempted to combine their maternal role with professional endeavours:

I look up to the likes of Karren Brady – I find her management of her life in general inspirational and as a mum – she really has a fantastic balance.

Lynette on Desperate Housewives who tries to juggle everything and do her best ... not always successfully.

Lynette from Desperate Housewives reminds me a lot of me ... trying to juggle work and family and assuming the grass is always greener and then finding out that you were wrong ... That's me!

Alicia Florrick, for going back and being a success. A career after children is possible, our brains are not eaten by our babies, or if they are, they grow back!

Alicia from The Goodwife and Skyler from Breaking Bad, I can relate to in part despite the differences in my life and theirs! They all want the best for their children even though it is sometimes a struggle.

The Good Wife, Raising Amy, The Cosby Show show strong working mothers that have a lot to deal with! They are trying their best at work and at home and don't always get either right but they love their children.

... I do admire Sarah Beany, Kirstie Allsopp, Lisa Faulkner, I admire how they juggle work and family life.

I admire women like Sarah Beoney who seem to maintain a balance between their professional on screen role with their maternal responsibilities. Not that you see this on screen, far from it. When Sarah Beoney is on screen in a range of home and property shows the only hint of her maternal situation are the visible pregnancies. It is only on reading about her in other arenas such as the Sainsbury's parenting club magazine that she acknowledges the reality of her motherwork and the strength of her maternal feelings for her four young boys. I rather admire her ability to be both a professional woman and a dedicated mother, without having to blur the lines between the two. That said, in her most recent renovation programme (her own property being the make-over home in question) there is a sense for the first time that these two worlds are not as distinct as previously thought.

While mothers in the audience could, on varying levels, relate to and take some comfort in scenes of toddler tantrums, sleep deprivation and the struggles of the working mother it is worth noting that notions of identification were not always spoken of in relation to the lived experience of mothers in the audience. While many women approved of storylines because they resembled their own maternal behaviours or encouraged them to look nostalgically back at earlier maternal practices, other women spoke in more hypothetical terms about notions of identification, drawing on wish fulfilment in their responses. Although many women struggled to relate to or identify with fictional characters, presenters or personalities on the small screen, it is clear that they continue to watch a range of television texts,

finding feelings of pleasure and fulfilment within contemporary popular schedules. With this in mind it is crucial to consider alternative pleasures as they are foregrounded by the women in the audience, namely notions of maternal fantasy and domestic escapism.

Mothers, daughters, friends: Maternal fantasy and escapism

Some women watched heritage titles (*Downton Abbey* 2010–) and fantasised about having ‘housekeepers and nannies’ while others spent time viewing quality American dramas (*Brothers and Sisters* 2006–11) and imagined a life ‘in a pristine mansion in California with a lovely big kitchen’. Some women wrote at length of an illusory mother who they see themselves becoming, particularly in relation to the changing dynamics associated with parenting different age groups. Mothers of toddlers and young children spoke on occasion about their future maternal selves while others again spoke about a family fantasy far removed from their own parental status, specifically in relation to the mother-daughter bond depicted in the popular and long-running *Gilmore Girls* (2000–07):

Lorelai makes single teenage motherhood look like the preferred maternal option, her relationship with her daughter is nothing short of a fantasy.

Love love love Lorelai and Rory ... and I daydream that I will be a cool mum that my daughter actually likes and wants to spend time with ... it is a daydream.

Lorelai Gilmore. Only her relationship with mother and daughter. She's an intelligent, educated (albeit late educated) woman. Nothing else about her life is the same for me, though it is attractive.

There is absolutely no reason behind this and it makes no sense in terms of my family status but I pretend to myself that I am like Lorelai and that my relationship with my daughter will be like that of Lorelai and Rory ... I am happily married!

This is anonymous so here goes ... I want to be Lorelai Gilmore, and I fantasise about me and my young daughter one day having the relationship that she has with Rory. But I couldn't be any less like Lorelai and I realise that having a husband and giving birth to my daughter 2 decades after Lorelai did means that the 'best friends' relationship isn't entirely plausible.

I totally relate to the mother on Gilmore Girls. Even though my daughter is 20-months-old, I hope that we can be very close when she's older. I would do anything for her, and I hope that she can feel comfortable to confide in me like Rory does to Lorelai. I can identify with the mother's relationships particularly with her own mother, which has been rocky. I've had a rocky relationship with my mother at times.

I wouldn't say that I've really found any television mothers realistic ... but ... I absolutely love the depiction of the Lorelai-Rory mother-daughter relationship in this show, which seems to depict the kind of love I have for my own daughters (and of course the Lorelai-Emily relationship mirrors frustration with my own mother!). The intensity of Lorelai's love for her daughter is shown so beautifully – something that I don't remember ever seeing in another show. This is a show about women's lives, so perhaps this is why it works so well – the women/mothers are not incidental to the story.

This response to the critically and commercially successful show is nothing new; indeed, a number of blog posts and feature articles are based entirely on the premise of a self-confessed happily married woman having fantasies about becoming a single mother so as to forge a closer bond between mother and daughter and experience maternal freedom and independence as depicted in the show in question. Cara Wall talks of her own Gilmore-esque fantasy when she comments that:

The reason Gilmore Girls is so appealing isn't the sunshine and lollipops veneer – it's the irresistible fantasy just beneath the surface ... there is a decadent fantasy being spun here ... a debauched, irresistible dream. I wasn't aware of it until my daughter was born, but now I can't contain my lust. I am beside myself. I desperately want to be Lorelai ... Lorelai is witty. Lorelai has long legs, good hair and fantastic clothes. Lorelai has an appealing job at which she is the boss, can set her own hours, and works with her best friend. Lorelai had her one child at 16 ... Lorelai's child is pretty, modestly dressed, motivated, has wholesome friends, and, though she has her license, doesn't pester her mother for a car ...

Let's compare: I am not witty; I am exhausted. I have bags under my eyes and straggly ponytail hair. I gave birth at 33 ... I have a job at which I am definitely not the boss, and my best friend lives halfway around the world. My child is, of course, even more beautiful than Rory, but she cries a lot, demands to get her own way and, if her single-minded pursuit of play strollers at the playground is any indication, will most definitely pester me for her own car. I have a stack of preschool applications on my desk, a minefield of toys on my living room floor, and 13 unanswered messages on my answering machine. I also have a pair of parents, a husband, and a mother-in-law. In contrast, Lorelai is free to date ... It's seductive: this vision of mother as sexual being, mother as romantic, mother as beautiful, with the rest of her life ahead of her. It's seductive: this world where mother and daughter are best friends, where the child is grown while the mother is still young ... but the fantasy really gets interesting when I pause at the fact that Lorelai got to raise her child alone.

This, like all porn, is politically incorrect and totally naive. Of course single, teenage motherhood is impossibly hard. Of course we should not glorify it; of course we should not long for it. But here is the deep, dark, shameful secret I, over-privileged, *Gilmore Girls*-watching, future suburban mom, keep: Sometimes I wish I could raise my child alone. I wish I didn't have to argue about the best sleep-training method or which school to send my daughter to. I wish I didn't have to have long discussions about what kind of toys she should play with and how to keep her from becoming spoiled. I wish I hadn't had to compromise on the nursery color or defend my decision to wean early. I wish I didn't have to pack my household up four times a year to visit relatives, when it is patently obvious that it would be so much easier for them to come here ... Maybe I'm the only one ... But I don't think so. Lorelai, for all her surface gloss and patter, is a powerful talisman, as powerful as the lights on a slot machine. Despite our desire to revel in the show's wholesomeness, we mothers can't quite ignore the dark feelings she ignites within us. She is the anti-Donna Reed, not the mother who's perfect in the way others want her to be, but the mother living the life all mothers secretly want to lead. And it makes *Gilmore Girls* an explicit turn-on: an hour in which happily married women can drool over the life of a good-looking, well-dressed, engagingly funny, totally independent, daughter's-best-friend, happily unmarried one. (Wall 2005)

The *Gilmore Girls* is an interesting case study and it is perhaps unsurprising that it has been mentioned by mothers in the audience, after all, even though the programme was initially conceived for a teen demographic by

the Family Friendly Programming Forum (a consortium that was set up by a number of mainstream advertising companies to fund programmes that offered multiple generation appeal, or, to put it more simply, an organisation that offers financial incentives to American networks to produce shows that parents can watch with, and enjoy alongside, their children) it proved, like much adolescent programming, to be popular with the thirty-something woman in the audience (Feasey 2006a).

Lorelai/Lauren Graham and Rory/Alexis Bledel not only eat fast food at an alarming rate, they also stock up on sweets, crisps, peanut butter and marshmallows, with little negative effect on their skin, weight or physical health. And although one should not and would not recommend the Gilmore diet or domestic routine to anyone outside of a fictional television series, the fascination with this young single mother from the perspective of a more mature and happily coupled female speaks volumes about the possibility of investing in or fantasising about an escapist maternal figure, a figure so diametrically opposed to the viewer's own motherwork routine that she becomes a fantasy figure, irrespective of the perceived realism or authenticity of the show or character in question.

The character of Lorelai offers a tantalising image of single teen motherhood, and many respondents who fantasised about morphing into this particular maternal image routinely acknowledged their maternal and marital distance from this particular family unit. That said, the escapist entertainment offered by the show, within and beyond the narrative structure of the series demonstrates both the power afforded by specific maternal texts and the pleasures afforded by such televisual escapism. Although not all women pointed to the *Gilmore Girls* as a potent domestic text, many respondents made it clear that they found pleasure in watching a diverse range of family units, particularly those removed from or outside of their own domestic experiences.

Maternal learning through sexual, social and cultural diversity

A growing number of programmes seek to depict the lived experience of gay couples as they try to conceive, give birth, foster, adopt and then parent, perhaps unsurprisingly. After all, the number of gay and lesbian couples bringing up children has risen, and continues to rise in recent years. Statistics reveal that there were 4,000 same-sex couples raising children in the UK in 2010, compared to 8,000 in 2011 and 12,000 in 2013 (Sof 2014; ONS 2012). Richard Lane of Stonewall said 'the shift could be down to the effect of the Government's move to introduce same-sex marriage' (Lane, cited in Malnick 2013). After all, legislation to allow same-sex marriage in England and Wales was passed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom in July 2013 and came into force on 13 March 2014. And likewise, legislation to allow same-sex marriage in Scotland was passed by the Scottish Parliament in February 2014 and received Royal Assent on 12 March 2014.

While same-sex couples are now able to marry in England, Wales and Scotland, so too, they are able to make choices pertaining to parenting. Indeed the 'options available to potential gay and lesbian parents are wider now than ever before' (NHS 2014d). Stonewall informs us that:

In the UK it is legal for lesbian, gay and bisexual people to both adopt and foster children. According to the British Association for Adoption & Fostering, growing numbers of gay men and lesbians have been entering into joint adoption proceedings since adoption for same-sex couples became legal in 2005 (lesbian, gay and bisexual people have always been able to adopt as individuals). The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 and the Civil Partnership Act 2004 have made it easier for lesbian couples to secure parental rights for any children they conceive through artificial insemination. (Stonewall 2014)

The number of gay and lesbian couples adopting children in England has doubled in the past four years, rising from 3 per cent in 2009 to 6 per cent in 2013 (McAleenan 2014). Moreover, in recent years Barnardos, the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) and First 4 Adoption have all been proactively encouraging adoption by lesbian, gay and bisexual

people. Indeed, in both Britain and America, ‘we are witnessing the early stages of a “gaby” boom, a situation wherein lesbian women and gay men are opting into parenthood in increasing numbers’ (Dunne 2000). A small number of mothers in the audience noted their interest in and desire to learn from the representation of gay and lesbian families:

I like ... different types of family setups e.g. gay parents ... because it helps to expand my understanding of contemporary parenting ... something I have no understanding of myself.

I like watching programmes about gay parents and I hope to be one myself someday. It is refreshing to see how many gay couples are adopting and having their own ‘biological’ children ... it seems to be a pretty new situation.

There seem to be a number of programmes on at the moment about gay and lesbian parents. I don’t know any gay parents and I am always a little curious to see how such family dynamics work ‘in reality’ in terms of divisions of work and parental labour without the predictable sex and gender roles informing day-to-day decisions about childcare. I am usually rather surprised to realise how ‘traditional’ these couples appear to be in terms of their parenting roles and responsibilities, bar their shared sex.

While some mothers in the audience commented on their desire to watch and learn more about gay parents and parenting, others spoke of an interest in viewing maternal practices from a diverse range of countries and continents, ranging from the wealthiest to less socio-politically privileged locales, from the strictest to the less disciplinarian. Women spoke with reverence rather than judgement, making the point that different parental techniques were simply that, ‘different’, not better or worse. And even then, some mentioned the surprising similarities in what were, ostensibly, alternative family dynamics. A number of mothers in the audience made the point that they used these viewing opportunities as a chance to question their own maternal practices and to see if there were any useful techniques that they might want to emulate in some way, or an approach that they might want to consider implementing within their family. Others watched such maternal difference played out on screen with a sense of maternal empathy and compassion. In short, these women were respectful of and open to alternative and unknown maternal practices:

I don't see other mothers as 'different' really.

Yes, it can be interesting to get a different perspective.

I think it's interesting to watch mothers who are different to me.

Yes, it's really interesting and it can actually challenge my views.

Yes, it can give you ideas on other things to try, or alternatively things you would never try!

I like to watch mothers from different cultures and how they bring their children up within that culture.

I am always interested in differing family set ups and learning how I might do some things better.

I do like watching mothers who are different to me because perhaps I can learn something from them.

Sometimes it's refreshing and interesting to see a different context ... puts things in perspective.

Sometimes it is nice to challenge assumptions. I enjoy World's Strictest Parents and Wife Swap for that reason.

I suppose I like to see how I could do things differently, is there a secret way to juggle kids, work, housework and some 'me' time?

It makes me realise there are more similarities than differences ... we all try our best and look out for our kids and try to be a good mum.

Yes, it's interesting to see different approaches, and to be reassured that everyone has their own way and we are all trying our best, there are very few wrongs or rights.

I am often surprised at how few differences I see on these programmes because ... the same basic sentiments are there but the circumstances and situations are more extreme.

I find it fascinating to watch things about family units in other countries like World's Strictest Parents ... the parenting styles are so different to mine ... I find it slightly voyeuristic viewing but it is fascinating to see the alternatives.

Watching other mothers in America, Africa, and Asia, my heart goes out to those who struggle to make ends meet. Their lives revolve around their elders and their children and seem to have a hard time. I wish I could make a difference to them.

I am fascinated by people's different approaches to motherhood, what works and doesn't work for them, what they have to deal with in different scenarios and how they cope. I am interested in different ways of doing things, being challenged to think of things in a different way.

Watching people with different experiences is more exciting than watching those who are the same. Seeing how a character will react under challenging circumstances is always interesting. It's also a way to 'experience' things that you'd never see normally.

I love to see mothers in other countries. I feel I am very fortunate, having had a wonderful childhood in a loving family home. I have been married twice ... I have three children of my own and two step children ... all married with good jobs, and ten grandchildren who I see very regularly.

It was not only sexual preference, location and disciplinary regimes that were offered as alternative maternal practices, notions of generational difference and distinction came to the fore in a number of audience commentaries:

I like to see how younger mothers cope with bringing up children and having to juggle a working life as well. Very different from my day.

Watching programmes about mothers today makes me realise just how much has changed since I was a mother of small children many decades ago now ... motherhood is hard but it seems even more difficult when you have to work to help provide for your family.

I was a stay at home wife and mother and although I found the role challenging at times, I wasn't having to work outside the home so I never had to worry about childcare in as much as I had the children's routines as my own, without any conflict or other demands on my time. I see now that this was a luxury when compared to some of these young mothers that I watch on television who have to navigate a logistical maze before and after taking the children to school and nursery. I see my daughter's life reflected in some of these shows and I cannot believe how many demands she and women like her have on their time and energies.

As noted at the outset of this chapter, many women in the audience were critical of the lack of recognisable mothers on screen, and as if in response

to this frustration, a number of women deliberately sought out images of maternal difference for reasons ranging from fantasy and escapism to curiosity and information. Depictions of gay parents, the portrayal of mothers from other countries and generational changes to the maternal role are said to offer both entertainment and educational value. That said, while several mothers enjoyed watching maternal diversity played out on the small screen, a small number of these women were frustrated by what they saw as '*patronising*' and '*condescending*' representations of third world family life. For these women, the promise of maternal differences were appealing, but ultimately the programmes in question were critiqued as ill-informed, misguided or problematic.

Those mothers who are watching alternative depictions of motherhood played out on screen clearly enjoy and find pleasure in alternative, maternal representations, however, they are unable to fully invest in these portrayals. After all, mothers and grandmothers made the point that they were more inclined to invest in a programme if they could identify with the character and that they were most likely to identify with a character when they were able to find similarities and familiarities between themselves, their own motherwork endeavours and those of the mothers on screen. The fact that many of the women in the audience were unable to find their own situation played out on television meant that many women were left disappointed with the programme options available.

Copying mother: Disciplinary techniques and domestic emulation

A number of women in the television audience found pleasure in viewing a diverse range of maternal techniques and practices, with some going as far as to suggest that they considered watching a myriad of mothers on television an eye opening and on occasion, educational experience. From this perspective then it is worth thinking about the ways in which

motherhood in the media might be seen to offer advice and instruction in line with the more obvious pleasures of entertainment and escapism. I went on to ask the question ‘Do you try to emulate the domestic skills or maternal practices of any of these women on the small screen’ and continued to try and clarify by prompting ‘Do you try and copy the domestic efforts, disciplinary techniques or family activities of any of these women that you see on television?’

In a media and entertainment environment saturated with pregnancy and parenting guidebooks, self-help leaflets and online forums dedicated to providing emotional support and more practical guidance to new mothers, it was worth asking what role, if any, television played in supporting or assisting women in the audience with their motherwork efforts, be it in the overt manner of shows such as *Supernanny* as they give details about specific disciplinary rules and techniques, or more scripted programming as they might be seen to offer codes of family conduct for parents trying to find the upper hand in a battle of wills with their children.

That said, what was surprising here was how few mothers looked to television as a source of maternal etiquette, support or assistance with their own parental roles and responsibilities. Extant research makes the point that shows such as *Supernanny* (2004–12) are watched in part because of the programme’s ability to communicate with its audience about tried and tested disciplinarian techniques, and even a cursory glance at the programme makes it clear that it can be watched with this position in mind (Feasey 2011). *Supernanny* is said to serve as an educational device ‘for parents, who may indeed be at a loss for how to deal with bad behavior [and] in this view, Jo Frost becomes a kind of national spokesperson for audiences who need a kind of civic education in parenting’ (Tally 2008). Indeed, a relatively small number of women confirmed that this was a reason to watch such ‘nanny’ texts, either taking on board particular techniques directly or using them as a more general guide to be reconfigured in line with their own family circumstances:

I do use some of Jo Frost’s techniques e.g. praising.

Supernanny’s 123 naughty step discipline works on my toddler.

Supernanny ... the programme has some good tips for how to manage my little monkeys.

In the past I have tried using a couple of 'disciplinary techniques' that were shown in Supernanny

Occasionally I see either parenting techniques or ideas for activities to do with the kids on television and use them.

... I know that Supernanny has inspired some of my friends struggling with toddlers or problematic behaviour. That programme is slightly skewed for dramatic effect but the principles it aims towards and the general approach is sensible and practical.

Although audiences are well aware that reality parenting programmes are heavily edited and that fictional genres such as soap opera and situation comedy are scripted, acted, directed and again edited, several women still considered fictional characters to be able to offer parental guidance:

Lois from Malcolm in the Middle ... she always had a good answer and an interesting threat ... if needs must I will rehearse some of those scenes on my own family.

I do see Debra from Everybody Loves Raymond as a role model because she struggles with discipline with her children. What she learns that works, I will remember.

I always like watching Outnumbered, I remember some of the arguments and the ways in which the parents outwitted their children, and if I am honest I have borrowed from their script on more than one occasion!

Some mothers spoke in general terms about trying different techniques and taking meaningful advice, from any respected avenue, with television playing a part in a parenting style that is about creating and supporting a harmonious family unit:

Sometimes you see something that works and you think, I'll try that. It's the same with every other endeavour in my life, I'm always looking for ways to do what I do better.

If something looks like it works I will probably try it out on my children, especially if it creates a more pleasurable and less chaotic environment ... television, magazines, friends and family ... if there are relevant experts I would be mad not to at least listen to their advice.

One mother pointed out that she borrowed particular phrases from popular American children's programmes such as 'Sesame Street *and* Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood' in order to provide what she saw to be the '*healthiest and most considerate way to communicate*' with her young children. There were no strict techniques being presented here and no rules to be followed; rather, the mother in the audience responded to a compassionate and carefully considered voice that she deemed appropriate and accessible for her and her family unit.

For those mothers who acknowledged that they did on occasion look to and borrow phrases and techniques from adult and children's programming alike, television might be understood as both an entertaining and informative medium; however, those women who emulated what they considered to be sensible, useful and helpful ideas and terminology were in the minority of those who responded to my questionnaire. Many mothers skipped over this question, answered in the negative or commented that they did seek helpful advice and practical support, but that this was to be found in friends and family members whose parenting styles they approved of and respected first hand. Others again suggested that they followed their own instincts or made their own decisions when it came to their maternal practices, questioning the appropriateness of those who emulate techniques demonstrated on shows such as *Supernanny*:

Sometimes I have taken some advice from Supernanny in the past ... I now have quite strong opinions on my own domestic life.

I tried some of the Supernanny techniques when my first son was small, but soon realised I needed to go with my own flow and that what works best for me and my family.

I am capable of following my own instincts and ideas about mothering ... which is not to say I don't seek advice from friends or share problems, and learn from their experience.

I just try to keep juggling ... whatever gets the family through the day ... I tend to think of Supernanny routines as brilliant in theory but hopeless in practice ... the reality is that you need to be able to be more flexible than she allows for.

I may not be an 'expert' in the traditional sense of the word but I am a mother ... I want the best for my children ... I think I am the one who knows how best to care for them.

I will listen to well meaning advice but at the end of the day I will do what works best for me and my family rather than look to the parenting fads or fashions that seem to be spoken about.

Programmes like Supernanny ... has lead to people setting themselves up as a professional nanny for help with certain child rearing issues and putting forward some quite outlandish advice. An example that comes to mind is one of my cousins and her husband getting a 'sleep consultant' in and telling them not to go to the toddler child at all during the night if she can't go to sleep/makes a noise or wakes up during the night.

Supernanny Jo Frost is committed to a rather traditional view of childcare that centres on routines and respect. Indeed, members of the Conservative party have praised Frost's organised methods in a parliamentary debate on anti-social behaviour (Macaulay 2010). And yet, there was little suggestion here that mothers in the audience were watching for practical advice. That said, away from the perhaps emotive or sensitive matter of motherhood and the questionable effectiveness of one parenting technique over another, mothers in the audience made it clear that they were happy to, and often did, follow a range of recipes, home styles and occasional fashion choices as they were presented on television. Although one commentator suggested that she didn't 'have a Nigella complex' it was soon evident that figures such as Kirstie Allsopp, Sarah Beeny and Mary Berry were applauded and emulated for their homeware, homebaking and haberdashery efforts:

I quite fancy being as crafty as Martha Stewart.

I may get ideas for crafting, cooking activities from TV.

I like ... home-made things, the rural lifestyle of Kirstie Allsopp and Sarah Beeny.

I aspire to have a home 'style' like Sarah Beeny or Kirstie Allsopp – shabby chic 'Country Living' style.

I did try to find the bowls Paul Hollywood was using on his bread show. Oh and I did spring clean my kitchen after seeing Lorraine Pascale minimalistic kitchen!

Can't help but start baking after The Great British Bake Off. I won't pretend to copy those showstoppers, but it is always fun to try a signature dish with the full recipe details.

I tend to watch cooking and gardening shows which don't focus on maternal figures as such but I do take note when they say what works for their children, e.g. chef Monica Galetti.

I love the sort of programmes that Kirstie Allsopp presents, all those cute projects and homely nic nacs that look a million miles away from the IKEA dream that has swept the country.

Those home programmes are really fun to watch, I confess that I have actually tried to copy a few things from them, not the complicated stuff, but the easy projects ... you can even get the whole family involved.

The Great British Sewing Bee got me really interested in 'trying' to make a few simple pieces for the family ... I confess it is more for fun than function or necessity, but what a nice way to relax in the evening.

I have tried to make a few things, knit the odd item and try my hand at cross-stich when Kirstie Allsopp did it. I never really think that I am copying from television, but I have always tried them after watching something, so yes, I must be.

The handmade and homemade programmes that Kirstie Allsopp does ... it makes you realise how much you could save if you tried to make your own things ... and that there is a real market for such items ... I used to buy them and now I have a go at making them.

The Great British Bake Off always gets me making muffins ... it's a bit like Wimbledon, you never think to play tennis all year but feel the need to get the racket out for two weeks over summer. I don't attempt to make any of the really tricky stuff, but it gets me baking a few bits and bobs for the family, and I always then wonder why I haven't done it for so long ... Until next year.

I do love watching all those home and property shows, not the ones where you buy and sell houses, but the ones about turning a house into a home, I actually made one of those beautiful fabric pin boards rather than purchase the one that had been hanging around in my Amazon basket for several weeks. I wouldn't copy everything that was shown but now and then it is quite relaxing and ever so slightly productive.

Since her television career started with property shows such as *Location Location Location* (2000–), Kirstie Allsopp has made a career out of not only buying houses for those in need of professional support, but out of home making. In shows such as *Kirstie's Hand Made Britain* (2011), *Kirstie's Vintage Home* (2012), *Kirstie's Handmade Treasures* (2013) and *Kirstie*

Allsopp's Home Style (2013), Allsopp learns the skills, and by association, teaches audiences some of the techniques used in fashion and furniture upcycling. Episode guides give a sense of Allsopp's homemade etiquette for her own projects and those for existing couples and families:

Kirstie demonstrates how to create a stunning handmade invitation, then shows how you can make a delightful cupcake bouquet to show off these on-trend treats. She then tries her hand at ice sculpting with a chainsaw, before rounding things off with a playful pudding. (4OD 2013a)

Victoria Cranfield, who has won gold medals for her jams and jellies, leads Kirstie through the torturous task of removing every stone by hand as Kirstie learns how to make damson jam. (4OD 2013b)

Kirstie pulls out all the stops for Cheshire couple Iman and Heather, who have a brand new home and a baby on the way. They'd like a vintage nursery and a 1920s inspired sitting room, but Heather's due date is in just five weeks and Iman doesn't like buying vintage goods ... The good news is that because it's a new house Kirstie has a perfect blank canvas on which to work her magic, and she finds inspiration in the art-deco decadence and travel influences of the 20s. Kirstie comes up with crafts and bargain hunting to help Iman overcome his aversion to second hand, and he even discovers a craft he really enjoys. From finding rare pieces to making personalised toys and gilding picture frames, with Kirstie's help Iman and Heather are able to create the home they dreamed of. (4OD 2012)

Although Allsopp was not the only name mentioned, her move from selling houses to creating homes speaks of a broader domesticisation that seems to have emerged during the recent recession, with this link being most blatant in the latest *Kirstie's Fill Your House for Free* (2013) production. With the rise of sites such as Freecycle, Freegle, Gumtree and the resurgence in knitting, crochet and sewing in recent years, Allsopp might be seen to act as the face of, or her name become the short-hand for such homemade endeavours. The programmes are popular with the viewing public, and there is evidence provided by mothers in the audience that they do actually attempt some of the less demanding projects being presented here. And yet, turning to television as an educational and informative medium is nothing new, British broadcasting has always had a strong impulse to improve its audience, with a strong 'hobbyist' or 'enthusiast' strand appearing popular

throughout television history. We are told that evening broadcasts in the 1950s catered to:

... minorities who are enthusiastically devoted to some form of self-expression... the jazz fancier or the pigeon fancier, the man or woman who wants to learn, say, Spanish from scratch, the fisherman or cyclist or collector of LP records ... the bridge player or the naturalist, the more sophisticated filmgoer, the ardent motorist or the enthusiast for amateur dramatics. (*Radio Times*, cited in Brunson 2003)

This 'hobbyist' strand of programming was overtaken by 'lifestyle' programming in the early 1990s with a number of fashion, gardening, cookery, home buying and Do It Yourself productions proving popular with audiences in general, and with the female audience in particular. The key differences between the 'hobbyist' text and the more recent 'lifestyle' production was that the former sought to instil a skill while the latter was committed to entertainment and commodification. An increase in home ownership, the growing number of women in employment and the postponement of childbirth among the middle classes at the end of the last century saw an increase in those programmes that offered immediate home and garden transformation through the purchase of specialist skills, trades, equipment, plants and furnishings. The instantaneous display of transformation took priority over education, with the 'reveal' as the dramatic finale of the piece. And yet, due in part to the recession and growing numbers of female unemployment, we have seen the resurgence of the 'hobbyist' strand whereby, like its 1950s predecessor 'the narrative of transformation is generally one of skill acquisition' (Brunson 2003). Charlotte Brunson looks at the BBC archives and discovers that:

In the 1967 BBC series, *Clothes that Count* ... each ... programme focused on the making of one garment, interspersing very close camera work on hands and sewing machine with more fashion-show like segments in which the garment is modelled, made up in a range of fabrics. ... The whole process of making, for example, a piped buttonhole in a coat, was shown in real time with framing that mainly excluded the dressmaker's face ... Similarly, in the earliest surviving *Gardener's World* ... we are shown appropriate spring pruning, how to divide herbaceous perennials and the planting-out of hardened seedlings during 20 minutes of continuous address by Percy Thresher ... the close-up is on the operation being demonstrated. The programmes

are didactic – they show you how to do or make things – and, historically, they deal with the difficulty of doing this in the ‘now’ of television through the device that has become a catch-phrase in Britain, ‘Here’s one I made earlier’ – or else they simply use real time. The hobby genre, like the short-lived broadcasts on Network Three in 1957, addressed the amateur enthusiast. By the end of the programme, the listener would know how to do something. (Brunsdon 2003)

Figures tell us that middle-aged women have been hit hardest by the recession (McVeigh and Helm 2012), and there is the suggestion that it is these women who are watching, and on occasion, making the handicrafts as displayed in the Allsopp oeuvre. Whether it is for the purposes of relaxation, budgeting, for environmental interest or commercial profit, mothers in the audience have spent time making and baking in line with their television counterparts. This is not to say that they actually relate to or find themselves invested in a particular performer, but rather, they speak of an interest in their homes, meeting the needs and wants of their family and a sense of entertainment and enjoyment in attempting modest and grander scale projects in line with the ‘hobbyist’ as the figure has returned to our television screens in recent years. Indeed, one could consider the irony of taking advice on frugality from the daughter of a baron or the disingenuousness of free homeware that demands time and financial investment to be upcycled for purposeful use, but it is the sense of home, hearth and domestication that audiences within and beyond my questionnaire have commented on here, with Allsopp appearing as a figure head for this particular trend. A cursory glance at the shopping phenomenon ‘Not on the High Street’ is another clear indicator, beyond the television screen, of the popularity of the crafts and creativities that Allsopp champions:

We’re passionate about hand-picking the best creative small businesses to sell on our marketplace, making it simple for you to find inspired, personalised, stylish or unique things ... We choose sellers who offer great design and the best quality products, many of which can be customised to suit you. It’s easy to find (or create) the look or style that works for you ... See how ordinary doesn’t get a look-in ... We won’t show you just anything – we want to inspire you. Or even surprise you. Think concrete wallpaper, balloon lights or a wall print featuring the entire text of a literary classic. Just like you, we’re not interested in being the same as everyone else ... And if you’re shopping for someone else, we can make you look

good too. Whether you're looking for a present for your mum, saying thank you to someone or need gifts for everyone in your business, find products that show how well you know the people you're buying for ... Everything you buy from our site comes directly from one of the artists, designers and curators who make up our collection of sellers. By shopping with us you're doing business with diverse, talented independent sellers who care about quality, innovation and style as much as you do, as well as supporting the future and growth of creative talent. (Not on the High Street 2014)

The vast majority of mothers made no mention of their interest in copying parental techniques, telling us that *'my lifestyle is different to those I have seen on television and I've yet to find a mum I wish to emulate'* and yet many of these same women spoke of their investment in and emulation of the *'making and baking'* that they see on screen. One might consider the sensitivity of the subject at hand here, whereby it is deemed socially acceptable and indeed socially desirable to admit to copying a creative art or food speciality, but it seems less appropriate to admit to seeking advice or help in your maternal role, for fear perhaps of failing to live up to the romanticised 'good' mother myth that continues to pervade the entertainment marketplace, with Allsopp, as other comments indicate, playing a part in this continuing façade. While it is deemed acceptable to emulate the homewares and craft projects as displayed on the small screen, it is worth considering the ways in which such copying or imitation extends beyond the home to maternal style, fashions and dress codes.

Extant theoretical work on fashion, marketing, advertising and celebrity culture speaks of the importance of celebrity endorsements, testimonials, advertising and sponsorship to the fashion and beauty sector (Desser and Joweth 2000) and I have written elsewhere about fashion, transformation and the interest in following the styles and trends as worn by film stars and the wider circuit of female celebrities (Feasey 2006b). Popular and long-running magazines such as *Now* and *Heat*, alongside more glossy titles such as *Grazia*, regularly present a range of features on star style and celebrity fashions – be it designer casual wear, vintage clothing or glamorous red-carpet gowns. In this way, one might suggest that the reader can look to these publications as a quick, easy and

entertaining way to browse contemporary styles and fashion trends on a seemingly endless array of beautiful stars. However, rather than dedicate its star style pages to the exclusive, vintage, or couture of celebrity clothing and expect the fashion-conscious reader to live somewhat vicariously through such exquisite yet often unattainable items, it is worth noting that these magazine encourage the female reader to both try on and buy such feminine fashions in features such as 'Steal Her Style' which point to the different garments being worn (not modelled) by the personality and the details whereby you can buy that item or a similar one on the high street as part of the wider domestic and spendthrift economy. Such features can be seen as an arbiter of fashion tastes, dictating which star styles to try on and which celebrity fashions to avoid, and readers appear happy to discuss their interest in and use of these articles when making sartorial choices.

My point here is simply that there is a long history of film stars and more recently, celebrity figures being positioned as fashion models or as unofficial style icons for women in the audience (Stacey 1994; Fox 1995; Moseley 2003), and that evidence exists to suggest that magazine readers appear happy to talk about their famous fashion inspirations (Feasey 2008b). From this perspective, one might consider the role of women on television, and more specifically, mothers on television, as fashion inspiration for mothers in the audience. If one considers the changing pregnant body and the sartorial demands of the new mother, it might seem obvious that women would look to fashion role models, perhaps coming as no surprise to see mothers emulating the style and trends of one celebrity mother over another.

With this in mind, I asked the question 'Do you copy the surface appearance, hair or fashions of any mothers that you see on television' with the supporting text asking 'Do you look to these women for fashion inspirational or stylistic expertise?'. Although some women commended particular figures for their sartorial efforts, only a very small number of mothers suggested that they did look to mothers on television for fashion help and inspiration, and found pleasure in doing so, particularly during pregnancy:

I do like seeing how pregnant women dress on television but not really mothers.

I like many of the pregnant presenters on the news channel and chat shows ... they always look good and have lovely clothes.

Holly Willoughby has a great sense of style when pregnant and I watched her deal with her increasing bump with interest.

I do like seeing what pregnant TV presenters wear e.g. newsreaders, weather presenters – how they stay smart with a bump.

Yes, definitely ... you need help when you have not had to dress during pregnancy before. You get more confident the second time around, but I remember being so self-conscious, especially at work, I would look to see what women on television were pregnant and what they were wearing to look respectable.

It is so difficult to find something flattering and cool (as in warm weather rather than the other sense of the word) to wear when you are heavily pregnant during the summer months, so I did keep an eye on what pregnant women on television were wearing, it was the era of Rachel being pregnant in Friends and I distinctly remember trying to form a similar look.

I don't want to fall into the 'mumsy' trap where everything is comfortable and ready for the school run so I look to mothers such as Holly Willoughby and Tess Daly to see the styles that they are wearing when they are pregnant. Not that I will be going out to buy expensive formal wear, but just to get a sense of the more sensible and everyday clothes that they are seen wearing.

When I was pregnant and struggling to find something comfortable and stylish I did occasionally look to pregnant celebrities for sartorial inspiration. It was not my intention to copy an exact garment, but rather to replicate a particular 'look' in terms of bohemian long summer dresses or smart-casual flared jeans with a slouchy nautical top and striped blazer. It gave me the confidence to choose pregnancy clothes from the masses of available options. This is not something that I had done before or since, but I wonder if it was because I was lacking the comfort of my usual style during my pregnancy.

You read the books that tell you about your changing pregnant body, you buy the same stretchy comfortable jeans and wrap around tops in classic styles that are available in every single high street maternity range and then after wearing the same outfits for a couple of months you start to feel incredibly bored and boring ... so it is nice to see what other pregnant women are wearing, it is nice if you can find and can afford something

suitable or similar just to give you a change ... I know nine months isn't long in the grand scheme of things, but wearing the same sensible comfortable outfit for that length of time is tiresome. Sorry, rambling ... yes I have copied the styles of pregnant mothers on screen and I will continue to watch what new mothers are wearing to give me a bit of confidence when I am tired of my own predictable wardrobe rut.

For some women then, looking to recognisable women on the small screen gave them the confidence to try and perhaps purchase everyday, casual clothing and work ensembles that they would otherwise have been unsure about. It is clear that these women were not looking to emulate the high-end fashions or glamorous outfits often seen on the Saturday evening schedules, but rather, to look to more moderate and manageable offerings as they were seen on particular personalities, characters or shows. In this way, these audiences appear to support extant research, which talks of the value of the celebrity in terms of beauty and fashion sales. And yet, these women were in the minority as most mothers made it clear that they were not particularly interested in and had never actually considered looking to mothers on television in this way. For a number of different reasons, including available time and limited finances, the majority of women spoke negatively about the television screen as a shop window for mothers, with a small number commenting on what they felt was the 'liberating' period of new motherhood whereby a woman did not have 'the time to doll yourself up as much as you used to'. For many mothers, however it was most crucially a matter of foregrounding their own styles and tastes:

No. I know my own identity.

No, I have my own standards and style which I adhere to.

No, I wear what suits me and what is practical for what I'm doing.

No I would rather be my own person, I've never followed fashion.

No, and I wouldn't want to ... I am better suited to choosing my own style.

No, I want to look like me with my own style not a pretend or false version replicated from television.

Why would I? These women are being dressed by others, they don't even have their own style so I certainly wouldn't let them create mine.

No, I try and present myself in my own way, I am not interested in what is fashionable but rather hone what suits me, even when pregnant.

I like to try and dress like the individual that I am, not to say that I don't buy fashionable clothes, but I would never try and copy a whole look that someone else was sporting.

For others it was a negative response due to what they saw as the stereotypical maternal images and identikit fashions of mothers and indeed women on the small screen:

No, Definitely not. I am me, not a carbon copy of someone else.

No, I think that it's false and I need to be the person and the parent that I am.

No. They don't look like me. In fact they all look the same really, a certain style of clothes, hair, makeup and build. There's no diversity at all – either in terms of surface looks or ethnicity.

Not really. Television has a standard 'mom wear' category of hair and clothing which isn't my style. I try to dress as I did before children or at least maintain a current look ... driven by comfort in a traditional style.

God no, they all tend to look the same ... the middle class mums all have blonde highlights, skinny jeans and brown leather boots while the working class versions are dressed in tracksuits and denim skirts. I kid you not, this is all I seem to see mums wearing ...

Mothers on television who deviate from the 'mom' look, do so to highlight their role. Sexy mom, corporate mom, lazy mom. But they're all done in contrast and in reference to the tradition garb. I don't want my style to be mom centred even if it is an oppositional form.

Mums tend to just look frumpy on television ... either budget BHS or the more expensive Laura Ashley version ... it is still all about cardigans, flat pumps and chinos. Even when the actress is beautiful and you have seen them looking stunning at an awards bash or in the glossy magazines, they are still dressed in a frumpy mum wardrobe, so no, I would not look to emulate these fashions.

Others again mention that they were prevented by time and financial constraints:

No, I don't have the time!

No. I don't have the time/energy!

No! No time to even look in mirror, let alone have style!

No ... I don't have the disposable income to do so if I wished.

Not a chance, I have to be out ready for the school run in three different directions.

Chance would be a fine thing, I barely have time to get dressed let alone think about fashion and outfits.

I don't have the income to have a work wardrobe, a going out wardrobe, and a mom wardrobe, so I don't buy those clothes.

No, but then I'm not spending much time or effort thinking about my appearance at the moment as it's just about being functional for dealing with small children all day.

A number of mothers in the audience highlighted the façade or maternal mask of mothers on screen, this time in relation to the sartorial appearance and surface apparel rather than the character, roles or responsibilities of the televisual mother:

No, a lot of these women are dressed in glamorous 'going out' clothes which I currently have no use for ... if they would wear more everyday clothing then I might consider it, finances permitting.

No, most Mums on screen who look good have a hair and make up artist and wardrobe expert to assist them, plus this is all done while they are being paid for their time. Totally unrealistic for me.

No not really, I'm just happy not to have Weetabix in my hair when I do the school run! Mums on television are so immaculate and for me unattainable figures that there is no point trying to copy, e.g. Holly of This Morning.

No, some of these women are dressed in a very particular style that ordinary mums like me just couldn't pull off at the school drop off and certainly not at work. I like that they show different styles and fashions, but I would not look to copy any of them ... and to be honest they change so frequently that I would run out of time, energy or money if I was interested in looking like them.

You know that these women have been 'dressed' by a stylist and that they probably wear or want to wear the same comfortable outfits that the rest of us can get away with at work or the school gates ... they wear what is needed by the programme rather than what is needed in their maternal role ... I would be more interested in seeing what they change back into when returning home ... and who knows, maybe I would be interested in copying that look!

Others shifted the focus of the question and commented on the physical appearance, surface attractiveness and the post-pregnancy bodies of the women on screen, in relation to what they saw as successful yet hard-won physiques. As I have noted elsewhere, the popularity of make-over fashion programming in general, and the plastic surgery makeover show in particular provides evidence of the ways in which the celebrity mother myth and the wider 'yummy mummy' profile are impacting on a generation of new mothers (Feasey 2012a). There has long been a focus on age prevention and maintaining a youthful visage for women in society, indeed, cosmetic advertising from the 1920s was trying to collapse the physical age distinctions between generations as they asked women to 'Stay Young with Your daughter!' (Addison 2009). However, since that time, mothers have been asked to not only stay young with their daughters, but to rehabilitate 'themselves as sexualized subjects post-childbirth' (Gailey 2007). Elizabeth Gailey makes the point that makeover television renders '*motherhood itself pathological*' because women are being asked to be sexually viable well into their late 30s and 40s (Gailey 2007, italics in original). Gailey tells us that 'reclaiming the "blown-out" body parts sacrificed to childbirth is a routine aspect of responsible women's self-management and care' and reminds us of the ways in which the plastic surgery profession views pregnancy as a pollutant on the female body (Gailey 2007).

Extant research on maternal responses to the post-pregnancy body suggests that many new mothers compare their own physiques to those

of new mothers in the television arena and wider media marketplace only to 'self-blame and internalize a sense of private bodily failure' (Dworkin and Wachs 2004) as they are unable to return to their pre-pregnant size, shape and fitness levels immediately after birth as is viewed as the norm in the mass media. And yet, the women who commented here on the post-pregnancy health, fitness and physiques spoke not only of their differences from these women, but of the immense time, effort and energy that must have gone into such transformations, which in itself must be seen to go some way towards lessening the effect of these figures as role models for new mothers.

Therefore, while some women said that they deliberately avoided those magazine style programmes that '*put unfair pressure on women to feel that they should be able to do everything perfectly and look great all the time*' others watch from a critical distance, aware of the role of stylists, dieticians, personal chefs, trainers and childcare providers who help to make such a physical transformation possible:

Most celebrity mothers have a lot of help, which ordinary working mothers can't afford.

I don't have a stylist, personal hairdresser, personal make-up artist or personal trainer!

Davina McCall looks great after three children and at least she's honest about having to work hard at it.

I may admire their weight loss post pregnancy but I assume they had access to more support than me with it.

Many mums on television look great after giving birth ... but ... they live a much more cash rich lifestyle than I can afford.

I sometimes wish I was like celebrities as I'd like to have their personal trainer, personal chef etc. and be able to afford a nanny. That's not realistic for most mothers.

I am aware that their lives are very different to mine and the things that I admire such as the fact that they are very glamorous, have great jobs, have several kids which they seem to effortlessly look after whilst maintaining a glittering career come from having more money and help etc. (who wouldn't love the glamorous life and to seemingly effortlessly pop out children whilst maintaining this perfectly – however this is unrealistic for most).

While extant scholarship from a diverse range of academic fields has pointed to the role and importance of Hollywood and the women's magazine sector as inspirations for feminine fashions, there is some evidence here to suggest that mothers might look to the television screen for sartorial inspiration, but in the main, these audiences are more cautious of speaking about mothers on screen as fashion role models. For a number of diverse reasons mothers on screen are not considered relevant or worthy fashion models for mothers, with comments being made about these characters and personalities being both too frumpy and too glamorous, too pedestrian yet also too outlandish; it is clear that fashion and style is a matter of personal taste and distinction, and that what one mother refers to as frumpy, another sees as classic, and what one mothers deems outlandish another views as respectably vintage ... but what is clear here is that mothers on screen are rarely seen as figures to relate to, personalities to emulate or characters to copy, be it in terms of mothering techniques, disciplinary practices or fashion models. And yet, perhaps surprisingly, mothers are keen to commit to the cooking, home wares and craft techniques seen on screen in line with recent trends in the hobbyist tradition.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the ways in which mothers in the audience responded to a question concerning maternal identification, before paying attention to the ways in which they have or have refused to copy particular behavioural techniques or sartorial etiquette from specific performers in a range of television texts. The women who responded to my questionnaire formed a frustrated and disappointed consensus as they referred to a lack of realistic, believable or authentic maternal figures. This was not to suggest that these women did not find escapist pleasures, cultural education or creative inspiration from the women on screen, but it does suggest that mothers in the audience are struggling to see their lived experiences played

out in the mainstream media, which continues to be a cause for concern, and a missed opportunity for public service and commercial channels alike.

At different times in the questionnaire, maternal audiences spoke of watching their favourite television mothers, and they routinely related these preferred figures back to their own lived experiences, with a sense of commonality often located between the audience experience off screen and their chosen on-screen performance. Recognition played a key role in finding a favourite maternal character, cast member or performer, but these self-same women later went on to foreground what they deemed to be the dearth of relatable or recognisable mothers on screen. Rather than speak of confused, contradictory or discordant viewing positions and challenge the maternal responses generously written, it is important to note that viewing pleasures are not and should not be rational, logical or consistent. There is much scope for inconsistencies, changeability and ostensible contradictions both here and in the broader viewing experience, and with this in mind it remains important to note both that television as a medium inspires, entertains and offers escapist fantasy, and that mothers in the audience are keen to balance such pleasures with maternal verisimilitude in the contemporary schedules.

