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Parents Displaying Family Consumption in Ireland

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The article considers qualitative data collected from 78 parents in an Irish study on the commercialisation and sexualisation of children. The article makes a distinctive contribution in showing that the framework of family display (Finch, 2007) can be productively applied to the entire field of family consumption. It shows that consumption narratives can be viewed as a tool used to display family; that is showing how family is done, to internal family members and to outsiders. While family display has been more often applied empirically with non-conventional families, our data re-asserts its relevance for all families. Our application of the family display framework shows that middle class parenting ideals are stretched and can become unstuck when displayed by middle class parents, the constituency most associated with their production and propagation.

Key Words: Family Practices; Parenting; Displaying Family; Consumption.

Introduction

David Morgan's (1996) approach to family studies, identified as 'family practices', advocated a historically and culturally located but more fluid understanding of the multitude of ways in which people *do* family. Janet Finch (2007) extended the family practices approach to take account of family *display* activities to emphasise how family life must not only be done but also be seen to be done or displayed. Family display productively utilised in a variety of subfields in family studies, has received less attention in research on family consumption. This article seeks to address this deficit. It shows the relevance of family display (Finch, 2007) to the substantive area of family consumption, as reported by parents in Ireland, to uncover a complicated interaction between display and the middle class norms of proper parenting and family life. Firstly, Finch's (2007) family display framework is elaborated and then the literature on family consumption is reviewed. After describing the study methodology on which the article is based, findings from the data analysis are presented and discussed. Family display has been more often applied empirically with non-conventional or diverse families (Harman and Cappellini, 2015) but our data reasserts its relevance for all families, low-income, working class and middle class families. The article also underlines the value of seeing family consumption narratives as an important displaying tool that can assist in opening up for analysis, social class, gender and generational politics of family life and relations.

Family Display as a Conceptual Resource

It is through family members' social action and interaction within certain social conditions and discursive resources, that family practices are constituted. Finch (2007) emphasised that it is by showing or displaying the 'doing' of family to multiple audiences; family members themselves and significant others, that family practices can be recognised and validated. In the context of increasing diversity in family makeup and fluidity of relationships, Finch (2007) viewed family display as the means by which families have their activities recognised and legitimated as family- like, by family members and those with whom they come into contact. She valued querying why family display is

done in families, how it is it being done and to whom. Finch's (2007) call to develop and use the concept, primarily informed studies of non-conventional families and families challenging or extending normative family practices or experiencing specific difficulties. These include lesbian parent couples and donor conceived children (Nordqvist, 2010) adoptive families and kinship networks (MacDonald, 2017), blended families (Lehad et al, 2017), migrant families (Walsh, 2018) transnational mothers (Juozolieūnė and Budginaitė, 2018) and more than two-parent-families (Andersson and Carlström, 2019). Of interest to us, is that Finch (2016) reiterated that family display is relevant for all families, notwithstanding that the need for display to achieve internal and external legitimacy, may be more intense for families at certain times or in particular circumstances or as relationships change or are re-negotiated. Family display's use for studying 'normal' family life and middle class families is demonstrated in studies of eating practices (James and Curtis, 2010), students' home school diaries (Haldar and Røsvik, 2020), intimate fathering (Earley et al, 2019), middle class families' purposeful leisure activity (Harrington, 2014), mothers' healthy foodwork (Parsons, 2016) and their preparation of children's lunch boxes (Harman and Cappellini, 2015). The normative standards and the cultural ideals of family life provide the repositories of resources that families interact with in various ways, to either constrain or enable their displays of doing family 'properly' (Finch, 2007; Heaphy, 2011).

Over time, increasing attention has been given to the intended audience of family display. In Finch's (2007) conception of family display, the audience was primarily those inside rather than outside the family and the audience could also constitute agents of display. However, scholars utilising family display in their research, have argued that external audiences merited attention because displays may be judged successful or unsuccessful in the context of whom or what is accorded privilege and legitimacy outside the family (Heaphy, 2011; Seymour, 2011; Walsh, 2018). Displaying family successfully can be a challenge for unconventional families (Heaphy, 2011) and families also alter how they behave to achieve successful display when they are being observed by different audiences

(Seymour and Walsh, 2013). Walsh (2018) found that some migrant families, for instance, those of European origin with proficiency in English language, could achieve successful family display more easily than others in their host country Britain. Shannon (2019) reported, that not all normative family leisure practices displayed on social networking sites, resulted in the legitimization of non-normative family identities.

While there is increased prevalence and acceptance of diverse family forms in Ireland, the marital family resident in one household, still commands status and respect (Fahey, 2014). There is increased democratization in Irish family relations (Gray et al, 2016). Despite the growth in dual earning households, women undertake the greater share of childcare and housework (Kitchin and Fine-Davis, 2016). Private and public eating practices including birthday and family celebrations are associated with conventional family display and concerted cultivation is identified as a significant feature of middle class Irish family life (Gray et al, 2016). Moral agency, good consumer habits, self-sufficiency, responsibility and resilience are signifiers of Irish middle class cultural identity (Meade and Kiely, 2020). Relevant to this paper, is the recognition that middle class parenting is accorded privilege and cast as moral and respectable, while working class parenting is considered deficient by comparison (Gillies, 2005, 2007; Skeggs, 1997, 2004). However, this does not foreclose the possibility that middle class parents have complicated engagements with the normative standards that have legitimacy for display purposes. We seek to build on existing work in family display, which shows that normative standards do provide essential raw materials out of which display is crafted, but not in seamless ways, thus, revealing display's capacity to test its audience and to stretch the limits of acceptance of conventional family norms. Finch (2007) identified the tools of family display as narratives and visuals (e.g. photographs) and these have been significantly expanded to include also for example, commercial ultrasound scans (Roberts et al., 2015), communication devices and social networking services (Share et. al., 2018; Shannon, 2019). In this paper, family consumption narratives are the tool of family display, used to explore how

parents convey who they are as a family, in the context of an active, reflexive engagement with a repertoire of ideas as to what constitutes good parenting and proper family life.

Family Consumption: A Literature Review

Parenting is frequently constructed as a bulwark against commercial practices perceived to disrupt 'normal' and 'natural' childhood, (Epp and Price, 2008; Lindsay and Maher, 2013). Moral concerns relating to affordability, health, preferences, principles and care for self and other, intertwine and compete in the ordinary everyday routines of consuming and particularly in family consumption contexts (Hall, 2011, 2016; Lindsay and Maher, 2013). Studies show that parents and children influence each other's consumption practices positively and negatively in significant ways (Hamilton & Catterall, 2006; Norgaard et. al., 2007). Parent child relational consumption is not uncommon as children encourage parents' participation in gaming (Nash et al., 2018), help parents to update their personal styles (Boden, 2006) and better inform parents about products (Ekström, 2007). Parents buy what they desire for their children as well as what they want for themselves and their children (e.g. Wii consoles, computer games etc.) what they can share (E.g. online services such as Netflix) (Chambers, 2012; Nash et. al., 2018). Family consumption aims to achieve togetherness (Nash et. al., 2018) and products (e.g. wii console) are marketed to families on that basis (Chambers, 2012).

Parents' worry about perceived intensification of commercial childhood (Nairn, 2008) and 'pester power', captures the pressure children exert over parents to consume what they want (Anitha & Mohan, 2016). However, this term is perceived to be deficient in accounting for the caring work families enact through consumption activity (Pugh, 2009). It also overlooks the complexity of parent child consumption related discussion and negotiation including children's moderation of demands

in accordance with family finances and their co-operation with normative family practices (Chandler and Evans, 2006; Gram and Grønhøj, 2016; Nash, 2009). Parents' reflections on their own childhoods illuminate anticipations or anxieties parents feel for their children, as well as their parenting consumption practices (Buckingham, 2011; Hall, 2016). The gendered orientation of family care consumption work is noted in the literature (Lindsay and Maher, 2013) and reflected in food purchase and cooking (Backett-Milburn, et. al., 2010; De Vault, 1991).

How parents are obliged to negotiate consumption from diverse social positions has been recognised (West et al., 2006). Research on poor households, demonstrates parental effort to meet children's needs and desires and to prioritise them in consumption decisions (Kochuyt, 2004). There is evidence that parents on low-income make sacrifices for their children; use products to conceal their poverty, to enable children to fit in with peers, to insulate themselves against stigma and to show love and care (Chandler and Evans, 2006; Gillies, 2007; Hamilton & Catterall, 2006; Ponsford, 2014; Pugh, 2009). The parental desire to shelter children from forms of consumption, particularly showy consumption, is perceived to be a more middle class preoccupation, as is, investment in children's futures and the financial responsibilisation of children through saving and entrepreneurial activities (Gillies, 2007; Pugh, 2009; West et al., 2006). Middle class consumption generates a market for quality toys, educational products, services, activities and purchases designed to enhance children's futures and to help them to identify and fit in with others in their social class (Lareau, 2003). While such consumption is constructed as sensible, the 'here and now' consumption of working class parents, confronted with uncertain futures and limited or unstable resources is subjected to ridicule and critique (Hamilton & Catterall, 2006; Ponsford, 2014). Middle class family consumption is represented as confident, rational and consistent and middle class children are represented as having a more parent-guided and self-disciplined approach to consumption (Ribeiro, et. al., 2018). In contrast, working class family consumption has been found to be more adaptable and solidaristic,

with working class children showing spending habits that prioritise their immediate pleasure and help for others (Ribeiro, et. al., 2018). While significant social class distinctions in family consumption practices have received attention, researchers also caution against overlooking what social class similarities exist (Backett-Milburn et. al., 2010).

Both consumption and sexualisation have been identified as sites for the production of ethical, responsibilised parent subjects, with negative implications in particular for working class mothers and their daughters, whose clothing choices and embodiment are more likely to be castigated for violating proper white middle class and gendered norms (Bragg, et. al., 2011; Egan, 2013; Howard et. al., 2016). Failure to protect children from poor cultural consumption such as the buying of sexualised clothing or goods, is frequently constructed as a problem more associated with working class parenting or mothering (Howard, et. al., 2016).

Finch's (2007) concept of display has been rarely used in research on family consumption and when it has, discrete forms of consumption rather than family consumption practice as a whole, have been the focus. For example, it has been employed in studies on family food practices (James and Curtis, 2010), internet gambling (Hughes and Valentine, 2011), family leisure (Harrington, 2014), families in commercial homes (e.g. family run guesthouses) (Seymour, 2015), mothers' preparation of children's lunchboxes (Harman and Cappellini, 2015) and migrant families' use of skype communication technology (Share et al., 2018). Each of these studies shows that through special and routine acts of consumption, family members reaffirm their connectedness to each other and demonstrate it to others. Moreover, they underline the critical evaluative role played by audiences in the display process, a process used to present a particular type of family (Seymour, 2015) and a family which works (Finch, 2007). Here we add to the very small body of research on family consumption, in which Finch's (2007) concept of family display has been used productively. We

show that consumption serves as a tool for family display and that parents, particularly mothers, engage in display to show they are parenting properly and at times better than others. We also provide evidence of parents' alternating between author and audience of their own displays, proactively (re)producing but also reflexively negotiating with standards of normative parenting that provide the accoutrements for successful display.

Method

The article is generated from research conducted for an Irish government funded study exploring the commercialisation and sexualisation of children in austerity Ireland, predominantly from the perspectives of parents but also other stakeholders (Kiely, et, al., 2015). The data presented in this paper is drawn from couple /pair interviews (n=12), individual interviews (n=27) and nine focus group discussions (n=39) with a total of 78 parents / guardians resident throughout Ireland. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to guide the interviews and discussion. The primary data were transcribed and subjected to a qualitative thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Coding categories and preliminary analytic documents were shared and discussed among the research team members and subsequently developed to generate the core thematic findings presented in the research report (Kiely, et. al., 2015). A comprehensive account of the entire dataset and findings is not provided in this paper, rather family display is the sensitising concept used for the selection of data presented.

Parent Participants Recruitment and Profile

Different modes of recruitment were used but most parents / guardians volunteered due to hearing about the research from a national parents' representative organisation and a branch of a national youth organisation. There was relatively limited diversity in the final parent /guardian sample. The

majority of the sample were mothers (n=68) and while participants were not asked to identify their social class backgrounds, we inferred from information provided, their locations etc., that the majority were middle class. Despite persistent efforts to access a more diverse sample, a lower number of fathers (n=10) and in turn less same-sex parents, foster parents, cohabiting and separated parents and parents in blended families (n=8) participated.

Ethics

An ethical protocol was devised for the study and ethical approval was secured from University College Cork Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) in January 2013. Information about the study was provided orally and in written form after which potential participants gave their written consent if they wished to participate. There was adherence to the university code of research conduct in relation to data storage. All research participants were given pseudonyms as were children named by parents.

There were ethical concerns with inviting parents to open a relatively intimate area of their family lives (Khanijou and Pirani, 2020) to an external gaze particularly when parenting is intensive and moralized (Faircloth & Murray, 2015; Strathern, 2005) and when the invocation of parents and family is evident in political, social and cultural spheres (Edwards & Gillies, 2012). With this in mind, we listened, empathised and shared some of our own experiences during data collection. During the focus groups, participants broadly complied with requests to show sensitivity to others when contributing. Couple interviews, requested by parents to facilitate their involvement, raised other ethical questions. On occasion, there was bickering or conflict in these interviews, providing insight into family display processes, but possibly also compromising how and what individual participants, wished to display. Following Valentine (1999), who suggested what researchers should

do when conflict happens in couple interviews, we did not intervene during these exchanges and they never erupted into anything concerning.

Findings

The research encounters can be viewed as sites of family display given the presence of the researcher audience and at times the parent focus group audience. An assumption made is that some parents self-censored or very consciously reported what they perceived to adhere to prevailing social norms pertaining to proper parenting and responsible family consumption. However, in couple interviews, family displays were produced collaboratively and in these interviews there was at times, dissent or disagreement. This shows individual co-creation and unfolding of family displays as well as their contestation in the context of an interview or group discussion. It brings to mind the varied audiences, internal and external to families, which play a part in shaping and co-constructing such displays (Seymour, 2011; Seymour & Walsh, 2013).

The findings are divided into two sections; section one explores how family consumption narratives are used as a tool to display parental responsibility, to share family values and to communicate a collective family identity to internal family members and to external audiences. Section two focuses on themes showing that family consumption invites moral scrutiny of self and others in the context of wider normative understandings and improvisational display on the part of parents given consumption's relational embeddedness.

Displaying Family Consumption Successfully and Unsuccessfully

Parents showed familiarity with the demands of conventional ethical and responsible consumerist discourses e.g. sustainability, fair trade, thrift etc., and their intersections with discourses on good

childrearing. Some parents held that by engaging in careful consumption, their children would do likewise, optimising opportunity for unified and successful family display. For example, Christine's comment about consumption in her family reflected the parent guided, self-disciplined 'middle class' approach (Ribeiro et al, 2018): 'I wouldn't say they [children] are the most demanding because we've never been, we're not, we wouldn't spend a lot and like if they had Christmas lists or whatever you know they would always have been reasonably modest.' Isabelle projected a savvy consumer identity onto her children, one that she also claimed for herself 'I would like to think that my kids are pretty discerning buyers and I would say that I am as well, I've always done the second-hand market.' Yet, some parents acknowledged that their children exhibited vastly different consumption habits varying from careful to profligate spending, despite their shared upbringing and family milieu. Parents Stephen and Orla presented themselves as actively involved in educating their children to be careful consumers and savers, but Stephen observed in relation to their two children that 'Rosa gets it and Katy just spends whatever you give her'. However, even when parents presented evidence of their children's divergent consumption practices, they mostly clung to a normative discourse of parent responsibility, asserting that what they said and did as parents and as consumers potentially exercised the strongest influence on children, thus enabling a shared family display of responsible consumption.

Among those interviewed were parents, who reported their efforts to avoid harm to others through engagement in responsible, ethical consumerist practices, including boycotts of particular brands or companies. Such practices constituted displays to the internal family audience of their children, who they hoped would acquire their knowhow of ethical consumption to achieve unified display. For example, Martina told us that she alerted her children to the deaths of workers in a fire in the Bangladeshi garment factory Tazreen in 2012, which produced clothes for a multinational company. She stated that she was '… always trying to bring the rest of the world into the situation' when

encouraging her children to make ethically conscious consumer choices. It was through such consumption tales that parents conveyed the kind of family they desired to be. For some parents, expensive brands of clothing popular among middle class pre-teens and teenagers, as signifiers of middle class respectability, were considered perfectly acceptable for public family display. However, others reported rejecting the same brands for family display purposes because they did not speak to how they wished to be projected as a family. For example, one American clothing brand, considered perfectly acceptable for public display by many middle class parents, was described as a '… no-go' by Saoirse because of the company's discriminatory hiring practices. Conscious value driven displays of family consumption, support Finch's (2016) contention that conventional families attend to audience and also need to display family. Intra-class diversity vis a vis parental attitudes to certain brands, show how consumption was a tool used to display 'who we are as a family' and to consolidate but also to reveal an array of normative middle class values (Backett-Milburn et. al., 2010).

In addition to displays of doing family consumption ethically, parents attended very much to the audience in public displays of family. Some parents reported that food shopping in the company of their young children was planned and involved strategies to avoid potentially embarrassing or stressful scenes. For example, Emily spoke about distracting her child when food shopping with promises of later treats rather than running the risk of having '… a huge battle' at the shopping checkout when refusing to buy what her child wanted at that moment. Such efforts by parents to orchestrate successful public displays of family can also be understood in a socio-cultural context where 'good' parenting is increasingly prescribed and scrutinised (Faircloth & Murray, 2015; Strathern, 2005).

Ideals for family were communicated, when parents recounted stories showing the work they put into cultivating attitudes and behaviours to effect what they wished to achieve in their particular family display and to communicate this to others. For example, Emily told us that she set the scene for her fourteen-year-old daughter and her friends, when she sighted her daughter's friends dress on arrival to her house:

> … some of them [daughter's friends] arrived here for the sleepover … dressed as if they were going to a nightclub… I met them saying 'girls look around you; where's the wellies where's the runners?' and they just laughed, and they all came in and they grabbed ours out of the press here and mucked in and went off….

In keeping with research findings challenging any over-emphasis on children as demanding (Gram & Grønhøj, 2016), some financially strapped parents told us that their children refrained from asking them for what they knew they could not afford. Margaret commented that 'if we had the disposable income they [children] would probably be a little bit more forthcoming with 'oh can I get this one instead of that", but they know that money is not there so they know that it's not fair to put the pressure on us…'. While not being able to fulfil parent provider roles in the way parents wished and knew were expected of them for successful display, relating how their children showed care for them by modifying their requests, still made possible an assessment of their parenting and their relationships as 'family-like' (Finch, 2007: 70).

As shown by others (Hall, 2016; Heath et. al. 2016), in family consumption decision-making, ethical principles and preferences compete with other relational ethical issues. Reported indulgent spending on goods or services for children, which could be viewed negatively outside the family, were frequently justified by parents with reference to familial nostalgic, emotional or care connections (Buckingham, 2011; Hall, 2016; Pugh, 2009). Fiachra surprised himself by spending a lot of money on an official soccer jersey for his son, who was not looking for it.

> I turned to Sorcha [wife] and I said I can't believe I'm actually in a position I said I'd never put myself in. I'm actually going to buy this now because it's about what another child might say to him [son]…

Motivated by his attention to a potential audience of display, as denoted by his concern as to what another child might say to his son, Fiachra made a purchasing decision, which he claimed was highly unusual for him. This allowed Fiachra to consciously present himself to the research audience as a careful consumer and a responsible parent only prone to sporadic acts of imprudent consumption. Similarly, Una, a middle class mother, reported very reluctantly buying a body contour dress for her daughter so that her daughter would not be the only one in her friendship group without such a dress. Explaining 'imprudent' acts of consumption with reference to care for family members still made it possible for such family displays to garner sufficient legitimacy not to be evaluated as unsuccessful (Heaphy, 2011).

Less financially well-off parents interviewed, disclosed feeling troubled by not being able to do the relational spending required to ensure their children fitted in with their peer group. Annette mentioned '… having a large family, there's seven children, so obviously we're not buying the Abercrombie [American fashion brand] … but yeah I would worry … that they don't feel included.' Maria acknowledged that not being able to buy for her children made her feel 'lousy' as a parent. In contrast, Emily, who recalled being teased for being poor when she was a child, believed it was important for her then and subsequently for her children, to learn to cope with not having one's expectations met. She informed her children that they had to accept that 'this is our lot'. She encouraged them to go play with friends because it was '… more focused on play than the things they play with'. This permitted Emily to reconcile her children to the family's financial constraints, but to ensure that the family they displayed to friends was not one solely defined by a lack of material possessions. In contrast to Emily's improvisational approach to effect a more successful family

display, Maria and Annette undoubtedly judged their display as less than optimal when their consumption fell short of their expected standards of relational care (Pugh, 2009). Common to each is how material evidence of family consumption is perceived by parents, to be part of displaying the 'proper' family as one which can comfortably provide for children.

Displaying the Family's Collective Identity

Communicating unified family displays, which complied with normative standards played a big part in displaying family properly to the researchers and they showed how parents' identities were bound up with their generational, social class and moral positionings. Implicit in Christine and Toby's exchange was a family display, which they considered good because it was 'anti-consumerist'.

Christine: … I suppose we're not that materialistic really, we're not really that, well we're not.
Toby: We're not brand people.

Donal and Theresa also took pride in presenting their family as a careful unit of consumption in a society given to excess:

Theresa: I think we keep pretty tight grip on it all, don't we?
Donal: Well I don't think it's [consumption] healthy in society but I wouldn't be overly bothered about us.

Attuned to how 'respectable' dress communicated proper family display, Dermot remarked that he would reprimand his children for their choice of clothing if it reflected badly on the whole family. He reported that he would say something to them like, 'You're part of the family, you're representing the family and maybe you're pushing it...' Similarly, Orla commented that when shopping with her daughter she would evoke a construction of their particular family as one, which necessitated practical clothing. She said she might say '… we're an outdoorsy family, we go out walking, why do you need like a skirt that small'.

Such extracts are only a few of those exemplifying how parents negotiated and resisted individual child consumption practices conflicting with their sense of what a collective, idealised family display should publicly project. Unified displays were used to show external audiences these families' togetherness and propriety, but they were also used to consolidate children's sense as to what defined their distinctive version of 'familyness' (Gordon, 2009, 196). In keeping with Davies (2011) research on children's agency in family display, parents in our research also provided evidence of this. Isabelle recalled that her daughter challenged her for buying her younger brother a brand of tracksuit, which conflicted with her daughter's sense of what her brother's clothes should say to others about their family's social class. She explained:

> She [daughter] came home from college one time and she said "Why is he [her brother] wearing that?' I don't know was it 'Nike' or some one of those ones, '"He should be wearing a grey 'Canterbury' because you're identifying your class by doing so" …

Some parents talked about toys they bought for children or permitted them to have, which allowed them to communicate their family values. Donal and Therese spoke about having a 'no [toy] guns' rule in their family. When a close friend bought their son a toy gun, they confiscated it. Their son continued to play with toy guns at friends' houses and to receive them as presents. They dispensed with the rule, claiming 'they were beaten'. However, the 'no guns' rule served as a useful display tool to convey a picture of their family as one with high standards. Their abandonment of the 'no guns' rule is just one instance showing parents' awareness of how significant audiences inside and outside families potentially support or destabilise unified family display.

Moral Scrutiny of Family Display

Similar to other studies (Appleford, 2014; Brackett-Milburn et. al., 2010; Harman and Cappellini, 2015), our data suggests that parents, and predominantly mothers, took greater responsibility for

family displays and were held accountable for them in the research. Perceived poor consumption by mothers, witnessed outside the specific confines of the research context, was sharply criticised. For instance, Judith stated:

> … people have to take responsibility for their own purchasing. …you make a lot of decisions for your children when they're young, and if you buy a five-year-old a padded bra you need to really ask yourself why you're doing that. And I'm sure they shouldn't be selling, but neither should people, women, be buying them.

Fathers, frequently acknowledged, as they did in Backett-Milburn et al. (2010), that they had no experience of shopping for, or with their children, or of family provisioning. As the bearers of responsibility for family consumption, mothers reported being blamed by fathers and they blamed themselves and other mothers, for perceived irresponsible consumption. Rebecca chastised herself for buying her children the latest consoles and Ross, who accepted that he never shopped for or with his nine-year-old daughter, acknowledged that he and his partner had '… couple squabbles' about what got bought occasionally. In a couple exchange, Dermot attributed his children's interests in premium products to their mother, Angela, being a '… a bit of a brand creature' but when challenged by Angela, Dermot reluctantly conceded that he was one too.

A number of parents distinguished themselves or middle class parents in general, as the custodians of responsible parenting and consumption and by extension, family display. Pauline constructed those who have money as more sensible consumers: '… you'll often find it's the people who don't have money who go and spend what they have on the labels, whereas the ones with money are smarter.' Ross, a middle class parent, commented that '… lower socio-economic groups would be more extravagant or less controlled in the types of clothes that kids wear.' Girls' 'sexualised dress' challenged directly and publicly, conceptions of what proper parenting and family life should look like and the foregrounding of mothers and daughters in parents' narratives of irresponsible consumption is consistent with others' findings (Bragg et. al., 2011; Howard et. al., 2016,).

By ridiculing other families' displays, parents provided additional insight into displays that could be judged unsuccessful. Martina spoke of poking fun at showy family consumption displays by others, to subvert desire in her own children for such display:

> One day my kid came home from a play date… the girl had according to her had a 42-inch flat screen in her bedroom and her own iPad and a bar in the kitchen… we just took it all for a bit of fun really …that kind of works… they see the ridiculousness of some of it.

A middle classed gendered gaze (Skeggs, 2004) was most often at play and ostentatious forms of consumption attributed to working class families were denigrated, but stereotypical displays of middle class culture and consumption were also ridiculed. In keeping with research findings showing intra-middle class diversity (Perrier, 2012), Karen was not alone among the middle class parents, who derided other middle class family displays. She commented:

> I sent her [daughter] to these very middle-class schools … all the kids came from parents who have a lot of money and an awful lot of them [parents] wear exactly the same as the kids; the big houses, the constant extensions…justifying themselves you know with what they had….

She was also just one of a number of middle class parents, who welcomed opportunities wrought by austerity in Ireland, to rekindle less consumerist, more 'authentic' forms of family display for all.

Displays Reproducing and Disrupting Normative Standards

Family displays of consumption connect in different ways with conceptions of what is proper, and in the Irish context democratic parent child relations have become increasingly normative. Saoirse, mother of three children remarked 'I think my generation, our parents always said "no" … they would never change it but I think with democratic parenting, you have to listen to them, and you have to reconsider it and that means sometimes you kind of go "well okay so"'. Displays of democratic family interactions cohere with reflexive parenting and Leona aptly captured the extent

to which she thought contemporary parenting demanded a display of 'reflexivity' (Faircloth & Murray, 2015: 116). As she perceived it, buying beyond essential items was complex when parents' knowledge of children's individual personality types and children's feelings, competed with other moral dilemmas, which also took hold.

> … it's very, very hard to make clear choices yourself as a parent, you know do I want him [son] to do this, or do I want him to feel a bit left out, he's vulnerable, or are principles and what I think is right… more important than his happiness. …it makes it very confusing. I think for our parents you didn't have all that.

Democratic relations and reflexive parenting prompted some reluctance to moralise about the parenting of others, as acknowledged by Charlotte commenting 'I'm probably less harsh on what parents need to do. …you have to be able to influence what children do but ... it's hard to be the "no" voice as well all the time'. While being seen to be on top of the job of parenting can epitomise successful family display, Naomi, a mother of a teenage daughter, commented that real life, pragmatic, relational consumption and parenting depart from this ideal:

> I think we all kind of struggle with our children, none of us really has a clue what we're doing, let's be honest, and we all think that …we could be better parents and there's probably a better way… at the same time you've to get through the day.

While acceptance of parental responsibility for family display was pervasive, a minority of parents argued that the demands this put on them were so burdensome as to be unachievable. In relation to her daughter's media consumption, self-identified middle-class parent Karen, commented on the challenges for family display:

> … you know it's my job as a parent but my child is in school, my child is with other children, my child has multiple devices and access to other people's wirelesses and …it's not something that I can police as a parent twenty-four seven.

She reported understanding '… why parents want to keep their head in the sand'. Other parents also articulated anxiety and ambivalence as to whether they had sufficient knowledge, capacity or time to keep track of new social media platforms, trends and risks, to monitor their children's dress and

behaviour in the ways they thought were expected them to achieve successful family display by external audiences.

Features of intensive parenting (Faircloth and Murray, 2015) were invoked in family displays. Leona, acknowledged her own compliance with one of these features in her own display, yet railed against its implications:

> I do think that in Ireland we're way to child-centric I mean in a way that I find negative in that I spent most of my money and my effort goes into my son... I mean I'm generalising a bit but I've worked for years with parents from other countries … they wouldn't feel as much pressure to please the child do you know…

Andrea commented that from the outsider, her children would be perceived too young at ages 9 and 10 years to have phones but she defended it as consumption decision that was right for her family. She explained that 'they [their children] travel a bit to school, my husband's away quite often… we could add [the children's] phones on to our own contracts; the cost was very low'. Her awareness of the ideal for family display was revealed by her drawing attention to its absence in her own family. Such a display showed parents' awareness as audience of their displays that could be perceived less than successful. By filling in the bigger picture as to why this makes sense for their family, parents sought audience approval. These accounts resonate with findings in other studies (Harman and Cappellini, 2015; Vincent and Ball, 2007) showing that there is also intensive work involved for middle class parents as display subjects (re)producing good parenting standards. When confronted with familial choices, responsibilities and anxieties, normative standards are stretched to provide better designs for living and these also find their way into family display.

Discussion and Conclusion

The data shows that parents use consumption as a tool to display family for a target audience inside the family (e.g. themselves, each other as parents, children), particularly to effect unified display but

also to achieve legitimacy from multiple external audiences; researchers, research participants, extended family, other parents and families (Seymour, 2011; Walsh, 2018). Responsible parenting and ethically conscious and prudent family consumption displays, associated with middle class parenting ideals, were recurrent in the data, as parents showed what they thought their audience expected of them. Parents used such displays to communicate to themselves and to others in different contexts, the kinds of families they perceived they were or that they desired to be. Parents showed tacit knowledge of their audience's expectations in terms of normative family standards, yet some displayed differently and challenged the audience to accept the legitimacy of their display. Consumption or inability to consume, caused upset for poorer parents when they thought it got in the way of displaying family properly, but it also enabled some parents to show that when confronted with economic hardship, they could only improvise to try and succeed at displaying family 'properly' (Heaphy, 2011). Many of the families in our research were middle class and 'conventional' yet their need to display was prominent as was their attention to audiences inside and outside the family. This can be usefully understood in the context of Finch's (2016) observation that the identities of those displaying move between orchestrating display to being its audience.

The data shows, consistent with the literature (Gillies, 2007; Pugh, 2009), that moral scrutiny was directed most often at working class family consumption displays perceived to be vulgar or to provide evidence of 'poor' parenting or more specifically 'poor' mothering. However, modes of middle class familial consumption display seen as excessive or clichéd, did not escape reproach from middle class parents either. Displays of family consumption assessed as being unsuccessful, sometimes troubled what parents perceived they could achieve, in the context of what they thought was expected of them by themselves and by others. They showed awareness that improvised and flexible modes of parenting risked not meeting the standard required for successful display.

Middle class parenting and consumption occupy the normative ground on what counts as good parenting and consumption display. Yet the family displays here show us, that the taste, knowledge and skills, making up middle class parenting and providing the yardstick for judgement, require active (re)production and generate their own affective dimensions. Some middle class parents presented their own family displays as morally superior to what they saw around them. Others struggled with the ideal standards, which while being more attainable for them than for working class parents, were still a 'moving target' (Harman and Cappellini, 2015: 778). These parents played their part in stretching the limits of good parenting and consumption imperatives as they explained and ultimately justified their perceived distortions from the norm in their display work. As researchers will increasingly explore newer and discrete forms of family display in the digital consumption sphere and extend its reach into researching unconventional families, our contribution cautions against losing sight of the concept's utility when researching 'conventional' families and when exploring entire family consumptionscapes. Parental consumption narratives if conceived as a tool for family display, also provide a relatively untapped resource for illuminating the ways in which moralising, classed and gendered ideas get put to work in complicated ways for family display purposes.

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