

**The Public Perceptions and  
Personal Experiences of Only  
Children Growing Up in  
Britain, c. 1850-1950**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis argues that only-childhood was never the sole, and only ever a minor, determinant of only children's experiences. It analyses autobiographies and oral history interviews of only children who grew up between 1850 and 1950 to show how personal inclinations, parental attitudes, domestic circumstances, geographical location, class, gender, and historical time, alone or in combination, were far more important influences on childhood experiences than only-childhood *per se*. These factors not only created differences between only children themselves, but also demonstrably influenced sibling children's experiences.

Its findings challenge negative ideas about only children that spread to the public from childrearing manuals through other media from the late-nineteenth century, when numbers of one-child families began to increase. Previous historians have inadvertently maintained these stereotypes by tending to present examples of only children who conformed to them, not seeking alternative explanations for their experiences, and presenting sibling relationships as vitally important. This thesis also questions these largely-positive portrayals of siblings.

It additionally shows how some only children use only-childhood as a 'lens' through which they present and explain their childhood traits and experiences, attesting to the pervasiveness of only-child stereotypes. By doing so, this research builds upon the work of Raphael Samuel, Paul Thompson, Natasha Burchardt, and others regarding the role of 'myth' in adults' representations of their childhoods.

This thesis' main argument supports sociologists' suggestions about the influence of factors other than only-childhood, but it takes a more historical and personal approach. It also builds upon, and is informed by, childhood and family historians' research into the advantages and disadvantages of decreases in family size from the 1870s onwards. Furthermore, it enhances demographic historians' work on fertility decline by examining why some only children had no siblings, and contributes to the history of emotions by examining loneliness and unhappiness.

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## **Abbreviations**

**Only-childhood** is used throughout to refer to the state of being an only child.

**FLWE1870-1918, Interview [number]** is used throughout to refer to interviews from Paul Thompson's 'Edwardians' interview set, the full reference for which is P. Thompson and T. Lummis, *Family life and work experience before 1918, 1870-1973* [computer file], 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], May 2009, SN: 2000.

**TC [box number, file letter]** is used throughout to refer to surveys from Mass Observation, the full reference for which is M-O A: TC 3 Family Planning 1944-49, [box number, file letter] Surveys.



## 1. Introduction

This thesis argues that only children growing up in Britain between 1850 and 1950 had a variety of experiences because only-childhood is never the sole, and only ever a minor, determinant of only children's experiences due to a wealth of other factors. It analyses autobiographies and oral history interviews to demonstrate how these other factors – personal inclinations, parental attitudes, domestic circumstances, geographical location, class, gender, and historical time – were more important influences. Its findings question negative ideas about only children that have demonstrably passed through childrearing manuals to the general public and historians of childhood and the family, and influenced recent studies by social scientists.

These persistent negative ideas about only children are the 'public perceptions' referred to in the title of this thesis. It does not analyse these 'public perceptions' *per se*. However, awareness of the characteristics most commonly associated with only children in the past and present made it possible to decide which aspects of this thesis' sources to analyse. This in turn helped to determine the focus of each analytical chapter. Furthermore, this thesis is concerned with how such common ideas about only childhood shaped only children's childhood experiences and later interpretations of their childhoods and feelings about only children.

For the purposes of this thesis, the term 'only child' refers to people who never had siblings of any kind, had step- or half-siblings who never co-resided with them, or lost an older or younger sibling they either never knew, or only knew for a short time (usually no more than two or three years). It

analyses accounts by only children born between 1845 and 1945, and thus reflects memories from between approximately 1850 and 1950. Details of how sources were identified and selected can be found in chapter 3.

The analysis of these life stories 'looks beyond' only children's comments on their experiences of only-childhood by examining their entire accounts of their childhoods for other circumstances that may influenced their experiences.

As a result, this thesis also argues that the only-child experience during this period was far more nuanced than historians of childhood and the family have suggested. Moreover, negative stereotypes of only children are so pervasive that some of them often come to use them as a 'lens' through which they reflect on their childhoods.

In arguing that only-childhood was very much secondary to several other influences on only children's experiences, this thesis uses a historical and personal approach to make a significant contribution to an argument that has been gradually developing among social scientists in recent years.

Sociologists such as Ann Laybourn and Toni Falbo – who has made the study of only children a particular focus of her career – have been critical of researchers from the early-twentieth century onwards who misattributed faults and negative experiences to only-childhood because they did not take other circumstances into account. As Falbo has written: 'if we find differences in the outcomes between only children and those with siblings, we should be aware that many factors contribute to differences, not just their



lack of siblings.<sup>1</sup> Chapter 2 indicates that social scientists have made some progress in proving this hypothesis, particularly regarding the generations of only children created by China's 'one-child policy' starting in the late 1970s.<sup>2</sup>

This study's originality lies in the differing approach afforded by its location within the discipline of history, and therefore the humanities. While social scientists from the late-nineteenth century onwards have measured only children's traits quantitatively, using discipline-specific scales, this study takes a qualitative approach. Topics such as happiness, memories of school and play, and the existence and quality of relationships with family and friends, are more personal and meaningful to humanities scholars and, arguably, the general reader, than psychological scales of 'adjustment', 'sociability' and 'personality'. It would also be difficult to measure people on such scales based on autobiographies and oral history interviews due to the differing focuses and levels of disclosure within each testimony.

Furthermore, by taking a historical approach, this thesis questions modern-day researchers' ideas that only children had less positive experiences in the past than in recent decades, and applies their developing ideas about the influence of geography and class on only-child experiences to only children who lived in a different period.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, by looking at several influences

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<sup>1</sup> Toni Falbo, 'Only Children: An Updated Review', *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 68:1 (2012), p. 47; Ann Laybourn, *The Only Child: Myths and Reality*, (Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 109-12.

<sup>2</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: An Updated Review', pp. 45, 46; Mei Fong, *One Child: The Story of China's Most Radical Experiment*, (London, 2016), pp. 92, 94, 100.

<sup>3</sup> Toni Falbo, 'Only Children: A Review', in Toni Falbo (ed.), *The Single-Child Family*, (Austin, 1984), p. 3; Laybourn, *The Only Child*, p. 108; Bill McKibben, *Maybe One: A Personal and Environmental Argument for Very Small Families*, (London, 1999), pp. 22-3, 45; Lauren Sandler, *One and Only: The Freedom of Having an Only Child, and the Joy of Being One*, (New York, 2013), pp. 163-4; Susan Newman, *The Case for the Only Child*, (Florida, 2011), p. 223; Xinran, *Buy Me The Sky*, (London, 2015), pp. 1-2, 8-9, 11-12, 15-16, 22-3, 77-8, 123-

on only children's experiences across various times and settings, it is more comprehensive than social scientists' studies, which have tended to isolate one aspect of experience such as domestic circumstances or historical time.

This study therefore adds a new strand to existing scholarship on only children because it examines their individual testimonies as they personally chose to relate them, 'messy' and incomplete as they may be. By taking this approach, it makes a valuable contribution to debates about only children by drawing attention to their experiences as people in certain environments at certain times, as opposed to dehumanised statistics. In doing so, it conveys more of the variety and nuance in their experiences than quantitative scales and averages ever can. This is why, in this thesis, historical demography is only used to demonstrate the historical research that already exists concerning only children and provide context. While it is necessary to identify broad areas of common influence, only children's rich and often unstraightforward experiences are privileged above neat explanations and generalisations in order to convey just how unimportant only-childhood – and, by extension, siblinghood – could be in relation to multiple other factors.

This thesis will show that childhood and family historians' expanding research into the changing dynamics and intensity of family relationships as family size declined over this period has had the unintentional effect of repeatedly implying that to be an only child was a universal disadvantage. As such, this thesis' major contribution to the history of childhood and the family is to remedy the oversight of the huge variety of only-child experiences. This

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4, 143, 135, 161, 185; Falbo, 'Only Children: An Updated Review', pp. 45, 46; Fong, *One Child*, pp. 92, 94, 100.

variety is influenced by factors that historians have identified as determinants of diverse experiences of childhood in history more generally, yet apparently not applied to only children. Analysing various aspects of only children's experiences will show how, by emphasising the importance of siblings, historians have unintentionally accepted and perpetuated ideas that only children were, and continue to be, uncomfortable with other children and unusually comfortable with adults, lonely, unhappy, spoiled and subject to intense 'triangular' relationships with their parents.

A recent seminal text on family relationships, Leonore Davidoff's *Thicker Than Water*, is an excellent study of siblings that gets to the heart of the many aspects of their relationships, and makes calls for further research that this thesis eagerly takes up. However, by extolling the virtues of siblings, it has implied that to be without them is a lack. For example, in the introduction, Davidoff acknowledged that 'in contemporary life in the West full brothers and sisters who have spent long spans of time together have never been so scarce on the ground,' so 'brothers and sisters remain an inextricable part of existence from our earliest world' only for 'those that have had them'. However, her description of siblinghood as 'life's longest relationship', and use of it as a heading in the book nonetheless seemed to pass over those whose birth position precludes such a long and 'special' relationship.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, Davidoff and Claudia Nelson, who has also looked at sibling relationships in history, have placed so much importance on brother- and

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<sup>4</sup> Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water: Siblings and their Relations, 1780-1920*, (Oxford, 2012), pp. 1-2.

sisterhood that one gets the impression that to have no siblings would be a grievous disadvantage. Throughout her work, Davidoff portrayed the decline in family size that started in the late-nineteenth century as regretful; children in smaller families may have received more attention on their birthdays, but they lost out on 'sibling companionship, help and competition.'<sup>5</sup> Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink and Katherine Holden have written that in the nineteenth century, siblings defined middle-class life. They argued that 'the middle classes were characterised by strong bonds between siblings, brothers and sisters who grew up together and stayed close all their lives.'<sup>6</sup> In *Thicker Than Water*, late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century siblings can be seen performing all manner of functions: 'emotional and social interaction', 'material help and information', advocacy, accompaniment and purpose for unmarried women, intermediaries between younger children and parents, gender formation, and support in old age.<sup>7</sup> Siblings are shown fulfilling similar roles in Nelson's *Family Ties in Victorian England*.<sup>8</sup> By portraying siblings in this way, these historians also seem to have inadvertently endorsed the myth of a 'golden age' of families, where united families of siblings living in the same home were kept together by unbroken marriages.<sup>9</sup> The implication is that one would have found it difficult to function without siblings in the past.

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<sup>5</sup> Leonore Davidoff, 'The Family In Britain', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950, Volume 2: People and their Environment*, (Cambridge, 1990), p. 118.

<sup>6</sup> Leonore Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink and Katherine Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960*, (Harlow, 1999), p. 126

<sup>7</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, pp. 54, 60, 64, 68, 114, 121, 137-56, 161.

<sup>8</sup> Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England*, (Westport, 2007), pp. 100-115.

<sup>9</sup> 'Traditional British family a myth, academic says - BBC News', 29/3/2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-26784754>, (accessed 22/7/2017); 'Golden Age of the Family? It's a modern-day myth', *The Herald*, 1/4/2013,

Of course, Davidoff and Nelson have acknowledged that sibling relationships were, and are, not always positive. They can produce high levels of anger, jealousy and resentment, and siblings can be set apart from one another by birth position – for example, being the youngest, not being part of a ‘cluster’ of siblings close in age or of the same sex, or being the oldest girl and being forced to take on a quasi-parental role – as well as personality differences, parental favouritism, arguments over inheritance, and refusal to participate in family life.<sup>10</sup> Yet, with siblings being portrayed in historical writing as so vital for childhood personality formation and socialisation, not to mention assistance in adulthood, it is imperative to ask how people got along in the absence of such relationships. It is important to show that only children thrived despite not growing up with such closely-related other children, and that sibling relationships were not as vital as they have so far been portrayed by historians. In favourable circumstances, one could benefit just as much from one’s relationships with parents, aunts and uncles, cousins, child and adult friends, and, if present, nannies and servants.

It is understandable that scholars have virtually revered sibling relationships as, like only-child stereotypes, particular ideas about them have become enshrined in social discourse. Valerie Sanders has written that ‘the brother-sister relationship assumed an intense emotional significance in English literacy and cultural history’ between the late-eighteenth and mid-twentieth

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[http://workingclassmarriage.gla.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Herald\\_Family.pdf](http://workingclassmarriage.gla.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Herald_Family.pdf), (accessed 22/7/2017).

<sup>10</sup> Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties*, pp. 115-20; Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, pp. 89-90, 95, 99, 115-16, 158, 164.

centuries, reaching its height in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Brother-sister relationships were viewed as ‘safe’, and therefore perfect: they were the model of loyalty, did not endanger one’s individuality in the same way as sexual and hierarchical relationships, both brother and sister could be at ease with someone who fully understood them, and sisters benefitted brothers morally while brothers benefitted sisters intellectually.<sup>12</sup> An early-twentieth-century example Sanders gave of such a relationship was that between the three Sitwell siblings. They worked together as poets and created a space for themselves where it was acceptable and safe for Edith to be single, Osbert to be gay and Sacheverell to be sensitive.<sup>13</sup> While Sanders acknowledged the tensions that could arise – particularly jealousy, dominance, and dependence – the impression is that sibling relationships were so significant that it is unsurprising that only children have been portrayed as disadvantaged.<sup>14</sup>

The notion that having siblings is invariably a positive experience persists to this day. As psychologist Dorothy Rowe has written about the so-called ‘sibling myth’:

The constant reiteration in the media and by politicians that the closeness of family members is of prime importance leaves many people feeling inadequate and guilty because they do not enjoy the close relationship with their siblings that seemingly most people enjoy with theirs.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Valerie Sanders, *The Brother-Sister Culture in Nineteenth-Century Literature: from Austen to Woolf*, (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 6, 8, 14, 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Dorothy Rowe, *My Dearest Enemy, My Dangerous Friend: Making and Breaking Sibling Bonds*, (Sussex, 2007), p. 297.

Yet this thesis will demonstrate that children with siblings might well appear to reflect the same traits more usually associated with only children. The same varied factors which shaped only children's lives were equally powerful influences on the experiences of children with siblings.

This thesis details historians' previous references to only children, examples of only children in edited collections of autobiographies and oral histories, and excerpts from childrearing manuals, Mass Observation responses, and recent social research regarding certain aspects of only-childhood to frame new findings about only children's experiences. It shows that historians have tended to present examples of only children who fitted stereotypes, and explained their experiences in such terms. They have additionally tended to assume that when only children broke away from these stereotypes, they must have been exceptional in some way. They have not, therefore, challenged the stereotypes themselves as a valid category of analysis.

While this thesis uses stereotypes of only children to determine which aspects of only children's lives to examine and provide a structure, it argues that no only child fitted them at all well. It therefore brings more positive and complex experiences of growing up alone to historians' attention. It encourages historians to avoid perpetuating stereotypes by choosing examples of only children that do not conform to negative ideas, and to look for alternative influences in more 'typical'-seeming only children's accounts. By doing so, it is possible to unlock a wealth of information about what makes people who they are. However small the numbers of only children may have

been at certain points in this period, scholarship would not tolerate such resort to stereotypes in describing the lives of other minority groups.

As indicated above, this study also shows that some only children themselves imbibed only-child stereotypes and came to use them as a 'lens' through which they framed and explained their childhood experiences. This further informs its methodological approach, which looks beyond their direct references to only-childhood to other influential factors that featured in their accounts. It is therefore more concerned with how only children looked back on their childhoods than creating a 'true' impression of how they 'really' felt at the time. This is a response to Ludmilla Jordanova's criticism of the use of autobiographies as a source for the history of childhood:

Children ... are constructed in particular social settings; there can be no authentic voice of childhood speaking to us from the past because the adult world dominates that of the child ... we cannot capture children's past experiences or responses in a pure form.<sup>16</sup>

This thesis therefore pays close attention to the inevitable layering of childhood memories with the adult's viewpoint and language in autobiographies and oral histories, and how adults use popular ideas to create 'lenses' through which they reflect upon their childhoods. It furthers the ground-breaking work of Paul Thompson and Raphael Samuel's 1990 edited collection *The Myths We Live By*, where the authors claimed that the pervasion of myth into oral history testimonies can be an opportunity rather than a problem. Although historians cannot glean an accurate account of an

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<sup>16</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, 'Children in History: Concepts of Nature and Society', in Geoffrey Scarre (ed.), *Children, Parents and Politics*, (Cambridge, 1989), p. 5.



interviewee's childhood, 'we can see precisely where memory diverges most clearly from fact that 'imagination, symbolism, desire break in.'"<sup>17</sup>

This approach adds value to this study, as it means that these testimonies are being fully analysed rather than presented to the reader 'as they are'.

Where only children appear to initially conform to certain stereotypes, or use only-childhood to account for their experiences, it seeks explanations in other details they supply about their childhoods. As Michael Roper has pointed out, the historian's job is to critically process an informant's experiences rather than express 'blind empathy' and/or be a mere conduit for them, and this thesis makes particular efforts to fulfil this criterion.<sup>18</sup> As Elizabeth

Tonkin put it:

Professional historians who use the recollections of others cannot just scan them for useful facts to pick out, like currants from a cake. Any such facts are so embedded in the representation that it directs an interpretation of them.<sup>19</sup>

In this thesis, subjects' accounts of their childhoods are not merely mined for anything they have to say about being an only child; their experiences as a whole are considered.

Several only children in this thesis use only-childhood as a 'lens' to explain their past experiences without appearing to consider alternative explanations. They privilege only-childhood as an explanation for stereotypical experiences such as difficulty interacting with other children above the numerous other influences this thesis identifies from other details they provide. This is in no

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<sup>17</sup> Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, 'Introduction', in Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (eds.), *The Myths We Live By*, (London, 1990), p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Roper, 'The Unconscious Work of History', *Cultural and Social History*, 11:2 (2014), pp. 175, 184.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Tonkin, 'History and the Myth of Realism', in Samuel and Thompson, (eds.), *The Myths We Live By*, p. 27.

way a failing on their part. By using only-childhood as a 'lens', they structure their memories and explore and make meaningful sense of their experiences.<sup>20</sup> As Julie-Marie Strange has suggested, 'inevitably, adult authorial identities shaped the telling of life stories. This is not a weakness of autobiography; it is its great strength.'<sup>21</sup> Only-child stereotypes seem to have pervaded only children's lives to such an extent that they affect how they look back upon their childhoods. The fact that historians have referred to both autobiographers and oral history interviewees using filters to reconstruct their childhoods justifies this study's use of both types of source. Furthermore, the authors of both types of source used only-childhood to explain their experiences. As a result of this thesis, only children might reconsider how much direct impact only-childhood has had on their own lives at a time when popular discourse still attributes certain traits to having had no siblings.

This thesis also contributes to the emerging discipline of history of emotions. Until relatively recently, scholars have taken a structural approach to the history of emotions, exploring the extent to which emotions are shaped by nature or culture, whether emotions in the past can be understood in the same way they are understood today, and analysing the role of emotion in government and society, and *en masse* in the wake of events that have affected entire nations.<sup>22</sup> It is only in the past few years that historians have answered Peter N. and Carol Z. Stearns' call for research that compares emotional norms and individual realities in certain societies at particular

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel and Thompson, 'Introduction', pp. 13, 14.

<sup>21</sup> Julie-Marie Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class, 1865-1914*, (Cambridge, 2015), p.12.

<sup>22</sup> Susan J. Matt, 'Current Emotion Research in History: or, Doing History from the Inside Out', *Emotion Review*, 3:1 (2011), pp. 118, 119, 120; William M. Reddy, 'Historical Research on the Self and Emotions', *Emotion Review*, 1:4 (2009), pp. 302-3, 305.

times.<sup>23</sup> It is even more recently that historians have started to look at children's emotions – how they were expected to feel, when in history these expectations developed, how they really did feel, and how not living up to these expectations affected them.<sup>24</sup>

This thesis particularly strengthens, and demonstrates the applicability of, Peter Stearns' ideas that from the late-nineteenth century, childhood was increasingly expected to be a 'happy' period of life. Parents were instructed that they should aim to make their children happy, and people increasingly considered how happy they were when they reflected upon their childhoods.<sup>25</sup> Only children judging the happiness of their childhood experiences are confronted with two contradictory ideas: childhood is meant to be happy, but only children are not supposed to be happy. Chapters 6 and 7, focusing on children's feelings of loneliness, contentment in solitude, happiness, and unhappiness, show how they responded to these tensions. Both 'happiness' and 'only-childhood' were 'lenses' this thesis' subjects could not help using when constructing their life stories. This thesis therefore contributes to a field of historical study that is still in its infancy.

This study additionally builds upon historians' work on fertility decline.

Between the mid-1870s and mid-1940s, the British birth rate was in decline,

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<sup>23</sup> Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', *American Historical Review*, 90:4 (1985), p. 834; Reddy, 'Historical Research on the Self and Emotions', p. 304; Matt, 'Current Emotion Research', p. 119.

<sup>24</sup> Karen Vallgård, Kristine Alexander and Stephanie Olsen, 'Emotions and the Global Politics of Childhood', in Stephanie Olsen (ed.), *Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History*, (Basingstoke, 2015), p. 29; Peter N. Stearns, 'Childhood Emotions in Modern Western History', in Paula S. Fass (ed.), *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, (Oxon, 2013), pp. 158, 159; Peter N. Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods: Assessing a recent change', *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 3:2 (2010), p. 166.

<sup>25</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 158, 159, 163, 164, 167-8, 169-70; Stearns, 'Childhood Emotions in Modern Western History', pp. 166-7, 169, 170, 172-3, 175-81, 183.

and, according to Michael Anderson, the accompanying marked increase in one-child families had a major impact on average family size.<sup>26</sup> This increase indicates an emerging distinctive group and demands and justifies the study of only children. Anderson is the only historical demographer so far to have examined 'very small families' – families with zero or one children – and the figures he deduced from the 1911 'Fertility' Census (which asked how many children had been born to 'completed marriages'<sup>27</sup>) and the 1946 Family Census show a notable increase in one-child families in the middle of the period under study. He found that 5.3% of couples had one child in the 1870s, and by 1925 this figure had risen to 25.2%.<sup>28</sup> Figure 1, from Anderson's work, provides a useful visual representation of the increase in proportions of couples under the age of 35 having one child between 1881 and 1925.

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility: Very Small Families in the British Fertility Decline', *Population Studies*, 52:2 (1998), p. 186.

<sup>27</sup> Edward Higgs, Christine Jones, Kevin Schürer and Amanda Wilkinson, *Integrated Census Microdata (I-Cem) Guide*, (Essex, 2013), [http://www.essex.ac.uk/history/research/icem/documents/icem\\_guide.pdf](http://www.essex.ac.uk/history/research/icem/documents/icem_guide.pdf), p. 127, (accessed 4/7/2016); Edward Higgs, *Life, Death and Statistics: Civil Registration, Censuses and the work of the General Register Office, 1836-1952*, (Hertfordshire, 2004), pp. 141-9.

<sup>28</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 178.

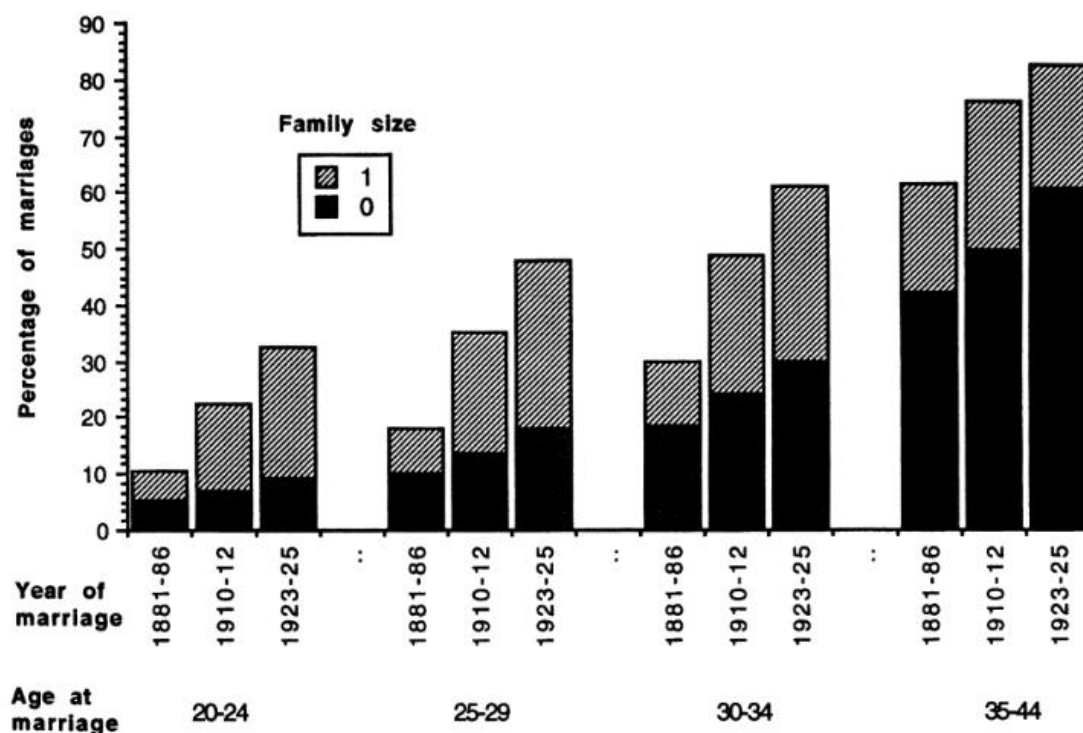


Figure 1: Percentage of marriages with zero and one child, by age at, and period of, marriage, Great Britain, 1881-1925, from Anderson, 'Highly Restricted Fertility', p. 180.

There was therefore a noticeable increase in numbers of children growing up alone during this period. However, as this thesis shows, historians have generally overlooked or not paid as much attention to them as the figures warrant, instead focussing on more general trends and parental decisions. Contemporaries were concerned by the general birth rate decline, what this meant for the future of the nation, and whether only children became useful, mentally-balanced, and socially-minded citizens.

By studying the consequences of this decline, historians of childhood and the family have identified many advantages and disadvantages for children of growing up in smaller families in general. This thesis adds nuance to these findings by considering the experiences of children from a particular size of small family. It also uses historians' work on relationships between family and household members to make sense of its findings. This is an area of

research that is currently expanding rapidly; like this thesis, many historians are currently responding to Davidoff's impassioned call for more work of this type in *Thicker Than Water*.

The neglect of relationships between family members, servants (especially those resident in the house) or lodgers and visitors of various types has sorely diminished understanding of social and psychological processes.<sup>29</sup>

By examining relationships between only children and their parents, this thesis also aims to contribute to historical debates about parenting styles, particularly the 'sentimentalisation' of childhood and the effects of childrearing manuals and fashions on parents' behaviour. It adds to arguments that individual parents' values could negate both popular discourse and instruction about the raising of children.<sup>30</sup>

This thesis identifies several particular situations that accounted for differences between only children. These included their reasons for being only children, for example, the loss of a sibling before or after birth, and illness in the parent or child. It shows how war could affect children's relationships with their parents due to separation. Other influences of note included the quality of the relationship of the only child's parents, the presence of other people such as grandparents and nannies in the home, whether or not individual parents liked children, when and where an only child went to school, and religion.

Chapter 2 takes a more detailed look at the work historians and other researchers have undertaken concerning declining family size in Britain in the

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<sup>29</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-child relations from 1500 to 1900*, (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 46, 65.

late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It shows that historians have researched topics such as how fertility declined, how this was perceived by contemporaries, why couples restricted their fertility and how, and the extent to which children were treated differently by their parents in smaller families. However, they have not examined the experiences of only children in any detail, instead concentrating on parents' decisions, the experiences of children *en masse*, or the experiences of children within particular social groups. The literature presented nonetheless adds context to this thesis' findings about individual only children. Chapter 3 outlines the sources and methods used for this thesis, including the advantages of the sources used, how their disadvantages are negated, and difficulties encountered in using them.

Chapters 4-10 contain the analysis of autobiographies and oral history interviews that forms this thesis' arguments. They are structured around traits and characteristics that have been particularly associated with only-childhood. They address whether only children were timid with other children, outgoing with adults, lonely, unhappy, materially spoiled, emotionally spoiled, and subject to intense 'triangular' relationships with their parents.

The popularity of the only-child stereotypes this thesis addresses is reflected by the fact that they are frequently mentioned in nineteenth- and twentieth-century childrearing manuals – where ideas about only children can be seen developing amid fears of population decline and increasing numbers of one-child families – and other primary sources such as Mass Observation surveys

concerning fertility decline from the 1940s. Assumptions about these facets of experience have also informed historians' work on childhood and the family, and recent sociological research on only children.

Each analytical chapter opens with examples from each of the above sources to establish the characteristic or experience the chapter focuses on and demonstrate the extent of its popular connection with only-childhood. In chapters 4-9, this is followed by in-depth analysis of the accounts of only children who wrote or said that they had, or did not have, the characteristic or experience in question. Chapter 10 solely examines the testimonies of only children who claimed to have had 'triangular' relationships with their parents, as no only children explicitly said that they had not had such experiences. Each chapter ends by analysing the accounts of sibling children whose experiences were comparable to the only-child stereotypes, demonstrating that children with siblings were equally likely to share these traits.

These chapters go on to show how only-childhood was secondary to personal inclinations, parental attitudes, domestic circumstances, geographical location, class, gender, and historical time in determining only children's experiences. When only children initially appear to conform to the stereotypes outlined at the beginning of each chapter, closer examination shows how this was the effect of these other factors, rather than only-childhood *per se*. Due to the pervasiveness of only-child myths, only children did not necessarily recognise the power of these influences themselves. This thesis is grounded in existing historical work throughout, enabling an understanding of whether particular only children's experiences were unusual



for the circumstances and time in which they were growing up, and aiding its understanding of the differences between the experiences of two or more only children.

Chapter 11 draws together the conclusions from chapters 4-10, comments upon significant discoveries, influences, and themes that regularly recur, and makes suggestions for future work. Before beginning analysis, this thesis turns to the existing historical literature on fertility decline and the sources and methods it employs.



## **2. Understanding changes in family size in modern Britain**

Much of the historical work that informs this thesis deals with the broad topics of the general causes and effects of fertility decline in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, rather than only children in particular. This chapter discusses historians' findings regarding the patterns of fertility decline, motivations for and methods of fertility restriction, and how the treatment of children changed during this period, and to what extent. This analysis grounds this thesis in the context of existing work, and situates its only-child subjects in historical context. This important background information will be further elucidated in subsequent chapters as only children's life stories are analysed. This chapter will show the extent to which couples began to restrict their families, explanations for this such as the influences of class and occupation, and new ideas about children, sex, and contraception, how people restricted their families, and the possible effects of smaller families on children's experiences. It will also discuss some existing work on history of emotion, and research into the effects of birth position.

As the introduction showed, Anderson has found that the proportion of married couples having an only child rose substantially during this period, from 5.3% in the 1870s to 25.2% by 1925.<sup>1</sup> This fits in with a broader trend of fertility decline identified by historical demographers that began in the mid-1870s and ended towards the end of the 1930s. Anderson found that couples married between 1870 and 1879 had an average of 5.8 children, and this shrunk to 3.4 children for couples married between 1900 and 1909. The

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 178.

mean number of children born to couples married in 1925 was 2.2.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, Eilidh Garrett, Alice Reid, Kevin Schürer and Simon Szreter found that the birth rate fell from just over 25 per 1,000 in 1911 to just over 15 per 1,000 in the 1930s. Just 15% of women born between 1851 and 1855 had one or two children, but this increased to 50% among married women born between 1901 and 1905.<sup>3</sup> To give this fertility decline more historical context, Hera Cook has found that the Gross Reproduction Rate (the average number of daughters per woman surviving to age 45) peaked in 1816, dipped in the 1820s and 1830s, then climbed again between the 1840s and 1870s.<sup>4</sup>

The lower birth rate from the 1870s onwards was therefore unfamiliar to older generations for whom high fertility was the norm. Contemporary investigations therefore sought to understand this new phenomenon.

Respondents to the 1911 'Fertility Census' were asked about the length of their current marriage, and how many living and dead children had been born within it, because officials wished to investigate contemporary links that had been made between poverty and high fertility, affluence and low fertility, and social status and mortality.<sup>5</sup>

These connections were particularly made by eugenicists such as the Malthusian League, the Eugenics Education Society, the Fabian Society, and Marie Stopes. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, these groups and individuals voiced concerns that middle-class couples were

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<sup>2</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 178.

<sup>3</sup> Eilidh Garrett, Alice Reid, Kevin Schürer and Simon Szreter, *Changing Family Size in England and Wales: Place, Class and Demography, 1891-1911*, (Cambridge, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception, 1800-1975*, (Oxford, 2004), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Higgs, Jones, Schürer and Wilkinson, *Integrated Census Microdata (I-Cem) Guide*, [http://www.essex.ac.uk/history/research/icem/documents/icem\\_guide.pdf](http://www.essex.ac.uk/history/research/icem/documents/icem_guide.pdf), p. 127, (accessed 4/7/2016); Higgs, *Life, Death and Statistics*, pp. 141-9

deliberately restricting their fertility, resulting in too few children, while working-class couples' fertility was dangerously out of control. They posited that the English race was 'degenerating', as this fertility imbalance meant that there were increasing numbers of 'defective' lower-class children and decreasing numbers of 'superior' middle-class children.<sup>6</sup>

As fertility continued to decline among all classes, the Eugenics Society changed in its composition and focus, particularly during the 1930s, when its membership shifted from lay to professional, and conservative to progressive.<sup>7</sup> Recognising the need to at least maintain population numbers, preferably among the 'best stocks', most of the Society's members at this time favoured a 'positive' approach that would encourage higher fertility among the middle class.<sup>8</sup> They proposed that 'family allowances, population investigations, and changes in the taxation system' were the way forward for the movement.<sup>9</sup>

This did not mean, however, that 'negative' ideas for controlling the composition of the population did not persist. In July 1931, a proposal for the voluntary sterilisation of 'mentally defective' people was defeated 169-89 in Parliament.<sup>10</sup> The proposal came from a minority of Eugenics Society members; however, while it was not the central concern of those who

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between The Wars*, (London, 2009), p. 115; R. A. Soloway, *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877-1930*, (North Carolina, 1982), pp. 52, 138.

<sup>7</sup> Mathew Thomson, *The Problem of Mental Deficiency: Eugenics, Democracy, and Social Policy in Britain, c. 1870-1959*, (Oxford, 1998), pp. 189-92.

<sup>8</sup> Pauline Mazumdar, *Eugenics, Human Genetics and Human Failings: The Eugenics Society, its sources and its critics in Britain*, (London, 1992), p. 3; Soloway, *Birth Control*, p. 55; Thomson, *The Problem of Mental Deficiency*, p. 186.

<sup>9</sup> Thomson, *The Problem of Mental Deficiency*, p. 192.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

believed in 'positive' action, they were not necessarily opposed to it.<sup>11</sup> Much of the backing the bill received came from those who were concerned by economy, and did not necessarily wholeheartedly endorse eugenics. Organisations such as the Central Association for Mental Welfare (CAMW), for example, were alarmed by the 1929 Wood Report, which found that numbers of 'mentally defective' people were both higher than previously estimated and expanding, placing possible cost and space pressures on institutions.<sup>12</sup> The bill was ultimately defeated for a number of reasons. Most Labour MPs objected to it precisely because they saw it as an economy measure that would disproportionately affect the poor, and undermine attempts to alter the environments that led to poverty and poor health.<sup>13</sup> Other objections came from a strong Catholic faction who would not countenance any interference in reproductive processes, those who doubted the scientific rigour of the eugenicists' research and how effective the proposals would be, and those who asked whether 'mentally defective' people were *compos mentis* enough to ask for or consent to voluntary sterilisation.<sup>14</sup> Both the British Medical Association (BMA) and the Conservatives rejected the idea because it was so contentious that to endorse it would potentially damage their public standing, demonstrating how eugenics as a whole was by no means popular.<sup>15</sup> The idea shed much of the support it had throughout the decade as fears provoked by the 1929 report eased and it began to look unappealingly similar to Nazi policies, while

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<sup>11</sup> Thomson, *The Problem of Mental Deficiency*, p. 192.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183, 193-6.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 67, 180, 185, 187, 203-4,

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 73-5, 186, 196,.

Parliament continued to be dominated by existing moderate parties, with new extremist parties making little impact.<sup>16</sup>

As indicated above, in the light of this overall fertility decline, contemporary scholars, including 'progressive' eugenicists who were drawn to the more 'positive' version of the movement that prevailed in the 1930s, became more concerned with the 'quantity' than the 'quality' of the population.<sup>17</sup> This spurred them to conduct research into just how severe the problem was, and call for measures that would encourage all couples to have more children.

Socialist statistician Enid Charles, writing in 1936, described under-population as a real danger that would affect 'the whole fabric of social life.'<sup>18</sup>

Richard and Kay Titmuss, socialist sociologists – and parents of Ann Oakley, an only child featured in this thesis – calculated that there were 1,000,000 fewer children in Britain in 1942 than there had been in 1931.<sup>19</sup> They agreed that Charles' predictions, while pessimistic, could transpire, resulting in a society with 'more than half the nation pensioned off; children as curiosities; derelict buildings and rotting land.'<sup>20</sup> Mass Observation, an organisation which used volunteers to conduct surveys and record details of public scenes in order to get a sense of life in Britain for the 'masses', published the results of their fertility survey in 1945. They were openly concerned that the birth rate was dangerously low, predicting economic turmoil and even the collapse of modern civilisation if it did not increase.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Thomson, *The Problem of Mental Deficiency*, pp. 73-5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 186-7, 191.

<sup>18</sup> Enid Charles, *The Menace of Under-Population: A Biological Study of the Decline of Population Growth*, (London, 1936), p. v.

<sup>19</sup> Richard and Kay Titmuss, *Parents Revolt*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London, 1942), p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> Mass Observation, *Britain and her Birth-Rate*, (London, 1945), pp. 7, 23, 24-9.

Charles, the Titmusses and Mass Observation calculated that all couples needed to have three children to maintain the population levels of the late 1930s and early 1940s. However, they recognised that as not everyone would or could do this, many couples would in fact have to produce four or five.<sup>22</sup> The Titmusses discussed how, in some countries, as many as 30% of couples had only children, and if this was the case in Britain, a high proportion of families could need as many as six children to sustain population levels.<sup>23</sup> The Titmuss' daughter, Ann Oakley, suggested that her parents would have had more children themselves, but they had not wished to have them during the Second World War. She was born in 1944 when they felt they could not wait any longer due to advancing age.<sup>24</sup>

The Report of the [1946] Royal Commission on Population was similarly concerned with establishing population trends in order 'to consider what measures, if any, should be taken in the national interest to influence the upward trend of population.'<sup>25</sup> However, its authors, writing in 1949, found that families were growing again towards the end of the period, with the average number of births per year increasing from 697,000 in the years between 1935 and 1938 to 799,000 in the years between 1939 and 1948.<sup>26</sup>

Historian Geoffrey Field wrote of this phenomenon now referred to as the 'baby boom': 'ironically, just as pressure for action peaked, the birth rate

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<sup>22</sup> Charles, *The Menace of Under-Population*, pp. 194-5; Titmuss and Titmuss, *Parents Revolt*, p. 31; Mass Observation, *Britain and her Birth-Rate*, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Titmuss and Titmuss, *Parents Revolt*, p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> Ann Oakley, *Man and Wife*, (London, 1996), p. 201; Ann Oakley, *Taking It Like a Woman*, (London 1984), p. 15; Interview with Ann Oakley by Margaretta Jolly, May 2012, *Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project*, C1420/56 track 1, © The British Library.

<sup>25</sup> 'Report of the Royal Commission on Population', *Journal of the Institute of Actuaries (1886-1994)*, 76:1 (1950), p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Population*, (London, 1949), p. 241.



began to rise significantly – in 1944, there were 20 per cent more births than the annual average for 1935-8.<sup>27</sup>

Historical work on changes in family size over time has confirmed contemporary beliefs that fertility was declining and one-child families were increasing between approximately the mid-1870s and mid-1940s. This justifies and provides useful information for this study. However, this thesis differs radically to such quantitative work in both its aims and the capabilities of its sources. Enumerative sources such as the census are limited in what they can tell us, for all they contain about people's ages, occupations, locations, and co-residents. The fact that censuses were undertaken on one night every ten years is an immediate disadvantage; while they give accurate broad pictures of family sizes, they cannot account for the fluctuations of individual households over time.

The biggest problem with household data, though, as Peter Laslett has pointed out, is that it cannot tell us the 'affective quality of family life', or 'the impact of beliefs, customs, norms about child rearing and desirable behaviour for the young.'<sup>28</sup> Anderson has also identified that censuses cannot elucidate the affective relationships between co-residing kin, and historical demographers have (likely out of necessity, given the limitations of their main sources) largely ignored relationships with kin outside of the household.<sup>29</sup> By contrast, this thesis asks who only children shared their homes with at various points throughout their childhoods, and about the

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<sup>27</sup> Geoffrey Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil: Remaking the British Working Class, 1939-1945*, (Oxford, 2011), p. 214.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Laslett, *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations*, (Cambridge, 1977), p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family, 1500-1914*, (London, 1980), pp. 35-6.

nature and quality of their relationships with them, in order to discover their influences. It asks about the quality of their relationships with relatives and friends living outside of the household for the same purpose. As Anderson found in his study of family structure in nineteenth-century Preston, 'kinship does not stop at the front door. There are few functions which can be performed by a co-residing kinsman which he cannot perform equally well if he instead lives next door, or even up the street.'<sup>30</sup>

Although demographers have long since neutralised early criticisms of their work by branching out from mere description to analysis and taking social and economic context into account when investigating early-twentieth-century family limitation, they have nonetheless focussed on the motivations and decisions of groups of parents, which are not the primary interest of this thesis.<sup>31</sup> As this chapter will show, demographic historians' main contribution to existing knowledge about shrinking families during the period under study is an ongoing debate about the order in which different groups of people began to restrict their families, and why and how they did so.

Historians of various subjects have deduced, and continue to deduce, all sorts of explanations for fertility restriction in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, indicating that there were many influences working at once. Historians have ruled out rising childlessness, decreasing child mortality, improving state pension provision, increasing owner-occupation

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire*, (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 56-7.

<sup>31</sup> Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family*, pp. 17, 19, 69.

and later marriage as explanations for fertility decline.<sup>32</sup> They have also discussed how the Anglican Church disapproved of fertility restriction, but middle-class couples clearly prioritised their own needs over the strictures of religion.<sup>33</sup> Several early-twentieth-century church leaders condemned the 'selfishness' of well-off people who did not have as many children as they could afford, and while some ministers did give their parishioners advice on birth control, the official line was anti-contraception until the 1930s.<sup>34</sup> Even then, though, bishops were at pains to specify that it was to be used for economic and medical reasons, and not 'selfishness, luxury, or mere convenience.'<sup>35</sup>

Although the concerns of eugenicists about 'racial degeneracy' prompted contemporary research into birth, morbidity, and mortality rates, historians have dismissed the idea that their propaganda convinced working-class couples to have fewer children, or middle-class couples to have more. In a history of the eugenics movement, historian R. A. Soloway has written that working-class couples were more likely to have controlled their fertility for personal and domestic reasons than as a result of, for example, the Malthusian League, whose views were extreme enough to put off many potential followers. Furthermore, these groups did not react to changes in

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<sup>32</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', pp. 186, 192, 194-5; Garrett, Reid, Schürer and Szreter, *Changing Family Size*, p. 273; Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures, England 1918-1951*, (Oxford, 1998), pp. 80, 103, 304.

<sup>33</sup> Soloway, *Birth Control*, p. 107.

<sup>34</sup> Richard A. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration, Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (North Carolina, 1995), pp. 87-8; Soloway, *Birth Control*, pp. 96, 97-8, 107, 240, 254.

<sup>35</sup> Soloway, *Birth Control*, p. 253.

circumstances such as loss of life during the First World War or the spread of fertility restriction across all classes quickly enough.<sup>36</sup>

It seems reasonable to assume that the general public, particularly the middle classes, learned more about and became more comfortable with birth control as a result of the major publicity and public discussion of the Bradlaugh-Besant trial of 1877 for disseminating 'obscene literature' than from eugenicist groups.<sup>37</sup> Sociologist Diana Gittins has suggested that couples in certain occupations and places were more likely to have restricted their fertility because it became more socially acceptable to do so, as well as to talk about it openly.<sup>38</sup> Hera Cook has also argued that eugenicists' ideas made no impact on changes in the birth rate, as women had always wanted to limit their fertility for health reasons – an argument this chapter returns to later on.<sup>39</sup>

By having increasing numbers of only children, working- and middle-class couples alike were ignoring eugenicists' advice. Many eugenicists regarded a family of one child as too extremely restricted, with most neo-Malthusians advising that two or three well-spaced children was the ideal.<sup>40</sup> In the light of heavy loss of life in the First World War, neo-Malthusian figurehead Betty Drysdale reportedly said that 'although it was a great shame that so many

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<sup>36</sup> Soloway, *Birth Control*, pp. 90, 174.

<sup>37</sup> J. A. Banks, *Prosperity and Parenthood*, (London, 1954), p. 155.

<sup>38</sup> Diana Gittins, *Fair Sex: Family Size and Structure*, (London, 1982), pp. 27-9, 46, 79, 82-5, 89-93, 103, 112-14, 122.

<sup>39</sup> Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, pp. 4, 11-13.

<sup>40</sup> Soloway, *Birth Control*, p. 186; Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, p. 103.

only sons were killed, the Malthusian League has never advocated single-child families, only small families'.<sup>41</sup>

Many historians have related the causes and consequences of fertility decline to a 'surge in sentiment' towards children that took place during this period. This paradigm echoes throughout this thesis in contextual explanations for individual only children's experiences. In the 1970s, historians such as Philippe Ariès, Edward Shorter, and Lawrence Stone posited that poor parents in particular showed little love or concern for their children until the late-eighteenth century. Before then, they apparently regarded them as economically-useful miniature adults who did not require special considerations, and whose mortality was so high that it was seen as imprudent to invest in them emotionally.<sup>42</sup> These arguments have been largely discredited by historians who have criticised these scholars' use of public and secondary, as opposed to private and primary, sources, their speculation, and their lack of convincing explanations. They have also presented evidence that shows pre-modern parents did express love, affection, and concern for their children.<sup>43</sup> Even when children became economically 'useful' to their parents at a particularly young age, for example in traditional Roman, Greek, and Chinese societies, this did not preclude the occasional indulgence or shared pleasure between parent and child.<sup>44</sup>

Historians have developed a more subtle and nuanced theory, arguing that while parents of all classes have always had emotional reactions to their

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<sup>41</sup> Soloway, *Birth Control*, p. 181.

<sup>42</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*, (Harlow, 1995), pp. 10, 12; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, pp. 4, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 9, 13; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, pp. 3, 23.

<sup>44</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 168-9.

children, they nonetheless came to be regarded more sentimentally from the late-eighteenth century. Childhood came to be seen as a very important stage in life during which personality and individual destiny were formed, and children were supposed to be unprecocious, innocent, vulnerable, ignorant, asexual and happy.<sup>45</sup> As scholars moved from inheritance to environment as an explanation for personality and behaviour from the mid-nineteenth century, children came to be regarded scientifically rather than morally. Terms such as 'original sin' and 'savage', which had previously engendered harsh treatment of children, were replaced by more neutral terms such as 'primitive' and 'natural'. Children were also linked to evolutionary progress and amoral animals by nineteenth-century scientists' 'recapitulation theories', notably German biologist Ernst Haeckel's 1866 'Biogenetic Law', which purported that 'each embryo's developmental stage represents an adult form of an evolutionary ancestor.'<sup>46</sup> These changes made people more affectionate towards children, as they came to be seen as analogous to amoral animals, or ancient man, whom evolutionary biology dictated had been primitive but improved over time, rather than little devils whose original sin required eradication.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 41, 61, 130, 164; Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990*, (Cambridge, 1997), p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> 'Ernst Haeckel's Biogenetic Law (1866) | The Embryo Project Encyclopedia', <https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/ernst-haeckels-biogenetic-law-1866>, (accessed 26/11/2017); 'Early Evolution and Development: Ernst Haeckel', [https://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/history\\_15](https://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/history_15), (accessed 26/11/2017).

<sup>47</sup> John Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain, 1918-1955*, (London, 2013), p. 39; Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900*, (Oxford, 2010), pp. 73, 181-3, 277; Christina Hardyment, *Dream Babies: Child Care from Locke to Spock*, (London, 1983), pp. 78, 124-5, 149; Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, (concise edition, Carl Zimmer, London, 2007), p. 223; John and Elizabeth Newson, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing in the English-speaking World', in Martin P. M. Richards (ed.), *The Integration of a Child into a Social World*, (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 53-4, 56-7; Daniel Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, (London, 1979), pp. 55, 58, 61; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 48, 61-2; Julia Grant, 'Parent-child Relations in Western Europe

This 'surge of sentiment' brought with it the ideology that a 'good' childhood was essential for a productive adulthood free of mental health problems and poor morality, and that the appropriate location for such a childhood was the home, in the bosom of the family.<sup>48</sup> Children were redefined as 'tender little plants needing careful nurturing in early life' in a 'garden of delight', where their innocence and playfulness would be protected from the adult world of work and vice.<sup>49</sup> There was an equivalent shift in expectations of parents, particularly mothers, whose femininity came to be defined by 'childrearing' as opposed to 'childbearing' and were required to make parenting their only task ('intensive') rather than one performed alongside other tasks ('extensive').<sup>50</sup> Parents were increasingly expected to display emotion towards children as a birthright and minimise fear.<sup>51</sup> There was also an increasing emphasis on families spending their leisure time in shared activities during the Victorian and Edwardian periods.<sup>52</sup>

Adhering to such ideologies was obviously much easier for middle-class parents than working-class parents, if they were even particularly aware of them. The advent of 'intensive' parenting may have led middle-class mothers, for whom it was no longer socially acceptable to rely quite so heavily on nannies and governesses, to have fewer children so that they

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and North America, 1500-present, in Fass (ed.), *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, p. 117.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Anderson, 'What is New about the Modern Family', in Michael Drake (ed.), *Time, Family, and Community: Perspectives on Family and Community History*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 85; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, p. 41.

<sup>49</sup> Anderson, 'What is New about the Modern Family', p. 85; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 136, 164; Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*, (New York, 1985), p. 152.

<sup>50</sup> John R. Gillis, 'Gender and Fertility Decline among the British Middle Classes', in John R. Gillis, Louise A. Tilly and David Levine (eds.), *The European Experience of Declining Fertility*, (Oxford, 1992), pp. 32-3; Grant, 'Parent-child Relations', p. 110.

<sup>51</sup> Stearns, 'Childhood Emotions', p. 162.

<sup>52</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 193.

might be freed from continuous child-rearing for social and philanthropic activities sooner.<sup>53</sup> However, working-class mothers were still far too busy with work inside and outside of the home, and had too many children to devote so much time to child-rearing.<sup>54</sup>

In fact, it is questionable how much this 'surge in sentiment' affected working-class couples' fertility and their children's experiences for much of the period under study. Late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century legislation against child labour and for compulsory education was designed to protect working-class children and give them 'a childhood', and turn-of-the-century philanthropists started placing street children into families instead of institutions as part of the new ideology. However, at the same time they had difficulty accepting that working-class children were the same creatures and had the same potential for innocence as their more 'childlike' middle-class counterparts.<sup>55</sup>

Lynn Jamieson has suggested that working-class children did not spend more time with their parents until after the First World War, when campaigners started making a concerted effort to educate working-class parents to treat their children differently. Several historians have found that even then, children spent a lot of time 'playing out' to keep out of their

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<sup>53</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 193; Siân Pooley, 'Parenthood, Childrearing and Fertility in England, 1850-1914', *The History of the Family*, 18:1 (2013), p. 91; Jane Hamlett, *Material Relations: Domestic Interiors and Middle-Class Families in England, 1850-1910*, (Manchester, 2010), p. 119.

<sup>54</sup> Grant, 'Parent-child Relations', p. 115.

<sup>55</sup> Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 134, 136, 137, 140, 145-6, 157; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 11; Carolyn Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan 1860-1931*, (London, 1990), pp. 66-7.



parents' way and ease overcrowding in the home.<sup>56</sup> While Davidoff *et al* have suggested that working-class parents lacked feeling for their children before and throughout this period, Harry Hendrick, Davin, Cunningham, Strange, Linda Pollock, and Laura King have argued that these parents always felt emotionally for their children, whether they showed it or not.<sup>57</sup>

Historians have also questioned whether there was a clear or even complete shift between working-class children being economically and emotionally valuable. Cunningham, Anna Davin, and Viviana Zelizer have described how parents always cared about their children, received increasing insurance payouts for children's deaths due to their sentimental value, and started to pay, rather than be paid to, adopt children. Furthermore, working-class children were proud to contribute to the household economy, and continued to be useful to their parents after their official removal from the workplace.<sup>58</sup>

However, there has been no suggestion that the effects of the 'surge of sentiment' on family finances were the sole or dominant reason for the decline in family size that took place over this period.<sup>59</sup> Even Zelizer, who

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<sup>56</sup> Lynn Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', in Drake (ed.), *Time, Family, and Community*, pp. 114, 116, 117, 123, 124; James Walvin, *A Child's World: A social history of English Childhood 1800-1914*, (Middlesex, 1982), p. 94; Thea Vigne, 'Parents and Children 1890-1918: Distance and Dependence', *Oral History*, 3:2 (1975), pp. 7-8; Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914*, (London, 1996), pp. 47-8.

<sup>57</sup> Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, pp. 120, 122; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, pp. 24-6, 28; Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 18, 20; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 9, 10, 12, 13; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, pp. 4, 10; Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain c. 1914-1960*, (Oxford, 2015), pp. 16, 18; Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 113.

<sup>58</sup> Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 106, 109; Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 75-97; Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, pp. 15, 96, 137, 165, 170, 201, 213.

<sup>59</sup> Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, pp. 65-6, 191; Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, (London, 1987), p. 357; Banks, *Prosperity and Parenthood*, pp. 173, 183-4, 189, 193, 198-201; Vigne, 'Parents and Children 1890-1918', p. 6; Wally Seccombe, 'Men's "Marital Rights" and Women's "Wifely Duties": Changing Conjugal Relations in the Family Decline', in Gillis, Tilly and Levine (eds.), *The European Experience of Declining Fertility*, p. 78; Jamieson,

wrote that 'the shift in children's value from "object of utility" to object of sentiment is indisputable', rejected economists' notion that parents' fertility decisions are purely based on cost.<sup>60</sup> Rather, the 'cultural factor' of 'the social construction of the economically "useless" but emotionally "priceless" child' interacted with economic factors, for example by influencing insurance pay-outs for children's deaths and adoption fees.<sup>61</sup>

Although historian J. A. Banks ruled out cost as the dominant explanation for fertility decline, he nonetheless devoted a whole book to the ways in which increased inflation, new pressure to own the 'paraphernalia of gentility', and the costs of longer, better-quality education led middle-class parents to restrict their fertility from the 1870s.<sup>62</sup> Siân Pooley has written that the small leisured family was the result of both material pressure and aspiration, and moral pressure. She found that elite men urged their sons to marry late in order to avoid the expense of too many children, and that there was a popular male discourse of complaining about the cost of children.<sup>63</sup>

Historians have also questioned whether their withdrawal from the workplace really made working-class children more of a financial 'liability' that led couples to restrict their fertility. Pooley found that child employment peaked before 1870, so it could not have been a sudden loss of child income that precipitated the working-class fertility decline.<sup>64</sup> Compulsory schooling did not impose a sudden extra cost on parents either, as many working-class

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'Theories of Family Development', pp. 110-11; Gillis, 'Gender and Fertility Decline', pp. 32-3; Grant, 'Parent-child Relations', p. 110.

<sup>60</sup> Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, pp. 7, 8.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 15, 18, 21.

<sup>62</sup> Banks, *Prosperity and Parenthood*, pp. 51-2, 66, 87-101, 173, 183-4, 189, 193, 198-203.

<sup>63</sup> Pooley, 'Parenthood, Childrearing and Fertility', pp. 90-91, 99-100.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

parents were already paying for their children to learn to read and write as a useful life skill.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Cook has argued that even when children were bringing money into the household, their earnings failed to offset their costs in physical household resources or women's reproductive (i.e. the effect on their health) or domestic labour.<sup>66</sup> The 'surge of sentiment' may have levied more financial costs on parents but, as Pooley has written, it is impossible to artificially separate 'emotional, social, organisational and financial bonds between parents and children.'<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, new attitudes towards children did not solely place new financial obligations on parents. Middle-class parents, at least, may have felt morally obliged to have fewer children in order to more easily give each child the emotional and practical resources required for the 'good childhood' described earlier.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps more in the case of lower middle-class families, having fewer children meant parents were better able to invest ambition in each child. They could take advantage of the new and prized opportunities for social mobility offered by relatively cheap fee-paying schools and new egalitarian approaches to recruitment and promotion in the armed forces and civil service.<sup>69</sup>

Demographic historians in particular have discussed, and continue to discuss, the extent to which reasons for fertility restriction were class-related.

T. H. C. Stevenson (Superintendent of Statistics in the Office of the Registrar

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<sup>65</sup> Pooley, 'Parenthood, Childrearing and Fertility', p. 93.

<sup>66</sup> Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, p. 72.

<sup>67</sup> Pooley, 'Parenthood, Childrearing and Fertility', p. 101.

<sup>68</sup> Pooley, 'Parenthood, Childrearing and Fertility', pp. 99-100; Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, pp. 65-6, 191-2; Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family*, p. 63.

<sup>69</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 192; Banks, *Prosperity and Parenthood*, pp. 163-4, 173, 183-4, 189, 193, 201.

General, and supervisor of the analysis of the 1911 census) wrote that the upper and middle classes were first to restrict their fertility, from 1877, and working-class couples came to 'emulate' them.<sup>70</sup> Stevenson's statistics do show the initial decline in fertility to be among Classes I and II (the upper and middle classes in his eight-class model, Class III being 'those occupations of which it can be assumed that the majority of men classified to them at the census are skilled workmen'), and, as detailed above, by the 1930s all classes were restricting their fertility.<sup>71</sup> However, while Banks and demographic historian Michael Haines have shared this view that working-class couples 'emulated' their social superiors, other historians have questioned it.<sup>72</sup> Contemporary researchers acknowledged to some extent that there were fertility differentials within classes, and several demographic historians have examined these differentials in more detail.<sup>73</sup> They have argued that instead of a simple class-based 'diffusion' of fertility restriction, factors such as occupation and geographical location were more influential than class, and working- and middle-class couples as a whole had different reasons for having fewer children.

Garrett, Reid, Schürer and Szreter have been particular proponents of the idea that fertility depended more on region, income, and workplace culture

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<sup>70</sup> T. H. C. Stevenson, 'The Fertility of Various Social Classes in England and Wales from the Middle of the Nineteenth Century to 1911', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 83:3 (1920), p. 422.

<sup>71</sup> Stevenson, 'The Fertility of Various Social Classes', pp. 410-11; Simon Szreter, *Fertility, Class and Gender in Britain, 1860-1940*, (Cambridge, 1996), p. 256; Charles, *The Menace of Under-Population*, pp. 2, 118, 120; Titmuss and Titmuss, *Parents Revolt*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>72</sup> Banks, *Prosperity and Parenthood*, pp. 200-203; Michael R. Haines, 'Social Class Differentials During Fertility Decline: England and Wales Revisited', *Population Studies*, 43:2 (1989), pp. 309, 315, 316.

<sup>73</sup> For example, Stevenson found that miners and agricultural workers had particularly high fertility, and textile workers had low fertility (Stevenson, 'The Fertility of Various Social Classes', pp. 410-411), and Charles discussed this phenomenon as well as high rural and low urban fertility (Charles, *The Menace of Under-Population*, pp. 111, 115).

than class *per se*. Szreter wrote in his 1996 volume, *Fertility, Class and Gender in Britain*, that upper- and middle-class couples generally restricted their fertility in order to fulfil their aspirations, while working-class couples did so in order to avoid poverty.<sup>74</sup> The co-authored volume expands his finding that in heterogeneous areas working-class people might have influenced higher fertility in their middle-class neighbours, or middle-class people might have influenced lower fertility in their working-class neighbours.<sup>75</sup> The influence of occupation and workplace set-ups on fertility choices is also evident in Anderson's work on very small families. He found that families of one or zero children were most common among:

...the professions; persons with some measure of independent means; couples where one spouse was especially likely to be geographically mobile; some small businessmen where the wife was especially likely to be involved in the business; and among domestic servants and related occupations.<sup>76</sup>

Some caution is required when considering such findings; Garrett *et al* and Anderson only had access to a certain portion of the 1911 census when they conducted their research, and, for example, Amanda Wilkinson has found that two similar Essex fishing villages exhibited considerable differences in demographic change, with neither village conforming to national trends formulated by Garrett *et al*. She suggested that 'there are too many variables involved in each separate community and indeed each individual family, for it to be possible to explain them within a single theoretical framework.'<sup>77</sup>

Cook's work on birth control (more on which later) complicates the picture

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<sup>74</sup> Szreter, *Fertility, Class and Gender*, pp. 527-9.

<sup>75</sup> Szreter, *Fertility, Class and Gender*, pp. 305-9; Garrett, Reid, Schürer and Szreter, *Changing Family Size*, pp. 244, 280, 289, 411.

<sup>76</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 183.

<sup>77</sup> Amanda Wilkinson, *The Turning Tide...: A study into the changes in household size and structure in Wivenhoe and Rowhedge 1851-1901*, unpublished MA thesis, (Essex, 2008), pp. 99, 100, 101.

further, as she suggested that the use of artificial contraception did not originate among the middle class and diffuse to the working class, but radical groups within both classes who were willing to buy and use such methods were the first to adopt them.<sup>78</sup> The recent creation of the Atlas of Fertility Decline project at Cambridge reflects demographic historians' continuing focus on the patterns and motivations, as opposed to the consequences, of family restriction.<sup>79</sup>

Other historians have also drawn attention to the effects of repeated childbearing on women's health, and women's increasing desire to assert control over their own bodies. Cook, for example, has highlighted the effects of repeated childbirth, breastfeeding and childcare on women's energy and health.<sup>80</sup> She wrote that women have always wanted to limit their fertility to a small number of children for this reason, but how successful they were in doing so depended upon how able they were to communicate such desires to their husbands, their husbands' co-operation, how knowledgeable they were about methods of fertility limitation, and what methods were available and easy to use.<sup>81</sup> This chapter will later explore how women became more able to discuss, and therefore implement, family planning methods with their husbands.

Other scholars have drawn attention to changing social norms leading to growing disapproval of large families. Cook has used this detail to suggest

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<sup>78</sup> Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, p. 77.

<sup>79</sup> 'Department of Geography, Cambridge » An Atlas of Fertility Decline in England and Wales', <https://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/victorianfertilitydecline/geographies.html>, (accessed 26/11/2017).

<sup>80</sup> Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, pp. 11-13, 31.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-13, 31, 52-3, 65, 88.

that a major method of fertility restriction until at least the 1930s was abstinence, as large families came to be associated with shameful sexual overindulgence.<sup>82</sup> This change in attitudes towards such families could be related to the transition in emphasis from childbearing to childrearing mentioned above. As John Gillis has written, 'large numbers of children, previously a sign of good motherhood, now became an embarrassment.'<sup>83</sup> This disapproval is also evident in contemporary writing of the 1930s; both Charles and Mass Observation referred to it as something that prevented people from having more children.<sup>84</sup>

Given the number of possible explanations for fertility decline, most historical work on it has focussed on general explanations and trends. Where only children in this study give reasons for being only children, however, they focus not on the general but the particular: how their own parents' attitudes and circumstances resulted in their having a single child. They draw attention to factors such as secondary infertility, widowhood, and illness, which historians, concerned with intent and seeking patterns and general explanations in fertility decline, have not focussed on. This thesis asks how such attitudes and circumstances affected only children's experiences, and uses the broader explanations for context rather than definitive answers.

Similarly, although Anderson and Garrett *et al* have ruled out improved infant mortality rates as a cause of fertility decline, historians have necessarily focussed on how many children couples bore, as opposed to how many they

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<sup>82</sup> Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, p. 156.

<sup>83</sup> Gillis, 'Gender and Fertility Decline', p. 44.

<sup>84</sup> Charles, *The Menace of Under-Population*, pp. 194-5; Mass Observation, *Britain and her Birth-Rate*, pp. 74-5.

raised.<sup>85</sup> The numbers of surviving children couples had did not always, or perhaps even often, reflect their original intentions. This gap between intention and reality can be illuminated by studying only children's life stories. Infant mortality decreased rapidly during this period, particularly between 1881 and 1931.<sup>86</sup> However, this was not the cause of the fertility decline; parents did not restrict their families as a result of increased probability of survival.<sup>87</sup> Rather, as R. I. Woods, P. A. Watterson and J. H Woodward have argued, the fertility decline caused infant mortality rates to improve, as fewer pregnancies and longer intervals between births benefitted the health of both mothers and children.<sup>88</sup> Other contributing factors were the provision of education for mothers regarding how to care for themselves and their children, and improved sanitation, food quality, milk supply and ante- and post-natal care.<sup>89</sup> Despite this demographic shift, however, a noticeable number of only children in this study lost siblings either *in utero* or once they had been born. This may well have influenced how parents treated the surviving child, an idea this thesis particularly explores in chapter 4.

Other work on the fertility decline has focussed on *how* couples restricted their families. Clearly, their desires to have fewer children would have had

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<sup>85</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 192; Garrett, Reid, Schürer and Szreter, *Changing Family Size*, p. 273.

<sup>86</sup> R. I. Woods, P. A. Watterson and J. H. Woodward, 'The Causes of Rapid Fertility Decline in England and Wales, 1861-1921, Part I', *Population Studies*, 42:3 (1988), pp. 346, 360, 362; Robert Woods, Naomi Williams and Chris Galley, 'Infant Mortality in England 1550-1950: Problems in the Identification of Long-term Trends and Geographical and Social Variations', in Pier Paoli Viazzo and Carlo A. Corsini (eds.), 'The Decline of Infant Mortality in Europe, 1800-1950: Four National Case Studies', *Historical Perspectives no. 2, International Child Development Centre*, (Florence, 1993), <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/32/>, (accessed 27/7/2017), pp. 35, 36, 44.

<sup>87</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 192.

<sup>88</sup> R. I. Woods, P. A. Watterson and J. H. Woodward, 'The Causes of Rapid Fertility Decline in England and Wales, 1861-1921, Part II', *Population Studies*, 43:1 (1989), p. 130

<sup>89</sup> Woods, Watterson and Woodward, 'The Causes of Rapid Fertility Decline Part II', p. 130; Woods, Williams and Galley, 'Infant Mortality in England', pp. 37, 41, 42, 49.



little consequence had they not found ways to achieve them. Researchers such as Anderson and Gittins have agreed that couples must have used some form of birth control, as the fall in the birth rate could not be fully explained by lower illegitimacy levels, and fertility levels failed to rise after 1911, when the average age at marriage decreased.<sup>90</sup> However, historians have debated how quickly different types of couple came to use it, and in which form. They have generally agreed that middle-class couples adopted artificial contraceptive methods, such as condoms, caps, and pessaries, more quickly and willingly than working-class couples, who for much of the period preferred to use 'old' and 'natural' methods such as abstinence, withdrawal, the 'safe period', and abortifacients.<sup>91</sup> However, Cook, as mentioned above, suggested that radical groups across the class spectrum were the first to use artificial contraception.<sup>92</sup> It seems plausible, of course, that the middle classes nevertheless had earlier access to the ideas of radical groups.

Researchers have deduced several reasons for this difference in birth control methods. Two practical reasons middle-class couples adopted artificial contraception more readily than working-class couples were that they were more able to afford them, and lived in homes that were better-equipped for washing out the new equipment following intercourse.<sup>93</sup> Another explanation is the relative lack of knowledge about artificial contraception among working-

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<sup>90</sup> Gittins, *Fair Sex*, pp. 36-7; Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family*, pp. 58-9.

<sup>91</sup> Gittins, *Fair Sex*, p. 33; Pooley, 'Parenthood, Childrearing and Fertility', p. 88; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 304; Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*, pp. 229, 231.

<sup>92</sup> Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, p. 77.

<sup>93</sup> Seccombe, 'Men's "Marital Rights"', pp. 69-70; Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, pp. 53, 161-2.

class people. Szeter and Kate Fisher, who interviewed couples about their experiences of sex and marriage between 1918 and 1963, found that middle-class girls were better-informed about sex, used medical terms, and consulted books to aid their understanding. By contrast, working-class girls avoided details, did not seek advice from their peers, and did not refer to books.<sup>94</sup> Wally Seccombe and Gittins found that the poorest women were also ignorant about the health effects of multiple pregnancies, and were deterred from using artificial birth control because they had heard it was ineffective and injurious to health.<sup>95</sup> This fear of the new methods is echoed in Cook's findings that many late-nineteenth-century women resisted new forms of birth control as they feared their 'unnaturalness', and potential to free men from responsibility towards their families.<sup>96</sup> Until the inter-war period, when women's attitudes towards motherhood and the family changed more broadly, working-class women's preferred method of contraception was, understandably, abstinence.<sup>97</sup>

Working-class couples who did have sex, though, experienced enough improvement in sex education and sanitation to increase their success in using withdrawal to prevent pregnancies during this period.<sup>98</sup> This suggests that there were also cultural explanations for contemporary patterns in contraceptive use. As indicated above, middle-class couples were generally more comfortable discussing contraception between themselves and with others than working-class couples, making them more likely to at least try

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<sup>94</sup> Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England, 1918-1963*, (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 93-4, 252.

<sup>95</sup> Gittins, *Fair Sex*, pp. 46, 112-13; Seccombe, 'Men's 'Marital Rights'', pp. 69-70.

<sup>96</sup> Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, p. 89.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-15, 156.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-3.

using it. According to Cook, Victorian women were not meant to enjoy or talk about sex, and this reluctance persisted for much of the period among working-class couples in particular.<sup>99</sup> Szreter and Fisher found that among working-class couples married between 1918 and 1963, 'there was a unanimity that birth control was something which husbands provided for their wives and was not a matter which they wanted to discuss between them', whereas middle-class couples were likely to regard 'birth control methods more as a matter of choice and deliberation between the two partners.'<sup>100</sup>

As indicated above, before the inter-war period, when women's attitudes towards motherhood and the family changed, and artificial contraception and living conditions improved, abstinence was working-class women's contraceptive method of choice.<sup>101</sup> They were increasingly encouraged to resist sex if they did not love their husbands, or found their bodies repulsive, and empowered by feminist arguments that they did not have to give in to their spouses' advances.<sup>102</sup> Increasing awareness of the health effects of reproductive labour, as well as shifts in emphasis from procreation to companionship in marriage also fuelled this increase in abstinence.<sup>103</sup> Some women simply avoided sex by going to bed after their husbands had gone to sleep.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, pp. 106-115.

<sup>100</sup> Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*, p. 230.

<sup>101</sup> Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, pp. 161-2; J. M. Winter, 'War, Family, and Fertility in Twentieth-Century Europe', in Gillis, Tilly and Levine (eds.), *The European Experience of Declining Fertility*, p. 300.

<sup>102</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', pp. 192, 193, 195; Seccombe, 'Men's 'Marital Rights'', pp. 72-7, 81; Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, p. 96; Charles, *The Menace of Under-Population*, p. 172.

<sup>103</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', pp. 192, 193, 195; Seccombe, 'Men's 'Marital Rights'', pp. 72-7.

<sup>104</sup> Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, pp. 189-90.

Even so, some working-class women were better able to discuss family limitation with their husbands, as they went out to work, for example, in factories, where they could gain knowledge about sex and birth control from their colleagues, and therefore the confidence to use artificial contraception. By contrast, servants, for example, were not exposed to such knowledge, making them more likely to stick with less reliable 'natural' methods.<sup>105</sup> Working also empowered women to refuse intercourse with their husbands, as they brought their own money into the household and did not therefore feel as though they 'owed' their spouses sex because they were completely financially dependent on them.<sup>106</sup>

When middle- and working-class couples did communicate regarding sex and birth control, they might still ultimately have chosen to abstain or use the withdrawal method because they distrusted or disliked artificial contraception, or could not access it.<sup>107</sup> Couples might have agreed to abstain because the wife did not like sex, or abstain or use withdrawal out of concern for the wife's health or the financial strain another child might bring.<sup>108</sup>

Like the literature concerning the numerical description of the late-nineteenth-century fertility decline and the motivations behind it, work on the history of contraception, while providing historical context for this thesis, has focussed on the decisions of parents rather than the experiences of only children themselves. However, even though, understandably, none of the intentional only children in this thesis discuss how their parents achieved small families,

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<sup>105</sup> Gittins, *Fair Sex*, pp. 46, 79, 89-93; Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*, p. 99.

<sup>106</sup> Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, pp. 65, 88.

<sup>107</sup> Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*, pp. 237, 239-40, 244, 250.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 235, 243, 248, 249, 250, 257.

it is necessary to detail how one-child families came about during this particular period, as well as where some historians have directed their attention regarding the fertility decline if not at children's experiences of it. Historians' work on the apparent consequences for children of growing up in smaller, more emotionally intense families, comes closer to this thesis' focus. Taking the view that there was a 'surge in sentiment' towards children during this period, historians have debated the advantages and disadvantages of new attitudes for middle- and working-class children during this period. In doing so, they have undertaken some research into children's experiences of having fewer (but not necessarily no) siblings, further justifying this thesis' focus on only children in particular and providing important historical context. Historians of childhood and the family have broadly agreed that a particular advantage of smaller families for middle-class children was that they enjoyed closer relationships with their parents. Having previously spent much of their time with nannies and governesses and seen their parents at appointed times, as Britain moved into the twentieth century, upper middle-class children apparently 'benefitt[ed] from a warmer, more sensitive family environment', were more companionable with their parents, and were treated more individually.<sup>109</sup> This thesis often asks questions about parent-child relationships, as it explores the extent to which a variety of only children reported the experiences described above.

Historians have suggested that smaller, emotionally closer middle-class families had disadvantages for children as well. As the introduction showed,

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<sup>109</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 119, Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family*, p. 49; Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 179; Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, p. 149; Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', pp. 110-12.

Davidoff thought that children with fewer siblings missed out on the 'sibling companionship, help and competition' previous generations had enjoyed.<sup>110</sup> She also wrote that homes became more 'claustrophobic' as a result of the more intense, watchful parent-child relationships borne of sentimentalisation and parents having fewer children to supervise – although the advent of the bicycle allowed children to reclaim some of their freedom.<sup>111</sup> Jamieson and Carol Dyhouse concurred that children were more closely monitored for conformity to the expectations of their parents and society.<sup>112</sup> Middle-class children might also have found themselves more socially isolated as families shrank, particularly if they lived in or moved to the new suburbs, where 'playing out' was frowned upon and children were often only allowed to play in homes or private gardens.<sup>113</sup>

Peter N. Stearns has contested these findings. He argues that although children from small families might have developed more intense relationships with their parents, this did not necessarily result in their developing fewer emotional ties overall, since they developed new relationships with unrelated children of their own age at school instead of with siblings.<sup>114</sup> He also tentatively suggested that new concerns with childhood happiness, discussed further below, led parents to 'compensate' their children for more serious schooling, fewer siblings, and living in urban settings, all of which supposedly eroded opportunities to play. This implies that parents were kinder, rather

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<sup>110</sup> Davidoff, 'The Family in Britain', p. 118.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>112</sup> Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', pp. 110-11; Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, (London, 1981), p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 190; Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970*, (Oxford, 1995), p. 212.

<sup>114</sup> Davidoff, 'The Family in Britain', p. 118; Stearns, 'Childhood Emotions', pp. 166, 171.

than stricter, towards their children as families grew smaller, particularly in the second half of the period under consideration.<sup>115</sup> This thesis thus considers the extent to which only children experienced intense relationships with their parents, and the reasons for this.

The sentimentalisation of childhood was experienced differently across the class spectrum. Arguably, working-class parents were never unfeeling about their children, and children could be simultaneously economically and emotionally valuable to them.<sup>116</sup> However, as shown above, working-class couples did not necessarily limit their fertility with the particular intention of giving more attention to individual sons and daughters. Working-class mothers often did not have the time and resources to devote themselves entirely to their children, and in general, their children continued to spend a lot of time outside of the home to give them much-needed space.<sup>117</sup>

Nonetheless, historians have identified some advantages and disadvantages of fertility restriction in conjunction with new ideas about childhood for children lower down the social hierarchy.

Davidoff *et al.* have written that working-class children from smaller families benefitted from closer parental involvement and a greater share of parental time and resources.<sup>118</sup> This was true in some cases, as this thesis shows.

However, it seems unlikely that many working-class parents were able to

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<sup>115</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', p. 178.

<sup>116</sup> Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, pp. 24-6, 28; Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 18, 20, 75-97; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 9, 10, 12, 13, 106, 109; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, pp. 4, 10; King, *Family Men*, pp. 16, 18; Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 113; Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, pp. 15, 96, 137, 165, 170, 201, 213.

<sup>117</sup> Grant, 'Parent-child Relations', p. 115; Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', pp. 114, 116, 117, 123, 124; Walvin, *A Child's World*, p. 94; Vigne, 'Parents and Children 1890-1918', pp. 7-8; Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>118</sup> Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, pp. 191-2.

give the same level of attention to their children as middle-class parents. King has also identified improvements in living standards – which would have made life more comfortable for working-class families of all sizes, but especially smaller ones – as a factor that facilitated better father-child relationships.<sup>119</sup> However, she added that while living conditions for middle- and working-class families became less disparate:

Both emotionally involved and distant fathers could be found among all social classes ... class differences in terms of the ways in which father-child relationships operated were important, but, as in numerous aspects of family life, class was not the primary determinant of behaviour.<sup>120</sup>

Similarly, John Tosh has written that ‘much of men’s experience of fatherhood turns on the particularity of the persons involved.’<sup>121</sup> These findings that the expression of affection depended more upon the leanings of the individual family than class or region are echoed throughout this thesis. It is vital to understand whether the behaviour of the parents of individual only children was typical of the time they were growing up, or the result of their particular circumstances.<sup>122</sup> Jordanova made the pertinent statement that it is:

...hard for historians to accept that a fragmented history of *children* exists alongside the perhaps more unified account of attitudes to *childhood*, and that, in a given time or place, the two histories are linked in elaborate, yet hitherto uncharted ways.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 100.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

<sup>121</sup> John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, (Harlow, 2005), p. 142.

<sup>122</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 106.

<sup>123</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, ‘New Worlds for Children in the Eighteenth Century: Problems of Historical Interpretation’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 3:1 (1990), p. 78.



In other words, while, as this chapter has shown, historians have worked towards a broad account of changes in attitudes towards children, in reality, there was no universal experience of being parented at any given time.

Jordanova also wrote that autobiographies (and diaries) are:

Products of individual lives and may reveal little about the general state of childhood ... it is mistaken to assume that if we aggregate numerous individual accounts we arrive and insights of a more general or abstract nature.<sup>124</sup>

This thesis places individual children's histories against the context of the history of childhood throughout; it does not seek to disprove grand narratives so much as show the factors that might stop a child from fitting them neatly. It asks whether only-childhood was one of those factors, and how overarching ideas about childhood influence how only children interpret their experiences.

A disadvantage of sentimentalisation for working-class children could have been that, when parents did keep them indoors to protect them from the moral and physical dangers of the outside world, they did not necessarily gain more space or freedom in the home.<sup>125</sup> Zelizer has pointed out that sentimentalisation, fertility restriction, and improvements in living conditions did not all take effect simultaneously. This meant that working-class children might have lost the freedom of the streets before they came to benefit from more dedicated domestic space, and found themselves subject to more rules to stop them from disrupting adult routines.<sup>126</sup> This thesis further explores

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<sup>124</sup> Jordanova, 'Children in History', p. 12.

<sup>125</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 190; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 212.

<sup>126</sup> Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, p. 54.

working-class only children's experiences of 'playing out' and space in the home.

As indicated in the introduction, historians have not previously focussed on only children as a distinct group. By making occasional, brief references to the experiences of only children, as well as sibling children who were brought up alone, as negative in comparison with those who grew up with siblings, they have, no doubt unintentionally, accepted and perpetuated only-child stereotypes. They have also appeared to choose testimonies that fitted only-child stereotypes, and not looked elsewhere in these accounts for alternative explanations for their experiences. By contrast, this thesis asks to what extent only-childhood in itself impacted only children's lives, and whether other factors were more crucial to their experiences. Previous historiographical findings are detailed at the beginning of chapters 4-10.

It is, however, important to discuss Frank J. Sulloway's unusual 1996 historical study of siblings, *Born to Rebel*, briefly. In some ways, it has come closer to giving a nuanced portrayal of only children than many studies by historians of childhood and the family. However, Sulloway's research methods were very different to those of the majority of historians whose work this thesis challenges and builds upon. Additionally, his methods and conclusions have caused controversy in the research community. This thesis contends that its own methods are far better-suited to drawing out the variety and complexity of only children's experiences and avoiding the acceptance of popular ideas about only children.

Sulloway measured, with the help of experts on the people in question, the reactions of 200 firstborn and laterborn scientists from the same families to 29 scientific innovations, including the theory of evolution. If a certain scientist enthusiastically adopted a new theory, they scored highly on radicalism; if they strongly resisted it, they scored highly on conservatism. These scores were subsequently compared with the scientists' birth positions.<sup>127</sup> He concluded that firstborns tended to be conservative and resistant to new ideas, while laterborns tended to be radical and open to experience. However, there were many caveats to this conclusion: prevalent social attitudes, parental social attitudes (reflecting the thesis that radical parents produce radical firstborns), parental birth positions, age, personal influences, national styles, scientific evidence for new theories, age gaps, parent-offspring conflict, gender, parental loss, and shyness could all disrupt Sulloway's model.<sup>128</sup>

*Born to Rebel* has been variously described as field-changing, authoritative and rigorous, and grandiose, full of inconsistencies, disregarding 'a substantial body of contrary evidence', and impossible to replicate.<sup>129</sup>

Frederic Townsend and Albert Somit and Steven Peterson have suggested that while Sulloway's work is an impressive undertaking, his definitions of rebellious traits and acts are so contradictory and flexible that he could fit his

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<sup>127</sup> Frank J. Sulloway, *Born to Rebel*, (London, 1996), pp. 32, 42, 101.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xiv, 21, 32, 42, 70, 157, 180, 213, 226.

<sup>129</sup> Frederic Townsend, 'Taking "Born to Rebel" Seriously: The Need for Independent Review', *Politics and the Life Sciences*, 19:2 (2000), p. 205; Frederic Townsend, 'Birth Order and Rebelliousness', *Politics and the Life Sciences*, 19:2 (2000), p. 147; Albert Somit and Steven A. Peterson, 'Born to Rebel: The Science of Birth Order', *Politics and the Life Sciences*, 19:2 (2000), p. 176.

theory to any given situation.<sup>130</sup> In fact, if one disregarded Sulloway's conclusions about conservative firstborns and radical laterborns, and considered the many caveats he identified as 'influences' on personality, his findings would be far more consonant with those of the following researchers.

Rowe has written: 'one thing I have learnt is that there is only one thing you can say about all siblings. This is that there is no one thing that you can say about all siblings. They are as various as snowflakes.'<sup>131</sup> This is because parents treat each child differently according to their interpretation of their children's personalities, and children in turn interpret and react to their parents' treatment of them.<sup>132</sup> She agreed with Judy Dunn's findings that siblings grow up in different environments within the same household not only because their parents treat them differently, but due to their reactions to one another.<sup>133</sup> Dunn has additionally pointed out that as siblings share between 40 and 60 per cent of their genetic material, some might be very similar and others very different from one another, and that their differences increase as they grow older due to outside influences.<sup>134</sup> Glen H. Elder and Avshalom Caspi, meanwhile, found that historical events during childhood could affect how children were expected to behave, which personality traits came to the fore, their experiences at particular positions in the life-cycle (hence a pair of siblings could have different experiences despite a small age

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<sup>130</sup> Townsend, 'Birth Order and Rebelliousness', pp. 136, 139, 147; Somit and Peterson, 'Born to Rebel: The Science of Birth Order', p. 176.

<sup>131</sup> Rowe, *My Dearest Enemy*, p. ix.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>133</sup> Rowe, *My Dearest Enemy*, p. 87; Dunn, *Sisters and Brothers*, p. 29.

<sup>134</sup> Dunn, *Sisters and Brothers*, pp. 126, 129.

gap), and their relationships with relatives and friends.<sup>135</sup> All of these findings cast doubt on Sulloway's general assertions about firstborns and laterborns, and lead this thesis to ask how only children were affected by their parents' treatment of them and the other influences, including historical time, that shaped their personalities, feelings, and experiences.

While Sulloway found that that only children were 'wild cards' who could turn out as radical or conservative as they please, vary greatly in their openness to experience, and be particularly influenced by parental social values, in other respects he appeared unable to escape certain ideas about them. In particular, he perpetuated the stereotype that only children are less outgoing than firstborns because they do not experience peer socialisation.<sup>136</sup> This thesis asks whether only children universally lack experience of mixing with other children, and whether they are timid when they do meet other children for this reason, and looks for the influences behind such experiences.

As this thesis develops another emerging historical field – the history of emotions – it is necessary to summarise some of the key relevant findings. It particularly develops the recent work of Stearns. In a 2010 article, he argued – with reference to the US – that happiness gradually became synonymous with childhood in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This is because factors that had previously made childhood a miserable time (and were incompatible with new sentimental views of children), particularly child labour and assumptions of Original Sin, fell away. At the same time,

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<sup>135</sup> Glen H. Elder and Avshalom Caspi, 'Studying Lives in a Changing Society: Sociological and Personological Explorations', in A. I. Rubin, Robert A. Zucker, Robert A. Emmons, and Susan Frank (eds.), *Studying Persons and Lives*, (New York, 1990), pp. 217-21.

<sup>136</sup> Sulloway, *Born to Rebel*, pp. 32, 42, 101, 189, 204, 234, 503.

childrearing experts urged parents to actively aim to make their children happy to ensure they would become happy adults, children received better treatment and more leisurely contact from their parents due to sentimentalisation, there was a general plea for American people to be happy and productive, and toy-makers targeted parents by persuading them that their wares would make their children happy.<sup>137</sup> Children were increasingly expected to be shielded from intense grief, fear, and guilt, and both children and parents were expected to express affection, while anger came to be regarded as an inappropriate emotion in a family context. As with all the purported effects of the sentimentalisation of childhood, this was a gradual change, and many communities maintained older approaches to childrearing.<sup>138</sup> In Stephanie Olsen's 2015 collection *Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History*, historians have studied how children managed the expectations that they should be happy in a number of diverse contexts.<sup>139</sup>

It is particularly pertinent to this thesis that Stearns identified a distinctive impact of this growing association between childhood and happiness as an alteration in the way people reflected upon their childhoods. People increasingly incorporated judgments of whether their childhoods had been happy into their life stories, and started making retroactive judgements of whether or not their parents had provided a happy childhood, even if they

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<sup>137</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 168-9, 175-7.

<sup>138</sup> Stearns, 'Childhood Emotions', pp. 158, 162-4, 166, 169.

<sup>139</sup> Kathleen Vongsathorn, 'Teaching, Learning and Adapting Emotions in Uganda's Child Leprosy Settlement', in Olsen (ed.), *Childhood, Youth and Emotions*, pp. 56-7; Hugo Morrison, 'Settler Childhood, Protestant Christianity and Emotions in Colonial New Zealand 1880s-1920s', in Olsen (ed.), *Childhood, Youth and Emotions*, pp. 81-2, 84-5.

had grown up before such expectations were established.<sup>140</sup> This thesis asks how new expectations that children should be happy influenced how only children reflected upon their childhoods and related unhappiness to only-childhood, drawing on details from the research referenced above. In order to do this, it asks what experiences led only children to define their childhoods as 'happy' or 'unhappy'. It also asks whether only children recalled feeling lonely, and how they framed this in terms of only-childhood as opposed to other aspects of their childhoods.

The most striking historical example of the demographic prevalence of only children is, of course, late-twentieth-century China, as a result of the notorious 'one child' policy. This was introduced in 1978 and limited families to one child, with some exceptions, to ease overpopulation. While, in theory, this would create a huge sample of only children researchers could use to conclusively prove or disprove stereotypes, in reality, as researchers such as Falbo and journalists Xinran and Mei Fong have found, these only children have been subject to several influences unique to China. There include unhappy political parental marriages, lack of knowledge about bringing up a single child among the first generation to be subject to the policy, extensive political and economic upheaval, and mounting pressure for these children to achieve academically and economically and adopt 'modern' values.

Furthermore, Chinese only children have been affected by growing up in a culture where children are not expected to become fully independent and control their own futures, people have difficulty expressing concern in an appropriate way, the education system values rote-learning over creativity

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<sup>140</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 178-9.

and independent thought, and the ideal home is quiet and peaceful. Huge differences between the resources and attitudes of the rich and the poor, and the city and the country, have ensured that Chinese only children recount a variety of experiences.<sup>141</sup> This thesis therefore asks how factors such as geography, class, and parental and social expectations shaped British only children's experiences in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

This chapter has shown how historians from various sub-disciplines have approached the topic of fertility decline between the 1870s and 1940s, and, to some extent, the subsequent rise in the birth rate. It has established that an increase in one-child families was part of this fertility decline, and that there were several reasons for, and methods of, fertility limitation. One of these was the sentimentalisation of childhood, which also affected parents' treatment of children to varying extents. This also takes research into siblings, emotions and Chinese only children into account in determining the questions it asks of its sources.

Many historians have focussed on the decisions of parents rather than the experiences of children. In doing so, they have demonstrated how early-twentieth-century scholars worried that couples were restricting their families too much, providing an explanation for rising contemporary concerns about only children which, as this thesis shows, made a lasting impression.

Historians who have examined children's experiences have found that over the course of this period, increasing numbers of children grew up in smaller, more emotionally tender and practically involved families, which had

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<sup>141</sup> Xinran, *Buy Me The Sky*, pp. 1-2, 8-9, 11-12, 15-16, 22-3, 77-8, 123-4, 143, 135, 161, 185; Falbo, 'Only Children: An Updated Review', pp. 45, 46; Fong, *One Child*, p. 100.



advantages and disadvantages. However, they have focussed on the overall experience of growing up in smaller families rather than the specific experiences of only children. This has created a useful general context this thesis draws upon, and its focus on only children adds a further dimension, as it shows how combinations of factors – individual personalities, parental attitudes, domestic circumstances, geographical location, war, class, gender, and time – explain both why they were only children and why they had particular experiences of being such.

Historians have tended to use accounts from only children that conform to stereotypes, and not sought alternative explanations for their experiences. It is the original work of this thesis to look beyond only children's direct statements about only-childhood and seek out these alternative influences in their wider accounts. The next chapter discusses the sources and methods used, and their advantages and disadvantages.



### **3. Sources and methods**

The key sources this thesis analyses are the autobiographies and oral history interviews of only children, as well as a small number of non-only children, born between 1845 and 1945. It is therefore necessary to discuss the advantages of these sources, and how they make them especially suitable for the purposes of this thesis, and their disadvantages, and how these are negated. This chapter also details the methods this thesis uses to identify and analyse these sources. As also mentioned previously, chapters 4-10 start with a brief explanation of the idea about only children that they analyse. These explanations comprise evidence from contemporary childrearing manual-writers, Mass Observation interviewees, historians, and modern research into only children. It is necessary to give some additional details here about the manuals and interviews, and how this thesis uses them.

Autobiographies and oral histories have many features, advantages, and disadvantages in common. Both have been used to produce valuable research since the 1970s, when historians first became interested in researching 'history from below', which is concerned with the lives and viewpoints of 'ordinary people'. It was also from this time that technological advances increasingly facilitated the recording, playback, and preservation of life-story interviews.

A key advantage of autobiographies and oral history interviews is therefore that they represent a range of experiences, including those of family and home life. They also represent people such as women and the working class

who are under-represented in 'traditional' historical writing and sources.<sup>1</sup>

John Burnett has suggested that women and the poor have remained the least represented among autobiographers.<sup>2</sup> However, this does not necessarily mean that female and/or poor life-writers had unusual childhood experiences.

Furthermore, the inclusion of oral histories in this thesis is believed to offset any imbalance among the autobiography-writers, and opens the field of historical representation to those who cannot, or do not want to, write an autobiography. Pioneering oral historian Paul Thompson has written that 'there is *no* [his italics] kind of family life which produced exclusively a single, un-interviewable type of personality', which bodes well for this study.<sup>3</sup> He did suggest that oral history interviewees, having volunteered to be interviewed, are especially likely to be confident and articulate. However, the number of interviewees in this study who described themselves as shy, either as children or throughout their lives, suggests that this is not a significant hindrance to representation.<sup>4</sup> By turns, the inclusion of autobiographies in this study increases the representation of only children who told their life stories before advances in recording technology allowed the development of oral history as a source. Representations of sex, birth decade and class in this thesis' collection of autobiographies and oral history interviews will be discussed later in this chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, (Oxford, 1978), p. 96; Raphael Samuel, 'Local History and Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 1:1 (1976), p. 204; Barbara Caine, *Biography and History*, (Hampshire, 2010), p. 74; Felicity Nussbaum and Regenia Gagnier, cited in Caine, *Biography and History*, p. 67; Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*, (Cambridge, 2010), p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> John Burnett (ed.), *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from the 1820s and 1920s*, (London, 1982), p. xii.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123-6.

Accuracy, memory, and truth are all issues researchers need to be aware of when using autobiographies and oral history interviews as historical sources. Before the 1970s, autobiographies were largely dismissed as a useable historical source because they were seen as presenting distorted and overly-personal, and therefore unreliable, accounts of historical events.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, oral historians have warned that interviewees' recollections of past events may be misremembered or distorted by subsequent developments.<sup>6</sup>

However, this consideration does not compromise the present study. This thesis is far more interested in only children's recollections of personal events than public historical events, and an advantage of both sources is that they represent these particularly well. Jane Humphries has found life-writers to be particularly reliable on the subjects of social conditions, family structure and household economy in childhood.<sup>7</sup> Presumably they therefore also recalled activities such as playing in certain places with other children and travelling certain distances to see relatives particularly well. She also wrote that childhood memories are less likely to be distorted than more recent ones as autobiographers feel little need to portray their childhoods as 'triumphant'.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Luann Walther has found autobiographers more likely to discuss early sufferings than more recent personal matters.<sup>9</sup> This makes sense considering the lack of immediacy of childhood events recounted in autobiographies.

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<sup>5</sup> Caine, *Biography and History*, p. 74.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, pp. 100, 106-7, 129; Paul Thompson, 'Interpreting and Using In-depth Interviews', 'Life History and Oral History Interviewing' course, University of Essex, 28/3/14.

<sup>7</sup> Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Luann Walther, 'The Invention of Childhood in Victorian Autobiography', in George P. Landow (ed.), *Approaches to Victorian Autobiography*, (Ohio, 1979), p. 70.

As for oral history, Paul Thompson has written that 'internal patterns of behaviour and relationships are generally inaccessible without oral evidence,' and celebrated social historian Raphael Samuel praised oral history for facilitating communication of the 'emotional realities of family life'.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore an eminently suitable source for a project which asks questions about only children's home lives and their relationships with others.

Furthermore, scholars of both autobiography and oral history have recognised these sources as particularly useful for researching the history of childhood because people remember this period of their lives especially well. Humphries, Susanna Egan, and Roy Pascal have described how autobiographers are more likely to remember events from their childhood in vivid detail than more recent occurrences.<sup>11</sup> Paul Thompson has discussed how oral history interviewees, having volunteered to be interviewed, are generally at a stage of life where they are very keen to recall long-term memories. The more interest they have in a particular memory, the stronger their recollection of it.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, personality psychologists Daphna Oyserman, Michael Ross, and Roger Buehler have found that people remember traits they had in the past with relative accuracy.<sup>13</sup> This last observation adds particular validity to this thesis' research into only children's memories of social comfort and discomfort in chapters 4 and 5.

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, p. 134; Samuel, 'Local History and Oral History', p. 203.

<sup>11</sup> Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, p. 19; Susanna Egan, *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography*, (North Carolina, 1984), p. 74; Ray Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, (London, 1960), p. 71.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, pp. 100-101, 113.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Ross and Roger Buehler, 'Identity Through Time: Constructing Personal Pasts and Futures', in Marilyn B. Brewer and Miles Hewstone (eds.), *Self and Social Identity*, (Oxford, 2004), p. 29; Daphna Oyserman, 'Self-concept and Identity', in Brewer and Hewstone (eds.), *Self and Social Identity*, p. 9.

Autobiographies and oral histories are also suitable sources for analysis in this thesis because their subjects often discuss their childhoods at length. From the nineteenth century, influenced by Romanticism and psychoanalysis, autobiographers increasingly adopted a *bildungsroman*, or 'growing up', model to examine and communicate how particular childhood experiences contributed to their development and led them to their ultimate position as adults.<sup>14</sup> According to Pascal, this means that the parts about childhood in an autobiography are usually the best, as life-writers have this clear model to follow.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, most oral history interviewers take a 'life story' approach, typically 'beginning with family background and running on through childhood and education to work, later personal and family life, and so on.'<sup>16</sup> This not only means that childhood is likely to be well-represented in oral history interviews, but that interviewees, especially if they are part of the same oral history collection, are asked similar questions. Thus, historians can 'mak[e] connections between lives' and compare and contrast only children's experiences effectively.<sup>17</sup> This chapter will discuss how often the autobiographies and oral history interviews used in this study followed these models later on.

While autobiographers and oral history interviewees are particularly likely to vividly recall and recount childhood experiences, they are neither immune to

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<sup>14</sup> Walther, 'The Invention of Childhood', p. 65; Burnett (ed.), *Destiny Obscure*, p. x; Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, p. 77; Pascal, *Design and Truth*, pp. 52, 84.

<sup>15</sup> Pascal, *Design and Truth*, p. 84.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, p. 231.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Thompson, 'Introduction: the potential of life story/oral history interviews in social and historical research', 'Life History and Oral History Interviewing' course, University of Essex, 27/3/14.

subjectivity in their judgements of what is 'important' enough to retain and incorporate into their accounts of themselves, nor unconscious repression or lapses of memory.<sup>18</sup> However, as indicated previously, this thesis is more concerned with adults' recollections and interpretations of their childhood experiences than whether they were 'truthful' and/or 'accurate' in their recollections. As chapter 1 showed, by taking this approach, it negates Jordanova's criticisms of the authenticity of autobiographies.<sup>19</sup> It also adopts Strange's view that autobiographies allow researchers to deduce the layers of cultural meaning life-writers heaped upon their childhoods, including the effects of stereotypes.<sup>20</sup> As mentioned previously, oral history interviews fulfil a similar function, with Samuel and Thompson describing how 'we can see precisely where memory diverges most clearly from fact that 'imagination, symbolism, desire break in' in interviewees' accounts of their childhoods.<sup>21</sup>

Several scholars of autobiography have discussed how these subjectivities in people's life stories can provide valuable insights into norms and 'myths', and these strengths can also be applied to oral histories. According to Judith Butler, social norms affect how much people reveal about their lives, and how they express what they do divulge. Life stories can therefore reveal a great deal about people's social and historical background.<sup>22</sup> Mary Fulbrook and Ulinka Rublack wrote: 'no account of the self can be produced which is not

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<sup>18</sup> Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*, p. 19; Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, p. 74; Pascal, *Design and Truth*, p. 71; William McKinley Runyan, 'Individual Lives and the Structure of Personality Psychology', in A. I. Rabin, Robert A. Zucker, Robert A. Eamons and Susan Finch (eds.), *Studying Persons and Lives*, (New York, 1990), p. 22; Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, (New York, 2005), pp. 20-21, 35, 37, 40; Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, (Minnesota, 2001), p. 32; Pascal, *Design and Truth*, p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> Jordanova, 'Children in History', p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel and Thompson, 'Introduction', p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, pp. 7, 8, 17, 19, 20.



constructed in terms of social discourses.’<sup>23</sup> The details life-writers and interviewees choose to include and omit are also important as they show which actions, situations, and feelings they feel represent their life as a whole and/or are relevant to their personal development. In doing so, they both create their own ‘personal myths’ and draw on wider myths in order to make sense of their experiences and produce coherent accounts of themselves.<sup>24</sup>

It is important to be alert to lapses of memory, excessive embellishment, descriptions of things a child would probably not have paid much attention, error, bias, inconsistency, and deliberate omissions in autobiographies and oral history interviews.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, for those who study these sources, accuracy is not as much of a problem as it is for those researching major historical events. This is because it is the writer or interviewee’s perception of ‘the truth’, coloured by their ‘emotional reality’, that has particular meaning and value.<sup>26</sup> A dispassionate portrayal of events in an individual’s life would be far less useful to this thesis than, for example, details of how they felt they were affected by only-childhood.

Existing work shows the value of using autobiographies and oral histories. By producing *Destiny Obscure*, an edited collection of autobiographies from the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Burnett showed that such sources were clearly worth consideration. This impression is furthered by his

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<sup>23</sup> Mary Fulbrook and Ulinka Rublack, ‘In Relation: The ‘Social Self’ and Ego-Documents’, *German History*, 28:3 (2010), p. 267.

<sup>24</sup> Pascal, *Design and Truth*, p. 61; Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, pp. 17, 20, 23; David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiography*, (London, 1981), pp. 43-5; Samuel and Thompson, ‘Introduction’, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 32; Pascal, *Design and Truth*, pp. 67, 70, 80-82; Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, pp. 6, 9-10.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, pp. 100, 106-7; Burnett (ed.), *Destiny Obscure*, p. xi; Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, pp. 15, 109; Pascal, *Design and Truth*, p. 83.

compilation, alongside David Vincent and David Mayall, of the bibliography *The Autobiography of the Working Class*, which, by providing a comprehensive list of working-class autobiographies available to researchers, acts as an impetus to use such sources.<sup>27</sup> Vincent's 1981 book *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom* demonstrates the usefulness of autobiographies for researching a range of subjects, including economic struggle, courtship and marriage, and relationships with kin and neighbours.

Oral history interviews have also been used to produce exceptional historical research. Thompson's collection of interviews with 'Edwardians' led to his 1975 book *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society*. This book was unusual for its time as it mostly focussed on the family, work, inequality and social change, incorporating such diverse topics as 'leisure and drink, religion, crime, and social mobility'.<sup>28</sup> This range demonstrates how oral history interviews can lend themselves to a variety of purposes, as some of the topics Thompson addressed overlap with the questions asked by this study. Thea Thompson, who also worked on the project, published a collection of excerpts from its transcripts titled *Edwardian Childhoods* in 1981, further demonstrating value of these interviews. Szreter and Fisher remarked that a large number of interviewees for their recent groundbreaking book *Sex before the Sexual Revolution* 'were prepared to discuss sex,

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<sup>27</sup> John Burnett, David Vincent, and David Mayall (eds.), *The Autobiography of the Working Class: an annotated critical bibliography*, (Hemel Hempstead, 1989).

<sup>28</sup> Henry Pelling, 'The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society by Paul Thompson', *Journal of Modern History*, 49:2 (1977), p. 312.

marriage and intimacy.<sup>29</sup> This indicates the usefulness of oral history in researching personal topics, which only-childhood may be considered to be.

Strange and Dyhouse have both used autobiographies to deduce women's feelings about gender norms. In particular, they found that women autobiographers, who tended to be 'ambitious', 'highly intelligent', and 'unusually articulate', were often highly critical of the constraints the domestic environment placed upon their mothers. This reveals the hostility that such writers later developed towards the idea that women should be full-time wives and mothers and should not pursue higher education or careers.<sup>30</sup> As a result, Dyhouse cautioned that autobiographers, writing from a position of success, might frame their childhood experiences as less tolerable than they found them at the time in order to demonstrate how far they had progressed.<sup>31</sup> This demonstrates how researchers can use these sources to gain important insights into how people reflect upon their childhood experiences.

As for oral histories, in Samuel and Thompson's *The Myths We Live By*, and a later study conducted alongside Thompson, Gill Gorell Barnes and Gwyn Daniel, psychiatrist Natasha Burchardt examined how interviewees incorporate myths of wicked step-parents and stepsiblings into their life stories. In her contribution to *The Myths We Live By*, she discussed how, for example, one 'Edwardians' interviewee expressed surprise that his stepfather

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<sup>29</sup> Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 11; Carol Dyhouse, 'Mothers and Daughters in the Middle-Class Home, c. 1870-1914', in Jane Lewis (ed), *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family, c. 1850-1940*, (Oxford, 1986), p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> Dyhouse, 'Mothers and Daughters', p. 42.

was 'quite a nice man'.<sup>32</sup> In the co-edited study, which focussed on mid-twentieth-century stepfamilies, she found that several interviewees described stepmothers with whom they got along well as 'not stepmothers,' because they did not resemble the stereotype.<sup>33</sup> Other interviewees thought it was unusual that they had good relationships with their stepsiblings due to an ingrained idea that 'stepsiblings ought not to be felt as real brothers and sisters.'<sup>34</sup> Just as this study finds that the experience of being an only child (and having siblings) depended on a variety of factors, the experience of having step- and half-siblings was subject to influences such as age gaps, co-residency, and amount of contact if not co-resident.<sup>35</sup>

Having discussed the particular suitability of autobiographies and oral histories for analysis in this study, it is necessary to discuss how these were found and used, and the issues that arose. Autobiographies and oral histories were identified using the definition of an only child as a person who either had never had any siblings of any kind, had step- or half-siblings who had never co-resided with them, or had lost an older or younger sibling they had either never known or only known for a short amount of time (usually defined as two or three years). Subjects born between 1845 and 1945 were included in the study, because this meant that an optimum amount of meaningful only-child experiences would fall in this thesis' period of 1850-1950. Given the limitations of recording technology, however, no oral history interviewees in the study were born before 1887.

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<sup>32</sup> Natasha Burchardt, 'Stepchildren's Memories: Myth, Understanding, and Forgiveness', in Samuel and Thompson (eds.), *The Myths We Live By*, pp. 239, 240, 249.

<sup>33</sup> Gill Gorell Barnes, Paul Thompson, Gwyn Daniel and Natasha Burchardt, *Growing Up In Stepfamilies*, (Oxford, 1998), pp. 124.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127-8.

Only-child autobiographers were identified in two key ways. The first of these involved searching for the term “only child” in the online Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB).<sup>36</sup> The biographies of only children born in the specified period which appeared as a result were then searched for references to autobiographies, which were subsequently located in libraries and online bookstores. This method was largely successful, though a small number of entries wrongly described their subjects as only children, the mistake only being uncovered upon reading the subjects’ autobiographies. The second method of identifying suitable autobiographies involved examining *The Autobiography of the Working Class* bibliography for references to autobiographies by only children.<sup>37</sup> These books were then also borrowed or purchased in order to increase the proportion of working-class subjects in the study. One autobiography was identified as a result of studying an oral history interview with its writer.

Similar methods were used to compile a ‘control group’ of autobiographies by writers of various birth positions. The ODNB was searched for anyone born between 1845 and 1945 who had written an autobiography. A roughly balanced representation of sex and decade of birth was achieved by choosing the first two women or three men, or three women and two men, listed within each decade of birth and whose autobiographies were relatively accessible. Further sources were found using library catalogues. In the case of the control group, autobiographies were also chosen for their relative availability.

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<sup>36</sup> ‘Oxford Dictionary of National Biography’, <http://www.odnb.com/public/index.html>, (accessed 4/7/2016).

<sup>37</sup> Burnett, Vincent, and Mayall (eds.), *The Autobiography of the Working Class*.

Most of the autobiographies used in this study broadly conformed to the typical *bildungsroman* format. Not all autobiographers presented their childhoods as happy and conflict-free, resulting in a helpful mixture of positive and negative experiences. A small number of autobiographies were described as 'as told to' a more accomplished writer, or were published posthumously, suggesting some family intervention. Naturally, the remainder of the autobiographies would have had more 'invisible' editors and motivators. A small number focussed entirely on childhood, and therefore provided a disproportionate amount of information for this study. At the opposite extreme, some autobiographies, often those of men who had worked in politics, featured frustratingly little information about childhood.

The majority of the oral histories used in this study originated in the British Library's collection. It also utilised a small number of transcripts from Paul Thompson's 'Edwardians' interview collection. Existing oral history interviews were analysed in order to avoid the anticipated difficulty of locating willing only-child interviewees of appropriate ages. This method also saved the considerable money and time it would have taken to travel to interview locations, conduct interviews, and transcribe them, and allowed the inclusion of interviewees who had since died. It also meant there was more time to conduct a thorough analysis of the autobiographies and interviews, as well as examine other sources.

This approach has been condoned by eminent oral historian Joanna Bornat, as it can bring fresh interpretations to old interviews. The original interviewer would have brought their own focus, and therefore discarded information not

relevant to their own interests. A listener with a different focus might therefore use the same interview for different purposes and make new discoveries.<sup>38</sup> Another proponent of the re-use of oral history interviews is April Gallwey, who has used the Millennium Memory Bank at the British Library to research mid-twentieth-century experiences of single parenthood. She has supported Louise Corti and Paul Thompson's argument that life story interviews particularly lend themselves to re-use because such a wealth of information on different subjects emerges during the interview.<sup>39</sup> All the oral history interviews from the British Library used in this research adopted the 'life story' approach described earlier in this chapter.<sup>40</sup> The 'Edwardians' interviewees were only asked about their lives up to 1918, but they nonetheless fulfilled the purposes of this study as they all looked back on their childhoods from the position of adulthood. There was some variation in how much of each interview from the British Library concentrated on childhood. The recordings in the collection of interviews with geriatrics specialists, for example, skimmed over the details of their childhoods. Other interviewers, especially those for the Women's Liberation oral history project, asked their interviewees about their childhoods at particular length. As with autobiographies, these differing focuses made some interviews more suited to this thesis' purposes than others.

The majority of the interviewers were skilled at their jobs and knew how to get information from interviewees by using pre-set questionnaires, yet asking

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<sup>38</sup> Joanna Bornat, 'A Second Take: Revisiting Interviews with a Different Purpose', *Oral History*, 31:1 (2003), p. 50.

<sup>39</sup> April Gallwey, 'The Rewards of Using Archived Oral Histories in Research: The Case of the Millennium Memory Bank', *Oral History*, 41:1 (2013), pp. 46, 47.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, p. 231.

for clarification and further information when necessary. In many cases, the interviewer asked useful follow-up questions upon hearing that the interviewee was an only child, or the interviewee themselves volunteered their opinion on only-childhood. It was frustrating, however, when this did not occur. There was a second interviewee present for two of the interviews, which may have inhibited the main interviewees' responses. A few interviews were more labour-intensive to listen to than others because they did not follow a straight path from childhood to adulthood.

Recordings of interviews with only children held by the British Library were found by performing a keyword search in the Library's catalogue, Explore, for the terms "oral history" and "only child".<sup>41</sup> The British Library hosts collections of oral history interviews on a variety of themes, and interviews were chosen from a range of these, including City Lives, Lives in Steel, Artists' Lives, The Oral History of Geriatrics as a Medical Speciality, The Communist Party Oral History Project, and Mass Conservatism: An Oral History of the Conservative Party. Initially, due to gender imbalance in the overall collection, all eligible women's interviews were used, with interviews with men then being 'matched' to each woman's interview according to decade of birth. However, as Table 1 shows, there was an imbalance in only-child women's favour in the end. This was due to the subsequent inclusion of the 'Edwardians' transcripts, which comprised more only-child women than only-child men. This additional set of interviews was sourced from the UK Data Service.<sup>42</sup> A 'control group' of oral history interviews with sibling children was compiled by selecting a set number of men and women

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<sup>41</sup> 'Explore the British Library', <http://explore.bl.uk>, (accessed 4/7/2016).

<sup>42</sup> 'UK Data Service', <http://ukdataservice.ac.uk>, (accessed 4/7/2016).



from certain collections for each decade, in order to provide a balance of sexes, birth decades, and adult occupations. This was selected from interviews available on the British Library's 'Sounds' website.<sup>43</sup> Transcripts, where available, were used in conjunction with recordings in order to save the substantial amount of time it takes to listen to and transcribe even part of a life-story interview.

Prior to studying the sources, several sets of research questions were identified based upon common ideas about only children. Identifying these questions made it easier to decide which information to record from the sources, in the form of notes or direct quotation. Although adult occupations were noted, and are included in the biographical dictionary in the appendix, this thesis' analysis focussed on the 'childhood' elements of the sources.

This was because it was found that once subjects left school, there was huge variation in their life courses, and the way they presented them. Additionally, it became obvious to the researcher that it would be virtually impossible to measure the effects of only-childhood in adulthood, not least because it so often appeared to have no such effects.

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<sup>43</sup> 'British Library – Sounds', <http://sounds.bl.uk>, (accessed 4/7/2016).

	Only children			Non-only children			Totals
	Autobiographies	Oral histories	Total	Autobiographies	Oral histories	Total	
	81	63	144	32	24	56	200
<b>Sex</b>							
Male	60	27	87	16	11	27	114
Female	21	36	57	16	13	29	86
<b>Decade of birth</b>							
1840s	2	-	2	1	-	1	3
1850s	4	-	4	3	-	3	7
1860s	6	-	6	2	-	2	8
1870s	0	-	0	4	-	4	4
1880s	8	1	9	3	0	3	12
1890s	12	7	19	3	1	4	23
1900s	20	8	28	3	4	7	35
1910s	9	9	18	3	5	8	26
1920s	12	14	26	3	5	8	34
1930s	7	12	19	3	5	8	27
1940s	1	12	13	4	4	8	21
<b>Class*</b>							
Poor working	12	5	17	7	0	7	24
Comfortable working	7	14	21	6	3	9	30
Lower middle	19	28	47	2	10	12	59
Upper middle	33	11	43	10	9	19	63
Upper	3	0	3	3	2	5	8
Unsure	7	5	12	3	1	4	16

**Table 1: Attributes of the only and non-only children in this study.** \*Class was defined, variously, by taking note of subjects' self-descriptions, fathers' occupations, and whether or not the family had servants.

Table 1 shows the representations of sex, birth decade and class in the autobiographies and oral histories used in this study, and requires some attention and explanation. The large gap between male and female autobiographers occurred because difficulties identifying and locating these sources meant that every suitable autobiography by an only child available was analysed. Considering men's lives were less restricted than those of women for much of this period, it is natural that there was more supply of, and demand for, their life stories, and they are therefore over-represented.

The over-representation of women in the only-child oral histories only goes some way towards making up this deficiency. However, it is worth noting that quantity does not always guarantee quality; it has already been mentioned that certain men wrote little about their childhoods. In accordance with this, Jane Hamlett found woman autobiographers more likely to write about their domestic lives in childhood than men. Consequentially, she read twice as many autobiographies by men than by women for her work on middle-class home life.<sup>44</sup>

Table 1 also shows that the majority of the only children in this study were born between 1890 and 1940. This reflects the increasing popularity of life-writing, the increased likelihood of survival of autobiographies that were published more recently, and the advent of recording technology, as well as the increase in only children born during this period. This birth period coincides with the decades in which only children most often appeared in childrearing manuals, as growing numbers of only children attracted increasing concern. It also encompasses both World Wars, which is particularly useful when analysing the effects of war on only children's experiences.

It also seems inevitable that the middle classes are over-represented. As we saw in chapter 2, middle-class couples were more likely than working-class couples to choose to have an only child in this period. Furthermore, their more advantageous social position could be a springboard for their children to have lives that were 'interesting' and public enough to warrant an autobiography. Nonetheless, the poor and better-off working classes are

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<sup>44</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 17.

healthily represented in this study. It includes a high proportion of comfortable working- and lower middle-class only-child interviewees, demonstrating the usefulness of the medium in recording the history of 'ordinary' individuals. Sixteen subjects' classes were categorised as 'unsure' by the researcher. It was usually possible to determine a person's class based on their self-description, father's job, or description of their home. In these cases, however, it was difficult to make such a judgement, for example, because their family broke up, or experienced changes in financial or domestic circumstances. Reasons for each case where class was too difficult to determine are given in the biographical dictionary in Appendix 1.

<b>Reason for being an only child</b>	<b>Autobiographies</b>	<b>Oral Histories</b>	<b>Total</b>
Combination of two or more reasons	4	2	6
Death of sibling	5	6	11
Divorce/separation	3	0	3
Illegitimacy	1	0	1
Lack of money	1	0	1
Lack of space	1	0	1
Orphaned	1	0	1
Parent widowed	8	4	13
Parents' age	2	7	9
Parents did not want more children	2	3	5
Parents' health	10	5	15
Unexplained	43	36	78
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>144</b>

**Table 2: Reasons given by writers and interviewees for being only children.**

Table 2 details the various reasons given, if any, by only children for their not having siblings. Most writers and interviewees did not give a reason for only-childhood. This could be due to their parents never giving them a reason, their simply not considering it a fact worthy of mention, reticence, protection of their parents, or the subject not arising or being pursued in interviews. Parents' age and health scored particularly highly as reasons for only-childhood. The second and third most common reasons, 'widowhood' and 'death of sibling', point towards the higher mortality rates, particularly among children, in the earlier part of the period. These statistics could suggest that having an only child was a matter of chance rather than choice for many parents in this period. Alternatively, it may have been more obvious to only children when they did not have siblings for these reasons, rather than as a result of parental choice. Individual reasons for only-childhood, where provided by the autobiographer or interviewee, are included in the biographical dictionary in Appendix 1.

The qualitative research program QSR NVivo was used to synthesise and analyse notes and quotations from childrearing manuals, autobiographies and oral history interviews. This program, which has been through several editions since its release in 1999, is designed for anyone who uses qualitative data such as interviews, open-ended survey responses, and articles. Its key market comprises academics, and government and market researchers. It promised a more efficient and effective way of organising,

discovering, and investigating connections within this thesis' data – 200 Microsoft Word documents – than more traditional paper-based methods.<sup>45</sup>

While NVivo appears particularly associated with social scientists, who base a lot of their research on unstructured interviews and observations, its use to organise and analyse historical sources is not without precedent. Social historian Joanne Begiato is a particular proponent of the program, having used it for various projects including her research into continuity and change in conceptions and lived experience of masculinity over the early modern period. Using it to categorise passages from prescriptive literature and 'ego-documents' such as diaries and letters allowed her 'connect the broader cultural framework, ideas and values with personal reflections, memories and behaviours.'<sup>46</sup> This work is also concerned with connections, as it asks how only children interacted with societal ideas about their kind, as well as the factors that meant some only children were similar in some ways, but not others.

Another social historian, Kate Bradley, has written that 'NVivo made short work of the management of the research process, and of ensuring a rigorous analysis.'<sup>47</sup> For this thesis, too, NVivo provided an efficient alternative to the equivalent method of manually cutting, labelling and highlighting hard copies

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<sup>45</sup> 'What is NVivo? | QSR International', <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/what-is-nvivo>, (accessed 5/12/2017); 'Our History | QSR International', <http://www.qsrinternational.com/about-us/history>, (accessed 5/12/2017); 'NVivo qualitative data analysis software | QSR International', <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/who-uses-nvivo>, (accessed 5/12/2017).

<sup>46</sup> 'Grappling with Continuity and Change in the History of Masculinities – Joanne Begiato Muses on History', <https://jbhist.wordpress.com/2013/07/22/grappling-with-continuity-and-change-in-the/>, (accessed 5/12/2017).

<sup>47</sup> 'Why historians should love NVivo – Kate Bradley', <https://katebradleyhistorian.wordpress.com/2012/06/01/why-historians-should-love-nvivo/>, (accessed 5/12/2017).

of the research material, and decreased the chances of overlooking crucial and useful information. It featured the same level of human agency (and human error) as more 'traditional' methods. No part of the process was 'automated', as the program enables researchers to sort data according to their own personal requirements by highlighting text and assigning it to categories they have defined themselves.

The process of using NVivo involved importing Microsoft Word documents containing notes and quotations from this study's collection of autobiographies and oral history interviews into the program. The next step was to create a set of 'nodes' – headings corresponding to different ideas about only-childhood. Excerpts from each document were then 'coded' – or assigned – to relevant nodes. When a particular node was selected, NVivo would display all the excerpts coded to it as well as links back to the original documents. From there, it was possible to break the data down further by assigning them to more specific sub-nodes. As an example, text that had been coded to the 'spoiling' node was subsequently reassigned to sub-nodes such as 'materially spoiled', 'not materially spoiled', 'emotionally spoiled' and 'not emotionally spoiled'. When, for instance, 'materially spoiled', was selected, text relating to only children who described being materially spoiled was displayed. It was then possible to choose illustrative examples and view the original files in order to determine the factors that influenced particular only children's experiences.

NVivo also has the facility to create a database of quantitative metadata for each original document. This made it possible to use the program to

maintain a record of subjects' attributes such as decade of birth, class, and reason for being an only child. Outputs from this database can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.

As mentioned previously, chapters 4-10 begin with explanations of the ideas about only-childhood they focus on. These explanations include evidence from two historical sources: childrearing manuals from between around 1850 and 1960, and Mass Observation responses from 1944 and 1949. The manuals demonstrate and explain the development of certain only-child stereotypes. These are echoed in the other explanatory sources as well as the testimonies of only children themselves. These were primarily used because they are a particularly accessible exemplar of well-circulated ideas about only children. Davidoff and Catherine Hall have asserted that there was a clear supply and demand for such work in the earlier part of the period under consideration, and Sally Shuttleworth has written that 'the Victorians were deluged by domestic medicine and child-rearing manuals.'<sup>48</sup> The sheer volume of advice books published during this period has no doubt aided their survival. The ideas published in manuals also reached people through popular fiction, radio talks, magazines and journals, psychology clubs, lectures, courses, newspapers, book reviews, advice from social workers, and contact with child guidance clinics, especially from the 1920s. With exceptions, many of these other sources have survived only in piecemeal form, if at all.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 156; Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 48.

<sup>49</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 2, 89, 107-17, 133, 304-322, 362; Nikolas Rose, *The Psychological Complex: Psychiatry, Politics and Society in England, 1869-1939*, (London, 1985), p. 203; Cathy Urwin and Elaine Sharland, 'From Bodies to Minds in



King has suggested that ‘the presentation of academic and medical expertise in the press was perhaps more influential than the texts themselves, due to the much higher circulations of newspapers than parenting manuals and the like.’<sup>50</sup> She also advised that manuals and newspapers should be ideally used in tandem, so researchers can see how newspapers stripped experts’ ideas of their subtleties for a mass audience.<sup>51</sup> While many contemporary manuals referred to only children who had turned out well due to judicious parenting – and paying to consult an expert – the message about only children that has survived does seem to be overwhelmingly negative.<sup>52</sup> Searches in historical newspaper resources The British Newspaper Archive, ProQuest Digital Newspapers: *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, and *The Times* Digital Archive for occurrences of the term ‘only child’ in articles between 1850 and 1950 return thousands of results.<sup>53</sup> The relevant results must be manually picked out from irrelevant results such as birth, marriage and death announcements. Unfortunately, due to time restraints, the analysis of autobiographies and oral history interviews which make this

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Childcare Literature: Advice to Parents in Inter-war Britain’, in Roger Cooter (ed.), *In The Name of the Child: Health and Welfare, 1880-1940*, (London, 1992), p. 193; Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Oxford, 2006), pp. 19-22, 32, 34, 114-15; Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, pp. 31, 33, 40, 62, 71, 97, 133.

<sup>50</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 91-2

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Harrison, *Misunderstood Children: Sketches Taken From Life*, (Chicago, 1910), <https://archive.org/details/misunderstoodchi00inharr>, (accessed 4/7/2016), pp. 140-50; Dr. Alexandra Adler, ‘The Only Child’, in Alfred Adler and associates, *Guiding the Child on the Principles of Individual Psychology*, (London, 1930), pp. 197-201, 202-6; Agatha Bowley, *Modern Child Psychology*, (London, 1948), p. 96; Elizabeth Harrison, *When Children Err*, (Chicago, 1916), pp. 15-22; Douglas Thom, *Everyday Problems of the Everyday Child*, (London, 1927), pp. 19-20; Agatha Bowley, *Modern Child Psychology*, (London, 1948), pp. 82-3.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Advanced Search | British Newspaper Archive’,

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/advanced>, (accessed 6/12/2017);

‘Advanced Search - ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and The Observer – ProQuest’, <https://search.proquest.com/advanced?accountid=16821>, (accessed 6/12/2017);

‘The Times Digital Archive | Advanced Search’,

[http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/start.do?prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=ess\\_earl](http://find.galegroup.com/ttda/start.do?prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=ess_earl), (accessed 6/12/2017).

thesis' arguments had to be prioritised over obtaining further details about contemporary perceptions of only children from newspaper articles.

However, if this study were to be expanded, it is anticipated that these sources would be an illuminating addition.

Not only were the ideas in childrearing manuals well-circulated, but Hendrick and Julia Grant have argued that they reflected dominant public attitudes, whether writers assumed that parents shared them or required instruction in them, or whether parents even read them at all.<sup>54</sup> This is exemplified by the findings of Daniel Beekman, and Cathy Urwin and Elaine Sharland, that the approach of childrearing manuals changed in accordance with national concerns. Examples from the 1930s and 1940s include writers adopting more forgiving attitudes towards unemployment in the light of the Depression, encouraging parents to be less authoritarian in reaction to the rise of fascism in Europe, and addressing worries about the effects of war on children.<sup>55</sup>

The numbers of editions manuals went through also show how authors adapted their messages in order to stay relevant; for example, Hector Charles Cameron's *The Nervous Child* went through five editions between 1919 and 1946, and Dr. Benjamin Spock's seminal *Baby and Child Care*, first published in 1946, reached its ninth edition in 2011.<sup>56</sup> Spock explained in the volume's second edition, published in 1958, that when the first edition was

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<sup>54</sup> Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 31; Grant, 'Parent-child Relations', pp. 108, 113.

<sup>55</sup> Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, p. 185; Urwin and Sharland, 'From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature', pp.183-5, 189.

<sup>56</sup> 'The nervous child, (Book, 1946) [WorldCat.org]', <http://www.worldcat.org/title/nervous-child/oclc/1580688>, (accessed 9/12/2017); 'Dr Spock's Baby & Childcare 9th Edition | Book by Dr Benjamin Spock, Dr Robert Needlman | Official Publisher Page | Simon & Schuster UK', <http://www.simonandschuster.co.uk/books/Dr-Spocks-Baby-Childcare-9th-Edition/Dr-Benjamin-Spock/9780857205261>, (accessed 9/12/2017).

published, most parents still took a 'fairly strict and inflexible' approach to feeding, toilet training and 'general child management', so he had to particularly encourage them to use his more relaxed and flexible methods. By contrast, parents reading the second edition were more liable to be too indulgent towards their children, so he 'tried to give a more balanced view.'<sup>57</sup>

However, there are also several disadvantages of using childrearing manuals as a source, which is why this thesis only uses them for descriptive purposes, and in conjunction with other sources that echo their messages. Jay Mechling has particularly criticised such works for reflecting the views of their writers, rather than parents themselves.<sup>58</sup> He and other historians have discussed how these viewpoints were particularly middle-class. Childrearing manuals were marketed to middle-class parents, and therefore about middle-class children, while working-class parents were seen as too unintelligent to take manual-writers' advice.<sup>59</sup> However, the dissemination of manual-writers' ideas through other sources, as mentioned above, and the fact that working-class Mass Observation interviewees and only children repeated such ideas throughout this thesis, suggests that they were well-known enough to validate their use.<sup>60</sup>

Another disadvantage of childrearing manuals that historians have identified is that whether parents bought them themselves or received them as gifts,

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<sup>57</sup> Dr. Benjamin Spock, *Baby and Child Care*, (new and enlarged edition, London, 1958), pp. 11-12.

<sup>58</sup> Jay Mechling, 'Advice to Historians on Advice to Mothers', *Journal of Social History*, 9:1 (1975), pp. 53, 55-6.

<sup>59</sup> Mechling, 'Advice to Historians', p. 47; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 32; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, p. xv.

<sup>60</sup> Rose, *The Psychological Complex*, p. 203; Urwin and Sharland, 'From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature', p. 193; Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, pp. 19-22, 32, 34, 114-15; Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, pp. 31, 33, 40, 62, 71, 97, 133.

they did not necessarily take their advice, or even read them. They might have prioritised the knowledge of childrearing they had gained by observing other parents, or only taken written advice if they felt particularly unconfident in and/or sensitive to criticism of their existing techniques.<sup>61</sup> This thesis regularly asks how well individual parents' methods conformed to contemporary prescription. However, even if parents were continuing to have only children despite manuals' criticisms, this does not mean that they did not imbibe and repeat their views, hence the continued survival of negative ideas about only children. Psychologist Adriean Mancillas has recently found that only children and their parents commonly insist that they or their child is an exception to stereotypes, thus implying that assumptions about only children are usually valid.<sup>62</sup> It is for this reason that, where possible, this thesis explores the feelings of the parents of only children about having one child, as well as only children's feelings about being only children.

As suggested above, childrearing manuals evolved over the period under study as attitudes towards children and approaches to childrearing changed. As the last chapter showed, this was not a unanimous or uncomplicated shift, and books recommending strict and regimented practices co-existed with manuals that advocated a more tactile and indulgent approach. For example, during the 1920s and 1930s, the behaviourist group of child psychologists recommended extremely unemotional and regimented

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<sup>61</sup> Mechling, 'Advice to Historians', pp. 49-50; Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 3; Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', pp. 124-5.

<sup>62</sup> Adriean Mancillas, cited in Sandler, *One and Only*, p. 29.

treatment of children reminiscent of nineteenth-century prescription.<sup>63</sup> As Pollock has found, and this thesis shows, parents' attitudes and behaviour did not always line up neatly with contemporary advice.<sup>64</sup>

A particularly important shift in childrearing literature during this period was that in focus from children's bodies to their minds, and the associated influx of early psychologists and their ideas into the field.<sup>65</sup> According to Shuttleworth, scholars were interested in the 'inner workings of the child mind' from around 1840. However, she was unable to find any childrearing manuals that referred to issues such as night terrors or nervous disorders published before 1848, and it was at the end of the nineteenth century that psychology truly emerged as a separate discipline with a particular interest in children.<sup>66</sup> Having already made themselves indispensable in the field of education, psychologists wished to expand their influence to the general public, through magazines as well as books.<sup>67</sup> Thus, while the manuals of the earlier part of the period were commonly written by self-appointed moralists and domestic advice-givers, in the early-twentieth century they were increasingly written by doctors and psychologists who claimed to have based them on their clinical experiences – and, thus, abnormal cases. This change also reflected the growing idea that environment had more influence

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<sup>63</sup> Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, pp. 132, 185, 188-9, 191; Newson and Newson, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing', pp. 61-3; Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 11, 267, 277; Stephen Lassande, 'Age, Schooling, and Development', in Fass (ed.), *The Routledge History of Childhood*, p. 222; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 175-6; Urwin and Sharland, 'From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature', pp. 177-8.

<sup>64</sup> Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, p. 45.

<sup>65</sup> Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, p. 39; Urwin and Sharland, 'From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature', p. 175; Newson and Newson, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing', pp. 53-4.

<sup>66</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 48, 221, 268-9.

<sup>67</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 2; Marc Brysbart and Kathy Rastle, *Historical and Conceptual Issues in Psychology*, (Harlow, 2009), p. 473; Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, pp. 32, 50, 135; Rose, *The Psychological Complex*, p. 203.

over a child's character than heredity. Only children would have been regarded as more prone to psychological problems if their home environment was blamed for character faults rather than inherent 'sin' that had to be tamed with moral instruction. Similarly, writers indicated that children from extremely large families, children of separated or divorced parents, illegitimate, middle, favourite, and step- children each came with their own sets of potential problems.<sup>68</sup>

This increasing participation of psychologists in manual-writing, and growing concern with children's minds, meant that references to only children in prescriptive literature were only occasional in the final decades of the nineteenth century, and proliferated in the first few decades of the twentieth century. This is reflected in the spread of references to only children in the 42 discrete childrearing manuals published between 1850 and 1960 this thesis uses, as shown in Table 3 below. These manuals were found using the reference sections of existing histories of such manuals and modern studies of only children, references to similar works in the manuals themselves, and personal knowledge of popular manual-writers during this period. The vast majority of these appeared in Britain; a small number that did not appear to have done so nonetheless contained sentiments echoed in British publications.

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<sup>68</sup> Agatha Bowley, *The Problems of Family Life*, (Edinburgh, 1948), p. 7; Oskar Spiel and Ferdinand Birnbaum, 'The School and Educational Guidance', Adler and associates, *Guiding the Child*, p. 81; Alfred Adler, *What Life Could Mean To You*, (1931, translation Oxford 1992), pp. 26-7; Cyril Burt, *The Subnormal Mind*, (London, 1955), p. 242; Edith Buxbaum, *Your Child Makes Sense*, (New York, 1949) p. 177; Mary Chadwick, *Difficulties in Child Development*, (London, 1928), pp. 328-30, 353; H. Addington Bruce, *Handicaps of Children*, (New York, 1917), <https://archive.org/details/handicapschildh00brucgoog>, (accessed 4/7/2016), pp. 55-8.

Although more than 42 manuals were accessed in the first instance, many from the nineteenth century were disregarded, or used for background information instead. This was because, in keeping with the shifts that occurred during this period, titles such as *Our Children, and how to keep them well and treat them when they are ill* (Robert Bell, Glasgow, 1887), and *Care and Feeding of Children* (Luther Emmett Holt, New York, 1894) primarily focussed on bodily health, and therefore yielded no information about perceptions of only children. Other titles, such as *Enjoy Your Baby* (E. Elias, London, 1945), focussed on small infants who were as yet too young to experience the problems of only-childhood. Similarly, the work of behaviourists such as John B. Watson or Frederic and Mary Truby King from the 1920s and 1930s were deemed of little use to this study because they 'focused predominantly on physical development.'<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 92.

Decade of Publication	Number of publications
1850-59	2
1860-69	3
1870-79	1
1880-89	0
1890-99	4
1900-09	1
1910-19	8
1920-29	7
1930-39	6
1940-49	4
1950-59	6

**Table 3: Number of childrearing manuals that contained references to only children, by publication decade.**

References to only children in manuals in the earlier part of the period tended to take the form of vignettes in which they had been mishandled by their parents, rather than concerted criticisms of only children as an entity. By contrast, some later manuals devoted entire chapters to the faults of only children. It might have been possible to find many more examples, but it was decided that as several books made similar points, any further reading would be unlikely to uncover new information. It was felt that the remainder of the research time available would be better spent analysing the autobiographies and oral histories which make this thesis' arguments.

However, the imbalance in the distribution of these manuals does not undermine this study in any way. For one thing, these sources are only used



to show how certain ideas about children can be seen in various books over the course of the period, and that these were not the only place people would come across them. For another, many autobiographers and oral history interviewees born throughout the period under study recalled being aware of their only-child status, and subject to negative ideas about only children. Furthermore, the earliest autobiographies used in this thesis were published in 1921. Therefore, even if ideas about only children were less common earlier in subjects' lives, they were likely to have picked them up as they grew older and the ideas became increasingly well-circulated, and used them to interpret their childhood experiences.

This thesis also uses responses to Mass Observation's 'Family Surveys' from 1944 and 1949 to demonstrate the existence and widespread knowledge of certain ideas about only children. The 1944 survey, which primarily informed the conclusions of the organisation's 1945 publication, *Britain and her Birth-Rate*, was carried out by volunteers, primarily with married women in their London homes. Respondents' answers to the questions 'how many children would you like to have yourself?' and '(if 3 or under and this more than she has at present) why don't you want more than that?' were of particular use to this thesis. The 1949 survey was conducted by post, and asked respondents a small number of open-ended questions regarding their 'ideal' family size and structure, their reasons for this and why this was or was not achievable. Unlike the 1944 interviews, Mass Observation did not ultimately analyse and publish the findings from the 1949 surveys. This is presumably because the

significant increase in the birth rate in the years after the Second World War allayed researchers' fears about a shrinking population.<sup>70</sup>

Between them, these two sets of surveys covered a range of people. The London interviewees of 1944 were mostly of classes 'C' ('Artisan and skilled Working Class) and 'D' (Unskilled Working Class) according to Mass Observation's classification system; in this system, 'B' referred to 'Middle Class'.<sup>71</sup> It is unclear how Mass Observation arrived at this system, but it is strikingly similar to Stevenson's census classification system, described in chapter 2.<sup>72</sup> There is no way to conclusively determine the social classes of respondents to the 1949 'Ideal Family' questionnaire. However, some of them were doctors, and others were members of the Mass Observation Panel, largely lower middle-class volunteers who had been recruited by newspaper advertisements.<sup>73</sup> As discussed below, the different approaches and questions asked to the respondents lent themselves to different types of response. However, it is nonetheless useful to this thesis that respondents to both surveys referred to negative ideas about only children without prompting.

Both set of surveys offer unparalleled access to a range of 'ordinary' people's opinions at this time. This echoes the organisation's over-arching aim 'to enable the masses to speak for themselves, to make their voices heard

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<sup>70</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Population*, p. 241; Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, p. 214.

<sup>71</sup> Mass Observation, *Britain and her Birth-Rate*, p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Stevenson, 'The Fertility of Various Social Classes', pp. 410-11; Szreter, *Fertility, Class and Gender*, p. 256.

<sup>73</sup> Nick Hubble, *Mass Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory*, (Hampshire, 2006), pp. 80-81; James Hinton, *The Mass Observers: A History, 1937-1949*, (Oxford, 2013), pp. 270, 278.

above the din created by press and politicians speaking in their name.<sup>74</sup>

Mass Observation themselves admitted that the responses to the 1944 survey should be treated with some caution, as 'they indicate verbal attitudes, expressed to a stranger in the street or on the doorstep.'<sup>75</sup>

However, they believed that their small, verbatim sample brought them closer to 'real answers' about fertility than tick-box questionnaires, which would also have been of little use to this study.<sup>76</sup> It is possible that the responses to the 1944 fertility survey were influenced by the interviewees' immediate experience of the privations of war in a way that the 1949 responses were not. However, this thesis argues that just as the respondents of 1949 discussed their 'ideal' families and the obstacles that prevented them from achieving them, many of the 1944 respondents spoke of the size of family they would like to have once the war was over. They additionally referred to the disadvantages of only-childhood while acknowledging that it was inadvisable for them to have a second child in their present circumstances.

A frequent criticism of Mass Observation's surveys and anthropological studies of the working classes has been that, as middle-class observers, they came across as patronising, voyeuristic, and even 'sneering' towards their subjects.<sup>77</sup> Volunteer interviewers' descriptions of their interviewees sometimes give this impression. For example, one interviewer described how a 32-year-old Class C mother's only child was 'a well-grown girl dressed very neatly in a navy-blue suit with spotless white blouse; the mother

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<sup>74</sup> Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Mass Observation, *Britain and her Birth-Rate*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>77</sup> Hubble, *Mass Observation and Everyday Life*, p. 1; Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, pp. 86, 211.

evidently took great pride in her and the child herself would be taken for a Class B child.<sup>78</sup> However, as indicated above, volunteers were trained to record interviewees' answers verbatim, and this thesis is concerned with these, rather than interviewers' opinions of their subjects.<sup>79</sup>

As for the 1949 questionnaires, one of Mass Observation's founders, Tom Harrisson, felt that such material was more valuable than opinion polls as it reflected what people were thinking as opposed to what they were prepared to say to a stranger.<sup>80</sup> While the 1944 survey generated spontaneous responses as it was conducted in person, the 1949 responses, being gathered by mail, were likely to have been more considered. Both types of survey have value for different reasons. The 1944 respondents' verbal comments about only children show how close negative ideas about them were to the forefront of their minds. By contrast, the 1949 respondents' written comments were possibly more likely to reflect the negative ideas about only children that, on balance, they saw as most important. Using both sets of surveys generates as rounded a view as possible of the ideas held by the general public about only children at this time. As indicated above, though, the Mass Observation Panel were disproportionately lower middle-class. They also over-represented London and the south east, and leaned to the left politically.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, the fact that they volunteered for the Panel suggests that they were likely to have been particularly opinionated and willing to share their thoughts. As it was not mandatory to respond to every directive, with the exception of a few who wrote very little on the

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<sup>78</sup> M-O A: TC 3 Family Planning 1944-49, 3-1-D Surveys.

<sup>79</sup> Mass Observation, *Britain and her Birth-Rate*, p. 11.

<sup>80</sup> Hubble, *Mass Observation and Everyday Life*, p. 8.

<sup>81</sup> Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, pp. 270, 278.

questionnaire because they did not find it interesting, people who did not care about the subject would simply have not replied. There is little that can be done about the geographical concentration of the two sets of surveys. Nonetheless, these views of 'ordinary people' show how negative ideas about only children were not confined to childrearing manuals.

Around 1,600 surveys were read for this thesis; 787 with married women from 1944, 213 supplementary surveys that were carried out with men at this time, and approximately 600 'Ideal Family' questionnaires from 1949. Responses that referred to certain ideas about only children were recorded and categorised; the results of this can be seen in Table 4.

<b>Characteristic of only children</b>	<b>Responses referring to this characteristic</b>
Being spoiled	39
Loneliness	35
Difficulties socialising with other children	33
Overly-anxious parents	12
Selfishness	10

**Table 4: Characteristics attributed to only children by 1944 fertility survey respondents and 1949 'Ideal Family' respondents from Mass Observation TC 3/3-1-A, TC 3/3-1-B, TC 3/3-1-C, TC 3/3-1-D, TC 3/3-1-E, TC 3/3-1-F, TC 3/3-1-G, TC 3/3-1-H, TC 3/3-1-I (Surveys), and TC 3/3-4-A, TC 3/3-4-B, TC 3/3-4-C, TC 3/3-4-D (Surveys).**

Respondents attributed a number of other characteristics to only children, but these are not included in Table 4 because they are not addressed by this thesis. Several interviewees were happy that they had only children; parents' views on having only children could be a fruitful topic for further study.

Autobiographies and oral history interviews are eminently suitable for this thesis' purposes, as writers and interviewees provide adequate representation of gender, class, and year of birth. They also remember personal events from their childhoods particularly well, and reveal how stereotypes of only children shape how they reflect upon their childhoods. Childrearing manuals and Mass Observation interviews pose more challenges and are therefore used, alongside examples and findings about only children from recent historical and sociological research, to introduce the characteristics that are examined in each analytical chapter. The fact that many autobiographers and interviewees refer to these ideas, and even incorporate them into their life stories, further demonstrates their potency. The next chapter begins this thesis' analysis by examining the idea that only children were unused to, and therefore shy of, other children.

#### **4. Relationships with other children**

Contemporary childrearing manual-writers, Mass Observation respondents, and historians of childhood and the family have shared the idea that during the period under examination, only children did not meet other children before starting school. As a result, only children were supposedly timid and unsure of how to interact with other children when they did meet them. Researchers of modern only children have consequentially addressed this idea. This chapter outlines what these groups have written about these supposedly common experiences of only children. It then analyses the cases of only children who claimed to have had, and not had, such experiences. It argues that the attitudes of parents and domestic circumstances in particular were more important influences than only-childhood on whether an only child was unused to, and therefore shy of, other children.

This thesis takes the viewpoint that personality originates from a complex interaction of genes and environment. This includes the environmental factors that influence only children's experiences, as well as genetic predispositions and genetically-influenced responses to these factors. These all contribute in unknown proportions and can differ between individuals. Psychological researchers have suggested that children have different temperaments from birth due to different combinations of genes, and that variable interactions between genes and environment determine the development of personality from there.<sup>1</sup> For example, an only child might be born with a timid disposition, but encouragement to socialise from their

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, (London, 2002), pp. 152-3, 179, 373, 396; Dan P. McAdams, *The Person: A New Introduction to Personality Psychology*, (New Jersey, 2006), pp. 211, 216, 220.

parents, and positive experiences of interacting with other children from a young age, might bring them out of themselves. Alternatively, they might resist these influences and remain reserved. Autobiographies and oral history interviews are particularly suitable sources for finding out about how people's personality traits differed and changed during their childhoods due to their reflective nature. As Fulbrook and Rublack have written, 'residues of earlier versions of selfhood and traces of earlier patterns of interpretation may be discerned' from them.<sup>2</sup>

American child psychologist Eugene W. Bohannon was the first person to conduct a study of only children using nascent scientific techniques, at the turn of the twentieth century. His approach of surveying high school and university students about the characteristics of particular only children they knew is regarded as deeply flawed today. This is because his questions drew out people's existing biases against only children, and he made firm conclusions that only children were prone to a dizzying range of negative characteristics. However, his work was seen as pioneering at the time.<sup>3</sup> Manual-writers who used psychological research to inform their writing on both sides of the Atlantic drew upon his findings, demonstrating that psychology was an international movement and justifying the inclusion of American manual-writers in this study. It was probably easy for Bohannon and other writers such as child psychologist Alice Hutchison to deduce that only children tended to have an 'isolated home life', and that most did not

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<sup>2</sup> Fulbrook and Rublack, 'In Relation', p. 267.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene W. Bohannon, *Exceptional Children and the Only Child in the Family*, dissertation reprinted in part from the *Pedagogical Seminary*, 1896 Vol. 4 and 1898, Vol. 5, (Duluth, 1912), <https://archive.org/details/exceptionalchild00boharich>, (accessed 4/7/2016), p. 10; Laybourn, *The Only Child*, p. 39; McKibben, *Maybe One*, pp. 28-9.



experience the same level of interaction with other children as sibling children.<sup>4</sup> Such isolation was supposed to have undesirable effects on only children's social personalities. Bohannon suggested that their lack of experience with other children in early childhood put them in a position where they were unable to understand, and therefore 'make approaches to' other children when they did meet them.<sup>5</sup> Alfred Adler, founder of the Individual Psychology movement of the 1920s and 1930s, concurred; only children were timid because they were 'unaccustomed to playing with other children.'<sup>6</sup> Other writers lamented that only children found it difficult to play games with other children because of their lack of experience of being with, and losing to, equals. Nurse Mary Chadwick warned in 1925 that 'school days are usually a reign of terror' for only children who were sore losers.<sup>7</sup> Child psychoanalyst Edith Buxbaum concurred in 1949 that 'children who fight and want to have their own way are a threat to the only child, who is not used to holding his own successfully with contemporaries.'<sup>8</sup>

These concerns reflected contemporary ideas about the need for children to be pro-social in order to work well with others, and advance the nation as productive, mentally-healthy adults. From the mid-nineteenth century, British public schools espoused being a proactive, loyal member of a team, and following the rules of team games, above all else. This was an attitude their

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<sup>4</sup> Bohannon, *Exceptional Children*, p. 23; Alice Hutchison, *The Child and his Problems*, (London, 1925), pp. 84-5.

<sup>5</sup> E. W. Bohannon, 'The Only Child in a Family', *Pedagogical Seminary*, 5 (1897-1898), p. 489; Bohannon, *Exceptional Children*, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred Adler, *What Life Could Mean to You*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Chadwick, *Psychology for Nurses*, (London, 1925), p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Buxbaum, *Your Child Makes Sense*, pp. 179-80.

alumni took into war and government.<sup>9</sup> These ideas that sports helped boys in particular to develop patience, diligence, resolution, productivity, ‘team spirit’, ‘loyalty, bravery, manliness, selflessness and honour’, as well as ‘muscular Christianity’ – a ‘robust, manly version of Anglicanism’ – spread to the lower classes, who needed such values to fight in wars and maintain the supremacy of the British Empire.<sup>10</sup> According to Bohannon, only children did not meet this criteria:

Many do not care for a large number of companions, and select one or two for friends with whom they prefer to spend most of the time. They do not, in numerous instances, enjoy crowds, and keep aloof from games, very often remaining in doors to talk to the teacher.<sup>11</sup>

Fitting in with one’s peers was also an increasing concern of child psychologists and manual-writers, who saw social maladjustment in childhood as a predictor of mental illness, and therefore anti-social behaviour, in later life. Inter-war manual writers regarded work, play, and competition with other children as key to the social adjustment, and therefore future success, of a child.<sup>12</sup>

It is therefore understandable that several advice-writers such as medical doctor and bacteriologist Alfred Donn  (writing in 1860), child psychologist William Forbush (1912), psychiatrist Douglas Thom (1927), and child psychoanalyst Edith Buxbaum (1949) warned that only children did not learn

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<sup>9</sup> Alex Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip: Secrets, Crimes and the Schooling of a Ruling Class*, (London, 2017), pp. 143-8, 150-55.

<sup>10</sup> Walvin, *A Child’s World*, pp. 79-85; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 81; G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency*, (London, 1971), pp. 9, 11, 13, 54, 66, 99; Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip*, pp. 143-4.

<sup>11</sup> Bohannon, ‘The Only Child in a Family’, p. 489.

<sup>12</sup> Deborah Thom, ‘Wishes, Anxieties, Play, and Gestures: Child Guidance in inter-war England, in Cooter, (ed.), *In The Name of the Child*, p. 210; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, p. 166; Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, p. 16.

how to adapt themselves to others, be part of a group, or deal with failure.<sup>13</sup> These concerns were particularly echoed by Mass Observation respondents from 1949, who, responding by post, had time to ruminate on the disadvantages of only-childhood. One Panel member lamented that an only child 'is not usually a good mixer when he grows up', and another that: 'only children, boy or girl, do not understand give and take and have to be treated more tactfully. Easily offended, have hardly ever heard the home truths brothers and sisters administer.'<sup>14</sup>

This chapter asks whether only children who grew up between 1850 and 1950 were commonly socially isolated during their formative years. It also asks if this affected their ability to socialise with their peers when they did meet them, and for how long. It analyses only children's testimonies for other factors that could determine whether an only child was unused to and timid of their peers. It therefore looks deeper into only children's accounts than Sulloway who, as the last chapter showed, maintained that only children's lack of experience socialising with their peers meant that they were less outgoing than oldest children.<sup>15</sup> Thea Thompson's *Edwardian Childhoods*, being an edited collection of diverse accounts, was not intended as an analysis. Nonetheless, Joan Poynder (born 1897), the sole only child in the collection, can be seen attributing her 'reserved' character to only-childhood, and thereby representing other only children as such. However, it is possible to identify other factors that may have shaped Poynder's character, such as

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<sup>13</sup> Alfred Donné, *Mothers and Infants, Nurses and Nursing*, (Boston, 1860), <https://archive.org/details/mothersandinfan01donngoog>, (accessed 4/7/2016), p. 209; William Forbush, *The Coming Generation*, (London, 1912), p. 41; Douglas Thom, *Everyday Problems*, pp. 179-80; Buxbaum, *Your Child Makes Sense*, p. 179.

<sup>14</sup> TC 3/3-4-C.

<sup>15</sup> Sulloway, *Born to Rebel*, pp. 32, 42, 101, 189, 204, 234, 503.

her upper-class parents' refusal to send her away to school because she was a girl, and her experience of her beloved nanny being replaced by a succession of uninspiring governesses.<sup>16</sup>

This chapter's examination of whether only children were commonly socially isolated, and therefore found it difficult to interact with other children, is further justified by recent research. This has asked similar questions but, as the introduction showed, taken a scientific, rather than a personal, approach.

Sociologist Ann Laybourn, environmentalist Bill McKibben, and psychotherapist Bernice Sorensen have all referred to persistent stereotypes that only children are 'maladjusted', 'socially challenged', and unable to interact with others, and presented evidence to the contrary.<sup>17</sup> Falbo's aggregation of various only-child studies found that only children are no different from others in terms of sociability, adjustment, or personality traits.<sup>18</sup>

Psychologist Susan Newman, meanwhile, cited the findings of family-size researcher Judith Blake that only children may even be more outgoing and popular than children from larger families.<sup>19</sup> Another study cited by Falbo concluded that while only children have less developed social skills when they start school, they soon catch up with their peers, disproving early-twentieth-century concerns that a timid child made for an anti-social adult.<sup>20</sup> With these findings in mind, this chapter turns to only children's accounts of their childhood interactions with other children.

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<sup>16</sup> Thea Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, (London, 1981), pp. 210, 211, 216, 217, 223.

<sup>17</sup> Laybourn, *The Only Child*, p. 1; McKibben, *Maybe One*, p. 20; Bernice Sorensen, *Only-Child Experience and Adulthood*, (London, 2008), pp. 4,15.

<sup>18</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: An Updated Review', pp. 40-41.

<sup>19</sup> Judith Blake, cited in Newman, *The Case for the Only Child*, p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: An Updated Review', pp. 43-4.

Lower middle-class poet Norman Nicholson, born in Millom, Cumberland, in 1914, lower middle-class gay rights campaigner Anthony Wright, born in Cheadle, Cheshire, in 1927, and upper working-class artist Victoria Crowe, born in Kingston, Surrey, in 1945, all grew up in particularly ‘anxious’ atmospheres at least partly because they had lost siblings before or after birth. While this explained why they were only children, only-childhood cannot be deemed the cause of their difficulties. This is because many only children in this study had never had siblings, while others had lost siblings but did not report growing up in such heightened atmospheres. As it was only after the 1890s that infant and child mortality began to significantly decrease, for around half of this period, losing a sibling would not have been an uncommon experience. However, there are no accounts of swathes of children, particularly among the lower classes where child mortality was exacerbated by unhealthy living conditions, being over-protected by parents who had lost children.<sup>21</sup>

Nicholson’s parents lost a previous child at six months old, seven years before he was born, and this was just one reason he gave for being ‘coddled as a child’.<sup>22</sup> He was a ‘sickly’ baby whose early years coincided with the ‘privations and hazards’ of the First World War, and his mother died of the Spanish flu when he was five; he also suffered from the illness. His maternal grandmother moved into the family home to look after him, and understandably he was treated with extreme care: ‘even the dog was taught

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<sup>21</sup> Woods, Watterson and Woodward, ‘The Causes of Rapid Fertility Decline Part I’, pp. 346, 360, 362; R. I. Woods, P. A. Watterson and J. H. Woodward, ‘The Causes of Rapid Fertility Decline Part II’, p. 130; Woods, Williams and Galley, ‘Infant Mortality in England 1550-1950’, pp. 35, 36, 37, 41, 42, 44, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Norman Nicholson, *Wednesday Early Closing*, (London, 1975), p. 17.

to stand guard over my push-chair when the few square inches of me that were not muffled and scarfed out of sight were allowed to take the air.'<sup>23</sup>

Consequently:

The dog, indeed, and my father were the only male creatures I can recall from those first four years ... as for other children, I can recall none of either sex. For I was not encouraged to play with other children; I was not allowed out into the street; I was cosseted, comforted, protected, and I grew up, as I could hardly help growing up, pale, timid, dependent, self-absorbed and rather girlish ... I never had a chance to grow up rough, tough, noisy and untidy like an ordinary boy...<sup>24</sup>

While Nicholson's brother had been born and survived for six months, Wright and Crowe's mothers had suffered miscarriages. It might be suggested that, as a result of decreasing infant mortality, only children were more likely to have experienced the death of a sibling in the second half of the nineteenth century than the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> It might also be tentatively suggested that miscarriage rates did not fall at the same time as infant mortality as, given the technology and opportunities for observation available at the time, it was easier to discover how to keep babies alive, as opposed to foetuses. Even today, it is far more common to hear about miscarriages than deaths of children once born. The custom of not announcing a pregnancy until the second trimester persists due to the risk of miscarriage.

However, lack of disclosure hinders research into the history of miscarriage and reconstruction of reasons for individuals to be only children. In the earlier

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<sup>23</sup> Nicholson, *Wednesday Early Closing*, pp. 17, 18.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> Woods, Watterson and Woodward, 'The Causes of Rapid Fertility Decline, Part I', pp. 346, 360, 362; Woods, Watterson and Woodward, 'The Causes of Rapid Fertility Decline, Part II', p. 130; Woods, Williams and Galley, 'Infant Mortality in England', pp. 35, 36, 37, 41, 42, 44, 49.

part of the period in particular, miscarriages in the early months of pregnancy were likely to have gone unrecorded because they were more common than today. Working-class women's miscarriages in particular might also have gone unnoticed due to lack of involvement from medical professionals. Despite decreasing infant mortality and improvements in healthcare, more only children born between 1900 and 1950 discussed how their parents had had miscarriages or lost other children than their nineteenth-century counterparts. This is may be because they were more likely to discuss such family circumstances as part of their life stories, and their parents were possibly more open about having had miscarriages.

For this reason, it is difficult to determine how right Laybourn was to suggest that only children in the past were at greater risk of unhappiness and psychological problems due to the death of siblings than they are today.<sup>26</sup>

Present-day only children are statistically far less unlikely to have lost siblings than their late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century peers. However, before the dramatic improvement in infant and child survival that occurred between 1881 and 1931, sibling loss would not have been an abnormal experience for children from any size of family.<sup>27</sup> From the late-nineteenth century, as Zelizer has written, parental and public reactions to children's deaths became more ritualistic and outwardly emotional. This was not because they were rarer occurrences, but because people were less likely to accept their children's deaths as God's will, and more likely to see them as events that could have been prevented. This also tied in with the developing view that

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<sup>26</sup> Laybourn, *The Only Child*, p. 108.

<sup>27</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 192; Garrett, Reid, Schürer and Szeleter, *Changing Family Size*, p. 273.

children's lives were uniquely sacred, and the increasing segregation of children by keeping them indoors or creating dedicated outdoor spaces for them in order to keep them safe.<sup>28</sup> Stearns, meanwhile, suggested that between the 1870s and 1920s, in America at least, children were expected to experience grief, and participate in its rituals, whereas after this, parents were supposed to shield children from death and intense grief.<sup>29</sup>

Only children who grew up at around this time and lost a sibling may therefore have been left with strong lasting impressions of the experience because of the rituals and outpourings of grief they witnessed and participated in. This could have made them more likely to include more than a passing mention of it in their life stories. Only children born towards the middle of the twentieth century may have been more 'shielded' from the worst excesses of grief, yet they did not witness a return to deaths being treated as common, minor events that were accepted as God's will, or to less emotional parenting. Although their parents may have tried to protect them from extreme sadness, this did not mean that they were neither unaware that a death had occurred, nor of its ramifications. The nature of this thesis' sources makes this theory difficult to prove; while Nicholson, Wright, and Crowe discussed their parents' reproductive misfortunes at length, other only children whose autobiographies were less 'confessional' or 'deep' were less forthcoming, though this did not mean they were unaffected.

Researchers of present-day only children have suggested that having an only child is far more likely to be a deliberate lifestyle choice today than it was in

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<sup>28</sup> Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, pp. 23, 26-7, 30-32, 43-4, 48, 52.

<sup>29</sup> Stearns, 'Childhood Emotions', pp. 158, 164, 166, 169.



the past. Many modern couples restrict their families to maintain their existing lifestyle in financial and practical terms, or to avoid compromising women's careers by taking multiple periods of maternity leave.<sup>30</sup> However, it is important not to lose sight of the information about deliberate fertility restriction provided in chapter 2. This includes Anderson's findings regarding the types of family that most commonly had only children, and that only children were seen as a lifestyle choice, at least to some extent, in the early-twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> A woman interviewed by gender historian Angela Davis, born in 1912, described how she 'grew up in the age when cars were just coming in and you had one baby and a baby Austin', and another, born in 1947, described how her father was 'pretty horrified' when she announced her second pregnancy, as he believed the 'right' family size was one child.<sup>32</sup> The report on the 1946 Royal Commission on Population suggested that many one-child families from earlier in the period had been deliberate, as parents were now consciously having more children to avoid the purported disadvantages of only-childhood.<sup>33</sup> A Mass Observation interviewee, responding to the 1949 'Ideal Family' survey, also suggested that one-child families had been a fashionable choice in the 1920s: 'the "only child" family of a generation ago has done incalculable and permanent harm. It is that fussy standard which women can't now keep up with, but feel they ought to.'<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: A Review', p. 3; Laybourn, *The Only Child*, p. 108; McKibben, *Maybe One*, pp. 22-3, 45; Sandler, *One and Only*, pp. 163-4; Newman, *The Case for the Only Child*, p. 223; Katz and Boswell, 'Sex-Role Development', p. 111.

<sup>31</sup> Anderson, *Highly restricted fertility*, p. 183.

<sup>32</sup> Angela Davis, *Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, c. 1945-2000*, (Manchester, 2012), p. 184.

<sup>33</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Population*, p. 56.

<sup>34</sup> TC 3/3-4-A.

Six only children born in the second half of the nineteenth century reported having lost a sibling, yet none spoke of their mothers having miscarried. It could be that at least some of them were only children for this reason, but they were unaware of this because parents and children did not communicate as openly as they did towards the end of the period under consideration.

Seven only children born in the first half of the twentieth century reported having lost siblings who had been born, and six said they were only children due to miscarriages. This could have been because they were emotionally closer to their parents, and were more likely to know about such personal events. It could also be because while, as shown above, the death of a child in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries led to great outpourings of grief, there was no equivalent public mourning for miscarried foetuses, possibly leaving less of an impression of the event on surviving children.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps if Wright and Crowe had been born 50 years earlier, they would not have been as aware of or open about their parents' reproductive difficulties. As indicated above, this might also have been due to the level of detail they were willing to reveal when recounting their life stories.

Wright was aware that his mother had had two miscarriages when he was growing up, though he did not know until later that these had been necessary medical terminations. He retrospectively considered that his mother's feelings of guilt and failure concerning these experiences may have contributed to the anxious atmosphere in their home.<sup>36</sup> Another influence he believed made him a quiet, timid child was his home environment. Thus, domestic circumstances were another influence on his experiences.

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<sup>35</sup> Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, pp. 23, 26-7, 30-32, 43-4, 48, 52.

<sup>36</sup> A. E. G. Wright, *Personal Tapestry*, (London, 2008), pp. 9-10.

Until Wright was six, his maternal grandfather, grandmother and aunt shared his family's home. However, Wright actually had little contact with his grandfather, who was bedridden from depression as a result of his war experiences, and he had to be quiet when he passed his grandparents' room. In retrospect, Wright felt that the presence of several adults in the household increased tensions as there were elevated chances of disagreement. He wrote that 'the family situation, and my consequent solitude as an only child surrounded by anxious, worry-laden grown-ups, undoubtedly played its part in making me shy of my contemporaries, a 'loner', and very introspective.'<sup>37</sup> Wright invoked the explanation of only-childhood for his timidity with other children, then, but in conjunction with his particular household situation. As this chapter shows later on, though, 'solitude as an only child' was not a phrase applicable to all situations. It cannot be known whether having a sibling would have made Wright more outgoing. In any case, though, only-childhood does not appear to have been the most important reason he was an isolated, introspective child. Unlike some other only children in this thesis, he appeared to acknowledge this to some extent.

Anderson and Laslett have found that English families have been generally nuclear in nature for at least several centuries. Although subsequent research has accepted this general trend as a starting point, it has added important nuance which explains Nicholson and Wright's particular situations.<sup>38</sup> Laslett recognised that household size fluctuated over time, with children more likely to share a household with grandparents at a younger age,

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<sup>37</sup> Wright, *Personal Tapestry*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>38</sup> Anderson, *Family Structure*, pp. 56-7; Laslett, *Family Life*, p. 26.

when their grandparents were more likely to still be alive.<sup>39</sup> Nicholson's grandmother might not have been alive, or healthy enough, to look after him had he been born later, and Wright's sickly grandfather died when he was eight, just two years after the household split up.<sup>40</sup>

Nicholson's mother died as a result of the 1919 flu pandemic, which killed around 250,000 people in Britain and 40 million worldwide, and was particularly deadly for those between 15 and 35.<sup>41</sup> Many children must have lost at least one parent thus, and as Pat Thane and Tanya Evans wrote:

Simple 'nuclear' family households were less dominant when death in youth and middle age as well as poverty were common, and flexible arrangements with grandparents and other relatives rearing the children of widowed, deserted, or impoverished offspring relatively common in all classes.<sup>42</sup>

As for Wright's household composition, as Thane has written, while the ideal was for grandparents to live close to, rather than with, their adult children, sometimes circumstances dictated that elderly relatives were taken in out of 'love, duty, affection, obligation and self-interest.'<sup>43</sup> Thane also described how relationships in households with co-resident relatives were often reciprocal, and elderly people avoided moving in with their relatives because of the conflicts that might arise.<sup>44</sup> This is certainly reflected in Wright's case; although his grandfather was too ill to be involved with him, he enjoyed the company of his grandmother and aunt so much that he regularly stayed with

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<sup>39</sup> Laslett, *Family Life*, p. 38.

<sup>40</sup> Wright, *Personal Tapestry*, p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> 'BBC NEWS | Health | The 'bird flu' that killed 40 million', <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4350050.stm>, (accessed 12/3/2017).

<sup>42</sup> Pat Thane and Tanya Evans, *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints? Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth Century England*, (Oxford, 2012), p. 37.

<sup>43</sup> Pat Thane, 'The Family Lives of Old People', in Pat Thane and Paul Johnson (eds.), *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, (London, 2002), p. 198.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

them for periods after they moved to their own home. As indicated above, Wright's home was characterised by tensions between the adults, and the household split when he was six 'because my grandfather's frail health was worsening and my parents were concerned at the effect upon me of being in a house with such a perpetual sickroom atmosphere.'<sup>45</sup> His grandmother was clearly in better health than her husband. As indicated above, she was able to care for Wright, and he described her as 'a remarkable person who was to be the strongest influence on my childhood. I adored her.'<sup>46</sup>

Nicholson and Wright's lack of contact, and therefore shyness, with other children may be attributed to a mixture of reproductive misfortunes on their parents' part and the anxiety engendered by illness and the presence of elderly relatives. Crowe was influenced by parental attitudes and domestic circumstances as well, but for different reasons. She implied that her mother's miscarriage six years before her birth heightened a lifelong obsession with illness which originated with her mother's awareness that she herself had lost a twin in the womb. To this end, Crowe's mother had trained in nursing – which she had to give up when she married – gave Crowe 'tremendous attention' whenever she was ill, and highly ritualised her own frequent illnesses. It might be reasonably assumed that Crowe's mother did not allow her out into the street as a result of this anxiety; she worried that her daughter might come to harm from 'big rough boys'. As a consequence of

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<sup>45</sup> Wright, *Personal Tapestry*, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

family circumstances and anxious parenting, like Wright, Crowe described herself as 'quite a loner'.<sup>47</sup>

The extreme care of Nicholson and Crowe's parents and relatives for their health went against contemporary advice. Even though they focussed on physical, rather than mental, health in the earlier part of the period under study, manual-writers consistently urged parents not to appear overly concerned about illness.<sup>48</sup> In 1913, clinical assistant Cecil Willett Cunnington warned that the only child:

Learns to think more than is desirable about its body and its health. It is taught to watch for evidence of ill-health. The anxiety of the parents is reflected in the over-consciousness of their child. Little aches and pains, which in a full nursery would be ignored, are dwelt upon and discussed. In brief, the young child is taught the elements of valetudinarianism.<sup>49</sup>

Hector Charles Cameron made similar comments in 1930:

No doubt the nervous mother of an only child does worry unnecessarily, and is far too prone to feed her fears by the daily use of the thermometer or the weighing-machine ... it is a matter of universal experience that excess of care for only children has a depressing influence which affects their character, their physical constitution, and their entire vitality. At all costs we must hide our own anxieties from the child, and we must treat his illnesses in as matter-of-fact a way as possible.<sup>50</sup>

Even if Nicholson's relatives ignored this advice, it is understandable that they were very concerned with his health given the loss of his mother and brother,

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Victoria Crowe by Jenny Simmons, March-August 2007, *NLSC: Artists' Lives*, C466/260 track 1, © The British Library.

<sup>48</sup> Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, p. 39; Urwin and Sharland, 'From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature', p. 175; Newson and Newson, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing', pp. 53-4.

<sup>49</sup> Cecil Willett Cunnington, *Nursery Notes for Mothers*, (London, 1913), p. 19.

<sup>50</sup> Hector Charles Cameron, *The Nervous Child*, (second impression, London, 1930), pp. 162-3.

his having had Spanish flu himself, and contemporary concerns about public health in the light of this epidemic and the First World War.

The anxiety Crowe's mother had about her daughter's physical health takes a little more explaining as, by the late 1940s, child health had improved to the point that mental health had overtaken it as a concern of manual-writers.<sup>51</sup> It appears that her particular personality – specifically, her pre-existing obsession with health – simply took precedence over wider childrearing trends. Alternatively, like many of the parents surveyed in the 1946 National Survey of Health and Development, she may have not adapted to the latest childrearing techniques. The survey found it was common for parents to still be following the methods of Truby King and other 'hygienists' of the 1920s and 1930s, whose advice briefly revived the nineteenth-century emphasis on children's physical health. They were particularly concerned with infant nutrition and recommended highly regimented 'domestic hygiene' practices, which were supposed to instil 'good habits'. They also advised parents to encourage independence in their children by avoiding giving them more than the bare minimum of affection.<sup>52</sup> The way Crowe's mother behaved appeared to reflect this, as Crowe could not remember 'lots of cuddles' from her, and was emotionally closer to her father.<sup>53</sup> Despite her outmoded childrearing methods, it seems unlikely that, in the late 1940s, Crowe's mother was

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<sup>51</sup> Woods, Watterson and Woodward, 'The Causes of Rapid Fertility Decline, Part I', pp. 346, 360, 362; Woods, Watterson and Woodward, 'The Causes of Rapid Fertility Decline, Part II', p. 130; Woods, Williams and Galley, 'Infant Mortality in England, pp. 35, 36, 37, 41, 42, 44, 49; Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, p. 39; Urwin and Sharland, 'From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature', p. 175; Newson and Newson, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing', pp. 53-4.

<sup>52</sup> Rose, *Governing The Soul*, p. 183; Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, pp. 126, 136; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, pp. 124-5, 155, 165; Newson and Newson, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing', pp. 59-60.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Victoria Crowe by Jenny Simmons, track 1.

unaware of the difficulties associated with only-childhood. Instead, it seems plausible that her obsession with health led her to identify with these older methods.

Crowe suggested that her father may have been more attuned to the disadvantages associated with only-childhood, having had several siblings himself:

**Interviewer:** How much do you think your father was aware of that, that for you, you were an only child and he had grown up in a big family?

**Victoria:** I think he must have realised that-, because he was like a sort of companion to me in many ways, in a way that my mother wasn't, and when we went into Richmond Park, he could say, 'this is the hill that I ran up with the kite with Laurie', you know? And so you'd be playing back these pictures that you'd heard from things that they did ... so it was like a sort of sharing of his childhood with me, which was just fantastic, umm, really good...<sup>54</sup>

Crowe 'used to listen with great envy to this rumbustious sort of family, erm, lifestyle' that was so different from her own.<sup>55</sup> She was aware of her solitary state, engendered more by her mother's overprotection than being an only child itself, and only alleviated by the companionship of her more affectionate father and dachshund: '...didn't have brothers and sisters, so, erm, Anaminka I suppose was quite a, quite an important little companion.'<sup>56</sup>

Nicholson, Wright, and Crowe's unfamiliarity and discomfort with other children eased when they went to school. This demonstrates that even if an only child was cut off from, and therefore nervous of, their peers in their early years, many eventually had the opportunity to become less solitary and shy.

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Victoria Crowe by Jenny Simmons, track 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., track 1.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., track 1.



Nicholson attested that his father had worried about his being ‘mollycoddled by an ageing grandmother, barred off from other children and not allowed to grow up ... I think he must have hoped that when I started school I would somehow begin to solve my own problem.’<sup>57</sup> He was initially shy and ‘painfully aware of the mockery of my contemporaries’, but went on to make his own ‘particular friends’.<sup>58</sup> Wright did not ‘relish’ the company ‘of other children when I went to my first kindergarten school’, but he clearly became accustomed to his peers between starting school and his mid-teens, when he willingly experienced the sexual initiations offered at boarding school. This was by no means an unusual experience throughout this period despite the attempts of staff to suppress sexual behaviour.<sup>59</sup>

Crowe found starting school particularly startling:

I used to find it absolutely terrifying being left with a whole load of children, because I’d never been left with a whole load-, and if the nun used to go out of the room for anything, I would go after her ... this must have gone on for about three or four months ... Then one day I thought, oh well I’ll just stay, see what happens, and it was alright [laughs]. But playtime was kinda scary too because there were all these children and they were running round, you know.<sup>60</sup>

However, while Crowe remained ‘quite shy with any sort of person when I first meet them,’ she did not fail to make friends, and reached a real turning point in her late teens when she went to art college and found ‘that everybody was kind of on the same level.’<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Nicholson, *Wednesday Early Closing*, pp. 28, 93.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28,

<sup>59</sup> Wright, *Personal Tapestry*, p. 78; Jane Hamlett, ‘Space and Emotional Experience in Victorian and Edwardian English Public School Dormitories’, in Olsen (ed.), *Childhood, Youth and Emotions*, pp. 126, 128-9.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Victoria Crowe by Jenny Simmons, track 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, tracks 1, 2.

These only children were all born after the introduction of compulsory schooling, and were not sufficiently high up the social scale to be taught at home by a governess. They therefore had earlier opportunities to mix with, and get used to, other children than some only children in this thesis, who grew up in isolated areas and were sent to school only after a few years of home education. In a way, this validates McKibben's idea that only children had more difficulties socialising in the past because they did not have the same access to crèches and nursery schools that they have had in more recent years.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, as this chapter shows, this is a simplification. Formally-arranged meetings were not the only opportunity only children had to meet other children at a young age, some isolated only children were unconcerned by their solitary state, and others who did meet other children were unmoved by the experience.

This chapter now turns to three only children who had frequent contact with other children, and were confident in their presence. This was mostly due to parental attitudes and an inseparable mixture of class and geographical location. Florence Dart was an upper working-class teacher who was born in 1895 and grew up in Southsea, Hampshire, Elizabeth Blackburn was a poor working-class only child of unknown occupation who was born in Blackburn, Lancashire in 1902, and Alice Thomas Ellis (also known as Anna Haycraft) was an upper working-class writer who was born in 1932 and grew up in Penmaenmawr, North Wales. All three lived in sociable areas. As chapter 2 has shown, while middle-class and some upper working-class children have been found to be increasingly confined to the home during this period, many

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<sup>62</sup> McKibben, *Maybe One*, p. 45.

working-class children remained free to 'play out', with other children living nearby. This allowed their parents to go about their business in their cramped homes more easily.<sup>63</sup>

Like Nicholson, Wright, and Crowe, Dart's reasons for being an only child were bound up with her experiences of being brought up. Nonetheless, only-childhood was subordinate to other factors, particularly parental attitudes, in determining what these experiences were. She was aware from an early age that her mother stopped at one child because she 'didn't like children,' and a difficult birth may have hardened her resolve: 'I remember grandma saying to mother, well – why not give her another child to play with. Have another child. I remember mother turning round and saying, no. Never will I go through that again.'<sup>64</sup>

Chapter 2 showed that many historians believe most turn-of-the-century working-class parents felt emotional towards their children, but showed this in a less effusive way than they did later in the twentieth century due to lack of space, time and energy.<sup>65</sup> By contrast, Dart's mother was actively hostile towards her. The influence of parental attitudes on Dart's experiences was compounded by her difficult relationship with her father. She did not meet him until she was four years old, when he returned from the Navy, and he immediately frightened her by chasing her with a hatchet 'for fun'. This fear

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<sup>63</sup> Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', pp. 114, 116, 117, 123, 124; Walvin, *A Child's World*, p. 94; Vigne, 'Parents and Children', pp. 7-8; Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 47-8; Elizabeth Roberts, 'Learning & Living: Socialisation Outside School', *Oral History*, 3:2 (1975), p. 23.

<sup>64</sup> FLWE1870-1918, Interview 405.

<sup>65</sup> Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, pp. 24-6, 28; Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 18, 20; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 9, 10, 12, 13; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, pp. 4, 10; King, *Family Men*, pp. 16, 18; Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 113.

and lack of familiarity characterised their relationship until Dart's father died when she was in her mid-teens:

I hated him. I never really and truly - had the admiration or the love for my father that many children do. Because he came into my life the wrong way you see. And I resented it. Yes. Yes. Mm. He did. I suppose he did - all he could for me and - I was given as good an education as they could get here for me. But no, I - I never - felt the - freedom. You see, I was four when I knew him first, and I never got that intimacy or freedom.<sup>66</sup>

Unsurprisingly, given the lateness and nature of their first meeting, Dart and her father did not enjoy the affective relationship that Strange has found characterised some working-class father-child relationships at this time.<sup>67</sup>

Dart's experience of her father's return from the Navy resembled some reunions described by King, where:

The return of the father could be a rather unwelcome disruption of family life, particularly for young children who had had very little contact with their fathers. The moment of homecoming could be a "rude awakening".<sup>68</sup>

Dart said that she did not want her father around, but 'knew I couldn't' 'behave in any way to try and get him to go [interviewer's words]':

Because I'd heard so much about daddy coming home ... if ... mother and father were sitting in the sitting room - I'd go and sit at the other end of the room. Right away from them. It's something I can't explain quite, the - this stranger coming and taking over this position.<sup>69</sup>

However, by doing 'all he could', including paying for Dart to attend a private school from the age of 12, her father's behaviour largely conformed to contemporary norms and expectations of fathers' duty and obligation to provide for their children. It was not uncommon for fathers to convey their

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<sup>66</sup> FLWE1870-1918, Interview 405.

<sup>67</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, pp. 1, 86-91, 96-7, 113.

<sup>68</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 149.

<sup>69</sup> FLWE1870-1918, Interview 405.

affection for their children through these channels if they were not particularly demonstrative.<sup>70</sup>

Quite aside from the absence of Dart's father for four years, it appears that her parents were among those who deliberately restricted their families in the late-nineteenth century. She did not have an unhappy childhood, as some modern researchers have suggested about only children in the past, because her parents were unhappy with their low fertility.<sup>71</sup> Her parents may have been among those identified by Anderson who had not intended to have any children at all, but conceived one by accident.<sup>72</sup> Alternatively, they may have been an example of a couple, Anderson tentatively suggested, 'for whom the value of children was so low that they felt able to ... minimise their commitment by having just a single child.'<sup>73</sup> Dart's parents may have felt obligated by social and/or local norms to have children, but, disliking children, sought to have the lowest number possible. As this chapter will show shortly, it was this hostility that led Dart to actively seek company outside of the home.

Blackburn's parents, unlike Dart's parents, had wanted more children, but, like Wright's mother, Blackburn's mother had had 'a number of miscarriages.' However, unlike in Wright and Crowe's cases, these losses did not seem to affect how Blackburn was treated by her parents. This testifies not only to the influence of different parental personalities, but also economic position and

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<sup>70</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, pp. 17, 27, 31, 113.

<sup>71</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: A Review', p. 3; Laybourn, *The Only Child*, p. 108; McKibben, *Maybe One*, pp. 22-3, 45; Sandler, *One and Only*, pp. 163-4; Newman, *The Case for the Only Child*, p. 223.

<sup>72</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 188.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

time. Dart wrote, 'my mother did not regret this circumstance as much as she might have done' as 'to bring up a family on a cotton weaver's wage at that time was an almost intolerable burden.'<sup>74</sup> Blackburn's mother appeared to be practical and stoical, but by no means completely unfeeling, in keeping with the general impression existing historical literature has given of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century working-class parents. This adds further nuance to the idea that only children in the past were especially likely to be affected by their parents' bereavements and frustration at not being able to have a larger family; families bore their losses in different ways.<sup>75</sup> As indicated above, the miscarriages Anthony Wright's mother experienced seemed to have more emotional effects on him and his family than on Blackburn's. This could be for a variety of reasons: their nature (induced as opposed to presumably spontaneous); his family's more comfortable financial situation; the possible improvements in healthcare and changes in emotional expectations and expression over the 25 years between their childhoods; his more in-depth emotional exploration of his childhood. It might also be asked whether the loss of live children had more emotional repercussions for late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century families than miscarriages, though that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

As indicated above, the hostile attitudes of Dart's parents towards her led her to seek out, and enjoy, the company of other children instead. While this may have been a coping mechanism, it nonetheless supports this thesis' argument that there was no typical 'only child' experience due to influences that loomed

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<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth K. Blackburn, *In and Out the Windows*, (Burnley, 1980), pp. 8-9.

<sup>75</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: A Review', p. 3; Laybourn, *The Only Child*, p. 108; McKibben, *Maybe One*, pp. 22-3, 45; Sandler, *One and Only*, pp. 163-4; Newman, *The Case for the Only Child*, p. 223.

far larger than only-childhood itself. Dart enjoyed school – or, perhaps more accurately, the school playground – because:

Whereas my home life was a little bit restricted ... you could talk to whom you liked – if you wanted to be cheeky to them you could be cheeky, couldn't you? There was no one to tell you to be quiet and behave yourself.<sup>76</sup>

Hendrick has suggested that whether a child enjoyed school or not during the period of 1870-1918 depended on how well-behaved and competent at schoolwork they were.<sup>77</sup> This thesis suggests that ease with other children was also a factor. This echoes the findings of education researchers Sue Dockett and Bob Perry, who found that an important consideration in present-day Australian children's judgement of whether they were happy in the first few months of school was whether or not they had made friends.<sup>78</sup> This was something Dart clearly had no difficulty with: 'you had the few you – hobnobbed with, you know, that you played with or played with you and – you sat with or you didn't sit with...'.<sup>79</sup>

Grant has described how 'it was in schools that children developed strong peer cultures that would put children's worlds into tension with that of their parents.'<sup>80</sup> However, Paul Thompson has written that working-class children evolved their own cultures, separate from adults, on the streets.<sup>81</sup> Dart, Blackburn and Ellis did go to school and meet more children there. However, their local areas facilitated socialisation before they started school at around

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<sup>76</sup> FLWE1870-1918, Interview 405.

<sup>77</sup> Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 77.

<sup>78</sup> Sue Dockett, and Bob Perry, 'Starting School: Perspectives of Australian Children, Parents and Educators', *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 2:2 (2004), p. 180; Sue Dockett and Bob Perry, 'Starting School: What do the Children say?', *Early Child Development and Care*, 159 (Jan. 1999), pp. 114, 116.

<sup>79</sup> FLWE1870-1918, Interview 405.

<sup>80</sup> Grant, 'Parent-child Relations', p. 116.

<sup>81</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians*, p. 39.

the age of around five, and would have offered longer periods and greater freedom for play than schools did. Given the feelings of Dart's mother about children, naturally 'I was never encouraged to have children in to play' and she did not have birthday parties, but she would 'go and play ... with me [sic] playmates. I had quite a few playmates in the High Street in those days.' She resented having to practice piano for an hour before she could play games in the road with neighbouring children.<sup>82</sup> While their dislike of children was a reason for Dart being an only child, her parents' lack of affection towards her appeared to have a larger impact on her enthusiasm about playing with other children than only-childhood itself.

Parental attitudes were also an influence on Blackburn's freedom to socialise with other children outside the home, as, unlike Nicholson and Crowe, the experience of losing other children did not lead her parents to keep her indoors. Another important factor, though, was the type of community where Blackburn grew up, which demonstrates how geography could influence children's experiences. The adults in Blackburn's street were clearly familiar with one another, living close to the mill where they worked, and this neighbourliness extended to their children: 'like so many other children, I had the run of friendly neighbours' houses.'<sup>83</sup> Families intertwined, with 'Mammie Eccles', the mother of Blackburn's best friend Polly, 'ha[ving] a lot to do with my bringing up.' Blackburn played with the babies Mammie Eccles looked after while their parents were at work, and Blackburn's parents had Polly round for meals during strikes and depressions.<sup>84</sup> Even more importantly,

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<sup>82</sup> FLWE1870-1918, Interview 405.

<sup>83</sup> Blackburn, *In and Out the Windows*, p. 15.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 18-19.



Blackburn demonstrated her ease with other children by describing how she enjoyed playing with them at various locations away from adult eyes, including a hen pen, canal tow paths, a brickworks and, of course, the streets.<sup>85</sup> Growing up with sociable parents in a neighbourly area seemed to have particular influence over her childhood personality and experiences.

Ellis also lived in a notoriously sociable, neighbourly type of area: a mining community. In her small town of Penmaenmawr, the local granite quarry was the central place of employment; it employed 1,000 workers at its peak, and the town was characterised by swathes of workers' dwellings.<sup>86</sup> Merfyn Jones has recognised that Welsh quarry workers were united as a community by their payment through 'bargaining', and solidarity against incompetent English managers. Their shared identity was further strengthened by their often lifelong employment at a certain quarry and the employment of sons at their fathers' places of work. Nationality, nonconformity, and liberalism also drew them together.<sup>87</sup> Although Ellis' father seemed to be one of the dreaded English managers, her mother was Welsh and had relatives living in the area, and the family were clearly part of the community. They sometimes bathed 'in our friends' more well-appointed houses' instead of their own tin bath, and 'when I was very young I used to go as a really special treat to Anglesey with a local tradesman known simply as Uncle Roberts.'<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Blackburn, *In and Out the Windows*, pp. 12, 42.

<sup>86</sup> Alice Thomas Ellis, *A Welsh Childhood*, (London, 1990), p. 50; 'BBC – The quarries that made Penmaenmawr', [http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/northwestwales/hi/people\\_and\\_places/history/newsid\\_8326000/8326580.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/northwestwales/hi/people_and_places/history/newsid_8326000/8326580.stm), (accessed 4/7/2016); 'Penmaenmawr and Dwygyfylchi Website', <http://www.penmaenmawr.com/historyindex.html>, (accessed 4/7/2016).

<sup>87</sup> Merfyn Jones, 'Y Chwarylwyr: The Slate Quarrymen of North Wales', in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Miners, Quarrymen and Saltworkers*, (London, 1977), pp. 105-9, 111, 117, 121-3, 130.

<sup>88</sup> Ellis, *A Welsh Childhood*, pp. 15, 86, 113.

For the most part, Ellis spent her time with friends of her own age, and, unlike Nicholson and Crowe, 'we spent as little time as possible indoors.'<sup>89</sup> Her particular association with a neighbouring family of six, the Joneses, shows that she was far from shy or reserved: 'the Jones children had evolved a noise – a war whoop – by which we could recognise and discover each other up on the hills.'<sup>90</sup> Other places she played with the Joneses and other friends were the granite quarry and a fairy glen. They were less keen on visiting the beach, where there were too many adults: 'it all felt oddly exposed and simultaneously constraining. You could not, for example, play cops-and-robbers or give vent to the war-whoop on the beach without upsetting a lot of people.'<sup>91</sup> Both Dart and Ellis give credence to Stearns' assertion that peer groups allowed some children to share their emotions, particularly sadness and anger, more freely than they could at home.<sup>92</sup>

Unlike the more timid only children featured earlier in this chapter, Ellis 'had no concept of fear and couldn't understand what her mother meant by 'worry' ... bit a neighbour's child in the leg ...'<sup>93</sup> She may have been naturally inclined towards confidence, and while, as indicated by her reference to 'worry', her mother may not have been completely carefree, Ellis was not restricted by excessive parental concern as Nicholson, Wright, and Crowe were. Her parents' attitudes gave her particular opportunities to mix with

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<sup>89</sup> Ellis, *A Welsh Childhood*, p. 56.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 56, 59.

<sup>92</sup> Stearns, 'Childhood Emotions', p. 171.

<sup>93</sup> Ellis, *A Welsh Childhood*, p. 113.

other children, as she was only socially restricted on Sundays and occasional days out.<sup>94</sup>

As suggested above, Ellis' geographical location and class were also important influences, as living in an especially sociable type of area offered her opportunities and encouragement to interact with others, practice her social skills, and develop her confidence. While many only children discussed the possible effects of only-childhood on their personalities and experiences, Ellis made no reference to it. This could suggest that she thought it had little or no influence, or simply chose not to write about it. As discussed in chapter 3, the type of autobiography people chose to write, and the areas of their life they elected to concentrate on, could determine how much they revealed about their childhoods, as well as what only-childhood meant to them. A central purpose of Ellis' autobiography was to celebrate and immortalise the experience of growing up in Wales in the early-twentieth century. She may therefore have decided that the Welsh landscape and way of life was far more deserving of attention than an examination of the role of only-childhood in her life.

Class also combined with time in determining Ellis' experiences as an only child, as she had a large neighbouring family to play with. The Jones family of six children would have been larger than average for the 1930s, but not untypical considering their mining background. Miners' fertility only started to decrease after the First World War, and considering Charles still correlated miners' stable employment and early fulfilment of their maximum earning potential with high fertility in the 1930s, it does not seem that this family size

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<sup>94</sup> Ellis, *A Welsh Childhood*, pp. 50-51, 53.

was anomalous quite yet.<sup>95</sup> Dart and Blackburn did not specify the size of their friends' families. However, the facts that Dart 'thought I ... ought to have some brothers and sisters', and the provision of meals by Blackburn's family to her friend Polly in times of need, implies that they knew some large families, and only children were not the norm where they lived at the turn of the century.<sup>96</sup> In general, the size of the families of only children's playmates would have decreased over this period, and this thesis' sources give a general sense that only children from the earlier part of the period were more likely to know a number of large families.

However, whether the decline in family size shrunk the pool of local children that only children could make friends with is difficult to ascertain. If families were getting smaller, but the size of a settlement was increasing, this might make little difference to the number of children available locally. It would be necessary to ask whether only children only played with the members of large families closest to them in age – some of the Jones siblings were too small to play with Ellis and the others – or of their own gender anyway.<sup>97</sup> It might also be asked whether the decline of large families decreased the chances that a child of the appropriate age and gender lived nearby.

It is also possible that the concurrent advent of compulsory schooling and decline in 'playing out' among some groups meant that only children were more likely to make friends through school, who possibly lived further away, than by playing in the street with their immediate neighbours. Another

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<sup>95</sup> Stevenson, 'The Fertility of Various Social Classes', pp. 410-11; Gittins, *Fair Sex*, pp. 46, 112-13; Charles, *The Menace of Under-Population*, p. 115.

<sup>96</sup> FLWE1870-1918, Interview 405; Blackburn, *In and Out the Windows*, p. 20.

<sup>97</sup> Ellis, *A Welsh Childhood*, p. 19.

question is whether grouping schoolchildren according to age made them more likely to confine their friendship groups to children of their own age.<sup>98</sup> Stearns has suggested that the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century decline in the birth rate and increase in formal schooling meant that children became more likely to relate to unrelated children of their own age than their siblings.<sup>99</sup> These questions could spark another study in themselves. This thesis shows that only children made friends, variously, through street, school, and their parents and other relatives.

As mentioned above, a strand that runs through Dart, Blackburn, and Ellis' testimonies is the importance of a combination of geographical location and social class. Not only did these only children live in areas where other children were available, but it was permitted or encouraged to play in public spaces, as opposed to private homes and gardens where some more socially elevated and/or anxious parents preferred their children to play.<sup>100</sup> As this thesis has already shown, it continued to be common for working-class children to spend much of their time outside and out of their parents' way well into the twentieth century, despite softening attitudes towards children.<sup>101</sup> Elizabeth Roberts has described how children played games in the street that required cooperation and acceptance of group standards and decisions.<sup>102</sup> This is reflected in Ellis' testimony in particular, where she described playing a made-up game involving throwing 'clinkers' – 'what was left of the coke which

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<sup>98</sup> For more information about the advent of grouping schoolchildren by age, see Lassande, 'Age, Schooling, and Development'.

<sup>99</sup> Stearns, 'Childhood Emotions', p. 166.

<sup>100</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 190; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 212.

<sup>101</sup> Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', pp. 114, 116, 117, 123, 124; Walvin, *A Child's World*, p. 94; Vigne, 'Parents and Children', pp. 7-8; Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 47-8; Roberts, 'Learning & Living', p. 23.

<sup>102</sup> Roberts, 'Learning & Living', p. 23.

fed the boilers' – with the Jones children.<sup>103</sup> Ellis was also particularly explicit about the separation between adults and children in her childhood: 'Looking back I find it remarkable to realise how small a part adults played in our lives. Our fathers were mostly away at the war and our mothers, aunts and nains [sic] were simply part of the background.'<sup>104</sup>

These accounts show how only children were part of the cultures, separate from adults, which evolved among working-class children on the streets and in other arenas of play.<sup>105</sup> In fact, only-child girls of this class might have had an advantage over their peers with siblings, as they were not required to keep an eye on younger brothers and sisters, so might have been able to roam further from home, like working-class boys.<sup>106</sup> It could be for precisely this reason that working-class only children have rarely featured in existing work on the history of childhood and the family. Historians may have assumed that working-class only children did not fit stereotypes because they lived near and regularly played with other children. While they are right in instances such as those of Dart, Blackburn and Ellis, such assumptions make their hasty conclusions about middle- and upper-class only children all the more stark. They have also overlooked cases of working-class only children who were not part of a local street culture. As chapter 6 will show, when this occurred, it was for reasons other than only-childhood.

This chapter has shown that parental attitudes were a particularly important determinant of whether an only child mixed with, and therefore became

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<sup>103</sup> Ellis, *A Welsh Childhood*, p. 19.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>105</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians*, p. 39.

<sup>106</sup> Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 47-8, 81.

comfortable around, other children before they started school. Parents' attitudes could be determined by their domestic circumstances. The loss of other children, for example, could cause them to treat their surviving children differently, and class and time might also influence their behaviour.

Geography was also an important influence that combined with class, as only children whose parents' attitudes conformed with those of other parents around them might have the opportunity to roam and make friends locally, increasing their social confidence.

Once only children were at school, they might continue to flex their social muscles, or be timid of the other children for a period while they got used to them and grew in confidence. This signifies that even if they had not initially been socially adept, this was not a permanent handicap. Being working- or lower middle-class, and born in the late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century, all of the only children in this chapter went to school. Even if schooling had not been compulsory, though, it seems likely that most would still have attended, even if only for long enough to learn basic reading, writing, and mathematics.<sup>107</sup> School allowed them to meet other children if they had not previously been allowed to 'play out'. By contrast, as this thesis shows at various points, some upper middle-class only-child girls from the earlier part of the period lacked educational opportunities. This also demonstrates the importance of parental attitudes and class, as well as gender, in determining only children's experiences.

As chapter 1 indicated, historians have acknowledged that sibling relationships were not always positive. However, by continually making

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<sup>107</sup> Pooley, 'Parenthood, Childrearing and Fertility', p. 93.

negative assumptions about only children, it might be argued that they have been unintentionally upholding the ‘sibling myth’, that having brothers and sisters is universally beneficial.<sup>108</sup> Yet, by looking at a ‘control group’ of non-only children, it is possible to infer that, contrary to common discourse, siblings were not an inoculation against timidity. Playwright and folklorist Augusta Gregory, the twelfth of 16 children, born to aristocratic English parents in Ireland in 1852, described herself as ‘very shy and quiet’ unless she was with her four younger brothers.<sup>109</sup> Due to her class background, she lacked the opportunity to mix with other children of her own age, as she was geographically isolated. Additionally, as a girl, it also seems likely that her parents denied her the opportunity to meet other children at school.<sup>110</sup> These are themes this thesis will return to in later chapters.

College principal Ronald Goldman, the middle child of three, born into a comfortable working-class family in 1922, described himself as ‘a shy, retiring boy, too long and too often with my mother to want to leave her,’ who found school playtimes a ‘frightening bedlam.’<sup>111</sup> This also indicates the importance of personal inclinations and parental attitudes, as opposed to birth position, in determining childhood experiences.

Sibling children were therefore subject to the same factors that influenced only children’s experiences. The next chapter shows how such influences

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<sup>108</sup> Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties*, pp. 115-20; Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, pp. 89-90, 95, 99, 115-16, 158, 164; Rowe, *My Dearest Enemy*, p. 297.

<sup>109</sup> Lady Augusta Gregory, *Seventy Years: Being the Autobiography of Lady Gregory*, (London, 1974), p. 6.

<sup>110</sup> Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, pp. 14, 44; Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, pp. 30, 244.

<sup>111</sup> Ronald Goldman, ‘Principal of Didsbury College of Education, Manchester’, in Ronald Goldman (ed.), *Breakthrough: Autobiographical Accounts of the Education of Some Socially Disadvantaged Children*, (London, 1968), p. 78.



also determined whether only children were particularly used to, and confident with, adults.



## 5. Relationships with adults

Another popular idea about only children is that they spent too much time with adults. This was dangerous, as it could supposedly cause them to prefer adults' company to that of other children, and become 'unchildlike' as they mimicked adults and were introduced to mature topics of conversation too early. This could contribute to their unpopularity when they finally came into contact with other children. As with other analytical chapters, this chapter outlines theories of the 'unchildlike' only child from late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century childrearing manual-writers, Mass Observation respondents, historians of childhood and the family, and modern only-child researchers. It then analyses whether only children reported spending a lot of time with adults, and whether they believed this had a detrimental effect. The cases in this chapter show that there were other, more likely explanations for such experiences.

Manual-writers understood that conscientious parents might want to 'make it up' to their only children by spending more time as companions or playmates to them than they might if they had siblings who could take on this role.

Educator Elizabeth Harrison, writing in 1910, told the story of a five-year-old boy called Herbert, who expressed 'irritability,' 'discontent,' and 'ennui' because he had spent too much time in the company of adults. She stressed that these adults were well-meaning, but limited in their understanding of the difference between their own interest in facts and children's need to use their imagination.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, psychiatrist Douglas Thom wrote in 1927 that 'from two years on, no child should be exclusively with adults, no matter how wise,

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<sup>1</sup> Harrison, *Misunderstood Children*, pp. 140-47.

how playful, how loving.<sup>2</sup> Parents of all classes might also have found themselves better able to be companions of only children, as they would not have needed to exercise 'crowd control' over a group of children, and could therefore concentrate on enjoying conversation and games with their single child. Upper middle-class parents might have presented their only children to visitors more often than they would have a group, as there was less chance of one child embarrassing them with their behaviour.

As the previous chapter showed, childrearing experts believed that the absence of other children during formative years could make it difficult for an only child to understand other children when they did meet them. Many believed this was exacerbated by the additional time they spent with adults. Bohannon wrote in 1898 that only children came to prefer adult company to that of other children 'due less to a dislike of suitable companionship than their inability to understand, and be understood by, children of near their own age.'<sup>3</sup> This lack of understanding could stem from their apparent internalisation of adult attitudes, as well as their suppression of childish traits. Chadwick (writing in 1928) and Individual Psychologist Alexandra Adler (1930) both described how only children were unpopular with their peers because they adopted an adult-like position of superiority, criticism, and instruction towards them.<sup>4</sup> Well-known child psychologist Donald Winnicott, meanwhile, wrote in 1957 that constant adult company stunted the only child's development, as they came to think that play was silly and beneath

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Thom, *Everyday Problems*, p. 329.

<sup>3</sup> Bohannon, 'The Only Child in a Family', pp. 489-90.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Chadwick, *Difficulties in Child Development*, (London, 1928), pp. 322-3; Alexandra Adler, 'The Only Child', pp. 195-6.

them, thus missing the 'pleasures that belong to inconsequence, irresponsibility, and impulsiveness.'<sup>5</sup>

As chapter 2 showed, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, childhood was increasingly seen as a special and separate stage of life. As a result, children were supposed to be kept from adult environments and concerns as much as possible, lest they lose their innocence and playfulness.<sup>6</sup> This is reflected in contemporary manual-writers' warnings to middle-class parents against spending too much time with their only children, or allowing them into the drawing room or to other adult gatherings too often.

In 1898, Bohannon referred to only children who:

Very often ... have been forced into an early adulthood from having been made the constant companions of older persons, especially the mothers, who very frequently make them the sharers of their trials and responsibilities.<sup>7</sup>

He added in 1912 that only children:

Shared too largely in the affairs of adults and could not well avoid the development of an outlook beyond their years. The mental attitude, the language, the manners and conduct generally, were modelled after those of mature people and the result is obvious in the typical only-child.<sup>8</sup>

Childrearing writer and lecturer Florence Hull Winterburn similarly warned readers in 1899 about dangers of allowing only children to spend too much time with adults. She provided a vignette of a seven-year-old only child called Daisy who repeated a negative remark her father had made about her aunt's potential suitor to the gentleman in question, embarrassing her parents. This

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<sup>5</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *The Child, The Family, and the Outside World*, (London, 1957), p. 132.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, 'What is New about the Modern Family', p. 85; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 136, 164; Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, p. 152.

<sup>7</sup> Bohannon, 'The Only Child in a Family', p. 494.

<sup>8</sup> Bohannon, *Exceptional Children*, p. 26.

was a reminder to readers that if only children were allowed to overhear conversation that was ‘too adult’ for them, their innocence would be eroded. Furthermore, they were prone to repeat what they had heard as they could not yet discern what information they should keep to themselves.<sup>9</sup> Clinical assistant Cecil Willett Cunnington also made this point in 1913, writing that the only child ‘imitates the assurance of the adult in its “drawing-room” manners but without the adult self-control.’<sup>10</sup>

This concern with the unchildlike only child reflected wider concerns with precocity from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century. Some Victorian scientists and medical practitioners theorised that forcing children to develop their mental abilities prematurely drained their finite energy (or electricity). This was believed to lead to physical weakness and arrested mental development, and, subsequently, insanity.<sup>11</sup> Manual-writers therefore warned that exclusively adult company could cause only children to become physically unhealthy, irritable, nervous, and exhausted, as their intellectual development was pushed too hard, intentionally or otherwise.<sup>12</sup>

These ideas about precocity were prevalent in the nineteenth century and seemed to have disappeared by the early-twentieth century, so it is unsurprising that Mass Observation respondents, historians, and modern only-child researchers have made no significant references to the possible

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<sup>9</sup> Florence Hull Winterburn, *From the Child's Standpoint: Views of Child Life and Nature*, (New York, 1899), <https://archive.org/details/fromchildsstand00wint>, (accessed 4/7/2016), p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Cunnington, *Nursery Notes*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>11</sup> Iwan Rhys Morus, *Shocking Bodies: Life, Death & Electricity in Victorian England*, (Gloucestershire, 2011), pp. 20, 23, 34, 35, 78, 81, 85, 86, 131; Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, pp. 97-9; Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 26, 31-2, 107-17, 131-2, 192, 308-9, 358.

<sup>12</sup> Donné, *Mothers and Infants*, pp. 211-12; Bohannon, ‘The Only Child in a Family’, pp. 494-5; Cunnington, *Nursery Notes*, p. 19; Cameron, *The Nervous Child*, pp. 37-8.

health effects of forced early development. This chapter instead focuses, like these sources, on the extent to which only children did spend a lot of time in the company of adults (and alternative explanations for this), and whether they felt this affected how they interacted with other children. Several Mass Observation respondents from 1949 wrote that they did not even regard one or two children as constituting 'a family', so limited were their opportunities to form a community with, and learn from, other children. A few respondents felt that only children did not develop in a 'normal', or 'natural' way, instead developing a 'warped' view on life.<sup>13</sup> One respondent wrote that their ideal family consisted of three children because 'there would not be the dangers of the only child which was continually in the company of its parents and consequently felt awkward when among children of its own age.'<sup>14</sup>

While historians and modern only-child researchers have presented examples of only children who appeared to conform to this stereotype, and not challenged the idea that only children were brought up in largely adult company, they have highlighted positive as well as negative consequences. Fletcher has described how upper middle-class only child Louisa Bowater's (born in 1842) main companions in early and middle childhood were her father and governess, but at least her father was 'kind' and her governess 'devoted'. Fletcher also noted that Bowater appeared to grow up with the social ease required to become close friends with a cousin of a similar age, as well as host 29 guests at a tea party as a teenager.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Davidoff *et al* described how an illegitimate middle-class only child, born in 1921 and

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<sup>13</sup> TC 3/3-4-A; TC 3/3-4-B; TC 3/3-4-D.

<sup>14</sup> TC 3/3-4-D.

<sup>15</sup> Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, pp. 241, 397, 340.

brought up by his grandparents and aunt (far from an unusual family situation during the inter-war period, according to Thane and Evans<sup>16</sup>), benefitted from 'being a child in a household of articulate adults,' and was socially adept enough to develop a close relationship with some nearby cousins.<sup>17</sup>

Sociologists who have studied only children in recent years have been unhindered by Victorian ideas that spending too much time with adults erodes children's innocence and health, and worked in an era where parents have been encouraged to spend time with and enjoy their children. As a result, they have challenged the persistent idea that only children are disadvantaged by too much adult company.<sup>18</sup> Falbo and McKibben have cited findings that having close, high-contact relationships with their parents actually helps only children develop their personalities and become better-adjusted, more sociable, and more confident. Moreover, they benefit in terms of intelligence and academic achievement, and while this can make them appear precocious in their early years, their peers with siblings catch up later on, leaving no significant difference between only and non-only children.<sup>19</sup>

Re-examining cases from the previous chapter shows the causes and effects of only children spending a lot of time with adults. As mentioned previously, both Norman Nicholson (born 1914, lower middle-class), and Anthony Wright (born 1927, lower middle-class) saw little of other children in their early years.

The same can be said of author Dodie Smith, who was born in 1896 and grew

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<sup>16</sup> Thane and Evans, *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints?*, pp. 35-7.

<sup>17</sup> Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, pp. 259-62.

<sup>18</sup> Anderson, 'What is New about the Modern Family', p. 85; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 136, 164; Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, p. 152; Morus, *Shocking Bodies*, pp. 20, 23, 34, 35, 78, 81, 85, 86, 131; Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, pp. 97-9; Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 26, 31-2, 107-17, 131-2, 192, 308-9, 358; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, pp. 223, 225.

<sup>19</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: An Updated Review', p. 42; McKibben, *Maybe One*, pp. 30-31, 34.



up in Old Trafford, Manchester. Given her eventual occupation and descriptions of her home, it might be assumed that her family was upper middle-class, if not particularly wealthy.

While parental attitudes influenced whether only children were cut off from other children, domestic circumstances were particularly important determinants of whether they spent what they considered to be an unusual amount of time with adults. For Nicholson, this circumstance was his father remarrying when he was eight. This led to a change in parental attitudes, as his new stepmother's commitment to Methodism led him into a new intergenerational social arena where he felt especially comfortable:

As a young boy, I always preferred the company of adults to that of children my own age ... and here, in the merry-making and money-making of the chapel society, I felt thoroughly at home, thoroughly accepted. I had no sense whatever of being too young to take my proper part ... no child has ever had a more comfortable feeling of belonging.<sup>20</sup>

The fact that Nicholson referred to 'the lovely scrimmage and mixing together of so many people of so many times and ages' suggests that other children also attended the church.<sup>21</sup> This accords well with Callum Brown's description of Methodism in the early-twentieth century: it had 'never before had so many good works on hand,' and 'religiosity was combined with patriotism, adventure and recreational activities' which appealed to young people.<sup>22</sup> However, it seems Nicholson's experiences made him more keen to befriend adults. Perhaps due to this, he reported that he had been shy of other children when he started school, but as relatives had helped with his

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<sup>20</sup> Nicholson, *Wednesday Early Closing*, p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>22</sup> Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Harlow, 2006), pp. 46, 56.

care as a young child, he 'was not worried about the teachers – theirs was, on the whole, the predictable behaviour of adults to which I had already learned to adapt myself.'<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, Wright's domestic set-up of 'solitude as an only child surrounded by anxious, worry-laden grown-ups' made him timid among children but comfortable with adults.<sup>24</sup> Although there were two slightly older girls available to play with next door, 'I cannot say that I relished their company, or that of other children when I went to my first kindergarten school. I was more interested in grown-ups.'<sup>25</sup> The friends he chose for himself reflect middle-class domesticity: the gardener, the charlady, and two successive live-in maids, Winnie and Jessie.<sup>26</sup> As Hamlett and Davidoff *et al* have found, such relationships developed between children and household staff across a range of middle-class backgrounds. Unlike his social betters, though, who might have had little contact with their parents and consequently been emotionally closer to nannies and servants, Wright did not appear to lack parental attention. He instead seemed to choose adult friends because he found them more interesting and easier to approach than other children.<sup>27</sup>

Like Nicholson and Wright, Smith was an only child living in a 'combined household'. Yet it was her mother's encouragement to express herself around adults which appears to have made her especially confident with her elders. Smith's father died when she was 18 months old – not an unusual

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<sup>23</sup> Nicholson, *Wednesday Early Closing*, p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> Wright, *Personal Tapestry*, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 118; Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, p. 169.

circumstance at a time of relatively high mortality, as discussed previously.<sup>28</sup> After this, Smith and her mother moved into a large, lively household consisting of her maternal grandparents, three uncles, and an aunt.<sup>29</sup> Unlike Wright's home, where the presence of several adults including an ill grandfather produced a quiet, tense atmosphere, the household Smith occupied for much of her childhood was particularly lively. Every lunchtime, for example, her uncles had loud and amiable arguments over the dinner table. On Saturday evenings, another family came to visit and each member would sing or recite, although, to Smith's disappointment, this was past her bedtime.<sup>30</sup>

This atmosphere appeared to develop Smith's confidence with adults; her mother encouraged her to shout in order to join in the lunchtime arguments, and she 'shouted so successfully that she was soon welcomed on anyone's 'side'.<sup>31</sup> Smith was purposely sent to bed before the Saturday soirées because 'no doubt the family knew I should have recited them off the face of the earth.'<sup>32</sup> When she did get the opportunity to perform she could expect a positive reaction, and acknowledged that her family were likely to have been more indulgent than most in this respect: 'I fear many children played, danced, sang and recited but I doubt many of them could count on such ecstatic audiences as I could,' she wrote.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Thane and Evans, *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints?*, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> Dodie Smith, *Look Back With Love*, (London, 1974), p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 40,

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5, 40.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Strange, Tosh, and King, in historical studies of fatherhood, have asserted that individual personalities were often more important than class in determining how children were treated by their fathers. Smith's case suggests that this could extend to how entire families treated children.<sup>34</sup> She portrayed her turn-of-the-century childhood as far removed from historians' usual image of privacy and controlled social interactions for middle-class children, particularly daughters, until they reached their teens. Although Smith had a nursery, where she spent her pre-school afternoons inventing characters for her dolls, she seemed far from confined to it, or separated from adults, not least because her mother appeared to stay there with her.<sup>35</sup> This accords well with Vigne's finding that while some upper middle-class parents barely saw their children, there were some who spent a lot of time with them, even when, unlike Smith, they had a nanny.<sup>36</sup> While Hamlett provides a rather depressing image of children seeing so little of their parents that they felt lonely and neglected, Mary Clare Martin has suggested this has been overstated.<sup>37</sup> As the next two chapters will show, some parents differed from Smith's mother by following these social prescriptions investigated by Hamlett. This further demonstrates the importance of parental attitudes and class over only-childhood as determinants of experience.

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<sup>34</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 101; Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, p. 142; Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, *Look Back With Love*, pp. 5, 19-21, 36, 43-4; Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, p. 30; Hamlett, *Material Relations*, pp. 1, 35-6, 38-9, 111-14; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, p. 96; Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', p. 116; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, p. 266; Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians*, p. 42; Vigne, 'Parents and Children', pp. 6-7

<sup>36</sup> Vigne, 'Parents and Children', p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Clare Martin, 'Disabled Children and Domestic Spaces in Britain, 1800-1900', in Margarita Sánchez Romero, Eva Alarcón García and Gonzalo Aranda Jiménez (eds.), *Children, Spaces and Identity*, (Oxford, 2015), p. 171; Hamlett, *Material Relations*, pp. 1, 113-14.

Smith's family, by encouraging her to be extremely sociable with both adults and children, again demonstrate how actual childrearing practices could differ from common advice, and harsh and relaxed parents co-existed.<sup>38</sup> The fact that the childrearing methods employed by Smith's family were the opposite to those of the mother of Victoria Crowe (born 1945), nearly half a century later, further embodies this variation in practice and difference from prescription. While the anxieties and quiet domestic circumstances of Nicholson and Wright's families made them wary of other children but comfortable around adults, Smith's boisterous family must have had some influence in her being outgoing with adults and children alike. Like Alice Thomas Ellis (born 1920), she did not explicitly refer to her only-child status; she did refer to feeling 'starved for the companionship of other children' before she started school, yet, unlike Nicholson and Crowe, her family facilitated at least some peer contact during this period.<sup>39</sup>

Smith's grandparents were still young enough to be proper companions for her. For example, she would discuss plays and feed the hens with her grandfather, and received 'constant and loving attention' from her grandmother.<sup>40</sup> Nicholson and Wright had similar relationships with their grandmothers, who were still fit to care for their grandchildren and husbands respectively, whereas Wright's relationship with his grandfather was restricted by his infirmity. Later chapters will include further examples of how the

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<sup>38</sup> Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family*, p. 39; Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 3; Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', pp. 124-5; Jordanova, *Children in History*, p. 12; Jordanova, 'New Worlds for Children', p. 78; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, pp. 46, 65; Priscilla Robertson, 'Home as a Nest: Middle Class Childhood in Nineteenth-Century Europe', in Lloyd de Mause, *The History of Childhood: the untold story of Child Abuse*, (London, 1991 ed.), p. 423; Rose, *Governing the Soul*, p. 183; Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', p. 171.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Look Back With Love*, pp. 27, 29, 34-6, 78.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 67.

domestic circumstance of living with grandparents could affect only children's experiences.

Being well-integrated with the numerous adults in her household did not preclude Smith from enjoying the company of, and being at ease with, other children. Prior to starting school, she enjoyed playing with her five cousins, and was not averse to boisterous play – 'fond as we were of one another, we were always fighting.'<sup>41</sup> The family friends who regularly visited had a daughter of a similar age to her, and Smith would go fishing, play in a haystack and visit the shops with her.<sup>42</sup> She made another friend when her grandmother noticed a little girl had moved in opposite them and introduced herself to the family, once again showing the importance of parents' and other carers' attitudes on only children's opportunities to socialise.<sup>43</sup> Smith was so sociable these friends were not enough, and she looked forward to starting school, because 'to be surrounded by so many [other children] seemed to me wonderful.'<sup>44</sup> The adult atmosphere of her home clearly did her no harm in this respect, contrary to the impression given by manual-writers, Mass Observation respondents and historians.

In contrast with the cases of Nicholson, Wright, and Smith, some only children spent very little time with adults, and were not particularly comfortable around them. Parental attitudes, domestic circumstances, location, and class could lead to such experiences. This can be seen by revisiting the cases of Florence Dart (born 1895, upper working-class) and Alice Thomas Ellis (born

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<sup>41</sup> Smith, *Look Back With Love*, p. 27.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

1932, upper working-class). This chapter also examines the case of poor working-class poet James Kirkup, born in South Shields, Northumberland in 1918, whose personal inclination towards timidity appeared to trump these other influences in moulding his childhood experiences.

The attitudes of upper working-class Dart's parents, as the last chapter showed, pushed her to be particularly sociable with other children. They also compelled her to be reserved around adults, including them. This may have been a strategy she developed in order to cope with her particular situation of parental hostility. Nonetheless, her usual practice of being reserved with adults and outgoing with children belied that described of only children by manual-writers, Mass Observation respondents and historians. Dart said that 'through – not being so close with my father, I grew up to be a little listener, rather than a partaker of any conversations.'<sup>45</sup> It is unclear exactly why Dart felt that this was the result of not being close to her father, though it might be speculated it was because he intimidated her and/or she simply did not feel confident expressing herself around her distant parents, preferring to observe them.

The impact of the attitudes expressed by Dart's parents further demonstrated by the fact that she stayed quiet when guests such as her father's friends and the family's landlady came to visit. Her parents were inevitably present on these occasions, inhibiting her expression. One exception was her preference for the company of her maternal grandparents. She said that she liked her grandmother more than she did her mother, and described her

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<sup>45</sup> FLWE1870-1918, Interview 405.

grandfather as 'a great playmate of mine.'<sup>46</sup> After Dart's family moved when she was five, though, she only saw her grandparents at Christmas and during the summer.<sup>47</sup>

Dart's parents initially approved of her silence with dinner guests, but increasingly expected her to participate as she grew older.<sup>48</sup> This initial approval of silence at the dinner table was in keeping with contemporary expectations of working-class children in larger families. In families of fewer than five children, according to evidence from the 'Edwardians' interviews (of which Dart was part), children were 'allowed to speak more at table', presumably because they made less noise and were easier to control than larger families.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps Dart's parents liked her silence due to their hostility towards children, but felt that, as she grew older, she came across as rude for not making conversation. Vigne's research on middle-class families suggests that a rule of silence at mealtimes was rare by the 1890s.<sup>50</sup> Obviously, mealtimes with the family of Dorothy Smith, who was born just a year later than Dart, were a complete contrast, as they were an occasion for lively debates.<sup>51</sup>

As indicated in the previous chapter, adults played little part in Ellis and her friends' lives in a Welsh mining village.<sup>52</sup> Like Dart, they found an adult presence inhibiting, though this did not seem to be due to emotional distance so much as the incompatibility of their social worlds. Ellis described how

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<sup>46</sup> FLWE1870-1918, Interview 405.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Vigne, 'Parents and Children', p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Smith, *Look Back With Love*, p. 19.

<sup>52</sup> Ellis, *A Welsh Childhood*, p. 53.



adult relatives would sometimes accompany her and her friend Mair on Sunday afternoon walks, 'which entirely ruined the whole point of the exercise. They meant well but their presence was lowering to the spirits and I could never think of anything to say to them.'<sup>53</sup> Similarly, as indicated earlier, on the occasions when Ellis went to the beach with her mother and mother's friends, 'it all felt oddly exposed and simultaneously constraining.'<sup>54</sup> Ellis and her friends appeared to bear no dislike towards adults; they simply wanted to be adventurous and noisy, but they could not behave in this way when they were around. This again belies the impression given by certain primary and secondary sources that only children were unusually familiar with adults.

Dart and Ellis' feelings about spending time with adults may also have been shaped by working-class expectations regarding children's behaviour. This thesis has already examined how working-class adults could occupy separate social worlds to their children. Adults were preoccupied with their own concerns and needed physical space to deal with them.<sup>55</sup> While working-class children regularly encountered adults, ran errands, did favours and minded babies for their neighbours, this did not necessarily result in easy familiarity.<sup>56</sup> Roberts has described how working-class children were not allowed to be 'cheeky' or talk too much in the presence of adults.<sup>57</sup> One working-class only child, Wallace Brereton, born in Salford, Greater Manchester in 1929, described how a neighbour never forgave him for

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<sup>53</sup> Ellis, *A Welsh Childhood*, p. 53.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>55</sup> Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', pp. 114, 116, 117, 123, 124; Walvin, *A Child's World*, p. 94; Vigne, 'Parents and Children', pp. 7-8; Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 47-8; Roberts, 'Learning & Living', p. 23.

<sup>56</sup> Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', p. 114; Roberts, 'Learning & Living', p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> Roberts, 'Learning & Living', p. 19.

refusing to run an errand for her on one occasion.<sup>58</sup> It was understandable that working-class children preferred to spend time with their peers, with whom they could be more 'free'. This included only children growing up in cramped houses, who thus took part in the same outdoor peer culture as their neighbours from larger families, and were expected to respect and obey other adults in the vicinity.

While Dart's parents' attitudes coloured her interactions with most other adults, timid Kirkup's very positive relationship with his parents did not make him comfortable interacting with many other adults. He described his parents as 'large, kind, beautiful people with whom I felt happy and safe.'<sup>59</sup> He went on to discuss how he 'was always a silent child, except when I was alone with my mother and father ... I learned to talk very soon in a rapid and fluent manner with my parents,' but this fluency did not extend to the other adults he encountered on a regular basis.<sup>60</sup> This suggests that the most important factor in this case was not negative parental attitudes or the existence of separate adult and child cultures, but Kirkup's personal inclinations. Kirkup's mother, like Dart's, was displeased 'to see me sitting solemnly without saying a word while other children of the same age "talked away twenty to the dozen,"' displaying a similar expectation that working-class children should be respectful but also neighbourly.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Roberts, 'Learning & Living', p. 19; Wallace Brereton, *Salford Boy*, (Manchester, 1985), p. 27.

<sup>59</sup> James Kirkup, *The Only Child*, (London, 1957), p. 50.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>61</sup> Kirkup, *The Only Child*, pp. 21, 105-6; Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', p. 114; Roberts, 'Learning & Living', p. 20.

However, the fact that Kirkup's mother did not relate this anxiety to him until he was older further demonstrates the difference in attitudes between Kirkup's and Dart's parents. Kirkup's parents differed radically from the common portrayal of busy early-twentieth-century working-class parents who loved their children, but were not necessarily affectionate, and encouraged them to play outside to give them much-needed space.<sup>62</sup> Kirkup himself identified that his parents differed from others living nearby, discussing how:

My father always said that he would "never lay a hand on me," and he never broke his word. I was grateful to him for that, because I often saw children brutally treated by their parents in our street, and such sights alarmed me more than anything else in those days.<sup>63</sup>

He went on to describe how, despite being poor, 'my parents' devotion always provided me with warm clothes and food ... though they deprived themselves of all kinds of necessities to keep me well and warm,' and he was aware of other local children who were less fortunate.<sup>64</sup> This further demonstrates how parental attitudes could create completely different experiences for individual only children.

Unlike Dart and Ellis, Kirkup's discomfort with adults was not paired with social confidence among other children. While he grew up in sociable working-class areas, his personal inclinations and, to some extent, his parents' attitudes prevented him from fully integrating. He was not allowed to 'play out' with the 'little ragamuffins' in the neighbourhood his family occupied

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<sup>62</sup> Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, pp. 24-6, 28; Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 18, 20, 47-8, 75-97; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 9, 10, 12, 13, 106, 109; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, pp. 4, 10; King, *Family Men*, pp. 16, 18; Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 113; Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, pp. 15, 96, 137, 165, 170, 201, 213; Grant, 'Parent-child Relations', p. 115; Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', pp. 114, 116, 117, 123, 124; Walvin, *A Child's World*, p. 94; Vigne, 'Parents and Children 1890-1918', pp. 7-8.

<sup>63</sup> Kirkup, *The Only Child*, p. 54.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p. 58.

until he was six. However, he did not mind, as he watched them from the window or doorstep and found their games and behaviour 'mystifying.'<sup>65</sup> Although he did play games with other children when his family moved to a more salubrious neighbourhood, he did not form any close attachments, and continued to prefer his own company.<sup>66</sup> Unlike some other only children in this thesis, school did not bring Kirkup out of himself, either. At the start, 'the playground, filled with a swarm of shrieking, violent children was a place of terror to me.'<sup>67</sup> The other children picked up on Kirkup's sensitivity and pale, girlish appearance, and so he was bullied and made few friends.<sup>68</sup> These reasons appear quite separate from only-childhood. The fact that not all only children were more used to the company of adults than that of children shows how their characters and experiences were subject to factors that loomed larger than only-childhood *per se*.

This chapter has shown that a variety of factors could influence how much time only children spent with adults, and that such experiences did not necessarily disadvantage them. Parental attitudes and domestic circumstances might determine whether an only child saw adults more often than other children before they started school, but this did not irrevocably compromise their familiarity with other children. Parental attitudes determined how children interacted with adults, and set expectations of their behaviour around adults, and this often – but not always – aligned with social class. Being sociable with adults did not preclude being sociable with children, and it

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<sup>65</sup> Kirkup, *The Only Child*, pp. 23, 48, 99.

<sup>66</sup> James Kirkup, *Sorrows, Passions and Alarms*, (London, 1959), pp. 42-4, 46, 88.

<sup>67</sup> Kirkup, *The Only Child*, p. 137.

<sup>68</sup> Kirkup, *The Only Child*, pp. 136, 137; Kirkup, *Sorrows, Passions and Alarms*, pp. 66, 70, 104.

did not necessarily follow that a child who disliked the company of adults liked the company of children. This was due to differences in parental attitudes and personal inclinations. Only-childhood, then, appeared to have little or no influence on experience compared to these factors, as well as domestic circumstances, class, or geographical location.

This chapter's argument that other influences took precedence over birth position is bolstered by the account of non-only child lawyer Patrick Hastings, born in London in 1880 and of indeterminate class due to his family's swinging economic fortunes. He was the younger of two sons, and described an 'unusual' upbringing, where he attended many dinners with his father and assorted 'businessmen'. He believed these experiences ill-fitted him for integration with his peers as they:

Certainly taught me many things both about life and people that most children never even hear about until long after they are grown up. It made me almost a heathen in the eyes of most boys my own age when I first came to meet them.<sup>69</sup>

Consequently, he was 'lonely' and 'miserable' at the age of ten because his schoolmates considered him a 'bumptious ass'.<sup>70</sup> Unlike the only children in this chapter, Hastings had little contact with other children. His brother, Archie, was completely different to him, and the pair got along badly.<sup>71</sup> There is no mention of Archie's presence at the aforementioned dinners, but as he was older than Hastings, he may have already been sent to school. The family's swings between affluence and poverty, meanwhile, meant Hastings

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<sup>69</sup> Sir Patrick Hastings, *The Autobiography of Sir Patrick Hastings*, (London, 1948), pp. 6-7, 8, 10.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 18.

was not considered 'respectable' by the parents of potential friends.<sup>72</sup>

Hastings' testimony questions the 'sibling myth' that children growing up together get along well and socialise with one another. As with the only children's accounts referenced in this thesis, parental attitudes, domestic circumstances, and class appear to have far more influential than birth position for Hastings.

The last two chapters have concentrated on only children's social interactions. The next two turn to only children's feelings of loneliness and unhappiness respectively. Chapter 6 asks whether some of the more solitary only children in this study thought of themselves as lonely, and examines the extent to which only-childhood determined such experiences, as well as the influence of ideas about only children on how they reflected upon their childhoods..

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<sup>72</sup> Hastings, *The Autobiography of Sir Patrick Hastings*, p. 6.

## 6. Loneliness

A particularly common late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century association with only-childhood that persists to this day was loneliness. As this chapter shows, though, when only children described themselves as having been lonely, this was more likely to be due to factors such as personal inclinations, parental attitudes, geography, and class than only-childhood *per se*. Some only children were solitary for these reasons, yet due to personal inclinations, they enjoyed being alone, so did not remember being lonely in an emotional sense.

It is in this chapter, and the next, which concerns unhappiness among only children, that this thesis particularly resonates with the findings of Samuel, Paul Thompson, and Burchardt that popular myths shape interviewees' recollections of their childhoods.<sup>1</sup> A number of only children used only-childhood to explain their experiences of loneliness and unhappiness to at least some extent, despite the presence of other explanatory factors and the existence of only children who did not share these experiences. It must be reiterated that these only children are not at fault, or 'lying to themselves' for describing their childhoods in these terms. It is understandable that they would imbibe strong and pervasive stereotypes and use them to construct, frame, and make sense of their experiences.<sup>2</sup>

As chapter 4 has shown, Bohannon deduced that only children had an 'isolated home life'. He also wrote that this was not a situation they were at

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel and Thompson, 'Introduction', p. 7; Burchardt, 'Stepchildren's Memories', pp. 239, 240.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel and Thompson, 'Introduction', pp. 13, 14.

ease with, as ‘it is plainly evident that they have as deep longings for society as the children of other families.’<sup>3</sup> Medical doctor Mary Scharlieb associated ‘onliness’ with ‘loneliness’ in her 1927 book *The Psychology of Childhood*. Harking back to the purported effects of isolation from other children described in chapter 4, she wrote that this resulted in ‘nervous habits’ and ‘difficult’ adolescents and adults who did not fit into society.<sup>4</sup> Paediatrician Karl König made similar pronouncements about the effects of loneliness in 1958, describing the only child as a ‘lonely bird’, and differentiating only and firstborn children by the loneliness of the former.<sup>5</sup>

It is notable that these writers used the word ‘loneliness’, where other authors have used the less emotive word ‘isolation’. It suggests, as Bohannon did, that separation from other children was both harmful to their socialisation in the long-term and unpleasant in the short-term. Then again, a couple of only children used the word ‘lonely’ simply to mean ‘alone’ (as in ‘I wandered lonely as a cloud ... they flash upon the inward eye, Which is the bliss of solitude’, from William Wordsworth’s 1802 poem *Daffodils*<sup>6</sup>). It is therefore important for this thesis to pay attention to the context in which writers used the word ‘lonely’. It seems likely that Scharlieb employed it to emotionally appeal to the parents or prospective parents of only children, given her obvious disdain for them: ‘owing to financial stress, to difficulty of housing, to fears for the wife’s health, and sometimes even to absolute selfishness, a

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<sup>3</sup> Bohannon, ‘The Only Child in a Family’, p. 489.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Scharlieb, *The Psychology of Childhood: Normal and Abnormal*, (London 1927), pp. 79, 88-9.

<sup>5</sup> Karl König, *Brothers and Sisters: The Order of Birth in the Family: An Expanded Edition*, (1958, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition revised and expanded Edinburgh, 2012), pp. 25, 46.

<sup>6</sup> ‘I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud by William Wordsworth | Poetry Foundation’, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45521/i-wandered-lonely-as-a-cloud>, (accessed 19/12/2017).



married couple determine that *no* child or *one* child is the ideal of family happiness to them [her italics].<sup>7</sup> König himself was an only child, and not a particularly happy one, and this could have given his pronouncements on the effects of loneliness on personality a particularly emotional charge.<sup>8</sup>

The increasing concern among writers about loneliness among only children mirrored both the contemporary growth in ideas that children learn how to be good citizens by being part of groups with their peers and the shift in focus from physical health and morality to mental and emotional health.<sup>9</sup> Agatha Bowley and Edith Buxbaum (writing in 1948 and 1949 respectively) recognised that only children might not be lonely if they had playmates available to them.<sup>10</sup> On the whole, though, Mass Observation respondents presented loneliness as inevitable in only children, perhaps reflecting the loss of subtlety when childrearing experts' messages appeared in newspapers.<sup>11</sup> A number of interviewees from 1944 who had one child expressed a desire to have a second, chiefly for reasons of companionship.<sup>12</sup> As chapter 1 showed, and this chapter will further demonstrate, siblings were not an automatic guarantee of company. Several respondents from 1949 felt that an ideal family did not consist of one child because they would be lonely, referring to

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<sup>7</sup> Scharlieb, *The Psychology of Childhood*, p. 89.

<sup>8</sup> König, *Brothers and Sisters*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>9</sup> Deborah Thom, 'Wishes, Anxieties, Play, and Gestures', p. 210; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, pp. 166, 209; Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, p. 16; Newson and Newson, *Cultural Aspects of Childrearing*, pp. 53-4; Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 168-9, 172-3; Grant, 'Parent-child Relations', p. 117.

<sup>10</sup> Agatha Bowley, *Modern Child Psychology*, (London, 1948), p. 96; Buxbaum, *Your Child Makes Sense*, p. 179.

<sup>11</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 93.

<sup>12</sup> TC 3/3-1-B; TC 3/3-1-C; TC 3/3-1-D; TC 3/3-1-F; TC 3/3-1-H.

'the loneliness experienced by an only child,' 'miss[ing] companionship both as a child and as youth', and the 'essential companionship' of siblings.<sup>13</sup>

As indicated in the introduction, Davidoff wrote that the decline in family size from the late-nineteenth century led children to experience less 'sibling companionship.'<sup>14</sup> Joan Poynder, the only child from Thea Thompson's *Edwardian Childhoods* who attributed her reserved character to only-childhood in chapter 4, also described herself as 'awfully lonely'. She discussed how she was unable to talk to her parents or governesses about her feelings, and 'long[ed] to go to school, because I loved my contemporaries.'<sup>15</sup> As mentioned previously, Poynder's experience of being upper-class, as well as a girl, may have had particular influence over whether or not she was lonely as an only child.

Loneliness is another purported aspect of only-childhood that has been challenged by recent researchers. Falbo, Laybourn, McKibben and Newman have all found, or cited findings, that only children are no more lonely than children with siblings.<sup>16</sup> Laybourn found that other factors, particularly parenting, were more important determinants of loneliness than only-childhood. The forthcoming analysis reflects this.<sup>17</sup>

This chapter analyses the cases of three only children who explicitly stated that despite being isolated from other children for various reasons separate from only-childhood, they were not lonely, and even sought solitude. These

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<sup>13</sup> TC 3/3-4-A; TC 3/3-4-B; TC 3/3-4-C.

<sup>14</sup> Davidoff, 'The Family in Britain', p. 118.

<sup>15</sup> Thea Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, pp. 210, 216, 220, 223.

<sup>16</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: A Review', p. 17; Laybourn, *The Only Child*, pp. 49-61; McKibben, *Maybe One*, p. 40; Newman, *The Case for the Only Child*, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> Laybourn, *The Only Child*, pp. 49-61.

were Arthur Machen, a lower middle-class author born in Gwent, Wales in 1863, Dorothy Crisp, an author and political activist born into an upper working-class family in Leeds in 1906, and Anthony Mallinson, an upper middle-class lawyer who was born in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, in 1923. This chapter also includes cases of isolated only children who actively desired company, so it seems reasonable to assume that Machen, Crisp, and Mallinson did not simply 'accustom' or 'resign' themselves to solitude.

Like some of the only children in the previous chapter, the attitudes of Crisp and Mallinson's parents both caused their solitariness and allowed them to enjoy it. Crisp criticised 'well-meaning doctors and whatnot' who 'inveigh against the loneliness of the only child', and credited solitude for developing her capacity for thought and independence of mind.<sup>18</sup> Unlike some of the working-class only children in chapter 4, Crisp often 'played all by myself.'<sup>19</sup> This appeared to be partly because her parents were ambitious for their daughter; although her father had 'no settled career' and 'money must ... have been difficult', they nonetheless invested in a 'middle-class education' for her.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, they 'had been married some years when a stillborn boy arrived, and again years passed before my birth.'<sup>21</sup> These attitudes of aspiration, and circumstances of fertility problems and child mortality (as in chapter 4) appear to have combined to ensure that 'a small princess would have received the same care' as Crisp did.<sup>22</sup> Until Crisp went to school, she appeared to have had little or no contact with other children, and 'only one

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<sup>18</sup> Dorothy Crisp, *A Life for England*, (London, 1946), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> 'Oxford DNB Article: Crisp, Dorothy', <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/96367>, (accessed 4/7/2016); Crisp, *A Life for England*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Crisp, *A Life for England*, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

little girl my own age was approved as a playmate, and she not until I was ten or eleven.<sup>23</sup> While Crisp might initially appear to fit the mould of a stereotypical only child, by examining her story more closely, this thesis reveals circumstances – namely, her parents' fertility problems and high aspirations – which were not common to all only children. She may have been an only child because of her parents' reproductive misfortunes, and better-placed for parental resources because she was an only child, but only-childhood itself was not the prime mover behind her experiences.

The way Crisp's parents treated her was not unusual for working-class parents who had certain aspirations for their children in the early-twentieth century. Davin and Roberts, for example, have described how parents who dreamed of social mobility for themselves and/or their children kept to themselves instead of being particularly neighbourly.<sup>24</sup> As the century progressed and more and more working-class families moved to new council houses in the suburbs, this behaviour increased. Children were kept off the streets to protect them from 'germs' and bad language, and because playing in the street came to be regarded by some as 'uncouth'.<sup>25</sup>

While some only children's parents actively kept them away from other children, Mallinson suggested that his parents simply did not 'set out' to give him opportunities to socialise with his peers before he went to boarding school, probably at the age of seven or eight.<sup>26</sup> Even though he made friends

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<sup>23</sup> Crisp, *A Life for England*, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Roberts, 'Learning & Living', p. 20; Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>25</sup> Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, p. 199; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 190; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 212.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Anthony Mallinson by Katherine Thompson, 1993, *NLSC: City Lives*, C409/089 tape 1, © The British Library.

at boarding school and 'enjoyed my school life', though, he did not bring anyone home:

When going home for the, for the holidays, um, I wasn't thinking 'how marvellous, I'm going to see X or Y tomorrow.' I was thinking 'how marvellous, I'm going to,' you know, 'be away from all these other people ... I never accepted an invitation to go and stay with anybody. I never suggested that my parents should invite anybody to come and stay with us.'<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, Mallinson's parents and other family members were largely accepting of his inclination towards solitude. He described how, at Christmas when relatives and family friends came to visit:

It rather depended whether I was going to be interested in the particular part of Christmas as to whether I put in an appearance or not. I was quite capable of staying upstairs ... with my books ... I think most people were quite used to my comparative unsociability so they didn't worry too much about it ... it was accepted. Although I can well understand that there were moments when my mother was slightly irritated by it.<sup>28</sup>

One might speculate whether being male allowed Mallinson more freedom to indulge his preference for solitude than if he had been a girl of his class. As Dyhouse and Fletcher have pointed out, upper middle-class Victorian and Edwardian girls and boys faced very different expectations in terms of sociability. While boys were sent to school for long periods during their childhoods, girls' education was deemed less worthy of expenditure, and they might attend boarding school for a few years, if that. Being largely home-based, their mothers gradually introduced them to society while their male counterparts missed many social occasions by being at school.<sup>29</sup> Girls were thus educated for the benefit of men – to be good wives and skilled

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Anthony Mallinson by Katherine Thompson, tape 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, tape 1.

<sup>29</sup> Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, pp. 14, 44; Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, pp. 30, 244.

household managers, and to act appropriately as their families' representatives in society.<sup>30</sup> This appropriate social behaviour included restraining their passions, while boys were less bound by such expectations.<sup>31</sup> If Mallinson had been a girl, his parents may well have been less forgiving or permissive of his tendency to withdraw from social occasions to read. Even towards the middle of the century, upper middle-class girls who liked reading too much were a cause for concern, showing that gender could be important in determining an only child's experiences.<sup>32</sup>

Living in a working-class area of Leeds, Crisp would probably have had other local children available to play with had her parents not been so protective. By contrast, Machen lived in a very isolated rural area, and while this precluded contact with other children as there simply were none living in the vicinity, it was clearly idyllic and gave him great pleasure:

It was only by the merest chance and on the rarest occasions that I ever saw any children at all ... there were no children's parties for me, no cricket, no football, and I was heartily glad of it, for I should have abhorred all these diversions with shuddering of body and spirit. My mother and father apart, I loved to be by myself, with unlimited leisure for mooning and loafing and roaming and wandering from lane to lane, from wood to wood.<sup>33</sup>

As this chapter will show, not all only children who lived in isolated rural areas enjoyed their solitude quite so much, demonstrating the importance of individual personality in determining only children's experiences.

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<sup>30</sup> Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, p. 73; Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, pp. 30, 47, 50.

<sup>31</sup> Stearns, 'Childhood Emotions', p. 165; Matt, 'Current Emotion Research in History', p. 120.

<sup>32</sup> Dyhouse, 'Mothers and Daughters', p. 37; Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, p. 132; Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, p. 99; Ysenda Maxtone Graham, *Teams & Conditions: Life in Girls' Boarding Schools, 1939-1979*, (London, 2016), p. 164.

<sup>33</sup> Arthur Machen, *Far Off Things*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/35153/35153-h/35153-h.htm>, (accessed 4/7/2016), pp. 22-3.

Machen attended boarding school from the age of 11, and like Mallinson, this did not make him more sociable, as he was glad to return to his solitary ways at the end of each term. While Mallinson claimed to have enjoyed school while he was there, Machen regarded it merely 'as a sort of interlude among strangers.'<sup>34</sup> As Hamlett has written, by leaving boys in dormitories largely to their own devices, boarding school housemasters intended that their charges would learn not only 'correct' expressions of emotion, but to 'form the right kind of attachments to others' as the boys would be constantly policing one another.<sup>35</sup> This often did not produce the emotional outcomes the housemasters were aiming for, with boys experiencing the extreme emotions associated with bullying, being a victim of bullying, illicit sex, and failure to accustom oneself to constant 'ragging'.<sup>36</sup> However, rather than cultivating the 'right' sort of attachments to their peers, Mallinson and Machen did not appear to cultivate any attachments to them at all, building upon Hamlett's arguments about how the emotional reality of dormitories differed from intention. Hamlett argued that boarding school boys varied in their emotional responses to the regime, and it can be argued that only children similarly reacted positively or negatively to isolation.<sup>37</sup>

Alternatively, Mallinson and Machen may have misrepresented their memories of boarding school to differing extents. Journalist Alex Renton, in an investigation of more than a century of boarding-school life, has suggested that trauma was inevitable for boys such as Mallinson who were sent away to prep school at the age of seven or eight. However, they rarely went on to

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<sup>34</sup> Machen, *Far Off Things*, p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> Hamlett, 'Space and Emotional Experience', pp. 119, 124-5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120, 127-9, 131.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120, 121, 128, 131.

discuss such painful memories at length in later life, because members of their class were brought up to keep their feelings to themselves. Instead, they presented the initial hardships of school 'as a necessary prelude to happier times,' that taught them to be mature and not complain. Alternatively, they repressed such memories altogether. Another reason that former boarding school pupils might not remember much about their schooldays was that they simply found them boring.<sup>38</sup>

While Machen at least escaped starting boarding school at a particularly tender age, the way he presented his memories could suggest he was bored there, as he simply did not consider school worth describing next to the glories of the Welsh countryside. Alternatively, he may have found the experience too traumatic to go into much detail because, as shown above, he was 'heartily glad' not to have to play cricket or football at home.<sup>39</sup> As chapter 4 showed, from the mid-nineteenth century, team sports became the backbone of public school education. They came to be regarded as more important than learning, and boys who had no enthusiasm for games were unpopular with the masters and other boys alike.<sup>40</sup> Mallinson, at least, enjoyed sports despite being 'an extraordinarily inefficient games player,' and the fact that he was more forthcoming about his school years than Machen (and his admission that 'I enjoyed my school life') suggests that this led to a more pleasant experience.<sup>41</sup> Renton also wrote that the trauma of boarding school could cause a split between a boy's private, 'real' self and his public,

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<sup>38</sup> Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip*, pp. 8, 21, 56, 171-80.

<sup>39</sup> Machen, *Far Off Things*, p. 23.

<sup>40</sup> Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip*, pp. 143-4, 157.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Anthony Mallinson by Katherine Thompson, tape 1.



constructed self.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps, for both Mallinson and Machen, home was where they could be 'themselves', and boarding school made them especially keen to be on their own, with a book or outside, when they got the opportunity. If so, for these only children, only-childhood neither led to loneliness, nor caused them to be anti-social. The class-based practice of sending them to live in an extremely sociable environment for most of the year may have intensified their preference for solitude.

Something that Machen, Mallinson and Crisp had in common were opportunities to be alone should they desire. One might assume that a common advantage of only-childhood was that one was automatically granted a space of one's own. However, a small number of only children in this study, even towards the middle of the twentieth century, slept in reception rooms or shared a bedroom with one or both parents. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, due to cramped housing, it was often easier for busy working-class parents not to have any children in the way at home.<sup>43</sup> In Crisp's case, it was implied, rather than explicitly stated, that she had the space to be alone, considering she referred to playing alone and learning to think as a result of her solitude.<sup>44</sup> Mallinson, being upper middle-class, not only had his own bedroom, but also his own sitting room (formerly his nursery) to which he could withdraw. Even at boarding school, he managed to carve out some personal space; he referred to reading all the plays of Shakespeare by

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<sup>42</sup> Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip*, p. 124.

<sup>43</sup> Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', pp. 114, 116, 117, 123, 124; Walvin, *A Child's World*, p. 94; Vigne, 'Parents and Children', pp. 7-8; Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>44</sup> Crisp, *A Life for England*, pp. 4, 9.

torchlight underneath his dormitory bed.<sup>45</sup> This corresponds well with Hamlett's finding that boarders 'might use space and material goods to actively exert agency within institutional space, creating a sense of emotional security and equilibrium.'<sup>46</sup>

Machen's isolated geographical position ensured he could be alone as often as he wanted when he was not at school. As Steve Humphries and Pamela Gordon have found, in the first half of the twentieth century, a rural setting was also useful for disabled children who wished to play alone, away from the other children who ridiculed and rejected them.<sup>47</sup> A large family in the same position might have found themselves equally cut off. James Bossard and Eleanor Stoker Boll, researching large American families in the 1950s, Sanders, and Davidoff have all referred to large families who, due to geographical isolation and/or other factors, became (Davidoff wrote) 'so enclosed in their sibling and kin world that they felt no need to engage with those outside.'<sup>48</sup>

Only children were not the only ones who could be cut off from their peers, then, and other children might also wish to be alone. Groups of siblings escaped the adult gaze by colonising spaces such as gardens, outhouses and attics.<sup>49</sup> However, it could be rather more difficult for a child of any class to escape their siblings, with separate bedrooms for individual children only

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Anthony Mallinson by Katherine Thompson, tape 1.

<sup>46</sup> Hamlett, 'Space and Emotional Experience', p. 134.

<sup>47</sup> Steve Humphries and Pamela Gordon, *Out of Sight: The Experience of Disability 1900-1950*, (Plymouth, 1992), p. 42.

<sup>48</sup> James H. S. Bossard and Eleanor Stoker Boll, *The Large Family System*, (Philadelphia, 1956), pp. 169, 197-8; Sanders, *The Brother-Sister Culture*, p. 4; Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, p. 102.

<sup>49</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, p. 87; Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 125.

becoming commonplace towards the end of the period.<sup>50</sup> As Martin has pointed out, in the nineteenth century, one advantage disabled children from large families had over their siblings was that they had the opportunity to withdraw from the fray when they felt overwhelmed.<sup>51</sup>

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the word 'lonely' appears to have been used to denote simply being alone, as well as negative feelings about being alone, among manual-writers, and autobiographers, and oral history interviewees. As mentioned above, Machen and Mallinson were explicit that they enjoyed solitude as children. However, they still used the word 'lonely' to describe themselves. Machen wrote that he 'was "set" to loneliness' by the time he started boarding school, and Mallinson said that 'being an only child, um, perhaps one does have a tendency to live a rather solitary, lonely life.'<sup>52</sup> This gives the impression that they did not necessarily load the term 'lonely' with the connotations of unhappiness in solitude.

Crisp's use of the term is less clear. As indicated earlier, she criticised 'well-meaning doctors and whatnot' for 'inveigh[ing] against the loneliness of the only child', and credited solitude for her successes in life.<sup>53</sup> However, she also wrote that her 'imaginative and lonely state', combined with the stories her father told her that were set abroad, gave her 'world-wide interests', and that when she started school, 'I had the keenest desire, no doubt intensified

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<sup>50</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, p. 87; Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family*, p. 48; Michael Anderson, 'The Social Implications of Demographic Change', in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, Volume 2*, p. 41; Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 130

<sup>51</sup> Martin, 'Disabled Children and Domestic Spaces', p. 143.

<sup>52</sup> Machen, *Far Off Things* p. 23; Interview with Anthony Mallinson by Katherine Thompson, tape 1.

<sup>53</sup> Crisp, *A Life For England*, p. 9.

by the loneliness of my home life, to form great friendships.<sup>54</sup> While, like Machen and Mallinson, Crisp may have been using the term 'lonely' as a synonym for 'solitary', it seems unlikely that a positive or neutral sense of aloneness drove her to try hard to befriend her peers.

Given that some only children frame their childhoods in ways that they might not have done at the time, perhaps Crisp really did feel lonely as a child, and only later on was she able to regard solitude as a useful situation that aided her personal development. Perhaps, by making a point of arguing against only children's critics, she denied her own childhood experiences, which nonetheless appear elsewhere in her autobiography. Equivalently, three only children in this study appeared to have imbibed only-child stereotypes, reporting that they could not recall being lonely, yet 'must have been' so, even if they were 'not conscious' of it, because they were only children.<sup>55</sup>

Whatever their 'actual' experiences, though, this thesis' concern is with how only children reflected upon their childhoods, rather than their feelings at the time, which are in any case impossible to reproduce.<sup>56</sup> These testimonies show that only children's ideas of how they were 'meant' to feel found their way into their life stories. This demonstrates the power of the stereotype and emotional norm that all only children were lonely, as well as the importance of looking more closely at what they said about their childhoods.

While solitude suited Machen, Mallinson, and Crisp, some only children said that they had been lonely, though their testimonies suggest that this was for

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<sup>54</sup> Crisp, *A Life for England*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>55</sup> Arnold L. Haskell, *In His True Centre*, (London, 1951), p. 33; Julia Neilson, *This For Remembrance*, (London, 1940), p. 20; Kirkup, *The Only Child*, p. 38.

<sup>56</sup> Jordanova, 'Children in History', p. 5; Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, pp. 11-12.

reasons separate from only-childhood. Margaret Haig Thomas, an upper middle-class suffragette and magazine proprietor, was born in Bayswater, London, in 1883, and lived in Monmouthshire, Wales for much of her childhood. Agnes Gilbey was a poor working-class housewife born in Shalford, Essex, in 1897, and James Nelson was a pseudonymous poor working-class ex-convict born in Elephant and Castle, London, in around 1936. He appeared also to live in Manchester and other, unnamed places for periods as a young child. All three conflated onliness with loneliness. Thomas wrote, 'I was an only child and therefore a lonely child,' Gilbey referred to having 'a lonely life really ... being an only child,' and Nelson wrote, 'I was quite a lonely child because I had no brothers and sisters.'<sup>57</sup> As this chapter has shown, though, only-childhood did not necessarily beget loneliness, and by taking a closer look at their accounts, it is possible to deduce other factors that had particular influence on their childhood experiences of loneliness.

Like Machen, Thomas and Gilbey appeared to have had limited opportunities to socialise with other children because they lived in remote locations, but unlike Machen, they were not content with this situation. Thomas' home was lively in the summer 'when it was usually full to overflowing with my mother's relations', but on autumn and winter evenings she felt it was eerie, implying that it was isolated.<sup>58</sup> She described her childhood as essentially happy, but 'superficially I was perhaps a bit too lonely to be quite as happy as a child can be. Always I longed for other children to play with. Every night when I went

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<sup>57</sup> Viscountess Rhondda [M. H. Thomas], *This Was My World*, (London, 1933), p. 36; FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 313; James Nelson, *No More Walls*, (London, 1978), p. 40.

<sup>58</sup> Viscountess Rhondda, *This Was My World*, p. 6.

to bed I prayed for a little sister...'<sup>59</sup> By contrast, every summer, she would visit her grandparents in Powys, where 'for six weeks I mixed not only with one child, carefully imported to keep me company, but with eight or ten others. That in itself was intoxicating joy.'<sup>60</sup> Unlike Crisp, who, at least in hindsight, regarded her social isolation as an opportunity to figure out her ambitions and values, Thomas felt that being alone with her thoughts was a danger:

Being an only child ... one gets time to think. Too much time, perhaps ... that is not good for any child. At best it teaches it to withdraw into a world of unreality; at worst it can become an overpowering disease like drink or drug-taking, which makes all real contact with the visible world illusory.<sup>61</sup>

As Thomas grew to adolescence, this over-thinking evolved into full-blown existential crises.<sup>62</sup> Just as only children might be divided into those who had company and those who did not, their reactions to being alone could differ remarkably. This strengthens the idea that an only child's particular personality influenced their experiences more than only-childhood itself.

By contrast to the only children in chapter 4 who had other children available nearby from a young age, Gilbey 'lived up there, that house there, and there's no other houses near me for – oh, half a mile, a mile, and I had no playmates at all.' Although, as she grew older, she was able to be more sociable, presumably because she was allowed to leave the house unaccompanied to play with schoolfriends and the children of her parents' friends, her mother 'wouldn't let me out far.' She associated this with only-childhood, but also

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<sup>59</sup> Viscountess Rhondda, *This Was My World*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> Crisp, *A Life for England*, p. 9; Viscountess Rhondda, *This Was My World*, p. 35.

<sup>62</sup> Viscountess Rhondda, *This Was My World*, p. 36.

suggested that her mother's protectiveness was engendered by the loss of another child: 'after losing the – other baby, they thought I might – they might lose me, I think.'<sup>63</sup> As mentioned in chapter 4, many families would have experienced such losses in the late-nineteenth century, and some only children were particularly burdened by protective parents as a result.<sup>64</sup> As this thesis has also indicated, both only and sibling children could be cut off from the outside world by living in a particularly remote location.<sup>65</sup>

Nelson, meanwhile, often lived in far more densely populated areas than Thomas or Gilbey, but appeared to be isolated by a combination of his own personality, his parents' attitudes, domestic circumstances, and historical events. In his autobiography, and an interview with Canadian street newspaper *Spare Change News*, he described himself as a 'sheltered' child whose mother 'over-smothered' and 'over-powered' him. While his father 'worked very hard' as a kitchen porter, he could also be a drunken figure of fear, and the two of them were never close: 'I had no faith in myself because of this early life I had. I always depended on people to tell me what to do and I don't think I was allowed to think for myself.'<sup>66</sup> Nelson suggested that his subsequent rebellion was a reaction to these parental attitudes.<sup>67</sup>

Another cause of Nelson's loneliness may have been his difficulty in communicating. Between the ages of three and five, he was 'put into care'

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<sup>63</sup> FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 313.

<sup>64</sup> Woods, Watterson and Woodward, 'The Causes of Rapid Fertility Decline in England and Wales, 1861-1921, Part I', pp. 346, 360, 362; Woods, Williams and Galley, 'Infant Mortality in England', pp. 35, 36, 44.

<sup>65</sup> Bossard and Boll, *The Large Family System*, pp. 169, 197-8; Sanders, *The Brother-Sister Culture*, p. 4; Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, p. 102.

<sup>66</sup> James Nelson, *No More Walls*, p. 37; 'Intercontinental Promotions: I AIN'T GOT NONE', <https://mickthepunk.blogspot.co.uk/2007/09/i-aint-got-none.html>, (accessed 7/10/2017).

<sup>67</sup> James Nelson, *No More Walls*, p. 38.

(evacuated to a children's institution as 'the war was on and it wasn't "safe" in Manchester so they put me away') and lived with seven other children.

However, because 'there was never any communication of any sort in our family ... the only way I communicated was in the form of violence, so's to get a reaction from somebody.'<sup>68</sup> His evacuation was clearly a traumatic experience; he likened it to his later stays in prisons and 'mental hospitals', and described how he was eventually sent home 'because they said I made a mess in my bed. Imagine blaming a kid of five.'<sup>69</sup> The professionals Nelson came into contact with may have deduced that he had been psychologically harmed by his evacuation. During and after the Second World War, psychologist, psychiatrist, and psychoanalyst John Bowlby's ideas that children who were separated from their mothers – by evacuation, or in nurseries and other institutions – were at risk of mental illness and delinquency were highly influential.<sup>70</sup> Nelson himself may also have come to the conclusion that his evacuation had long-term effects because he was aware of such ideas about maternal deprivation.

Nelson was writing from a particular position: he had been homeless, and admitted to psychiatric hospitals 16 times, where he underwent Electro Convulsive Therapy and a lobotomy. He was also sent to prison twice before the age of 36, before having a near-death experience which motivated him to

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<sup>68</sup> 'Intercontinental Promotions: I AIN'T GOT NONE', <https://mickthepunk.blogspot.co.uk/2007/09/i-aint-got-none.html>, (accessed 7/10/2017).

<sup>69</sup> James Nelson, *No More Walls*, p. 5; 'Intercontinental Promotions: I AIN'T GOT NONE', <https://mickthepunk.blogspot.co.uk/2007/09/i-aint-got-none.html>, (accessed 7/10/2017).

<sup>70</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 60; Rose, *Governing the Soul*, pp. 158-65; Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, pp. 110-12; Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, pp. 210-12; Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, pp. 187-8.



give up alcohol and help others in his position.<sup>71</sup> This is likely to have made him especially reflective about his experiences and their origins. As mentioned above, even though he was close to his mother, he suspected that her over-protectiveness had not benefitted him.<sup>72</sup> He also wrote:

My health has not let me lead a normal life ... I felt that I was really different from other people. I found that I was slower in picking up everyday things than other kids. I felt rejected or dejected ... found it difficult to express feelings towards people and used ... to display my temper to get myself noticed by other people ... I saw my first psychiatrist between the age of 8 and 12 years and she sent me out of the room and told my mother that I would never go to work as my illness would not allow me to work.<sup>73</sup>

While Nelson was lonely and had difficulty interacting with other children, then, this appeared to be less related to only-childhood than his condition. He told *Spare Change News* that he was diagnosed with schizophrenia at the age of eight, though he suggested that this was a 'label', implying that his family's failure to teach him how to communicate explained his behaviour.<sup>74</sup> His problems getting along with other children might have stemmed from the effects of the condition itself on sociability, or alternatively a learning disorder may have led him to feel inferior and frustrated, and this manifested in his behaviour. At secondary school, 'I was always in trouble with teachers and had only a few friends ... I was always unhappy because I felt inferior to other

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<sup>71</sup> James Nelson, *No More Walls*, p. 5; 'Intercontinental Promotions: I AIN'T GOT NONE', <https://mickthepunk.blogspot.co.uk/2007/09/i-aint-got-none.html>, (accessed 7/10/2017); 'Intercontinental Promotions: 60 SECOND TRANSMITT TO LIFE STORY [sic]', <https://mickthepunk.blogspot.co.uk/2006/10/60-second-transmitt-to-life-story.html>, (accessed 7/10/2017).

<sup>72</sup> James Nelson, *No More Walls*, pp. 37-9.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-40.

<sup>74</sup> 'Intercontinental Promotions: I AIN'T GOT NONE', <https://mickthepunk.blogspot.co.uk/2007/09/i-aint-got-none.html>, (accessed 7/10/2017).

children. That is why I got into fights – because of feeling inferior to the other kids.’<sup>75</sup>

Nelson’s experiences may have been, to some extent, a product of the time he was growing up. As mentioned in chapter 3, from the late-nineteenth century, there was increasing interest in the development and health of children’s minds.<sup>76</sup> Nelson’s diagnosis, during or after the Second World War, coincided with a time of particular anxiety about children like him. Hendrick, Roberts, and Urwin and Sharland have described how the rise of fascism and turbulence of war caused heightened anxiety about children’s emotional and intellectual, as well as physical, development. Aggression and delinquency were particular concerns.<sup>77</sup> Also during the first half of the twentieth century, experts increasingly adopted the viewpoint that the first signs of mental disturbance appeared in childhood, and originated in the home.<sup>78</sup> Parents’ faulty practices were therefore commonly blamed for their children’s misbehaviour, and they were instructed to change their own behaviour to improve that of their children.<sup>79</sup>

It is unclear how aware Nelson was that he fitted these symptoms at the time, but nonetheless, he certainly seemed to exhibit the ‘abnormal behaviour, antisocial conduct, neuroses ... making friendships too easily or not at all ...

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<sup>75</sup> James Nelson, *No More Walls*, p. 41.

<sup>76</sup> Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, p. 39; Urwin and Sharland, ‘From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature’, p. 175; Newson and Newson, ‘Cultural Aspects of Childrearing’, pp. 53-4; Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 2; Brysbar and Rastle, *Historical and Conceptual Issues in Psychology*, p. 473.

<sup>77</sup> Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 31; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 143; Urwin and Sharland, ‘From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature’, p. 175.

<sup>78</sup> Rose, *Governing the Soul*, p. 153; Rose, *The Psychological Complex*, p. 163; Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Rose, *Governing the Soul*, p. 155; Rose, *The Psychological Complex*, pp. 159, 176-88; Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, pp. 1, 24, 90, 102; Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, p. 195.

quarrelling' that contemporary professionals said indicated maladjustment and predicted future delinquency.<sup>80</sup> His attribution of some of his problems to his mother's 'over-smothering' and 'over-powering' behaviour could also be retrospective, or learned from the professionals he came into contact with as a child.<sup>81</sup> His encounters with psychiatrists and their ideas may also have contributed to his feelings of inferiority, difference, and therefore loneliness. He might have picked up on new ideas that aggression in children was particularly undesirable, and that boys' displays of anger and aggression were only acceptable when channelled through sports.<sup>82</sup> It was also around this time that clinical psychologist and paediatrician Arnold Gesell's ideas about developmental milestones, and the behaviour and understanding parents and teachers should expect from 'normal' children at particular ages, became popular. Nelson may therefore have also found himself falling short of newly-established 'targets'.<sup>83</sup> As he was behind his peers intellectually, and aggressive towards them, it is unsurprising that his mother took him to a psychiatrist, either independently or on the advice of a teacher.<sup>84</sup>

This is not to say that Nelson's development and behaviour would not have aroused concern had he been born earlier, as 'passion' in children was also regarded as a dangerous precursor to insanity in the nineteenth century.<sup>85</sup> However, as a working-class child under observance in a structured school system at a time of particular worry about children's mental health, the

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<sup>80</sup> Rose, *The Psychological Complex*, p. 165.

<sup>81</sup> James Nelson, *No More Walls*, p. 38.

<sup>82</sup> Stearns, 'Childhood Emotions', pp. 165, 169.

<sup>83</sup> Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, pp. 154-6; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, pp. 163, 241-2; Rose, *Governing the Soul*, p. 150.

<sup>84</sup> James Nelson, *No More Walls*, pp. 40, 41.

<sup>85</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 89.

attention and treatment he received were very particular to the time that he was growing up. Although Nelson wrote that he was lonely because he was an only child, a whole host of circumstances – his health, and its effects on his personality, his mother's over-protectiveness and father's hostility, poverty, and growing up at the time he did – seemed to have contributed to, or been the reason for, his loneliness as a child.<sup>86</sup> Unlike Thomas and Gilbey, though, he often lived in populous areas, and unlike Thomas, he had the opportunity to meet other children from a young age, though his difficulties communicating prevented him from getting along with them.

Thomas and Gilbey were at virtually opposite ends of the class spectrum.

Gilbey's home was isolated because her father was a groom and gardener for a grand country house, while Thomas appeared to occupy such a home.

While Gilbey went to the local school, where she met other children, however, for much of her childhood, Thomas was bound to her home by the practices and expectations of her class and gender.<sup>87</sup> She was educated at home by governesses until she was 13, when she was living in Westminster, London, and was sent to a day school there. She went to a boarding school in St. Andrews, Scotland, at her own request, at the age of 15; she 'thirsted' for the freedom the girls there were allowed by the mistresses, and persuaded her father that the school would not turn her 'silly'.<sup>88</sup>

We have already seen how upper middle-class girls were commonly educated at home for most or all of their childhoods in the late-nineteenth

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<sup>86</sup> James Nelson, *No More Walls*, p. 40.

<sup>87</sup> FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 313.

<sup>88</sup> Viscountess Rhondda, *This Was My World*, pp. 11-12.

century, while boys were sent off to boarding school at an early age.<sup>89</sup> As a contrast to Machen and Mallinson, Thomas described her school years as 'gloriously happy and unrepeatable.'<sup>90</sup> Perhaps girls such as Thomas, being involved in the decision to go to boarding school, attending at a less tender age, and experiencing a less brutal environment, were more likely to enjoy themselves there. Renton has found that a particular grievance boys had about being sent to boarding school was their lack of say in the matter. He has further suggested that early boarding, with its attendant discomforts and sudden loss of privacy, traumatically fractures relationships between young boys and their well-meaning parents.<sup>91</sup>

Renton has also discussed how cold dormitories, bad food, and violent behaviour from fellow pupils tasked with keeping order and underpaid, sadistic masters were cost-saving measures that 'became the means of instilling virtues such as bravery, resilience and ... 'manliness'.' A culture of silence prevented boys from complaining about their treatment.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, Hamlett has portrayed boys' dormitories as a hotbed of conflict, negotiation and lack of intervention from masters.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps girls enjoyed a friendlier, more comfortable environment than boys at boarding school. As Davidoff *et al* have written, at this time, institutions for men were antithetical to ideas of family and domesticity, whereas those for women were more reminiscent of home.<sup>94</sup> Ysenda Maxtone Graham, in a rather more jolly account of girls' schools, has implied that displaying emotions was more acceptable in such

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<sup>89</sup> Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, pp. 14, 44; Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, pp. 30, 244.

<sup>90</sup> Viscountess Rhondda, *This Was My World*, p. 77.

<sup>91</sup> Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip*, pp. 49, 50, 51-2, 63.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 49, 69, 120, 171-80.

<sup>93</sup> Hamlett, 'Space and Emotional Experience', pp. 120, 127, 129, 131.

<sup>94</sup> Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, p. 131.

institutions. At the beginning of term, for example, 'the whole wing of a school could sound like a field of bleating lambs in search of their mothers', whereas pupils at the boys' schools Renton described could expect a beating for such behaviour.<sup>95</sup> Corporal punishment was far more strongly associated with boys' schools than girls' schools. However, girls were more likely to be subject to complex psychological punishments, as well as policing from their peers.<sup>96</sup>

Alternatively, Thomas was simply particularly fortunate to have a reliable, fair and unselfish housemistress, and possess a temperament that meant she was 'gloriously happy' at boarding school.<sup>97</sup> As Renton has written, 'there were (and are) good and bad schools ... just as there are children who adapted easily and those who didn't.'<sup>98</sup> Graham has described some girls' schools where the teachers were kind and the girls enjoyed themselves, and others which were more akin to boys' schools, where pupils were expected to withstand hardships stoically.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, some only-child boys whose testimonies were studied for this thesis appeared to have friendly, healthy relationships with their masters, and some only-child girls hated being sent away to school and dreaded the end of the holidays. Whether or not a child enjoyed boarding school might not just come down to gender. It might also depend on their temperament, whether they went willingly and at what age, and the nature of the particular school they attended.

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<sup>95</sup> Graham, *Terms & Conditions*, p. 79; Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip*, pp. 120, 171-80.

<sup>96</sup> Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip*, pp. 205, 206.

<sup>97</sup> Viscountess Rhondda, *This Was My World*, pp. v, 15, 77.

<sup>98</sup> Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip*, p. 171.

<sup>99</sup> Graham, *Terms & Conditions*, pp. 92-103, 138.

This chapter has shown that while the circumstance of being alone depended upon parental attitudes, domestic circumstances, geographical location, class, and historical time, individual only children's personalities ultimately determined whether or not they felt lonely. They also influenced their reactions to interacting with other children. Considering that only children referred to rural isolation, evacuation, and boarding school when discussing whether or not they were lonely, it seems fair to conclude that location, historical circumstances, and class had more to do with loneliness than only-childhood *per se*. However, this did not prevent only children from attributing their loneliness to only-childhood, demonstrating how people use popular ideas to construct their life stories.

An example from this thesis' 'control group' further indicates that having siblings did not preclude loneliness. This strengthens its argument about the importance of influences separate from birth position, and provides a counterpoint to historians who have portrayed siblings as companionable. Sculptor Ralph Brown, born into a working-class family in Leeds in 1928, had two brothers. However, they were five and nine years older than him respectively. Not only was the difference in their ages too vast for them to play together, but he saw little of them after the age of 11 as they joined up for the Second World War. Like some of the only children in this thesis, Brown lived in an isolated area – his father was the caretaker at a semi-rural secondary school, and the family lived in a house on the campus – and he felt lonely because when he was at home from school, there were no other

children nearby.<sup>100</sup> Although Davin was referring to the poorest children, her finding that age gaps meant that siblings were not necessarily natural playmates for one another are relevant here. She cited abortion, unintended miscarriages, deaths in infancy, lower fertility later in marriage, and prevention as reasons such gaps might occur.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, Bossard and Boll found that children from large families were less likely to play together if they lived in a populous area and were allowed to 'play out' with other children of their own choosing, were widely spaced in age, or had particularly divergent interests and personalities.<sup>102</sup> Considering the age gaps between their children, Brown's parents may have carefully spaced their births. Alternatively, as Brown described himself as an 'afterthought', his conception may have been unintended.<sup>103</sup> Whatever decisions Brown's parents made, or did not make, as a sibling child, Brown seemed to be more isolated than some of the only children in this thesis.

As well as loneliness, only-childhood has been associated with a more general unhappiness. The next chapter shows that there were only children who considered their childhoods as happy and unhappy, and the reasons for this went far beyond only-childhood.

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Ralph Brown by Gillian Whiteley, September 1999-June 2000, *NLSC: Artists' Lives*, C466/92 part 1, © The British Library.

<sup>101</sup> Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, p. 16.

<sup>102</sup> Bossard and Boll, *The Large Family System*, pp. 167-70.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Ralph Brown by Gillian Whiteley, part 1.



## 7. Unhappiness

Considering all the problems associated with only children during the period covered by this thesis and beyond, it is perhaps of little surprise that contemporary childrearing manual-writers, 1940s Mass Observation interviewees, and historians have also supposed that they had generally unhappy childhoods. This chapter asks what happy and unhappy childhoods entailed for those who wrote about and experienced only-childhood, and argues that only children's happy and unhappy experiences were the result of factors other than only-childhood.

It is worth conducting a separate examination of reports of happiness and unhappiness in only children's testimonies for two reasons. The first is that, just as some only children incorporated only-childhood into their explanations for being lonely or otherwise, others employed it in their accounts of whether they were happy or unhappy as children. As this thesis has shown, Stearns has found that around the turn of the twentieth century, an association grew between childhood and happiness, with the two becoming synonymous, at least among middle-class people, by the middle of the century.<sup>1</sup> This new interest in childhood happiness is reflected in childrearing manuals, oral history interviewers' questions, and autobiographers' and interviewees' considerations of their childhoods.<sup>2</sup> As a result, people increasingly made judgments about whether their childhoods, and those of other people, had been happy. This occurred even when it was anachronistic to do so because they had grown up at a time when the equation between childhood and

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<sup>1</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 167, 170, 172, 175; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 41, 61, 130, 164; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 167, 172, 174, 175, 178-9.

happiness was weak or non-existent.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, even only children who were born before 1890 discussed whether or not they had been happy, presumably for much the same reason that they addressed only-child stereotypes that only appeared to have become widespread once they were adults.

The second reason this chapter focuses on only children's happiness as a separate concern is that by doing so, it contributes to the growing field of history of emotions, where there is still much to do. Its work on happiness builds on that of Stearns, as well as that of the contributors to Stephanie Olsen's 2015 collection *Youth and Emotions in Modern History*, who have been among the first historians to examine childhood happiness. Stearns found that parents were increasingly obliged to make their children happy from the early years of the twentieth century, and they were aware that play and having friends were particularly important to happiness.<sup>4</sup> This contrasts with the varying ideas of childhood happiness Renton received from child psychologists, psychotherapists, trauma and abuse experts, psychoneurobiologists, child-development writers and teachers for his study of boarding schools. While Renton failed to find a definitive answer to the question 'what makes a happy childhood?', the only children whose testimonies were analysed for this study particularly based their judgements of happy childhoods upon playing with friends and having good relationships

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<sup>3</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 178-9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 167, 172, 173, 178-81.

with their parents.<sup>5</sup> This was broadly shared by manual-writers, Mass Observation respondents, and historians.

Manual-writers particularly focussed on parental treatment as the cause of only children's unhappiness. As chapter 5 showed, in 1910, educator Elizabeth Harrison described the negative effects of too much adult company on a five-year-old boy named Herbert. Not only did this lead to 'irritability,' 'discontent,' and 'ennui', but Herbert also had 'an unhappy disposition' because his parents and grandparents did too much for him, and did not let him do much for himself.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Hutchison wrote in 1925 that only children were unhappy and sickly because their parents fondled and caressed them too much. These attitudes possibly reflected nascent behaviourist advice to parents not to touch their children more than was necessary if they wanted them to become independent and mentally and physically healthy.<sup>7</sup> Cunnington, meanwhile, wrote in 1913 that the absence of siblings caused unhappiness in only children, as without the distraction of other children, they 'dwell[ed] on emotional events.'<sup>8</sup>

Cunnington also suggested that only children would continue to be unhappy in adulthood. He appealed to couples considering stopping at one child to ask themselves, 'what will the child say when he has grown up? For his good we do this; will he live to thank us?'. The implication was that only children would look back on their childhoods as setting the scene for a lifetime of

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<sup>5</sup> Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip*, p. 53.

<sup>6</sup> Harrison, *Misunderstood Children*, pp. 140, 146-7.

<sup>7</sup> Hutchison, *The Child and his Problems*, pp. 91-2; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, pp. 169-70, 173-4; Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, p. 126; Newson and Newson, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing', pp. 61, 64.

<sup>8</sup> Cunnington, *Nursery Notes*, p. 17.

unhappiness. An adult only child, according to Cunnington, 'finds himself without brothers and sisters, plagued by a frail physique, an ill-balanced intellect, a weak morality, or he may discover the loneliness of his position to be unendurable to one of his sensitive nature.'<sup>9</sup> Psychologist H. Addington Bruce, writing in 1917, referred to the ideas of a contemporary, psychoanalyst A. A. Brill, that only children 'are in later years "selfish, unhappy, and morose",' and 'begrudge the happiness of friends and acquaintances' because their parents' over-solicitude towards them as children made them neurotic, as well as arrogant and self-centred.<sup>10</sup> As this chapter shows, several only children in this study described their childhoods as 'happy'. Those who said they had had unhappy childhoods had these experiences for reasons that went far beyond only-childhood.

Respondents to Mass Observation's 1949 'Ideal Family' questionnaire shared the view that only children were unhappy as both children and adults. Different interviewees wrote that 'one child by itself is not usually happy,' "only" children, on the whole, have a less happy childhood,' and 'the only one ... is apt to be psychologically dangerous to health & happiness from over coddling or parental anxiety.'<sup>11</sup> Similarly, several interviewees associated large families with happiness. Notable comments included: 'generally speaking, the child & adult who belongs to a family of several children is happier than an only child,' 'I am certain that the happiest & most mentally balanced & normal men & women (& children) were from large families,' and 'the children of largest families seem to be happier. Free from difficulties of

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<sup>9</sup> Cunnington, *Nursery Notes*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce, *Handicaps of Children*, (New York, 1917), pp. 47, 50, 53, 56, 58.

<sup>11</sup> TC 3/3-4-A; TC 3/3-4-B; TC 3/3-4-C.

temperament.<sup>12</sup> In fact, most respondents stated that the ideal family consisted of four children; two girls and two boys. Many of them recognised the obstacles that prevented them and others from achieving this. In the twentieth century, the total fertility rate (number of children born per woman) peaked at 3.5 in 1900, and, as chapter 2 showed, large families came to be derided. Thus, it might be assumed that these respondents' 'ideal' family sizes were very much just that, and rooted in nostalgia.<sup>13</sup>

While, as this thesis has shown, and will continue to show, historians have presented accounts of only children who conformed to stereotypes by being miserable, and commonly portrayed sibling relationships as happy and advantageous, Davis' work has particularly pointed towards the general unhappiness associated with only children. She described several women interviewees, born in the 1930s when only children 'were very common'. They had disliked being only children, and wanted to 'break with the past' by having more than one child themselves.<sup>14</sup> However, she did not explain why they had disliked being only children – thus ruling out the possibility of deducing other factors that influenced their experiences – or present any examples of happy only children, giving the impression that all only children were unhappy. This chapter argues – as have Falbo, Laybourn, and

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<sup>12</sup> TC 3/3-4-A; TC 3/3-4-C; TC 3/3-4-D.

<sup>13</sup> Joe Hicks and Grahame Allen, 'A Century of Change: Trends in UK statistics since 1900', *House of Commons Library*, Research Paper 111/99, (December 1999), p. 6; Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, p. 156; Gillis, 'Gender and Fertility Decline', p. 44; Charles, *The Menace of Under-Population*, pp. 194-5; Mass Observation, *Britain and her Birth-Rate*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>14</sup> Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, p. 184.

Newman in their recent sociological research into only children – that this was not the case.<sup>15</sup>

Several only children in this study described their childhoods as ‘happy’.

Ruari McLean was a lower middle-class typographer and author who was born in Scotland in 1917 and mostly grew up in Oxford. Maud Franklin was a lower middle-class fancy-dress shop owner who was born in Northampton in 1927 and grew up in Ilford, Essex, and Bishop’s Stortford, Hertfordshire.

Peter Schofield was a lower middle-class salesman and Conservative Party member born in Manchester in 1944.

McLean and Franklin both credited their parents for their efforts to make them happy as children. This is in keeping with historians’ ideas that in the first half of the twentieth century, middle-class parents had an increasing responsibility for their children’s happiness, and enjoyed more emotional, companionable relationships with them.<sup>16</sup> McLean wrote:

In 1932 I had spent the first fourteen years of my life living with my parents. I believe that my genes, and the particularly happy life I had lived with my father and mother, had now made me. There had been no quarrels or unhappiness that I can remember, but a continual quiet guidance that I never consciously noticed.<sup>17</sup>

McLean’s account of his childhood suggests that his parents were particularly receptive to new ideas about childhood that emerged in the early-twentieth

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<sup>15</sup> Falbo, ‘Only Children: A Review’, p. 17; Laybourn, *The Only Child*, pp. 49-61; Newman, *The Case for the Only Child*, p. 166.

<sup>16</sup> Stearns, ‘Defining Childhood Happiness’, pp. 167, 170, 172-3, 175, 178-81; Stearns, ‘Childhood Emotions’, p. 162; Anderson, ‘Highly restricted fertility’, p. 193; Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 119; Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family*, p. 49; Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 179; Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, p. 149; Jamieson, ‘Theories of Family Development’, pp. 110-12.

<sup>17</sup> Ruari McLean, *True To Type*, (London, 2000), p. 8.

century, promoting happiness over strict correction and shielding him from particularly negative emotions.<sup>18</sup>

Franklin suggested that her parents, bringing her up a decade later, maintained some of the older childrearing advice, yet this did not detract from her experience of childhood: 'I had a very happy childhood,' she told the interviewer. 'I wasn't cosseted ... it was fairly strict, but, erm, a very loving household.'<sup>19</sup> As previous chapters have shown, it was not uncommon for parents to combine old standards of discipline with new practices of emotional childrearing.<sup>20</sup> Franklin's experience again suggests that contemporary ideas about bringing children up in an environment that promoted happiness could result in different experiences for only children depending upon when they were born, as well as their parents' receptiveness to fashions in childrearing methods.

McLean suggested that his mother made particular efforts to stave off his boredom and loneliness when he was ill for long periods between the ages of four and 12 due to two botched tonsil operations: 'it was my mother to whom I was close ... she was my main teacher and influence, since I was ill in bed for more days than I was up.'<sup>21</sup> This accords well with Humphries and Gordon's finding that, in particularly close middle-class early-twentieth-century families, parents could be substitute friends for disabled – and, by extension, sick –

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<sup>18</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', p. 173; Stearns, 'Childhood Emotions', pp. 158, 162, 168, 169.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Maud Franklin by Siobhan Logue, December 1998, *Millennium Memory Bank*, C900/04534 track 2, © BBC.

<sup>20</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', p. 171; Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family*, p. 39; Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 3; Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', pp. 124-5; Jordanova, *Children in History*, p. 12; Jordanova, 'New Worlds for Children', p. 78; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, pp. 46, 65; Robertson, 'Home as a Nest', p. 423; Rose, *Governing the Soul*, p. 183.

<sup>21</sup> McLean, *True To Type*, p. 7.

children. Temporary as his bouts of illness were, they nonetheless confined and isolated McLean and, like some of the children Humphries and Gordon researched, he was able to socialise with his mother.<sup>22</sup> Even if McLean had had siblings, this would have been no guarantee of entertainment during his frequent illnesses. As previous chapters have shown, differences in age and temperament could distance siblings from one another. Furthermore, Martin's study suggests that while sick and disabled children were often integrated into the sibling group, they were sometimes teased or left out.<sup>23</sup> This also fits well with Stearns' assertion that, in the first half of the twentieth century, boredom became parents', rather than children's, responsibility to solve. Although McLean did read a lot during his convalescent periods, his mother nonetheless appeared to make an effort to supplement this with her company.<sup>24</sup>

Franklin described her home as similarly companionable and entertaining. Her family would play cards and board games, and complete crosswords and jigsaws together, as well as listen to records and the radio.<sup>25</sup> This would have been a middle-class norm by the 1930s; as chapter 2 showed, families were encouraged to spend their leisure time together in shared pursuits from the nineteenth century onwards.<sup>26</sup> If McLean and Franklin had not come from middle-class families, though, they might not have enjoyed such comfortable homes. As previous chapters have shown, while working-class parents may have become more emotionally expressive towards their children by the

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<sup>22</sup> McLean, *True To Type*, p. 7; Humphries and Gordon, *Out of Sight*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>23</sup> Martin, 'Disabled Children and Domestic Spaces', p. 143.

<sup>24</sup> Stearns, *Defining Happy Childhoods*, pp. 179-81; McLean, *True To Type*, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Maud Franklin by Siobhan Logue, track 11.

<sup>26</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 193.



middle decades of the twentieth century, this did not necessarily mean they had more time and space to share.<sup>27</sup>

Both McLean and Franklin described how, because they were only children, their parents were keen to bring other children into their homes. McLean wrote, 'a miscarriage prevented [my mother] having another child after me, but she kept a flow of children in the house whose parents were abroad, in order that I should never think I was the only pebble on the beach.'<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, Franklin said:

I had a very happy childhood ... I was an only child and that's something I have always regretted, and my parents regretted it too, but we always lived next door to a child or children of my sort of age, so I always had plenty of companions.<sup>29</sup>

Both of these only children and their parents seemed aware of negative ideas about only children, and their parents sought to negate these in order that they would have happy childhoods *despite* being only children. Although Franklin's parents may not have purposely chosen houses with neighbouring children, they nonetheless facilitated play with these children, for example, by allowing a neighbouring child to regularly play with Franklin in the back garden.<sup>30</sup>

Franklin referred to both her and her parents' regret that she was an only child at the same time, and she went straight on to talk about living near other children, and to say that 'perhaps because I hadn't got siblings, my friends

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<sup>27</sup> Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', pp. 114, 116, 117, 123, 124; Walvin, *A Child's World*, p. 94; Vigne, 'Parents and Children', pp. 7-8; Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 47-8; Roberts, 'Learning & Living', p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> McLean, *True To Type*, p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Maud Franklin by Siobhan Logue, track 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, track 2.

have always been very important to me.’<sup>31</sup> This suggests that her and her parents’ particular regret about only-childhood was the lack of companionship that siblings might have provided, hence her parents’ efforts to be and provide companions for her. As previous chapters have shown, loneliness was not the default position of the only child, and they could come into contact with other children for a number of reasons. Franklin and McLean were particularly glad of their parents’ efforts. Franklin’s parents may have let her play with neighbouring children to the same extent if she had had siblings, but without the yoke of only-child stereotypes, she might not have felt moved to pass comment on it.

Franklin summed up her childhood as ‘happy’, yet she deliberately had three children herself: ‘it was very important to me to have more than one child. I certainly didn’t want my first child to be an only child like I was. Although, frankly, I think she’d have been fine because she’s very, she’s the extrovert one...’<sup>32</sup> This shows the pervasiveness of the stereotype in only children’s accounts of their lives. Franklin remained negative about only children despite her own, largely positive, experience, and despite her admission that only children’s experiences could depend on their individual personalities. This negative attitude bears out Samuel and Thompson’s ideas about the role of myth in personal testimonies.<sup>33</sup> It also fits well with Mancillas’ findings that only children or their parents often portray themselves or their children as

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Maud Franklin by Siobhan Logue, track 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, track 38.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel and Thompson, ‘Introduction’, p. 7.

exceptions to the rule, thus implying that negative ideas about only children are generally valid.<sup>34</sup>

Schofield, like Franklin and McLean, associated his happiness in childhood with having loving parents and playing with other children:

It was an average childhood, quite happy, erm, spent a lot of time playing cricket, football, the usual things that children do ... I never really wanted for anything, we were never rich, father never earned a lot of money, but we never wanted for anything.<sup>35</sup>

What sets Schofield apart from Franklin and McLean is his equation of 'average' and 'happy'. It further demonstrates that the time period that an only child grew up in influenced their experiences. According to Stearns, by the 1950s, when Schofield was growing up, the synonymy of childhood and happiness was virtually fully established among the middle classes.<sup>36</sup> Schofield's father also seemed to meet the 'standards' for fathers at this time. As a policeman, he appeared to be too busy to fulfil the expectations of an 'involved' or 'fun' father, and Schofield admitted that Christmases were less enjoyable than they might have been had his father been at home. However, like others who told their life stories, Schofield implied that his father made him happy by providing for the family as he should, and credited his father for influencing him politically.<sup>37</sup> This is in keeping with Strange's findings that children who did not see much of their fathers nonetheless demonstrated the

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<sup>34</sup> Mancillas, cited in Sandler, *One and Only*, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Peter Schofield by James Dearling, August 1998, *Mass Conservatism: An Oral History of the Conservative Party*, C895/05/01-03 tape 1, © The British Library.

<sup>36</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', p. 175.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Peter Schofield by James Dearling, tape 1; King, *Family Men*, pp. 17-18, 57, 86-7; Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, pp. 14, 27, 31, 122, 126-33.

bond they shared by imbibing their fathers' religious, education, or political values.<sup>38</sup>

Schofield said of his childhood that 'I don't know whether you'd call it middle-class or what expression you wish to use'. Yet some of the venues where he met other children, and the types of activity he participated in, had a particularly middle-class flavour. They were formally organised and designed to cultivate character, strengthen communities, and divert young people from less wholesome activities, such as going to the cinema.<sup>39</sup> He talked about joining the Cub Scouts, playing in a local Baptist church football team, and being part of youth clubs attached to this church and the Church of England. The Young Conservatives was 'almost like a youth club' too.<sup>40</sup> The church organisations in particular would not have been available to an only child born just a few decades earlier. Brown has described how they proliferated from the 1890s onwards, appealing to young people by combining religiosity with 'patriotism, adventure and recreational activities,' and increasingly making church halls sites of secular activities that were nonetheless linked with observance of religion.<sup>41</sup>

During the school holidays, when they were not playing football, cricket or snowballing, Schofield visited his friends' houses. Similarly, McLean and Franklin described associating with other children in their homes and gardens. By playing on private property, rather than on the street like some

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<sup>38</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 126.

<sup>39</sup> Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', p. 114; Don Romesburgh, 'Making Adolescence More or Less Modern', in Fass (ed.), *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, pp. 237-8.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Peter Schofield by James Dearling, tape 1.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, *Religion and Society*, pp. 46, 55, 56, 141.

of the only children in this thesis, these only children marked out their childhoods as particularly 'middle-class'.<sup>42</sup> This further demonstrates the variety of experiences only children had in the past, which have previously been hidden behind historians' choices of examples that appeared to conform to stereotypes. As chapter 2 showed, Davidoff suggested that middle- and upper working-class children were disadvantaged by increased confinement to the home from the early-twentieth century.<sup>43</sup> However, if only children who played on private property, rather than the streets, nonetheless regarded their childhoods as 'happy', perhaps they were not particularly disadvantaged.

The analysis of accounts by only children who said that they had been unhappy *because* they were only children shows that the cause of unhappiness often lay in other factors. Three such examples are Henrietta Leslie, an upper middle-class writer, born in Marylebone, London, in 1884, John Pudney, an upper middle-class poet and journalist, born in Langley, Buckinghamshire, in 1909, and Jo Robinson, a lower middle-class only child who worked variously as an artist, activist, midwife, and teacher, born in Blackpool, Lancashire, in 1942. As with others who blamed their experiences on only-childhood, it is possible to deduce reasons for their unhappiness that were separate from, and more important than, only-childhood. Factors such as parental attitudes, domestic circumstances, geographical location, and class were particularly influential in these cases.

As mentioned above, all three of these only children referred to only-childhood when discussing their lack of happiness as children. Leslie, born in

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<sup>42</sup> Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, p. 199; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 89; Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, p. 52; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 41.

<sup>43</sup> Davidoff, 'The Family in Britain', p. 102.

the 1880s but writing in 1943, would have been among those autobiographers whose judgements Stearns termed anachronistic.<sup>44</sup> Chapters 1 and 2 have shown how fertility started to decline, and only children started to become more common, in the late 1870s. Thus, when Leslie was growing up, only children would have still been regarded with particular suspicion because they were a relative novelty. This has also been noted by modern only-child researchers Laybourn, Newman, and Sandler.<sup>45</sup> Leslie discussed how being an only child made her feel 'different' and therefore unhappy:

I think back to myself at the age of eight or so, and I am faced with a very solitary, highly inquisitive little girl, still a partial cripple [Leslie had undergone surgery on her hip], who hated above all things to be different from other children. I do not believe that I put this difference down so much to my physical disabilities as to my being an only child ... [my fellow] cripples were, none of them, "only ones" ... they were always to be seen, on visitors' days, being visited not only by their grown-up relations but also by a variety of juvenile relatives. Moreover, all the children I knew had at least one or two brothers or sisters. The sole other "only one" I had come across was a weedy youth who ... told fibs out of school. It was, therefore, firmly planted in my mind that to be an "only one" was, somehow, a disgrace, not entirely one's own fault perhaps, but for which one was, in part, mysteriously responsible.

It is such beliefs with, to their torment, secretly fester in the minds of most young things, that makes of childhood a much less happy time than it ought by rights to be.<sup>46</sup>

This passage suggests that it was not only-childhood itself that made Leslie unhappy so much as *ideas* about only-childhood. She became aware that her birth position was unusual, and picked up the notion that there was something wrong with being an only child. Not dissimilarly, recent researchers have found that some only children judge themselves harshly

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<sup>44</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 178-9.

<sup>45</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', pp. 178, 186; Garrett, Reid, Schürer and Szreter, *Changing Family Size*, p. 1; Laybourn, *The Only Child*, pp. 106-8; Newman, *The Case for the Only Child*, p. 40; Sandler, *One and Only*, p. 164.

<sup>46</sup> Henrietta Leslie, *More Ha'Pence Than Kicks*, (London, 1943), pp. 18, 25-6.

because they are aware of common criticisms of only children, and unnecessarily apply them to themselves.<sup>47</sup> As this thesis shows, the problems attributed to only children during this period were very limited in their accuracy. It could be that the increasing public awareness of such negative ideas caused real damage to some only children, though, as they impacted upon their self-esteem and reflections on their childhoods.

Leslie's reference to the child's 'right' to happiness further bears out historians' ideas that childhood and happiness became increasingly synonymous during the early-twentieth century.<sup>48</sup> It is interesting that, at this time, she felt more marked out by only-childhood than the fact that she was a 'cripple'. Disabled children whose parents were better able to afford hospital treatments and stays in convalescent homes were more likely to come into contact with others like themselves. Their experiences were unlike those of working- and lower middle-class disabled children, who felt isolated because their impairments made them unable to fit in and keep up with their able-bodied peers.<sup>49</sup> As preventative and combative medicine improved, only children may well have become more common and disabled and chronically ill children less common, meaning that the latter came to be regarded as more of a novelty than the former.

By contrast, Pudney, born 25 years later in 1909, claimed to have been less aware of the negative stereotypes of only children at the time that he was a young child: 'I did not miss what I had never experienced. I did not feel

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<sup>47</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: A Review', p. 15.

<sup>48</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 167, 170, 172, 175; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 41, 61, 130, 164; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 11.

<sup>49</sup> Humphries and Gordon, *Out of Sight*, pp. 42, 76.

deprived. I had this self-sufficiency, a natural compensation perhaps, and I was undoubtedly happy in those early pre-school days'.<sup>50</sup> He wrote at length, though, about gradually becoming aware of the problems associated with only-childhood as he grew older: 'in hindsight, I can see some deprivations and moments of actual suffering. At the time I was not aware of anything wrong or not being as it should be.'<sup>51</sup> This approach to his childhood memories is reminiscent of the only children mentioned in the previous chapter who, reflecting upon their childhoods, could not remember being lonely, yet concluded that they must have been so because they were only children.

Pudney's reflections also, again, show the value of the work of Samuel, Thompson and others in identifying how myth pervades into people's accounts of their lives. Although Samuel and Thompson were discussing oral history, in this autobiography, it is possible to 'see precisely where memory diverges most clearly from fact that 'imagination, symbolism, desire break in.'<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, as chapter 3 discussed, autobiographies are 'personal myths', and their authors select and amplify actions, situations, and feelings they regard as important to their personal development.<sup>53</sup> Pudney's lengthy discussions of and repeated references to the effects of only-childhood shows the importance he attributed to it as well as the amount of time he spent considering it as an adult rather than as a young child, when he knew no different.

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<sup>50</sup> John Pudney, *Thank Goodness for Cake*, (London, 1978), p. 33.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>52</sup> Samuel and Thompson, 'Introduction', p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, p. 23; Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, pp. 43-5.



At the same time, Pudney was critical of some only-child stereotypes. He wrote, 'I am still surprised at the stress that some people, not only psychiatrists, lay upon only childhood ... nearly every undesirable trait I have shown in my lifetime has been attributed to only childhood,' and declared that 'the picture of deprivation and actual suffering is often luridly overdrawn.'<sup>54</sup>

However, he also wrote:

Oneness affected attitudes, habits, sexuality and, indeed, love itself. That oneness looked anxiously for security...', 'awareness of being an only child came with the first school ... I perceived that my fellows ... enjoyed a more open environment... I felt myself to be an outsider, a perpetual junior, the first effects of only childhood', and 'the competitive pack-leading, over-stimulation of my late teens, was surely a manifestation of only childhood.'<sup>55</sup>

Despite acknowledging that the experience of only-childhood 'much depend[s] on the setting and circumstance, whether the home is open or closed to its environment, and the stimulus of communication,' Pudney returned to the subject of only-childhood remarkably often.<sup>56</sup> Like others of his generation, Pudney was likely to have gained knowledge of only-child stereotypes from newspapers, radio and other media. Furthermore, he was encouraged to consider the effects of only-childhood by psychiatrists; as an adult, he received therapy for alcoholism, as mentioned in his autobiography.<sup>57</sup>

Jo Robinson's (born 1942) automatic response to being asked whether she was an only child was to refer to a negative connotation of only-childhood:

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<sup>54</sup> Pudney, *Thank Goodness for Cake*, pp. 32-3.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10, 34.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>57</sup> Rose, *The Psychological Complex*, p. 203, Urwin and Sharland, 'From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature', p. 193; Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, pp. 19-22, 32, 34, 114-15; Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, pp. 31, 33, 40, 62, 71, 97, 133; 'Oxford DNB article: Pudney, John Sleigh', <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31573>, (accessed 30/9/2017).

**Interviewer:** Were they ... were you the only child, Jo?

**Jo:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Did you have brothers or...

**Jo:** Yes, yes, pressure cooker atmosphere, only child. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Explain to me what you mean, pressure cooker atmosphere?

**Jo:** Oh, I just read that in Sheila Kitzinger. She describes one parent, one child ... single children, you know, being brought up in a pressure cooker atmosphere.<sup>58</sup>

Robinson went on to explain how she felt that she missed out on sibling mediation and rivalry, and continually asked her mother for a brother.<sup>59</sup> Like Pudney, Robinson's narrative combines the effects of being an only child at the time that she was a child, its effects on her as an adult, and ideas about only-childhood she must have become aware of as an adult. As a former midwife, it is natural that Robinson would have been aware of the work of Sheila Kitzinger. Kitzinger was known as the 'high priestess of natural childbirth', and in her obituary was celebrated for 'hav[ing] done more than anyone else to change attitudes to childbirth in the past 50 years.' She advocated for midwives by arguing that their experiences should be prioritised over the expertise of obstetricians.<sup>60</sup> Considering the high esteem in which Kitzinger was held, it is likely that Robinson would have been particularly receptive to her views. While, like Pudney, Robinson acknowledged that she was unhappy for a number of reasons besides only-childhood, the strength of

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Jo Robinson by Polly Russell, November 2011-December 2012, *Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project*, C1420/43 track 2, © The British Library.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, track 2.

<sup>60</sup> 'Sheila Kitzinger obituary | Life and style | The Guardian', <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/apr/12/sheila-kitzinger>, (accessed 30/9/2017).

only-child stereotypes appear to have caused her to overlook other aspects of her home environment that created the 'pressure cooker atmosphere'.

Like other only children mentioned in the previous chapter, Leslie and Pudney discussed lack of companionship as an aspect of only-childhood that made them unhappy as children. Yet, their loneliness could not be attributed to only-childhood *per se*, as their childhoods were affected by other influences which were not unique to only children. Leslie, like her only-child contemporary Margaret Haig Thomas in chapter 6, 'longed passionately to go to school. There were things I itched to learn seriously about. But above all, I desired, always and always, to be like other children and have friends. I had very few.'<sup>61</sup>

Leslie and Thomas were subject to the upper middle-class attitudes that, girls, unlike boys, were to be educated at home. Even if their parents did deem sending them to school a worthy expense, they usually only attended for a few years as teenagers.<sup>62</sup> While Thomas successfully persuaded her father to let her go to boarding school, Leslie was unsuccessful. This might have been due to the expense as much as the dim view Leslie's family took of girls' schooling. When Leslie was five or six years old, her father's 'persistent gambling caused him to be excluded from the family firm and he died shortly afterwards'. From then on, she and her mother were 'supported by the family.'<sup>63</sup> Their residences suggested that they were kept in some style, but schooling for Leslie may nonetheless have been deemed profligate spending.

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<sup>61</sup> Leslie, *More Ha'Pence Than Kicks*, p. 34.

<sup>62</sup> Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, pp. 14, 44; Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, pp. 30, 244.

<sup>63</sup> 'Oxford DNB article: Schütze, (Gladys) Henrietta', <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/71774>, (accessed 1/10/2017).

Instead, Leslie had 'the school-room upbringing of the comfortable middle-class, a backwash of the Victorian era when girls were expected to be purely ornamental'.<sup>64</sup>

It is possible that if, like Thomas, Leslie had had a living father who was receptive to 'new' ideas, she might have been allowed to go to school. According to Tosh, the increase in girls' secondary schools in the second half of the nineteenth century reflected not only the efforts of 'pioneer women educationalists', but also the 'readiness of fathers to spend money on their daughters' education in order to protect them from the indignity of unendowed spinsterhood.' As indicated above, upper middle-class daughters continued to be far less readily sent to school, and for less time, than their male peers. However, for some, girls' schooling provided a solution to the increasing burden of 'surplus women' on their families at this time, and also created educational and career opportunities that had not been available to girls and women a few decades earlier.<sup>65</sup> Parental attitudes, domestic circumstances, class, gender, and time produced different outcomes for two girls who happened to share a birth position.

Pudney lacked companionship as an only child for other reasons that recur throughout this thesis: geographical isolation, combined with parental attitudes. He wrote that 'my first contact with boys of my own age, except for illicit contact with village boys, was when I went as a weekly boarder to a

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<sup>64</sup> Leslie, *More Ha'Pence Than Kicks*, p. 32.

<sup>65</sup> John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, (London, 1999), p. 152; Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, pp. 14, 44; Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, pp. 30, 244.

school in Slough.<sup>66</sup> Pudney's description of contact with 'village boys' as 'illicit' suggests that they were of a lower class than his family, and therefore not deemed suitable companions for him. He acknowledged that geography contributed to his isolation, and again suggested that he did not perceive only-childhood as a negative experience at the time:

I was born into a rural setting, unaware of all that threatened it. Dogs, horses, Plymouth Rock hens, a mud-banked stream, buttercup meadows, cherry orchards, a blacksmith's forge up the road, labourers about the place, maids who acted as nannies ... when I was lonely, I talked to the nearest human – Father called it stopping people working – to the animals, often to the stream, to one or two orchard trees, and to an oak near the forge ... I also talked to imaginary companions, which unaccountably made some people feel sorry for me, murmuring about missing brothers and sisters.<sup>67</sup>

If Pudney had been born a few decades earlier, in the nineteenth century, his imaginary friends might have caused far more consternation, as a symptom of lying and delusional insanity, or 'monomania'. While only children with imaginary friends, as in Pudney's case, provoked pity from those who thought they ought really to have flesh-and-blood companions, by the early-twentieth century they were seen as a beneficial aspect of play and a sign of intelligence.<sup>68</sup>

Like Arthur Machen in the previous chapter, Pudney appeared to enjoy his rural idyll, describing it lovingly and with a sense of nostalgia for a 'threatened' way of life. Unlike Machen, though, he later appeared to overlay the memory with concerns about the effects of only-childhood in this setting. His frequent contact with and willingness to talk to adults such as labourers and maids

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<sup>66</sup> Pudney, *Thank Goodness For Cake*, p. 11.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>68</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 39, 63, 87, 181, 282; Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, pp. 39-40; Chadwick, *Difficulties in Child Development*, pp. 349-59; Valentine, *The Normal Child*, pp. 55-6.

places him among the only children in chapter 5 who were comfortable with adults. By contrast, Leslie was among those who preferred the company of other children. Like Pudney, she was cut off from other, less refined, children:

On the other side of the railings, was everybody's park and I was sufficiently graceless to look upon it as far more desirable than my own privileged Eden. In the summer, it swarmed with children, dirty, smelly children most of them, who went about in bands, playing cricket and rounders, throwing stones at the indignant water-fowl, running away from the park-keepers, shouting and halloing and generally having a royal time.

I would have given anything to join them.<sup>69</sup>

Comparing this experience to some of those described earlier in this thesis by only children who *were* those who 'went around in bands', historians' homogenisation of only children seems ever more unjustified.

Furthermore, although she was friendly with the servants in her home, Leslie did not particularly enjoy the company of adults. For example, she found her father's family elderly and boring, and was 'invariably sick' when expected to play the piano for her mother's dinner-party guests.<sup>70</sup> This is in keeping with Hamlett's finding that many middle-class children found being presented to adults dreary and unenjoyable, and conflicts with contemporary ideas that only children were dangerously *au fait* with the world of adults.<sup>71</sup>

Leslie, Pudney and Robinson had few or no cousins, limiting possible social contacts with children of their own age. Leslie described how 'the dearest' of her 'two or three' friends was her cousin Madge, whom she 'rarely saw', Pudney discussed the difficulties of being 'the only representative of my

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<sup>69</sup> Leslie, *More Ha'Pence Than Kicks*, p. 21.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 36.

<sup>71</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, pp. 35-6.

generation,' and Robinson said that 'I can't work out family relationships very well, even like aunties, uncles, cousins, nephews, because all my family died off.'<sup>72</sup> At the very least, Leslie and Pudney's circumstances in this respect might be symptomatic of the shift not only towards one-child families but towards no-child families. Some of their uncles and aunts possibly produced few or no children due to the change in emphasis away from child-bearing towards companionship in marriage, and emergent ideas that women did not have to have sex with their husbands if they did not want to.<sup>73</sup>

For Pudney, this lack of relatives of his generation was another cause for unhappiness, as he felt pressured: 'I came under family scrutiny which lasted until I ran out of aunts and uncles ... as the only one of my generation, I was used to some bizarre family comments and to pursed-up silences of disapproval.'<sup>74</sup> Leslie and Robinson also felt unhappy due to pressure, though this appeared to come more from their parents than their extended families. Although, being a girl, Leslie was not deemed worthy of a formal education, her mother made their shared lunchtimes an 'agonising' affair:

For the benefit of my education, she insisted on our talking French one day and German the next, so that conversation did not exactly flow ... she had evolved a method of making me less careless in expressing myself which I hated so much that I used to dread the ringing of the lunch going. She would draw up a list of the mistakes I had made the day before and this would be presented to me as I approached the table. I had then to recite a correct version before I was allowed to take my seat ... it's not really to be wondered at that I became a timid person...<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Leslie, *More Ha'Pence Than Kicks*, p. 34; Pudney, *Thank Goodness For Cake*, p. 31; Interview with Jo Robinson by Polly Russell, track 2.

<sup>73</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', pp. 192, 193, 195; Seccombe, 'Men's 'Marital Rights'', pp. 72-7, 81; Charles, *The Menace of Under-Population*, p. 172; Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, p. 96.

<sup>74</sup> Pudney, *Thank Goodness For Cake*, p. 31.

<sup>75</sup> Leslie, *More Ha'Pence Than Kicks*, p. 22.

Robinson felt that her mother pressured her to be more feminine than she felt, dressing her up like child actress Shirley Temple:

She got such a kick out of, you know, dressing me up to take me to these parties and I just used to hate it from the word go, I just hated it so much, being dressed up and paraded about ... And I have no memories of her looking at me and appreciating me for who I was. You know, the fact that I liked to, you know, play out in the mud and always be covered in mud. I got called a tomboy, but that was like probably my artistic endeavours were just, you know, ridiculed and I was told off for playing in the street with the common children from down the road. So it was grim, she was just imposing into me, I just felt invaded by her, possessed by her, she was possessive. And I just remember that there was so much hatred, get off me, so much hatred.<sup>76</sup>

Robinson had a more positive relationship with her father, 'who I felt treated me like a boy because he'd ... wanted a boy to have fun with so he taught me golf, he taught me to drive the car...'.<sup>77</sup> Such companionable relationships between fathers and daughters became common over the course of the period, so as a child of the 1940s, Robinson was more likely than earlier only children to have had such an experience. Davidoff *et al* and Stearns have discussed how shifts towards the sentimentalisation of childhood and the 'leisured' family led fathers to become more friendly and accessible to their children, and share traditionally 'masculine' hobbies and interests with their daughters.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, Strange found that the ambitious women whose autobiographies she studied aligned themselves sympathetically with their fathers rather than their mothers because they were frustrated by the limits placed on their mothers' opportunities due to their gender.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with Jo Robinson by Polly Russell, track 2.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, track 2.

<sup>78</sup> Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, p. 149; Stearns, 'Childhood Emotions', p. 168.

<sup>79</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 11.



Both Robinson and Leslie demonstrated the effects of time on how people reflected upon their childhoods. Writing and speaking as adults, they displayed understandings of their mothers' behaviour they did not have at the time they were children. Robinson came to sympathise with her mother, who was stuck in a loveless marriage. Robinson's father had had an affair with a neighbour but as they could not afford to divorce, the couple had to continue living together, and their mutual hostility added to the unhappiness of Robinson's childhood. Her mother was disinherited twice, had few friends, and regarded her daughter as 'everything'.<sup>80</sup>

The negative experiences of Robinson's mother might have lessened her affections for her daughter. While Hendrick found some working-class mothers in difficult circumstances were nonetheless demonstrative towards their children, others were 'hardened' by their difficult lives.<sup>81</sup> Parental attitudes seem a likely explanation for the lack of affection reported by Robinson. While Robinson herself believed that the Second World War had affected their freedom of expression, King has argued that in fact 'there was a ... growth in the acceptability of men professing strong emotions towards their families, particularly after the Second World War.'<sup>82</sup>

Leslie, meanwhile, came to understand how her mother:

Worried so much and was so determined that I should turn out more brilliant and more beautiful than anyone else's child. And when I was slow and lumpish, as I often was, and ugly and lame and would bite my nails, she was filled with despair and disappointment.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Jo Robinson by Polly Russell, track 2.

<sup>81</sup> Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Jo Robinson by Polly Russell, track 2; King, *Family Men*, p. 115.

<sup>83</sup> Leslie, *More Ha'Pence Than Kicks*, p. 22.

Given that a formal education was regarded as a waste of time for Leslie, perhaps her mother despaired over her chances of making a good marriage and being a successful household manager and social contact.<sup>84</sup> Leslie's later understanding of her mother was similar to those identified by Liz Heron in some women born between 1943 and 1951. These women had difficult relationships with their mothers when they were growing up, but came to feel more sympathy as they became more aware of the societal expectation that women sacrifice their own desires in order to be dutiful wives and mothers, sometimes with limited material resources.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Strange has found that life-writers came to understand and accept their fathers' behaviour towards them with hindsight.<sup>86</sup>

While only children were particularly likely to refer to only-childhood when discussing whether or not they had a happy childhood, then, as with other characteristics associated with childhood this thesis examines, their happiness had far more to do with other influences. Parental attitudes seemed to be particularly important to childhood happiness, with parents being credited for giving their only children good childhoods by entertaining them, providing opportunities to play with other children, and holding particular values. Such was the potency of the association between only-childhood and unhappiness that some only children claimed their parents had consciously avoided the misfortunes of their birth positions, even though they may have behaved similarly had they had more than one child.

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<sup>84</sup> Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, p. 73; Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, pp. 30, 47, 50.

<sup>85</sup> Liz Heron, *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing Up in the Fifties*, (London, 1985), p. 8.

<sup>86</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 201.

Parental attitudes, combined with the isolation geography and class could engender, could also make for unhappy childhoods. Only children might blame only-childhood for their unhappiness, but a closer analysis of their accounts reveals other circumstances – such as poor parental relationships, high expectations from parents and other relatives, and social isolation as a result of geography and class – which were not unique to only children. In cases of both happy and unhappy only children, it is particularly illuminating to distinguish between their feelings as children and their later understandings of their childhoods as adults. This could be due to the increasing practice of reflecting upon one's childhood, as identified by Stearns.<sup>87</sup> It might also be that 'did you have a happy childhood?' is a question particularly asked of adults, both by themselves and others, whereas perhaps children do not tend to ask themselves, 'am I having a happy childhood?', or even 'am I happy?'. Autobiographers and oral history interviewees' thought processes are particularly discernible when answering this question. As discussed in previous chapters, this is not an obstacle to this analysis, as regardless of the difficulty of discovering exactly how they felt at the time, it illuminates how only children reflected upon their childhoods.<sup>88</sup>

Just as only children could be happy or unhappy for reasons separate from birth position, having siblings did not automatically make for a happy childhood. Upper middle-class glass maker Tessa Clegg, born in London in 1946, was separated by two years from her older brother and younger sister. She had an unhappy childhood partly for the same reason as Jo Robinson –

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<sup>87</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 167, 172, 174, 175, 178-9.

<sup>88</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working-Class*, p. 12; Jordanova, 'Children in History', p. 5.

her parents had a poor relationship, and eventually divorced. Before Clegg's parents split up, their home was tense, as her father had a bad temper and would get drunk and 'lose control'. Things did not get much better for Clegg and her siblings after their parents divorced. The three children were sent to boarding school, about which Clegg said: 'it's horrible, there's nothing nice to say about [it], nothing at all.' She resented the lack of freedom, and her sister would cry for two weeks before each term started, to no effect.<sup>89</sup> Again, this shows that whether or not a child enjoyed boarding school could depend on the nature of the school, and whether or not they had a choice about going there.<sup>90</sup>

Clegg admitted that her siblings provided company, particularly when they were younger and lived in relative isolation on a hill. She nonetheless remarked that 'it wasn't a very happy childhood' because her mother did not encourage her to have friends or make any efforts to entertain her children during the school holidays.<sup>91</sup> She therefore fell short of mid-twentieth-century expectations that middle-class parents make their children happy by avoiding exposing them to fear or anger, and providing opportunities for play and minimising boredom.<sup>92</sup> This illustrates that parental attitudes and geographical location could have just as much influence over a sibling child's experiences as those of an only child. As the next chapter shows, developing expectations that parents should do more to keep their children entertained,

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with Tessa Clegg by Frances Cornford, January-April 2011, *NLSC: Crafts Lives*, 960/101 tracks 1, 2, © The British Library.

<sup>90</sup> Viscountess Rhondda, *This Was My World*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Tessa Clegg by Frances Cornford, part 1.

<sup>92</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 172, 175-6, 177, 178, 179-81; Stearns, 'Childhood Emotions', pp. 162, 165, 169.

along with other influences, could make a large difference to whether or not only children were materially indulged.



## 8. Material spoiling

It has been, and still is, commonly assumed that, as their parents have no other children to divide their resources, only children are 'spoiled'. As with the other ideas about only children examined in this thesis, this supposition can be traced through late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century childrearing manuals, Mass Observation responses, and historical works, with recent researchers questioning the stereotype. The next two chapters ask whether the only children in this study commonly regarded themselves as materially and emotionally spoiled. They argue that whether or not an only child was spoiled depended on factors other than only-childhood, and show how ideas that only children were spoiled shaped some people's recollections of their childhoods. First, though, it is necessary to unpack the meanings of the term 'spoiled', and what constitutes 'spoiling' for the purposes of this thesis.

As indicated above, there is more than one way in which a child can be spoiled. Charonjit Kaur Pooni, in an exploratory D.Ed. thesis on the divergence in parents' and teachers' ideas about spoiling, has identified that 'spoiling' can refer to 'over solicitude, overindulgence, or excessive praise.'<sup>1</sup> Pooni additionally identified that children who have been treated in such a way were commonly assumed to develop spoiled personalities, whereby they expected all their demands to be met, lacked appreciation and interpersonal skills, and did not respect adult authority.<sup>2</sup> This chapter analyses reports of material spoiling and otherwise, and the next chapter does the same with

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<sup>1</sup> Charonjit Kaur Pooni, *An Exploration of Parent and Teacher Perceptions of the Spoilt Child and Possible Implications for Starting School*, Unpublished D.Ed. Psych. thesis, (Essex, 2008), pp. 6-7, 8. Although every reasonable effort was made, it proved impossible to track down the author to ask her permission to refer to her thesis.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 24, 74, 77, 99, 141, 143, 150.

emotional spoiling. They both also address the development of spoiled personalities in certain only children where appropriate.

Contemporary parents were likely to have been well aware of the dangers of spoiling children during this period. The *Oxford English Dictionary* first referred to ‘spoiled’ and ‘spoilt’ children in 1648 and 1816 respectively.<sup>3</sup>

Samuel Butler famously coined the quotation ‘spare the rod, spoil the child’ in his mock heroic narrative poem *Hudibras* in 1663, and this has come to be used as shorthand for ‘he that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes’ (Proverbs 13:24).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, in *Some Thoughts On Education*, published in 1692, philosopher John Locke addressed ‘Spoiling children and its results’:

The Fondling must be taught to strike and call Names, must have what he cries for, and do what he pleases. Thus Parents, by humouring and cockering them when *little* [his italics], corrupt the Principles of Nature in their Children, and wonder afterwards to taste the bitter Waters, when they themselves have poison’d the Fountain.<sup>5</sup>

By giving children everything they desired, according to Locke, parents created ‘untoward and perverse’ and ‘wilful’ ‘Brats’ with ‘ill Humours’ who did not respond appropriately to being ‘restrain’d or curb’d’ and lacked the ‘Rules and Restraints of Reason.’<sup>6</sup> When Butler and Locke were writing, children were still invariably associated with the concept of Original Sin. This meant

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Spoiled, adj. : Oxford English Dictionary’, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/187268?redirectedFrom=spoiled>, (accessed 2/8/2017); ‘Spoilt, adj. : Oxford English Dictionary’, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/187277?redirectedFrom=spoilt>, (accessed 2/8/2017).

<sup>4</sup> ‘Hudibras / Samuel Butler’, Part II, Canto I, [https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/butler/samuel\\_1612-1680/hudibras/complete.html](https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/butler/samuel_1612-1680/hudibras/complete.html), (accessed 2/8/2017).

<sup>5</sup> John Locke and Robert Herbert Quick, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, (Cambridge, 1889, first published 1692), <https://archive.org/details/somethoughtsconc00lockuoft>, (accessed 2/8/2017), p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-2



that they were concerned not only with the effects of spoiling on their personalities, but on their very souls. At this time, many people thought harsh parental treatment was necessary to break children's spirits and eradicate the sin they had been born with. As chapter 2 showed, ideas about evolution had weakened this association between childhood and sin considerably by the period under study. As a result, manual-writers were concerned with creating pro-social citizens rather than decreasing children's chances of going to hell.<sup>7</sup> However, as this chapter will show, the association between spoiling and sin may have lingered for some more religiously-minded parents.



**Figure 2: Incidences of references to spoiled and spoilt children in books, % per year, 1750-2000. Generated by Google Books Ngram viewer, <https://bit.ly/2w6oOLY>, 2/8/2017.**

As Figure 2 shows, bearing in mind the low survival of books from before 1800, references to spoiled/spoilt children in books increased significantly over the course of the nineteenth century, then decreased after peaking in 1899. The increase might be accounted for the rising belief, originating in the

<sup>7</sup> Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, p. 39; Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 73, 181-3, 277; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, pp. 78, 124-5, 149; Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 223; Newson and Newson, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing', pp. 53-4, 56-7; Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, pp. 55, 58, 61; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 48, 61-2; Grant, 'Parent-child Relations', p. 117.

Enlightenment, in the importance of nurture over nature in determining a child's fortunes, which this thesis examined in chapters 2 and 3.<sup>8</sup> While no longer required to eradicate their Original Sin, parents would nonetheless have been increasingly held responsible for their children's development, and spoiling them would not result in the rational, reasonable, sociable adults that society demanded at this time. References to 'spoiled' and 'spoilt' children enjoyed a brief spike around 1931, suggesting the influence of the short reign of behavioural approaches to childrearing. These emphasised rigid routines and little display of emotion as a means of producing mentally-balanced, non-hysterical adults.<sup>9</sup> Overall, though, references to 'spoiled'/'spoilt' children can be seen declining over the twentieth century. This might be due to the influence of the new dominance of ideas that parents should enjoy their children and aim to make them happy, as well as consumerism. Constant rhetoric against the indulgence of children would not have helped toy manufacturers sell their wares.<sup>10</sup>

Jordanova has written: 'we cannot take at face value accounts of intimate relationships provided by the participants [i.e. historical subjects], especially when it comes to relationships between parents and children.'<sup>11</sup> It is important to reiterate that the testimonies this thesis examines are individual subjects' interpretations of their childhood experiences. Whatever these only children's 'raw' and 'immediate' feelings about their parents' treatment of

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<sup>8</sup> Stewart, *Child Guidance*, p. 39; Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 73, 181-3, 277; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, p. 149; Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 223.

<sup>9</sup> Urwin and Sharland, 'From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature', pp. 177-8; Newson and Newson, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing', pp. 59-61; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, p. 202; Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, pp. 135, 136.

<sup>10</sup> Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, p. 225; Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 177, 179-81; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, pp. 79-80, 88-9.

<sup>11</sup> Jordanova, 'Children in History', p. 12.

them were at the time they were children, their adult recollections nonetheless have great value because they show the aspects of their childhoods they considered worth remembering and recounting. They also show how life-writers and interviewees have come to use particular aspects of their childhoods – only-childhood being one – to explain whether and why they considered themselves spoiled as children. Before examining their accounts, though, it is necessary to establish what contemporary manual-writers, Mass Observation interviewees, historians, and recent researchers have written about spoiling and only children.

Childrearing manual-writers' examples of spoiled only children range from the 'bad' to the 'mad', reflecting the shift in emphasis from children's morals to their minds during the period this thesis covers.<sup>12</sup> In 1851, W. C. Todd – whose biographical details have been lost to time – used the tale of an overindulged only son to warn parents about the dangers of spoiling. A direct consequence of only-childhood for 'John' was that 'his parents granted all his requests, and if he did wrong, could not find it in their hearts to punish their darling boy; so, soon at home he had his own way, and of course wished it elsewhere.' John became 'headstrong', 'vicious', and a habitual truant, eventually running away to sea where he died in a drunken fight. Todd

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<sup>12</sup> Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, p. 39; Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 73, 181-3, 277; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, pp. 78, 124-5, 149; Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 223; Newson and Newson, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing', pp. 53-4, 56-7; Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, pp. 55, 58, 61; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 48, 61-2; Grant, 'Parent-child Relations', p. 117.

implied that overindulgence was dangerous, and a particular threat to the successful upbringing of only children.<sup>13</sup>

The following year, Christian minister John S. C. Abbott provided a similar example of a spoiled only child whose mother 'loved him most ardently, and could not bear to deny him any indulgence.' This eventuated in the boy becoming 'self-willed, turbulent, and revengeful', burning down his mother's house in a fit of rage and becoming a 'maniac' who 'madly dug out his own eyes' in prison.<sup>14</sup> A clear connection was made not only between only-childhood and spoiling, but also poor morality and insanity, reflecting the overlap of scientific and religious ideas in the mid-nineteenth century. Such concerns about spoiling are evident in the wider context of the period. Shuttleworth has discussed the connections nineteenth-century scholars made between childhood 'passion' (i.e. tantrums) and later insanity, which came to be conveyed in popular literature.<sup>15</sup> In the 1820 text *Henry Phillips, or The Life of the Angry Boy*, Shuttleworth wrote, an only child was 'indulged by his mother in all his whims and caprices.' As a result, he developed a violent temper. His 'ungovernable passions' led first to his expulsion from school, and then his execution for murder at the age of 16.<sup>16</sup>

By 1917, the stories of spoiled only children had become less dramatic, but spoiling was nonetheless portrayed as dangerous to children's personalities

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<sup>13</sup> W. C. Todd, 'Guard Early Tendencies', in Mrs H. B. Pratt, Rev. C. Stone, Wm. C. Brown, and Rev H. G. Park (eds.), *The Mother's Assistant, Young Lady's Friend and Family Manual*, (Boston, 1851), pp. 117-18.

<sup>14</sup> John S. C. Abbott, *The Mother At Home; or, the Principles of Maternal Duty Familiarly Illustrated*, (New York, 1852 edition), [https://archive.org/stream/motherathomeorpr00abbo/motherathomeorpr00abbo\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/motherathomeorpr00abbo/motherathomeorpr00abbo_djvu.txt), (accessed 4/7/2016), p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 92-4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

and mental health. Psychologist H. Addington Bruce described an only son whose rich parents ‘minister[ed] to their son’s every whim, and eternally busied themselves devising amusements and distractions for him.’ This made the boy excitable and irritable – leading his parents to consult a doctor – as well as conceited and selfish, negatively affecting his relationships with other children.<sup>17</sup> Members of the early- and mid-twentieth-century Child Guidance movement were particularly concerned with spoiled children<sup>18</sup> Such beliefs clearly reached the Mass Observation correspondents of 1944 and 1949, who made comments such as ‘if you have only the one, they get so selfish,’ ‘I don’t believe in having one child and giving it everything. The child doesn’t appreciate it,’ and ‘single child always almost hopefully spoilt’.<sup>19</sup> As mentioned previously, even if they did not read the manuals themselves, these ideas were disseminated through other mediums.<sup>20</sup>

The existing work on the history of the family and childhood examined for this thesis yielded no examples of materially spoiled only children. However, historians’ accounts of sibling children who were ‘transformed’ into only children have nonetheless maintained common ideas about only children that are questioned by this thesis. In Davidoff’s *Thicker Than Water*, a key part of a sibling child’s ‘change into an only child’ when she was sent to live with a childless aunt and uncle was that she was ‘pampered by gifts – a doll and a kitten’.<sup>21</sup> Roberts has described how a non-only child was sent to live with an

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<sup>17</sup> Bruce, *Handicaps of Children*, pp. 38-40.

<sup>18</sup> Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, p. 60.

<sup>19</sup> TC 3/3-1-A; TC 3/3-1-B; TC 3/3-4-B.

<sup>20</sup> Rose, *The Psychological Complex*, p. 203; Urwin and Sharland, ‘From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature’, p. 193; Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, pp. 19-22, 32, 34, 114-15; Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, pp. 31, 33, 40, 62, 71, 97, 133.

<sup>21</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, p. 171.

aunt soon after the birth of a sibling. She told Roberts: 'I was made very welcome, probably very spoiled because I was like an only child. Right through school I was thought of as an only child. They were very surprised when I said I had a sister.'<sup>22</sup> In both of these cases, only-childhood is clearly associated with indulgence. Roberts' example further demonstrates how widespread this association was, and remains, though it is unclear whether it was the teachers or other children who assumed her interviewee was an only child because she was 'spoiled'.

Material indulgence is a central theme in several recent works that explore and refute stereotypes of only children. Laybourn wrote that spoiling is part of a stereotype 'deeply ingrained in the British consciousness'.<sup>23</sup> McKibben, Newman and Sorensen have made similar statements about the pervasiveness of this image in Britain and the US. All four have refuted it using their own evidence or that of others.<sup>24</sup> Falbo has suggested that only children were more likely to have been spoiled in the past because their mothers had often had only children involuntarily.<sup>25</sup> Chapter 2 has already questioned the extent to which women in the past did have only children involuntarily.<sup>26</sup> This chapter further questions this idea. It suggests that while some only children in the past described themselves as materially spoiled, a number of factors other than secondary infertility were involved.

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<sup>22</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 179.

<sup>23</sup> Laybourn, *The Only Child*, pp. 1, 62-73.

<sup>24</sup> McKibben, *Maybe One*, pp. 20, 41; Newman, *The Case for the Only Child*, p. 38; Sorensen, *Only-Child Experience and Adulthood*, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: A Review', p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 183.

To move on to this chapter's analysis, two only children who described themselves as materially spoiled were Elizabeth Goudge and Cyril Connolly, both upper middle-class writers. Goudge was born in Wells, Somerset in 1900, and also grew up in Ely, Cambridgeshire. Connolly was born in Coventry in 1903, and lived in South Africa, Corsica, Ireland, Bath, and Surrey as a child. While both were materially spoiled only children, others were not, and their experiences cannot be adequately accounted for by only-childhood itself.

Goudge referred to herself as spoiled, both materially and (as the next chapter will show) emotionally on multiple occasions, sometimes making it difficult to distinguish which type of spoiling she was referring to. She acknowledged that not all only children were spoiled, while nonetheless associating herself with the stereotype: 'I have met many delightful untarnished only children but I was too spoilt to be one of them.'<sup>27</sup> She attributed her material indulgence to her mother's childhood experiences:

It is said that parents always try to give their children what they have lacked themselves and so my mother, remembering the austerity of her own childhood, allowed me too many pretty clothes, too many toys, too much spoiling, and ended up having a very nasty little spoiled brat.<sup>28</sup>

As Goudge herself noted, it was understandable and not uncommon for her mother to want her to have a more comfortable and enjoyable childhood than she had experienced herself. Pooley has found that both working- and middle-class parents in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were interested in 'improving their children's lives voluntarily through providing a

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<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Goudge, *The Joy of the Snow*, (London, 1974), p. 76.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

better quality of care ... than they had experienced.'<sup>29</sup> King, Roberts, and Hendrick have also uncovered such attitudes among parents who raised their children after 1919, 1940 and World War II respectively.<sup>30</sup> Importantly for this study, the majority of parents these historians studied would have had more than one child. As chapter 2 showed, providing a better quality of care for each child was not necessarily couples' main motivation for reducing their family sizes. This attitude, therefore, would not have been limited to parents of only children. Perhaps Goudge's mother believed that she would have had a better quality of life had her family had more money when she was young. As part of a married couple who could afford such middle-class accoutrements as 'a medium size house and garden, three maids ... Nanny and a gardener', her desire to make her daughter's childhood better than hers therefore manifested materially.<sup>31</sup>

Although, as in Goudge's case, parents might find themselves spoiling their children as a reaction to their own childhoods, it was not just parents who might spoil children. This further obscures any reputed connection between only-childhood and spoiling. Goudge described her nanny, who had presumably had other charges in the past, as a 'congenital spoiler', and wrote that her favourite aunt 'adored children and spoilt me even more shockingly than my mother did.'<sup>32</sup> It was not Connolly's parents, but his paternal grandmother who spoiled him, when he was sent back to England from South Africa at the age of six to live with her for a period. He wrote that she

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<sup>29</sup> Pooley, 'Parenthood, Childrearing and Fertility', p. 93.

<sup>30</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 38; Roberts, *Women and Families*, pp. 33-5; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 32.

<sup>31</sup> Goudge, *The Joy of the Snow*, pp. 60, 62.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 51, 76.



overindulged him in terms of food and toys, to the point that 'my character began to deteriorate.' When he became overwrought at his day school (a regular occurrence), 'I would be handed, still hysterical, to the matron, and the inevitable case-history would be gone over. "It's his grandmother. She spoils him."<sup>33</sup>

Connolly did not blame his grandmother for spoiling him: 'my grandmother, lonely, religious and unselfish, was only playing her biological role. The tragedy was that I found it out and recognised my victim.'<sup>34</sup> As far back as 1600, one Reverend John Robinson lamented that 'children brought up with their grandfathers and grandmothers seldom do well but are usually corrupted by their too great indulgence.'<sup>35</sup> It might also be supposed that grandparents have retired from the 'disciplining' role they needed to adopt in order to keep their own children on the right path. Without the same responsibility to provide for all their grandchildren's material needs as they had to for their own children, they have more disposable income to spend on treats for their grandchildren. Whether or not a child – only or otherwise – was materially spoiled, then, could depend upon how inclined their grandparents were to indulge them.

Connolly's case also echoes those of Norman Nicholson and Dodie Smith in chapters 4 and 5, as his parents' circumstances led him to live with a grandparent who was still young and healthy enough to look after and indulge him. This was a contrast to Anthony Wright, who had little contact with his co-resident, ill grandfather. This adds to this thesis' finding that only children's

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<sup>33</sup> Cyril Connolly, *Enemies of Promise*, (London 1948), pp. 148, 149, 154-5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>35</sup> Reverend John Robinson, quoted in Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, p. 57.

relationships with co-resident grandparents depended upon whether their grandparents needed their parents' help or *vice versa*. In general, children would have more involved relationships with grandparents who were required, and still fit, to help raise them than with grandparents who had been brought into their home because they were no longer able to live in their own homes.<sup>36</sup>

Both Goudge and Connolly felt that being materially and, in Goudge's case, emotionally spoiled, had negative effects on their personalities, turning them into 'spoiled brats'. Goudge described how she expected all of her grandparents' attention when she got ill when she was staying with them: 'Spoilt little brat that I was I thought everyone should always be on my side. Especially with measles upon me.'<sup>37</sup> She also related having a spoiled personality to her resentment and misbehaviour when her nanny's sister looked after her for a period while her nanny accompanied her mother on a health retreat.<sup>38</sup> 'In the ungrateful way of spoilt children', she failed to take care of, and briefly lost, a copy of the New Testament she had been given.<sup>39</sup> She also had trouble adjusting to boarding school because 'I found myself no longer the centre of the universe.'<sup>40</sup> This adds to this thesis' argument that a child's reactions to boarding school depended upon temperament and whether they went voluntarily.

Another shock came in the form of Goudge's younger cousin H  l  ne, who had been sent to England from Java, Indonesia and stayed with the family during school holidays: 'she was thirteen years younger than I was, a gap

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<sup>36</sup> Thane, 'The Family Lives of Old People', pp. 183, 187, 198.

<sup>37</sup> Goudge, *The Joy of the Snow*, p. 50.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

difficult to bridge for a child and a much older girl who had hitherto been cock of the walk, reigning with a supremacy that must now be shared.<sup>41</sup> Davidoff has written that such arrangements could result in ‘petty tensions’, as an only child might ‘regard the incomer as drawing off attention and resources from parents.’<sup>42</sup> However, it is worth reiterating that not all only children in this study described themselves as spoiled, and certainly not to the same extent as Goudge. Others who had cousins and other children brought into the home reported getting along well with them. Moreover, Goudge and her cousin eventually overcame their differences and became firm friends.<sup>43</sup>

Although Connolly did not blame his grandmother for ‘playing her biological role’, he wrote that ‘to this period I trace my worst faults’, as he was able to take advantage of her generous nature:

Indecision, for I found that by hesitating for a long time over two toys in a shop I would be given both and so was tempted to make two alternatives seem equally attractive; Ingratitude, for I grew so used to having what I wanted that I assumed it as a right; Laziness, for sloth is the especial vice of tyrants; the Impatience with boredom which is generated by devotion; the Cruelty which comes from a knowledge of power and the Giving way to moods for I learnt that sulking, crying, moping, and malingering were bluffs that paid.<sup>44</sup>

He also wrote of being ‘so spoilt that I felt bored and disappointed with myself and tried to take it out on whom I dared’ at school. His mother eventually collected him from his grandmother’s and ‘tried to repair the damages to my character’, to no avail, as he would demand her attention when he was supposed to be asleep:

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<sup>41</sup> Goudge, *The Joy of the Snow*, pp. 149-50.

<sup>42</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, p. 187.

<sup>43</sup> Goudge, *The Joy of the Snow*, p. 150.

<sup>44</sup> Connolly, *Enemies of Promise*, pp., pp. 148, 149.

I would scream and scream with real tears and screams that grew more and more artificial as I had to raise my voice to carry to the dining-room ... till at last my mother appeared in evening dress and would sit with me and stroke my head smelling of chocolates.<sup>45</sup>

Connolly suggested that he was aware at the time that his spoiled personality made him different from other children and, by extension, contemporary expectations of children's behaviour. He reckoned, 'I have always disliked myself at any given moment,' and 'all my cousins were healthy, destructive, normal children. I was lonely, romantic and affected...'<sup>46</sup> He was clearly a very troubled individual, and apparently for reasons other than only-childhood and as well as the effects of his grandmother's spoiling. He was unusually open about his unhappy experiences at Eton, where frequent 'beatings and bullyings ... ruin[ed] my nerve' in his first year, and he was unpopular with the masters because he was lazy, and with the other boys because he was 'a bad fag' and 'a coward at games.'<sup>47</sup> Even though he eventually made friends and even became popular as 'he adapted enough to have had enormous fun pushing at the rules and codes,' he was highly critical of the boarding-school system. By contrast, others of his class often downplayed or reinterpreted their negative experiences to justify sending their own children away to school.<sup>48</sup> He suggested that:

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<sup>45</sup> Connolly, *Enemies of Promise*, pp. 151, 153, 158.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143, 154-5.

<sup>47</sup> Connolly, *Enemies of Promise*, pp. 180-83, 187; Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip*, pp. 8, 120, 171-80.

<sup>48</sup> Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip*, pp. 21-2, 34-6, 54, 108.

Experiences undergone by boys at the great public schools, their glories and disappointments, are so intense as to dominate their lives and to arrest their development. From these it results that the greater part of the ruling class remains adolescent, school-minded, self-conscious, cowardly, sentimental and in the last analysis homosexual.<sup>49</sup>

Another detail about Connolly's life that may have affected how he looked back on his childhood and character was that he believed he was gay until he was 37 as a result of the (unconsummated) romantic friendships he experienced at boarding school.<sup>50</sup>

When presenting their life stories, people are liable to overlay their feelings as they experienced them as children with feelings and knowledge developed subsequently. However, it does not seem unreasonable that Connolly accurately remembered strong feelings such as disliking himself and comparing himself negatively to other children.<sup>51</sup> It is more questionable whether, and if so how, he was aware at the time that his mother intervened in his grandmother's care, or that the school matron would go over his 'case-history' of being spoiled whenever he became hysterical at school.<sup>52</sup> Either way, Connolly's behaviour was far from that which adults wanted from children at any point in this period, but particularly in the early-twentieth century.

Although Connolly implied that he maintained the 'faults' he developed as a result of his grandmother's overindulgence of him, Goudge appeared to be more aware of her spoiled character in hindsight than at the time and sought

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<sup>49</sup> Connolly, *Enemies of Promise*, p. 253.

<sup>50</sup> Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip*, p. 239.

<sup>51</sup> Jordanova, 'Children in History', p. 5; Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, pp. 11-12; Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, pp. 16, 59, 125; Pascal, *Design and Truth*, pp. 80-82.

<sup>52</sup> Connolly, *Enemies of Promise*, pp. 153, 155.

to change it.<sup>53</sup> She suggested that a nervous breakdown she had in her thirties was a cause for reflection, writing:

How difficult some temperaments (mine, for instance) are to live with ... I think I only realise now how much both my parents always helped me. At the time I took them far too much for granted. If you grow up with wonderful people about you always you do tend to take them for granted. It needs emergence into the world, and contact with the other sort, to know your luck.<sup>54</sup>

Like James Nelson's near-death experience detailed in chapter 6, Goudge's breakdown may have spurred her to think deeply about her personality and experiences, and discuss them in her memoirs around 40 years later. She concluded that the spoiling she received was inevitable, and it made her 'difficult ... to live with.'<sup>55</sup> Like Connolly, she linked her faults as an adult back to childhood: 'that child was and is a neurotic selfish little brat. I say is for she is with me still. All my life I have been waging war with her. I have a dim hope that I may get rid of her before I die, but it is very dim.'<sup>56</sup>

As chapter 3 showed, from the late-nineteenth century, Romanticism and psychoanalysis increasingly influenced autobiographers to present their childhoods as a key stage in their character development.<sup>57</sup> Goudge and Connolly appeared to differ from the teachers and parents interviewed by Pooni, who believed that spoiling could be undone.<sup>58</sup> This have might been due to changes in attitudes towards spoiling in recent decades. As this chapter has shown, late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century writers were very concerned about the effects of spoiling on children's morality, mental

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<sup>53</sup> Connolly, *Enemies of Promise*, p. 149.

<sup>54</sup> Goudge, *The Joy of the Snow*, p. 199.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>57</sup> Walther, 'The Invention of Childhood', p. 65; Burnett (ed.), *Destiny Obscure*, p. x; Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, p. 77; Pascal, *Design and Truth*, pp. 52, 84.

<sup>58</sup> Pooni, *An Exploration of Parent and Teacher Perceptions*, pp. 148, 149, 150-51.

health, and usefulness as citizens. By contrast, while some of the parents Pooni interviewed were worried about the possible long-term effects of spoiling, others insisted that it did no harm in the long run, and, reflecting more recent emphases on children's happiness, discussed spoiling their children in order to make them happy and avoid sadness.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps, as spoiled children who happened to have no brothers and sisters and grew up at a certain time, Goudge and Connolly were conditioned to be highly self-critical and regard having a spoiled personality as something they could not successfully 'grow out of'. Being the daughter of the principal of a theological college, Goudge may have been especially sensitive to the long-held but fading association between spoiling and sin.<sup>60</sup>

Some only children were materially spoiled, then, primarily as a result of their parents' and other caregivers' experiences of hardship in their own lives and attitudes of extreme generosity towards children. Only-childhood might increase the material dividends in such situations, as there were no other children to share parents' and carers' resources. However, this does not detract from the fact that parents and carers needed to be inclined towards materially indulging children in the first place. Domestic circumstances were also important, as parents who wanted to spoil their children required the means to do so. This chapter now turns to only children who wrote or said

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<sup>59</sup> Pooni, *An Exploration of Parent and Teacher Perceptions*, pp. 147, 148; Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 165-7, 169-71, 174-5; Stearns, 'Childhood Emotions', pp. 169-70.

<sup>60</sup> Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, p. 39; Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 73, 181-3, 277; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, pp. 78, 124-5, 149; Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 223; Newson and Newson, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing', pp. 53-4, 56-7; Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, pp. 55, 58, 61; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 48, 61-2; Grant, 'Parent-child Relations', p. 117.

that they were not materially spoiled. These same factors combined with another influence that could affect childhood experiences: historical time.

Upper middle-class scholar and author Joan Evans was born in Abbots Langley, Hertfordshire, in 1877; she had four much older half-siblings who never lived with her, hence her inclusion in this thesis as an only child. RAF pilot and local councillor David Lomas was born in Birmingham in 1936; it is difficult to determine his class, as although he said his father had his own business, he did not explain what it involved.

Evans wrote:

My parents held the Victorian view that it was wrong for a child to have too many toys. I cannot remember their ever giving me one, though when we finished reading a book it was usually given me ... I never had a large property of toys as children do now.<sup>61</sup>

Evans' parents also did not allow her much money, so 'I was always hard up', with her toys coming from her beloved 'Nannie', her parents' friends, or being second-hand.<sup>62</sup> Her parents' treatment of her, as she suggested, was in keeping with childrearing norms at the time that she was growing up. As indicated above, Shuttleworth has identified that there was a clear connection between indulgence of children and 'passion' by the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup> Stearns, meanwhile, has found that parents were increasingly pressured to buy toys to make their children happy and avoid boredom in the twentieth century.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Banks has found that while middle-class parents spent more money on their children from the mid-nineteenth century, they put

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<sup>61</sup> Joan Evans, *Prelude & Fugue*, (London, 1964), p. 17.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 25.

<sup>63</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 92.

<sup>64</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 177, 179-81.



it towards clothes and education, which were increasing in price and value, rather than food or toys.<sup>65</sup>

Even as manufacturers increased their efforts to win parents' Christmas and birthday budgets and children's pocket money, concerns about the effects of material indulgence on children's characters persisted. In 1927, psychiatrist Douglas Thom wrote: 'too many toys are as destructive of good habit development, emotional, intellectual, and social, as too few.'<sup>66</sup> By this time, most parents would have long moved on from the austerity of Evans' parents, but toys were nonetheless not without purpose. In 1907, paediatrician Luther Emmett Holt recommended toys that trained children in gender roles, 'imagination ... habits of neatness, order ... regularity ... concentration of mind.'<sup>67</sup>

As indicated above, Goudge's middle-class parents were well-off enough to be able to materially indulge her in comparison to her mother's more austere experiences of childhood.<sup>68</sup> Connolly described his grandmother as poor, and living in lodgings, yet she clearly had enough money to buy him more food and toys than was advisable. This may have been because she made him a financial priority or received money for his care from his parents (his father was an army major and his mother came from a wealthy family).<sup>69</sup> While Evans was not materially spoiled at least partly because it was not common for children to have many toys at the time she was growing up, Lomas was

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<sup>65</sup> Banks, *Prosperity and Parenthood*, pp. 171-3.

<sup>66</sup> Douglas Thom, *Everyday Problems*, p. 331.

<sup>67</sup> L. Emmett Holt, *The Care and Feeding of Children*, (New York and London, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1907), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15484/15484-h/15484-h.htm>, (accessed 18/11/2017), no page numbers.

<sup>68</sup> Goudge, *The Joy of the Snow*, p. 60.

<sup>69</sup> Connolly, *Enemies of Promise* pp. 152-3; 'Oxford DNB article: Connolly, Cyril Vernon', <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30959>, (accessed 15/10/2017).

affected by growing up in a time of austerity: 'people always have this vision of any only child as being spoilt but with all of the deprivation and hardship that there was during the war, there was certainly no, no element of my being spoilt.'<sup>70</sup>

This adds to the variety of experiences only children had as the result of several different factors. It also echoes Falbo's more extreme finding that a group of only and last children whose intellectual problems had previously been attributed to their birth positions had in fact been affected by deprivation during the Dutch famine of 1944-5.<sup>71</sup> It also relates to Elder and Caspi's findings, described in chapter 2, that historical events during childhood might affect children's personality traits and relationships with relatives and friends, as well as parents' expectations of them.<sup>72</sup> The concerns of several Mass Observation respondents from 1944 also reflect this idea that historical time is an important consideration when it comes to a child's quality of life. Many respondents said that they were putting off having more children until after the war, presumably because of its effects on economic fortunes and housing, as well as the physical and mental danger posed by bombing. One woman said that she had instructed her 23-year-old daughter not to have children during the war as 'she's not going to ruin their nerves.'<sup>73</sup>

Lomas' unprompted discussion of the only-child stereotype of spoiling in relation to himself is also revealing. Like the stepchildren Burchardt studied, who expressed surprise that their step-parents were kind, he found it worthy

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with David Lomas by Dylan Roys, January 1999, *Millennium Memory Bank*, C900/09596 track 1, © BBC.

<sup>71</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: A Review', p. 16.

<sup>72</sup> Elder and Caspi, 'Studying Lives in a Changing Society', pp. 217-21.

<sup>73</sup> TC 3/3-1-A.

of remark that as an only child, he did not fit a particular image of only children.<sup>74</sup> By referring to this stereotype, yet denying it of himself due to the 'deprivation and hardship' of war, he showed that he was aware of it and incorporated it into his account of himself. Furthermore, like the only children studied by Mancillas, he maintained the stereotype by implying that he was an exception to a rule.<sup>75</sup> He also reinforced the only-child stereotype of loneliness by saying:

It was always a very lonely life, people don't realise how lonely it can be to be an only child. When my friends ... went out on bank holidays with their mums and dads, I was left on my own, and I had to find things to do for myself.<sup>76</sup>

However, as chapter 6 showed, only-childhood was no guarantee of loneliness. Other only children might have also been taken out by their own parents, joined their friends' families for trips, had friends available to play with on bank holidays, or simply not minded being left on their own.

A key dissimilarity between Evans and Lomas which may also have affected how they presented themselves as having not been materially spoiled is their relationships with their parents. As a child, Evans did not have a close relationship with her archaeologist mother:

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<sup>74</sup> Burchardt, 'Stepchildren's Memories', pp. 239, 240, 249.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with David Lomas by Dylan Roys, track 1; Mancillas, cited in Sandler, *One and Only*, p. 29.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with David Lomas by Dylan Roys, track 1.

My mother's own home life had been mistrustful and difficult, and in her escape from it she had ceased to be closely one of a family ... she had never, I think, had the slightest wish to stoop down and make contact with an immature mind.

She had told me herself that she never wanted to have children, and that she was angry when she found one was coming to modify the order and dignity of her new life ... my mother was determined that my existence should not spoil her life. When I was six months old she left me for a second honeymoon in France. My first year was spent under the care of a succession of resentful nurses, and then, when I was eleven months old, Nannie came.<sup>77</sup>

Evans did not indicate how old she was when her mother told her she had not wanted a child, or how she knew that her nurses were 'resentful'. However, it seems likely that she was aware of her disfavour as a child; she noted that her much older half-siblings 'had had their nurseries on the first floor [when they were children decades earlier], but I and my nurse were exiled to the attics.'<sup>78</sup> She also discussed how her parents (her father was also an archaeologist) were away for much of the year: a few weeks in the spring, many weeks in late summer, three months in the winter, and three or four days a week in London when they were at home.<sup>79</sup> Like some of the only children studied by Anderson, Evans appears to have been an accidental conception in a marriage undertaken for love and companionship, as evidenced by her parents' shared occupation and excursions.<sup>80</sup>

Even by the upper middle-class standards of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Evans' parents were distant. She spent the customary 'hour in the drawing room' with them, but as they were away from home for much of the time, this was not a regular occurrence as it would have been for

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<sup>77</sup> Evans, *Prelude & Fugue*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 26.

<sup>80</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 188.

many of her peers.<sup>81</sup> Her very close relationship with her nanny, who was part of her life for 67 years and to whom she dedicated her autobiography, was also not unusual for this time.<sup>82</sup> Several historians have described how it was common, even as late as the 1930s, for upper middle-class mothers to turn their children over to nurserymaids and nannies more or less immediately. They only became more involved with their children as they grew more coherent and, in the case of girls, needed to be introduced into society.<sup>83</sup> It was little wonder, then, that in a number of families, nannies were far more involved in children's upbringing than their parents, and their charges subsequently developed close, informal relationships with them and other servants, and more distant and formal relationships with their parents.<sup>84</sup>

As Goudge's case suggests, and as Martin has found, historians such as Hamlett may have overstated the extent to which upper middle-class children who had nannies and nurseries were unfamiliar with their parents.<sup>85</sup> As indicated in chapter 5, it is likely that parents' and nannies' behaviour fell on a spectrum. Evans' parents would have been at the extreme end of such a spectrum due to their frequent absences. Evans described how:

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<sup>81</sup> Evans, *Prelude & Fugue*, p. 26; Hamlett, *Material Relations*, pp. 1, 114; Vigne, 'Parents and Children 1890-1918', pp. 6-7.

<sup>82</sup> 'Oxford DNB article: Evans, Dame Joan', <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47612>, (accessed 15/10/2017); Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny*, (London, 1972), p. 147.

<sup>83</sup> Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, p. 101; Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, p. 31; Vigne, 'Parents and Children 1890-1918', pp. 6-7; Ronald Fraser, *In Search of a Past: The Manor House, Amnersfield, 1933-1945*, (London, 1984), p. 72; Gathorne-Hardy, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny*, pp. 126, 181-2, 186-7.

<sup>84</sup> Fraser, *In Search of a Past*, pp. 57, 74; Hamlett, *Material Relations*, pp. 118, 119; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 27; Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians*, pp. 141-2; Gathorne-Hardy, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny*, p. 235.

<sup>85</sup> Martin, 'Disabled Children and Domestic Spaces', p. 142.

In the years of childhood I can remember our [her and her nanny's] life went on its monotonous way not much affected by the rest of the household ... the fact that there were only two of us greatly lessened our choice of games...

...the coldest and darkest months were fairly dreary for us, shut up in the attics, with no stir in the house below ... no one came to the house to visit us...

...since it was not made easy for me to ask anyone to the house, I knew hardly anyone at all well...<sup>86</sup>

In such circumscribed circumstances, it is no wonder Evans and her nanny developed such a close relationship. Evans' nanny took on all duties concerning her care; she bought her such books and toys as she had, took Evans to visit her own family as well as Evans' half-sister, and helped her move into her Oxford college, where she was to be a regular visitor.<sup>87</sup> By contrast, Evans did not accompany her mother anywhere until she was 16.<sup>88</sup>

While Evans' parents may have made efforts not to spoil her because it was not the custom of the time to indulge children, her mother's attitudes of disinterest in and dislike towards children may also have been influences. By contrast, Lomas spoke of having positive, close relationships with his parents and wider family, and implied that he might have been materially spoiled had there not been limited resources due to the Second World War. Although Lomas did not see his father between the ages of five and 11 due to the war, they corresponded by airmail throughout the period and resumed a 'very very' close relationship upon his father's return.<sup>89</sup> This reflects King's finding that sometimes a father's absence during wartime could create a closer emotional

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<sup>86</sup> Evans, *Prelude & Fugue*, pp. 25, 26, 30.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 17, 33, 41, 44, 49, 54, 72.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with David Lomas by Dylan Roys, track 1.

bond with his children.<sup>90</sup> Lomas went on to describe his father as ‘a gentleman in, in, the real sense of the word ... he wouldn’t say a, a, a rotten thing about anyone, he was, he was always prepared to see the better side of everybody.’<sup>91</sup> Like the autobiographers growing up a few decades earlier studied by Strange, as well as Peter Schofield in the previous chapter, Lomas conveyed that his father’s values were both positive and important to him, even though they had not spent as much time together as he would have liked.<sup>92</sup> Not only did Lomas miss his father’s company during the war, but he regretted that his father died in 1960, ‘so really I only had about 13, 14 years where I could actually relate to my father completely.’<sup>93</sup> Lomas also implied that having a close, lively extended family was important to his happiness as a child, as he spoke at length about the ‘good old get-together’ which made Christmases ‘quite something special for me.’<sup>94</sup>

From Evans’ descriptions of her mother spending very little time with her and showing her little affection, we can infer that her mother’s behaviour would have been at the more extreme end of the parenting scale at the turn of the century. However, it is important to note that it would have not been necessarily concerning or particularly unusual. As previously discussed, upper middle-class children might only see their parents at prescribed intervals, which could result in stilted relationships between them. Some children came to see their parents as ‘exotic’ creatures for whom they had to be on their best behaviour, and they were more at ease with the nannies and

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<sup>90</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 91, 149; FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 405.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with David Lomas by Dylan Roys, track 1.

<sup>92</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, pp. 122-3, 126; Interview with Peter Schofield by James Dearling, tape 1.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with David Lomas by Dylan Roys, track 1.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, track 1.

servants they had more frequent and intimate contact with.<sup>95</sup> Another recurrent theme in this thesis is Stearns' idea that before the early-twentieth century, 'happiness and childhood were not assumed regularly to coexist ... happiness was not seen as an adult or parental obligation.'<sup>96</sup> Evans' mother did not seem to set out to make her daughter *unhappy*. For example, 'she was more puzzled than angry' when Evans, sensing 'my work was not good enough and I came very near to a breakdown,' rejected her mother's plan for her to read Classics at Somerville College, Oxford.<sup>97</sup> However, being a distant parent at a time when happiness was regarded as a by-product of correct childrearing methods rather than a central concern for parents meant that she did not necessarily hold Evans' happiness at the forefront of her mind.<sup>98</sup>

Three decades later, when Lomas was growing up, expectations of parenthood and happiness in children had shifted. As King has written, both men and women experienced an 'intensification' of parenting during the inter-war period in particular. At the same time, fathers were increasingly portrayed as affectionate and playful in public discourse, as well as important influences who were expected to be more practically and emotionally involved with their children than previously.<sup>99</sup> While Lomas' father might have been at the opposite end of the parenting scale to Evans' mother, had Lomas grown up earlier, his attitudes would have been not unheard-of at the turn of the century

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<sup>95</sup> Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, p. 96; Fraser, *In Search of a Past*, pp. 57, 74, 84; Hamlett, *Material Relations*, pp. 113, 118, 119; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 27; Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians*, pp. 141-2; Gathorne-Hardy, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny*, p. 235.

<sup>96</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 167, 172, 175.

<sup>97</sup> Evans, *Prelude & Fugue*, p. 58.

<sup>98</sup> Stearns, *Defining Happy Childhoods*, pp. 167, 170-73, 175.

<sup>99</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 16, 18, 52, 57, 77, 86, 115, 186, 194.



and relatively 'normal' at the time Lomas actually grew up. As chapter 2 has shown, many historians have identified a general shift towards more companionable, emotional, and child-centred parenting that started in the late-eighteenth century and continued throughout the period under consideration.

Lomas' discussions of being lonely as an only child suggested that his parents, or at least his mother, could not go out of their way to keep him entertained. He was 'left on my own' on bank holidays when his friends went out with their families, and 'I had to find the things to do for myself'.

Nonetheless, it appears that his mother at least assisted him in staving off boredom by 'encourag[ing] me to read and use my library card tickets' and taking him to the library for this purpose 'every single week.'<sup>100</sup> Stearns has observed that American parents were increasingly regarded as responsible for alleviating their children's boredom over the course of the twentieth century.<sup>101</sup> However, Lomas' experience suggests this mindset was slower to take full hold in Britain than in America. Alternatively, the contingencies of war may simply have meant that a mother whose husband was absent understandably had concerns that took precedence over entertaining her child.

Evans and Lomas' cases have further demonstrated the influence of factors other than only-childhood – particularly parental attitudes, domestic circumstances and historical time – on whether or not an only child was materially spoiled. In order to be spoiled, an only child had to have a relative

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with David Lomas by Dylan Roys, track 1.

<sup>101</sup> Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 179-81.

or caregiver who was willing and able to spoil them. Historical time also influenced spoiling, as this could make it particularly undesirable or desirable, possible or difficult to indulge children materially. The cases of Goudge, Connolly, Evans, and Lomas have again shown that, contrary to historians' claims, there was no simple connection between growing up in a small family and indulgent treatment from parents. This finding is supported by the existence of non-only children who were materially spoiled or unspoiled for the same reasons.

Upper middle-class potter Mary Wondrausch, born in Battersea, London in 1923, had one brother, seven years older her senior. While, as this chapter has shown, some only children were not materially spoiled because their parents lacked the funds to overindulge them, Wondrausch's family clearly had more than enough money to do so. Wondrausch's father owned a car dealership – the first Ford franchise in London – and this was clearly a lucrative business, as she described herself as a 'totally indulged' child with a well-equipped gymnasium in her family's mansion flat, and was 'never crossed or thwarted.' Like Ralph Brown in the previous chapter, the age gap between her and her brother was such that they did not know one another well, and her brother's term-time residence at boarding school was also a hindrance.<sup>102</sup> This once again shows how having siblings was no guarantee of companionship.

Unfortunately, Wondrausch did not indicate whether her brother was similarly indulged. It might be asked whether – as Davidoff found with the siblings she

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<sup>102</sup> Interview with Mary Wondrausch by Hawksmoor Hughes, September-October 2007, *NLSC: Crafts' Lives*, C960/77 part 1, © The British Library; Interview with Ralph Brown by Gillian Whiteley, part 1.

studied – Wondrausch’s gender, or status as the youngest child, granted her parental preference.<sup>103</sup> Alternatively, while both siblings went to boarding school, it is possible that Wondrausch was particularly indulged because, being a girl, she would likely have spent more of her childhood in the family home.<sup>104</sup>

Upper middle-class writer Nicolas Monsarrat, born in 1910, was the fourth of five children, though an elder brother died when Monsarrat was three.<sup>105</sup> The family was well-off; Monsarrat’s father was a distinguished surgeon and the children had all the middle-class accoutrements of day and night nurseries and, later on, an entire wing of a house where they spent the majority of their time. They also had a succession of nurses, and went to boarding schools.<sup>106</sup> Their mother ‘was very strict, immensely strong-willed, sometimes harsh, but never ... unfair,’ and despite the family’s privileged economic position, the children were not given treats very often.<sup>107</sup>

The fact that Wondrausch was indulged, but Monsarrat was not, might have been symptomatic of a mixture of their parents’ attitudes towards childrearing as well as the thirteen-year gap between their childhoods. Over the course of this period, parents were increasingly expected to buy more and more toys to keep their children entertained and happy. Perhaps Monsarrat’s parents, in the 1910s and 1920s, looked back towards the older ideas about childrearing that overlapped with the newer ones that possibly influenced Wondrausch’s

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<sup>103</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, p. 99.

<sup>104</sup> Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, pp. 14, 44; Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, pp. 30, 244.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Oxford DNB article: Monsarrat, Nicholas John Turney’, <http://www.odnb.com/view/article/31457>, (accessed 11/11/2017).

<sup>106</sup> Nicholas Monsarrat, *Life is a Four-Letter Word*, (London, 1966), pp. 7, 9, 49, 63, 78.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

parents in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>108</sup> Just as parental attitudes particularly determined whether or not an only child was materially spoiled, as the next chapter shows, they also had considerable influence over whether or not they were emotionally spoiled.

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<sup>108</sup> Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 92; Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 177, 179-81; Banks, *Prosperity and Parenthood*, pp. 171-3.

## 9. Emotional spoiling

As the previous chapter indicated, there is more than one type of spoiling, and only children discussed both material and emotional indulgence, or the absence thereof. The idea that only children were given too much parental attention, and harmed by such treatment, is evident across late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century childrearing manuals, Mass Observation responses from the 1940s, and historians' work. Recent sociological research into only children has critiqued this idea. This chapter shows that, like material spoiling, whether an only child was emotionally spoiled depended largely upon their particular parents' attitudes. Other factors such as domestic circumstances and time were also important. Like the previous chapter, this chapter analyses cases where only children described themselves as having spoiled personalities where relevant.

According to contemporary manual-writers, over-attentive parents risked harming their only children with too little discipline and too much regard. Respondents to Eugene W. Bohannon's 1897 survey described 191 of 266 only children they knew as 'excessively indulged'. This led him to conclude that 'as a rule the home treatment [of only children] has been that of unthinking indulgence.'<sup>1</sup> Child psychologist Alice Hutchison asserted in 1925 that 'without the helpful intervention of brothers and sisters', parents became lax in applying discipline to their only children, making them 'nearly always hopelessly spoiled.'<sup>2</sup> She also raised concerns that only children's parents were excessively physically affectionate with their children. Echoing the

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<sup>1</sup> Bohannon, 'The Only Child in a Family', pp. 493, 494.

<sup>2</sup> Hutchison, *The Child and his Problems*, p. 86.

warnings of contemporary behaviourists such as Truby King, John Watson, W. E. Blatz, Helen Bott, and Susan Isaacs, she claimed that this would make them ill and unhappy.<sup>3</sup> Child psychoanalyst Edith Buxbaum also associated only-childhood with excessive parental attention nearly 25 years later, in 1949: ‘the only child has mostly all the attention of his parents all the time. He gets “spoiled”; being the only one he may be watched and fussed about constantly – too much usually for his own and his parents’ well-being.’<sup>4</sup>

Excessive parental attention apparently made it difficult for only children to get along with others, as they were used to being treated as special and important. They therefore expected to be allowed to win games and order other children around, and regarded children of their own age as a threat to their dominance.<sup>5</sup> This was supposed to have lifelong effects. Hutchison wrote that spoiling ‘unfits the child for the essential give and take of social life, and later for citizenship.’<sup>6</sup> Nurse Mary Chadwick wrote in 1928 that: ‘usually the only child finds it difficult to take the place of one among many. It prefers to be continually the only one, who gains the entire attention of those older than itself...’<sup>7</sup> These concerns were in keeping with contemporary emphases on making children into mentally-healthy, pro-social adult citizens by ensuring they had good relationships with their peers from an early age.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Hutchison, *The Child and his Problems*, pp. 91-2; Newson and Newson, ‘Cultural Aspects of Childrearing’, pp. 59-60; Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, pp. 126, 134, 136; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, pp. 166, 169, 173, 174, 175, 202, 204

<sup>4</sup> Buxbaum, *Your Child Makes Sense*, p. 179.

<sup>5</sup> Chadwick, *Psychology for Nurses*, p. 37; Alexandra Adler, ‘The Only Child’, p. 195; Bohannon, ‘The Only Child in a Family’, p. 489.

<sup>6</sup> Hutchison, *The Child and his Problems*, p. 89.

<sup>7</sup> Chadwick, *Difficulties in Child Development*, p. 320.

<sup>8</sup> Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, pp. 7, 8, 62, 86, 87, 89, 90, 142, 162, 180; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, pp. 166, 199, 209-10; Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, pp. 135, 136;

Manual-writers also worried that overly-attentive parents limited their only children's opportunities to learn to do things and think for themselves.

According to Bohannon:

The constant interference and watchfulness of over anxious parents denies to the child the range and freedom of action and experience which his nature calls for at the time, and which he must have if he is to develop self-control and self-direction ... He must be given some opportunity to choose for himself, to experiment.<sup>9</sup>

This idea was shared by writers in the 1920s and 1930s. Hutchison wrote that by interfering with their only children's activities because they could not bear to see them playing alone, parents risked limiting the child's initiative, resourcefulness, and pride in their achievements.<sup>10</sup> Neurologist Alexandra Adler was a member of the Individual Psychology movement, which particularly valued co-operation and social cohesion. Reflecting this, she described how by 'continually instructing, criticizing, telling the children that they know it better,' parents of only children prevented them from appreciating their own power and developing self-confidence. This could cause them to seek power in socially disruptive ways instead.<sup>11</sup>

Mass Observation respondents were also concerned by the excessive attention they believed parents bestowed upon only children. Interviewees in 1949, explaining what they considered to be the 'ideal family size', made comments including 'the only one ... is apt to be psychologically dangerous to health & happiness [sic] from over coddling and parental anxiety', 'however well-meaning the parents, an only child will always receive too much

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Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 48, 61-2; Grant, 'Parent-child Relations', p. 117; Rose, *Governing the Soul*, p. 153; Rose, *The Psychological Complex*, pp. 159, 165.

<sup>9</sup> Bohannon, *The Only Child in a Family*, pp. 474-5.

<sup>10</sup> Hutchison, *The Child and his Problems*, p. 85.

<sup>11</sup> Alexandra Adler, 'The Only Child', pp. 195-6.

attention', 'parents tend to fuss over the only child. The only child sometimes expects too much attention from its parents simply because it has no brothers and sisters,' and 'an only child is undesirable on account of the concentrated parental attention.'<sup>12</sup>

Historians have not challenged the idea that only children are emotionally spoiled. Fletcher's work reveals that concerns that only children received too much attention, to their detriment, existed as early as the 1840s. In an example he used, a mother who had lost several children came to regret devoting too much attention to her remaining child (she later had further children). She blamed herself for her surviving daughter becoming so conceited and 'forward' that she had to send her to school at the age of nine because she had become difficult to handle. She hoped her daughter would be improved by the company of other children, writing that: 'her faults are such as could scarcely fail to be those of an only child which she was for some years.'<sup>13</sup>

The perceived dangers of giving one's sole child too much attention in the mid-nineteenth century are also apparent in Hamlett's reference to William Thackeray's 1848 novel *Vanity Fair*. One mother, Becky, pays too little attention to her only child, Rawdon, leading to estrangement. However, another mother, Amelia, pays too much attention to her only child, George, leading her son to develop a spoiled personality. In Hamlett's words, this conveyed the message that while 'too great a distance between parent and child results in disaster ... a little distance is necessary to achieve the

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<sup>12</sup> TC 3/3-4-A; TC 3/3-4-B; TC 3/3-4-C.

<sup>13</sup> Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, pp. 120-21.



appropriate discipline.<sup>14</sup> As chapter 2 showed, Davidoff has lamented that while children with fewer siblings may have received more attention on their birthdays, they did not benefit from the ‘competition’, presumably for resources as well as achievements, provided by siblings.<sup>15</sup>

As shown previously, modern researchers have suggested that only children were unhappier in the past due to the questionable idea that their parents were far less likely to have deliberately limited their families than they are today.<sup>16</sup> However, they have argued that in more recent years, intended only children have tended to benefit as a result of inevitable extra parental attention. Falbo, Laybourn, McKibben, and Newman have all referred to findings that undivided parental attention and resources boost only children’s self-esteem, intelligence, maturity, cooperation, self-control, and happiness.<sup>17</sup> This chapter will show, though, that not all only children received this extra attention. The only children who reported receiving excessive attention were a minority, and had this experience for reasons other than only-childhood.

This chapter returns to the case of Elizabeth Goudge (born 1900). It also analyses the autobiography of Harold Hobson, a lower middle-class theatre critic born near Rotherham, Yorkshire in 1904. Both of them reported receiving excessive attention from their parents, but only-childhood *per se* does not adequately explain this treatment. It is therefore important to

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<sup>14</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 114.

<sup>15</sup> Davidoff, ‘The Family in Britain’, p. 118.

<sup>16</sup> Falbo, ‘Only Children: A Review’, p. 3; Laybourn, *The Only Child*, p. 108; McKibben, *Maybe One*, pp. 22-3, 45; Sandler, *One and Only*, pp. 163-4; Newman, *The Case for the Only Child*, p. 223.

<sup>17</sup> Falbo, ‘Only Children: An Updated Review’, p. 41; Laybourn, *The Only Child*, p. 73; McKibben, *Maybe One*, pp. 31-3, 40; Newman, *The Case for the Only Child*, p. 166.

analyse their entire accounts of their childhoods to reveal other, more influential factors.

As the previous chapter showed, Goudge wrote that her mother had materially spoiled her in order to give her daughter what she had lacked in her own childhood. She also wrote that her mother spoiled her emotionally because her mother was an invalid as a result of experiencing a difficult birth 'too soon after a bicycle accident'.<sup>18</sup> The following passage provides much to consider:

I do not see how the spoiling could have been avoided. In my early years no one expected that my mother would live long. She herself was quite sure she would not, and like so many sensitive extroverts her own suffering caused her not only to be acutely aware of illness in others but even to imagine it was there when it was not. She considered me a delicate child who might not live long either. Whichever way she looked at it fear of being parted from this adored child, whom she had nearly died to bring into the world, was always a shadow upon her. And so she, who if she had been a well woman would have been a wise mother of many children, was in illness the reverse. Whenever I sneezed she sent for the doctor. Or if she did not Nanny did, for Nanny well or ill was a congenital spoiler. And so that child was and is a neurotic selfish little brat.<sup>19</sup>

Her mother's inability to, or advisement not to, have another child, and her experiences of her own illness, appeared to affect Goudge's upbringing. She was treated similarly to Norman Nicholson (born 1914) and Victoria Crowe (born 1945) who, as chapter 4 showed, were cut them off from other children because their parents and caregivers worried about illness. Like Crowe, Goudge explained that there was nothing physically wrong with her, yet her mother appeared to project her experience of poor health and concerns about her own mortality onto her.

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<sup>18</sup> Goudge, *The Joy of the Snow*, pp. 32, 60, 76.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

The concerns Goudge's mother had for her daughter's physical health were more understandable than those of Crowe's mother four decades later. This is because at the beginning of the twentieth century, infant survival was still a major issue and advice to parents was still particularly oriented towards physical health.<sup>20</sup> However, as chapter 4 showed, manual-writers throughout this period urged parents not to pay too much anxious attention to their children's health, as this could affect their characters. Goudge may well have become aware of these warnings later on and incorporated them into her account of herself.

Cunnington and Cameron suggested that having more than one child would diminish a mother's anxiety about a child's health, and Goudge suspected her mother would have acted more judiciously with more children.<sup>21</sup> However, this might not have been the case. An obvious example cited by contemporary manual-writers and historians Shuttleworth and Humphries and Gordon is the sick child among a sibling group who received particular attention from their parents.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, as Davidoff has acknowledged, parents often could not help but have favourites. They might favour one of their children over the others because they possessed certain traits such as being of the parents' preferred sex, conforming to gender expectations, or

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<sup>20</sup> Woods, Watterson and Woodward, 'The Causes of Rapid Fertility Decline, Part I', pp. 346, 360, 362; Woods, Watterson and Woodward, 'The Causes of Rapid Fertility Decline, Part II', p. 130; Woods, Williams and Galley, 'Infant Mortality in England', pp. 35, 36, 37, 41, 42, 44, 49; Newson and Newson, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing', pp. 53-4, 68; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, pp. 124-5; Grant, 'Parent-child relations', p. 117; Urwin and Sharland, 'From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature', p. 75.

<sup>21</sup> Cunnington, *Nursery Notes*, p. 19; Cameron, *The Nervous Child*, pp. 162-3.

<sup>22</sup> Cunnington, *Nursery Notes*, pp. 14, 70-71; Abbott, *The Mother at Home*, p. 100; Florence Hull Winterburn, *Nursery Ethics*, (New York, 1895), <https://archive.org/details/nurseryethics01wintggoog>, (accessed 4/7/2016), p. 171; Alfred Adler, *What Life Could Mean to You*, pp. 24-5; Spiel and Birnbaum, 'The School and Educational Guidance', p. 81; Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 89; Humphries and Gordon, *Out of Sight*, pp. 22, 39-40.

being well-behaved.<sup>23</sup> This chapter will later show how sibling children could receive particular attention from their parents.

Illness and secondary infertility were also influences in Hobson's case. He wrote, 'my father and mother regarded me as the very centre of their humdrum existence.'<sup>24</sup> Their distress when he contracted polio at the age of eight, paralysing his right leg for life, was understandably so acute that his mother suffered a miscarriage.<sup>25</sup> Hobson's parents 'regarded me as their most precious possession', and 'assume[d] that I was extraordinarily clever ... they were of the opinion that they had begotten a wonder-child'; his mother was convinced he was a genius despite having 'little tangible evidence.'<sup>26</sup> His parents therefore conformed to Cunnington's warning that parents were particularly liable to make only children feel as though they were exceptional: 'the parents, having no other children to provide a healthy comparison, are likely to regard their single offspring as a miracle of cleverness.'<sup>27</sup>

However, few other only children in this study described their parents as being as devoted to them and effusive in their praise as Hobson's. Furthermore, unlike Goudge – and contemporary childrearing experts – Hobson regarded his parents' excessive attention to him as a mixed blessing, rather than wholly negative. He suggested that, in keeping with the findings of modern only-child researchers described above, his parents' extreme confidence in his abilities helped him to succeed in becoming a theatre

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<sup>23</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, pp. 98, 99.

<sup>24</sup> Harold Hobson, *Indirect Journey*, p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 41, 42, 80.

<sup>27</sup> Cunnington, *Nursery Notes*, p. 18.

critic.<sup>28</sup> He added that his parents' image of him 'did not make me think that I was clever, but it relieved me of any anxiety that I was not.'<sup>29</sup>

Although Goudge and Hobson both recalled having over-solicitous parents, their individual personalities, and possibly Goudge's material spoiling, led them to react differently to such treatment. This calls uniform portrayals of only children by historians and other writers into further question.

Furthermore, Hobson did not refer to only-childhood as a cause of excessive parental attention as Goudge did. He instead implied that his parents' attitudes and the circumstances of his illness were more important influences. However, like Goudge, he suggested that some of his parents' concerns made him neurotic and fearful:

These acts of over-protection speak touchingly of the love and concern that my mother and father had for me, which they preserved all through their long lives. But I think that they did me harm because they were based on fear, and fear is the worst foundation that life can have ... in their anxiety for my welfare they frequently acted under the influence of fear. This inevitably had an effect on me, creating a feeling of insecurity and a conviction that the world was a hostile place.<sup>30</sup>

Contemporary manual-writers warned parents – of only children or otherwise – of the consequences of excessive fear in child-rearing. Childrearing writer and lecturer Florence Hull Winterburn wrote in 1899: 'What man is pusillanimous and unfortunate in all his undertakings? Usually, the one who has been kept close to the hearth in his boyhood and never suffered to stray out of sight for fear of his coming to harm.'<sup>31</sup> Similarly, psychiatrist Douglas

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<sup>28</sup> Hobson, *Indirect Journey*, p. 18; Falbo, 'Only Children: An Updated Review', p. 41; Laybourn, *The Only Child*, p. 73; McKibben, *Maybe One*, pp. 31-3, 40; Newman, *The Case for the Only Child*, p. 166.

<sup>29</sup> Hobson, *Indirect Journey*, pp. 41, 80.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 52.

<sup>31</sup> Winterburn, *Nursery Ethics*, p. 214.

Thom wrote in 1927 that constant parental warnings resulted in children ‘filled with doubts and indecision; confidence is lacking; courage is gone. They feel inadequate to meet life, and they can exist only in the most protected kind of environment.’<sup>32</sup> He added that ‘teachers, nurses, and social workers are continually meeting children who are shy and timid ... because the fear instinct has been overstimulated.’<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, Stearns’ work shows how, over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it became less acceptable for children to be exposed to the emotion of fear.<sup>34</sup> Hobson’s parents may have been unable to help acting fearfully despite advice to shield children from fear. Alternatively, Hobson may have later become aware of the perceived dangers of instilling fear in children and interpreted his childhood experiences accordingly.<sup>35</sup>

The next chapter analyses ‘triangular’ relationships, where only children felt as though they were either an ‘intruder’ in their parents’ loving relationship or had to ‘pick a side’ in stormy marriages. However, it is worth discussing here how Hobson felt that he had such a relationship with his mother and father not because he was an only child, but because of his illness. Like other fathers in this thesis, and the ‘ideal’ father of the time, Hobson’s father ‘made every sacrifice on my behalf.’<sup>36</sup> However, the exception to this was ‘the sacrifice of an evil temper.’<sup>37</sup> Hobson described how his father would ‘storm, and rage, and swear, and abuse my mother, and accuse her of plotting

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<sup>32</sup> Douglas Thom, *Everyday Problems*, p. 161.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158.

<sup>34</sup> Stearns, ‘Childhood Emotions’, pp. 162, 169.

<sup>35</sup> Hobson, *Indirect Journey*, pp. 18, 41, 80.

<sup>36</sup> Hobson, *Indirect Journey*, p. 45; Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, pp. 17, 27, 31, 113.

<sup>37</sup> Hobson, *Indirect Journey*, p. 45.

against him ... bully and threaten her', or else 'lapse into silences that ... drove me to the very end of endurance. Neither I nor my mother ever had a real conversation with him.'<sup>38</sup> Hobson felt that he was the cause of his parents' difficult relationship:

I used to criticize him for causing so much needless unhappiness, but I begin to wonder if I was not really its cause. My lameness must have imposed an intolerable strain upon him. The degree of attention which my mother lavished upon me may have interfered with their sexual relations.<sup>39</sup>

It is important to mention ahead of this thesis' fuller discussion of triangular relationships that only a small number of only children reported feeling as though they had disrupted their parents' marriages. Whether they did so appears to have been determined by their parents' particular attitudes and circumstances. Hobson reported receiving excessive attention from his parents before he got ill, and implied that his father's temper, in not being 'sacrificed', was also pre-existing. It therefore seems likely that, like the only children in the next chapter, he would have been expected to 'pick a side' whether he was ill or not.<sup>40</sup> Historical time may also be regarded as an influence in his case, as polio was a particular threat to children when he was growing up, before the introduction of a vaccine in the 1950s.<sup>41</sup>

Goudge's nanny, in addition to her mother, was a 'congenital spoiler'.<sup>42</sup> By contrast, Hobson made no reference to receiving excessive emotional attention from anyone other than his mother and father. As for material

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<sup>38</sup> Hobson, *Indirect Journey*, p. 45.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 45

<sup>41</sup> 'Polio - NHS Choices', <https://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/polio/Pages/Introduction.aspx>, (accessed 28/10/2017).

<sup>42</sup> Goudge, *The Joy of the Snow*, p. 76.

spoiling, he reported that his paternal grandparents did not help his parents with necessities, let alone unnecessary indulgences.<sup>43</sup> This shows yet again how only children's experiences varied depending not only on their parents' attitudes, but also those of other adults they had contact with. While this thesis has discussed the long-established association between grandparents and indulgence, this did not apply to every family.<sup>44</sup> As Thane has found, not every grandmother was a loving carer; they could, for example, be unwilling or too busy to be particularly involved with their grandchildren.<sup>45</sup>

Goudge was indulged in terms of attention and affection from two directions: her mother and her 'congenital spoiler' nanny.<sup>46</sup> This adds to the impression that upper middle-class parents' and nannies' involvement with children could fall somewhere on a spectrum. It also supports Martin's argument that children in this class were more likely to have frequent contact with their parents than historians such as Hamlett have asserted.<sup>47</sup> Emotional spoiling from a nanny was far from unheard-of. Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy has described how nannies might be 'devoted', 'docile', or 'savage', with Winston Churchill's Nanny Everest falling into the first category.<sup>48</sup> The more affectionate nannies may have been more likely than their charges' parents to overindulge them, considering that looking after children was their only, full-time, job.<sup>49</sup> It was therefore unsurprising that children and nannies developed especially attentive, loving relationships. As the case of Joan Evans (born

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<sup>43</sup> Hobson, *Indirect Journey*, p. 47.

<sup>44</sup> Reverend John Robinson, quoted in Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, p. 57.

<sup>45</sup> Thane, 'The Family Lives of Old People', p. 198.

<sup>46</sup> Goudge, *The Joy of the Snow*, p. 76.

<sup>47</sup> Martin, 'Disabled Children and Domestic Spaces', p. 142.

<sup>48</sup> Gathorne-Hardy, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny*, pp. 19, 26.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.



1877) in the previous chapter showed, children might be emotionally closer to their nannies than their parents if they had particularly little parental contact.<sup>50</sup> Once again, class obscures any simple connection between only-childhood and certain experiences. Upper- and upper middle-class only children primarily had nannies, increasing their likelihood of being spoiled by someone other than their parents. Historical time also influenced this experience, as, according to Gathorne-Hardy, nannies were diverted from their charges by additional household jobs as servitude declined between 1901 and 1939, and became uncommon after the Second World War.<sup>51</sup>

So far, this chapter has shown that a variety of factors could combine to determine whether or not an only child received particular attention: illness, or perceived illness, the attitudes of their parents and other caregivers, secondary infertility, class, and time. By exhibiting excessive concern about their children's health, and giving them too much attention, Goudge and Hobson's parents did not act according to contemporary parenting advice. This again shows the particular importance of parental attitudes in determining only children's experiences.

This chapter now turns to analysing accounts of only children who described themselves as unindulged in terms of attention. Such treatment was dependent on similar influences that were separate from only-childhood.

Doris Tarling, a lower middle-class secretary born in North London in 1903, and Beatrice Hawker, a poor working-class Methodist preacher born in

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<sup>50</sup> Gathorne-Hardy, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny*, p. 235; Fraser, *In Search of a Past*, pp. 57, 74, 84; Hamlett, *Material Relations*, pp. 118, 119; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 27; Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians*, pp. 141-2; Vigne, 'Parents and Children 1890-1918', pp. 6-7.

<sup>51</sup> Gathorne-Hardy, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny*, pp. 181-2, 186-7.

Somerset in 1910, both reported such treatment, particularly from their mothers.

Tarling's mother was clearly aware of contemporary ideas about only children:

**Interviewer:** Was your mother an easy person to talk to?

**Doris:** No, I wouldn't say she was.

**Interviewer:** Did she show affection?

**Doris:** No. No, because she was always told an only child was spoilt therefore she was not going to spoil me and she was harder on me than – than she need have been in a way.

**Interviewer:** She went a little too far the other way you mean?

**Doris:** That's right. She did it quite deliberately because she said she wasn't going to have me spoilt – spoken of as a spoilt child.<sup>52</sup>

Tarling's middle-class background may have particularly influenced how her mother treated her. As chapter 3 showed, late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century childrearing manuals targeted a middle-class audience.<sup>53</sup>

Tarling's mother was clearly aware of the ideas about only children that were circulated in these books, whether she read the books herself or heard about them elsewhere. In fact, manual-writers came to recognise that parents like Tarling's mother, worried about the possibility of spoiling, might be over-zealous in their attempts not to indulge their children. Cunnington, for example, wrote in 1913 that 'anxious to avoid spoiling their child, they [the only child's parents] perhaps slip into the other extreme. Small offences natural to youth are condemned as though they were mature vices.'<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 64.

<sup>53</sup> Mechling, 'Advice to Historians', p. 47; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 32; Christina Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, p. xv.

<sup>54</sup> Cunnington, *Nursery Notes*, p. 19.

Medical doctor Elizabeth Sloan Chesser wrote in 1934 that 'he [the only child] is in danger of being spoiled, or, on the other hand, of being over disciplined by parents who are determined not to spoil.'<sup>55</sup> Such ideas have persisted, with Sorensen discussing in 2008 how some parents end up harming their children by being extremely strict in order to avoid spoiling.<sup>56</sup>

Tarling therefore fitted a common image of only children whose parents treated them harshly in order to avoid spoiling. However, it is worth reiterating that no other only children in this study reported such an experience. It might also be suggested that her mother was particularly concerned about appearances. It is revealing that she referred to her mother not wanting her to be 'spoken of as a spoilt child.'<sup>57</sup> This suggests that her mother was more concerned with what other people would think of her daughter, and, by extension, her parenting, than what her daughter actually was. The concerns Tarling's mother held about how her family were seen by others also appeared to manifest in her expectations of how her daughter should behave. Tarling described how, unlike relatives of her own age, her mother did not allow her to accept gifts of money.<sup>58</sup> According to Zelizer, this instruction was not uncommon among upper- and middle-class parents at the turn of the century, presumably as they wished to avoid making any connection between children and money.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Sloan Chesser, 'Psychology and Family Life', in Sir W. Arbuthnot Lane (ed.), *The Hygiene of Life and Safer Motherhood*, (London, 1934), p. 69.

<sup>56</sup> Bernice Sorensen, cited in Pooni, *An Exploration of Parent and Teacher Perceptions*, p. 19.

<sup>57</sup> FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 64.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, p. 103.

Tarling and her friends played together in their homes or gardens as ‘you weren’t allowed in the streets when I was a child’, and she got into particular trouble on one occasion for acting ‘superior’ towards a younger aunt. As chapter 4 showed, contemporaries of Tarling such as Elizabeth Blackburn (born 1902) certainly were allowed to play in the streets. Middle-class and aspirant working-class parents often did not allow their children to ‘play out’. This was partly because they regarded it as unseemly, but also because they worried that their children would pick up ‘germs’ and bad manners and language from their less refined peers.<sup>60</sup> This was clearly a concern Tarling’s mother shared:

**Interviewer:** Were you free to play with anyone you pleased?

**Doris:** Well, there I should say I was very carefully shepherded never to meet anybody that would displease my parents because I don’t remember being stopped from going with anybody. As I say she fetched me from school and she took me to school and I should say that she did it in a very nice way but those that she thought weren’t quite the thing would be carefully shepherded in the other direction.<sup>61</sup>

Class, therefore, seemed to influence how Tarling’s mother treated her more than her position as an only child. Being middle-class made Tarling’s mother particularly aware of contemporary ideas about only children, being part of the target market for childrearing advice. It also made her concerned that her daughter did not come across as uncouth, impolite, or ‘common’. This is further demonstrated by her expectations of her daughter’s behaviour around other children:

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<sup>60</sup> Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, p. 199; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 89; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 190; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 212; Roberts, ‘Living and Learning’, p. 20.

<sup>61</sup> FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 64.

**Interviewer:** If you were playing with other children and one of the children hit you, would your parents ever suggest how you should treat the child in return?

**Doris:** Oh no, but they wouldn't have allowed me to hit her back. Oh no. I knew that yes, and I was expected when we had guests to let them have anything they wanted of mine because it was polite. Oh yes, yes.<sup>62</sup>

Tarling's case is not incomparable to that of Dorothy Crisp (born 1906), described in chapter 6. Despite their differences in class and locality, both only children's mothers had ambitions for their daughters. Tarling's mother wanted her daughter to become a schoolteacher and, to a lesser extent than Crisp's parents, strove to keep her away from children who might be a bad influence.

While Hawker's mother also did not make her the centre of attention, this was not related to only-childhood so much as religion. This shows that only children were not always their parents' sole focus, as some historians and other writers have suggested. As well as being unindulged emotionally, Hawker described how she was not materially spoiled because her parents were not very well-off. She wrote that 'we were very poor and my dolls had always been rag affairs', and 'we had very little money (I keep saying it, I know, but it was insistent thing), and she [Hawker's mother] would not spend money on things she did not consider essential.'<sup>63</sup> Her case is therefore similar to that of David Lomas (born 1936) who, as the last chapter showed, could not be materially indulged due to the privations of the Second World War.

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<sup>62</sup> FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 64.

<sup>63</sup> Beatrice Hawker, *Look Back in Love*, (London, 1958), pp. 21, 49.

As Hawker's vocation as a Methodist preacher suggests, she was brought up in a religious household. As the case of Norman Nicholson, who was born four years after Hawker, showed, the Methodist church 'never before had so many good works on hand' as it did in the early-twentieth century.<sup>64</sup> It additionally demanded more of its followers than the more relaxed Church of England.<sup>65</sup> Hawker described how her mother was adamant that she would not 'grow up selfish', but she did not relate this to only-childhood. She instead implied that her mother's motivations were religious.<sup>66</sup> As the previous chapter showed, the act of spoiling, and creating spoiled children, was originally linked to ideas about their inherent sinfulness and the need to 'break their spirits' to increase their chances of going to heaven. This connection appears to have faded as new ideas about the 'naturalness' of children gained influence. However, as Stearns has found, families who continued to believe in Original Sin were less receptive to new advice to make happiness a central goal of childrearing.<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, religious parents may have held on to the notion that a spoiled child was a sinful child. Hawker portrayed her mother as an exemplar of unselfishness, who occupied her time with concerns other than her daughter: 'I was her only child, but home was where mother was for any who needed her.' Tramps were commonly invited to share family meals or even stay with

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<sup>64</sup> Brown, *Religion and Society*, p. 46.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>66</sup> Hawker, *Look Back in Love*, p. 15.

<sup>67</sup> Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, p. 39; Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, pp. 73, 181-3, 277; Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, pp. 78, 124-5, 149; Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 223; Newson and Newson, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing', pp. 53-4, 56-7; Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby*, pp. 55, 58, 61; Cunningham, *Children & Childhood*, pp. 48, 61-2; Grant, 'Parent-child Relations', p. 117; Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', pp. 169-70.

them while Hawker's parents and others from their congregation found them jobs and clothes and made contact with their families.<sup>68</sup>

Hawker found herself subject to particular demands as a child due to her family's religion. Her acceptance of her family's Methodist faith, and her becoming a preacher herself, suggests that she did not find these expectations overly limiting. However, writing from a position of success, and perhaps wishing to set an example of piety and unselfishness, she may have exaggerated her 'good' behaviour as a child to some extent. It is difficult to believe, for example, that she was only a little upset, and showed such great understanding, when her mother gave her one decent doll (a china one from her godmother) to a sick Belgian refugee.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, she appeared to smooth over the one rebellion she admitted she made against her mother's steadfast belief in her innate goodness, which she found an 'impossible ideal'. Although she refused to go to her mother for advice for a period in her teens, 'I could never quite throw it all back in her face.'<sup>70</sup> Whether or not this really was Hawker's strongest rebellion against them, her mother's demands of her seemed to stem far more from religion than only-childhood.

As a poor working-class child, Hawker was allowed far more freedom than Tarling, whose mother's concern with appearances seemed to be bound up with what was deemed appropriate for her class.<sup>71</sup> Like Alice Thomas Ellis (born 1920) in chapters 4 and 5, many of Hawker's recreational activities involved outdoor physical activity. She described playing with kites and

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<sup>68</sup> Hawker, *Look Back in Love*, pp. 22, 23.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 24.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 24.

home-made bows and arrows, playing conkers, cricket and football, climbing trees, fishing for tadpoles and tiddlers, and even getting into hand-to-hand fights.<sup>72</sup> In fact, Hawker wrote, 'I was never missing if there was a fight,' a far cry from the experiences of Tarling who, as this chapter has shown, would certainly not have been allowed to hit another child back.<sup>73</sup> Also like Ellis, Hawker's geographical location determined the types of places she and her friends might play; she described how, on one occasion, she nearly cut off the tip of her finger falling into an old saw-pit.<sup>74</sup> This thesis has already discussed how, due to cramped homes and busy parents, for much of the period under study, many working-class children spent much of their time playing and forming alliances with other children outside of the home.<sup>75</sup>

Hawker wrote that she 'always played with boys in preference to girls', and it might be speculated that she and Ellis, being working-class only children with parents who allowed it, were able to roam as far from home as boys, who were less likely to be required to keep an eye on younger siblings.<sup>76</sup>

Alternatively, she might have simply enjoyed the 'boyish' activities described above to those more associated with girls. She certainly adopted the celebratory tone identified by Davin in former tomboys who fondly recalled a time in their lives when they were less restricted by gender expectations.<sup>77</sup>

As Davin has also written, if a girl wished to play with boys and define herself as a tomboy around the time that Hawker was growing up, it 'had to be locally

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<sup>72</sup> Hawker, *Look Back in Love*, pp. 16, 18.

<sup>73</sup> Hawker, *Look Back in Love*, p. 55; FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 64.

<sup>74</sup> Hawker, *Look Back in Love*, p. 37.

<sup>75</sup> Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 47-8; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 25; Roberts, 'Living and Learning', p. 23; Walvin, *A Child's World*, p. 94.

<sup>76</sup> Hawker, *Look Back in Love*, p. 55; Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, pp. 47-8, 81.

<sup>77</sup> Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, p. 81.



acceptable: to yourself and the boys you joined, to street and court opinion, and to your parents.<sup>78</sup> In accordance with this, Hawker wrote 'I cannot remember that my mother ever made much fuss about these activities', a contrast to the concern of Victoria Crowe's (born 1945) mother that if she went out into the street, she might be hurt by 'big rough boys'.<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, Hawker wrote, 'for all the freedom she gave me my mother stood for no nonsense,' punishing her, for example, when she and a friend picked on some neighbouring boys for being half-German.<sup>80</sup>

Both Tarling and Hawker described their mothers as disciplinary parents, whereas their fathers came across as more 'fun'. These were common roles for mothers and fathers at the beginning of the twentieth century, when they were growing up. According to Tosh, this division of parental labour evolved among many middle-class families from the 1830s onwards, when mothers were increasingly regarded as primarily responsible for and suited to providing their children's moral and spiritual education. At the same time, fathers' presence in the home decreased, as they were more likely to commute to jobs outside of the home. Mothers therefore came to be seen as 'apt disciplinarians', able to tailor gentle yet firm punishments to their children's individual characters, while fathers became a 'last resort' or had no disciplinary role at all. Additionally, towards the end of the century, there was increasing public criticism of fathers who insisted upon their authority in the

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<sup>78</sup> Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, p. 80.

<sup>79</sup> Hawker, *Look Back in Love*, p. 18; Interview with Victoria Crowe by Jenny Simmons, track 1.

<sup>80</sup> Hawker, *Look Back in Love*, pp. 18-19.

home, though some fathers nonetheless emulated their own fathers' harsh and distant attitudes towards their children.<sup>81</sup>

Strange was loath to liken the stressed, yet emotionally involved, working-class fathers of 1865-1914 to the more obviously 'fun dads' who emerged between the 1930s and the 1960s. Nonetheless, she characterised the father's return from work as a highlight of the day for many working-class children during this period. They could look forward to being entertained, indulged, and given advice, with many fathers making good playmates for their children. Furthermore, while fathers were portrayed as having the ultimate authority in the home, in practice, they were reluctant to discipline their children for more prosaic reasons than those suggested by Tosh. It simply made sense for working-class fathers to leave discipline to mothers who, after all, conducted the bulk of childrearing activities.<sup>82</sup>

Similarly, King has found that fathers were portrayed as 'fun parents' throughout the period of 1914-65, even if this came to be more of an expectation than an ideal over time. Mothers continued to be more likely to discipline children than fathers, again because they were present more often, though this could depend upon power balances among individual couples as well as the continually increasing negative public attitudes towards overarching paternal authority.<sup>83</sup> This, and the analysis that follows, adds a further dimension to this thesis' identification of parental attitudes as a particular influence on only children's experiences. Most only children in this study grew up with two parents, from whom they could experience very

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<sup>81</sup> Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 90-92, 145-6; Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, pp. 131, 133-4.

<sup>82</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, pp. 14, 86-91, 138, 180, 182.

<sup>83</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 57, 77.

different behaviour and with whom they could form very different relationships. When an only child was spoiled, or not spoiled, they did not necessarily receive exactly the same treatment from both parents.

This division of parenting labour is evident in Tarling's account of her childhood. As shown above, it was her mother who had particular concerns about her coming across as spoiled, and intervened by disciplining her for not behaving appropriately, and keeping her away from unsuitable playmates. Like the fathers described by Tosh, King and Strange, Tarling's father was less physically present than her mother, as he often worked away from home:

**Interviewer:** Was your father affectionate?

**Doris:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** More so than your mother would you say?

**Doris:** Well, you see, not being there during the week it might have seemed it.

**Interviewer:** You had him just for weekends?

**Doris:** Yes. That you – naturally he would come in and sort of make a fuss of you and that sort of things but he wasn't – wasn't there all the week that you obviously would make more fuss having come home after being away for five days.

**Interviewer:** You were alone with your mother quite a lot weren't you?

**Doris:** Yes. That's right.<sup>84</sup>

Tarling went on to discuss how she would 'potter around' the garden and walk the dog with her father on Saturdays. Other activities they shared were playing cards and bicycle rides (from the time Tarling was about 12 years old). While she did mention spending leisure time with her mother – for example, going on walks as a family, and going to the cinema together – it is

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<sup>84</sup> FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 64.

understandable that Tarling made a more explicit connection between her father and recreation.<sup>85</sup>

Hawker said far less about spending leisure time with her father, not least because he was away fighting in World War I when she was aged between around 5-8 years old, and referred to her mother helping her make and play with conkers and kites.<sup>86</sup> Nonetheless, she made it clear that her mother, rather than her father, was the disciplinarian in her family. Her parents were concerned that her father would be unintentionally overly-rough as 'he was a workhouse boy who had never learned to play and romp.'<sup>87</sup> As indicated above, such experiences were also not unusual for the time that Hawker was growing up, in the 1910s, with public attitudes turning against corporal punishment from fathers and towards emotional punishment from mothers.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, individual personality was an important consideration in determining whether, and to what extent, a father disciplined his children, with Tosh identifying four broad, co-existing types of father: absent, tyrannical, distant and intimate, depending upon the personality and circumstances of the man in question.<sup>89</sup> Pooley has found that working- and middle-class parents were concerned with 'improving their children's lives voluntarily through providing a better quality of care ... than they had experienced.'<sup>90</sup> While Goudge's mother expressed her concern for her daughter through the

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<sup>85</sup> FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 64.

<sup>86</sup> Hawker, *Look Back in Love*, pp. 15, 16.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>88</sup> Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, pp. 133-4; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 90-92, 145; King, *Family Men*, p. 77.

<sup>89</sup> Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 93-100; Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, p. 142; King, *Family Men*, p. 100, 106, 195.

<sup>90</sup> Pooley, 'Parenthood, Childrearing and Fertility', p. 93; see also King, *Family Men*, p. 38; Roberts, *Women and Families*, pp. 33-5; Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 32.

material indulgence she herself had missed out on, Hawker's father wished for his daughter to have a gentler childhood than the one he had experienced.

Both Hawker and Tarling implied or stated that their parents' expectations of them – Hawker to be unselfish and morally upstanding, and Tarling to become a schoolteacher – came from their mothers rather than their fathers.<sup>91</sup> Tarling said that her father, unlike her mother, 'didn't mind whether or not she became a teacher.' While her mother was upset when she instead got engaged, left school and got a job in an office at the age of 17½, her father was unconcerned.<sup>92</sup> This paternal attitude was, according to King, on the increase in about 1921, when Tarling was 17½ and World War I had disrupted what had parents and children had previously regarded as infallible life trajectories. King has written that:

Paternal ambitions for sons (and daughters) to take up a specific career path did appear to be declining, but were replaced with the desire for children to do well generally and to make their own decisions in order to achieve happiness.<sup>93</sup>

Presumably Tarling's father approved of her fiancé, as 'throughout the period, a daughter's choice of husband continued to be scrutinized by fathers of all social backgrounds.'<sup>94</sup> It must also be remembered that it was Tarling's mother in particular who wanted her daughter to be a schoolteacher, having wished to become one herself, so naturally she would have been more disappointed by her daughter's choice than Tarling's father.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Hawker, *Look Back in Love*, pp. 15, 24; FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 64.

<sup>92</sup> FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 64.

<sup>93</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 40, 42.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>95</sup> FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 64.

Although Tarling and Hawker's mothers were both determined not to spoil them, then, in other ways their upbringings were very different. Tarling's mother reacted to ideas that only children were usually spoiled, felt that her daughter should be seen acting in a way that befitted her class, and wanted her to fulfil the ambitions she had set for her. Hawker's mother wanted her to be and do good, as befitted their Methodist religion, but allowed her to mix and play freely with other children in the makeshift play areas near her home. Although neither of these only daughters saw a great deal of their fathers due to the constraints of work and war, they nonetheless had companionable relationships with them. By contrast, in keeping with practices of other families during this period, their mothers took on the disciplinary role.

This chapter has shown that parental attitudes – whether influenced by parents' childhood experiences, infertility, illness, social standards, or religion – were a far more convincing determinant of whether or not an only child received excessive attention than only-childhood in itself. While the personalities of individual parents over-rode contemporary childrearing trends, the advice given by childrearing experts nonetheless reflected the spectrum of 'normal' parental behaviour at any given time. As the case of Tarling's mother has shown, parents picked up on their ideas and reacted according to their own particular beliefs and concerns.

This dominance in influence of parental attitudes over birth order can also be seen in some non-only children's cases. Davidoff has described how a particular child in a sibling group might get more emotional attention than the

others because they possessed certain characteristics.<sup>96</sup> Upper middle-class public servant Violet Markham, born in Chesterfield, Derbyshire in 1872, and the youngest of three sons and two daughters, had such an experience. As the youngest child, she received particular attention: 'I was the baby and, dear though all his children were to him [my father], 'little ViVi' had a special place in his heart.'<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, her interest in books led her mother to spend more time helping her develop her intellectual abilities than her other children. This was because none of Markham's brothers were interested in intellectual activities, and her sister's schooling had been disrupted by an accident.<sup>98</sup>

While having particular skills and interests might mark a child out from their siblings, though, it did not necessarily follow that their parents gave them special attention. Upper working-class academic Jane Mitchell, who was born in Glasgow in 1934 and had a half-brother who was 13 years older than her, was a delicate but bright child who went to grammar school. She won scholarships and prizes and stayed on beyond the minimum leaving age, whereas her half-brother insisted on leaving school to get a job at the age of 14. Her mother was concerned about her health, and her parents made financial sacrifices so she could continue her education. Nonetheless, Mitchell wrote that while she 'came in for a good deal of indirect spoiling, [I] was never allowed to be the focus of interest in any family gathering.'<sup>99</sup> The difference in the way Markham and Mitchell were treated by their parents

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<sup>96</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, pp. 98, 99; Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 114.

<sup>97</sup> Violet Markham, *Return Passage*, (Oxford, 1953), p. 5.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>99</sup> Jane Mitchell, 'Lecturer In Classics, University of Reading', in Goldman (ed.), *Breakthrough*, pp. 125, 128, 130, 132, 135, 136.

might come down to differences in their parents' personalities and/or historical time. Markham was born some 70 years earlier than Mitchell, whose parents might have been influenced by the ideas about the dangers of giving a child too much attention that developed in the meantime. Class is also likely to have been an influence. Markham's upper middle-class mother possibly had more free time to devote to her daughter than Mitchell's upper working-class mother.

Vigne has suggested that children from small families were generally liable to spend more leisure time with, and receive less harsh discipline from, their fathers.<sup>100</sup> However, looking back across several of the cases in this thesis, it is clear that only-childhood did not necessarily lead to close, affectionate relationships between fathers, or mothers, and children. This is further evidenced by the cases in the next chapter, where only children found themselves part of intense 'triangular' relationships with their parents. Such relationships appeared to result from having extremely loving or extremely hostile relationships between parents, rather than simply from being an only child.

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<sup>100</sup> Vigne, 'Parents and Children 1890-1918', p. 8.



## 10. 'Triangular' family relationships

This final analytical chapter examines the popular idea that only children had difficult relationships with their parents because there were two parents, but one child. This could either cause parents to be overbearing, or the child and one adult to 'side against' the other adult. However, this phenomenon was only reported by a small number of only children in this study. No only children said categorically that they had not experienced such relationships; it is always difficult to quantify a negative, but it may be assumed that if they did not refer to them, they had not been notably affected by them. 'Triangular' family relationships may have particularly affected only children. However, the roots of this dissatisfaction lay in parental attitudes and domestic circumstances that were in place prior to and independent of their existence. They did not cause their particular family dynamics by being only children, and having a sibling may or may not have made a difference.

Some manual-writers, influenced by Freud's ideas about Oedipus and Electra complexes, wrote that having one child was harmful both to parents' relationships and children's characters. Nurse Mary Chadwick wrote in 1928 that 'in the case of the only child, we may sometimes find keen rivalry on the side of the parents, bidding for the preference of the child.'<sup>1</sup> A few years later, Individual Psychologist Alfred Adler claimed that only children commonly competed with their fathers. This was because their mothers indulged them, creating a close mother-child bond. The father could be a threat to this unless parents worked hard to cultivate their only child's interest in both of

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<sup>1</sup> Chadwick, *Difficulties in Child Development*, pp. 321-2.

them.<sup>2</sup> Child psychologist Agatha Bowley repeated this message in 1948: 'in the case of the only child the environment is too adult ... rivalry for affection may be very intense.'<sup>3</sup> One respondent to Mass Observation's 1949 'Ideal Family' survey summed up the problem thus: 'two adults + one child is not a balanced unit that does not provide the home friendliness that is present with having at least two children.'<sup>4</sup> Other interviewees voiced similar concerns that 'with an only child the parents tend to be very possessive and kill the child's individuality', and 'in a family with an only child there is often jealousy among the parents over the affection of the child'.<sup>5</sup>

In their discussions of the effects of sibling relationships, historians have suggested and implied that to be an only child was to be subject to the full force of the personalities of one's parents. Sulloway wrote that only children were more likely to come into conflict with their parents because they lacked the 'safer' outlet for their anger that siblings provided.<sup>6</sup> Davidoff, meanwhile, wrote that:

Elder siblings acted as intermediaries between younger children and adults in protection from punishments or getting advantages or treats. They often took it upon themselves to settle disputes, enforce unwritten rules, and oversee general behaviour appropriate to family honour. In all these activities there could be an atmosphere of light-hearted play as well as teasing and 'ribbing' that had a different quality to the interaction of children with full adults. The group of siblings as a whole or the smaller groups within it created their own codes that, above all, stressed *fairness*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Alfred Adler, *What Life Could Mean To You*, p. 131.

<sup>3</sup> Bowley, *The Problems of Family Life*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> TC 3/3-4-D.

<sup>5</sup> TC 3/3-4-A; TC 3/3-4-C.

<sup>6</sup> Sulloway, *Born to Rebel*, p. 489.

<sup>7</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, p. 114.

By implication, only children lacked fair relationships with others of a similar status within the family, as well as sibling buffers against their parents' more extreme behaviour.

Recent sociological researchers have also discussed ideas that only children experienced, and still experience, unbalanced and intense relationships with their parents. Falbo has described findings that only children actually have significantly better relationships with their parents than non-only children, as they spend more leisure time with them and talk to them more than they might if they had more than one child.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, McKibben has written that researchers continue to find tense parent-child relationships to be a disadvantage of only-childhood.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps these contrasting findings represent, as this thesis does, the huge variation in parental personalities and behaviour and the differing effects this can have on individual only children.

This chapter's analysis begins with two only children who experienced 'triangular' relationships at home due to poor relationships between their parents. Robert Aickman was an upper middle-class writer and inland waterway campaigner who was born in Hampstead, London, in 1914, and John Drummond was a lower middle-class TV producer, broadcaster, and music administrator, who was born in Willesden, London in 1934. He also lived in Kensington, London and Bournemouth, Dorset as a child.

As chapter 7 showed, Jo Robinson (born 1942), whose parents had a bad relationship, felt pressured by her mother but had a close, companionable relationship with her father. By contrast, the poor relationships of Aickman

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<sup>8</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: An Updated Review', p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> McKibben, *Maybe One*, pp. 36-7.

and Drummond's parents translated into pressure from their mothers and difficult, antagonistic relationships with their fathers.<sup>10</sup> Unlike Robinson, Aickman suggested that while he would have liked a sister, this would not have improved the relationships within his family:

Her daughter, if there had been one, would, I think, had a terrible time, as my Mother tried to live her own ideal childhood by proxy. I am sure that my parents would have spoiled everything between us, leaving only a grey desert, as elsewhere.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, at no point did Aickman refer to being an only child as an influence on his negative childhood experiences, solely attributing them to his parents' poor relationship and how they acted towards him. This could have been because he was aware that his mother, in turn, had been dominated by her parents, despite being one of at least five children.<sup>12</sup> This adds to this thesis' argument that parental attitudes were far more important than birth position in determining a child's experiences.

Aickman wrote that his parents' poor relationship meant that 'nothing else was possible' but for him to become overly-dependent upon his mother, as she was the parent who looked after him when he got upset and intervened in late-night quarrels:

My Mother would fuss about my being cold, which I was not ... would at least try to comfort me, but it was difficult to do much good in that way when there was such an absence of love between the two of them. In the end, the poor woman merely made me over-dependent upon her ... I would be taken back to bed, cared for but not involved.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Jo Robinson by Polly Russell, track 2.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue*, (London, 1966), p. 41.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 41.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 36.

As this chapter will show shortly, Aickman perceived his father as ineffectual by comparison to his mother in showing care for him when he was upset, and at other times. Furthermore, his mother:

Deprived and cheated as she felt herself to have been (and how rightly, as I, alas, so clearly saw) she too placed her only hopes in me, failed daughter though I was ... my mother set out to make me an author, a precocity, a man, a confidant, a best friend; no doubt, as we all know, a lover.<sup>14</sup>

Like Robinson, Aickman reflected that his mother, trapped in a loveless marriage – she did not leave his father until Aickman was 17, possibly due to the social ramifications of such actions in the early-twentieth century – found little to interest her other than her only child, and therefore invested all of her ambitions and hopes in him.<sup>15</sup> Heron had mothers of women born between 1943 and 1953 in mind when she wrote that ‘motherhood is a condition not likely to bring out the best in people if it is undergone with reluctance (however unacknowledged), with material hardship or with bitterness.’ However, given the importance of parent-child relationships uncovered by this thesis, it might be applied to any mother at any time.<sup>16</sup> Aickman’s reference to being his mother’s ‘lover’ not only indicates his father’s failure to fulfil this role, but situates his autobiography firmly in the twentieth century. This was when Freud’s ideas about the Oedipus Complex, however seriously they were taken, became a ubiquitous cultural reference that required no explanation (‘no doubt, as we all know’).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue*, p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue*, p. 159; ‘Oxford DNB Article: Aickman, Robert Fordyce’, <http://www.odnb.com/view/article/60658>, (accessed 4/7/2016); Interview with Jo Robinson by Polly Russell, track 2.

<sup>16</sup> Heron, *Truth, Dare or Promise*, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue*, p. 54.

Similarly, when Drummond was a teenager, and his father (more on whom later) contracted tuberculosis and required care, he found his mother:

Became increasingly dependent on me to provide stimulus and escape, while I found it hard to get out of the house to meet my own friends. For the rest of my parents' lives, if I came home for the weekend that was where I stayed – the merest suggestion that I might go off on my own ... disappointed my mother.<sup>18</sup>

Like Robinson, and unlike Aickman, Drummond felt that having a sibling would have relieved some of this pressure to entertain his mother: 'if only I had a sister or a brother, I used to think.'<sup>19</sup> However, as this thesis has shown, having siblings might have made little difference to Drummond's situation. They could have been much older than him, and therefore already left home, or his mother might have chosen his company over that of a sibling who was less well-behaved, interesting, or intelligent.<sup>20</sup>

Like Harold Hobson's polio and Norman Nicholson and his mother's Spanish Flu, Drummond's experience of his father suffering from tuberculosis shows the influence of time on only children's experiences. At the time Drummond was growing up in the 1930s and 1940s, tuberculosis was a particular public health problem. It was only in the late 1940s that the BCG vaccine was rolled out on a mass scale, and the early 1950s when screening and antibiotics dramatically improved chances of detection and recovery. Before then, patients were treated with fresh air and pulmonary collapse therapy in

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<sup>18</sup> John Drummond, *Tainted by Experience*, (London, 2000) p. 43.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, pp. 98, 99; Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 114.

sanitaria. Perhaps Drummond's father had been treated at such a facility, returning home cured but no longer healthy enough to work.<sup>21</sup>

Another time-specific factor that affected both Drummond and his mother's relationship with his father was the Second World War; his father was away from 1939 to 1943, so Drummond did not see him at all between the ages of five and nine.<sup>22</sup> When his father returned, Drummond wrote, 'I hardly recognized him, nor he me.'<sup>23</sup> Drummond's reunion with his father was therefore more akin to that of Florence Dart and her father, and those described by King where 'the return of fathers could be a rather unwelcome disruption of family life ... the moment of homecoming could be a 'rude awakening,' than the emotional reconnection of David Lomas (born 1936) and his father, as seen in chapter 8.<sup>24</sup>

An important difference between the experiences of Drummond, Dart and Lomas was their fathers' attitudes towards them. Lomas described his father as 'a gentleman' who 'wouldn't say a rotten thing about anyone' and 'was always prepared to see the better side of everybody.'<sup>25</sup> By contrast, Drummond found that 'everything about me was offensive to [my father], whether it was my love of music and books or my critical attitude to authority which was beginning to show itself.'<sup>26</sup> As Tosh and King have pointed out, while general improvements in father-child relationships moved along class

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas M. Daniel, 'A History of Tuberculosis', *Respiratory Medicine*, 100 (2006), pp. 1866, 1867.

<sup>22</sup> Drummond, *Tainted by Experience*, pp. 13, 34.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>24</sup> FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 405; King, *Family Men*, pp. 91, 149; Interview with David Lomas by Dylan Roys, track 1; Drummond, *Tainted by Experience*, p. 44.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with David Lomas by Dylan Roys, track 1.

<sup>26</sup> Drummond, *Tainted by Experience*, p. 44.

lines in both theory and practice, the attitude of an individual father was nonetheless the ultimate determinant of the quality of such relationships.<sup>27</sup>

As indicated previously, Drummond also experienced a 'triangular' relationship with his parents because his mother and father had a bad relationship with one another. By the time his father returned from the war, it was apparent that his mother's 'marriage ... was by now obviously a failure although her strong moral sense forbade her to walk out on it,' again indicating contemporary hostility towards separation and divorce.<sup>28</sup> It was for this reason, presumably, that Drummond's mother felt obliged to care for his invalid father, even though they 'found themselves increasingly estranged' and his father frequently made 'embittered denunciations' of both his wife and son.<sup>29</sup> It is understandable that Drummond's mother 'became increasingly dependent on me to provide stimulus and escape' in these circumstances, especially considering the contrast between her life stuck at home looking after a difficult husband and the lively, companionable life she had shared with her son in Bournemouth during the war.<sup>30</sup> During this period, Drummond's mother had been his 'most creative influence' and 'made sure that everyday life was full of activity.'<sup>31</sup> While Drummond felt that he was disadvantaged by not having siblings to relieve the burden of his mother's attention, it was not only childhood, so much as a mixture of parental attitudes, domestic circumstances and historical time that led to his particular

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<sup>27</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 100, 101, 106, 195; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 93-100; Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, p. 142.

<sup>28</sup> Drummond, *Tainted by Experience*, p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 43, 44.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 33.



family dynamics. As suggested previously, the presence of siblings might not have improved his experiences.<sup>32</sup>

Drummond's close relationship with his mother, and his father's absence and hostility, appeared to combine so that there was never any question of whose 'side' he took in his parents' difficult relationship. By contrast, Aickman felt torn between his warring parents, who both possessed good and bad qualities:

'The agonizing early revelation was that both my parents were good people, while together they had almost nothing for one another but incomprehension, contempt, and dislike ... as it was, their completely different goodnesses entered into me, and have continued the war inside me ever since. A decision is, in the nature of the case, impossible.'<sup>33</sup>

As indicated previously, Aickman's mother put great pressure on him, and this caused him to become antagonistic towards her and even 'begin to hate, or think I hated, all women.' Nonetheless, he described their relationship as close and companionable in the sense of, for example, reading to one another for hours on end and going for short walks together on weekdays.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, he enjoyed 'participat[ing] in many adult pleasures from an extremely early age; notably, the theatre, restaurants, and travel,' as well as long Sunday walks with his father. However, he remained critical of his father's personality and attempts to show affection.<sup>35</sup> Although his father 'was not unkind in a general way,' Aickman wrote, he 'was impossible to live with, to be married to, to be dependent upon' because he was unpunctual, failed to

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<sup>32</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, pp. 98, 99; Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 114.

<sup>33</sup> Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue*, p. 39.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 104-5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95-104.

take into account the needs of others, and 'would go into frustrated rages most days.'<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, Aickman's father 'had great difficulty in putting straight feelings of any kind into straight words,' and Aickman found his well-intentioned attempts to communicate with him 'strange, empty, but none the less menacing.' Even when Aickman took his father's side as a reaction against his mother's expectations of him, he continued to dread and avoid him.<sup>37</sup>

Aickman's father was a lot older than his mother; Aickman wrote that there was a 30-year age gap between the couple, although he could not be sure of the accuracy of this as it was possible his father had lied on the marriage register.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, his father's advanced years may have hindered his success in communicating with his son because, as shown previously, fathers generally became more companionable and affectionate with their children over the course of the period under study.<sup>39</sup> As Aickman's father probably grew up in the mid- or late-nineteenth century, it is possible that new modes of fathering did not come naturally to him. This could explain his policy of treating his son like an adult at all times, and why Aickman dreaded communicating with him.<sup>40</sup>

However, while Aickman's mother looked after him when his parents' quarrels upset him, and read and went for walks with him, he perceived her as 'hard'. Like Jo Robinson 30 years later, he described his household as a loveless

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<sup>36</sup> Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue*, pp. 31, 33.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 49-53, 54.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 15.

<sup>39</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 16, 18, 52, 57, 77, 86, 115, 186, 194.

<sup>40</sup> Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue*, pp. 49-53, 95.

one, where nobody was demonstrative or said 'I love you.'<sup>41</sup> As she was much younger than Aickman's father, his mother might have been more receptive to new ideas about bringing up children. However, it can be surmised, as in Robinson's case, that the difficulties she had experienced in her life led her to be unaffectionate towards her only child.<sup>42</sup> Difficult experiences might have such an effect on working-class mothers' relationships with their children, and it does not seem implausible that some middle-class mothers who had had hard lives might also have difficulty expressing affection.<sup>43</sup> Yet again, parental attitudes and domestic circumstances dominated other factors that might determine only children's experiences. These testimonies bear out King's finding that individual personalities trumped class when it came to parental demonstrations of affection.<sup>44</sup>

The poor relationships of Aickman and Drummond's parents created uneven family dynamics and high-pressure, low-affection environments. By contrast, some only children experienced 'triangular' family relationships because their parents were particularly emotionally close to one another. This chapter now turns to the cases of Michael Levey, a lower middle-class art historian and gallery director who was born in Wimbledon, London in 1927, but also lived in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex and Harrogate, Yorkshire as a child, and Ann Oakley, an upper middle-class sociologist born in Chiswick, Middlesex in 1944.

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<sup>41</sup> Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue*, pp. 36, 104-5, 109.

<sup>42</sup> Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue*, pp. 14, 18, 41, 54; Interview with Jo Robinson by Polly Russell, track 2.

<sup>43</sup> Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>44</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 100, 101, 106, 195.

Both Levey and Oakley felt like ‘intruders’ in their parents’ lives. Levey was explicit that his family was a ‘triangle’ and it was easy for him to disturb his parents’ relationship. This was especially the case on Sundays, when his father was home from work and the family was confined to the house with no visitors:

On any Sunday, in that controlled environment, I tended at some moment to retire upstairs, having – wittingly or not – unleashed a poltergeist. I left it frolicking about, a warning to my parents that they were no longer just a couple. My moods could make the whole house uneasy and drive them out into the garden, where to stumble over some toy of mine was to be given a new, painful reminder of my existence.<sup>45</sup>

Levey’s experiences speak to the idea that only children felt overpowered and isolated at home, as two parents were set against one child. It is worth reiterating, though, that this was not a typical experience among the only children studied for this thesis. As with Aickman, Drummond and, as this chapter will show, Oakley, the personalities and behaviour of Levey’s parents towards one another were key to this family dynamic. His feeling of being part of a “triangular” relationship grew stronger as he grew older, so that by the age of 11:

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Levey, *The Chapel is on Fire: Recollections of Growing Up*, (London, 2001), pp. 67-8.

I was more keenly aware of emotional fluctuations and fissures, often quite minor ones, that occurred between the trio of us. At one moment I might seem, simply by expressing an opinion, to be siding with my father, and at the next I was on my mother's side. Or it might be that they united in a way that left me feeling isolated...

There would be nothing so definite as a quarrel. But I felt tensions which made me long for us to be a larger, less tightly-knit group, one in which I alone was not the inevitable shuttlecock. Oh, for a sibling, I thought, who would take some of the concentration and responsibility off myself.<sup>46</sup>

Like Drummond, Levey appeared to regard lopsided family relationships as intrinsic to only-childhood, and suggested that having a sibling would have evened things up, though it might in fact not have done so.<sup>47</sup> By contrast, Oakley, perhaps as a mark of her experience as a sociologist, wrote, 'all children are intruders ... they set up house with their victims and never leave. Parents are never free of children. But children are never free from parents, either.'<sup>48</sup> She also acknowledged that children within the same family can have completely different experiences of and attitudes towards their parents: 'had I had brothers or sisters, their truth would have been different from mine.'<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, like Levey, she often felt 'surplus' in her childhood home:

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<sup>46</sup> Levey, *The Chapel is on Fire*, p. 184.

<sup>47</sup> Drummond, *Tainted by Experience*, p. 43; Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, pp. 98, 99; Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 114.

<sup>48</sup> Oakley, *Man and Wife*, p. 301.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 306-10.

Witnessing, I was a voyeur, a stranger who hovered in doorways, on the edges of streams of light, poised on the margins of relationships. Simply, I was in the way ... there was a chair on either side of the fireplace ... if I wanted to sit there with my parents I had to draw up an extra chair. But then I could not see to read because the only two lamps in the room were beside their chairs. Probably unfairly, but with some justification, I thought they felt be to be an intruder in their relationship. (In much the same way my own children take this view now, but whereas they are all in it together, I had to fight my own battle.)<sup>50</sup>

Not dissimilarly, Levey felt excluded in his home at 'many a mealtime, [when] I would encounter thickets of conversation suddenly sprung up between my parents, thickets which, it seemed, I was not intended to penetrate ... some of the topics that arose were only for two people.'<sup>51</sup> While, unlike Levey, Oakley suggested that it was not merely only children who were 'intruders', she nonetheless felt isolated in her exclusion from her parents' companionable relationship.

The relationships of Levey and Oakley's parents could be regarded as examples of the more companionate marriages Anderson has identified as increasing from the late-nineteenth century. Rather than marrying primarily to conceive children, more and more couples were marrying for companionship.<sup>52</sup> Although Levey did not give a reason for only-childhood, nor imply that he was necessarily an unwanted child, the above quotation suggests that his parents functioned well as a unit in themselves, and his entry was something they somewhat struggled to adjust themselves to.<sup>53</sup>

Oakley, again demonstrating her background as a sociologist, described her parents as conforming to the model of an 'ideal' middle-class family as 'small,

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<sup>50</sup> Oakley, *Taking It Like a Woman*, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Levey, *The Chapel is on Fire*, p. 62.

<sup>52</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 188.

<sup>53</sup> Levey, *The Chapel is on Fire*, pp. 67-8, 184.

self-sufficient, inward-looking; a selfish cosiness...’ and having an ‘emotional nationalism’ that separated them from both their own and other families.<sup>54</sup> This echoes historians’ ideas about changes in middle-class families over the course of the period under study, and suggests that Oakley’s parents had a relationship so intense that it excluded all others.<sup>55</sup> Oakley’s parents, Richard and Kay Titmuss, did not have her until they had been married for seven years. During this period and their two-year courtship, alongside her career as a social worker, Kay helped Richard improve his writing, and then acted as his typist, which was her contribution to fertility treatise *Parents Revolt*, mentioned in chapter 2. According to Oakley, middle-class Kay regarded working-class Richard as her ‘discovery’, and felt that she had ‘made’ him, and that his success was hers too.<sup>56</sup> This indicates their close working relationship; as this chapter will show, Oakley’s mother continued to share in her husband’s work after the birth of her daughter, but she was not as content as she had been previously.

In both Levey and Oakley’s cases, their parents’ love for one another partly manifested itself through the mother’s devotion to the father, and resentment of the child. Levey discussed how his mother portrayed his father as ‘ideal ... and that I must do my best to grow up like him’, and wrote that ‘if I put my father at the apex of our triangle, I was merely obeying her unspoken or – more likely – spoken wish.’<sup>57</sup> Levey’s mother ‘loved me, of course, but she

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<sup>54</sup> Oakley, *Man and Wife*, pp. 304, 305.

<sup>55</sup> Anderson, ‘What is New about the Modern Family?’, p. 85; Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, p. 102; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 188-92, 357, 359; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 212.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Ann Oakley by Margaretta Jolly, track 1; Oakley, *Taking It Like a Woman*, p. 5; Oakley, *Man and Wife*, pp. 3, 25-7, 34, 60, 63, 89, 158.

<sup>57</sup> Levey, *The Chapel is on Fire*, pp. 45, 66.

had the duty of improving me' and he was explicit that she regarded him as a burden. Her resentment manifested in that 'she shrank from high spirits at any time and frequently quenched mine by acid observations, asking, for instance, whether I was afflicted with St Vitus's dance.'<sup>58</sup> This was particularly evident during a two-year period when Levey's father was away working in Iraq.<sup>59</sup> This suggests that Levey's existence prevented his mother from going with his father. It also reinforces the idea that, like increasing numbers of early-twentieth-century fathers, Levey's father was the 'fun parent', who was seen far less often than his mother and took on the more enjoyable parenting tasks when he was at home.<sup>60</sup>

Oakley and her mother, meanwhile, 'were often surreptitiously at war with one another. She thought she had first claim on my father's love; and I thought I had first claim.'<sup>61</sup> Although neither of Oakley's parents were physically affectionate, as with Levey, Oakley's father came across as the more companionable, less disciplinary parent, who was warm and (presumably verbally) affectionate. As indicated earlier, Oakley's mother had had a career as a social worker before giving up her job to conceive, have, and raise a child. She continued to support and take pride in her husband's career as an unpaid, invisible secretary. However, it was clear to Oakley that her mother resented having to do domestic work on top of this, and was not as satisfied as she had been as a busy and productive social worker.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Levey, *The Chapel is on Fire*, pp. 69, 90.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>60</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, pp. 14, 86-91, 138, 180, 182; King, *Family Men*, pp. 57, 77.

<sup>61</sup> Oakley, *Taking It Like a Woman*, p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Ann Oakley by Margaretta Jolly, track 1; Oakley, *Man and Wife*, pp. 3, 60, 97, 212-16, 288, 289, 290, 291, 296, 299, 300, 304.



Additionally, similarly to Levey, Oakley's existence kept her parents apart for a period. She and her mother stayed in Wakefield, Yorkshire, with relatives when she was a baby to avoid the 'flying bombs' at the end of the Second World War, while her father remained in London. Oakley suggested that her mother could not help but resent her for this difficult separation not only from her husband, but between their marital roles.<sup>63</sup> Yet again, it is possible to see how the circumstances of war could alter only children's family relationships in various ways.

Like Aickman and Robinson's mothers, the feelings Levey and Oakley's mothers had about their children might have also been affected by their own experiences. Levey's mother claimed never to have known her mother, while 'she was guarded, detached, possibly resentful' about her father, telling Levey 'surprisingly early ... that he 'drank'.<sup>64</sup> Oakley discussed how her mother was affected by her parents' preference for her younger brother, and described her maternal grandmother as a formidable woman who lacked warmth.<sup>65</sup>

Unlike Aickman, Drummond, and Levey, Oakley appeared to have felt pressured to be successful by her father rather than her mother. She wrote:

I was always conscious even as a very young child of how much my father's hopes for the future centred on me ... his feeling would perhaps have been the same had I been a boy ... in me, as pre-woman, he could vest all his desires for perfection. I could not therefore afford to let him down.<sup>66</sup>

Although Oakley said that her mother also had expectations of her to live a particular kind of 'conventional' and 'respectable' life, her father's

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<sup>63</sup> Oakley, *Man and Wife*, pp. 226, 227, 239, 256, 261, 266-7, 304.

<sup>64</sup> Levey, *The Chapel is on Fire*, p. 54.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Ann Oakley by Margaretta Jolly, track 1.

<sup>66</sup> Oakley, *Taking It Like a Woman*, p. 32.

expectations sounded more explicitly-stated.<sup>67</sup> It is possible, as Oakley suggested, that her father would have had high expectations of his child whether they had been a boy or a girl. Faced with the impossibility of having a son owing to his wife's advanced age, her father may have transferred his expectations onto a daughter instead. Alternatively, his desire for social mobility may have been such that he wished for any son or daughter of his to succeed. As mentioned earlier, Richard Titmuss came from a humble background. He did not enter academia, in fact, until his mid-thirties, having written five books while working as an insurance clerk.<sup>68</sup> It was therefore understandable that Oakley said: 'you know, a man who hadn't been to university at all, one child, what do you want? You want Oxbridge for that child.'<sup>69</sup>

Levey was also aware of his parents' aspirations for him. He knew they had made sacrifices to send him to private school; his mother made it clear that he should strive to deserve this education.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, like some of the former boarding school pupils surveyed by Renton, he did not feel he could complain to his parents about school because they had paid so much for him to go there.<sup>71</sup> The attitudes of Levey and Oakley's parents reflect parents' increasing interest in giving their children a better quality of education and care during the period under study.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Ann Oakley by Margareta Jolly, track 1.

<sup>68</sup> Oakley, *Man and Wife*, pp. 11, 23, 62, 63.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Ann Oakley by Margareta Jolly, track 1.

<sup>70</sup> Levey, *The Chapel is on Fire*, p. 193

<sup>71</sup> Levey, *The Chapel is on Fire*, p. 12; Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip*, p. 76.

<sup>72</sup> Pooley, 'Parenthood, Childrearing and Fertility', p. 93; Roberts, *Women and Families*, pp. 33-5; King, *Family Men*, p. 38.

Like other only children in this thesis, Levey and Oakley's experiences were also influenced by the Second World War. Levey's experiences in the early part of the war, when he was still at school, reinforced his feeling that he was an inconvenient appendage to his parents. His father's workplace was evacuated to Harrogate. During boarding-school holidays, Levey had to live in cramped houses, shared with another family, where 'an extra bedroom had to be sought for me, but fitting me in emotionally was even harder. I was increasingly ... ill at ease in what passed for home.'<sup>73</sup> As mentioned in chapter 2, Oakley was an only child because her parents put off having her for as long as they could in the hope that the war would end.<sup>74</sup> Despite this, though, her childhood experiences were ultimately the result of a range of influences separate from only-childhood itself. Additionally, as mentioned above, the war affected her experiences as she and her mother temporarily relocated to Wakefield to escape the 'flying bombs'. This evacuation for Oakley's safety separated her mother from her husband and her role in his career, leading her to resent her child.<sup>75</sup>

This chapter has shown that while some only children reported uneven, intense, 'triangular' relationships with their parents, these were primarily the product of existing parental attitudes and domestic circumstances. Class and historical time were also influences. When parents did not get along at all well, only children felt pressured to 'pick a side', and when parents got on particularly well, they might feel like 'intruders'. Hostile and close parental

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<sup>73</sup> Levey, *The Chapel is on Fire*, pp. 6, 7.

<sup>74</sup> Oakley, *Man and Wife*, p. 201; Oakley, *Taking It Like a Woman*, p. 15; Interview with Ann Oakley by Margaretta Jolly, track 1.

<sup>75</sup> Oakley, *Man and Wife*, pp. 226, 227, 239, 256, 261, 266-7, 304.

relationships alike could result in only children, but only-childhood did not cause such domestic situations.

No siblings in this study reported feeling like 'intruders' in their parents' close relationships, perhaps because of the small sample size, or the likelihood of a particularly companionate couple electing to have the minimum number of children. However, siblings proved no protection against the need to 'take a side' in bad parental relationships.<sup>76</sup> Constance Howard, a lower middle-class textile artist who was born in Northampton in 1910, preferred her easy-going father to her 'difficult', bad-tempered mother, as did her two younger sisters. Her parents seemed to quarrel frequently for many reasons, but particularly because her mother wanted her teacher father to take a better job so that the family would have more money. All three daughters left home as soon as they could because they hated their mother due to her temper.<sup>77</sup>

Upper middle-class lawyer John Phipson, meanwhile, was born in 1940, grew up in Sussex and Essex, and had one younger brother. His father was away fighting in the Second World War until he was 3½ years old, and the pair never bonded. The relationship between Phipson's parents deteriorated over time, with Phipson provoking some of their arguments. Eventually, when Phipson was an adult, he and his mother became estranged from his father (he did not say whether his brother did so too).<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', pp. 193, 194, 195.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Constance Howard by Tanya Harrod, July 1999, *NLSC: Crafts Lives*, C960/03 part 1, © The British Library.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with John Phipson by Judy Slinn, December 1991-June 1992, *NLSC: City Lives*, C409/104 parts 1, 2, 3, © The British Library.

In both of these cases, parental attitudes and domestic circumstances that existed independently of how many children were born to each marriage determined children's experiences. Historical time was also important. Contemporary ideas about divorce possibly kept these couples together for longer than they might have been a few decades later, and war affected Phipson's relationship with his father. These factors also influenced only children's experiences. As in the case of Doris Tarling (born 1903) in chapter 9, perhaps Howard's mother was motivated by class aspirations when she argued with Howard's father about his earning prospects.

The past six chapters have shown how personal inclinations, parental attitudes, domestic circumstances, geographical location, class, gender, and historical time influenced the experiences of only children growing up between 1850 and 1950. This thesis' original contribution to knowledge is that these factors were far more important than only-childhood itself. The next, final chapter reiterates this study's argument, draws together its findings, discusses its contributions and makes suggestions for future work.



## 11. Conclusions

This thesis' main achievement is its original argument that only-childhood was never the sole, and only ever a minor, determinant of only children's experiences. It has argued that personal inclinations, parental attitudes, domestic circumstances, geographical location, class, gender, and historical time, alone or in combination, were far more important influences on only children's childhood experiences than only-childhood *per se*. These factors made only children very different from one another despite their shared birth position. They also impacted upon sibling children's experiences, thus demonstrating their influence on childhood in general.

Of all the factors this thesis has identified as having more influence than only-childhood on only children's experiences, parental attitudes have recurred with particular frequency. Only children's experiences of being parented depended not only on their parents' personalities *per se*, but also how their parents reacted to different domestic circumstances. One such circumstance was the loss of a child, before or after birth. While this could result in only-childhood, it did not follow that only children commonly grew up in anxious atmospheres as a result of such experiences. This was partly because parents increasingly consciously decided to stop at one child over the course of this period, and partly because such losses did not have a singular effect on all parents.<sup>1</sup> Chapter 4 showed, for example, that there was an anxious atmosphere in Anthony Wright's (born 1927) home because his mother had had to terminate two pregnancies for medical reasons. By contrast, the more outgoing Elizabeth Blackburn's (born 1902) mother appeared to have been

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 183.

more philosophical about her experiences of miscarriage. This comparison exemplifies not only the differences in the two mothers' personalities, but also differences in experience, class, and time. Wright's mother may have had a more traumatic experience of pregnancy loss than Blackburn's mother, Blackburn's family could ill-afford further children, and miscarriage may have been more common, but less talked-about, earlier in the period. While no non-only children in this study discussed miscarriage at the same length as these only children, this may have been due to the small sample size rather than a lack of effect on their families.

Illness, or the perception of illness, in an only child could have similar effects on how their parents treated them, with Norman Nicholson (born 1914) and Victoria Crowe (born 1945) being particularly restricted as a result of actual or imagined illness, and Elizabeth Goudge's (born 1920) mother emotionally spoiling her partly because she believed her to be a sickly child.<sup>2</sup> In each of these cases, parents were either ignorant of, or chose to ignore, contemporary advice not to show too much concern for their children's health, or overindulge sick children.<sup>3</sup> This reflects a more general finding of this thesis shared by Pollock and King: individual parents' personalities often took precedence over contemporary childrearing advice and expectations of how people of their class should raise their children.<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that the

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<sup>2</sup> Nicholson, *Wednesday Early Closing*, pp. 17, 18; Interview with Victoria Crowe by Jenny Simmons, track 1; Goudge, *The Joy of the Snow*, p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, p. 39; Urwin and Sharland, 'From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature', p. 175; Newson and Newson, 'Cultural Aspects of Childrearing', pp. 53-4; Cunnington, *Nursery Notes for Mothers*, pp. 14, 19, 70-71; Cameron, *The Nervous Child*, pp. 162-3; Abbott, *The Mother at Home*, p. 100; Winterburn, *Nursery Ethics*, p. 171; Alfred Adler, *What Life Could Mean to You*, pp. 24-5; Spiel and Birnbaum, 'The School and Educational Guidance', p. 81; Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child*, p. 89; Humphries and Gordon, *Out of Sight*, pp. 22, 39-40.

<sup>4</sup> Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, p. 45; King, *Family Men*, pp. 100, 101, 106, 195.



ideas from childrearing manuals at the beginning of chapters 4-10 bore no relation to the thoughts and actions of parents, however. 'Harsh' and 'soft' advice to parents could, and did, co-exist, and this may have represented the spectrum of 'normal' parenting practices at any one time.<sup>5</sup> Several only children in this thesis were raised in ways that did not appear to fit the expected practices of their class; for example, Dorothy Crisp's (born 1906) working-class parents did not let her 'play out' with other children due to their aspirations, and Dodie Smith's (born 1896) upper middle-class family allowed her to freely mix with and talk to adults.<sup>6</sup>

Only children's experiences, in fact, could be influenced in all manner of ways by all kinds of parental characteristics. Parents who liked children and were aggrieved to only have one were likely to be more amenable towards their only children than parents who disliked children and had had one by accident or to meet social expectations. Being religious and/or outgoing might lead a parent to encourage their only child to develop similar characteristics.

Parents might respond, for example, to their own experiences of poverty, or a particularly good or bad marriage, in how they treated their children. Good and bad marriages alike might result in one child, but the only child was not responsible for the quality of a relationship that pre-dated their birth. This thesis has also shown how parental attitudes could influence the experiences of non-only children. For example, Mary Wondrausch (born 1923), the youngest of two children, was materially spoiled because her well-off parents

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<sup>5</sup> Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family*, p. 39; Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 3; Jamieson, 'Theories of Family Development', pp. 124-5; Jordanova, *Children in History*, p. 12; Jordanova, 'New Worlds for Children', p. 78; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, pp. 46, 65; Robertson, 'Home as a Nest', p. 423; Rose, *Governing the Soul*, p. 183; Stearns, 'Defining Happy Childhoods', p. 171.

<sup>6</sup> Crisp, *A Life for England*, p. 4; Smith, *Look Back With Love*, pp. 5, 19-21, 36, 40, 43-4.

were inclined to treat her in this way, and possibly also as a result of her gender.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, Nicholas Monsarrat (born 1910), and his four surviving siblings did not receive many treats despite their privileged economic position, because his mother 'was very strict, immensely strong-willed, sometimes harsh.'<sup>8</sup>

Only children's experiences of bad parental relationships also particularly highlighted how they could experience different treatment from, and relationships with, their mothers and fathers, especially as fathers became more accessible over the course of the period.<sup>9</sup> Individual parents' attitudes could also determine their reactions to only-child stereotypes; secretary Doris Tarling's (born 1903) mother, for example, was overly-strict with her daughter because she worried about that people would think of her as spoiled.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, only children such as Maud Franklin (born 1927) and Ruari McLean (born 1917) suggested that their parents made a special effort to 'compensate' them for their birth position.<sup>11</sup>

Even when they were not over-ruled by parental attitudes, factors such as personal inclinations, domestic circumstances, geographical location, and class created all sorts of differences between only children. As long as their parents did not object to them 'playing out', living in a lively working-class areas could make an only child particularly sociable with other children

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Mary Wondrausch by Hawksmoor Hughes, part 1.

<sup>8</sup> Monsarrat, *Life is a Four-Letter Word*, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working-Class*, pp. 2, 14; King, *Family Men*, pp. 16-18, 52, 57, 100, 130, 136, 186-8, 195; Cunnington, *Children & Childhood*, p. 179; Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, p. 149; Roberts, *Women and Families*, pp. 155-7.

<sup>10</sup> FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 64.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Maud Franklin by Siobhan Logue, track 2; McLean, *True To Type*, p. 7.

unless, like poet James Kirkup (born 1918), they were particularly timid.<sup>12</sup> Class could also determine when and where an only child went to school, a key arena for socialising. Working- and lower middle-class only children who had had little contact with other children prior to starting school commonly met and became used to other children once they were there. By contrast, their social superiors were more likely to stay at home with nannies and governesses. They were often kept apart from other children due to geographical isolation or the unsuitability of local children until at least the age of seven – much later, or not at all if they were girls – when they were plunged into the icy waters of boarding school. Whether or not a child enjoyed boarding school appeared to depend upon their particular personality, the individual school, their gender, and how much of a choice they had in whether they went there. This appeared to be true of both only and non-only children; as chapter 7 showed, Tessa Clegg (born 1946), the middle of three children, remarked, ‘it’s horrible, there’s nothing nice to say about boarding school, nothing at all.’<sup>13</sup> While being an only child may have meant that one received more resources from parents that would have otherwise been shared among siblings, some families were so poor that their only children still only experienced a basic standard of living.

A particular domestic circumstance that differentiated some only children’s experiences from others was living with their grandparents. Living with one or both grandparents was itself not a homogenous experience; whether or not an only child developed a close relationship with a co-resident grandparent depended on the grandparent’s health. If an unwell grandparent had moved

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<sup>12</sup> Kirkup, *Sorrows, Passions and Alarms*, pp. 42-4, 46, 88.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Tessa Clegg by Frances Cornford, track 1.

into an only child's household to be looked after by their younger relatives, they were less likely to have extensive contact with them, as in the case of Wright and his grandfather.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, if a grandparent was in good enough health to help care for their grandchild, or had been specifically tasked with their care, they were more likely to develop a close relationship, as in Smith's case.<sup>15</sup> These findings build upon those of Thane and Laslett that older people only moved in with younger generations when they were no longer able to live in their own homes. Furthermore, when more able grandparents did live with their children, they were keen to avoid conflict by taking on their fair share of tasks such as childcare.<sup>16</sup> Cases where only children shared a home with adults other than their parents have highlighted that if only children were spoiled, this was not necessarily due to only-childhood. It was more related to having regular contact with an adult – a grandmother for Cyril Connolly (born 1903), and a nanny for Elizabeth Goudge (born 1900) – who happened to be inclined towards indulging children.

Time underpinned these factors by determining what constituted 'normal' and 'unusual' parental treatment, domestic circumstances, and class and gender expectations during particular only children's childhoods. While individual parental attitudes, as mentioned above, took precedence over general trends in childrearing practice in determining only children's experiences, some testimonies were nonetheless particularly 'of their time'. For example, some upper middle-class only children discussed seeing far more of nannies and

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<sup>14</sup> Wright, *Personal Tapestry*, pp. 9, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *Look Back With Love*, pp. 18, 67.

<sup>16</sup> Thane, 'The Family Lives of Old People', pp. 180, 185, 187, 191, 197, 206; Laslett, *Family Life*, p. 26.

servants than their parents in the earlier part of the period, and only children born later in the period appeared to know more about their parents' personal lives and say more about their relationships with their parents.

Specific events appeared to particularly distinguish different only children's experiences from one another. As mentioned above, only children's experiences could be affected by illness, either their own or that of their parents, and Nicholson and his mother's Spanish flu, theatre critic Harold Hobson's (born 1904) polio, and broadcaster John Drummond's (born 1934) father's tuberculosis were illnesses that were particularly time-specific.<sup>17</sup> War was another event that affected the lives of only and non-only children.

Several only children's relationships with their fathers were disrupted by their absence during the Second World War in particular, and ex-convict James Nelson (born c. 1936) portrayed himself as traumatised by his experiences of evacuation.<sup>18</sup> John Phipson (born 1940), the oldest son of two, also said that he never bonded with his father because he was away fighting until Phipson was 3½.<sup>19</sup> Ralph Brown (born 1928) was also affected by the war, as his two older brothers went away. This might have increased the loneliness of living in a semi-rural area.<sup>20</sup> Time might also determine whether only children came into contact with mental health professionals, as well as whether they lived near larger families. The latter may not have made much difference to their pool of potential playmates, however. It could have been more important that they lived close to a small number of children of their own age and gender

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<sup>17</sup> Hobson, *Indirect Journey*, p. 2; Nicholson, *Wednesday Early Closing*, p. 11; Drummond, *Tainted By Experience*, p. 43

<sup>18</sup> James Nelson, *No More Walls*, p. 5; 'Intercontinental Promotions: I AIN'T GOT NONE', <https://mickthepunk.blogspot.co.uk/2007/09/i-aint-got-none.html>, (accessed 7/10/2017).

<sup>19</sup> Interview with John Phipson by Judy Slinn, part 1.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Ralph Brown by Gillian Whiteley, part 1.

than a large number of children of all ages, and compulsory schooling also facilitated friendships.

This thesis has shown that when historians have referred to only children, they have presented accounts that conformed to stereotypes, without questioning their statements about only-childhood, examining their testimonies for other influences, or challenging only-child stereotypes. They have also implied that, as sibling relationships could be so useful and important, only children could only be disadvantaged by their singular state. Examples provided by Davidoff *et al*, Fletcher, and Thea Thompson only represent only children who were either lonely or surrounded by adults.<sup>21</sup> Davis, meanwhile, only referred to women who had disliked being only children, without discussing why they had been unhappy.<sup>22</sup> Fletcher included the story of a mother who suggested it was inevitable that her daughter was unmanageable because she was an only child, and the sole only child in Thea Thompson's collection of testimonies put her reserved nature down to only-childhood.<sup>23</sup> None of these historians provided counter-examples, or pointed out other explanations for these only children's experiences from the primary material.

Davidoff and Roberts maintained the association between only children and spoiling with examples of sibling children who became 'like only children' when they were sent to live with childless relatives who indulged them.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, pp. 241, 397, 340; Thea Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, pp. 210, 216, 220, 223; Davidoff, Doolittle, Fink and Holden, *The Family Story*, pp. 259-62.

<sup>22</sup> Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, p. 184.

<sup>23</sup> Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, pp. 120-21; Thea Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, pp. 210, 211, 216, 217, 223.

<sup>24</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, p. 171; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 179.

Despite his thorough work on firstborn and laterborn children, Sulloway upheld the ideas that only children were less outgoing than oldest children because they lacked opportunities to socialise with other children, and that only children were more likely than sibling children to come into conflict with their parents.<sup>25</sup> While Davidoff's work on sibling relationships is excellent and has been extremely useful to this thesis, it leaves the reader with the impression that to be an only child was to lack essential equal companionship, competition, and assistance.<sup>26</sup> This thesis has shown that only children's experiences were, in fact, far more complex than those previously represented in historical work, both in terms of what they were and why they had them.

It is easy to understand why historians, looking at childhood and family life as a whole rather than only-childhood in particular, have so readily accepted only children's admissions that they conformed to popular images of their kind. As this thesis' approach has revealed, persistent negative ideas about only children – that they were, and are, unused to and timid with other children, used to and confident with adults, lonely, unhappy, materially and emotionally spoiled, and subject to 'triangular' relationships – can influence how they present their life stories. Each analysis chapter started by outlining the main ideas about only children that started to appear in childrearing manuals in the late-nineteenth century. These chapters then showed how 'ordinary people' interviewed by Mass Observation in the 1940s, and some only children themselves, have echoed these views. By examining how only children used popular ideas to interpret and explain their experiences, this thesis has

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<sup>25</sup> Sulloway, *Born to Rebel*, pp. 32, 42, 101, 189, 204, 234, 489, 503.

<sup>26</sup> Davidoff, 'The Family in Britain', p. 118; Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, p. 114.

particularly built upon the work of Samuel and Thompson and the contributors to their co-edited volume *The Myths We Live By*.

Some only children used 'myths' to make sense of their experiences in more than one way. In this thesis, they have attributed timidity with other children, ease with adults, solitariness, loneliness, and being brooding, over-protected, unhappy, pressured, and strictly-parented, to only-childhood.<sup>27</sup> Three only children had no memory or consciousness of loneliness as children, yet came to assume they must have been lonely because they had no siblings.<sup>28</sup> This corresponds with recent research findings that only children's self-esteem could be affected by their acceptance of others' erroneous judgements of them, and that only children commonly blamed only-childhood for certain problems because they fit the stereotypes. For example, some regarded themselves as self-centred purely because they were only children.<sup>29</sup> By accepting myths about only children, some subjects of this thesis also adopted the corresponding 'sibling myth', that siblings made for companionship and a more pleasant home life.<sup>30</sup> This is a myth this thesis has also questioned to some extent.

Other only children accepted that only-child stereotypes were true of others, but not themselves. Franklin discussed how she had a happy childhood despite being an only child, and pilot David Lomas (born 1936) suggested

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<sup>27</sup> Wright, *Personal Tapestry*, p. 11; Viscountess Rhondda, *This Was My World*, pp. 35, 36; FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 313; James Nelson, *No More Walls*, p. 40; Leslie, *More Ha'Pence Than Kicks*, pp. 18, 25-6; Interview with Jo Robinson by Polly Russell, track 2; Interview with David Lomas by Dylan Roys, track 1; FLWE 1870-1918, Interview 604.

<sup>28</sup> Haskell, *In His True Centre*, p. 33; Neilson, *This for Rememberance*, p. 20; Kirkup, *The Only Child*, p. 38.

<sup>29</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: A Review', p. 15; Laybourn, *The Only Child*, p. 113.

<sup>30</sup> Drummond, *Tainted By Experience*, p. 43; Levey, *The Chapel is on Fire*, p. 184; Rowe, *My Dearest Enemy*, p. 297.



that he might have been spoiled as an only child had it not been for the Second World War.<sup>31</sup> These only children lent credence to the recent findings of Mancillas that only children and their parents commonly insisted that they or their child were an exception to stereotypes. By doing so, they have implied that assumptions about only children were usually valid.<sup>32</sup>

Some only children did not accept the stereotypes quite so readily, but they nonetheless felt the need to discuss them. Goudge associated her experiences of being spoiled, and its effects on her personality, with only-childhood, yet acknowledged that many only children she had met had escaped such a fate.<sup>33</sup> John Pudney (born 1909), meanwhile, appeared to struggle to determine the impact of only-childhood on his life. He wrote, variously, that he had not been aware of only-childhood as a young child, that it had had some influence, that other factors played a more crucial part in his experiences, and that some of the characteristics people had attributed to his being an only child were rather far-fetched.<sup>34</sup> This thesis has shown how Crisp criticised 'well-meaning doctors and whatnot' who 'inveigh[ed] against the 'loneliness' of the only child,' because, on balance, she felt that solitariness had benefitted her.<sup>35</sup> Some only children gave a great deal of thought to the myths, while others did not refer to them at all. This suggests that the extent to which they took ideas about only children seriously, and reflected upon them, could depend upon personal inclinations. It could also depend on whether certain events in adulthood, such as having a breakdown,

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Maud Franklin by Siobhan Logue, track 2; Interview with David Lomas by Dylan Roys, track 1.

<sup>32</sup> Mancillas, cited in Sandler, *One and Only*, p. 29.

<sup>33</sup> Goudge, *The Joy of the Snow*, p. 76.

<sup>34</sup> Pudney, *Thank Goodness for Cake*, pp. 10, 32-3, 34.

<sup>35</sup> Crisp, *A Life for England*, p. 9.

seeing a therapist, losing a parent, or simply being asked about being an only child by an oral history interviewer, led them to consider the possible impact of only-childhood on their lives.

As well as making contributions to the field of history, then, this thesis has shown the validity of social scientists' emergent idea that only-childhood is secondary to several other factors in determining characteristics and experiences. It has also substantiated their claim that only children were liable to over-attribute certain traits and experiences to only-childhood due to their awareness of stereotypes pertaining to themselves. As mentioned in the introduction, though, the value in this new piece of work is that it takes a different approach from that of social scientists. By taking a qualitative, rather than a quantitative approach, it has been able to draw conclusions about recollections of childhood, emotions, and relationships from autobiographies and oral history interviews in ways social scientists would not.

Using QSR NVivo, a qualitative research program which is particularly associated with social scientists but is being increasingly used by historians, has made this thesis' analysis more thorough than it might have been otherwise. Its coding function made it possible to see everything the only children in this study said or wrote about certain subjects in one file. This meant that no only children's experiences were forgotten or overlooked as a result of more 'messy' paper methods. It also made it possible to quickly find only children whose stories were particularly suitable for inclusion in this thesis, and easily access their entire testimonies for analysis. Overall, NVivo made the analysis process very efficient while, as mentioned in chapter 3,

maintaining the same level of human agency. The future projects suggested at the end of this chapter would all benefit from the use of this program.

This thesis is also firmly rooted within the discipline of history by the time period it covers. Not only does it take the study of only children further back in time than social scientists have done, but, as the introduction and chapter 2 showed, the period of 1850-1950 is particularly relevant for the study of only children. As fertility declined in Britain between the mid-1870s and mid-1940s, only children became a distinct group, with the percentage of couples having one child increasing from 5.3% in the 1870s to 25.2% by 1925.<sup>36</sup>

Historians have been discovering patterns in the demographic data and establishing a range of explanations for the fertility decline for decades, and no doubt will continue to make new deductions for years to come.

This thesis has been concerned, though, with the experiences of this growing group who (along with their parents) faced increasing hostility in childrearing manuals and other media as they became more noticeable and induced worry about the quantity and quality of the population. Even though the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has hovered between 1.94 and 1.66 children per woman since 1974, making one-child families ever more 'normal' and 'common', criticisms of and assumptions about them still abound in popular discourse.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Anderson, 'Highly restricted fertility', p. 178.

<sup>37</sup> Office for National Statistics, 'Births in England and Wales: 2016', <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsummarytablesenglandandwales/2016>, (accessed 4/1/2018); see also, for example, 'Being an only child makes you more creative, but less agreeable', <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2017/05/12/child-makes-creative-less-agreeable/>, (accessed 4/1/2018); 'Chinese study finds being an only child makes you selfish | Daily Mail Online', <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-4493960/Being-child-DOES-make-selfish.html>, (accessed 4/1/2018); 'General Election 2017: Why Theresa May's 'Only Child' Tag Is A Lazy Slur And, Worse, A Distraction From An Important Personality Discussion', <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/caroline-frost/general-election-2017->

In some cases this thesis has been able to discuss parents' reasons for having an only child. This has had the effect of relating historians' more general ideas about the causes of fertility decline to individual situations. This project has been particularly inspired by, utilised, and supported findings from other studies in the sub-disciplines of the histories of childhood and the family, thus situating it in the same fields.

By taking a 'historical' viewpoint, this thesis has also questioned some social scientists' assumptions that it was worse to be an only child in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century than it has been in more recent decades. Falbo and Laybourn have both suggested that only children born in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries had more negative experiences than more recent generations of only children because they were more commonly born to parents who had wanted more children and/or been only children as the result of misadventure. Such only children, they wrote, were therefore more likely to experience unhappiness, psychological problems, overprotection, overindulgence, and heightened expectations from their parents.<sup>38</sup>

Chapter 2 showed, however, that by the end of the nineteenth century, some parents were already deliberately restricting their families to one child. Some only children had certain experiences because their parents had ended up with one child involuntarily. However, it seems somewhat excessive to make

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[why\\_1\\_b\\_17033604.html](#), (accessed 4/1/2018); 'Only child 'syndrome': How growing up without siblings affects your child's development | The Independent', <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/only-child-syndrome-no-siblings-traits-selfish-more-creative-study-chongqing-china-southwest-a7737916.html>, (accessed 4/1/2018); 'Only children most likely to cheat on partners, study finds | The Independent', <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/love-sex/only-children-cheating-most-likely-partners-relationships-infidelity-boyfriends-girlfriends-study-a7908036.html>, (accessed 4/1/2018).

<sup>38</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: A Review', p. 3; Laybourn, *The Only Child*, p. 108.

such sweeping generalisations about only children in the past when this thesis has shown so many other factors influencing their experiences. Similarly, McKibben has suggested that recent generations of only children have had more opportunities to socialise than earlier generations due to the advent of daycare facilities and nurseries.<sup>39</sup> As chapters 4 and 5 in particular showed, though, only children did not necessarily need organised childcare to provide them with such opportunities if, for example, they lived in sociable working-class areas, or their parents deliberately facilitated contact with other children.

This thesis has also made a contribution to the growing sub-discipline of the history of emotions. Loneliness and unhappiness are two emotions that appear to have been particularly associated with only children since the early-twentieth century, and several only children in this study discussed these feelings with reference to only-childhood. As with other experiences examined in this thesis, though, other factors were found to be larger, separate influences on loneliness and unhappiness.

A particular challenge when studying loneliness was that manual-writers and only children alike used the term 'lonely' with and without emotional connotations, and it was important to determine the meaning that they intended. Some manual-writers appeared to deliberately use the word 'lonely' to manipulate parents who were considering stopping at one child for what they deemed 'selfish' reasons (as opposed to, for example, secondary infertility or poor health), as they wished to convey the message that their only children would suffer as children and adults. Crisp's use of the word 'lonely',

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<sup>39</sup> McKibben, *Maybe One*, p. 45.

meanwhile, highlighted the importance of distinguishing how autobiographers felt at the time that they were children from how they reflected upon their childhoods as adults. This thesis has taken the view that autobiographers and oral history interviewees inevitably present their memories from the perspective of adults who have subsequently added layers of meaning. Like Strange and other historians, it has been interested in the 'lenses' people apply to their pasts rather than the 'accuracy' of their memories of past events.<sup>40</sup> It was therefore of more interest to this study that Crisp was positive about her solitude as an only child in retrospect than whether she felt lonely at the time that she was a child.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, given that children probably did not ask themselves whether or not they were having a happy childhood, this thesis was more interested in only children's reflections on their childhoods than how they felt as children. It has built upon Peter Stearns' work by finding that only children – and possibly life-writers more generally – made particular references to positive relationships with their parents, and playing with their peers, when considering what had made their childhoods happy. They appeared to regard only-childhood as an obstacle to happiness that had to be overcome, without considering that they might have been just as happy, or been unhappy, if they had had siblings. This, again, demonstrates the influence of stereotypes on how some only children presented their experiences.

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<sup>40</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working-Class*, p. 12; Jordanova, 'Children in History', p. 5; Samuel and Thompson, 'Introduction', p. 7; Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, pp. 7, 8, 17, 19, 20; Fulbrook and Rublack, 'In Relation', p. 267; Pascal, *Design and Truth*, p. 61; Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, pp. 17, 20, 23; Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, pp. 43-5.

<sup>41</sup> Crisp, *A Life For England*, pp. 4-5, 9.

When only children did describe their childhoods as unhappy, not only could this analysis identify factors separate from only-childhood that caused them unhappiness, but it found that only-childhood in itself did not seem to directly impact childhood happiness. Instead, popular ideas about only children appeared to affect whether they looked back on their childhoods as happy or not. As mentioned above, ideas about only-childhood appeared to result in a great deal of inner conflict for Pudney as he reflected upon his life and the possible consequences of having no siblings.<sup>42</sup> Henrietta Leslie (born 1884) seemed to have been less directly perturbed by the fact of being an only child than the ideas she imbibed that she was 'different' because the other children she knew had siblings, and that 'to be an "only one" was, somehow, a disgrace ... for which one was, in part, mysteriously responsible.'<sup>43</sup> This strengthens this thesis' argument that only-child myths shaped how some only children reflected upon their childhoods. The novelty of only children, and the emerging literature against them, meant that they were more likely to be judged by other people. As detailed above, their awareness of these judgements at the time, and as adults, may have made them unnecessarily harsh on themselves.<sup>44</sup>

This thesis' findings suggest several ideas for further study. As it found in chapter 4, while only children were statistically more likely to have lost siblings in the late-nineteenth century, it was more common for only children born in the early-twentieth century to talk about such loss. This might be indicative of parents becoming more open with their children, or the

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<sup>42</sup> Pudney, *Thank Goodness for Cake*, pp. 10, 32-3, 34.

<sup>43</sup> Leslie, *More Ha'Pence Than Kicks*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>44</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: A Review', p. 15.

increasingly demonstrative reactions to children's deaths recognised by Zelizer.<sup>45</sup> Alternatively, it might signal a change in the details people included and expanded upon in their life stories. Further investigation could shed more light on this.

Another effect of children spending more time with their parents as the period went on, as indicated above, may have been that later interviewees and autobiographers had more to say about their parents' behaviour and characters. They might also have given their relationships with their parents more thought as psychological ideas about the influence of parenting, particularly those of Freud, evolved from the beginning of the twentieth century. Some only children in this thesis explained how they had come to understand their parents' behaviour as they grew older themselves. This echoes Strange's findings that life-writers did not experience static relationships with their fathers, as they came to understand and accept their fathers' behaviour with hindsight.<sup>46</sup> These findings could spark further study of how autobiographers and interviewees described their parents, and their relationships with them over time.

In the light of cases where only children had lost siblings, or suggested that they were treated particularly harshly or kindly by parents who worried about the effects of only-childhood, further study might further examine why individual couples had only children, how they felt about this, and the prejudices they faced. Such research might find that only children's parents thought they had brought their children up in a certain way, or their children

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<sup>45</sup> Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, pp. 23, 26, 27, 30, 32, 43-4, 48.

<sup>46</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working-Class*, p. 201.



had certain characteristics, because they were only children, when other influences could be detected. It might also uncover whether parents bringing up only children were concerned by different ideas about only children at certain times, and where they heard about only-child stereotypes. At the other end of the scale, a fruitful area of research might be why parents had particularly large families, the prejudices and difficulties they faced at different times, and their thoughts about the effects on their children of growing up in a large family.

A closer look at the development of only-child stereotypes is also a possibility. This thesis has only outlined some of the main ideas about only children to explain why it has analysed their testimonies for certain experiences, and show influences on how only children reflected upon their childhoods. As mentioned in chapter 3, negative ideas about only children reached the public through a range of media. If the analysis of autobiographies and oral history interviews had not taken priority, this thesis would also have analysed articles about only children in newspapers, and compared them with descriptions from childrearing manuals. In doing so, it would have tested King's assertion that the media stripped psychologists' messages of their subtlety when presenting them to the public.<sup>47</sup> Further work might take a similar look at the development of prejudices against large families and the motivations behind them.

This thesis has referred to examples from a 'control group' of sibling children to demonstrate how the influences of personal inclinations, parental attitudes, domestic circumstances, geographical location, class, gender, and historical

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<sup>47</sup> King, *Family Men*, pp. 91-2, 93.

time took precedence over birth position. In doing so, it has also questioned the 'sibling myth', that having siblings guaranteed companionship and happiness. Further research might analyse the testimonies of sibling children of certain birth positions, for example, firstborn, lastborn and minority-gender children, to test the wider applicability of this thesis' findings, and offer alternative methods and conclusions to Sulloway's much-criticised research. A study of children from large families might also be useful for deducing the perceived and actual influence of growing up in such a group, as well as the prejudices such children faced. Another area of study might be that of children of separated and divorced parents. As this thesis has shown, only children had particularly negative experiences when their parents had poor relationships, yet were unable to separate due to personal and cultural beliefs about failed marriages. However, as the case of sibling child Tessa Clegg (born 1946) showed, life did not necessarily improve for children when parents did split up, and further investigation might reveal how typical her experience was.<sup>48</sup>

As prolific modern only-child researcher Falbo has written, 'if we find differences in the outcomes between only children and those with siblings, we should be aware that many factors contribute to differences, not just their lack of siblings.'<sup>49</sup> This thesis has identified several such factors that influenced only children's experiences between 1850 and 1950, whether they were related to reasons certain only children had no siblings, or completely separate from only-childhood. It shows that recent findings regarding only children are applicable to past generations not only because of the various

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Tessa Clegg by Frances Cornford, part 1, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Falbo, 'Only Children: An Updated Review', p. 47.

factors that took precedence over birth position, but also because only children commonly used popular ideas about their kind to explain their experiences. These only children's use of such 'lenses', as well as internalised ideas about the disadvantages of only-childhood and the advantages of siblinghood, has led previous historians to conclude that only children had certain experiences as a result of their singularity. This thesis has shown how important it is to analyse the rest of their testimonies for factors that influenced their lives far more than only-childhood itself.



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NB. Please see Appendix 1 for bibliographical details for autobiographies and oral histories.

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## **Appendix I: Biographical dictionary/bibliography of autobiographies and oral histories**

The aim of this section is to provide quick references for the biographical details of each of the only and non-only children featured in this thesis, as well as a bibliography of these sources. Reasons for being only children, birth positions of non-only children, and Oxford Dictionary of National Biography references (all accessed 4/7/2016) have been given where available.

### **Only Children**

Adlington, William, interviewed by Stuart Anderson, October 1995, *Oral History of Community Pharmacy*, C816/40/01-03, © The British Library. 1930-??, born and grew up in Bootle, Merseyside. Only child due to parents' advanced age. Lower middle-class. Pharmacist.

Aickman, Robert, *The Attempted Rescue*, (London, 1966); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/60658>. 1914-1981, born and grew up in Hampstead, London. No explanation given for only-childhood, but could possibly be due to poor parental relationship. Upper middle-class. Writer and campaigner for inland waterways.

Aird, Adam Robertson, P. Thompson and T. Lummis, *Family life and work experience before 1918, 1870-1973* [computer file], 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], May 2009, SN: 2000, Interview 185. 1893-??, born in Berwick on Tweed, Northumberland; also lived in Tweedsmouth, Newsholme, Acle, and Wooler, all in Northumberland, as a child. Lower working-class. Joiner.

Akehurst, John, *Generally Speaking*, (Norwich, 1999); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/98567>. 1930-2007, born and grew up in Chatham, Kent. No explanation given for only-childhood, but could possibly be due to poor parental relationship. Upper middle-class. Army officer.

Alexander, Jean, interviewed by Rorie Fulton, October 2001, *An Oral History of the Post Office*, C1007/14/01-07, © The British Library. 1943-??, birth name Jean Beattie, born and grew up in Glasgow. No explanation given for only-childhood, but it was the Second World War and her father was away at sea when she was born, and she and her mother (and father, when he was home) lived with her maternal grandparents until she was five. Lower middle-class. Philatelist.

Anderson, George, interviewed by H. B. Ockrim, October 1991, *Wellcome Trust Course Oral History Interviews*, C646/28/01-02, © The British Library. 1927?-??, born and grew up in Willington Quay, Newcastle. Lower middle-class. Pathologist.

Barclay, William, *Testament of Faith*, (Oxford, 1975); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48827>. 1907-1978, born in Motherwell; also lived in Caithness as a child, from the age of five. Only child due to father's advanced age. Unsure of class, as father a bank manager but mother from an aristocratic background. New Testament scholar, writer, and broadcaster.

Barnard, Howard Clive, *Were Those The Days? A Victorian Education*, (Oxford, 1970); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30790>. 1884-1985, born and grew up in London. Only child possibly due to mother's invalidism and eventual death when he was about seven. Upper middle-class. Historian.

Beattie, Basil, interviewed by Mel Gooding, August 1996-January 1999, *NLSC: Artists Lives*, C466/59, © The British Library. 1935-, born in West Hartlepool, Durham; grew up in Hart Station, near Hartlepool, from the age of five. Only child due to parents' age and/or the fact that they had come from large families. Upper working-class. Abstract painter.

Becow, Eve, interviewed by Daniel Doveton, April 1994, *Communist Party Oral History Project*, C703/02/01-03, © The British Library. 1912-??, birth name unspecified, born and grew up in Kilburn, London. Only child due to the death of her father in the First World War; she and her mother lived with her grandparents until she was eight for this reason. Lower middle-class. Communist party member.

Blackburn, Elizabeth K., *In and Out the Windows*, (Burnley, 1980). 1902-??, born and grew up in Blackburn. Lower working-class. Occupation unknown.

Bowen, Marjorie, interviewed by Alan Brown, November 2000, *Wellcome Trust Course Oral History Interviews*, C646/57, © The British Library. 1930-??, born in Consett, County Durham; also lived in South Somerset and Gloucester as a child. Upper middle-class. Paediatrician.

Brereton, Wallace, *Salford Boy*, (Manchester, 1985). 1919-??, born and grew up in Salford, Greater Manchester. Only child due to illegitimacy; raised by aunts and uncles; never knew father, and mother emigrated to Canada, and he only saw her twice between the ages of four and 17. Upper working-class. Occupation unknown.

Broomfield, Maurice, interviewed by Martin Barnes, January-February 2007, *Oral History of British Photography*, C459/194, © The British Library. 1916-2010, born and grew up in Breeston, Derbyshire. Lower middle-class. Photographer.

Brown, Edward, *Memories at Eventide*, (Burnley, 1934). 1851-1939, born in East Lancashire but grew up in Newcastle from the age of five. Only child due to a younger brother dying in infancy. Lower working-class. Poultry specialist.

Brown, John, *I Was A Tramp*, (London, 1934). 1907-??, born and grew up in South Shields, Tyne and Wear. Initially upper working-class, but family's fortunes declined considerably in Brown's mid-teens. Former tramp.

Burnett, John James, interviewed by Hugo Manson, August 2004, *Lives in the Oil Industry*, C963/176/01-03, © The British Library. 1938-??, born and grew up in Dundee. Only child due to mother's advanced age and difficult birth. Upper working-class. Travel agent.

Castle, Roy, *Now and Then: An Autobiography*, (London, 1994); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/54799>. 1932-1994, born and grew up in Scholes, near Huddersfield, Yorkshire. Suggests only-childhood due to lack of space in the home forcing him to share a bedroom with his parents until he was 16. Lower working-class. Entertainer and charity campaigner.

Clark, Kenneth, *Another Part of the Wood*, (London, 1974); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30934>. 1903-1983, born in London; also lived in Sudbourne, Suffolk as a child. Only child because he had been a caesarean birth, and his mother was unable to have any subsequent children. Upper middle-class. Art patron and historian.

Clay, Malcolm, interviewed by Barbara Gibson, April 2002, *Oral History of the Circus*, C966/18, © The British Library. 1945-2015, born and grew up in Halifax, Yorkshire. Lower middle-class. Solicitor.

Cobham, Alan, *A Time To Fly*, (London, 1978); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30944>. 1894-1973, born and grew up in Camberwell, London. Only child due to death of one or more (unmentioned) siblings. Lower middle-class. Aviator.

Connolly, Cyril, *Enemies of Promise*, (London, 1948); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30959>. 1903-1974, born in Coventry; also lived in South Africa, Corsica, Ireland, Bath (with his grandmother), and Surrey as a child. Upper middle-class. Writer and literary reviewer.

Cook, Betty, interviewed by Rachel Cohen, August 2012, *Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project*, C1420/59, © The British Library. 1938-, birth name Clarissa Danks, born in Doncaster, Yorkshire; grew up in South Elmsall, Yorkshire, from the age of three. Only child because mother advised not to have more children for health reasons. Upper working-class. Educational advisor; former nurse and campaigner.

Costello, Carmel, interviewed by Matthew Linfoot, March 1999, *Millennium Memory Bank*, C900/05103B, © BBC. 1943-??, birth name unspecified, born, adopted, and grew up in Ireland. Unsure of class as does not specify parents' occupations. Nanny.

Crisp, Dorothy, *A Life For England*, (London, 1946); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/96367>. 1906-1987, born and grew up in Leeds. Only child due to stillbirth of a brother several years before her own birth; her mother additionally had poor health when Crisp was a child. Upper working-class. Author and political activist.

Crowe, Victoria, interviewed by Jenny Simmons, March-August 2007, *NLSC: Artists' Lives*, C466/260, © The British Library. 1945-, born and grew up in Kingston, Surrey. Only child due to miscarriage six years before her birth. Upper working-class. Portrait and landscape painter.

Cuneo, Terence, *The Mouse and his Master*, (London, 1977); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/60751>. 1907-1996, born and grew up in Hammersmith, London. Upper middle-class. Painter.

Curl, (Isa)Bella, P. Thompson and T. Lummis, *Family life and work experience before 1918, 1870-1973* [computer file], 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], May 2009, SN: 2000, Interview 403. 1898-??, birth name not specified, born and grew up in East London. Only child possibly due to death of mother when she was six; subsequently raised as own by stepmother. Lower working-class. Turkish baths attendant.

Daniel, Glyn, *Some Small Harvest*, (London, 1986); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39803>. 1914-1986, born and grew up in Llanbedr Felffre, Pembrokeshire; also lived in Llantwit Major, Pembrokeshire, as a child. Upper middle-class. Archaeologist and writer.

Daniell, Sir Peter, interviewed by David Phillips, April-September 1990, *NLSC: City Lives*, C409/031, © The British Library. 1909-2002, born and grew up in Chelsea, London. Only child due to mother's age; she was 40 and had to have a caesarean section for this reason. Upper middle-class. Stockbroker.

Darroch, Jane, P. Thompson and T. Lummis, *Family life and work experience before 1918, 1870-1973* [computer file], 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], May 2009, SN: 2000, Interview 392. 1907-??, born and grew up in Edinburgh. Only child due to parents' advanced age. Upper middle-class. Educational psychologist.

Dart, Florence, P. Thompson and T. Lummis, *Family life and work experience before 1918, 1870-1973* [computer file], 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], May 2009, SN: 2000, Interview 405. 1895-??, born in Chatham, London, but grew up in Southsea, Hampshire, and Portland, Dorset. Only child because her mother did not like children, and had not wanted her; saw little of her father until the age of four as he was in the Navy, and they consequently had a strained relationship. Upper working-class. Teacher.



Day Lewis, Cecil, *The Buried Day*, (London, 1960); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31014>. 1904-1972, born in Queen's County, Ireland; also lived in London as a child. Only child due to death of his mother when he was four years old; subsequently brought up by father and aunt. Upper middle-class. Poet and novelist.

Dewar, Maureen, May 1995, *Labour Oral History Project*, C609/73/01, © The British Library. 1925-, birth name not specified, born and grew up in West Norwood, South London. Lower middle-class. Physiotherapist and Labour councillor.

Drummond, John, *Tainted By Experience*, (London, 2000); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/97406>. 1934-2006, born in Willesden, London; also lived in Kensington, London, and Bournemouth, Dorset, as a child. Only child due to mother's poor health. Lower middle-class. TV producer, broadcaster, and music administrator.

Emmerson, Harold Corti, *Masters and Servants: A Career in the Civil Service*, (Berkhamsted, 1978); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/66851>. 1896-1984, born and grew up in Warrington, Lancashire. Upper working-class. Civil Servant.

Evans, Joan, *Prelude & Fugue*, (London, 1964); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47612>. 1873-1977, born and grew up in Abbots Langley, Hertfordshire. Only child because mother wanted no more children; had four much older half-siblings who never lived with her. Upper middle-class. Scholar and author.

Fell, Sheila, 'Artist and Lecturer, Chelsea College of Art', in Goldman, Ronald (ed.), *Breakthrough: Autobiographical Accounts of Some Socially Disadvantaged Children*, (London, 1968), pp. 57-72. 1931-1979, born and grew up in Aspatria, Cumbria. Lower working-class. Artist and lecturer.

Ferguson Anderson, William, interviewed by Margot Jefferys, April 1991, *Oral History of Geriatrics as a Medical Specialty*, C512/25/01, © The British Library. 1914-2001, born in Glasgow, but grew up in Edinburgh from the age of three. Only child due to the death of his father in the First World War; this prompted the move to Edinburgh, where he and his mother lived with his grandmother. Unsure of class for this reason. Medical practitioner.

Franklin, Maud, interviewed by Siobhan Logue, December 1998, *Millennium Memory Bank*, C900/04534, © BBC. 1927-??, birth name not specified, born in Northampton but grew up in Ilford, Essex, and Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire. Only child due to difficult birth. Lower middle-class. Fancy-dress shop owner.

Frith Dawkins, Veronica, interviewed by Pauline King, December 1990, *Wellcome Trust Course Oral History Interviews*, C646/27/01, © The British Library. 1901-??, place of birth not specified, but lived in Oxford for at least part of her childhood, and in Devizes, Wiltshire, as a teenager. Only child due to mother's health. Upper middle-class. Medical practitioner.

Ford, Ben, interviewed by Henry Irving, April 2013, *The History of Parliament Oral History Project*, C1503/56, © The British Library. 1925-, born in Hoxton, London, and grew up in Mitcham and Streatham, London, from the age of one. Lower middle-class. Politician.

Fox, Alan, *A Very Late Development: An Autobiography*, (Coventry, 1990); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/77054>. 1920-2002, born in West Ham, London; also lived in other places in London as a child. Lower working-class. Sociologist and industrial historian.

Fuke, James, interviewed by James Dearling, September 1998, *Mass Conservatism: An Oral History of the Conservative Party*, C895/08, © The British Library. 1943-??, born in Hammersmith, London, but mostly grew up in Wembley, London. Upper working-class. Conservative party worker.

Fuller, John, interviewed by Sarah O'Reilly, November 2009, *NLSC: Authors' Lives*, C1276/26, © The British Library. 1937-, born in Ashford, Kent; also lived in Blackpool (during the Second World War) and London as a child. Only child possibly due to the Great Depression, Second World War, or contemporary fashion for small families. Upper middle-class. Poet.

Fuller-Maitland, John Alexander, *A Door-Keeper of Music*, (London, 1929); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34838>. 1856-1936, born and grew up in London. Upper middle-class. Music critic.

Garnett, David, *The Golden Echo*, (London, 1954); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31138>. 1892-1981, born in Brighton; also lived in Limpsfield Chart, Surrey, as a child. Only child due to a difficult birth. Lower middle-class. Author.

Gibson, Alan, *A Mingled Yarn*, (London, 1976). 1923-1997, born in Sheffield; grew up in Ilkley, near Bolton, from the age of two. Only child due to loss of a younger sister at the age of nine months. Lower middle-class. Journalist, writer, and radio broadcaster.

Gilbey, Agnes, P. Thompson and T. Lummis, *Family life and work experience before 1918, 1870-1973* [computer file], 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], May 2009, SN: 2000, Interview 313. 1897-??, birth name unspecified, born and grew up in Shalford, Essex. Only child due to loss of a sibling shortly after birth, presumably before she was born. Lower working-class. Housewife.

Goudge, Elizabeth, *The Joy of the Snow*, (London, 1974); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31163>. 1900-1984, born in Wells, Somerset; also lived in Ely, Cambridgeshire, as a child. Only child due to mother's poor health. Upper middle-class. Author.



Gower, George Leveson, *Years of Content, 1858-1886*, (London, 1940); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/58252>. 1858-1951, born in grew up in London. Only child due to death of mother when he was three days old; brought up by father and other relatives. Upper-class. Politician and private secretary.

Greenly, Edward, *A Hand Through Time: Memories – Romantic and Geological; Studies in the Arts and Religion; and the grounds of Confidence in Immortality, Vol. 1*, (London, 1938); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37485>. 1861-1951, born and grew up in Bristol. Upper middle-class. Geologist.

Haig Thomas, Margaret (Viscountess Rhondda), *This Was My World*, (London, 1933), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36479>. 1883-1958, born and grew up in Bayswater, London. Upper middle-class. Feminist and magazine proprietor.

Harley, Sir Stanley, P. Thompson, *Family Life and Work Experience before 1918, Middle and Upper-class Families in the Early 20th Century, 1870-1977* [computer file]. 2nd Edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], May 2008. SN: 5404, Interview 2053. 1905-1979, born and grew up in Coventry. Only child due to his mother's advanced age. Lower middle-class. Civil engineer.

Haskell, Arnold L., *In His True Centre*, (London, 1951); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31210>. 1903-1980, born and grew up in London. Upper middle-class. Ballet critic.

Haslam, Bob (Robert), *An Industrial Cocktail*, (London, 2003); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/77393>. 1923-2002, born and grew up in Bolton. Lower middle-class. Industrialist.

Hattersley, Roy, *A Yorkshire Boyhood*, (Oxford, 1984). 1932-, born and grew up in Sheffield. Lower middle-class. Politician.

Hawker, Beatrice, *Look Back In Love*, (London, 1958). 1910-??, born and grew up in Somerset. Lower working-class. Methodist preacher.

Hellerman, Rose, interviewed by Siobhan Logue, January 1999, *Millennium Memory Bank*, C900/04562, © BBC. 1925-2015, birth name Rose Barlow, born and grew up in Cooper's Hill, Gloucestershire. No explanation given for only-childhood, but may be because her father suffered from tuberculosis. Lower working-class. Bed-and-breakfast proprietor.

Hill, Joyce, interviewed by James Dearling, September 1998, *Mass Conservatism: An Oral History of the Conservative Party*, C895/02/01-03, © The British Library. 1928-??, birth name Joyce Lee, born in Exeter; also lived in India, London, and Manchester as a child. Upper middle-class. Conservative councillor.

Hobson, Harold, *Indirect Journey*, (London, 1978); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/51130>. 1904-1992, born and grew up in Thorpe Hesley, near Rotherham, Yorkshire. Only child due to mother's miscarriage caused by shock when Hobson contracted polio at the age of eight; this illness caused lifelong paralysis in his right leg. Lower middle-class. Theatre critic.

Insley, Morag, interviewed by Margot Jefferys, June 1991, *Oral History of Geriatrics as a Medical Specialty*, C512/36/01-02, © The British Library. 1924-, birth name not specified, born in Edinburgh but grew up in Dornock, Sutherland. Upper middle-class. Medical practitioner.

Jenkins, Roy, *A Life at the Centre*, (London, 1991); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/88739>. 1920-2003, born and grew up in Abersychan, Monmouthshire. Only child due to parents having stillborn son five years previously, several miscarriages, and parents' age. Upper working-class. Politician and author.

Joad, Cyril Edwin Mitchinson, *The Book of Joad: a belligerent autobiography*, (London, 1935); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34193>. 1891-1953, born in Durham; also lived in Southampton as a child. Upper middle-class. Senior civil servant and socialist philosopher.

'King of the Norfolk Poachers', *I Walked By Night*, (Suffolk, 1935). c. 1860-??, born and grew up in rural Norfolk. Lower working-class. No defining occupation.

Kirkup, James, *The Only Child*, (London, 1957); *Sorrows, Passions and Alarms*, (London, 1959); *I, Of All People*, (London, 1988); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/101917>. 1918-2009, born and grew up in South Shields, Tyne and Wear. Lower working-class. Poet.

Kyle, (John) Keith, *Reporting The World*, (London, 2009); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/98596>. 1925-2009, born and grew up in Iwerme Minster, Dorset. Only child because parents could not afford to educate more than one son; lower middle-class. Journalist, broadcaster, and historian.

Lancaster, Osbert, *All Done From Memory*, (London, 1953); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39836>. 1908-1986, born and grew up in London. No explanation for only-childhood given, but father died in the First World War when he was eight. Upper middle-class. Cartoonist and designer.

Laurenson, Mrs, P. Thompson and T. Lummis, *Family life and work experience before 1918, 1870-1973* [computer file], 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], May 2009, SN: 2000, Interview 159. 1890-??, no birth or first name specified, born and grew up in the Shetland Islands. Unsure of class due to nature of the locality. Teacher.

Leach, Bernard, *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits, and Essays*, (London, 1978); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31342>. 1887-1979, born to English parents in Hong Kong; also lived in Kyoto and Singapore before being sent to England aged ten. Only child due to mother dying in childbirth; father remarried when he was four. Upper middle-class. Potter and writer.

Leakey, Mary, *Disclosing The Past*, (London, 1984); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/56023>. 1913-1996, birth name Mary Nicol. Born in London, but had a peripatetic childhood due to her father's work as an artist; father died when she was thirteen, at which point she and her mother settled back in London. Unsure of class for these reasons. Archaeologist and paleoanthropologist.

Lee, Janet, interviewed by Helen Hampson, November 1998, *Millennium Memory Bank*, C900/09036, © BBC. 1936-??, birth name not specified, born and grew up in Leicester. No explanation given for only-childhood, but mother died from cancer when she was 14; father remarried when she was 15. Lower working-class. Housewife.

Leslie, Henrietta, *More Ha'pence Than Kicks*, (London, 1943); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/71774>. 1884-1946, birth name Henrietta Raphael, born and grew up in London. Only child possibly due to death of father when she was six. Upper middle-class. Writer.

Levey, Michael, *The Chapel is on Fire: Recollections of Growing Up*, (London, 2001); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/100642>. 1927-2008, born in Wimbledon, London; family evacuated to Harrogate, Yorkshire, during the Second World War. Lower middle-class. Art historian and gallery director.

Lewis, Cecil, *Never Look Back*, (London, 1974); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65198>. 1898-1997, born and grew up in London. No explanation for only-childhood given, but parents divorced when he was a teenager. Upper middle-class. Airman and television broadcaster.

Lomas, David, interviewed by Dylan Roys, January 1999, *Millennium Memory Bank*, C900/09596, © BBC. 1936-??, born and grew up in Birmingham. No explanation for only-childhood given, but did not see his father between the ages of five and ten due to the Second World War. Unsure of class for this reason. RAF pilot and local councillor.

Longhurst, Henry, *My Life and Soft Times*, (London, 1983); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31375>. 1909-1978, born and grew up in Bromham, Bedfordshire. Lower middle-class. Golf journalist and television broadcaster.

Macara, Charles Wright, *Recollections*, (London, 1921); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34662>. 1845-1929, born and grew up in Fife, Scotland. Upper middle-class. Cotton spinner.

Machen, Arthur, *Far Off Things*, (London, 1922); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37711>. 1863-1947, born and grew up in Ghent, Wales. Lower middle-class. Author.

Mallinson, Anthony, interviewed by Katherine Thompson, 1993, *NLSC: City Lives*, C409/089, © The British Library. 1923-??, born and grew up in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk. Upper middle-class. Lawyer.

Matthews, Denis, *In Pursuit of Music*, (London, 1966); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39910>. 1919-1988, born and grew up in Coventry. No explanation given for only-childhood, but father committed suicide when he was 12. Upper middle-class. Pianist and composer.

MacArthur, Brian, interviewed by Louise Brodie, March 2007, *Oral History of the British Press*, C638/11, © The British Library. 1940-, born in Chelmsford, Essex; also lived in Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, from the age of 13. Lower middle-class. Journalist.

Manning, Dorothy, interviewed by Simon Evans, January 1999, *Millennium Memory Bank*, C900/07551, © BBC. 1936-??, born and grew up (with the exception of six months in Wales during the Second World War) on the Isle of Sheppey, Kent. Lower middle-class. Teacher.

Mayes, Peter, interviewed by Cos Michael, December 2005-March 2006, *Food: From Source To Salespoint*, C821/173, © The British Library. 1940-, born and grew up in Brightlingsea, Essex; also lived in Manchester when his father was posted there for a period during the Second World War. Lower middle-class. Buyer for food companies.

McNicoll, Carol, interviewed by Frances Cornford, July-September 2011, *NLSC: Crafts Lives*, C960/109, © The British Library. 1943-, born and grew up in Birmingham. Lower middle-class. Ceramic artist.

McLean, Ruari, *True To Type*, (London, 2000); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/97785>. 1917-2006, born in Scotland but mostly grew up in Oxford. Only child due to subsequent miscarriage. Lower middle-class. Typographer and author.

Middleton, Bernard, interviewed by Hawksmoor Hughes, November 2007, *NLSC: Crafts Lives*, C960/81, © The British Library. 1924-, born and grew up in East Dulwich, London until the age of 13, when his family moved to Kenton, London. Only child due to mother having poor health for three months after his birth; lower middle-class. Bookbinder.

Mitchell, Leslie, *Leslie Mitchell Reporting...: An Autobiography*, (London, 1981); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31449>. 1905-1985, born in Edinburgh; also lived in Canterbury, Kent, as a child. Possibly an only child due to his parents' separation when he was a young child; for several years he believed his father had died in the war, and he did not see his mother for nearly five years during his childhood, as she was unable to return from a holiday in the United States she took at the beginning of the First World War. Divided his time between two sets of family friends during this period. Later suffered from a bullying stepfather and stepsiblings. Unsure of class for these reasons. Actor and television broadcaster.

Morrison, Victor, interviewed by Jenny Simmons, August-November 2000, *NLSC: Book Trade Lives*, C872/50, © The British Library. 1926-??, born and grew up in Hackney, London; also spent periods of time living with aunt in Braintree, Essex, as a child. No explanation given for only-childhood, but may have been due to mother's rheumatoid arthritis, which was why he was sent to stay with his aunt on occasion. Lower middle-class. Worked in publishing.

Mortimer, John, *Clinging To The Wreckage*, (London, 1982); <http://www.odnb.com/view/article/100790>. 1923-2009, born and grew up in Hampstead, London. Upper middle-class. Barrister and author.

Mullin, James, *The Story of a Toiler's Life*, (London, 1921). 1846-1920, born and grew up in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland. Only child due to death of father when he was very young. Lower working-class. Medical practitioner and poet.

Murdoch, (Jean) Iris, interviewed by Richard Wollheim, July 1991, *Richard Wollheim Recordings*, C1021/07/01, © The British Library; <http://www.odnb.com/view/article/71228>. 1919-1999, born in Dublin; also lived in Hammersmith and Chiswick, London, as a child. Lower middle-class. Author.

Neilson, Julia, *This For Rememberance*, (London, 1940). 1868-1957, born and grew up in London. Only child due to separation of parents at a young age. Unsure of class for this reason; mother a landlady and father a jeweller. Actor and theatre manager.

Nelson, James, *No More Walls*, (London, 1978). c. 1936-??, pseudonymous, born and grew up in Elephant and Castle, London. No explanation for only-childhood given, but parents got along badly and father was away fighting in World War II from 1941-4. Lower working-class. Ex-convict and campaigner. Also known as Mick the Punk; see <http://mickthepunk.blogspot.co.uk/>.

Nicholson, Norman, *Wednesday Early Closing*, (London, 1975); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39840>. 1914-1987, born and grew up in Millom, Cumberland. Only child due to death of sibling before he was born; mother died when he was five; grandmother, and later stepmother, assisted his father in bringing him up. Lower middle-class. Poet.



Oakley, Ann, *Taking It Like A Woman*, (London, 1984); *Man and Wife*, (London, 1966); interviewed by Margaretta Jolly, May 2012, *Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project*, C1420/5, © The British Library. 1944-, birth name Ann Titmuss, born and grew up in Chiswick, Middlesex. Only child due to parents' advanced age. Upper middle-class. Sociologist.

Ogden, Hilda, P. Thompson and T. Lummis, *Family life and work experience before 1918, 1870-1973* [computer file], 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], May 2009, SN: 2000, Interview 128. 1902-??, birth name not specified, born and grew up in Keighley, Yorkshire. Upper working-class. Housewife.

Oman, Charles, *Memories of Victorian Oxford*, (London 1941); <http://www.odnb.com/view/article/35312>. 1860-1946, born in India but moved to London soon after his birth, then grew up in Cheltenham from the age of six. Upper middle-class. Historian.

Page, Ethel M., 'No Green Pastures I', *East London Papers*, 9:1 (1966), pp. 27-40; 'No Green Pastures II', *East London Papers*, 9:2 (1966), pp. 84-100. Late 1890s-??, birth name Ethel Blow, born and grew up in Poplar, London. Lower working-class. Occupation unknown.

Parker, Boris, interviewed by Jo Hollis, November 1998, *Millennium Memory Bank*, C900/09033, © BBC. 1926-??, born and grew up in Birmingham. Lower middle-class. Accountant.

Pascod, John, interviewed by Lorna Baker, February 1999, *Millennium Memory Bank*, C900/00580, © BBC. 1944-??, born and grew up in Oldham, Greater Manchester. Lower middle-class. Vicar.

Peters, James, interviewed by Rachel Cutler, October 1996, *An Oral History of British Athletics*, C790/01, © The British Library. 1918-1999, born in Hackney, London; also lived in Bow, London, and Barking, London, as a child. Unsure of class as parents' occupations not specified. Long-distance runner and optician.

Petrie, William Matthew Flinders, *Seventy Years in Archaeology*, (London, 1932); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35496>. 1853-1942, born and grew up in Charlton, London. Upper middle-class. Archaeologist.

Piper, Myfanwy, interviewed by Margaret Garlake, November 1994-March 1995, *NLSC: Artists' Lives*, C466/25, © The British Library. 1911-1997, birth name Mary Myfanwy Evans, born and grew up in London. Only child because her mother was rhesus negative, meaning that subsequent children would be unlikely to survive; lower middle-class. Art critic and opera librettist.

Pool, Lilian, P. Thompson and T. Lummis, *Family life and work experience before 1918, 1870-1973* [computer file], 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], May 2009, SN: 2000, Interview 431. 1902-??, born in Falmouth, Cornwall, but grew up in nearby Camborne. Lower middle-class. Teacher.

Price, Nancy, *Into An Hour-Glass*, (London, 1953); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40479>. 1880-1970; birth name Lilian Price, born and grew up in Kinver, Staffordshire. Only child due to death of five-year-old sister when Nancy was less than a year old. Upper-class. Actor, author, and theatre director.

Pudney, John, *Thank Goodness For Cake*, (London, 1978); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31573>. 1909-1977, born and grew up in Langleigh, Buckinghamshire. No explanation given for only-childhood, but mother was in her 40s when Pudney was born, and died when he was around 13. Upper middle-class. Poet and journalist.

Pugh, Rees, P. Thompson and T. Lummis, *Family life and work experience before 1918, 1870-1973* [computer file], 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], May 2009, SN: 2000, Interview 130. 1901-??, born and grew up in Ffestinog, Wales. Upper working-class. Foreman for a road contractor.

Raine, Kathleen, *Autobiographies*, (London, 1991); <http://www.odnb.com/view/article/92258>. 1908-2003, born in Ilford, Essex; also lived in Bavington, Northumberland, with her mother's cousin during World War I. Upper middle-class. Poet and literary scholar.

Robertson, Walford Graham, *Time Was*, (London, 1931); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/51133>. 1886-1948, born and grew up on London. Only child because mother wanted no more children, having had to care for her numerous siblings after her mother's death when she was a teenager. Upper middle-class. Painter and theatre designer.

Robinson, Jo, interviewed by Polly Russell, November 2011-December 2012, *Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project*, C1420/43, © The British Library. 1942-??, born and grew up in Blackpool, Lancashire. Only child due to parents' poor relationship and mother's advanced age. Lower middle-class. Worked variously as an artist, activist, midwife, and teacher.

Rook, Jean, *The Cowardly Lioness*, (London, 1989); <http://www.odnb.com/view/article/49945>. 1931-1991, born in Hull; also lived in York for four years as a child, during World War II. Only child because subsequent pregnancies would have put mother's life in danger. Lower middle-class. Journalist.

Russell, Audrey, *A Certain Voice*, (Bolton, 1984); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40697>. 1906-1989; birth name Muriel Audrey Russell, born and grew up in Dublin. Upper middle-class. Radio broadcaster.

Russell, Hastings William Sackville, *The Years of Transition*, (London, 1949); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/58844>. 1888-1953, born in Kirkcudbridshire, Scotland and divided childhood between family estates in Bedfordshire, South Devon, and Galloway. Upper-class. Social philanthropist.

Rutherford, Margaret, *An Autobiography as told to Gwen Robyns*, (London, 1972); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31642>. 1892-1972, born in Balham, London; lived in India until she was three, and then Wimbledon, London, with her aunt following the death of her mother; her father died shortly after this. Only child due to being orphaned. Unsure of class for this reason. Actress.

Schofield, Peter, interviewed by James Dearling, August 1998, *Mass Conservatism: An Oral History of the Conservative Party*, C895/05/01-03, © The British Library. 1944-, born and grew up in Manchester. Only child due to the death of his mother when he was six weeks old; father remarried a year later and he regarded his stepmother as a mother. Lower middle-class. Salesman and Conservative Party member.

Scholderer, Victor, *Reminiscences*, (Amsterdam, 1970); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/54057>. 1880-1971, born and grew up in Putney, London. Unsure of class; father a portrait-painter. Bibliographer.

Smith, Dodie, *Look Back With Love*, (London, 1974); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40481>. 1896-1990, birth name Dorothy Smith, born in Whitefield, Lancashire, but mostly grew up in Old Trafford, Manchester. Only child due to death of her father when she was 18 months old; subsequently lived with mother and extended family. Unsure of class for this reason. Author.

Southern, Amelia, P. Thompson and T. Lummis, *Family life and work experience before 1918, 1870-1973* [computer file], 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], May 2009, SN: 2000, Interview 115. 1887-??, born and grew up in Liverpool. Only child due as a younger sister was stillborn after her mother had a fright, and her father did not wish to risk another pregnancy. Upper working-class. Dressmaker.

Stewart, John Innes Mackintosh, *Myself and Michael Innes*, (London, 1987); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/55756>. 1906-1994, born and grew up in Edinburgh. Upper middle-class. Literary scholar and novelist.

Stupples, Janet, interviewed by Jane Danser, 1998, *Millennium Memory Bank*, C900/18074, © BBC. 1938-, born and grew up in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. Only child due to parents' advanced age. Lower middle-class. Physiotherapist.



Tanner, Jack, interviewed by Esella Hawkey, November 1998, *Millennium Memory Bank*, C900/03518, © BBC. 1918-??, born and grew up in Kingsbridge, Devon. Lower middle-class. Outfitter.

Tarling, Doris, P. Thompson and T. Lummis, *Family life and work experience before 1918, 1870-1973* [computer file], 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], May 2009, SN: 2000, Interview 64. 1903-??, birth name unspecified, born and grew up in North London. Lower middle-class. Secretary.

Thomas, Irene, *The Bandsman's Daughter*, (London, 1979); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/75815>. 1920-2001, birth name Irene Ready, born and grew up in Feltham, Middlesex. Upper working-class. Quiz panellist and radio personality.

Thomas Ellis, Alice, *A Welsh Childhood*, (London, 1990); <http://www.odnb.com/view/article/97587>. 1932-2005, birth name Anne Margaret Lindholm, born in Liverpool; also lived in Penmaenmawr, North Wales. Upper working-class. Publisher and novelist.

Thwaite, Anthony, interviewed by Sarah O'Reilly, August-December 2008, *Authors' Lives*, C1276/15, © The British Library. 1930-, born in Chester, but grew up in Leeds, Sheffield, America (where he was evacuated to his aunt, uncle, and two cousins for four years during the Second World War) and Leicester. Only child due to a difficult birth, which resulted in at least five subsequent miscarriages. Upper middle-class. Poet.

Trethowan, Ian, *Split Screen*, (London, 1984); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40167>. 1922-1990, born and grew up in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. Lower middle-class. Journalist and broadcaster.

Tulloch, Alice, P. Thompson and T. Lummis, *Family life and work experience before 1918, 1870-1973* [computer file], 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], May 2009, SN: 2000, Interview 80. 1894-??, birth name unspecified, born in Scotland, but lived in Bootle (Merseyside), Southampton, and America before settling in Bootle from the age of four. Lower middle-class. Book-keeper.

Urquhart, Elsie, interviewed by Esella Hawkey, December 1998, *Millennium Memory Bank*, C900/03529, © BBC. 1899-??, birth name unspecified, born and grew up in Southampton. Upper working-class. Tailor.

Ustinov, Peter, *Dear Me*, (London, 1977); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/93510>. 1921-2004, born and grew up in London. Upper middle-class. Playwright and actor.

Waite, Jessamy, March 1994, *National Life Story Awards 1994*, C642/122/1-2, © The British Library. 1912-2001, birth name unspecified, born and grew up in London. Only child due to death of sibling before she was born; additionally, there were 26 years between her parents and they had a poor relationship. Upper middle-class. Housewife.

Walker, Audrey, interviewed by Hawksmoor Hughes, September 2004, *NLSC: Crafts Lives*, C960/30, © The British Library. 1928-, born and grew up in Workington, West Cumberland. Only child due to older sibling being stillborn. Upper working-class. Textile artist.

Walker, Marjorie, interviewed by Cathy Courtney, December 2001-March 2003, *NLSC: Food: From Source to Salespoint*, C821/81/01-10, © The British Library. 1930-??, born and grew up in Manchester. Only child due to two siblings being stillborn, one before and one after her birth. Upper working-class. Factory worker.

Webster, Patricia, interviewed by James Dearling, September 1998, *Mass Conservatism: An Oral History of the Conservative Party*, C895/07, © The British Library. 1923-??, birth name Patricia Press, born and grew up in Belfast. Lower middle-class. Housewife and Conservative Party member.

White, Antonia, *As Once In May*, (London, 1983); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/38276>. 1899-1980, birth name Eirene Botting, born and grew up in Kensington, London. Only child due to her mother's health. Upper middle-class. Writer and editor.

Wightman, (An)Drew, interviewed by Rorie Fulton, November 2002, *An Oral History of the Post Office*, C1007/77/01-04, © The British Library. 1929-??, born and grew up in Edinburgh. No explanation given for only-childhood, but may have been due to parents' age. Civil Servant.

Williamson, John, *Dangerous Scot: The Life and Work of an American "Undesirable"*, (New York, 1969). 1903-1974, born and lived in Glasgow until he was ten, when he and his mother emigrated to America. Only child due to his father sustaining an injury when Williamson was 18 months old; father was permanently hospitalised when he was three-and-a-half, and died when he was eight. Lower working-class. Communist leader.

Willis, Vi, interviewed John Casson, 1991, *Labour Oral History Project*, C609/52/01-02, © The British Library. 1917-??, birth name not specified, born in Little Ilford, London. Lower working-class. Labour councillor.

Wolfenden, John, *Turning Points*, (London, 1976); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31852>. 1906-1985, born and lived in Swindon until he was five, when his family moved to Wakefield, Yorkshire. Only child due to loss of a younger sibling. Lower middle-class. Educationist and public servant.

Wright, Anthony Edgar Garside, *Personal Tapestry*, (London, 2008); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/102784>. 1927-2010, also known as

Antony Grey, born in Cheshire; also lived in Sheffield as a child. Only child due to his mother's health; two subsequent pregnancies had to be medically terminated. Lower middle-class. Gay rights campaigner.

Wood, Georgie, *I Had To Be "Wee"*, (London, 1947). 1894-1979, born and grew up in Jarrow-on-Tyne, Tyne and Wear. Unsure of class as parents divorced when he was eight; father a shop proprietor. Actor and Comedian.

Wood, Henry Joseph, *My Life of Music*, (London, 1938); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37001>. 1869-1944, born and grew up in London. Lower middle-class. Conductor.

Wood, Thomas, *True Thomas*, (London, 1936); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37005>. 1892-1950, born and grew up in Lancashire, as well as at sea with his mariner father. Unsure of class. Composer.

### Non-Only Children

Allaway, John, 'Vaughan Professor of Education, and Head of Department of Adult Education, University of Leicester', in Goldman, Ronald (ed.), *Breakthrough: Autobiographical Accounts of Some Socially Disadvantaged Children*, (London, 1968), pp. 1-18. 1902-1983, born and grew up in Sheffield. Eldest of four children. Lower working-class. Academic.

Andrews, Julie, *Home: A Memoir of my Early Years*, (London, 2008). 1935-, birth name Julia Wells, born in Walton-on-Thames, Surrey; also lived in London, Kent, and elsewhere in Surrey as a child. Three younger half-brothers (one of whom she believed to be her full brother until her late teens, when she found out the man she thought of as her father was not her natural father) and a half-sister; parents split up when she was five. Unsure of class; non-resident 'father' a teacher and mother a singer. Actor.

Ayres, Gillian, interviewed by Mel Gooding, August 1999-January 2000, *NLSC: Artists' Lives*, C466/1, © The British Library. 1930-, born and grew up in Barnes, Surrey. Two sisters, one eight years older and one ten years older; parents so disappointed that she was not a son that they did not name her for a month, after which time the doctor named her for them. Upper middle-class. Abstract artist.

Baring, (George) Rowland, Earl of Cromer, interviewed by David Phillips, May-October 1990, *NLSC: City Lives*, C409/043, © The British Library. 1918-1991, born in Hitchin, Hertfordshire, but grew up in Marylebone, London. Two older sisters. Upper middle-class. Banker and diplomat.

Basset, Lady Elizabeth, interviewed by Cathy Courtney, November 1998, *NLSC: Artists' Lives*, C466/85, © The British Library. 1908-2000, birth name Elizabeth Legge; presumably born in Buckinghamshire; grew up in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire. One older sister, three younger sisters, and a younger brother. Upper-class. Author and Woman of the Bedchamber to the Queen Mother.

Benney, Gerald, interviewed by Cathy Courtney, March 1990, *NLSC: City Lives*, C409/036, © The British Library. 1930-2008, born in Hull but grew up in London from the age of four. One brother, six years older. Lower middle-class. Goldsmith.

Berman, Brenda, interviewed by Hawksmoor Hughes, April-May 2006, *NLSC: Crafts' Lives*, C960/75, © The British Library. 1936-, birth name Brenda Clark, born and grew up in Luton, Bedfordshire. One sister, three years younger. Lower middle-class. Letterer.

Berry, Shirley, interviewed by Rachel Cutler, January 2002, *An Oral History of British Athletics*, C790/20, © The British Library. 1932-, birth name Shirley Cawley, born and grew up in Croydon, Surrey. Two older brothers and one older sister. Lower middle-class. Long jumper.

Blakemore, John, interviewed by Shirley Read, December 2001, *Oral History of British Photography*, C459/146, © The British Library. 1936-, born in Coventry; lived with his grandparents in Oxfordshire 1940-1944 due to the Second World War and consequently felt closer to them than his parents. One brother, at least nine years younger. Upper working-class. Photographer.

Bondfield, Margaret, *A Life's Work*, (London, 1948); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31955>. 1873-1953, born and grew up in Chard, Somerset, though spent parts of her childhood with relatives in Brighton. Tenth of 11 children; oldest 21 years older than her and died when Bondfield was eight. Upper working-class. Trade unionist, women's campaigner, and politician.

Brightwell, Ann, interviewed by Rachel Cutler, April 2006, *An Oral History of British Athletics*, C790/40, © The British Library. 1942-, birth name Ann Packer, born and grew up in Moulsoford, Berkshire. One brother, four years older, died in a motorcycle accident when he was 18; parents also had a number of miscarriages, a stillborn child, and a child who died at the age of three. Lower middle-class. Sprinter, hurdler, long jumper, and PE teacher.

Brown, Ralph, interviewed by Gillian Whiteley, September 1999-June 2000, *NLSC: Artists' Lives*, C466/92, © The British Library. 1928-2013, born and grew up in Leeds. Two brothers, five and nine years older than him; he was an 'afterthought'. Upper working-class. Sculptor.

Callaghan, (Leonard) James, *Time and Chance*, (London, 1987); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/94837>. 1912-2005, birth name Leonard James Callaghan, born and grew up in Portsmouth. One sister, eight years older. Upper working-class. Politician, former prime minister.

Canadine, Sybil, interviewed by Rebecca Abrams, February 1990, *NLSC: General*, C464/005, © The British Library. 1897-??, born in Hythe, Kent, but grew up in Camberwell, London, from the age of three. One brother, 18 months older. Upper-class. Swimmer and PE teacher.

Castle, Barbara, *Fighting All The Way*, (London, 2003); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/76877>. 1910-2002, birth name Barbara Betts, born in Chesterfield, Derbyshire; also lived in Pontefract and Bradford, Yorkshire. Youngest of three children. Lower middle-class. Politician.

Castle, John, interviewed by Cathy Courtney, November-December 1989, *NLSC: City Lives*, C409/030, © The British Library. 1911-??, born in South Woodford, London, but grew up in Woodford Green, London, from the age of one. One elder brother and one younger brother. Lower middle-class. Banker.

Clarke, Christopher, interviewed by Ray Davies, September-November 1991, *NLSC: City Lives*, C409/059, © The British Library. 1907-??, born in Tavistock, Devon, but grew up in Sunderland. Fourth of six children. Upper middle-class. Lawyer.

Clegg, Tessa, interviewed by Frances Cornford, January-April 2011, *NLSC: Crafts' Lives*, 960/101, © The British Library. 1946-, birth name Elizabeth Clegg; born in London; also lived in Sussex and Cornwall as a child. One brother, two years older, and one sister, two years younger; parents divorced when she was nine; virtually lost contact with her father, who emigrated to Canada; mother remarried when she was 15, resulting in three 'nightmare' stepsiblings and two further half-brothers. Upper middle-class. Glass artist.

Collingwood, Peter, interviewed by Linda Sandino, May-June 2003, *NLSC: Crafts' Lives*, C960/15, © The British Library. 1922-2008, born and grew up in Hampstead, London. One older sister and one younger brother. Upper middle-class. Artist weaver.

Cox, Stephen, interviewed by Denise Hooker, May-November 1995, *NLSC: Artists' Lives*, C466/30, © The British Library. 1946-, born and grew up in Bristol. Three brothers, six, ten, and 12 years older; he 'was the last shot at having a daughter'. Lower middle-class. Sculptor.

Critchley, Julian, *A Bag of Boiled Sweets*, (London, 1994); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/74606>. 1930-2002, born in Islington, London; also lived in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, as a child. Elder of two sons. Upper middle-class. Politician.



Davies, David, interviewed by Alan Dein, July 1991, *NLSC: Lives in Steel*, C532/001, © The British Library. 1909-??, born in Ebbw Vale, Gwent, Wales; also lived in Abergavenny, Monmouthshire. Three older sisters; two further sisters and a brother died before he was born. Mother died in an accident when he was 18 months old, and he was principally brought up by his grandmother until she died when he was eight; he subsequently lived with his aunt in Abergavenny for two or three years before returning to the family home. Upper working-class. Steel worker.

Dayus, Kathleen, *Her People*, (London, 1982); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/105125>. 1903-2003, birth name Kathleen Greenhill, born and grew up in Birmingham. Fifth of seven surviving children, six others did not survive to adulthood. Lower working-class. Jewellery enameller and autobiographer.

Disley, Sylvia, interviewed by Rachel Cutler, January 2000, *An Oral History of British Athletics*, C790/15, © The British Library. 1929-, birth name Sylvia Cheeseman, born and grew up in Kew until the age of ten, when she moved to West London. One sister, four years older, and one brother, two years younger; parents separated when she was a baby and her mother brought her up. Lower middle-class. Sprinter.

Ellis, Havelock, *My Life*, (London, 1940); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33009>. 1859-1939, born and grew up in Croydon, Surrey. Eldest of five children. Upper middle-class. Writer and sexologist.

Foley, Alice, *A Bolton Childhood*, (Manchester, 1973); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/71614>. 1891-1974, born and grew up in Bolton. Youngest of six children. Lower working-class. Trade unionist.

Goldman, Ronald, 'Principal of Didsbury College of Education, Manchester,' in Goldman, Ronald (ed.), *Breakthrough: Autobiographical Accounts of the Education of Some Socially Disadvantaged Children*, (London, 1968), pp. 73-89. 1922-??, second of three sons, parents split up when he was nine and the children ended up in separate children's homes for two months. Upper working-class. College principal.

Greenhill, (Christine) Elizabeth, interviewed by Hawksmoor Hughes, August-September 2004, *NLSC: Crafts' Lives*, C960/31, © The British Library. 1907-2006, born in Paris but grew up in Kensington, London, from the age of two. One older brother and one older sister; brother died of a throat infection at the age of 13. Upper middle-class. Bookbinder.

Gregory, Lady Augusta, *Seventy Years: Being the Autobiography of Lady Gregory*, (London, 1974); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33554>. 1852-1932, née Persse, born and grew up in County Galway. Twelfth of 16 children. Upper-class. Playwright, folklorist, and literary patron.

Hammerton, John, *Books and Myself*, (London, 1944); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37505>. 1871-1949, born in Alexandria, Dunbartonshire; also lived in Manchester and Glasgow as a child. One older half-sister from father's first marriage and one younger sister; father died when he was three. Lower working-class. Author and editor of reference works.

Hamnett, Nina, *Laughing Torso*, (London, 1932); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/57344>. 1890-1956, born in Tenby, Wales; also lived in York and Belfast for periods as a child. Eldest of four children. Upper middle-class. Painter and illustrator.

Hastings, Sir Patrick, *The Autobiography of Sir Patrick Hastings*, (London, 1948); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33756>. 1880-1952, born and grew up in London. Younger of two children; difficult to determine class due to family's swinging fortunes. Lawyer.

Heffer, Eric, *Never a Yes Man*, (London, 1991); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/49773>. 1922-1991, born and grew up in Hertford. One brother. Lower working-class. Politician.

Hichens, Robert, *Yesterday*, (London, 1947); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33851>. 1864-1950, born and grew up in Speldhurst, Kent, moved to Bristol aged 15. Eldest of five children. Upper middle-class. Writer.

Howard, Constance, interviewed by Tanya Harrod, July 1999, *NLSC: Crafts Lives*, C960/03, © The British Library. 1910-2000, born and grew up in Northampton. Two younger sisters. Lower middle-class. Textile artist, writer, and teacher.

Lumley, Joanna, *No Room For Secrets*, (London, 2004). 1946-, born in Kashmir and grew up in various places in England from the age of one. One sister, two years older. Upper middle-class. Actor.

Markham, Violet, *Return Passage*, (Oxford, 1953); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34881>. 1872-1959, born and grew up in Chesterfield, Derbyshire. Youngest of five children; father died when she was 15. Upper middle-class. Public servant.

Mirren, Helen, *In The Frame*, (London, 2007). 1945-, born in Chiswick, Essex, also lived in Southend-on-Sea, Essex as a child. Second of three children; one older sister and one younger brother. Upper working-class. Actor.

Mitchell, Jane, 'Lecturer in Classics, University of Reading', in Goldman, Ronald (ed.), *Breakthrough: Autobiographical Accounts of the Education of some Socially Disadvantaged Children*, (London, 1968), pp. 124-41. 1934-??, born and grew up in Glasgow. One half-brother from her father's first marriage, thirteen years older. Upper working-class. Academic.

Monsarrat, Nicholas, *Life is a Four-Letter Word*, (London, 1966); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31457>. 1910-1979, born and grew up in Liverpool. Fourth of five children, one of whom died in an accident at the age of five, when Monsarrat was three. Upper middle-class. Writer.

Muir, Frank, *A Kentish Lad*, (London, 1997); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/69233>. 1920-1998, born in Ramsgate, Kent; also lived in Leyton, London, as a child. Youngest of two sons; father died when he was 14. Lower middle-class. Writer and broadcaster.

Neave, Julius, interviewed by David Phillips, December 1989-January 1990, *NLSC: City Lives*, C409/034, © The British Library. 1919-2008, born near Ingatestone, Essex; grew up in Colchester, Essex, from the age of seven. One older sister and one older brother. Upper middle-class. Insurance executive.

Olivier, Edith, *Without Knowing Mr. Walkley*, (London, 1938); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/38311>. 1872-1948, born and grew up in Wilton, Wiltshire. Eighth of ten children. Upper middle-class. Writer.

Pankhurst, Emmeline, *My Own Story*, (London, 1914); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35376>. 1858-1928, birth name Emmeline Goulden, born and grew up in Hulme, Lancashire. One of ten children. Upper middle-class. Suffragette leader.

Pannett, Juliet, interviewed by Janet Grenier, October 1991-February 1992, *NLSC: Artists' Lives*, C466/09, © The British Library. 1911-2005, born in Hove, Sussex; also lived in Ealing, London, as a child. Two older brothers and one older sister, one younger brother and one younger sister; another older sister died of meningitis before she was born. Unsure of class due to father's lack of profession and squandering of her mother's inheritance, and their separation when Pannett was 14; she stayed in touch with her father but her siblings did not. Portrait painter.

Phipson, John, interviewed by Judy Slinn, December 1991-June 1992, *NLSC: City Lives*, C409/104, © The British Library. 1940-, birth name John Smith, born in Sussex; also lived in Essex and London as a child. One brother, three and a half years younger; one specified reason his parents stopped at two sons was that his father had tunnel vision, transmitted through girls. Upper middle-class. Lawyer.

Pomeroy, Beryl, interviewed by Cathy Courtney, April 1990, *NLSC: City Lives*, C409/039, © The British Library. 1922-2005, born and grew up in Cranfield, Middlesex. One brother, three years older. Lower middle-class. Brother lived with grandparents until he was eight and she was five because mother had was ill after he was born. Fine art print dealer and former managing director of a printing works.



Rees, Mavis, interviewed by Judy Slinn, February 1993, *NLSC: City Lives*, C409/091, © The British Library. 1943-, born and grew up in Addington, Surrey. One sister, five years older. Lower middle-class. Personnel manager.

Rogers, Frederick, *Labour, Life and Literature*, (Brighton, 1914); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37909>. 1846-1915, born and grew up in Whitechapel. Eldest of six children, five of whom survived infancy. Upper working-class. Bookbinder and trade unionist.

Sitwell, Edith, *Taken Care Of*, (London, 1965); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36113>. 1887-1964, born in Scarborough. Eldest of three children. Upper-class. Poet and biographer.

Snowden, Philip, *An Autobiography: Volume One, 1864-1919*, (London, 1934); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36181>. 1864-1937, born and grew up near Cowling, Yorkshire. Youngest of three children. Lower working-class. Politician.

Stott, Richard, *Dogs and Lampposts*, London, 2007); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/98972>. 1943-2007, born and grew up in Oxford. Youngest of three children, parents separated when he was very young. Unsure of class due to absence of engineer father; mother let out rooms. Journalist and newspaper editor.

Southgate, Walter, *That's the Way It Was: A Working Class Autobiography, 1890-1950*, (Surrey, 1982); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/101184>. 1890-1986, born and grew up in Hackney. One of seven children, three of whom died 'young'. Lower working-class. Political activist and co-founder of the National Museum of Labour History.

Summerskill, Edith, *A Woman's World*, (London, 1967); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31734>. 1901-1980, born in Bloomsbury, London; also lived elsewhere in London, and near Margate, Kent, as a child. Youngest of three children. Upper middle-class. Medical practitioner and politician.

Wondrausch, Mary, interviewed by Hawksmoor Hughes, September-October 2007, *NLSC: Crafts' Lives*, C960/77, © The British Library. 1923-, birth name Mary Lambert, born and grew up in Battersea, London. One brother, seven years older; father died when she was 13 and the family had to move house. Upper middle-class. Potter.

Woolf, Leonard, *Sowing: An Autobiography of the Years 1880-1904*, (London, 1960) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/370199>. 1880-1969, born and grew up in Kensington, London. Third of ten children, nine of whom survived infancy, father died when he was 11. Upper middle-class. Author and publisher.