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Fashioning The Pregnant Body: Wearing Pregnant Bodies

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Fashioning The Pregnant Body: Dressing Pregnant Bodies

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Abstract

Drawing on qualitative research including in-depth interviewing and extensive participant observation this thesis maps a particular story of production and consumption of maternity wear in England at the turn of the twenty-first century. Arguing that these processes are not mutually exclusive but rather intricately interwoven, I analyse both the ways in which maternity wear is produced for and by high street and small independent retail and also personal accounts of its consumption. Having described the broad context for its problematic material production, I go on to analyse the cultural production of maternity wear in key retail spaces of representation. I argue that whilst the strategic and spatial marginality of maternity wear on the high street for example can be seen to be the result of less than favourable production issues that put tremendous pressure on margins and profitability, cultural discourses of the pregnant body and motherhood also structure the nature of provision and representation. These discourses which become imbued not only in the retail spaces themselves but also the clothing sold within them, it is further argued, are also significant in structuring women's embodied consumption experiences during pregnancy. Such inherent links between production and consumption, economics and culture can be seen to be significant at the level of personal experience as I describe through my analysis of women's embodied experience. However I also identify wider implications for the maternity wear market as a whole since the ways in which women consume clothing during pregnancy, indeed dress and wear their pregnant bodies, has important consequences for its sustainability and future growth.

The contribution of this thesis however goes beyond identifying the need for an expanded focus towards cultural economies in order to fully understand the workings of a market and indeed consumption processes themselves. I also identify the need for embodied theory to be at the heart of studies into fashion and dress. Consumption of clothing during pregnancy as it is understood here is about far more than the acquisition (and indeed flows) of material goods. Rather the process is explicitly embodied. My analysis takes a progressively in-depth look at the embodied nature of clothing consumption during pregnancy and argues that constant corporeo-sartorial negotiation is at the heart of women's experiences. The material cultural significance of clothing and bodies (for example as is mapped out in retail spaces of representation) are not merely academic nuances to be identified for discussion, they have material consequences for the ways in which pregnant bodies are dressed and indeed lived.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Pregnancy Chic?

The publication of the Annie Leibovitz images of heavily pregnant Demi Moore in, and most importantly on the cover of, *Vanity Fair* in 1991 (see Figure 1.1) can be seen to signify a turning point in discourses about pregnancy and (ironically given her nakedness) maternity wear. Despite the controversy sparked by these images – which I will argue remains at the heart of discourses and practices of clothing pregnant bodies – they also opened up new ways of seeing and indeed, for some, being the pregnant body. For perhaps the first time this troublesome corporeality was positively articulated in ways that can be seen to have radically influenced popular representations of pregnant bodies and indeed wider discourses of maternity wear.

Figure 1.1: Demi Moore: *Vanity Fair*, August 1991, Front Cover.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century the cliché of frumpy smock dress maternity wear is no longer acceptable, the emphasis on continuity of pre-pregnancy style and the new vogue for celebrity images would seem to indicate the birth of a 'pregnancy chic' (Serota and Kozlow Gardener, 1998), that pregnancy itself could even be considered fashionable.

However whilst there have undoubtedly been shifts in discourses about the clothes pregnant women wear, this thesis argues that there have been no parallel or comparable changes in discourses about the pregnant body itself. And since practices of dress and indeed clothing as material objects are intricately bound up with corporeality, I argue that they continue to structure the ways in which maternity wear is produced and consumed, and indeed therefore the ways in which pregnant bodies are clothed and worn.

1.2 The Demi Moore Effect

> "A woman announcing her pregnancy will be offered congratulations, will find herself treated as though she has done something very special, but the display of the pregnant body inspires a degree of repulsion which is not properly explained by the suggestions that such images are merely indecorous or inappropriate. When Demi Moore appeared on the front cover of *Vanity Fair* and exposed the painted curves of her pregnant body, some newsagents insisted the magazine be sold in an opaque wrapper. In 1997, when the new women's magazine *Frank* ran a fashion layout using pregnant models, the magazine's offices were deluged with complaints. " (Forna, 1998, p.8).

This contradictory response to impending and actual motherhood described by Forna (which she argues is exemplified by attitudes to breastfeeding in public) can indeed be seen to characterise interpretations of, and reactions to such images. Perhaps the most exaggerated, certainly the most widely reported and deeply discussed (although see also Longhurst (2000) for a commentary of a New Zealand bikini beauty contest for pregnant women) were those in relation to the Demi Moore *Vanity Fair* images. Views reported tended to be highly polarised. As Peter Jackson observed:

> "In Britain, the *Independent on Sunday* (14 July 1991) asked a selection of people if they were offended by this picture. Emma Nicholson MP thought it "absolutely beautiful, a triumph of womanhood and a celebration of life ... the most natural thing in this world.' Other people, such as David Sullivan, publisher of the scurrilous *Sunday Sport* newspaper, found the picture 'in bad taste': I think the picture is totally unacceptable on a cover in Britain in 1991. It should have been inside with a warning sticker, not thrust down people's throats in the newsagents. A lot of people would find it offensive, though I don't personally. (Independent on Sunday, 14 July, 1991)." (Jackson, 1993, p.221).

These highly polarised views typify the kind of responses this image provokes. Whilst some perceive beauty in such a representation I would argue that this is largely contingent upon the degree of correspondence a viewer perceives it to have with acceptable discourses of motherhood. It is clear from my research that there are many ways in which this front cover conforms to acceptable versions of motherhood in comparison to other images such as those of Spice Girl Melanie Gulzar (as she was at the time) published in the *Sunday Times Magazine* (and *News of the World*) in 1999 do not (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3 overleaf). For example the protective cradling of her bump evoked for many the maternal bond with the unborn child and the associated basic protective instinct. However for those who perceive the normative codes to be broken by such an image the response is likely to be far more negative. For example the *Sunday Times Magazine* images of Scary Spice provoked an almost entirely negative response among my research participants, in particular her perceived overt performance of sexuality being a particular problem to many. However, in so far as an image can be read as representing *mother* in correspondence with the hegemonic discourse, there is scope for a positive reading whilst the articulation of such an identity within a context of highly sexualised female

Figure 1.2: *Sunday Times Magazine* Front Cover, February 28th 2000

Figure 1.3: Tinsel Bikini Shot, *Sunday Times Magazine,* February 28th 2000, p. 34.

corporeality causes significant conflicts. As Stabile (1998) argues it was the display of *pregnant flesh*, which lay at the core of the controversy, since whilst:

> "...the cover [of *Vanity Fair*] displayed no more skin than magazines like *Allure*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Vogue* do on a regular basis. What repelled and shocked viewers was the vast expanse of white pregnant belly" (Stabile, 1998, p.183).

Despite the historical and cultural context being one of "infinitely representable female nudity" (Stabile, 1998, p.183) the display of pregnant flesh generated unease among viewers primarily because of the persistent articulation of the pregnant with the maternal body (Stabile, 1998). As many commentators have noted not only did some retailers refuse to sell the issue or do so only under opaque wrapping (Forna, 1998, Jackson, 1993, Stabile, 1998) but:

> "The cover provoked the most intense controversy in *Vanity Fair's* history: 95 television spots, 63 radio shows, 1,500 newspaper articles, and a dozen cartoons" (Stabile, 1998, p.183).

I would suggest that there are two main strands within this conflation of the pregnant and the maternal that explain this controversy and which are also highly significant when considering discourses and practices of maternity wear. Firstly, the conflation of sexual and maternal identity evoked by such an image and secondly the public display of a corporeality traditionally denied and abjectified by western cultures. The first is nicely illustrated by one of the *Independent on Sunday's* respondents:

> "Its awful. I saw Demi Moore in Ghost only a couple of weeks ago and I thought she was a lovely and beautiful lady. Then the next thing I see is her displaying herself all over the front of *Vanity Fair*. It is both unnecessary and distasteful. Pregnancy is a private matter and should stay that way" (Martin Warren, finance director quoted in Jackson, 1993, p.221).

Demi Moore's pregnant embodiment in the *Vanity Fair* image violently disrupts the hegemonic pleasures of the heterosexual male gaze. Her status as a 'lovely and beautiful' Hollywood actress enhances the power of the image, merging this identity with the sexual power relations evoked by 'the female nude' and her identity as 'mother'. The stark contradictions these constitute contribute to the unacceptability of this image for some, and may hint at the root of discontent voiced by some about the dress of certain pregnant pop stars in recent years. These women are high profile performers, participating in what could be conceptualised as an 'interactive 'service' occupation' to borrow Leidner's (1993) phrase. That is their bodies form an integral part of the 'service' they provide, the product they 'sell'. In all their cases their (hetero)sexual desirability is a fundamental component of their appeal to mass audiences, their bodies consumed through their audiences gaze. The 'pleasure' derived from such spectatorship is delegitimized in pregnancy by a culture, which firmly separates pregnancy and sexuality[1] (Rose, 1991). Conflicting pleasures are therefore evoked by the conflation of female (hetero)sexual desirability and

[1] A reflection on (reactions to) a pregnant Melanie Blatt singing "Voulez Vous Couchez Avec Moi ?" a song covered by 'All Saints' around the time of Melanie Blatt's pregnancy may be particularly interesting in this context.

pregnancy, images which conflict one another. The possibility for 'pleasure' in either one of these is disrupted by its corporeal association with the other.

Secondly, and closely related to discontent surrounding the conflation of sexuality and pregnancy is a historical denial of 'the pregnant body' in hegemonic discourse. The relative explosion of images of pregnant celebrities, both clothed and in a similar genre to Demi Moore, suggest that pregnancy has come to be considered almost fashionable. However, responses to certain images such as this, those published in Frank (1997), the bikini contest of which Longhurst (2000) reports and indeed those of my own respondents in relation to the Scary Spice images in particular (*Sunday Times Magazine*, 1999) show a sustained unease with the *materiality* of the pregnant body. As Stabile again argues:

> "The pregnant body – even clothed – is a source of abjection and disgust in popular culture: the woman is represented as awkward, uncomfortable, and grotesquely excessive. In a culture that places such a premium on thinness, the pregnant body is an anathema." (Stabile, 1998, p.183).

The pregnant body dramatically disrupts the normative codes of western female beauty and therefore displaying such corporeal forms remains, at some fundamental level, inappropriate. Whilst the internal functions of the maternal body are revered and almost unproblematically revealed through various visual technologies, the brute materiality of pregnancy conversely horrifies (Stabile, 1998). The pregnant woman in western society is firmly denied sexual subjectivity (by her bodily articulation with mother), her nakedness or otherwise inferred sexuality is deemed inappropriate because of her manifest sexual unavailability. In addition, the cultural discourses of female bodily beauty, being defined in almost perfect opposition to pregnant corporeality, also work to preclude such an identity. It is almost as if Demi Moore had posed naked and significantly 'over weight' for this is how the pregnant body is largely perceived. As Hyde suggests:

> "Among the vociferous minority defending the publication of the photo were a number who thought it demonstrated that pregnant women could still be beautiful and sexy: 'what a pretty sight it is!', 'Who says women can't ... retain their sexuality during pregnancy?' (*Vanity Fair*, October, 1991, p.18-20). The problem here is that pregnancy entails a number of changes to a woman's body – swollen abdomen, enlarged breasts – which conflict fundamentally with the current ideal of slimness as feminine beauty, propagated by magazines such as *Vanity Fair*. Responses to the photo of Demi Moore demonstrated that attractiveness to men is still seen as the most important function of both art and a woman's body, in the latter case overriding any other function, such as that of producing and nurturing a child." (Hyde, 1997, p.45).

This having been said, following Demi Moore's confident corporeal display there have been many more similar images (for example Cindy Crawford (*W* magazine, 05/99, figure 1.4); Scary Spice (*Sunday Times Magazine*, 28/02/99, figure 1.5); Jordan (*Now* magazine, 24/04/02, figure 1.6)), many magazine articles and photo shoots featuring pregnant celebrities (the list is too expansive to note in full but see for example: Patsy Kensit in *OK!* 173, 06/08/99, pp. 26-36; James Major and Emma Noble, *Hello!* 602, 14/03/00, pp. 62-70 Samantha Janus in *OK!* 254, 9/03/01,

Figure 1.4: Cindy Crawford, *W* Front Cover, May 1999.

Figure 1.5: Melanie Gulzar, *Sunday Times Magazine*, 28th February 2000, p.35.

Figure 1.6: Jordan, *Now* Front Cover 24th April 2002.

pp34-50)) and indeed a great deal of media publicity in general surrounding such women. Indeed despite the persistent hetero-patriarchal discourses outlined above it would seem that there are now new ways of seeing and doing pregnancy which have taken on a new legitimacy as several commentators have noted:

> "The publicity surrounding these [celebrity] pregnancies attracted in itself represents a sea-change in attitude. While mothers-to-be were once almost literally shut away ... All Saints' Melanie Blatt uncovered her bump for the world, a confident signal that that pregnancy is a natural state, not an illness, and need not interfere with even the most demanding tour schedule. This is certainly a change from the dark days of 1985 when the ... Icelandic singer star Bjork went on TV in her homeland with her bare 7-months-pregnant stomach on display – a national outcry ensued and the shock was enough to give on old lady a heart attack." (McGrail, *Pregnancy Plus* magazine, Jan/Feb 1999, p.6)

Indeed this apparent 'sea-change' in public opinion would appear to be far reaching since images such as those of Cindy Crawford (which was even published on the front cover of a national newspaper in the UK (The Mirror Wednesday May 12th 1999)) and those of Scary Spice (which I would consider to be amongst the most risqué to date because of their overtly sexual tone[2]) registered barely a murmur of comment, certainly nothing on the scale of that encountered in the wake of Demi Moore. In fact amongst the only misgivings voiced were those by some who felt the pregnancies of pop stars might encourage a 'rash of school girl pregnancies' (McGrail, 1999) suggesting that pregnancy had indeed become a fashion object akin to platform shoes or combat trousers. More recently, in 2002, the model Jordan hinted she may be on the verge of challenging the public/private discourse of pregnancy even further by bringing the *birthing* body into the public domain, proposing to broadcast the birth of her baby live over the internet. Whilst it is difficult to comment on what response such an act might have provoked, since in the event she regaled and did not go through with the planned screening, it is significant that it was even considered and indeed taken up by a media company. Certainly just over a decade ago such a notion would surely not have been given credence. It would appear that in this new era of apparent relative permissiveness surrounding iconographies of pregnancy, which in turn is a reconstruction of public-private discourses in relation to the body, in order to court controversy celebrities must find new taboos to challenge such as the birthing body.

1.3 Courting controversy as a means of challenging negative corporeal discourses

Some have suggested that celebrity pregnant corporeal display whilst being "narcissism, undoubtedly" (Benn, 1998, p.10) may also be a strategy to maintain media profiles and therefore marketability, rather than risk fading from the public eye in the hope of recapturing popularity post partum. In a notoriously fickle industry and indeed culture it is likely that participants motivated in such a way have

[2] Melanie's oiled skin, poses and adornment, along with the lighting used all contribute to the sexual overtones of these images. Certainly amongst all those discussed with participants these produced by far the most disapproving interpretations.

Figure 1.7: Melanie Blatt: *GQ*, September 1998, front cover.

sustained the undeniable 'fashion' for pregnant celebrity images. For example Jordan recently admitted her motivation behind the internet birth concept had been an awareness of her assured lack of longevity as a media figure and therefore the finite nature of her earning potential (*Now* magazine 24/04/02).

However I would argue that such actions can also be seen as a means of negotiating the negative discourses associated with the pregnant body. I would argue that by using inferences of sexuality or dressing or behaving unconventionally and provocatively these women attempt to avoid unflattering and negative comparisons with fashionable images or associating too closely with maternal imagery, which would threaten their carefully constructed identities. This is well illustrated in the instance of Melanie Blatt (figure 1.7). By dressing in this manner she clearly marked herself out as pregnant (rather than having an inferior body to others conforming to hegemonic ideals such as the other members of All Saints - one which appears fat in comparison) whilst also breaking acceptable codes of dress for pregnant women thus simultaneously avoiding aligning herself with maternal imagery or discourses. Furthermore Dressing in a modest manner more expected of pregnant women in this culture (see for example Longhurst, 2000) or wearing clothing identifiable as *maternity wear* would have been as damaging to Melanie Blatt's celebrity image as being identified as 'fat' for example since as I have suggested 'mother' (as it is hegemonically understood) is irreconcilable with any sexual identity.

The fact that so many celebrities who choose to publicise, or at least 'wear' their pregnancies in such ways choose to pose naked (what has become known as 'doing a Demi'), or semi-naked (in towelling robes, sarongs or bikinis for example) or dress in non-conforming ways would seem to reaffirm this argument. Certainly there are no images of high profile women wearing 'off the peg' maternity wear (indeed any maternity garments at all as a general rule) and there is no sign of the celebrity guest model in any maternity wear catalogue or fashion spread. It would appear that in order to negotiate the negative discourses surrounding the pregnant body high profile women adopt a variety of strategies, either to evoke a perhaps now acceptable version of 'maternal beauty' through the gentle sexuality of a Demi image, or to mark oneself out as different by breaking codes of dress (and / or behaviour)[3]. Indeed, the absence of (everyday) dress in most celebrity images highlights the problems of clothing discourses as they relate to the pregnant body. Being photographed naked or in items such as towelling robes and so on skilfully avoids having to negotiate these. Further, whilst hegemonic iconographies of pregnancy have certainly shifted, if not entirely as a result of then certainly since Demi Moore, with public displays of pregnant corporeality in the media becoming much more everyday (and to some degree therefore acceptable). The articulation of pregnant with maternal continues to structure discourses and indeed the pregnant body retains its ability to horrify. Therefore in constructing identities through dress and composing marketable images, celebrities must continue to negotiate these negative connotations of pregnant corporeality in specific ways. Despite apparent changes in iconographies of pregnancy and discourses of dress which such images have undoubtedly facilitated, the pregnant body itself in its brute materiality remains highly problematic in western culture and this I would argue lies at the centre of women's everyday practices of clothing their pregnant bodies.

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[3] For example Scary Spice can be seen to do this in her semi-naked shots published in the Sunday Times Magazine where my respondents felt she had transgressed the (new) boundaries of acceptability established post-Demi Moore. Here the imagery is too overtly sexual to be acceptable to many.

1.4 Everyday Negotiations

Everyday discourses of clothing the pregnant body today reject the 'mumsy' images of the past (see for example Serota and Kozlow Gardener, 1998). Smock dresses have come to form the cliché of what every self-respecting mother-to-be should avoid and indeed dressing poorly has apparently become a social faux pas in itself, despite desperately inadequate high street provision, as the following excerpt of a commentary of fellow antenatal class members attire from a recently published 'pregnancy guide' demonstrates:

> "It amazed me what some women would wear, irrespective of the stage of pregnancy or the season. ... Lime Lycra Lady ... appeared to be on a mission to demonstrate just how much stretch Lycra really does have. The first week she came, her lime lycra dress was a pretty snug fit, but she wore the same frock every week. I accept that it may have been comfortable to wear with all that stretchy fabric, but enough is enough – the rest of the world could watch as her tummy button gradually changed from its inward resting place to outward position as the weeks passed by.
>
> This snug fit was a total contrast to Kaftan Queen, who was your earth mother type. Everything she wore was flowing, shapeless and tie-dyed." (Gardener *et al*, 2002, p.47-48).

This tyrade is but a snippet of the detailed observation made of fellow class members' maternity clothing. Interestingly the authors do not choose to turn their critical gaze inward, giving little or no account of their own practices of dress during pregnancy, whilst being exceptionally and exclusively critical of others (there are no positive comments here). However their commentary demonstrates quite clearly the critical surveillance that women remain subject to, even in pregnancy, with respect to their appearance. As a general rule the emphasis tends to be much more on dressing in continuity with pre-pregnancy style and in particular utilising non specialist maternity wear, as self-professed pregnancy style afficianados' Serota and Kozlow Gardener suggest, rather than adopting a compromise or distinctive pregnancy style:

> "Clothing that you already own and feel comfortable in should be the mainstay of your nine-month wardrobe. We believe pregnancy should be a wonderful continuation of your life, not a compromise of your style. Why should you dress differently just because you're pregnant?" (Serota and Kozlow Gardener, 1998, p.18-19).

Whilst these women, the innovators of '*The Pregnancy Survival Kit*' clearly have an interest in the maternity wear market, they too reflect the discourse of continuity, which acts to construct maternity garments as a poor second to ordinary clothing. Indeed within this continuity discourse maternity wear itself continues to occupy the same position as its signifier the smock dress, being largely denied by popular culture which when paying any attention to the thorny issue of successfully clothing the pregnant body tends always to focus on ways of using non-specialist items. Interestingly I would argue that such a discourse whilst providing an alternative to a distinctive maternity style (which now appears unacceptable in everyday negotiations) acts to reinforce the negative bodily discourses hinted at above. Yet

this negativity towards maternity wear, indeed its denial, is apparent in many aspects of cultural commentaries about clothing the pregnant body.

Perhaps not surprisingly given the cultural context and corporeal signification of the pregnant body and in particular its radical contravention of the 'ideal female body' of fashion, the mainstream fashion press remains largely silent with respect to maternity style. I will argue that this is of great significance to the development of women's sartorial competencies with respect to their pregnant bodies, whilst also constructing them and indeed maternity wear itself as outside or almost anti-fashion. Certainly maternity wear itself is produced in this way – as outside fashion - by such media since any coverage pregnant bodies do receive (and this literally constitutes the odd article see for example: Lang, in *Elle*, March 1998; Clark, in *Marie Claire*, October 1999) positions them as best accommodated by larger sized standardised womenswear with any mention of specialist maternity wear being derogatory. Specialist items are written off as inherently frumpy and outdated. Indeed even the niche press of pregnancy and birth magazines and books tend also to follow this trend. The coverage of sartorial concerns within this medium is vastly outweighed by the enormous quantity of information on baby centred consumption and health issues, and that which does survive the editorial prioritisation tends to take the form of a 'tried and tested' trial of maternity items (for example different styles of maternity jeans, see *Pregnancy and Birth*, July 2002, p.94-95), with any 'fashion shoots' dominated again by standardised womenswear.

As importantly, the production of specialist maternity wear and indeed the pregnant body as anti-fashion and therefore practices of clothing this corporeality as almost 'damage limitation' – as the very terms 'Pregnancy *Survival* Kit' (Serota and Kozlow-Gardener, 1998, emphasis added) and 'fatty fashion' (Gardener et al, 2002, p.47) suggest – is 'made flesh' through its material provision and significatory production on the high street. This thesis interrogates the ways in which maternity wear and indeed the pregnant body are produced through retail spaces of representation (Nixon, 1992, 1996, 1997) arguing that these are structured by hegemonic cultural discourses of pregnancy and motherhood and the pregnant body such as those outlined above and that these have implications for the ways in which women consume clothing during pregnancy and indeed wear their pregnant bodies. This thesis therefore – in comparison to much consumption literature which often focuses narrowly on one aspect of this lengthy and fluid process (see Blomley, 1996; Entwistle, 2000; Lowe and Wrigley, 1996) – examines both production and consumption of maternity clothing within this particular cultural and historical context. In particular I argue that despite the challenge perceived in images such as those of Demi Moore and others to traditional discourses women's corporeal and sartorial experiences of pregnancy remain disciplined by little changed ideologies. Although by considering these experiences and practices in-depth a new challenge to hetero-patriarchal discourse can be established, one which asserts the fluidity of pregnant embodiment itself.

1.5 Outline of Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 outlines the literary context for this thesis. I explicitly situate my work as an intervention into the profound silence surrounding the inherent links between dress and the body. I briefly outline the historical absence of corporeality and clothing from academic discourse noting the significance of Cartesian dualistic thought in their exclusion firstly, by masculinist scholars and latterly, by feminists

who feared reaffirming these traditional gendered alignments by engaging with such subject matter. Whilst the body has largely been rehabilitated over recent years (in the main by feminists) and the pregnant body has been exorcised and shown to be a powerful theoretical tool in the dismantling of Cartesian thought, I argue that with respect to the study of fashion and dress it remains strangely distant. This is not only a curious latency given that one of the reasons for clothing's traditional absence from serious academic consideration is its intimate relationship with the corporeal, but I argue it is also so given the findings of this research. Cultural codes of dress define more than the appropriate surface presentation of the body, prescribing also appropriate modes of *being* the body as is described by those who have addressed maternity wear in the past, Bailey (1992) and in particular Longhurst (2000). And further, the ways in which women construct appropriate social bodies in relation to these requires constant corporeo-sartorial negotiation because of the fluid nature of corporeality. It is argued that because of the fluid nature of corporeality women's relationship with their clothing is constantly changing and therefore practices and meanings of dress are also multiple and fluid. This is something hinted at by recent work by Guy and Banim (2000) for example but is not explicitly engaged with by this or other scholarship. Using my own research as a starting point I argue that future work must be both empirically grounded and explicitly embodied and engage with everyday practices of corporeo-sartorial negotiation.

Chapter 3 works through the methodological foundations of this thesis. Here I outline the epistemological and methodological ideals underpinning my work and indeed describe the practical realities of engaging in research so conceived. Specifically I define my research as feminist and discuss the particular characteristics which delineate it as such. For example, I argue that this thesis represents one story among multiple possibilities, the particular outcome of research between mutually constituted individuals and its analysis by a particularly embodied and positioned researcher. Further, I argue that the knowledge constructed here, rather than contributing to some imagined 'permanent store of knowledge' (Gibson-Graham, 1996) is itself fluid and subject to reworking over time by different ad indeed the same individuals. In this respect I discuss the influence and significance of my own shifting corporeality over the course of the research and writing up periods from childless and never pregnant to embodying the very subject of the study – the pregnant body.

The first two chapters of analysis focus on the ways in which maternity wear is produced, both in a material sense - and indeed the economic conditions of its production – and also in a cultural symbolic sense with respect to the meaning and identity imbued within it.

Chapter 4 is a largely descriptive chapter which outlines the production and provision of maternity wear on the UK high street and more broadly. The chapter aims to highlight that whilst focusing on production issues these cannot be considered separate from consumption, indeed the two are intricately interwoven.

Beginning by describing the production of clothing for high street retail I discuss the strategic and spatial marginality of maternity wear within this context as being the result of problematic production issues which put tremendous pressure on margins and profitability. The marginality of maternity wear interestingly seems to contradict the highly segmented nature of the womenswear market at large and, I argue, works to produce a monolithic pregnant identity in contrast to the apparent

multiplicity represented elsewhere. However, beyond the high street I identify consumption led retail production of maternity wear in the shape of small independent shops. Over recent years several such enterprises have been established by women who I describe as 'consumers-turned-retailers', since their entrepreneurial motivation lays in poor personal consumption experiences. Drawing on participant observation data from two case study examples I argue that these retailers encounter exaggerated problems of production because of their lack of professional knowledge. As a result the production of maternity wear at these sites is seriously curtailed despite being distinct from the high street, for example in terms of privileging it as a primary rather than marginal and largely latent product. Both material provision and the overall production of maternity wear can be seen to be affected to the point where I question the long-term viability of such enterprises.

Nevertheless, these small independent retailers do succeed in producing maternity wear differently to high street retailers through the construction of particular spaces of representation and it is this I explore in chapter 5. Following Nixon (1996) I analyse the various mediums and techniques of representation in both high street and small independent retail spaces which I argue contribute to the particular productions of maternity wear and indeed, pregnant bodies at these sites. For example having provided a broad overview I break down these spatial compositions and analyse individually: clothing design; the display of clothing on mannequins; photographical representations; and shop design. Whilst the small independent representations are inescapably non-professional in most respects they do constitute challenges to the hegemonic monolithic constructions on the high street and indeed articulate different ways of wearing and being the pregnant body. Here multiple pregnant identities are represented and whilst maternal imagery is never entirely absent the salient point is that it is not the only version of pregnant femininity present. Further, in complete contrast to the high street the pregnant body is produced in these spaces as a legitimate site of consumption where women are validated as narcissistic consumers.

The following three chapters move away from a consideration of the production of maternity wear to consider the ways in which women consume clothing during pregnancy. The foregoing discussion provides the broad context within which the particular consumption experiences examined here take place, and whilst the linear progression of this thesis appears to separate out production from consumption the argument is rather that they are complexly interwoven and crucially influence one another.

It is important to note that being primarily based upon the articulations of a small, narrow group of women within specific embodied encounters with myself the forthcoming chapters map an understanding particular to this research. This is at best a partial picture and by no means a definitive explanation of 'pregnant women's consumption practice'. And whilst the variety of sources and methods I have drawn upon allows for some triangulation, and therefore a degree of confidence to be held in the analysis presented here, it remains a unique and partial rendering.

Specifically the final three chapters take a progressively more embodied look at pregnant women's clothing consumption. Chapter 6 focuses on consumption practices and knowledges, specifically their destabilisation during pregnancy. Here I map examples of the ways in which these are destabilised along with some of their consequences for clothing consumption and women's identity performance in addition to certain strategies through which women negotiate these. Clothing

consumption during pregnancy is characterised as a series of coping strategies due to the fundamental destabilisations of practice, knowledge and certitude women experience in addition to the need to negotiate a discourse of consumption specific to pregnancy, which centres on a need for thrift.

Chapter 7 takes the discussion of consumption a stage further arguing that a crucial aspect, which is often neglected, is its inherently embodied nature. Whilst this is not something unique to clothing consumption during pregnancy it is particularly important in this context due to the fundamentally problematic nature of pregnant embodiment. Four examples are identified here for discussion. Firstly, the pregnant body is incompatible with discourses of fashion. It is argued that this not only has tangible consequences for women's consumption practices, knowledges and certitude (and therefore identity performance) but also the ways in which their bodies themselves are experienced. Further pregnant embodiment itself, as it is understood and experienced within hegemonic discourse, strongly influences the perceived appropriateness of fashionable dress. Therefore as well as being curtailed by an absolute lack of material provision as identified in the previous chapter, embodied encounters with fashion are also significant in women's renegotiations. Secondly, the embodied experience of consumption, specifically shopping is qualitatively different from pre-pregnancy. On a number of levels women experience their pregnant bodies as being 'out of place' in consumption spaces, both those in which maternity wear is sold and more generally. For example not looking obviously pregnant appears to make women feel their presence is less legitimate in shopping spaces coded as maternal, being heavily pregnant and embodying the antithesis of fashion provokes feelings of not belonging in consumption spaces where other bodies are closer to the norm, and indeed the materiality of such corporealities also problematises full participation in such activities and spaces. Thirdly, sartorial knowledge at a very fundamental level must be re-learnt. Here I examine the material encounters between clothing and bodies and discuss the difficulties women have in negotiating alien bodies and clothing, neither of which are stable. Finally, I examine the ways in which women use clothing to negotiate both the symbolic significance of their bodies in particular spaces and indeed their materiality through dress. One woman's particular workplace experience is examined in-depth.

Chapter 8 focuses specifically on the pregnant body itself, arguing that contrary to the monolithic form evoked by hegemonic discourse and indeed cultural representations there is no singular, fixed pregnant body but rather a profusion of fluid, constantly shifting corporealities. Although categorising these is akin to drawing lines in dry sand I identify several corporealities which loom large in the accounts of my respondents. These are presented not as a definitive account of multiple pregnant corporealities but rather as a means of demonstrating their existence. Those identified here are: the 'in-between' pregnant body; 'properly pregnant' or 'satisfactorily' pregnant bodies; heavily pregnant bodies and post-partum bodies. This analysis has deep implications for the study of clothing consumption at a number of levels, for example if bodies are not stable then neither can the material relationship between clothing and the corporeal be fixed. Rather than assuming bodies to be inert canvasses upon which the symbolism of clothing is projected we must engage with the material encounters between the two recognising their mutually constitutive relationship and indeed the power of each to *remake* the

other. Indeed, the final part of this chapter examines particular ways in which pregnant bodies and clothing can be seen to be mutually constitutive.

Chapter 2: The Emperor's New Clothes: A Call To Make The Body Explicit In Academic Accounts of Dress

2.1 Introduction

The existence of inescapable links between the corporeal and clothing has been eluded to by the exclusion, or perhaps rather repression (Soper, 2001) of both by post-enlightenment thought and therefore the majority of academic disciplines. Over recent years many feminist scholars across the social sciences have challenged the masculinist structure of both the academic establishment and the form of rationalist knowledge underpinning western thought by exorcising the dualistic basis for their exclusion. Rehabilitating 'the body' as an appropriate site for the production, and subject of knowledge and writing the corporeal into academic literature to occupy a position of 'self' rather than 'other' has been a feminist project challenging centuries of taken for granted assumptions. Whilst much of the initial impetus was theoretical, centring on 'the body' (in itself a masculinist construct), exposing the foundations of rationalist thought to critical consideration, the implications for disciplines have been greater for example involving a widening of subjects open to legitimate investigation, constructing an infinitely broader range of embodied individuals as 'knowers', and by positioning researchers within their field of study - as integral parts of their findings - changing the theory of knowledge altogether. Indeed where once western knowledge and our understanding of the social world was shaped by:

> "The Platonist emphasis in the western tradition – that is ... its abstraction and prioritisation of the mental, the rational and the spiritual over the corporeal, the sensual, and the related tendency to define what is distinctive to human beings in terms of the possession of mind and soul rather than by reference to embodied existence." (Soper, 2001, p. 15)

And where once the masculinist rationalist form of knowledge was the only legitimate form it might be argued that embodied thought is now *de rigeur* with the corporeal being considered the only way to interpret the social world. However it is my argument here that whilst social scientists may well have come to terms with the corporeal, insisting that:

> "It is vital to understand bodily experience in order to understand people's relationships with the physical and social environments" (Longhurst, 1997a, p.486)

The mind/body dualism still haunts embodied work in key ways, which terminally undermine its efficacy with respect to truly challenging the masculinist assumptions surrounding sexed bodies. In many ways the cerebral remains prioritised over the corporeal and in no area is this more apparent than that of fashion and clothing. It is the persistence of this debilitating dualism that this thesis seeks to root out and challenge with respect to one of the forms of embodiment charged by many with the ability to do so – the pregnant body.

2.2 Cartesianism, Corporeality and Clothing

> "From the time of Plato, reason was thought to enable the soul to reach a 'pure, and eternal ... immortal and unchangeable' realm where truth dwells among the divine... and the wise' as Genevieve Lloyd puts it. 'The senses, in contrast, drag the soul back to the realm of the changeable where it wanders about blindly, and becomes confused and dizzy, like a drunken man, from dealing with the things that are ever changing" (Lloyd, 1984: 6). To achieve knowledge, Plato concluded, 'the god-like rational soul should rule over the slave like mortal body'." (Alcoff, 1996, p.14-15).

What feminists have come to conceive as the 'masculinist formulation of reason' (Alcoff, 1996) has been fundamentally predicated on a surgical separation between body and mind (see for example Alcoff, 1996; Colebrook, 2000; Gatens, 1992; Grosz, 1994, 1995; Johnston, 1996; Longhurst, 1994, 1995, 1997a; Rose, 1991, 1993; Soper, 2001). The formulation of knowledge has been thought dependent upon this dualistic view of the human condition within which the devalued 'other' is necessarily both excluded from the conditions of knowing (and therefore the position of 'knower') whilst also being depended upon for its implicit presence to define 'self' as rational (see for example Rose, 1991, Longhurst, 1994, 1995). As Grosz (1994, p.3) suggests:

> "This bifurcation of being is not simply a neutral division of an otherwise all-encompassing descriptive field. Dichotomous thinking necessarily hierarchizes and ranks the two polarised terms so that one becomes the privileged term and the other its suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart. The subordinated term is merely a negations or denial, the absence or privation of the primary term, its fall from grace; the primary term defines itself by expelling its other and this process establishes its own boundaries and orders to create an identity for itself."

In this respect the mind/body dualism has been mapped onto other dichotomies such as culture/nature, reason/passion and is in this way situated within a pervasive binary code (which has been shown to structure all areas of western thought including for example geography (see for example Longhurst, 1997a)), which consistently devalues the body. Since through this dualistic framework the body is defined in:

> "non-historical, naturalistic, organicist, passive, inert terms, seeing it as an intrusion on or interference with the operation of mind, a brute givenness which requires overcoming, a connection with animality and nature that needs transcendence. Through these associations, the body is coded in terms that are themselves traditionally devalued" (Grosz, 1994, p.3-4).

An additional and crucial dimension to this binary code, which at once presents as an additional binary opposite but also underlies the whole system and significantly contributes to the repression of the body, is the distinction between male and female. In this context therefore:

> "The body is a term traditionally associated with women and femininity while its opposite, the mind, has become the principle field of the masculine" (Longhurst, 1994, p.216)

This has had various implications for women within academic domains and indeed beyond and is key to what feminists refer to as the 'masculinism' of rationalist thought (and therefore by extension all disciplines predicated upon it). This masculinist dualistic thinking, predicated on the distinction between male mind and a female body, has been identified by feminists as having two main implications with respect to modern academic work. These relate to who is legitimately seen to produce knowledge and indeed what are deemed appropriate themes of knowledge itself (Longhurst, 1997a), since whilst the body has become feminised women themselves have also traditionally been closely aligned with their corporeality to the point where Kirby (1992, quoted in Longhurst 1997a, p.491) suggests that, "Woman is the body".

> "Though reason was portrayed as universal and neutral precisely because it was bodiless, this schema worked to justify the exclusion of women from the domains of the academy, of science, and from generally being accorded epistemic authority and even credibility" (Alcoff, 1996, p.16)

Despite the self-professed 'objectivity' of rational thought in truth the concept (and indeed therefore the knowledge thus produced) is highly and inescapably gendered. Through the adoption of popular and scientific discourse which both informed and reinforced one another female bodies were constructed as being inescapably tied to their biology - something of which women were constantly aware - men were able to escape their corporealities. In relation to the problematic leaky, cyclical, fleshy bodies of women male bodies were cast as unchanging, controlled and therefore ultimately transcendable. Therefore the bodilessness of men and their resultant access to reason depended entirely on the rooted embodiment of women and their exclusion from it. As Kirby argues (1992, p.12-13 emphasis in original quoted in Longhurst, 1997a, p.91):

> "Although it is granted that man has a body, it is merely as an object that he grasps, penetrates, comprehends and ultimately transcends. As his companion and complement, Woman *is* the body. She remains stuck in the primeval ooze of nature's immanence, a victim of the vagaries of her emotions, a creature who can't think straight as a consequence.
> In western culture, while white men may have presumed they could transcend their embodiment ... by seeing it as little more than a container for the pure consciousness it held inside, this was not allowed for women, blacks, homosexuals, people with disabilities, the elderly, children and so on" (Longhurst, 1997a, p.491)

The implication therefore inevitably became that women and all 'others', were constructed as incapable of rational thought. In being embodied in ways constructed as problematic and inescapably immanent the ability to think rationally was denied. "Their knowledge cannot count as knowledge for it is too intimately grounded in, and tainted by their (essential) corporeality" (Longhurst, 1997a, p.494).

Since the privileged access to knowledge and indeed reason's underlying structure relies so entirely on the mind/body distinction and in particular the denial of male corporeality it has been necessary to exclude any embodied presence from the themes of knowledge itself. Opening up enquiry to matters of the body would be to risk the basis of knowledge itself if for example it were to reveal the problematic assumptions underlying the presumed alignment of woman with her particularly constructed corporeality or indeed the presence of a male body as anything other than an unproblematic container of consciousness. The danger to knowledge of the distinctions absent/present, culture/nature, mind/body, male/female, being breached required any hint of the corporeal being excluded from legitimate knowledge. Indeed as Longhurst argues in relation to geography there has been an identifiable policing of material controlling what counts as geographical knowledge:

> "Many themes, topics and approaches are deemed inappropriate or illegitimate by the hegemons in 'the discipline'. Themes such as embodiment and sexuality; topics such as abjection, bodies of the homeless, love-making and blood spilt in violence; and approaches that are deemed to be overly subjective and 'non-academic', threaten to spill, soil and mess up, clean, hard geography... What constitutes appropriate issues and legitimate topics to teach and research in geography comes to be defined in terms of reason, rationality and transcendent visions as though these can be separated out from passion, irrationality and embodied sensation" (Longhurst, 1997a, p.493-493).

The key point here is that not only has faithfulness to the concept of Cartesian knowledge determined these embodied themes to be outside legitimate knowledge but that the position of those within the discipline as privileged producers of rational knowledge depends upon this also. The interrogation of such themes and topics puts this at risk by threatening to reveal the interconnectedness of mind and body and dissolving the distinctions between male mind and female body for example. Indeed I would suggest that the historical repression of clothing by western academic thought could be attributed in part to such concerns. As Soper (2001) suggests the neglect of clothing is part of the wider repression of the corporeal and the feminine. Clothing is intricately associated with the corporeal as Bell (1992, quoted by Dant 1999, p.85) has noted (see also Entwistle 2000, 2001; Warwick and Cavallaro, 1998):

> "Our clothes are too much a part of us for most of us ever to be entirely indifferent to their condition: it is as though the fabric were indeed a natural extension to the body, or even the soul"

By virtue of being seen as an extension of the body, clothing has been clearly outside the legitimate academic project. Indeed with respect to the conditions of Cartesian thought its repression was *required* since any academic discussion would not just bring the body uncomfortably close but bring it into focus since an admission of sartorial significance simultaneously admits the importance of the body it adorns. Further whilst the traditional association of fashion and dress with the feminine has justified its exclusion (Soper, 2001; Wilson 1992) a construct, which can be seen to aid male corporeal transcendence, this dualism itself is challenged by explorations of

historical patterns of dress and indeed theoretical discussions underlying the fundamental 'need' for clothing. As Soper suggests:

> "...clothes have been very extensively used to assert the cultural status of human beings, to police the border between humans and animals, to deny or cover our animality and thereby preserve a seemly distance from the beast" (Soper, 2001, p.17)

Such assertions not only align male bodies with their female counterparts with respect to their animal status, revealing their corporealities as not entirely 'culture'. But also asserts that cultural work is done on bodies at a fundamental level in order to make them socially acceptable, therefore opening up to question assumptions about the naturalness (or not) of male/female bodies.

In this respect there has indeed, in recent years, been an extraordinary growth in work within the social sciences as a whole exploring new areas of study centring on the body and precisely the themes traditionally excluded[4]. The purpose of the largely feminist work in this area has been to challenge the primacy of Cartesian masculinist thought and carve out a place for the body within mainstream theory by exposing the fallacies of phallocentric approaches and the centrality of the corporeal in the organisation and experience of everyday social life. This thesis aims to both build upon and critique existing feminist work in this area. Using the powerful theoretical assertions made in relation to the pregnant body I shall develop a critique of literatures concerned with clothing, which largely continue to neglect the body, as lived. I argue that not only is an exploration of the negotiations of the pregnant body fundamental to any understanding of maternity wear production and consumption but also that such an exploration can add something to the challenge of cartesianism and masculinist knowledge by suggesting new ways of thinking through embodiment and underlining the intersection of nature/culture, body/ mind in the structuring of everyday life and indeed sexed social relations. However I argue that this is only possible with genuine engagement with fleshy corporealities which theorists appear stubbornly reluctant to enter into since it remains lacking in a literature predicated upon an inferred primacy of the cerebral over the corporeal. It is my argument also therefore that any discussion of clothing consumption or practices of dress must necessarily include detailed consideration of the bodies involved. Without an understanding of lived corporealities a partial appreciation of the sartorial is all that can be hoped for.

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[4] For example in geography (and the social sciences more general) there has been a particular growth in embodied work in a number of areas. For example economic geography has begun to make concessions to the corporeal with important work such as McDowell (and Court's) in city workplaces confirming that actors even in rational, cultural realms of masculinity so indeed have bodies. Although her focus on women and their need to actively manage their bodily identity in order to conform to work place cultures could be seen to re-inscribe the notion of male transcendence. In medical geography too theorists such as Kearns (1994); Dorn and Laws (1994) and Brown (1995) have argued for bodies to be attended to as more than vectors of disease to be mapped (Brown, 1995). In response there has been for example new efforts to exorcise the cultural constructions of female and male bodies in relation to screening debates which it has been argued structure men and women's lived experience of their bodies in relation to the traditional gender order (see for example Bush, 1996 and West, 1998). West (1998) in particular works to develop a more critical view of male corporeality, explicitly noting its fragility with respect to sexually specific diseases for which it is in need of external surveillance and monitoring (in similar ways to female bodies).

2.3 The Pregnant Body

> "Misogynist thought has commonly found a convenient self-justification for women's secondary social positions by containing them within their bodies that are represented, even constructed as frail, imperfect, unruly, and unreliable, subject to various intrusions which are not under conspicuous control. Female sexuality and women's powers of reproduction are the defining (cultural) characteristics of women, and, at the same time, these very functions render women vulnerable, in need of protection or special treatment, as variously prescribed by patriarchy" (Grosz, 1994, p.13-14).

Within this context of patriarchy Grosz argues it is not surprising that there has been suspicion among feminists about any form of theoretical engagement with female corporeality. Indeed this resistance and attempt towards extra-corporeal theory can be seen to be reflected in the adopting of the sex/gender distinction (which some remain resistant to moving away from, see for example Witz, 2000) and also in previous feminist rejection of fashion and dress. As Wilson (1992, p.5; see also Negrin, 1999) argues:

> "many feminists reject fashion because of the way in which it reinforces the sexual objectification of women; for its association with conspicuous consumption and the positioning of women as economic chattels, as property, and because it is held to be uncomfortable and to render women helpless (high heels and pinched-in-waists for example, can impede movement)."

In this respect research focused primarily on the pregnant body could be seen to reaffirm the alignment of women with reproductive bodies and therefore justify patriarchal social relations. However I would argue that through a focus on pregnant bodies and in particular how they are negotiated and experienced through dress at once poses a theoretical challenge to misogynist thought and its structure and also problematises patriarchy's very foundations through its laying bare of pregnant bodily experience and indeed material corporeality as inescapably culturally determined.

Pregnant corporeality has been identified by several theorists as posing a significant threat to major premises of Cartesian dualism (see for example Braidotti, 1994; Young, 1984, 1990). Iris Marion Young for example has argued that the pregnant body is challenging with respect to not only 'dualistic metaphysics' but also the dualistic language maintained by phenomenologists who, whilst locating subjectivity in the body itself continue to assume a distinction between subject and object, indeed conceiving of the subject as unity (Young, 1984, 1990). Young notes several specific challenges, which lived pregnant embodiment poses to even this dualistic distinction: split subjectivity; the shift (and indeed fluidity) of body boundaries; and the split in bodily self-location (Young, 1984, 1990). For example, during both pregnancy and birth Young notes the radical splitting of self and other, inner and outer.

> "Pregnancy challenges that integration of my body experience by rendering fluid the boundary between what is within, myself, and what is outside, separate. I experience my insides as the space of another, yet my own body." (Young, 1990, p.163).

Birth itself can be seen as yet a more dramatic collapsing of dichotomy when, for a moment, the other is simultaneously inside and outside of self (Young, 1984, 1990).

Further recent work with female-to-male transsexuals who transitioned either during or soon after pregnancy has constructed an additional challenge in this vein. More (1998) found that for such individuals pregnant embodiment was experienced as an 'other' within the self, that is outside, inside. This collapsing of the assumed integrity of the body and self is seen here in far more exaggerated terms than Young describes. The relationship perceived with the other for these pregnant subjects was one that could not be conceptually aligned with this embodied experience as Young refers to it:

> "Pregnancy was described as a strange experience, several FTMs characterised their feelings towards the unborn child as one of a father. The unborn child was perceived either negatively as 'a parasite' or positively – neutral rather than 'as a guest', who had to be protected, *but never as part of the pregnant person*" (More, 1998, p.322, emphasis added).

In addition this study has brought into question the assumption that fertility and in particular pregnancy defines bodies as female, therefore also challenging the taken for grantedness of pregnancy as a female, indeed even feminine concern, identity or bodily process. More's (1998) work has shown that despite naturalised assumptions underpinning western society (and indeed knowledge production) the lived pregnant body is not necessarily the demarcator of a feminine subject who experiences this corporeality (as it is constructed and 'treated' in this cultural context) as consistent with their sexed identity. As one of More's respondents remarked:

> "I did not feel more feminine, but still the feminine image was imposed on me externally. I was given, by mom and her friends, and wore begrudgingly and with all sort of humiliations maternity clothes for a woman. I wear / wore men's clothes. Having to be examined pelvicly repulsed me to an exaggerated degree, I thought. Sitting in the docs office who delivered me, and my mom, and Zac was also humiliating me in an (en) gendered way: that space was a woman's space and fundamentally at the surface of my skin I didn't fit in" (More, 1998, p.322)

Such experiences powerfully destabilise the mind/body, male/female dualistic associations underpinning Cartesian rationalism. More's respondents lived their pregnant (potentially leaky, fertile, natural, uncontrollable) bodies as located male subjects and through this and indeed their transitioning and living as men the assertion that the male body is the infinitely transcendable inverse of the female is dramatically fractured.

Young (1984, 1990) and More's (1998) work would appear to challenge the very basis upon which women (and other 'others) have been excluded from the position of knowledge producer. Indeed just as Longhurst suggests that "[t]he pregnant subject appears to personify / exemplify the feminine unknowable" (1994, p.217) pregnant women would seem to embody the height of the feminine unknowing. Pregnant women and pregnant embodiment have therefore been excluded from disciplines such as geography on this basis:

> "the Pregnant Woman has previously been excluded from geographical discourse – she has been confined to the domestic realms and therefore rendered 'natural' and invisible... [S]he is thought to speak the (irrational) language of the hysteric thereby raising epistemological questions about the possibility of her place within the discipline of geography" (Longhurst, 1994, p.218).

Longhurst's work on pregnant women in New Zealand (1994; 1997b; 1999; 2000) has therefore been posited as a challenge to the traditional formulations of Cartesian knowledge and in particular the discipline of geography in its privileging of pregnant bodies as sites of knowledge production and also in focusing on the bodies of these women not as natural unchanging givens but as actively produced:

> "Pregnant bodies are 'real', while at the same time, they are socially inscribed and constructed. 'Real' material bodies do not exist outside the political, economic, cultural and social realms. They do not exist outside of discourse" (Longhurst, 1997b, p.34).

Through her work with women pregnant for the first time, Longhurst has shown that despite the fact that they may describe shrinking life worlds and awkwardness in public space for example in terms of the materiality of the pregnant body, its construction through the physical built environment and discourse is of key importance in this regard. Indeed she argues that:

> "It is undeniable that the material body of the pregnant woman is 'different' to the material body of the non-pregnant woman. The pregnant woman is likely to be 9 to 13.5 kilograms heavier, she may be retaining some fluids, feel tired, and experience shortness of breath. Some women, on the other hand report feeling energetic and healthy for the duration of their pregnancy. Ye this very 'real' and undeniable body is not simply a biological bedrock which can solely explain pregnant women's withdrawal from public space. The 'real' pregnant body is at the same time constructed and inscribed by the discourses that surround pregnancy. It is these discourses that are too frequently ignored in the understandings of pregnancy" (Longhurst, 1997b, p.35).

For example, she argues that discourses, which inform the construction of so-called public (but in truth highly 'privatised') spaces such as shopping malls can work to physically produce awkwardness and problematic bodily experiences (1994). For example, inadequate public facilities highlight the need to urinate more frequently (at certain stages of pregnancy); few lifts require reliance on stairs (which can be tiring) and escalators (which can be "problematic due to a change in their centre of balance" (1994, p.220)); and perhaps most explicitly a lack of adequate seating in public houses. Such aspects of the physical environment provoke embodied experiences which, whilst can be understood in terms of the particularities of the pregnant corporealities can also be seen to reinforce the expectations for pregnant bodies, contributing to withdrawal from public space and 'inappropriate' activities. The built environment therefore can be seen to discipline pregnant bodies by modifying women's behaviour as was borne out by comments made by one of Longhurst's

respondents about the provision of only high, backless bar stools rather than chairs in a public house she described them as:

> "impossible – I was sitting there thinking 'where's a proper seat?' I was getting sore and so I'd rather not go any more. I think even now I'd probably say to my husband 'you go' (Interviewee, 1992)." (Longhurst, 1994, p.220).

The built environment itself can therefore be seen to be shaped by cultural discourses determining appropriate activities, behaviours and spatialities of pregnant bodies. By the same token material embodied experience of the 'real' pregnant body can thereby be seen to be structured by discourse. Further, Longhurst discusses how representations of pregnant bodies are internalised by women in their material embodied experiences. For example she notes that discourses of the pregnant body as prone to 'emotional eruptions', incapable of clear or rational thought, forgetful and so on are commonly eluded to by women, as in this particular instance:

> "I seldom raise the issue of lack of concentration on tasks or being unable to think clearly and rationally during pregnancy, yet it nearly always came up in the course of our interactions. In one conversation the topic came up by way of a woman, Iris, who had recently given birth to her first baby advising other women who were soon due to give birth for the first time ... "Your brain grows back after a while [laughter] and when you get your brain back it only comes back about 50 per cent and you need a lot of positive mental attitude to get the other 50 per cent back and then you can start to function again". The comment was light-hearted but nevertheless served to reiterate this dominant discourse of pregnant women as less intelligent and rational than non-pregnant women or men." (Longhurst, 1997b, p.36).

Longhurst therefore argues that cultural discourses of pregnancy influence the ways in which women materially experience pregnant corporeality, and specifically she suggests that her "discussion of pregnant women as (overly) emotional, irrational and forgetful" particularly in the way it shows the internalisation of these discourses "illustrates an interface between material and discursive representations of bodies" (Longhurst, 1997b, p.38). With respect to my research into the production and consumption of maternity wear this assertion is particularly significant, specifically the contention that:

> "Social and psychical investments effect material bodily changes. Changes in body image and representations are inseparable from changes at the level of the material body itself, just as corporeal changes are registered in changes concerning representations of bodies (see Grosz, 1994, p.76)." (Longhurst, 1997b, p.38).

With respect to clothing the pregnant body discourses of abjection are highly significant. These I would suggest are internalised in much the same way as those discussed by Longhurst influencing the lived experience of pregnant corporealities as well as the way they are lived (including how they are dressed). An examination of such discourses is significant in this context since they, like those Longhurst examines expose the undeniable cultural influence on the material pregnant body as well as contributing to the theoretical challenge of Cartesian assumptions about the

body already begun by feminists. When examining the ways in which women clothe their pregnant bodies discourses of abjection and ugliness are common but what is clear is that there is not one single pregnant body that is described or experienced as equally problematic throughout pregnancy. Rather, women's experience maps multiple pregnant bodies, which are discursively constructed and materially experienced very differently. Theorists have noted the significance of the phenomenal morphological changes that occur during pregnancy, for example Braidotti notes that:

> "The woman's body can change shape in pregnancy and childbearing; it is therefore capable of defeating the notion of fixed *bodily form*, of visible, recognisable, clear and distinct shapes as that which marks the contours of the body. She is morphologically dubious. The fact that the female body can change shape so drastically is troublesome in the eyes of the logocentric economy within which to see is the primary act of knowledge and *the gaze* the basis of all epistemic awareness." (Braidotti, 1994, p.64, emphasis in original).

However, the multiplicity and fluidity of corporeality as it is lived has not previously been explored, and certainly not from an embodied perspective. Yet my research shows that discourses of abjection in particular, which construct the pregnant body as monstrous and grotesque, fundamentally structure cultural codes of dress and therefore women's negotiation of their bodies through clothing and indeed the ways in which these bodies are experienced and lived more broadly. Further, within this discursive context the pregnant body is experienced as *multiple* corporealities rather than a singular yet shifting figure. For example, my research has found that women commonly describe being differentially embodied throughout their pregnancies, experiencing for example a contradictory body which is at once pregnant and yet not pregnant in addition to 'in-between', 'satisfactorily' and heavily pregnant bodies as well as an almost invariably problematic post-partum body[5]. Such a contestation is, I would argue, immensely valuable in the context of any feminist challenge not only of the theoretical foundations of knowledge but also patriarchal social relations. As Grosz (1994, p.19) argues:

> "Where one body (in the west, the white, youthful, able, male body) takes on the function of model or ideal, the human body, its domination may be undermined through a defiant affirmation of a multiplicity, a field of differences, of other kinds of bodies and subjectivities."

This work takes such a suggestion to a new level arguing that we must consider multiplicity within what was once cast as singular and not just in terms of the presence of multiple subjectivities (as previous work on the pregnant body has done), but more than that, multiple fleshy materialities[6]. Further as this work will show

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[5] And whilst clearly not all women experience each of these bodies or indeed in a singular way I argue that these are identifiable corporealities.

[6] And this does not just apply to pregnant corporealities; they are simply used here to demonstrate the principle. Other examples which might usefully be considered are multiple corporealities associated with ageing, illness or injury or also perhaps seemingly insidious surface changes such as growing facial hair, losing ones hair, or perhaps more radically changes due to plastic surgery. Indeed, Guy and Banim (2000; see also Banim et al, 2001) note women's shifting corporeality on a day-to-day basis for example in terms of having a 'fat day' which requires particular modification of one's practices of

whilst for the most part pregnant corporealities are represented, understood, discursively constructed and lived within discourses of abjection these bodies only exist as such within particular "economic, cultural and social realms (Longhurst, 1997b) and central to this is the production, retail and consumption of maternity wear.

2.3.1 Pregnant bodies as abject

> "'Abjection is the affect or feeling of anxiety, loathing and disgust that the subject has in encountering certain matter, images, and fantasies – the horrible and dreadful – to which it can only respond with aversion, with nausea and distraction. Kristeva (1982) argues that the abject provokes fear and disgust because it exposes the border between self and other. This border is fragile. The abject threatens to dissolve the subject by dissolving the border. The abject is also fascinating, however, it is as though it draws the subject in order to repel it' (Longhurst forthcoming; see also Young 1990, p.144)" (Longhurst 2000, p.466)

Longhurst (2000), Young (1984, 1990) and Braidotti (1994) for example discuss the ways in which the pregnant body is typically considered to be abject, being literally embodied as both self and other (mother and foetus), threatening to split into 'at least two selves' at almost any moment (Longhurst, 2000, p.466). The boundaries of the self threaten to break both in terms of self and other and also in terms of bodily seepage, being considered likely to leak:

> "Their bodies are often considered constantly to threaten to expel matter from the inside – to seep and leak – they may vomit (morning sickness, cry [pregnant women tend to be constructed as 'overly' emotional (see Longhurst 1997b)], need to urinate more frequently, produce colostrum which may leak from their breasts, have a 'show' appear, have their waters break', and sweat with the effort of carrying the extra weight of their body (see Longhurst, forthcoming)." (Longhurst, 2000, p.467)

I would suggest that there is more to this 'fabrication of pregnant bodies as sites / sights of abjection' (Longhurst, 2000) than these threatened fractures of corporeal boundaries. From women's own perspectives it would appear for example that there is a very real sense of a self/other split in addition to that felt in relation to their unborn child/ren. There is a sense in which the body itself becomes 'other' with the real or true corporeal 'self' being temporarily obscured by the pregnant body. Women talk about feeling that they do not represent themselves well during pregnancy, about being shocked and horrified by particularly their heavily pregnant bodies and feeling that these bodies do not work properly any more and so on. All of these articulations, and particularly those which often accompany them in relation to being impatient to, and eagerly anticipating getting back into their *own* clothes, getting *their* body back, back to normal (or indeed fearing they may never be able to)

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dress. I would argue that multiple corporealities structure our everyday experience in ways previously unimagined and explored. As a result no one can be said to be free from the body as constant renegotiation is necessary through dress, comportment and so on.

suggest a discourse of distancing, a distinction where the true corporeal self and pregnant bodies are somehow split.

2.3.2 Transgression of Acceptable Body Boundaries

Integral to this particular aspect of self/other split I would suggest as well as indicating another aspect of this body's abjection and its material threat to social order is its fundamental uncontrollability and therefore transgression of acceptable body boundaries in terms of size. In western societies over recent years the body has come to be experienced and lived more as a locus for change and control in relation to its appearance and conformity to social norms. Not exclusively, but particularly in relation to the performance of femininity (Bordo, 1993) such bodily surveillance and self-regulation has become almost normative. As Featherstone (1991, cited in Entwistle, 2000) among others (see for example Bordo, 1993, Gamman, 2000) has suggested these conceptions and practices of the body have developed in direct relation to consumer culture:

> "...since the early twentieth century there has been a dramatic increase in self-care regimes of the body. The body has become a focus for increasing 'work' (exercise, diet, make-up, cosmetic surgery etc) and there is a great tendency to see the body as part of one's self that is open to revision, change, transformation ... We are no longer content to see the body as finished, but actively intervene to change its shape, alter its weight and contours. The body has become part of a project to be worked at, a project increasingly linked to a person's identity of self. The care of the body is not simply about health, but about feeling good... Increasingly our happiness and personal fulfilment is pinned on the degree to which our bodies conform to contemporary standards of health and beauty" (Entwistle, 2000, p.19)

During pregnancy the ability to control the body, to 'actively intervene to change its shape' in order to assure its correlation to social norms (whether these be pregnant or non-pregnant) is dramatically removed. For women who are used to embodying anything approaching the slim, taught, firm ideal – "In other words a body that is protected against eruption from within, whose internal processes are under control" (Bordo, 1993, p.190) – their embodiment as heavily pregnant and full term can inevitably be destabilising. It is for this reason that 'self' can be seen to be corporeally split during pregnancy, the pregnant body being distinct from the true corporeal self, which is temporarily obscured by this unruly, uncontrollable, hideous form.

Given the cultural values assumed by the controlled, ideal body therefore it is hardly surprising that the pregnant body is universally – in western cultures at least – devalued. As Bordo suggests:

> "..preoccupation with fat, diet and slenderness are not abnormal. Indeed, such preoccupations may function as one of the most powerful normalising mechanisms of our century, insuring the production of self-monitoring and self-disciplining 'docile bodies' sensitive to any departure from social norms and habituated to self-improvement and self-transformation in the service of these norms" (Bordo, 1993, p.186).

Despite the almost absolute uncontrollability of pregnant bodies in terms of conforming to any bodily ideal currently lauded culturally, they remain trapped by the same discourses as non-pregnant corporealities. As has been discussed pregnant bodies (both in between and heavily pregnant bodies) are actively constructed and materially experienced as 'fat' which in this cultural context of slimness is not only constructed as hegemonically unattractive but also abhorrent and dangerous. As Bordo notes:

> "..the size and shape of the body have come to operate as a marker of personal, internal order (or disorder) – as a symbol for the emotional, moral or spiritual state of the individual" (Bordo, 1993, p.193)

Overweight bodies have long been considered signifiers of lack of self-control and will power, of laziness and greed (Bordo, 1993) and vilified as a result for their unwillingness to conform (see also Adam, 2001). Women internalise such discourses vilifying themselves for not eating sensibly enough during pregnancy, or exercising enough afterwards in order to loose excess fat and re-establish more slender body boundaries. Therefore actively constructing themselves and their overweight, untoned, fat bodies (both pregnant and post partum) as greedy and lazy. Indeed Gamman (2000, p.65) argues that there is a:

> "culture of slenderness that promotes a form of misogynistic revulsion against the fleshy female body. The irregular female form must be abhorred and contained, if not entirely repressed from representation."

2.3.3 Cultural Discourses of the Pregnant Body Reinforce Cartesian Dualism

This abhorrence and revulsion itself functions to keep the slender norm – and therefore accepted bodily boundaries through self-surveillance and regulation – in place (Gamman, 2000), therefore helping to contain the threat large, fleshy bodies pose to social order. Yet further than this, this punitive culture of slenderness can be seen to re-establish the Cartesian association between women and their bodies. Gamman cites Peter Stearns who:

> "discusses how the contemporary obsession with fat ran parallel with the growth in consumer culture, women's equality and changes in sexual and maternal roles" (2000, p.62)

One implication therefore of the culture of slenderness would seem to be that it functions to redress the balance, to counter the trends of social change. To re-establish the link between woman and body (and therefore by association man and mind), to locate women again primarily in the locus of the body. As Gamman (2000, p.75) explicitly argues:

> "... fatness in women, in the West at least, is linked in representation (and in life) to a fear of female transgression that serves to keep women in their place, worrying about their bodies".

I would suggest that the construction of the monolithic pregnant body as 'fat' (and abject) can also be seen to be significant in this light. In the same way as the culture of slenderness promotes self-surveillance and regulation amongst women, producing docile bodies focused on the corporeal, the cultural abhorrence of particularly the heavily pregnant body works alongside medical discourses to locate women firmly within these bodies. Hegemonic discourses of pregnancy dictate that a woman's first priority should be for her unborn child/ren and that she should alter her behaviour and so on accordingly. She must retreat into the private realm and live at the level of her body (considering the consequences of every action for the foetus inside her), which she must simultaneously allow to be managed by others in a very public way. The (heavily and full term) pregnant body is medically defined as in need of monitoring, intervention and management and is increasingly pathologised in its relation to the foetus. In this medicalised discourse the pregnant body is unruly and dangerous, incapable of controlling its own internal functions. Such a construction runs alongside those associated with the pregnant body as fat, heightening women's awareness of their bodies, forcing them to attend to them more carefully than when not pregnant. The uncontrollability of this body in both a medical sense and in terms of its boundary transgressions is key to this corporeal focus as it is this that poses the greatest threat to social order. Fracturing accepted bodily boundaries in so many ways women are constantly located at the level of their bodies by interactions with others (socially and medically) as well as by their own lived experiences of these bodies. It would seem near impossible to transgress this reduction to and location in an unruly, uncomfortable, disruptive, dangerous body. The cultural construction of the (heavily) pregnant body can then be seen to be an extension of the tyranny of slenderness – particularly since the pregnant body itself is considered to be fat – reinforcing the need for women to attend to, and worry about their bodies, thus making it difficult to simultaneously maintain constructions of female bodies as rational agents[7].

Further, what at first glance might appear to be (and on some levels may be read as) resistance to the cultural discourse of the pregnant body as fat and abject – the celebrity culture of display – can also be seen to collude with this. Throughout my discussions with women about images of celebrity pregnant bodies, such as Demi Moore, even those of women clothed rather than naked, a common discourse emerges that constructs such bodies as 'ideal pregnant bodies', against which inevitably women's own bodies are judged, negatively. Such a concept reinforces that construction of individual women's bodies as being fat. Ideal pregnant bodies such as that of Demi Moore whilst not escaping the general discourses surrounding the pregnant body are considered more fit for display, more acceptable and so on as they are seen to be more controlled. This is a contradictory discourse since women rationalise that the pregnant body cannot in fact be controlled as such. However despite this several discuss having considered eating less (or differently) in subsequent pregnancies in order to possibly stem their growth, and others even laud the benefits of morning sickness and nausea in keeping their weight down. Whilst realising their inability to control the size and shape of their bump and so on the culture of bodily control to achieve parity with accepted norms remains. It would appear that in this culture of slenderness the continual attending to and worrying about the female body in reference to an ideal is inescapable even in pregnancy, something these media images have exacerbated if not entirely produced. Women

[7] And as Longhurst (1997b) notes during pregnancy in particular they are not, being thought to be forgetful, emotional and so on.

must now not only negotiate their transgression of accepted bodily boundaries, which are non-pregnant and slender but also those of abject – and at same time ideal – body boundaries of celebrities.

It is important to note that those – like celebrities – who are seen to embody the ideal pregnant form are assumed by women who read these images as such, to have spent much time and money on personal trainers, dieticians and so on. Though in one respect transgressing cultural discourses by constructing the heavily pregnant body as not excessive and ugly but rather, in respect to celebrity images, glamorous and beautiful. This constant attending to the pregnant body (imagined or otherwise) graphically illustrates its cultural construction as dangerous, unruly, un-conforming as it is in need of these controlling regimes in order to construct it as anything approaching acceptable. Perhaps more than any other preoccupation with the body this is the most effective form of control since this is a body which ultimately is uncontrollable and will always be fundamentally constructed as abject in this contemporary culture.

I would therefore argue that whilst as Longhurst has latterly discussed in relation to 'bikini babes' (2000) cultural discourses clearly map out expectations for how women 'do' pregnancy, including how they clothe these bodies in particular spaces and so on and that one of the key influences with respect to how these bodies are worn is the discourse of abjection. Despite the fact that this is so central to clothing consumption and bodily experiences of pregnancy (and also I would argue the most difficult to challenge due to its taken for grantedness) it has not yet been addressed with respect to the lived pregnant body within existing literature. Whilst I am not denying the salience of other aspects of embodied experience such as that discussed by Longhurst (2000) in particular I maintain that such work retains a comfortable distance from the body itself, a distance which dealing with the body as it is lived must cover.

The centrality of such discourses to the ways in which pregnant corporealities are experienced and lived as real, material bodies is important in exploding myths about pregnant and maternal embodiment as natural and pre-given. It also highlights a way in which pregnant women are located within the realm of their bodies by patriarchal discourses (some of which have little to do with pregnancy directly). Aside from these and the argument that there is no singular pregnant body but rather multiple corporealities has significant implications for not only embodiment literature but also that concerning fashion and dress. No longer can the body underneath the clothing be considered as an unchanging, insignificant factor as has largely been the case in the past and indeed remains so. As Paul Sweetman argues:

> "In the main...writing on fashion has neglected the body – and more particularly the lived body – treating the fashionable social actor as a 'disembodied consciousness' (Turner, 1992:7), whose corporeality comes into play only implicitly, as an inert or unfeeling frame to be decorated and adorned. The body in fashion is simply a mannequin or shop window dummy – it is the clothing, rather than the wearing of it, that is regarded as significant." (Sweetman, 2001, p.159).

Whilst being disembodied and distanced from the reality of the lived body clothing and fashion literature has made assumptions about these 'inert or unfeeling frames'. The implicit assumption in disembodied theory is that the frame is entirely unproblematic and indeed maps onto an ideal model thus having no influence on the

outer adornment. Thus to continue Sweetman's analogy it is as if the body as written by fashion and dress literatures reflect the making of these dummies themselves which as Schneider remarks do not faithfully represent real corporealities, even of models themselves:

> "even the most realistic mannequins represent a selective reality; striving for perfection, they must often alter or omit aspects of their live models" (Schneider, 1997, p.5).

2.4 Literatures of Fashion and Dress

Whilst the study of fashion and dress has been 'transformed' over the past decade and a half (Entwistle and Wilson, 2001, p.1), this has occurred within a context of historical neglect and rejection. Even leaving aside philosophy and sociology's apparent contempt for fashion on the basis of:

> "a philosophical inclination to discount appearances in favour of some sort of reality lying beyond them and, second, a mapping of appearances onto the feminine and reality onto the masculine. Honour and prestige is more likely to be accorded to perceived 'masculine' dealers in 'reality' who routinely uncover, unveil, unmask, expose, strip, reveal and lay bear the supposedly naked truth, consigning the rent wrappings to the garbage bin of scientific history." (Corrigan, 1993, p.144).

It would seem that elsewhere fashion and dress have also been devalued relative to other cultural forms, as Ash and Wilson (1992, p. xi-xii) point out:

> "Historically it has rarely been afforded the serious contemplation reserved for the arts of literature, painting, sculpture, music and theatre, nor has its analysis competed successfully with the debates conducted around the popular cultural forms of the last half century: television and popular music."

However during recent years theorists across the social sciences and humanities have grown to suggest that the importance of fashion and dress lies beyond apparently shallow concern with 'appearance', and cannot be solely written off on the basis of its implication in conspicuous, seemingly frivolous consumption. As Bruzzi and Church-Gibson (2000, p.2-3) have argued:

> "fashion's fundamental dilemma is that is has inevitably been predicated upon change, obsolescence, adornment and in, the so-called First World, it has been inextricably bound up with the commercial; this has led to the assumption that it is therefore superficial, narcissistic and wasteful."

However as they demonstrate through their edited collection the importance of fashion is wider than "the narrow parameters of the couture world that these derogatory dismissals target" (p.3). Indeed, I would argue that its greatest importance lies outside it and this is reflected in the broadening of the definition of 'fashion' as a discipline in its own right and as an academic concern more generally (Bruzzi and Church-Gibson, 2000). Over recent years there has been enormous

growth in both the quantity of fashion and clothing studies and also the variety of approaches with great debate developing as regards the precise significance of adornment. Alongside this there has been a collective shift away from considering fashion to be a macro-social delineator and wholly significant in this sense – demarcating class position for example – towards a concern with its importance in relation to individual identity (Dant, 1999). In this respect the focus has shifted towards the ability of fashion and clothing to communicate something about the wearer to others.

2.4.1 Dress as Communication

> "A number of theorists saw the manner in which dress communicated as a kind of language. This may have been partly because it had become commonplace to assert the idea that fashion and dress are ubiquitous to culture, a fundamental feature which defines humanity. This apparent universality is one of the reasons why fashion and dress are often compared to language. Moreover, it would seem that dress and language are part of the same fundamental human concern, namely to communicate" (Entwistle and Wilson, 2001, p.2).

Although several theorists worked to use the concept of language to explain the communicatory power of clothing (see for example Barnard, 1996; Dant, 1999; Entwistle and Wilson, 2001), this approach has been subject to critique as a result of its oversimplification of meaning formation. Language itself, it is argued, is a much more complex system of communication which material objects are not capable of mimicking (Dant, 1999).

> "Fred Davis points out that ordinary language is a communication system in which complex messages impart abstract information in an interactive process and in comparison clothing is 'undercoded' in that the link between signifier and signified is unreliable" (Dant, 1999, p.96).

Indeed in addition the significance of individual clothing garments is assumed by some theorists to be unproblematic 'givens', regardless of their relational (and I would argue bodily) context. As for example Barnard argues:

> "Lurie seems to take the metaphor of clothing being a language literally. She is of the opinion that ... language is only there to express concepts and meanings. This is a mechanistic view of language and leads to a mechanistic account of meaning in fashion and clothing in that the meanings of the garment appear to pre-exist being selected and combined into an outfit or ensemble. It is as if the pieces of clothing have meanings which the wearer then combines into an outfit. There is not the slightest hint in this account of how the 'words' that the clothes are supposed to be, mean nothing on their own, how it is only in relation to all other, different garments that an item of clothing has any meaning at all. Nor does one get the impression of meanings being the product of any form of negotiation between designer / wearer / spectator." (Barnard, 1996, p.27).

I would also argue that ascribing all meaning to individual material garments themselves, such that they are thought to speak some defined, unproblematic statement unencumbered by the bodies they adorn, is a grievous short coming. Clothing cannot be assumed to have some pre-existing meaning which persists regardless of its embodied (or indeed also for example its socio-spatial or temporal) context. Words mean nothing without a spoken or written delivery, which necessarily has a profound affect upon their precise meaning, and it is the same with clothing. The body underneath the clothing is not fixed and unchangeable so that it can be ignored or transcended in the communication or deciphering of meaning. It is central and indeed defining.

Barnard also argues that there is a fundamental flaw in theoretical alignment of clothing with language given that a defining characteristic of fashion to tend towards obsolescence and novelty. As such this concept of meaning communication cannot be maintained as to do so would be to imply that "a garment might 'say' or mean something this year but 'say' or mean something entirely different next year" (Barnard, 1996, p.27, see also Dant, 1999). Further, it must be noted that clothing is not only meaningful in relation to its surface communication. For example, Campbell (1996) notes ways in which clothing items may have latent significance (that is hidden from the distanced observer and indeed academic theorist). For instance meaning may lie in an item having belonged or belonging to someone other than the wearer, perhaps it has been taken and is being worn without permission or has been passed on as a treasured possession or an item that represents the other person (Campbell, 1996, see also Dunseath's edited collection (1998) for a whole host of examples). Meaning may also be found in the conditions of purchase and wearing, perhaps an outrageous garment bought and worn as an act of rebellion as Caryn Franklin describes in relation to a particular pair of shoes:

> "Those plucky fashion items were responsible for the only row my parents and I ever had about clothes ... But the shoes managed to cause a rift, and on safety grounds they were banned. Not to be hemmed in by such unimaginative restraint, I loaded my comedy footwear into a Macfisheries bag and cycled out of view where I duly changed from lowly plimsolls to state-of-the-art wedges." (Franklin, 1998, p.30).

Recent work has begun to realise the significance of clothing in this respect, looking beyond the decipherable 'written' meanings and dwelling more on personal significance. Banim and Guy (2001) for example suggest that a propensity to keep clothes that are 'no-longer-worn' (which they found to be prevalent among respondents):

> "reveals that the clothes have 'lives' that extend beyond the point of being worn and thus women's relationship with them extends beyond the structural and meaning systems of the fashion industry" (Banim and Guy, 2001, p.204)

Indeed even whilst meaning in relation to fashion may (and inevitably does) change dramatically over time, personalised signification may be much more enduring and therefore of great importance with respect to understanding and explaining the complex meanings associated with clothing. As Caryn Franklin's account of this one significant material presence in her wardrobe shows:

> "I find it hard to remember why I was ever so attracted to such a monstrous pair of shoes but I'll try ... I haven't worn my silver wedge peep-toe platform sandals, procured from Petticoat Lane for the price of several weeks' Saturday pay, for twenty-five years – well not out of the house. But I do keep them close by." (p.29).

In particular she describes how these shoes retain personal significance and meaning within her wardrobe despite the fact that they no longer perform a functional role particularly not in respect to work, 'in the boardroom' where:

> "the chance to appear matt black, shiny and impenetrable is mine with the help of a well-cut suit and scraped back hair ... as I get dressed for such events, I am reminded of my earlier allegiance to the power shoe ... [B]efore I step into the arena armed with womanly experience, a whiff of Eau D'Issey and a brief case full of facts, I steal a loving look at these platforms and remember the sheer joy of striding out with my head in the clouds." (p.32).

Such critiques can be seen to apply to other theories of meaning in dress such as semiotics for example which was seen as the more sophisticated alternative to language concepts. This approach, perhaps most commonly associated with Barthes failed attempt to develop a 'vestimentary code' (Barnard, 1996; Dant, 1999), retained the premise of clothing's communicative function but appreciated its cultural specificity and most importantly that clothing cannot speak for itself (Dant, 1999). Rather than meaning being an inherent property of a garment the semiotic model assumes the negotiation of meaning between different actors who are grounded in a particular culture (Barnard, 1996). However whilst this understanding of communication (particularly that suggested by Saussure (see Barnard, 1996)) allows for some fluidity in meaning – that is the relationship between signifier and signified is not fixed – it continues to *locate* the signification of clothing in the material garment or ensemble itself. Although there is an appreciation that these are 'not meaningful in themselves' (Barnard, 1996, p.85) but rather it is the cultural and historical context which defines them in particular ways, or at least provides the context for their possible decodings, there is a sense in which these garments remain disembodied and that meaning resides purely in their materiality alone. There is no room here for any appreciation that clothing may be meaningful in the ways discussed above, nor in their acquisition or history (see for example Gregson *et al*, 2000; Miller, 2000; Pagram, 1998) and there is certainly no appreciation that the meaning of clothing is significantly influenced and indeed defined by its juxtaposition with a particular embodied context. Semiotic analyses therefore I would suggest continue to privilege a disembodied decoding by a distanced observer since meaning is thought to be located in the decoding of the garment (whether that be the intended decoding of the designer, wearer or actual decoding of the spectator) rather than the *practices* of consumption and wearing, and the relationship to the body.

2.4.2 Dress As Bodily Practice

Theories of dress as communication (particularly semiological accounts) posit clothing as more than merely 'saying' but rather 'doing' something, in particular in relation to their power to re-inscribe the social order (see for example

Barnard, 1996). However more recently there have been a number of theorists who have begun to think more carefully about fashion and dress as something one does and particularly something one does to one's body.

I would suggest that there are two main ways in which fashion can be conceptualised as bodily practice, firstly, in relation to what Negrin (1999) terms functionalist approaches (which relate to the regimes imposed on the material body by fashion) and secondly in relation to the surface production of socially appropriate bodies. Whilst post-modern theories of fashion have largely criticised functionalist approaches for assuming that there is a 'natural' body which is disguised, repressed or indeed mutilated by fashion, I would suggest that such theories, focusing on the ways in which fashion works on the materiality of the body, remain highly significant. Early feminist critiques of fashion focused on the physically debilitating effects of female dress which:

> "was criticised for reinforcing the subservience of women to men because of its impractical and excessively ornate nature (Tickner, 1984). Amelia Bloomer, an American feminist in the 1850s, for instance, criticised the female dress of the day insofar as it hindered the physical mobility of women, reinforcing the confinement of women (at least those of the middle classes) to a sedentary form of existence in the domestic sphere. Female dress, particularly the corset, was also criticized for being detrimental to the physical health of women" (Negrin, 1999, p.100; see also Wilson, 1992).

Whilst as Wilson (1992) notes it may be:

> "something of a cliché to state that the whalebone, canvas and steel corset of the nineteenth century (discipline forced from without) has given way to the corset of muscle produced by exercise and diet of the twentieth century (discipline internalised and produced from within)." (Wilson, 1992, p. 10)

It is nevertheless clear from accounts such as Bordo's (1993) and others for example Macdonald (1995) that the creation of an ideal figure of fashion creates docility amongst women and encourages attempts to physically alter the materiality of ones body in order to conform to culturally defined images of femininity. It is not so much that fashion disguises or represses the natural body, since no body exists outside of culture and even the naked body is riven through with social meaning and constructed by discourse. Rather it is that the hegemonic codes of dress relate to specific bodies and it is as much the body that underlies the dress as the clothing one wears that defines one as conforming to the socially prescribed norms set out in the sartorial codes themselves. Engaging with the physical materiality of the body is therefore as much a part of producing socially appropriate bodies as is the surface consideration of wearing the right thing.

Jennifer Craik (1994) has engaged with the notion that women "wear their bodies through their clothes" (p.1). She argues through her concept of 'habitus' that clothing is neither purely functional nor symbolic as these terms are traditionally understood. Rather she suggests that bodies learn particular ways of being in the world in order to 'fit its occupancy of a chosen social group' (p.4), that is identity is positively constructed (rather than a natural body negatively hidden) by the practices of acculturation which are inherent within the fashion system. Alongside the fashion

system's prescription of socially appropriate ways of wearing the body with respect to styles for example it also acts as:

> "a technology of civility, that is, sanctioned codes of conduct in the practices of self- formation and self-presentation. The body is trained to perform in socially acceptable ways by harnessing movement, gesture and demeanour until they become second nature." (p. 5)

Fashion and dress can therefore be understood as bodily practice through which one does not just wear clothing that is culturally meaningful but composes a socially appropriate body through adorning and *wearing* one's body in the correct manner as determined by sartorial codes. As Entwistle has suggested therefore such bodily practice involves concern with not just the outward presentation of the self but also the intimate experience of constructing it to fit cultural codes:

> "The individual and very personal act of getting dressed is an act of preparing the body for the social world, making it appropriate, acceptable, indeed respectable and possibly even desirable also. Getting dressed is an ongoing practice requiring knowledge, techniques and skills, from learning how to tie our shoe laces and do up our buttons as children to understanding about colours, textures and fabrics and how to weave them together to suit our bodies and lives. Dress is the way in which individuals learn to live in their bodies and feel at home in them. Wearing the right clothes and looking our best, we feel at ease with our bodies, and the opposite is equally true: turning up for a situation inappropriately dressed, we feel awkward, out of lace and vulnerable. In this respect, dress is both intimate experience of the body and a public presentation of it." (Entwistle, 2000, p.7)

Such understandings of fashion and dress explicitly situate the body as central to their functioning and indeed significance. However few theorists have adequately engaged with the ways in which embodied individuals carry out and experience such practice on an everyday basis. Whilst gestures have been made theoretically to conceptualising dress as bodily practice few have yet to empirically research it as *embodied* practice. This is a sever shortcoming I would suggest since as Entwistle argues dress is an *ongoing* practice and therefore cannot be fully understood by isolated acts of observation or purely theoretical discussion.

Whilst not always being positioned primarily within the debate about fashion and dress a significant literature has developed around the management of bodily identity in workplace contexts. This literature has tended at least to ground itself in empirical work drawing largely on two broad areas of focus, women in professional occupations where the overwhelming gender culture is a particular version of masculinity (see for example Davis, 1992; Entwistle, 2000; Green, 2001; McDowell and Court, 1994; McDowell, 1995) and women in what could be termed as 'interactive service occupations' where their bodies form part of the service offered to the customer (Adkins, 1992; Kerfoot and Knights, 1993). Clearly with respect to women's agency and active management of bodily presence through dress the first of these examples is by far the richer since in jobs where women's bodies form part of the service being offered uniforms are far more common. For those employed as professionals in masculine environments such as the city (McDowell and Court, 1994; McDowell, 1995) and indeed university departments (Green, 2001) dress as

bodily practice is an incessant consideration which must be carefully managed in order to successfully perform in such socio-spatial contexts. However whilst the theoretical need for such careful management is widely discussed (see in particular McDowell, 1995) the fleshy body as lived remains strangely absent in many such studies. There is a lack of involvement with the day to day processes involved in dressing bodies which whilst undeniably prescribed by culture to be problematic in particular ways are also fleshy corporeal entities. It would appear that for many theorists the flight from functionalist approaches to dress has meant losing sight of the body as it is lived. The body (whether clothed or not) is indeed a cultural construction but that does not mean that the individual body and the experience of it in relation to its clothing is any less important than this corporate cultural construction. Whilst there may be ideal figures constructed by discourses and representations of fashion and dress and indeed sartorial codes which prescribe appropriate ways of wearing particular bodies, individual bodies do not map onto these cleanly. Individual bodies must be managed in relation to these codes and whilst we can identify trends, for example amongst women in particular workplaces, the crux of the matter I would argue for dress as embodied practice is how these women engage with them on a daily basis given the fleshy fluidity of their corporeality and therefore the meaning of dress as it maps onto their bodies. I would argue that studies such as McDowell and Court's whilst apparently dealing with an example of dress as bodily practice, certainly working to bring the bodily dimension of the supposed rational world of city banking into focus, actually retains a clinical distance between the body and dress. Green (2001) however goes much further and deals explicitly with women's individual bodies rather than a detached cultural construction of 'women's bodies'. For example, she notes the difficulties some women professors have with negotiating their fleshy bodies and producing these as competent authoritative figures:

> "Body-management strategies which has been internalised at an early age as part of the process of becoming gendered (Grogan, 1999; Bordo, 1993) became critical to their embodied presence as women of intellectual substance ...
> ...its unlikely that I'd go to work with sleeveless tee-shirts and stuff even in the height of summer ... even though I like them a lot, because sometimes I have to tell them (students) off and I think it undermines my capacity to do that effectively if they've seen my sort of floppy, middle-aged body ... (Beth)
> Many of the women implied that unclothed or 'wobbly, aging, fat bodies' were perceived to signal weakness or vulnerability which undermined their authority and could not be countenanced" (Green, 2001, p.110-111).

And as further recent work has shown, the incessant fluidity of the body means that practices of dress may change on a daily basis given that:

> "In many ways, what we chose to wear at any one time depends on how we are feeling about our bodies (or what those bodies are actively doing) and how we are feeling about ourselves. ... On fat, bloated, washed-out days the last thing we want to do is chose an outfit that we feel accentuates these features. Personal perceptions of our bodies constrain our choice of outfit" (Banim *et al*, 2001, p.2-3).

On the micro-scale of the individual body there are more codes to be negotiated through dress than the monolithic construction of culturally coded bodies. As Green's work with women professors has shown it is not just these bodies' femaleness that is managed through dress but also other aspects of their corporeality which while culturally constructed in particular ways in relation to these macro-codes are experienced as fluid and changing and must be addressed on a daily basis. Therefore the continued absence of the body from theories of fashion and dress must be redressed if a full understanding of clothing is to be attained.

2.5 Fashioning The Pregnant Body: Dressing Pregnant Bodies

It is perhaps unsurprising to find that the amount of consideration given by the academy to clothing the pregnant body has by and large been negligible. Given both the context of inherent masculinism discussed here and also the persistent feminist fear associated with reaffirming the damaging dualistic association of woman with her troublesome body the reluctance to engage with such subject matter is not unexpected. I would add here that my own experience of research in this area at times troubled me that I might indeed be in danger of reflecting traditional discourses in my findings since their continued prevalence is all too evident in popular discourse. However, to acknowledge that the embodied experience of pregnancy for many remains understood in relation to Cartesian, patriarchal concepts is not to condone or indeed reaffirm them and indeed I would argue that it is precisely because of the sustained significance of these in women's everyday lives that feminists have a responsibility to critically engage with them. If scholars can begin to take apart the workings of such discourses and ideologies in women's everyday lives then they can provide the makings of grounds for challenge, if only in the sense of *denaturalising* them. I would argue that an examination of maternity clothing is one way in which traditional ideas about the pregnant body can be dismantled and indeed is vital in this project given the close association between bodies and dress (see for example Warwick and Cavallaro, 1998). An understanding of how overriding discourses of pregnant bodies are mapped onto practices of dress and indeed clothing consumption in women's everyday lives can be seen to engage critically with cultural prescriptions of appropriate bodily composition and more fundamental theoretical fears about the pregnant body. Such a focus, as is taken by this thesis, highlights the essentially contradictory function of clothing as a means of re-inscribing normative and socially appropriate identities since whilst the reflection of hegemonic discourse through culturally established codes of dress can be demonstrated (as Bailey, 1992 and Longhurst, 2000 do) a close examination of the mutually constitutive nature of the relationship between body and dress reveals incessant fluidity. If practices of dress are understood as processes of continual corporeo-sartorial negotiation then the idea of a natural pregnant body is firmly questioned not only because clothing is integral to the body's surface production and the way it is lived and experienced but also because this process is necessarily incessant because of the multiplicity and fluidity of pregnant corporeality.

A study of clothing consumption during pregnancy can therefore be seen to be significant both with respect to demonstrating the need for explicitly embodied study of practices of dress and also in terms of critically engaging with traditional Cartesian and patriarchal discourses. Having noted the lack of consideration of

maternity wear within the academy it is necessary to briefly outline the contributions made by two authors in this area, Rebecca Bailey and Robyn Longhurst.

Bailey (1992) discusses how the availability of different forms of maternity wear in the United States has closely mapped the prescriptions of the medical profession with respect to what activities are deemed appropriate at any historical moment:

> "Dress for pregnancy became a very telling marker of whether pregnant women were allowed to participate fully in society. The commercial availability of specialized garments, such as swimwear, indicated a pervasive social view – the view of the dominant male group – that such an activity was acceptable during pregnancy. Although the activities allowed pregnant women by doctors, and subsequently, the availability of clothing appropriate for such activities, has steadily diversified throughout the twentieth century, this has always occurred years after being adopted by fashionably attired non-pregnant women. Change has virtually always come through gradual acceptance of the activity as benign by the dominant group, and through isolated acts of rebellion by the suppressed, rather than through scientific inquiry," (Bailey, 1992, p.251)

Bailey therefore conceptualises maternity wear as being an explicit tool through which the activities of pregnant women were controlled by patriarchy. Despite the fact that it was the medical profession which exerted the most significant power in prescribing appropriate behaviour (which therefore determined the availability of clothing allowing women to participate in particular activities and spheres of public life) the views were not based on scientific enquiry but rather cultural ideologies[8]. Whilst warming to Bailey's analysis I fundamentally disagree with her assertion that from the 1970s onwards medicine largely relinquished its influence over fashion and that maternity wear subsequently became free of draconian prescriptions about pregnant women's proper behaviour. I would argue that whether directly inferred by medicine or not maternity wear provision remains a significant means through which appropriate activities for pregnant women are communicated. For example, as I shall go on to discuss, the styles of dress available remain restrictive in certain respects. On the high street in England today it is virtually impossible to purchase a suit appropriate for a professional workplace context, or indeed eveningwear suitable for seasonal parties for example. Far from being free of restrictions and "deviating little from their pre-pregnant condition" (Bailey, 1992, p.262) maternity wear continues to be subject to cultural codes which dictate appropriate modes of being the pregnant body. Longhurst (2000) demonstrates this clearly through her analysis of the public reaction to a bikini contest for pregnant women held in Wellington, New Zealand, she argues that:

> "There is now a proliferation of images and texts that suggest that if you are pregnant you no longer have to be dowdy. ... Pregnant women appear to 'have arrived' and are free at last from the social constraints which formerly tied them to domesticity and to the private realms. It seems as though it is now possible to be pregnant and fashionable; pregnant and sexy; pregnant and a corporate manager; pregnant and sporty.

[8] For a fuller discussion of how medical discourses more widely can be seen to map onto cultural ideology see work by for example Margrit Shildrick (1997; Shildrick and Price (eds) 1998).

> And yet, the regulatory practices that shape pregnant bodies have not disappeared. Constant contestation of these practices by pregnant women and others have meant that behaviours have changed (slowly and slightly) over time. To claim the pregnant women are now free agents to act in a manner in any place that they choose, however is to fail to understand the discursive modes that operate in relation to pregnant bodies" (Longhurst, 2000, p. 458)

As well as discussing her own respondents docility in relation to dressing in public in 'modest' ways her work also outlines the reasons for such self-surveillance and disciplining in its account of public reactions to a bikini contest organized by a Wellington radio station and held in public in October 1998. In a fashion not dissimilar to the responses following the publication of the Demi Moore image on the cover of *Vanity Fair* complaints flooded in to the local media. Letters reached newspapers that covered the event and the radio station itself received phone calls of complaint. The overriding concern of all who chose to express their views in this way reflected the notion that such public displays of pregnancy are unseemly and inappropriate. For example:

> "I take umbrage at the disgusting picture featuring on the front page of the *Herald* last Thursday and consider it an affront to the decency and sacredness of motherhood.
> It is little wonder that the moral standards of our society are so low when the prospective mothers of our capital city choose to make such a spectacle of themselves in the name of fun or entertainment and advertising.
> How low can we go?
> It is most distasteful that your staff should choose to photograph such an even, let alone publish the picture..." (Letter to the *New Zealand Herald* by Evelyn McGregor quoted in Longhurst, 2000, p. 463).

Whilst such reactions and interpretations were not universal that people who did hold such views felt moved to communicate them so forcefully is significant. As Longhurst notes pregnant women's behaviour is commonly policed by others and in a variety of ways and this can be explained by the cultural construction of the pregnant body as '*mother*-to-be':

> "Gazing at, touching and commenting on pregnant women's stomachs and behaviours is tied to the notion of the fetus as public property. It is widely believed that a pregnant woman's primary concern ought to be foe her fetus. Julia Kristeva (1980, p. 237) argues that the mother "is simply the site of her proceedings". She is primarily a vessel for the fetus and must not be tempted to assert her own primacy. Young (1990, p.160), drawing on Kristeva (1980), claims that: "Pregnancy does not belong to the woman herself. It is a state of the developing fetus, for which the woman is a container." (Longhurst, 2000, p.468).

The example used by Longhurst demonstrates that hegemonic discourses that operate in relation to appropriate dress for pregnant women are centrally about the composition of appropriate pregnant bodies. This involves not just the surface presentation of a body but also the ways in which it behaves, the spaces it occupies and so on. The disquiet prompted by the bikini contest was clearly about much more

that the adornment of heavily pregnant bodies with inappropriate clothing, it was also about where this took place and how these women were behaving. In particular I would argue that the alignment of pregnant bodies with bodies of fashion through the context of a catwalk and fashion show was particularly problematic. Whilst such abject bodies constitute the antithesis of the ideal body of fashion and therefore do not 'fit' in such a context with respect to their appearance, this context also juxtaposes notions of the fashionable body onto pregnant corporeality which are unacceptable in the dominant cultural construction. For example, according to popular representations bodies of fashion are conspicuous, frivolous, narcissistic consumers focused on self and with respect to pregnancy this is largely considered to be totally inappropriate. I will come to argue later that with respect to clothing the composition of appropriate social bodies extends to the way in which women act as consumers, that part of the prescribed behaviour that delineates this body as acceptable involves not just what it wears but how it shops for and consumes clothing. Drawing on Miller (1998) and Miller *et al* (1998) for example I shall discuss the importance of thrift driven practices of consumption for the composition of appropriate pregnant bodies and indeed the establishment of maternal identities in a cultural context where as Longhurst suggests pregnant women are expected to be focused primarily on their unborn child and not themselves. This I argue is a discourse reflected through the production and consumption of maternity wear, for example in retail spaces of representation such as high street shops, pregnancy and birth magazines, and indeed women's discussions about and practices of consumption. Codes of dress can therefore be seen to extend through to modes of consumption as well as styles of adornment.

The study of maternity wear therefore reveals the existence of inherent links between bodies and dress, not just on an aesthetic level but also on an everyday, material basis. However, as with other areas of sartorial study which have begun to engage with the body more explicitly these two discussions (Bailey, 1992 and Longhurst, 2000) fail to address the messy, fleshy body and the daily negotiations women make in their embodied relationship with their clothes. I would suggest that such engagement is absolutely fundamental to understanding practices of dress and clothing consumption. For whilst it is at once necessary to address clothing in relation to the body because of the intricate relationship between the two (Entwistle, 2000, 2001; Dant, 1999; Soper, 2001; Warwick and Cavallaro, 1998), it is also vital for researchers to get their hands dirty and engage with subjects' day to day relationship with their clothes. This is not something that can be understood from a sterile point of detached observation, rather, to understand this intricate relationship requires us to enter into sustained empirical work with fleshy, embodied subjects. Through such work we may hope to begin to map the mutually constitutive nature of clothing and bodies which I would argue is the crux of clothing consumption and practices of dress. Composing appropriate social bodies on an everyday basis is about producing composite constructions of the body and dress in relation to cultural codes as has been hinted at by recent work by Guy and Banim (2000). Though Guy and Banim do not deal explicitly with the body their work with women does show the everyday nature of corporeo-sartorial negotiations:

> "Most women were able to identify types or styles of clothing they had learned to avoid because they drew attention to particular areas. However an extra difficulty emerges ... in that concealing, disguising clothes do not always work consistently. Several women stressed the need to be vigilant

> because of the shifting body shape they had. For example, four women talked of the fit of their clothes and the times (what one women termed fat days) when they deliberately selected or would not use certain clothes." (Guy and Banim, 2000, p.320, see also Banim, *et al*, 2001).

Indeed, the necessity of grounded empirical work with fleshy, embodied subjects is highlighted by this excerpt since it shows not only that everyday clothing practice involves explicit consideration of the body and that the image attained is judged appropriate or not based on the composite construction of body and dress, but that this is an everyday practice precisely because of the shifting nature of the body. A crucial aspect of the relationship women have with their clothes is that it is not stable. Bodies, and therefore practices of dress and the meaning of clothing are all fluid and this is something exemplified by the relationship between pregnant bodies and maternity wear.

My research has shown that far from being stable the pregnant body as it is lived is incessantly fluid, indeed in the course of a single pregnancy women embody multiple pregnant bodies. Whilst noting that these are by no means universal constructions or experiences I identify several for detailed discussion, specifically 'in between', 'satisfactorily', and 'heavily' pregnant bodies and also post partum bodies and note how women's relationship with their clothing similarly shifts throughout pregnancy, some bodies being more antagonistic in relation to dress than others for example. I also stress that within such multiplicity there is additional fluidity and discontinuity and that as a result women are engaged in constant corporeo-sartorial negotiation in order to successfully compose socially appropriate bodies. In addition to women having to constantly renegotiate the way they clothe their body's because of its shifting nature it is also the case that corporeal multiplicity is defined in part through clothing itself. For example, clothing can materially define pregnant bodies as 'not pregnant', 'fat', and also exaggerate their boundaries to construct them as larger than they physically are. In early pregnancy when women are embodied as 'clinically pregnant but yet not so' and 'in between' their bodies do not visually (or otherwise) manifest their pregnancy. At this time maternity wear actively contributes to a construction of these bodies as 'not pregnant' since women feel out of place in retail spaces and the material fabrication of the clothing literally does not fit them. The inability to legitimately shop for, buy into and wear maternity wear at this time therefore constructs these pregnant bodies as 'not pregnant' in a variety of ways. Further the relationship between 'in between' pregnant bodies and clothing in general is particularly antagonistic for most women. As I have suggested maternity wear tends not to fit these bodies because they do not require the extra fabric within the designs. This can lead to the exaggeration of bodily boundaries as the contours of the body are inaccurately mapped by the poorly-fitting clothing. For many women the composite image of body and dress in this instance is wholy unsatisfactory as it produces a larger body than their physical corporeality. However whilst the poor fit of maternity wear at once constructs them as 'not pregnant' and larger than they physically are (in an ambiguous sense and therefore producing them as 'fat') this body rarely fits women's existing wardrobe well. Therefore the relationship of this body to clothing tends to reinforce the construction of being 'in between'. It literally neither fits maternity wear nor women's ordinary clothes and is therefore neither pregnant nor normal. Clothing can also define pregnant bodies as 'fat' in a different respect, in direct relation to representations of fashion. For example fashionable styles do not map unprobematically onto obviously pregnant

bodies because the ideal body of fashion is explicitly not pregnant. Therefore the incongruous nature of the pregnant body and fashion, the disruption of fashion by the pregnant body defines it as 'fat' (i.e. not slim, toned and flat stomached, not the ideal body of fashion).

Despite the rehabilitation of the body by recent academic scholarship the fleshy, embodied subject remains latent in studies of fashion and dress and indeed clothing consumption. It is argued here that this approach cannot be sustained in the light of this research which identifies inherent links between clothing and corporeality and indeed the fluidity of bodies which necessitates constant corporeo-sartorial negotiation and therefore signals fluidity of practices and meanings of dress.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The methodological issues associated with this thesis have become somewhat more complex since I became pregnant towards the end of my writing up period[9]. Whilst, as I shall outline and discuss I have made every attempt to carry out robust qualitative research informed from the outset by feminist principles and ethics, my pregnancy has highlighted and raised several interesting methodological issues. I believe that my 'becoming the research subject' has indeed been beneficial to my work, increasing the value of my research in this sense. In particular my altered material corporeality has not only provided me with a radically shifted positionality in relation to the subject matter it has also literally *embodied my knowledge*. Therefore my analysis now takes on new emphasis and depth as I think and speak from new corporeal positions (which are constantly shifting) and indeed a new identity. As such this thesis highlights once again the contingency of academic knowledge and crucially its embodiedness. I would argue that my pregnancy constructs this research and particularly this thesis as methodologically challenging with respect to traditional masculinist approaches to knowledge creation since it has been composed by an individual who has inhabited multiple corporealities during its production (and who explicitly acknowledges these and their significance within this process) one of which is that most feared of bodies (as has already been discussed) that of the pregnant woman.

I shall discuss these issues and others in greater depth during this chapter however firstly it is necessary to outline and explain the underlying methodological strategy for this research and indeed its theoretical grounding.

3.2 Feminist Research

Where once the emphasis in feminist methodological texts lay in asserting the multiplicity of perspectives and indeed techniques for conducting research on gender (see for example Gilbert, 1994; McDowell, 1992; Moss, 1993; Olesen, 1994; Raghuram *et al*, 1998). More recently concern has shifted towards negotiating, not just what characterises "appropriate feminist research methodologies" (McDowell, 1999, p.224), but indeed how peculiarly feminist research stands up to the challenge of postmodernism (see for example Gibson-Graham, 1994, 1996).

> "With the turn to postmodernism many of the certainties of feminist research practice have been dislodged. This has liberated a plethora of exciting philosophical, political and cultural endeavours that tackle the essentialism around women embedded in both feminist and non-feminist texts. At the same time, however, feminist social analysts find themselves confronting an

[9] Cotterill and Letherby (1993) in particular note the importance of researchers auto/biographies to research and explicitly attempt to write themselves into their work. However they do not acknowledge the significance of a researcher's corporeality and whilst they do acknowledge that research changes participants (both researcher and researched, in ways in which others do not) they do not consider how changes in corporeal identity also influence the knowledge produced. It is not just the researched who reveal the fallacy of the notion of a 'fixed person' (p.77) by displaying contradictory responses in discussions; the researcher too cannot be viewed as a single coherent self.

> ironic impasse as what has been seen as the unifying objects of our research dissolve before our eyes" (Gibson-Graham, 1994, p.206).

The original maxims of feminist research, particularly that it should be 'on, by and for' women (Stanley and Wise, 1990) and crucially, committed to political intervention in systems and conditions of gender related oppression of women have thus been called into question with the deconstruction of the unifying category 'women' (Gibson-Graham, 1994).

However epistemological challenges to masculinist knowledge remain of central importance to post modern social science. The partial and situated nature of knowledge which is presented as "a process rather than a product" (Pratt, 1993 quoted by McDowell, 1999, p.227) I would argue is a fundamental cornerstone of such a theoretically structured discipline. Further I would suggest (alongside Gibson-Graham, 1994, 1996) that far from erasing any political significance or impetus to our work, it has rather shifted in emphasis. Feminist work can still be seen to challenge existing gender relations, indeed in more complex and perhaps significant ways. Since in recognising the diversity, multiplicity and fluidity of subjects feminists can address political differences across these rather than aiming at some mythical mean, which in some respects ironically reinscribed the binary gender code. As Gibson-Graham (1994, p.219-220, see also 1996) argues:

> "As a feminist researcher, I am coming to understand my political project as one of discursive destabilisation. One of my goals is to undermine the hegemony of the binary gender discourse and to promote alternative subject positions for gendered subjects. I see my research as (participating in) creating identity / subjectivity, and in that process as constituting alternative sites of power and places of political intervention."

In this respect I firmly believe that this research has a political strength both within the immediate contexts of the embodied research practice itself (in conversations with women and in the case study sites of participant observation), and academically, through theoretical analysis. Whilst I have at times been dismayed by the (continued) hegemony of what I consider to be 'traditional' and oppressive discourses in the performances constituted by the research (and also in the production of maternity wear) conversations with women gave space for questioning these and also gave rise to data which form clear grounds to affect a dissection of the monolithic pregnant body. This is highly significant from a feminist perspective since this body can be seen to form one of the underpinning figures of patriarchal binary gender discourse.

Therefore, despite recent problematisations of feminist research and indeed perhaps a shift in focus I remain committed to practising feminist methodological strategies. The research presented here has been constructed within peculiarly feminist parameters as I shall outline below which encompass my theoretical approach to knowledge production as well as the embodied practice of research itself. Indeed as Brunskell (1998, p.40) argues:

> "...the choice of methods ... cannot be separated out from the theory informing their use. Nor can these theoretical frameworks be properly understood outside arguments which take place at the level of epistemology."

Before discussing my methodological strategy however it is important to note that whilst I construct my perspective as 'feminist' I do not claim to conform to any one definitive approach, or, indeed to be defining any ideal position. As Moss (1993, p.48) argues:

> "...those of us who contemplate feminist analysis cannot be lumped together into one categorically bounded position termed *feminist*. Clearly there is not one generic feminist perspective."

3.3 Epistemology

Feminist epistemologies have posed a fundamental challenge to traditional theories of knowledge (see for example: Moss, 1993; Gilbert, 1994; WGSG, 1997), systematically unpicking the ethnocentric, masculinist assumptions underlying academic knowledge production. Crucially the doctrines defining 'knower, knowing and the known' (WGSG, 1997, p.87) have been rewritten by feminist scholars. As has previously been discussed the Cartesian claims of a disembodied rational male knower who assimilated knowledge through detached observation has been mightily challenged by scholars who reject the gendered dualisms upon which such an epistemology is founded. Equally the assertion that only the realms of male concern were suitable for the interrogation of the academy have been 'debunked' (Gilbert, 1994) by feminism, arguing that research done on men could no longer be seen to be representative of human experience (Gilbert, 1994, p.90). Further the construction of particular themes as inappropriate according to the rational/irrational binary has also been challenged (Longhurst, 1997a). I have noted elsewhere the key interdependence of such Cartesian claims to knowledge and the necessity of the conditions these place on knowing and known for the definition of 'knower'. Feminist epistemological debates have therefore had implications beyond the theory of knowledge production for example by constructing a legitimate position for non -white, non -male knowers within the academy as well as opening up new fields for study and giving others voices through new practices of research.

Perhaps most significantly for contemporary feminist research, given the extent to which such shifts have become integrated into reworked epistemologies, are the implications for 'ways of knowing' and the production of knowledge. The theoretical challenges of feminist epistemologies have practical connotations for what knowledge can be produced and how we engage in the processes of its production. As Raghuram *et al* (1998, p.39) suggest:

> "Feminists have displaced ethnocentric, masculinist claims to universal knowledge, asserting that knowledge is partial and situated and that this had to be acknowledged in any research project (Madge et al, 1997)."

Feminists have consistently argued that masculinist forms of knowledge are deeply flawed by the insistence that detachment from the research subjects, and indeed the maintenance of 'objectivity, underpinned 'good research' (England, 1994; see also McDowell, 1992):

> "..part of the feminist project has been to dismantle the smokescreen surrounding the cannons of neo-positivist research – impartiality and objectivist neutrality – which supposedly prevent the researcher from

> contaminating the data (and, presumably, vice versa). As well as being our object of inquiry, the world is an intersubjective creation and, as such, we cannot put our commonsense knowledge of social structures to one side. This immediately problematises the observational distance of neo-positivism because as Stanley and Wise [(1993), argue] ... those who are researched should be treated like people and not mere mines of information to be exploited by the researcher as the neutral collector of 'facts'" (England, 1994, p.81-2).

Indeed Gibson-Graham has suggested in relation to her own research experiences that such concepts as the researched as mines of information and the researcher as miners are misleading since they perpetuate the fallacy of objectivity in research encounters. Rather than write themselves out of research feminists acknowledge the significance of their embodied presence and interactions with research subjects for the data itself:

> "In my research I found metaphors of 'conversation' and 'performance' much more useful in imagining a research strategy than the mining metaphors I had initially adopted. The mining metaphors constitute research as a process of discovery, of revelation: as researchers we reveal truths that are hidden from the untutored observer, contributing hitherto untapped resources to the permanent store of knowledge. By contrast, conversation and performance are metaphors of creation and interaction" (Gibson-Graham, 1996, p. 241, see also Gibson-Graham, 1994).

Knowledge produced as a result of research thus conceived is necessarily considered to be not only partial and situated but crucially contingent upon the individuals involved and the particularities of their interactions. For example Reger (2001) discusses the inherent problems she encountered in attempting to approach her ethnographic research in an objective, dispassionate and neutral way, poignantly noting that:

> "...every time I took myself out of the observation; the observation took itself out of me" (Reger, 2001, p. 611).

Her work has shown how deeply entrenched the researcher is in the research process and indeed the production of data and therefore knowledge. Further it highlights the significance of the researcher's emotional[10] responses to and embeddedness in the research context and with the participants. The influence of the researchers embodied presence is not unidirectional; the research also has implications for the researcher (see for example Cotterill and Letherby, 1993). These too are an important aspect of knowledge and reflect its inescapably social nature. In recognising research as a 'social activity' (Staeheli and Lawson, 1994) and therefore the knowledge we produce as a single text within multiple possibilities it is also argued that what Gibson-Graham terms 'the permanent store of knowledge' must too be seen as a fallacy. The knowledge we produce is itself not fixed but rather open to multiple interpretations:

[10] See also Anderson and Smith (2001) for a discussion of the importance of emotional geographies.

> "If we now understand that the outcome of the research process is a single story among many that are possible, we also now understand that the out put of our work – be it article or book – is also a product open to multiple interpretations, rather than a fixed and final end product. Just as research is a relational process so too is reading. Each reader brings to the text her or his own experiences which influence the interpretation of what we write" (McDowell, 1997, p.395; see also McDowell, 1999; Raghuram *et al*, 1998).

These ideas of relational reading and indeed the depth of personal investment of the researcher in the knowledge they create have been vividly played out within my own research experience as a result of my changing corporeality. My becoming pregnant has meant that towards the end of my writing up period I now bring to my writing and indeed editing a new and shifting set of material corporeal experiences. I have personally experienced the fluidity of meaning and interpretation and explicitly acknowledge this multiplicity.

Of particular significance to my research prior to my own pregnancy in particular was adopting something of a 'supplicant role' (England, 1994). Feminist epistemologies as I have discussed characteristically privilege subjective knowledges and fundamentally value the everyday experiential knowledges of research participants within these. Whilst recognising that research does not illuminate some pre-existing 'truth' due to its relational nature I nevertheless feel it is important to acknowledge the centrality of the narratives of our research participants to our understandings. Particularly in my relationships with pregnant women, embodied as I was then as a woman who had never been pregnant I found the 'supplicant role' highly desirable and appropriate, not least I would add in respect to negotiating the potentially exploitative power relations of research:

> "most feminists usually favour the role of supplicant, seeking reciprocal relationships based on empathy and mutual respect, and often sharing their knowledge with those they research ... [T]he researcher explicitly acknowledges her/his reliance on the research subject to provide insight into the subtle nuances of meaning that structure and shape everyday lives. Fieldwork for the researcher-as-supplicant is predicated upon an unequivocal acceptance that the knowledge of the person being researched (at least regarding the questions being asked) is greater than that of the researcher. Essentially, the appeal of supplication lies in its potential for dealing with asymmetrical and potentially exploitative power relations by shifting a lot of power over to the researched." (England, 1994, p. 82; see also Raghuram *et al*, 1998).

Negotiating the unbalanced power relations of social research is a crucial element of feminist research practice and an explicit awareness and concern to skew them more in favour of participants has indeed been a preoccupation of mine as I shall go on to outline further within my discussion of methodology which is more concerned with research procedures (Eyles, 1993) than the theoretical products of it.

3.4 Methodology

As previously discussed, despite the postmodernist challenge to any notion of unitary political action or wholesale change, feminist methodologies are consistently

underpinned by a motivation to destabilise existing gender discourses, which are crucial in the organisation of power. As Gibson-Graham (1996) suggests:

> "Following Foucault, I ... see post-modern feminist politics starting from the assumption that power is everywhere inscribed, in and by women, as well as by men, in theory as well as in practice, in difference as well as in unity. Thus the process of theoretical production is as much a political intervention in changing power relations, as is self-consciously (identity-based) political organisation. There is no prior reality or unified identity to be accessed or created by research from which we can launch a programme of change. There do, however, exist discourses that position subjects in relations of empowerment and disempowerment. The ways in which theory and research interact with these discourses have concrete political effects." (Gibson-Graham, 1996, p.237; see also, 1994).

In this respect my thesis, I would argue, whilst being motivated by precisely this desire – to destabilise hegemonic discourses of the pregnant body and make space for new ways of speaking, seeing and doing pregnancy – has succeeded to some degree. The pregnant body can be seen as a key figure in patriarchal power relations. However, whilst culturally this body is produced as a unitary, monolithic figure (not least through maternity wear), which maps neatly onto ideologies of motherhood, my research had shown that this implied singularity is false. Through conversations with women alternative discourses of pregnant corporeality have become apparent – on the basis of material, lived experience – in which multiple and fluid corporealities are present within the single pregnancies of individual women. As a consequence, I would argue, the concrete maternal figure who underlies patriarchal oppression of women can no longer be seen as an immutable biological and indeed natural body onto which singular discourses of pregnancy and motherhood can be unproblematically mapped. The constantly shifting nature of pregnant embodiment surely can be seen to destabilise oppressive patriarchal discourses not only about pregnancy itself (for example also opening up new possibilities for being pregnant bodies) but also motherhood and indeed perhaps more generally. Since as Gibson-Graham again identifies, whilst a unitary identity of woman does not exist, women are positioned in society by a binary gender discourse:

> "While I share no fundamental identity with any other person (as I am a unique ensemble of contradictory and shifting subjectivities), I am situated by one of the most powerful and pervasive discourses in social life (that of the binary hierarchy of gender) in a shared subject position with others who are identified, or identify themselves, as women. This subject position influences my entrée into social interactions and the ways I can speak listen and be heard. In this sense I am enabled as a women, to research with other women the conditions of our discursive construction and its effects." (Gibson-Graham, 1994, p.219).

Whilst this 'binary hierarchy of gender' may indeed place me in some sense in a shared subject position with my female research participants it is nevertheless crucial to explicitly acknowledge the different positionalities of those involved (including myself) and to be *reflexive* about the influence of these within the research. Reflexivity is a research strategy widely discussed by feminists (see for example

Dyck, 1993; England, 1994; McDowell, 1992, 1997, 1999; Moss, 1993; Raghuram *et al*, 1998; Rose, 1997; WGSG, 1997). The main premises behind reflexivity have been described as the need for "self-critical sympathetic introspection and self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as researcher" (England, 1994, p.82), since in order to challenge the view of the researcher as detached and objective it is argued that:

> "...research is never complete "until it includes an understanding of the active role of the analysts self which is exercised throughout the research process" (Smith, 1988; 18 see also Evans 1988, Pile, 1991)." (England, 1994, p.84).

However the concept of truly transparent reflexivity has been questioned by Rose (1997) who suggests that whilst the driving principles behind it remain valid and crucial to feminist work, the concept that one can fully know one's own position / identity as separate and indeed in relation to the research context is itself dangerously close to reproducing masculinist claims:

> "...assuming that self and context are, even if in principle only, transparently understandable seems to me to be demanding an analytical certainty that is as insidious as the universalising certainty that so many feminists have critiqued" (Rose, 1997, p.318).

Despite this problematisation of the concept of transparent reflexivity Rose stresses that the project to 'situate knowledge reflexively' (p.315) remains crucial to those working towards "a critical politics of power / knowledge production" (p.318). One possible 'situating tactic' that she refers to is the concept of 'betweenness', which I find to be particularly helpful. This strategy much more explicitly acknowledges the relational character of research, allowing for the remaking of identities as part of the process rather than assuming a unidirectional influence of some pre-determined, fixed and fully knowable self. This method of understanding knowledge as partial, situated and riven through with power relations is much closer to the concept of knowledge as creation, performance (as outlined by Gibson-Graham) and itself a *process* rather than a *product*. It acknowledges that whilst we cannot claim to study as disembodied entities, our research contexts unmediated by our presence, our analysis unsullied by our biographies, neither can we arrogantly assume ourselves to be cocooned (in ways which we do not assume our participants to be) within fixed, fully knowable selves. Not only is our research a dialogic process (England, 1994), one of conversation and performance, but our very identity performances, our*selves* must be seen in this light also. Therefore the concept of betweenness can be explained as:

> "the notion that, in addition to research knowledge being a collaborative product, researchers and researched mutually constitute each other through the research process in multiple, shifting ways. This idea is based on a Foucauldian conceptualisation of power as interactionally produced, distributed at all levels in hierarchical relations, and shaping choices, decisions and practices. It also links with Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) theorization of gendered and sexualised identities as fluidly and repetitively

(re)constituted within rigid constraints through their performance" (Delph-Janiurek, 2001, p.414; see also Rose, 1997).

In this respect preconceived ideas of positionality cannot be privileged as the most salient factor in situating research. Whilst these may be relevant with respect to understanding the motivation behind the selection of particular research themes and so on to attempt to map knowledge's situatedness and partiality in relation to them is misleading since:

> "Following Butler and Gibson-Graham, there is no clear landscape of social positions to be charted by an all seeing analyst; neither is there a conscious agent, whether researcher or researched simply waiting to be reflected in a research project. Instead, researcher, researched and research make each other; research and selves are 'interactive texts' (Miles and Crush, 1993; see also Katz, 1994)." (Rose, 1997, p.316).

This method of situating - acknowledging research as a single story among multiple possibilities, produced as a collaborative text by mutually constituted individuals – however does not imply the egalitarian redistribution of power, indeed it manifestly appreciates the importance of power relations in the production of knowledge. It is therefore necessary to take steps to attempt to dissipate power in order not to exploit participants and foster more reciprocal, empathetic relationships within the research and further to be aware of the fact that power is intimately bound up in the identities performed and the knowledge making process and can never be truly equalised. Whilst it is also impossible to accurately map these landscapes of power in the same way as it is not possible to fully know ourselves as researchers it is still crucial to note our attempts and indeed our failures (both to understand fully and to achieve equality). In my own research I would argue I was able to transfer power to many of my participants to some extent at least. For example, I explicitly acknowledged the research as a particular production between all research participants (and within this I include myself). However of particular importance within this is my unquestioning validation of the personal lived experience of the researched and particularly in my embodied position as childless, which was performed within the interview research contexts and therefore constituted me in those relational contexts as being in possession of significantly impoverished knowledge and completely reliant upon my participants in this respect. In addition, conceptualising research as an interactive text, which the researcher is not fully in control of during data production, nor subsequently during reading by different individuals and audiences also reduces the proportion of power traditionally held by researchers. I shall note in more detail strategies I adopted in order to minimise power differentials between participants and myself during my discussion of the practical realities of research. However for the purposes of discussion here it is crucial to note that since we cannot be aware of the precise nature of power in a research situation in all its complexity we must however endeavour to minimise power we hold as researchers where possible, act ethically with respect to our participants and acknowledge where power cannot be dissipated.

In respect to conducting research ethically this has long been a core feminist principle, in particular to ensure the research is 'relevant' to those involved and indeed 'mutually beneficial'. Whilst perhaps the initial motivation behind such ideals lay in the political aspirations of feminist research I would argue that for researchers who appreciate the relational nature of their research practices it is indeed preferable

to engage in work which is both relevant and beneficial to our participants in some way. Whilst clearly this is difficult to achieve in all contexts, particularly I would argue when researching elites (with which I had considerable problems) a particular success of my research from a personal perspective was the amount of mutual benefit derived from my periods of participant observation. In both small independent case study settings relationships developed where I was able to genuinely reciprocate in the sense that my presence was manifestly beneficial to the retailers as well as to myself. Again this is something I wish to discuss within the context of the practice of my research but it is worth mentioning here, as it is one of the methodological characteristics that define my work as feminist.

3.5 Methods / Practical Realities of Research

> "Recent feminist scholarship has challenged the pigeon-holing of certain techniques as inherently more feminist than others" (Raghuram *et al*, 1998, p.42).

Therefore, rather than the method themselves being conceptualised as inherently feminist or non-feminist it is considered that the questions informing their use and indeed the ways in which they are practiced define research as such (see for example McDowell, 1997). For this reason I shall give an in-depth account of the 'practical realities' of my research by way of discussing the research methods I chose to employ.

My research was carried out over a period of almost 2 and a half years all told and by no means followed any structured blueprint that had been set out initially. Whilst my commitment to engaging in robust qualitative, feminist research remained constant, I found my research practice to be an organic and developing process. I found that I needed to be flexible to respond to emerging opportunities and particularly to problems of access, which altered the precise foci of my research and prevented me from pursuing particular avenues to the full. However this is not to say that my research project lacked structure and planning, indeed my core research strategy was set out to enable me to answer the research questions originally posed.

3.5.1 Research strategy

The core research strategy was divided into two broad areas, firstly involving actors involved in the production of maternity wear and secondly consumers.

In terms of producers I sought to focus on retailing companies, hoping to carry out semi-structured in-depth interviews with people from different companies within (and outside) the maternity wear market. Specifically I hoped to gain access to a variety of people within this process of production from design, presentation and retail of maternity wear from a range of retailers that I categorised into three broad groups. Firstly, high street retailers of maternity wear who at the time I began my research comprised only Mothercare and Dorothy Perkins, Etam having recently pulled out (though Marks and Spencer and H&M both entered the market during the period of my research). I sought to engage with head office (corporate) staff responsible for the production of these branded maternity wear collections through buying or merchandising for example and also possibly with staff in-store (preferably those with special responsibility for maternity wear). Secondly, mail order companies are highly significant within this niche sector of the market given the lack

of choice on the high street. Therefore I sought to again engage in semi-structured in-depth interviewing with personnel with responsibility for catalogue design and also buying. Next at this time was classified under this heading given that it carried a maternity collection in its Directory but not in its stores. I hoped to interrogate why this policy was being pursued and indeed conversely why mail order companies such as Blooming Marvellous and Formes (and to a more limited extent JoJo) were at this time expanding their material presence by opening small stores in a variety of locations. In order to triangulate my data I also hoped to be able to carry out a period of participant observation in one such store. This I hoped would allow me not only to knit together the two elements of my research in terms of observing producers and consumers in their interactions but also to triangulate the data from interviews with both producers and consumers individually. In short, I sought to discern through in-depth interviewing the material processes by which maternity wear was produced and also through which values were fixed to maternity wear during production whilst also determining what these particular set of branded values were for each retailer. Bearing these branded values in mind I discerned my third group of retailers with whom I hoped to engage. These were a selection of those high street womenswear providers who did not carry a maternity collection. These were included for the sake of completion and were not to be subject to the same type of in-depth interviewing as others. However on the premise that cultural discourses of pregnancy would disbar brands such as Miss Selfridges, Top Shop and New Look from carrying such clothing and by the same token Country Casuals and Principles I hoped to carry out structured telephone interviews with representatives from head offices of such retailers.

With respect to consumers of maternity wear I sought to carry out a series of repeat, semi-structured, focused, in-depth interviews with a group of women. Initially I hoped to recruit 10 women who were pregnant at the time of interview or had been pregnant within the last 5 years and interview them up to 3 times each. I also planned to supplement this with a number of focus groups, carrying out one-off sessions discussing the same themes but in a different setting. I sought to recruit women primarily through social networks and snowballing, anticipating NHS antenatal avenues to be closed to me for ethical reasons.

It was very important to my research design that whatever problems I encountered, and I was aware from the outset that this would be a fluid and necessarily shifting process, that I work to maintain the breadth of my study and to this end I always sought to achieve the goal of good quality research with both producers and consumers. And whilst the research I report on in this thesis differs significantly from that originally set out above I am confident that I have achieved that.

3.5.2 Factors Influencing Change – The Perennial Problem of Access

Perhaps quite predictably I have encountered particular problems in relation to access. This has been without doubt the single most important (and frustrating) challenge to my research. In the very early stages of my research for example it became clear that the hope of carrying out participant observation in a 'high street' store was a false one as my initial attempts to gain access to a company I had hoped to use as a case study were thwarted and I considered myself lucky to achieve an in-store interview let alone any longer term or more in-depth, sustained involvement.

My persistence in the face of a lack of engagement and interest produced nothing but unreturned phone calls and fob-offs and as a result this method was soon effectively 'written out' of my research agenda.

Similarly my attempts to pursue in-depth interviews, or indeed any engagement with, corporate personnel from the high street companies were largely blocked. Phone calls were never returned, answer machine messages not responded to, emails ignored. I was told by one company that as an expanding market their corporate information concerning maternity wear was too sensitive to share with me and this developed into a pattern almost across the board. As a result my work with mainstream maternity wear retailers was severely limited in comparison to what I had hoped to achieve and whilst I was able to carry out in-store interviews with staff engaged with maternity wear in all the high street providers (Dorothy Perkins, Mothercare, Marks and Spencer and H&M) and indeed dogged persistence won me a guarded telephone interview with a maternity merchandiser from Dorothy Perkins the standard of data I was able to achieve and the depth of knowledge gained from the range of actors was greatly lacking in respect to that I had hoped for. In relation to my initial research strategy I did manage to gain data on retailers from the two groups of retailers carrying maternity collections, those listed above from the 'high street', which was supplemented by a brief period of research diary from observations made during visits to stores in one town, and also a telephone interview with the marketing manager from Blooming Marvellous and an interview with a store manager from Formes.

These problems, which could have been due to what I perceived to be a lack of prestige or importance attached to post-graduate academic research and an associated unwillingness to be involved in the research process, in addition to the highly competitive nature of high street clothing retail curtailed my original research strategy. However, new opportunities did arise which allowed me to develop my research project in unexpected ways. The most significant of these has been in relation to small independent maternity wear companies. Shortly following my disappointment with chasing a case study store within which to carry out participant observation and my assumption that this method would have to be 'written out' of my research I was introduced to two women (through familial networks) who had literally just established and opened their own maternity wear shop in Bradford. This was to be a highly significant turning point for me, one which led to a new emphasis in my research and also the achievement of some of my feminist principles which whilst I always aspired to, felt I had slim hope of actually achieving. I shall discuss the more methodological benefits I feel have derived from my involvement with these women later however here I wish to focus on how this new avenue of research influenced, and indeed fitted within, my research structure.

3.5.3 Methods

The initial contact with Ari and Sarah of *Mums & Co* (initially *Mums 2 Be*) resulted in over a year of participant observation during which time I spent at least a day a week working in the shop, serving and talking to customers as well as helping with the running of the business. I developed close relationships with both women (whom I now count amongst my friends) who unselfishly and unguardedly shared their aspirations with me as well as the realities of running the business, the motivations and intentions behind everything they did. This was, as a result, an enormously rich time in my research period as I derived several of my interview

participants from their social networks as well as speaking to numerous women in a more informal manner in the context of their shopping practice. This in-depth and sustained involvement in the life of this shop allowed me to gain an insight into the realities of the maternity wear market, which I could not have hoped to have gleaned from merely interviewing retailers and consumers. Indeed the benefits of this method were many since whilst I was carrying out my research 'alone' I gained 'member checkers' of sorts (see for example Baxter and Eyles, 1997) in the shape of the retailers themselves. I found it hugely beneficial to discuss things, which I felt, were arising out of the perpetual analysis of my research diary notes. Indeed they began to take on almost researcher roles themselves, bringing forward observations of their own both within specific 'member checking' discussions and also unprompted whilst also, interestingly becoming somewhat reflexive about their own actions, both as retailers and consumers. These women participated in a very real sense with the research and knowledge production and clearly my role here was not one of passive, detached observer. This is not a role I ever sought to emulate (as will have become clear through the discussion of my epistemological and methodological position) and I acknowledge the unique nature of the data produced as a result of my presence in these spaces and relationships with these women. It is important though to acknowledge that I did develop an emotional attachment to these people, and in a sense to their businesses, as I spent so long with them during the early stages of their development. However I do not see this as having curtailed my analysis in any way or indeed the data itself since I explicitly acknowledge it as one story among multiple possibilities, the result of particular relationships and performances in particular socio-spatial contexts. Whilst this emotional attachment has brought up difficulties in *critical* analysis - from an ethics perspective – I am firmly committed to this method of participant observation as one which enacts many feminist principles of research. Carrying out participant observation in such a site and in this collaborative manner also gave me an insight into the ways in which maternity wear was produced in these contexts and produced data, which was triangulated in a number of ways for example through a combination of my own observations and visual analysis and overt discussion with producers themselves. Further the involvement it allowed me to have (though not always on an overt basis) with customers / consumers as they shopped for their maternity wear again provided opportunities for triangulation with interview data.

Interestingly I found that handwriting notes at convenient points during the day and on my journey home on the train, and then subsequently typing them up longhand was a very beneficial exercise. It allowed me to feel that I'd 'got everything down on paper' – something which I acknowledge takes time to learn, indeed when comparing my early diary entries to later ones this learning curve is very clear – and also to engage in some form of analysis as time and the research progressed. This I feel is a great strength of participant observation, the flexibility it gives the researcher to continually reflect and be informed by the emerging data at all stages of the research (see for example May, 1997). I found that personally, visiting each day's data twice as I did allowed me to engage in this process more effectively.

I would have persisted in my visits here (particularly during my writing up phase as I felt the member checking was so valuable) had it not been for the fact that, due to circumstances beyond my control, I found myself moving hundreds of miles away during autumn 2000 which clearly brought to an end my work here. However in the town to which we moved (Northampton) I soon discovered another small independent maternity wear shop, which had opened the week before I established

contact. I was to spend the following (almost) year and a half in a similar relationship with Maria and Dennis, the owners of this company. This was a tremendous opportunity as it allowed me to accumulate comparative data for another similar retail site and also allowed me to explore different aspects of maternity wear production as Dennis, being a professional photographer is very interested in using images to construct particular identities. In addition, in order to triangulate with this vast amount of research diary data from two case study sites, I carried out 20 telephone interviews with small independent maternity wear shops around England. Using the online Yellow Pages I contacted a random selection of those listed as 'maternity wear retailers' and conducted a structured interview, having coded my participant observation data and analysed that I had gathered with respect to high street stores. Having done some initial analysis I was able to identify issues, which appeared to be emerging as important with respect to the market and was able to investigate these further by exploring them with a wider group of retailers.

Therefore whilst my work with the producers of maternity wear has not by any means mapped onto the initial plan constructed it has allowed me to explore aspects of production that I set out to understand, albeit with a different focus (i.e. small independent rather than high street). Despite my acute access problems I have nevertheless been able to meet my initial goal of gathering data on both the production and consumption of maternity wear in comparison to so much existing literature, which focuses entirely on one or other. The key here has been re-evaluation and a readiness to work in a fluid manner, seeking out and taking advantage of new opportunities in order to develop the research and indeed keeping a broad view of the project in order to adapt all aspects of the research in order that they fit together to form a coherent, robust whole.

Following my involvement with my first participant observation it became clear that this method was providing a wealth of consumer data in addition to that on production. As a result, and my sustained inability to gain access to and recruit pregnant women outside of relatively narrow identity groupings[11], it was decided that pursuing focus groups would not necessarily develop the consumer research any further than the participant observation data had. Instead I focused on recruiting a group of 20 women, all of who had been pregnant within the last 5 years or were pregnant at the time of interview and who were recruited through my own personal networks and those of my participants.

I was keen to adopt a style of interviewing that embodied my feminist research methodology and therefore worked towards the kind of method exemplified by for example Anne Oakley (1981). Due to my own embodiment (at the time) as childless and therefore my complete dependence upon the knowledge of my participants I was keen to carry out interviews in an 'unstructured' (Fontana and Frey, 1994) manner, whilst still being loosely guided by a broad 'schedule' to enable similar themes to be covered in each interview. The main advantages I perceived in

[11] The participant observation opened me up to a much larger group of women and thus potential participants since both Ari and Sarah, and Maria and Dennis were happy for me to talk to customers about my research if I wished which therefore opened up the possibility of recruiting for interview. However in reality I shied away from this possibility in the main for fear of affecting their customer perceptions and so on and so by affecting their business, and more importantly the customer bases for these shops is actually reasonably narrow. In the whole time I spent in these shops and the numerous women I spoke with I encountered few who differed markedly from what appeared to be a white, middle class, heterosexual norm. Although there was significant variation in ages (which I have tried to reflect in my interview group) there were very few ethnic minorities for example, which has meant I have been unable to explore the influence and importance of ethnicity in this context.

approaching these conversations in a relatively unstructured way was the freedom such a method allows participants to "talk about the subject in terms of their own frames of reference" (May, 1997, p.112) and therefore also describe experiences primarily with respect to their own priorities and meanings rather than the rigid pursuit of a schedule imposing these on them. Since my aim was to understand how women negotiated dressing their pregnant bodies and not to impose my own pre-determined framework of meaning upon their experiences I was keen as much as possible to 'let women speak for themselves'. Beginning each interview by asking women to tell me about their maternity wear experiences in a very open ended manner therefore allowed me to 'take my cues' from them and from the outset placed the emphasis on their narrative as of central importance to the research rather than the predetermined schedule. Indeed I soon found that the collection of broad themes of which this consisted (which was, I stress, only ever loosely followed and only in relation to women's narratives) shifted as my research progressed and I responded to the data.

As is the aim of many feminist interviewers I also attempted to build rapport with my participants and indeed informal relationships based on engagement. All interviews were conducted in as informal way as possible with cups of tea and so on, and using armchairs and so on where possible. In fact, all were relaxed and friendly and laughter punctuated our discussions to a great extent. Indeed more than interviews I would rather conceptualise these meetings as conversations. If I was asked questions about my own opinions for example or what my research was suggesting about any issue I freely answered and certainly sessions did not begin and end with what was recorded (and subsequently transcribed). I have been delighted with the degree of engagement several of my participants have shown (since this suggests to me that the research is indeed relevant to them as individuals). For example several months after the second of our interviews one participant came into the case study shop through which I had met her and commented that she was really pleased to see me because she'd been thinking about what we'd discussed and had not only something else to tell me but also a question to ask about my personal view. We proceeded to chat for about an hour over tea and biscuits! Instances such as this confirm to me that conducting 'interview' research in this way is preferable since this participant clearly felt valued, involved and engaged with the process and indeed we also developed a high level of rapport, which both facilitated and was enhanced by this. From a feminist perspective such outcomes are clearly pleasing. With those with whom it was possible I carried out repeat interviews, in some cases resulting in a series of three, but with all I engaged in at least one semi-structured in-depth interview. Clearly the level of rapport that was established was greater with those with whom I met on a number of occasions and indeed each relationship was different, so whilst making these assertions about their development and so on it cannot be said to have been replicated in each case and nor can I speak for each respondent with regard to their experiences of the process. Further there are particular limitations to this portion of my research, which must be acknowledged.

3.5.4 Limitations

I would argue that although my acute access problems have clearly made for a significantly different research project than I perhaps set out to do, (and therefore inevitably has produced different knowledge to that which would have been possible had my original plans been more easily realised), this research has been largely

successful from a number of perspectives, not least in realising feminist methodological principles. I shall discuss these in more depth later however first I believe it is necessary to identify and discuss several limitations of my research as it stands, particularly the lack of depth to my group of pregnant women.

As I have previously mentioned the group of women I was able to recruit for my in-depth interviewing was relatively limited. As can be discerned from the list provided in Appendix 1 there is a broad homogeneity to the group. They are all undoubtedly white, heterosexual and English and indeed many also share other significant similarities, for example 8 are members of the teaching profession and several identify as practicing Christians. This broad homogeneity I acknowledge is a failing of my research. I would have been much more comfortable with a group that was drawn from a wider cross-section of society and indeed perhaps all lived in one definable area. As it was they were drawn from the different areas in which I conducted my producer research, Bradford, Manchester and Northampton and the narrow grouping means that the knowledge produced from this data necessarily omits any discussion of such important identity markers as ethnicity and sexuality for example. This limitation therefore highlights the partiality of the knowledge set out in this thesis. It is by no means a complete representation of practices of maternity wear consumption although I would also suggest that this would not be the case even had I managed a better balanced 'sample'.

Whilst I remain uncomfortable with the degree of similarity across my group of interviewees I would however stress that this was largely a result of difficulties of recruitment. As I have noted the customer bases of the small independents I worked in were reasonably narrow, giving few opportunities to expand the sample wider and further avenues of recruitment such as GP surgeries or antenatal classes[12] were not open to me. Therefore utilising social networks, both my own and those of other participants was the most effective method of recruitment open to me. However this in itself almost bred the homogeneity, particularly with respect to those with Christian backgrounds – church communities tend to include large numbers of socially connected families – and also occupational similarities, for example Lizzy introduced me to Meryl who was a teacher in the same school.

I explicitly acknowledge that the homogeneity of my group of interviewees has produced very specific data with respect to clothing pregnant bodies and indeed reflects particular ways of being pregnant and also mother. For the most part these are women who are happy to be/come mother as their core identity. However I would nevertheless reject the assertion that I have merely replicated the voice of the 'chattering middle classes'. Despite the undeniable similarities these women do not constitute a singular, undifferentiated group who speak from a monolithic positionality. Not only do these women have very different personal identities and indeed biographies, which clearly structure their experiences and their articulations of these. But there are also discernibly different voices within the group. For example there are clear disparities between the core of the group and Leonie, Natalie and Tracy (with respect to her first pregnancy) since these women were considerably younger than the culturally prescribed norm when pregnant for the first time – in fact all were unmarried, teenage mothers. I discuss Tracey's embodied experience of this in respect to its significance for her clothing consumption during this pregnancy in chapter 7, in particular her desire to conceal a corporeality she felt to be socially

[12] I never considered pursuing organisations such as the NCT since these would not have allowed me to cast the net wider given the ideologies and practices they espouse and the broad identity of the organisation.

unacceptable. Whilst not wishing to construct 'unmarried teenage mothers' as a homogeneous group in themselves – indeed there are disparities between these 3 women – there are clear difference between the voices of these women and the predominantly married, Christian, 'appropriately aged' group whose pregnancies were planned. In addition there are individual differences which stand out such as Jo who was a pre-pregnant size 18 plus. Her embodied experience of clothing consumption during pregnancy was in some respects much more difficult than others due to the lack of larger sized maternity wear. However, in other respects she found her pregnant body much easier to negotiate since it was defined as 'pregnant' rather than 'overweight' (as her pre-pregnant body was) which allowed her greater confidence in the way she dressed. This was in complete contrast to most women who experienced their pregnant bodies as infinitely less attractive and therefore difficult to dress then their non-pregnant corporealities. Ari and Natriece for example are interesting examples in this respect and whilst both their experiences point to the problematic relationship between the pregnant body and fashion (something I explore in chapter 7) their responses to this are entirely different. Both dressed in accordance with 'fashion' prior to pregnancy but whilst Ari went to extreme lengths (for example cannibalising clothes) in order to dress as trendily as she could during pregnancy, Natriece retreated from fashion entirely, preferring to dress as 'mother' rather than risk looking 'horrific'.

As I have argued previously no research can be posited as universal, fixed and complete as it is a particular result of the interactions between researcher and participants in a particular socio-temporal context. This knowledge is subject to reworking over time by both different individuals and indeed a single individual (as I shall go onto illustrate based on my own experience). Therefore this research has produced a partial and limited representation of practices of clothing pregnant bodies as narrated by a specific group of women in their conversations with me (who at the time was embodied as a woman who had never been pregnant although in other respects performed an identity not vastly dissimilar to their own). And whilst my triangulation between interview and participant observation data goes some way to improving the robustness of my research it does not detract from this narrow focus. However it is worth noting that this narrow grouping can be seen to a large extent to be broadly representative of the customer base of the small independent shops I worked in. Although I have not confirmed this numerically in any way it is certainly the case that the customers I encountered in my two and a half years of participant observation were overwhelmingly white and 'middle class'.

3.5.5 Feminist Research Practice

As previously mentioned writing reflexively in order to situate research is considered to be a crucial element of feminist research. Given an appreciation of the situated and partial nature of our knowledges it is necessary to acknowledge the betweenness of knowledge subsequently created through relational research processes where both researcher, researched and research are mutually constituted. The identities of the researcher and the research participants are not incidental but rather defining factors. Whilst it is impossible to know these fully they are implicated in the power relations, which also characterise research relationships and with which feminists are particularly concerned. As such I wish to discuss here some of the power relations which were inherent in the research process and indeed important issues of identity

and performance which have been posed by my own shifting embodiment due to pregnancy.

3.5.5(1) Power Relations

I will not give detailed attention to the power relations involved in every research encounter since I believe those to be embedded in in-depth sustained interactions to be of greater methodological significance than for example those involved in one-off telephone interviews. That said clearly power relations were very important to shaping this research from the outset, as my acute access problems demonstrate my absolute lack of power in interactions with corporate retailing companies. However feminist methodological literature has focused most readily on issues of power and attempts to engage reflexively with the influence of its imbalance in more sustained, in-depth encounters and indeed this is where I wish to focus my attention here.

During interviews with pregnant women every effort was made to make the encounters as informal and friendly as possible. The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations, some in the backstage space of one of the participant observation sites, some in participants places of work, their homes or indeed my own (on two occasions where the participants were existing friends). Recognising the importance of the 'place' of interviews (see for example Elwood and Martin, 2000) locations where power relations were not skewed towards me were favoured (for example places where participants had personal investment and felt comfortable) and attempts were made to make seating arrangements and so on as informal as possible. As a means of breaking the ice and conveying the value I placed in their participation, and indeed their views, I bought each individual flowers or chocolates (unless the interview was spontaneous and there was no opportunity for me to purchase these). I found this an effective means of developing rapport from the outset. In no way did I wish to replicate the traditional masculinist researcher, researched relationship and always began my interviews giving a broad outline of the issues I was hoping to explore, thus setting out the context for why I wanted to talk to them, and then expressly articulated that whilst I had in mind the broad purpose of my research I wanted it to be guided by the experiences of women such as themselves. I therefore attempted to place great value on their own knowledge and experience both within the immediate context of the interview but also with respect to my research as a whole. Additionally, despite having a 'schedule' of sorts which I took with me to each interview and a collection of images which I hoped to discuss, I maintained a deliberate policy of asking open ended and broad questions (particularly in the early stages of interviews), in order to gain an insight into individuals own priorities and experiences before focusing on any particular issues on the schedule which came out of their narratives. In all cases I tried to be led by the women themselves and I consider this to have been (as was my participant observation data) *collaborative* research. As a general rule I was genuinely pleased by the level of rapport I was able to develop with the majority of my participants. In particular with those I was able to carry out repeat interviews I was not only able to (having transcribed and analysed the previous meeting before any others) practice triangulation of sorts by clarifying certain issues and exploring certain aspects of their experience in more depth, but also to develop closer relationships with them which significantly accentuated the quality of our data. However I am aware that despite the relaxed nature of interviews and my attempts to dissipate power away from myself I inevitably retained not only the editorial power inherent in all

research[13] but also some controlling influence over the interview encounters themselves. For example comments such as *'does this interview go down to underwear?'* reminded me that I still occupied the position of interviewer and researcher in the perceptions of my participants[14] and therefore that there was a degree to which they structured their responses and narratives in relation to these perceptions and what they thought I regarded as important. Additionally I was aware that the power relations were more unbalanced with some respondents than with others. For example those with whom I built up a deep rapport over the course of several interviews or knew socially beforehand had minimised power differentials whereas I felt particularly with participants such as Leonie, a 15-year-old single mum-to-be it was much more exaggerated. There was also one instance in which I interviewed a woman who until stopping work during her third pregnancy had been a university lecturer, she pointed out at the beginning of the interview that she had marked many a PhD in her time and thus set up an interesting power relationship within which I felt very much in her shadow! Despite the maintenance of power on my behalf in the majority of these interview contexts however I believe my embodied positionality at the time as a woman who had never been pregnant went some way to counteract this. All my respondents knew that I was childless and so were aware that they had an enormous amount of knowledge which no amount of academic research could acquire – that of embodied knowledge of pregnancy.

It is interesting to note that there was a discernible shift in the power relations embedded in my participant observation periods. Initially, in both contexts the power was firmly weighted towards the shop owners, since particularly with Mums & Co (as at that point I had very little working knowledge of the maternity wear market) I was constantly learning from them and was unsure of the day to day running of the shops. Whilst I retained the inevitable power of the researcher with respect to what was written in my research diary (although this was diluted by especially Arianna suggesting things she'd thought about or noticed or even herself written down to tell me when they had happened on a day I hadn't been there) and ultimately was included in the thesis itself my lack of knowledge relative to theirs, both in terms of the retailing side but also embodied knowledge of pregnancy was significant in structuring the power relations. However as my research progressed, and particularly as I gathered data from a range of other sources, the power did begin to shift more in my favour. Indeed towards the end of my research period I began to feel more and more uncomfortable about the power imbalance that my increased knowledge and critical analysis of these businesses had produced. This highlights the need for sustained reflexivity throughout the research process, as power relations are not stable but rather fluid. Clearly any shift influences the nature of the research

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[13] Which in this sense was not dissipated by having member checkers as each individual woman could not fulfil this role, although for those who I interviewed more than once I was at least able to discuss with them themes I had discerned from their previous transcripts in order to clarify their relative importance and so on.

[14] Instances such as this serve to reiterate Rose's (1997) argument that we can never fully know our positionality and indeed its influence on the research context. Regardless of my efforts to dissipate power in my interviews in the ways I have described I was unable to completely remove the researcher/researched relationship. This in some respects was not only beyond my control but I was also unaware of the extent to which this was the case in each individual encounter. We cannot entirely regulate for how our research participants perceive us (that is the self we perform in the research context) therefore how can we hope to document our positionality as it situates the knowledge we produce as a result. To assume that we can do so is not only arrogant but to privilege our own interpretations of our-selves over those who interact with us in the process of its production.

and brings to light new issues which must be negotiated. Indeed a difficult aspect to negotiate in this particular respect has been the critical analysis I have been led to of the small independent retailers I now count amongst my friends. Over the years I have been involved with my two case study retailers I have come to know these women well, and have therefore become interested in their businesses not just from a research perspective but also a personal one. The critical conclusions I have reached both in terms of the consequences for their shops of their lack of professional knowledge and the gloomy prospects for future survival and growth are difficult for me to negotiate. Not only did I have to I negotiate their feelings in what I let them read – which must be reflexively considered since their close involvement as member checkers with other parts of the thesis is in direct contrast to their involvement with the writing and editing of sections concerning their businesses. But also I have had to consider what disservice I may be doing to withhold some of the negativity I have discerned in terms of their long-term financial investment in these ventures. This is an incredibly difficult balancing act, one, which uniquely arises out of feminist in-depth qualitative research and one which I do not feel I was able to satisfactorily resolve. At the point that I began to struggle with this issue of power imbalance I made the decision to withdraw from an active research relationship with these women (something which in itself posed its own problems). However my personal relationships continue, emphasizing again the illusion of any boundaries between everyday life and a definable 'field'[15].

3.5.5(2) Relevance and mutual benefit of research

Whilst clearly my research cannot have been of mutual benefit to all those who have been kind enough to be involved, particularly employees of high street or larger retailers of maternity wear, there have been instances within my research where particularly personally satisfying reciprocal relationships have developed.

With respect to the in-depth interviews of pregnant (and recently pregnant) women I would like to think (but of course can never be sure to what extent this is true for each individual woman) that these conversations were relevant in a number of ways. Firstly I would hope that they in some sense validated their experience and their everyday embodied knowledge as important, not only in a personal sense or just in respect to my research but also in developing wider understandings of (and indeed challenges to) the cultural structuration of gender. I hope that in conducting interviewee led discussions and stressing the centrality of their experiences to my work these women will have felt some validation of themselves as knowing subjects and the producers of academic knowledge in a collaborative sense. In addition, I hope to have produced portions of their everyday lived experience as valuable in this respect, which, perhaps otherwise might be constructed as trivial and ordinary. Secondly whilst always valuing women's experiences and opinions I did probe their responses, asking them to question their feelings and so on in order to understand the contexts and motivations behind the instances they described. In this way, particularly when discussing experiences that reflected oppressive discourses I hope that in some respects spaces for alternative performances and discourses were opened up. In particular, the discussion of a set folder of images, which formed a part of

[15] Whilst I have not discussed this in-depth here the collapsing of boundaries between some identifiable 'field' where researchers physically 'go' to research is an important feminist contribution to social science (see for example: Katz, 1994; Nast, 1994; Staeheli and Lawson, 1994; Raghuram *et al*, 1998) which is now being embraced by the wider academy (see for example Driver, 2000).

each interview, can be seen as a means of introducing different discourses of the pregnant body to women. Whilst it is not possible to ascertain to what extent these were influential outside of the research context these interviews were certainly a forum where different ways of seeing and dressing (and therefore being) pregnant bodies were constructed (since each participant had their own views on each). On a more personal note I was delighted when one respondent with whom I conducted three interviews in all asked to read her transcripts and expressed delight at reading them. She felt they formed a unique record of her pregnancy and requested copies of all three in order that she might keep them and show them to her children in years to come. She commented that they were so detailed in their representation of her experience of pregnancy and that she would not be able to recount it in so much depth in years to come. As far as she was concerned they formed a personal and meaningful almost 'personal history' of her pregnancy and as such were personally valuable.

For me however the most satisfying and rewarding aspect of my research was the mutually beneficial relationships that were established in my participant observation contexts. In both case study sites my presence was genuinely helpful to the retailers themselves. For instance at the very beginning of my time with Ari and Sarah at Mums & Co, Sarah was on maternity leave, expecting her twin girls. As a result in the very early days of the business Ari found herself with a small child of her own, working 5 days a week and negotiating all the teething problems associated with (in particular) stocking the shop which involved national travel in order to achieve. My presence, on one of those days allowed her a little bit of breathing space and some company, as well as someone to talk to about the developing business and her hopes for the future as well as the difficulties she faced. On perhaps a more practical level it also provided her with someone who could run the shop in her absence for example allowing her to have some time off, as well as providing an extra pair of hands to accommodate her son when there were customers to be served and so on. This was also a benefit for Maria who was working 6 days a week initially (as Dennis is a freelance photographer and so has other work commitments). Therefore very quickly, since she was confident in my ability to run the shop successfully without her, given my knowledge gained from Mums & Co as well as my research more generally, I began 'working' one day a week to give her a break. Had I not been there it is debateable whether she would have had this luxury so early on.

Linked to this is a more general concern about the ethics of research. This was something I encountered relatively early on when one of my prospective participants with whom I had set up an interview sadly lost her second baby through miscarriage. This was something I had not previously considered (again here lies the significance of being – at that time – embodied as childless and never pregnant) but brought to the fore many ethical issues I needed to consider. In this particular event I contacted the participant some time later to express my sympathy and stress that she should feel no concern about involvement in my research. I didn't want her to worry about letting me down in any way if she felt she could no longer contribute. Which she did not. This unfortunate event made me realise quite how emotionally loaded my research and indeed the data itself was. Had the interview have taken place before the miscarriage I would have faced still more troubling ethical problems. I would surely have had to approach this participant and asked her if she felt it appropriate to use her data. If the reaction of my respondent who requested copies of her transcripts as oral histories of her pregnancy is to be interpreted as a possible

reaction, this woman may have wanted the research to be used and indeed may have herself valued the transcript as a form of validation of the baby having existed (see Layne, 2000) however I would have clearly been completely open to her wishes in this instant. Clearly pregnancy, birth and the transition to motherhood are a highly emotional and significant time in a woman's life (as I myself am now experiencing first hand) and whilst many women find it a happy period in their lives it must be remembered that hegemonic ideas about pregnancy and childbirth as joyous, life affirming events are not everyone's experience. The experience of the participant who lost her baby emphasises this. It highlights that care must be taken when researching such aspects of women's lives, that not all experiences will have been positive, indeed as I found with another respondent who had suffered a still birth the year before I met and interviewed her (when she was pregnant again) and for others who had experienced other forms of negativity during their pregnancies, particularly for example social exclusion on the part of one teenage mother. Further, whilst as a researcher it is crucial to be aware of the emotional nature of such research it is also necessary to acknowledge the intensely personal character of many aspects of these experiences. As is often the case with feminist research within which high levels of rapport are developed with participants I often found that women shared with me intensely personal and private aspects of their experiences. In certain instances I felt these were so personal that whilst I transcribed them for the sake of completeness I did not at any stage consider using the sensitive material within my thesis or any other form which this material my take. I felt that whilst the women had clearly been comfortable enough to share these aspects of their experience with me in the context of our conversations this was entirely different to sharing it with unknown others who would read the report.

Another ethical issue that I faced was negotiating the necessarily critical analysis I have made of my case study small independent retailers. This has been a particularly difficult aspect of this research to negotiate since as I have noted, I now count these people amongst my friends and have developed an emotional attachment to both them and their businesses. I resolved to write the analysis into my thesis as I feel it is central to what I am trying to achieve here and I have not as yet shown the finished write up to these women. However if I am asked for it I will not hide it since I have openly discussed with them some of my concerns for them, particularly with Dennis and Maria, and they are aware of my conclusions about the difficulties of the maternity wear market in general. This said, I do not feel I have satisfactorily resolved this ethical issue. I am still uneasy about how critical I have been about these people who so unselfishly shared with me the realities of their businesses and have taken me into their confidences. It highlights once again the vulnerability of research participants, particularly in feminist research where the emphasis is on building meaningful relationships and engagement. Despite any assertions I have made about the balance of power in my research, this situation does illustrate, poignantly, the editorial power held by myself and indeed the importance of that power. My most fervent hope is that I have not done them a disservice since I have not anonymised[16] them, rather I hope that in sharing with them my concerns as I have in informal ways[17] that this research and my analysis may have positive influences for them in the future.

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[16] The reason for this is that in many ways discussing their projects in-depth may also be of benefit to them from the perspective of heightening their profile in even some small way.

[17] I do worry that if they read the chapters in question it would upset them, despite the fact that I have probably already raised the issues I discuss here with them in the course of conversations over time.

3.5.5(3) Identity and Performance

Towards the end of my writing up period I myself fell pregnant. This had the effect of placing me in the privileged position of experiencing my research at an embodied level. It also made me realise that whilst sharing embodied experiences with participants is by no means essential to research, it does give a special insight into the research matter. I certainly appreciate now that whilst I feel I was able to engage with women well during interviews and participant observation I was engaging with some of the issues on a much more superficial level than I now would. For example where before I might consider the pregnant body to be a surface upon which society inscribes meaning and through which the material body is experienced and lived I now understand it in an entirely richer way. There is a new level to my understanding of pregnant bodies that are worth noting.

Whilst my experience to date has confirmed to me the existence of multiple pregnant bodies it has enriched my understanding and pointed to others that my interviews did not bring out. This may perhaps have been because I wasn't knowledgeable enough to pick them up from people's narratives because of my own lack of experience, or perhaps I did not pursue questions about them in interviews because I did not consider them to be important (equally this can be seen to highlight the influence my research has had on my own performativity and lived experience). For example personally I felt I inhabited a body that was 'clinically pregnant but yet not pregnant' in the early weeks of my pregnancy. Whilst the three pregnancy tests that it took to convince me showed positive results I neither looked nor 'felt' pregnant and indeed could not even have my pregnancy affirmed by the actions of others since convention (and personal fear of miscarriage) prevented us telling anyone the news for a number of weeks. This body merged with what I can only describe as a 'sick' body quite quickly when at 5 weeks I began to develop the symptoms of what is laughingly termed 'morning sickness'. This medicalised term for me was far from accurate as my nausea and sickness virtually took my body hostage for many weeks, changing my eating habits so much that I lost a considerable amount of weight and had to take significant periods of time off work. In fact the medicalised term I felt negated my experience, passing it off as 'normal pregnancy symptom' rather than the very personal and excruciating experience that it was (and still is as I write this). This in particular was not a body I encountered in my discussions with women, perhaps because they effectively 'wrote it out' of their narratives for various reasons. Perhaps also because of my desire not to re-inscribe discourses of illness in relation to pregnancy I certainly did not actively pursue such avenues of questioning. In addition my poor eating habits induced by the sickness and nausea induced fear and concerns about my 'in-between pregnant body', which others did not voice. I worried that I was not growing as quickly as I should have been and that as a result of my reduced and limited diet I had in some way managed to damage my baby, that it wasn't growing as it should be as a result. I worried about my lack of discernable bump not only in relation to the ambiguities of my 'in-between' body but also in relation to the baby growing inside it.

In many ways then my knowledge and understanding of my pregnant bodies is much more inwardly focused than perhaps before. I understand more of the depth of pregnant corporeal experience since my focus on what is happening to the surface of my body is always in some sense related to an awareness of what that signals about the activity within. This is not to say that I now consider issues relating to clothing the pregnant body to be in some way negated by this new depth of

knowledge. Rather I feel I can engage with it on another level. For example in the context of having experienced a 'clinically pregnant but yet not so' body I can clearly identify with the desire to have an identifiable bump to outwardly signify pregnancy to others. Further I now appreciate the almost contradictory status maternity wear can hold for women. For when inhabiting a clinically pregnant body or an 'in-between' body maternity wear can be experienced as *excluding* since it almost defines you as *not pregnant* because your body has not changed enough for it to be required and there is very much a sense in which you feel out of place in maternity wear and baby shops at this time. However, conversely I certainly found that wearing maternity wear helped to define my body as pregnant once it was necessary highlighting the symbolic nature of the material object irrespective of the style/design of the clothing itself. For me pregnancy did not immediately signal a curtailment of my wardrobe but rather I have almost regained some items in my wardrobe as losing weight allowed me to wear items I had previously felt unsuitable because of my shape. I found myself able to wear things I had previously disregarded as I felt I had gained too much weight to wear them. My sickness however meant I lost weight even when embodied as 'in between' I was happy to wear my reclaimed clothes because of the relative lack of weight elsewhere on my body. This would appear to be a converse experience to others I have spoken with.

I do not feel that this new embodied knowledge now means that my research and analysis done as a woman who had never been pregnant is not valid or is in some way terminally flawed, rather I now appreciate the benefit of sharing corporeal experience with one's respondents. It also highlights the tenuousness of knowledge created by academics and their embodied investment in it. Throughout my thesis I have chosen to leave unchanged my original analysis done as a women who had never been pregnant but where my new position has led to significant rethinking, an alternative view, or indeed significant comment I have inserted it as an italicised footnote. I believe this is the most reflexive means of writing in my embodied pregnant knowledge whilst not erasing that previously constructed. I believe this allows a feminist methodological point to be raised and highlighted, that this thesis presents a contingent account which is subject to change and reworking over time by different and indeed the same individuals. Further I would suggest that the politics of 'betweeness' are highlighted by my changing corporeal experience. While this concept strictly relates to the production of knowledge in the research setting where "what we research is our relation with the researched" (England, 1994, p.86 quoted by Rose, 1997, p.315). I would suggest it can be extended beyond these encounters and social identity can be seen to be made and remade (Rose, 1997) as a result of research processes as well as within them. To assume that I would have performed my pregnant identities or materially experienced my pregnant bodies in the same ways, as I now do, having not engaged with this research, is to be misled.

Chapter 4: Material Production And Provision Of Maternity Wear

4.1 Introduction

> "...fashion exists not simply as an abstract force or idea, but is put into practice through the actions of individual agents, producers, buyers, magazine editors, journalists, retailers and consumers within the various subsections of the fashion system/s. Fashion has to be translated and made meaningful, a process that cuts across economic and cultural practices to the extent that it is impossible to separate the economic from the cultural since as du Gay (1997) argues, these do not exist in isolation but mutually constitute each other." (Entwistle, 2000, p.235)

Within the literatures of fashion, geographies of retail and indeed consumption there persists a problematic division between production and consumption with one invariably being privileged over the other (Blomley, 1996, Entwistle, 2000, Lowe and Wrigley, 1996). As Entwistle (2000) among others however argues, this is a false distinction, suggesting that important "chains of dissemination and distribution link the two" (2000, p.221) and further that neither can be understood as purely economic or cultural practices but rather as hybrids (du Gay 1997 cited in Entwistle 2000). Therefore, whilst limits to my research mean that I cannot discuss with any first hand knowledge the *material* production of maternity wear for the UK market as it is traditionally understood, that is with reference to the specifics of its manufacture, the retail capital involved and so on, I can however discuss with clarity the production of maternity wear in terms of the ways it is constructed by cultural mediators such as retailers themselves and the economic elements within this.

Focusing within this chapter on the economic factors influencing the production of maternity wear I shall at first outline descriptively the wider production of clothing for the UK high street and the organisation of retail in this location. Having sketched the core relationship between production and retail in terms of supply chains and in particular the continued drive towards flexible, just-in-time strategies which are of particular importance at a time when margins are squeezed and growth within the womenswear market generally is low, I shall situate maternity wear within this broader picture arguing that it occupies a marginal position on the high street – strategically and spatially – with only narrow provision seemingly contradicting the segmentation of womenswear at large. I will suggest that this marginality is largely driven by problematic production issues, which put tremendous pressure on margins and profitability.

However additionally I shall suggest that whilst the economic realities of production are less than favourable, the market itself is not wholly controlled by such factors. For example spending on maternity wear is variable by season, depending on prevailing fashion trends. Rather than economically driven this is a primarily cultural influence and in this case production is influenced directly by designers, buyers and retailers, for example in terms of how they produce fashion in any given season. In addition, in response to the marginality of maternity wear on the high street and personal consumption experiences in this context a distinctive form of retail has developed. Across the country a spate of small independent shops have been established over recent years by women who are what I will term 'consumers – turned – retailers'. These are businesses established in some cases almost independently of concerns about the economic functioning of the market being

primarily founded in response to what could be described as culturally led appraisals of the market.

4.2 Production of Clothing For High Street Retail

4.2.1 Conditions of Production

If claiming to work towards an embodied understanding of fashion and clothing consumption it is imperative to acknowledge those whose labour forms the fundamental basis of the practices of production. Though the glamorous image of fashion depends on keeping this labour and its precise embodied nature hidden (Entwistle, 2000) it is important to acknowledge not only the exploitative nature of production as an industrial process but also this very fact that as part of the wider production of fashion it is actively concealed. Even academically:

> "the fashion industry [is] an example of a field where perspectives on both production and consumption are rarely brought together" (McRobbie, 1997, p.73).

Indeed even where exploitative conditions of production are revealed (for example in the advent of exposés such as that of Nike's production processes) certain discourses – specifically about the bodies of those involved – are employed to legitimate the organisation of production and which too are identified by Entwistle (2000) as underlying the exploitative history of the clothing industry itself. These are particularly important at a time when major retailers such as Marks & Spencer are making fundamental changes to their supply systems, severing longstanding relationships with domestic manufacturers and drawing instead on 'cheaper' labour abroad. It is also imperative to appreciate that fashion consumption also impacts on the industrial processes of production and therefore the bodies of those involved. For example the demand for low prices puts strain on already tight profit margins therefore instigating drives to cut costs further (see for example Hale, 2000).

> "The history of the fashion industry is ... a shameful one. Fashion production has fed off the labour of the most vulnerable workers, working class women and children and new immigrant populations. In the twentieth century, class, gender, and race became so interconnected that it is impossible to provide an account of clothing production which does not take account of the ways in which these intersect and make the garment industry one of the poorest in terms of pay and conditions." (Entwistle, 2000, p.208-209)

Phizacklea (1990) discusses at length the dependence of UK high street clothing retail on exploitative practices of production centred on home working. In the late 1980s she found that despite technological changes in the industry "far from home-working being regarded as an inefficient and uneconomic relic of the productive past" it was "actually on the increase" (Phizacklea, 1990, p.1-2). At this time sub-contacting was widely used as a means for manufacturers to meet the 'speed and flexibility' demands of the powerful large retailers. Indeed Hale (2000) argues that despite enormous increases in international sourcing the drive to flexible production maintains the need for such workers in the 1990s who continue to:

> "play a key role in these production chains, not only in low wage economies but also in industrial countries of Europe, North America and Australia" (Hale, 2000, p.352).

Phizacklea argues that such conditions (to be discussed in greater depth below) in the 1980s perpetuated and sustained the existence of these "small, inner city firms dominated by ethnic entrepreneurs and labour" (Phizacklea, 1990, p.2):

> "These small firms are run predominantly by ethnic-minority man who are located at the bottom of a 'dog-eat-dog' subcontracting chain. This chain means up to 200 per cent mark ups even on British produced goods for some retailers, and paltry sums for the subcontractors, who survive at the expense of extremely low paid workers and home-workers" (Phizacklea, 1990, p.3)

With the increasing squeeze on profit margins, according to Verdict Research these having halved to 6% for the top 10 clothing retailers between 1998 and 2000 (Butler, 13/10/01, p.10), and the associated drive to develop flexible supply chains it is clear that the role of such firms has far from diminished. Though one would hope that the introduction of the minimum wage might have made some inroads into improving these women's working conditions (although this would seem unlikely given their immigration status and so on) their fundamental vulnerability and exploitation would appear to persist. As Entwistle notes:

> "Today, garment workers all over the world are at the mercy of a volatile market which is highly recession sensitive. They are disposable labour, brought in cheaply when there is work and laid off when the market slows down" (Entwistle, 2000, p.217)

Indeed given the current macro economic climate, the structure of retailing and consumption trends on the high street this would appear to be a particularly critical period for such women. In addition the fact that technological developments within the industry "have not eliminated the basic unit of production, the woman at a sewing machine" (Entwistle, 2000, p.212) and the enduring cultural discourses constructing the bodies of these women as naturally inclined to such working practices suggest that these conditions are likely to persist.

Gendered divisions of labour have always existed within the clothing industry, divisions which also map onto a "division of pay and status" (Entwistle, 2000, p.213). Men have historically occupied those positions that grant high status and wages – both in the British cottage industry and subsequent factory systems. These gendered divisions are reproduced in the home-working system also, Phizacklea (1990) significantly noting that she did not encounter a single female entrepreneur in the course of her research[18]. She argues that women continue to be confined to low paid roles because they are classified as unskilled.

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[18] Yet ironically, as McRobbie (1997) argues, fashion is otherwise an almost entirely feminised industry:

> "Apart from a few men at the top, including manufacturers and retailers, celebrity designers and magazine publishers, it is and has been a female sphere of production and consumption" (McRobbie, 1997, p.84-85).

> "...both historically and transnationally women's sewing skills learnt in childhood and adolescence are never adequately rewarded. This is because the acquisition of those skills is usually hidden in a sexual division of labour in the privatised sphere of the home where 'work' is unpaid and training rendered invisible" (Phizacklea, 1990, p.3)

Employers are therefore justified in paying women poorly in comparison to apparently 'skilled' male workers particularly as neither are they seen as breadwinners (Phizacklea, 1990). Such discourses about female labour markets are apparently used by developing world governments in order to attract multinationals, (Elson 1984 cited in Entwistle, 2000), women's bodies being constructed as being naturally suited to particular types of work, being hard working, nimble fingered and so on as well as cheap because of the 'innate' nature of their abilities and so on (Entwistle, 2000). As Chapkis and Enloe (1984, cited in Entwistle, 2000) argue:

> ".. rather than being 'cheap' women's labour is *cheapened* by cultural attitudes that fail to recognise it or give it adequate status of reward" (p.213)

Though I have no data relating to the conditions under which maternity wear is produced for the UK market I believe it is important to begin discussions of its consumption with an acknowledgement of the exploitative practices behind much of British fashion. Though I cannot specifically account for the material production of the clothing I am focusing on the following discussion of the structure of clothing retail in the UK does suggest that it is likely to be implicated in the exploitation of women. Therefore this research project is not just about the bodies of consumers but also those of the producers themselves. Any account of fashion must take account of the corporeal realities of fashion consumption not just for those who consume but also for those whose labour allows them to do so (and allows them to do so in particular ways). Fashion does indeed have material implications for how bodies are experienced and lived, is integral to the construction of women's bodies both as producers and consumers. And as Entwistle (2000) notes there is an important division between the two, suggesting that there is a:

> ".. great disparity ... between fashion as freedom of expression, playful and fun, and fashion as an oppressive system of production. In this respect the body of the wearer contrasts strongly with the body of the worker who is almost invariably unable to afford the clothes she makes" (Entwistle, 2000, p.209)

In this context it would be interesting to consider what the clothing consumption practices are of those who produce fashion for the market in question, particularly during pregnancy. Particularly since, as McRobbie (1997) notes, there are also enormous gaps in the literature concerning conditions of consumption, many studies (including my own to a certain extent) taking for granted the ability to engage in consumption whereas clearly this is not the case for all.

I shall now turn my attention to the organisation of material production in relation to the specific demands of high street retailing in the UK which form the context for and arguably sustain the need for flexible – read 'exploitative' – supply systems.

4.2.2 Retailer / Manufacturer Relationships

The suppliers and manufacturers of clothing for the UK high street market have received some attention by social scientists in their analyses of clothing retail and consumption. For example, Crewe and Davenport (1992) look in particular at the changing buyer-supplier relationships within clothing retailing in the 1980s and early 1990s (the period of Phizacklea's research into conditions of production). Sean Nixon (1996) also briefly describes the dominant forms these relationships took in order to contextualize his study of menswear retailing and consumption. It appears to be the case that the relationships between the large high street multiples and their suppliers grew closer in the 1980s. On the high street the dramatic changes which occurred in clothing retailing in the 1980s, that have been described as a 'retailing revolution' (Crewe and Davenport, 1992, Crewe and Forster, 1993), apparently influenced the buyer-supplier relationships and placed new demands on clothing manufacturers (Crewe and Davenport, 1992, p.188). The 1980s were a time of "vast retail expansion as the major groups, designer independents and mail order firms struggled for an increased share of a fragmenting and higher spending market" (Crewe and Davenport, 1992, p.194). Motivated by a desire to 'maintain control over production without bearing the risks typically associated with a fickle and unpredictable fashion market" (Crewe and Davenport, 1992, p.189) a new set of demands were imposed on suppliers and manufacturers by the powerful high street multiples such that:

> "rapid response and smaller batches are critical: retailers are now demanding 'faster turnaround', 'reduced lead times', 'lower stock levels, quicker turnover', 'more flexibility, smaller quantities, less lead time' (manufacturing survey)." (Crewe and Davenport, 1992, p.188; see also Hale, 2000)

In addition throughout the 1980s high street multiples adopted 'phased deliveries throughout the season' (Crewe and Davenport, 1992, p.188). This caused disruption to the production process but allowed the retailers to respond to customer demand through "feedback from electronic point of sale systems (EPOS), which gave up-to-date information about the sales performance of different product lines." (Crewe and Davenport, 1992, p.188). Crewe and Davenport state that at this time Marks and Spencer operated a "60 per cent initial take-up rule, with no guarantee of uptake of the remaining 40 per cent" (p.188-9). Closely linked to this new drive for increased flexibility was the use of new technology in design and more involvement of the suppliers in the design of garments. Zeitlin (1988, quoted by Nixon, 1996, p.25) for example "highlights increased collaboration between the buyers from large retail chains as a key development" in the process of increasing flexibility.

> "Rather than send out detailed designs to manufacturers on a cut-make-and-trim (CMT) basis, or buy from wholesalers' catalogues, retailers like Marks and Spencer or Next worked more closely with their manufacturers in developing designs (Zeitlin, 1988, p.215). The aim was to produce a more flexible process of garment design and innovation that could be highly responsive to fairly small shifts in consumer demand. ... New production technology 'made possible the easier modification of styles and switches between garments for short batches. CAD [Computer Aided Design], with its ability to store garment patterns and allow their quick modification, meant

that production decisions could be delayed until up to date sales information was available (Zeitlin, 1988, p.222)" (Nixon, 1996, p.25 - 6)

It is necessary of course to appreciate that this shift in buyer-supplier relationships took place around 15 years ago and as Crewe and Davenport themselves point out even at the time their analysis was written it was difficult to make generalizations given the speed of change within the clothing industry, the 'diverse and fragmented variety of organizations' (Crewe and Davenport, 1992, p.183) within it and the instability of the relationships between retailers and suppliers. It would be churlish therefore to assume that the industry remains organized in the same way particularly given the dramatic changes that have swept the high street during the early 1990s during the recession and since then through an upturn in the UK economy. In addition it has been widely publicised that large retailers such as Marks and Spencer have sold out on their UK suppliers (many of whom have gone out of business as a result of the lost contracts with the loss of many British jobs) taking their sourcing contracts abroad. Therefore the assumption that relationships are now as close, that there is still the same level of involvement in relation to design cannot be taken for granted. However it is fair to say that the drive for increased flexibility for example remains significant. For example it was reported in the *Drapers Record* in November 2000[19] that:

> "Marks and Spencer is undertaking another supply chain review to speed up its reaction times and flexibility, after sales were hit by stock availability problems." (Carruthers, DR, 11/11/00, p.3)
> "M&S's move to buying in lifestyle categories meant that different supply chain arrangements from the traditional seasonal model were needed. In some core areas like men's socks and underwear, it may allow manufacturers to manage stock levels in response to demand, under a system called vendor-managed inventory." (ibid)
> "Unveiling another disappointing set of results, executive Luc Vandevelde said the retailer had suffered from a lack of product availability. He estimated £11million had been lost to M&S because of lingerie supply chain problems with Sara Lee Courtaulds, £6m from disruption to knitwear supplies at Coats Viyella, and £5m from lost footwear sales. He said M&S would now switch from buying 100 per cent in advance of the season to buying 40 per cent close to the season and 10 per cent in season to respond better to trends, from next Spring." (ibid)

For M&S at least the question of flexibility and presumably short lead times remain a pressing concern. This review was apparently to be 'much more fundamental' than anything undertaken in recent years (including the decision to source from abroad). M&S clearly saw this review as essential to their long-term survival, their ability to respond to customer demand and the season's trends perhaps incurring a rise in sales, which they so desperately needed at the time. It is interesting that a vendor-managed inventory was being considered which would allow the supplier to manage the stock flow of certain items based on customer demand. I suspect this would have been for core items like underwear for example, since I would expect M&S to want to retain

[19] Clearly the discussion here relates to the widely reported economic circumstances in the early 00s since which time the company's fortunes have undergone a marked up turn, for the most part consequent upon the advent of George on Per Una.

more input over the stock levels of seasonal fashion items. However this does represent a relationship similar to that which Crewe and Davenport suggest, a close alignment between retailer and supplier with the latter being involved with decision making and management in relation to the finished product rather than just performing passive a cut-make-and-trim (CMT) service (Crewe and Davenport, 1992, p.191; Nixon, 1996). This represents a still closer relationship between the production and consumption processes and as a consequence, as Crewe and Davenport argue, we can no longer make crude divisions between the two, "a complicated relationship exists between production and consumption, with one influencing the other" (Crewe and Davenport, 1992, p. 186).

The interrelationship between the production and consumption of fashion in the U.K is an important one to consider. The introduction of flexible processes of design and supply allow direct responses to be made by the retailer to customer demand[20]. This clearly casts consumers, not in the light of passive dupes of the fashion and retailing system since trends driven by consumers to some degree determine the garments produced. It also implicates them in the processes and practices of production, which as I have noted are inherently exploitative of other women. The trade press suggests certain solutions to forecasting consumer demand, which centre on the development of truly integrated, flexible and rapid supply systems which hint at further demand for labour in the mould of the inner city entrepreneurial firms described by Phizacklea (1990; and Hale, 2000):

> "The suggested solution ... the initial order is given to foreign suppliers with a long lead time. 3 or 4 weeks into the season, once the pattern of demand had been identified, top-up orders can be placed with local suppliers for quick response"(Butler, Drapers Record, 13/10/01, p.10)

In particular it is important that the suppliers for in season top-ups are:

> "close so deliveries are no more than a week away, and have flexible production units set up for a quick response" (Watson quoted in Butler, Drapers Record, 13/10/01, p.10)

4.2.3 The Structure of Retail

Despite the focus on flexible supply systems over recent years the structure of high street retailing itself could not be characterised in the same way (Crewe and Forster, 1993). Rather:

> "[T]he key feature of clothing retailing in the 1980s was not flexibility but concentration and dominance of the high street by a few major players. Throughout the 1980s, organic growth, frantic acquisition, and merger activity combined to result in the British clothing retailing system becoming the most concentrated in the world, the 'big six' capturing almost 40 per cent of total clothing sales (Corporate Intelligence Group, 1989)." (Crewe and Forster, 1993, p.215-216)

This would appear to remain true today with a handful of large, powerful groups controlling much of the high street, a structure which has been described as

[20] The impact of poor forecasting of consumer demand being "lost sales opportunities and mark downs, which add up [in the UK] to between £1 billion and £1.5bn annually according to IF (Industry Forum)" (Butler, Drapers Record, 13/10/01).

promoting a sense of 'retailing placelessness' (Crewe and Forster, 1993, Gilbert, 2000), with each high street, shopping centre and so on being characterised by almost invariable consumption landscapes. Within the monotony of chain dominated clothing retailing however there has been restructuring around specific 'lifestyle' niches with the large multiples carrying portfolios of several brands each tailored to different sections of the market.

> "Intense competition within the retail arena ensued [throughout the 1980s], with customer profiling emerging as a key tactic to woo customers to build allegiance to one store (Crewe and Davenport, 1992). Spearheaded by the launching of new concepts, such as Next and Principles, market segmentation became the dominant retailing concept. The Burton Group plc for example segmented their retail concepts into no less the eleven different stores.... The result was a dramatic restructuring of the high street, with all the retailing concepts apparently converging on the co-ordinated, segmented, middle market" (Crewe and Forster, 1993, p.216)

Despite segmentation within the market therefore it has been argued that the indistinguishable nature of high street retail landscapes across the country was paralleled by a lack of differentiation of the offers, crowded as they were round the middle market. The mainstream middle market remains the main battleground, certainly with respect to womenswear, according to Verdict Research (Web page, 30/10/01). And despite management changes at some of the major retailers – BHS, Arcadia, M&S – and ensuing restructuring in recent years (for example the slimming down of Arcadia's portfolio, interestingly shedding four brands in one management buy out deal, therefore continuing the trend of large companies controlling swathes of the high street), the trend remains one of market segmentation. The lessons of recent years may have increased clarity and focus within this however with Arcadia (formerly the Burton Group) in particular having rationalised following the realisation that profits were suffering due to its portfolio being overpopulated with almost indistinguishable brands. At a time when the womenswear market was growing at an almost negligible rate, spending on womenswear growing by just "0.8% in 2000, the weakest growth in 10 years" (Verdict web page, 30/10/01) clarity and focus in branding would appear to be of greater importance than ever in order to win and maintain customer allegiance for example. This is particularly the case in the crowded middle market where retailers such as BHS, Arcadia, M&S, (and Next) "essentially target the same broad church of customers," and due to the exceptionally low growth rate of the market " any retail winner in womenswear is taking market share from someone else" (Verdict web page, 30/10/01). M&S arguably suffered greatly over recent years precisely because of the muddying of their brand and ostracising of traditional (and loyal) customer base, though 'Per Una' appears to have re-established some brand integrity and substantially contributed to a reversal of fortunes in 2001/2002.

Retailing placelessness and market segmentation therefore appear to have persisted as significant characteristics of the structure of retail on the high street over recent years, despite a vastly volatile retail environment Crewe and Forster discuss how the "high of retailing in the 1980s" gave way in the early 90s to "a deep and protracted recession, which ... resulted in a very different operating environment for clothing retailing, with growth and confidence being replaced by uncertainty and caution" (Crewe and Forster, 1993, p. 216). Redundancies and shop closures

characterised the early 90s as escalating interest and mortgage interest rates, increasing high street rents and decreased consumer spending took their toll (Crewe and Forster, 1993). The result however was not a slimming down of the surviving brands but, argue Crewe and Forster, a cheapening of the high street and an upsurge in the fortunes of small designer companies located elsewhere. At the beginning of the twenty first century although the UK economy is not in recession it is an uncertain time with predictions for possible recession ahead abound. Indeed clothing retailing is already suffering from falling sales, static profits and a 'guerrilla war on price' (Whitehead, Drapers Record, 16/12/00). During 2000 for example:

> "As price deflation continued a pace, conversely consumer levels of price awareness continued to rise. Womenswear prices over the past twelve months fell by 8 % and overall retail prices today remain at the same level they were 2 years ago" (Whitehead, Drapers Record, 16/12/00, p.18)

Whilst analysts are warning that:

> "more than a quarter of the UK's retailers could go out of business if retail sales suffer a 10% collapse in an economic downturn" (Cooper, Drapers Record, 13/10/01, p.1)

It is had to imagine the basic structure of the high street being affected even if such a shake out were to occur. Since in order to meet the challenge of these economic and market conditions of narrow margins, slow growth and so on, integrated, flexible supply systems are required and it is the major groups who are best placed to manipulate the production process in order to achieve this.

4.2.4 Situating Maternity Wear Within This

Whilst clearly being materially curtailed by the relatively small number of pregnancies per year in relation to the population as a whole (only 700 000 from an adult population of 36 million according to the Blooming Marvellous marketing manager I spoke to), and although this would appear to be at odds with the wider picture (outlined above) for womenswear according to a Dorothy Perkins head office maternity wear merchandiser, this is an *expanding* market. Indeed this would appear to be the case if recent movement within high street provision is taken to be indicative of changes within the market itself. During the late 1990s, Dorothy Perkins, Mothercare and C&A were the sole high street providers of maternity wear ranges. However during 2000, although C&A withdrew from the European fashion market altogether, closing all stores, two new (or renewed) offers[21] have been developed by M&S and H&M, with Next too doubling the size of its collection and experimenting for a time with carrying a portion of its range in larger stores. Ironically the withdrawal of C&A and the sudden availability of large prime site retail spaces as a result can be seen to have to some degree allowed the penetration of different retailers into the market. For example H&M opened a new store in C&A's place in Northampton town centre that carries a maternity wear range. Next and M&S too have taken on some sites vacated by C&A. This expansion on the high street is also being echoed elsewhere with Formes, a French fashion quarter brand steadily increasing its number of boutiques in large UK cities, away from the high

[21] Although it must be noted that this is an exceptionally fluid market with brands altering the size of ranges for example on a regular basis. Next and M&S have been particularly fluid in their provision for example during 2000, 2001 and 2002.

street. Also within the mail order sector, Blooming Marvellous continues to expand its shop retail side of the business, locating mainly in 'secondary centres', whilst trading through mail order remains the core of the business and a popular way to retail maternity wear, JoJo Maman Bebe and La Redoute being two examples among other such providers.

However despite this recent expansion of provision (not to mention the increasing number of small independent retailers offering maternity wear from shops in the main away from the high street and prime sites, through mail order and over the internet) as well as middle size companies trading through mail order and off high street positions, in comparison to the womenswear market on the high street at large provision remains partial and restricted at best. Despite the highly fragmented high street, apparently offering sartorial expression of a vast array of lifestyle choices, maternity wear appears to be far more monolithic. Although the greater number of providers contributes to an arguably growing 'illusion of choice' the coverage of these new collections remains partial - being far from national and focused on larger branches as a general rule - and therefore restricted in availability. In addition the overwhelming picture gained through my research, from consumers, is of a lack of provision on the high street – let alone adequate provision (as individually defined). The picture here remains one of a marginalized provision.

There would appear to be many complexly interwoven reasons for maternity wear's sustained marginality, explaining why, in a retail context, which is apparently entirely structured by the concept of niche marketing it remains for the most part hidden and devalued despite being an expanding market. However before analysing these in-depth I would like to turn to the organisation of maternity wear retail within two specific retailers, Dorothy Perkins and Blooming Marvellous. The first being an example of a high street retailer which includes a maternity range in their 'offer', the second a medium sized company, a specialist in maternity wear, which retails in the main through mail order and secondary sites.

4.2.4(1) Dorothy Perkins

> "With over 2000 outlets in high streets and shopping centres throughout the country, Arcadia Group is the UK's second largest clothing retailer" (Arcadia group web page, 29/10/01)

Arcadia, the group to which Dorothy Perkins belongs has been the focus of much attention within the trade press as a result of its tumultuous recent history. Having:

> "demerged from Debenhams in 1998 [Arcadia] has seen both its profits and its share price go into freefall. Arcadia's debut price of over 400p slumped to under 50p [in 2000] under the impact of the mid market crisis" (Drapers Record, 18/11/00)

A change of Chief Executive in November 2000 was thought to herald wide ranging change in the portfolio which was widely considered, both within the fashion industry itself and the City, to be over populated with similar and overlapping brands (Investors Chronicle 17/11/00). The editor of the Drapers Record for example suggested that drastic action was required:

> "Arcadia is ripe for an overhaul. A bit of fiddling here and there is not going to assist a business, which is hopelessly overloaded with chains. Looking at womenswear alone, it runs Top Shop and Miss Selfridge, Warehouse and Wallis, Dorothy Perkins, Principles and Evans. The unavoidable question is why so many? .... Industry observers reckon that Dorothy Perkins, Top Shop, Wallis and Evans are decent brand propositions in their markets, so why keep the others?" (Musgrave, Drapers Record, 18/11/00, p.4)

Principles for Men was an early casualty and along with a great deal of reshuffling its store space, working to significantly decrease its phenomenally high rent bill there has been much speculation about the management buy out of Racing Green, Hawkshead, Principles and Warehouse (see for example Drapers Record, 6/10/01; 13/10/01). The group itself suggested that the sale of these 'smaller brands' would facilitate future concentration on its 'core business' and that:

> "The Group's focus for future growth will concentrate on six core brands that comprise: Burton, Dorothy Perkins, Wallis, Evans, Top Shop/ Top Man and Miss Selfridge. Our six core brands will benefit from the increased clarity and focus we can provide for them by the reduction in size of the overall portfolio" (Arcadia group Web page, 29/10/01)

During 2000 and 2001 Arcadia group indeed underwent significant and wide-ranging change, downsizing from 13 brands to a core of 6 in less than 12 months, bringing new 'focus' and 'clarity' to their portfolio. However there may be some surprise within the industry about Miss Selfridge's survival and indeed its inclusion along side Top Shop as a core brand given its similarity to the latter but significantly poorer recent performance, as such it was originally tipped for rapid disposal.

Dorothy Perkins has in comparison consistently been identified as core brand and it seems was never in danger of being culled. It is described by Arcadia itself as providing "affordable mainstream clothing" for women (Arcadia web page, 29/10/01) and therefore perhaps unsurprisingly is the group's only retailer of maternity wear, carrying a range in around 156 (Dorothy Perkins website 29/08/02) of its 540 stores[22] (Arcadia website 29/08/02). Of the womenswear brands retained as the newly clarified core Dorothy Perkins provides the largest potential market occupying the ideological safe-ground for maternity wear aiming at women of 25-35 in a middle-income bracket (Dorothy Perkins head office maternity wear merchandiser). These are women thought of as most likely to be having children and indeed socially sanctioned to be (the pregnant body and mother) in ways in which those targeted by Miss Selfridge, Top Shop and indeed Wallis are not. Indeed in a (guarded[23]) telephone interview a Dorothy Perkins maternity merchandiser confirmed these ideas of appropriateness:

> "Maternity wear fits Dorothy Perkins target customer much better than any of the others. [She] said you certainly wouldn't expect to see maternity in Top

[22] That's less than 30% of its stores, a figure which gives some indication of the relative importance attached to this range.

[23] I was unable to record this interview and therefore made extensive notes during our conversation. I followed an interview schedule, as I knew from the effort it had taken to set up and the emails exchanged in arranging it that any attempt at in-depth interviewing was unrealistic, particularly over the phone. I therefore typed into this schedule as we spoke. These are the notes from which I quote.

> Shop and if you did people would have something to say – there would be a problem. Also she said it is not suitable for Evans. I asked her why and she said it was because Evans have a different target customer and are more focused on that target customer" (Dorothy Perkins head office maternity wear merchandiser – interview notes).

She seemed to be hinting at the fact that providing a maternity range in Top Shop would be seen as entirely inappropriate and indeed would provoke an angry response from the public. I was less clear about why Evans was felt to be unsuitable but would suggest that the potential market within their target customer base – which is plus size women – could be considered too small and it might be assumed that perhaps these women might make do with larger sized garments available from Evans anyway, rather than seeking out specialist maternity wear.

The decision to provide maternity wear through one brand in the portfolio only – and this was equally the case when there were 13 members as now – I would suggest is indicative of the monolithic nature of maternity wear within an otherwise fragmented, segmented womenswear market. Of the diverse lifestyle groups that Arcadia seeks to serve (arguably focused on the middle market although with aspirations towards high fashion in Top Shop's explicitly fashion led offering) only one maternity wear range has been developed. This suggests an assumption that within a plethora of lifestyle and identity niches there is required only one to fit pregnant bodies, that either, only those who fall into the Dorothy Perkins profile will require it, or that all women who might ordinarily be refracted through the prism of multiple brands can be condensed into and accommodated by the offering of a singular, mainstream, mid market Dorothy Perkins range when pregnant. For the maternity wear market, the bread and butter segmentation which forms the basis of high street clothing retail and around which women's consumption knowledges are constructed simply does not apply according to this organisation. There is, according to Arcadia, until recently the most brand laden, highly segmented retailer in the country, only one way to dress the pregnant body. Whilst this may be seen as Arcadia' best marketing proposition – the most effective way of selling maternity wear within a large portfolio and terminally tiny market – I would however argue that it also constructs pregnant women as a homogeneous group.

Strategic information is difficult to come by regarding high street retailers. Nevertheless it is possible to outline in part the organisation of maternity wear at Dorothy Perkins. In terms of their position within the market itself it is considered that much of their competition comes from mail order, in fact the merchandiser I spoke to cited Blooming Marvellous as their 'main competition', she also acknowledged, Next, Formes and M&S as mail order competitors. In terms of the high street she mentioned Mothercare as their "only direct competition" although:

> "H&M is starting to grab their attention and although their coverage is still quite partial and dispersed at the moment in a couple of years time they foresee them being a big competitor. For the next few seasons they do not see H&M as too much of a threat though" (Dorothy Perkins head office maternity wear merchandiser – interview notes).

It is clear that Dorothy Perkins's competition in the maternity wear market is expanding given Next's doubling of the range offered through their Directory and their experimentation with carrying this in larger stores along with H&M's expansion

in coverage largely through new store openings[24]. Whilst formerly partial and heavily weighted towards the south, maternity appears to be firmly accommodated within the new store programme in the UK. This clearly is where the greatest danger lies as H&M's fashion led brand image is likely to cream off a portion of their market share who are currently making do with the middle market offerings of Dorothy Perkins in preference to Mothercare. As the only high street alternative to Mothercare, Dorothy Perkins was well placed to take a large share of the market however their position is now being challenged on more than one front.

In terms of provision Dorothy Perkins maternity wear is only available in store, neither being retailed through the company website (at the time of writing) whereas the core ranges are, nor their 'home shopping magazine'. The latter has been attempted in the past but with limited success (though this does apparently lead to benefits with buying strategy). Further, coverage has been contracted recently with the range being pulled out of many smaller stores and in 2002 it is carried in less than 30% of stores. In small outlets space is at a premium and, unable to carry the entire range, the decision was made to forfeit maternity wear at these sites. The merchandiser I spoke to described this move as having been made on the basis of impressions, the basics carried in these stores not reflecting the desired image of the range as a whole. It is likely however to have also been due to the greater pressure in smaller stores to gain a high return from each unit of space and the relative deficit gained from stocking maternity wear in comparison to core ranges, particularly at a time when the group has been reshuffling store space allocation in order to cut costly rent bills and improve efficiency.

With respect to the way maternity wear is bought at Dorothy Perkins the merchandiser I spoke to outlined a strategy which suggested it is viewed and treated (and therefore produced) in much the same way as the core ranges:

> "Maternity wear is bought as a separate range with separate buyers and so on forming a specific team. ... Although bought separately maternity wear is bought in exactly the same way as the core brands, some before, some during the season. Because they don't sell through mail order they don't have to have it all up front in bulk. ... Everything she told me related to maternity wear as another fashion range tailored to a particular body in much the same way as say the petite range. Although maternity seems to be particularly sensitive to fashion trends in terms of volumes sold." (Dorothy Perkins head office maternity wear merchandiser – interview notes).

If maternity wear is bought separately it would appear to be bought as a specialist product rather than being produced as a corollary, another size variable of the core ranges. Therefore despite the insistence that maternity must reflect the core ranges there clearly are other considerations at work and a distance and differentiation between them. In terms of customer demand forecasting[25] and associated integrated

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[24] Despite M&S's development of a maternity range in recent years and expansion of the number of stores carrying it from the original 10, it would appear that in 2002 they have made the decision to pull it from their stores, presumably because of low returns. In addition it is unclear what Next's strategy is since the range has been present in larger stores during 2002 but towards the end of summer has been withdrawn. This is clearly a time of flux for the maternity wear market.

[25] I would suggest that customer demand forecasting for maternity wear may be more complex than for mainstream womenswear, certainly requiring different considerations. For example whereas the consumption of the latter is organised into seasons maternity wear consumption is driven more by material need. Women tend to by one 'wardrobe' for the duration of their pregnancy regardless of

and flexible production it seems likely that these are at work in similar ways to mainstream womenswear within large retailing operations. Although batch sizes and so on will inevitably be much smaller than for core ranges and therefore production costs higher it would appear that within such organisations as Arcadia, maternity wear is produced in similar ways in order to maximise profitability and sell through (and minimise lost sales opportunities and mark downs).

4.2.4(2) Blooming Marvellous

Blooming Marvellous is a 'medium sized company' cited by Dorothy Perkins as their major competitor. It was established almost 20 years ago by 2 women – Vivienne Pringle and Judy Lever – who like many small independent retailers today, found maternity wear provided elsewhere 'limited and unimaginative' (company history document). Having engaged in 'some research' and believing they had indeed identified a 'gap in the market' they launched the mail order company offering 2 designs. In 2001 Blooming Marvellous employed over 100 employees across mail order and retail carrying both maternity and nursery rages and having opened around 9 stores (around one a year since the mid 90s) in London and secondary sites (for example St Albans, Chester, Winchester, Bath), they are, according to the marketing manager I spoke to, the biggest company in their market in the country and there are further plans for expansion involving new shops.

Interestingly despite providing credible competition to high street retailers, company strategy is firmly fixed away from the high street and prime locations aiming to:

> "provide a stop gap, when pregnant women suddenly find that the normal range of fashion on the high street is no longer open to them. BM picks up where the high street leaves off, providing a stop gap, somewhere where can buy similar fashion / styles whilst pregnant then go back to the high street. BM sees itself then as very closely aligned to the high street, as fashion led and as stepping in where the high street provision falls away to cater for women for nine months in a kind of seamless action to enable them to maintain their clothed identities and then deliver them back to the high street."(Blooming Marvellous marketing manager - interview notes)

This strategy of providing a refuge for women used to buying their clothing on the high street again reinforces the assumption marked out by Arcadia's provision of maternity wear through just one member of its highly segmented portfolio, that during pregnancy, or in relation to dressing the pregnant body, differences with respect to lifestyle and identity choices melt away. Blooming Marvellous apparently aims to provide a 'stop gap' for an enormously diverse group of women whilst offering a singular production of maternity wear imbued with specific meaning around a particular brand image which is overtly maternal, the 2 founders being

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whether or not it carries over more than one season. This means that demand cannot necessarily be determined by buying trends within the first three or four weeks of the season - particularly as pregnancies tend to be clustered, for example around early October following Christmas conceptions (Formes manager, Manchester). Women do not buy in relation to fashion seasons as such but more for a defined period of use and will therefore buy at any time during that period when the need is greatest and can be seen to be cost effective.

constructed both within the company and in terms of its brand image as almost matriarchal figures[26].

Whilst clearly positioning themselves in relation to a high street customer profile – specifically 27-37 year old ABC1 women – and explicitly aiming to reflect high street fashions in their offer, Blooming Marvellous apparently have no aspirations to enter the fray in such locations themselves, preferring instead to locate away from the 'ever expanding' high street competition (marketing manager). In addition:

> "[The] high street is far too expensive to have started out that way – even now its too expensive for such a niche market – can't make it pay. Maternity wear is such a niche market that it is not a high street product. Customers will come looking for you because there is so little competition, so you don't need to be centrally located in expensive prime sites."(Blooming Marvellous marketing manager - interview notes)

Whilst opening more shops is clearly the vision for future expansion there is a balance to be struck between this and mail order. New retail outlets must be carefully placed to ensure no negative impact on the mail order side of the business. It is imperative therefore that the footfall in the shops (very often generated by women having first seen the catalogue) generates new revenue rather than representing lost income from mail order. Mail order itself continues to be the core of the business, allowing Blooming Marvellous to reach a geographically dispersed customer base in the UK, Europe, and ex-pat communities in Saudi Arabia and America (Marketing manager). From an economic perspective mail order is key to the companies success since it brings certain cost advantages in relation to the high street:

> "Although mail order – producing catalogue itself - is extremely expensive can reach far more people through mail order for money spend than through high street presence for same money." (Blooming Marvellous marketing manager - interview notes)

In addition it is felt to be particularly appropriate for this specific customer:

> "Mail order is better for customers who are not particularly mobile and don't want to go traipsing down the high street, through the crowds for their clothes. Mail order is much easier for them – can shop from home, work or wherever." (Blooming Marvellous marketing manager - interview notes)

Such an assumption clearly relates to a very particular construction of pregnant materiality, and indeed actively produces the bodies of Blooming Marvellous consumers in this way. Women are assumed to withdraw from the normal practices of consumption as a matter of choice (rather than being forced to by lack of provision and so on), forced to do so by an awkward, excessive, debilitating corporeality[27].

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[26] The marketing manager I spoke to referred to them as having "about a hundred children between them" and the catalogues often include a picture of them with their children on the inside front cover. This perhaps can be seen to infer authority to their products suggesting it is based not only on "18 years of experience" (marketing manager) from a business perspective but personal experience too.

[27] *This is an inaccurate assumption for many women as I can assert directly from my own experience. The bulk of maternity wear shopping is generally done reasonably early on in pregnancy – when the material need arises, ones own wardrobe becomes uncomfortable and poorly fitting, and there is still an apparent cost benefit in purchasing new clothing. At this point I certainly did not inhabit an awkward, excessive corporeality. At the times when I was shopping for maternity wear I had a small,*

With careful strategic planning and steady growth Blooming Marvellous has demonstrated that despite production difficulties it is possible to return a profit in this market. From small beginnings and based on customer experience the company has developed into an important provider of a niche product within womenswear retail. The relative success of Blooming Marvellous has clearly been based upon the careful negotiation of the niche status of the product – with only '700 000 births a year from a 36 million adult population' (marketing manager) – and managing the ways in which it is retailed in relation to this, specifically avoiding the enormous costs of a prime site high street presence.

4.2.5 Explaining The Marginal High Street Presence

Interestingly my discussion with the marketing manager from Blooming Marvellous gave an insight into the marginal position of maternity wear on the UK high street. In terms of the material production of maternity wear most of Blooming Marvellous's offer is manufactured abroad, for example some in Hong Kong, by third parties. It is manufactured in small batches, which means the margins achieved are far from optimum. In addition there are difficulties with manufacture since it does not fit in with that of other products and production runs. Such production issues impose caps on the potential profits made by retailing such garments, and here lies the rub for high street stores, since relatively speaking:

> "..the problem is for high street companies it makes a hole in the financial figures because they can't make the kind of margins and money on it as with their other ranges because of the smaller batch sizes they need to run and the difficulties manufacturers have in producing the stuff, because it doesn't fit in with the other production runs." (Blooming Marvellous marketing manager - interview notes)

Maternity wear, being specially cut and involving certain significant pattern alterations in respect to mainstream womenswear in order to fit the pregnant body, clearly does not fit neatly into production runs of core garments. Not only in terms of cutting but also making up the garments, the practical processes required differ from other core ranges and of course must be produced in smaller batches. Advances in textile technology have undoubtedly lessened the time investment required by the seamstress since stretchy fabrics such as Bengalin allow garments to be made up without 'pouch' inserts. Even denim fabrics can be produced with stretch qualities enabling jeans and so on to be made in the same way. Clearly there was a necessity for pouch inserts at a time when such textiles were not available, allowing trousers and skirts and so on to be tailored to the pregnant body. Indeed there remain fabrics, which to some extent necessitate such techniques for example gabardine and wool rich textiles particularly used in suiting. However not only do many consumers find the fit of such garments highly unsatisfactory I would suggest that the production processes required for such garments might be extremely inefficient. Modern fabrics therefore allow trousers and skirts to be made without the time consuming insert and therefore might allow maternity wear to be produced more cheaply.

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neat bump and actually on some occasions was feeling fantastic in comparison to my first 4 and a half months of constant sickness, so in this respect I felt positively spritely!

Interestingly however in Dorothy Perkins maternity wear range for example pouch insert garments appear to remain the norm. At a time when margins are low across the industry, let alone maternity, and there is much pressure to develop more flexible supply chains and so on, this may be somewhat surprising. However companies such as Dorothy Perkins may be reluctant to put the capital investment (that would be required to research new garment technologies and implement them), into what for them must be an essentially loss making market (in comparison to other core ranges). Although the collection each season is tailored to reflect the core designs I would suggest that there is likely to be minimal change in terms of the type of garments to necessitate minimal changes to production processes. Indeed at Mothercare changes are so peripheral as to involve only colour and minor design details such as sleeve length. Such a policy would minimise the investment necessary right the way through the production process. It would appear that the particular production issues associated with maternity wear which impose caps on margins, (which are already under pressure from retailing and consumption trends), might then be particularly problematic for retailers.

Interestingly the marginal position of maternity wear on the high street and in particular the monolithic nature of the market in comparison to the highly segmented womenswear market in general, may shed some light on the reality of provision within this broader structure. The narrow provision of maternity wear on the high street could be seen as contradicting the highly segmented nature of the womenswear market at large. Certainly consumers report experiencing it as being restrictive in relation to identity expression and in comparison to their pre-pregnancy clothing consumption. However what the maternity wear provision on the high street might more accurately be seen to reflect is the reduction of womenswear to its true form, "the high street clone model" (Crewe and Forster, 1993, p.218):

> "Although segmentation was an attempt to differentiate products in accordance with life-style preferences, in reality it was little more than a thin veil attempting to disguise what was really massification par excellence. As George Davies, entrepreneur and pioneer of the Next concept, acknowledges, "the exercise taught me one of the keys to success in retailing ... the trick is to give the *illusion of choice*" (1989, p.33)" (Crewe and Forster, p.216, emphasis added)

Whilst acknowledging the broad invariance of fashion across the high street despite the insistence of brand integrity in relation to specific lifestyle and identity choices it is however imperative to note the importance of the production and construction of 'fashion' and more importantly for my purposes, maternity wear, within these narrow parameters. 'Fashion' is produced on the high street - primarily by market segmentation and careful branding – in a very particular way. Specifically as *fashions*. Despite the absolute lack of choice it is constructed as diverse and therefore clothing consumption is accordingly produced as being primarily about choice. Whether women act as consumers motivated primarily by for example thrift (many woman proudly classifying themselves as 'bargain hunters', only buying clothes cheaply, in sales and so forth), or style, the common feature of women's consumption experiences is the feeling of relative freedom to consume according to their own choice and priorities. Therefore despite the placelessness of the high street and the internal invariance in style, fashion is produced (by market segmentation) as broad and diverse and allowing the illusion of choice. However maternity wear is

produced by its very marginality as the antithesis to this. Baring in mind that within the segmented market women often have a very clear idea of what is (and equally importantly, what is not) 'them' and that to a large extent this can be hinged on brand, maternity wear in this context is constructed as infinitely narrower and more restrictive (not only in terms of style but also what types of consumption are available). Whereas in reality the basic lack of choice in maternity wear may be a realistic reflection of that in womenswear more broadly it is experienced as an infinitely more impoverished provision. Whilst it may be that the large number of high street womenswear retailers, though highly segmented, are not differentiated enough to support multiple maternity wear ranges. That when condensed into a smaller market, that pregnant women undeniably represent, the high street as it is currently structured cannot support more than a handful of retailers. In the context of the segmented high street production of women's fashions it is produced as marginal and inadequate. In addition it is produced in very particular ways not just by its marginal provision but also by cultural intermediaries such as retailers and magazine editors and so on. In terms of various spaces of representation within which maternity wear appears there are a number of key elements imbued within the garments themselves, which construct it in a monolithic light for a singular specific body and for the performance of a singular specific identity – mother – who consumes clothing during pregnancy in a very particular way. The latter aspect of its cultural production, which is not unrelated to its material marginality, shall be discussed in the following chapter.

The marginal position of maternity wear on the high street can be seen in relation to not just the small number of providers but also the spatial allocation given to such products. As Blooming Marvellous's strategy implies, returns per unit of space given over to maternity wear will be much lower than for other (core) womenswear or childrenswear ranges. It is therefore perhaps not surprising to find that in shops spaces themselves maternity wear is indeed routinely marginalized, occupying presumably the least profitable areas of the shop – usually at the back in a corner. By the same token Dorothy Perkins (and Mothercare appear to) have a distinct policy not to display maternity wear in window space. In this context it is not surprising that Next have historically only delivered a maternity range through their mail order directory.

In addition to the restricted profitability of maternity wear and therefore loss making nature of such ranges in relation to stocking prime retail sites with other products, the market is apparently also far from stable. According to the Dorothy Perkins merchandiser I spoke with, the market expands and contracts depending on the season's fashion trends. If the season's trends are for casual clothing for example (such as drawstring trousers and the like) demand will dip as women find themselves easily able to 'get away' with wearing ordinary clothes (in larger sizes) For example this was demonstrated by one of my interview respondents, Meryl, who had consciously avoided buying any specialist maternity wear – mainly because of her appalled reaction to that available on the high street – finding it preferable to wear larger sizes of ordinary clothes and indeed finding it easy to do so because of the seasons trends:

> "I've hardly looked at any maternity wear because that things that I have seen I've not been that impressed with. I looked in um ... Mothercare just to be, have a look and be interested and was put off by designs but also by the price as well. But also because I don't know whether this year its quite good

because of having lots of having lots of elasticated waists that normal fashions have been quite sort of O.K. to wear and I've just bought bigger sizes of things to um ... grow into really. " (Meryl, early-thirties, married, first pregnancy, Manchester)

However if the season's look is determined by structured, tailored styles then spending on maternity wear increases since a specialist cut is essential to achieve the look. The maternity wear market is therefore a volatile one in relation to fashion trends (something that clearly must be taken into account in terms of customer demand forecasting). Therefore not only are the margins achieved on these garments narrow in the extreme (in the context of a womenswear market where margins are already squeezed) but the market itself is not stable, expanding and contracting in accordance with fashion trends therefore causing variable returns. This seasonal variation once again points to the integrated nature of production and consumption and also shows that the market is not solely determined by economic realities of production processes but also cultural influences too. Indeed there is more to the production of maternity wear than the material processes of manufacture (Entwistle, 2000).

Indeed there would appear to be an interesting form of maternity wear retail arising out of largely cultural experiences of high street and other mainstream provision. Across the country small independent shops are being established by women, many of whom are 'consumers-turned-retailers' and whose foray into the maternity wear market is based as much (if not more in some cases) on cultural evaluations of the market and related business opportunities as any economic or professional knowledge. Whilst from a cultural perspective these small independent retailers do produce maternity wear very differently to the high street – for example in terms of their privileging it as a primary product occupying whole shop units, window space and so on, as well as constructing it differently through spaces of representation and therefore legitimating and allowing different ways of consuming maternity wear – in terms of the economic caps to the market and production process issues, these retailers feel the rub all too keenly.

4.3 Small Independent Retailers

From the interviews I carried out with 20 small independent retailers of maternity wear it is apparent that there have been a spate of such new firms, being established over recent years. Of those I spoke with, half retailed from single shops with a further 7 working from home, either selling through a web shop or from a room in their own houses[28]. The businesses are overwhelmingly small scale, being set up with minimal external financial investment and are being largely run by women whose entrepreneurial motivation lies primarily in personal experience. Of the 20 women I spoke with 19 had established their companies between 1989 and early 2001 (within the period of high street organisation discussed), indeed 11 having done so between 1999 and 2001 (the period of my research), therefore they can be seen to have been established in the market and consumption context identified by this research. 14 cited poor personal consumption experiences (either of themselves or their daughters) as the primary motivation behind their business venture. Indeed

[28] The remaining 3 operated out of: two shops and a small mail order catalogue; a web shop; and a single shop, which was part of a larger franchise.

this can be seen as the common raison d'etre of many such companies beyond those I spoke with, accompanied by an attempt to respond to and redress the marginal provision of maternity wear elsewhere and to allow women to consume and dress differently than this allows (see for example company information for Bumps Maternity (www.bumpsmaternity.com/index2.html 19/11/01)). I would therefore suggest that these peripherally located, small independent retail ventures are largely the result of particular ways in which maternity wear is provided and produced on the high street. Far from any considerations or knowledge of the economic marginalisation that restricts this, these small businesses locate largely in out of centre locations, in women's homes and on the web, in the main because of the nature of their establishment, as I have said, frequently with little or no external financial assistance. And whilst clearly the rent and rate structure of retail property is a significant barrier to expansion few view the product as restrictive to future growth, at least in the first instance. For these are often women with little or no retail experience, certainly very few of those I spoke with had any professional experience and significantly none had a past in maternity wear. Many therefore could be described as 'consumers – turned – retailers' given their personal motivation and lack of professional knowledge of retail or the specificities of the maternity wear market. A significant proportion of my research has involved detailed and sustained participant observation in two small independent retailers, which fit into this mould. It is to these case studies that I now turn in order to analyse the significance of these primarily cultural interventions into maternity wear provision.

4.3.1 Case Studies: Problems Associated With Non-Professional Positionality

The two small independent retailers I have carried out detailed research with are Mums & Co in Shipley, Bradford, and Belly Bumpers in Northampton. Both have been founded within the period of my research by people with no professional retail (let alone maternity wear) knowledge. In both cases the primary motivation for the businesses lay in personal experiences of high street maternity wear provision as marginal and restrictive. For example Maria has four children with an age difference of 13 years between the oldest and youngest and to her disgust even during her last pregnancy there remained little choice of maternity wear:

> "...my last pregnancy was three years ago and I was working and couldn't find any maternity clothes at all, casual, work or evening. So I decided I'd like to try and have a go at selling maternity wear when my last baby was old enough for me to leave." (Maria, early-forties, mother of 4, Northampton.)

Maria ended up travelling from Northampton to London to shop for her maternity wear, finding nothing at all in Northampton itself. But even despite this journey she still found little to choose from:

> V: And so where did you end up in London then?
> M: Anywhere really. Um John Lewis had a better stock um I shopped in Hennes.
> V: Oh right yeah.
> M: That's all really, just those few shops.
> D: I think we looked just about everywhere. All the big stores ....

M: Yeah River Island [Inaudible]
D: .... all the smaller stores and then Maria just hit on Hennes, on their maternity section.
M: They had a small section which for Oxford Street you'd think they'd have a huge, but they didn't it was still a small section at the back of the store wasn't it. It was just a few things nothing. I ended up with a brown trousers suit which I never wear brown but I was so desperate.
D: Yeah we just picked something that would fit
M: Would do
D: But not particularly something that you wanted.
M: That I'd wear again.

Ari of Mums & Co. too found it incredibly difficult to dresss as she wished during her first pregnancy as a direct result of the paucity of provision on the high street:

> "It was awful actually [laugh] really awful which is one of the reasons why we're doing what we're doing, because it was just, I couldn't find anything I liked, couldn't find anything that was my style. You know when you're not pregnant you can choose which shops you go to and you have your own style and those are the shops you buy from and when you're pregnant that goes out the window, you buy what's there and that I found really hard."(Ari, mid-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford)

The initial stimuli behind both these new businesses are remarkably similar; the experiences of fashion conscious individuals being unable to find adequate maternity wear provoking the assumption that there is a significant gap in the market, which could be easily and profitably filled. Despite being in very different parts of the country both women had broadly comparable consumption experiences during pregnancy, which is not unsurprising given the placelessness of the UK high street as has been discussed. These are consumers – turned – retailers in a very real sense since it is their reflection on their own experiences as consumers which has led them to enter the market as retailers despite their lack of professional experience or knowledge of the industry.

The explicitly non-professional positionality of these retailers has had tangible consequences for not only the mechanics of running the businesses but also the ways in which they have produced maternity wear as a result. For example developing contacts with suppliers and coherent buying policies are crucial to the construction of their business identity, shop space and the clothing itself, and despite very clear ideas about what they wanted to achieve in these respects both retailers have struggled with the former.

For example, when Mums & Co first opened in August 1999 the shop space had been carefully planned, decorated and fitted in a coherent signature, which was integral to Ari and Sarah's vision for the business. However despite their relative success at realising their ideas for the space of representation the initial stock sold within this space could hardly have been further from their objectives on style. Having few initial contacts, the majority of their stock was sourced from other small retailers rather than from suppliers, with the exception of JoJo Maman Bebe who wholesale some of their collection each season. Being positioned as non-professional, with no inside experience or knowledge of the maternity wear market or indeed the mechanisms of retail, and faced with the perpetual need for new stock

they found themselves having to travel all over the country buying up other women's excess stock from past seasons. This almost trial and error approach provided less than ideal stock and on occasions proved inefficient and unreliable. For example very early on, at a time when Sarah was imminently expecting twins and therefore not actively involved in the day-to-day running of the business Ari was working almost a 6 day week and with an 11 month old son of her own to care for, travelling at least one of those days to source new clothing:

> *"this week she went to London but had something of a wasted trip. She said she walked into the room and immediately she knew she was wasting her time because it was just full of the kind of stuff Princess Diana wore during her pregnancies! Not the kind of thing they are looking for at all. Next week she is going to JoJo's warehouse in Wales."* (Mums & Co research diary, September 8th 1999)

Although most of the clothing available to them through this sourcing method was highly unsatisfactory, certainly not what they had set out to provide and indeed on this particular occasion was particularly unsuitable. They were forced to buy most of their stock in this way for many months, sifting out the few saleable items from other's excess orders, which in some cases were clearly years out of date and on one occasion had been stored under the owner's bed. Indeed on the above occasion Ari did spend a few hundred pounds, buying some items as if only to compensate for the fact that she had made the long journey to London for what had essentially been a wasted trip. Incidentally many of these items were difficult to sell and remained in the shop for some considerable time eventually being reduced or subsumed into the 'dress agency' section.

At this time their stock purchasing actually reflected the way in which particularly Ari had consumed clothing during her first pregnancy. Specifically they were buying clothing in order to make-do. They needed to stock the shop with something and their limited knowledge did not allow them to source from those who could supply what they would have preferred to retail. In order to make-do they turned to other women who had experience and knowledge that they lacked, who in turn passed onto them their own surplus stock which no longer had any value for them, a process that in some ways mirrors the sharing of maternity wardrobes among women. In addition, in buying in this way there was an overwhelming feeling in relation to the shop, akin to how Ari described her own clothing during her first pregnancy, that it did not allow her to represent herself properly:

> *"Despite their initial desires / intentions for the shop - their desire to sell fashionable, affordable maternity wear in complete contrast to other maternity wear retailers, and particularly to reflect current fashions / fashionable classics so that women do not have to buy things they wouldn't normally; 'make do'; buy into maternity wear style / identity, but rather can be themselves in what they wear - they are having to compromise themselves in what they stock and therefore to a certain extent in who they (as a business) are and what they stand for. And I suppose there is a kind of disjuncture between the shop space (its design etc. as a fashionable designer-esque boutique type space), their own*

clothed embodiment and the majority of the clothes they are currently selling. Ari is becoming increasingly unhappy about this." (Mums & Co research diary, December 15th 1999)

Indeed not only was there a disjuncture between what they were trying to achieve through the shop space and the clothing itself but also the shop space itself was altered by the inconsistency and poor quality of the stock, taking on something of a charity shop appearance. Clearly there were significant implications here for the identity not just of the shop space and the company but also maternity wear itself as constructed within this context. Rather than being the fashion item they desired it became entirely removed from mainstream clothing and became more of a charity shop garment.

This clearly was a highly unsatisfactory method of sourcing stock, particularly as it compromised everything they had set out to achieve and was also a non-sustainable arrangement. In buying up the more reasonable portions of other small retailers past season's stock they were not tapping into a renewable source. Once they had visited a particular retailer once they had exhausted any significant pools of excess, certainly of anything saleable. With only a handful of exceptions they had to continually search for new offers. As a result they found themselves in what can only be described as a perpetual stock crisis for much of the first year of trading.

However during their first year of trading Ari and Sarah did eventually acquire sufficient market knowledge to enable them to establish much more formalised supply relationships with a number of suppliers. Today they have a shop stocked with a far more coherent range, which is bought mainly out of, but with specific basics re-ordered according to demand within, season. Interestingly however this organised stock buying still includes buying from a supplier who produces for a high street company, selling them presumably portions of the clothing that this chain are not obliged to buy up. Therefore although the obvious benefit to them from the massively lower prices he offers compared to branded maternity wear suppliers a portion of Mums & Co's offer remains contradictory to their initial drive.

The establishment of (brand) supplier-retailer relationships are however just one example of the difficulties faced by consumers – turned – retailers. These relationships, whilst clearly being of central importance do not stand alone. Buying policies are equally vital to the production of maternity wear within retail spaces of representation. This remains a particular problem for Maria and Dennis at Belly Bumpers. At the outset of their business Maria described the way she bought stock as being entirely based on her own taste rather than any knowledge of the market:

> "I've never been in retail, I've got no retail experience. I've just bought what I think I would wear and that I would like."

And indeed a year on they still lacked any coherent policy or strategy for buying. In contrast to Mums & Co, Maria and Dennis opened with various contacts with brands already established. Although they too have sporadically turned to a fellow retailer for top ups in times of desperation this has tended to be on a different basis, buying up present seasons stock from a woman who not only heads a franchise company (Bumpsadaisy) but also acts as an agent for several brands. In addition they have, from a relatively early stage viewed collections and bought out of season in a fairly standard way. However, despite the wealth of Europe wide of contacts (including

Figures 4.1 and 4.2: Internal photographs of Belly Bumpers.

Madonna (Spain); Fragile (Belgium); Carla C (Denmark); Valja, Tête-à-Tête, Brimmel (Demark); Noppies (The Netherlands); Blooming (Ireland); Vida Vita they lack any coherent buying policy. The orders placed with each of these brands bears little, if any relation to any other, therefore no overall range is put together and repeats of certain styles often occurs (for example autumn/winter 2001 they stocked similar coloured short PVC jackets from both Vida Vita and Noppies), which is clearly a particular problem when these styles do not sell well (as these jackets did not). Also there appears to be little identification of season trend predictions before buying (the trade press, such as the Drapers Record carries such information which is easily available to them), therefore the degree to which their offering can be said to reflect 'fashion' is debateable despite their initial wish to stock trendy clothing for pregnant women and their criticism of the high street for not doing so. Rather it reflects the tastes of the buyers, which because of their lack of industry knowledge can scarcely be seen to be a season ahead. Further there is no budget set for buying, either overall or with respect to individual brands and no record is made at the time of viewing and ordering of either the details of the order or the cost. The result is a fragmented, inconsistent range, which frequently does not cater for women's needs. Again the effect on the shop space is to significantly dilute any kind of brand image they may try to cultivate through other means such as advertising and the composition of the shop space itself. Despite efforts to improve the appearance of the clothing through frequent re-organisation the overall effect is almost always charity shop – esque (see figures 4.1 and 4.2). Even when orders encompass multiples of a style, the inconsistency within brand and as a whole makes it very difficult to organise coherently. This clearly has consequences for how the clothing itself is produced and ultimately how it is sold.

In addition to the poor policy on buying out of season, which almost certainly stems from a complete lack of professional knowledge, there is little co-ordination or strategic planning of in-season re-ordering. Although it is the case that this is greatly restricted with companies only providing certain items for re-ordering in season. Clearly the providers themselves are placing orders with manufacturers based on the out of season orders of retailers. Many of the providers are not maternity wear specialists as such, carrying other ranges as well and therefore encountering similar production problems to high street retailers. In order to maximise cost effectiveness they therefore restrict the items available for in-season re-ordering, commonly to a core of basic garments, which change little by season (other than by colour for example). Although there are restrictions then to in-season re-ordering the basics provided by the various brands are valuable to this type of retailer. Unable to take risks with large orders frequent re-ordering of basics such as black trousers and jeans could provide a consistent provision of sizes and styles. These staple items are big sellers in these stores and are therefore central to their income. However at Belly Bumpers, despite the cognitive recognition of the popularity of such garments, particularly in certain styles there is little effort made to coordinate re-ordering to maintain a constant, consistent provision. Re-ordering, rather than being pre-emptive of shortages or planned in relation to sales figures or stock takes is arbitrary at best, often occurring once the situation becomes greatly exaggerated. This poor planning and naive ordering leads to missed sales on an almost weekly basis and is clearly not sustainable if the business is to succeed. The culmination of both these major buying policy vacuums is that stock crises are common, for example as I noted at the beginning of April 2000 at the time of the spring/summer photo shoot for their web page and other promotional material:

"Stock crisis looming. Despite the fact that they have several suppliers I can see that they are approaching a point of crisis with their stock. There is only one long, straight skirt left in the shop - and I've had two customers who between them have bought 3 in the last week. There are only a couple of small t-shirts left, all the others are sizes medium and above, and Maria told me herself when I mentioned the skirt problem that there are no size 10 trousers left (apart from jeans). Although it has seemed as if the shop has been full over the past few weeks since the deliveries arrived all together it is becoming more depleted. The photo shoot this week has fewer clothes than last week because we've sold some. Its kind of pointless shooting something you only have one left of. Its only just beginning to get warm too, and with the amount of people coming through wanting something for a wedding I can see they are going to have to reorder certain things- if they can - or else they'll be loosing customers through lack of provision. This is something that they haven't really considered I don't think. Last week they were panicking because they hadn't sold anything and it was so quiet. Now after just a few good days they are thinking about where they'll get the money from to pay for new stock. There are still at least two deliveries to come, which they have to pay for up front but I honestly think they'll need more than that, of basics if nothing else." (Belly Bumpers research diary, April 9th 2000)

The depth of the buying problem I think is clearly illustrated by this excerpt since this was a time when several deliveries of out of season ordered core stock had arrived in the previous few weeks, and yet there was still a significant problem looming. Indeed the irony of this photo shoot was that they were shooting designs of which they had in some cases only one or two in stock and so in many respects this was a pointless exercise in terms of selling items. Without a coherent buying policy this kind of advertising venture is not going to yield dividends and although for them it is not as expensive as for those who would have to buy in the skills of a photographer and studio it is not as productive an exercise as it could be.

Having suggested that this almost complete lack of buying strategy is the result of the consumer-turned-retailers lack of professional knowledge it is also necessary to note that these are new, small businesses and as such often lack the necessary cash flow in order to place regular orders. To a certain extent this may be seen as a vicious circle as sales are lost through bad buying policies. However it is also a function of other factors such as the high cost of merchandise, the small market, low footfall (as a result of the small market, high costs of advertising and so on), and the discourse of thrift dominating women's maternity wear consumption in this country, all of which place very real curbs on the long term viability of these businesses. Although there are very real limitations to the market and therefore the potential for these businesses their profitability is clearly being undermined (at least at the outset) by the retailers lack of professional experience and knowledge. A lack of awareness of the functioning of the market and consumer trends accounts in part for these women's inability to account for and anticipate the undulations they experience in footfall and spending. One would hope that as they gain experience

over time this might become more intuitive, as they gain and learn from first hand knowledge. However at the present time especially for Maria and Dennis at Belly Bumpers it leads to difficulties with cash flow management and stocking issues as well as undermining any confidence they might have in any awareness they are building up or any policies already in place. This has a particular influence on their fluctuating pricing policy. Although originally having thought they would sell items for double their cost price, plus VAT, many of the garments are priced lower than this. Particularly at times when it is quiet in the shop Maria has a tendency to become nervous about the cost of her merchandise, particularly in comparison to high street providers who clearly can offer much cheaper alternatives. At times of uncertainty she has commonly reduced prices by often arbitrary amounts in the hope of selling garments and regaining the dead money tied up in stock that is not selling. There are clearly some enormous issues of policy, which they must tackle in order to ensure any kind of success for this business.

However not all problems lie with the retailers themselves. Ari and Sarah at Mums & Co have developed a much more coherent buying policy over the time they have been trading, establishing relationships with a number of companies from whom they source the entirety of their stock. This has had a huge influence on their identity as a business, as retailers, on the shop space and the construction of maternity wear within this context as I noted as this process began to develop:

> *"Some new stock came in today. Every time I go over at the moment there seems to be new stock to sort out, they seem to have really sorted out the perpetual stock crisis they were stuck in not so long ago, hopefully this will be the shape of things to come. The new stock today was from Valja (maternity label - Tete - a- Tete) and in amongst the clothes were catalogues and a poster to distribute through and out up in the shop. Ari was very excited at this and when Sarah came in at lunchtime she told her that they were a proper shop now! They have entered into some kind of arrangement with Valja and are able to sell their clothes with the original brand labels in and obviously advertise also which seems for Ari and Sarah to have lent some legitimacy to their business which was lacking before. ...*
>
> *The new Valja stock is highly significant in another way too, it adds legitimacy to their project / aim to provide fashionable maternity wear - to make clothes which women would normally wear available. Although they have been sourcing stock directly from JoJo for some time ... this Valja stock adds a new level of legitimacy because of the style and quality of the garments. ... An indication of Ari's awareness that the clothes on the shop floor are active in the production of their identity is shown by the fact that as soon as the stock had arrived almost she became extremely eager to move the clothes around. For about a month now they have had a sale rail taking up one of the 4 rails, this was an attempt to get rid of a lot of the stock they had bought in the early days when they had not been quite so discerning due to a need to fill the shop space. The sale, like the dress agency disrupted the organization of the shop floor space as it was a rail of mixed colours and styles (non of which*

were felt to fit in with the Mum's & Co identity hence the reason they were in the sale) and with the wealth of new stock Ari said she wanted to show it off and not have it tainted by the fact it was on a shop floor that was so full of crap. We spent most of the afternoon therefore sorting through the sale rail putting anything vaguely decent back in amongst the normal stock or the winter stock out the back and relegating everything else into the dress agency or a box which Ari plans to try and sell for a pound an item at a car boot sale (she's having one anyway - its not purely to get rid of old stock). It has now become the case therefore that any items which depart radically from the idealised identity of Mum's & Co. is relegated to the back stage space of the back room." (Mums & Co research diary, July 18th 2000)

This development of a strategic, organised buying policy involved not just more formalised relationships with suppliers but the deliberate selection of a handful of suppliers, which specialise in different styles in order to build up a coherent range. In addition they now make seasonal buying trips to London, to view collections and place out of season orders. However unlike Maria and Dennis they do not make unrelated orders at each supplier, rather planning carefully what they buy in order to ensure a coherent range and best value for money (both for themselves and the customer):

"They have bought a new Polaroid camera for the express purpose of taking pictures of stock when on their trips to London. Its first outing was during their latest trip to London to a clutch of suppliers. Sarah showed me the shots they took to show me what they have ordered. It's amazing how things have evolved over the last year. This time last year when I first got in contact with them they were just going to suppliers and buying up oddments from seasons collections of literally years ago. Now however they are making highly organized trips to a number of noted suppliers and are putting in advance orders of thousands of pounds all told in a very organized and co-coordinated way. They have worked out what to get from certain places to fill particular niches and price bands to cater for as wide a range of styles as they think necessary. A particularly interesting feature of this most recent trip was the fact that their own performance identity has also changed in their dealings with other companies. For instance they thought long and hard about what they should wear this time. Ari even went and bought a jacket to wear and looked very professional in a short skirt, high heeled shoes and this jacket, a style she would normally not wear at all. ... I think actually this change in their personal identity performance is indicative of how the company has changed too. Clearly this professional identity was intended to say certain things about them as business women and their company a kind of 'we know what we're doing and you want to do business with us'." (Mums & Co research diary, August 17th 2000)

Rather than making orders at the time of viewing Ari and Sarah have developed a strategy of taking polaroid pictures of collections, which they annotate at the time of viewing. They then take these away, having repeated the process for all those viewed, and consider their range as a whole, encompassing elements of each brand before placing their orders. This seems to work well as it ensures they can offer the best prices possible by sourcing the cheapest garments in certain styles for example (amongst the brands they view) and also allows them to select a range of styles and looks within a co-ordinating range. They now have a very clear idea of what is right for them, in terms of brand, style, and price and so although research continues, for example viewing new brands each season, they will not necessarily buy into these unless they enhance and fit into their established structure:

> *"They maintain their buying policy involving four suppliers. Noppies, Valja, JoJo and Low Profile. ... Despite professing to me that they are happy with the selection they have put together, and the range of prices and styles these four suppliers offer I know that they are looking at others. Sarah is going to London again next Monday to see Barbara Pound who is the rep for Vida Vita, she also hopes to have time to see the Madonna collection too. I'm not sure they are seriously thinking about any stock from them, I get the impression its almost more of a case of just checking they're not missing out on anything by not stocking them, at least if they've seen the other collections they won't be wondering about what they haven't got - at least it will be an informed decision not to have it. ... They have decided not to even consider Carla C on the basis of price and also Forty Weeks for the same reason. They have decided that their niche is trying to compete more with Next sort of prices and that anything above that is too much of a risk." (Mums & Co research diary, March 14th 2001)*

This out of season ordering is complimented by in-season reordering of basics such as the Noppies trousers which are so popular (not just here but at Belly Bumpers too). However, despite their awareness of their popularity restrictions on their spending curtails the smooth, rolling re-ordering perhaps required to ensure a consistent stock level of such items:

> *"they still can't afford to pay out too much in one go. The largest orders they place are about 3 in each size of the Noppies trousers say, which they know will sell well (so well in fact [Arianna] says they can't always keep up with the amount of people who want them)." (Mums & Co research diary, March 15th 2001)*

4.3.2 Limits Imposed By Production Issues

Having established a strategy for buying and a reasonable means of ensuring at least some level of stock consistency Ari and Sarah had begun to look more to the future and the goal of perhaps a second shop. However there are very real barriers to this and no firm plans have emerged as they admit sales have not 'taken off' as they had hoped. In short they are beginning to realise the limits of the market. However

besides this there are also other practical issues to consider in relation to successfully stocking another outlet given persistent problems that both they and Belly Bumpers experience for example the restrictions imposed on in-season re-ordering and the unreliability of suppliers.

> *"Having said that their supplier relationships have begun to settle down and that the stocking crises the characterised their operation a year ago is a thing of the past they are still having some problems. For example they have a problem in that certainly with Valja they have to place their full order of collection items out of season. They cannot purchase any items from the season specific collection in season, only 'basics'. (I checked with Maria and Dennis and it is the same for them too). This is a real problem for small independents like these two businesses. Partly because they do not have a background in buying, fashion or indeed retail at all they simply do not know what will sell. Also they cannot afford to invest large sums of money in stock, which may not. Since the businesses are so small they cannot risk having capital tied up in dead stock. Therefore the best arrangement for them would be to be able to buy some out of season but the majority in season in response to customer demand. However clearly Valja in particular doesn't operate in this way. I suspect this is because they manufacture a fixed amount out of season (in response to their customers demands) therefore minimising risk on their side."* (Mums & Co research diary, February 15th 2001)

This inability to react to in-season trends by re-ordering collection items almost certainly leads to lost sales. For example by mid-March 2001 particular items had sold out. Clearly these would have been re-ordered had they been available and Ari and Sarah were openly frustrated at not being able to do so, particularly as other components of a particular outfit had not sold as well and they anticipated problems selling it without the matching top. This policy on the part of the suppliers is clearly a strategic decision based on production issues specific to maternity wear. As the high street providers experience problems with not fitting into other production runs and the low profitability of the garments as a result of high production costs so must these companies manage their production in order to maximise profit. Due to the small size of individual orders from small independent retailers it would simply not be economically viable to produce to order collection items in season, although basics which change little season by season and can be made in larger batches and therefore held in reserve, and which are likely to be ordered in much larger quantities and more consistently across numbers of these small retailers are a viable proposition. There are therefore limits to the efficiency of the buying policies of small independents because of the very production problems that marginalize maternity wear provision on the high street. In addition regardless of the organisation of buying on the part of the retailers they are at the mercy of the suppliers in terms of its translation onto the shop floor. Given the restrictions on ordering that these small retailers have, not being able to place large orders because of their financial position they are clearly highly dependent on suppliers delivering on time. However it is too often not the case, and with little information reaching the

retailers on firm delivery dates even after a pre-promised date has been missed significant problems ensue.

> *"They are experiencing problems with several of their suppliers at the moment. They ordered their stock for this season in advance and as yet very little of it has arrived. I asked them if that meant that it was late and Maria replied that they don't really know because this is the first season that they have done it like this. When they have asked their suppliers when it will arrive they are getting very vague responses. For example Barbara Pound told them they should have it by the end of this week or next week, which doesn't give them much to go on when they are advising customers when to come back in to see the new stock. Also they seem to be getting part orders in from some of the suppliers with no indication of when the rest will follow. Also they had a particular problem with Emma Jayne in that they ordered some bras for a customer I think and they sent them back the right paperwork but the wrong bras. Having promised these to a particular customer who by this time had, had her baby and needed the feeding bras this posed a problem for them. Dennis says he is getting fed up with being messed about by suppliers. They are trying to run a business and it makes them look unprofessional if they can't deliver. " (Belly Bumpers research diary, February 5th 2001)*

This was not an isolated incident and has recurred in subsequent seasons with the Carla C delivery arriving in several parts. Indeed some items never arrive at all. An order of gold wedding dresses from Valja was never honoured because they were unable to source the fabric, a fact Maria and Dennis were not informed of until they rang for an explanation as to why the bolero jackets (which were to be worn over the dresses) had arrived without any sign of the dresses themselves. Several sales were lost as a result of this, large sales, from women who had been told of the order and were waiting to try them on when they arrived. For the large high street companies the degree of control they have over the production of their garments ensures greater reliability of delivery, indeed shorter lead times and significant in-season ordering are features of the continued drive towards integrated, flexible supply chains. However small independent retailers are relatively powerless in this sense, finding relatively few suppliers of maternity wear and being unable to produce their own because of the prohibitively high cost of production. Therefore peripherally located in small, single shops, with little or no external financial backing and feeling their way through the pitfalls of retail with no prior knowledge, these businesses are precariously positioned. Not only must they negotiate the vagaries of the maternity wear market, which marginalizes it on the high street, but also they must do so with the added burden of relying on third parties.

Chapter 5: Spaces of Representation: The Cultural Production Of Maternity Wear

5.1 Introduction

> "..fashion or (more precisely given market segmentation) 'fashions' are the outcome of a range of intersecting practices: market and economic practices, labour relations and practices, technological developments and a range of more 'cultural' practices such as marketing and design... Thus the distinction between production and consumption is an artificial one that does not shed much light on the crucial relations between the two" (Entwistle, 2000, p.227)

Having critically analysed the provision of maternity wear both on the high street and in the new crop of small independent consumer-turned-retailers in relation to the conditions of production and the limitations of the market from an economic perspective it is important also to consider the cultural aspects of the production of maternity wear within these sites. As Entwistle (2000) among others has argued the two are complexly interwoven and in order to attempt anything approaching a full account of fashion production both must be considered, not only in their own right but also in terms of their inter-relatedness. Focusing in this chapter on the cultural production of maternity wear and particularly the fixing of specific values associated with pregnancy and motherhood around these garments through certain spaces of representation, I argue that these also have implications for the economic aspects of production through their moulding of consumption practices which, for example, determine in part, the size of the market itself. The market is not only curtailed by the relatively small number of pregnant women at any one time but also, for example, by how these women consume maternity wear, how much they buy and so on. As suggested in the previous chapter this is variable by season depending on the prevailing fashion trends, for example structured, tailored looks requiring specialist maternity wear and therefore boosting the market. This is clearly a cultural influence, being dependent upon the seasonal production of non-pregnant 'fashion'. However I will argue that in addition to producing maternity wear itself in certain ways and crucially fixing certain values around the clothing, high street spaces of representation also can be seen to construct, in relation to this, a particular form of consumption as normative – defined by maternal thrift – which itself constrains the development of a more expanded market. In comparison small independent consumers-turned-retailers have explicitly set out to enable women to consume maternity wear differently, constructing spaces of representation in which maternity wear is produced in particular ways in order to promote this. Whilst these small independents are limited – as I have outlined – by economic supply and professional shortcomings they are arguably better placed to successfully engage with the cultural production of maternity wear, if only in the microcosm of their own shop. Indeed, whilst on a very small scale in retail terms – given the current structure of clothing retail – these small independent consumer-turned-retailers may be seen to be producing maternity wear in specific ways in relation to their own readings of high street constructions.

5.2 Spaces of Representation

> "Whether they are intended for corporate design houses or for a market stall, fashion designs have to be sold through some mechanism of another. In this way, retail plays a crucial role in defining fashion and indeed, Braham (1997) argues that large retailers such as M&S or Next might exert even more influence on fashion than manufacturers and designers" (Entwistle, 2000, p.225)

Retail can indeed be seen to be central to defining fashion in several respects. For example fashion as ephemeral and changing on a seasonal basis is reinforced by the organisation of clothing retail. Flexible specialisation has in part been driven by the need to keep pace with fashion (Entwistle, 2000) and also therefore serves to reproduce the perpetually renewing nature of fashion itself. In so doing the fashion clothing industry ensures its own economic survival by (therefore) reaffirming the need for perpetually renewed consumption. Further, buyers for particular brands identify specific looks, which are produced as being the fashion for the season by their very presence in the offer. Entwistle (2000, p.222) cites Blumer (1969) who noted that:

> "there is a remarkable similarity between all the buyers and journalists as to what elements they select and this he puts down to the fact that these cultural mediators are so immersed in the world of fashion, and so trained to spot trends, that they usually pick up on the same garments. Indeed, the success of any store buyer depends on the ability to spot the latest trends".

As was noted in the previous chapter, fashion is produced on the high street, through market segmentation and branding, as diverse and indeed multiple *fashions*, whilst in reality being very narrow and similar. Whilst each brand (for example each within the Arcadia portfolio) has its own buying team, which is focused on their specific target customer (lifestyle group), they are all tapping into the same cultural resources from which the latest trends are discerned. Therefore whilst, as the Burton Group (now Arcadia) annual report of 1987 explained, market segmentation has been structured according to differential consumer identities and attitudes, this takes place within a macro-cultural context (and similarly a common fashion context) within which there are important corporeal discourses that translate into hegemonic codes of dress:

> "Everyone knows the standard age, sex and socio-economic categories [can] be used to segment markets. But things aren't that easy. Rather than squeeze people into boxes that don't fit, we have thrown away the boxes and now use more creative and flexible ways of grouping customers. We look at their attitudes to living, how they want to live and express themselves. What their aspirations are ... what sort of shopping experience they are seeking. For each group we develop a shopping experience that meets their requirements." (Burton Group 1987, p.1 and 10, quoted in Nixon, 1996, p.57).

I would suggest therefore that a significant aspect of developing merchandise for these differentiated segments involves filtering fashion trends with respect to the corporeal specificities of the group being addressed. This filtering process, indeed

even the initial identification of trends occurs in a cultural context in which clothing style and social value systems are inextricably linked (as for example Craik, 1994 has discussed). And where the former might shift seasonally the latter is in contrast far more firmly fixed. As Sean Nixon has suggested in relation to menswear for example:

> "As cultural forms, menswear garments (like all clothes) carry particular cultural meanings. The choices made by designers in terms of the selection and design of garments, choice of fabrics and colours work to signify, most importantly, particular masculine identities through the menswear" (Nixon, 1997, p.324)

The overall similarities within fashions on the high street for example therefore might be seen to be as much due to cultural intermediaries such as buyer's immersion in a particular *cultural* context as the world of fashion itself. In the case of womenswear for example only certain feminine identities are considered appropriate and these are reflected in the fashions imbued with these gendered identity ideologies. Equally, across the womenswear market only certain identities are deemed appropriate for particular bodies. Filtering occurs therefore whereby styles are selected, modified or rejected with specific reference to not only the signification of the styles themselves and the bodies of the target customers.

Importantly however, as Nixon's work in relation to menswear retailing in the 1980s shows, retail is not only important in terms of producing fashion in this way, mediating between production and consumption by addressing particular fashions to particular customers (Entwistle, 2000). Nixon also argues that retailing practices, and in particular design, is crucial in the fixing of meanings around clothing. He has shown how the design and therefore material construction of retail space is as significant as the design of garments themselves in articulating cultural meanings - meanings that I would add are fundamentally to do with the bodies of the specific group of consumers addressed by the particular brand:

> "The forging of ... new versions of masculinity through the design codes of menswear however, was also dependent upon other practices of representation to help fix meanings around the garments. This is where the display techniques used in menswear retailing come into play. Through the presentation of the garments on mannequins or display boards with photographs of the clothes being worn by models and through techniques like lighting and interior decoration, shop design and display attempt to fix a series of cultural values and meanings around the garments – values centrally to do, in this case, with masculinity. It was through these techniques that the 'new man' was signified within menswear shops as a particular version or type of masculinity" (Nixon, 1997, p.324)

With respect to the context of this research then, and to paraphrase Nixon through 'shop design and display techniques' specific pregnant femininities are 'represented at the point of sale' (Nixon, 1996, p.47). Whereas Nixon's highly influential work focuses solely on the economic and cultural aspects of meaning production through visual representation I would go beyond this and suggest that such spatial constructions have influence beyond the shopping experience itself. Indeed, the representation of specific pregnant femininities at the point of sale I would suggest

has both economic and cultural affects, since sartorially articulated identities have wider social significance than the aesthetic. In evoking particular identities, retail and garment design articulate something of the consumption practices themselves and, indeed, the wider lifestyle and behaviour of the customers within the niche, in this case pregnant women as mothers-to-be. These are cultural texts with which consumers corporeally engage and which can be seen to map out cultural expectations for how they wear and live their bodies as I shall examine in more detail later.

With respect to maternity wear retail this is especially significant since market segmentation does not apply in the same way as for womenswear as a whole. Whatever the intentions or target customer of individual retailers the general lack of provision and small number of high street providers effectively produces pregnant women (mothers-to-be) as a singular, unstratified and therefore monolithic group. Regardless of their personal identity or previous brand allegiance (and therefore "attitudes to living, how they want to live and express themselves" and so forth (Burton Group 1987, quoted in Nixon 1996, p.57)) their corporeality identifies them as members of this group. Therefore the representation of particular pregnant femininities in high street shop spaces, for example, can be seen to evoke expectations for the way all pregnant bodies are worn and lived rather than an identity reflecting a lifestyle choice. In particular I would argue these cultural texts have important implications for the ways in which women consume clothing during pregnancy and indeed wear their pregnant bodies. High street retail spaces in particular are central by virtue of their reproduction on a national scale and resultant normativity, which lends legitimacy to their productions. Despite distinct differences between such retailers according to brand in the precise nature of retail design, their embeddedness in a common cultural context is reflected in broad similarities which evoke dominant discourses of pregnancy and motherhood. The reflection of these across different sites and particularly in the absence of many credible alternatives would seem to reinforce the hegemony and indeed naturalness of particular pregnant femininities whilst also establishing specific codes of dress and practices of production as integral to the performance of such identities.

It is through techniques of representation that small independents are engaging with the production of not only maternity wear itself but also practices of consumption and versions of pregnant femininity signified by maternity garments and pregnant bodies. These are retail sites being constructed in direct response to material, embodied experiences of the mainstream, high street spaces of representation (and resultant productions of maternity wear), which were found to have material consequences for these retailers own consumption practices and identity performances during pregnancy. The production of maternity wear in mainstream spaces of representation had very real implications for how they lived their pregnant bodies and therefore the construction of their own retail sites reflects their attempt to counter this and create new possibilities for clothing and wearing pregnant bodies. The degree to which they achieve this is open to question, however it is important to acknowledge the ways in which they attempt to do so through practices of representation in comparison to those more hegemonic productions of maternity wear in mainstream, high street spaces.

5.3 Analysis of Retail Sites as Spaces of Representation

5.3.1 Dominant Production of Maternity Wear in High Street and Small Independent Retail Sites

Though there are clearly some significant differences between retailers of maternity wear - for example as a result of branding - it is possible to make some general assertions about the production of maternity wear on the high street and in small independent retailers.

On the high street – concentrating on the two retailers patronised by the majority of my interviewees and arguably that are still, despite the expansion of competition from others, the dominant providers – maternity wear can be seen to be produced in a particular way across these two retailers despite very different corporate brandings. For example both can be seen to produce maternity wear as in many ways anti-fashion. Whilst Dorothy Perkins in particular might claim to reflect their core ranges in their maternity offer, therefore reflecting current fashion trends, and Mothercare assert that theirs allows women to appear a 'groovy baby' (Mothercare Magazine Autumn/winter 2000) the design content of the garments available is relatively low. Whilst colours and sleeve length for example might change with seasonal trend variation there are few signifiers of fashion in the ranges and indeed any there may be are invariably disrupted by the poor take up of new garment technologies which allow greater flexibility in the design and make up of garments to reflect more closely those of non-maternity wear. For example almost all trousers, in particular, continue to contain panel inserts which require a certain way of dressing which in itself is often anti-fashion. Middle market, middle of the road is the order of the day with the brands themselves hardly contributing to the production of high street maternity wear as 'fashion'. Indeed in a high street structured to produce the illusion of choice and diversity, maternity wear in its marginality is constructed as narrow, impoverished and restrictive, particularly since the range of styles provided tend to be predominantly causal, with little if anything appropriate in for example business or occasionwear available. The narrow provision of styles in addition to the low design content has implications for the way in which pregnant bodies are produced in these spaces also.

The marginality of maternity wear on the high street in terms of provision and its spatial allocation contributes to its construction as a marginal product of little value and also as anti-fashion. The marginal space allocation and spatial dissociation with mainstream fashion – for example in Northampton Dorothy Perkins' maternity is situated alongside shoes, underwear and markdowns in the far corner of a L-shaped shop, therefore hidden from view of the main entrance – and the very fact that one of the only established providers is Mothercare, a one-stop-shop for all children's and Mothers' needs, rather than a fashion retailer, work to construct maternity wear as anti-fashion. Further the poor quality of high street offerings in terms of design and the quality of fabrics and garments themselves contributes to a representation of maternity wear as a low priority product in comparison to the importance of children's consumption needs, womenswear and fashion as a whole. In comparison to the well lit, spacious, design laden interiors, and at least the *illusion* of choice within womenswear as a whole the discrepancy between this and maternity wear is shocking. It is perhaps not surprising that many consumers are entering the market themselves in this context when their first hand experience of the high street provokes disbelief that companies who otherwise produce fashion in a polished way

appear to disregard maternity wear and therefore also pregnant women. Women commonly express disbelief and frustration at the paucity of provision and I would suggest that this is indeed exaggerated by the difference between the level of investment in design and practices of representation surrounding maternity wear in comparison to other ranges. Further this marginalisation does imply a devaluation of the pregnant body in comparison to the social validation more commonly gained by this corporeality (providing their embodiment maps onto the cultural expectations for this body that is).

However, whist this indeed makes for difficult embodied experiences of clothing consumption during pregnancy and indeed pregnant corporeality itself, and whilst economic rationales for this marginality can be flagged up as central to these retailing strategies, there are significant cultural factors which may also be at work here. For example the explicit devaluation of the pregnant body through policies to not allow window space for display of maternity wear and the allocation of the least profitable areas of floor space is hardly surprising given the cultural signification of the pregnant body as abject (and anti-fashion) and indeed as maternal and therefore unconcerned with her own needs (let alone appearance), particularly in a consumption sense where baby's requirements always usurp mothers. With respect to fashion the pregnant body represents the antithesis of the ideal female body, which is central to this concept. In comparison to this figure, the pregnant body is fat and as such unattractive, unsexy and therefore unfashionable. In addition pregnancy signifies not only Mother which is considered terminally unattractive but also sexual unavailability which arguably therefore undermines the fashionable gaze which is inherently male. As such this figure is dangerous to any brand that draws on fashion in any sense. The presence of the maternal body (however fashionably dressed) would be damaging and contaminating to brand image. Further, the production of mother as a conspicuous, narcissistic consumer concerned with self would undermine for example Mothercare's brand image, which is firmly centred on hegemonic discourses of motherhood.

It is with respect to this overall production of maternity wear in mainstream spaces of representation that the two small independent shops, which form my case studies, have been constructed. Here, whilst there may be supply and buying problems which disrupt the construction of maternity wear attempted, other practices of representation are utilised to produce it in a more positive light than on the high street and more akin to mainstream 'fashion'. The clothing sourced through the more formalised relationships with suppliers is produced seasonally in line with the mechanics of mainstream fashion and though in some ways the absence of any comprehensive in-season reordering opportunities of 'collection' garments is problematic it can also be seen to construct some level of exclusivity as a result of the relative scarcity of certain items.

In these spaces of representation – though arguably peripheral themselves – maternity wear is far from marginal, being the primary (and perhaps only) product, with the majority, if not all shop space being given over to it, including the window displays. Here in what retailers hope customers will interpret as a boutique setting, with one to one (and sometimes two to one) attention from staff, maternity wear is represented as a priority product, of central importance to the experience of pregnancy and the pregnant body. Pregnant women are therefore valued and validated in these spaces in their capacity as clothing consumers. And though imagery associated with motherhood is never entirely absent, the salient point is that it is not the only version of pregnant femininity that is present. Further these

retailers, in order to construct themselves as specialists and maximise their customer base do stock a much wider selection of styles of clothing with the express intention of not only allowing women greater possibilities to dress in continuity with their pre-pregnant identity but also to allow women to dress their pregnant bodies appropriately for a wider range of socio-spatial contexts than the high street offers. Here maternity wear is produced as a legitimate consumer good. And indeed as signifiers of motherhood – for example the sale of breastfeeding bras (also available in leopard skin print!) does not preclude the sale of little black dresses, or indeed lacy black lingerie – an important aspect of these spaces is the message that being a consumer in one's own right and performing a range of identities through clothing is not incompatible with being a good mother.

Whilst the corporate spaces of representation on the high street are constructed in relation to brand image and specific discourses of the pregnant body and motherhood, those of small independent retailers are inspired and motivated by real embodied experiences of pregnant and maternal corporealities. As such they arguably produce more authentic and diverse versions of pregnant femininity and practices of consumption (whist remaining contextualised and constrained by social discourses).

Within these broad productions there are specific components and practices of representation which fix these particular meanings to maternity wear garments and pregnant bodies themselves. Following Nixon (1997, p.324) I shall identify several aspects of representation in these sites which I argue are significant in these productions of maternity wear.

5.3.2 Clothing Design

It is widely agreed that items of clothing carry cultural meanings (see Nixon 1992; 1996; 1997 for example) and that culturally specific codes of dress - the socially acceptable forms of dress for particular bodies in particular socio-spatial contexts - are determined by the hegemonic meanings imbedded in clothing styles and design. Rebecca Bailey's work on maternity clothing in the US between 1850 – 1990 explores the direct control exerted by the medical profession over pregnant women's dress during that time. Her work shows how historically contingent views about the capacities of the pregnant body were directly linked to the availability of appropriate clothing:

> "Dress for pregnancy became a very telling marker of whether women were allowed to participate fully in society. The commercial availability of specialised garments, such as swimwear, indicated a pervasive societal view of the dominant male group – that such an activity was acceptable during pregnancy" (Bailey, 1997, p.251)

Bailey found that the hegemonic societal view concerning the way pregnant bodies were lived, the way women were expected to behave and so on, was mapped clearly through codes of dress and indeed maternity wear itself, suitable clothing for particular off limits activities for example being unavailable. This is an interesting assertion given that today, in the UK, retail can be seen to parallel this in the narrow availability of maternity wear in mainstream sites. Indeed the retail of particular garments appropriate for specific activities or socio-spatial contexts can also be seen as indicative of cultural ideologies concerning not only acceptable codes of dress –

ways of wearing the pregnant body, and in so doing what identities are performed – but also what this body does, how it is lived, how it participates in society and so on. For example swimming is widely lauded as a particularly effective and safe form of exercise for pregnant women and correspondingly swimsuits are included in the ranges offered by many providers. As the manager of the nursery department in M&S's flagship store in Manchester remarked:

> "We always keep the swimsuits on [throughout each season] ... because *we* feel its healthy you know for a Mum and its very good exercise, for anybody actually, but I mean for pregnant ladies that's why we like to keep the swimsuits on as well, we feel they're quite important" (M&S interview, 16/10/00)

The stocking of swimsuits all year round by M&S therefore is a clear indication of particular discourses surrounding the importance of certain forms of exercise for the pregnant body. Significantly they did not stock garments appropriate for wearing to exercise in a gym for example and indeed two of my respondents commented on their frustration at not being able to obtain such garments at all during their pregnancies. This in itself is perhaps indicative of social signification attached to 'the gym' itself as somewhere the pregnant body is out of place (again here it would disrupt the image of fit, thin, toned bodies that gyms themselves may like to associate themselves with) and not advised to be (this is not considered to be as safe a form of exercise as swimming). Also the pregnant body itself, the type of exercise associated with gyms is much more masculine[29] and therefore contradictory to the inherent femininity of pregnant bodily identities. In addition, to stock such items would disrupt the maternal femininity often inherent in these retail spaces of representation. Therefore I would argue that looking at what maternity wear providers do *not* stock is as indicative of cultural discourses about appropriate behaviour of pregnant bodies as what they do. As I have noted the ranges provided by high street retailers tend to be relatively narrow, focused on casual clothing and with significant omissions such as business and formal wear. For example, in interviews conducted with store staff in October 2000 I was told that both Dorothy Perkins and Mothercare had 'pulled out of suiting' in recent years altogether (at that time too the M&S gesture in such a direction was a single jacket and this was only available in a handful of stores). This gaping hole in provision is evocative of patriarchal views that pregnant women and mothers ought not be found in business contexts let alone in powerful positions where specific standards of appearance are essential[30]. In addition occasion wear is generally lacking, some stores lacking even a basic component of such garments. For example, at Christmas time 2000, I noted the failure of Mothercare in Northampton[31] to offer anything beyond their customary jogging pants and denim dungarees despite company advertisements in Mothercare magazine and elsewhere of a Christmas partywear range. This, as I noted in my research diary at the time, certainly appears to imply that not only is party going a dubious activity for pregnant women but also that buying an entire new outfit for

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[29] See for example Johnston's (1996) work on female body builders' contradictory and challenging corporealities. She argues that hard, taught. built, muscular bodies are explicitly coded as masculine.

[30] See for example McDowell, 1995; McDowell and Court, 1994 and Green, 2001 for discussions of sartorial negotiations of corporeality in the workplace.

[31] This failure to carry formal wear lines may be a function of the store size – it is certainly not one of the biggest. Nevertheless I would argue that the above analysis is still valid for this particular store.

perhaps one, at best a handful of outings is frivolous and unnecessary (though interestingly the same value judgement does not apply to Christmas outfits for babies and children, the consumption of which is seemingly encouraged): certainly this was my interpretation recorded in my research diary at the time:

> *"...given that Mothercare have produced a number of items for this season which are advertised in the magazine and catalogue it is surprising that there are none here. The fact that there are none at all suggests to me the relative importance attached to maternity partywear in comparison to say children's toys of which there is a huge collection. The selection of children's clothes, pushchairs, playpens, and cots ad infinitum is enormous in comparison to clothes for pregnant women. There is a value system at work here. Undoubtedly there us likely to be some economic basis to this, they probably do sell more children's toys at this time of the year than anything else for example. But the fact that there is no party, seasonal wear for women at all suggests: a) the sacrificial mindset - good mothers go without in order to give their children everything; b) that no-one will want to buy anything for pregnant women at Christmas other than something for their unborn child / children; c) that pregnant women should not be going to parties. Certainly it does suggest that women who come to this Mothercare to shop are concerned only with their children's wants / needs... rather than their own social life, work party and appearance in relation to these or any other seasonal event." (Northampton research diary, December 7th 2000).*

Significantly even at a time when the maternity wear stock seemed so seasonally inappropriate one aspect of the collection was amply stocked (as is routinely the case for Mothercare). That is there were large quantities of maternity bras available, and in particular:

> *"..there were about double the amount of feeding bras as anything else" (Northampton research diary, December 7th 2000)*

Whilst evoking the 'breast is best' adage and clearly asserting the importance of this activity to good mothering this skewed provision associates particular cultural meaning to Mothercare maternity wear in relation to this and also asserts the functional value of this range of products over any other. Whilst Christmas garments were foregone in this size of store, feeding bras were as well stocked as ever suggesting that the physical maternal functions of the pregnant body were more important to serve than the possibility of participating in Christmas festivities.

In contrast, small independent retailers are able to accommodate both of these aspects of maternity wear consumption. For example Belly Bumpers stock a wide range of Christmas party and occasion wear incorporating different styles and looks,

Figure 5.1: Carla C, Summer 2002

Figure 5.2: Carla C, Summer 2002

suitable for very formal occasions (for example on one occasion I sold an outfit to an air steward who was attending a company ball) through to office parties and Christmas day at home (I sold an outfit to a woman who had been wearing only leggings and t-shirts for almost the whole of her pregnancy but wanted something nice to wear on Christmas day). Therefore, despite the undeniable buying policy vacuum here the range of seasonal garments available alternatively constructs the pregnant body as a legitimate participator in such social activities and indeed personalised consumption itself.

In terms of the design of the clothing itself it is significant to note that many of the brands stocked by small independents are imported from continental Europe. Although most have UK based agents and clearly the buying is done by the retailers themselves who are immersed in the UK cultural context, the design of many of these garments takes place within different national, cultural and fashion contexts. Clearly then these collections are unlikely to be neatly aligned with domestic high street 'fashion'. However in comparison to high street maternity 'fashion' the design content of many brands appears to be much higher, utilising different colours and fabrics in order to achieve different styles and signify different pregnant femininities.

For example *Carla C*, a brand based in Amsterdam and founded by a Danish couple who supply Belly Bumpers with a large portion of their collection, produce designs specifically developed for the pregnant body. Carla has designed a range of definitive garments centring on wrap over pieces to define the pregnant shape and using modern fabrics in order to create clean lines, which follow the contours of the pregnant body (see figures 5.1 and 5.2). The fabrics are a particularly important feature of her designs and she uses colour particularly boldly. These are not garments to hide away in. Rather her collections can be seen to be celebratory, signifying bold, confident, independent pregnant femininities. In such collections beautiful, carefully selected fabrics can be seen to construct the clothing itself as high quality, something, which is clearly transferred to the pregnant body itself, and its status as a legitimate site of consumption. For example in their winter 2001 collection Valja used fur trims on several garments (including evening wear and daywear) explicitly signifying opulence in relation to the pregnant body.

Fabric is also important to design from a technological perspective. Both Mums & Co and Belly Bumpers specifically buy trousers utilising modern fabrics and design techniques to eliminate the need for fabric inserts. This is significant from an embodied perspective, the poor quality of fit achieved by inserts leading to blurring of body boundaries and the experience of the body as being larger as a result. However these 'pouches' as they are commonly called, are also crucial to the style of dress achievable. Crucially as they are widely considered to be the 'visible panty line' of maternity wear as one small independent retailer described them, the most acceptable way to wear such garments is to conceal the insert by wearing long, baggy tops. High street providers such as Dorothy Perkins and Mothercare remain largely committed to such designs, a policy which as I have suggested is likely to have an economic basis, lack of willingness to invest in new production practices and so on in addition to the fact that they also support demand for their own maternity tops (panelless garments enabling women to wear shorter, tighter – perhaps therefore non-maternity – items). However the signification of such designs is important too as I noted in my research diary:

> *"Both Mothercare and Dorothy Perkins seem to routinely use pouches in the trousers with the one exception [in Dorothy*

Perkins] of a pair of stretchy black trousers made entirely of a poor quality, thin stretch fabric, nothing like the bengalin available in the small independents. I was struck here by the lack of appreciation of the pouch problem, the need this creates to buy tent like tops to cover the pouch, and never more so than when I clapped eyes [in Dorothy Perkins] on a pair of deep red pair of trousers with a black insert. What are the buyers thinking? It is almost as if they are actively encouraging women to cover up with voluminous tops and not do anything too strenuous lest they should reach up for example and reveal the black pouch beneath." (Northampton research diary, March 20th 2001)

Avoiding such garments as small independents tend to do disrupts this high street construction of the pregnant body as inactive and necessarily enshrouded in voluminous garments, which not only constructs it as anti-fashion but also muddies the distinctive pregnant shape therefore producing it more conclusively than ever as 'fat'. Rather the exclusive stocking of insert-less trousers and skirts allows women to wear their pregnant bodies in different ways. Significantly whilst they remove the necessity of concealing the pregnant body they also allow women to dress to reflect pre-pregnant choices or current fashion trends therefore disrupting the disjuncture between pregnant and non-pregnant bodies the pouch insert sets up. Indeed whilst the pouchless designs stocked by small independents disrupt the signification of pregnant bodies set up by high street garments they also produce maternity wear itself differently too:

"Talking to women ...in Belly Bumpers and following my discussions with retailers around the country I am now convinced that the pouch is in some way replacing, or at least coming in line with, the tent dress stereotype of maternity wear, it is seen as an unattractive feature which identifies an item of clothing not only as maternity wear but also unattractive. It is certainly not a feature that endears maternity wear to women." (Northampton research diary March 20th 2001)

The design of clothing stocked by small independent retailers therefore can be seen to challenge the production of maternity wear and pregnant bodies in mainstream retail sites in several respects. By drawing on a number of brands and providing garments for disparate socio-spatial contexts, small independents provide for multiple pregnant femininities, disrupting the patriarchal expectations for pregnant bodies arguably re-inscribed by narrow high street collections. The designs themselves (with their use of colour, fabric quality and technology for example) disrupt the stereotyping of maternity wear as 'frumpy' and 'old fashioned' so often noted in relation to high street offerings. Instead they provide women with greater choice and the possibilities of dressing in ways to reflect pregnant feminine identities of their choice rather then a single maternal monolith. The maternal body of the high street, which must be hidden from view both in terms of the way women dress and – particularly from the consumer society - is not evoked here. Whilst overtly maternal garments are present – such as feeding bras – these are accompanied by others, which signify very different identities for the pregnant body.

5.3.3 Display of Clothing on Mannequins

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the display of maternity wear on mannequins in high street spaces of representation is the lack of visibility in this respect. Indeed the marginality of maternity wear (provision) on the high street is compounded by the profound absence of representation in high street space itself. Both Dorothy Perkins and Mothercare have a company policy not to dress shop windows with maternity wear. Whilst this is a sore point with merchandisers for example who perceive a great deal of value to be located in store window representations, it is a policy common to all high street providers and is rarely breached. As I have suggested there may be dual economic and cultural reasoning behind such policies. The niche market position and low returns earned by maternity wear do not justify it taking up profitable prime space in store frontage. Indeed this space is key to producing brand image as well as representing garments in particular ways and given the cultural meanings generally associated with maternity wear and the pregnant body the presence of such corporealities – however they might be represented – would undoubtedly dilute and disrupt, indeed damage the core identity sought[32]. Indeed this was hinted at by the maternity merchandiser I spoke to at Arcadia head office. She was clearly frustrated by the policy to withhold window space from maternity saying it was difficult to build a brand image for Dorothy Perkins *maternity* without this tool and also with very little store space to work with. However she conceded that whilst:

> "They [the maternity merchandisers] want to have some window space, they want it in store windows... its about what is good for the company as a whole not just one department" (Dorothy Perkins head office maternity wear merchandiser – interview notes)

Indeed that specifically in relation to this absence from store windows, the difficulties of representing maternity in a way that enhances the image of Dorothy Perkins might be central:

> "it is difficult to put a maternity graphic together and make it look like Dorothy Perkins and make it look good. She said on the photography side of things it is difficult to keep up with, [to] maintain the image ... produced through other graphics" (Dorothy Perkins head office maternity wear merchandiser – interview notes)

Whilst I shall discuss the nature of photographic representation of maternity wear more specifically in the following section it is important to note this discussion here as it undoubtedly contributes to the profound lack of visibility of maternity wear – on mannequins and otherwise – in high street windows.

The only two examples I have observed over the last three years, of high street retailers allowing any hint of maternity wear into their shop windows are specific to particular dates and locations: Dorothy Perkins Trafford Centre (Manchester) branch which around 24/5/00 had a simple display of one mannequin wearing a single un-accessorised garment, and similarly Mothercare in Northampton,

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[32] Particularly for Dorothy Perkins who might also perceive a risk of being associated with Mothercare.

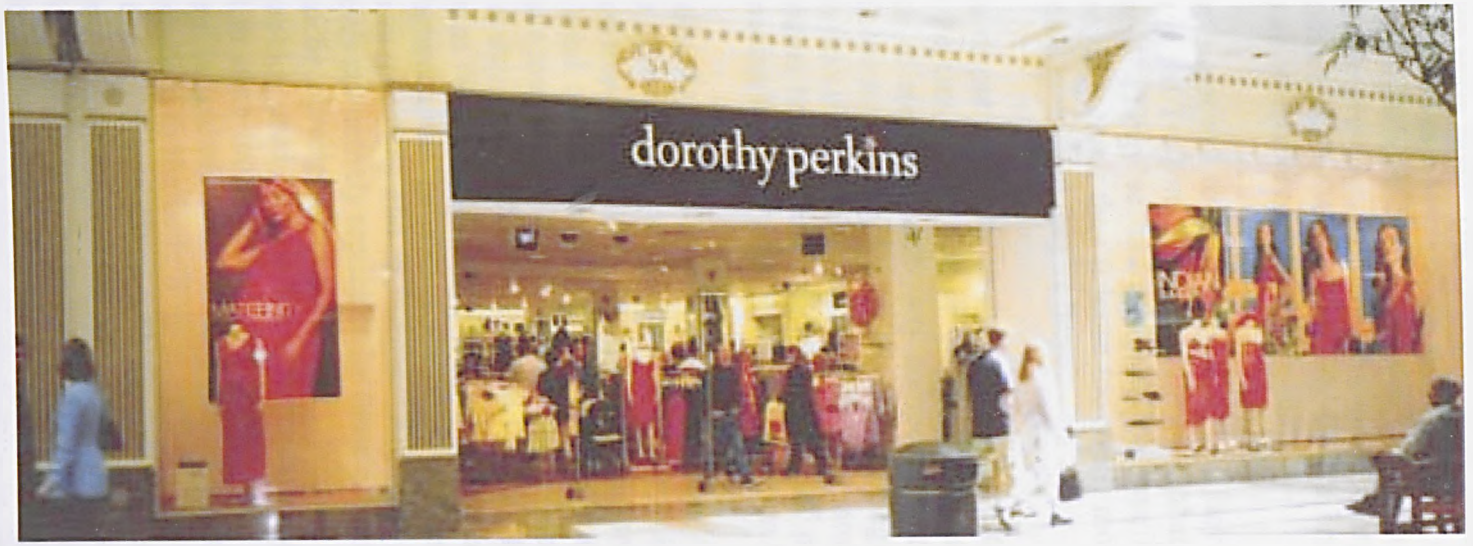

Figure 5.3: Photograph of Dorothy Perkins Trafford Centre branch window display.

which in March 2001 literally moved a mannequin into the window, again wearing one un-accessorised garment. These were transient displays, by no means permanent fixtures and were both seemingly sanctioned as a result of rival maternity wear provision in the immediate locality. In the case of Mothercare this appeared around the time that a new branch of H&M offering a maternity collection[33] opened a short distance away on the same street. The Trafford Centre Dorothy Perkins window was also apparently sanctioned as a result of the specificities of competitors' provision in the centre locality. Although, far from facing competition from another retailer at the time they were the sole providers in this, one Europe's largest shopping malls. As the visual merchandiser in the Manchester City Centre branch told me, this was a single exception to an otherwise company wide rule:

> "We're not supposed to have anything ...[t]hey've got no competition whatsoever in the Trafford Centre and they feel that that have to have that in the window ... [T]hey've basically said we have to have it in ... because they'll loose, they think they'll loose too much money if its not in because no-body would know that they're there"

I read the decision to put maternity in the window here to be more an attempt to establish Dorothy Perkins as the sole or certainly the main high street maternity provider. The lack of any other maternity competition at such a major retail site provided them with the opportunity for (relatively speaking) massive maternity sales and as such, in this specific spatial context maternity represented a positive adjunct to the Dorothy Perkins brand image and was worthy of prime site window space. However it is interesting to briefly analyse the composition of the window of 24/5/00 (see figure 5.3).

I would speculate that as the inclusion of maternity in the window here was only temporary at this time, its appearance in this specific window display was determined by its correspondence with the core range garments displayed in the main window. As the head office merchandiser hinted the company policy to exclude maternity from window space is based at least in part on the difficulty of representing it in a way that 'makes it look like Dorothy Perkins and make it look good', that 'maintains the image produced by other graphics'. Here however there is clear continuity between the palette of the maternity and core range garments displayed both on mannequins and in images. Although the 'handwriting' of the core range graphics is not entirely replicated by those of maternity the colour relation was clearly felt to be correspondence enough. What I find most interesting in relation to the graphics used here is the difference in caption used (and this is something echoed in store too). Whilst abstract concepts can be used to headline core ranges – here it is 'Indian Summer' it is deemed necessary to describe plainly maternity wear according to the body it maps onto and as such is always headlined 'maternity'. The desire for association with the core ranges is not strong enough to carry the theme over to maternity. This presumably would not only be undesirable from an economic perspective – in terms of the costs involved in producing an individual graphic for a single window display – and also in terms of the signification issues this would raise, particularly with respect to muddying the Dorothy Perkins brand image. Instead there is a safe distance maintained here between maternity and the core range, between the pregnant body and that central to

[33] Interestingly H&M however did not advertise their maternity range in all of their pre-opening publicity.

Dorothy Perkins brand image. This distance is concretised too by the physical separation of the maternity display from the core, displayed as they are in two separate windows. In addition significant distance between the two product ranges is produced by the careful accessorising of core garments, the composition of ensembles on mannequins and glass shelf display through layering whilst the maternity figure is dressed in a single garment (which interestingly and significantly conceals far more 'flesh' than the layered ensembles opposite) with no additional accessories. As discussed with respect to the range of designs stocked by high street providers this would seem to suggest the appropriateness of different practices of dress and consumption with respect to these different bodies. Specifically this might be read as evoking the idea that pregnant bodies should be clothed demurely and further that they are less legitimate consumers than non-pregnant bodies, worthy of less investment and attention to detail. Therefore whilst as an exception to common company policy this window is important as it disrupts the invisibility of maternity wear and the pregnant body in mainstream retail spaces, which in its profoundness constructs this latency as almost natural and appropriate. It can also be seen to re-inscribe hegemonic discourses in relation to appropriate forms of consumption and dress (there is no partially dressed pregnant body, clad only in revealing swimwear and transparent sarong in this very public (yet privatised) space for instance). And whilst its inclusion in the window here is undeniably important, stemming as it does from the very real possibility of significant sales, and therefore disrupting the construction of maternity wear elsewhere on the high street as a marginal and devalued product in economic and cultural sense, its transience and the fact that its very inclusion is solely motivated by the lack of any alternative provision at this site counteracts this and renders mute this small, impermanent challenge.

In contrast to this absence in mainstream retail sites maternity wear and the pregnant body are becoming more visible in other retail locations across the country. As a result of a number of small independent retailers – not all of which are under-financed, non-professional start ups, for example Bump Start (London and Brighton) was a finalist in the *Drapers Record* new store of the year award 2001 (*Drapers Record* 24/11/01, p.4) – there is an increased visibility on 'the street'[34] generated primarily through shop window displays which specifically consist of clothing on mannequins. Although certainly the retailers I worked with lacked any professional knowledge with regards to dressing their windows and constructing internally coherent displays, their productions are none the less significant. Through their mannequin displays small independents legitimately place the pregnant body in public shopping space, although there are certain qualifiers to this as these are peripheral retail locations and the pregnant body's visibility here as opposed to its absence in the core could be seen to reinforce its marginality and so on. However, this aside it is significant that within these locations maternity wear is produced as a legitimate consumer good alongside others retailed in that area, as well as constructing an acceptable corporeal presence for the pregnant body in public space as a consumer. Although the window displays – particularly for example the Bravado bra graphic that Belly Bumpers have in the past displayed in their window featuring a group of women, at different stages of pregnancy wearing leopard skin

[34] These companies are also contributing to increased visibility in other spaces such as cyber space. Whereas high street brands have restricted the availability of their maternity offers via the internet even whilst developing other core brands in this way, many small retailers are developing sites as an additional advertising and merchandising tool or as sole retail sites.

Figure 5.4: Promotional image of Bravado Bras, an enlarged copy of which was displayed in Belly Bumpers window during 2001.

print underwear (see figure 5.4) – might have gained the odd disapproving look and certainly provoked curiosity, producing double takes and shared exclamations among passers by for example. By and large the responses are positive, for example as Maria described not long after opening:

> "We've had a lot of people in here who aren't pregnant and they just come in to look because they like the look of it from outside, from the outside in and they come and have a look round and they say 'we never had this when I was pregnant'"

This is significant as it shows how unusual this type of presence of maternity wear and the pregnant body actually is in a retail location. It is received, it would seem, not with the disgust associated with the abject - although the responses to the Bravado graphic (figure 5.4) do suggest something of the fascination associated with this figure – but rather with interest from a consumption perspective, generating interest in the context of marginality and lack of provision. In this respect the lack of professional knowledge and resources these retailers have to dress these windows matters little, the presence is enough, and their visibility magnified by the general lack. This is perhaps demonstrated in part by the fact that a significant proportion of sales are generated through passing trade (either directly by customers themselves passing or indirectly through word of mouth from others) for both Mums & Co and Belly Bumpers. It would appear that the lack of visibility and availability elsewhere enhances the effectiveness of these window displays such that members of the public, and not just pregnant women, cognitively internalise the presence of these shops and indeed pass on this knowledge to others.

The windows themselves consist (see figures 5.5 and 5.6), both in Mums & Co and Belly Bumpers of two (or three) mannequins each of which is dressed in a different ensemble that is changed on a weekly basis. Clearly the policy to change the garments displayed in the window so frequently is motivated in part by the fact that that these are items from the shop floor and as such are essential elements of a seasons collection given the small orders placed and so on. Therefore changing the mannequins regularly prevents any fading and other sun damage. However through this practice retailers also hope to represent their collections in a particular way, specifically as being dynamic and exciting, consisting of a wide variety of styles and therefore offering significant choice. The selection of clothing displayed is also significant in terms of the visual codings established. For example neither Mums & Co or Belly Bumpers dress window mannequins with denim dungarees or other such garments which typically signify 'maternity wear'(even if they do begrudgingly stock them), these retailers have no desire to evoke the 'old fashioned' and 'frumpy' labels associated with such garments. Rather through their window displays both these retailers attempt to construct new visual codings of maternity wear itself and indeed pregnant femininities by choosing (not) to display particular garments. For example it is common for them to select items they personally particularly like. As Maria is fond of saying, she likes to show that 'you can get 'normal' clothes when you are pregnant' through her window. Of course this is dependent upon individual perceptions of 'normal' but clearly the intention here is to construct some continuity between Belly Bumpers maternity wear and non-pregnant womenswear.

Figure 5.5: Photograph of Mums & Co showing window display.

Figure 5.6: Photograph of Belly Bumpers showing window display from inside.

5.3.4 Photographic Representations

As noted in relation to the absence of maternity wear in high street window displays the representation of not only maternity wear itself but also the brand is important in photographic display. Specifically at Dorothy Perkins it is felt that the difficulty in reproducing the image achieved through other core graphics with maternity is prohibitive to its inclusion in window displays. In other words maternity does not represent the brand image of Dorothy Perkins in some fundamental sense. However, I have observed photographic representations linking maternity wear to others ranges through similar 'handwriting' in store. For example during autumn / winter 2000:

> *"..there is an image on the wall showing a pregnant woman wearing items from the collection which is in keeping with other images around the store - she is wearing similar items and the feel of the image is the same" (Northampton research diary, November 28th 2000)*

> *"The image is of a brunette woman in her 20s or 30s, clearly pregnant but not excessively so, photographed leaning against the back of a chair or stool, shown to the top of her legs. The feel of the picture is very similar to that of other images used in relation to other ranges this season. Very glamorous I would say. Excessive make up and jewellery, for example the pregnant model has enormous cut diamond like rings on" (Northampton research diary, December 7th 2000)*

This was clearly an occasion where it was felt that the image produced represented both maternity and Dorothy Perkins in an acceptable way. As a result it represented maternity as a seamless transitional range catering for Dorothy Perkins customers during their pregnancy, allowing them to dress in the same way as normal and then leading them back to the core ranges post pregnancy. This practice of representation produced maternity wear as fashion in the same sense as core Dorothy Perkins clothing, rather than solely functional and anti-fashion. However, this level of coherence between maternity and core range graphics is not consistently produced, for example, in March 2001 despite having produced a maternity image with key intertextual references to core range images this was removed from display only weeks later and replaced with a white poster sized card with simply the headline 'maternity' emblazoned in black type across it. It is possible that this removal may have something to do with Dorothy Perkins questioning precisely who their maternity customer is and whether she is always a Dorothy Perkins faithful, the merchandiser I spoke with only two months prior to this freely admitted they were investigating this. It may indeed be the case that on the premise that a significant proportion of their maternity customers are drawn in from elsewhere due to lack of provision they may decide to produce maternity differently to Dorothy Perkins itself in order to encompass different identities and appeal to a wider customer base. However, the complete removal of a photographic display for maternity works not only to distance it from other ranges, but also reinforces the distinction between fashion and associated consumption practices and maternity wear, acting to marginalise and devalue it.

Mothercare in comparison is very successful at aligning its corporate branding with maternity wear through its photographic representations in store. As a rule Mothercare uses very little photographic material in its in-store display of maternity wear and what little is used tends to be understated and rarely produced solely for this use. For instance it is often displayed on small cardboard mounts around A4 size, which are self-supporting and placed on top of low level display units rather than the walls themselves. Further they are commonly images lifted directly from the catalogue Mothercare Direct or other promotional material rather than being images produced specifically for in-store display. This practice ensures a coherent production across different Mothercare spaces of representation with consistent visual codings present in each in relation to both maternity wear itself and also the version of pregnant femininity attached to it:

> *"The brand image as being sensibly priced, value for money is highlighted by the use of a cardboard reproduction of a page from the catalogue boasting "nine different looks for under £100" (Mothercare Direct Autumn/Winter 2000, p.14) which is placed on top of one of the display units. This idea that you can buy your whole wardrobe at Mothercare is the same as that suggested by the magazine feature in their most recent magazine (Mothercare Magazine, Autumn/Winter 2000, p. 36-43) which shows three distinct looks using the current range. It seems Mothercare are trying to construct themselves as comprehensive providers for all maternity wear needs. Indeed this is integral to the Mothercare concept - a one-stop shop for you, baby and child. However in the shop space of the Northampton branch on this particular day it fell down completely. I doubt very much anyone would have been able to find those '9 looks' for example (which is in reality 5 separate items to mix and match), all 5 items in their size." (Northampton research diary, November 28th 2000)*

Whilst this graphic (see figure 5.7) re-inscribed the brand image of 'comprehensive provider of reasonably priced maternity clothing' it is significant that the shop space itself, display of clothing and particularly the stock levels completely contradicted this, disrupting entirely the image presented through photographic representations across different sites. However the visual codings in relation to the version of pregnant femininity attached to the maternity wear are less coherent when the shop space and clothing is in such a depleted state. The pregnant femininity inherent in Mothercare maternity wear is explicitly maternal, self-sacrificing and domestic and therefore the apparently low priority assigned to maternity wear in terms of keeping stock levels up and so on (as well as the positioning within store and so on) does not disrupt this since personal clothing consumption is a low priority for mother, as is demonstrated by the focus on thrift in the above graphic. As a general rule Mothercare graphics in-store tend to concentrate on aspects of clothing consumption rather than the garments themselves. For example the graphic discussed above represented very specific thrift driven consumption practices as most appropriate for Mother, and further that the clothes themselves are the secondary issue is demonstrated by the fact that the precise garments themselves were not always available. It is the signification associated with the way clothing is consumed during pregnancy that is the most central to Mothercare maternity wear and inherent in their

Figure 5.7: Mothercare Direct (Autumn / Winter 2000), p. 14-15, used as an in-store graphic.

spaces of representation, and underlying this is a very specific notion of pregnant femininity – Mother:

> *"I noticed a new graphic today ... on the top of one of the free standing display units. It is only A4 size so not particularly imposing in its presence but none the less it did catch my eye today. It is a picture of a woman sitting on a sofa with a child about toddler age sitting beside her. The child is touching her stomach in two places, which appears to pull her clothing - a white t-shirt - in to define a pregnant bump. This is very typical of Mothercare, the woman is clearly portrayed as mother here, the mother of both the unborn and the curious child. It is very family oriented - the kind of two point whatever children... The picture is set in the home - a domestic setting and space ... - the typical Mothercare customer does not work remember and there are certainly no clothes here that could be worn to work in an environment where the culture is for smart wear. Also the child literally defines her. She is not pictured here as an independent being, her pregnancy is not even allowed to be visually identified by the curves of her body, rather it is defined and identified by the hands of a child. She is most certainly not a pregnant woman here but Mother." (Northampton research diary, March 20th 2001)*

Again here the clothing itself is far from at the forefront of this graphic, rather it is the model's role as Mother.

The direct intertextuality utilised by Mothercare is significant not only economically and in terms of continuity of brand, but also, as Nixon discusses with respect to organizing the ways of looking for consumers (Nixon, 1996). The construction of catalogues and pregnancy magazines themselves are also important in organizing the ways of looking in shop spaces and also therefore set up normative ways of *seeing* (after Burgess) the clothed pregnant body which has implications for maternity wear consumption in a number of respects. Here the link is direct with the presence of catalogue graphics in the shop space itself and therefore the construction of the catalogue as a cultural text is relevant to any discussion of the shop space. Though I do not have sufficient scope within this thesis to fully examine the construction of all visual cultural forms relevant to maternity wear shopping and consumption it is important to note their significance, as Nixon says a full account of the ways of looking organized within particular shop spaces requires a consideration of such texts since they form (together with the shop space itself in all its component parts) the intertextual context within which looking (and, I would add, being) is directed. In this particular context I would suggest that the visual codings in the catalogue (Autumn / winter 2000) specifically direct customers to view the pregnant body as mother. The pre-text to the maternity wear section of the catalogue is several pages of 'advice' covering pregnancy, birth, caring for a newborn (including breastfeeding) and parenting advice, and with the front cover depicting a young child the maternal function of the pregnant body (indeed arguably the female body) is firmly established as the key focus. Additionally the style of the images, set in a domestic context by and large and constructed – through the posture of the model and so on – to draw the eye to the bump encourages the viewer to look upon this

body as mother. The models themselves also imply particular maternal identities in their embodiment and implied social status, for example wedding bands are almost ever present, their whiteness too evoking particular ideologies of motherhood and images of mother. These images, indeed the catalogue as a whole does not encourage the narcissistic gaze evoked by fashion photography, the 'style press' as Nixon refers to it, but rather a very specific way of looking deeply entrenched with traditional ideologies of motherhood. The viewer is invited to look upon these bodies (including their own) - within the shopping context – as mother, rather than clothing consumers in the more usual respect. It suggests therefore that any narcissism be concerned with the performance of mother rather than physical / fashionable appearance *per se* and this has clear implications for the way in which clothing is consumed by this body.

In direct comparison small independent retailers Mums & Co and Belly Bumpers construct and use images they feel build different pregnant femininities into their maternity clothing. Far from being explicitly maternal and evoking ideas about thrift for the most part the emphasis is far more placed upon what can be achieved through the clothing. Rather than the value of these garments lying in their low cost, through the images used they are represented as well fitting, comfortable and stylish. Significantly many of these images can be seen to resist the 'intertextual ways of looking' constructed by many mainstream maternity wear catalogues and pregnancy magazines. Focusing on style, fit and so on, constructing the pregnant body as an object of fashion encourages a narcissistic gaze[35] in relation to appearance and legitimates concern with and taking visual and corporeal pleasure in this embodiment whereas others do not.

Interestingly despite their independent status there are direct associations between the spaces of representation. For example as both Mums & Co and Belly Bumpers stock Valja (Brimmel, Tête-à-Tête) and Noppies clothing they display similar branded graphics, both these companies providing their stockists with posters of various sizes and collection 'catalogues' each season. Of these Noppies is particularly interesting as they produce a life-size image (taken from their seasonal 'catalogue') printed onto translucent fabric which both Mums & Co and Belly Bumpers have displayed at one time or another in window space (Mums & Co at the back of their building in a window overlooking the car park and Belly Bumpers in their front shop window). Through the stocking of particular brands and display of branded graphics therefore these spaces of retail are directly linked and despite their peripheral location, small scale and inherent problems, considered together are perhaps more significant than might first appear. Small independent maternity wear shops are perhaps together disrupting hegemonic discourses about acceptable ways to consume clothing during pregnancy and the versions of femininity signified by and fixed to maternity wear by representing alternatives. In making direct photographic and material (by selling baby and maternity products in the same space) links between maternity wear and motherhood, Mothercare represents clothing consumption during pregnancy as being that of a Mother and indeed integral to performing this identity, *being* a mother. This production almost appears 'natural' given its longevity on the high street and almost taken for granted presence. Small

[35] The culturally specific narcissistic gaze in relation to fashion in particular however does not fall easily on the pregnant body. This is a significant problem for maternity wear as a market (and therefore individual retailers such as those discussed here) and also for individual women as they live their pregnant corporealities.

independents however to a large extent sever this direct link through their photographic display of clothing. In all but a few images used in Mums & Co and Belly Bumpers women are represented as individual consumers of 'clothing' rather than a 'maternity' product as such, and indeed this is shown to reflect other characteristics and aspects of ones identity than simply mother.

With respect to small independents own image production this is clearly restricted by the prohibitively high cost of such processes. Whilst some with websites[36] have, it seems, used amateur means to produce images perhaps as a direct result of the financial outlay required for more professional productions, others are more critical of this practice precisely because of the implications of this for the company image. Dennis of Belly Bumpers for example is a professional photographer himself, (working freelance while Maria runs the shop day to day) and is very careful to avoid such connotations for his own company:

> *"Dennis is fond of commenting on how dreadful other people's websites are in fact he even pulled one up this morning to show me what he meant. He picked on Mums2000. I must admit the pictures do look like they've been taken in someone's front room against the closed curtains. There is no attempt to do hair or makeup; its not at all professional in that sense and the thing that Dennis picks on most is the woman (he didn't call her a model he called her a woman). I suppose it is obvious that she isn't a model, she doesn't stand particularly well, facing straight to the camera and her posture's not great for example but if its as expensive as Dennis suggests I'm not surprised people try and make short cuts." (Belly Bumpers research diary, March 1st 2001)*

Belly Bumpers are therefore something of an anomaly in terms of small independents generally, having the expertise in-house as it were that allows them to produce graphics of their own. Mum's & Co on the other hand have no such resources and so have been unable to produce any graphics of their own, although they were lucky enough for their local paper – the Bradford Telegraph and Argus – to offer to do a feature on them in the January after they opened. Although they had little control over the shots as they were taken, and indeed those selected for publication, they had very clear ideas about the contexts they wanted. For example the paper wanted to take the photographs on Shipley Glen, a green open space nearby, but Ari was particularly unhappy about this idea:

> *"She has her own very clear ideas about how the pictures could be set up / constructed. For example for the business / work clothes she has an idea about using Matthew's car (I assume she thinks his, a V-reg VW Passat, is more executive looking than hers, an L-reg Ford Mondeo) and having a picture of Clare getting into / out of / locking the car, brief case / mobile phone in hand. She says she feels that bit of context is necessary. I think she is worried about how a pregnant woman in business clothes on open moorland is going to look! She clearly doesn't feel it is the right*

[36] Many small independents have websites (even if they do not sell directly through them) and again these contribute to the alternative construction of maternity wear as discussed above since many also use graphics supplied by brands at these sites too.

backdrop / setting for work clothes. (Mums & Co research diary, January 6th 2000)

In the event the weather intervened on Ari's behalf and the shoot took place in the street behind the shop and on the canal side terrace of a nearby restaurant. The context was therefore urban, public space rather than being exclusively rural and 'nature' dominated, which would perhaps have evoked the 'naturalness' of gender roles and motherhood, the fecundity of the female body and so on. Ari was much happier with these contexts as they represented their clothing as allowing women to dress appropriately for the socio-spatial situations these pictures represented thereby associating active, independent, competent femininities with the clothing.

Interestingly it would seem that such photographic representations are felt to afford a degree of legitimacy and professionalism to the shop space and therefore indeed the company itself. Whilst this is particularly the case with branded graphics – for example Belly Bumpers, whilst producing their own professional graphics only use branded representations in their advertising, whether this be in the local paper or national magazines – it is also true of others such as the newspaper feature. A great deal of care was taken when deciding where to situate a copy of this feature (which interestingly omitted the images involving the business suit and car):

"Ari decided in the end to put this inside the changing cubicle as it would give the customers something to inspire them perhaps while trying on clothes." (Mums & Co research diary, January 25th 2000)

Maria too perceives the almost educational function of graphics and hints at using these (as well as the store mannequin displays) as a way of actively producing different ways of wearing the pregnant body to those portrayed by more mainstream retailers and giving women the knowledge and certitude to dress according to different codes to those represented elsewhere.

"Dennis is going to take some shots of a model wearing some of their clothes over Christmas as he has the use of a studio over the Christmas week. The model is not pregnant; they have chosen to use a model rather than a pregnant woman, which is interesting. ... Maria says that she thinks women need to see other women wearing the clothes so they know how to wear them. She thinks that perhaps women would be a little more 'daring' if they saw how to wear the clothes, if they saw other pregnant women (or women that appear to be pregnant!) wearing them."(Belly Bumpers research diary, December 13th 2000)

I would suggest that this is an important concept since it is the case that women lack knowledge and certitude with respect to clothing their pregnant bodies, and that given the general invisibility of the pregnant body in mainstream fashion spaces of representation (including the mainstream fashion press) it is in such alternative retail spaces that women are most likely to receive advice and knowledge. Indeed the ways in which women shop in these spaces is indicative of this, frequently asking for staff's opinion and advice and so on when selecting, trying on and purchasing garments. Further Ari and Maria have both observed that garments they themselves

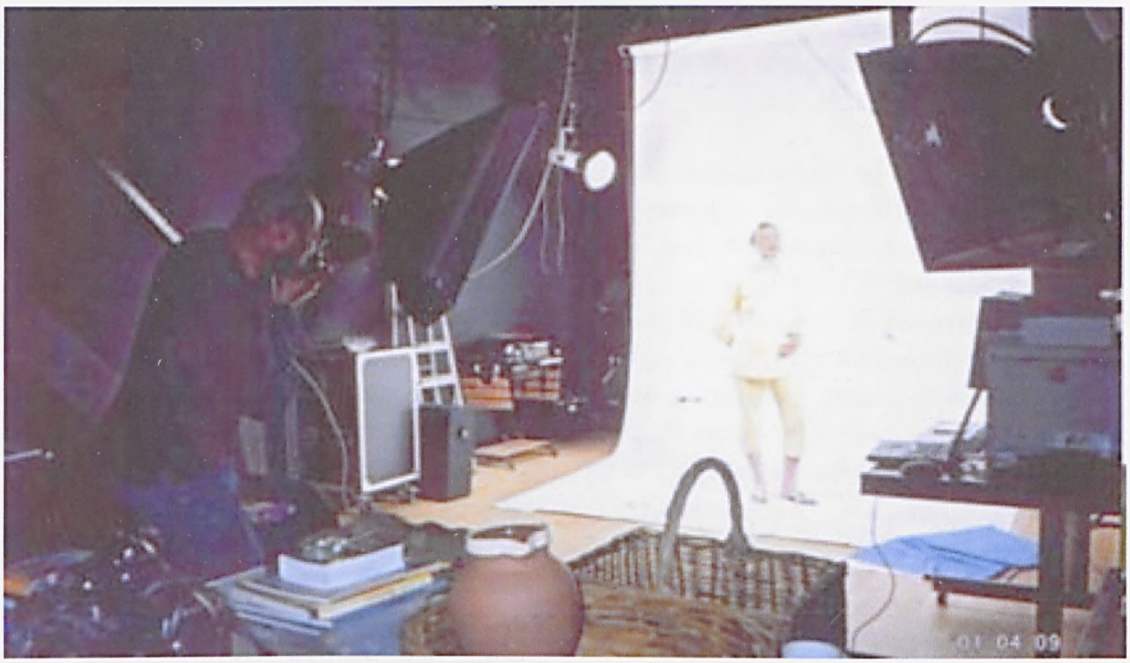

Figure 5.8: Photograph of Belly Bumpers photo shoot (showing pregnant model).

have worn in these spaces have sold on those occasions indicating the influence of embodied display and representation.

Perhaps with this in mind Dennis, in his construction of photographic representations of models wearing the clothing, has been keen to keep the focus always on the garments themselves. Whilst being concerned with the appearance and ability of the models used and the construction of the individual shots it appears that his drive for professionalism is motivated by an associated desire to make the clothing the most striking and visible component of the images. As I noted in my research diary after attending a shoot:

> *"Dennis, all the way through was conscious of 'ringing the changes' trying to get a bit of variety in each shot, trying different angles and accessories to get different images, taking some with both of them together if there was two of the same item in contrasting colours and so on. Mostly he used full-length shots but he also took head to waist shots to show off particular tops. He was editing as he went along so as to save disk space, taking a few shots looking at them on screen and then deleting the ones he definitely didn't like, taking others if he thought necessary and keeping his favourites to decide between later. He kept referring to the images from the last shoot in order to make sure he didn't repeat the same shots again. He freely called for Jo to redo the hair if he wasn't happy saying things like he didn't want people to be thinking about the hair on the web, he just wanted them to have a really professional impression.*
>
> *All the pictures were taken against a white background* [see figure 5.8]. *Most were single shots of the individual women on their own. He definitely favoured side on, profile shots so that the outline of the bump was visible, more than full frontals and also favoured shots where the models were smiling rather than wistful looks or anything like that." (Belly Bumpers research diary, April 2nd 2001)*

The emphasis appears to have been upon allowing other elements of the images to almost melt into the background, at least not to draw the eye from the garments themselves. As such these images can be seen to act as knowledge disseminators, informing how to wear particular items and indeed pregnant bodies themselves as well as producing Belly Bumpers maternity wear in particular ways, centring on the look of the clothing – what can be achieved through it – and so on, that is, its value as fashion. Clearly Dennis's intention to produce professional images is central to creating a particular identity for Belly Bumpers itself as well as their maternity wear. In the early stages of the business and particularly as a small under-financed and essentially non-professional company the desire to construct a polished identity to instil legitimacy into the project and command credibility is understandable. In this vein it is no surprise that the fundamental composition of the images, taken in a studio against a white background (see figure 5.8), and so on echoes those of Formes for example and specifically Carla C whose own images are also used by Belly Bumpers in-store, on their website and in magazine advertising. Such use of similar visual codings streamlines the graphical display of clothing by Belly Bumpers and

infers the professionalism and legitimacy of the branded images in relation to themselves.

5.3.5 Shop Design

The techniques of display and styles of interior design and lighting are equally important as photographic images and so on in fixing "cultural values and meaning around garments" (Nixon, 1997). Indeed the construction of the spatial context can be seen as key to underpinning this as the material manifestation of these values and as such providing the basis for consumers embodied encounters with the product and its signification. The importance and significance of retail design in this respect is recognised within the industry itself with retail design becoming one of the "ascendant professional identities of the 1980s" (Nixon, 1996, p.47) as a result of policy shifts within several large multiples. As Nixon notes:

> "the ascendancy of retail designers was rooted in the decision of retailing strategists to privilege retail design as the single most important selling technique within retailing" (Nixon, 1996, p.48).

Nixon cites the approach of Rodney Fitch and James Woudhuysen of Fitch-RS consultancy as being particularly well conceptualised. They used design as the basis upon which to "implement the basic strategy of market segmentation" (Fitch and Woudhuysen 1988, p.19 quoted in Nixon, 1996, p.51) through honing in on "consumers visual, tactile and spatial consciousness" (ibid, p.15 quoted in Nixon, 1996, p.51). As Nixon himself asserts, this approach showed that Fitch and Woudhuysen explicitly understood "retail design as working through the organisation and incitement of identity" (Nixon, 1996, p.52).

Over a decade later, carefully branded retail space remains a core concern of high street clothing providers and whilst the industry rhetoric may centre on the identity of the brand itself this is clearly inextricably linked with that is the consumer since market segmentation similarly remains central to retail structure. Indeed in the particular economic and competitive retail environment of the early years of the 21st century retail design is an apparently indispensable tool. Specifically in a crowded market place at a time when consumer spending on clothing is apparently dwindling:

> "As more and more shops compete for fewer and fewer pounds, the need for brands at all levels of the market to establish a strong and distinctive retail identity has never been so important. Today, retail design really matters. Thom Breslin, senior consultant of global brand and design consultant Fitch, says it is a 'medium for brands to communicate their values in a three-dimensional way" (Foster, *Drapers Record*, 8/12/01, p.21)

The design of the retail space can indeed be seen as the material manifestation of a brand's values and as such a site for customers to corporeally engage with and experience these. As Jeff Kingleysides, managing director of another design consultancy suggests:

> "As soon as customers cross the threshold of the store *they are in the home of the brand* and what they find there can either fulfil or destroy their image of it. The store designer has to analyse brand values, understand what they

mean and then manifest them in physical form." (Quoted by Foster, *Drapers Record*, 8/12/01, p.21, emphasis added)

Whilst Nixon focuses on the emergence of new masculinities through specific retail design vocabularies and restricted his analysis largely to the production and theoretical decoding of these three dimensional cultural texts. I have found that with respect to the mass market, *traditional* pregnant femininities continue to loom large with small independent retailers making space for different identities. Also whilst Nixon seems to conceptualise the bodies of consumers as inert canvases onto which meaning laden garments, bought in particular spatial contexts, project particular masculinities. I perceive retail design to actively construct the pregnant body itself in particular ways and as it does so re-inscribe cultural norms with respect to how it should[37] be lived and worn. The design of retail space in unison with the other elements discussed therefore can be seen to have greater significance than merely fixing meanings around garments. However eluding to the traditional Cartesian dualism mind/body Nixon appears to assume the masculine ability to transcend fleshy corporeality by omitting to consider the embodied connotations for consumers, their consumption practices and experiences. I however, whilst concurring with the concept of retail design as central to the construction of brand and therefore customer identity (and indeed vice versa), would stress that any full account must also consider the centrality of the corporeal in these productions. Significantly I would argue this manifestation of (cultural) brand values through retail design is in part explicitly corporeal. Not only are the bodies of store staff and models, both of whom represent the 'brand' (see for example Adkins, 1992; Leidner, 1993; McDowell and Court, 1994; McDowell 1995), central to this but so too are those of customers who through their patronage may too act as corporeal sites of representation through wearing branded clothing or carrying a carrier bag outside the 'home of the brand' itself. Further, brand values are not merely a set of abstract ideas used to distinguish one company from another, but rather are embedded in a particular cultural context and therefore relate specifically to prevailing sartorial codes. Any physical manifestation of 'brand' in retail design therefore also materially expresses values associated with the clothing itself and the bodies for which it is intended.

Mothercare

For example I would argue that Mothercare store spaces are central to the embedding of meanings and values associated with traditional ideas about motherhood in their maternity wear. Specifically as I have consistently suggested, in these spaces visual codings and the material construction of the space constitutes maternity wear as anti-fashion and low-priority, reflecting demure, maternal dress codes adopted by the (literally) *self*-sacrificing mother.

The idea of a shop which caters for the needs of pregnancy and children drives a wedge between Mothercare maternity wear and women's clothing more generally and not only that but pregnant women and other women, and maternity wear consumption and clothing consumption more generally. On a fundamental level it is almost the only situation where you would find women's and children's clothes in the same shop. Since whilst department stores carry concessionary ranges for children and adults in the same stores the spatial differentiation employed

[37] The implication is indeed a draconian *should* given the apparent lack of segmentation in this (niche area of the) market and therefore production of a monolithic identity for the most part.

between the different groups allows for the integrity of the different brands to be maintained. However in Mothercare the stores are more open and uniform throughout. Maternity wear is not organised as a separate shop within a shop[38], something that would help to differentiate a women's clothing product from children's clothes and toys. Rather it is a corollary to these other brands. The visual impact on walking into a store is amazing in comparison to other womenswear shops and bearing in mind the associated intertextual ways of looking women are well versed in. Women who are used to shopping in glossy, (laminate) wood floored, well set out high street stores with up to the minute designs and fittings, to a background of music – spaces that are often almost always occupied by women – walk into a completely different consumption context. Everything about womenswear consumption is turned on its head in Mothercare. The maternity wear which is usually at the back in a corner, accounts for at best one fifth of the unit space, the sound-scape is made up of children's crying, shouting, chatter, electronic toys and other distractions, and the spatial organisation and the shop fittings have the effect of all the ranges melting into one – there is no brand integrity between them. This is not an environment, which invites women to shop for clothes in anything like the same way that they do normally. Rather it disrupts the ways of looking associated with women's clothing and directs the gaze in a very different way, away from the female body as a site of conspicuous consumption of fashion. Indeed I would suggest that indeed this environment serves to produce maternity wear as an incidental need, an inevitable need but nonetheless one much less important than the needs of the baby. The pregnant body therefore is not constructed as a legitimate site of consumption in the same way as the female body in womenswear space elsewhere on the high street. In complete contrast to the corporeal construction of the consumer in these contexts, where clothing consumption is produced as integral to female identities, here the pregnant femininity evoked is radically disruptive of this. It is almost as if the productive capacity of this body identifies it as being outside of legitimate consumption. This is literally mapped out in the shop space, for instance the section of maternity wear is dwarfed in size by the enormous amount of space given over to baby clothes, equipment and toys. For me this reinforces the traditional view that self-sacrifice is good – that good mothers go without in order to provide for their baby. So it could be argued that the very concept of Mothercare, along with its spatial organisation produces maternity wear (and mothers) in a particular way, setting it apart from women's clothing more generally and defining it as a functional garment and nothing more since the frivolity of fashion should not concern women who's baby's needs overshadow all else[39]:

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[38] Although it maybe that this is direction they may be moving towards. The Manchester city centre store had just had a single dressing room built in the maternity wear section in October 2000. The maternity wear manager I spoke to there felt that made them more self-contained as it meant women didn't have to trek across the shop to change amongst children. Trying clothes on whilst surrounded by children clearly contributes to the production of the image of maternity wear as baby centred rather than woman centred. The image produced is of mother rather than pregnant woman, the focus not on appearance or personal identity maintenance or continuity but on the metamorphosis into Mother.

[39] This can be seen to be reinforced by the fact that maternity wear sections commonly are situated adjacent to those containing the first items that people will come in for, such as prams, nursery equipment and so on. Presumably this is so if people don't come in specifically for maternity wear they will see it if they come in for any of the other things which people usually buy before baby is born and vice versa. It is usually situated as a leader off these first baby buys.

As for the maternity wear I nearly walked straight past it, hardly noticing it was there at all as the section ...is so miniscule and insignificant. In fact there are no clear boundaries between it and the neighbouring sections at all which gives the impression of the children's clothes and maternity wear melting into one another. Women's identities are literally subsumed into the unitary identity of Mother here. ... There is literally nothing here.... For me this suggests the varying levels of importance Mothercare lend to women's clothing during pregnancy and items for children and babies. The tiny amount of maternity wear in comparison to everything else and the dreadful way in which it is displayed, the lack of coherence, full range and so on suggests that it is a need to be met certainly but in a functional sense only. We all need clothes and certainly the pregnant body should be modestly covered but the frivolity of fashion has no place here and spending any more than the minimum is unnecessary. Besides the sea of items to fulfil your baby's needs fairly swamp your own, they are greater by far and a good mother should concern herself and commit her finances to those. (Northampton research diary, November 28th 2000)

The display of the maternity clothing further contributes to the disruption of the ways of looking associated with women's clothes shopping more generally. With maternity sections often appearing (even early in the morning) like an end of season sale at the end of a busy Saturday, with no apparent stock continuity, coherence, organisation or inclination to use display to sell the items. The implied value attached to these products is very low indeed particularly when compared to the often immaculate displays of nursery items and baby clothes for example. By extension therefore whilst this might be seen to appeal to the 'bargain' mentality of the English consumer and the undeniable priority given to thrift in many women's maternity wear consumption, this three dimensional communication of (cultural) brand values can be seen to devalue the pregnant body itself in all but its maternal role (to which the thrift element of consumption is directly linked), particularly as items linked specifically to the biological function of the pregnant body such as feeding bras and so on are often well stocked and tidily displayed. As such Mothercare shop spaces would seem to communicate particular expectations for pregnant bodies as consumers, positively encouraging practices such as breast-feeding which are in line with traditional maternal identities whilst distancing pregnant women from clothes shopping and therefore consumption practices of womenswear more generally. Women are encouraged, even directed - through the construction of Mothercare retail space - to consume clothing during pregnancy in a way quite removed from pre-pregnant clothing consumption practices. Their bodies are not central to this sartorial shopping rather their unborn child is:

There are literally three stands of clothes and there is no coherence to the way the clothes are displayed on them. Different styles are mixed together, there is no run of the same style in a number of sizes for example. To borrow a phrase from one of my respondents, Tina, it's a real 'jimble jamble' and really does have the look of a charity shop about it. To find anything you wanted

would be difficult, you would have to look through the entire lot... It would be the luck of the draw, sort of jumble sale type shopping rather than anything else ... Further, despite almost everyone I have talked to involved at whatever level with retailing maternity wear telling me that it has no 'hanging appeal' many of the clothes were hung in such a way here as to make them seem worse! Many of the leggings and jogging trousers for example were folded up and then hung up on grabber hangers highlighting the functional supermarket type approach. I certainly can't imagine walking into another women's clothes shop and finding items hung up in this way.

Interestingly in complete contrast to the organisation of the outer wear garments there is a whole bank of maternity bras hung up in a huge mosaic on the wall. The contrast is enormous as there are so many in comparison to the other clothing available - the choice seemingly so great, the provision seemingly so comprehensive - and in with respect to the organisation - the bras are hung in regimented rows and columns. It gives the impression that Mothercare has got it together in relation to maternity and feeding bras, that functional, bodily needs are well catered for. (Northampton research diary, November 28th 2000)

Whilst these are not the design vocabularies identified by Nixon, who described how the use of particular building materials and so on were central to the construction of brand and therefore consumer identities for example (see particularly, 1996). I would argue that the elements of the physical construction of shop spaces such as those I have described are equally important in communicating branded values as those strategically employed by retail designers. Indeed the material landscape can be seen to map out values and associated expectations for the pregnant body which extend beyond dress codes and practices of consumption, even directing their movement and so on, their ways of being:

Something I noticed today which I didn't last time was the use of space surrounding the maternity wear section. I did note last time about the fact that the maternity wear section was so ill defined and insignificant that it seems to melt into the neighbouring sections. Today it seemed to be more so as there are a selection of playpens, which actually jut out into the maternity section floor space. I actually wondered, when I saw them if anyone had ever tripped over them. You do not reasonably expect to have to step over children's play equipment whilst clothes shopping! Or perhaps this is me thinking as a selfish, independent childless woman, Mother is perhaps used to stepping over toys and negotiating her time, shopping and all the rest around baby. Mother is perhaps used to having no space of her own. This provides yet another reminder within the space of the maternity wear section itself that there are greater expenses to be borne for ones child.

The space of the maternity wear section was also invaded by children in another sense. There is a mechanical train ride thingy there too. When I arrived there today a woman was supervising her two young children on it. It is one of those noisy, all singing all dancing affairs complete with flashing lights, a Thomas The Tank Engine one I think if I have successfully identified the tune blaring across the shop. So not only is the floor space of the maternity section invaded by playpens, the section itself is a child's play area. The sound-scape and the physical space dominated by children. (Northampton research diary, December 7th 2000)

The specific representations of pregnant femininity produced by retail and garment design in Mothercare stores is unambiguous and clearly focused on Mother. The design of Mothercare retail space clearly identifies Mother's proper consumption focus as being directed away from herself. Here Mother is constructed as self-sacrificing, child-centred, and only incidentally distracted by her own sartorial requirements. Indeed these are functional needs for basic casual garments since this maternal femininity is spatially defined also by the design of retail space. For example, the spilling of children's amusements and equipment into maternity sections evokes the realm of the domestic, which is highlighted as the appropriate socio-spatial context for mother by the (lack of) styles of clothing retailed and the catalogue images used. To a large extent therefore I would argue that the design of Mothercare retail space is child focused in the extreme, the brand values clearly being articulated in relation to traditional ideas of motherhood and child rearing. Integral to the version of pregnant femininity represented here are not just cultural values associated with how the pregnant body should properly be worn but also how it conducts itself more generally. Being a good mother, it is inferred, begins at the earliest stage of pregnancy and even the ways in which clothing is consumed during pregnancy is important in this respect. This infers not only the aesthetic cultural values surrounding mother's dress and indeed her self-sacrifice and thrifty consumption, but indeed also the associated activities the maternal body is expected to undertake.

Small Independent Retailers: Corporeo-Spatial Production

Whilst differing greatly from Mothercare in many respects it is indeed the case that small independents such as Mums & Co and Belly Bumpers also contain within their retail spaces elements which reflect similar pregnant femininities. For example Mums & Co have a play pen area in one corner of the shop which is well stocked with toys and is integral to the design of the shop space, being bordered by a wooden fence divider painted in the same green colour wash as other elements of the clothing display units. Indeed to a certain extent these spaces have been more child centred, certainly child dominated than even Mothercare since because of child-care issues both retail spaces often have owner's children present. For example though they are now at nursery, when Mums & Co was first established Ari and Sarah both had their children with them on a day-to-day basis. Although the shop has a 'back stage' space within which the children spent most of their time clearly the necessity for supervision meant they were present in the front stage shop space when customers were present. This presented some problems, particularly for Ari who felt that her son at times prevented her from performing the professional identity she

sought since she was simultaneously performing 'Mummy' alongside this. I would suggest however that not only did the children's presence create tensions in these women's personal identity performances it also significantly influenced the identity of the space itself and therefore the brand image created through it. Whilst this is not strictly a 'design' issue I feel it is important to note it since it demonstrates the embodied nature of space and indeed its fluidity:

> *I was aware of how different the shop is without Jacob today... The difference is tangible and it was highlighted this afternoon when Sarah came in with the twins. Although they spent all afternoon in the back room - the backstage space their chatter and particularly crying did penetrate into the front stage space of the shop. ... To a certain extent this doesn't disturb the shop identity given that they sell children's clothes as well as maternity wear and this kind of noise is of course second nature to most of the people who come into this space if not from direct personal experience of existing children but in anticipation of the child to come ... However... it adds to the complexity of the identity represented through the space and highlights the fluidity of the identity performance depending on who is in that space and what sounds are present also. I would suggest that the children's presence, either physically in the shop space itself or through sound leakage from the backstage space influences the identity of the shop and clothes in different ways for different people. For instance the woman who came in this afternoon who already has a daughter the same age as Jacob will undoubtedly read ... the twins crying differently perhaps as an everyday, inevitable sound indeed she may even not particularly notice it as it is such a normal sound for her to hear. However a woman who is pregnant for the first time may notice it in a different way since this is not a sound she associates with clothes shopping yet or her everyday life. ... Of course there are other possibilities, a mother may be more honed into children's cries and so hear the sounds in a more sophisticated way, discerning what kind of cry it is (hungry, tired, attention seeking and so on) whereas I as a member of the uninitiated .. hear it as just that, a child's cry, and therefore each will interpret .. it differently in respect to the spatial construction of the shops identity. The point is of course that the fluidity of this identity is as much to do with the customers readings which are of course contingent on their backgrounds .. and so on as on how the space is physically, symbolically, deliberately constructed and peopled by Ari and Sarah themselves. (Mums & Co research diary, August 22nd 2000)*

Interestingly this highlights the fluidity of the space itself depending greatly on who occupies it at any given time and specifically on how those present decode, interpret and experience it. This would seem to add a corporeal layer to Nixon's concept of spaces of representation, suggesting that cultural meaning and specifically versions of pregnant femininity are fixed to clothing not only through the design of the

material environment. The construction of space and therefore inferred identities are contingent upon the corporealities of those present also.

Although the presence of children's toys and owner's children can be seen to align these retail spaces with Mothercare and traditional femininities, evoking the consumer as Mother with all this entails with regards consumption practices. I would argue that the design and composition of these spaces also actively challenge such monolithic identity constructions. Indeed they can also be seen to suggest new pregnant femininities rather than merely re-inscribing traditional ones. Coupled with other elements of design which seek to construct the space as boutique like - constructing the clothing as comparable to mainstream womenswear rather than functional garments and women as clothing consumers in their own right - the presence of children can be seen to highlight the importance of maintaining some sense of self in relation to ones role as mother rather than self being subsumed by any monolithic maternal identity. The children's presence in these particular spaces can be seen to actively construct new pregnant femininities where conspicuous personalised consumption is not incompatible with good mothering for example. Indeed the presence of owner's children in particular evokes non-domestic maternal identities and explicitly associates entrepreneurial identities with mother, clearly challenging traditional discourses. This is particularly poignant during times when the owners themselves have been embodied as pregnant as this corporeality perhaps more than any other has been hegemonically constructed as irrational and so on and therefore out of place in public space and certainly incompatible with professional identities. These spaces can therefore be seen to be especially challenging since they also seem to evoke pregnant and maternal identities which do not rely on the mutual exclusivity of Mother and alternative personal identities such as a professional identity.

These corporeal aspects of the shop space, though clearly fluid and ephemeral help to fix particular meanings to the maternity wear sold here. The importance of shop space is to act as a three-dimensional representation of brand values and the bodies of those present, particularly the owners are crucial in this sense since effectively they are *the brand.* Other staff are also important in this respect, helping to fix meaning to the clothes through the specificities of their corporeality. Ari and Sarah of Mums & Co are particularly focused on this being very aware that the staff are an important aspect of their image building both in terms of the corporeality and also the way they themselves dress:

> *"Ari was talking today about going shopping to the Trafford Centre when the sales are on to buy some really trendy clothes. ... She says that she thinks it would be good for the shop if she looks trendy. This is very interesting as it shows an awareness of how her appearance (her embodiment and clothed identity), influence how people view the shop. Clearly she sees her embodiment / clothed identity as important to the image of the shop and perhaps by extension the clothes stocked in it ... Its almost as if her wearing clothes at the height of fashion will impart/transfer some kind of fashionability to a) shopping at Mums and Co; and b) the maternity wear they sell." (Mums & Co research diary, December 15th 1999)*

The corporeality of staff themselves is also important in this respect. When considering who they might enter into partnership with in order to open new shops, employ to manage them or indeed work odd days in their existing shop such factors are given a great deal of consideration. They are keen for those employed in front stage roles at Mums & Co to be knowledgeable about maternity wear itself, be sympathetic to the values upon which the business was founded and also to have a corporeal identity which reflects these. For example a particular individual in her early 50s with grey permed hair and a wardrobe largely from Marks and Spencer was dismissed out of hand as a prospective manager purely because her 'image' was not considered to be 'what they would be looking for' (Mums & Co research diary, August 30th 2000).

Material Spatial Production: Front and Back Stage Spaces

Whilst neither Ari and Sarah, nor Maria and Dennis have any professional knowledge or experience of retail design, both display an appreciation of the importance of the material construction of their shop spaces in building brand image, including as I have described the corporealities of staff and so on. This is particularly well demonstrated by the distinctions drawn between front and back stage spaces and the ways in which they are used differently in order to construct particular identities. For example at Mums & Co, the decision was made after only a few months of trading, and despite low stock levels, to relegate the 'dress agency' clothing to the back stage space of the shop. The 'dress agency' comprises items which are entering at least their second cycle of consumption, brought in by customers who receive half of the selling price, which is usually low. Whilst this is a service they continue to provide, therefore making good quality[40], affordable maternity wear available to all, the visual impact on the shop space was considered to be unacceptably compromising very early on:

> *"Sarah and Ari were discussing whether or not to bring the dress agency section back onto the shop floor after Christmas this afternoon. Sarah thinks that when the Christmas stock is taken off it will look very empty but Ari is not so keen and would really much rather it stayed in the back room ... [She feels that] the dress agency section spoils the colour - coded way in which the stock is organised and displayed on the shop floor as clearly there are many different, random clothes brought in by customers. I know that she is desperate for the shop not to look like a second hand shop or a 'jumble sale' and I think she feels the dress agency, although being a good service to customers and so on does tend to give that impression. Visually it does not evoke the kind of identity she wants for the shop. She wants it to look fashionable and (although the clothes are relatively cheap and they want them to stay that way) classy." (Mums & Co research diary, December 15th 2000)*

Displaying more unsightly, discontinuous lines in more 'backstage' spaces does indeed diminish their visual contamination of the main ranges, with which retailers would rather be identified. At Belly Bumpers a similar practice has emerged. Whilst

[40] They are very careful to take only items in excellent condition and reflecting recent seasons trends.

not having a 'dress agency' as such Maria and Dennis do tend to weed out single items of stock and as new collections come in move old stock from the main selling area to what I would describe as an in-between[41] space, between the backstage office and the front stage main shop floor. Here they have what they call their 'sale rail'. Items here are displayed with less care than on the main shop floor, which is seemingly justified given the 'sale rail' tag, yet the presentation of this space is still more important than the backstage space, which whilst only separated from the in-between space by a beaded curtain remains the most informal area of the shop. However even backstage space has significance in the construction of professional identities as Maria demonstrated shortly before the first visit of Carla C designer and head, Carla and Per, around four months after they opened:

> *"She has been talking about her unease at the state of it for a couple of weeks now, saying she needs to 'blitz it' and the reason it has become an urgent, pressing concern is that the husband and wife team behind Carla C are coming to visit them on Wednesday. They are coming to show them their autumn/winter collection and Maria is concerned about what their impression will be of them, what they will think when they see that room if its in the state its in at the moment. She is worried I think that if they saw [it as it is] they might think her unprofessional and wouldn't want her to stock their brand/label. She is concerned about her company image being tarnished by the state of this space and that this would cause Carla C to withdraw their offer to supply them." (Belly Bumpers research diary, March 12th 2001)*

Despite any professional knowledge of the importance of retail design these small independent retailers do have an appreciation of the importance of their spatial constructions to their brand image. And indeed Maria's concern about Carla and Per's impression of them as a company, based on their readings of the backstage space highlights an additional factor for these companies. The construction of spaces of representation is important not only for themselves as a brand but also those brands they stock. In this particular case the image of Belly Bumpers is important to Carla C as it will be pivotal to the image constructed for Carla C in this space. Equally the brands they stock and the values embedded in these may also influence those expressed in, and embodied by, the space.

Socio-Spatial Environment

With respect to the material design of these two shops it is interesting to note that despite their independence from one another there are several similarities between them. Both companies seek to rehabilitate maternity wear relative to the ways in which it is produced on the high street believing it to be a significant aspect of pregnant embodied experience. Since these small independent shops have, in common with many others, been founded and developed on the basis of personal embodied consumption experiences it is perhaps not surprising that there are

[41] I describe it as 'in between' since whilst not being backstage space as such customers themselves clearly perceive it differently from the rest of the shop frequently asking permission to go through and look.

Figure 5.9: Internal photograph of Mums & Co.

Figure 5.10: Internal photograph of Mums & Co.

Figure 5.11: Internal photograph of Belly Bumpers.

significant similarities in not only what we might term their brand values – such as the belief that women should be offered choice in maternity wear and have relative freedom in dress during pregnancy rather than being forced into a faceless 'uniform' because of lack of provision, and that dress is integral to the embodied experience of pregnancy - but also the material environment in which they are reflected. These retailers are well versed in the visual repertories of womenswear retailing in general and also those of maternity wear, which because of the 'placelessness' of the UK high street are almost identical the country over. Hence the similarities in their own productions which are largely a mirror of what they see to be lacking or wrong elsewhere within their frame of reference which is wider visual repertoires of womenswear retailing design. As I have previously mentioned however I would argue that there is more to the construction of spaces of representation than the physical décor itself and that further the characteristics of these spaces and the values constructed through them have implications beyond communicating brand values. Therefore whilst the similarities in visual repertoires are significant the key importance of these spaces I would suggest lies in their wider implications for the consumption of maternity wear (within them) in comparison to the high street.

The visual repertoires of these two small independents themselves are similar in several respects (see figures 5.9[42] – 5.11). For example Mums & Co has a light coloured laminate wood floor and Belly Bumpers a stripped wooden varnished floor. In this respect both are clearly drawing on a key design feature of clothing, specifically fashion retail design of recent years. Therefore, whilst for the most part these shops are vastly different to high street shops or other small independents – largely because of their lack of professionalism as I have previously described – the flooring acts as a strong visual link to other clothing retail sites. Mums & Co in particular also, through the use of colour washed wood in the construction of display units and such and also iconic Ikea motifs such as shaped mirrors (see figure 5.9) have built an image based on 'fashion' in a wider sense. The use of materials fashionable in interior design (and in this respect it is notable that Belly Bumpers have chrome fixtures and fittings and halogen inset ceiling lighting) works to construct a similar identity for the brand itself, the clothing sold here and also perhaps for the customers themselves.

The palette adopted in the interior décor is also broadly comparable comprising fresh, clean colours and with green being dominant in each (though the precise shades vary). Both shops therefore have a calm, airy feel, lending an unhurried ambience to the shopping context and perhaps a feeling of freshness and novelty to the clothing. Mums & Co accentuate this fresh, calm theme by often adding a large vase of fresh flowers. The calm greens and light airiness is in contrast to the frenetic activity of mainstream consumption sites. Indeed along with differences in the way these spaces are peopled, this characteristic makes for qualitatively different consumption experiences. Interestingly therefore whist aligning maternity wear more with fashion than is attempted on the high street these spaces construct maternity clothing consumption as distinct from shopping for fashion as it would ordinarily take place on the high street. The colours themselves do not stand alone in this clearly. Indeed green is the dominant colour in Mothercare retail design and yet the character of these spaces are very different, they are not spaces which encourage unhurried, careful, considered, self-indulgent consumption. However whilst for example shopping with children could never be described as

[42] Please note that the photographs of Mums & Co (figures, 5.9 and 5.10) were taken at a time when they still stocked childrenswear.

stress free it is likely to be easier in small independents in which toys are routinely provided and the one-to-one attention provided by staff means an extra pair of eyes and supervision when women are trying on therefore allowing extra freedoms during selection and purchase. The socio-spatial environment encourages clothing consumption in very different ways to Mothercare for example allowing women more opportunity to focus on themselves rather than any existing children they may have and also their unborn child in the absence of any consumer goods relating to their needs which may compete in importance with their own (and always win).

Whilst children may be present these are adult, *women-centred* spaces. For example, the sound-scapes reflect this with women choosing contemporary pop and soul music as back drops and conversations about the clothing, the way it looks, feels and wears dominating exchanges in addition to the omnipresent disbelief as to the state of provision elsewhere. These are spaces where women's needs are fore-grounded. They are also predominantly female spaces where men routinely feel out of place and staff unconsciously question a single man's presence. As such they are also exceptionally social spaces with retailers' friends often popping in for coffee and chat, but more than that the interaction between retailers and customers is highly significant and often takes very personalised forms. Further, customers often spend some time, on occasions literally hours, in these spaces. They are encouraged by the physical surroundings including the provision of seating for those accompanying them for example and the socio-spatial environment as a whole as I have described to take time considering their purchases. In addition whilst thrift is recognised as an important aspect of maternity consumption it is couched in terms of attempting to gain value for money by assuring the acquisition of appropriate, satisfactory well fitting garments.

While lacking any professional retail design knowledge and without any significant outside input in this direction both Mums & Co and Belly Bumpers have constructed spaces of representation which construct maternity wear in specific ways. These small independent retailers have succeeded in producing physical contexts through which maternity wear is reconstructed with respect to mainstream high street comparisons. But more importantly I have suggested that these spaces in their socio-spatial complexity actively challenge not just the construction of maternity wear itself in high street spaces but also values associated with the way it is consumed and therefore the pregnant body itself which has practical implications for ways of seeing, dressing and being this body.

In particular, in both Mums & Co and Belly Bumpers maternity wear is the priority product. Whilst both have experimented with small baby items or children's clothes these diversifications were relatively short lived and the core focus has become exclusive in both cases. In contrast to high street stores where small ranges are marginalized in unprofitable spaces here maternity wear is dominant and central. This in itself has the effect of legitimising maternity wear as a commodity in its own right worthy of single purpose shopping trips (since these shops are located away from central shopping centres). By extension therefore the pregnant body is constructed by these small independent retailers as being not only a legitimate consumer but being worthy of such personalised consumption, of spending time, money and effort on its sartorial needs, thereby inferring social value beyond its nurturing role. Furthermore the attitude and knowledge of the retailers themselves and the attention they afford their customers strengthens this production. Rather than pregnant women's dress being subordinated by the needs of her unborn child in these spaces she is prioritised as a clothing consumer in her own right.

5.4 Conclusion

Small independent retailers Mums & Co and Belly Bumpers through various practices of representation are successful in challenging hegemonic versions of pregnant femininity (usually equated to mother) and in offering up new, more complex, fluid and multiple identities in relation to their maternity wear. Through the design of clothing stocked assumptions about appropriate activities are broken down and along with the quality and design content of the garments greater flexibility is offered in the pregnant femininities performed. The display of clothing on mannequins, particularly in shop windows, shatters the invisibility of the pregnant body in primary retail sites and firmly locates it in public space more generally whilst also legitimating it as a site of consumption. Photographic images used by small independents rather than evoking traditional maternal imagery used by others which support more common self-sacrificial consumption patterns align maternity wear more closely with fashion iconographies. And the socio-spatial environment constructs new ways of seeing, dressing and being the pregnant body.

However whilst this may be so, the power of these challenges is questionable given the subverting factor of the lack of professionalism that defines these businesses. Problems arising directly from this significantly mute the potential of these challenges and dull the effectiveness of the various practices of representation. For example the lack of consistency of buying (particularly at Belly Bumpers) and poor standards of display (often arising directly from this lack of consistency) work to undermine some of the efforts of retail design. A lack of professional knowledge with respect to window dressing decreases their impact and therefore effectiveness. The production of glossy photographic images is undermined if the stock capacity is not there to back it up. And finally shop fitting is notoriously expensive and small businesses must inevitably cut corners, indeed Belly Bumpers opened with an unfinished shop floor, which has never been fully completed. In addition whilst shop interiors quickly look dated it is doubtful whether such companies with limited profits will be able to afford to update effectively and maintain (or improve) their image.

Indeed even if such problems could be overcome (and to some extent at Mums & Co in particular some are beginning to be resolved) the possibilities for such businesses with respect to their economic potential and their ability to affect social change on anything but a micro-scale are limited. Even linked through branding their challenge is muted by the hegemony of traditional discourses and the power of high street multiples. Interwoven economic and cultural factors, which shape maternity wear production and consumption, construct an uncertain future for these businesses. At the centre of this uncertainty lie crucial corporeal issues. Whilst there may indeed be a collective cry amongst pregnant women for better provision of maternity wear than the high street can muster this does not necessarily translate into a guaranteed market for the small businesswoman. As I have suggested through these past two chapters the processes of production and consumption are underwritten and constructed by a common set of cultural values which have the pregnant body as their core focus and therefore it is to this site that I now turn, to evaluate in detail how the way this body is lived shapes the maternity wear market arguing that the biggest obstacle to face Mums & Co and Belly Bumpers is not material construction of their socio-spatial contexts but the need for a wholesale re-imagining of the pregnant body in western culture.

Chapter 6: Destabilisation and Reconstitution of Sartorial Consumption Knowledge and Practice

6.1 Introduction

Despite the challenges to hegemonic productions of maternity wear provided by small independent retailers, for many women clothing consumption during pregnancy centres on mainstream, high street provision. Having mapped the landscape of provision and production in the previous two chapters I now argue that the specificities of this context have particular implications for the ways in which women consume clothing during pregnancy. It would appear that women's existing practices and knowledges of consumption are fundamentally destabilised during pregnancy, specifically as a result of the nature and organisation of high street provision and production. The following chapter analyses examples of these destabilisations and some of their implications for women's clothing consumption. It is argued that women are often unprepared for the degree of destabilisation and therefore the difficulty they will encounter in competently dressing their pregnant bodies, something which is exacerbated not only by the latency of maternity wear (and indeed the pregnant body) on the high street but also its absence from traditional sources of vestimentary competence such as the fashion press. Inevitably therefore, women experience particular consequences for their identity performance and sartorial certitude and employ strategies in order to negotiate not only the destabilisations of practice, knowledge and certitude but also a distinct pregnancy consumption discourse. Specifically this discourse defines pregnant women as 'mother-to-be' and crucially defines their bodies' as legitimate sites of consumption only under particular, self-sacrificial, need fulfilling conditions. Socially sanctioned clothing consumption during pregnancy therefore it is argued centres around thrift.

This chapter therefore addresses the distinctive form clothing consumption takes during pregnancy. I look firstly at the destabilisation women experience with respect to their pre-pregnant shopping geographies and related consumption practices and secondly at the difficulties encountered in renegotiating these due to a lack of sartorial certitude and knowledge from normative sources. Thirdly I consider examples of practices my research participants employed in order to negotiate such destabilisations, including developing 'personal strategies' to cope with impoverished provision and the disintegration of shopping geographies and practices; 'uniform strategies' to cope with deficits in certitude and anxiety about dressing the pregnant body appropriately; and 'sharing strategies' which are perhaps the most effective at negotiating the widest range of destabilisations of clothing consumption caused by pregnancy. The practice of circulating wardrobes of maternity wear (usually within friendship or familial networks), it is argued, allows women to negotiate not only the disintegration of shopping geographies by clearly removing the need to engage in so much first cycle consumption, but also crucially the deficits of knowledge and certitude since circulated items are constructed as 'safe' having been previously worn by another pregnant body. This too is important from a material culture perspective since these clothes, in a way similar to that suggested by Gregson *et al* (2000), retain traces of the prior owner – if only in terms of their biography – and therefore allow confirmation of a pregnant identity for those who subsequently wear them. Finally this strategy is often central to women's negotiation of the specific discourse of appropriate clothing consumption during pregnancy, which centres of maternal sacrifice and thrift. Whilst eluding to this central

paradigm of consumption throughout the chapter (since it is inherent in all the practices observed and discussed) I seek to examine it more closely in the final section.

6.2 Destabilisation of Sartorial Consumption Practices

When shopping for maternity wear it appears that existing sartorial consumption practices are almost totally destabilised for most women. Specifically these destabilisations can be seen to firstly involve geographies in relation to *where* to buy maternity wear, and perhaps more crucially, maternity wear that fulfils personal identity and style requirements. Pre-existing practices of consumption[43] developed in the context of a highly segmented womenswear market must be re-negotiated during pregnancy where in contrast the market is comparatively small and appears to be far more (though not entirely) mass marketed towards a singular (pregnant) woman.

On a fundamental level it is clear that women lack even basic knowledges with regards to *where* to buy maternity wear and *how* to satisfy their changing clothing needs. Maternity wear knowledges are assumed to be specialist knowledges applicable to and appropriate only for those embodied as 'pregnant[44]'. Indeed, it is often not until women experience embodied 'need' that the necessity of such specific knowledges is appreciated. It is at this point, often literally at the point when maternity wear becomes a material *necessity*, that the destabilising influence of the pregnant body on existing, personalised shopping geographies and practices first becomes apparent. For example as one of my interviewees Clare described, she and her Mum went looking for maternity wear quite early on in her pregnancy (something which is relatively unusual in itself, many women putting it off until the last possible moment). They went, not with any specific knowledge or cartographies with respect to where they might be able to buy it (beyond Mothercare that is) but rather just notional thoughts about which brands might accommodate the pregnant body. As Clare noted, their estimations proved to be wildly optimistic:

> "Mum and I went to Milton Keynes and we tried to find, very early on in my pregnancy, I was only about two, three months, and we went round all the shops that we thought would have maternity wear, or went in and asked have you got it and there were so many that said no. It was very few of them that said yes. And Next said yes but we only do it through our catalogue, Dorothy Perkins said yes and I thought 'god is that really it hanging up there' [laugh]. Marks and Spencer said no, you can one, one sort of five piece through their catalogue and I think that was it." (Clare, early thirties, married, mother of one, Northampton)

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[43] It must be noted that though I discuss the destabilisation of consumption practices here I do not intend to reduce these to where and how one shops for clothing. The practices I discuss here are specifically those which relate to this narrow aspect of consumption – since it is perhaps these which first alert most women to the complex and differential nature of this particular form of consumption. I shall go on to discuss wider practices of consumption later in the chapter.

[44] And as I shall discuss later this is a specific form of embodiment, not all pregnant bodies being identified as such.

This almost trial and error approach was quite an eye opener for Clare and for her was almost the only way of gaining the necessary new knowledge since more familiar means were less helpful:

> V: ...could [you] tell me what you did for maternity wear.
> C: Struggled! [Both laugh]
> V: In a word! [Both laugh]
> C: It wasn't very easy because there no real advertising um for maternity wear and it was a case of speaking to people who had been pregnant, finding out where they'd got things from and the obvious one is Mothercare cos that shouts out at you whatever." (Clare, early thirties, married, mother of one, Northampton)

Drawing something of a blank through practical means seems to be quite common. And although for Clare this seems to have been quite disorienting and 'shocking' finding that for example John Lewis had nothing, it didn't have quite the acute destabilising effect it can have on others. Clare at least set out to follow different cartographies from the first whereas others perhaps do not anticipate the need to do so whilst also retaining a desire to maintain threads of continuity with their pre-pregnant clothed identity. As Ari (of Mums & Co) explains:

> A: It was awful actually [laugh] really awful which is one of the reasons why we're doing what we're doing, because it was just, I couldn't find anything I liked, couldn't find anything that was my style. You know when you're not pregnant you can choose which shops you go to and you have your own style and those are the shops you buy from and when you're pregnant that goes out the window, you buy what's there and that I found really hard.
> S: That's what that customer was just saying
> A: Yeah she was saying the same thing, cos she doesn't want to change her style and she shouldn't have to. But one of the sad facts of maternity wear is that you do really. You have to go with the nearest thing you can find to what you would normally wear ..." (Ari mid-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford)

To a much greater extent than womenswear more generally, which remains "designed, marketed and mediated for different market segments rather than for a mass market of women" (Hollows, 2000, p.152), maternity wear appears to be constructed and produced for a monolithic pregnant woman. As I have argued, though there is some differentiation between brands there is none of the (arguably illusory (see for example Crewe and Forster, 1993)) spectrum of choice available on the high street in the womenswear market. Therefore women whose consumption knowledges and practices have been acquired and developed in this context, whose shopping geographies and related brand dependent consumption have a strong relationship with their social identity may find such practices (and therefore arguably also their identity) destabilised by a market seemingly focused on a singular, for the most part undifferentiated consumer – 'mother-to-be'. For someone in this position the shock of finding that not only do they lack the basic knowledges with respect to where to buy maternity wear but also that what little they can locate is completely at odds with their normal personalised ideas about style (or other priorities in relation to clothing consumption for that matter such as price for example) can be quite

overwhelming. This can be a particular problem too if, unlike Clare, this awareness of the radical destabilisation of existing knowledges is not discovered until there is a real embodied need:

> S: ...you need it very suddenly
> A: It comes on really suddenly, suddenly you find yourself pregnant and you think 'I can't get into my clothes any more' and its actually quite a shock when you, you put on your jeans that fitted you yesterday and today you put them on and they don't fit, so you go and you find something else and that doesn't fit either so you think 'I'm going to have to go and buy something to wear'.
> S: And you expect to be able to buy something
> A: Yeah you get in your car and drive into Leeds which is exactly what I did and you think .. 'where do I go?' .. So you go into Mothercare and come out again and think 'my goodness me!' [laugh] 'I'm never going in there again'. And then you may remember that oh yeah Dorothy Perkins do it cos they've got dolls in the window
> V: And because you've stumbled in there by accident and put it back and though 'oh no!'
> A: Yeah. So you go there and you think '25 quid for a pair of black bootlegs, they're only 20 quid in the normal section!' and you think 'well O.K. I'll go and have a look around' and then you look around and you think 'oh' so you go and have a cry [laugh]. And you still haven't got anything to wear [laugh] unless you go home and say [to your husband] 'can I borrow that shirt please!' [laughing] 'what size are your jeans!'(Ari (mother of 1) and Sarah (first pregnancy), both mid-twenties, married and from Bradford)

That the very basic geographical knowledges required to clothe the pregnant body in maternity wear at all - let alone in any relationship of continuity with pre-pregnant identities - are generally lacking amongst women is borne out by the fact that so few of the women I interviewed seem to have ventured beyond the main high street providers. Whilst most report having knowledge of Mothercare and Dorothy Perkins, and to a certain extent Next Directory (even if they didn't buy there), much fewer mention others such as C&A (who did carry some before their demise), H&M and M&S (although interestingly most expected them to carry a range). Lack of knowledge of the latter two is perhaps not surprising given that at the time of interview the emergence of their ranges on anything like a country wide scale was very recent, but it is perhaps more surprising that few of the women I spoke to actually did buy through or indeed even know of the various mail order companies who retail maternity wear. For many then their knowledge of maternity wear can be described as narrow at best. For some this narrow shopping geography may be the result of apathy as described by Meg and Sharen when discussing small independent retailers such as Mums & Co where the interview took place:

> S: [Cough] I suppose again its like what we were saying about what *value* you put on how you look during your [pregnancy].... someone who put more value on it would probably make the effort to come out to a shop like this, whereas you see I wouldn't
> M: I would probably come here but I wouldn't bother with finding out, I mean unless somebody put a catalogue through my door I probably wouldn't

make the effort. (Meg (fourth pregnancy, mother of 2) and Sharen (third pregnancy, mother of 2), both mid- to late-thirties, married and from Bradford)

I would suggest that this is not an uncommon approach, given the hegemonic discourse reinforced by the specialist press covering pregnancy, birth and parenting issues, which consistently devalues maternity wear in relation to more rational concerns about the health of mother and baby and the (consumption) needs of the child. Any consumption entered into by women in this context then is cast as legitimate only if for the fulfilment of material need or for the direct benefit of the child itself. Such cultural codes do seem to frame women's maternity wear consumption and I would suggest may be responsible for such feelings of apathy, devaluation of shopping knowledges and a sense of making do being the most appropriate form of consumption during pregnancy. However whilst this might be the case for some, in addition to the fact that there are far more limited geographies of shopping to be mapped in relation to maternity wear than womenswear in general, it is clear that women do experience destabilisation of their pre-existing shopping geographies[45] and associated consumption practices and that new ones must be learnt, based not on specific lifestyle identity groups, but rather on the monolithic category of pregnant woman. Women therefore must not only negotiate their lack of knowledge with regards to knowing where to buy maternity wear but also negotiate their diminished ability to dress according to their own identity. This is not only experienced in relation to mapping shopping geographies but also in relation to the embodied experience of these geographies, in terms of the experiences of the spaces themselves:

V: so ... what is your overall impression of maternity wear? On the whole.

T: I'm not that impressed really. I've seen bits, a few bits and pieces that I've liked but I just, I don't think there's enough of it, I don't think the stuff's available really ... you know in specific shops in specific corners um ... and you're kind of it and its kind of sort of ... But I did feel the first time I went to look in a maternity section I felt a bit weird cos I thought I'm not showing very much and people are going to think 'what's she doing over there?' um. And I just think, you know I don't think what I've seen, from what I've seen it just seems to be for older Mum's not ... its a bit sort of frumpy. (Tina, mid-twenties, married, first pregnancy, Coventry)

For Tina, a 24 year old primary school teacher, the disruption of her shopping geographies in terms of where to find maternity wear on a very basic level and also in relation to her own identity is narrated here in an explicitly spatial sense. She found it only to be available in specific shops in specific corners, 'maternity wear spaces', not commanding an obvious presence on the high street but rather being tucked away in certain 'corners', and as such it was, for Tina, not widely available. The spatial organisation of retail spaces by and large afford maternity wear ranges the minimum square footage of shop floor and therefore can be seen to compound the lack of geographical knowledge that women have in relation to maternity wear. Further the shopping geography Tina had managed to develop for maternity wear led

[45] And this is in terms not only of the knowledges themselves but also in the appropriateness of such knowledges at all, the legitimacy of the pregnant body as a site of consumption.

her to restricted ranges of maternity wear which she decoded as being for 'the older mother'[46] being as she thought 'sort of frumpy' and therefore not reflective of her own identity and certainly not suitable for flawless assimilation into her own regimes of style and dress. Tina's consumption practice was therefore marked by not only diminished geographical shopping knowledges which limited her ability to find maternity wear at all but in addition the spaces in which she did encounter it further destabilised her practices of consumption because of their representation of different identities (other than her own) and also their deviation from the more familiar construction of high street womenswear retail spaces. As I have suggested women's' consumption knowledges are built up in the context of a highly segmented and specialised market where different brands are purportedly tailored to particular lifestyles and identities. These are communicated at least in part through retail spaces as I have discussed (see also Nixon, 1992; 1996; 1997). For Tina for example occupying spaces where the clothes were actively decoded by her as being for the 'older mother[47]' (i.e. not herself) and crucially when not visually discernibly pregnant provoked feelings of being out of place. This kind of shopping space was alien to her, not comparable at all with that mapped by her existing shopping geographies. For example as she says of Mothercare:

> T: The one in Coventry I don't know if you've ever been in there is *absolutely dreadful*. Its all baby stuff, its all baby clothes and stuff and there's like about you know one hanger this long [indicating length with span of arms] with like maternity clothes on which is a real jimble-jamble its not got lots of like the same styles in sizes or I mean you know whatever.. You know it's all just a big miss match of stuff all hung up.
> V: And was it right at the back in a corner
> T: *Yeah* it was like you know it was like walking into a charity shop with a big you know when you walk into a charity shop its all different clothes all in a big row it was like that and I thought 'oh that's a bit weird'. (Tina, mid-twenties, married, first pregnancy, Coventry, emphasis in original speech)

Tina's consumption practice was therefore destabilised on a number of levels. Firstly, in finding appropriate clothing not available enough, not only absent from the shops she ordinarily would have visited but also generally latent and concealed in 'certain corners', she found she had to do a lot more work in order to competently dress her changing body and actively renegotiate her shopping geographies. Secondly, her embodied experience of shopping was qualitatively different and indeed wholly destabilised. From feeling 'in place' in the retail spaces frequented, constructed as such by the correspondence between lifestyle and bodily identity and that represented spatially, Tina talks about how the composition of maternity wear retail spaces and the identity she perceived to be embedded within the clothing itself destabilised her consumption practice. Such spaces were for her 'a bit weird' and during the early portion of her pregnancy she felt doubly 'out of place' since not only were these spaces selling clothing for 'the older mother' but also pregnant women – 'mothers to be' – and at this stage her body and identity defined her as neither.

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[46] This is something many of the younger women I have spoken to have commented in relation to high street offerings (for example Natriece, Tracey and others)

[47] It is significant perhaps that she decodes these clothes as being for the 'older *mother*' perhaps at this point not yet seeing herself as a 'mother' as embodied not as obviously pregnant, but rather the 'in between pregnant body'.

The destabilisation of shopping geographies and associated consumption practices can therefore be seen to have a number of consequences for women's identities as these are expressed through clothing (and indeed the *consumption* of clothing). Firstly, I have noted the disintegration of shopping geographies and difficulties in mapping new ones, which enable the consumption of clothing that adequately reflects and embodies personal identity. This is significant not just from the perspective of being unable to source satisfactory clothing and therefore having 'nothing to wear' – which requires negotiation of wider consumption practices (as I shall discuss later) – but also with respect to the relationship between shopping context and identity (Miller *et al*, 1998). To the extent that the places (and in this context I mean specific retailers rather than shopping centres) people shop in contribute to a sense of identity the destabilisation of shopping geographies is highly significant. Women are unable to map their identities in the same ways as pre-pregnancy in relation to *where* they shop any more than *what* they wear. Clearly many find it difficult to identify either their pre-pregnant or pregnant selves with the shopping sites they are forced into, and I would argue that this is another way in which the pregnant consumer is homogenised into a singular figure through high street provisioning. Secondly, particularly during early pregnancy when embodied as not obviously pregnant but rather 'in between' shopping practice reaffirms this 'in between-ness' – the sense of being neither pre-pregnant self nor indeed 'pregnant'. At the same time as women are forced out of familiar shopping contexts with which they identify and into ones which they don't – not only because of stylistic reasons but also for example because, as the 'in between pregnant body' at the level of their body they can feel 'out of place' as Tina describes – they are unable to affirm their pregnant identity because of the limited provisioning of, their lack of knowledge about, and indeed the material design of maternity wear. Layne (2000) shows clearly the importance of material commodities in affirming bereaved parents' identities, items having 'belonged' to dead babies tangibly constructing them as having been 'real'. In the same vein maternity wear can function to affirm a woman as 'pregnant' and this is particularly significant when the body itself does not manifest this itself (either through looking or feeling pregnant for example). However given the lack of provisioning and particularly women's lack of knowledge with respect to where to shop for the limited amount available such affirmation is itself difficult to obtain. Further, as I shall discuss in more depth later, the material design of much maternity wear itself contributes to the construction of the early and 'in between' pregnant bodies as not pregnant since it rarely fits these bodies satisfactorily. Therefore shopping for maternity wear can be seen to actively construct women, in the early stages of their pregnancies as neither 'self' nor 'pregnant'.

However I would argue that there is a significant aspect of shopping practice which can be seen to actively construct maternal identities, and this is with respect not so much to *what* one buys, or even *where*[48] one buys it but rather *how* one shops. The destabilisation of pre-pregnancy shopping geographies and practices and the difficulties experienced in constructing comparable alternatives can be seen to

[48] Although this is also important for example with respect to where people do not shop for example. Even those of my interviewees who knew of and liked for example Formes maternity wear (and those who knew of it invariably expressed the opinion that here was one place you could obtain genuinely desirable maternity wear) did not shop there. *Universally amongst these women the clothes were* considered to be far too expensive, to shop here would have been inappropriate because of the high cost of the goods. This shop did not therefore fit into the discourse of appropriate consumption for 'mother-to-be' and so was avoided.

actively construct pregnant women as consumers in significantly different ways to non- (and specifically, never-) pregnant women. Whilst Miller (1998) and indeed Miller *et al* (1998) argue that little shopping can be see to be "centred upon hedonism and materialism" (Miller, 1998, p.66) and that most mundane shopping is directed towards 'others' (Miller, 1998), I would suggest that shopping for (and indeed consuming) maternity wear can be seen to be a transitionary phase where many women become 'mother' through their shopping and consumption practices by explicitly directing this primarily away from self and towards the unborn child (and family). The prevalence of 'thrift' within women's consumption practices is indicative of this. This is represented as the most appropriate form of consumption for 'mother-to-be' within retail spaces as I have previously noted, and indeed, is further affirmed by the lack of provisioning and so on of maternity wear on the high street which forces women to suspend their pre-pregnant forms of clothing consumption.

During pregnancy therefore many women find their practices of clothing consumption destabilised in a number of ways. From the fundamental level of not knowing where to look for maternity wear, and being unable to find appropriate clothing through to the embodied experience of shopping these destabilisations are felt more acutely when women lack the knowledge with which to successfully renegotiate their practice. For many who put off such consumption until it presents itself as a material necessity this can be seen as a significant problem, particularly as the acquisition of such knowledge is not nearly as straightforward as with other varieties of womenswear and fashion.

6.3 Destabilisation of Sartorial Consumption Knowledges

As for example Clarke and Miller (2002, p.193) have noted, feelings of 'anxiety and embarrassment' are central to many women's relationship to their clothing. As such, anxiety about and the need for certitude in relation to appropriate dress can be seen to structure women's everyday clothing consumption practices. This I would argue is particularly significant with respect to women's clothing consumption during pregnancy – which I shall come to conceptualise as a series of coping strategies – since traditional sources of institutional and social certitude on which women ordinarily draw have little to say about and therefore offer scant support to the pregnant body. Faced with the destabilisation of shopping geographies and practice women often find it difficult to map new ones, particularly in relation to *what* to buy and subsequently wear given the lack of knowledge they possess, the debasement of traditional sources of certitude and therefore the increase in fashion anxiety they feel. In particular I focus here on the lack of support provided by institutional sources such as the fashion press and social sources such as other women, and using an example of one of my interviewees I describe the implications the destabilisations of shopping and sartorial knowledges can have for women's clothing consumption, particularly their feelings of competency in relation to dressing their pregnant bodies.

6.3.1 Magazine Media As Knowledge Disseminators

> "Nothing, perhaps, more directly depends on early learning, especially the learning which takes place without any express intention to teach, than the

> dispositions and knowledge that are invested in clothing, furnishing and cooking or more precisely, in the way clothes, furniture and food are bought" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.78 quoted in Clarke, 1998, p.73).

Much has been written on the perceived bombardment of 'women' with ideal forms of feminine embodiment from seemingly all corners of the media. Whilst this saturation of the visual with images of perfect femininity may be variously interpreted as damaging to women, encouraging docility and the reproduction of particular social relations within which they remain subordinate or, offering up a norm to be parodied and challenged, it has been argued that under any interpretation such representations are internalised as informative media disseminating fashion, communicating sartorial codes and literally educating women in how to achieve certain 'looks'. This is not to suggest that women unquestioningly internalise representations, passively undertaking to recreate what they see, but media images are undeniably important in developing vestimentary competences in relation to composing social bodies and allaying fashion anxiety.

> "...most women's magazines, like cinema and novels, are crucial arenas for educating women in what and where to buy clothing and how to use and transform these commodities into a particular look (Winship, 1987, p.48)" (Hollows, 2000, p.153)

The destabilization of women's sartorial consumption practices in terms of where and how they shop during pregnancy can be seen to be further compounded for example therefore by the magazine media. Traditionally a source of certitude construction, the fashion press appears to abandon women for the duration of their pregnancies and further the particular coverage given by specialist pregnancy and birth magazines contributes little to sartorial knowledges. Indeed, the absence of the pregnant body and, in particular, maternity wear from traditional sources of sartorial certitude can be seen to have important implications for women in terms of the development of sartorial knowledges and therefore how they dress their pregnant bodies.

Whilst it is true to say that certain sections of the magazine media, specifically the celebrity watchers *OK* and *Hello!* Have published seemingly countless images of pregnant celebrities finely dressed in beautiful clothes over recent years, this is largely an anomaly. By and large the pregnant body remains absent from the very media deemed so important in the dissemination of consumption and sartorial knowledges (for example women's magazines such as *Vogue*). Indeed, despite the variety of celebrity women who appear to be queuing up to display their pregnant bodies through dress (in magazines such as *OK* and *Hello!*) – something which could be seen as contributing to positive new sartorial codes, new ways of wearing the pregnant body – in the main these features withhold the most important information, that is where to buy the clothes pictured. Whereas in other cases it appears to be common to note the designer and origin of the clothes celebrities are pictured wearing, this is far less common with those who are pregnant, denying the women constituting the audience the vital knowledges necessary to take on such vestimentary regimes themselves (should they wish or be able to do so)[49].

[49] Rather than acting as disseminators of positive fashion advice for (pregnant) women then these publications can be seen more as purveyors of cultural codes constructing a dualism between celebrity pregnant bodies and others, such that the clothing regimes adopted by the celebrities in these glossy

In other portions of the visual media too, where consumption knowledges and sartorial competences are developed, little information is to be found. Indeed, the pregnant body is all but absent, lending credence to the discourse that the pregnant body is not an appropriate social body and incongruent with fashion. The major fashion and women's magazines have a particular blind spot in relation to this form of embodiment, perhaps unsurprisingly given the antithesis it provides in relation to the idealised (slim, toned, flat stomached) female body otherwise dominating their pages. Over the past few years I have come across only a handful of articles concerned with 'maternity wear' in such publications none of which actually deal positively with specialist maternity wear, rather suggesting women buy ordinary clothes in larger sizes (see for example: Lang, in *Elle*, March 1998; Clark, in *Marie Claire*, October 1999). Ironically, although this may be seen as at least providing some consumption knowledge for many women such advice rings rather hollow since they find the fit of such clothing wholly unsatisfactory. As such this tiny morsel of information can itself be seen as being entirely concerned with the surface aspects of 'fashion' rather than its material encounter with the body itself. What is just as important to women are the techniques and practices involved with dressing and wearing the pregnant body. In such a context pregnancy and birth magazines are perhaps the only source of serious sartorial and consumption knowledges women are likely to be exposed to since the cinema and television are comparable to fashion magazines in terms of coverage. The absence of the pregnant body in such media was summed up for me by a recent series of 'Frasier' (shown on Channel 4) where the actress Jane Leeves' pregnancy, (whose character Daphne was not pregnant at the time), was written into the storyline as an uncontrollable weight problem for which she needed professional treatment at a health spa. She returned, flat stomached and lean as ever, presumably after the real life birth of her baby, apparently cured of her addiction of food (or should that be deviation from her idealised female embodiment?). Considered fat and fundamentally unattractive therefore the pregnant body remains largely absent from both cinema and TV screens with the odd exceptions of pregnant celebrities (which may not be considered to bear much relation to ordinary women's pregnant bodies), or 'mother figures' (or indeed anti-mother figures) in soap operas. As Church Gibson suggests in relation to images of old age in film, television and newspapers "representation often resembles caricature" (2000, p.87), thus hardly constituting a backdrop against which highly developed vestimentary competencies are likely to be awakened.

Pregnancy and birth magazines may therefore be seen as one of the only sources of knowledge for women with respect to dressing their pregnant bodies. Though even these charge maternity wear with variously low levels of priority in relation to far more serious concerns of health and birth issues and baby related consumption for example. The volume of coverage given over to clothing the pregnant body is only a fraction of that devoted to other issues.

That these magazines are perhaps the mainstay of knowledge dissemination in any practical sense - carrying adverts for maternity wear retailers both mail order and small independent as well as small scale fashion shoots using high street and major mail order clothes as well as larger sized ordinary women's wear – suggests a major difference between this consumption and that of other womenswear. Only the specialist media has any kind of real practical advice (and even this is limited) suggesting that consumption knowledge of this kind is completely removed from any

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images remain culturally and practically off limits for other women. Different codes of appropriate dress and different compositions of socially appropriate pregnant bodies apply to each set of bodies.

ideas of fashion and its associated codes and competences and further is reserved only for pregnant women themselves. In addition it associates it with the more important functional knowledges disseminated in these publications, about the practicalities of pregnancy, birth and parenting rather than the leisure and pleasure discourses ordinarily represented in relation to womenswear and fashion in particular.

I would argue that there are two main reasons for the absence of the pregnant body from traditional sources of sartorial certitude. Firstly, as I shall explore in more depth in the following chapter, the pregnant body is culturally constructed as the antithesis of fashion and therefore does not fit into such representational contexts. Secondly, discourses of appropriate (clothing) consumption in relation to the pregnant body are very different to those mapped onto those addressed by the fashion media. In the context of Miller (1998) and Miller *et al's* (1998) theory that most shopping is directed towards an other with whom the subject has a relationship of love (Miller, 1998) a fundamental opposition becomes apparent. The hegemonic gaze falling on the ideal forms of feminine embodiment represented in the fashion press is heterosexual and male. This body is composed for his pleasure. The form of appropriate consumption implicit in such representation is the continual improvement (Clarke and Miller, 2002) of women's bodies through the consumption of specific products in order to more closely embody the ideal represented. The significant other in such consumption practice may therefore be reasonably seen to be a heterosexual male partner. However in a culture where the pregnant body is desexualised, considered terminally abject and the pregnant consumer constructed as 'mother-to-be', the significant other in appropriate consumption is the unborn child (and family) discourses of appropriate consumption for the pregnant body centre not on continual improvement in order to embody a particular ideal figure for the pleasure of another (for example) but rather the denial of personal desire – beyond functional material need – in favour of the child. The discourse under which the pregnant body is constructed as a legitimate site of consumption in relation to thrift and functional necessity also therefore defines it as out of place on the fashion press – particularly as the relationship expressed through such consumption (Miller, 1998) is maternal and nurturing (rather than sexual as is normatively implied in such a context).

6.3.2 Discursive Sartorial Knowledges

The general paucity in formalised dissemination of sartorial knowledge associated with the pregnant body and indeed, a specific discourse of clothing consumption quite removed from fashion and other womenswear consumption, can be seen to be reflected in the ways women talk about maternity wear and therefore the reproduction of consumption knowledges on a social and discursive level. For example functional knowledges revolving around how one might 'get through' pregnancy and successfully negotiate the need for maternity wear are particularly prevalent in advice circulating between women. As one of my respondents in particular demonstrated, stylistically speaking women's knowledge is broadly limited particularly in relation to knowing where to buy maternity wear:

"...I don't think people are particularly full of ideas because I don't think there are that many more options" (Linda, early thirties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.)

The absence of the pregnant body from traditional sources of sartorial certitude and therefore the lack of institutional knowledge dissemination and support can be seen to influence the social forms of 'support and reassurance' (Clarke and Miller, 2002, p.209) that women rely on to allay the anxieties associated with clothing their bodies. During pregnancy it would seem that social sources of certitude are also focused on functional aspects of consumption rather than the crux of most fashion anxiety as Clarke and Miller (2002) see it – the aesthetic. Therefore to the extent that women may seek reassurance of this type from friends and family they are likely to be disappointed. Rather such sources of knowledge and certitude support them in developing functional consumption practices. As Linda noted, the advice she received was all of this type:

"I remember a friend of mine who had been pregnant told me, 'oh get yourself a pair of leggings its miles better than feeling uncomfortable'."

"...people said to me 'don't buy bigger sizes, buy maternity wear' so, I think, I personally think that was good advice."

That Linda acted upon both pieces of advice, assimilating this social knowledge into her consumption practice is significant. It highlights the credence given by women to knowledge circulated in this way and therefore its importance in structuring women's practice. In particular it suggests that during pregnancy the social circulation of embodied sartorial knowledge between women is particularly significant given that prior to pregnancy most appear to possess almost no knowledge at all in relation to maternity wear and dressing the pregnant body. Sources of sartorial certitude during pregnant are therefore not restricted to 'close friends and family who are trusted to give advice reflecting care and concern" as Clarke and Miller (2002, p.209) imply, but rather are extended to others who have embodied experience of such vestimentary negotiations:

"...it's the kind of thing you don't ... I think you have to mix with people that are pregnant or ... the kind of thing you don't really know about until you suddenly find you're pregnant" (Linda)

"But don't you think that pregnancy is not something you think about until you are either know someone who's pregnant or are pregnant or get to the age where you might think about being pregnant. Before that it's like a completely undiscovered world, you don't even think about it. I never even thought about maternity wear, I didn't look at it in the shops, I didn't, I'd never been into Mothercare until I was pregnant. I'd never been into Mothercare, I'd never had any reason to go into Mothercare, I knew it existed but only ... because I'd, I don't know subconsciously maybe noticed it on the high street and you know I'd never actually been in. And its like such a funny thing, you don't realise" (Ari mid-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford)

Rather than valuing the detached observations of non-pregnant (and certainly never-pregnant) friends and family (who are thought to have little (credible) knowledge precisely because of their lack of embodied experience) practical, functional advice from other pregnant women appears to be the dominant form of social support received and internalised during pregnancy. Indeed, I would suggest that this support and reassurance often takes a material form in that it is expressed through the circulating of maternity wear wardrobes between women, something I shall examine in more depth in the following section. Further, I would argue that the destabilisation in normative forms of sartorial certitude points to another important role for the small independent retailer as one of the only places where women may obtain support and reassurance on a one-to-one basis (which reflects Clarke and Miller's point about shopping with a trusted friend or family member) in relation to clothing aesthetic as well as function. Here women who are perceived to possess institutional, credible knowledge about maternity wear style (purely because of their position as retailers) consistently provide reassurance to customers, helping them to make purchasing decisions by supporting and reassuring them (or not!) in their choices. Such advice is not available at the point of sale in most other retail contexts, certainly on the high street, either on a personal basis or otherwise (though see Clarke and Miller's discussion about catalogues). Indeed, in Mothercare in particular the absence of all but saving promoting graphics provides little sartorial certitude beyond reaffirming the right way to consume as being self-sacrificial and thrift driven. Given the overwhelming lack of support and reassurance in relation to the aesthetics of clothing the pregnant body from traditional sources and indeed the substitution of functional advice over style in many respects I would argue that it is hardly surprising that women's clothing consumption during pregnancy tends to take the form of a series of coping strategies punctuated by increased fashion anxiety.

6.3.3 Cultural Competencies

Such knowledge vacuums and associated destabilisations of shopping geographies lead to destabilisations of cultural competencies in relation to composing one's body as socially acceptable, both with respect to personal identity and more general clothing regimes associated with the pregnant body. It is surely the case that shopping geographies of maternity wear *are* far more limited than those of womenswear more generally, as Linda commented, there would indeed appear to be a finite amount of knowledge to be had with respect to where to buy maternity wear and particularly that which facilitates certain identity performances. However, I would suggest that many women do not possess anything approaching the full picture, and even those who do, remain troubled by the profound lack of knowledge and therefore resources they have with which to clothe their pregnant bodies. This clearly becomes a particular problem for those who defer any thought of maternity wear consumption until the last possible moment, being faced with a pressing material need for clothing to fit their rapidly changing body and a profound destabilisation of existing sartorial consumption practice and knowledge whilst lacking the resources with which to replace these. Though the destabilisation of personal shopping geographies is clearly differentially felt by individual women, being contingent for example on the level of identity investment in fashion generally, particular brands, personalised regimes of style and so on, I would suggest that it is felt in some way by the vast majority of women and is mapped through consumption itself, resulting in a lack of certitude and erosion of cultural competences.

For example Jo, one of my interviewees, a 36 year old nursery teacher from Bradford, experienced maternity wear consumption almost as a process of profound deskilling. A pre-pregnancy size 18 plus she found it inordinately difficult to find firstly, any maternity wear in her size at all[50] and secondly, and very importantly to her, any such clothes which corresponded to her well defined personalised sense of style:

> "...at Two Plus One [John Lewis] everything was all in really weird, it was all in like very pale, very like pale green and ... but I, but I can't wear that you know. And you see the other thing is because I've been coloured and I know what my colours are that I try and wear those colours and ... it just hasn't been as easy to do that with um you know the whole lack of clothes thing. I mean I think after I'd been to the White Rose I was actually starting to get quite like [in a panicky/tearful voice]'what am I going to wear' you know a bit like that because you just didn't think I could get anything. And when you know that your girth's increasing daily virtually you know that you just think 'where's it all going to stop ?' ... And I know I've got a long, long way to go yet ... bump wise" (Jo, mid-thirties, married, first pregnancy, Bradford)

Jo is clearly a high investor in her clothing and has highly honed consumption knowledges in this respect. She has acquired specific knowledges and geographies in relation to her clothing for example by being 'coloured'[51], finding out what colours suit her skin tone and so on best. Also in relation to where to find clothes to fit in with this. However as with others, in pregnancy these carefully assembled knowledges are no longer relevant to a large extent and despite significant efforts to acquire specialist maternity wear geographies, mapping far more widely than most, Jo found it almost impossible to find satisfactory items to wear:

> "...I was starting to get a bit desperate really because when you've only got like 2 pairs of trousers that fit you and then this limited amount of tops. And because I'm a nursery teacher my clothes like literally last one day and then they've got to go into the wash so you're having to like a really quick turn around time to get things up and out again. I did think I'd maybe get one of the Mum's to make me a shalwa chemise [quiet laugh] but I don't really want to have to go and do that!"

Though feelings of desperation at the very real prospect of literally having nothing to wear were clearly significant in Jo's maternity wear consumption these were almost surpassed by the concern that she would not be able to obtain clothes that would fit in with her personalised regime of style:

> "...I suppose I'm quite used to buying clothes for myself now and finding what I want and not having to just wear something really weird you know but I suppose I, I feel like I've come up against another brick wall really you

[50] There does appear to indeed be very little specialist maternity wear in this size bracket.

[51] See Clarke and Miller (2002) for a discussion of institutions such as 'Colour Me Beautiful' as sources of fashion certitude. The fact that Jo was unable to consume according to the specific advice given by those who had 'coloured' her I would suggest is particularly significant in her feelings of being deskilled, the debasement of her ability to dress well and her obviously heightened anxiety in relation to this.

know... And we are as I you know famously say, we are 47 % of the population, I'm not unusual being a over size 16 person you know"

What Jo is describing is more than a profound destabilising of her consumption knowledge and practice and more a process of *deskilling*. From her discussion it is clear that this is not the first time she has struggled to find adequate clothing to fit her body. However she has previously managed to develop consumption knowledges and practices to allow her to compose an acceptable body. As a result she no longer had to make do and wear 'something really weird' and yet her specific corporeal sartorial needs during pregnancy rendered her knowledges (and specifically those which provided a degree of assurance such as the colour knowledge) useless and reverted her to a deskilled and anxious position.

Destabilisation of existing sartorial knowledge and difficulties in obtaining pregnancy specific knowledges can therefore lead to a tangible lack of certitude for women. The cultural competences acquired and applied to non-pregnant bodies do not correspond to pregnant corporealities. Used to composing vestimentary regimes informed by personalised knowledges women may inevitably loose confidence in their sartorial abilities as a result. Their maternity wear consumption and consumption of dress during pregnancy more widely (since not everything worn during pregnancy will be specialist maternity wear in the majority of cases) is therefore punctuated by anxieties, stemming from an acute awareness of their lack of vestimentary competences and the absence of sources of support and reassurance. As Tina describes:

> "I think .. I feel .. I've not .. I haven't been wearing clothes that I would normally wear and that makes me feel uncomfortable because I think .. I always like to feel comfortable in my clothes cos otherwise I don't feel very confident d'you know what I mean I think everybody's like that. You like to feel *comfortable* and you like to look in the mirror and think you know this looks nice, this looks O.K. because otherwise you know you, you feel *self conscious*. And because like the stuff I've been wearing I wouldn't normally wear ... or I wouldn't maybe wear some of the combinations together you know cos I've got I mean I bought this big baggy elasticated waist trousers but I never normally wear those and I feel a bit .. I don't know funny in them, they don't, they're not what I would normally wear..." (Tina, mid-twenties, married, first pregnancy, Coventry)

Ironically although women lack practical and material consumption knowledges, resulting in diminished competences and a lack of certitude in relation to dressing their pregnant bodies they are simultaneously aware of certain codes of dress relating to the monolithic pregnant body (mother-to-be) which delineates the appropriate *social* pregnant body. The importance of these are expressed within discussions in interviews surrounding media images of pregnant celebrities for example which not only delineate the perfect pregnant body but also are interpreted in relation to what are considered un/acceptable performances of mother. Whatever the particular reading of individual images, these are as an increasing number enter the public arena important communicators of these codes since as I have discussed images of the pregnant body in relation to clothing are largely absent in other respects. As Bordo suggests images are vastly important in relation to defining the production of appropriate femininity:

> "With the advent of movies and television, the rules of femininity have become culturally transmitted more and more through standardised visual images. As a result, femininity itself has become to be largely a matter of constructing, in the manner described by Erving Goffman, the appropriate surface presentation of the self. We are no longer given verbal descriptions or exemplars of what a lady is or what femininity consists. Rather we learn the rules directly through bodily discourse: through images that tell us what clothes, body shape, facial expression, movements and behaviour are required" (Bordo, 1993, p.169-170)

Though largely absent from the visual media in respect to techniques of dress and disparate performances of pregnancy save for the celebrity images I have mentioned, mother figures are highly prevalent. Discourses of motherhood are ever present in the media, from newspapers to novels, cinema to TV and so on. Such discourses can be seen to inform and underlie ideas about an acceptable and appropriate social maternal body (and it is in this sense that the pregnant body is socially acceptable). Therefore whilst women's sartorial consumption practices, knowledges and sources of certitude are debased during pregnancy they must simultaneously negotiate clear boundaries of acceptability with respect to composing appropriate social bodies through their clothing consumption. I would therefore argue that this is a form of consumption fraught with anxiety perhaps to a greater extent than suggested by Clarke and Miller (2002) since there is a great deal of scope for getting it wrong. Where under normal circumstances 'getting it wrong' sartorially would provoke perhaps a raised eye brow, the label of eccentricity or perhaps the stares of others, getting it wrong in pregnancy can provoke much more definitive responses. The codes of dress appear to be stronger for pregnant women and the ideological tenets of this stronger still, making the inappropriately dressed pregnant woman not only 'a sight' but also a 'bad mother'. Fashion anxiety with respect to maternity wear therefore is not restricted to concerns about aesthetics and style but also includes concerns about composing one's pregnant body appropriately in a social sense (which is currently prescribed as 'mother-to-be). An integral part of this goes beyond the 'surface presentation of the self' and as Bordo notes includes behaviour and therefore specifically I would argue not just *what* but also *how* one consumes. I would argue that the image of the appropriate social pregnant body as 'mother-to-be' structures many women's clothing consumption practices during pregnancy because of the lack of alternatives made available to them through traditional sources of certitude. The knowledge and support typically encountered (outside of small independent retailers) either through institutional or social sources tends to reinforce functional, thrift driven, self-sacrificial consumption. As has been discussed credible alternatives are either absent or the knowledge needed to construct them is withheld, the bottom-line being that women lack the knowledge and therefore certitude to construct them. Therefore, given this context it is hardly surprising to find that women's clothing consumption during pregnancy tends to reflect this specific discourse of appropriate consumption and also resembles a series of coping strategies as women seek to negotiate destabilised practices, knowledges and heightened anxiety.

6.4 Maternity Wear Consumption As A Distinct Form: Responses Made By Women

As a result of the destabilisation of practices, knowledges and certitude maternity wear consumption can be conceptualised as a distinct form of consumption quite different from the ways many women consume more mainstream fashion. I suggest here that maternity wear consumption can be seen as a series of coping strategies, which women employ in order to negotiate their knowledge and certitude deficits, as well as their pregnant corporealities and indeed discourses of consumption as they relate to these bodies[52]. I identify a series of strategies that were evident within the consumption practices described by my research. These strategies include firstly, personal mechanisms. These are clearly highly individual, relating as they do to individual women's established practices of sartorial consumption, but they commonly include utilising larger sizes of ordinary womenswear and in some cases cannibalising it in order to make it fit the pregnant body. Secondly, as a means of negotiating deficits in certitude, some women employ what might be described as a 'uniform strategy', buying into 'safe' styles readily identifiable as maternity wear. A specific example discussed here is the sustained appeal of denim dungarees. Thirdly, 'sharing strategies' are particularly common, with many women sharing items and indeed entire 'wardrobes' of maternity clothing within social networks. Such strategies can be seen to exemplify a perceived need for thrift and also a lack of certitude, clothes previously worn by other pregnant women as well as costing nothing are coded as sartorially 'safe'.

6.4.1 Personal Strategies

Personal strategies clearly are developed in relation to women's personalised practices and knowledges of sartorial consumption and are employed as a means of coping with the destabilisation of these experienced during pregnancy. However, despite being tailored to individual consumption practices there are broad trends which can be identified: as I discuss here, many women avoid specialist maternity wear for a variety of reasons and make do with larger sizes of ordinary womenswear (or even perhaps their own clothes) through a variety of means. In addition, women often describe a newly pragmatic approach to clothing consumption, for example as Ari did due to tensions surrounding fashion.

During her first pregnancy Ari found herself having to significantly compromise her clothing aesthetic, wearing many items she ordinarily wouldn't because at the time they were the best she could find within her parameters of acceptable style and cost. As she suggests, her consumption became far more pragmatic:

> " I think you have a different um ... plum line when you're pregnant, it changes. So what you'd consider 'nice' is nice in comparison to other maternity things or other things you'd wear when you're pregnant rather than what you... you actually completely disregard the whole thing about what you would normally wear." (Ari mid-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford)

[52] Which are hinged upon thrift and maternal sacrifice.

This approach was borne out by her reactions when we were looking through a bag of her maternity clothing (from her first pregnancy), which had been returned to her that day by her friend Jane:

> "Oh this dress [a grey dress with brown printed flower design]. Look at this dress I mean this is just unbelievably hideous. I can't believe I ever wore this; this was like my best dress. Sarah's worn this. I mean look at this, can you see me wearing this?"

Ari reached the conclusion that her usual style was unattainable during pregnancy and as such adopted a much more pragmatic approach to her clothing. Rather than being a true reflection of her identity it became rather more functional, and to be negotiated in terms of 'making do' with the most reasonable clothing she could find. This negotiation involved, during her first pregnancy in particular, an avoidance of maternity wear to a large extent (though this was also for reasons of cost), buying larger sizes of ordinary clothes and radically altering them in order that they might 'fit' her pregnant body:

> A: [Discussing a photograph of herself during her first pregnancy] Now those trousers aren't maternity wear, those brown ones [laugh]. Um but those had, I wore those under [my bump] with lots of cuts in the waistband. That top is maternity but I would never have worn that before.
> V: Why not?
> A: Because I don't like it, I don't like the colours, I don't like the pattern. But at the time it was as fashionable as it was going to get and it went with those trousers [laugh].

'Making do' with larger sizes of ordinary clothes is a relatively common strategy adopted for varying reasons but almost always involving some element of pragmatism. Clothing aesthetic is a considerable motivating factor for women to 'make do' with larger sizes of ordinary clothes, as it was for Ari, but with this comes a significant compromise in fit. Tolerating such poor fit however I would suggest is related to a prioritisation of both clothing aesthetic and also thrift (the kind of style women seek may be available in specialist maternity wear but at an unacceptable cost). 'Making do' with ordinary clothes is perceived as better value for money as women tend to assume they can be adapted for wear after pregnancy whereas maternity wear cannot[53]. Further it is by far the easiest method of clothing consumption during pregnancy, as it involves no prerequisite of specialist consumption skills and knowledge (providing of course the size required is within the normative high street provision, i.e. nothing above a 16). Meryl's experience illustrates these discourses nicely as they sit along side one another within her consumption:

> "...well I've, I've hardly looked at any maternity wear because the things that I have seen I've not been that impressed with. I looked in um ... Mothercare just to be, have a look and be interested and was put off by designs but also by the price as well. ... [I've just bought] just very much like things that are the normal sort of fashions that are in the sort of normal shops so. I'm afraid

[53] Although clearly this would not have been the case for Ari who cannibalised her clothes, cutting into and removing waistbands for example. These items were put beyond use by her 'alterations'.

I've been quite lazy really and carried on getting things that I know that I could then perhaps adapt for afterwards as well." (Meryl, early-thirties, married, first pregnancy, Manchester)

I suspect a large part of Meryl's decision to wear ordinary clothes throughout her pregnancy was based on her lack of knowledge regarding specialist maternity wear. Having found the clothes in Mothercare to be "pretty repulsive to be honest" she apparently lacked any further ideas about where else to buy it and describes herself as having been lazy in just continuing to buy from ordinary shops. This suggests to me not only ambivalence towards specialist maternity wear in general as a result of what she saw in Mothercare but also a fundamental lack of knowledge about it. She assumed this would be the standard against all other maternity wear could be judged and therefore not only lacked the knowledge of where else to find any but also the motivation to look. It was easier for her to buy what she knew, clothes that aesthetically were close to if not exactly what she would ordinarily have bought, from shops she knew.

Natalie's comments also reflect how much easier it was for her to buy ordinary clothes than maternity wear and it appears she only bought maternity wear literally as a last resort:

V: ...can you just clarify for me when exactly and what it was that made you decide to buy maternity wear. What point in your pregnancy was that?
N: It was that last sort of couple of, last sort of couple of months from about say six, seven months.
V: And was that because you wanted something specific to wear that you bought maternity wear?
N: I just found it more difficult to get the sizes that I wanted. The shops are very limited in the sizes, there are only certain shops that do certain sizes, there's not enough variety of larger sizes. And if you go like to Manchester or somewhere where you get the bigger variety the prices sort of zoom up, they're not sort of in a budgetable price range. (Natalie, early-twenties, mother of 1, Manchester)

N: ...it would probably have been more worthwhile in the long run to sort of buy it from the beginning but they are quite expensive so I just tended to buy them later on when I got too big for normal clothes.

Natalie literally only bought maternity wear as a last resort, when making do with larger sizes became no longer an option, largely because of the restricted range of sizes available on the high street and also because the fit became unsatisfactory. Her reasons for avoiding maternity wear so long were both to do with ease and cost but also because of a desire for continuity with her pre-pregnant clothed identity which she, like so many others, did not see reflected in the maternity wear available:

V: Did you look at maternity wear right at the beginning and then decide not to buy any?
N: I went down and looked at it and the things that I saw sort of I didn't really like, they weren't the sort of things that I'd normally wear and I was looking for more, things that were things like I would normally wear. But at the time they weren't they were like ... just like flowery dresses ...

This desire for continuity in clothed identity and more specifically to avoid the kind of 'flowery dress' maternity wear available is not at all unusual. As I have discussed, clothing aesthetic is an important negotiation which women must make during their pregnancy. Pragmatic consumption often results because of the unavailability of maternity wear that reliably recreates the desired clothing aesthetic. However I would suggest that where women characterise maternity wear *per se* as being all 'flowery dresses', 'sailor collars' and the like, as Natalie does, this avoidance can be seen to point to something of a sense of denial. It is clear that there are stereotypical views of what maternity wear is and that within this, indeed even within maternity wear that transcends these assumptions, there are clear investments of a certain maternal identity which women can be seen to be avoiding by wearing larger sizes of ordinary clothes. I would suggest that this coping strategy could therefore be seen also as a denial of the identity of 'mother' perceived to be associated with maternity wear. At this time, the change in Natalie's identity to being a mother was an enormous change. I am not suggesting that she was consciously or even unconsciously regretting the pregnancy, rather that through her clothing consumption she was enacting a subtle resistance to the enormous identity and life changes that were happening to her. Resisting the mother identity perceived to be associated with maternity wear can be seen therefore as resistance. A kind of putting the brakes on something that is uncontrollable in almost all other respects. For Tracey, a teenager (like Natalie) during her first pregnancy, I would suggest that this was more denial than resistance. She wore no maternity wear at all during this pregnancy, preferring to wear larger dresses instead and refusing to wear the Mothercare dress her mother bought for her, and indeed refusing to even venture into that shop herself. Meg also hints at resisting a maternal identity seen to be imbued in maternity wear during her first pregnancy:

> M: In my first pregnancy it was um much more important to me to look the same as I'd always looked, um and to find clothes that were reasonably comfortable but made me look, not as though I wasn't pregnant but as though I hadn't altered my style at all...
> S: Yeah, I mean I didn't bother that much, in my first..[to Meg] I've never heard you say anything like that about this before, but I was the same in my first pregnancy, it was much more ... just wearing what I'd always worn, things that ... just making do
> M: Using bits of string! [Laugh]
> S: Yeah and you know not doing up the zip and just wearing a belt. (Meg (forth pregnancy, mother of 2) and Sharen (third pregnancy, mother of 2), both mid-late thirties, married and from Bradford)

Rather than engage with and take on the identity of Mother by wearing maternity clothing that reflected this, Meg during her first pregnancy at least wished to maintain this sense of herself and so pushed her own clothes to the limit in order to do so. Using bits of string extended the life of her own clothes and allowed her to do this in a way that required little financial outlay or shopping knowledge. This strategy therefore allowed her to negotiate and cope with not just a devaluation of this corporeality and a related desire to spend as little as possible, but also the difficulty of obtaining maternity clothing to not only fit her pregnant body but reflect her normal sense of style with diminished consumption knowledges. This excerpt is

also interesting as it reveals her friend Sharen's equal desire to extend the life of her clothing and postpone the need for new clothing consumption. For Sharen this form of making do was much more thrift driven and about wearing her own clothes for as long as possible in order to avoid spending money on maternity wear. Such a strategy of pushing ones own clothing to the limit is also employed by others, for example many women postpone shopping for maternity wear until they have literally grown out of their ordinary clothes, a practice which can be seen to both feed into and from the idea of the pregnant body not being allowed to consume. 'Making do' with ones ordinary clothes until the last possible moment almost proves the assumption that maternity clothing is poor value for money because of its short, finite period of use value. This practice however is widespread since the socially acceptable form of maternity clothing consumption is punitive in the extreme, sanctioning only need fulfilling, frugal spending. For example Carolyn talks about how, even at work, where her clothed identity was crucial and required careful construction, she made do up even until the point where she felt she was 'pushing it':

> "You can, I got away with sort of loose blouses and elasticated skirts until about what 4 even 5 months and I thought I was pushing that with [2nd child] but um I did get a way with it. Um and then I need obviously something um a bit bigger round the waist. Um really and truly I was also I didn't want to buy something that I knew I was only going to use for a few *months*" (Carolyn, early forties, married, mother of 2, Manchester).

Despite feeling that she was literally only just 'getting away' with wearing these clothes until the fifth month of pregnancy Carolyn persisted with it, avoiding having to spend money on maternity wear for as long as possible. Judging by the importance of her work place identity – something I will explore in more detail later – I find it hard to believe that she would push the acceptability of her clothes to such limits in any other circumstances (other than pregnancy).

'Making do'[54] with larger sizes of ordinary clothes and indeed pushing ones own wardrobe to (and perhaps beyond) the limit can be seen to go beyond a pragmatic approach to consumption itself and be seen to be a means of *coping* with not only the destabilisation of knowledge and practice but also the shifts in identity that pregnancy involves. However, as with the majority of these coping strategies it is also driven by a concern about cost, as one small independent retailer suggested:

> "Women want several things from their maternity wear but by far the most important is value for money ... Style comes a long way down the list of priorities. Women don't think about looking stylish and beautiful in this country ... All the women who come to her say they feel fat and unattractive. In Europe however it is different, they think they look beautiful and feminine. They think about pregnancy differently, they think it is a wonderful time to be enjoyed and savoured whereas in Britain we think of it as something to be endured and gone through in order to have a baby. This has a big influence on how different women think about maternity wear to the extent that in this country *the price is always more important than what it looks like.*" (Room 4 2, telephone interview notes, emphasis added)

[54] I refer to it as a means of making do because it does involve significant compromises in fit.

From my research I would concur wholeheartedly with this comment. Although there are undoubtedly a handful of women for whom clothing aesthetic and more particularly the maintenance of a certain style is of great significance within their clothing consumption during pregnancy, I would suggest that still for many of these women cost is a parallel concern. For example, both Ari and Maria's clothing consumption though undeniably punctuated by aesthetic concerns, remained curtailed and moulded by cost. For others, as the above quote suggests style is a concern completely eclipsed by the need for thrift. Wearing clothes incompatible with ones clothing aesthetic is a common strategy for ensuring acceptable consumption. For example, Linda, who bought most of her clothes in a Mothercare sale commented that these were mainly items she would never have paid full price for but bought them purely because they were cheap. Jane too comments that she had to severely compromise how she looked in order to save money:

> V: Did you find it hard to get things that you specifically wanted?
> J: Well yes ... they were around but the price range was difficult when you're wanting to save as much as you can and you don't really want to spend a load on things that um you know you're only going to wear for 6 months so. So there were things around but just not in my price range, so I ended up just wearing stuff that I could afford. (Jane, mid-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.)

Indeed, Tracey Hand who established Budget Bumps online, a web shop which sells second hand maternity wear at low prices, was motivated by frustrating experiences during her own pregnancy where she made do in the extreme with less than ideal clothing in order to keep her spending to a minimum:

> "She had next to nothing when she was pregnant, two dresses and some borrowed stuff. She says she wore summer dresses in the winter because she had bought them in a sale and that was what she had, so by and large she just made do. She said she begrudged spending money on maternity wear." (Telephone interview notes)

What could be described as a culture of thrift therefore appears to be pervasive in relation to the way women shop for and consume maternity clothing. Indeed I would argue that it is absolutely fundamental, an ever-present consideration regardless of the precise nature of coping mechanism employed. In line with the discourses of appropriate consumption represented in retail spaces, magazines and so on it would appear that normatively:

> "Women are very conscious and don't want to spend anything really but it's a necessity, they have to" (Room 4 2, telephone interview notes)

Although women have to spend on some things it would seem that many of them are disciplined to the extent that they spend very little, many going without various things rather than increase their outlay. On the surface this would seem to involve high levels of consumption knowledges in order to put together specialist wardrobes for the least amount of money possible. However what in reality is going on is that women literally make do. They wear ill fitting, butchered clothing that does not

satisfy their clothing aesthetic refusing to pay the perceived extortionate prices charged by retailers:

> C: ... I refused to spend a huge amount of money cos you're not going to wear them for that long. ... Its *disgusting* the amount that Next charge you.
> V: Is it more expensive than their normal clothes or is it normal Next prices?
> C: Normal Next prices but you don't want to spend the same sort of money on clothes that you're only going to wear for a few months. (Clare early-thirties, married, mother of 1, Northampton, emphasis in original speech)

Despite the fact that their maternity wear was in the same price range as their ordinary clothing Clare clearly felt that it this was not acceptable. Specifically because of its short life span, only a matter of months (despite the fact she has put it in her wardrobe to be brought out again next time she is pregnant) she feels it does not have the same value as ordinary clothing and therefore should not be priced as such.

It is important therefore to note at this point that a key similarity between all my interviewee's personal practices of consumption was a concern with cost minimisation. However, rather than help women cope better with the destabilisations caused by pregnancy it in fact places more pressure on consumption – is itself something to be coped with – and therefore is significant in moulding the ways in which women clothe their pregnant bodies. I shall discuss this culture of thrift in more detail later but mark it as significant here since it is evident throughout the personalised strategies discussed and forms part of the overall context for the development of coping strategies.

6.4.2 'Uniform' Strategies

What I have termed 'uniform' strategies may not overtly be seen to be informed by an underlying concern about thrift. However, based as they are on a negotiation of a lack of certitude and associated fears of 'getting it wrong', it is clearly part of the picture, as one small independent retailer observed:

> "..because women are going to wear their maternity wear to death, they have to love it to death. It needs to be able to do so many things, cater for so many different occasions. Women have to be clever with their maternity wear purchases because of this. *You can't put it away in your wardrobe and hope to get it out next year if you decide you've made a mistake.*" (Manager, Bumpsadaisy, Worcester, telephone interview notes, p.2, emphasis added)

Entering into 'safe' consumption, of garments readily identifiable as maternity wear may be seen as a way of saving oneself from costly mistakes. The otherwise baffling popularity of denim dungarees among pregnant women can perhaps be explained in this context and can be considered in much the same way as the uniform Pamela Church Gibson (2000) identifies amongst older women:

> "... the majority of women in their sixties and upwards seem to be following their own sartorial rules. During the day there is in the summer, a profusion

> of floral and other prints, usually man-made fabrics. Over the frocks – or skirts and blouses – there is a white cardigan or, if colder, a beige blouson jacket (also worn by men of a similar age). In winter there are pleated skirts, cardigans again, pull-on trousers or a very unfashionable, non-designer, non-sporty tracksuit, possibly made of velour and pastel coloured. Shoes are usually beige and bear little relation to current styles. There is a preponderance of neutral colours, a seeming desire for camouflage and anonymity... If you observe and take notes over a sustained period of time, as I did, one thing is interesting, you see these women and their friends wearing virtually identical outfits, give or take the details, just as teenage girls still finding their fashion feet tend to do... Have they consciously adopted this regimented appearance or has it been forced upon them by an unsympathetic industry? Have they given up on fashion, perhaps through self-consciousness, and opted for the security of peer group style – or anti-style?" (Church Gibson, 2000, p.81)

I would suggest that these questions are just as valid with respect to the persistent demand for denim dungarees amongst pregnant women. These are garments which also bear little resemblance or reference to current fashions and yet have remained something of a constant feature in maternity wear ranges, for example in Mothercare and JoJo, and are begrudgingly stocked by several small independents due to demand:

> "...she swore she would never stock denim dungarees but they are a really good seller. She said you would be surprised how many people come in asking for them! Husbands in particular she said seem to have a 'fetish' (her word) for dungarees." (Owner, Mothers To Be, Burnley, telephone interview notes)

> "[Tracey says she] can't get enough denim dungarees, particularly in a size 14. She said she was shocked about this as it is the typical pregnant lady thing and she thought it would be the last thing people would want, but she is inundated with requests and sells them as fast as she can get them in." (Owner, Budget Bumps website, telephone interview notes)

I would further suggest that whilst it is true that as for older women there is a fundamental lack of maternity wear available on the high street, it is more a lack of certitude (stemming in part from the destabilisation of shopping, consumption knowledges and in particular sources of certitude) that influences women to make such specific sartorial choices which differ so radically from the everyday selections made pre-pregnancy. Although the fashion industry can indeed be seen to be unsympathetic in respect to specialist maternity wear (indeed the pregnant body full stop), I would suggest it is more the case that women, lacking the knowledges and certitude to buy into, or construct for themselves, different ways of wearing the pregnant body fall in with something perceived as safe, purely because they have seen others wearing them. A lack of certitude can therefore be seen to lead to certain docility in appearance.

> "...many people ring up and ask for denim dungarees. I asked her why she thought that was and she says it's the way people's minds work. They think

that's what pregnant people wear. She said they were all right in the 70s when they were in fashion, they were comfortable and all the rest but they just look dreadful, and are completely unflattering" (Room 4 2, telephone interview notes)

Despite the women behind Room 4 2 refusing to make up denim dungarees many small retailers do relent and carry them, often purely because as one woman commented she realised that she was literally "cutting off her nose to spite her face" by not doing so. This is by no means a positive endorsement therefore but rather a reaction to market forces. Most of these retailers have to respond to constant requests; they literally cannot afford to ignore them since they take such little money relatively speaking. Denim dungarees do not correspond at all with the images constructed by those at Mums & Co or Belly Bumpers, although both have sold them at various times. Ari described them as 'gold dust' not long after they opened since they were hard to get hold of. Maria too continues to stock them. Indeed an entry from my Belly Bumpers research diary illustrates nicely the way in which these garments have become associated with the (socially appropriate) pregnant body and thus established within the accepted code of dress for pregnant women:

"Right from the start it was obvious that she had her heart set on the dungarees ... Maria and I were honest about the fact that we both thought the jeans looked better and that we thought they would last better than the dungarees might (to us both they looked tight enough already whereas the jeans had more give). It was almost as if she was deaf to our positive endorsement of the jeans though. I don't think she took in at all what we were trying to say to her. It all became clear why this was when she relayed to us a discussion she had had with her husband about dungarees, she had told him that she didn't care what he thought about them she wanted a pair of dungarees while she was pregnant because if she didn't wear them now when would she get a chance to. These were obviously something she had imagined herself wearing from the outset, something she associated with pregnancy, and it was almost as if, if she didn't have some she'd missed out on some pregnancy experience in some way. Being pregnant somehow gave her a license to wear dungarees; it is something pregnant women do, something she wanted to do as a pregnant woman and not ordinarily. Her purchase means they have no denim dungarees left! So obviously she is not alone!" (Belly Bumpers research diary, Tuesday April 5th 2001)

This particular woman bought a pair of dungarees not because of the way they looked so much and neither were they a particularly practical buy since in comparison to the jeans had far less space for growth and so on. Yet she felt her body fitted the dungarees in a different respect, symbolically, culturally, and in a way in which her non-pregnant body never would. That this was a socially acceptable code of dress allowing the composition of a correspondingly acceptable pregnant body was clearly strongly enmeshed in her consumption knowledge, so much so that she ignored the advice of two women normally viewed as having some degree of authority with regards maternity sartorial knowledge. For example as Ari noted

during her second pregnancy when she was working in the shop until a few weeks before the birth:

> *"...she very often sells what she wears. She says that most of her clothes this time have come from the shop stock and so it is inevitable that more often than not she will be wearing something that is for sale in the shop on days when she is working. In fact whilst I was there a customer bought the red/pink top she was wearing! They now have none of those left, they have all been sold already - and this is new season stock! ... [P]eople see Ari wearing items and are influenced by this. They see her very possibly as knowledgeable about fashion and such like since she is the owner of this shop and therefore think she must be right about what is good to wear. Also they can make a value judgement of what that item looks like on a heavily pregnant body - does it look 'right' or not - is it acceptable. Again if it is acceptable for Ari to wear and in her place of work then it must be OK for them."* (Mums & Co research diary, Thursday February 15th 2001)

It could be argued therefore that small independent retailers such as Mums & Co and Belly Bumpers have a tangible knowledge dissemination and 'support and reassurance' role to play in their customers consumption of maternity wear. Ari's observation that what she wore on any given day very often sold that same day and the fact that they sold out of a spring/summer season item by mid-February as a result lends credence to the argument that a need for certitude leads women to opt for items safely associated with the pregnant body and therefore identified as acceptable maternity wear. Ari wearing shop stock demonstrated to women the garments legitimacy as maternity wear items. Seeing someone else, someone in the business of maternity wear itself, wear certain items appears to have given women the confidence to buy them, the certitude to wear them. This is something that others recognise, for example Maria and Dennis at Belly Bumpers, though lacking the advantage of being embodied as pregnant are acting to increase women's levels of sartorial certitude and cultural competences in this respect. In their case they attempt this by utilising Dennis's skills as a professional photographer and undertaking various photo shoots of their clothes which they post on their website and around the shop (as I noted in the previous chapter).

It can be strongly argued therefore that women's lack of knowledge with respect to how to dress the pregnant body extends from knowing *where* to buy maternity wear to *what* to wear. An awareness of being so impoverished, something many women are not at all used to, causes their cultural competences and sartorial certitude to fall away and can be seen to structure their clothing consumption as they seek safe practices of consumption in order to negotiate increased anxiety. For example, as Leonie noted:

> "I don't know it people, if people wore tight things whilst they were pregnant then I'd do it but everyone just wears baggy stuff. So I found something I liked baggy, so I just got them" (Leonie, mid-teens, first pregnancy, Bradford.)

6.4.3 Sharing Strategies

One important consumption strategy which combines the need for thrift with a means of negotiating diminished sartorial knowledge and certitude is that of sharing, borrowing the clothes worn by others during their pregnancies, and this appears to be normative amongst those I have interviewed. Of all those with which in-depth interviews were carried out literally only one or two reported not having borrowed from or lent to other women at all. Those who did not borrow themselves often suggested that this was not an aversion to the practice but rather that this option wasn't open to them for one reason or another, usually because they were the first in their friendship group to fall pregnant or as Linda describes missing out because of someone else's concurrent pregnancy:

> V: Did you borrow any from anybody?
> L: I didn't actually but that's just because it was just the way it worked out. [Inaudible]. I was going to and then it just didn't get round to it and then I had another friend, and someone else got pregnant just before I did so I just missed the boat sort of thing ... but I would have been quite happy to borrow things" (Linda, early-thirties, married, mother of 1, Bradford)

Despite her own inability to borrow from others, Linda's own maternity clothing entered into a second cycle when she lent it to a friend – Meg – who was pregnant for the last time:

> "I knew that with it being their last she wouldn't want to buy stuff so I said if she wanted to have it"

This approach appears to be incredibly common. The very fact that Linda couldn't borrow from one particular friend because someone else in the friendship network became pregnant just before her and presumably borrowed the clothes she would have had illustrates just how prevalent it is and how widely these clothes are circulated. Borrowing and its reciprocal, lending out ones own maternity wardrobe (either in between ones own pregnancies or following the completion of ones family), is a strategy positively endorsed by the vast majority of the women I interviewed. As I have suggested this is perhaps hardly surprising given the certitude invested in and attached to the items, which are circulated in this way. Having been worn by at least one other pregnant woman they are as such constituted as safe, legitimate maternity *wear*[55] (that is safe for the pregnant body to wear – sartorially

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[55] *On a personal note I have experienced first hand the status of clothing passed on in this way as having particular significance as* ***maternity wear****. During my own pregnancy an acquaintance from our church – I would not call her a friend as such as I do not know her particularly well – passed on her maternity wardrobe to me. Gill is considerably older than myself and does not dress in a style I aspire to. Nevertheless I accepted the offer, planning initially to leave the clothes in the Tesco's carrier bags they came in at the bottom of my wardrobe, or more likely the spare bedroom. However I in fact 'cherry picked' a number of the items I considered to be more acceptable such as a cream long sleeved top from Blooming Marvellous; an orange long sleeved t-shirt and a long sleeved white linen shirt both from Dorothy Perkins. These I have worn, even in front stage spaces. In addition there are a couple of other tops I have worn, though these I do reserve for back stages spaces only. What I have found interesting about my experience of this clothing is that whilst I may not particularly appreciate it stylistically it does have other tangible qualitie, which I do find attractive. It has potency as maternity wear and transfers legitimacy to my own pregnant identity (perhaps more so when my*

appropriate - rather than necessarily specialist maternity wear). In addition this form of consumption is perhaps the most prevalent strategy for coping with the demand for thrift, the hegemonic concern amongst pregnant women with respect to dressing the pregnant body. Indeed, for some women circulated wardrobes provide the mainstay of their maternity clothing consumption. For example for Carolyn borrowed items were absolutely central to her consumption to the extent that her own purchases could almost be described as peripheral:

> C: ...my cousin um.. my younger cousin had been, she'd had her baby nine months before [1st child] was born. She works in a bank so she had styles, which I could use um. My sister had also passed I think big, big blue skirt on to her which was you know she said 'oh have this as well' and that was ideal for me cos again my sister's a pharmacist and she works in you know dealing with the public.. and you could mix and match with, with those things.
> V: So that was a big help?
> C: Oh yes that was a big help, it saved me, I mean I.. apart from the pinafore and I think maybe two blouses [that she had bought herself] I don't think I actually bought any more for my, for that maternity with [1st child] because I got some other stuff, two more blouses passed on to me by somebody at school um. I was just quite happy to use those, I felt that I hadn't put in an excessive amount of money beyond what I would normally buy in the course of the year um I hadn't had to go out and buy a complete new wardrobe just because I was pregnant" (Carolyn, early-forties, married, mother of 2, Manchester.)

Natriece too made minimal purchases and relied heavily on a 'wardrobe', passed between her and her sisters, to which each woman's purchases were subsequently added. Natriece commented that when she next falls pregnant she will have many more clothes to choose from since the wardrobe will have expanded in the mean time.

As the above examples suggest, maternity clothes, through their multiple cycles of consumption, have mappable biographies. Dant (1999) for example notes the biographical qualities of commodities, that they can at once be biographical – reminding the owner of certain events, emotions experienced in their own lives – and also have their own biography. Maternity clothes can indeed be seen to be biographical, many women for example reporting that they never wanted to see their maternity clothes again following birth. In part this is related to its exhaustive use, in many cases being in almost continuous use due to the restrictive consumption women enter into. However, a significant portion of this feeling relates to the body, which was framed by the clothes themselves and the negative connotations frequently associated with the excessive, abject, uncontrollable pregnant body. For others of course positive associations and memories will make these clothes items of sentimental attachment – my mother-in-law for example only recently threw out her maternity night dresses. However, here it is the biographies of the clothes themselves that I would like to briefly consider as I would suggest the elaborate biographies lend credence to the suggestion that making do with borrowed clothes to some degree at least is a major form of clothing consumption amongst pregnant

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body was less obviously 'pregnant') because I know it was worn by another women when she was pregnant, and more than that a woman who I identify as a mother.

women. Dant draws on Kopytoff's (1986) concept of cultural biographies of things, using the particular example of a car as an 'alien object' in African culture to demonstrate these biographies:

> "The biography of a car in Africa would reveal a wealth of cultural data: the way it was acquired, how and from whom the money was assembled to pay for it, the relationship of the seller to the buyer, the uses to which the car was regularly put, the identity of its most frequent passengers and of those who borrow it, the frequency of borrowing, the garages to which it is taken and the owners relation to the mechanics, the movement of the car from hand to hand over the years, and in the end, when the car collapses, the final disposition of its remains" (Kopytoff (1986) quoted in Dant, 1999, p.143)

Although not exhaustively or in tremendous depth, within my small group of respondents it is possible to partially map something of these biographies of maternity wardrobes.

For example, though not forming part of my group of recently pregnant women a relatively complete biography of my mother-in-law's maternity nighties can be traced. Bought new during her first pregnancy in the early 70s they were worn by both her and her twin sister during all their pregnancies (they have six children between them). These night dresses along with complete maternity wardrobes were passed between the two over a period of at least 6 years and 7 pregnancies. However their use value did not end with the completion of their families, rather their use changed. Having been returned to my mother-in-law she continued to wear them until very recently, until they were thin and worn out.

Within my group of respondents similar biographies can be traced, although for the most part their end points are unknown since the majority of the garments remain in circulation or lie in temporary states of 'limbo' (Dant, 1999) between cycles of consumption, having been put away in wardrobes awaiting subsequent pregnancies – either those of the 'owner' or someone else, several examples can be pieced together:

Linda constructed her maternity wardrobe through first cycle consumption, having bought almost all her maternity clothing in a sale at Mothercare in Leeds. Although Kopytoff in his consideration of the car example is interested in the acquisition of monies with which to purchase the object I would suggest here it is more pertinent to consider the (acquisition of) knowledge which leads to the particular decision making surrounding consumption choices. As previously discussed, Linda notes being advised to always buy specialist maternity wear by friends who have been pregnant. In addition, immersed in the culture of thrift she took advantage of a Mothercare sale to buy almost all her maternity clothes therefore consuming in a way supported by embodied advice (and therefore social assurance (Clarke and Miller, 2002)) and in a socially appropriate – i.e. thrifty - way. Following the birth of her son, Linda passed her maternity clothing onto a friend for use during her final pregnancy. What is interesting to note here is not just the movement of this maternity wardrobe from hand to hand, but also the reasons for this movement. Linda assumed (rightly) that Meg would not wish to spend much at all on maternity clothes during her final pregnancy since they would have no foreseeable future biographical significance for her. However Linda, not planning to buy anything beyond a pair of leggings to replace a pair of bleach stained ones, does anticipate the future biography of this wardrobe as mapping onto her own and being

used in subsequent pregnancies of her own. Therefore one would assume that this wardrobe would be returned to Linda following the birth of Meg's baby. Interestingly there are items within this wardrobe that's use will be altered during these subsequent cycles. Firstly, the bleached leggings I suspect will not be thrown out but will rather be reserved for backstage spaces only, whereas before they could be 'dressed up or down'. Secondly, a particular dress judged to fit unsatisfactorily, since it exaggerated her body's size because of its voluminous design, will I suspect be sidelined and used infrequently if at all.

Other biographies, such as those of Carolyn's maternity wardrobe, are more detailed in the sense that they involve multiple changing of hands and cycles of consumption. This wardrobe contained many items in their second or third cycle of consumption passed to her through family and friendship networks. What I consider to be a particularly interesting facet of this biography is the uses to which these second and third cycle items were put. They were integral to Carolyn's workplace identity performance; her most carefully constructed clothed identity (as I shall go on to discuss). Despite a common ambivalence towards second hand clothing, in *this* context, in dressing the pregnant body, they were acceptable, indeed even preferable for Carolyn even in her most crucial identity performance. What is also interesting about this particular 'wardrobe' is that it included items from a number of different women. It is almost a node for the convergence of different items, with distinct biographies in themselves, coming together within one woman's wardrobe and subsequently, having been subsumed into this biography diverging once again to be returned to their original owners and then on who knows where. It would be interesting to investigate further the precise biographies of individual items as they pass through different women's wardrobes, charting the social life of individual garments as they map social networks (it would appear that most of these circulations take place within familial and friendship networks[56]) and perhaps transcend them. These commodity circulations chart the movement of knowledge, certitude, codes of dress and so on as well as marking out these commodities as essentially social in themselves.

Although these detailed biographies of individual items cannot be mapped by the data I have, purely because they extend so widely in terms of time and consumers involved, what I can say with a great deal of certainty is that these circulations are based on a shared culture of and desire to practice thrift. A desire not only to minimise ones own expenditure and gain value for money from one's own purchases but also to prevent someone else having to make wasteful outlays too. Whilst some pieces and indeed whole wardrobes of maternity clothing – usually specialist maternity wear – do make their way into renewed cycles of consumption through more formalised processes of exchange, for example through Mums & Co's dress agency and Tracey Hand's second hand maternity wear Internet enterprise Budget Bumps[57]. I would suggest that most of these circulatory biographies are mapped in

[56] It may also be the case that these circulations of maternity clothing are retraced by movements of children's clothes and so on following birth. Baby and young children's clothes are worn for such short periods that they suffer little 'wear'. As such they are judged to have high exchange value and are not viewed in the same way as adult second hand clothes. Mums & Co originally sold young children's clothes at very low prices, which many women were more than happy to buy. It appears that the gentle use, which has little material manifestation on the clothes themselves, legitimates them for further use.

[57] Indeed, it would be interesting to pursue research on the consumption of such garments particularly in relation to issues raised by Gregson et al (2000). Despite the fact that as with charity shop clothing the previous owner and wearer of the clothing is unknown, and also the cultural construction of the

these less formal ways, involving no exchange of money, through friendship and family networks. Maternity clothing therefore bears an overtly social characteristic, having biographical significance for several women as well as biographies involving several consumers.

What makes this coping strategy all the more significant, beyond the fact that so many people appear to employ it, is that it is a specific strategy for dressing pregnant bodies and not previously or subsequently part of many women's clothing consumption. For example, as Wendy describes, although she did borrow several items during her pregnancy from friends, this is something she ordinarily would not have done:

> V: Is that something you would normally do or was that...
> W: I suppose not, no not really with clothes. Its just because it's a one off thing that happens in your life I suppose and you don't need the clothes forever so.. You sort of tend to you know work it out and in some people who are pregnant or just been pregnant and share ... but you wouldn't no I wouldn't normally do that." (Wendy, late-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.)

It would seem therefore that borrowing and sharing are practiced and embraced as dominant – or at the very least significant – ways of coping with the need to consume clothing during pregnancy. That this is not practiced to the same extent outside of this corporeal context suggests to me a devaluing of this body, that it is literally not worthy of financial investment through formalised first cycle consumption, certainly not to the same extent as the non-pregnant body[58]. In relation to the culture of thrift there is an explicit devaluation of the body during pregnancy, the pregnant body is constituted as not being a legitimate site of consumption (as it is understood in terms of shopping and the inevitable expenditure of purchase). It is for this reason, I would suggest that different forms of consumption ordinarily dismissed, passed over or unimagined can be seen to be so prevalent. In entering into such forms of consumption women's whole perception of, approach to and performance through clothing is altered. Natriece and her sister's collective coping strategy perhaps provides the best example of this radical shift.

By and large Natriece made do with a handful of – literally five – bought items in addition to a small 'wardrobe' built up through minimal purchases made by her sisters during their pregnancies and passed on to her. This seems to be a relatively well thought out arrangement whereby the sisters (I think there are 3 of

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pregnant body as potentially leaky, there appear to be few of the anxieties surrounding the bodily associated with the consumption of second hand maternity wear at these sites. I would suggest there may be a number of reasons for the apparent absence of such anxieties. For example, the knowledge that such items have been given over to second cycle exchange following a finite period of use, the end of pregnancy having signalled the termination of the clothing's value for the previous owner is perhaps significant. These items are not polluted in the same way as charity shop clothes by the possibility of the others' body having died or the clothing being disregarded for some other unpaletable reason. They are simply of no further value to their previous owner and in the context of maternity wear value is normatively understood in relation to the practice of thrift. Second hand clothing, whether the other is known or not is normatively positively viewed as a means through which this can be practiced. This discourse I would suggest is the most prevalent with respect to second hand maternity wear rather than that of the bodily though there is much left unsaid here because of time and space restrictions and the need for further research.

[58] This is something that clearly has significant implications for the potential future growth of the maternity wear market and indeed the long term fortunes of particularly small independent retailers.

them including Natriece) pool their maternity wear, each person adding a few items during their pregnancy and then handing them on to the next person:

> "...my other sisters had been pregnant as well, they all had maternity wear anyway and we just passed it round the family. So as anyone else gets pregnant the wardrobe builds up!" (Natriece, early-twenties, mother of 1, Bradford.)

> V: Um, so you borrowed a lot of stuff, or shared it around
> N: Yeah I shared it with my family. Actually there wasn't that much to go around because my 2 sisters had been pregnant so they only buy the minimum stuff because you don't want to spend the money. So now that we've - like my sister's been pregnant again and I was pregnant - the wardrobes gone bigger and bigger and so we've got quite a good like sack[59] to pass around now really
> V: Mmmm so next time ...
> N: So next time I'll have quite a better choice. Because everyone buys one or 2 new things don't they so as they get better .... as you get like, as more people more times you get more to choose from"

This is an interesting use of the idea of having a 'wardrobe' of maternity wear to pass between sisters. Often a 'wardrobe' of clothes is thought of as a very individual, almost personal thing, a collection of garments chosen and collected together over time from a variety of sources largely by the individual who it belongs to. The idea that a 'wardrobe' of maternity wear can be passed round between three women with only minimal modification by each is interesting. For example it suggests a view of maternity wear as an impersonal commodity. Rather than being selected and worn to reflect particular personality traits or as integral to a performance or construction of a particular identity it is worn purely to fit and literally to clothe the body, nothing more. Again this is not in a personal sense, most people have certain sensitivities about specific parts of their body (feeling their thighs, bust ... etc are too big). But in this sense, where clothes bought by three individuals are shared the clothes are perceived to fit one body – the *pregnant* body. This wardrobe idea therefore suggests to me a prioritising of a singular pregnant identity, at the very least a subordination of ones individual non-pregnant identity, a dressing of their pregnant bodies as primarily that rather than a pregnant version of their non-pregnant selves.

This homogenous way of dressing (as) the pregnant body is, as I have discussed, sartorially safe. However, making do with other people's clothes (and often other people's clothes that aren't particularly to one's taste) rather than spending money on, making personal investments in new ones is also indicative of the devaluation of the individual pregnant body as a legitimate site of consumption.

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[59] The fact that these clothes are passed around in a 'sack' I don't think is insignificant. I would suggest that this is indicative of the devaluation of both the pregnant body itself and the clothes that adorn it. Tracey Hand also talks about how she obtains stock – generally bin liners full of women's maternity clothes – their wardrobe. Whilst this may be normative with respect to second hand clothing it nevertheless speaks volumes for me about what women actually think about these clothes, how they are valued. I am reminded of the stark contrast with the care taken of treasured items such as wedding dresses, or even winter coats and other items worn infrequently and stored between outings. Plastic coverings, mothballs, tissue paper and the like, are used to protect from dust and so on, yet these are all absent from maternity clothing storage as it is suggested by Natriece – rather this is fit to be stored only in a sack.

The readiness of women both to borrow, and perhaps more importantly to proactively offer their maternity wardrobes to others, can be seen to effectively reinforce this.

6.5: Conclusion: Making Do – The Pursuit of Thrift

> "These days women are happy just to slop around in a pair of leggings and a baggy jumper and no make up" (Expectations owner, telephone interview notes)

Among many of the small retailers I have spoken with there is a feeling that their market is being seriously curtailed by a strong, established and persistent culture of 'making do' amongst pregnant women. From my interview and participant observation data I would argue that this is indeed the case, that many women's consumption of maternity wear (and indeed clothing during pregnancy more widely) can not only be conceptualised as a process of 'making do' but that further a variety of coping strategies can be identified which women employ in order to sartorially *survive* pregnancy. Since almost every woman I have spoken to in the course of this research has 'bought into', discursively at least, one or more of these coping strategies I would argue that this culture of 'making do' can be seen to be the most socially acceptable form of clothing consumption for pregnant women, based as it is on ideas of thrift, which can be seen to be of central importance to the performance of Mother-to-be whilst also being a means of negotiating the destabilisation of existing practices, knowledges and sources of certitude. These coping strategies mark out consumption of maternity wear to be quite unlike other forms of clothing consumption, and one in which there can be seen to be a hegemonic docility in relation to cost, denying the pregnant body's sartorial consumption needs apart from in the most fundamental sense.

I have argued that running through all coping strategies outlined here is the pursuit of thrift. This principle appears to underlie almost every woman's clothing consumption practice during pregnancy with respect to those involved in this research. This principle is strongly linked to the performance of Mother-to-be and reflects those maternal identities fixed around clothing for example by Mothercare as I have previously discussed. It is a highly significant impetus in clothing consumption during pregnancy since not only does it influence (and arguably structure) women's consumption practices and indeed therefore practices of dress, but also the construction of the pregnant body as a legitimate site of consumption and therefore the market itself. For instance one particularly common attribute of the ways in which women consume clothing during pregnancy are the employment of strategies for 'making do' in order to minimise financial outlay. The prevalence of the practice of thrift is therefore highly significant since it reflects the interweaving of the production and consumption of clothing. As I have noted the discourse of appropriate consumption which defines the pregnant body as mother-to-be and therefore a legitimate sire of consumption only under self-effacing, need fulfilling conditions – the antithesis of the narcissistic consumer constructed by for example discourses of fashion – is inscribed as normative by spaces of representation such as high street retail sites and the women's magazine media. The ways in which clothing is produced therefore has significant implications for the production of the pregnant body itself as a consumer. Indeed, as I have explicitly described in this chapter, in line with this discourse thrift can be seen to resonate through and indeed structure

most women's clothing consumption during pregnancy, in some cases even becoming almost an end in itself (see Miller, 1998). Given that the production of maternity wear on the high street in particular constructs pregnant women as a monolithic mother-to-be it is perhaps unsurprising to find the self-effacing, thrift driven consumption to be so prevalent. As Miller *et al* (1998) have argued in relation to mother's shopping practices:

> "[The] distinction between 'luxury' goods and shopping for 'necessities seems to be more to do with who the goods are for as simply a matter of price. Women can be seen to be defining themselves as mothers through the sacrifices they make to their families, particularly their children. ... Personal shopping for clothes or other 'luxuries' provoked as sense of guilt rather than pleasure as these mothers surrendered their sense of self to the needs and wishes of their families: 'I regard shopping for myself as a luxury'." (Miller *et al*, 1998, p. 100)

It could be argued therefore that through practicing thrift women are actively constructing maternal identities for themselves. Indeed, at a time when existing and established practices of consumption and therefore means of establishing identity are so destabilised (and cast as inappropriate) it could be further argued that the way in which clothing is consumed as much as what one consumes becomes the normative means of identity construction through clothing. This clearly has implications for the market itself since the dominance of thrifty, self-sacrificial consumption imposes limits on the possibilities for growth.

As Campbell (1996) has noted many studies of fashion and clothing consumption have been somewhat preoccupied with the symbolic facets of clothing such that:

> "...there is a natural tendency to focus on what can be seen, rather than what cannot, can to presume that these qualities influenced the decisions to buy and then to wear. However the self reports of consumers suggest that practical considerations play a very important part in purchasing decisions, frequently overriding taste-based preferences; whilst similar instrumental considerations frequently determine what will be worn on any particular occasion" (Campbell, 1996, p.100)

However, in respect to maternity wear I would suggest that for many women it is appropriate to concentrate on the instrumental, practical considerations informing and shaping their consumption practices in perhaps greater measure than symbolic decoding of their clothing. For many of the women I interviewed for example their underlying approach to maternity wear was indeed functional, the garments themselves perceived as such rather than fashion items, purchasing decisions were often made if not in panic or pragmatism out of desperation for something (anything) to wear, than perhaps informed by a desire for comfort, and the justification for consumption at all being material need. Many of them describe their maternity wear consumption therefore as a means of getting through, even 'surviving' pregnancy. This is not consumption for pleasure, nor is it primarily about identity performance in the first instance it is about meeting material corporeal needs by the most socially acceptable means.

This is not to suggest that symbolic aspects of maternity wear are not important, far from it, they are highly significant in women's maternity wear consumption, in their attempts to construct and compose socially acceptable pregnant bodies. However what I am suggesting here is that instrumental considerations are intricately interwoven with this. The socially acceptable pregnant body in white English culture as it exists today is not an ostentatious consumer. Clothing consumption during pregnancy can therefore be conceptualised as a series of coping strategies informed and shaped primarily by the pursuit of thrift. Women develop strategies in order to negotiate the destabilisation of their existing practices in a cultural context where the most prevalent sartorial knowledge and certitude available with respect to their pregnant body precluded clothing consumption in alignment with pre-pregnancy and defines the appropriate pregnant body as mother-to-be. Therefore in a context where women's ability to forge individual identity through clothing consumption is debased, composing an appropriate social body with respect to how one acts as a consumer can become a more significant means of performing identity.

Chapter 7: Embodied Sartorial Consumption

7.1 Introduction

Whilst the foregoing account of clothing consumption during pregnancy is significant there is a sense in which it only scratches the surface of this complex process. Whilst being concerned with the difficulties and negotiations women encounter in their clothing consumption it does not engage with the inherently embodied nature of such consumption. Indeed, this is an aspect of clothing consumption that has been consistently ignored throughout academic consideration of the sartorial. Although embodied consumption is not exclusive to pregnancy it is perhaps particularly acute due to the problematic nature of pregnant corporeality. Therefore, a consideration of maternity wear consumption demonstrates clearly the need for an embodied approach to the study of clothing. Four examples of ways in which clothing consumption during pregnancy is embodied are identified for discussion here. Firstly, I examine consequences for women's consumption of the incompatibility between discourses of fashion and the pregnant body. Secondly, I discuss women's embodied experiences of shopping, noting in particular the construction and experience of pregnant bodies as 'out of place' in consumption spaces. This can be seen to be influenced by a variety of factors such as pregnancy consumption discourses defining pregnant bodies as legitimate sites of consumption only in a very specific sense and indeed the materiality of the pregnant body itself. Thirdly, my research has shown that clothing consumption practice and knowledges are destabilised and must be relearned. Sartorial knowledges and practices at the level of the body too must be renegotiated in terms of the physical, material practices of dressing pregnant bodies. Further, this is a process of constant renegotiation, since neither maternity wear nor pregnant corporeality are fixed. Finally, I examine ways in which women sartorially negotiate the surface appearance of their pregnant bodies. Drawing on the particular experiences of two of my respondents I explore ways in which women work to manage the surface appearance of their pregnant corporealities in order to negotiate its reading and interpretation by others.

7.2 Embodied Consumption: The Incompatibility Between Fashion and the Pregnant Body

In the previous chapter I noted that many women encounter significant problems in terms of dressing their pregnant bodies to reflect their personal identity. Due largely to the narrow provision of maternity wear, particularly on the high street, many of my respondents found it virtually impossible to find clothing that they genuinely wanted to wear. This not only has consequences for the ways in which clothing is consumed – for example I noted how Ari became much more pragmatic and also resorted to cannibalising ordinary womenswear in order to minimise the style deficit she experienced – but also for the embodied experience of consumption. The incompatibility of the pregnant body with discourses of fashion demonstrates this clearly, indeed a consideration of the pregnant body in relation to fashion demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between bodies and clothes. For example, Ari's experience illustrates this particularly well. Having particular identity investments in the fashionable way she dressed her pre-pregnant body and perceiving her bodily construction to be 'trendy and slim' she found her first pregnancy an

especially difficult time sartorially and corporeally. Her inability to dress in the way she would normally have chosen radically undermined her ability to construct a bodily representation of her 'self-identity', to perform her individual identity through clothing. As a consequence Ari found herself for the most part devoid of confidence in the appearance of her pregnant corporealities:

> "...you do loose your confidence but especially if your confidence is tied to your appearance before you're pregnant. Which I didn't really realise until I was pregnant how much it did affect me. The fact that I could walk into a room and think 'I know I look O.K.' and then suddenly think 'I don't know if I look O.K." (Ari, mid-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.)

Ari found her pregnant corporealities difficult to negotiate therefore and distanced from her embodied idea of self because she was no longer 'trendy and slim'. This meant that she not only lost confidence in her appearance because she was unable to perform her own identity but she also lost the affirmation gained through the gaze, which fundamentally changed the way she felt about herself. This inability to represent herself well and make the necessary identity investments in and through clothing – and in particular 'fashion' – was on the face of it due to the lack of maternity wear which reflected current trends:

> "I didn't like not wearing fashionable clothes, I found that quite hard. I'm a bit of a fashion freak, I'm quite influenced by fashion ... I'm very much influenced by what's in fashion and I think when I was pregnant last time it was a bit of a *shock* to suddenly realise that I couldn't be at the cutting edge of fashion, I couldn't wear really trendy clothes because they just weren't around"

Ari therefore, like many others who were unable to obtain maternity clothing that corresponded with their own sense of style, was forced to reconstruct 'self', by wearing clothes she would not ordinarily have chosen. Such a construction is never likely to be fully identified with or found to be satisfactory for this very reason. However Ari's difficulties with her personal body image were not restricted to the availability of fashionable clothing. Her inability to construct a fashionable identity was related to more than consumption knowledges *per se*. Rather, key within this was her material embodiment and its position with respect to fashionable discourse and also her embodied experience of pregnant corporeality in relation to this. For example due to the fluidity of pregnant corporeality it appears that Ari struggled to imagine a body image she could identify as self:

> A: ... your body changes so quickly really it does over a period of weeks it doesn't look like it did 4 weeks ago and you've always got a picture in your head of how you look ...
> J: Yeah
> A: ... And when you look in the mirror and that doesn't look like how you think you look in your head that's quite difficult to ... Like ... I think that why I'll be more prepared next time because I'll know that I'm never going to look how my head thinks I should look but I'll be happy [inaudible] if you know what I mean whereas I was never happy when I was pregnant last time cos I never looked thin basically ... or thin-ish. You know I never looked like

how other people looked. Cos I tend to work very much on a, if I think see something on someone that I like I assume it'll look like that on me and usually it probably does but, when you're pregnant it doesn't work like that. ...Cos the combat trouser, I was desperate for combat trousers because they were just in fashion when I was pregnant but I thought to myself what are people wearing with combat trousers and everywhere I looked everybody was wearing little vest tops and crop tops and I thought 'can't wear that, I'm not showing my belly, its massive'. And I couldn't, there was nothing you could wear with combat trousers that looked nice, that I thought looked nice, I could have worn a big T-shirt over it but I just didn't think that looked nice because I would have worn a vest top and I wanted to wear a vest top.

The incessant fluidity of pregnant corporeality disrupted any body image Ari may have had, effectively preventing her from constructing a singular body with which to identify and upon which to build any kind of idea of self. Each time she looked in the mirror she was confronted with a body she did not recognise, and a clothed construction that did not look as she expected. Far from just being about fashion availability therefore it is as much about the mapping of clothing itself, and in particular of 'fashion' onto pregnant bodies that precludes her from not only constructing a singular pregnant body image but also a fashionable pregnant self which was what she originally expected to be able to achieve. The above excerpt reveals that Ari felt 'fashion' did not map neatly onto pregnant bodies. She reports finding that the key look for that particular season (as she saw it) was not available to her. Although not entirely satisfactory – they were a bit 'Marks and Spencer's' for her liking, not the correct fabric and so on for the look – she *had* been able to find some combat trousers. However she felt unable to recreate the look itself because she 'couldn't' wear the corresponding top, the style being judged to be too revealing and therefore inappropriate to be worn on her pregnant body. I would therefore suggest that the discourses of fashion and the body are so intricately and intimately interwoven that even if maternity wear reflecting current trends can be found it is unlikely that they will actually map onto pregnant bodies comfortably. For someone like Ari who's personal body image is 'slim', a body onto which fashion maps perfectly – precisely because it is slim and the discourse of fashion presumes such a body – the look produced by wearing such clothing on a pregnant body will almost inevitably be unsatisfactory (even if unlike the vest top the style itself is deemed appropriate). It was therefore impossible for Ari to maintain personal identity of trendy and slim because the pregnant body is seen as neither. It is rather not slim and therefore fat and therefore the antithesis of fashion.

Ari is not alone in her difficulty of finding her pregnant body incongruent with 'fashion'. For example she observed a customer in her own shop struggling with similar issues:

"Ari ... told me about a woman who came in the other day who wanted a fashionable tight top. She tried one on but was unhappy about the way it looked on her pregnant body - she said it didn't look the way she wanted it to. She also kept complaining how fat she was ... Ari said she wasn't fat at all, just pregnant." (Mums & Co. research diary January 6th 2000)

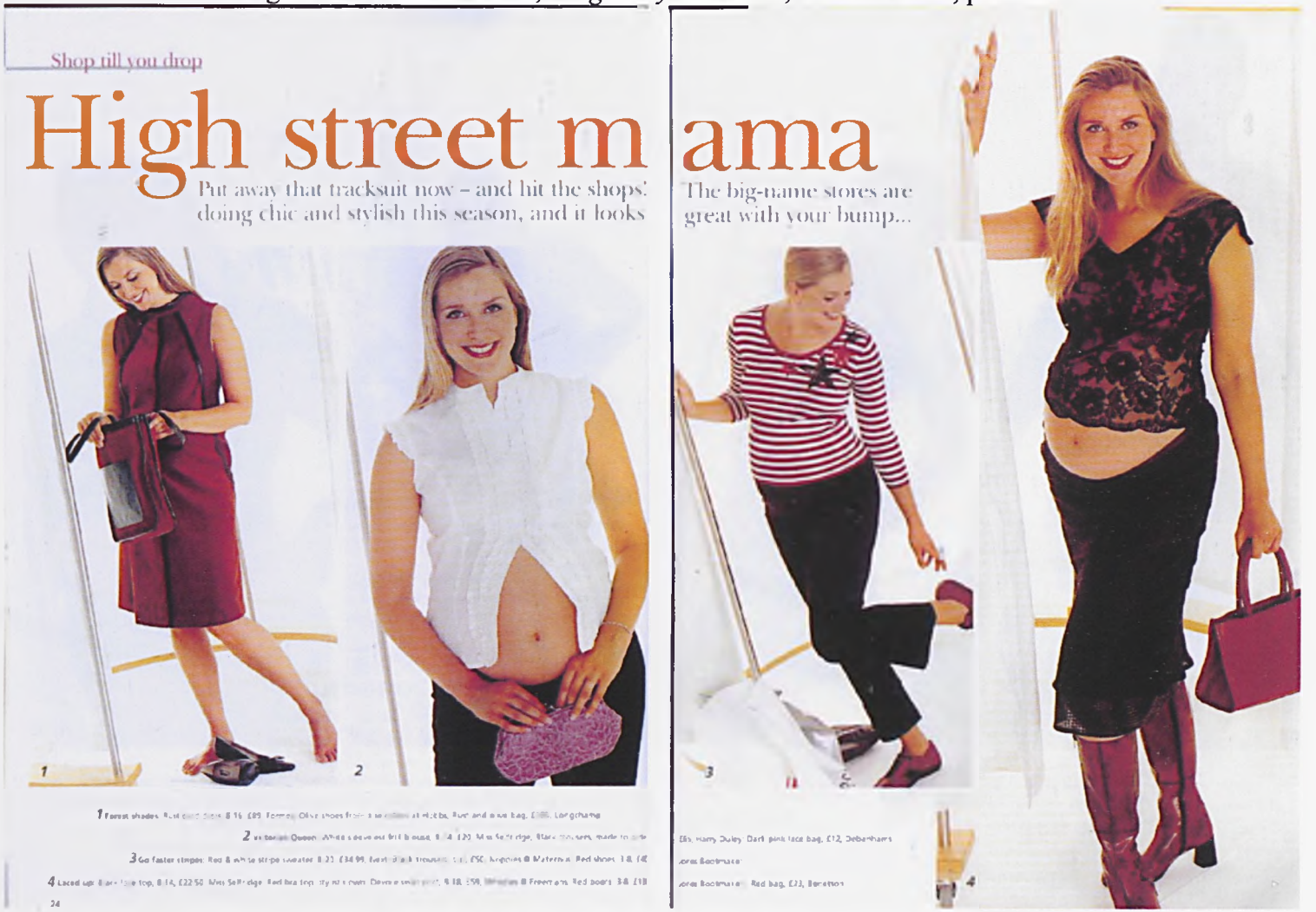
This customer clearly had an image of what the 'fashionable tight top' should look like, not just as a disembodied garment but also in relation with the body itself. The style of garment was not the problem but rather that when embodied by her pregnant corporeality the desired image was disrupted. Her 'fat' pregnant body did not fit the ideal image and was incongruous with the fashion item. Thus I would suggest that such embodied encounters with fashionable clothing might solidify and confirm women's constructions of their pregnant bodies as 'fat' because they so radically disrupt fashionable images. I would indeed argue that a significant part of the remarkably prevalent discourse defining the pregnant body as such is rooted in fashionable discourses, as they currently exist. Further that the almost absolute invisibility of maternity wear and pregnant bodies as consumers (certainly of fashion) on the high street for example is a result of, and at the same time reinforces, this. For the position of the pregnant body as the antithesis of fashion is internalised by many women as for example Natriece specifically articulates, pointing out that maternity wear retailers:

> "...didn't really cater for the fashionable, for the fashion that's at the time. So I just had to have the basics that people'd wear and just ... But then I think that's because they cater for what people want, because I don't think you'd go out and spend loads of money on fashionable clothes when your pregnant anyway because you don't feel that fashionable." (Natriece, early-twenties, mother of 1, Bradford.)

Despite the contemporary celebrity culture for publicly displaying pregnant bodies through tight fitting clothing and photographic images and the associated assumption that it has become fashionable to be pregnant, the pregnant body nevertheless, as Natriece attests, remains far from fashionable. Therefore on the high street where the dominant representation of female bodies corresponds entirely with those espoused by the discourses of fashion, the pregnant body is wholly out of place. Particularly for those retailers who specialise in normal women's wear, providing a small maternity range as an add-on, the pregnant body could be seen as dangerously disruptive to their brand image. In this context tracing backwards through the fashion cycle, it is therefore not surprising to note the absence of maternity wear at womenswear and fashion trade fairs, (producers exhibiting instead at childrenswear events), and also the total vacuum at haute couture and designer show level.

Having noted this it is perhaps worth considering other possible mechanisms through which such ideas are institutionally perpetuated. Clearly the absence of the pregnant body from any 'fashionable' discourses, not least magazines such as Vogue, as well as other landscapes of fashion (retail) themselves is significant. However I would suggest that the few sources of knowledge specifically relating to maternity wear and dressing the pregnant body available to women also in some ways reinscribe the idea that the pregnant body is the antithesis of fashion. For example pregnancy magazines often publish 'fashion features' (though as I have mentioned previously the amount of coverage received by maternity clothing in these publications is minimal at best) which at times can be read as explicitly reinforcing the radical incongruence between fashion and the pregnant body. Here I shall briefly draw on two examples. The first is a fashion shoot published in *Pregnancy and Birth* (October 2001, p.24-27, see figures 7.1 and 7.2), which was followed immediately (p.28-9, see figure 7.3) by a full double page advert for Mothercare featuring two models dressed in items from their maternity range. This layout in itself, given the

Figure 7.1: Fashion Shoot, *Pregnancy and Birth*, October 2001, p.24-25.



Shop till you drop

High street m ama

Put away that tracksuit now – and hit the shops! doing chic and stylish this season, and it looks

The big-name stores are great with your bump...

1

2

3

4

1 Forest shades.

2

3 Go faster stripes: Red & white stripe sweater

4 Laced up:

Ellis Harry Dukey Dark pink lace bag, £12, Debenhams

Red bag, £23, Benetton

24

Figure 7.2: Fashion Shoot, *Pregnancy and Birth*, October 2001, p. 26-27.

Figure 7.3: Mothercare advert, *Pregnancy and Birth*, October 2001, p.28-29.

tremendous discontinuity between the clothing worn by the models in the two items – the feature being significantly more fashion led and flirting with the boundaries of acceptability, and the advert depicting much safer, casual styles – could be seen to suggest one style as more appropriate than the other. Specifically since the fashion feature puts forward several unrealistic ideas that, based on my research, I would expect few women to find acceptable let alone adopt themselves. The feature includes many items of ordinary clothing (rather than specialist maternity wear) and therefore inevitably displays the models naked bump in two of the images. Even the most fashion conscious of my respondents such as Ari for example who did discern the culture of display among celebrities to have forged some kind of idea of fashionability would not and did not adopt such a style. On some level this kind of display for most women remains at best problematic and at worst wholly unacceptable[60]. For me therefore the question inevitably arises – why incorporate such a look into a fashion shoot that purports to give ideas to women about how to dress pregnant bodies stylishly:

> "Put away that tracksuit now and hit the shops! The big-name stores are doing chic and stylish this season, and it looks great with your bump" (p.24-25)

Of course it could be seen as providing different possibilities for wearing the pregnant body and therefore as a positive intervention into fashionable discourses. However I would also suggest that given the strength of prevailing ideas these images are likely to be read negatively and therefore strengthen (rather than weaken) the discourse situating the pregnant body firmly outside of fashion by showing graphically that it does not map comfortably onto pregnant bodies.

The second example I wish to draw on here is a fashion selection by Meg Matthews in *Having a Baby* (Jan/Feb 2000, p.50-56, see figures 7.4 and 7.5) for which she acted as a 'guest editor' and upon which Ari commented at the time of publication:

> *"The guest edited section of Having A Baby magazine really made Ari cross, or at least the fashion shoot did. .... Ari said that having Meg Matthew's as a guest editor (or any celebrity editor for that matter) was a really good idea and it was a fantastic opportunity to do something really good, different and interesting but that it had been wasted by the outrageous outfits she had dressed the models in. She wasn't impressed at all by the fashion photos saying things like: 'does she really expect that people are going to want to wear this!'. Having said that however she wondered whether she was trying to be like ordinary magazines like Vogue because in that type of magazine there are often fashion shoots featuring clothes no-one is ever going to want to wear. ... Ari was even less impressed by the fact that none of the clothes featured were maternity wear and that some (DKNY) only come in sizes up to 14! She also commented that the*

[60] It is interesting to note in this context that Maria at Belly Bumpers, in 10 months of trading estimated she had only seen two customers come into the shop wearing clothing, which revealed bare bumps.

Figure 7.4: *Having A Baby* Jan/Feb 2000.

Figure 7.5: Having A Baby: Jan / Feb 2000

model didn't look pregnant really either." (Mums & Co research diary, January 13th 2000)

I would agree with Ari that the possibilities for such a feature were indeed very promising and the comparison she made with Vogue type shots showed that it succeeded in bringing brought the pregnant body into that particular fashion frame of reference if only fleetingly. However again I would suggest that this feature does more to reinscribe than to challenge the incongruence between the pregnant body and fashion for two of the reasons Ari mentions. Firstly the fact that the model doesn't 'look pregnant really' is significant as the images do not therefore represent fashion as it maps onto a visually discernibly pregnant body. When the model's belly is revealed her pregnancy can be discerned since it is not the flat shape we would expect of a model under normal circumstances. However I would describe her as embodying an 'in-between' pregnant body as with clothing worn over her embryonic bump her shape appears much more ambiguous, her pregnancy barely visually discernible. The extent therefore to which this feature aligns 'the pregnant body' more closely with fashion is dubious. In addition the questions it raises in terms of why a model with a larger bump was not used serves to suggest that any alignment only applies to 'in-between' pregnant bodies (which can be made to look more like non-pregnant bodies) and not bigger, 'fatter' corporealities. Secondly, and in relation to this, the clothes featured are unlikely to fit many women's bodies. For example DKNY in sizes up to 14 is an unrealistic proposition in terms of both size and cost (particularly as it is unlikely to fit for the entire pregnancy). The fact that the clothes are physically unlikely to fit many women – certainly later in pregnancy – defines their bodies as *materially* incongruent with such a (high fashion) style. And further the high cost of such clothing also constructs it as outside of pregnant women's proper consumption therefore defining it in another sense as unsuitable attire for pregnant bodies. The representation of fashion here taps into the fashion as frivolity discourse which, set against the overwhelming importance of thrift in the hegemonic form of maternity wear consumption, points to another aspect of discontinuity and incongruence.

As a result of this well-established incongruence between fashion and the pregnant body some women find their normal identity performance unavailable to them. Ari and others talk about wearing basic items, 'middle of the road' styles, in the absence of what they see as credible alternatives. In response to this then some women, even some of those who usually make significant identity investments through clothing and specifically fashion, become 'Mother'. Natriece for example, someone who on the occasion I met her for interview was wearing a Polo body warmer and Armani jeans, whose identity investments lay in designer fashion, not only changed her style during pregnancy but also her clothing consumption *per se*. Natriece felt the incongruence between her pregnant body and the fashionable discourse she would normally have bought into in the sense that her body became inappropriate for display in a way that would normally have been acceptable:

> N: ... I did really change my style, because ... if I was going out now, the stuff that I wore when I was pregnant was a lot different to what I'd wear now but that's because I wear quite tight things anyway.
> V: So why wouldn't you have worn that when you were pregnant?
> N: Tight things? I don't think it looks right but that's my personal opinion. Like I think if you buy maternity wear that is like supposed to be

tight it doesn't look *too* bad. But if you go out and buy like tops that meant to be like worn by everyday people it looks horrific ... but that's just my personal opinion.

V: Is that because it doesn't sit properly or just ...

N: Well if I'm fat anyway I get a real thing about it anyway and I just didn't find myself wanting to ... I mean you could tell I was pregnant but I still put on a lot of weight as well so I didn't want to show off my fat really [laugh]! (Natriece, early-twenties, mother of 1, Bradford.)

Perceiving her pre-pregnant style to be unavailable to her specifically because of her embodiment Natriece took on a clothing regime and clothed identity more closely associated with 'Mother' than fashion. For her it was better to opt out of fashion altogether than to risk looking 'horrific'. In terms of the magazine feature discussed above she opted for the 'safe' items advertised by Mothercare, where she bought what little she did purchase, borrowing as well from a communal 'wardrobe' shared with her sisters. In so doing Natriece shifted not only her style but her form of clothing consumption from fashion to thrift, her pregnant body being unfit for both display and conspicuous consumption. Indeed there are also distinct undertones in her discussion to suggest she felt her pregnant body simply unworthy of investment in this sense. In both a financial and stylistic sense, her pregnant body was so unattractive that no amount of manipulation through clothing could improve its basic look; therefore there was no point. Whatever she did would produce a look unsatisfactory in relation to that of her non-pregnant body therefore it was not worth anything but the minimum investment.

The incompatibility between pregnant bodies and fashion discourses and garments can therefore be seen to have material consequences for the ways in which women consume clothing, and also wear and experience their bodies during pregnancy. The disruption of consumption practice, knowledge and certitude therefore in relation to fashion has deeper implications than merely having nothing preferable to wear. This is not just about a disruption of the identities women perform through clothing at a surface level; it is about who they materially are. Embodied experiences of retail spaces can also be seen to disrupt this with respect to women's status as legitimate consumers.

7.3 The Consuming Pregnant Body: Embodied Experience Of Shopping

As noted in the previous chapter, consumption practice is disrupted for many women at the level of shopping not just because they are literally forced out of their usual destinations through lack of provision[61] but also due to the radically different spaces they migrate to and the specific codings of these. High street maternity wear spaces of representation as I have noted tend to evoke singular pregnant bodies, which particularly in the case of Mothercare for example are explicitly maternal.

[61] *It may also be that women feel forced out of these spaces because their bodies no longer fit here. I have experienced this myself. Once embodied as obviously pregnant I began to feel ill at ease in clothing shops I would ordinarily confidently frequent. Specifically I feel that because my body discounts me from being an active, conspicuous consumer in these spaces I am somehow out of place. This is a feeling which is compounded by a sense in which I am being critically surveyed by others (particularly store staff) who would judge any intention to wear the clothes on offer here as inappropriate as they clearly would not 'fit' my growing body in a variety of ways.*

Women may therefore feel themselves to be 'out of place' in such spaces if their bodies do not map onto the dominant representation within them. Whilst clearly with respect to identity this may be problematic (as discussed with reference to Tina's experience in the previous chapter) material embodiment may also construct women as 'out of place', as Natalie for example describes:

> N: ... when you're in a maternity store you're automatically assumed to have this great big bump in front of you and um be about to have the baby and going round looking at maternity clothes and more baby clothes. They don't think that people go round when they first get pregnant and buy them, its more towards the end that they, that they buy them.
> V: So it did make you feel a bit ...
> N: I mean people, you still go in and if you, whenever I was in Mothercare whether it was buying for Anthony or if it was buying maternity clothes you still have a look round to see if everyone is actually, everybody is actually got a bump and if they're expecting and you sort of go 'ohh'. (Natalie, early-twenties, mother of 1, Manchester.)

As Natalie suggests there is an expectation and surveillance among women themselves that those occupying these spaces will be embodied as obviously pregnant. It is perhaps therefore not surprising that women who are clinically pregnant but not showing (in very early pregnancy) or embodied as 'in-between' (when their bodies are neither normal due to an embryonic bump but nevertheless not obviously pregnant) might feel out of place in such spaces. Indeed it is a common occurrence in small independent shops for women to offer explanations for their presence as if not looking pregnant disqualifies them from legitimately occupying such spaces or participating in consumption within them. This would seem to imply that discourses about appropriate consumption are indeed embedded within retail spaces, discourses about who these clothes are intended for and how they should be consumed. Indeed it would appear that it is almost expected that this consumption will take place according to need. That legitimate maternity wear consumption should take place after a period of 'making do'. Having waited until the last possible moment, when literally clothes do not fit any more women should only then embark upon a brief and limited period of shopping in order to fulfil this material need. To the extent that the pregnant body is a legitimate site of consumption at all, high street retail spaces can be seen to reiterate the limitation and parameters of this acceptability. Not only is maternity wear a functional garment for the fulfilment of material need and therefore not for the 'in-between pregnant body[62], such bodies being experienced as out of place in these consumption spaces but also *heavily pregnant* bodies are also similarly coded and experienced as inappropriate consumers.

> "...the last bit of pregnancy ... goes really, really slowly. And I think then it would have been really nice actually if I could have gone out and treated myself to something, because by that point you're really missing going shopping as well. Unless you've got lots of money you just stay away from

[62] This is reinforced by the fact that for the most part, high street maternity wear does not fit this 'in-between' pregnant body either, suggesting further that maternity wear is only for a certain – monolithic - pregnant body.

shops when you're pregnant because it's too depressing. Cos everybody else is, especially cos everybody else is wandering round and they all look healthy and you just look *fat* [inaudible] and especially because you waddle as well! [laugh] So if I could have gone and treated myself to something that would have helped but ...." (Sarah, mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Bradford, emphasis in original speech)

Sarah talks here about the desire to buy something new in the last months and weeks of her pregnancy but there were a variety of reasons that stopped her, many of which arose from the anticipated embodied experience of being heavily pregnant in consumption space. Specifically it seems the she perceived her heavily pregnant body to be somewhat out of place in the shopping spaces. On a fundamental level Sarah's clothing consumption during pregnancy was structured by a desire to minimise expenditure on herself – the discourse of thrift identified in the previous chapter. Therefore whilst desiring to go shopping and buy something new in the latter stages of her pregnancy her self-imposed consumption practice itself defined her heavily pregnant corporeality as an inappropriate site of consumption. Any purchase of clothing would be grievously frivolous at this time since its use value would be short lived and further this would be consumption as leisure, for pleasure, rather than the fulfilment of material need. Therefore were she to have gone shopping Sarah would have occupied consumption space but not as a consumer *per se*. Her body in this sense barred her from full involvement in the space's activities her presence could therefore have been construed as unjustified and indeed inappropriate. In addition, in relation to the dominant forms of embodiment both represented and physically present in these spaces the heavily pregnant body is again something of an anomaly, indeed an antithesis. Indeed alluding to the comparative body image themes which come out in for example Rachel Colls work where women feel out of place in particular spaces depending on the degree of deviation between their body and that represented and idealised in that space by both the clothes on sale there and the other people in those spaces. Sarah felt her body to be 'fat' and physically abject in comparison to others present in shopping spaces. For her to occupy such spaces therefore would be a negative and 'depressing' experience, she would be out of place because of the look and materiality of her body.

This said it would not be accurate to suggest that women - though finding their shopping geographies vastly diminished and destabilised in terms of the knowledges that sit behind them and the embodied experiences of the spaces themselves - similarly loose the desire to actively consume clothing. Although as I have suggested thrift is an important part of this consumption process and some women like Meg, Sharen and Natriece could be described as apathetic at best with regards their maternity wear many others retain a desire to shop for clothes and indeed find buying new items or even outfits even towards the end of their pregnancy cathartic. Indeed even though Sarah did not enter into renewed sartorial consumption at this stage in her pregnancy she nevertheless desired to remain an active consumer and suggests it would have helped her to feel better about her heavily pregnant corporeality[63]. However even if women do continue to participate

[63] *Indeed, I can identify with this feeling. Buying new clothes during late pregnancy could indeed be experienced positively, perhaps even improving how a woman feels about her heavily pregnant body. Any garment bought at this time would be visually and materially associated with this corporeality only, whereas clothing that has been worn over time during which significant changes have occurred to the pregnant body will inevitably be associated with multiple pregnant corporealities. In relation*

in consumption activities during late pregnancy the material realities of heavily pregnant corporealities can be made to feel out of place by the physical construction of shopping centres for example. This is something discussed in-depth by Longhurst (1994) in her study of a New Zealand shopping mall and indeed is reflected in my own research. For example, women reported that shopping can be experienced as tiring, the physical design of shopping space therefore being of heightened importance and indeed to a certain extent determining their ability to engage in shopping activities at all:

> S: ...Its nice actually, if you can go ... if you can go shopping when you're pregnant and find something and buy it and feel nice in it that really cheers you up.
> A: Like when I was pregnant I went to the White Rose centre a lot because I could drive, I could park near the door, I could walk into the centre and there were escalators and lifts everywhere and its cool and its all on one level. So to me I, I went there almost right up to the birth you know I was there because I felt comfortable there. I wouldn't have gone into Leeds cos you can't find anywhere to park and if you do park you've got to walk miles before you can get to the shops. So indoor, indoor places are absolutely brilliant...(Ari mid-twenties, married, mother of 1 and Sarah, mid-twenties, married, first pregnancy, both from Bradford)

The materiality of the pregnant body therefore – which is only experienced as 'in place' in even maternity wear retail spaces for a marginal period, when embodied in a very specific way - can be seen to influence women's shopping geographies. For example they appear to contract during the latter stages of pregnancy due to the awkward materiality of the heavily pregnant body. However it could also be argued that the design and physicality of such spaces accentuate this construction of heavily pregnant embodiment. As Ari says, she frequented a certain shopping centre where she felt her specific corporeal requirements were met almost right up until her due date, whereas she avoided other places where they were not. Longhurst (1994) suggests in relation to various spaces it is not surprising to find the needs of pregnant bodies not considered in design since the underlying ideology informing construction takes for granted their exclusion. This is clearly more dramatic and deeply seated in spaces such as public houses and the like (see Longhurst, 1994), yet I have suggested that for the most part women experience their pregnant bodies as similarly out of place in mainstream consumption spaces, even maternity wear spaces when embodied in particular ways.

Women's shopping practices can then be seen to be not only grossly destabilised by the sartorial needs of the pregnant body but also the embodied experience of new practices can be seen to be vastly different to what women are used to and also crucially *change over time as their embodiment shifts*. This is indeed also true of the knowledges required to dress pregnant bodies. These are not

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with these bodies garments produce radically different looks and I would suggest that particularly as the body grows larger satisfaction with this is likely to deteriorate. Clothing that looked better on a pregnant body that is subsequently (in late pregnancy) 'replaced' by a larger, more abject form is unlikely to provoke positive embodied experiences. Therefore entering into renewed consumption of new garments may help women to feel more positive about their heavily pregnant bodies since these items will not have been part of a now unobtainable but more satisfactory look of a smaller, neater corporeality.

constant either, rather, they need to be fluid as is the corporeality itself. The embodied experience of clothing consumption, from the spatialities of consumption to the material encounters with clothing can be seen to be critically destabilised by pregnancy and necessarily renegotiated on a constant basis throughout its duration as a result of the pregnant body's fluidity.

7.4 Sartorial Knowledges – Practices of Dressing the Pregnant Body

Material practices associated with dressing the body can also be seen to be critically impeded by pregnancy. Though there is a deafening silence within the fashion and clothing literatures regarding consumers' material encounters with clothing items themselves, I would argue that this is of central importance here. No consideration of maternity wear consumption could count itself credible without this. Indeed I would even question the validity of other accounts of fashion consumption, which do not consider that material relationship between clothing and body from the perspective of the consumer. Material encounters with clothing are critical since they betray levels of sartorial competence in relation to wearing particular bodies. Vestimentary competences extend beyond the construction of visually acceptable social bodies in terms of style and can be destabilised too by a lack of knowledge and confidence in literally how to wear the clothes themselves. Any difficulties with coming to terms with the sartorial techniques required can destabilise any certitude women may muster since for example ill-fitting clothes can disrupt the most carefully constructed image. Here then lies a further disruption to embodied sartorial consumption knowledge and practice since many women are used to having expert personalised knowledges tailored to their own bodies and identities. For example with respect to sizing, women are often knowledgeable in terms of what size clothes their body fits in relation to different retailers and different styles. Despite the fact that sizing is rarely experienced as a constant within these variables women are generally adept at negotiating these. However, pregnancy tends to disrupt even these sensibilities. Not only are women's existing consumption knowledges destabilised whilst they simultaneously lack often even the most basic awareness of maternity wear on which to build new ones. At the same time their in-depth, expert knowledges of their bodies are also destabilised and neither do they throughout the duration of pregnancy (and arguably beyond) since the pregnant body is constantly changing. As these small independent retailers commented, women often require guidance at a fundamental level in relation to sizing:

> "Especially when it is their first pregnancy women need a lot of advice. They don't know what size to buy and so on, they will always tell you they are bigger than they are. For example if they are a size 10 normally they will tell you they need a size 12." (Partner, Precious Cargo, telephone interview notes)

> "People are naïve. Really have to tell them to wear pre pregnancy size. She used the example of a customer she had in yesterday who was usually a size 10 and had assumed that by now she would need a size 16 in maternity wear. She said people don't seem to realise that it is cut to fit you right through in your normal size." (Manager, Mums 2 Be, Kew, telephone interview notes)

> "When it's their first pregnancy people don't know what's available and although they think they do they don't really know what's going to happen to their bodies she says. Often she's had customers come and try things on and say 'this is enormous' and she's had to explain that if it fitted now it wouldn't accommodate their bump at full term. She says women have no idea how big they're going to get." (Partner, Room 4 2, telephone interview notes)

Not only are practical consumption knowledges destabilised by the pregnant body as discussed in the previous chapter therefore but also *material* knowledges associated with physically dressing the body. Material encounters with clothing during pregnancy, particularly at the outset, and during the process of shopping for maternity wear can be seen to be structured by the clothes and indeed the pregnant body's unfamiliarity. Even the clothes themselves disrupt existing vestimentary knowledges and consumption because they too are alien:

> "I'll tell you what I did find difficult is ... you don't ... when you're looking for things on the *hanger* ...it is a kind of different thing ish to what you would normally wear and you kind of try to take into account your body growing, its actually quite difficult to know what to buy or even what to take in to try on. And it was just *shear* pot luck that I took a few things in and ... Because I *really* wanted a skirt and it was quite difficult to find nice skirts, and I found one, and on the hanger it didn't look anything special but it turned out to be, to be all right." (Linda, early-thirties, married, mother of 1, Bradford)

As Linda describes the unfamiliarity of the body and the clothing can contribute to making shopping for maternity wear quite a daunting task, particularly for women facing the need for, and engaging with it for the first time. It is not insignificant I would suggest that two of the retailers quoted above stress the lack of embodied knowledge as a particular problem to women. In subsequent pregnancies women have greater sartorial knowledges precisely because they are more materially aware of their corporealities and are therefore more skilled in the techniques of dress through greater familiarity with both pregnant embodiment, maternity wear and specifically the way the two are mapped onto one another. However, when at first women venture into this 'world of maternity wear' as Ari describes it, the pouch inserts, the extra material, the button hole elastic can seem quite daunting and strange. As Linda describes the clothes are completely different to those she was used to buying, and lacking embodied knowledge to contextualise these apparent anomalies they seemed strange and unappealing. This is something noted by others, that 'on the hanger' the apparently voluminous garments, disembodied and slack appear 'horrendous' and yet when in place, contextualised and pulled taught by their pregnant bodies they are transformed to acceptability:

> N: But I find with maternity wear that it looks better on you than it does on the hanger. So like I was trying on the trousers and I was thinking 'Oh God, these are going to look awful' and I put them on and they didn't look that bad, its just the actual, on the hanger because of the panel and they're hanging down and they look horrendous
> A: Yeah I always say that to customers, 'I know it looks awful but try it on, it really does look better'

N: Yeah it does, it looks better on than on the hanger [laugh](Natriece, early-twenties, mother of 1, Bradford and Ari)

It is certainly the case that maternity wear has little or no hanging appeal and that once mapped onto the pregnant body and the extra material smoothed out, pulled taught by its contours, (and as such hidden), these garments are viewed more positively[64]. Indeed retailers are conscious of this and encourage women to try items on as part of their selling strategies, as Ari hints in the above quote. However although it may be generally the case that maternity wear looks better on the hanger this of course assumes the wearer possess appropriate knowledges relating to the various techniques of fit built into the clothes themselves. That women possess these sartorial knowledges I would argue cannot be taken for granted however. For example the non-pregnant model Dennis and Maria have used in their photo shoots demonstrates this very clearly. Having never been pregnant herself and therefore presumably, as others have commented, never having considered maternity wear before, least of all how she might wear it, she found the clothing alien and had little idea how to wear it:

"One thing that she clearly wasn't at all used to - not surprisingly since she has never been pregnant - is wearing maternity wear. She had no idea how to wear it. I first noticed this on the very first take when she put on the JoJo apple tunic and Capri pants. The crutch looked very low and it was obvious why immediately, she'd got them around her waist not over her 'bump'. All evening we had to keep asking her to pull things right up over the bump. It clearly seemed completely unnatural to her to have them right up so high." (Belly Bumpers research diary, Monday April 2nd, 2001)

Again this can be seen as a further respect in which maternity wear is alien to women, destabilising yet again the material experience of consumption, in particular, the material relationship between body and clothes. As Ari commented following the empty handed departure of a first time pregnant woman from Mums & Co:

"Ari wasn't at all surprised that she hadn't bought anything and said after she'd gone that she was probably surprised by how much spare material there was in the trousers and how peculiar it felt compared to normal clothes. She said that the first time you try on maternity wear it is a bit strange because you've never thought about it that much before, certainly not the mechanics of how you wear it (trousers etc. above your bump). When you're used to clothes fitting you properly it can be a bit of a shock and

[64] However, particularly garments with pouch inserts do not fit all pregnant bodies perfectly. For example the 'in-between' pregnant body (that the majority of women embody when they first are forced to shop for maternity wear) does not fill the pouch at all which means the smooth mapping does not occur. This creates an unacceptable image since there are a whole set of issues with respect to the degree to which the clothing frames the body, non-framing items blurring corporeal boundaries and so on. These shall be discussed later, suffice to say at this point that this can impact significantly on sartorial competences as women find this difficult to negotiate, limiting their ability to compose a socially acceptable body through dress. Also it is important to note that the transformation from hanger to body, unacceptable to acceptable is not always as smooth as it is expressed here.

it doesn't really feel right. (Mums & Co research diary, Thursday January 13th 2000)

Although this customer didn't buy anything from Mums & Co on that particular occasion she at least left with the skills necessary to obtain optimum fit from whatever she did eventually buy, wherever she bought it from. Again this flags up a key role of these small independents, increasing their customer's knowledges in so many ways. This I would argue is a particularly important role since these are skills women do not learn, certainly not in any formalised way, anywhere else. The one to one attention women receive in these retail spaces is quite unlike the virtual anonymity on the high street. I would suggest that excluding those who do receive advice from small independent staff (and perhaps to a small degree on the high street and elsewhere) many women are actually wearing their maternity wear wrongly, as for example Carolyn revealed during an interview:

> "You don't want it round your bump you want it hugging your hips if you can leaving you that bit sort of feeling comfortable" (Carolyn, early-forties, married, mother of 2, Manchester.)

> *"...it was obvious that the woman was completely flummoxed by the maternity wear itself. Ari had to go into the changing room and help her. When she tried the Noppies trousers on she called out, asking did they do alterations because 'look'. I didn't go into the changing room to look as that would have been wholly inappropriate but I could tell what had happened and Ari confirmed this afterwards that indeed she had them on her waist and consequently the crutch was somewhere approaching her knees. Ari then explained at some length about how the trousers work, this is something she has to do a lot." (Mums & Co research diary, 14/15 March 2001)*

And as Ari also noted in an interview more than a year before this incident the crux of this problem is that:

> "...nobody tells you how to wear maternity clothes. I'm surprised the amount of women who come in and they look at me completely .... they try trousers on and they're hanging like the crutch is down there somewhere [points to half way down thigh]... because they've got them where their waist is. And they'll say 'oh these aren't right they're too big' and I'll say 'just pull them right up under your chest' and they'll look at me and I'll say 'well that's where you're supposed to wear them so they'll pull them up and suddenly it all fits and then they tighten it up around there with the button - hole elastic and suddenly it looks fine and they all go 'oh wow'. It's just that nobody actually says to you ...(Ari, mid-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.)

I am not suggesting that women spend the majority of their pregnancies with the crutch of their trousers around their knees. Rather I am arguing that this is the natural instinct of women when they first shop for and materially engage with maternity wear. The clothes are alien but they apply their existing sartorial knowledges to them. They don them as if they were comparable with the clothes

they are used to wearing and their material knowledges are based on[65]. Without any prior knowledge of maternity wear and with these clothes destabilising virtually everything they do know about clothing in general, this can be a daunting experience and without the one to one attention of small independents trial and error would appear to be the dominant method of knowledge acquisition given the lack of anything else. It is also significant to note that material encounters with clothing are never stable during pregnancy. The nature of most styles (particularly of trousers and skirts) necessitates almost constant adjustment of drawstrings, buttonhole elastic and the like in order to achieve optimum comfort and fit. Even those items, such as bengalin trousers, which have no such mechanisms fit differently (and indeed *feel* different) as the boundaries of ones corporeality shifts[66]. And indeed it is wholly possible that satisfactory fit or comfort may never be achieved[67] (or indeed only for a brief period) if clothes are bought in a certain size in anticipation of excessive growth that is never realised for example. Precisely because of the incessant fluidity and apparently limitless possibilities for corporeal growth and change material sartorial knowledges are disrupted and are rarely re-stabilised. I have argued here that the materiality of maternity wear garments and the lack of formalised knowledge dissemination (other than through small independent retailers for example) exacerbates this disruption that in turn influences the competency of women to compose appropriate social bodies through dress. This is a fundamental problem which can be seen to reinforce the culture of making do during pregnancy since achieving satisfactory fit can be experienced as a constant battle, a satisfactory silhouette never quite achievable, therefore undermining certitude at a basic level.

7.5 Sartorial Negotiation of the Pregnant Body

It is not just at the basic level described above that sartorial negotiation of the pregnant body takes place. I refer to it here as *the* pregnant body very deliberately because despite the constant negotiation of the fluid pregnant body through dress described above, with respect to the cultural signification of bodies coded as pregnant there is little distinction made between women's multiple pregnant corporealities. Regardless of the constant detailed surveillance and negotiations that may be necessary at the bodily scale as a result of corporeal multiplicity, women may simultaneously find themselves negotiating a singular figure since the pregnant body is always read by others in the context of hegemonic cultural discourse. As such the management of bodily boundaries mapped through dress is more a method of composing the pregnant body to be the most appropriate it can be at a particular time

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[65] When discussing this with Maria at Belly Bumpers for the purpose of getting feedback from her she agreed wholeheartedly with me about the lack of sartorial knowledge women have and commenting that this can have dire consequences for women. One customer of theirs did not consult her about how she should wear the jeans she purchased and brought them in to be shortened (they offer an alterations service). However it transpired that she had measured the amount she wanted taking up when wearing them on her waist. Consequently as her pregnancy progressed they became unwearable because she could no longer wear them in this way. This customer because of her lack of knowledge effectively wasted about £50 in the end.

[66] For example some women choose to fold down the 'waist' of these garments until their bump becomes large enough to require the full length.

[67] *I personally have a pair of black linen trousers in my maternity wardrobe for which I do not hold up much hope in this respect. I do not anticipate them fitting satisfactorily or being comfortable at all during my pregnancy, mainly because I bought the wrong size – I should have bought a size smaller but also because of the cut.*

in relation to all encompassing discourses which conflate all pregnant corporealities into one figure and narrow possibilities for the way it is lived and performed. Though there may be degrees of how uncomfortable particular pregnant corporealities may make others feel, how unattractive they are considered to be, how out of place in a particular space and so on, the pregnant body as a monolithic figure inhabits almost all social discourses of pregnancy. Some women may therefore find managing their pregnant bodies through dress particularly demanding given the two levels on which they must negotiate them both in relation to the multiple corporealities they experience and also in relation to the monolithic figure they embody. Two examples are discussed here. Firstly one teenage mother's sartorial negotiation of her pregnant body which she dressed in order to construct a 'non-performance' of pregnancy since she perceived cultural discourse to mark out her pregnancy as socially unacceptable. Secondly 'the workplace' is discussed as a particular spatial context where the pregnant body is considered largely inappropriate and out of place. I consider one woman's particular experience in managing her bodily identity through dress in order to maintain an authoritative and professional workplace identity, which again demanded something of a 'non-performance' of pregnancy.

7.5.1 Managing An Inappropriate Pregnant Body

For those for whom a pregnancy is un-welcomed (even if the child is subsequently cherished) the negotiation of other's readings of their bodies can be particularly difficult, as it was for one of my respondents who had her first child in her late teens. This pregnancy was unplanned and although the child was indeed subsequently cherished the pregnancy itself was difficult for Tracey in terms of the upheaval it wrought on her self-identity. Indeed she freely admits that for the most part, particularly at work she tried to hide her pregnancy as much as possible:

> "I covered it up an awful lot last time..." (Tracey, mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Northampton.)

> "With [my first baby] it was um, cos I was working in an office and I had to be kind of like all right to wear so it was mainly like dresses cos it was summer. But they weren't maternity because I couldn't find any maternity dresses and I didn't really want to look fat and frumpy but I did. Um and you really wanted to hide it as much as what you could."

From the discursive regimes Tracey often slips into when discussing this first pregnancy, as here using the second person, it is clear that to a certain extent this was a pregnancy that happened to someone else. The impersonalisation in her speech suggests a distancing, that this body was somehow not entirely her own (as it disrupted her sense of self so radically) but also that she was not and could not entirely become what this body should be. It appears there are two main reasons for Tracey wanting to hide her pregnant body as much as possible during her first pregnancy and these are not unrelated. First, she was very conscious about her changing body shape and in particular about how big she felt and, secondly, she was very conscious of how others reacted to her pregnancy, feeling that people were 'judging' her because of her age:

V: Why did you cover it up more the first time? Or was just because you had baggy dresses and that was what you had?

T: Because I weren't that old I felt a bit everybody was looking at me. And because I put on weight everywhere I felt like a bus. I was like, everything, anything I ate just went on everywhere. And like because I wasn't that old I felt like everybody was looking at me and *judging* me so you tended to cover it up more." (original emphasis)

This quotation is also extremely revealing as to Tracey's sartorial negotiation of her pregnant corporeality during her first pregnancy as well as how she experienced and lived it. In at least two respects her pregnant corporeality was radically disruptive of her pre-pregnant self-identity. Her rapidly changing body shape which contrasted in the extreme with her pre-pregnant 'really nice figure' and caused her to feel 'like a bus' as well as the pregnancy itself undermined her self-identity dramatically. She took on an entirely new clothing regime during this pregnancy – that did not reflect her self-identity either - in order to negotiate this essentially alien corporeality. Largely chosen and bought by her mother on her behalf (it seems she could not even bring herself to shop for this body) Tracey wore large, baggy dresses, none of which were specialist maternity wear – significantly she refused a Mothercare dress (which to this day has its labels still attached) – in order to compose an appropriate body. For Tracey this meant (particularly at work) covering and attempting to conceal not just her increasing size but also the pregnancy itself. Concealment of her pregnancy was for Tracey the only means of composing an appropriate social body since she felt that her embodiment as pregnant (given her self-identity and specifically her life stage) was fundamentally inappropriate in the eyes of others. The fact that she refused to wear maternity wear at all, and especially Mothercare clothing is significant I would suggest, she was aware that the identity associated with such clothing was radically at odds with her own and to wear it would make her all the more visible and open to judgement.

Despite the radical disruption of not only her consumption knowledge, practice and certitude but also her embodied identity on a very basic level Tracey did not reconstruct her clothed identity in relation to 'mother' as others (for example Natriece) have done. This identity, imbued in specialist maternity wear, was also felt to produce an inappropriate clothed composition for her particular body. As a teenaged, unmarried, pregnant woman she felt the identity of mother did not map onto her body at all. In fact her corporeal identity contradicted the prevailing cultural expectations for how mother was to be embodied. Therefore in a culture where the readings of the pregnant body as the maternal body – a mother-to-be – are associated with equally narrow prescriptions for her behaviour and dress, indeed even down to her embodiment itself, Tracey felt she had little alternative but to conceal it as much as possible and to literally *not be* the pregnant body.

7.5.2 Managing An Inappropriately Placed Pregnant Body

Whilst Tracey experienced her teenage pregnant body to be socially inappropriate in almost every sense it seems this feeling was heightened and the need for disguise deepened when she occupied public spaces, where she would fall under the judgmental gaze of others. Other women too report the need to manage the appearance of their pregnant bodies in particular socio-spatial contexts, for example it would appear that particularly significant example of a space where pregnant

bodies must be carefully negotiated through dress is 'the workplace'. Though clearly not the case to the same extent in all workplaces, at a fundamental level the pregnant body is defined as 'out of place' in such spaces by the social order and hegemonic gender roles, relations and identities which underpin it. Despite the advances of women into almost every conceivable part of the 'workforce', the pregnant body, perhaps the most definitive embodiment of femininity as it is dominantly perceived, remains problematic for a variety of reasons (see for example McDowell, 1995).

For some women, their workplace experiences are almost entirely positive. For example Tracey found her workplace encounters enhanced her experience of pregnancy the second time round. Though there were clearly other factors influencing her far more positive second experience of pregnancy (not least her marital status, her age and established identity as a mother), the validation she received from her colleagues as a result of their sustained interest and concern was clearly significant:

> T: ...there's so many, down Tesco's there's so many people that have had children, so many people have been on maternity leave, so many people are pregnant. And you work with the same people on the same nights so you know them as individuals, you know what they like and they were like coming up and feeling the bump and touching it and 'oh are you all right?' and 'how's the bump?' 'How's it going?' 'How do you feel?' 'How long have you got to go?' And they were all interested and it made you feel nice. It made you feel really good because there was somebody else interested in how you were feeling. And they turn round when you go in shopping saying 'you look really well', and you'd be feeling like shit but ... I did look well fair enough but it was like 'oh thank you', 'how are you feeling?'
> V: Yeah it makes you feel better at least.
> T: Yeah. So I think the job had a lot to do with it and how I felt ... and everything else. Plus I get on really well with like my team leader so if I was feeling tired I'd just go into the cash office and sit and sort the pods out, instead of having to deal with people. Because sometimes you start to feel 'I don't want to speak to you, go away'. So I'd go and shut myself in the office. (Tracey, mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Northampton.)

In Tracey's particular workplace context, her local Tesco's supermarket, working evening shifts in the customer services department on the checkouts, her pregnant body was clearly not just tolerated but also valued by the personnel, certainly those she came into immediate contact with. This is not surprising, such shifts and departments are often dominated by mothers working in the evenings once their partners have returned from work to look after the children. It is perhaps unsurprising that Tracey should feel valued and comfortable in such an environment; she was explicitly in place here. In other predominantly female jobs and workplaces similar experiences may also be commonplace. Certainly those occupations with uniforms which provide maternity garments for their pregnant employees signal that if not openly valued above any other (as Tracey was in a social sense at least) the pregnant body's presence is at least expected and tolerated, for example health service occupations such as nursing and physiotherapy (members of both being represented among my research group). However this has not always been the case as Linda's mother, who was present during her interview, suggested:

LM: I was nursing at the time and that was a nightmare because if you can remember this was sort of thirty plus years ago they had belts and you couldn't go into anything different than the uniform.
L: Really could they not, even when you were pregnant [surprised]
LM: No, they didn't then and it was really uncomfortable. Matthew was born 6 weeks early and I'd actually finished work on the Friday of one week and he was born the following Wednesday so I was like working on the wards right to then because I was training.

This suggests that only just over three decades ago, even in professions most closely associated with femininity such as nursing, the pregnant body was on some level at least unwelcome. Even today in similar workplaces uniform issues arise, which hint at continued uneasiness about the place of pregnant bodies in workspaces. Uniform issues that may preclude the efficient performance of pregnant bodies as for example Angela, a physiotherapist pregnant with her third child described:

A: Work was the worst because they don't really um ... well they gave me a uniform and it's a pregnancy one but it was a size 42...and I'm only a size 14 normally, so like the shoulders [laugh] were off here [pointing to half way between her shoulder and elbow] and the cleavage was down here and then it had got a lovely tie apron at the back that you could tie up, it was awful. So in the end I just said 'Oh I'm not wearing it; and put my foot down and just wore a T-shirt with navy trousers so [laugh]
V: Oh gosh, so was that the only one they had or something?
A: Yeah. I got away with it for a while just wearing, I wore the next size up for a while but then, for about the last ten weeks [that she was working] I just couldn't fit into that at all, it was too small so I tried this top on and I must have worn it three times [laughing] And then I decided no, this is positively indecent, when I was bending down in front of everybody you know. (Angela, mid-thirties, married, third pregnancy – mother of 2, Manchester.)

Angela at least had the confidence to assert herself and refuse to wear the provided uniform because of its inappropriate fit exacerbated by the demands of her job. Had she felt unable to do this the influence of what can be seen to be an essentially subtle assertion that her pregnant body itself was inappropriate to be filling such a role would have been more significant. However she did receive more direct suggestions of this from some of her patients:

"I work with the elderly and a lot of them, once they know you're pregnant, they don't want you to do anything for them. 'Oh you shouldn't be doing that, you shouldn't be doing this!' [laugh] 'Get off your hands and knees!'"

Angela does not appear to have been greatly troubled by these occurrences but they were clearly significant enough for her to call them to mind during the interview when we were not initially discussing work related issues. Underlying both Angela's described experiences is a tacit assumption that her pregnant body is out of place in this workplace, for example through its inability to perform tasks safely (in reference to the baby's safety that is) as suggested by the elderly patients comments. For her the dress code in relation to dressing appropriately demurely was interestingly self-imposed, the provided uniform being judged to reveal too much cleavage to be

'decent'. Her official uniform represented her pregnant body in an inappropriate way. This could be read as the institutional statement of what the elderly patients verbally expressed, that a pregnant body should not be doing such a physical job.

In other women's experience, dress codes in the work place, whilst not being dictated directly through company uniforms as such are just as central to carving out or maintaining a niche within the workplace. As Sarah notes there are many sources of discipline for bodies that break the codes of dress specific to these bodies:

> "There was one woman at work who I didn't realize at first cos she'd comment on what I was wearing ... and then I realized that she only commented when I was wearing something that sort of skimmed my bump and didn't really hug it. But then she made, she slipped up one day and she made some comment about how ... oh that was it I was wearing a shirt, a maternity wear shirt and it just sort of fell over the top of my bump and hung down it didn't [inaudible] and she, she made some comment about really liking what I was wearing and she liked the way I looked and she said 'oh yeah I don't like these girls nowadays who wear really tight fitting things and show everything off and I just don't think it looks right, I don't think its nice and I think people should just cover up a little bit, I don't think, I just think it looks ..' I can't remember the phrase she used and then she sort of .. I don't know. She didn't even try to back track or anything. But I'd sort of after her saying that I sort of thought about it and realized that she'd never said I looked nice on the days when I wore tight things" (Sarah, mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Bradford)

The comments made by Sarah's colleague can be seen to assert that wearing tightly fitting clothing was not just unattractive in this particular person's eyes but also inappropriate, 'not right'. Framing the body boundaries in this unambiguous way, making the pregnant body visibly present in the office was not acceptable to this woman and her communication of this to Sarah can be seen as an attempt to discipline her into conforming. Others impose stringent regimes upon themselves in workspaces often in order to minimise the visibility of their pregnant bodies. For Carolyn for example, the head of modern languages in a large secondary school in Manchester, management of her workplace appearance with respect to the visibility of her pregnant body was central to her articulations about maternity wear. This was perhaps the most significant aspect of her embodied relationship with clothing during pregnancy since she felt that producing the right body for the workplace was crucial to her ability to continue doing her job unhindered by her pregnant body in terms of it impinging on and contaminating her identity. Carolyn felt that her pregnant body was dangerous to her authoritative identity and undermined her in the sense that it opened her up to certain comments and behaviour from both staff and pupils for example. As a result of these perceptions and fears she engaged in a particular negotiation of her pregnant corporealities through dress, selecting her clothing very carefully in order to diminish the impact on her workplace identity:

> "...they were all into sort of like um you know um *revealing* your bump as much as possible at that time, certainly in 97 they were because it was the time of the you know the Spice Girls and that kind of pregnancy. Um and really for a teaching situation that's not acceptable you know. You, I wanted to basically get on with the fact that you know I'm a teacher I didn't want to

draw attention too much to the fact that I was pregnant you know." (Carolyn, early-forties, married, mother of 2, Manchester.)

"...I tend to have stuff that I wear just for work and stuff that I wear at home because *work is so much of a formal situation and when I put on those clothes I'm turning into 'Miss' and I need you know there's a certain personality and things you know roles and common behaviour which go with that* um. I tend not to put those things on in the evening or when I'm going out to church..." (emphasis added)

Carolyn describes very specific identity performances related to her professional and non-professional lives and in particular it is her workplace identity that received most attention in terms of her maternity wear wardrobe construction. It is this she spent most money on and for which she had the most stringent (self imposed) requirements. This is perhaps not surprising given her explicit discussion of how she constructs and performs this identity of 'Miss' through not only her behaviour but also her clothing. How she dresses her body is integral to the performance of this identity. During her pregnancies maintaining this identity required careful negotiation of her pregnant embodiment (and the discourses attached to it) through clothing, something she talks about at length. This is in complete contrast to her backstage identity at home. As the above quotations show she has clear ideas about a code of dress appropriate for work and also marks a clear distinction between this identity and her home performance of self. The way she dresses her pregnant body out of school is entirely different to when performing 'Miss'. The two identities are completely separate and as such require separate codes of dress.

Her work place clothing regime was all about managing the appearance of her pregnant body through dress in order to limit its impact on her work place identity. It seems that Carolyn felt her pregnant body was wholly out of place in this context and that it almost threatened her professional identity:

V: So can you put into words why it is that you didn't want to, well that you did want to conceal it at school? And was it specifically only at school or was that...?

C: Um ... I ... Yeah I think, I certainly didn't want male members of staff patronizing me um, the reactions seem to vary between um over concern and total neglect of the fact that you're pregnant. Like the guy who did the cover who had me in July and seven and a half months pregnant um taking a register in the, because I was a year 11 tutor and I was therefore free so I was on register cover you see, he put me on the middle floor of a block where I had to walk all the way to the, it was about a five minute trek, all the way down from where I was up two flights of stairs register this class and walk all the way back again to take my afternoon classes. And in the end I actually said to him after two days of this and was beginning to feel absolutely shattered um 'excuse me um is there nobody else who can do this because in actual fact you know I don't *like* special consideration but if it could be *shared* I'd be grateful. I do seem to be the only person who's copping for this' and 'yes' he said 'that's because you've got 11A so you're first up on the register' [laughing] and I thought 'well thanks, thank you!' Um ... And in general um ... I just felt that ... I actually got one comment from an Asian

lad when I was very heavily pregnant and he said 'you should be at home not at school' and I did him for that because I wasn't having that from anybody um. Children's reactions to the fact that you're pregnant I mean I was, I was a teacher doing a job ... I was taking home the money therefore in my opinion you're not entitled to any special consideration. I think the point about the cover was that it was actually even if I hadn't been pregnant I would have still been going to him and saying 'excuse me why am I the one who's doing this class every single time?' The fact that it was adding to a problem you know that it was just making me absolutely exhausted was you know he hadn't thought through the situation. But I honestly believe that I'm there to teach and you don't want anything distracting from that um ... and in any case my own personal situation when I go into a classroom is.. is secondary. I'm there, I'm *there*, I'm the teacher, I'm in control, what's happening at home is *totally separate*. And that's something that you just learn with the job you've got to be able to do that.

Carolyn certainly felt that her pregnant embodiment encroached on her professional identity of 'Miss'. Her body was therefore out of place in the school space since it caused disruption, distracting the children from seeing her as the teacher in control and causing adverse reactions not only from them but also colleagues as well. The boy who made the comment about her proper place being at home spelt out for Carolyn just how out of place her body was, not because she shared his conviction, but because it disrupted her identity and undermined her authority. Her pregnant embodiment was not conducive with her identity as the teacher in control, the capable authority figure, and this particular situation confirmed that to her. For these reasons she sought to cover it up at school, to wear baggy clothes and to attempt to keep her pregnant body hidden in order to minimise its impact on her identity.

The children were not the only problem in this respect. She was concerned that other staff members continued to see her as competent and was particularly unwelcoming of patronizing over concern. This again was part of her desire to maintain absolutely her identity of 'Miss', as a head of department she wanted to maintain, without question, her position of authority and she felt that any over concern or special treatment on account of her pregnancy would jeopardise this.

The careful management of her clothed appearance in terms of concealing her pregnant body as much as possible can therefore be seen as an attempt to keep this dangerously undermining body out of the workplace. She talks about it being a way of keeping home and workplace identity separate, her private and public identity performances mutually exclusive. It is perhaps therefore not surprising that she, (in direct contrast to for example Tracey), found a colleague's uninvited touching of her bump 'offensive'. This action effectively breached the boundaries she tried so hard to maintain, literally bringing her pregnant body into the very space she wanted to keep it out of:

V: So did you have problems with or did you find that people were very often touching you and ...

C: One, one woman did at school and I was, I was quite offended at that I didn't think that was, that was on at all um. Its not a request I would make of any woman I was quite, I was quite shocked. Um the second time, the second time when I had Timmy I was more prepared for these bizarre reactions from

people but when Sabrina was born it was the first time I'd had this. I was asking 'what?'

It is a distinct limitation of my research that Carolyn is perhaps the most 'senior' woman in a professional sense. She is certainly the person who amongst my interviewees marks out professional identity management as the most significant aspect of her embodied relationship with clothing during pregnancy. It would indeed be a worthwhile and interesting path for further research to pursue such questions with women in senior corporate positions for example. I would suggest this to be an interesting corollary to the wealth of recent work across the social sciences looking at the significance of body management through dress in such workspaces (see for example Davis, 1992; Entwistle, 2000, Green, 2001; McDowell, 1995, McDowell and Court, 1994) in addition to other embodied aspects of work such as the employment of signifiers of femininity, and therefore the bodies of female employees, as part of service provision (see for example Adkins, 1992; Kerfoot and Knight, 1994). I would argue that it is a significant oversight that none of these studies considers how pregnant bodies might be managed in such contexts or indeed how they might disrupt such institutional practices. Although my research cannot authoritatively make such an intervention it does enable me to make certain suggestions in this area. For example in workplaces where certain forms of masculinity are privileged and where women find it correspondingly necessary to manage their bodily expression of femininity, pregnant bodies may be seen as particularly problematic. As for Carolyn these bodies may be experienced by women as dangerously contaminating in their efforts to construct authoritative identities. Equally they may be used by colleagues to disrupt these identities, touching and commenting for example in ways, which bring pregnancy (and all this stands for) sharply into focus. They may also be institutionally unacceptable also. Those who embody the company itself by performing front stage roles, meeting clients and so on, may find these activities curtailed particularly as pregnancy progresses and becomes more difficult to conceal, (heavily) pregnant bodies embodying the wrong values in relation to the company profile for example.

It may be seen as encouraging that high profile figures - such as Cherie Booth who continued to work as a high profile judge and indeed was in court only days before giving birth to her fourth child - provide positive role models for many women, (Carolyn for example explicitly noted this). However I would be tempted to suggest that other women in similar professions might not find working whilst embodied as obviously pregnant quite so easy. Ms Booth's almost celebrity status endorsed and almost compelled her continued presence in the workplace. Her identity is one of 'professional working mother' and to have conducted herself any other way during her pregnancy would have undermined this. Any melting into domestic oblivion would have done irreparable damage to her identity (just as wearing conventional maternity clothing would do to pop stars images for example) and perhaps projected an unwanted political message. Her high profile status and recognisable image as this breed of superwoman also accrues positive values to the image of those she represents in a work capacity. Certainly her sidelining would have caused more damage to them. And therefore, in much the same way as images of perfect celebrity pregnant bodies can be seen to set up an ideal against which other women's bodies are measured, her example might inevitably be experienced as unattainable for those who lack the support structures of celebrity.

Indeed despite positive images constructed by Cherie Booth and others (for example Nicola Horlick), I would suggest that experiences articulated by women who work, such as Carolyn's in particular, point to the continued prevalence of gendered discourses that construct pregnant bodies as out of place in work settings and inconsistent with authoritative identities. As previously noted there is a considerable literature discerning the persistent discourses constructing female bodies as naturally unsuitable for such roles (see for example Alcoff, 1996; Entwistle, 2000; Green, 2001; McDowell, 1995), for example McDowell (1995) argues that:

> "Women's bodies are, by very definition (and in contrast to those of men) grotesque, incomplete, fertile and changing. Like nature, women too are natural, marked by sexuality, fecundity and growth and so apparently uncontrolled and uncontrollable. And while culture is appropriately found in the public or civic sphere, nature is located in, and should be confined to, the private or domestic arena. Thus, women's sexed bodies are threatening in the workplace for the very reason that there are not meant to be there" (McDowell, 1995, p.80)

Such literature also commonly reports on the gender cultures of particular professional workplaces and strategies used by female employees to limit their femininity, manage their female bodies in relation to these. Yet it would seem that there is a significant silence in relation to the female body which is perhaps the most threatening and therefore problematic in these contexts – the pregnant body[68]. However it would seem to be important to discuss pregnant embodiment in these contexts particularly when it is so blatantly excluded on perhaps the most fundamental level – availability of appropriate clothing Maternity business wear is a rare commodity it would seem. Certainly none of the high street retailers carry suiting ranges (not that these kind of professional women would be likely to turn to the high street), some having pulled out of such lines altogether at the time of interview:

> "The only thing that we're not, that we don't do any more which we still do get asked for but I don't know whether they're taking it up is suiting. We used to do a suiting range within um maternity but they've not done one for a good twelve months or so" (Dorothy Perkins visual merchandiser, Manchester City Centre branch, 9/10/00)

> "..at the moment we're tending to be very ... um not to go for very smart clothes. We did have, we did at one time actually have quite a lot of smart office wear which we haven't done now for a couple of seasons. We do smart casual wear but not suiting" (Mothercare maternity wear manager, Manchester City Centre branch, 10/10/00).

Other retailers only carry limited suiting as a rule too. This can be seen to speak volumes about the mainstream expectations for pregnant body's activities and corresponding sartorial needs, reflecting the traditional ideologies properly locating them in the domestic sphere of the home. That this lack of appropriate clothing is so

[68] This may be because as such they are so almost entirely absent in such contexts of course.

widespread suggests the hegemony of such ideologies and that culturally there is an inability to accept pregnant bodies as authoritative, competent professionals.

Clearly heavily pregnant corporealities are likely to be more problematic to women in terms of managing their appearance – which in professional work environments tends to mean managing femininity and sexuality – since the effectiveness of dress to smooth out this body's exaggerated boundaries is greatly diminished. However it is not just this specific pregnant corporeality that is constructed as out of place (not just through taken for granted cultural ideologies but also actively through clients and colleagues comments and behaviour, touching giving advice and so on), rather *the pregnant body*, the monolithic figure is. Whilst specific forms of masculinity are prized over femininity, which is seen as a signifier of incompetence, whilst such gender cultures persist in any workplace the pregnant body will remain problematic since its sexuality is undeniable, yet its pregnancy defines it as unattainable- or at any rate sexually undesirable. And indeed its clear fertility and reproductive capacity defines it as irrational, natural and maternal which remains wholly irreconcilable with rational, cultural production at least in the current gender order. It is the conflation of this fundamental dualism, which makes this body so problematic and therefore ultimately from a feminist perspective excitingly challenging although on the level of individual lived embodiment tremendously difficult to negotiate.

7.6 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have sought to embody understanding of clothing consumption through identifying four examples from my research. I have argued that the disruption of consumption knowledges, practices and certitude during pregnancy is explicitly and inherently focused on pregnant corporeality itself and that central to understanding clothing consumption during pregnancy therefore is consideration of the material encounters between bodies and dress. Further it is crucial to acknowledge that women's accounts of their embodied clothing consumption points to a process of constant renegotiation in these relationships, specifically as a result of material pregnant embodiment being experienced not as a fixed body but rather multiple corporealities. Therefore, whilst cultural discourse (and indeed the production of maternity wear in mainstream retail spaces of representation) may map onto a singular maternal figure, prescribing appropriate consumption and dress for example for the pregnant body, this body is fundamentally experienced as fluid and shifting. As a consequence clothing consumption during pregnancy, as it is understood here, is a process of constant renegotiation as a result of not only the disruption of existing consumption but also crucially, corporeality and dress themselves and their relationships with one another. Clothing consumption during pregnancy therefore involves constant negotiation of both a singular, monolithic body (as produced by discourse and retailers) and multiple fleshy corporealities.

Chapter 8: Multiple Pregnant Corporealities

8.1 Introduction – monolithic and multiple pregnant bodies

It would appear that there are very specific ways in which the pregnant body is expected to act in relation to socially sanctioned forms of (clothing) consumption, and I would suggest that it is through adherence to such socially sanctioned practices that appropriate identity performances are pieced together. What is worn and how it is consumed is important in this for example. There would appear to be a singular body at the core of this appropriate performance of 'mother-to-be', the pregnant body evoked as a monolithic figure, and anyone embodied as such being culturally conditioned to behave and dress for example according to the prevailing social discourse surrounding motherhood. The singular pregnant body onto which expectations about Mother are unquestioningly mapped is present in almost all cultural representations of discourses of pregnancy. Those who are seen to transgress this are condemned and disciplined as a result, for example the treatment of those who drink, smoke or continue drug use during pregnancy has been widely discussed both in terms of direct action in relation to extreme substance abuse (see for example Longhurst, 1999; Young, 1997) and more indirect measures taken in relation to less serious consumption. For example the physical construction and in particular seating arrangements in bars can be seen to exclude pregnant women from such spaces (see Longhurst, 1994). In my research I have also seen evidence of such disciplining for example, one of the small independent retailers placed leaflets giving advice about quitting smoking during pregnancy on their counter, alongside flyers advertising prams shops and local play facilities. This specific example suggests how pregnant women and mothers themselves act to reinforce the boundaries of acceptable behaviour for 'the pregnant body', expecting pregnant women to deny their own 'needs' and put their baby first. The idea that 'being a good mum starts here' (*Pregnancy and Birth*, October, 2001) is clearly informing such actions. Particular substance consumption during pregnancy can perhaps be seen to be a reasonable cause for conditioning discourse since there are significant grounds to suggest harm to the unborn child. There would appear to be a cause / effect relationship certainly with sustained and heavy use. However ideas about being a 'good mum' extend far beyond nurturing in this sense, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, not least into ideas about consumption of clothing and dress codes themselves. These are perhaps most clearly demonstrated by noting the reactions of my group of women to images of Scary Spice (published in *The Sunday Times Magazine*, see figures 1.2, 1.3 and 1.5 for example) and Demi Moore (published in *Vanity Fair*, see figure 1.1) both scantily clad and heavily pregnant. Whilst the image on the front cover of *Vanity Fair* was by and large interpreted positively those of Melanie Gulzar (as she was then) were less well received mainly because of unacceptable sexual undertones perceived by many women and the associated perception of her as 'un-motherly'. Almost no one had a positive word to say about these images (surprising then that there was little if any media response to them at the time of publication in comparison to the furore that accompanied the issue of *Vanity Fair*). For example Sarah describes her dislike of the Mel G images in direct relation to the Demi Moore front cover:

> "[Demi Moore is in] a *protective position*, she's covering, she's ... she's looks as if she's sort of *protecting* her baby and she's because its not 'look at me

here I am' full frontal um ... and its not even to do with her being naked its *not* to do with her boobs its to do with the *bump* and how she's portraying the bump. Whereas there she's supporting it she's sort of, its a *loving* thing she's obviously, its like a *nurturing* thing whereas these are [Mel G images] ... she happens to be pregnant and have a bump but she's being exactly the way she would be normally and .. its just I don't know it doesn't work." (Sarah, mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Bradford, emphasis in original speech)

It would appear therefore that in most everyday cultural discourses of pregnancy a singular body is evoked and all bodies defined as such are expected to conduct themselves in equally tightly defined ways. This is not without consequence since these discourses and the resultant disciplining of bodies by individuals themselves (and each other) as well as society at large can be seen to be central to the maintenance of the prevailing social order through hegemonic constructions of female bodies and Mother for example.

However, despite the consistent cultural construction of a monolithic pregnant body (which serves to allow the maintenance of hegemonic discourses) the articulations of my group of women suggest that pregnant corporeality as it is lived is not constant and does not map onto a singular construction. Indeed women report experiencing what can only be described as multiple pregnant bodies in the course of singular pregnancies:

"When you're first pregnant you actually really, really *want* to just get a little belly cos it makes you *feel* more pregnant and its sort of there and its sort of ... you want people to have, you want to have something that makes you look pregnant rather than just looking a bit overweight. But um ... And then when it actually happens its really nice because it makes you feel special, but then you get big and then you just feel, you feel like a whale then. But you go through; well I went through these stages of how I felt. Because when you first find out you're pregnant its really hard because there's nothing, you don't feel pregnant at all, and then you grow out of your clothes and you feel frustrated because you can't wear proper maternity clothes and you can't wear your ordinary clothes. And then you get into maternity clothes and you feel nice for a couple of months, and then you get huge! (laugh) and you can't roll over in bed and you can't bend down..." (Sarah, mid-twenties, married, first pregnancy, Bradford, emphasis in original speech)

Although negotiating the socially constructed monolithic pregnant body in a variety of ways during and through clothing consumption, women simultaneously experience, and must negotiate, constantly shifting, fluid fleshy corporealities. By quoting Sarah in-depth here I do not mean to suggest that this is how these multiple corporealities are always experienced. Or even that women always experience these particular corporealities as Sarah describes them. But rather that the idea of a monolithic pregnant body is fragmented by embodied experience, that fluidity and multiple corporealities themselves must be negotiated, and that integral to these negotiations is dress.

Here for detailed discussion I shall mark out four specific pregnant corporealities commonly encountered by the participants. 'In between pregnant bodies'; 'satisfactorily pregnant bodies'; and 'heavily pregnant (out of control) bodies', in addition to 'post partum' bodies' which counter the assumption that the

pregnant body is a discrete, temporary form of embodiment. These women's experiences show the leaking of the pregnant body beyond pregnancy itself, which can have implications in both the short and long term future for the way women's bodies are sartorially constructed and lived. Though identifying these different corporealities and singling them out for discussion is rather like drawing lines in the sand - the boundaries between them being blurred, tenuous and shifting, for each woman during different pregnancies and between women for example as well as over time - I would argue that this is an important distinction to make and that the shifting nature of pregnant embodiment as it is lived has consequences for and is reflected in consumption of maternity clothing.

Multiple pregnant bodies mean that women's embodied relationship with clothing is by no means stable either during pregnancy or afterwards. The negotiations that take place involve managing the body through clothing as well as negotiating the clothing itself, and these are as fluid as the corporealities themselves. It would appear from the way women talk about their clothing during pregnancy that as pregnancy progresses the 'look' of clothing, for some, declines in significance. The heavily pregnant body appears to 'take over' and how one feels comes more to the fore of discussions. This said the look is never entirely redundant since how women talk about their different pregnant bodies hinges on the way their corporeality is visually perceived in the context of the gaze of others. This is significant in a particular way when embodying an 'in-between pregnant body' for example since many women feel the gaze will read their bodies as 'fat' rather than 'pregnant'. Also in later pregnancy (and indeed afterwards) many women struggle with the perceived interpretation of the male heterosexual gaze, though this time that of a specific individual – their partner – since many feel sexually unattractive. These two aspects of the 'look' of the topography of the body at the opposite reaches of pregnancy illustrate nicely the shift in the power of clothing to mediate the production of a body. As I shall show, women attempt to use clothing during the time they embody an in-between pregnant body to negotiate the ambiguity of the frame and diminish the appearance of the body as 'just fat' for example. However, a heavily pregnant body cannot be 'disguised' and remade in the same way. Clothing has little power to mediate (and re-map) the topography of such bodies[69]. Further it demonstrates a shift in the negotiation of the relationship with the gaze. During the time they embody the 'in-between pregnant body' many women assert a desire for the gaze falling on their bodies to ascertain some visual signifier of their pregnancy, suggesting that to do so would not only absolve them from being 'fat' – provide some justification for this – but also gain social validation. However once past the point where their bodies are considered acceptable, once they become 'too big' social validation melts into horror, not least in the eyes of women themselves, particularly those more used to occupying corporealities more closely akin to the western idealised norm.

This chapter therefore takes apart the notion of a monolithic pregnant body by analysing the fluidity of pregnant embodiment through the specific corporealities

[69] In addition the relationship between body and clothing may become more antagonistic as pregnancy progresses, particularly as women grow out of garments and find themselves with fewer and fewer clothes. This not only reinforces the corporealities as 'too big' and also 'fat' but also may provoke practical problems in terms of a conflict between material need and the culture of thrift, particularly if women lack clothing for particular socio-spatial contexts. Shrinking life-worlds could conceivably be in part explained for some women by having 'nothing (appropriate) to wear' therefore.

most prevalent in my participant's accounts. By discussing in detail the multiple pregnant bodies experienced and lived by specific pregnant women I hope to challenge the monolith of the pregnant body, upon which cultural ideologies underpinning patriarchy are maintained (such as motherhood for example). These multiple corporealities demonstrate the possibility of qualitatively different ways of constructing and living pregnant bodies whilst also recognising the influence of the culturally constructed monolith.

In the second part of the chapter I bring dress back into more explicit consideration. Though not discussing dress here primarily from a material culture perspective, it is necessary to note that it is significant in influencing the way pregnant bodies, particularly 'in-between pregnant bodies' are lived. Linda Layne (2000) for example talks about how material culture can be crucial to embodying lost babies, constructing them as having been 'real'. I would suggest that maternity wear might be of similar significance for women in the early stages of pregnancy. Wearing specialist maternity wear helps to reaffirm the pregnancy, define and construct the body as properly pregnant. If, as I shall discuss, specialist maternity wear is felt unsuitable and is not worn (either because of cost or issues relating to poor fit for example) such affirmation is unavailable. Conversely of course this can be seen as a motivation to avoid maternity wear for those women who resist identifying as mother or for whom pregnancy is undesirable, unwanted. Here however I concentrate more on dress in an embodied sense, the relationships between bodies and clothing in relation to body topographies for example. Having discussed multiple corporealities of pregnancy I suggest that women therefore experience shifting embodied relationships with clothing, using specific examples of the framing characteristic of clothing and the tensions surrounding its mapping of body boundaries for different pregnant bodies.

8.2 Multiple Pregnant Bodies

8.2.1 'In Between' Pregnant Bodies

What I shall refer to as in 'between pregnant bodies' are forms of embodiment, which provoke several sartorial and corporeal tensions for women immersed in western culture which values thinness most highly. Depending on a woman's identification with the western idealised (some might say fetishised) female body shape these may be felt more or less keenly but the ambivalence of the 'in between' pregnant body's shape must be negotiated to some extent by most if not all. These bodies are literally 'in between'. They are materially ambivalent in terms of their surface appearance and the way they are lived. In neither respect do they 'feel properly pregnant' (Tracey). They are literally 'in between' in their ambivalent surface form. What is mapped is neither definitively non-pregnant nor pregnant, since they depart from women's pre-pregnant body shape yet are not visibly discernibly pregnant. As a result there is a tension in their appearance, hovering between looking fat rather than pregnant.

Though of course not by any means stable, many women report becoming this body early in the second trimester of pregnancy, (though for some it may be much earlier, as early as the eighth week), and being this corporeality until the shape

becomes an obviously pregnant bump[70], and more specifically for some, until their maternity wear fits them:

> "I remember going through a stage between 12 and 15, or 12 and 20 weeks where normal clothes didn't fit me but I wasn't big enough for maternity wear really and that was a bit strange" (Jane, mid-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.)

Much of this in-betweenness I would suggest is defined by this body's relationship with clothing and more specifically by women's encounters with (maternity) clothing. This is a body, which fits neither women's normal clothes nor specialist maternity wear properly. This body is literally 'in between'. It fits neither one thing nor the other; it is neither non-pregnant (for which read 'normal) nor 'pregnant'. Being defined as neither normal nor pregnant by clothing can for example exacerbate both the feeling of being not properly pregnant and therefore being 'out of place' in maternity wear retail space. It can also cause tensions in the construction of this body through dress as socially appropriate. As Tina points out, who was 4 months pregnant with her first child and in the throes of negotiating her 'in between' pregnant body at the time of interview, she found it a struggle to compose this body as socially appropriate in any other context than the backstage, private space of her home:

> "...its really weird at the minute cos I'm too *big* for normal clothes but I'm not big enough for maternity wear... I, I bought a couple of pairs of maternity trousers and that but they are too big at the moment, I can wear them with long tops but they're you know they're really gathered around the bump and the bum bits so um. So it is difficult and my elasticated I've got some elasticated trousers but now they're starting to be a bit too small so they're slipping under the bump [laugh] so it is a bit of a nightmare in the morning deciding what to wear .. especially to come and wear something smartish to school. You know at home I can just you know bum around in jogging bottoms or whatever but it's a bit difficult." (Tina, mid-twenties, married, first pregnancy, Coventry.)

There is therefore a tension between needing clothing to accommodate the embryonic bump and finding that much specialist maternity wear fits unsatisfactorily. Some styles of maternity wear clearly are designed better to accommodate the range of pregnant corporealities from this 'in between' form to

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[70] For some women these tensions might never go away. For example one customer I observed shopping in Mums & Co:

> *"...commented that she always carries 'around' rather than 'out in front' and she says she has to be careful what she wears because if she chose the wrong thing she ended up looking fat rather than pregnant. She said it was funny because you have this idea in your head about what you're going to look like when you're pregnant but for her it hadn't turned out like that. I got the impression she was rather disappointed at her lack of distinctive pregnant body shape" (Mums & Co research diary, Tuesday July 18th 2000)*

For this woman the tension surrounding looking fat rather than pregnant as a result of the ambivalence of her body shape is something she had to negotiate (through dress) for the duration of her three pregnancies. Unless visibly identifiable as 'pregnant' (which clearly denotes something very specific) the body is read, labelled and experienced as fat (since it departs from the western idealised female form.

approaching full term. For example trousers and skirts made from bengalin fabrics by companies such as Valja and Noppies (and sold by several small independents) provide a much more acceptable fit than garments with 'pouches' or voluminous quantities of extra material. This is something, which women inevitably encounter when shopping for and more specifically trying on maternity wear. As I argued in the previous chapter the alien nature of the clothing in this respect is difficult for women to negotiate. The fact that the clothing itself is unfamiliar in design and in terms of how it is worn coupled with being embodied as not properly pregnant produces particular encounters with maternity wear. As I have also previously noted women, particularly if it is their first pregnancy are commonly very unsure about how big they are going to get – their 'in between' pregnant body whilst being a material manifestation of their metamorphosis to come gives little indication of the extent of this. Whilst experiencing embodied need for different clothing women anticipate the enormous corporeal changes they will undergo. Simultaneously however buying clothing to fit their pregnant bodies is challenging since they know little of the body they will become. And whilst attempting to pre-empt this, making assumptions about whether or not a garment will or will not fit their full term pregnant body they must also negotiate the fact that it does not fit their current corporeal state.

The low quality of fit achieved when embodied as 'in between' is highly unsatisfactory. However, many women are more concerned that there is enough room to accommodate their full term pregnant body, a concern that is borne out of uncertainty about the material limits of their growth, literally not knowing how big they are going to get. This can at once have two outcomes for women. Whilst having lots of room in a garment – leaving space for much potential growth- on the one hand can put women's minds at rest that they will not grow out of it and therefore need to buy something else, this material space can also be quite shocking[71]. Trying on maternity wear when embodied as 'in between' can, through the encounter with the extra, as yet unfilled material and 'room', provide something of an encounter with the ghost of the corporealities to come, and in particular the full term pregnant body. This is what can be quite shocking and I would suggest that this is linked to Natriece's comment about maternity wear looking dreadful on the hanger. It seems that part of the problem of it looking horrendous on the hanger is that it looks, and is, so enormous in comparison to the clothes women would normally buy (especially if used to wearing tighter fitting clothes for example as Natriece was). It is almost as if the maternity wear provides an embodied encounter with the (potential) size a woman's pregnant body will become. Perhaps the first time women encounter maternity wear this can be particularly shocking because for the first time they can see mapped out before them the assumed upper limits of their growth (assuming they buy their own size) and although they will have been dimly aware of the possibilities before this may be the first time they gain a material frame of reference for this.

As I have previously noted one of the crucial ambiguities which women negotiate when embodying the 'in between' pregnant body early in pregnancy is the apparently fine line between looking 'fat' rather than 'pregnant'. As I will go on to discuss the pregnant body in general is considered as abject, and looking pregnant

[71] Particularly given that maternity wear sized in relation to ordinary dress sizes so that women buy their usual size. This means that the amount of space allowed in a garment is measured according to manufacturers assumptions about how big a woman of that size is going to get. Certainly they are not expected to get any bigger.

therefore not thought of as particularly desirable, indeed even equated with being fat itself. However this is preferable to being assumed to be truly fat in the absence of an obvious bump, rather than just temporarily, or justifiably so because embodied as pregnant.

> "I keep thinking do I look pregnant or do I just look like I've got a fat belly at the moment ... I'm quite looking forward to being bigger so people can say 'oh yes she is pregnant not just got a beer belly [laugh] or something'" (Tina, mid-twenties, married, first pregnancy, Coventry.)

> T: It is, it is weird and I, it doesn't bother me, I'm not um that over worried about putting on weight and looking bigger because I know that's going to happen and I'm quite looking forward to having a big bump but its when, its that in between stage when you, you know your face has got, I mean my face has got fatter, my bump has, I've got a bump coming but its not huge and its sort of you know just 'is she pregnant is she [laugh] fat [laugh]
> V: Mmm and the clothes issue adds to that doesn't it
> T: Yes it does
> V: Adds to that feeling of ...
> T: Cos you're having to wear stuff that you wouldn't you know like what I call fat clothes [laugh]. You know just that is larger or elasticated or baggy.

Clothing would indeed appear to be an integral part of women's negotiation of this 'in between' body. Sartorially speaking many women literally make do during this period, negotiating changing vestimentary needs by wearing ones own clothes and putting up with discomfort (or perhaps using bits of elastic and so on) before beginning to wear maternity clothes when the body is more suited to their tailoring for example. However other sartorial negotiations are carried out, ones, which are more to do with codes of dress and cultural aesthetics of the (pregnant) body. For example it would appear that the most significant aspect of the construction of this body is that it is not acceptable to reveal or display this ambiguously shaped body through dress since it could be read only as 'fat'. It is neither one thing nor another in the sense that it is neither slim and toned, nor obviously pregnant – neither ideal female form nor ideal pregnant body.

This would appear to be the major corporeal negotiation required and one, which women do attempt to manage sartorially. Though embodied as pregnant their appearance does not manifest this – therefore leaving only one reading of their bodies open to others – 'fat' (that is, not slim, flat stomached etc). The tension therefore becomes how to produce this body appropriately given that it is not acceptable to reveal it, to faithfully represent and frame it with clothing and, at the same time, wearing non-framing clothes runs the risk of exaggerating its boundaries (something I shall discuss in more detail later). This is something many women struggle with in relation to dressing this pregnant corporeality:

> "..wearing certain things you thought this would make me just look fat. Or can I show it so I look pregnant" (Tracey, mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Northampton.)

By way of a specific example Ari, during her second pregnancy, negotiated her 'in between' pregnant body in a very carefully thought out way:

> *"..she is choosing baggy clothes at the moment [at eight weeks pregnant] that hide her growing bump because she doesn't look pregnant... But as soon as she is obviously pregnant [she says she] will probably go back into her own tops (because they will be tighter by then and will show off a discernible bump) and tighter maternity tops. Whilst her body shape is ambiguous and could therefore be read by strangers and those who don't know about her pregnancy as 'fat' or 'over weight' or just 'not slim and flat stomached' rather than 'pregnant' she would rather cover it up rather than show it off and run the risk of that being people's impression of her ... Ari says ... that her [tummy] is not really fat but its rather like a tummy like older women get, older women who've had children, like her mum." (Mums & Co research diary, September 4th 2000)*

Ari chose to negotiate this ambiguous shape by wearing maternity wear items (none with pouches though) as early as eight weeks in order to disguise it. She utilised the relative bagginess of carefully chosen maternity wear to deal with this problematic corporeality. She preferred to cover up her bloated, no longer flat and therefore 'fat' stomach by wearing maternity wear. Though this negotiation is with respect to the gaze of others falling on her body I would suggest that this donning of maternity wear also had significance for her own experience and performance of this body. Wearing maternity wear defined, or at least confirmed her body as pregnant, and therefore not just 'fat'. A similar experience was reported by Meryl in relation to buying larger sizes of ordinary clothes (than she would normally buy) when embodied as 'in-between'. It is almost as if she felt that her purchases further confirmed the construction of her body as 'fat'. Once her pregnancy was obvious this tension was significantly diminished.

> M: To start off with it was a real mental thing that going into a different size and I, I've got, I'm still a pair of trousers that I've stretched and stretched and stretched. So there's that psychological thing there is like 'well I'm still wearing those so I haven't grown!' But I know I have grown. But it was like; it was sort of 'gosh you know am I ever going to get back into a normal size?' So it was a bit of a mental thing yeah, I, I found it quite sort of ... And also going into um... this probably sounds really stupid but going to pay for things and like thinking 'I'm not really this size' [laugh]
> V: I know what you mean yeah
> M: Yeah but then as I've got bigger and then its been very much that people have obviously realised that you are pregnant that its sort of actually seen that well you know there's a reason and that its sort of the fact that you're growing is a good sign as well. (Meryl, early-thirties, married, first pregnancy, Manchester.)

The discursive construction of the 'in between' pregnant body therefore largely centres on it '*being*' (which equates in the main to *looking*) 'fat' rather than pregnant.

Further, as Tracey suggests part of the 'in between-ness' of this body is the fact that embodied as such women may not *feel* properly pregnant:

> "..probably from about like 3 or 4 months onwards when the bump starts growing and then from about 6 months it's a proper bump. And then you think 'oh I just look fat and everyone's going to think I'm fat! [Inaudible] So its finding clothes that cos you can't wear your normal clothes that have got buttons cos you can't do them up but you don't want to wear anything maternity because *you don't feel properly pregnant*" (Tracey, mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Northampton, emphasis added)

This is perhaps not surprising, particularly as Wendy appreciates the embryonic bump is not the manifestation of the baby itself but rather the engorged uterus:

> "I started getting a bit of a tummy from about 8 weeks actually and cos most of my clothes are quite tight fitting um I just, they just didn't fit me from about 8 weeks and that was to do with like your womb expands even before the baby's getting bigger. So I found I felt I wasn't getting into my clothes ... like but still not being obviously pregnant" (Wendy, late-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.)

Women are largely aware therefore that the growth at this stage is not so much to do with the baby itself but is more a manifestation of their reproductive organs. At this early stage women can neither see evidence of their growing child etched onto their bodies, nor feel them moving inside them. Neither can they gain affirmation of their pregnancy, being embodied as pregnant from the validation of others if they choose to conceal the news during this time. It is perhaps not surprising then that many report not feeling pregnant when embodied 'in between' since this body is not constructed externally, produced or performed as such. A body's status as pregnant would seem to hinge on its *visual appearance*[72] and others reaction to it as such, something Longhurst also notes in her 1994 paper:

> "In some shops in Centreplace, such as Pumpkin Patch Toys and Kidswear ... Extra Elegance and Kooky Garments (the last 2 shops mentioned stock and sell clothing for 'larger' and pregnant women) a number of the pregnant women I interviewed, reported feeling initiated and welcomed into new worlds. This was particularly the case for those women who were *visibly pregnant* for the first time. For pregnant women, in the aforementioned shops, their new body shape made them feel like welcome members of 'humanity' and that they were somehow approved of and accepted ... They were met with affirmation. Their reproductive capacity was accorded social significance and value" (Longhurst, 1994, p.218, emphasis added)

Even this kind of affirmation and validation is withheld from women embodied as 'in between' because of their bodily anonymity. Indeed as I have previously discussed women are more likely – particularly if pregnant for the first time – to feel out of place in such spaces because they are not embodied as 'visibly', 'properly'

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[72] *Although from my own experience I must also add that feeling the baby move was also a significant factor in 'feeling properly pregnant.*

pregnant[73]. I would argue that this out of placeness is exacerbated by the fact that so much maternity wear fits and frames this body so poorly, falsely mapping its limits, blurring the bodies boundaries and so on. Thus constructing it as only suitable and appropriate for visibly, properly pregnant bodies and therefore those bodies that are 'in between' as indeed out of place in maternity wear retail spaces. Much of this body's 'in between-ness' can indeed therefore be seen to be related to clothing. Yet it is also inherently linked to the ideas women have about what is to come, about what a 'properly' pregnant body is and against which this bloated, ambiguous, (not slim and therefore) 'fat' body is judged.

8.2.2 'Properly Pregnant' – Satisfactorily Pregnant Bodies

> "...lots of pregnant women, and me included just *yearn* for a bump, because ... because it, *because* it takes so long and because, especially when people know, when you start telling people you're pregnant, you want to *look* pregnant as well. Because its exciting at that stage and you want something visible and it just seems to take *so* long and you want sort of something to go along with the words as well." (Sarah, mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Bradford.)

> V: So did you look forward to getting a bump?
> W: I did actually yeah I did because ... I mean its so exciting being pregnant for the first time and you've sort of been looking forward to having a baby and you almost sort of can't wait for things to happen so. I sort of kept looking at my stomach and you know thinking when is this bump going to come [laugh]. So yeah. And I did enjoy it, it was nice when you know people started to notice and say oh you know ... um and knew that I was pregnant and not .. not just fat [quiet laugh]. (Wendy, late-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.)

For these women having a small bump was a much anticipated and enjoyable form of embodiment. Inhabiting a corporeality that was clearly identifiable as 'pregnant' by others (as well as themselves) validated both their identity as 'pregnant' and also, in some kind of justificatory sense, their increasing size. Although it is significant to note that, as Wendy suggests in her comment that she was not '*just* fat', but rather fat because she was pregnant.

This much anticipated body is talked about by many in ways, which indicate that this is the most satisfactory pregnant body (to the extent that it can be considered 'acceptable' – in an aesthetic sense – at all). Indeed for some women this corporeality is experienced incredibly positively, in ways, which transcend hegemonic ideas about the pregnant body, and in particular its direct association with Mother, a thoroughly desexualised figure. As Sarah for example describes the

[73] Indeed I can empathise with this to a certain extent having struggled with my own feelings of insecurity and of being a fraud even in the simple act of buying pregnancy magazines in the early stages of this research. I felt as if I was deceiving people by buying them and that more importantly the fact that I wasn't pregnant, nor planning to be, somehow disqualified me from buying the. I felt as if I were pregnant I would somehow have greater rights to buy these publications and as it was I was buying them under false pretences. I suspect this is something of what these women may be describing. That they worried others might look upon them as having less 'right', certainly less call to be in these spaces than 'properly' pregnant women.

controlled yet significant changes she observed her body go through, during the 'second trimester' (3-6 months), as allowing her to feel 'sexy' and 'nice'. This corporeality for her, whilst being obviously pregnant also conformed to fragments of the idealised heterosexual female body. It is the conformity of this body to certain, specific idealised corporeal norms that allowed Sarah to be comfortable with this body:

> "My favourite time I think was when I could still wear my normal clothes. And because I decided that I wanted to wear quite tight fitting things cos when I was pregnant I liked the shape of my bump and things, and because I didn't really put weight on, on my legs and my bum so legs still looked, my legs looked even - I quite like my legs - so my legs looked fantastic underneath this bump, they just looked really long and thin [laughing] and they were fab! So um my favourite stage was when I could still wear my normal clothes but just wear them tighter and I just had this little belly coming out, and that was really nice. And I actually felt quite sexy cos your boobs get *massive* before your bump does! And so you have this tiny bump which is, you've got beyond the stage of just getting bigger and feeling like you're just putting on weight and getting fat and you now feel pregnant because you have a little bump, but you don't feel like a big elephant cos you don't have a *massive* bump. But you have these amazing boobs and you haven't started putting on weight anywhere else so you actually feel really sexy! [laughing]. (Sarah, mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Bradford.)

The key to Sarah's feelings about and experiences of this body was its size, the lack of extra weight and therefore its correlation with the culturally conceived idea of the 'ideal pregnant body'. This can be seen to be embodied by representations of various celebrities such as Demi Moore pictured on the cover of *Vanity Fair* (see figure 1.1) toned and slim, differing from the fetishised female form only through its accessorisation with a tight, neat, football-esque bump. With no extra weight and a clearly identifiable pregnant bump Sarah was confident enough to wear closely fitting clothing that framed her body, mapped its boundaries accurately and therefore faithfully represented her corporeality to others – exposing it to their gaze[74].

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[74] *I also have shared some aspects of Sarah's experience and as I write this footnote, inserted during editing, I embody a corporeality lived in a similar way. At 27 weeks pregnant I too was enjoying my corporeality, dressing deliberately and carefully to reveal its contours, which I was happy to display, perhaps more so than my pre-pregnant shape. This was a very positive time for me and I reflected this in my dress and the ways in which I wore this body. Having said this, I must however note the fluidity within this. As I have previously stated identifying multiple pregnant bodies and putting names to examples is rather like drawing lines in the sand. Although I would categorise this particular corporeality as 'satisfactorily pregnant' and suggest I embodied such a form for several weeks (probably from around 20-22 weeks when I feel the bump became a discernible pregnant bump), this was by no means a consistent, unchanging, singular corporeality. For example some people within this time commented that I still didn't look obviously pregnant, having gained no extra weight, so for some of this time some ambiguity has remained, which disappointed me when it was expressed. Further I experienced some physical discomfort that for example led to difficulties sleeping and backache that impacted negatively on my experience, as did evenings out with slender, well-dressed, non-pregnant friends, in comparison to whom I began to feel maternal and 'dumpy'. On a more distressing note a friend of mine commented that I looked like a beached whale! Therefore even within this 'satisfactory' corporeality, which for the most part I relished being, there were fractures and contradictions.*

Though transcending to some extent the hegemonic and traditional desexualisation of the pregnant body (ironic given its manifestly sexual identity) and more precisely of 'Mother'. Sarah's experiences and her articulation of them do reconstitute dominant discourses surrounding the pregnant body and motherhood. Her delight at being pregnant is obvious, indeed much of her display through dress can be seen as 'celebratory', her descriptions of her corporeal metamorphosis to a certain extent romanticised, unsullied by the materiality of pregnancy which can in itself prevent women from feeling at all celebratory (even if they feel as joyful to be having a child as Sarah did). As Carolyn for example described, her second trimester pregnant corporeality was indeed her most satisfactory form of pregnant embodiment but for very different reasons. Inhabiting this corporeality she received respite from the physical difficulties she experienced during pregnancy:

> "I'm not a woman who found pregnancy um particularly delightful. I mean I know some women absolutely love it, I didn't. Um I like food too much um and wine to appreciate ... I mean I just found that I had once I got over the morning sickness I probably found I had about two months in which I felt absolutely great you know it was a wonderful period round about 4 or 5 months when you feel absolutely wonderful and then the baby starts taking over so much of your stomach you've got permanent indigestion and that's a horrible feeling [laugh]." (Carolyn, early-forties, married, mother of 2, Manchester)

Such experiences and more importantly articulations of them are significant as they cut across and challenge the more celebratory discourses which can be seen to permeate the construction of this small pregnant body as satisfactory, acceptable and even enjoyable. There appears to be little space for an appreciation of this body as anything other than mother since even underlying Sarah's feelings of sexiness is this excitement of the baby (or in Sarah's case babies) growing and the bump as a manifestation of that. Although not in aesthetic terms Carolyn's experience of the satisfactory pregnant body, feeling 'absolutely wonderful' because of the relief from physical ailments, the absence of discomfort in comparison to her other pregnant bodies does at least counter the celebratory discourse. Her embodied experiences contradict the notion that pregnancy is the natural state for the female body during which women bloom and so forth. For Carolyn, rather than delight in her obviously pregnant shape her satisfaction with this corporeality was her relief from discomfort. For her the physical and visual manifestation of her pregnancy on her body was more problematic and something she struggled with, particularly in her work place, as I have discussed.

Pregnant bodies with small, neat bumps then may be the most acceptable of all pregnant corporealities in both appearance and the physical experience of living them. They are the least awkward materially in terms of appearance and comfort. However satisfaction and pleasure associated with these bodies as I have suggested is undeniably individual and dependent on the woman's underlying feelings about the pregnancy. It is clear for example that those who do appear to revel in this embodiment are those eagerly anticipating the baby and the transition to motherhood. As is clear from Jane's comment for example feeling validated and confident with one's identity as pregnant and 'mother' is integral to the construction of this corporeality as satisfactory, acceptable and, perhaps, enjoyable:

> "I think at this stage before [5 months] I was really chuffed because I really like to have a bump and I wanted people to see that I was pregnant and I was really proud of it and I was excited about the baby coming..." (Jane, mid-twenties, married, second pregnancy (mother of 1), Bradford.)

Clearly this is not the situation for all women, and although through my literary construction here I have represented the small, neat bumped pregnant body as satisfactory, acceptable and, to a degree, enjoyable it is critical to note that this is a partial rendering. The satisfactory pregnant body is a particular classification, an arbitrary line in the sand. The way pregnant materiality is experienced is clearly highly contingent and differs over time and between women. It is always socially interpreted and therefore in particular those who deviate from the culturally established norms may never find their bodies to be satisfactory (even if to themselves then perhaps not socially). For example Tracey, during her first pregnancy when she was in her late teens, felt she was very young and anticipating adverse reactions from others worked to conceal her pregnant body from their gaze as I have discussed. Whether or not she ever experienced her shifting corporeality as satisfactory, she keenly felt that it was not socially acceptable. However during her second pregnancy 5 years later she experienced her body very differently this time feeling (and receiving) validation and acceptance, established as she was in her identity as 'mother'.

Tracey's experiences show that however individual women experience, perform and construct their pregnant corporealities they must negotiate the way they are in turn constructed by others on both a personal level through those they personally interact with and on a wider scale in popular culture. As Jane notes, who as I have already noted felt 'chuffed' and proud of her 5-month pregnant body, during her second pregnancy she found herself even at this point fielding negative comments about her size from others. This kind of input from others was not unfamiliar to her, having been pregnant before and receiving far worse barrages. However she appeared surprised (and perhaps a little disappointed) that her satisfactory pregnant body should attract such comments:

> "People are doing it even *now*, telling me you know 'gosh you're really big for your...' you know 'how far on are you?' 'Gosh you're massive' you know and you think ohhh you know." (Jane, mid-twenties, married, second pregnancy (mother of 1), Bradford.)

Beyond women's individual articulations wider cultural perceptions of these corporealities appear to be far more negative. Women who experience these bodies as satisfactory and acceptable appear to be resisting and subverting the general cultural consensus that even these bodies are infinitely unattractive, grotesque, indeed abject. For example the way in which Kathy Lette – in her novel 'Foetal Attraction' – describes and constructs her character's second trimester pregnant body is more resonant and representative of the way in which my respondents talk about their heavily pregnant and even full term corporealities:

> "By the second trimester, Maddy's body as going through more mutations than Jekyll and Hyde. Warning. Dangerous Mutant at Large. She was seriously considering joining the Moscow State Circus. Her belly gave the impression that someone had taken to it with a bicycle pump. Her ankles

were so swollen it looked as though she was wearing flesh coloured bell-bottoms. Silver stretch marks were surfacing all over her body like runs in stockings. Her distended breasts, cased in industrial strength, steel-capped bra, put her seriously off balance. She was forever listing into her lasagne. When people asked why she only wore black she said that she was in mourning for her body" (1994, p.183)

These wider cultural constructions, both on interpersonal levels and on larger scales appear to have the affect of blurring the distinctions between pregnant corporealities as they are lived and performed by individual women. In western culture it would seem the pregnant body is only representable as a monolithic corporeality, which is always met with a disturbed, uncomfortable gaze. The degree of horror with which it is viewed may be tempered by its relative size but the reading is consistently one of abjection. Indeed this cultural discourse of abjection relating to the pregnant body in general would seem to be widely and deeply engrained in western culture. For example Longhurst also notes that one of her respondents found that even friends felt it acceptable to communicate their disgust at her bodily appearance:

> "Paula, a participant in her early twenties ... recounts a story of a friend visiting her at home. She explained that at about 22 weeks pregnant, a friend whom she saw about once a fortnight came to dinner. As Paula opened the door her friend exclaimed: 'Gosh you get worse every time I see you' Paula explained that 'get worse' was equated to looking larger and less attractive." (Longhurst, 2000, p.466)

I would suggest that this comment is indicative of the hegemonic western discourse of the pregnant body, that it is one continual and inevitable descent into abjection. Within such a context it is hardly surprising that women who may identify themselves as being embodied as a satisfactorily pregnant body may yet receive negative input from others. In this cultural context the satisfactorily pregnant body is an anathema, and here then lies the importance of these accounts, of women's positive articulations of pregnant embodiment. Though most are founded on established and accepted ideologies of motherhood and may therefore not be considered disruptive in the extreme, they do unsettle the discursive construction of the pregnant body as always abject. They do suggest different ways of performing and living this body. The positive experiences, performances and articulations of some, noted here, and others such as images of Demi Moore can therefore be seen to begin subvert some of these constructions (even though reinforcing others such as the pregnant body as 'Mother'). However as the articulations immediately above show the precedent is well established and therefore the performances as sexy, attractive and pleasurable are fleeting, as the cultural constructions seem to become flesh for women as they embody heavily pregnant and full term corporealities. For those women I have interviewed it would seem that even if they do find space to experience and construct their pregnant bodies as satisfactory for a short time, many do indeed inevitably find themselves on this path to abjection.

8.2.3 Heavily Pregnant – Out of Control – Bodies
8.2.3(1) Material Presence – Discursive Construction

> J: ... its a lot of discomfort as well that goes with it towards the end and that seems to get you down and um, then when you go over your dates you're just desperate to get back to normal and um. Its not all about how you looked its more, a lot of its about how you feel as well. I came out in a rash and it was itching like mad and...
> A: Stretch marks!
> J: Stretch marks! Which I wouldn't have had if she'd come on her due date ... that is so depressing! Um ... So although some of it definitely was that I felt I looked awful um ... you know ... a lot of it was to do with my feelings, you know that I felt uncomfortable as well
> V: Yeah, yeah
> A: Its that whole ... you loose your ... your ability to do really simple things like sleep and get out of bed and get off the sofa and get out of the car and everything takes twice as long, everything is really uncomfortable.
> J: Yeah
> A: And you don't feel like your body's your own because you can't, [accompanying explanation with mime of doing things she describes] you know like you can't just like quickly jump up and quickly get that and just sit down again. You just like have to heave yourself off and then you stumble across and [inaudible Jane and Ari laughing]. And you just think (laugh), I'm not a human being any more, my body doesn't work
> J: I think as well, I mean I don't know about any other girls but I you know, you want to feel that you're attractive to your husband and there comes a point where you feel that you're just not attractive at all really (laugh) (Ari, mid-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford and Jane mid-twenties, married, second pregnancy (mother of 1), Bradford.)

This excerpt from a discussion between Jane and Ari about their experiences of heavily pregnant corporealities alludes to the overwhelming negativity associated with these bodies. What is clear from the exchange above is the shared nature of this negativity and the breadth of reasons for this, which can be categorised in relation to these bodies awkward and excessive materiality and also the cultural aesthetic which brands them fundamentally unattractive, indeed abject. Further, it is clear that crucial to their definition and constitution as such are not only the embodied articulations of women but also the articulations of hegemonic cultural discourses through a whole host of sources, from literary representations to reactions of those casting a critical gaze over the body, to husbands and partners reactions and feelings regarding these bodies. Indeed, it could be argued that these women's articulations of their embodied experiences of heavily pregnant corporealities are internalisations of these wider cultural discourses. As Longhurst suggests:

> "Pregnant bodies are 'real', while at the same time, they are socially inscribed and constructed. 'Real' material bodies do not exist outside of the political, economic, cultural and social realms. They do not exist outside of discourse" (Longhurst, 1997b, p.34)

Whilst some women find space for resistance (such as Lizzy for example having photographs of herself taken at the culmination of several of her pregnancies for the sole purpose of recording her corporeality in almost a celebratory sense[75]) most women I have spoken with articulate their embodied experience of these corporealities as having been negative. Though these women's discussions are very personal and relate to very particular experiences of individual corporealities I would argue that they map onto and reflect wider social discourses about heavily pregnant bodies in particular and pregnant bodies in general. These would seem to inform the ways in which women not only live and experience but also constitute their bodies through personal activity, bodily comportment and composure (including dress) and language. The hegemony of these cultural discourses suggests they constitute the 'right way' in which to interpret and live these bodies.

Whilst the material presence of these bodies is undeniable and indeed one of the main ways in which this body is constituted through women's speech this too is not without cultural influence. Though as the above excerpt shows much of the negativity surrounding heavily pregnant corporealities would appear to be their physical awkwardness and discomfort, brought about purely by its biological construction. It is also the case that these biological functions are always culturally interpreted, and given meaning in a specific cultural context, "biology does not stand outside culture but is located within it" (Entwistle, 2000,p.12). For example quoting again from Kathy Lette's novel Foetal Attraction:

> "Waddling down the stairs, she vowed to write to Watchdog and complain about the faulty design of the pregnant female. She would set the Trade Practices people on to God right away" (Kathy Lette, 1994, p.208)

Such ideas about the poor design and performance of ones body are resonant in some women's discussion. There is a very real sense in which some women talk about their heavily pregnant bodies as being in some way faulty, using discursive regimes relating to infirm or disabled bodies. As Ari commented (as quoted above) she found her body literally 'didn't work' any more and Carolyn for example explicitly compared hers to elderly and disabled bodies:

> "...I think you accept the fact that you're going to be pretty big at the end but I've never met anybody who actually enjoyed being that big at the end you know [laugh] ... Well you see when it gets, when you get to the stage where its difficult to cut your toenails you start to appreciate how frustrating people, elderly people or people with severe back problems who cannot bend down, I mean it did actually give me an insight into what that was like. Um you how frustrated they must feel because its just so uncomfortable having to negotiate your way around this bump. " (Carolyn, early-forties, married, mother of 2, Manchester.)

Longhurst (1997b) discusses the withdrawal many women seem to make from public spaces particularly towards the end of their pregnancies. She talks about the

[75] Even those with bodies that adhere closely to the hegemonic 'ideal female body' can find space for such resistance. For example my sister-in-law, a professional and highly successful ballet dancer constructed an entire photograph album charting her pregnancy and changing body shape (including images of her very much 'in between' corporeality), culminating in shots taken by a professional, just weeks before her due date.

shrinking lifeworlds that many of her respondents explained by making reference to the materiality of their pregnant bodies, which caused them to withdraw from many public spaces and dwell more consistently in 'private realms'. Whilst conceding the very real 'differences' in non-pregnant and pregnant (particularly heavily pregnant) corporealities Longhurst argues that these material differences cannot in their essence explain these behaviours:

> "It is undeniable that the material body of the pregnant woman is 'different' to the material body of the non-pregnant woman. The pregnant woman is likely to be 9 to 13.5 kilograms heavier, she may be retaining some fluids, feel tired, and experience some shortness of breath. Some women on the other hand, report feeling energetic and healthy for the duration of their pregnancy. Yet this very 'real' and undeniable body is not simply a biological bedrock, which can solely explain pregnant women's withdrawal from public space. The 'real' pregnant body is at the same time constructed and inscribed by the discourses that surround pregnancy. It is these discourses that are too frequently ignored in understanding pregnancy" (Longhurst, 1997b, p.35)

Longhurst goes on to examine in detail the medicalised discourses surrounding hormonal changes, forgetfulness, irrationality and so on. She argues that these are inscribed onto women's bodies and used to explain behaviours and episodes during pregnancy, which reinforce their 'truth' and cause women to live their bodies in particular ways. For example, she shows that these 'instabilities' seem to justify withdrawal from public spaces. Whilst not focusing on these specific discourses myself, although it is important to note that my transcripts are littered with such references, I would suggest that the wide use of discursive regimes linking the heavily pregnant body to infirm, geriatric and faulty bodies would appear to reinscribe a wider medicalised discourse. The pregnant body, constructed and lived in this way, would seem to constitute it (or at least reaffirm it) as being in need of medical supervision and management in ways in which non-pregnant bodies are not, thus justifying the degree of medical intervention and supervision of the pregnant body currently lauded and imposed in this and other western cultures (see the expansive medicalisation literature for example: Martin, 1984; Oakley, 1980; 1984; Young, 1984, 1990). Further I would also argue that the ways in which some women talk about these bodies (for example Carolyn talks about having to negotiate her way around 'this bump'), employing a type of distancing, non-personal articulation reinforces the construction of pregnant corporeality as 'out of control'.

Whilst discomfort and awkwardness directly associated with the physicality of the body is undeniably real and experienced at the level of the individual body the way in which such experiences are given meaning and articulated and therefore to a certain extent materially lived are inherently linked to cultural ways of understanding these bodies. The physical capabilities (and disabilities) of these bodies are determined as much by external physicalities such as the built environment (see Longhurst 1994 for e.g.) and discourses as by women's personal experience of their materiality. The cultural always provides the lens through which these material experiences are interpreted, and at the present moment in our culture they are almost without exception interpreted negatively.

8.2.3(2) Unattractive – 'Fat'

A not insignificant and unconnected consequence for the living of these bodies and the physical experience of these materialities is in relation to their size and the way they are dominantly discursively constructed. As has already been noted, even when embodied as the most acceptable pregnant body women are not immune from the regulatory gaze of others. For example, Jane was told how large she looked in her fifth month of pregnancy, when she was at her happiest in terms of her corporeal appearance. Against such a background it is not difficult to imagine why heavily pregnant bodies are experienced and discursively constituted as such monstrous forms, why indeed women themselves interpret them in such specific ways, constituting them through language to be excessive to the extreme, ridiculous, indeed almost freakish in size. For example, women commonly compare their size to large objects and animals:

> "...because I put on weight everywhere I felt like a bus. I was like, everything, anything I ate just went on everywhere." (Tracey, mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Northampton.)

> V: Err ... right so when you got to a certain point then, about 6 months, what was it then that changed? You felt worse about how you looked or ...?
> S: A huge, I felt like a massive elephant yeah! And because you [cough] because you swell, I mean not everybody does but my face was swollen and my hands were swollen and my feet and my legs were swollen, everything just felt ... it was hot and I was uncomfortable and just. And then your bump becomes, if, if you could be pregnant for 6 months its like the perfect time because from ... you're just sort of beginning to really look forward ... [inaudible - laughing] you just begin to really look forward to not having this bump any more. I mean especially from like about ... oh I don't know how long, about 7 and a half months on you just begin to yearn, really yearning it stops being a novelty and it stops being exciting and just becomes cumbersome and a pain and you just don't want this bump any more you want to be back to normal. (Sarah, mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Bradford.)

This is something that Longhurst also found in her study in New Zealand suggesting it is not restricted either to my group of respondents or to English culture, as one participant commented who was forty weeks pregnant at the time of interview:

> "My husband he laughs at the way I get out of bed you know, 'cause you've got to roll to this side and get up and you're like a beached whale" (Longhurst, 2000, p.462)

These kinds of discursive regimes allude to the interpretation of heavily pregnant corporealities in relation to their excessive size; indeed they suggest they are almost beyond description within the language relating to human bodies. However, rather than relating purely to their inferred non-human material dimensions, it is also perhaps the case that the animal (and more specifically mammal) associations make reference to the underlying cultural associations of pregnancy and motherhood with nature. For example, pregnancy is often considered by many (including Clare who

articulates this specifically amongst my respondents) to be the natural state for the female body. These discursive regimes can therefore be seen not only to relate to the size of these bodies but also their function, as birthing bodies fulfilling an essentially animal role. To constitute them as such is far easier (and safer) to confront than the massive destabilisation that these bodies pose to the hegemonic ways in which human bodies are conceptualised in western culture – as singular, bounded selves (see for example Young, 1984, 1990). To construct heavily pregnant bodies as not human but rather as animal, (and as objects of ridicule) in this way therefore preserves some of these strongly held assumptions and core values about 'the body'. The pregnant body is therefore cast as 'other', not only in respect to 'the body' which traditionally has been thought necessary to transcend in order to think and act rationally – the excessive and awkward materiality of full term pregnancy literally thought to trap women and cause irrational and emotional behaviour in greater measure than even the non-pregnant female body (see Longhurst, 1997a). But also in relation to the female body itself.

Discourses of animality are highly significant in women's everyday experiences of heavily pregnant corporealities, and can be seen as important in the common discursive regime that defines them as 'fat'. In contrast to 'in between' bodies which are defined and experienced as 'fat' because of their deviation from the idealised flat stomached norm rather than their weightiness as such, heavily pregnant bodies are described as heavy and excessive. Whereas 'in between' bodies, I would argue are 'fat' in the sense that the cultural frame of reference defines any imperfect correlation to the idealised norm as such -- i.e. 'not slim' seems largely to equate to 'fat' – and women's articulations about these bodies reflect the cultural conditioning of docile bodies, heavily pregnant bodies are 'fat' in a different sense, in a more material, fleshy sense. Not only do such bodies undeniably feel excessive in relation to non-pregnant corporealities there is also no concealing this body through dress as there is with 'in between' 'fat' bodies, rather it is ever-present, ever visible. It is beyond all control both physically (in terms of how much it grows) and sartorially since its boundaries cannot be manipulated through dress. It is therefore inescapably open to the critical gaze that decodes and actively constructs it as grotesque, abject and animal in very similar ways to overweight bodies themselves are culturally constructed. For example, Jane during her first pregnancy had what one might almost describe as a humiliating experience at the hands of her apparent friends. They marked her out and through their actions and language actively and deliberately constructed her as 'fat' in an apparent attempt at humour:

> J: ... towards the end um, do you go to church? Yeah, Have you been to ours?
> V: Once, a long time ago!
> J: Well I used to sing in the backing vocals there and I knew quite a lot of, my husband plays the keyboards there so I know most of the music group. And when I was nearly due they announced right at the beginning that I was about to give birth that week and um somebody who else was on backing vocals started singing 'who ate all the pies, who ate all the pies, you fat ....!'
> V: [Really shocked] Really! That's not very friendly!
> J: I know and I was like ... it was only a joke but [laugh]
> V: It's not what you want to hear though is it!
> J: [Laughing] No! It's not a pie it's a baby [both laugh](Jane, mid-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.)

Though she laughed about it when relating the story to me it was clear that she had found the whole situation thoroughly upsetting since she had found her heavily pregnant body very difficult to negotiate both in terms of physical discomfort and also physical appearance even before this incident. This kind of banter therefore could only have served to heighten her body consciousness in relation to its deviation from accepted norms and fundamental unattractiveness. It says something of the strength of the social discourse about pregnant embodiment being fat and unattractive that this event occurred in such a public way and that it was considered by others to be not only acceptable but also funny. Not only does it re-establish the heavily pregnant body in particular as an object of ridicule but it also delineates it as fat in a very explicit way, in relation with over-eating and lack of self control and so on and all the negative connotations that holds in our society. Therefore such articulations serve to reinforce the disparity of this body and the idealised female norm:

> M: I mean there's no way in which the *whole* of society's view on you looking, it being good to look slim is suddenly *altered* in anybody's mind just because you're, they're pregnant, so that *definitely* is playing its part isn't it
> A: Oh definitely. I think that's one of the hardest things I felt when I was pregnant was suddenly not being slim any more. Because I'd spent my entire life before, I was 25 when I got pregnant, 25 years I'd been slim and then suddenly almost over night I wasn't slim any more and its *amazing* the effect it has on you. (Meg mid- to late- thirties, forth pregnancy, mother of 2 and Ari mid-twenties, mother of 1, both married and from Bradford)

As Meg and Ari discuss above the departure of the pregnant body from the culturally established notion that 'to be slim is good' is significant in women's experience of their bodies and also others interpretations of them. The heavily pregnant body is generally experienced negatively not just because of its material presence but because of the way this is interpreted and given meaning within the context of the dominant cultural aesthetic. So great is the heavily pregnant body's disruption of the dominant bodily codes of acceptability that members of society at large feel free to pass comment of women's corporeality in ways which would in other circumstances be deemed thoroughly unacceptable. The kind of behaviour experienced by Jane for example in relation to her full term pregnant body serves to explicitly identify and define such bodies explicitly as fat. Having such a keen awareness of how this body is viewed culturally does make this body incredibly difficult for women to negotiate, particularly I would suggest as accompanying this awareness of the critical gaze is a questioning of what one's (male) partner might also be thinking.

> "... you want to feel that you're attractive to your husband and there comes a point where you feel that you're just not attractive at all really (laugh) [Inaudible -Ari and Jayne talking together]. You want them to still think that you're attractive but inside you know that they don't and that's quite hard to come to terms with really and you wonder if you're ever going to get it back you know.... and um so that's quite difficult really. Well I found that really hard." (Jane, mid-twenties, married, second pregnancy (mother of 1), Bradford.)

> "While pregnancy remains an object of fascination, our own culture harshly separates pregnant from sexuality. The dominant culture defines feminine beauty as slim and shapely. The pregnant woman is often not looked upon as sexually active or desirable, even though her own desires and sensitivity may have increased. Her male partner, if she has one, may decline to share in her sexuality, and her physician may advise her to restrict her 'sexual activity'. To the degree that a woman derives a sense of self worth from looking 'sexy' in the manner promoted by dominant cultural images, she may experience her pregnant body as ugly and alien." (Young, 1984, p.52)

As Iris Marion Young suggests men are often reluctant to 'participate in their partner's sexuality' and engage in sexual activity during pregnancy. Many of my participants talked about their partner's difficulty in negotiating the proximity of the baby and so on, and whilst some women also felt uncomfortable, particularly if the baby moved during orgasm for example, this reluctance on the male partner's part could be seen to contribute to women's feelings of being unsexy. Women's relationships with their partners to a large extent define them as sexual beings and if this is withdrawn these bodies are not only desexualised (because of their embodiment as mother) but also defined as un-sexy – as unattractive and even physically repulsive. This is something women may even feel about their own bodies, as Jane describes she was shocked and horrified when she saw her full term pregnant body in a full length mirror in Mothercare:

> J: ...I remember I came out of Mothercare and I was in tears one time just because I'd seen myself full length in a mirror at nearly full term pregnant and I couldn't believe how hideous I looked [laugh]. I came out nearly in tears. I saw my friend and I just burst into tears [laugh]. She said 'you're all right, you look lovely' and I went 'I don't' [laugh]. I just felt so gutted because I'd seen myself full length because I didn't have a full-length mirror at home and I just couldn't believe what a sight it was! [laugh]
> V: Why you know why did you think you looked so gross?
> J: Because I'd put on a lot of um ... extra, like I put on fluid and like I put on 4 stone in total and like it was all sort of, I couldn't wear my rings and my legs were a lot bigger. I've only just got back down again and I've still got about half a stone to lose but I just couldn't believe it. I had stretch marks and bigger boobs and..[inaudible] (Jane, mid-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.)

So traumatic was the experience of embodying this monstrous form that Jane dreaded becoming it again. The fear of looking 'hideous' again, or becoming that grotesque body caused her to feel quite negative[76] about her advancing second pregnancy.

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[76] Such articulations cause me not to be surprised to learn of recent medical research discussed on BBC Breakfast news (3/8/01) that has apparently concluded that depression is more common in women during pregnancy rather than after birth as was previously thought. Interestingly the researcher interviewed espoused a medical and biological explanation for this depression (though this has still to be investigated fully) suggesting hormonal influences and anticipation of birth itself. Whilst the mother interviewed who had herself experienced 'ante natal depression' mentioned the impact of celebrity mothers such as Madonna who seem to sail through pregnancy wearing designer maternity wear and so on. I would suggest that the research that this team in Bristol carry out should

"I've looked back on photos and thought 'ohh you looked hideous, I don't want to look like that again' and um I'm actually more negative about it this time because I don't want to become like I did before and it took me a while to get rid of it as well, well I didn't fully get rid of it but. So I'm probably, I probably feel more negative and I'll probably wear lots of different clothes because I want to look different." (Jane, mid-twenties, married, second pregnancy (mother of 1), Bradford.)

8.2.3(3) Fear of never being normal again

I would suggest that a significant factor in the negative experiences and discourses surrounding heavily pregnant bodies and in particular the anxiety around becoming them (such as Jane describes above) stems from a fear that what is lost as a result of being this body may never be regained.

"Of course there are plenty of women who start big and remain big, plenty who start slender and remain so. But the image of the woman spreading from slender teenager towards larger, maternal middle age is a powerful one in western society" (Adam, 2001, p.42)

For example, part of Clare's apparent (and highly unusual) satisfaction even with her 42 weeks pregnant body stemmed from her feeling of corporeal control as a result of her daily exercise regime. Unlike most of my other participants she did not fear her post partum body, did not fear she would never return to her slender pre-pregnant body. Indeed I would suggest that a significant aspect of the discourse of abjection in relation to heavily pregnant and full term bodies is the fear of what this body will mean for the true corporeal self temporarily obscured (or perhaps not so temporarily) by pregnant embodiment. The fear that this embodiment actually heralds the metamorphosis to 'maternal middle age', that this uncontrollability will spill out of pregnancy and affect the post partum body too.

As Adam (2001) suggests the image of 'maternal middle age' is indeed a powerful one in western society, structuring I would suggest women's fears about and responses to their heavily pregnant bodies. Many women are aware, even during pregnancy that their bodies are undergoing permanent changes, that not all corporeal changes are temporary and therefore even afterwards they will always be embodied as 'once pregnant', 'mother'. For example as Sarah explained when 8 months pregnant with her twins:

"...you really have to come to terms with it, its something that ... I don't know, I think you have to ... I mean some women wouldn't be bothered at all but I, I found a picture of myself in a bikini the other day ... I never liked my body before I got pregnant, but as I was looking at these photographs I though I was just really stupid not liking it because I actually had quite a nice body! [Laugh] But its just, I know its ruined now, it just will never be the same, it will never be like that. I *wish* I'd appreciated it more. And you do have to, its like you have to say goodbye to it really and obviously I want

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not be restricted to medicalised or biological lines of enquiry and should include consideration of such influences as body image which are clearly – as Jane for example shows very clearly – extremely important to women, particularly those embodying heavily and full term pregnant bodies.

children, I want a family a lot more than I want to have a nice [body] I'm not vain enough to not do it, or to be upset, or feel resentful towards the child or whatever. But um you have to have a little sort of ceremony to say goodbye to it" (Sarah, mid-twenties, married, first pregnancy, Bradford.)

For many women there is a real fear of always being grotesque, embodying the maternal, being fat and unattractive. In some ways these fears can be seen to structure attitudes towards heavily pregnant bodies - in terms of their definition as abject – that if they become too excessive and distorted they may never relinquish their hold over non-pregnant female bodies. The derision can be seen to reflect their danger, that acceptable body norms may be rendered permanently inaccessible by this uncontrollable, animal form and the female body therefore thereafter remain grotesque. And since immediately after birth the body retains more pregnant characteristics than not for many women the post partum body is even more difficult to negotiate than the excessive heavily pregnant body.

8.2.4 Post Partum Bodies

The pregnant body may be constructed as a temporary form of embodiment existing for perhaps a little over 9 months (40-42 weeks) or at least the duration of the pregnancy. However, it is clear from the articulations of my participants that these seemingly real, material, indisputable boundaries between pregnant and non-pregnant (carrying a baby and not) are also threatened by pregnant corporeality as lived. Although it is biologically the case that pregnancy begins at conception and end at birth, pregnant embodiment does not necessarily map neatly onto these events. Pregnant embodiment can be seen to leak into the post partum body causing lasting changes, which identify it as having once been pregnant and 'mother'. The consequences of this leakage are of course varied and experienced variously by different woman at different times, therefore what is outlined here are the very particular experiences of a small group of women. However, considered together they do illustrate graphically the persistence of pregnant embodiment beyond birth and the continual negotiation women must make both in the immediate short term after birth and also into the future, possibly for the rest of their lives.

8.2.4(1) Immediate Post Partum Body

For many, this body is eagerly anticipated due to the freedom from corporeal awkwardness, discomfort and excess it can bring. Indeed for Carolyn for example, it heralded immediate relief from months of constant indigestion:

> "I remember someone said to me you'll, the relief you will feel the first meal you eat after you've actually had the baby will be amazing', and I can still remember it, it was only hospital food, it wasn't that great but I kept thinking 'great, no heartburn! For the first time in months no heartburn!" (Carolyn, early-forties, married, mother of 2, Manchester.)

However, for others this corporeality, though giving relief from pressures associated with carrying their unborn child/ren, it is actually perceived as more horrific and abject than their heavily pregnant bodies. As Natalie for example describes, the

solidity of her pregnant bump was lost after birth. This is significant since the solidity of the pregnant bump is at least remotely acceptable (in itself) in the culture of slenderness, which dictates that:

> "It is perfectly admissible in our culture (even for women) to have substantial weight and bulk – so long as it is tightly managed. Simply to be slim is not enough – the flesh must not 'wiggle'." (Bordo, 1993, p.191)

Following birth however this tight, firm non-wiggly bump collapses into a wobbly, jelly like mass of quivering, unmanaged flesh, something Natalie found unsettling and unpleasant:

> "After I'd had him it was like ... its like solid when you're carrying him and then after you've had him its, its like I looked at my stomach and it was like, it just looked like jelly. It looked like this big wobbly thing of jelly. It just was horrible. It was all um, it was all like wrinkly where me stretch marks were and it was all, you went to touch it and it was all sort of 'ohh!' [in disgust]" (Natalie, early-twenties, mother of 1, Manchester.)

Natalie literally could hardly bring herself to touch her stomach immediately post partum, the disgust she felt was almost unspeakable as she tried to explain how the prospect made her feel or what it might have felt like. Rather than immediately or even in the short term reverting back to a pre-pregnant body shape therefore women must again negotiate an almost 'in between' body. Immediately post partum the body is neither pregnant nor slender, corresponding to neither ideal and embodying something that as a rule is socially unspeakable and therefore latent. This body is rarely talked about and several of my respondents mentioned not only how shocking they found it, but also how difficult it was to negotiate having not been told about it and therefore almost lacking a frame of reference with which to interpret it:

> "..towards the end you sort of get a bit fed up just because its harder to move around but you know I didn't mind looking in the mirror and being huge. I think is more afterwards that you sort of feel, sort of the baby's gone but it takes you a while to loose your weight and I think that's the harder bit because you're still in your maternity clothes for a few weeks. Which nobody tells you about [laugh] ... so it's a shock" (Wendy, late-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.)

The cultural silence regarding this body also extends into the media. Though there are more and more images entering the public arena of pregnant celebrities, particularly in the lifestyle magazine press, this 'in between', immediate post partum body is universally absent. There are commonly images of pencil slim, tight, toned, maternal bodies complete with polished, clean, serene babies (and occasionally husbands / male partners). But never a woman with ravaged stomach muscles hidden by virtually worn out, ill fitting maternity trousers and a long baggy and equally well worn top, perched on top of an inflatable ring hoping not to laugh and therefore burst her stitches. This painful, awkward 'in between' body is denied and hidden by the celebrity media (and arguably the specialist press too). This latency and denial can again be interpreted as part of the tyranny of slenderness encouraging

women to "...kind of feel that you want to loose *it* quickly" (Wendy, late-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford, emphasis added).

8.2.4(2) Bodies marked as 'once pregnant'

The docile bodies of women are well versed in the cultural discourses of corporeal acceptability and it is clear that many begin to police their bodies in relation to the non-pregnant ideal almost right away. For example many report acting themselves to keep their 'horrible' bodies hidden from the gaze of others, even their own partners and indeed themselves. This is not restricted to the immediate post partum body however. As Sarah describes, talking when her twins were just over six months old:

> "..its only recently that I've started looking in the mirror again and even now I don't do it and I get changed as quickly as possible in front of [my husband] and things and, and um ... which really bugs him, he doesn't understand that, he doesn't understand why. I mean if I had my way I'd get changed in the bathroom every night which I first did when I'd had the girls and he told me off ... But I, I don't, it doesn't make any difference whether it matters to him or not it matters to me and I'd still rather hide away or go up to bed earlier and get changed before him" (Sarah, mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Bradford.)

Sarah's internalisation of cultural discourses regarding the unspeakableness of her body created such docility and body consciousness in her performances of this body that she withdrew and hid both from herself and her husband despite his attempts at reassurance. His opinion, his interpretation of her body, his hope that she would feel comfortable with him were insignificant compared to the power of docility.

Pregnant embodiment therefore for many women is a source of daily self-surveillance, regulation and management long after birth. Indeed particular marking, scarring and other bodily changes may be permanent, needing attendance indefinitely. Stretch marks for example are particularly problematic, as I shall go on to discuss, and render certain items of clothing, ways of dressing and wearing the body (Craik, 1994) inappropriate. In addition various changes may occur to the shape of the body, whether this be in terms of for example breasts becoming saggier, hips bigger, or in terms of stomachs no longer being flat, or perhaps a general feeling of being larger and 'overweight' compared to previously. The latter two are particularly problematic for women since these are aspects they feel they should be able to control themselves, their failure to do so being construed as their lack of will power in reference to what they eat and how little exercise they do.

> C: Mmm it's my fault [laugh]
> V: Its not!
> C: I eat too much, drink too much, well no I wouldn't say I drink too much but I eat too much, I enjoy a glass of wine and basically I don't exercise enough although I am on my feet all day long.
> V: Well exactly. So you obviously berate yourself about this?
> C: Yeah um it's when you've got a load of size twelve clothes in there and you're thinking... Um but it is, it is something that rankles slightly but um I don't regret it cos we've got Sabby and Timmy and I mean I wouldn't

> um you know I just look at me and say well you know you could do more about it if you wanted but you could go to a gym or something ! mean you know. (Carolyn, early-forties, married, mother of 2, Manchester.)

Given Carolyn's consciousness that her body has changed from that she embodied before her pregnancies, blaming herself for this rather than the pregnancies themselves, it is perhaps surprising that she had largely retained her pre-pregnancy clothing, which largely no longer fits. Though this is not something I have particularly pursued in my research I would suggest that it might be an interesting further avenue for future work since such practices might indicate a further aspect of women's embodied relationship with their clothing. As Banim and Guy (2001) have discussed in relation to no-longer-worn clothing, despite the fact that they are currently 'inactive' such garments may be of importance to women's current body image and identity. In the case of retaining clothes which, following pregnancy, are no longer worn due to changing body shape for example[77] women may be reluctant to remove them from their wardrobes because of their significance in relation to a lost body (and even perhaps identity). Their continued presence as part of a clothing set' (Banim and Guy 2001) even if not 'active' facilitates an impermanent body image incorporating the possibility of once again being able to wear such items (and sizes) as well as defining the currently unsatisfactory body as once having been that size and shape. As Carolyn's articulations suggest she may be retaining her 'load of size 12 clothes' for such time that she could discipline her body through the exercise she talks of and regain her lost body. Whether or not she ever will, or could regain her pre-pregnancy body shape is an entirely different matter.

In the same vein, though as I have mentioned this is not something I have specifically asked women, I would suspect that whilst practices such as Carolyn's would be common in relation to everyday clothing items (and others for example with special significance), there will be some items which are less likely to be kept if no longer worn. Bikini's for example might be discarded because of the impossibility of ever wearing them again. Post partum bodies scarred by Caesarean sections, stretch marks and so on are largely experienced as unfit to be revealed defining such items as bikinis for example as un-wearable. Sarah for example talks about her fears about going on holiday with a group of close friends and family and wearing clothing that might reveal her stretch marks (crucially none of the other women going had children):

> "I think definitely stretch marks just make a body look awful and they're just horrible things stretch marks are and because you get stretch marks when you're not pregnant anyway societies view of stretch marks is that they're a terrible thing and they're something to be ashamed of, something to be hidden away and that's just what people do. And I'm exactly the same I mean that's why I'm going to feel uncomfortable on holiday because I'm not going to be able to hide all my stretch marks like I do normally. And they are they're horrible, they look awful and maybe we shouldn't feel like that but most people do so there's never an issue to change how people, how you feel about them and how people's perception of you feels" (Sarah, mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Bradford.)

[77] Or perhaps also because of a perceived need to change ones clothed identity. Several of those I spoke with mentioned a need to dress differently following pregnancy; of different expectations for the way mothers dress.

I would suggest therefore that with respect to such aspects of body surfaces which are constructed as permanent, irreversible and also 'awful', 'horrible' and so on, women may be more likely to throw away items which they feel no longer able to wear.

Such experiences I would suggest elude to a corporeality, which far from being impermanent and ephemeral is persistent, and in some way less fluid than pregnant embodiment during pregnancy itself. The articulations of many of my participants show consistently that the boundary between pregnant and non-pregnant embodiment is blurred – the two are not mutually exclusive – and that crucially therefore, the negative discourses of abjection associated with pregnant embodiment have lasting consequences for women embodied as 'once pregnant'. Whether this be in terms of guilt felt at not having lost weight associated with pregnancy, or negotiating the repulsiveness of their immediate postpartum corporealities or the more permanent scarring of stretch marks or caesarean scars the continuing presence of the abject pregnant body in women's lives is real and has tangible effects for the way their bodies are lived and worn.

8.3 Corporeo-Sartorial Construction: The Mapping Debate

"One cannot talk body without talking clothes" (Tseelon, 2001, p.105)

The multiple pregnant corporealities described by pregnant women can be seen to disrupt and destabilise the notion of a singular pregnant body, which is always and everywhere in this culture considered abject. The multiplicity and fluidity of these corporealities would seem to open up possibilities for different discursive constructions and performances of pregnant embodiment. Although each individual transgression of accepted discourses is significant in that they demonstrate that these cultural ways of knowing, seeing and being bodies are not fixed (and certainly not immutable or natural), as I have noted, women's lived experiences of these bodies are largely structured by hegemonic cultural discourses, which tend to relate to the pregnant body as a monolithic figure. The pregnant body within this culture is one which society at large feels justified in passing comment on, touching and interacting with in ways quite unique from any other. As such, perhaps to a greater degree than when embodied as not pregnant, women find themselves constructed as, and reduced to a body perceived by others in relation to the hegemonic discourses since these are more directly and consistently imposed on them by others. Though as this thesis has shown there are spaces for resistance, and that crucially these are created by the multiple material realities of pregnant corporeality, these remain very often at the scale of the individual's own body. For example Sarah talks about feeling sexy before she grew 'too large', however it is questionable whether beyond her own bodily experience – and perhaps that of her husband – her body would have been discursively constructed or read as such. Indeed Jane talks about being happy and 'chuffed' with her 5 months pregnant body but already being told by others how big (for which read unattractive) she was.

However as Tseelon (2001) among others argues it is impossible to talk about bodies without also taking account of clothing (and the reverse is also true). Indeed, as Warwick and Cavallaro (1998, p.3) argue, that body – in particular the unclothed body – has been "traditionally regarded as lacking and unfinished", with dress being "assigned the responsibility of transforming the incomplete body into a complete

cultural package." Therefore dress is an integral part of the body's cultural construction – one which we cannot ignore – indeed, in many respects it is impossible to conceptualise a body independent of practices and discourses of dress, as Entwistle suggests in her conceptualisation of dress as situated practice:

> "..bodies are socially constituted, always situated in culture and the outcome of individual practices directed towards the body: in other words, 'dress' is the result of 'dressing' or 'getting dressed' .... Becoming a competent member involves acquiring knowledge of the cultural norms and expectations demanded of the body ... Dressing requires one to attend unconsciously or consciously to these norms and expectations when preparing the body for presentation in any particular social setting" (Entwistle, 2000, p.11)

The act of 'getting dressed' is for Entwistle at once both an intimate one, an individual attending to the presentation of their body and also a socially situated one since the practice is constrained by cultural norms and expectations which can be seen for example to be reinforced by the interaction of others with pregnant bodies[78]. The act of 'getting dressed' is therefore one of making the body acceptable and appropriate for its specific social context (see also for example Craik, 1994). It is important to note that it is not only through the adoption of particular styles of dress that bodies are made into acceptable and appropriate cultural packages for specific socio-spatial contexts. Practices of dress, as I have suggested, involve corporeo-sartorial negotiations at an intimate level whereby the material specificities of corporeality are negotiated in relation to their cultural representation and interpretation. As Warwick and Cavallaro (1998, p.3) argue:

> "In framing the body, however precariously, dress contributes to the symbolic translation of materiality into cultural images or signifiers. As a mediator between the carnal dimension of existence and the abstract laws of the symbolic order of language and institutions, dress aids the construction of subjectivity as *representation.*"

I would argue that the nature of this framing, or as I conceptualise it here mapping of bodily landscapes, also contributes to the *material construction* of corporeality and that this too is highly significant in composing bodies as socially appropriate. I shall discuss this here in terms of the ways in which ill- or loose- fitting clothing materially constructs bodies through their inaccurate mapping of bodily landscapes, and in particular the socially problematic nature of such constructions. In addition, I consider the ways in which clothing that blurs body boundaries can be seen to be preferable for example even solidifying, and therefore protecting, fragile boundaries from fracture and porosity if only temporarily. Specifically I would suggest that the tension between being and having a body and clothes – and in particular the corporate construction in which each is 'remade' (the materiality of each working on the construction of the other) – is significant. Quoting again from Warwick and Cavallaro (1998, p.4):

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[78] For example touching – which is common place, invited and uninvited, by friends, family, colleagues and strangers - can be seen as reducing the woman to her identity as mother, reinforcing that she should conduct herself as mother. The negative and insulting reactions many pregnant women report also reinforce the abjectness of this body and therefore suggest certain norms expected of this body.

> "If it is difficult for the subject to decide whether the body is something it *is* or *has*, it is even trickier for it to establish whether the clothes with which it is intimately connected are part of its *being* or rather an item in the parcel of its having. The subject is a body and has a body; but it also is and has, at one and the same time, the clothes that it wears."

I argue here that clothing and the body are in fact mutually constitutive and therefore the exaggeration of bodily limits and landscapes by ill- or loose- fitting clothing can be problematic because it means that the body (and therefore the subject) materially *is* the larger size so mapped. Further, that whilst perhaps during pregnancy the body may be experienced more as something one has – given that the pace of relentless change can make it difficult for women to construct a stable body image and that such change is uncontrollable – clothing may be seen to solidify this fluidity for the moment of its wearing. Even ill- or loose- fitting clothing forms a framing boundary – is suggestive of a body shape – as it adorns a particular corporeality, and therefore defines what the body is at that moment. In this sense clothing which maps bodily landscapes uncertainly may be experienced as preferable particularly in relation to heavily pregnant bodies. With respect to these corporealities blatantly framing clothing is often seen as inappropriate and this I would suggest may be linked to anxiety about such tightly defined boundaries fracturing (both with respect to showing skin and also literally breaking and leaking). The blurring of boundaries by ill- or loose- fitting clothing may therefore be seen to act as a 'buffer zone' between self and other, protecting other from potential contamination and insulating the fragile boundaries of the pregnant self. Again, a key aspect of this argument is that the nature of corporeo-sartorial negotiation shifts throughout pregnancy with the nature of corporeality itself and here I focus specifically on the 'in between' pregnant body and the heavily pregnant body with respect to ill- and loose- fitting clothing.

8.3.1 Ill- and Loose- Fitting Clothing Constructing Larger Bodies

As previously discussed the 'in between pregnant body' and in particular its ambivalent shape is commonly interpreted by the critical gaze as 'fat' – that is, not slim - which is difficult to negotiate in relation to clothing. As I have suggested, to a large extent this body's 'in between-ness' is defined by its relationship with clothing – too big for women's normal clothes yet too small for maternity wear. In dressing this pregnant corporeality there would appear to be two main tensions women must negotiate. Firstly, the difficulties associated with the fact that this 'fat' body is hegemonically experienced as inappropriate for display through dress, women often do not wish to adorn it with clothing that faithfully maps its landscape since this would draw attention to this transgression of the normative slender body's flat stomach in particular. Secondly however maternity wear, particularly ill-fitting items are perceived to exaggerate the size of the stomach in an equally unsatisfactory way. The nature of much maternity wear as it inaccurately maps onto 'in-between' corporealities often contributes to the tensions felt in the performance of these bodies. In particular, such problems with poor fit produce an unsatisfactory form, one that appears 'bigger' (for which read 'fatter') than women's 'real' corporeality, exaggerating the limits of the body. The clothing produces a representation of the

body, which is not faithful to the material reality (which is hidden and therefore absent) and is even less acceptable than this:

> "Maternity wear had a tendency to make you feel...bigger, a lot bigger than you actually were because you had the big sort of sewn on sort of pouches that extended. If you didn't actually fill them properly, yet you were the size of the thing that you'd bought it made you look bigger than you actually were" (Natalie, early-twenties, mother of 1, Manchester.)

> "...the trousers even though they're elastic you have to pull the elastic and then you've got the pocket kind of thing. But it all puckers and like you've just got little saggy material" (Tracey, mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Northampton.)

As Natalie and Tracey both describe garments with 'pouches' – inserts of stretchy elasticated material, in trousers and skirts primary made of fabric with otherwise no give – cause particular problems in this respect. As both these respondents note this technique of fit is deeply flawed and does not provide the kind of fit women are used to or desire, both in terms of look and the sensual experience of actually wearing the clothes. As Linda describes in relation to her pair of jeans:

> "I found the jeans a bit of a nuisance because when you're a bit smaller they don't stay up and then when I was really big they were uncomfortable... I just found that even if I did that [pulled the button hole elastic right in] I just found them, I don't know, funny. So I used to wear them with braces but then that's a nuisance when you've got a top over the top when you go to the loo and you go to the loo a lot when you're pregnant." (Linda, early-thirties, married, mother of 1, Bradford)

Pouches appear to provide a comfortable, neat, acceptable fit and therefore silhouette only when the body is the correct size and shape – the appropriate corporeality – to pull the insert and the extra material taught[79]. The loose skin of the pouch either when unembodied, on a clothes hanger, or adorning an 'in-between' pregnant body is extremely problematic. As noted in the previous chapter Natriece describes maternity wear as 'horrendous' when hung up, the pouch hanging down loosely. It is only when it is smoothed out, pulled tight by the contours of the body that it is acceptable. When adorning a pregnant body that fills the pouch it produces a more acceptable silhouette, indeed it becomes a second skin almost, part of the pregnant body itself. The clothing almost becomes part of the body when the extra fabric is smoothed out and pulled tight, effectively hiding, making it invisible. When mapped onto the pregnant body, which fills the pouch, the insert no longer hangs down like excess rolls of fat, loose skin, untoned and ravaged stomach muscles, or bunches to

[79] This particular problem of fit would seem to perpetuate the discourse that maternity wear is only suitable/appropriate/meant for discernibly pregnant bodies. For example, this is discerned by some women in relation to feeling out of place in maternity wear retail space whilst embodied as 'in between'. In relation to this it can also be seen to contribute to feelings of not being properly pregnant when embodying this corporeality, the fact that it does not fit literally defined this body as 'not pregnant'. Women may choose not to wear this poorly fitting, unflattering, falsifying clothing until embodied as more obviously 'pregnant' (as Linda did for example) because of the unacceptability of the body it produces, when wearing it could affirm and validate their pregnancy, embodiment as pregnant (if only to themselves).

exaggerate the ambiguous tummy of the 'in-between' pregnant (for which read 'fat') body.

In Warwick and Cavallaro's (1998) terms this ill- and loose- fitting clothing with extra, unfilled material literally *fabricates* the body, representing it as larger than it 'really' is which is ultimately unacceptable given the cultural code abjectifying largeness. The boundary the clothing constitutes in this case is not a genuine one, does not function as it should as a 'neat line between self and other' (Warwick and Cavallaro, 1998, p. xvii). The body it produces itself is other, the gap represented by the clothing not identified with as the woman's own body, as it is larger and therefore less appropriate than their own materially 'is'. Far from this clothing allowing women to make their bodies culturally appropriate, it actually exaggerates their inappropriateness.

Though this problematic construction due to clothing which inaccurately maps bodily landscapes is particularly pronounced when embodied as 'in-between', it is not an experience confined to this particular corporeality and neither is the only difficulty related to the material construction of a 'fatter' body. For example, when embodied as 'in-between' a particular sensitivity may arise if the body produced is perceived to be 'more pregnant' since many choose not to disclose their pregnancy to others for various reasons, for example until the risk of miscarriage has passed. This was a particular concern for Linda when embodied as 'in between' though the dissatisfaction with the fit of one particular voluminous garment did not subside:

> "..the little pinafore I had, and dungarees, you can wear them when you're not pregnant but they look enormous so you probably wouldn't wear them until you got a bit bigger because they make you look more pregnant early on which is probably not what you want especially if you've not told anyone yet. But you know they look like they just hang off you... I had a dress which I wore to work and when I wore that dress everyone commented on how big I was, whereas when I wore other things, it just made me *look* more pregnant which I probably didn't particularly ... it made me look more enormous than I was ... It was nice to look pregnant but you didn't want to look absolutely huge" (Linda, early-thirties, married, mother of 1, Bradford, emphasis in original speech)

Like garments such as Linda's maternity dress, which through its voluminous expanse constructed her body as being materially more excessive than it was, larger sizes of ordinary clothes can also add weight to the frame. Although Linda initially resisted looking 'more pregnant' 'early on' because of her desire to keep her pregnancy from others at that time, and although she felt uncomfortable looking 'more enormous than she was' the dress at least still constructed her body as pregnant. However larger sizes in their inaccurate mapping do not. They, even on more obviously, 'properly pregnant' bodies can blur the body boundaries, blurring its construction as 'pregnant' rather than just 'fat'. Indeed, in this respect they can almost be seen to revert more obviously pregnant bodies to a state of 'in between-ness':

> "I think I made the mistake the first time I was pregnant like ... of just wearing, well I didn't have a choice, I just wore normal clothes. And maybe that's why I didn't feel that I looked nice because whenever I looked at myself in the mirror everything looked, masses of material round my legs

which actually made my legs look worse" (Ari, mid-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.)

"You don't feel you look good ... I don't find but you can look nicer. I think you do look nicer, I mean you do look *nicer* in maternity clothes than you do in like normal clothes because, because then you've got like the basics of the same size you are normally whereas if you just buy bigger sized clothes you just look *fat* ... because its not fitted to the proper size of ... you just look fat." (Natriece, early-twenties, mother of 1, Bradford, emphasis in original speech)

8.3.2 Ill- and Loose- Fitting Clothing As Socially Appropriate

Though certain non-framing clothing can be experienced as problematic when mapped onto the 'in-between' pregnant body in particular because of the increasing transgression of culturally acceptable body boundaries they cause, other pregnant corporealities are expected to adopt such clothing practices because they are considered inappropriate for display through clothing for example. The heavily pregnant body for example is often considered as literally 'too big' to be appropriately displayed through dress. In this case the blurring of body boundaries is preferable since it goes someway to disguising the body itself and in particular its socially problematic margins (which may break at any moment).

There is a body, which is considered to be 'too big', an identifiable corporeality which is almost always, and by almost everyone, considered to be inappropriate and unacceptable. However this is not to say that all pregnant women embody such a corporeality in the course of their pregnancies. Although the point has been laboured I feel it is significant to note that the categorisation of bodies I have constructed here is by no means exhaustive or universal. Not all women experience their heavily pregnant bodies as fat, unattractive and so on, indeed not all women experience their pregnant bodies as particularly *heavily* pregnant. For example during an informal discussion with a friend as part of an informal member checking exercise she told me that until two weeks before the birth of her first baby many people had no idea she was pregnant. Interestingly there was no disguising her pride at having not embodied this grotesque figure. Similarly with Sharen, one of my interviewees she too proudly relayed how she never got very big, something which she too was pleased about. Clare, who went two weeks over her due date and eventually had to be induced never experienced her heavily pregnant body as unattractive and fat. Her daily workouts at the gym, literally until the day her son was born were incredibly significant in this.

However many others do reach a point where their bodies are considered 'too big' in an aesthetic sense, something which is also expressed in relation to representations of others. As Meryl for example suggests during our discussion of the folder of images, she identified Cindy Crawford's toned body with a small, neat bump (see figure 1.4) as infinitely more attractive and acceptable than that of the model in one of the images published in the women's magazine *Frank*.

M: ...[turning to Cindy Crawford front page] that one I think is quite well I mean she's not as pregnant there is she?
V: I think she's about 6 months pregnant there

M: But then I think that is quite a nice shape. I think that you go from being quite a nice compact shape to that one, where is it [Frank cornfield] that which I just think is horrible and if that's what I looked like then I'd be doing my very best to cover up. (Meryl, early-thirties, married, first pregnancy, Manchester.)

For Meryl once the 'nice compact shape' has morphed into a much more heavily pregnant body its acceptability declines enormously. This is a body, which should be covered up, it is inappropriate for display. This too is a view Natriece ascribes to; indeed she defines very specifically the bodies acceptable and those unacceptable for display. She herself changed the way she dressed during pregnancy, wearing looser fitting clothes as opposed to the tight, body hugging styles she was used to, in order to conceal her 'fat'. Rather than being her pregnant body *per se* that she was at pains to disguise it was the extra weight she put on, alluding to the idea of an ideal pregnant body embodied by celebrities such as the Spice Girls who did flaunt their bodies during pregnancy. She suggests that this was only acceptable because of their lack of extra weight – their bodies being acceptable for display only because of their adherence to this bodily ideal. However even where these perfect bodies are concerned there is still a very definite limit to their acceptability:

V: So what do you think about people like the Spice Girls then?
N: I think it looks all right if you don't put weight on, and they obviously didn't put weight on, they just had bumps. But I think when you get passed a certain, like 32 weeks sort of thing and you *are* getting a bit big I think it does look a bit stupid. Like I seen a woman yesterday walking round with like a pair of drawstring trousers down to here [indicating that trousers were below her bump] and a crop top just below her boobs and it looked horrific
V: Yesterday? [Thinking that must have been freezing – it was the beginning of November!]
N: Yeah yesterday ... [inaudible] ... she had a jacket over the top but when she took her jacket off it looked horrific ... And when she was picking, when she was going to pick stuff up you could see her boobs. ... So some people do need a bit of style [laugh] if you know what I mean! [laugh] (Natriece, early-twenties, mother of 1, Bradford.)

There is a discernible difference in the ways in which women talks about celebrities and the ways they dress in pregnancy in comparison to themselves and others. It would appear that there are distinct codes of dress, which apply to both groups – celebrities and others – those relating to the former being far more permissive. However despite this Natriece still suggests there is a point where even these bodies become 'a bit big' to be appropriate for display. Given the dualism between celebrity and other it is not surprising the she would interpret the woman she saw on the street as looking 'horrific'. However it is interesting to note that much of this horror is in relation to it being not just displayed but revealed through dress and the risk of it being exposed further by her movement. These feelings of horror are clearly linked to an interpretation of this woman's body as being abject as well as fundamentally unattractive. Indeed, the potential breaking of boundaries to reveal more of this abject body are also resonant in the 'horror' provoked by this heavily pregnant corporeo-sartorial construction. The blurring of bodily boundaries by

loose-fitting clothing would perhaps have been less horrific since they would constitute more stable boundaries, ones less likely to break, split or leak.

These interpretations of heavily pregnant bodies as horrific and in need of concealment and disguise would seem to be internalised by many women both in the readings of others bodies and in the performance of their own. Ari for example had thought she might have some photographs taken of her during her second pregnancy, modelling some of the clothes stocked in Mums & Co. However for some reason this had never transpired and when we discussed it a matter of 6/7 weeks before the birth of her son she was already feeling the window of opportunity had passed:

> *Sarah was very keen on the idea of taking some pictures of Ari wearing some of their clothes and displaying them in the shop, particularly given the success of lines that Ari wears herself. They discussed taking them against a blank background, copying the format of the Formes catalogue, and perhaps asking a professional to take them for them. Ari was quite keen too (it was her idea to use the Formes catalogue as a guide) but was keen to get it done soon as she feels she is getting a bit too big and if they don't do it soon it will be too late. Ari's feeling that she is already a bit big really is in keeping with the dominant discourse surrounding the pregnant body's attractiveness, and acceptability being tied to its size. I read in the Prima Baby magazine (one Maria has in her shop) the other day about a model who said she'd been very popular and got lots of work during her pregnancy because she had had such a 'neat' bump. Ari is concerned that should she get much bigger she might not want pictures of her taken, she might not want to model the clothes because the excessiveness of her body will render her unattractive and may therefore undermine what they are trying to do. (Mums & Co research diary, February 15th 2001)*

Ari was acutely aware of the fact that her body was no longer attractive to others at this point. That although *she* was relatively confident in her body, still wearing relatively close fitting clothes for example, the gaze of others would fall critically and uneasily on her corporeality. For this reason she felt constructing commercial images using this body would not be a sound marketing move, feeling that her body would create a negative impression of the clothes rather than promoting them because it is 'too big'. This example illustrates quite nicely the at once social and intimate nature of dressing. Ari, on a personal level was relatively comfortable to wear close fitting clothing late into this pregnancy, however she was acutely aware that the cultural lens through which 'others' would gaze upon this body would not view it positively in the main. She appreciated that cultural norms dictated that this body should not be displayed in the way she planned.

The construction of appropriate social bodies through framing and non-framing clothing demonstrates clearly the mutually constitutive nature of bodies and dress. Particularly when embodied as 'in-between' women report feeling that certain garments exaggerate their body boundaries, literally *remaking* their bodies, making them look and feel larger than their material reality. In many respects this was experienced by these women as unacceptable. In this example the clothing directly influenced both the material and symbolic construction of the body.

Constructing appropriate social bodies may also involve blurring body boundaries to a controlled degree. For example 'in-between' bodies are often interpreted as 'fat', rather than 'pregnant', and therefore concealment of ones bloated stomach is widely practiced. Further heavily pregnant bodies are considered particularly problematic and generally considered unfit for display through clothing in everyday contexts. To faithfully map the landscape of such bodies and reveal one's body boundaries through dress is widely considered to be socially unacceptable. Indeed there is even a sense in which this embodiment remakes the clothing worn. As Ari's reluctance to model merchandise for advertising material (and arguably the lack of heavily pregnant models used elsewhere) shows the abjectness of this body is felt in some way to influence the construction and appearance (for which read attractiveness) of the clothing it wears. The body disrupts the production of the clothing in much the same way, as fashionable garments do not look 'right' on the pregnant body. Clothing and bodies are therefore in no small measure mutually constitutive, each being capable of remaking the other.

8.4 Conclusion

Through this final chapter of analysis I have sought to take the discussion of embodied clothing consumption to another level by explicitly identifying several of the multiple pregnant corporealities revealed by women's accounts and outlining something of the corporeo-sartorial negotiation that goes along with them. I would argue that such a discussion has important theoretical implications for both the conceptualisation of the pregnant body itself and also the study of fashion and dress, particularly their consumption.

As I have argued throughout the previous three chapters the accounts produced by this research suggest that clothing consumption during pregnancy can be understood as a series of coping strategies developed by individual women as a means of negotiating the radical disruption of existing practices, knowledges and certitude. Further that structuring these strategies are monolithic discourses which map onto a singular pregnant body, for example with respect to the appropriate form personalised consumption should take, defined by maternal sacrifice and thrift; the incompatibility of fashion and also professional and authoritative identities with the pregnant body and so on. However far from being a singular process of negotiation the accounts of consumption produced by this research point to constant re-evaluation and negotiation specifically in relation to multiple fleshy pregnant corporealities. Therefore whilst clothing consumption during pregnancy can be understood as a series of personalised coping strategies – dealing at once with the disruption of individual's existing practices and knowledges, and also simultaneously with monolithic and multiple pregnant corporealities – the accounts given here can also be seen to disrupt the monolithic discourses themselves. The monolithic discourses which structure so much of women's experience can be seen to be challenged by women's accounts since the articulation of corporeal multiplicity makes space for alternative ways of living, being and indeed wearing the pregnant body. Perhaps the most potent examples discussed here are the 'satisfactorily pregnant' bodies. Whilst for many women the existence of such a body is fleeting, its disruptive power is by no means negated, particularly as for some women even heavily pregnant bodies are experienced as such.

With respect to the study of fashion and dress, particularly their consumption, the discussion of multiple pregnant corporealities also has specific implications. I

would argue that it highlights the necessity for explicitly embodying sartorial theory. In the light of this research bodies can no longer remain invisible in such work, assumed to be inert clothes-horses, blank canvasses upon which the symbolic meaning of dress is unproblematically projected. Clothing is designed, made, marketed and retailed for particular bodies and its consumption too is about more than buying (or acquiring) the garments themselves. Acquiring clothing is not the end of the story and whilst many have argued for the need to look beyond first cycle consumption (see for example extensive work by Gregson and Crewe such as 1994, 1998) I would reiterate that it is crucial to concentrate more on the life of goods within these multiple cycles, and specifically the material encounters between bodies and clothes. Clothing production and consumption as has been demonstrated here is about more than a flow of commodities or indeed marketing, shopping for and performing lifestyles and identities. Rather it is also fundamentally about the wearing of clothing on fleshy, fluid bodies, the everyday use of material objects and corporeo-sartorial relationships and negotiations. I have explicitly demonstrated in this chapter that bodies can no longer be ignored in the study of clothing since they are integral to the look of clothing itself, and indeed clothing also has the ability to remake bodies by exaggerating body boundaries for example. Therefore clothing and corporeality are conceptualised as being mutually constitutive. Further the existence of multiple pregnant bodies shows that however they may be culturally constructed and understood through discourse, fleshy corporealities are not singular and fixed. Although perhaps exaggerated in this study because of the enormity of change that occurs during pregnancy, bodies as they are lived are not fixed day to day, through the life course and certainly not between individuals. Therefore in order to understand the complexities of clothing consumption fully consumers embodied experiences must be addressed.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Towards the end of my writing up period one of the small independent retailers with whom I carried out participant observation contacted me to let me know they were selling their business. Ari and Sarah of Mums & Co had come to the conclusion that the maternity wear market was not as profitable as they had hoped and that there was little they could do to improve the profitability of their business enough to make it worth their while continuing. They therefore made the decision to sell to the couple who bought the majority of the Bumpsadaisy chain, and whilst they continue to manage the shop, Mums & Co as it was no longer exists.

Whilst a source of personal sadness for me, both for the women involved and also from a research perspective, this news is not entirely surprising. As I have discussed at length the production and consumption of maternity wear in contemporary English culture as so deeply intertwined that regardless of any retailer's (whether this be high street or small independent) efforts to produce it in ways which challenge the hegemonic monolith, the dominant discourses and practices of clothing consumption during pregnancy continue to curtail the market. During the time covered by this research the market has demonstrably been in a state of flux with different high street retailers dipping into and retreating from providing ranges. Marks and Spencer and Next in particular appear to have brought their in-store experiments to a close. On the one hand this might appear to be a surprising decision for the former, given the considerable financial outlay in product development that must have been invested, however it might also perhaps further highlight the inherently problematic and limited nature of the maternity wear market. Indeed, Next appear to have arrived at the conclusion that Blooming Marvellous also hold, as expressed to me by their marketing manager, that maternity wear "is not a high street product" (interview notes), having apparently reverted to their former policy of carrying their maternity range through mail order only. I would argue that whilst the stark economic realities of its production might contribute significantly to this position the ways in which it is consumed are also highly important in curtailing market growth and limiting profitability.

As this thesis has shown, maternity wear is consumed in particular ways, which reflect hegemonic discourses of consumption as they relate to pregnant bodies. For example, I have identified discourses of consumption embedded in retail representations of maternity wear and reflected in women's consumption practices which define the pregnant consumer as mother-to-be and therefore align her proper consumption with this identity. Mother is not appropriately a conspicuous, narcissistic consumer but rather is concerned primarily with the material needs of her child above her own. Acceptable personalised consumption, particularly of dress apparently takes place after a period of 'making do' and involves minimal investment and first cycle consumption. Such discourses of thrift are apparently so closely aligned with the performance of the pregnant body as mother-to-be that even in spaces where maternity wear and indeed the pregnant body are represented and produced differently (such as the small independent retailers studied here) the dominant ways in which maternity wear is consumed continue to be reflective of them.

It is interesting to note that distinct parallels can be drawn between discourses of clothing consumption identified here (as they relate to the pregnant body) and discourses of appropriate food consumption during pregnancy reflected by for example NHS and other pregnancy and birth literature. Warwick and Cavallaro

(1998) point out that such alignments between discourses of food and dress can be traced historically. For example, during the Renaissance period dress exaggerated the size of the body through multiple layers and applied decoration at a time when excessive eating was "viewed as a signifier of power" (Warwick and Cavallaro, 1998, p.11). With respect to contemporary discourses of food and indeed eating during pregnancy I would argue that these mirror those of clothing consumption and dress. At the same time as conspicuous clothing consumption during pregnancy is constructed as unseemly and inappropriate so too is over indulgent eating. Women are advised to regulate their food intake carefully in order to safeguard their unborn child from dangerous substances found in some foods (such as unpastuerised cheese, raw eggs, shellfish and so on) but also in order to control weight gain. Discourses surrounding stretch marks suggest that creams and oils don't help, rather skin type and rapid weight gain dictate whether or not a woman will develop them. Normal limits are put on the amount of weight women are expected to gain and following being weighed at their first antenatal appointment their weight may be monitored at subsequent visits if these limits are thought to have been breached. Women are encouraged to eat a healthy balanced diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and in particular to avoid sweet and highly refined starchy foods since there are said to constitute 'empty calories' (i.e. they have a high calorific content and little or no nutritional value). Discourses of food consumption during pregnancy can therefore be seen to centre on the acquisition of adequate nutrition to support the pregnancy and allow the baby to develop. Eating for pleasure, personal satisfaction or indulgence is discouraged, indeed even defined as inappropriate. Such a parallel perhaps can be seen to further reinforce the construction of the pregnant body as an illegitimate site of conspicuous, personalised, narcissistic consumption for pleasure. Indeed, since the body is disciplined in more than one arena of consumption to be self-effacing and primarily orientated towards the needs of the growing foetus in her practice, it is perhaps hardly surprising that in relation to clothing consumption such a discourse appears to be persistent and dominant to the point of being almost 'naturalised'.

Maternity wear consumption is therefore about far more than commodity chains, a trade in signs and symbols, or even the disruption of pre-pregnancy consumption practices because of impoverished provision. Rather it is about a cultural economy, which centres on the pregnant body. Throughout the consumption process women work to compose socially appropriate bodies, both through shopping and associated consumption practices as I have described and also in the everyday negotiations they make in their relationship with their clothes. I have argued that clothing consumption must be understood as explicitly embodied, that the practices of consumption themselves as well as the signification of the clothing consumed is crucial to the production of socially appropriate bodies. It is therefore essential to engage at the level of the embodied consumer and their everyday corporeo-sartorial negotiation. The production of socially appropriate bodies is a necessarily incessant process requiring constant self-surveillance and management of corporeo-sartorial productions because of the multiplicity and fluidity of corporeality and therefore practices and meanings of dress. Theorists must therefore begin to explicitly engage with the body in this context and get their hands dirty in their research.

I have argued here that the ways in which clothing is consumed can be seen as highly significant as a means of establishing identity during pregnancy as a result of the destabilisation of established personal practices of clothing consumption through which this is ordinarily achieved and also because this is one source of

stability in a process of otherwise constant renegotiation (in relation to the multiplicity and fluidity of pregnant corporeality). Clothing consumption during pregnancy as it is dominantly practiced by those involved in this research could be therefore be conceptualised as a regulatory practice shaping their pregnant bodies to conform with hegemonic cultural discourses about pregnancy and motherhood. Running through every interviewees account of their clothing consumption and practices of dress during pregnancy is the discourse of thrift which is explicitly related to provision for the unborn child (and the rest of the family). What these women report then is a particular way of doing pregnancy and of being mother-to-be which is explicitly in line with dominant societal ideas about pregnancy and motherhood. Whilst media images of pregnant celebrities would appear to open up new ways of being the pregnant body and their increased prevalence work towards a change in attitudes it would appear that these have yet to penetrate into women's everyday experience. Similarly, nodes of resistance within the production of maternity wear such as small independent retailers, whilst allowing women to consume differently struggle for survival in a market which is terminally restricted and capped by the discourses of appropriate consumption it itself perpetuates.

However there may be one saving grace for small independent retailers, since within any regulatory system there exist discontinuities and conflicting practices. In maternity wear consumption this would appear to be in the realm of occasion wear. Whilst it is true that women's consumption practice is structured by the practice of thrift, its dogged pursuit is often suspended when a specific (and particularly sartorially problematic) occasion (such as weddings, christenings, company dinners and so on) must be dressed for. Indeed, during my participant observation I have witnessed many women spending almost as much on one outfit, for a single occasion, as they have on the rest of their maternity wear wardrobe. I would suggest that Clarke and Miller's (2002) concept of aesthetic anxiety plays a significant part in this, the need to be sure of being appropriately dressed in this case outweighing the need for thrift. In a context where credible 'support and reassurance' is offered on a one-to-one basis women do spend comparatively large quantities on themselves in order to compose appropriately styled social bodies. This may be therefore a means through which small independents might survive the vagaries of this market and perhaps strengthen their presence and resistance to the normative incarnation of the pregnant body.

Appendix 1: List of in-depth interview participants

Below is a list of those who participated in the in-depth interview portion of my research. I provide a 'description' of them only to provide some context for their discussions. These are not meant to define these women in any particular way and are not intended to provide an explanation for their comments. Neither can they be seen to be fixed and rather apply to the women at the time of interview only. This is complicated somewhat by the fact that multiple interviews were carried out with several of the women over an extended period of time and therefore significant change may have occurred within this. For example Sarah was interviewed during her pregnancy and subsequently, therefore some discussion took place during her first pregnancy and other when she was a mother of two, this is clearly significant from an embodied perspective and highlights the fact that the knowledge presented here is by no means fixed since it is corporeally situated and articulated.

Again I would like to extend my thanks to all these women who talked with me at length about their experiences. Their knowledge provides the basis for this thesis in many respects.

Name	Brief description	Biographical notes
Sarah	Mid-twenties, married, first pregnancy, Bradford.	Sarah is the other half of the Mums & Co partnership. She previously worked in textile design. She gave birth to her twins not long after our first interview and was interviewed twice more subsequently.
Ari	Mid-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.	Ari is one of the retailers who owns Mums & Co in Bradford. She was previously a teacher. During the course of my research had a second child.
Jane	Mid-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.	Jane is an intensive care nurse. Following our first interview she fell pregnant for a second time and during our subsequent interviews she was 5 months pregnant for the second time. She has since given birth to her second child.
Angela	Mid-thirties, married, third pregnancy – mother of 2, Manchester.	Angela is a physiotherapist.
Meg	Mid-thirties, married, forth pregnancy – mother of 2, Bradford.	Meg is a trained teacher. She had a still-birth a year before our interview. She and Sharen were interviewed together.
Sharen	Mid-thirties, married, third pregnancy – mother of 2, Bradford.	Sharen was previously a university lecturer and just prior to our interview had ceased to work to be at home with her children.
Linda	Early-thirties, married, mother of 1, Bradford	Linda is a pharmacist.
Natriece	Early-twenties, mother of 1,	Natriece is the partner of a professional footballer who, at the time of interview played for then

	Bradford.	Premiership side Bradford.
Tracey	Mid-twenties, married, mother of 2, Northampton.	Tracey works part time at a local supermarket and is a full time Mum. She had her first child before she was married, when she was 19 so her experiences of pregnancy have been very different.
Lizzy	Early-forties, mother of 3, Manchester.	Lizzy is a primary school teacher. Her children were reasonably spaced out in age, at the time of interview being aged, 15, 9 and 15 months.
Wendy	Late-twenties, married, mother of 1, Bradford.	Wendy is a modern languages teacher at a Bradford secondary school.
Meryl	Early-thirties, married, first pregnancy, Manchester.	Meryl is a primary school teacher.
Jo	Mid-thirties, married, first pregnancy, Bradford.	Jo is a nursery teacher. She is a non-pregnant size 18 plus.
Leonie	Mid-teens, first pregnancy, Bradford.	Leonie is still at school and lives at home with her mum.
Tina	Mid-twenties, married, first pregnancy, Coventry.	Tina was a primary school teacher at the time of interview but since having her baby has become a full time Mum.
Carolyn	Early-forties, married, mother of 2, Manchester.	Carolyn is head of modern languages at a Manchester secondary school, her husband is a 'house husband'.
Natalie	Early-twenties, mother of 1, Manchester.	Natalie had her son when she was 18. She works part time at a local late store and is a full time Mum.
Michelle	Early-thirties, married, mother of 3, Northampton.	Michelle is a full time Mum.
Claire	Early-thirties, married, mother of 1, Northampton	Claire works part time for a large building society.
Maria	Early-forties, mother of 4, Northampton.	Maria is one of the retailers who owns and runs Belly Bumpers.

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