

BRINGING MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORK
LITERATURE INTO FAMILY STUDIES: THE
INTRICATE DYNAMICS OF *AU PAIR* FAMILIES

Pelechova Lenka, MA, BA (Hons)

School of Sociology and Social Policy

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I dedicate the thesis to my son Benjamin.

Abstract

This thesis explores families with live in *au pairs*. In particular, it investigates the changes that families go through as a result of the addition of an *au pair*, as well as the means by which the host parents and *au pairs* negotiate their new circumstances of living and working together.

From a theoretical perspective, the thesis is positioned between two bodies of literature, namely, those of migrant domestic work and family studies. Up until now, research conducted in relation to *au pairs* has mostly been done as a part of feminisation of migration and domestic work divisions. However, such studies do not focus on the family as a unit of analysis and on the diverse experiences of different family members. In terms of family theories, there is a general consensus among scholars that contemporary families are diversifying. Even though the heterosexual couple family is still the most common form, new types of families are emerging, such as lone parents, divorced parents, same sex couples, extended families, reconstituted families, foster families and transnational families. Although the field of family studies has directed attention to diverse family forms, families with live in *au pairs* have, so far, escaped attention. The host families who employ and live with *au pairs* have to reset and renegotiate boundaries between fictive kin, family member and domestic worker.

This thesis addresses the gaps that are present in much of the literature on migrant domestic work; namely the multifaceted relationships between host parents and *au pairs*, and the diversity of *au pair*'s experiences. The role of an 'employer' is approached not only from the viewpoint of migrant domestic work, but also from a family studies perspective. This focus allows for a greater understanding of family roles, family time and family boundaries and how they are re-negotiated by *au pair* employment.

The exploration of *au pair* families was conducted through qualitative analysis consisting of semi structured interviews with 18 host

parents and 19 *au pairs*. The data illustrate that host parents developed various and lengthy strategies to ensure that their *au pairs* were 'the perfect fit for their family'. This commodified version of an ideal *au pair* was largely affected by the host parents' social class position as well as by their ideals of 'the family'. Moreover, the degree of association, communication, relationship and involvement with *au pairs*, appeared to be very different between host mothers and host fathers. In accordance with the gendered roles and division of work within families, the interviews with host mothers and host fathers revealed that the *au pairs* were perceived as mainly the host mother's responsibility. Host parents' endeavours in creating the '*au pair* family' were explored through their negotiations of 'family time'. '*General* family time' consisted of sharing family related activities with the *au pair* while '*genuine* family time' meant that the *au pair* was not involved. Although *au pair* families navigated their proximity by negotiating their family time and relationships which revealed that families are adaptable, at the same time these host families were crowded with images of the romanticized traditional family. The thesis claims that the combination of family and migrant domestic work scholarship enables a greater understanding of how living with and employing an *au pair* is experienced and managed in everyday life. Following these empirical findings, it is argued that whilst host families 'displayed' flexibility and fluidity (Beck 1992), at the same time, the hegemonic notions of what families should be like indicate that traditional values still prevailed.

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CHAPTER 1

Introducing the *Au pair* Scheme

'The Council of Europe's action attempts to help settle a problem of ever-increasing magnitude, as the number of young persons going abroad to improve their knowledge of languages has risen constantly since the end of the second world war. Although that form of placement is not new, its nature has changed. Arranged in the past on a friendly basis between families known to each other, or through mutual acquaintances, it has now become a unique social phenomenon because of the frequency and large number of persons involved. It is now by tens of thousands that the candidates travel throughout Europe and it is quite obvious that the uncontrolled development of such temporary migration cannot be allowed to continue if only in the interests of the parties concerned. "*Au pair*" placement is the temporary reception by families, in exchange for certain services, of young foreigners who come to improve their linguistic and possibly professional knowledge as well as their general culture by acquiring a better knowledge of the country where they are received'.

*(Council of Europe
1969)*

This statement from 1969 captures the Council of Europe's depiction of the motives behind the establishment of the '*Au pair* Scheme' in Europe. The *au pair* arrangement dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century when German and English middle class families sent their daughters to improve their French language skills to either Swiss or

French speaking families. This exchange was based on an idea of reciprocity between families as well as the acquirement of language skills. Due to growing numbers of *au pair* applications the Council of Europe officially established the 'European Agreement on *Au pair* Placement' in 1969 (Burikova and Miller, 2010: 2 and 32). The French term '*au pair*', translating as 'on equal terms', implies that equality is deeply embedded within this scheme as *au pairs* are supposed to live with, and be treated as 'family members' by their host families. The concept of pseudo-family is thus deeply embedded within this scheme, and is reflected in terms such as 'pocket money' instead of salary and 'family member' instead of employee. Overall, the *au pair* program was specifically developed in order to provide a cultural exchange for young people, to offer them the opportunity to get to know different cultures and customs as well as to learn a new language. For the receiving host families, *au pairs* are to carry out light domestic work and childcare in exchange of free board and accommodation (Hess and Puckhaber, 2004).

Historical analysis of domestic employment in Britain demonstrated the decrease of domestic workers after the Second World War. This was mainly due to labour opportunities being more accessible to mostly working class young women, who would by and large occupy the main labour-force of servants and maids (Cox 1999; McBride 1976). Recently however, scholars documented the increase of paid domestic employment in the West as well as industrialized countries of the Middle East (Anderson 2007, Williams 2003). This category of labour is in particular occupied by migrant populations and there are various

intertwining factors influencing such demand for paid migrant domestic work.

According to Addley (2002), the number of *au pairs* in the UK is rising every year, mainly influenced by continuing enlargement of the European Union together with trends in the global feminisation of migration. For example, Cox (2006) noted that the new organisation of the global economy, and in particular '*the spread of neo-liberalism have supported the recent growth of contemporary domestic employment in Britain*' (2006:4). In this way, the supply and demand of domestic work is sustained by increased working hours and the high cost of state-provided childcare in the UK (and other developed countries) on the one hand, and the existing global inequalities where low wage labour is being transferred from poorer to wealthier countries on the other hand. According to Anderson (2001) it is a combination of factors that encourage the recent growth of the paid domestic sector; such as an ageing population and the increase of women entering the paid labour market. Together, these factors lead to a 'reproductive labour gap', as well to changes in family forms and reduction in social provisions. Also, Williams and Gavanas (2008) pointed out that even though childcare is supplied by the state sector, the cost of state provided nurseries is expensive and does not always provide the hours necessary for parents in full time employment. Only some parents have the advantage of drawing on 'voluntary care-givers' (mainly relatives and friends) and therefore it is not a reliable tool to address the needs of every parent. As a result, parents are put in a situation where they have to look for the

most financially sound solution, which Cox (2011) refers to as a marketized childcare economy.

The UK *au pair* placement immigration category was modified in November 2008 and is now part of the 'Points Based System'. This change implies that *au pairs* coming to the UK either fall within the European Freedom of Movement Act (BAPAA 2013) in which case they are exempt from obtaining a visa under the Freedom of Movement Act or in the case of not being classed as an EU citizen, *au pairs* have to obtain a visa under the Youth Mobility Scheme system¹. As a result, the exact number of *au pairs* currently working in the UK is unknown, however the estimate for the year 2000 was 60000 (Addley, 2002). Over ten years later, and with the EU having undergone three further enlargements², these numbers are likely to be even higher.

Despite the recent legislative changes, the term *au pair* refers to any person of single status with no dependants, between the ages of eighteen and thirty years old (previously seventeen to twenty-seven years old) who comes to the UK with the purpose of learning the English language and to gain cultural experience of living in another country. *Au pairs* live with the English speaking host family, help with light housework and childcare for up to a maximum of five hours a day and they might be asked to babysit for up to two nights a week. In exchange the host family provide free accommodation in the form of a private room, free board and 'pocket money' currently recommended at between £70 and £90 per

¹ Referred to as Tier 5* Youth Mobility Scheme, eligible nationals who can apply for the *au pair* visa include Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan, Monaco, Taiwan and Republic of Korea (BAPAA 2013).

² These were as follows: 2004 Central and Eastern European Countries, Malta and Cyprus; 2007 Rumania and Bulgaria; 2013 Croatia (EUROPA, 2014).

week (BAPAA 2013). At the same time, there are sets of guidelines regarding the host families; with the condition that the family must offer the *au pair* the necessary time to study English, English language must be the main language spoken in the household and families must have resident status in the UK.

My interest

My interest in the topic of '*au pair* family life' began with my own experience of working as an *au pair* for two years in 1997. My host family was composed of divorced mother with two teenage children, situated in the city of Bristol (UK). It was not until 10 years later that I began my MA course which allowed me to develop my interest in *au pairs* and families into a research proposal. From this viewpoint, my own experience as an *au pair* allowed me to personally connect with the theme studied, and better understand the intricate aspects of host family and *au pair* living. It was during the time when I started to review the mainstream *au pair* and domestic work literature that I started to realize that there was a tendency to take a broad view on *au pairs*, especially in regards to categorizing this group as exploited and vulnerable victims within the larger domestic work chain (Anderson 2000; Cox 2007; Hess and Puckhaber 2004). My own experience made me aware of the possible exploitation that *au pairs* can experience (in particular this was through meetings with other *au pairs* as well as personally experiencing the unclear boundaries between living and working in the same house. Subsequent data chapters explore my personal experience in further

detail). However, I was also aware of the diversity of *au pair* life, which is not always perceived as a negative experience. Wanting to illuminate the diversity of the *au pair* experience, at the same time I was also interested in how host families are affected by living with an *au pair*. Starting to explore the academic literature on *au pairs* further, I could not find much research being conducted on families with *au pairs*. Instead, families were mainly portrayed as employers, and as such lacked the aspect of 'family life' that I was interested in (Burikova and Miller 2010; Cox and Narula 2003). Of course *au pairs* are working for their host families, however they are also living with the host family and thus the boundaries between living and working become blurred. The *au pair* is not always working and the host parents are not always in the role of employer.

Modes of theorizing contemporary families and migrant domestic workers

In the introduction to the special issue of Sociological Research Online Journal titled 'Intimacy beyond the family' Jamieson et al (2006) argue that a variety of 'personal relationships' should be further researched in order to develop the understanding of contemporary families. This is because;

These relationships are all outside the established package of partnership, parenthood and household although all represent some aspects of intimacy: bodily, emotional and privileged knowledge of the other person. They have some affinities and overlaps with family practices while also having their own distinct characteristics.' (Jamieson et al 2006, online source).

Sociological literature has examined various family forms in the past, however very little attention has so far been given to families which include an au-pair. Their presence is usually unrecognised even though *au pairs* may have developed quasi-kinship relationships with other family members (Anderson 2000; Cox and Narula 2003). My aim is to address what Jamieson et al (2006) alluded to, specifically by approaching *au pair* families from family studies perspectives, exploring the lived experiences of host mothers, host fathers and *au pairs*.

With the recognized family diversification in mind, McCarthy et al (2003) pointed out that the dominant theory explaining the reasons for changes in family arrangements has been the process referred to as

'individualisation' (2003:5). This process implies that people today have more choices in terms of their family lifestyle and are not necessarily following the 'traditional family form'. Within these lines, Giddens (1991:53) argues that individuals are '*reflexive authors of their own biographies*', and similarly, Bauman (2000) comments that family relationships today are much more 'fluid' than in the past. Similarly, Beck's (1992:2) theory of individualisation states that it is the notion of 'reflexive modernization' which impacts on the traditional way of life such as family life, identity and gender relations. Reflexive modernization is based on the concept that the contemporary processes of individualization bring forth the breakdown of formerly existing social forms, for example categories such as class, gender roles, family and social status. As a consequence of individualisation progression, it is becoming increasingly widespread that people are taking their decisions earlier, and are being more actively involved and aware of their own actions. This process results in 'reflexive biography' rather than previously implied 'elective biography' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), where the process of modernization entails weakening of social structures that in turn indicates increased 'individualisation' on individuals (2002:158). In other words, due to the condition of individualisation, what was previously perceived as traditional family with set roles and obligations now becomes questioned as there are more choices individuals face in relation to family living.

On a similar note, Giddens and Griffiths (2006) emphasize that 'reflexivity' is being inflicted on people, as traditional ways of living are becoming challenged and changed by adopting more open means of

social codes (2006:68). Individuals' identities are therefore even more shifting and changing as a response to the globalization processes and as a result people have to become more adaptable. Moreover, the notion of social reflexivity indicates the constant questioning and reflecting of peoples' actions, having a great effect on traditional ways of living and standards (Giddens and Griffiths, 2006:123). As a result of these developments, people have additional opportunities such as choosing a different family style, when to have children, and career paths.

Other scholars however, argue that despite the impact of increased individualisation on family life, the notion of family and family values remain still rather powerful in contemporary society (Crow 2002). Such a critique of 'de-traditionalisation' suggests that it overrates the process of social change and overlooks the persistent importance of tradition (Ribbens McCarthy et al. 2003). That is, instead of increased 'individualisation' scholars emphasize the continuous influence of social rules. For example, Marsh and Arber (1992) note that the concept of family involves not only biological and legal ties, but also a range of relationships that impose norms of behaviour for each member. Social rules within the family unit are a key part in prescribing obligations that are imposed on each member (1992:10). Bernardes (1997) notes that the prevailing ideology of the traditional family and its associated roles has a huge impact on what individuals perceive as what should be an appropriate type of work for each member (1997:27). In this way, each set of roles such as husband (father) and wife (mother) bring different expectations of behaviour and actions that altogether imply diverse outcomes for individual opportunities and achievements.

As a result, the concept of family could be investigated by means of changing attitudes suggesting family diversity, where individuals are less and less guided by 'traditional norms' as they are being encouraged by processes of 'reflexive modernity and individualisation', or by means of gendered and classed power shifts and control, where social rules remain significant in prescribing individuals responsibilities.

Up until now, research conducted in relation to *au pairs* has mostly been done either as a part of scholarly work on the feminisation of migration or focusing on the (enduring) inequalities associated with the domain of domestic service (Hess and Puckhaber 2004; Parreñas 2001; Williams and Gavanas 2008). In particular, migrant domestic work theories focus on the concepts of gender (Hochschild 1989, Oakley 1987), care (Bowlby et al 1997) and migration (Anderson 2000, Parreñas 2003), highlighting issues such as inequalities, (low) value of care work and the intensification of feminisation of migration. Through this spotlight, domestic work research has helped to illuminate many problematic areas that are located within this sphere, such as the vulnerable position of migrant domestic workers, their exposure to exploitation and the invisibility of such work. The interconnectedness of these issues is clear, as is the invisibility of the private sphere of home that to a degree influences this type of work as either low paid or unpaid altogether. *Au pairs* are undoubtedly part of this chain of female migrant domestic workers. The invisibility of *au pairs* is further underlined by government immigration policies as this scheme is referred to as 'cultural exchange' and this is also reflected in the low remuneration as *au pairs*

receive 'pocket money' rather than wages for their labour (Cox and Narula 2003).

Aim of study

According to Kindler (2009), the sphere of paid domestic work is not only enveloped with workers themselves (such as their prospects, challenges and experiences), but also with the individuals who are in demand of such work, the employers. Whilst acknowledging the diversification of contemporary family forms, existing research on family studies does not focus on families with *au pairs*. Moreover, the mainstream literature on migrant domestic work constricts itself mainly with issues of power inequalities experienced by migrant workers. This thesis seeks to address the impact of *au pairs* on host family dynamics and therefore a new approach which links these two (separate) bodies of existing literature is needed in order to address this overlooked yet important area of research/investigation. Furthermore, this dual approach consisting of family and domestic work studies allows for more integrative understanding of this category of domestic work sector as well as how individuals understand and negotiate the meaning of family in their own lives. The analysis of *au pair* families allow us to study how family roles, boundaries and tasks are reworked as well as how the nature of the family as a socio-economic unit is changing over time (Glick Schiller 2008:291). Furthermore, a detailed exploration of *au pair* families' practices may lead to increased understanding not only in regards to their particular experiences and motives but also whether there are any similarities of *au pair* families to other family forms.

Cheal (2002) argues that '*family life is often subject to change, either in our own experiences or in the lives of the people around us. Alternative lifestyles and reconstruction of families are giving us more encounters with unfamiliar ways of living*' (2002:2). Living with an *au pair* could be perceived as one form of family life, as practical family living and relationships become to a degree adjusted by all family members. At the same time, the pseudo-family emphasis of the *au pair* scheme does not necessarily imply that *au pairs* automatically become 'a new member' of the British host family, nor does it mean that she is only perceived as a worker. The main aim of this study is to reveal and uncover the changes that occur as a result of *au pair* employment, as well as the means by which the host family and the *au pair* negotiate their new circumstances. The ways that the family members and the *au pair* react to each other in the 'family setting' helps to expose the effects on family dynamics. Also, by revealing certain features of these families, this research helps to shed more light on the wide-ranging assumptions surrounding family living and the meaning of family. What is more, attention will also be brought to the middle class socio-economic position *au pair* families inhabit as well as the role of gender in families.

Thesis outline

This thesis is organised as follows. Chapter 2 will review and assess the relevant literature significant to the study of *au pair* families. Moreover, the theoretical positions set out in this thesis will be

established. Specifically, focus will be placed on the debates on family continuity/diversity, the definition/meaning of family and these will be interlinked with literature on domestic work, the hierarchical power structures and boundaries that are embedded within *au pair* employment. There are number of particularities within the *au pair* scheme, such as the emphasis on quasi familial set up, the gendered aspect of this work as well as the importance of class location. The complexity of the *au pair* scheme in relation to the notion of family will be assessed through both the literatures on migrant domestic work and family studies.

The methodological underpinnings are discussed in Chapter 3. Starting with an overview of the epistemological rationale of qualitative research, specifically in relation to researching families, the choice of semi-structured interviews as the main research method is then described. Specific focus is placed on the different types of interviews that I employed in this research, such as interviewing family members together and apart. Moreover, the sampling strategy, data analysis, negotiation of access to the field, ethical considerations and the role of researcher specific to this study are examined.

Chapter 4 examines the following questions: How do host parents hire their *au pairs*? What strategies do they employ? Why do *au pairs* decide to take up this position? The findings are based on the interviews I conducted with *au pairs* as well as host parents, and in this way allow for a comparative discussion. Moreover, the questions outlined are discussed in terms of the context of class, specifically the middle class ideology of the family. Past studies on domestic work indicate that domestic workers

are selected according to the stereotypical beliefs of different nationalities (Anderson 2001). Was this also the case in *au pair* families I interviewed? And how do host parents' recruitment strategies compare with *au pair* perceptions of selecting host families?

The level of association, communication, relationship and involvement between *au pairs* and host mothers and *au pairs* and host fathers is assessed in Chapter 5. The findings are also, as in the previous chapter, based on interviews with *au pairs*, host mothers and host fathers and the following themes are discussed. Firstly, according to the gendered roles and division of work within families, host mothers' positions are portrayed and linked to wider debates on contemporary motherhood ideology, care work and the concept of 'second shift'. Then, host fathers' experiences are portrayed in terms of contemporary fatherhood and the breadwinner model. Following this, *au pairs'* perceptions on relationships with host parents are described and the chapter concludes by drawing on larger theories of contemporary family debates.

Host parents' and *au pairs'* reconstruction of family time is illustrated in Chapter 6. One of the main aims of this research was to analyse how is 'the happy family ideology' dealt with after the arrival of the *au pair* into the core of the UK family? How do host parents see and refer to their families? Is the *au pair* being referred to as a member of the UK host family? Under what conditions and what are its implications? Similarly, the notion of 'family member' is being explored from the point of view of the *au pairs*. The first part of this chapter looks at the larger

au pair institutions and policies, especially how they evaluate the position of *au pairs* in families, whilst the second part of the chapter focuses on the division of space and boundaries in *au pair* families' homes and on the issue of privacy.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of all the findings in terms of the research questions set out in the introductory and literature review chapter (Chapter 1 and 2). Moreover, this chapter locates the findings in terms of wider theoretical debates on family diversity and continuity. Migrant domestic work literature and family studies are typically addressed separately, and as such the advantages of linking both family and domestic work approaches are set out. I will conclude with a suggestion that the role of an 'employer' is approached not only from the viewpoint of domestic work, but also from a family studies perspective, hence the classification of host mothers and host fathers. By introducing the concept of family studies into the subject of domestic work, the focus shifts towards a greater understanding of family roles, family time and family boundaries, and how these are re-negotiated in this case by the employment of an *au pair*.

CHAPTER 2

Bringing migrant domestic work into family studies

The main aim of this chapter is to establish the theoretical positions developed within this thesis and to consider existing literature relevant to the research on both family and migrant domestic work studies in relation to *au pair* families. The previous chapter briefly described the *au pair* scheme, and how it emphasizes the notion of cultural exchange and 'being part of the family' rather than employment. How do host parents and *au pairs* interpret these guidelines in everyday life? Are there any tensions that arise as a result of these blurred boundaries? How is the concept of 'family' understood by host parents and *au pairs*? And what can a focus on *au pair* families offer in relation to broader theories of contemporary family living? The following section will help in understanding how the scholarly thought on family has developed and shifted over the last few decades. Starting with an outline of the functionalist viewpoint of the nuclear family, this chapter will highlight how this approach influenced the feminist account as well as the current debates on individualisation and family continuity. Within the recent developments in family scholarship, the concept of 'family practices' (Morgan 1996) will be particularly crucial for understanding how host parents and *au pairs* negotiated the spatial boundaries under the context of '*au pair* family'. Following this, the second part of this chapter will

address the academic literature on migrant domestic work. In particular, *au pair* families will be located within the sector where the demand and supply of domestic workers and the persistent inequalities associated with it are continually persistent. How are *au pairs* and their experiences specifically referred to in the body of domestic work literature? And how does this study in turn fits within such research? Moreover, how is the ideology of the family located within the field of domestic work and *au pair* families in particular?

Finally, drawing on both the waged migrant domestic and family literatures, this chapter will highlight the advantages of bringing these two bodies, previously studied separately, together. As such, this chapter will offer not only an overview, but will also highlight some of the overlapping areas and tensions between family studies and migrant domestic work that specifically relate to the study of *au pair* families' dynamics.

Functionalist theorization and family ideology

One of the most influential social theories on the family developed by Murdock's (1949) and Parson's (1971) was the functionalist model of the conventional family. A sociological tradition based on functionalist perspective, this model underlines what the 'normal family' should consist of and behave like. The basic premise of functional reasoning is the whole social system in relation to how different parts function within it (White and Klein, 2008:42). Within these lines, Parsons (1971) assumed that social world is composed of three systems; the cultural (shared symbols and meanings), the personal, and the social (institutions such as family). Each of these three systems was perceived as a necessary part in attaining a state of order (White and Klein, 2008). In this way, families were viewed as one of the significant institutions within the wider society. Specifically, it was the 'the nuclear family' that was perceived as the foundation for a well-functioning society (Bernardes, 1997). Parsons' (1971) concept of 'modern nuclear family' (rather than the formerly upheld extended Victorian family) was supposed to consist of husband, wife and their children, and was deemed as more appropriate for the needs of the capitalist society³. Moreover, the nuclear family was supposed to be organised into clearly marked family roles, where each role follows a specific hierarchical model based on gender and age (White and Klein, 2008). In this 'nuclear family' it is *'females who are seen as more expressive and maintaining the internal order of families and males'*

³Despite the belief of the demise of the extended family as suggested by Parsons, Laslett (1965) and Macfarlane (1979) argued that families still maintained rather strong extended kin networks, particularly in some geographical areas.

role is instrumental, in charge of maintenance and relation of the family to the external world' (White and Klein, 2008:39). Thus, men are perceived as the 'superior and executive leaders' whilst women are encouraged to act as the head of cultural, expressive and childrearing responsibilities within the family (White and Klein, 2008:39). This functionalist approach on family has been since widely criticized (by mostly feminist family scholarship discussed below) for its 'narrow and simplistic formulations', 'abstraction from reality' (Allan, 1999:59), and 'drawing upon popular stereotypes' (Bernardes, 1997:38). At the same time, White and Klein (2008:50) noted 'there can be no doubt that it (functionalist family theory) has influenced generations of family scholars'. Not only that, as Bernardes (1997:38) noted the nuclear family was; 'an extremely attractive and relatively simple explanation of society and implied that the functional explanation had very rapidly become part of the ordinary everyday common sense'. Indeed, more than a half century later, the concept of nuclear family continues to be predominant in current idealisation of the 'traditional family'. Despite the increased diversity of family forms, it is the nuclear family that tends to be set as an example in TV advertisements and media and continues to be culturally and socially idealised, particularly in the Western context (Carr 2011, Stacey 2011).

Although there is general agreement over diversification of family life among family scholarship, Ribbens McCarthy et al (2003:5) pointed out, whilst 'some are more positive about the implications' of changing trends, others regard them as 'breakdown'. The family breakdown argument interprets the current social changes, such as increased

divorced rates, co-habitation and single parenthood as negatively affecting the society at large and its moral order (Popenoe 1993). According to Gillies (2003) *'the more negative account of social change appeals to a traditionalist argument which calls for a renewed respect for normative structures and values'* (2003:3). As such, family breakdown supporters perceive (only) the nuclear family as an ideal arrangement and any alteration of it poses a danger to the stability of society, such as bringing emotional, psychological and economic disadvantages to children (Popenoe 1993). Moreover, Ganong and Coleman (2009:42) noted that *'the nuclear family model has come to be associated with a moral, natural imperative. Other forms of family life are considered to be immoral, or at best, less moral than the private Western nuclear family model'*. Similarly, Dally (2001) conducted research on the meaning of 'family time' and her research question focused on this widely held presumption that family time equals quality time and is usually perceived as something positive. Dally (2001) pointed out that according to her findings, even though the diversity of family forms is increasingly accepted, the ideology of 'happy family time' still prevails. It generally refers to family togetherness and enhanced quality time spent with family members, and thereby excludes the negative and difficult times.

Benton and Craib (2001:111) noted that the concepts of 'second nature' and 'totality' are imperative in discussions of ideology (of family in this case), whilst Muncie et al (1997:65) argued that the term ideology can be described as a *'set of partial, false and distorted ideas'*. According to Hall (1988) there is a variety of ideas and positions simultaneously battling (Hall in Muncie et al, 1997:67), however, some ideas are much

more successful at becoming ideological because no other alternatives are presented at the given time. Therefore this 'only' idea is then acknowledged, accepted and widely spread by the media, schools and state policies (Hall, 1988). Similarly, Muncie et al (ibid:70) noted that the capacity of thriving ideologies to materialize largely affects social processes. This materialization could be observed in state policies such as maternity/paternity leave, or they could be heard on the TV or radio when discussing the 'problem of family decline', or even watching TV advertisements for cleaning products that portrays the 'classic' nuclear family, happily acting out their pre-arranged family roles. As a result, when referring to the ideology of the family, it is almost unimaginable to think of a world where families would not be linked to prescribed family roles (mother, father, child, grandparents and so on) or not being associated with continuously positive feelings. Within these lines Bernardes (1997) adds that the prevailing ideology of traditional family and its associated roles has a huge impact on what individuals perceive as appropriate types of work for different family members.

How is the ideological nature of traditional family then manifested in *au pair* families? According to Muncie et al (1997) one of the explanations of successful ideology is that it is linked to the more privileged group of society, yet another description points to the 'constant battle of plurality of arguments' (Hall 1988). As it is families with relative class privilege that can afford to employ an *au pair* (in terms of house space and weekly 'salary'), it will be analysed whether there are any practices that reflect the traditional family values in relation to class position of host families. Chapter 4 will centre on the process of *au pair*

recruitment and will specifically focus on the selection criteria employed by host parents. It will become evident, that alongside ethnic and national means of commodifying *au pairs*, traditional family values also impacted on the selection of 'perfect *au pair*'.

Feminist influences on family studies

In the case of the ideology of the family, feminism has acted as a driving force behind the critique of the 'natural' or 'normal' family. Bernardes (1997:44) outlined '*within a conventional model of the family, both motherhood and housework were perceived as completely 'natural' and non-problematic; and feminist scholarship has begun to reveal these topics to be far more problematic and challenging than earlier work suggested*'. More specifically, feminist accounts were first to open up the spectrum of family theories not only from the point of view of gender inequality within families (initial phase of feminism), but also from the point of view of broadening the understanding of family, household and wider linkages to concepts such as class, age and ethnicity (De Reus et al 2005, Morgan, 1996:9). Similarly, Thorne (1982:2) summarized the main effects of feminism on various areas of family studies, such as the challenges of the ideology of 'the monolithic family', 'differentiation of family experience' (in particular based on the concepts of age and gender), questioning of public/private boundaries and highlighting the varied experiences of family life.

As Gillies (2003) points out, it was the second feminist wave of the 1960s that brought forth a vigorous critique of the family ideology, in

particular the assumption that families are units where mainly care and love is distributed. This critique was (and continues to be) highlighted in various studies revealing spousal and child abuse and violence within families (Straus and Gelles 1986; Thorne and Yalom 1982). Smart (2007:155) emphasized at various points in her book that *'an exploration of the existence of, and significance of, negative emotions is an essential correlative to the growth in nostalgia about families in the past and also the taken-for-granted assumption that families are healing and supportive places'*.

Yet other accounts directed the attention to the social construction of families, where the nuclear family posed a site where women were obligated to carry out unpaid domestic, care and house work, and as such were obstructed from participating in a wider society (Gillies 2003: 5). Such critique worked on the deconstruction of the public and private debate, where gender roles were divided between the public (male) domain and the private sphere of the family occupied by women. According to feminist scholarship, family should not be perceived as the place where division between the private and public is situated, as this division is not real. Rather, the dichotomy of public versus private is interlinked, not divided into opposites (Silva and Smart 1999:7, Anderson 2000). Nevertheless, Gillies points out (2003) that the public and private division continues to be debated as feminist scholars either call for the abolishment of the private sphere or recognise it as a crucial aspect of women's lived experience (2003:6). Other feminist scholars argued that gendered expectations, although unequal, can be reaffirmed by both women and men (Berk 1985; DeVault 1990). In relation to this research,

Chapter 5 will address in more detail the gendered division of domestic labour and the concept of companionate marriage. More specifically, it will be asked 'how does the division of labour become affected by the *au pair*'s arrival? What is more, it will be assessed how gendered division of labour affects relationships between hosts and *au pairs*.

Domestic work literature

'Domestic work is one of the oldest and most important occupations for millions of women around the world' (ILO 2010:7). Therefore, even before the employment of *au pairs* was established in Europe and elsewhere (and as such became the focus of academic research), several other classic studies centred on the analysis of domestic workers. Such research sought to bring attention to this type of employment, highlighting the poor conditions, lack of regulation and the problematic relationships between domestic workers and their employers. In the nineteenth century, and up until 1914, domestic service comprised one of the most important occupational categories in Britain (Gregson and Lowe, 1994:52 citing Burnett 1974). This then, was overwhelmingly a female occupation, and between 1851 and 1901 it accounted for over 40 percent of all employed women (Gregson and Lowe, 1994:52).

Over the last few decades, there has been an increase in academic literature addressing the contemporary changing patterns of migration in relation to domestic workers. Broader approaches on contemporary migration point to the 'feminisation of migration' (Castles and Miller 2003) and as such draw attention to how migrant workers are being

segregated into the type of labour associated with their gender. The globalisation of care literature examines how care has been distributed and redistributed in an international system where immigrant workers provide care in wealthier countries (Zimmerman et al 2006). The aspects of care work, such as its invisibility, low or no pay and being predominantly performed by women are not a new occurrence, however as Degiuli (2007) pointed out, the new element of this work is the shift towards migrant women who are now becoming the main performers of domestic work in receiving countries. This trend is becoming ever more widespread, taking on new global dimensions. Parreñas (2003) analysed how the current global economy patterns of increasing gaps between the global south and north has a major influence in the creation of these global dimensions and divisions of care work. The key element here is the furthering economic divide in the distribution of power and control (global north) in opposition to powerlessness (global south), concepts generally applied when describing the characteristics of care work organisation, as Parreñas (2008) noted:

While structural adjustment policies burden women in the global south, welfare reform in the global north subject women to significant reductions in public funding and the privatisation of social welfare programs. (2008:50)

Thus, Parreñas (2003) clearly illuminated the push and pull factors affecting both the female migrant domestic workers as well as the women in affluent countries, bringing the scope of domestic work employment to a global level. The unequal distribution of care is not the only result of the global economy divide, it is also the new system of inequalities

occurring between more affluent and less privileged women that should be brought to attention, where domestic work is being predominantly performed by migrant women for women in the West (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1997, Hochschild and Ehrenreich 2003, Anderson 2000). Within these lines Bush (2013) noted that *'low pay, low status, and ethnic and social class stratification have, then, been identified as contributing to in-home childcare becoming a 'migrant' sector in the UK and elsewhere in the world'* (2013:544). Anderson (2001) adds yet other factors that encourage the recent growth of migrant domestic workers, such as the ageing population, the increase of women entering paid labour together with changes in family forms (2001:27). As a result, Cox (2006) noted that *'Britain is now served by tens of thousands of nannies, cleaners and au pairs as well as housekeepers, gardeners, drivers and the new domestic helpers – all ensuring the middle class live more comfortably'* (2006:3).

According to Lutz (2011) the sector of migrant domestic work today is different to the one in the past as migrant domestic workers today tend to be higher educated, combine both live-in and live-out form of domestic work and they increasingly tend to come from middle class background in their country of origin. Up until now, research conducted in relation to *au pairs* has mostly been done either as a part of scholarly work on the feminization of migration or the division of power associated with the sphere of domestic service (Anderson 2000, Hess & Puckhaber 2004, Newcombe 2004, Parreñas 2001, Williams and Gavanas 2008). Within the UK, attention has been given to the *au pairs'* personal experiences (Burikova and Miller 2010; Williams and Balaz 2004) the

living conditions and interactions between the *au pair* and her/his employer (Hess and Puckhaber, 2004); on the representation of *au pairs* in the British Press (Cox, 2007); and more recently, on the subjectivities of *au pair* visa immigration control (Anderson 2009). Approaching this topic from the viewpoint of relationships between *au pairs* and host parents, Cox and Narula (2003) explored the quasi-familial complexities and suggested that household rules are a key factor in shaping the relationship between the au-pair and her employer. Burikova (2006) explored Slovak *au pairs* in London in relation to their bedrooms, suggesting that the decoration and other aesthetic strategies were being affected by *au pairs'* desire to both settle and not settle at the same time. In addition to the UK research, the literature on *au pairs'* experiences has also been growing in Europe. For example, Hovdan (2005) studied the experiences of Norwegian *au pairs* and their reasons for starting this experience and concluded that the *au pairs'* experiences were closer to domestic work than cultural exchange (also in Hemsing 2003).

The above research raises significant issues concerning the employment of *au pairs*, namely the inequalities that persist within the sphere of domestic work employment, as well as assumptions regarding the *au pair* scheme. For example, the 'family membership' is classed as highly problematic. The studies highlighted above demonstrated that classing domestic workers (in this case *au pairs*) as family members posed difficulties in the way power was distributed and operated within the employer/employee relationship. As a result, domestic workers experienced decreased working conditions as employers viewed their 'family membership' as a means of gaining control of working hours.

What is more, the pseudo family set up of domestic work frequently results in either a relationship which is either pretended or deemed as too intimate, depending how employers feel about employing a domestic worker. In either case, Tronto (2002) noted that domestic workers are employed in a sector which makes them highly vulnerable to different types of exploitations. Other authors point out to the informal recruitment organization of migrant domestic workers (Kindler 2009) and lack of legal regulation and protection of domestic workers (Anderson 1993) as other features contributing to their exploitation.

Critique of mainstream migrant domestic work literature

Some of the recent migrant domestic work literature has begun to pay attention to the differences among domestic workers, and challenges some of the main assumptions of the earlier research. For example, in relation to gendered dynamics of domestic work, Scrinzi's (2010) research in Italy and France revealed that male migrants were also involved in the participation of migrant domestic care chain, and during this process their masculinities were re-constructed based on their racial background. Lutz (2011:2) also pointed out that *'contrary to other scholarship in which relations between the female employer and employees are frequently characterized as a genuine 'exploitative relationship' between the global North and South, I suggest to put forward the thesis that in fact these relations are far more complex.'* Macdonald (2010) conducted research on the delegation of mother-work with 30 mother employers and 50 child carers in the United States and also suggested that grouping all types of domestic workers into a single

category is not productive as *'there is a crucial difference between delegated, commodified mothering and delegated commodified housework'* (2010:7). What is more, Macdonald (2010: 8) reminded us that there are significant differences in the 'demographic composition' of available employees, depending whether the care provided focuses mainly on childcare or composes of both childcare and housework.

Williams and Balaz (2004:1814) noted that *'migrant workers acquire financial capital, human capital, social capital and cultural capital from working abroad, but these have different values in the spaces of destination and origin'*. Similarly, Zontini (2006) described women migrants as active agents and Burikova with Miller (2010:1) noted *'the mainstream academic literature is concerned primarily to reveal the exploitation and inequality found in this form of work and it is thereby directed to domestic workers largely in their capacity as labourers'*. Likewise, Hondageneu-Sotelo (1994) argued that migrant women coming to work abroad as domestic workers might challenge the traditional gender roles, as by being the main provider for the family back at home might improve their status not only within their family but also in the wider society.

As highlighted earlier, migrant domestic work literature remains rather negative regarding the *au pair* scheme, such as by focusing on the occurrence of inequalities (Anderson 2003; Cox and Watt 2002; Gregson and Lowe 1994; Parreñas 2003). Without a doubt it is imperative to address the vulnerable position occupied by *au pairs* in host families and this research will seek to contribute in this regard.

So far however, there is limited empirical research on *au pairs* which highlights the positive aspects of such work. One of such research was conducted by Nagy (2008), who investigated the linguistic outcome of Hungarian *au pairs* that returned from the UK, and suggested that the *au pair* experience had not only had a positive effect on their knowledge of the English language, but there were also larger socio-cultural developments, as *au pairs* felt their experience helped them to be more independent. In this regard, the current research aims to add to existing scholarship by considering the variety of *au pair* experience. By looking beyond the 'victimization thesis', it will also be considered whether *au pairing* can be perceived as an experience that is not deemed as only exploitative.

Low value of care

According to Cheal (2008) one of the crucial questions examined by feminist scholars in terms of the gendered division of family roles is '*Who does what for whom?*' and '*Who gives what for whom?*' (2008:91). Tronto (2002) argues '*when the wealthiest members of society use domestic servants to meet their child care needs, the result is unjust for individuals and for society as a whole*' (2002:35). This is because the domestic workers are employed in the private households, their work is often assumed not to be as employment, but merely as a 'substitute for the wife'. As highlighted above in the feminist literature overview, the nature of domestic work has been undoubtedly linked to issues of gender. Predominantly perceived as 'women's work', domestic work is normally carried out in unpaid form by women in families. Although

migrant domestic workers are remunerated for their labour, Anderson (2000) claims that its low status is linked to the general undervaluation of care work. Williams (2012: 372) poignantly summarizes the development and motivations of migrant domestic work employment, as she stated:

'This is the continuing role migrant workers from poorer regions have played as welfare providers. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s in Britain, the recruitment of health and care labour from the colonies provided both cheap labour for the new institutions of the welfare state and met a labour shortage that otherwise would have had to be filled by married women (Williams, 1989). Paradoxically, today the employment of migrant domestic and care labour prevents the disruption of the 'adult worker' model of welfare where women are encouraged into paid employment, as well as maintaining care work as underpaid, undervalued 'women's work'. Then and today these were cost-effective ways of securing family norms and meeting care needs, creating a reproductive labour force layered through 'race', class and gender inequalities.'

Existing literature highlighted that reproductive work sits within the 'maternal culture' which deems women responsible for it. In particular it is working mothers who are simultaneously positioned between employment, childcare and housework duties, undoubtedly creating tensions. According to Parrenas (2014:62), the employment of migrant domestic workers 'helps retain a culture of maternalism that hunts the efforts of women entering the labour force'. Parrenas (2014:52) continues; 'as such, the migrant domestic workers are there to maintain the traditional gender order in the family and ease the impacts of

women's labour market participation'. Domestic duties as well as care for children and elderly are seen as women's responsibility, irrespectively of their employment situation (Parrenas 2014). The fact that *au pairs* are also (mostly) women only underlines the unequal gender division of work in families. Chapter 5 will focus on the gendered relationships between host parents and *au pairs*. In particular, how were the tensions between labour market and gender associated responsibilities perceived by both host mothers and host fathers? Undoubtedly, *au pair's* work is perceived as female in nature, how does it affects host parents' roles and their relationship with *au pairs*?

Contemporary modes of family theorization

The following section will return to the subject of family studies and it will address the contemporary theories in family studies. Although there is a general consensus among academics over the diversity of family life, there are different interpretations in relation to both the extent and the effect of diversification on social life. According to Gillies (2003:2) contemporary scholarship on family studies could be divided into three main standpoints which could be broadly encapsulated into the debate over the *continuity*, *breakdown* and the *individualisation* of family life. Jamieson et al (2006:2;3) adequately summarized that the differences between these three approaches depend largely on their 'degree of emphasis on individual agency as well as the extent to which these changes are seen as positive or negative'. The following sections

will outline these perspectives and will relate them to the current study of *au pair* families.

Individualisation theory and democratisation of family life

According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) the traditional social structures, such as family, class and prescribed gender roles, are losing their importance within an era of reflexive modernity. The following quote neatly summarizes their concept of individualisation:

On the one hand, the traditional social relationships, bonds and belief systems that used to determine people's lives in the narrowest detail have been losing more and more of their meaning. From family unit through region, religion, class and gender role, what used to provide a framework and rules has become increasingly brittle. On the other hand, people are linked into the institutions of the labour market and welfare state, educational and legal system, which have emerged together with modern society (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:ix)

As previously mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, the thesis of individualization (leading to de-traditionalisation or democratisation) has been outlined in recent years as one of the explanations responsible for the current changes in family arrangements. This viewpoint also suggests that in order to ensure the continued survival of family in an increasingly 'risky' society, it is necessary to democratise family life (Bauman 2000; Giddens 1991; Finch and Mason 1993). Also, what is implied here is that what was previously perceived as the 'traditional family form' is now viewed as a family which is 'fluid' (Bauman 2000), or where individuals are in pursuit of their own 'reflexive biographies'

(Giddens 1992). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim referred to the increased fluidity and individualisation as a 'loss of security' and implied that *'familiar concepts such as 'marriage' no longer apply'* (2002:2, 3). This is because women's' emancipation, economic prosperity and increased education, together with new advances in technology, medicine and law open up the options of new forms of partnerships and as such bring forth new alternatives to family living. For example, obtaining a divorce is now much readily available and acceptable than in the past, presenting new options of remarriage (creating reconstituted family) or alternatively of single (divorced) status (or parenthood when children are present). In terms of technological advances in medicine, there are new possibilities of artificial insemination, again bringing new set of questions and possibilities for today's partnerships. For example, Hargreaves (2006) focused on heterosexual families in New Zealand using donor insemination (DI). She noted that since *'social fathers were constructed as the legal and nurturing father, and donors had no rights and responsibilities towards their DI offspring'* these families had to reconstruct the biological and the social meanings of kinship ties (Hargreaves, 2006:280). In this regard, Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) individualisation theory suggests that there also comes a confusion regarding who belongs to a family, *'because you can no longer tell who belongs together and how'* (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:6). What is more, the newly created sets of possibilities in regards of personal life organisation affect the nuclear family where;

The fragility of the traditional model of the family will become more pronounced, further breaks will occur and affect

groups that have hitherto remained stable' whilst consequently 'the appearance of counter-trends and the development of hopes and longings that the family will be a haven in the stormy seas is more likely' (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:39).

In this way, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) suggested that due to weakening traditional nuclear family model and increasing diversification of other family forms, the nostalgic idealisation of families will become more dominant.

In response to individualisation theory, this thesis will address the following questions; If individualisation implies diversification of family forms, what can be said about *au pair* families? Also, how is the proposed 'loosening of prescribed structures' such as class and gender roles manifested in the lives of *au pair* families?

Individualisation critique and Family continuity

The critique of the individualisation thesis raises doubts over its extent and impact on structural formations, such as class and gender (Heaphy 2011; Jamieson 1998; Jordan et al 1994; Smart 1997). For example, according to Heaphy (2011) individualisation theories '*overplay the agency, choices and 'freedoms' that people have with respect to how they can relate, whilst continuities underplay how relating practices are institutionalised, structured along axes of differences and linked to the flow of power*' (2011:24). Along similar lines Jamieson (1998) argues:

Perhaps the main reason for doubting a shift towards disclosing intimacy is the relatively modest change in gender

inequalities. This is highlighted particularly in heterosexual behaviour and couple relationships. Gender differences in parenting persist. Many men continue to see fatherhood as having much less involvement with children than motherhood. Even those men who believe that being a father and being a mother should be very similar tasks often fail to implement this in practice (1998:166).

Similarly, Bornat et al (1999:115) posed a question regarding the increasing 'fluidity' of family life in Britain; *'How realistic is this picture of fluidity and inclusivity in Britain today?'* Focusing on the intergenerational family relationships of women in families, they concluded that although there were some aspects of women's family lives that have become 'equalized' with men, such as financial independence, role sharing, cohabitation, female authority and control over fertility, the link with the traditionally perceived care work remained still rather unequal (Bornat et al, 1999:117). In this way, although the authors described a variety of feminist language the young women used in their interviews, at the same time when it came to the gendered expectations of care work towards their parents, these seemed to be perceived as 'non-negotiable' (Bornat et al, 1999:127). Irwin (1999:32) also noted *'despite changes in some women's position within employment, the general experience of women is of relative economic disadvantage and vulnerability'*. Overall, such scholarship emphasizes continuity in the amount of gender inequalities persistent around domestic, child and care work.

To a degree, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001:56) recognise that gender and class still shape individuals' lives. For example the authors note that women today still 'bear the brunt of family tasks' and 'the

degree to which they can realize the self-fulfilment and emancipation varies according to their social and educational level'. Although the persistence of gender inequalities is clear, the authors also assume that the higher the social class and education level the better chances have women to become self-fulfilled individuals. In reality however, the migrant domestic work literature discussed above demonstrated that there is an increase in the numbers of highly educated women (university degree) and from middle class background, who are part of the 'global domestic work chain' (Lutz, 2011; Williams et al 2004). More crucially, the individualisation thesis argues that a new model of 'free choice' has replaced the traditional division of gendered roles within home (2002:62), noting that the disparity between greater education achievements contrasted with lack of equality in the labour market is a recipe for 'high risk of failure and retreat into family life (2002:67). Nonetheless, the literature on migrant domestic work reminds us that 'in Western industrialized countries, in spite of all emancipatory rhetoric, the domestic tasks of cleaning, caring and cooking are persistently viewed as women's work' (Lutz, 2011:1). It could be also said, that the contradictory influences over increased education and the lack of employment equality, is in the case of host mothers' avoided by the employment of *au pair*, and as such it creates further inequalities between women, whilst sustaining the gendered division of labour.

Beck-Gernsheim (2002:8) pointed out that the common interpretation of 'individualisation' involves the belief of the end of family, or (and) the creation of 'singles society'. However, the condition of individualisation implies not only the emphasis on the being as

individuals, at the same time it also bears with it the concept of 'closeness and longing for ties'. As a result, Beck-Gernsheim (2002:8) claims that the process of individualisation creates a new and better meaning of family, and that is 'the negotiated family, the alternating family, the multiple family, new arrangements after divorce, remarriage, divorce again, new assortments from you, my, our children, our past and present families'. The author continues, 'whereas one used to be able to fall back upon well-adapted rules and rituals, we now see a kind of stage-management of everyday life, an acrobatics of discussion and finely balanced agreement' (2002:9). As a result of this new living arrangement with an *au pair*, host parents had to consciously address new questions and dilemmas. For example, negotiation of working hours, responsibility over *au pair* and 'general family time' are all concepts closely addressed throughout the thesis.

The concept of 'negotiation' is closely linked to the individualization thesis, where traditional norms give way to choice that leads to 'families of negotiation' (Evertsson and Nyman, 2011:70). In particular, negotiation involves 'interactions between family members about how to understand a situation, and the courses of action that emerge from these understandings' (McCarthy and Edwards, 2011:135). Similarly, Beck and Beck Gernsheim (1995:2) also suggest that due to an increase in emancipation and equal gender rights, families are becoming negotiated spheres, where new and convenient arrangements substitute the fixed nuclear family. In relation to this research, Chapter 5 will focus on how relationships are 'negotiated' between hosts and *au pairs*. To what degree are these relationships shaped by negotiation of status, hierarchy or are

gender dominant? According to Evertsson and Nyman (2011) social and cultural notion of gender remains powerful, as they note; 'despite a variety of ways in which gender can be constructed, normative (traditional) notions about gender are still strong. Women and men are still often perceived as „being“ a certain way and as „being good at“ certain things (2011:73). Within these lines, chapter 6 will focus on how host parents negotiated 'family time' and interpreted the notion of *au pair* being a 'family member'.

Continuity of family

Yet, other scholars recognise that although there seems to be diversification of family relationships, the continuity of 'traditional family' still persists. For instance, Ribbens McCarthy et al (2003:8) suggested that '*there seems to be, then, an intertwining of continuity and diversity in contemporary family life* (also in McRae 1999, Silva and Smart 1999). Similarly, Weeks et al (1999) referred to lesbian and gay partnerships as 'families of choice', and noted there is a '*sense of involvement, security and continuity over time traditionally associated with the orthodox family, and yet which are deeply rooted in a specific historic experience*' (Weeks et al, 1999:83). Park and Roberts (2002) also argue for the pertinence of family ties. Based on a large survey of almost 50,000 households, they suggested that family continues to be the main source of support when individuals experience difficulties (2002:202). Moreover, Pahl and Spencer (2003:21) described contemporary relationships as a combination 'between familial and non-familial' and suggested; '*Those who claim to have found novelty in certain contemporary forms of social*

relationships need to be both more cautious and more attentive to the rapidly expanding historical evidence that is now available.

Other studies have also supported the claims that family remains important for individuals in contemporary Britain. For example, Scott (1997:603) conducted research based on large household survey composed of 5500 households and concluded that 'family events were, by far and away, the most frequently mentioned category'. According To Scott, this implies that despite the rising number of diverse types of families, 'it does not stop individual lives from remaining inter-twined with others they consider 'family'' and warned against confusing between increased diversity among household composition from the presumed decline of family (1997:617)

'It has been suggested, that the obligatory, rather than voluntary, and hierarchical, rather than equal, character of the husband-wife bond has dissolved and public stories support the view that parents and spouses are or will be like friends to each other, having broken with the past of each- in- their- place, playing out a family role. However, it is not so clear that this picture of change sums us how people are behaving towards each other in practice' (Jamieson, 1998:161).

According to Crow (2002), sociological concepts such as gender, age, social class and ethnicity should be considered in relations to the nature of family life. In this way, when put under the lens of their middle class position, gender roles and dominant views of family meaning, how do the *au pair* families correspond to these wider debates?

Approaches to studying families

As stated above, feminist scholarship has acted as the main driving force behind the critique of the 'conventional nuclear family', steering the direction for new ways of theorising families. For example, in order to avoid over-generalizing and over-idealizing families, Gubrium and Holstein (1990) suggested defining family in terms of 'being a family', where family is defined by practices and actions embedded within it. Ball (1972), rather differently, suggested characterizing families as a '*cohabiting domestic relationship which involved sexual activity and the birth of children*' (1972:302). In contrast to Gubrium and Holstein (1990) and Ball (1972), Bender (1967:493) proposed omitting the use of the word 'family' altogether, and instead using the term household. Applying yet another standpoint, Bernardes (1999) proposed that only by acknowledging that 'the family' does not exist can we be liberated from its ideological and socially constructed nature. Within these lines for example, Holstein and Gubrium (1999) argue that family should be perceived as a *socially constructed process* where family is performed and enacted in aspects of everyday life. This view of family, does not only seek new ways of theorizing family, due to its recognition of family diversity, but at the same time, viewing family as a socially constructed process questions the deterministic ideas of family that views it as a singular concept. Such a view of family is regarded as ethnomethodological, as according to the authors, this social construction of families is an ongoing process that is constantly reproduced in different

localities. The emphasis lies in the interaction as a mode of transfer from meanings into reality. From this point of view, Gubrium and Holstein (1999) and Bernardes (1999) argue that it is the *discussion* itself in relation to the meaning of family, that makes this abstract meaning real, in other words, it is what Gubrium and Lynott (1985) call '*doing things with words*'.

Another highly influential approach in examining families was developed by Morgan (1996). Similarly to Gubrium and Holstein (1996), Morgan (1999) suggested looking at family as a fluid and flexible entity rather than a static unit of analysis, as only in this way can we truly understand the current diversity of family life and family practices. Emphasizing change, fluidity and flux, Morgan (1999: 15, 18) also highlighted that '*the notions of 'family' are rarely static but are constantly subjected to processes of negotiations and re-definitions*' (for example, non-heterosexual families, couples with handicapped children or step families). For Morgan (1999:16) '*family represents a constructed quality of human interaction or an active process rather than a thing-like object of detached social investigation*'. In relation to the meaning of 'family' in Morgan's 'family practices', Morgan described three interconnected levels that are all part of the process of constructing family practices. First, these are the social actors (parents, grandparents, children, etc.), then there are the social and cultural institutions (such as professionals, schools, religious leaders, legislative frameworks, etc.) and lastly it is the observer himself/herself, the sociologist (Morgan, 1999:18, 19). In addition to these three levels, Morgan (1999:19, 20) also stressed the importance of emotional meaning (both positive and negative) which is

associated with the word 'family'. This emotional meaning is underlined in part by the ideological essence of the family, of what families are supposed to be like, and also by the different historical contexts.

The main focus of family practices is on 'doing family' through the analysis of human activities. These activities might occur every day as part of a routine such as doing homework, cooking and eating dinner, or as part of occasional rituals, such as Christmas celebrations, Summer holidays or Sunday lunch. For Morgan, the term 'family' remains important, as he recognises that 'family' remains significant for many people. What is more, according to Morgan (2011) there is variation of practices over lifetime, and 'family' (not in singular but ideological sense) continues to be a meaningful concept in people's lives. In other words, this approach then suggests recognition of diversity of family life (such as single parent, step families and so on) whilst also highlighting the continuity.

'For Morgan, family practices are routines that are not random and do not change suddenly. They are located in culture, history and personal biography, and they change according to circumstances' (Silva and Smart, 1999:5). In this way, both the concepts of time and space are relevant to family practices, because 'the way in which time and space are involved in everyday family practices and with each other can be seen in the everyday phrase, often the subject of ironic comment, about 'spending time with family'' (Morgan, 2011:74). In the context of this research, Chapter 6 will closely address the notion of 'family time' in *au pair* families. Family time is associated with 'quality time' and is

underlined by ideological thinking surrounding 'happy families'. As previously mentioned, Dally's (2001) findings suggested that 'family time' is a term that is often taken for granted and needs to be critically examined. Based on her research, family time is often more diverse and problematic than generally assumed (Daly 2001). In this way, it will be discussed whether 'family time' becomes affected after *au pairs*' arrival? *Au pair* scheme is embedded within notions of family membership and cultural exchange, not as a form of domestic work, how is then 'family time' understood by *au pairs* and host parents?

What is more, within family practices, the way space is organised within a house also 'includes divisions of labour within the home, which may well map on to differences between genders and generations' (Morgan 2011:75). Gregson and Lowe (1994) overviewed the scholarship on domestic work in Britain and highlighted Davidoff's (1974) study, as one of the examples of domestic service research in Victorian Britain. In Davidoff's research (1974) '*the reproductive space of the Victorian middle-class household is shown to be socially and spatially segregated. The domestic workers, referred to as 'servants' are shown to have been confined to certain social spaces, to have been constrained in their use of other spaces*' (cited in Gregson and Lowe, 1994:54). The participant *au pair* families also noted that sufficient space in the house was almost prerequisite affecting the decision to hire an *au pair* in the first place. The issue of space, used as a concept in separating the 'quality time' between the *au pair* and host family will be addressed in Chapter 6.

One of the main aims of the above literature overview was to assess recent investigations and examinations about the notion of family and as such its connection to the theories on fluidity, change and contemporary family life. One of the perspectives put forward in understanding family diversity, suggested analysing families in terms of actionable processes as illustrated by the notion of 'doing family', 'displaying family' or by focusing on family practices. Increasingly, non-conventional families (step families, same sex partnerships, and so on) have been employed as case studies to highlight how 'family practices' are performed in different settings (Finch 2007, Smart 2003, Weeks et al 1999). However, *au pair* families have so far been absent from such analysis. Such a lack of systematic study may be due to several reasons, e.g., that in the mainstream literature, *au pairs* are referred to as migrant domestic workers and to conceptualise them as family members might be perceived as problematic (Anderson 2001, 2003). Yet, if we were to adopt the meaning of Morgan's (1996) 'family practices', or Finch's (2007) 'family display', the *au pair's* presence in itself could represent yet another family adaptation- the *au pair* family- and helps us shed light on a variety of contemporary issues.

Aim of thesis

When considering the diversity of contemporary family forms, sociological literature has paid attention to nuclear (Crompton 1997, Haddock et al 2003), extended and multigenerational (Bengston 2001), single-parent (Bumpass and Raley 1995, Silva 1996) divorced (Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991, Smart et al 2001), transnational (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002, Zontini 2006), ethnic minority families (Collins 1990), step and reconstituted families (Ribbens McCarthy et al 2003) or same-sex partnerships (Cheal 2008).

Tantalisingly, very little attention has so far been given to the study of families, which include an au-pair. The *au pair* presence is usually unrecognized even though she not only works but also lives with the host family, and as such participates in the day to day family life, and without a doubt this new set up impacts differently on each family member. New relationships are built and re-conceptualization regarding family time and family membership have to be re-formulated. It will be debated whether the actions of embedding the *au pair* into the host family could be viewed as an extension of contemporary family forms, highlighting democratisation of families, or whether these families convey a different sense, as argued by 'family continuity' theories. Crucially to this dissertation, I will ask to what end can the *au pair* can be considered as bringing diversity *into* the host family, and it is the main core of my research, namely, to consider how differences regarding family roles, family time and space boundaries are negotiated by these *au pair* embracing 'neo' families.

In terms of researching different forms of contemporary family arrangements, Jamieson et al (2006) have suggested that '*the detailed exploration of these different sets of practices, using a variety of methodologies, may help us understand their particular logics and rationales, as well as how they are distinct from or have continuities with more regularly understood relationships of family and kinship.*' With the increased numbers of families seeking live-in childcare arrangements in the form of *au pairs*, this research adds to the growing scholarship of contemporary family studies. It increases the understanding of how host families construct their relationships and space boundaries as well how they re-conceptualise the meaning of family after the introduction of an *au pair* into its core.

This thesis seeks to contribute to the wider debates of migrant domestic work by increasing the understanding of the relationships between host parents and *au pairs*, not only from the perspective of domestic work literature. As such, the role of 'employer' is approached not only from the viewpoint of domestic work, but also from a family studies perspective, hence the classification of host mothers and host fathers. This focus allows for greater understanding of family roles, family time and family boundaries and how they are re-negotiated by *au pair* employment. Therefore, this thesis seeks to address this gap in knowledge that currently prevails in academic literature.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The previous chapter provided an overview of the theoretical framework employed in this thesis and in the present chapter I provide the methodological outline of this research. Firstly, the epistemological rationale of qualitative research is assessed, particularly in relation to studying families where each individual can occupy a different 'role' and as such a family can be presented as engaging a diverse set of subjectivities. Second, the choice of semi-structured interviews as the main research method is described and consideration is given to the different types of interviews carried out with families. Following that, the focus is placed on the sampling strategy, negotiating access to participants, analysis of the data, and ethical considerations. Finally, the role of the researcher is discussed, highlighting the significance of reflexivity in qualitative research.

Researching families

According to Greenstein (2006:7), there are four distinctive features in terms of researching families as a type of social and behavioural research:

1. There is a general difficulty in defining families. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Literature Review), there are various definitions of what

families are, and some researchers have even substituted the term such as personal/intimate relationships or 'family display' (Finch 2007). Moreover, the ongoing discussion regarding the meaning of family could be separated into dichotomy of what family is as opposed to what family should be like (Gillis 1996). Thus the concept of family is laden with ideological images that relates to both; the epistemological and moral debates (Silva and Smart, 1999).

2. Families are composed of a set of individuals, and each individual can occupy simultaneously different roles. For example, in terms of this research, some of the women interviewed inhabited the role of the wife, mother, host mother and employer at the time during an interview.
3. Families are viewed as private niches, and therefore particular attention needs to be given not only to the access of this private area but also to the access of the collective meanings shared by family members.
4. Every person has their own individual presumptions of what families are, and this further adds to the complexity of carrying out family research.

Within these lines, Daly (1992: vii) comments: '*The family is a specialized area of study and family phenomena are complex, subjective and private*'. The issues of families as a private sphere and the personal presumptions of what constitutes families will be further discussed in the subsequent chapters, as they were particularly relevant in this study.

Qualitative research of families

As outlined in the Introductory Chapter of the thesis, this research is primarily concerned with answering the following overarching question: **What is the impact of *au pair* employment on family dynamics?** I have addressed this overarching question by focusing on how are host parents' roles and family time negotiated after the arrival of *au pair*. How do host parents hire their *au pairs*? These questions were guided by my aim of understanding family members within their own context of family life. I wanted to explore how their perspectives are constructed within an area where multiple meanings are being simultaneously created. The discussion that follows below highlights the applications of qualitative methodology to this research.

Various scholars have pointed out that conventional family studies began as mainly quantitative in nature (with notable exceptions of Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918), and qualitative methodologies were initially largely ignored (Gilgun et al 1992, LaRossa et al 1985). It was not until the late 1980s that qualitative family research began to develop, with a particular interest in the exploratory and descriptive small scale family research (LaRossa et al 1985). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998:3) the term qualitative research could be broadly understood as a '*field of enquiry by itself that crosses different disciplines*'. As such, it could imply a multiplicity of philosophical traditions, for instance those of positivist, post-structuralist, interpretive and postmodernist in nature. For instance, addressing the epistemological (the nature of knowledge) diversity, the positivist stance '*assumes that reality exists and it can be*

directly observed and measured' whereas the interpretive orientation presumes that there is *'no single observable reality and highlights the social construction of reality'* (Merriam, 2009:8).

Nevertheless, in order to outline a firmer definition, Denzin and Lincoln (1998:3) note that a qualitative researcher *'studies things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them'*. Similarly, Gilgun et al (1992:4) point out that qualitative methodology is particularly appropriate for the type of research that *'delves in depth into complexities and processes that emphasize the subject's frames of reference'*. As families produce both shared and individual meanings, a qualitative approach emphasizing the interactions, meanings and environments is particularly suitable for family studies and thus appropriate for the current research of *au pair* families. Greenstein (2006) also highlights that due to the nature of families being constructed by individuals, qualitative analysis is most suitable as it can examine the subjectivities of each family member from their own perspective, rather than from the perspective of the researcher. On the same note, Miles and Huberman (1994:7) comment: *'A primary goal of qualitative research is to understand the ways that people come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day to day activities'*. Quantitative methods in the form of surveys and questionnaires are unable to illustrate and express the depth and meaning of every-day human actions and to uncover how roles and responsibilities are articulated and negotiated within the family (Denscombe, 2003; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). In terms of this

research, it was particularly important to be able to present as wide a picture as possible from different family members, in particular of how living with an *au pair* affected host mothers and host fathers and in turn the effects on *au pairs* of living with a host family. This is because family dynamics occur within a sphere that is composed of different perspectives and meanings, and this research seeks to uncover how these perspectives and meanings are affected by the inclusion of 'a new family member' – the *au pair*. For instance, Chapter 5 will focus on the modes of interactions and relationships between host mothers/*au pairs* and host fathers/*au pairs*, as each position is embedded within, and affected by, a larger social classification of not only contemporary motherhood and fatherhood but also by dominant beliefs of gender roles within families. In this way, the individual accounts shared by my participants allowed me to shed light on the many-sided web of family living. For that reason, it is possible to speculate that being able to conduct interviews with various family members allowed for the emergence of richer empirical data. On this note, Gilgun et al (1992:4) argue that qualitative methodology is particularly helpful in the '*examination of the diversity of family experiences and family forms as it can focus on the processes of maintaining and producing family realities.*' Qualitative methods, such as interviews or observation are approaches best suited to accessing the inside information of family life. Gilgun et al (1992:5) continue: '*What participants think of as habitual, takes on new meaning when compared and contrasted with the habits of others. Qualitative research can facilitate making the obvious (and therefore hidden) into new sets of meanings.*' Franklin (1996:253) also suggests that '*qualitative research*

*methods are especially relevant to studying families because there are many aspects of family process and interactions that are **hidden**, or may be complicated to be easily ascertained with quantitative methods'* (my emphasis). For example in the current study, employing a questionnaire approach would not have been able to reveal in great detail how participant host families re-constructed the meaning of 'family time' in order to either include or exclude the *au pair* from taking part in certain family outings. Chapter 6 further explores the negotiation of boundaries in *au pair* employing households.

The following section will particularly address the research method chosen for this study.

Choice of research method

In the past, research conducted in relation to *au pairs*, has mainly employed; in depth semi structured interviews (Burikova 2006; Hovdan 2005; Williams and Balaz 2004), follow up interviews (Hess & Puckhaber 2004), structured interviews (Cox and Narula 2003), ethnographic approaches (Burikova and Miller 2010), but also a combination of in depth interviews and questionnaires (Nagy 2008; Quinn 1997) or focus groups (Cox and Narula 2003) as a methodological means of gathering data. As discussed above, the main aim of this study is to investigate the effects of *au pair* employment on the larger family dynamics, and a qualitative approach was selected as the most suitable to uncover the subjective, hidden and complex processes that occur within participant host families. According to Ryan and Bernard (2000), the choice of

research method(s) is not only affected by the actual topic of the research and the research question, but it is also influenced by the accessibility to participants, ethical considerations, available resources and theoretical underpinnings. Within this study, due to practical reasons, such as the location and relatively limited time allowed for data collection, an ethnographic investigation involving participant observation was not feasible. This is because accessing one host family (both host parents and *au pair*) involved obtaining permission from each person. Following this, each participant was then contacted individually in order to schedule an interview, where *au pairs* usually preferred to meet at a local café and host parents in their houses after working hours. Thus, this approach was time consuming on the one hand, on the other hand it resulted in obtaining access to various family members (accessing participants is discussed in more detail later in this chapter). At the same time, I would suggest that recognizing this 'time limitation' undoubtedly offers a scope for conducting of further research, as participant observation or indeed gaining access to other family members such as grandparents (and perhaps older children), would undoubtedly add an additional dimension to understanding the nature of *au pair* families. As a result, given the taken-for-granted nature of many of the daily actions that go on in the private sphere of host families, together with the time available for accessing participants and data collection, and as my aim was to work with a sample bigger than just one *au pair* family, semi-structured interviews were selected as the most suitable method for this study.

Denscombe (2003) notes that qualitative interviews are an appropriate tool for producing in-depth data with the particular focus on participants' viewpoints. In the current study, the choice of semi-structured interviews was selected as appropriate for an in-depth exploration of the main aim of the research, particularly themes relating to family roles and family practices. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to give their opinions and share their personal views by introducing general questions, whilst at the same time, the nature of the 'semi-structure' allowed for detours and explorations of other potentially interesting and relevant themes (Denscombe, 2003; Bryman, 2004). This allowed the interviewees to address not only the introduced themes, but also to express what they felt to be relevant and thus offered valuable insights for the research (Bryman, 2004). One of the main advantages of the qualitative interview as a method is its flexibility, as it not only allows for more opportunities in terms of arrangements with participants (location, date, time), but also in relation to modifications of the line of enquiry (Bryman, 2004). This flexibility is further discussed below, where the rationale for interview questions is set out.

Interview guide

An interview plan was set up prior to the data collection, merely as a guide for themes and questions to be explored (see appendix 1 for *au pairs* and appendix 2 for host parents).

Host parents were asked to talk about their experiences of hiring, employing and living with an *au pair*. At the beginning of the interview,

host parents were asked about their reasons for hiring an *au pair*, and to describe the hiring process. This allowed enough flexibility in responses, and facilitated data regarding development of host parent research strategies employed when selecting and hiring an *au pair*. The subsequent questions invited the host parents to describe the first few days of living with an *au pair*, the daily activities performed by the *au pair*, what were seen as the advantages and the disadvantages of employing and living with an *au pair*, how host parents felt it affected them when living with an *au pair*, spending time with an *au pair*, whether they would recommend having an *au pair* to another family, whether (and the reason) there were any rules, and to describe their relationship with their *au pair*. Also, towards the end of the interview, host parents were asked whether they felt their *au pair* was a member of their family and in what ways they would describe such membership. They were also asked how they would describe what it means to have an *au pair*, as if explaining to somebody who does not know what an *au pair* is. At the very end of the interview, host parents were asked whether there was anything else they would like to share and this allowed for more diverse and detailed data to emerge, that were not anticipated at the research design stage. Overall, these themes/questions were aimed at exploring the effects on family dynamics, particularly the impact on parenting/couple roles, house space and issues of privacy, eating practices and differences in spending time with the *au pair* during working/free time, the management of relationships between couples and the views and insights of the idea and meaning of family.

Interviews with *au pairs* focused on their reasons for becoming an *au pair*, how the *au pairs* found their host family, their expectations before coming to live with a host family, the positives and negatives of being an *au pair*, what type of work they do on a daily basis, and how they spend any free time. Additionally, in relation to the meaning of family, *au pairs* were asked whether they felt like they were members of the host family and in what way they did or did not feel so. Finally they were asked to describe their relationship with their host mother and host father and whether they would recommend somebody else to work as an *au pair*.

Exploring different types of interviews in family studies

As mentioned above, the main aim of this research was to explore the effects of *au pair* employment on host family dynamics and as such it was particularly significant to obtain the perceptions of as many family members as possible. According to Valentine (1999) some of the conventional family studies research, although claiming to study families, actually uses the perceptions from only one family member. Normally, this family member tends to be a woman (mothers/wives), as they are easier to gain access to and also because, from a gender perspective, families are perceived to be a female domain (Valentine, 1999). In terms of this research, including only *au pairs* would be limiting the findings of family dynamics, and for the same reason, analyzing only *au pairs* and host mothers would limit the findings by not including their husbands/partners (Song, 1998:104). Similarly, Handel (1996: 338) argues;

'No member of any family is a sufficient source of information for that family. A family constructs its life from the multiple perspectives of its members, and an adequate understanding requires that those perspectives be obtained from their multiple sources'.

Handel (1996:339) further notes that the majority of family research is conducted with only one member of the family, and as such *'either there is little recognition that families are groups whose members have individual perspective on their family membership, or that approach is disregarded because it is not amenable to quantification and statistical analysis.'*

For this research, it was particularly important to analyse how living/working with an *au pair* is perceived by different family members. However, due to the access restrictions (discussed in depth in the Access to Participants' section), this research focuses on the family dynamics taking place between parents (host mothers and host fathers) and *au pairs*. Therefore, these three perspectives allowed for the examination of family dynamics that occur on the individual level, such as mother/wife, husband/father and *au pair*, as well as on the dyad level. Interpreting multiple interviews from various family members highlights more effectively the negotiations that occur in families with *au pairs* as a whole. What is more, the perceptions gained from *au pairs*, host mothers and host fathers also allowed me to compare and contrast beliefs and perceptions relating to idealisation of family. This encompassed the gendered nature of family practices and gendered roles represented within the family, as well as the effects of living with an *au pair* relating to the couples' relationships (Gillis, 1991).

In terms of gathering data from host parents, apart from all being semi- structured in nature, three different interview approaches were adopted: individual interviews, follow up interviews and couple interviews.

Individual interviews were conducted with seven host parents. This rather traditional mode of interviewing meant that I conducted interviews with each host parent alone, at one time. Beitin (2007) notes that individual interviews with members of the same family are particularly useful when comparing data between participants. Moreover, there is no risk of interruption by other family members, nor is there the potential danger of someone dominating the interview or answering in reference to 'we' (Valentine 1999). Individual interviews with host parents were easiest in the practical sense, as arranging follow-up interviews or couple interviews was more time consuming. Valentine (1999) conducted research with members of the same household employing both separate and joint interview methods and she notes that the privacy of individual interviews allowed family members to express themselves more freely, especially when participants revealed secrets. At the same time, Valentine (1999:71) notes '*Not surprisingly, separate interviews can generate a lot of anxiety amongst couples, because each cannot manage the impression of themselves being reproduced by the other*'. Similarly, in the current study host parents often probed or joked about how the other partner might have replied, such as 'I don't know what my wife told you but...'. But more often host parents were curious about my interview with their *au pair*, and would ask; 'I don't know what she thinks...', or 'I am sure she told you about...' Similar queries took

place in Valentine's (1999) study and she suggested being very cautious in terms of confidentiality between the interviewer and participants (I discuss confidentiality issues later on in this chapter under the section Ethical Considerations: Confidentiality).

Follow-up interviews were conducted with five host parents; four host parents were interviewed twice within a period of six months, and one host mother was interviewed on three occasions within a period of eight months. In terms of the follow-up interview, the emphasis was placed on the way in which relationships and roles between host parents and the *au pair* are negotiated and are evolving throughout different stages in time. On average, the *au pairs* I interviewed stayed with their host family for a duration of nine months, and therefore the research sought to expose the way that host parents' and *au pairs*' bonds were affected by the time they spent together. The four host parents that agreed to be interviewed twice, occurred during the stay of one *au pair*. One host mother was interviewed on three occasions; once soon after the *au pair's* arrival, then two weeks before the *au pair* was due to return to her home country, which was six months later. The third interview occurred two months after the arrival of another *au pair*.

Couple interviews were conducted with three married couples (six host parents) where both host parents were present concurrently during an interview. I had originally intended to conduct only individual interviews with the aim of follow-up interviews at a later stage, and was doubtful of the potential advantages of joint interviews. Astedt-Kurki et al (2001) suggest that such a data collection method needs to be reflected upon not only ethically, but also in terms of its reliability and

validity. This is because as discussed above, there are potential issues of confidentiality, but also difficulties relating to dominating interviews due to unequal power dynamics between family members. In her study of couples seeking adoption, Daly (1992:107) chose to interview couples together in order to capture the shared reality of parenthood construction. One of the limitations she identified of conducting joint couple interviews is that uncomfortable or sensitive information did not emerge, as opposed to when the couples were interviewed separately. During the conduction of the joint interviews in the current research, I actually found the contrary. The host parent couples felt at ease and often disputed each other (something that myself as a researcher could not do), and in this way I found these interviews richer in the depth of data than some of the individual interviews.

As I mentioned above, when I first met with the host parents, it was not my intention to conduct joint interviews; the aim was to speak with host parents separately. However, as these interviews normally took place in the evening, after working hours, some host parents told me that they would prefer to be interviewed jointly. As I did not want to jeopardise gathering the data, and as arranging host parents interviews normally took persistent work and lengthy emails/phone calls agreeing the date/time, I agreed to the joint interviews. At the beginning, I was quite doubtful as of the kind of data such an interview will produce, especially in terms of confidentiality, anonymity and issues of power. I felt that joint interviews could be problematic, as some voices might be obscured by the other person who would normally tend to speak up more. Certainly, interviews conducted with more than one family

member pose difficulties and limitations. According to Lofland and Lofland (1984), the topic which is perceived as not too sensitive generally works best when interviewing couples. As Carey (1995) pointed out, interactions between family members need to be made explicit as the collected data become affected by agreements/disagreements between family members or domination of one particular family member. Therefore, the researcher needs to be aware that hierarchical and unequal power distribution between family members can affect the joint interviews.

During the couple interviews I conducted, I found out that as these interviews normally took place during evenings, the host parents took turns leaving the room to take the children through the evening routine of putting them to bed. This gave me the chance to probe some questions individually with the host parent who stayed. Another factor was that the couples were interviewed together in their homes (normally at the dining table or in the living room) and I believe that the familiarity of the home setting, together with the familiarity between themselves as participants, influenced the depth of data that were gathered as a result. Under these conditions, the host parents were often contradicting each other, and openly elaborated into great detail as to why they did certain things differently to the spouse.

On the other hand, Daly (1992) also points out some of the advantages of interviewing couples. For example, the reliability is strengthened by having had two accounts during one interview, because *'spouses can jog one another's memory and keep each other honest* (Daly, 1992:108)'. As mentioned above, during my joint interviews, it

was common for couples to disagree with each other and justify their reasoning for doing so. Another advantage that should be mentioned during discussion of the joint interviews, is the benefit of interviewing host fathers. Similarly to other family research (Daly 1992, Miall 1985, Sandelowski et al 1992) it was revealed that recruiting men in family studies is normally far more challenging than recruiting women. For that reason, conducting joint interviews with couples benefited from adding more host fathers' perspectives than would otherwise be possible. The following is an example of an interview conducted with host mother 'Silvia' and host father 'Richard' to illustrate this point:

S: ...and to have the nervous laugh, that is the most important.

R: well, that's not really important, is it?

S: well, yes, the nervous laugh, that tells me that they (au pair) care, that they actually care and they really want it (the job).

R: anyway, I do the initial 90% and Silvia does the last 10% of choosing

S: yes, well, yes, always. That is how it is set up.

R: because I am online all day,

S: but I think that even if you would not be, we would do it like that (pause), and then it's just that we will do a telephone call, which takes maybe like fifteen, twenty minutes, where I explain about the job and what it's going to be like.

This extract illuminates how the host parents navigated and justified the different positions they occupy within the family and at the same time how a joint couple interview emphasizes different roles performed within the family. Silvia and Richard were asked to describe the way they search for *au pairs*, and here Silvia referred to the qualities

she looked for when choosing an *au pair*. Particularly interesting was how Silvia and Richard not only questioned themselves, but also corroborated each other's viewpoints. My role as a researcher did not allow me to employ such directness that the couple, due to the closeness of their relationship, clearly felt able to do. Equally, Valentine (1999:68) noted *'the dynamics of joint interviews can encourage spontaneous further discussion, providing richer, more detailed and validated accounts than those generated by interviews with individuals'*.

Access to participants

'The public image that a family chooses to present to the outside world can be different from the private, internal image' (Greenstein, 2006:9). On a similar point, Gilgun et al (1992:4) points out that families as social groups can be viewed by the nature of their private setting, which is formed by *'demarcating boundaries between the outside world and protecting and preserving traditions in order to sustain their distinctive characterization'*.

Without a doubt, gaining access to the families' private setting was one of the main challenges for this project. A further dimension to the issue of access was brought by the concept of the study topic itself and that is the fact that there are two different types of participants who were being recruited to participate in the study; the *au pairs* and the host parents. Therefore, two different strategies were formulated in order to target these different sets of participants.

As the pilot study during my MA highlighted, I realized that I needed to be more flexible in trying out different avenues of accessing participants. *Au pairs* were identified as a group more visible and therefore easier to gain access to, than host parents. Thus, I had initiated the access negotiation with seeking *au pairs* first, aiming to access host parents in the second stage, through their *au pairs*.

Accessing *au pairs*

Accessing *au pairs* was approached by introducing several different tactics, such as distributing leaflets in language classes in local colleges, visiting primary and secondary schools at the times of pick up and drop off of children, and contacting local *au pair* agencies. However, none of these strategies proved very fruitful, and I was even considering widening the sampling location further from Nottingham in order to access participants. However, I was fortunate to find out from one of the *au pairs*, that there was an online group set up on Facebook called '*Au pair in Nottingham 2009/2010*'. At the time when I discovered this group, it had already 34 *au pair* members, and thus I accessed most of my *au pair* participants through this group. According to Hesse-Biber (2011:6) '*within the context of social research practice, emergent technologies have the ability to create new multimedia data sources for the researcher, as well as make it possible for a researcher to ask and pursue new research questions*'.

I employed this Facebook group purely for the purpose of accessing *au pairs*, without altering my research questions. Overall, I

encountered benefits as well as drawbacks when using Facebook as a tool to access *au pairs*:

Benefits: First of all, I gained instant access to quite a diverse *au pair* group, as there were *au pairs* from different nationalities living in different areas of Nottinghamshire. Also, there was a mixture of *au pairs* who had just arrived in the UK as well as those who were close to completing (or indeed had finished) their *au pair* placement. The second benefit is due to the way Facebook operates as a communication tool. Launched in 2004, Facebook is social networking service, which offers its users various ways of communicating with each other, be it by instant messaging, creating and inviting to an event, posting updates, or sharing and commenting on photos. I realized that as I sent messages asking for a meeting or chat, normally when the *au pair* replied that she would like to meet, she then sent me a friend request. As I accepted this request, not only did the *au pair* have access to my profile but I also got to see the *au pair's* profile. I could thus see all the posts and general likes/dislikes and this helped me to have a better idea of the *au pair's* background. This information was then rather useful when we both finally met, because I had an idea of the kind of music the *au pair* enjoyed, where she was from and even what she looked like.

Drawbacks: First of all, many *au pairs* would first ignore my suggestions of meeting for coffee in town even though they had added me to their 'friends' list. I had decided to contact *au pairs* in groups of four contacts per week, in order to ensure that I could arrange the meeting with them if they wished to participate. Contacting more *au pairs* at once would have run the risk of keeping some *au pairs* waiting for

longer than a week to arrange a meeting and thus they might have been discouraged. Despite this, there were many *au pairs* that had already left the UK, and some that were still here but were not replying to my messages. I found this stage particularly frustrating. On the one hand I felt that I had gained partial access to the participants through the *au pairs*' invitation to 'become friends' on Facebook, and as such I could access the potential participant's profiles where I could see all their posts, photographs etc. On the other hand, as they were not responding to my messages, I was left in a loop. There were five *au pairs* who through their friend request suggested they were interested in communication but that was then contradicted by the lack of response regarding a potential meeting.

Accessing host parents

As mentioned above, my MA pilot study reflection made me realize that accessing host parents was best achieved through their *au pairs*. I therefore decided to contact host parents by leaflets that were passed through their *au pairs*. These leaflets (contrary to the informal messages I wrote to *au pairs* asking for participation see appendix 3) were quite formal, printed on the University of Nottingham headed paper, and included basic information regarding the study and about myself (see appendix 4 for details). According to Silverman (2011), gaining overt access to the participant's home involves the researcher giving the 'right' impression, as it normally affects the decision of the potential participants. In this case, ensuring the information leaflet given to host parents was in a correct format and language proved significant, as some

of the host parents who agreed to participate in the study commented on the way that the leaflet was written (Silverman, 2011).

As mentioned above, gaining access to multiple family members (except one single parent family) was one of the most challenging parts of the research. It was more common for host mothers to agree to be interviewed than the host fathers, and as such (with the exception where both couples were interviewed together), the access negotiation occurred individually first with the *au pair*, then host mother and lastly the host father. This seems to confirm Gilgun et al's (1992) argument that accessing men in family research is particularly difficult, and it is often women who are seen as the main informants of family lives. Thus, the aim of gaining access to three participants from each host family also involved a chain of gatekeepers; from the *au pair* to the host mother and from the host mother to the host father. The ethical ramifications are discussed further below.

Sampling approach

The sampling strategy was mainly affected by the access to participants. As Astedt-Kurki et al (2001:289) suggest; *'in a qualitative study, sampling is a very complex issue and even more complex in family research. Therefore, family research needs to be flexible, sensitive and applying practical methods'*. The sampling size is, in most qualitative research, affected firstly by restrictions of funding and time, but also by issues of access to specific group/participants and the actual topic/question of proposed research (Bryman, 2004). In terms of this research, the main effect on sampling criteria was the restrictions of

access to the private sphere of the family home, thus the study's sampling was mainly informed by accessibility (O'Reilly, 2005).

As mentioned above, access to participants was mainly gained through the Facebook *au pair* page, which influenced the type of participants I located. In total 35 participants were interviewed for this study, out of which 18 were *au pairs* and 17 were host parents (see appendix 5 for participant details). Given the diversity of contemporary British families, the initial emphasis was on locating as wide a range of families from different economic and social backgrounds as possible. However, due to access restrictions, the families that participated in this research were of middle or upper middle-class background. Moreover, although there were number of *au pairs* that worked for single parents or ethnically diverse families, these families did not agree to participate in the study. When I spoke with these *au pairs* afterwards, the reason their host parents gave them for not participating was time constraints. Since host families employ *au pairs* in order to receive help with childcare and light housework, I was expecting some host families to decline to participate due to a lack of time. Single parent families were especially affected by time constraints and this is why I only managed to interview one single host father. Similarly, in her study on motherhood and delegated care, Macdonald (2010) found that those participants that were in full time employment were more likely to decline participating due to lack of time. In the current research, all of the other families were either dual earner marriages or married couples where the host fathers worked full time whilst the host mothers were stay at home mothers.

One of the main limitations of this sample is the access method, as host parents were initially contacted through their *au pair*. On our first meeting, three *au pairs* told me that they did not want to give the leaflet to their host parents as they did not have a good relationship with them and felt that forwarding the leaflet would cause them further stress. This was also the case in Cox and Narula's (2003:338) research on *au pairs* in London, as they commented that '*it is possible that only the agencies/families/language schools that were run in the most ethical conduct, actually agreed to take part in the study, whilst many others refused*'. Similarly, after conducting an overview of the *au pair* scheme in Norway, Øien (2009:27) noted that '*the limitation of the method used was that it was difficult to access those who were using the scheme in a way that was not in accordance with the regulations*'. Due to the snowball sampling strategy and the subsequent challenges of gaining access to host parents, it is possible that this research does not include the more vulnerable participants, such as *au pairs* experiencing exploitation or host parents that took advantage of *au pairs*. This issue will be further addressed in the ethical reflections later in this chapter.

Background on participants

All of the 18 *au pairs* interviewed came from European Union countries. Six were from Germany, three from Austria, two from Slovakia, two from the Czech Republic, two from Hungary, one from Poland, one from Italy, one from Spain and one from Sweden. Only one *au pair* was male and all were between the ages of 18 and 29 years.

From the 17 host parents interviewed, eleven were host mothers and seven host fathers. Six host fathers were of British nationality and one host father classed himself as a British national of Indian descent. From the ten host mothers interviewed, seven were British, one from Austria, one from Spain and one from Rumania. All of the host fathers were in full-time professional employment (ranging from IT development, business leadership, self-employment, management, architecture, medicine) although one host father was in the process of searching for a new directorial position. From the eleven host mothers that participated, nine were in full-time professional employment (such as HR director, self-employed, General Practitioner, university lecturer, physiotherapist and other managerial positions), and two host mothers were on maternity leave or stay at home mothers. All host parents interviewed were between the ages of 35 and 47 years old.

This sample of host parents and *au pairs* constituted a total number of 10 families with *au pairs*; seven families included three participants (the *au pair*, host mother and host father) and three families included two participants (the *au pair* and one of the host parents). Only in one case I interviewed one host mother from one host family without managing to speak to either her *au pair* or her husband. This was due to time constraints; the *au pair's* time with the host family came to an end two weeks after interviewing the host mother and the husband declined to participate. As a total of one year was dedicated to data access and collection, a larger number of participants might have weakened the strategy of interviewing the three 'family members' from each household (*au pair*, host mother and host father). In other words, a larger number

of participants could imply a more disjointed sample where participants from different families would be interviewed without access to family members from other families, and therefore weaken the 'three family members model' that was sought in this study. In these terms, as Cox and Narula (2003) rightly point out in their study of rules and relationships in *au pair* households, the limitation of such a sample implies that the group of participants is not a representative sample and therefore the overall findings cannot be generalizable, but rather more suggestive of how families might negotiate some of their dynamics when living with an *au pair*. I acknowledge that this study of family dynamics with *au pairs* is not representative of all families with *au pairs*. Due to its relatively small sample size and limited location (Nottinghamshire area only), it is evident that this thesis cannot be taken as representative of all *au pair* families in the UK. Nevertheless, the explorative nature of this study, in combination with the approach of both family studies and domestic work offers (to my knowledge) original and valuable empirical insights into the *au pair* families' experiences.

Analysis

My research diary and tape recorder were the main tools of recording data. All of the interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder and then fully transcribed. The research diary was used as a method of recording observed incidents regarding participants, settings, and also researcher reflections. According to Gibbs (2007:3) '*analysis can, and should start at the field*' and suggests that due to the flexibility of qualitative research, analysing data early on can help raise new

questions and issues. My analysis therefore started with the beginning of each interview and continued throughout the transcription, writing up of chapters and finalising conclusions. After each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym, I read all of the interview transcripts repeatedly and thoroughly, in order to identify themes. Elliott and Timulak (2005: 154) note that '*categorising is an interactive process in which priority is given to the data but understanding is inevitably facilitated by previous understanding. It is a kind of dialogue with the data*'. From this point of view, after I conducted the initial interviews with one host family, I began to develop possible themes and this step was repeated with each additional interview. The observed themes were then grouped together. I first did this by cutting interview extracts and copying them onto a new document in Microsoft Word. However, it became quite a daunting task at a certain stage, so I decided to use large sheets of coloured paper (A3 size) where I pasted clippings of interview extracts based on themes. Following this, I re-read the themes to identify any differences and similarities, and also started to link them to wider topics, such as gender, class, family ideology, ethnicity, house boundaries and other topics discussed individually in the next three data chapters. I then returned to the literature to read in more depth on each theme, in order to be able to critically examine the findings. Even though I began the research design by reading available literature on family and domestic work studies, I often had to return to both sets of literature in order to verify my interpretations. Also, I pursued new avenues of scholarly literature, following the trail left by my participants. For example, after conducting three interviews with host mothers, I began to notice that they frequently

expressed frustration in terms of childcare and housework overload. Therefore, I decided to pursue literature discussing the 'second shift' (such as Hochschild 1989) but also on subject of 'intensive mothering' (Hays 1996, 2011). Last but not least, guided by one of my research questions 'how the meaning of family is perceived and negotiated by host parents and *au pairs*', I analysed my interview data from a phenomenological approach, where the researcher looks '*beyond mere description of core concepts and essences to look for meanings embedded in common life practices. These meanings are not always apparent to the participants but can be gleaned from the narratives produced by them*' (Lopez and Willis 2004:728). Within the current study, as the meaning of family often implies ideological connotations (discussed in Chapter 2) it became apparent that host parents were placing preference for *au pairs* that came from a particular type of family (further discussion in Chapter 4). In the same way, *au pairs* commented on certain events only when describing whether they felt like family members in their host families (Chapter 6 offers a detailed discussion). Similarly to this study, Berger and Kellner (1994:22) examined under the phenomenological lens how couples constructed their new reality of marriage. They defined marriage as a '*dramatic act in which two strangers come together and redefine themselves*' and that is ideologically marked by concepts such as nuclear family, self-realization and romantic love. According to Berger and Kellner (1994:21) '*sociologically, one must ask how the world building relationships are objectively structured and distributed and one will also want to understand how they are subjectively perceived and experienced*'.

Location

The qualitative nature of the study implied travelling and spending successive periods of time with the participants and hence it was neither possible nor practical to travel long distances to other parts of the UK. Moreover, most of the past research on *au pairs* in the UK has been geographically concentrated in the London area, where there is, without doubt, nationally the largest distribution of *au pairs*. Nottingham was then selected as the initial starting point in initiating contact with participants, but surrounding villages and other towns such as Newark and Grantham were also included. Thus, the East Midlands area of the UK was the main geographical area of the research.

Researchers' identity

According to Allen and Walker (1992), who the researchers are as individual human beings is important to research, but it is rarely discussed. The role of the researcher is noteworthy in qualitative research, as the researcher is connected to the participants and thus involved in the whole research process. The researcher's personal values become embedded into the analytical processes and should be reflected upon and analysed. Researching the private sphere, the family, and its intricacy was the main theme of Ribbens and Edwards (1998) and they note that one of the main challenges is how one communicates the private to the public academic domain. The answer lies in the concept of

the personal, where the role of the researcher and his/her situatedness is at the core of private and public.

I am a 30 year old female and was born in the Czech Republic. My parents are both in full time employment (my father works as plumber and my mother works as warehouse assistant in a large company) and I have two siblings. These aspects of my own identity were revealed to all participants prior to the interviews, as I included this on the information leaflet (see appendix 4). What is more, I also shared one aspect of my personal experience with the participants – and that is that I used to work as an *au pair* twelve years ago. There is a debate on whether sharing personal experience with participants is appropriate or not. On the one hand, some academics would state that it is dangerous, particularly to the credibility of the study, when researchers share personal information (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000). On the other hand, some argue that the researcher himself/herself has an impact on the research field, research design and research analysis, and therefore such information should be provided (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). According to Bourdieu (1997:608) our research is part of who we are as researchers, and he notes '*how can we claim to engage in the scientific investigation of presuppositions if we do not work to gain knowledge of our own presuppositions?*' The extract below is my reflection on my *au pair* years, and I shared my story with my participants.

'I came to the UK twelve years ago on an au pair visa. I was planning to stay in the UK for one year, with the goal of learning the English language and to improve my prospects in job hunting, and also to gain the experience of a different culture. I ended up staying with my host family for two years, and then after

meeting my boyfriend, I decided to stay here to further develop my education. During my au pair years, I came to know many au pairs of different nationalities, mostly through college studies, but also through agency contacts from the Czech Republic. I have myself become very close to my host family's grandparents, who became very protective of me, offering me enormous emotional, social and even financial support.'

My experience as an *au pair* greatly affected this research in different ways. Firstly, my experience is the main reason I chose to study families with *au pairs*. It has made me curious about family life when living with an *au pair*. Although I met and became friends with lots of other *au pairs*, I wanted to hear not only *au pairs'* views but also other family members' views on how they find living with an *au pair*. Second, apart from a few exceptions such as Miller and Burikova (2010), I did not share the view with much of the domestic work literature that *au pairs* should be viewed mainly as victims in the global care chain (Anderson 1993, Parreñas 2001). From my experience, I knew that even though *au pairs* are in vulnerable positions when coming to live in a foreign country 'as part of host family'; at the same time there are many negotiations that occur on a daily basis between the host parents/*au pair*, children/*au pair*. I believe that many *au pairs* exercise their agency in negotiating their role within the host family. Third, as much as I did not want to admit it at first and despite having reviewed much literature on the meaning of family and family theories, I found it hard to acknowledge that families are socially constructed and not egalitarian entities. The concept of family ideology as well as power relations constructed on the

base of gender will be further discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 of this thesis. I therefore concur with Stanley and Wise (1979) when they point out that who the researchers are as people is relevant to the research process. Similarly, Franklin (1996:262) also noted that *'reflexivity is important to qualitative research and has particular implications for validity in the data analysis'*.

From a different perspective, I believe that my personal experience as an *au pair* gave me an advantage when talking with both host parents and *au pairs*, as my insight into *au pair* family living helped me during interviews, especially when asking probing questions. I was familiar with the un-familiarity after the *au pair* arrival, such as setting and explaining routines, and meeting extended family members. It was this familiarity that helped me to delve deeper into certain aspects of *au pair* family living than other researchers might. On the other hand, and as Daly (1994) points out, the familiarity of family living can be challenging when analysing the research data, particularly as the personal experience can become overly embedded within the research experience. It is due to this connection between the personal and the research that using a reflective approach is especially helpful, as it can reveal and help to separate these two spheres. In order to let participant's voices speak for themselves, I asked participants to rephrase certain passages, or at times I asked them the same question twice during the interview.

According to Daly (1994:109) *'personal involvement predisposes researchers to enter the field with perspectives shaped by idiosyncratic thoughts, feelings, and experiences'*. This is particularly relevant when

researching families, but more so in this research as my past experience of having worked as an *au pair* influenced greatly my way of thinking. In this way I agree with Daly (1994), as the researcher's subjective experiences should be acknowledged in the research and also they are a crucial aspect in forming the research itself. Daly suggested making the researcher's insider experience visible in the research in form of '*disclosed statements about one's experiences with the phenomena in question*' (Daly, 1994:109). Similarly, Berk and Adams (1970 from Daly 1994:110) pointed out that '*revelation of some intimate facts promotes acceptance and trust in the fieldwork relationship that can pay dividends in the depth and quality of the data collected.*'

Relationships during research

When gathering data, relationships start developing from the moment the researcher recruits the participants. What is more, in the case of current study, '*the nature of the interview itself allowed for the creation of a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, which affected the building of rapport and trust*' (Gilgun et al, 1992:5). The particular relationships between the researcher and the participant(s) that develop in the field or during data collection are also influenced by the social research forms and the actual research method applied (Silverman, 2011). Also, I conducted host parent interviews in a home setting which undoubtedly helped them to feel at ease within their familiar environment. The development of the relationship between myself as the researcher and the *au pair* participants was another crucial factor in accessing the host parents.

Another factor that influenced the interviews was the cross-cultural association between the myself and the participants (Denscombe, 2003). As stated previously, I am of Czech origin, the host parents were mostly British nationals (with three exceptions) and the *au pairs* came from other European countries (see the sampling section above for more details). The cultural context should therefore not be overlooked in the fieldwork, as behaviour patterns, ways of thinking and other values might be very different from those of the researcher (Denscombe 2003). The issues of language should also be noted when communicating with *au pairs*, as one of the main purposes of the *au pair* scheme is to improve the knowledge of English language. I speak fluent English and am accustomed to the British culture after residing in the UK for 12 years; however some of the *au pairs* had beginner or intermediate level of English language knowledge that impacted on the interview process. For example, two *au pairs* who were interviewed during their first two months of their stay in the UK spoke very basic English. On other occasions, where possible, my knowledge of my native language (Czech) was used during three *au pair* interviews with two Czech and one Slovak *au pair*, and one *au pair* was interviewed in Spanish (which I also speak fluently).

Ethical Considerations

The development and planning for possible research problems guides the theoretical assumptions of the actual research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). To start with, every researcher should address ethical challenges, particularly when the data collection utilizes human beings as participants in the study. It is apparent that ethical considerations are challenging to depict, especially when the researcher has to deal with unexpected ethical dilemmas. But also there are other concerns with regards to ethical issues in a qualitative study, such as issues of informed consent, confidentiality, intimacy etc. (Esterberg, 2002). As a mandatory requirement, I utilized the ethical checklist in The School of Sociology and Social Policy, which helped me to identify any potential ethical issues (<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/sociology/pdfs/ethics-documents/ethics-checklist-2013-14.docx>). For this research, two main potential risks were identified, particularly the location of data collection (participant's homes) and the possible presence of children. When interviewing participants in their homes, I had to carefully assess the possible dangers for me as a researcher and also ensured that my conduct when carrying research complied with the ethical guidelines. This meant that the host parents and *au pairs* were given the information should they wish to contact my supervisors/department. Also, in terms of my security, prior to the interviews, my partner was informed of the specifics of my whereabouts, such as the exact address and phone number where I was travelling, and we established regular communication prior to, and after the interviews were carried out.

Consent form

All the participants were asked to sign the consent form and I explained the details and the purpose of the study. The consent form informed the participants of their rights, such as the right to withdraw from the study and also of their right to anonymity and confidentiality (Bryman, 2004). This was particularly important as I had to ensure that all participants felt comfortable speaking to me, in the light of knowing that I was also interviewing other members of their family. However, as I became involved with variety of people, asking for informed consent from all the individuals encountered was impractical (Bryman, 2004). This was especially apparent when at times other family members were present at any point in the interviews (although not participating), especially children and grandparents. Therefore, the consent form was required only from those participants who were actually interviewed. Although children's perspectives would add another very valuable insight (and as it happened some host parents asked their children to share their opinion), due to ethical and practical reasons I chose not to include children. However, including children as family members is suggested for potential further research. In terms of children's safety, I ensured that I was never left alone with the children, and when children were present, they were supervised by either their parent(s) or the *au pair*.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality in this study was maintained by providing the participants with both the participant information sheet and the consent form. All participants were assigned pseudonyms and this was also

carried through the transcription period when participants referred to their family members (Israel and Hay 2006). However, the issue of confidentiality became further challenged by the fact that participants knew each other as members of the same family. As Daly (1994) points out in her study, researching members of the same family poses several ethical dilemmas, one of which is confidentiality. This becomes particularly noticeable when the researcher conducts individual interviews and is consequently aware of other family members' feelings. I had to pay special attention in order not to breach the confidentiality agreement. The confidentiality agreement would only be breached if encountering danger in the fieldwork.

Due to the nature of this research where interviews were conducted with different members of the same family, the relationships and rapport that developed between the researcher and the host parents/*au pair*, became affected when there were arguments or disagreements between the two parties, or just simply due to the nature of the *au pair* work. As a result, my role as a researcher was sometimes tested. This is because both host parents and the *au pair* knew that I had spoken with both of the parties, and as *au pair* employment is embedded within larger power dynamics within the family. On one side, the *au pair's* work and the fact that she lives with the family she works for is embedded within the most intimate sphere of the family, and on the other side, the *au pair* is seen and placed as an outsider (the *au pair* is an outsider living inside the family home.) During data collection, I was asked on many occasions by host parents or *au pairs* 'What has the *au*

pair/host mother said?’ In these situations I reminded my participants that I respected the confidentiality agreements of all interviewees.

Au pair as participant and gatekeeper – ethical reflections

I used my previous experience as an *au pair* to create a dialogue (Bryman, 2004). It should also be noted that within the study, the *au pairs* took the role of the participant as well as the gatekeeper, allowing access to the rest of the family members (host mother and host father). As Bryman (2004) notes, key participants (also referred to as gatekeepers), act by providing access to further participants and thus their role becomes particularly important before and during the data collection process. Thus, the following ethical dilemma developed during my interviews with *au pairs*: when and how do I ask the favour of initiating the contact with the host parents? I decided to tell all the *au pairs* from our first meeting that the research would ideally include the host parents and *au pairs* were asked whether they would be able to pass the study leaflet to their host parents. Indeed, some *au pairs* told me straight away that they did not wish to ask the host parents, some told me that they were not sure but would ask, and some told me that that they thought that their host family would be happy to help and they would pass the leaflet on.

Further notes

Throughout the thesis, I will be referring to '*au pairs*' and 'host parents', not to undermine that *au pairs* are real workers, but because these terms were used by the participants themselves. It is also to further highlight that *au pair* work is embedded within the realm of work and family relations.

CHAPTER 4

'Girls from big families': The influence of class and family ideology in *au pair* recruitment strategies

'My husband Richard spends lots of time, you see, we have a system how we get our *au pairs*. And I think that so far, it has worked extremely well. He spends a lot of effort and time in actually looking for the right *au pair*, exchanging emails, I think the last two or so *au pairs* we had, he exchanged like two hundred emails. There is this portal, you put your profile on it, and then they (*au pairs*) would get in touch with us, or we would get in touch with them, and it is a lot of emails. We start with probably ten or fifteen *au pairs*, wiggle it down to about five, and then start having a telephone discussion.'

[Host mother Stephany, 38 years]

This chapter focuses on the dynamics of *au pair* families in its initial phase – the recruitment process. As the passage above highlighted, host parents Stephany and her husband Richard approached the *au pair* selection as a 'system'. IT consultant Richard was in charge of the practical workload involved during this search, where the ultimate goal was to narrow the search down to just one 'right *au pair*'. Yet, what became apparent during

my interviews with other host parents was that 'the right *au pair*' was actually supposed to have quite specific qualities and attributes. Therefore, this chapter addresses the recruitment process of *au pairs*, and how it is shaped and formulated within the context of host families' middle class socio-economic position. In particular, it will examine the following questions:

- How do host parents hire their *au pairs*?
- What strategies do they draw on?
- What are the motives host parents employ when selecting their *au pairs*?

In order to address these questions, this chapter will firstly examine the broader literature on domestic work hire. The following section focuses on the role of nationality in *au pair* hiring strategies. Finally, the position of middle class family ideology is explored through the means of host parent interviews as well as EU and *au pair* agencies' documents. What role do host parents, *au pair* agencies and larger *au pair* institutions play in these processes, in which, according to Anderson (2000:152) '*nationalities are classed and racialized*'? What is the impact of the host parents' growing reliance on recruitment through *au pair* websites? And how do these recruitment approaches and 'systems', in turn fit within the stories shared by the *au pairs*?

Parreñas' (2003) classification of the main push/pull factors in relation to global care chains were indicated earlier, in the Literature review chapter. Moreover, she highlighted that another important factor affecting the countries that 'pull' the influx of domestic workers is the

result of commodification of care work. As women flee from the unpaid private sphere of family into the public sphere of employment, whilst still carrying out the majority of household work and care themselves, the solution of employing a domestic worker commodities housework responsibilities and care (Parreñas, 2003).

The first step: choosing between *au pair* agency and internet search.

As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, *au pairs* are classed neither as students nor as employees, but rather as '*young people gaining cultural experience*' who are to be '*treated as a member of the family*' (www.gov.uk; 2013). The UK *au pair* placement immigration category was modified in 2008 and is now part of the 'Points Based System'. This change implies that *au pairs* coming to the UK either fall within the European Freedom of Movement Act (in which case there are no regulatory measures) , or in the case of non-EU citizens, *au pairs* are to obtain a visa under the new 'Youth Mobility Scheme'.

Over the last two decades there has been an increase in academic literature addressing contemporary changing patterns of migrant domestic workers (see Literature review chapter). In terms of this research, all host parents highlighted that their reasons for hiring an *au pair* were mostly motivated by the flexibility of the live-in scheme and the relatively low cost when compared to other forms of childcare arrangements. I was often told that employing an *au pair* is a 'financially sound solution' or 'good value for money' (also in Lutz 2002). Once host

parents decided to hire an *au pair*, they employed either an *au pair* agency or online means. The following passages describe both of these approaches as well as the reasons host parents favoured one or the other option.

***Au pair* agencies**

In this case, host parent(s) contacted an *au pair* agency, which implied that greater responsibility over the recruitment was placed with the agency itself. In this case, both the host family and the *au pair* completed a set of application forms, which, for the host family was comprised of basic information about the family (location, host parents profession, number and ages of children), information regarding the ideal *au pair* candidate (start date and preferred length of stay, *au pair's* gender, driving licence abilities) and any additional information that the host family felt were relevant. The *au pair* also completed an application form with her basic information (age, nationality, gender, driving licence, childcare experience), information regarding his/her placement (preferred location, type of family, number and ages of children, working hours) and any other relevant information. Appendix 6 and 7 feature examples of both family and *au pair* application form drawn from the East Midlands Nannies and *Au pairs* agency (2009). Additionally, both parties are asked to send some photographs of themselves, and the *au pair* also has to write a letter detailing why she wishes to work as an *au pair*. For example, Nannies For You agency (<http://nannies4u.co.uk>, accessed October 2011) state in their introductory page:

'The Agency will supply all the information about the host family to the *Au pair* and vice versa. *Au pairs* must submit character and babysitting references, an essay about themselves, their hobbies and interests, photographs and a medical certificate. The family will supply a fully detailed application form with photos of the family. The form will set out the conditions and information about their home and the area where they live, language schools and facilities in the area..'.

Agencies therefore act as intermediaries between the host families and *au pairs*, where paper applications and supporting forms are processed and screened and cross-matched based on the availability and suitability of host families and *au pairs*. In their book '*The Au pair and Nanny's Guide to Working Abroad*', Griffith and Legg (2002:26) described this system as 'referral services', where candidate host families and *au pairs* are cross-referenced for the best match. *Au pair* agencies also provide additional facilities, such as advice on visa regulations and insurance, but also act as intermediary in case of any problematic family/*au pair* placement. All of this incurs a cost; *au pair* agencies charge host families for the facilitation of *au pairs*, where the cost ranges from approximately £300 for a 6-12 month placement to around £800, depending on the agency's reputation as well as their terms and conditions of replacements (Griffith and Legg 2002).

Online recruitment

The alternative for *au pair* agency recruitment was for host parents to look for the *au pairs* themselves, be it through internet websites or other type of online or newspaper advertisements. In this way, both host parents and *au pairs* commented on the increased flexibility over the application process, as they were creating and managing the application themselves (with the help of online tools), as well as being solely in charge of the selection process. On the other hand, Griffith and Legg (2002:28) noted that the lack of a professional and experienced agency implies that there are no screening processes of prospective candidates in place (both host families and *au pairs*) and neither is there any assurance of replacements in case of incompatibility or maltreatment. This 'flexibility' allowed host parents and *au pairs* not only more choice in terms of potential candidates, but also it was deemed an easier and cheaper alternative to an *au pair* agency as the whole process could be done from a home computer. Five host parents also felt that their involvement was far greater during the online search, and as such they felt more in control in comparison to using an agency. In addition, online means bore much less cost for host parents, and often no cost to *au pairs*, which was viewed as a further bonus for host parents who were already looking for a 'cheaper alternative' within the 'global market of domestic work' (Lutz, 2011:10).

In relation to this research, thirteen *au pairs* were recruited through an online source and six *au pairs* through an *au pair* agency. Seven host parents employed the services of *au pair* agencies and eleven

host parents opted for *au pair*-search websites. Overall, host parents who recruited *au pairs* through an agency commented that they felt safer as agencies carried out background checks. They also felt that agencies provided the safety net of a free replacement in case an *au pair* should leave unexpectedly or if either of the parties found the relationship difficult. Other host parents' reasons for opting for *au pair* agency included their busy time schedules that did not give them time to place online advertisements. Developing special relationships of trust with the agency staff was also mentioned when host parents hired *au pairs* from the same agency for many years. On the other hand, three host parents hired their *au pair* through a recommended *au pair* agency and because they were not satisfied with the services, they decided to switch to online advertisements when looking for their next *au pair*. Another set of host parents, Debbie and Jim, explained that after hiring their first *au pair* Sandra through an agency, despite the fact that the *au pair* placement worked very well, it was not until they saw their *au pair* applying online for her second *au pair* placement in Australia that they realized the online advertisement potential. Host mother Debbie commented:

So, she [*au pair* Sandra] put herself on aupairworld.com and she found a family through there in Australia. So, I thought, if somebody like Sandra who we know and we trust and all of that, if she puts herself on *Au pair* World [online], there must be a lot of other *au pairs* who do the same thing, who do exactly the same. So, yes, the agency is good, like we were having an *au pair* every nine months, and we could not find anybody who wanted to stay for 12 months for whatever reason, and it is costing us £400-£500 each time, you know, every nine months, which is kind of negating

the benefit of having the *au pair*.

[my inserts]

According to host mother Debbie, the potential of an online search, with the attractive option of either paying much less or even being free of charge, was weighed against the odds of the 'safety net' of the agency. Another option for home-based childcare was employment of a nanny who was professionally trained. However, there is a considerable difference in the fee incurred; *au pairs* earn on average £80 a week⁴ and nannies £10 per hour (2013). Host mother Debbie hence reasoned that the high cost of *au pair* agency fees was a drawback to choosing the cheaper *au pair* services in the first place. Yet two other sets of host parents opted to search on the internet websites as they were not convinced their agency was cross matching them according to their *au pair* preferences, and they believed there were not many *au pairs* to choose from the selection they were given (normally two or three *au pairs*). Single host father Sam was sceptical of both the agency and the *au pairs* themselves. He viewed the recruitment process as a 'give and take' situation, where agencies were not transparent enough and both *au pairs* and host families were overselling themselves. Sam's ambivalence was voiced in the following:

I think personally that these agencies do not work very well, they do not liaise very well, they do charge considerable amount of money. And truthfully when I ask the *au pairs*, the way it works is

⁴ Based on BAPAA (2013) estimates, if converted into hourly rate, based on 30 hours per week recommendation, an *au pair* would earn £2.70. The minimum hourly wage in the UK is currently £5.03 (2014)

that the *au pair* gives money to the agency, let's say in the Czech, I give them money here in the UK, the agency win, win, win. The people who probably lose are the *au pair* and the parents. Because they just go like: 'here are the ladies' and you are supposed to interview them, but on the phone, the *au pair* will say, 'yes, yes, yes'.

For host father Sam, online websites were the 'best way' of hiring an *au pair*, and he compared them to 'dating websites', where each party has the opportunity to not only decline a prospective employer/employee, but also to ask questions about each other and about the specifics of the placements. On a similar note, host mother Penelope described why after using the services of an *au pair* agency, she would either change her current agency or opt for an online website in the future:

They [*au pair* agency] gave me two girls, there were only two girls available when I contacted them. I contacted them in June, probably I should have contacted them before June, because, they, they had a few but, there was this particular girl [*au pair*], who the agency lady was very fond of and she said that this was a very very nice girl. I wanted to meet more [possible *au pairs*], but she [agency] said: 'I have been here many years and this [*au pair*] is really good', so I trusted her. I trusted her, I only spoke with Isabelle once, I exchanged few emails with her. I WISH really that I had more choice, but I trusted the judgement of the lady who had a lot of experience.

[my inserts]

As a result of this overall sense of a lack of control over the selection of the *au pair* candidates, some host parents wanted to be more involved during this stage. *Au pair* agencies were perceived as too

impersonal and inflexible, and as a consequence host parents opted to search for the *au pair* themselves, which offered them increased flexibility which was lacking in the agencies' approach. For instance, host father Jim remarked:

I think that *Au pair* world (website) is quite good, you can set up your own parameters, there are loads of *au pairs* out there, and we have our own winning formula. So I put A B C, I clicked a few things about our family and that was it.

This approach of online recruitment was generally favoured (eleven out of eighteen), as host parents felt that they were in charge of the whole recruitment process from deciding the criteria and selecting the shortlist of *au pair* candidates, to ultimately hiring their *au pair*. This mode of online recruitment indicated that host parents firmly believed that this level of freedom allowed them to implement their own 'winning formula' in order to get 'the perfect *au pair*'. It became evident, that the 'perfect *au pair*' was designed to reflect quite specific family ideals, and the following section will analyse this in greater detail.

Ethnic/national stereotypes in *au pair* hire

As mentioned earlier, in comparison to professional nannies, *au pairs* are generally not qualified in childcare. In the UK, there is an informal sector of domestic service which is occupied by positions of cleaners, babysitters, childminders, nannies, *au pairs* and mothers' help. At the same time, there is a formal division within this sector, where such roles are highly professionalized and highly trained. These include various staff such as servants, butlers, nannies and housekeepers who are

employed by upper class households. Cox (2007) has observed that the domestic sector is made up of a system where highly trained and sought after British workers are exported whilst at the same time a mainly immigrant female workforce is being imported. This is not to imply that all British nannies and domestic workers are employed outside of the UK, but rather it is to stress the stark differences in status according to the nationalities of the workers. The contrast between the low status import and high status export is evident and could be also analysed in terms of ethnic background or nationalities of workers. In this way, Britishness is perceived as an advantage in export and foreign nationalities are demanded for import of domestic workers (Stiel and England, 1997). The professional elite of workers range from highly trained nannies, such as those from Norland College and Chiltern College butlers. The status symbol of British butlers and British nannies is associated with the stereotypes of not only professionalism, but also of calmness, patience and discretion (Cox, 2007). These perceptions are also visible and understood within the larger media discourses. For example, popular TV series such as Supernanny UK and Supernanny USA are broadcasted continually for several seasons not only in the UK and US, but also internationally (www.supernanny.co.uk). In the series Supernanny UK, the main character nanny Jo Frost, offers advice on childcare to parents with 'misbehaving' children, recommending not only discipline techniques, but also advice on household order and even on relationships between family members. The fact that Jo Frost is not only a highly trained nanny but also a **British** nanny is apparent at the beginning of the programme, where she arrives in a polished black British taxi.

Another TV show, *Nanny 911* is based on the same principle, where British nannies offer advice on childcare problems to US families. From this point of view, Britishness is stereotyped as a status symbol.

Therefore, within the sector of childcare and domestic work, the UK is placed both as an export country, where Britishness is stereotyped as a status symbol, and an import country, dominated by largely migrant workers. It should also be noted here, that since I began this research in 2009, the global economic crises have also brought a shift in the supply and demand of *au pairs* in the UK. Unemployment figures have increased dramatically all around the world, but focusing on Europe, the situation in the Mediterranean countries has been particularly severe. For example, in 2013 Spain reported the unemployment rate of young adults (under 25 years) as high as 56%, and Greece at 62,9%, (compared to 20% in the UK), and has since been referred to as 'the lost generation' (Burgen, 2013). Such high levels of joblessness among the young population had, among other causes, resulted in the higher than before influx in *au pair* applications. In her article for *The Telegraph* newspaper, Murray-West (2012) remarked on the disproportionately high numbers of *au pair* applicants for each job advertisement. Her newspaper column reported an instance of one employer, who described having received two thousands replies for her '*au pair* post', most of which were of Spanish origin, followed by Italy. On the same note, an agency representative for the newspaper article noted that '*the mix of nationalities in the books have switched completely over the last two years*' with highest submissions from Spain compared to previous Eastern European applicants (Murray-West, 2012, *The Telegraph* 1/10/2012). What this

suggests is that the *au pair* scheme is rather dynamic, conceivably responding and moving together with the demands of the employment market.

Returning to the theme of national and cultural stereotypes, the issue of race and ethnicity (Anderson 2007; Bott 2005; England and Stiell 1997; MacDonald 2011) was one of the viewpoints from which scholars analysed the hire of migrant domestic workers⁵. For example, England and Stiell (1997) conducted a study on the perceptions of domestic workers in Toronto and suggested that domestic workers' nationalities were constructed through their gender, race, ethnicity and class. Similarly, Anderson (2000, 2011) researched the motives behind the preferences of hiring migrant instead of local domestic worker and she stated that the 'foreignness' of the workers was viewed as an asset based on different ethnicity or nationality. Based in the cities of Athens, Barcelona and Paris, Anderson (2000:153) noted that the position of the different workers' national groups varied from city to city within a 'racist hierarchy'. As such, the lighter the skin of domestic worker, the better the rate of pay and the easier to find work. Anderson revealed that in practice this differentiation was evident when agencies and employers expressed their preferences in terms of nationality, almost as if they were guided by a code for the precise shade of skin of worker's colour. However, it was not only the colour of the skin that was racialised in domestic work employment, it was also the religion, the culture, or even physical appearances such as weight and prettiness that became

⁵ Other studies concerning the hire of *au pairs* as a category of migrant domestic workers focused on; macro 'push and pull' factors and the demand for this type of employment in general (Bikova 2008; Hess and Puckhaber 2004; Parreñas 2001), and the employers' negotiations of balancing work and childcare (Williams and Gavanis 2008)

commodified. Overall though, race and nationality were reported as the most discriminating factors (Anderson, 2000). In terms of the UK, the employment agencies were much more cautious when delineating domestic workers as Anderson noted;

'While discrimination on the grounds of colour or nationality does not contravene the Race Relations Act for private householders, the issue is rather more complicated for employment agencies catering to this market since they are in the public realm and hence not allowed to discriminate' (Anderson 2007:252).

Similarly, Williams and Gavanas (2008) conducted a comparative research on migrant domestic workers in Madrid, London and Sweden, and noted that stereotyping workers' nationalities took different forms in each country/city, which were linked to different effects of antidiscrimination policies. In relation to commodification of domestic work, Bikova (2010) described the radical shift in Norwegian *au pair* employment, indicating the impact of rapid growth of *au pairs*' employment since 2000 implied the transformation of this sector from 'cultural exchange' to a much more commodified version of domestic work.

In terms of the current research, the analysis of online information provided by *au pair* agencies in the East Midlands area of the UK revealed that some agencies highlighted the advantages of particular nationalities⁶. For example, an agency specializing in providing Hungarian *au pairs* stated on its pages: '*In general, young Hungarians seem to love*

⁶ Specifically, these are: such as <http://www.eastmidlandsnanniesandaupairs.co.uk/>, <http://www.avonaupairs.co.uk/index.html>, <http://www.brickaupairs.co.uk/>

Britain and tend to fit in very well (better than Western Europeans, we believe)' (Brick au pair agency, 2010). Also, in line with Anderson's (2007) research, host parents recruiting au pairs also employed a combination of racial, ethnic and national stereotypes. More specifically, when asked to describe the process of au pair hire, three host parents shared their preferences for certain nationalities. These were either based on previous bad experiences, or other types of national stereotypes related to differences in weather and even obtaining a driving licence. For example, host mother Jackie firmly believed that a Mediterranean au pair would not be suited to work in the UK:

I think it was down to personality, I don't know whether I am right or wrong with this, but I think that the culture plays a huge part. I did not think that before, but I do think it matters now, so I would be careful about which country they [au pairs] come from. Because I would not choose Mediterranean country, like Spain or France. Because I feel that the culture of those countries are, I think that people coming from these countries to England come because they want to learn English primarily. And they don't really understand the English culture and the English weather. I know that this might sound stupid, but I think that the weather plays a huge part and people come to England and they hate the weather. They come from a warm climate and they cannot beat it, so it makes them feel terrible in an already difficult environment. So, the last two (au pairs), which have been more successful came from a colder climate.

[my inserts]

For Jackie, applicants from Southern Europe were not suitable for *au pair* work, as they were not able to adapt to the colder British climate. Other host parents stereotyped their *au pairs* positively, based on

previously good experiences. According to Bott (2005) this positive stereotyping of domestic workers leads employers to become 'hooked' on certain nationalities, and this is how they controlled their fear of national/racial differences. Host father Jim was in charge of the online search for their third *au pair* and he told me:

I took over [the search] because A, I was less busy with my work at that time, and also I think that *Au pair* World [website] is quite good, you can set up your parameters. So, we are, not to sound stereotypical, but we had a German *au pair* who was very good, because the Germans have very similar view on life, they are very structured, their driving license is one of the hardest to get in Europe, they usually speak very good English, so why change it? There are loads of *au pair* out there, why change the winning formula? So I put there, I want it to be a German girl, and so on. [my insert]

Jim's bias towards German *au pairs* as ideal *au pair* candidates was another example of racial stereotyping in *au pair* recruitment strategies. Also, Jim clearly illuminated how host parents can become 'hooked' (Bott 2005) at placing preference on certain *au pair* nationalities. This goes in line with Anderson's (2010) research, in which some host parents expressed their preference for *au pairs* in more subtle ways, referring to skills, attitudes of preferred nationalities. Following previous scholarly research such as Anderson (2000, 2007), Bott (2005) and England and Stiell (1997), it is apparent that these 'racialized' preferences of *au pair* candidates are still employed by many host parents. Be it stereotypical beliefs in the ability to drive a car, the difference in climate, or the contradictions between the relaxed Mediterranean lifestyle that did not match with the structured lifestyle of the UK, these were just some of the

examples that host parents described when justifying their fondness or dislike of certain nationalities. Host parents' convictions of the importance that certain cultures and nationalities were better suited for *au pair* work resonated with Anderson's (2000:155) commentary that '*household myths about different nationalities assumed an almost folkloric character, and a bad/good experience with domestic worker would be used to generalize in future hiring process of employers*'.

***Au pair* hiring practices in relation to socio economic status**

The strategy of finding the 'perfect *au pair*' employed by host parents included another set of criteria based on familial ideology (discussed in Chapter 2). It is families with relative class privilege that are able to employ *au pairs*, starting with the ability to afford extra finance for the *au pairs* salary (between £70 – £100 per week), but more importantly it is the facility of providing adequate extra space within the host family's home.

In his book '*Class in Contemporary Britain*', Ken Roberts (2011) noted that because 'class' is being used and described rather frequently, it is a concept quite difficult to define. Despite of this, there is a common agreement amongst sociologists that the concept of class is economically underpinned (Roberts, 2011). One of the prominent and influential thinkers on the theory of class, Karl Marx, suggested that individuals are positioned within the class order based on their relation to the production process. Therefore, production was perceived as the main marker of class difference as individuals either had ownership of the

production (bourgeoisie), or they were dependent on it (proletariat workers). For Marx, the increasing evolution of a capitalist society would lead to a greater polarization of these two classes, which would in turn lead to conflicts and eventually the end of capitalism (Roberts, 2011). Bottero (2004) described how this traditional view of class theory has been reopened for debate in the 1990s, emphasizing social interests and identities and their association with economic status. In particular, Devine and Savage (2000) noted that this revival has highlighted the way that the subject of cultural identity has become linked with class as an economic concept, and commented: *'the focus on how cultural processes are embedded within specific kinds of socio-economic practices, explore the way inequality is routinely reproduced through both cultural and economic practices'* (Devine and Savage, 2000:193). This is referred to as *'culturalist class analysis'* (Devine and Savage, 2000:196). Savage (2000:102) added that this mode of analysing class allows for the continuation of applying class as part of one's identity, however it is achieved by *'applying it as form of differentiation rather than of collectivity'*, as was previously employed. Bourdieu's (1984) concept of the habitus is highly influential in culturalist class analysis. Based on the theory of class inequalities as being reproduced through different values of taste, Bourdieu's habitus is influenced by the theories of Immanuel Kant (1978) which suggests that taste is of an acquired character (Wacquant 2005). Taken as a whole, Bourdieu (1984:166) considered taste to be a *'social orientation, a sense of one's place, guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which*

benefit the occupants of that position'. Within the current research, the fact that host parents decided to hire live-in childcare and domestic worker in the form of an *au pair*, could be also perceived as representing their middle class status. Anderson (2001:25, 26) argued that the employment of domestic workers was linked to social standing as *'in practice it is hard to distinguish essential domestic work from work that is to do with maintaining status, however it is the level and extent of this work that differentiates between what is necessary and in fact the issue of status'*. Bourdieu's (1984:101) concept of habitus, although affected by the economic context of individuals, essentially refers to a *'set of dispositions, assumptions obtained from assimilation of learning'*, such as family and school and implies a *'tendency to think feel and behave in particular way'* (Vincent et al, 2006:7). From this point of view, habitus refers to the way individuals' choices are affected by particular sets of aspirations, responsibilities and anxieties (Vincent et al, 2008). It will be discussed in due course, the ways in which the host parents' social position of middle class was guiding them towards particular practices in *au pair* recruitment. According to Ball (2003:177) *'class presents itself as natural and intuitive actor through which the exclusions of choice exist within the social networks, families and social institutions'*. Additionally, Reay (2005) argues that class is also about the feelings that individuals have and develop towards certain practices. Referring to this as *'psychic landscape of social class'* (Reay 2005:911), such class-thinking argues Reay, occurs on both a conscious and unconscious level. A fitting example of how the *'psychic landscape of social class'* operates in practice is Vincent's et al research (2008). In their study of childcare

choices in the UK, Vincent et al (2008) compared professional middle class and working class families to assess the impact of class on different arrangements within the childcare market. Their findings suggested that due to higher access to financial resources the middle class families had more choices in the type of childcare they selected, compared to working class families. Moreover, the dominant ideology emphasizing in-home care of children was preferred by middle class families, whilst the working class families resisted it. The authors concluded that *'social class is crucial in any consideration of families' use, experience and perceptions of childcare'* (Vincent et al, 2008:22).

Therefore, studying the means by which host parents within this study searched for, chose and selected their *au pairs* could also allow a better understanding of their own class location and identity. Bush (2013) also found in her study on employers of migrant domestic workers in London, that social class was relevant to how employers perceived their migrant employees and *'in some cases they explicitly compared a nanny's background and education with their own'* (2013:548). In the UK, Murray-West (2012) noted the dramatic rise of *au pair* applications from countries that were hit by the current economic crisis, and how this increasing pool of 'desperate' highly qualified yet unemployed candidates, in turn opens up new options for employers. Employers are then 'spoilt for choice', wondering; *'do I want a pastry chef, a swimming instructor or primary school teacher? They want to teach my children Spanish, chess and balloon modelling - possibly all at once'* (Murray-West 2012, *The Telegraph* 1/10/2012). Undoubtedly, such a dramatic rise in availability, creates an increasingly uneven picture in the supply and demand of *au*

pairs and impacts on how host parents can 'cherry pick' the best *au pair* available.

Interestingly, in relation to this research, host parents' reasoning was based on the principle that the ideal *au pair* candidate did not have to be necessarily highly educated, but rather was expected to have certain goals and ambitions in life. When I asked host mother Amelia to describe how she found her *au pair*, she replied:

We wanted someone, this sounds awful, but somebody who when they were doing something, they had some intelligence, do you know what I mean? Someone, who had got some job lined up, or someone who was going to the university because I thought that they would have something more about them that they would have a good head on their shoulders' ...' Why did we choose her? She sounded nice, you know her emails, we had quite a few emails and they were all nice, friendly and well written. And she sounded like she was from a nice family.

For host father Jim however, the same 'ambition in life' was also closely linked to the *au pair*'s age as he noted:

The other problem is that she [potential *au pair*] was a bit older, and in hindsight you have got to wonder, she was about 23, I can understand why a girl would want to be an *au pair*, when she finishes college, and it is for the experience. But when you are doing it at 23, I think she was very lost, she was just doing it to get out of the country and she was not doing it because she had a goal, she was just doing it for the sake of doing something, because there was nothing better to do and I think it is not a good reason. [my insert]

What host father Jim conveyed in this statement is that the age of 23 years was too old to be considering working as an *au pair*. Both Jim and Amelia's concerns were similar in the way that they emphasized the motivations (or the lack of) in any potential *au pair*. In her study of the changing discourse of motherhood in 1990s Britain, Steph Lawler (2000) discussed how the pairing between intelligent/stupid was used by participants (mothers and daughters) to distinguish themselves from a working class status. It was not only a particular taste, but also 'knowledge' and 'how to go about things' that was implemented as a cultural artefact of middle-classness (Lawler 2000:106). In relation to this research, one could assume that as *au pairs* are a form of live in domestic arrangement, host parents preferred to choose *au pairs* with similar interests/hobbies – or to borrow Bourdieu's term – the same habitus. What is more, as *au pairs* perform mainly childcare (and light housework) host parents wanted to ensure that the *au pair* who looks after their children shares the same middle class values, as these are ultimately going to be passed onto their children. Bourdieu (1996) noted that the main sites for the accumulation and transmission of cultural capital are the family and the education system. In this way, the host family wanted to ensure that particular qualities are reflected by the *au pair*, who in a certain way assumes the parenting role⁷. For host mother Amelia, this meant having 'a good head on their shoulders' and for host father Jim, the age of any potential *au pair* was important in determining the *au pair's* ambitions and goals in life.

⁷ Chapter 5 will further elaborate and discuss the classed concept of 'intensive mothering' and how this affected the relationship between the *au pair* and host parents.

In contrast to the above, one set of host parents interviewed together explicitly noted that they rejected hiring an *au pair* who was 'too intellectual' and they commented:

We decided that she would be little bit needy and lonely and would end up you know, it would be like having another child. Because she was not very social, she was very intellectually based, like academic, and had experience with children from her family but no experience with other people's children. But it was more a gut feel really, she did not add up, we did think that she would get very lonely, she would not go out and mix. And we wanted somebody who would not be overactive socially, but someone who had not so much dependence on us.

At first glance it might appear that the fact that the *au pair* enjoyed reading books was seen as too intellectually based and implied that the *au pair* lacked other necessary qualities such as being inventive and independent with her own time. However, these host parents were not only concerned with the qualification and hobbies of this *au pair* candidate, but ultimately they were anxious about the management of boundaries at home. The navigation of the boundaries when employing an *au pair* will be further discussed in Chapter 6. Within the extracts I have just showed, the host parents did not necessarily want *au pairs* who held a degree, or particular childcare diploma, they were referring to a quality or rather an aspiration that they wanted to pass on to their children. Rosie Cox (2011) commented that the role of class plays crucial role for middle class families looking for childcare. Therefore, the 'advantage' of a middle class position becomes something that is perceived as something to be passed onto the children, and therefore, as

Cox (2011) points out, the class identity of any potential childcare workers becomes more important than their qualifications.

The display of family ideology in *au pair* recruitment

Big family, that tends to go well, girls from big families. Clearly she [*au pair*] was very family oriented; she looked like somebody who enjoyed family life. So, yes, Anabel [*au pair*] was standing out, she looked really nice and somebody who wanted to be part of a family.

[my inserts]

The importance host parents assigned to the type of family an *au pair* came from was quite pronounced. The above quote was from host mother Brenda, a married physiotherapist in her early fifties, and her preference was consistent in the interviews with another 11 host parents. Specifically, it was the 'traditional family' that host parents viewed as yet another 'marker' they looked for in the 'perfect *au pair*'. These host parents shared the view that was ideologically based on 'good and traditional family values' as essential for the right *au pair*. This ideological view of families was predominantly associated with *au pairs* who came from rural areas where she would live within a nuclear- extended family, surrounded by siblings, cousins and grandparents. For example, host father Richard described the ideal *au pair* candidate as follows:

'We are looking for somebody who is 18-20 years old, we are not looking for somebody experienced, some people are looking for somebody to take over the household, we are not looking for the finished product, we want somebody who is like a big sister who can help out, with nice background and somebody

who would fit in well....it is really a combination of things, it may sound odd, but we look for *au pairs* **who have got brothers or sisters**, so they are used to the hustle and bustle of the family. All of our *au pairs* have sort of come from the countryside, a bit of a coincidence, but also not. So they come from **big family** from the **countryside**, they have **grandparents** and spend time with family and their little **cousins**, it seems to be a really **nice product** and person who comes out of that.....So, for example, if an *au pair* comes and says, I am the only child and I live with my mum in Vienna, I probably would not bother.'

[my emphasis]

Host father's Richard comment suggests his particular view of family which can be broken down to the several aspects. The belief of what should constitute a family is the traditional extended family (where brothers, sisters, cousins and grandparents are all mentioned), and the idea of rural (traditional) family living as preferential to the urban (modern) family living. It can be noted here that this idea of the ideal family is presented within a particular type of family dichotomy: the traditional (rural, nuclear and extended family) as opposed to the modern (urban, single or divorced type of family). Such reasoning, based on the good and stable traditional family, was contrasted with the insecurity of the modern family, and as such host parents seemed to be assured that their *au pair* would have 'good family values' as a result. Host mother Debbie noted:

The reason I chose Sandra (*au pair*) was because, I spoke to quite a lot of *au pairs*, and it was her because she had quite a lot of family values. She lived near her auntie and her granddad and

grandma and she saw them quite a lot. So you can always see and tell quite a lot about their family unit, do you see what I mean?

In this way, it almost seems that the modern family is seen to pose a threat to the traditional family type. Therefore, the ideal here is not the modern cosmopolitan *au pair*, but rather an *au pair* who holds traditional family values and who lives in close proximity to her extended family in the countryside. Host father Richard, explicitly noted, that an *au pair* who comes from a single parent background is not the ideal candidate. and this also sheds light on the belief of what a typical family should look like, perhaps in this case the ideal is the nuclear or extended type of family. The 'decline of family' is a highly debated topic in public discourse (but also in academia), and refers to the decline of one particular type of family, namely the nuclear type family. As previously mentioned in the Literature review chapter, sociological literature asserting the breakdown of family demonstrates as its evidence the increased diversification of family forms. For example, Popenoe (1988: xii) argued that *'the institution of the family is growing weaker, it is losing social power and social function, losing influence over behaviour and opinion and generally becoming less important in life'*. Based on analysis of Swedish families, Popenoe reasoned that the traditional nuclear family was weakening due to an increase in single parenthood, divorce and cohabitation among couples as well as the high number of women entering the labour market (1988). This view also resonates with some societal and political discourses in the UK. For example, Boffey (2012) commented for *The Observer* newspaper that the current British government is trying to measure how happy Britain is, linking mental

health with overall happiness. What is significant however, is that as shadow health secretary Andy Burnham explained, a large part of the problem why people are not happy is the 'modern condition' which he strongly linked to the fragmentation of families. From this point of view, it is the nuclear family that seems to be the bedrock of stable society. Burnham also referred to past generations as having stronger support networks, and referred to his two brothers as the main source of strength, again strongly stereotyping one form of family, the nuclear family (Boffey, 2012). In this way, host father Richard and host mother Amelia could be striving for the type of family that was more normative in the past, as Gunn (2005:56) commented: *'for the most of the nineteenth and twentieth century Britain, family implied not only immediate kin but also 'clan', which is the dense network of relatives or also referred to as 'cousinhoods'.*

The above arguments are clear in that they all share the view of traditionally nuclear (and middle class) family values as highly significant, and this indicate not only the type of family the *au pair* originates from, but also the type of family the host parents strive to present themselves to be. This vision of what constitutes a 'good and proper' family as opposed to 'broken' family is visible on various levels, the political as well as the local.

Created as a support organisation to policy development, The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) has published a document titled: 'Fractured Families; Why Stability Matters' where it is stated: *There are complex social reasons behind the long-term rise in family breakdown.*

These include a cultural shift in family formation away from married-couple families towards increasing numbers of lone parents and sole registrations of births as well as cohabiting (2013:14). It further adds that *'A secure, nurturing, loving, stable family environment is therefore crucial and its absence has a profoundly damaging effect on children, families and wider society (2013:20).* Apart from revealing anxiety over family diversification, this view also asserts that it is the nuclear family that acts as the bedrock and stability of our society. Such interpretation is highly problematic because it normalizes nuclear families as the only type of family which could be nurturing, and as such is oblivious to negative aspects such as domestic violence experienced by all types of families (Walby and Allen, 2004). What is more, this view goes in opposition to the reality that families in contemporary Britain are indeed very diverse, and the nuclear family is no longer the sole type of family living. Indeed, there are now increasing numbers of single parent families, step and reconstituted families, same sex families, mixed ethnic families, and transnational families. For example, the Office for National Statistics (2012) stated in their 'Families and Household survey' that from the 18.2 million families in the UK, 12.2 million were married couples with or without children, whilst 2.9 million couples were cohabiting and 2 million parents were living alone with their child/ren.

Contemporary mothering

'The new competitive mothering ideology is aimed squarely at middle class mothers and admonishes them to prepare their infants and toddlers to compete for the coveted slots in the preschool that will ultimately destine them for Harvard' (Macdonald, 2010:21).

Macdonald (2010) outlines above yet another feature influencing host mothers, not only in selecting their *au pairs*, but also affecting the relationship between them – and that has been described as 'intensive mothering'. According to Cheal (2002:104), the concept of 'intensive mothering' is a contemporary approach to mothering, which involves wholly absorbed commitment over childrearing, as the priority lies in the child's education, particularly in early development. This form of mothering, is based on ideas that consider such management of children as providing greater advantages in all aspects of a child's life (such as cultural, educational, physical and psychological benefits) (Hays, 1996). This is purely based on the child-centred approach, where the needs of the child take priority over those of the mother, involving great effort, time and energy. This notion has been continuously reinforced by child experts from the second half of the twentieth century (Cheal, 2002). Similarly, Miller (2005:46) pointed out that '*women are confronted with an array of expert, public and lay knowledge, through which their expectations and experiences of motherhood is filtered*'.

Hays (2011) suggested that contemporary North American mothers have to navigate their mother identity between the notion of 'intensive mothering' and a career. These two mothering notions

contradict each other, as one implies the role of the stay at home dedicated and active mother, and the other operates in a sphere where child care is deemed as under-valued type of work and as such emphasizes out of home employment. Both of these images are socially and culturally constructed, and even though they contradict each other, at the same time both the traditional mother and the career supermom are socially accepted types of mothering. Similarly, Stone (2011: 368) commented that women feel split between '*trying to be the ideal mother (in an era of intensive mothering) and the ideal worker (a model based on a man with a stay at home wife)*'. Hays (2011:43) explained another difficulty; neither the intensive mothering ideology nor the career mum are perceived as the 'perfect' type of mothering, or as the 'perfect' solution, as there is always the other side, the other option of how women can and should be coping with motherhood. On this note, Hays (2011:43) argued '*this ambivalence always makes women inadequate in one way or the other, resulting in the feelings of being pushed and pulled in two directions*'.

The notion of intensive mothering is also categorized by race and class, as according to Macdonald (2010:3), there is a significant prevalence of white middle class women who conform to the '*all the time attentive at home mother*' model. Whilst Hays (2011:58) agrees with this point, she also stressed that it is the privileged position of being middle class that gives this group of women an opportunity to make a change that shifts away from the dominant, and often damaging, ideology of intensive mothering. This, according to Hays (2011), is mainly due to the fact that, compared to the working class, salaries and career

prospects are higher in the middle class group. Therefore, for middle class women, *'there is more to gain from the alteration away from the intensive mothering ideology'* (Hays, 2011:58). Equally, Miller (2005:55,56) argued that *'within the Western world, dominant ideologies surrounding motherhood can be seen to represent the ideas of more powerful groups and do not recognise or accommodate the diversity of women's experiences'*. Stone (2011:364) noted, that although her study of high-achieving mothers who opted to become stay at home mothers refers to only distinct minority of women, it is nevertheless significant to study this group, as *'high achieving women have historically been cultural arbiters, often defining what is acceptable for all women in families and work'*. More fittingly, Stone (2011) suggested:

'While these women do not represent all women, elite women's experiences provide a glimpse into the work-family negotiations that all women face. And their stories lead us to ask, "If the most privileged women of society cannot successfully combine work and family, who can?'

(Stone, 2011:364)

As already noted in the previous chapter, the position of middle classness was played out during the stage of *au pair* hire, where host parents set out their preferences for a particular type of *au pair*, with a traditional family background being rated as highly important. In relation to the intensive mothering model and the link of class privilege, *au pair* hire could be also perceived as offering an advantage to the host family's children. Although not uniformly shared by all of the nine host mothers, three host mothers mentioned during the interviews, that hiring an *au pair* was also considered as bringing 'an extra' benefit, namely in the

form of their children learning a foreign language. In terms of one host family where host parents were of different nationalities, host mother Miriam reported that:

The other very positive thing for us is the language aspect. We are a bilingual family and bringing our child up bilingual. So choosing an *au pair*, who speaks both English and the other language is really great, really beneficial to our particular circumstances.

As Miriam was Austrian and her husband was British, she felt that her children were disadvantaged with their German language as they were growing up in the UK. For Miriam then, it was perceived as an obvious choice to look for *au pairs* who spoke German and could thus help the children with developing their German language skills.

Another host mother was so determined to find an *au pair* who spoke Chinese, that it took almost six months to recruit the right *au pair* (mainly because China is not member of the EU, therefore there are extensive visa regulations in place). Host mother Anna believed that the ability of her children to be able to learn Chinese would be of a great advantage in the current and forecasted economic and political climate, as she commented:

You know, I read about a research about the children's capacity to absorb languages very very easily up to the age of four, and so I thought, well, with China being in the control of it, at least that is where we are headed, I decide to get an *au pair* who could teach them (children) some Chinese. Not in a very structured way, but just talking to them and communicating with them, you know, like songs and some words, so they can pick it up'.

Later on during the interview, Anna added that three months after the *au pair* left, her older daughter talked to her in Chinese one morning:

...'yes, it was incredible, we were having breakfast and she said two words in Chinese, you know just like that, and I was not even sure if she remembered something, that was the first time I heard her say a Chinese word, so obviously it served its purpose'.

According to Stone (2011:364) '*middle and upper middle class women tend to be particularly mindful of expert advice*' and it was shown by her sample of elite and highly-educated mothers, that these women were very conscious of the high standards placed on them and guided them to how they should be raising their children, or in other words, the influence of intensive mothering. In terms of other host mothers, two also commented that the *au pair* was very helpful particularly during homework time. In this way, host mothers could give full attention the oldest child, who 'actually needed their support with assignments or schoolwork exercises', whilst the *au pair* would play with the younger child. Another host mother commented how hiring an *au pair* freed her from the 'mundane' domestic tasks which enabled her to better enjoy and relish spending time with her children and in turn be a better parent:

Having an *au pair* gives me time to do things that I then have more good time with the children, so you know, in the morning, she (*au pair*) would have done their washing and ironing and the uniform is ready, so I don't have to do that, so it gives me more time with the children, I can enjoy them more, and it gives me that stress free time with them...'

However, it should also be noted, that another three host mothers perceived their *au pairs* as the second best option when it came to the education of their children. In these cases, host mothers commented that due to the better work flexibility and less financial cost, the *au pair* was a satisfactory solution in assisting with domestic work and childcare. At the same time, it was viewed that because the *au pairs* were mainly young women with very little childcare experience, this was the sacrifice taken for receiving domestic help. For example, one host mother told me towards the end of our second interview how an *au pair* compares to a nanny in terms of the quality of care:

'Hmm, I think that the difference was in terms of having an experience with children. So one thing like during the school holidays, when Nina (*au pair*) stays with them, she does not really know what to do with them, sometimes I would suggest things and she would do them, but like she is happy to supervise them and like taking them to the cinema, but she would not sit with them and say: 'right, let's do some drawings, or painting, or shall we play a game? '. Nanny is experienced in what to do with children and I think that that is one of the things that are downside. For the summer holidays for example, we are going away for a few weeks, and I have been looking for holiday clubs today so the children would have something to do in the daytime, because I don't think Nina is confident enough to keep them entertained enough for the whole day, she does not have the experience to do that. So, that is the thing that I miss, having somebody who has experience of entertaining children.

In terms of this research, the majority of host mothers (eight out of ten) were in full time employment outside of the home, and, similarly to other groups of mothers, it was deemed as impossible to conform to

the 'intensive mothering' model. As a result of the burden of a 'second shift' together with an ideological dominance of 'intensive mothering', these host mothers opted for finding the solution by employing an at home child-carer and domestic helper, in the form of an *au pair*. By doing this, the primary responsibility over the childcare still stayed with the mother, as it was her who assigned the daily tasks to the *au pair*. In this way, it was still the mother who was seen as the person who was primarily responsible for the care of her child/ren.

Reasons for becoming *au pair* – *au pairs'* perspectives

The following section focuses on the many-sided views and reasons for becoming an *au pair*. My personal experience broadly fits with some of the *au pairs* I have met during this research. I had just finished my A levels in the Czech Republic, and although I considered applying for a university I felt wary of applying straight away and simply wanted a 'break'. I thought that going abroad to the UK was an excellent opportunity for experiencing something new and exciting, whilst also giving me plenty of opportunities to learn how to manage by myself and dealing with new responsibilities. I also considered that having the experience of living in a foreign country together with learning the English language (I had studied German for my A levels) would undoubtedly improve my future employment opportunities once I returned to my home country. I do not remember very clearly my 'host family criteria', only that I did not want to be placed in the countryside

where I would feel isolated as I did not have a driving licence. Also I did not want to care for very young children as I was scared by the prospect of looking after a toddler. I contacted a local agency in my town and after completing all the forms and writing 'Dear family' letter together with two photos of myself and my siblings, I was told to wait. It was not long before the agency called back and asked me if I would be interested in a host family of a professional couple with two children living in a village in the South of the UK. I decided to decline as I felt the location would be too isolating for me and would not give me enough opportunities to practice English apart from with the host family. A week later, the agency called again, and this time I decided that the single mother with two teenage children living in Bristol would suit much better my 'criteria'.

As mentioned previously in chapter 3 (Methodology), there were 18 *au pairs* interviewed for this study, all during the period of 10 months in from September 2010 to July 2011. Only Gabriela already worked previously as an *au pair* in Ireland when she was 19 years old, and now, at the age of 28 decided to work as an *au pair* for a second time in the UK. This was because after a rather difficult employment situation she decided to leave the job and felt coming to the UK as an *au pair* would give her 'a nice break'. All the other 17 *au pairs* took on this position for the first time, and the reasons behind their decisions, although greatly varied owing to personal circumstances, could be summarized as: having a break after school (either before starting university or before looking for employment), learning/improving their knowledge of the English language (and as such improving future job/study prospects) and visiting and living in a foreign country (life experience). The majority (12) of the

au pairs I met, had quite a clear idea of why they decided to become an *au pair*. For example, *au pair* Eva commented that in order to continue with her advanced degree that included English language, she felt that being able to live in the UK for a year and then returning to Italy to write her dissertation would give her a clear advantage, as she stated:

Because in Italy we study English but not speaking, we do lots of grammar, you can know grammar but not be able to speak, so I thought that staying as an *au pair* with a family would be easier and it could help with my English, because I always have to speak in English to communicate with them.

Although these reasons might at first glance appear quite thought through and pre-arranged, there were also some *au pairs* who came to the UK because they were not sure what to do next and thought that an '*au pair* break' would give them the time to think their future over, whilst still 'doing something cool'. *Au pairs* Anita and Olga both arrived after finishing their A level exams and were in doubt as to what to do next. For instance, Anita said: 'because after school I did not really know what to study, I know I want to study but not sure what to do', and similarly, Olga told me 'I wanted to have a break after school, because school was hard for me and I thought it would be nice to have a break and I wanted to do something to improve my English, because it was not very good and you need English all over the world and so I decided that becoming an *au pair* was the best thing for me.'

In her study of motivations of future *au pairs* from Germany and Austria, Geserick (2012) described that the reasons and motivations for wanting to become an *au pair* could be generally divided into pull and

push factors. Within these two dominant categories, pull factors were based on 'attracting codes to travel abroad' (such as wanting to spend time in a foreign culture, learn English, experience USA and personal benefits of living abroad) and push factors as reasons behind wanting to leave home/country for various reasons (such as having a break from mundane job, escaping a problematic relationship or family). Although both of these factors complement each other, Geserick (2012:61) concluded that the cultural and learning experience, the pull factors, *'are a major relevance in the decision process, especially at the early stages of that process among younger au pairs. Only seldom is the wish to become an au pair the primary motivation, but it is often used as a method or vehicle for young people to fulfil other wishes'*. This finding also resonates within this study, only two *au pairs* mentioned that 'being an *au pair*' was something they 'always wanted to do' and as such was the main motivation for coming to the UK and live with host family. *Au pair* Anna told me that since having worked for five consecutive years as an instructor in a summer camp in her native Austria, she knew she liked working with children and similarly, *au pair* Sonia mentioned at the beginning of our interview: 'Since I was like fifteen, I always wanted to come and work as *au pair*, I don't really know why, I just like to play with children'. Interestingly, 26 year old Petra from Hungary was the only *au pair* within the sample that told me straight away at the beginning of the interview: 'I did not want to be an *au pair*, that was **the last thing**, the absolutely last thing I wanted to do'. Magda was made redundant and thought of coming to London where she had a close friend already, but as she did not have any savings she decided that the second best option

would be to come for two months as a summer *au pair*. However, as she could not find a host family for a short time, she had to change her plan again and finally decided to come as a 'long term *au pair*' for a period of one year. When I asked Petra how she found her host family she replied:

Actually it was the mother who found me, who wrote me an email. She said that she liked my profile and she liked me and that she lived in Nottingham. And she wrote that it is a big city and so on, and I thought why not? I was really desperate in Hungary, I did not have any job, I did not have any money and I just wanted to get out of the country. So I just grabbed the possibility to come to Nottingham.

Petra's anxiety over her financial situation was increasing by the day, so in the end she agreed to work for the first host family that contacted her. According to Geserick (2012:61) the '*push factors are especially visible among the older au pairs and those who have already been working in a job*'. Likewise, Burikova and Miller (2010:30) explained that based on their research of Slovakian *au pairs* in London; '*Individuals decide to come often for personal reasons and sometimes even on a whim. But in aggregate there are still general trends amongst which economic aspects are important, so too is the general feeling that there are fewer opportunities today in Slovakia*'. Moreover, Burikova and Miller (2010) argued that often it was personal relations, such as relationship breakdown or family problems, that were the main factors in influencing individuals in becoming *au pairs*. This is contrary to the *au pair* sample interviewed in this study, as the *au pairs* were mostly motivated by the opportunity to improve their English or just to do something different before looking for a job or further studies.

Searching for the host family

After deciding to come to the UK and work as an *au pair*, the next step involved searching for the host family. From the 18 *au pair* participants, the majority (11) searched for a host family through an online *au pair* agency. Six *au pairs* were recruited through a standard *au pair* agency in their home country, and two *au pairs* used personal contacts from family members in finding their host family. During their search for a host family, just over half of the *au pairs* (10) commented that they chose their host family because following the initial contact either via email, skype or phone, they felt they found the '*right family for them*'. This was typically described as 'following the gut feeling' about the potential host family they were communicating with. At other times, *au pairs* told me that when they were phoning the host family to discuss the placement 'they simply understood each other'. Other *au pairs* also described other factors that influenced them in choosing their host family, such as; the geographical location (the preference was normally in relation of being/not being in London or in terms of countryside versus city), and the number and ages of children they were going to look after. Regarding the last point, *au pair* Kathy reasoned:

There were three families, the first one, they had four children, and the children were ten, eight, nine. And this family I chose, the children are five and two and I prefer that, I wanted a little baby, because with ten year old, I don't know, I am eighteen, so maybe for other *au pairs* it is fine, but I wanted younger children.

In terms of their decision of choosing an agency or searching on the internet, all of the *au pairs* who applied online were confident about their decision. For example, *au pair* Sophie described the process of searching for a host family online:

I had to create my profile online, on the website you can contact the family or they can contact you directly. I looked for my family and in my profile I put how long I want to stay here, if I have any experience with children and how many children I want to look after and the website finds suggestions for my families, the matches with my requests. So, I put the search and there was a message that there is this family interested and then I could click and we could chat. If the family finds you then they say they are interested, but you can also find your own family. We exchanged our email addresses and we emailed for two weeks and then they asked me if I wanted to come.'

German *au pair* Anita, who also searched online, described her experience and how she had changed her criteria after being contacted by a host family:

They [host family]) contacted me, and it was very quick. The first week we exchanged emails and pictures and then we talked on skype and they said that the main reason why they chose me was because the other *au pairs* were not able to talk properly on the phone, so they said ok. I actually wanted to go to London, but they said that Nottingham is also quite a big city and they gave me the email of the previous *au pair* and I asked her about the family and she said:' it's an amazing family and you will love them', so I thought OK.
[my insert])

What was particularly notable from the *au pair* interviews was the relatively small time frame in finding a host family. As Sophie above

commented, it took two weeks, but other *au pairs* also commented how quick the hiring process was. For instance, Czech *au pair* Iva finished her nursing qualification and before continuing to do MA course she wanted to improve her English, and she said:

I searched through the agency, and I did not even put any preferences apart from that I did not want to be in London, that did not appeal to me. So, well, this was really the first offer I had from a family and I just remember reading: divorced father who is a doctor, tick, two older children, tick, a bit of cooking and tidying, tick. So I called the agency back straight away and I told them, I will take them, and they were surprised, they said, that was quite quick, do you want to think it through? And I was like, no, I am going.

In regards to the form of recruitment, those *au pairs* who chose the online means often referred to the advantage of low or zero cost as well as that it was perceived to be 'less hassle' and quicker to navigate than a classic *au pair* agency. Those *au pairs* who decided to opt for a classic *au pair* agency stated the main reason as feeling more secure in comparison to using online sources. For example, *au pair* Lucy pointed out: *'I think it feels safer, and somebody is there and I can ask them anything I want; online it is only me. And if there really would be a problem, I have the possibility to change'*. Also, 19 year old Anna from Germany told me that it was her parents who wanted her to use the *au pair* agency in their city because:

'they just wanted to make sure I was going to a good family and the thing is that even before I went to the agency my dad told me that if I was not happy or they were treating me bad, I could just call and book the next plane and come back.'

Anna was the only *au pair* who explicitly mentioned the risk of being placed with host family where she would not be treated fairly and also mentioned that her parents were involved in the decision making process. Overall, it seemed that *au pairs* were relating their scheme as an opportunity to combine learning or improving English with getting life experience or 'just doing something else before learning/working again'.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the strategies host parents and *au pairs* employed during the recruitment process. Specifically, it looked at the commoditised ideals upheld by host mothers and host fathers, and how these were affected by their socioeconomic position as middle class. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the online means of *au pair* recruitment is becoming more popular by host parents, as it offers them the advantages of flexibility over the selection of their perfect *au pair* candidate. This increased popularity of online sources also resulted in host parents having to develop their own sets of practical tips, of how to best navigate the online world.

According to the data gathered during this research, it is apparent that host parents employ a variety of strategies during the *au pair* recruitment. These can be used consecutively, or they can rely on mainly one preferred 'method'. What is important to notice is that these strategies are developed and they reflect not only the middle class identity, but also some unique strategies based on stereotypical beliefs and principles. These are revealed in an expressed preference for a certain nationality, family situation or upbringing, as well as the future plans of the *au pairs* pre-selected. The way host parents wanted to ensure that their children are being cared for by an *au pair* who is from a particular family setting, education and other skills could also be viewed as the understanding of class as dynamic, where these classed values are to be continually striven for (Savage, 2000). Instead of looking for tangible skills such as previous experience of handling children, host

parents seemed to be more preoccupied with the family background of a potential *au pair*. Specifically, *au pairs* from a 'traditional family' were presented as an example of stability and good moral values.

The descriptions of the 'selection process' could not be more different between host parents and *au pairs*. Whereas *au pairs* motivations resonated with learning a foreign language or having a new experience or even a break, host parents seemed to be quite systematic in how they specified their criteria and ultimately selected the 'perfect *au pair*'. For *au pairs*, the aim of finding a good host family was either based on 'gut instincts' or on preferences in terms of geographical location or the number and ages of the children they would be looking after.

Whereas *au pairs* want to come to Britain to learn language, gain new experience, travel or simply 'take a break' whilst earning money, the host parents have the opportunity to apply their middle classness in the increasingly competitive *au pair* recruitment (Anderson 2000). Macdonald (2010:26) similarly noted in her study on delegated mothering that '*unlike their own mothers, who could presumably transmit middle-class habitus through their very presence, through exposure to their tastes and judgments, likes and dislikes, the mothers in this study had to 'contract' this transmission*'. Interestingly, within the current study, it was also host fathers who were directly involved in this initial stage of *au pair* selection practices in searching for their 'ideal *au pair*' (as opposed to the lack of involvement in relating to *au pairs* as discussed in the next chapter).

Lastly, Vincent et al (2008) conducted two research projects and focused on how parents engaged in the childcare market, however their findings are mainly focused on mothers (57 compared to 14 fathers) and their views on childcare and relationships with carers. This study also included host fathers and their views, and as such was able to offer greater detail on the ways host parents selected an *au pair*. Although childcare is based on highly gendered ideals, the analysis of both host parents also demonstrated that some host fathers were also involved in the hire of *au pairs* as they voiced their preferences of the 'perfect *au pair* criteria'. Two host fathers were even solely in charge of the online recruitment process. I suggest that it is important to include both parents (when studying couple families) as both are undoubtedly involved in parenting their children and highlighting only one gender only reaffirms that childcare is (should be) women's domain. Whilst the findings in relation to host fathers presented in this chapter might suggest the move away from traditional gender roles, in this case of fatherhood, the next chapter will address the gendered relations between *au pairs* and host parents in further detail.

CHAPTER 5

'Negotiating closeness and distance': the role of gender in *au pair* families' dynamics

Adriane and Theodor, both in their late thirties, have been married for eight years and have two daughters, aged four and two. Both are in full time employment, Adriane works as a university lecturer and Theodor as an architect, and they live in a five bedroom house not far from the town's city centre. Six months before the interviews, they decided to hire an *au pair*, mainly to help with after school childcare. This decision came about at a time, when Adriane's mother, who was living with them in order to help the couple with the childcare, returned to her own house in Rumania. I interviewed Theodor in their house as we sipped our tea in the dining room and two days later, I met up with Adriane. Our first interview was in her office and then two weeks after that we talked over a tea in a local coffee shop. Initially, both Theodor's and Adriane's interview began with a reflection of how fortunate they considered themselves, to have found their *au pair* Yuri. Nevertheless, further along our conversations, it became apparent that the couple associated their involvement with Yuri rather differently. This included various aspects of daily life, such as the management of Yuri's working schedule, meal planning or even socialization. For instance, when I asked Adriane

whether they ate dinner together with Yuri, she began explaining about the conflicts between the *au pair*'s expectations based on her home country and the meals they were eating all together here in the UK. These conflicts and the reasons for them but mostly how Adriane related herself to them, were all very different in how her husband Theodor responded. In describing this situation, Adriane noted:

'Yuri did talk **a lot** about different ways of eating that the Swedish had, and I was constantly **self-conscious**, you know, whether we have enough, let's say of whatever the Swedes appear to think is important for you to eat...'

Interestingly, when I asked Theodor the same question he also told me that the food was an issue at first, because Yuri appeared to be critical of the amount of fat in the food they were buying and he reported:

'We just tried to explain that here that is normal. Now, we cook and Yuri does her own thing, Adriane will be probably able to tell you more about this, they agreed sort of policy on her (Yuri) having her own food and she would usually eat with us'.

What is more, Theodor attributed the 'food problem' to Yuri's family background of Chinese origin living in Sweden, as he said:

'Some things she (Yuri) said was clearly an exaggeration, I don't think her family was very integrated into the Swedish culture'.

Later on, when we talked about spending time when Yuri was not working, Adriane talked about how she and Theodor organised several weekend trips to different parts of the UK so that Yuri could see the country. She described how when initially asked, Yuri always expressed an interest but then declined the offer at the last minute:

I always found it a bit sad that she [Yuri] never wanted to do that with us, and I really tried, but it was very difficult to work out whether it was because she didn't like us or whether it was because she was just so avidly keen to be in London with her friends. Or maybe it was because she wasn't too keen to see what is there, but then she hasn't seen it, and she said that it would be exciting to see, so I don't know why, but it is certainly saddening for me.'

Adriane then described her husband's approach:

'Theodor was only worried initially, then he gave in, but I would ask more questions, sort of talk to Yuri, I don't know, to make it more social atmosphere and after about three months, I thought: have I not demonstrated how open I am about things? So, it was upsetting and perhaps he got more used to it, when I perhaps over time grew more sad, I felt that there wasn't really any progress I guess.

In turn, Theodor commented the following:

I think I have sort of developed strategy where I stopped asking her questions, because the response would be awkward, so I stopped initiating that sort of the prepping to find out more about her...' I know that Adriane was very upset about Yuri not coming with us on the trips that we planned for example, and for me it was just kind of annoying, I don't think there were any serious problems.'

Analysing their responses, there is an overall impression that Theodor's relation to Yuri was far more removed when compared to Adriane's replies. Of course, one could explain these differences in terms of different personality traits and ways of behaving. On the other hand, these differences could also be analysed in terms of gender, in particular the construction of the gendered perceptions of who is deemed to be responsible for certain tasks within the home.

Whereas Adriane immersed herself much more emotionally, particularly by drawing on her concerns, and feelings of self-consciousness and sadness, Theodor's responses appeared to be far more removed from Adriane's sentiment. On the whole, Adriane's interviews felt sad, her experience with their first *au pair* Yuri was described as upsetting, and at one point we had to pause the interview when Adriane began to cry. Theodor's interview was also to a degree quite grim, but his negotiated distance from the difficulties with Yuri's relationship was also layered with laughter and jokes.

In this chapter, I will be arguing that dominant beliefs regarding the gendered division of household labour influenced the relationships between host mothers and *au pairs*, as well as host fathers and *au pairs*.

Gendered division of labour – a historical overview

The position of men and women within the traditional nuclear family is rather oppositional. Grounded in the patriarchal code, men are portrayed as the breadwinners and women as domestically (and economically) dependent on men. The section below will closely address the development of 'the nuclear family' and how it has shifted in relation to larger social changes.

Shelton and John (1996:302) argued, that it was the process of *'Industrialization, more generally, that has been linked to the separation of paid and unpaid work and the development of the role of "housewife" as well as to women's dependence on men through their reliance on their husbands' wages'*. The process of industrialization can be described as the spread of technological mass production, which resulted in the creation of new types of employment. This new –manufactured and waged- work in factories (mainly occupied by men) was developed as an opposite to the private unpaid terrain of domestic work at home (mainly occupied by women). As a result, women and men conducted their work separately; women worked in the home and depended economically on men who were occupied in public employment (Cheal, 2002). Of course, this gendered work separation was not a consistent experience for all types of families. For example, various studies on working class families pointed out that their gender division of labour differed to families of middle class status, mainly due to the material conditions. In the case of working class families, it was (and still is) perceived as financial necessity that both the husband and wife were employed outside of the home. For

example, Seccombe (1995) noted that despite the ideal image of female domesticity, in reality many working class women and children had to work outside of the home. It was the middle class family that was set as an example to live up to these 'new' principles. Seccombe (1995) added that where possible, the working class women brought their paid work into the home (such as needlework or production of food for sale), which enabled them to provide money whilst still belonging to the sphere of the home.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the concept of 'companionate marriage' was also linked to the development of the traditional nuclear family. The term 'companionate marriage' referred to a set of ideas about the need for increased companionship between married partners, especially in the aspiration for teamwork, sharing, and as a result of desiring 'equality' between married heterosexual couples. According to Cheal (2002:75) what began as a '*business like plan to manage the shared resources*' turned into a new idealized form of family living which was increasingly sought by the growing numbers of middle class families. Davidoff et al (1999:18) also described how the 'companionate marriage' was based on ideas of equality, exclusive emotionality '*with husband and wife playing different but complementary roles*'. Reviewing the development of the companionate marriage concept in Britain, Finch and Summerfield (1991) noted that even though this concept was first used in the 1920s, it was not until post World War II in 1945 that this model was intentionally developed in state policies as a means to consolidate family life. One of the main reasons for the construction of this type of marriage was to improve the material

conditions of mothers, as the birth-rate during the Second World War fell dramatically. The fears that accompanied this birth-rate drop resulted in the conception of pro-natalist policies in Britain, which in turn heavily relied on the creation of the ideal companionate marriage (Finch and Summerfield 1991). However, the actual reality remained that rather than equal partners in this new version of companionate marriage, it was women who were deemed to be mainly responsible for maintaining the couple's relationship (Finch and Summerfield, 1991).

In her overview of the individualisation theory, Smart (2007) has noted the similarity between the 'companionate marriage' of the 1920s and the ideas of a 'pure relationship' introduced by Giddens (1992). According to Giddens (1992:58) individuals begin the pure relationship '*for its own sake*' and continue it as long as both parties feel satisfied within it. Linked to romantic love, the pure relationship is perceived as a driving force behind the recent changes of intimate relationships such as changing attitudes towards marriage. For Smart (2007), the concept of a 'pure relationship' implies another version of the 'companionate marriage', only being reworked during the different stages of the twentieth century, as she noted; 'it is possible to see it as a trend or as something that is simply intensifying or expanding over time (Smart, 2007:12). However, Finch and Summerfield (1991) have demonstrated that the idealized 'companionate marriage' actually brought different expectations for men and women. Whilst still perceived as main breadwinners, men were encouraged to be more understanding and tolerant of their wives' paid employment outside of the house. Women, on the other hand, were allowed to pursue their interest and paid work,

whilst still being expected to be '*better mothers to larger families, better sexual partners and better homemakers*' (Finch and Summerfield, 1991:30). Finch and Summerfield concluded that the idea of a harmonic 'companionate marriage' actually resulted in creating extra pressures for women.

Contemporary division of labour within families

Even though the traditional husband/wife roles are now changing, the ideology of family where women are located within the private sphere and men within the public domain still prevails and there is substantial literature discussing the gendered division of family roles (Arber and Ginn 1999; Gregson and Lowe 1994; Morgan 1999; Tronto 1993).

Within these lines, Seccombe (1995:147) argued that '*the breadwinner/homemaker family model in the UK is now changing due to the increased employment of women outside of the home, resulting in increased numbers of dual earner families*'. For example, during the 1950s the percentage of women who were employed outside of the home was at 10-15% (Seccombe 1995:148), whereas in 2009 these numbers amounted to 70%. This shift has continued to the present, where in 2009, the number of men (12,8 million) and women (12,7 million) in employment was almost equal (Office for National Statistics, 2009). However, the gendered distribution of domestic work at home, such as cleaning, cooking, food shopping, and childcare implies that women today are still more likely to be in part time employment than men (Muncie et al, 1997). In 2009, half of the women employed outside of home were occupying part time positions (Office for National Statistics, 2009). What

is more, as Davidson and Burke (2011:108) noted '*women continue to be segregated into certain jobs and sectors*'. For instance, there are substantially higher numbers of women than men employed in health and social care, women are more likely to work in the public sector and about 25% of women were employed in administrative and secretarial work in 2009 (Office for National Statistics, 2009).

Yet another area around which gender is being constructed based on differences is sexuality. Linked to reproduction, construction of femininity and masculinity shifts further upon the arrival of children; as the husband becomes a father and the wife becomes a mother (Doucet 2007, Dowd 2000, Hochschild 1989, Morgan 1996). Each set of roles (father/mother) brings different expectations of behaviour and actions that altogether imply diverse outcomes for individuals' opportunities and achievements (Ribbens 1994). Therefore, the concept of family could be also investigated by means of organized power shifts and control. Taken from this viewpoint of gendered distribution of family roles, Bernardes (1999) highlighted that family ideology has made the notion of 'the family' not only very powerful, but also an oppressive institution.

In terms of the *au pair* families, it will be considered whether and to what degree the roles of host parents become influenced by the hire of an *au pair*. How does the division of domestic labour become affected by the *au pair*'s arrival? Who, in these new set ups, allocates the domestic tasks and who carries them out? Undoubtedly, the regularized organisation of domestic labour becomes to a great degree affected by

the employment of the *au pair*, whose main role and responsibility is to assist with housework and childcare. In this new set up, new relationships are formed, both through the *au pairs'* presence, the nature of her work in itself, but also through the responsibilities of caring for children. The following sections explore in greater detail the impact of *au pair* employment on the relationships developed between the host mother/*au pair* and host father/*au pair*.

Host mother role

The previous chapter focused on the broad reasons host parents described behind their necessity to hire an *au pair*. Host parents mostly reported that the live-in status and the arrangement of the scheme as a 'cultural exchange' allowed them to benefit from a flexible, yet cheap, form of childcare. However, after delving in further, there appeared to be considerable differences between host parents as to who actually needed this 'service'. All of the host mothers who were interviewed shared the view that their *au pairs* are there to help them, with their work and their domestic and childcare responsibilities. ⁸For example, host mother Samantha replied as follows when asked to summarize what it meant to have an *au pair*:

In a way, for me, it is like having a wife, another wife, because she (*au pair*) does all the things that a wife would do for her husband.

⁸ Several classical studies have also described how women- employers were perceived as responsible for the management of domestic workers, such as Rollins (1987) and Romero (1992). More recently, Bikova (2010) reported similar findings in her study of Norwegian *au pair* families.

This statement summarized fittingly the traditionally gendered division of family roles, where women were perceived as the main housekeepers and child-carers, whilst emphasizing the notion of the husband's main role as breadwinner.

Overall, when speaking with host mothers, it became apparent that they perceived the *au pairs* as an extension of their own responsibilities, which in turn were viewed as the responsibilities of women in families. Correspondingly, Morgan (1996) suggested that the distribution of resources within the home of traditional families is based on unequal principles, and even though power relationships could be negotiated and shaped differently, the norm remains that each family role represents different power and authority. In this way, the perception of responsibilities, tasks, authority and ultimately control differs within roles associated with being a husband, wife, child or grandparent (Morgan, 1996). During the interviews with host mothers, there was a mixture of tones regarding the husbands' involvement in domestic tasks. There were sentiments of acceptance (with the gendered family division) and those of slight resentment. For instance, host mother Anna told me:

'I needed some help, I needed somebody to help me with the house, because my husband works very long hours, I cannot count on him, not with taking the kids to school, no picking up or anything.'

In this case, host mother Anna also perceived childcare and looking after the house as her responsibility when she emphasized that **she** needed the help. What is more, Anna's response suggested slight resignation as well as resentment over the unequal division of labour.

She described her husband as being absent from home at work, be it on a business trip or working very long hours, and it was assumed as a matter of fact, that the obligation to care for their children and for domestic duties was placed on her. On a similar note, host mother Trisha described her relief when she hired an *au pair*:

It is worth its weight in gold to have somebody who you can trust and who can be in the house when the kids are ill...I don't have to take all three children swimming, and I can spend time with my eldest doing homework, whereas before I had to look after the other two. I have more help in the house; it is a big house...

In other cases, the rather rigid gendered role separation was perceived as something much more 'natural', as a 'way of family life'. For her part, 43 year old business owner Sharon commented:

When he [husband] is travelling, he is gone, and that is one of the reasons why I decided to get an *au pair*. Of course when he comes from work **he does his best, but no picking up, no taking, no bathing, no nothing...** [my insert and my emphasis]

Within this statement, it is obvious that Sharon's husband was not able to carry out the basic work around domestic duties and childcare due to his extensive working schedule. However, as Sharon noted, nothing changed when her husband came home. The reality of her husband's persistent absence in form of 'no picking up, no taking, no nothing', seems to imply the contrary to the belief that her husband is still 'doing his best'. One could ask why there is such a contradiction

between the reality of the absence, and the belief that placed the husband as imaginatively present. In this regard, Stones (2011) also found in her study that the stay at home mothers tended to advantage their husband's absence by this false egalitarian principle, simply pushing away the reality of the unequal power balance of domestic work and childcare between couples. According to Bowlby et al (1997), issues with domestic and caring responsibilities based on a gendered division are also linked with debates surrounding femininity and masculinity. In this way, as childcare and domestic work is linked to female responsibilities, host mother Sharon could be producing and drawing on her femininity, and in turn creating her own authority and control within the family. According to scholarship on the construction of gender identities, for Sharon it might have been a 'moral issue' as she continued to reaffirm her female role within the house (Benjamin and Sullivan 1996, Gershuny et al 1994, Silva 1999, Sullivan 1997). According to Coltrane's (2000) review of housework literature during the 1990s, research demonstrated that when husbands work longer hours in paid employment, wives are more likely to perceive the division of domestic labour as fair, even though they are responsible for the majority of it. Yet, both Sharon and her husband Nathan were in full time employment.

The second shift

Sociological studies have shown that housework is not only physically, but also emotionally difficult (Oakley 1974). As discussed above, within the traditional division of family roles, women are responsible for unpaid domestic work even when employed outside the

home. This occurrence has since been referred to as a 'double burden' or the 'second shift' (Duncombe and Marsden, 1995:150). For example, Hochschild (1989:4) noted *'just as there is a wage gap between men and women in the workplace, there is a 'leisure gap' between them at home. Most women work one shift at the office or factory and a 'second shift' at home'*. In terms of this research, the interviews with host mothers also revealed how the 'double burden' affected their decision to employ an *au pair*. For example, host mother Anna told me:

She [*au pair*] does lots of the things the nanny used to do, but it is outside of my work time which helps me the most...When I did not have an *au pair*, I would come home, then I would have to spend hours preparing the food and the kitchen, so it is nice to come in now, and have things ready...

[my insert]

Likewise, host mother Diane commented:

As a working mother, your work can collapse so easily when your child is ill, the household runs much smoother with an *au pair*....you know, we tend to be working women I think as a whole, we find *au pairs* useful, really.

It seems that both Anna and Diane found the pressures of full time employment in addition to working the 'second shift' at home demanding. However, even Jennifer who was a full time mother to three children (all under six years) described how overwhelmed she felt with being responsible for the house and taking care of children whilst her husband was working:

It enables me to have a more of a quality of live, definitely, because I am not doing the tea every night, and not dragging the

youngest to school every day, which would be exhausting, I would be exhausted, just the sheer quantity of the cleaning and washing and all that. So, it fundamentally changes it for a better, massively. And I also enjoy having them as company, I normally see them for a few hours a day and I usually have very good relationship with them, so that's always been quite nice.

Here, Jennifer's quality of life is viewed as radically different, when she compared her exhaustion to actually managing to balance her quality of life. What is more, Jennifer implied that she enjoyed having company in the house during her husband's absence. This suggests that hiring an *au pair* was also a solution to her segregation at home, and also reminiscent of the companionate marriage ideology mentioned earlier. At the same time, she described enjoying the *au pairs* company 'for a few hours a day', implying a boundary of time-limit. Further discussion on relationships between *au pairs* and host mothers follows later on in this chapter.

From my host mother sample, three were full time mothers, whilst eight were employed full time (one worked from home). In her study of elite stay at home mothers, Stone (2011) noted that the lack of involvement in day to day childcare and domestic responsibilities was one of the reasons for giving up their full time work. Nevertheless, in the case of this research, such absence and the unequal power dynamics between host parents resulted in the delegation of the 'second shift' to the *au pair*. This delegation though was observed to include all aspects of 'au pair management' and host mothers often mentioned how they were usually in sole charge of 'everything *au pair* related'. This new responsibility

revolved around different aspects of *au pair* associated work, starting with the practical aspects of preparing for and managing the *au pair* arrival, such as:

- Welcoming the *au pair* (taking time off work to stay with the *au pair*, collecting tourist leaflets, leaving flowers and sweets on *au pair's* bed). For example, host mother Trisha commented: '*Normally, when I get a new au pair, I make sure to take at least a day off, to spend a few days with her on orientation.*' Similarly, host mother Jill told me: '*I always collect a little bit of information, and I spread all the leaflets with a flower and a sweet on their bed, and I set it like a welcome thing...*'
- Preparing the *au pairs* room by making them cosy and re-decorating
- Setting out all the rules (writing charts, working folders, demonstrating how to clean, what to cook for the child(ren)'s dinner, how to hang out washing), as host mother Paulina noted: '*I write down from scratch the jobs I want them to do and how to do them*'.
- Putting a system in place for *au pairs* food shopping

Burikova and Miller (2010) commented in their study of Slovak *au pairs* in London, that host parents also prepared practically for their *au pairs* arrival, by arranging *au pair's* rooms, decorating the walls and buying new furniture, in other words, making them 'cosy'. However, the

authors did not regard these 'practical preparations' in relation to the gendered distribution of work within families.

Relationship proximity

As stated earlier, host mothers were responsible for the majority of the *au pair* relationship and management, and this close proximity of working with *au pairs* in turn implied that many host mothers developed varied relationships with their *au pairs*. At times, they were described as friends, other times as daughters, and some host mothers referred to their *au pairs* as wives or workers, all of these enmeshed within the meaning of *au pair*⁹. In all of the cases, feelings and emotions were described by host mothers as part of *au pair* employment, be it feelings of sadness and irritation or feelings of care and support. During the interviews with six host mothers, I did not anticipate such an amount of emotions that surrounding by their relationships with the *au pairs*. In particular, during my interviews, two host mothers burst into tears as they described their problematical *au pair* situations. Similarly to Adriane's feelings described at the beginning of the chapter, host mother Jackie also described her previous *au pair's* 'difficult relationship', and told me in disbelief how the *au pair* continually declined all invitations to outings with her family, even on 'special days' such as birthday parties. Jackie commented how the '*constant effort in making her au pair feel welcom and like part of the family*' simply felt exhausting. Although these differences between *au pairs*/host mothers could be analysed in relation

⁹ Chapter 6 will further address the problematic issue of denoting relationships with *au pairs* as family members.

to unequal power dynamics(chapter 6), where the *au pair* (worker) simply did not want to spend her free time with the host family (employers), the emphasis here is on how host mothers negotiated these close knit boundaries.

Dunscombe and Marsden (1999:94) noted in their research on the '*ideology of love in the social construction of coupledom*', that the concept of '*emotional sharing influenced the way couples presented their finances and to some extent shaped the actual financial arrangements themselves*'. The main focus was placed on the gendered differences in emotional behaviour and how this type of behaviour changed during the life course. Their findings demonstrated that there was a significant asymmetry of emotional response between genders. This asymmetry was described as women being emotionally responsible and men as emotionally absent within their emotional participation in marriage (Dunscombe and Marsden, 1999). According to James (1989):

'Gender segregation in the labour market has meant that responsibility for the domestic sphere has fallen largely on women, and as a result the gender division of labour results in a gender division of emotion: the 'emotional' becomes part of a major cluster of other adjectives by which 'masculine' and 'feminine' are differentiated and through which the emotional/rational divide of female/male is perpetuated'.(James, 1989:23)

Erickson (2005) argued that the concept of emotion work should be included in studies of the division of labour, as according to her findings it became apparent that '*emotion work was more closely linked to the construction of gender than were housework and child care,*

implying that gender influences the meaning and allocation of family work' (Erickson, 2005:348). Similarly Hochschild (1983) pointed out that dominant ideologies of feelings affect emotional life, which is based on 'feeling rules' that guide how a person should feel according to a certain situation. Such 'rules' indicate what type of emotion should be played in certain situation, and guide an individual to act in certain way, therefore it is constructing emotions (quoted in Dunscombe and Marsden, 1999:103). As a result, the socially constructed role of women in families, which associates women as the main housekeepers and childcarers, includes 'emotion work' as a part of 'invisible domestic labour' (Hochschild 1983, Miller 1976).

In terms of this research, the majority of host mothers (eight out of eleven) were in full time employment outside of the home, and, similarly to other groups of mothers, it was deemed as impossible to conform to the 'intensive mothering' model. As a result of the burden of the 'second shift' together with the ideological dominance of 'intensive mothering', these host mothers opted to find the solution by employing an at home child-carer and domestic helper, in the form of an *au pair*. By doing this, the primary responsibility over the childcare still stayed with the mother, as it was her who assigned the daily tasks to the *au pair*. In this way, it was still the mother who was seen as the person who was primarily responsible for the care of her child/ren

The section below focuses on the other spectrum of understanding the host parents' relationships, by analysing the relationship between the host fathers and *au pairs*.

Host father role

Various researchers have pointed out that contemporary fathers in developed countries are increasingly more involved in parenting activities compared to half a century ago (Coltrane and Adams 2001; Gershuny 200). For example, in her book *'Making Sense of Fatherhood, Gender, Caring and Work'*, Miller (2011:7,8) argued that contemporary discourses surrounding fatherhood in the UK are linked to concepts of *'emotional engagement, involvement, sensitivity and intimacy'* compared to previously associated notions of *'absence and economic provision'*. Indeed, Miller (2011:9) refers to this change as *'shifting understanding of masculinities'* which in turn indicates the *'detraditionalisation of fatherhood'*. These debates are also reflected in public debates such as a recent debate which focused on 'the need to increase the effort in involving fathers-to-be in maternity care', ranging from introducing flexible times for antenatal classes to having the opportunity to stay in the hospital following the birth of their child/ren (BBC News, 2011). Likewise, the campaign group Fathers for Justice (which was created in 2001), whilst focusing on the increasing the awareness of 'fatherlessness' where fathers have limited or no rights to see their children after divorce, the group was influential in increasing public awareness of fathering/mothering inequalities. Campaigning for equal rights and responsibilities for both parents (mother and father), Fathers for Justice was a key instigator of the public debate surrounding the removal of secrecy surrounding family courts. Moreover, Featherstone (2009)

pointed out that one of the main features indicating change is that according to statistics from 2000, *'marriage is no longer the prerequisite for fatherhood and with the increase in divorce and re-partnering the nature of fathering has changed* (Featherstone, 2009:21)'.

However, despite these changes, there remains a prevalence of fathers having a significantly lower proportion of responsibilities over the childcare and domestic tasks compared to mothers (Doucet 2000, Coltrane and Adams 2001). Reflecting on this, Miller (2011:8) also acknowledges that: *'Whilst shifts in discourses and policies may imply change, research findings continue to highlight entrenched and gendered practices in the division of domestic labour and paid work between the 'logic of cash' and 'care''*. Within this research, the ways in which host fathers related to their roles, could be to a large degree associated with the traditional breadwinner/fatherhood model. For instance, host father Walter noted:

'If it would not be for our *au pair* Monika, I would get sucked into looking after the children much more during the day, and I love spending time with them during the weekend, I love it, having sort of the time after work to spend with them, from sort of five thirty in the evening onwards.

This statement clearly demarcates the separateness of the time host father Walter spent at work (paid employment) compared to the time spent caring for their children. The time spent with children, although perceived as very important, was clearly separated from the paid employment and almost considered as a leisurely activity to be

carried out during the weekend. The perception of fairness of splitting childcare was undermined by the fact that it only occurs at certain times, and thus women are still perceived as the primary care givers.

In regards to other literature on fatherhood, findings also indicate that despite the rise of women's employment, the breadwinner model linked to masculinity perseveres, even in households where both partners earn similar wages (Raley et al 2006). Furthermore, according to a study by Tichenor (2005), women who earn more money than their male partners are still carrying out most of the housework duties and the male employment is perceived as more important. This breadwinner ideology has been analysed by various scholars elsewhere in Europe, such as Novikova et al (2005), Haas (1993) and Gal and Kligman (2000). These studies associating masculinity with 'breadwinnerism', also pointed out that it is not only the perception of who is responsible for economically providing for family, but also, (particularly linked to the middle class sphere), the level of earnings. This is due to the belief that higher men's earnings indicate higher status of masculinity in the public sphere. Whilst it is essential to state the common trends of contemporary fathering and the changes they bring with it, (or rather do not), at the same time it is important to state that within every predisposition towards a certain trend, there are cases of diversion, the exceptions from the mainstream. For example, La Rossa (1997) argued that it should be remembered that even in the past, there were fathers who were heavily involved in the care of their children, and as such, it is important to remember the variety of fathering forms. The growing body of literature on fatherhood points out that men (as well as women) experience work and family

conflict as well as pressures associated with being breadwinners, and as a result go through difficulties in establishing close, emotional links with their children (Doucet 2007).

In the section above relating to host mothers' roles, it was apparent that host mothers were perceived as the ones responsible for managing *au pairs*, which involved practical as well as emotional aspects of work. Similarly in the interviews with host fathers, there was a general consensus that it was host mothers, who were normally in need of employing an *au pair*, and who were 'responsible' for recruiting, dealing with and communicating with *au pairs*. As host father Jeremy rationalized:

We first got an *au pair* when Anna [wife] was expecting our second child. So **we, Anna**, could cope. **We** could cope as a family unit with one child, sort of with a one year old, but when **we** had a second child, it became apparent that, yeah, **Anna**, needed some help. That was sort of the bottom line of it. [my emphasis and insert]

In this interview extract, it became evident that when host father Jeremy referred to the reason why they decided to hire an *au pair*, the connotations of *we*, as married couple, became actually associated with the wife only, as it is her who could not cope with the demands of caring for two small children and the house. Again, similar to the host mothers' interviews, such a view resonates with the idea of families with traditionally divided roles; the stay at home mother and the breadwinner father. Among the host fathers I spoke to, I often heard remarks such

as: *'you will have to ask my wife if she actually went to the agency or online'*, or *'I am not sure if we did any interview on skype'*, or as host father Paul noted: *'I can go days without seeing her (au pair), my wife is in the forefront of the relationship and I am very much the secondary.'* This disconnectedness of the family roles between men and women in traditional families was also echoed throughout the host fathers' interviews, such as the following:

The bottom line is that it makes my wife happy, because she is less stressed. Without help, she would be incredibly stressed, and if she is happy, I am happy...I might be abroad or in different part of the country, so that give my wife a stability in terms of organising her own schedule.'

[host father Jim]

The gender-prescribed roles within the household implying who is deemed responsible for certain tasks was also apparent during the initial recruitment process, although it should be noted that half of the host fathers were heavily involved in *'finding the right au pair for their family'* (as discussed in chapter 3). As such, host father Sam shared:

I wasn't really involved at all, Trisha (wife) talked to the agency and the agency sent us through the details of Kristina (*au pair*), so the form she filled in with some photographs of her family and a letter to prospective family, Trisha reviewed that, and we didn't do, as far as I know, we didn't do a verbal interview with her.

Similarly when I asked another host father how they hired their *au pair*, he told me:

You will have to ask Samantha (wife) what actually happened, I am not sure how it happened really, I am not sure if she went to the agency.

The sense of dis-involvement continues when host fathers were asked about house rules:

I try to stay little bit detached, so if something is not right, I would try to feed my concern to my wife'...'I think it is more appropriate that there is one voice and it is my wife who is the key host and I don't want to be having to tell the *au pair* that some room is untidy or that she is not doing something with the children.'

Another host father commented on his involvement in the *au pair* recruitment:

My wife wanted me to read through the application forms, but I am like, if I am honest, I gave it like 10 minutes of my time, I am afraid, it was like a decision about if this is like a new jumper, I kind of look and choose, but I did not throw myself into asking a lot of questions, I did not throw myself into it, I was not involved in any of the interviews.' [host father Robert]

Robert's feelings regarding the *au pair* scheme are clearly demarcated by the commoditised ideas, where the *au pair* is seen in terms of her childcare and domestic services, or as something that can be readily purchased, like a new piece of clothing. It is statements such as the ones above, that suggest the belief of traditional gender separation of family roles. According to Marsh and Arber (1992), the concept of family involves not only biological and legal ties, but also range of relationships

that impose norms of behaviour for each member. Social rules within the family unit are a key part in prescribing obligations that are imposed on each member. Similarly, in terms of family roles, Morgan (1985) and Bernardes (1997) commented how the relationships around childhood and parenthood are often seen as natural and therefore inescapable. Morgan (1996) also states that the traditional nuclear family is central to all family ideology where specifically prescribed division of labour based on gender takes place. Even though these naturally expected connections between family members are ideological in essence, in reality they are expressed and reinforced through everyday actions (Barrett, 1980). For example, the belief that women 'naturally' care for children and men do not, is embedded within countless daily practices and actions and is then continually reinforced through society (education, media and family policies such as maternity/paternity leave).

In the case of this research, the host fathers that had the most distant relationship with their *au pairs* seemed to see their *au pairs* as the representation of female domestic labour, something they, as men, had nothing in common with. For instance, host father John referred to their *au pair* as follows:

'It is not that she (*au pair*) is not part of the family, she is part of the house rather than part of the family.'

Whereas the section referring to the *au pair* as 'part of the family' will be analysed in the following chapter which focuses on family boundaries, what is worth noting in the second half of this statement is the way that the *au pair* is linked to the household. One could argue that

similarly to host father Robert, John sees their *au pair* as a domestic commodity.

On a similar note, some host fathers perceived their *au pairs* as a convenient way of improving their family's life style. Such a view resonated with the idea that the *au pair* scheme is simply a supply and demand system, where both sides receive something they require. The *au pair* gains the cultural experience of another country, along with the opportunity to learn and improve her foreign language skills and consequently improve her chances of succeeding in the labour market in the home country. At the same time, the host family receives help with the housework and childcare which they need in order for both parents to be better able to maintain full-time employment and hence improve the quality of family life. This was apparent when host father Tom noted:

I would not describe any of the *au pairs* as a part of the family, but more as an exchange. You have this to offer, and I have this to offer, we can work something out.

The invisibility of domestic work as being located within private home is made further invisible by perceptions of this work being unskilled, or simply a 'chore to be done'. Anderson (2001:26) highlighted that domestic work is normally performed '*simultaneously as a sets of tasks*', and as such involves not only physical, but also mental and emotional work. This aspect of domestic work management is normally hidden or ignored although it is essential for the maintenance of people's lives (Anderson, 2001).

It seems that host mothers were well conscious of this prevalent responsibility and structured their relationships with *au pairs* accordingly, whereas host fathers simply viewed *au pairs* as childcares and domestic workers.

As was noted above, host mothers were relating to the *au pairs* by means of negotiating the correct type of motherhood, employer and friend. All of these were affected by being exposed to a variety of ideas of 'intensive mothering' as well as the perceptions of what is deemed to be women's responsibilities within families. On the other hand, the host fathers' relationships to their *au pairs* were to a large degree affected by the traditional, rather than de-traditional, position of men as breadwinners within families, and entailed creating the correct distance. Another element that was described as affecting the distanced relationship between host fathers and *au pairs* was the discourse of linking *au pairs* to sexuality. The believed 'sexualized danger' that *au pairs* represented had created the feelings of awkwardness and unease, which was referred to by half of the host father participants. For example, host father Walter told me:

I sometimes feel a bit awkward saying goodbye and hello, because when I come in, I usually get a kiss and hug from the children, and when saying goodbye very much the same thing. In Zuzana's [*au pair*] case, it's more like, bye and have a good day. If anything needed to be discussed formally, it would come from Jill (wife). My role is more of , if Jill is not here, as a substitute in that way, so if Jill has not told her something and she needs clarification, then she would ask me about it. But if Jill is here, she would ask Jill first of all. [my insert]

During my interviews with host parents, I was at some point told the anecdotal '*au pair* horror story', where the *au pair* would either seduce the host father, or run away with the host father or in one case, I was told a story of how one *au pair* secretly ran a porn website from her own room in the host family's basement. This is in line with research conducted by Cox (2007) on the representation of *au pairs* in the British press. In particular, she noted:

The idea of *au pairs* as sexually available and desirable appears to have great tenacity in the British imagination. There seems to be something about the combination of gender, youth and location within the family home that positions *au pairs* as willing and available sexual partners (Cox, 2007:286).

During the interviews, in particular with four host fathers, it became evident that they were more than aware of this stereotyping, as I often heard the statement: '*I get fun poked at me from all my friends now, about the fact that I have a young female in my house*'. More importantly, this stereotype as placing *au pairs* as sexually attractive was seen as another reason why host fathers seemed to have constructed their distance. For example, host father Richard told me about his experience with their first *au pair*:

There was this one thing, Steph (*au pair*) was very upset about something, and she was crying, and I was there, and I thought, do I hug her or not? Because my natural instinct was to hug her, but in that moment, suddenly, I thought, ugr, Is this appropriate? What do I do? It is very stupid, but it is one of these

things that you, that they pop up in your head, they pop in you, it was surprising, what do I do? ...So, that was very, she was very pretty, and she was very emotional and she was very... and I am very confident in myself, but even then, I was uncomfortable and I wasn't expecting to feel that. I can imagine lots of other chaps would be very uncomfortable....'

Here the host father/*au pair* sexual stereotype was actually constructed as a reason for deliberately creating a distance. Richard was faced with this rather intimate situation where the *au pair* was crying and he described fittingly his ambivalence. This conflict, situated between offering the *au pair* personal support (described as his natural instinct), was potentially running the danger of fulfilling the sexual stereotype, underlined by the sexualized image of *au pairs*. In this way, it was not only the construction of the father and breadwinner identity, but also the sexualization of *au pairs* that created the distanced relationship.

On a similar note, host father Jim said:

With our first *au pair*, it was something, I was little nervous about it, if I am being honest, you know, what is that going to be like? Am I confident that I am going to behave myself? I think I am confident being around girls, and being around pretty girls, but I can imagine if I was somebody who was a bit awkward, to have that can probably cause interesting dynamic.

Jim's perception of *au pairs*, as young and pretty girls carrying out domestic work, resonates with Cox's (2007) argument linking female domestic workers to sexual objects. For example, the sexual connotation

of the 'French maid's outfit' is yet another sexual representation of female domestic workers. What is more, Cox (2007) described the contradictions within the public discourses around *au pair* institution '*overwhelmingly, au pairs are represented in the press as young, attractive and promiscuous, while agencies strive to portray them as pretty and happy, but not sexually available*' (Cox, 2007:281).

Fathering

Although most of the host father participants described their detached relationship with *au pairs* based on either the 'breadwinning ideal' or in terms of the sexualized stereotyping of *au pairs*, host father John described a certain 'fatherly' responsibility he felt towards their first *au pair* Magda:

The first *au pair*, she was like a daughter, which was kind of nice, and we went to a pub and she ordered a Guinness. I mean she was 18, so you know she looked very young and there were some security guards at the door and they thought that it was me and my daughter having a beer.

Here, the 'host fathering' resonated with a leisurely activity of drinking a beer over a chat during the weekend. John, who was married with two children, was the only host father that rather proudly told me he made the time to spend with their *au pair*, and they would go for a pint of beer in their local village pub at the weekend. Although it is not within the scope of this research to assess in detail the current debates on the shift

in 'fathering', the findings above would suggest that host fathers had very little involvement with the *au pairs*, indeed they were represented as secondary to host mothers who were the primary point of contact.

Host couples privacy

The following chapter will address in greater detail how host families restructured their 'family time' as a means to incorporate the *au pair* 'as a member of the family'. Issues of privacy which host parents described, could also be addressed in relation to navigating boundaries between employers and domestic workers. However, this section focuses on couple privacy exclusively, not only in terms of constructing boundaries, but also in how 'couple time' was constructed as something to be continuously worked on. The lack of privacy (as a couple) was the most stated disadvantage to having *au pair* by host parents. Apart from single father Samir, who told me:

I think that our family, we don't really need privacy, because we encourage them (*au pairs*) to come here. Because I am a single parent, maybe couples they might want to sit and chat together in private, and they don't want their *au pair* to be sitting there, because they want time for themselves, but here it is actually the other way around, we do want to be chatting.

Whilst Samir recognised that his status as a single parent might have affected how much time he spent with *au pairs*, he suggested that

perhaps if he were married he might want to spend more time 'alone' as a couple. Other host parents however, commented on how they felt their *au pairs* are often 'too young' to understand when to give them 'as a couple, their space'. One host mother told me that her *au pair* 'lacked some key adult social skills like knowing when to give her and her husband time alone', and similarly I heard from a different host mother that her *au pair* 'took my place in the sofa every night, next to my husband until I had to explain that was MY seat'. As stated earlier, sexual stereotyping of *au pairs* was noted by host fathers. Within these lines, Constable (1997) has focused on the representations of 'general anxieties about sexuality of foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong'. She observed how concerns over the sexuality of Filipino domestic workers resulted in their control, discipline and constraining of their sexuality in order to live up to traditional codes of Hong Kong values¹⁰. Constable (1997) argued that the female migrant domestic workers were constructed as:

'posing threat to a woman employer's role as wife and sexual partner. The domestic worker is regarded as a potential seductress – as one who can both turn a man's attention away from family matters and also deplete his energy for productive and reproductive work' (Constable, 1997:544).

Perhaps these statements are constructed as a result of the sexual stereotyping of *au pairs*, where the 'young, pretty and foreign' *au pairs* posed a threat to the couple? These stereotypes are also observable in public narratives, where tabloid titles such as 'Why *au pairs* can never be

¹⁰ Hansen (1989) had also addressed the issue relating to female domestic workers' constructions as sexually threatening their employers.

too ugly (unless, of course they're a man)' are frequently being published (Holden for *Daily Mail*, 9/8/2007).

Overall, host parents perceived 'couple time' as an important aspect that nurtured their relationship, as Annabel described:

Yes, it is important to have some alone time, I think you need that. I think that is really important, otherwise you don't talk to your husband about the things that are important every day, well, for us. And you need that, I hardly see him.'

Host parents differed in the ways they wanted to ensure that their *au pair* would not interfere with this essential couple time. One of the responses to navigating the privacy of the couple boundary was when host parents introduced a set of rather specific rules, such as described by host father Paul:

For us, evening times are very important to us, and so I didn't want there for three of us to be sitting at the table, because I didn't want to disturb our dynamics between Diane and me, because we have limited time together, between children and work. So, it came to sort of eight o'clock onwards, and that is when **Theresa needs to disappear and kind of go to her area**, so we can have time together. Because I didn't want to threaten that time together, and Diane was at the front of that and made sure that is what happened.

[my emphasis]

Here, host father Paul described how their *au pair* Theresa was told the rule of not coming to the kitchen after eight o'clock in the evenings, in order for the couple to have their time together. In this way, the

'couple time' becomes something that needs to be protected. Perhaps this was seen as a threat to the quality of their marriage? Or was it to protect host mother Diane, who was apparently at the forefront of making this rule? What is also noteworthy within Paul's comment is his use of words, where he describes Theresa as 'needing to disappear into her area', highlighting his highly commoditized view of her position.

Other host parents told me that they did not create any rules. They still perceived the 'couple time' as important and were grateful for their *au pair's* understanding attitude:

We have not set any rules about it, and when we are ready to sit and eat our food, sometimes it's here at the table but often its sitting on the sofa because it's the chilled thing to do, Ella [*au pair*] will then say, maybe she knows that we are about to do that, so she will say: 'right, I am going upstairs now'. Occasionally, she will stay and watch it, because its something that she is interested as well, so I think that she respects that it is our time, our privacy time. [host mother Trisha, my insert]

Similarly to host mother Trisha, host mother Beverley noted:

Zuzana is very considerate of our time, so she will come down and mix with us until about nice o'clock and then she will go up to her room or goes out, so she does not sit with us the whole evening. So she just leaves us to be, and we never actually discussed that, but it works because then we have the evening just to be ourselves.

What is apparent in these quotes, is that host parents valued their time together as a couple, and it was perceived as something that should be protected and cherished. Host parents appreciated the *au pairs* who

understood their need for this type of 'privacy' and other host parents introduced strict rules for safeguarding this time. The literature overview at the beginning of this chapter focused on the development of 'companionate marriage', where the focus was placed on the couple as the core of the family, (Cheal 2002, Finch and Summerfield 1991, Dunscombe and Marsden 1999). Similarly, Jamieson (2005) regarded the social construction of coupledness when she highlighted '*as the twentieth century proceeded, marriage became highly romanticized and by the mid twentieth century, the emphasis placed by experts on love, sex and the relationship implied equality, mutuality and deep understanding between spouses*' (2005:16). Berger and Kellner (1964) also described the shifting position in regards of marriage as they noted; '*it was in the 1960s that sociological accounts of ideal typical marriage began to describe something like 'disclosing intimacy' between man and women; the ideal marriage partner was then seen as a best friend, and confidante, as well as a responsive sexual partner*' (1964:24). In this way, the idealized type of marriage not only emphasized mutual understanding, but was also perceived as an intimate time devoted between spouses. Perhaps these couples were guarding their 'pure relationship', which according to Giddens (1992) is based on mutual disclosure and trust? What then happens when the *au pair* inhabits this space, which host parents perceive as their time to work on the 'companionate and pure relationship'? Host mother Amelia felt that she could not sit next to her husband when they were watching the TV in the evenings as it was perceived as inappropriate, as the reported:

When my husband is here and she is here, I am little bit less touchy feely with him, just out of respect for someone else there. And he would sit over there and I would sit here, whereas normally we would sit together.

Whereas earlier on, Amelia described her *au pair* as her family, more specifically her cousin, as someone she 'cared for a great deal', at this point she viewed the *au pair's* presence during this 'private couple time' almost as an intrusion.

The following section will address the *au pairs'* perspectives on their relationships with their host parents.

Relationships with the hosts – *au pairs'* perspectives

The relationships that developed between the *au pairs* and host parents undoubtedly varied significantly. Not only was this affected by the factors of personal nature, but also by the ways in which each member perceived the *au pair* scheme. The following chapter will discuss further how some host parents opted for the 'friendly worker model' whereas some decided to set in place strict rules, which bore more similarity with the 'domestic worker model'. Moreover, as the *au pairs'* responsibilities were viewed as women's responsibilities in families (see above sections on host mother and host father relationships), this 'gender work' was one of the main influences in the relationships between *au pairs* and host mothers/host fathers. Host mothers normally

spent much more time with *au pairs* who were perceived to be 'their domain' whereas host fathers adopted the 'secondary position'. From the eighteen *au pairs* I spoke with, fifteen were living with two parent families, whilst three *au pairs* worked for single parent families (two for a single host mother and one for a single host father). As expected from the findings described above, whereas host mothers were normally described as the main point of contact for *au pairs*, most of the *au pairs* also commented on the limited time they spent with host fathers. This is in line with Mellini et al's (2007:57) study, where *au pairs* reported that they felt uncomfortable interacting with the host father, simply because host fathers were mostly working outside of the home and as such were not present in most day to day at home interactions.. In relation to this research, *au pairs* did not describe as feeling uncomfortable around host fathers, but there was a definite impact on the relationship with host fathers due to the limited time they spent in each other's company. Three *au pairs* did not even know the jobs their host fathers did and four *au pairs* worked for families where the host father worked in another city and only spent weekends at home with his family. For these four *au pairs*, the host father was described more as a 'stranger', with whom *au pairs* barely spoke to or spent any time. For other *au pairs*, it was simply the fact that host fathers worked long hours outside of the home that limited their interactions. Like *au pair* Petra noted '*it is just that I am spending more time with my host mother*' and similarly *au pair* Denise commented when asked about how she gets on with her host father:

Well, we don't really see each other, he works as a doctor and he works **a lot**. When I do see him, it is just like, hello, how

are you, how was your day and nothing much more. The host mum is much more communicative, we talk much more, she is much more open with me, I sometimes go out during the weekend, and I tell her, I am going out, and she asks what I am wearing and like that. [participant emphasis]

Similarly to Denise, *au pair* Monica told me about the differences in communication between her host parents:

Well definitely the host mum would be the primary person I would talk to in general, like for instance, if the kids did something, or they needed something, then I would talk to the mum. I just started talking to her more, because the dad when he came home after work, he wouldn't normally ask me any questions or anything.

What is apparent from these quotes is that the time *au pairs* spent with host mothers clearly influences the level of relationship that might then develop.

Moreover, as suggested earlier, the limited time *au pairs* spent in the company with their host fathers could also contribute to the awkwardness host fathers reported in their interviews. These feelings of uneasiness in turn affected even the time host fathers spent at home. Monica described how even when her host father was at home, he would not interact with her. Monica further recalled: '*I am not saying that he didn't like me or anything, but generally we talked maybe about the weather or something, not really anything personal.*'

In relation to host mother interactions, the stark contrast compared to the limited times *au pairs* spent with host fathers were

usually perceived as a 'good relationship' and 'mutual', such as *au pair* Petra reported:

With the host mum, we can talk about everything, she tells me about her work, it is good, when we talk it is good and when we do not talk it is also good, sometimes in the morning it is just quietness at the table (laughs), but we understand each other.

A similar, rather positive, outlook on relationship with host mothers was described by eleven *au pairs* in total. For example, phrases such as: *"I can tell her (host mother) anything about everything, it is a bit like my second mum... Definitely not like my MUM, but in a way"* were shared at some point within the interviews. This is similar to the argument presented by Cox and Narula (2003:335) who noted that within the *au pair* placement, *'the employer can become 'mother' and the domestic worker a child, a power relationship which is more comfortable within the home than that of employer and employee'* (also in Stiel and England 1999, Bakan and Stasuiliis 1997). Likewise, in her book *'Shadow Mothers'* Macdonald (2010) commented on the use of false kinship ties in nanny/*au pair* employment: *'with the encouragement of the au pair programme, au pairs considered themselves part of a 'host family' and often viewed their employers as surrogate parents'* (Macdonald, 2010:113). In terms of the current research, most *au pairs* referred to the familial terminology when describing their relationships with their host parents. However, as noted earlier, contrary to the *au pairs*, the host mothers' perceptions were a mixture between, daughter, friend or a wife, perhaps affected by the '*au pair* management' as an added responsibility.

What is more, Macdonald (2010) has pointed out that applying false kinship ties in *au pair* employment could create problematic relations due to differences in expectations. Where *au pairs* are expecting to be 'part of the family' but the families are looking for 'low cost childcare' this could *'often result in their defining their mutual obligations differently. This, in turn increases the opportunity for problems and the likelihood that these difficulties will go unresolved'* (Macdonald (2010:52). In terms of this research, the boundary between host mother and employer was often confusing for *au pairs*, as Petra told me:

I mean, I get on really well with them, but I feel John (host father) is more, more open to me, than Sue (host mother). I have the feeling that she does not like me so much sometimes, I mean she is really really friendly, so it depends, sometimes I feel better when I talk to her, sometimes I feel a bit strange, but with John it is a bit easier. But maybe it is because Sue tells me what to do so she is kind of my boss, if you can say that. But I am really really happy with my family, they are just great.'

Here, Petra clearly described that the fact that she was paid for her work made her feel uncomfortable with how she related to her host mother. Instead of the *au pairs* who felt the amount of time they spent with host mothers affected their relationship positively, Petra associated her host mother with an employer status. Petra felt she could approach host father John with 'no strings attached', as this relationship was distanced from the host mother/employer connection¹¹. Another three *au pairs* described the same shifting nature of the relationships with host

¹¹ Further discussion on denoting *au pairs* as family members follows in the next chapter

mothers, where host mothers marked the role of an employer, whilst the host father simply stayed 'host father'. But at the same time, there were those *au pairs* who did not see their role in terms of 'family membership', and rather preferred the clear separation between their work and personal life. For example, *au pair* Pavla¹² told me:

Well our relationship, No. Well, she can be a very helpful person, but my problems, a lot of my problems are personal so, no, I don't want to share, I work there, and so I like to keep my privacy.'

On a similar note, *au pair* Denise told me how she felt the relationship with her host mother changed from what she originally expected would be similar to 'family like' relation:

In the beginning, I thought she is more of a friend rather than a boss, but now, of course she is a friend but I keep more distance. Now I don't tell her everything about my life because at the beginning, I told her everything, like about my relationship with my boyfriend...

Some *au pairs* also commented on the negative aspect of being 'too close' to their host mother, especially as they were in daily contact through the childcare routine. For example, *au pair* Pavla told me during our second interview that although she normally got on well with her host mother, at the time of the first interview she did not want to discuss the relationship as her host mother was on a restrictive diet that influenced how she treated her:

¹² Unfortunately, I was not able to access Petra's and Pavla's host parents and recruit them as participants, as they declined to be interviewed.

She (host mother) was every day in a really bad mood, but I understand that, because when you can't have any food, so yes, and I did everything wrong, but I know she did not mean to do it (raise voice), so. Well, I had a bad time and I did not want to talk to you at that time, because I did not want to say anything bad about them, because they are really really nice'.

This particular example clearly reveals how the *au pair* scheme that suggests *au pairs* as 'being a family member' might be problematic. Pavla's relationship with her host mother was rather difficult, however, despite this; Pavla still reassured me that her host family is a 'really really nice' family. Perhaps Pavla did not want me to know about how she initially felt because she was not sure whether I would end up interviewing her host mother? Or perhaps it was a way of coping, where Pavla was trying to convince herself (and me) that she was living in a 'nice family' despite the reality of actually having 'a hard time'? Another *au pair*, Agata, who at the time of interview was very unhappy with her host family also told me how she initially hoped to be on 'good terms' with her host parents, implying to be 'as a family', when she said:

She (host mum) is very direct, so if something did not work, she is like: we have to talk. And we just sit and talk about it. But now, it is not good, we are not on good terms. But I think it will sort itself out. Our relationship, it is changing, but I think that she is more like a boss unfortunately, because I work, maybe it is my fault as well, I like to keep to myself and now I work 35 hours a week, so it is a lot of hours and after all day I just want to go to my room and relax. And she is busy as well. And we don't have time to even talk about

things that are nice subjects, it is so busy and it is always just: oh, can you do this? And can you do that? So, it is more like boss and worker relationship. So now I will try and talk to her a bit more, but you see that will have to be after my working hours which means that my working day will be longer, but I think it is important to have a better working relationship.

Agata lived with a married couple and their four children, and told me how demanding her work was. Because her host mother was studying for a part time postgraduate diploma and spent the rest of the time at home, Agata felt that it was difficult to live with her employer who did not want to negotiate her pay rate nor her working hours. Agata described her host mother as a *'really bossy woman'* whilst her host father who was away and only spent weekends with his family was described as a *'really good father'* because *'he helps, he does everything, and he is really loyal to his family'*. Agata's situation was clearly marked with what seems to be unfair treatment in relation to her excessive working hours and low 'pocket money'. But it is also interesting that despite only spending often one day a week with her host father, he was perceived as opposite to his 'controlling and bossy wife', when actually both host parents employed and benefited from Agata's employment.

Only *au pair* Nora worked for a host family that could be described as not nuclear with a 'stay at home father' and 'breadwinner mother'. Nora described how *'host dad cooks for us and we eat all of us together with the children and the mum gets back at six or seven o'clock in the evening and she puts the boys to bed'*. Her fondness for the host father was apparent as she mostly referred to him during our interview. For example, Nora described how it was thanks to the host father that she

had improved her cooking skills, whilst her host mother 'only' gave her the recipe, and how her host father suggested where to go for a night out with her *au pair* friends.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

In the UK, there is a widely held belief that at present fathers are carrying out much more child care and domestic work than they did in the past (Cheal 2010). However, academic studies have demonstrated that the time allocated to care and domestic work still greatly differs between men and women (Pilcher, 1999). For instance, Coltrane (2000:1208) argued in reference to developed countries '*although the vast majority of both men and women now agree that family labour should be shared, few men assume equal responsibility for household tasks*'. What is more, notes Coltrane (2000:1208), the visible unequal division of unpaid domestic labour is '*perceived as fair by the vast majority of men as well most women*'.

As a result, this gendered division of family responsibilities could be understood as a means of managing the gendered identity of mothers and fathers. Whilst host mothers felt the pressure of 'intensive mothering model' with a combination of sole responsibility over domestic work, host father also experienced pressure of being the 'family breadwinner'. In this way, host fathers were pulled towards the public sphere of economic provision and domestic work detachment, whilst host mothers were pulled towards the centre of the family, perceived as their main area of

responsibility even whilst in full time employment. By focusing on the almost oppositional roles of men and women in families attached to the notion of traditional nuclear family, it is possible to observe how the notion of family can be viewed as an oppressive institution. Rather than the fluid family live, embedded within individualised actions and negotiations, the host parents interviewed viewed their families as location where to a certain degree different roles of mother/wife and father/husband entailed different expectations and these in turn implied different outcomes and opportunities (Ribbens 1994).

What is apparent from the data presented in this chapter, is that the degree of association, communication, relationship and involvement with *au pairs*, although varied, appeared to be very different between host mothers and host fathers. According to the gendered roles and division of work within families, the interviews with host mothers and host fathers reveal that the *au pairs* were perceived as mainly the host mothers' responsibility. In this way, the host mothers were observed as having to negotiate between the closeness with their *au pairs*, both through their role as the main point of contact and as such bridging the roles of host, mother, friend and employer. On the other hand, the host fathers were negotiating what was perceived to be the appropriate distance, underlined both by their detachment from domestic duties and the role of breadwinner as well as the effect of dominant public stereotyping of *au pairs*.

In relation to the debate on the changing nature of men and women within the increasingly democratisation, Chapman (2004) argued

for increased fluidity, whilst recognising that the organisation of gendered domestic practices is slow to change. In particular he noted '*the conventional homemaker and breadwinner identities may have been challenged, but cultural notions of masculinity and femininity run deep....and for couples who want to have children, conventional nuclear family form remain a convenient option for many because the traditional gender script helps women and men to decide who should do what*' (Chapman, 2004:206).

The process of 'doing gender' involves not only practices, behaviours and associated tasks that include the dress code, occupation or even movement (Dunne, 1999:69). At the same time it implies the continuous assertion of gender difference. In this way, to belong to one gender category (either feminine or masculine) is perceived as essentially different. This line of thought also bears a consensus, that the ongoing process of 'doing gender' is largely to blame for the rather slow changes in attitudes towards domestic arrangements between men and women (Berk 1985; Hochschild 1985; Seymour 1992). Dunn (1999:70) noted that '*in relation to household divisions of labour, rather than consciously participating in an exploitative process of labour appropriation, women and men are simply doing what women and men do – in performance/non performance of household tasks men and women are affirming their gender difference*'.

Whereas some *au pairs* perceived the larger amount of time they spent with their host mothers positively influenced their relationship, at

other times this time was viewed essentially as 'exhausting time living with the employer'.

In conclusion, even though the families with *au pairs* interviewed could be seen as representing one of the many forms of contemporary family living, the way that they navigated between the gendered division of family life could be seen as indeed very traditional in its nature. This is because on one level, these families could be giving a certain impression that could be associated with gender equality, as most of the host mothers were actively engaged in full time employment, relishing in their careers. On the other hand, the traditional separation of family roles based on gender persevered, as both host parents believed that it was to a large degree the women's responsibility to provide the childcare and housework tasks. In regards to the gendered division of domestic labour and within it the division of care work, one could ask whether the employment of *au pairs* could be considered as a way of resolving this predicament. However, the illusion of egalitarian family role division was hindered by the fact, that it was still women (host mothers) who were responsible for managing the *au pairs*, starting with practical aspects to the overall *au pair* work management, and also including the 'emotion work'. The host fathers on the other hand were mainly following the traditional pattern of male breadwinner. Therefore, when explored much closer, it became apparent that although both host parents enjoyed the same career freedom in principle, in practice the division of domestic labour and childcare was still operated unequally. The solution to this unequal division, the hire of an *au pair*, therefore did not result in equality between the host parents, as it was the responsibility of host

mothers to see to the *au pair*'s needs and management. Lastly, as the majority of *au pair* work is performed by young women, the notion of which gender is assumed to be responsible for care and domestic work remains continuously unchallenged.

Another factor that influences the demand of paid domestic work, at least in the more privileged middle class households is what Anderson (2001:27) refers to as a solution to the gendered division conflict between couples, where *'perhaps managing a domestic worker openly is a more attractive option for women than attempting to manage men covertly'*. Other trends include the intensive mothering ideology where women are perceived to be accountable for children's development in a 'happy marriage'. *'In effect, employing a worker enables middle-class wives and mother to give moral and spiritual support to the family, while freeing them from servitude'* (Anderson, 2001:27).

It should also be noted, that gender was not the only factor affecting the host parents/*au pair* relationships. Relationships between host parents and *au pairs* were also often affected by the families' house rules which could potentially include or exclude the *au pairs* from family life, as well as the personal characteristics/personalities of both host parents and *au pairs*. Nevertheless, it became apparent that the role of gender played a vital role in shaping the ways in which host parents would relate to their *au pair*.

This research offers not a critique, but rather differing evidence to the literature which discusses changes to traditional families, and particularly the gendered dimensions of families. The *au pair* families in

this study, hired an *au pair* as a possible solution to the difficulty of the unequal gender distribution of domestic labour. However, as it became evident, these middle class families share a belief associated with traditionally gendered family ideology, and as such, the *au pair* employment could be viewed as a camouflage, masking the unequal powers within families.

Whilst different host families approached the *au pair* boundaries at home from different perspectives, for the majority of host parents the notion of 'couple-hood' remained important. In this way, host parents negotiated various levels of family time, as well as maintaining their 'couple time', which was perceived as indispensable in the host parents' relationship. It is indeed this focus on 'the couple', that emphasizes the idea of 'companionate marriage' and thus further highlights the continued importance of normative familial links.

The following chapter will continue in the theme of relationships between host parents and *au pairs*. The focus however, will be placed on the blurred boundaries between employment and family membership and it will be assessed in detail how host parents and *au pairs* navigated the concept of family time.

CHAPTER 6

'Genuine' VS 'general' family space: host parents'

re-construction of family time

The previous chapter focused on the context of gender division within families, and how such a division impacted on the relationships developed between host parents and *au pair*. This chapter centres on yet another piece within relationship building-blocks, and that is the implication of positioning *au pairs* as 'family members'. Indeed for me, as both a researcher and ex *au pair*, this part of research initially posed quite a challenge. I had personally lived through the unclear boundaries of *au pairing* with a host family. My own experience placed me in a position where I developed what sociological literature describes as 'fictive kinship' relationships with my host family (Stacey 1996), particularly with my host mother and my host grandparents. I still remember one occasion (as well as many others) when I was introducing my partner to my host mother for the first time. Although we had been going out for over a month, the moment of 'introduction' arrived when all three of us stood in the kitchen over a cup of tea. I remember clearly how the acceptance and 'approval' of our relationship felt very important

to me and nervously observed how my host mum Sharon conversed with my partner. Sharon's consent was something that I presumed my own parents would have given, if I had been back home. But they were far away. I also developed close relationship with my host grandparents and would often visit them for lunch at their home after attending college where I studied English.

I am very grateful to my host family for their support, their care and for looking after me, and I cherish those memories; indeed I had associated it with feeling like a 'member of their family'. But I also remember the many evenings and weekends that I spent in my own room reading or watching TV, instead of joining my host family in the living room. There were many awkward moments for me. Sometimes I was not sure how much space I should give them 'as a family' and at other times my own room offered me the place where I could enjoy 'my time off', without having to face the overgrowing pile of clothes ready to be ironed, or the plates in the kitchen that needed washing. In these instances, I felt as if I belonged somewhere between a worker and a polite guest who only shared a residence address with my host family.

It is the aim of this chapter to discuss the ambiguous boundaries associated with *au pair* employment. On the one hand, they are to be treated as family members and on the other hand their presence is underlined by domestic employment. They have to follow their 'work schedule' of looking after children, cooking and cleaning, yet at other times they are invited to spend (and enjoy) an evening out with the host family.

This chapter will address the following questions; How do host parents see and refer to their new family set up? How do they incorporate their *au pair*? Is the *au pair* referred to as a member of the UK host family? Under what conditions and what are the implications? How is the 'family member' emphasis by the *au pair* programme interpreted by both host parents and *au pairs*? In relation to their research on Slovak *au pairs* in London, Burikova and Miller (2010) fittingly summarized this intention of differentiating *au pairs* as family members rather than domestic workers, as they commented '*the official model is of a pseudo-family arrangement in which the au pair is supposed to be incorporated within the household more as a member than as a labourer*' (Burikova and Miller 2010:2). In this way, the *au pair* scheme is set up on the basis of a 'pseudo-family arrangement'. In reality, studies in the past have demonstrated the economic aspect of this agreement, as host parents' decisions to hire an *au pair* were affected by the relative affordability in comparison to other forms of childcare such as nannies or nurseries (Anderson 1993; Burikova and Miller 2010; Cox 2003). As such, it could be said that there are competing subject positions within the scheme, one set up on the ideal of the family member model and one based on the reality of the host parents' needs of domestic worker. This chapter will focus on how this mixed message is understood by the participants interviewed in this study.

The first part of this chapter will look at the larger *au pair* institutions and regulations, in particular by evaluating their position of *au pairs* within host families. Then the notion of 'family time' will be

employed as an example of how host parents construct their status as '*au pair* family'. In particular, specific examples of the 'Sunday Roast' and weekends will be addressed at further length as most participants related to them as 'something we do as a family'. The following part of this chapter will focus on the division of space and boundaries in *au pair* families' homes, and will be discussed in light of domestic work debates. All of these areas will be furthermore addressed by the viewpoints of *au pairs*. Finally, conclusions will be drawn in relation to broader family theorisations.

Pseudo family set up in the context of *au pair* scheme regulations

Before being able to analyse in greater detail how host parents perceived and interpreted the 'family member' regulation within the *au pair* employment, the larger context of the *au pair* scheme needs to be set out. As such, the EU and UK *au pair* official recommendations, in particular their outlook on the role of *au pairs* within host family will be firstly closely addressed. As mentioned in Chapter 2 (Literature review), the *au pair* industry is a complex global network, comprised not only of agencies, *au pairs* and host-families but also of larger national and international regulatory systems, each adding their share to locating the *au pairs* within the host family. These are EU guidelines, and within the UK context there is the British *Au pair* Agency Association (BAPAA), as well as the *au pair* agencies themselves. Beginning from the top-down approach, The Council of Europe, which is situated at the European level and acting as an example for EU countries' *au pair* regulations stated:

The *au pair* placement is the temporary reception by families, in exchange for certain services, of young foreigners who come to improve their linguistic and possibly professional knowledge as well as their general culture by acquiring a better knowledge of the country where they are received. The *au pair* does not belong to neither the student category nor to the worker category and the *au pair* agreement shall specify in another manner, in which the person placed as *au pair* is **to share the life of the receiving family**.

[Council of Europe 1969, my emphasis]

As stated above, the original Council of Europe definition of the *au pair* placement is built around the familial discourse, as '*au pairs* are to share the life of the receiving family'. The *au pair* should not be classified as a worker nor as a student, but she should enjoy certain benefits of the receiving family instead, whilst still enjoying her own independence. What should also be noted, is that this rather outdated quote is still being referred to as the baseline for current official recommendations, and as such the *au pair* scheme today is wedged within the 1960s EU declaration. At the same time, the agreement also considers that:

Many of these persons are minors deprived for a long period of the support of their families, and that as such they should receive **special protection relating to the material or moral conditions** found in the receiving country.

[Council of Europe 1969, my emphasis]

Since the location of *au pair* placement is set in the host family's home, the host family as a result takes on the role of the 'receiving country' and as such locates the *au pairs* into the hidden (from work

regulations) sphere of the family (Cox 2012). Moreover, what these quotes seem to suggest is that host families also become guardians of *au pairs*, who should see to their well-being and 'moral conditions' of this rather vulnerable category of foreigners. Overall then, the Council of Europe (1969) situates *au pairs* into the mixed (and confusing) category of: non worker, non student, part of cultural exchange and living with the receiving family.

Within the UK, there are many *au pair* agencies, for example in the East Midlands there are three main agencies; The East Midlands *Au pairs* and Nannies, Brick *Au pair* agency and Avon *Au pair* Agency. Additionally, the BAPAA (British *Au pair* Agencies Association) was launched in the UK in 2003 in order to set clear standards for the *au pair* industry. This organisation was formed on a non-commercial basis, with the intention of setting standards for the *au pair* industry and protecting the *au pair* experience as a 'worthwhile cultural exchange scheme'. Its members (*au pair* agencies) must comply with the ethical and business standards (BAPAA Code of Conduct, 2008) and BAPAA states that the *au pair* programme in the UK serves as a significant 'cultural exchange' agreement benefiting young people worldwide. The scheme thus contributes to the improved understanding between different cultures and countries. This cultural exchange is meant to occur in a particular setting, and that is that the *au pair* lives and is treated as a family member. BAPAA (2008) clearly states:

The *au pair* **should be** welcomed as a **member of the family**, i.e. share **in some or all** family meals, be invited / included on days out, family events etc. A host family needs to be

realistic about expectations and understand that an *au pair* is neither a nanny nor a cleaner. A happy and settled *au pair* will be a joy to have around as **an additional member of the family!**

The importance is on hosting the *au pair* as a family member, not on employing the *au pair* – and BAPAA employs a specific language in order to highlight this, such as the following terms: host family, host mother, host father. Therefore, the BAPAA's main emphasis relating to the role of *au pairs* is set on cultural exchange and becoming a family member, in some way continuing in the line of the Council of Europe's (1969) message. Only marginally does BAPAA mention the domestic employment nature of the *au pair* scheme, where it states that: '*A host family needs to be realistic about expectations and understand that an au pair is neither a nanny nor a cleaner*'. Adding to this, a further statement notes that BAPAA believes that the *au pair* scheme helps the UK economy by 'enabling family members to continue working where it might not otherwise be possible' (BAPAA, 2008). From this point of view, there is a clear disparity between the *au pair* joining the lives of the British host family as its new member, whilst the host family's economic prospects are clearly outlined as needing 'support' with childcare and housework.

Au pair agencies on the other hand, refer to the scheme rather differently compared to the EU and BAPAA level and are thus marking an interesting shift from linking *au pairs* mainly to the cultural exchange scheme and family member category. Regarding the position of *au pairs*,

au pair agencies draw attention to childcare as a service above all. For example the East Midlands Nannies and *Au pair* agency stated that:

'as a result of our excellent service we have now specialised in providing the full range of nanny services for Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire,...and we can offer qualified/un-qualified nannies, parents' help, *au pairs*, summer *au pairs*, emergency nanny cover, etc, by using a unique screening process of candidates by our experienced personnel'.

In this approach, *au pairs* were classed within the domestic work and nanny category, and the agency's terms of professionalism and trustworthiness further underlined the *au pair* programme as a childcare service above anything else. Taken as a whole, it was evident that there was a differing emphasis on situating the *au pairs*. The Council of Europe (1969) as well as BAPAA (the guiding bodies of the programme) emphasized the cultural exchange and *au pairs* living as family members. Therefore, being part of someone's family is interpreted as something positive, as a good experience. In this way, the *au pair* regulations acted in sustaining the image of 'always happy and protective families', i.e. the idealized form of families. Who would not wish to be living as a part of a family, losing out on all the blissful time spent with the people who love you, enjoy the protective image of family, where you could relax and be truly yourself? At the same time, this image obscures the key aspect of the *au pair* programme, which is childcare and domestic work. The *au pair* agencies' perception was rather different, focusing on placing *au pairs* within the professional nanny and housekeeper category, further underlining the flexibility of the scheme for potential customers (host families). But how actually did host parents interpret these (rather

mixed) messages, where the *au pair* is supposed to be welcomed as 'family member' whilst providing childcare and housework duties? How did they perceive the statement of 'welcoming new family member who came to improve linguistic and cultural knowledge', and who at the same time was supposed to provide 'professional (to a certain degree) and trustworthy childcare'? The following section will examine host parents' interpretations and negotiations of placing *au pairs* in their families.

The construction of genuine and general 'family time'

The ideology of the 'happy family' was apparent in the narratives of host parents and *au pairs*. During the recording, transcribing, listening to and coding the host parents' interviews, I noticed an occurrence of contradictions in how they referred to 'family time'. For instance, statements that the *au pair* 'really feels like part of our family' would later be withdrawn when host parents described how taking the *au pair* on holidays with them would interfere with their 'real family time'. In this way, the incorporation of *au pairs* into the host family could be analysed in relation to negotiating the contested meanings regarding family and family time. The notion of the *au pair* supposedly becoming a family member clashes with the fact that the host family requires childcare provision. How did host parents 'display' (Finch 2007) and 'practise' (Morgan 1996) their *au pair* family? The way host parents conceptualised their meanings in relation to their 'own' family and 'family time' is addressed in the following section.

When talking to host parents, I was interested in how 'living as part of the family' was actually interpreted and enacted by my participants. I realized before the fieldwork stage that host parents would be well aware of the prominent classification of *au pairs* as family members, and asking them whether they considered their *au pair* to be a family member would probably result in straightforward affirmance. Indeed, most host parents seemed to conceal themselves behind this 'happy *au pair* family' ideal as they would proudly announce at the beginning our interview that their '*au pair* lives with them as part of their family'! For example, at the beginning of the follow up interview with host father John, I asked him how things were going and he replied:

'Yes, you know, everything is going great, Lena (*au pair*) is **really** now like a member of our family and the kids really love her, she is just lovely, you know.'

In this way, it seems as if family member implies interconnectedness, involving her in family activities and routine. Perhaps John's emphasis that he only 'now' he views Lena as family member suggests that he does not see her as a stranger? Later on, I asked John to explain in what way he perceive Lena as a family member, to which he replied:

'No, that is not what I meant, you know, it is just a nice thing to say, I thought it sounded nice you know, of course she is not a family member, she just lives here and helps out.'

Referring to this as conducting a 'performance' Goffman (1959) suggested that individuals relate to each other based on the impressions

and manners they associate as appropriate in a particular setting. According to Goffman (1959) each performance (interaction) is simultaneously created by both of the individuals, where each assumes the role of an actor in order to produce meanings of themselves and the given situation. In this way, to perceive *au pair* Lena as a family member is seen as something that is almost expected. Perhaps it was deemed as an easier choice to refer to Lena as a family member rather than accepting the actual situation where Lena 'just lives in the house and helps out?

In order not to lead my participants I instead focused on asking how host parents spent their time in the evenings and weekends, whether they dined together and deliberately asked them whether and how they viewed *au pairs* as part of the family at the end of the interview. It has been suggested that within qualitative methodology, it is questions starting with 'how' and 'why' that 'encourage participants to think about their feelings' (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006).

John's honest reaction, unmasking the 'happy *au pair* family' performance, was not shared by other host parents, who were repeatedly trying to almost force the family vision on the *au pair* employment. For example, host mother Joan continuously talked about their *au pairs* as family members, and when I asked her later on in what ways she sees their *au pairs* as family members she replied:

We just involve them with anything we do as a family, on family level, like family occasions. Like, when Nora came, I took her to Derby to meet my mother. When I go to visit, my mum lives in a bungalow and we all went over and I said to Nora that we are

going, but I don't invite her all the time because the bungalow is too small. And it is almost too small to have all of us and her in that small space. But, I mean I would not be going to my mum and not introducing her, I mean she knows the circumstances. So, it is very much to make her feel like part of the family. Like, we had a party on Friday night and the neighbours came and everybody who came, they were like: hello Nora....'

In this statement, Joan described taking their *au pairs* to 'anything we do as a family', however, later on she also said that she does not invite her *au pair* every time because 'the bungalow is almost too small' to have all of the family and the *au pair* in such small space. Similar contradictions took place in seven other interviews with host parents. In her study of mothers' feeding practices, Murphy (2000) analysed the ways in which moral contexts between breast feeding and formula feeding were shaped by motherhood ideology. The contradictions between the two types of feeding, one encouraged by state institutions and the other discouraged, were analysed in relation to the construction of moral meanings occurring in talk as a self-representation. Describing her participants' responses in the light of 'motive talk' Murphy (2000) noted how negative interpretations of bottle feeding were challenged to reassert the identity of a good mother (2000:319). In a similar way, this could resemble the contradictions between the *au pair* guidelines defining *au pairs* as 'family members' who help out, and the exclusion of *au pairs* from family activities as acknowledged by host mother Joan. Joan's insistence on her 'happy *au pair* family' could have been interpreted as

ethically correct, despite the fact that the *au pair* was employed to carry out certain tasks around childcare and domestic work.

In other cases, host parents seemed somewhat confused when asked whether they would describe their *au pair* as a family member. For example, host mother Amelia replied:

Well, she is like a, like a daughter almost really in a way. You know, daughter but not a daughter, you know what I mean. Not that close, because as I said she is very different to me, with her culture and all of that, but she is lovely, lovely person. Like a cousin, that is really good analogy, like a cousin. You know, someone you would care for great deal and whatever, but not so close as your own.

In this instance, Amelia was at first not sure where in the 'family scale' she should have placed their *au pair* Magda. In the end she resolved this dilemma by placing Magda in the cousin category, which was not perceived as the closest circle of intimate family members, but still close enough within the family realm. Other host parents also used the familial analogy when describing their *au pairs*:

The *au pair* has always been the older sister, and that is how I see it and I had not, I have never realized until I got an *au pair*, she is not just another adult, she is your older daughter. An adult daughter, but she acts as your daughter. And you do actually have a mother role, and I have had this more with some than with some others, to some I very much play the role of a mum as well as my children and they fit very much as a big sister.

[host mother Brenda]

What is apparent in the statement above is that it seems almost overloaded with the use of familial descriptions. On the one hand, the *au pair* is perceived as an older sister to her 'host siblings', whilst in terms of host mother relationship she is perceived as a daughter. However, the *au pair* seems to be demoted from 'adult' to 'adult daughter' position, with an undertone of power disparity that is being associated between parents and their children. Moreover, Cox (2003), Stiel and England (1999), Burikova and Miller (2010) and Bakan and Stasuilis (1997) highlighted the fact that pseudo-family relations were one of the approaches responsible for *au pairs'* exploitation. For example, Cox (2003:335) noted, that the use of 'maternalism' in domestic work employment can also be utilized as a way of further exploiting the employed *au pairs*. Within these lines, Bakan (1997:10) argued that '*the personalized relations and non-work related bonds of attachments that commonly exist between employers and employees are a feature of paid domestic service*' and it is this intimacy that goes hand in hand with the often heard phrase by employers stating that employees are 'just like one of the family'. Another study regarding domestic labour in contemporary Britain was conducted by Cock (1980), which amongst other aspects of domestic employment, such as working conditions, also focused on the relationship between waged domestic workers in South Africa and their employers. This relationship was described as '*representing a 'paternalistic' form of dependence in which the domestic worker, whilst being seen as 'part of the family' was considered and treated as a child*' (Gregson and Lowe, 1994:56). In contrast, Preson (1976) suggested that the employer-employee relationship between domestic servants and their

employers is not a uniform one, as they can be either based on familiarity (due to physical closeness of the employment) or based on distance and strict conduct.

What is more, Anderson (2006:236) suggested that the notion of '*being a family member*' is also deemed as an easier option for employers, in that employers find it easier to refer to their domestic worker as a 'family member' as a coping mechanism for difficulties of intimacy and status. Similarly to Anderson (2006), Cox (2003:335) highlighted that the usage of family like relationships in *au pair* employment is partly due to the fact; that host parents find it more comfortable to refer to their *au pairs* as '*bigger sisters to their children*' rather than 'employees'. Anderson (2006) further noted that this negation of reality exists because live-in domestic workers share the 'home' with the family. In this way, domestic workers are witnesses to many intimate details of family living whilst such a perception clashes with the notion that live-in domestic workers are a significant status representation of the families (Anderson, 2006:236).

However, in terms of this study, the use of maternalism (Cox 2003) was also perceived by five *au pairs* as something they were almost expecting and they expressed how positively they felt about having a 'second mum'. For example, *au pairs* Emily and Kathy both told me that they felt integrated into the host family because the host mother was worried when Emily was ill and when Kathy did not give notice that she was spending Saturday night at her friend's house. Kathy described:

'Yes, she called everywhere, it was so sweet. She was worried like my mother, more than my mother, it feels like home'.

Equally, *au pair* Iva described how her host mother would often refer to her as a sister to herself and auntie to the children:

'She (host mother) was like my mother, exactly like my mother. When I got ill, she would feed me the medicine, she would measure my temperature, feed me, help me up and back to bed, and she would check on me often to see if I was doing ok. I don't know how I would have managed, it felt very nice'.

What is interesting regarding these interview extracts is how generational differences between *au pairs* as fictive daughters and host mothers are toned down compared to the 'maternalism' approach described by some host mothers. It could be argued that perhaps the young age group of *au pairs* was also a factor in this reasoning.

According to past research on domestic work, '*employers can switch from considering the relationship as contractual or familial, depending on what is most convenient for them*' (Anderson, 2001:31). Similarly, in her research on domestic workers in Swaziland, Miles (1999:207) reported that being referred to as 'part of the family' was mostly perceived as a drawback rather than a benefit as such statement allowed the employers to lower the wages as well as concealing exploitation.

Within the research on *au pairs* and domestic work, Hess and Puckhaber (2004) have analysed the working/living conditions and interactions between *au pairs* and their employers in Europe (Germany) and in the United States. They point to the similarities of the *au pair* programme to the experiences within live-in domestic workers. The strategy of disguising the *au pair* programme as 'the cultural exchange scheme' is identified as one of the major factors leading to exploitation. This strategy was found amongst all *au pair* agencies presented in Hess and Puckhaber's (2004) research. Also, hidden within the cultural exchange scheme, is the notion of being treated as 'one of the family'. Hess and Puckhaber (2004) found that those *au pairs* who were more integrated within their host families were discouraged from criticizing the unjust working conditions, because mutual responsibility and cooperation as a means of belonging to the host family were being employed to the *au pairs'* disadvantage. However, it should be also pointed out that citizenship status also had a large effect on the working and living conditions of *au pairs* because and Hess and Puckhaber (2004) focused on Eastern European *au pairs* working in Germany and European *au pairs* working in the United States. Both of these groups were subjected to strong immigrant visa regulations. The current research of UK families with *au pairs* occurs within an area where most *au pairs* come from the EU and therefore there are no strict visa regulations. In this regard, host mother Helen described her expectations of blurred boundaries associated with the *au pair* as a family member:

I think I liked the least the fact, that I didn't had just a helping hand, I mean I don't expect the *au pair* to be here all the

time, but I guess I expected someone to be little bit more to be like part of the family, and therefore, ready to be more available...I don't know, because Yuri did help me and she did nice things, but it was always in a cold manner, you know, like she didn't necessarily want to do it. So I guess, I didn't like the fact that I didn't feel like she wanted to do that particularly.

Here, Helen's perception of the *au pair* becoming part of the family does not only imply a 'helping hand' with childcare and housework but also, in terms of working time allocation it seems to imply that the *au pair* should be available 'anytime'. What is more, Helen also suggested that she wanted the *au pair* to 'enjoy' her work, and because the *au pair* did not seem to enjoy washing up, ironing, and cooking, she was not 'really integrated within the family'. Similarly, host mother Anna told me:

'I don't want them (*au pair*) to think that they have to do that because it is their job, I want them to enjoy it, that they are happy to throw themselves into a water fight or other things. You don't want them to feel that they just have to turn up.

What both Anna and Helen seem to be suggesting, is that the *au pair* should enjoy her work, the same work that these host mothers seemed to resent in the first place. Describing this assumption as a '*labour of love*', Luxton (1980:11) noted that domestic labour is associated with concepts such as; invisibility, lack of recognition, low status, isolation and as part of a female domain. What is more, as housework takes place within the privacy of homes, which are idealized

as '*the heart of the family*', housework becomes romanticised as something that is done '*out of love*' (Luxton, 1980:11, 12).

According to Anderson (2006), domestic workers are often referred to as family members as this position has clear advantages for the employers. For example, within the host parent interviews, host mother Jean noted:

I mean, the weekends are free, but because we encourage the *au pairs* to be part of the family, if they do go out, that is fine, but it is almost like we don't expect that, we expect them to spend time with us. You know, I would often ask, can you do stuff for me? Like this weekend we had a party and I said to Astrid, I have got a party, would you help me with the preparations, and I gave her little bit of extra money for doing that. You know, she said yes, I enjoy doing it, so you know. I always get this when I am answering the *au pair's* questions, when they want to come to us, they would be like: what is this, and what is my rate of pay, and what are my hours and like that. And I am like: well, you are member of my family so yes, you do have two days off work, but as a member of my family it is not like, oh now you are working and now you are not working, you live with us, so it is not that exact. So I always, I am aware that they are supposed to be working for 25 hours a week and I don't go over that...'

In this way, Jean's view of the *au pair* becoming family member implies, that their *au pair* Astrid is readily available as a 'helping hand'. At the same time spending family time together with Astrid actually does not mean 'family time' as time off, it involves working for the host family with whatever tasks are needed. Anderson (2006) also noted that the negotiation of working hours, wages and other working conditions is

undermined by the fact that the domestic worker is considered as part of the family and the improvement of such conditions is seen as an '*insult to the family*' (Anderson, 2006:235). Another approach of positioning domestic workers as family members is due to the nature of their work, as care-work is normally perceived as a type of work being done within the family. The commodification of care work, meaning that money is exchanged for providing caring job is normally excluding the formation of human relationships, as all obligations of care are absolved by the money exchange. Anderson (2006:235) points out, that it is due to this commodification of care work that the relationship between the worker and the family is even more asymmetrical than between the family members themselves (i.e. husband-wife-daughter are all roles that have unequal distribution of power). This difference in family relationships and family relationships versus domestic worker is underlined by the fact that the money exchange for the work carried out does not bear any other relationship to the family's net of responsibilities and obligations. Therefore, as a result there is even further power disparity between the employer - other family members – domestic worker. '*By incorporating the worker as 'part of the family' employers can not only ignore the worker's other relationships, but feel good about doing so – as it is an honour to be part of the family.*' (Anderson in Zimmernam et al, 2006:236).

Family time

Similarly with the reconstruction of family membership, family time also underwent the same process. According to Daly (2001:283) '*family*

time is coloured by some of the ideological debates that are carried out with respect to the family itself. In the same way that families of the past have been romanticized and idealized, so too has family time.' In terms of spending time collectively, host parents within the current study constructed quite well-defined boundaries in when they preferred to spend family time with or without the *au pair*. All of the host parents commented at some point during their interview, that they recognised the *au pair* scheme as a form of cultural exchange. This was described in how *au pairs* were encouraged to socialize outside of the host family's home (not only with other *au pairs*) and attend language courses. Most host parents (eleven) also told me how they actively engaged with their *au pair* during her free time, for example activities such as sightseeing, meeting with grandparents, family celebrations and children's activities (mostly sports). Other (seven) host parents would consciously prefer not involve the *au pair* at all in their family time, such as during the weekends. However, even those parents who would be more open to spending 'family time' with *au pairs* during evenings and weekends, would appear to construct two sets of family times: the 'genuine' family time (excluding *au pair*) and the 'general' family time (including *au pair*). The following quote from host mother Trish highlights this division:

We don't want them [*au pairs*] really involved in **our days** at the weekend. I don't mind if she [*au pair*] is around during the hours she is off during the week, some of them are off, like I am finished and that is it now, others, they are much more flexible like that. And if they want to get involved coming and spending some time **with us** during a Saturday or Sunday, I am very happy about that, but I would not want it for all Saturday and Sunday. And my husband is also, he is looking for a job now, but he is looking for a

job all day, so he doesn't want to be entertaining the *au pair* and include her in **our weekend and our time** together as a family. So we don't do that, whereas some people are probably more inclusive, but we don't do that.

[my inserts and emphasis]

The highlighted words reveal the genuine/general family time separation, where 'our family time' excludes *au pair* from this activity, whereas at other times the *au pair* is 'welcome' to spend time with the family. One of the reasons that host parents employ *au pairs* is to get help with the household and childcare, in other words, to free them from these activities in order to spend more 'quality time' together as a family. In this way, and as living and working in contemporary Britain involves longer working hours increasingly for both genders, these families can therefore 'afford' to buy some more free time to spend as a family or couple. Host parents extensively commented that one of the advantages and main reasons why they hired an *au pair*, is so that they can then spend more time with each other, and be freed from some of the routine domestic responsibilities such as washing up, ironing, or driving to school to pick up their children. Cox (2006:85) also pointed out that '*these families are able to afford the support that many mothers of young children crave. For these families, it is possible to give their children all the attention they may need and still have time for leisure.*'

Additionally, Lan (2003) described how the employment of domestic worker turns '*the private home into a contested terrain where employers and workers negotiate social boundaries and distance from one another on a daily basis*' (Lan, 2003:525). Negotiations between

Taiwanese employers and Filipino domestic workers of issues such as space, privacy and food were explored through larger categories of class, ethnicity and nationality. Lan (2003) used the concept of boundary work in assessing the interactions between the employer and the employee's social position. The author concluded, that the notion of 'other' is constructed and re-developed by the employers in order to exclude and include their domestic workers within their family, and by this, these families develop multi-layered boundaries (Lan 2003). Similarly, in this study the concept of 'family time' was reconstructed by host parents in order to welcome the *au pair* to all family activities, whilst at other times the 'our time as a family' was indicative of excluding the *au pair* from the rest of the host family. In this way, by reconstructing the notion of 'our family time' host parents generated different levels of boundaries that implies either inclusion or exclusion of the *au pair*. These two 'family times' then could be viewed as fulfilling the 'cultural exchange and family member' on the one hand whilst still maintaining the 'idea of sacred intimate family time' on the other. Daly (2001:288) described how '*family time is created as a source of memories, it must be positive and involve togetherness, and it is highly valued when it involves spontaneity*'. In this way, the *au pair*'s presence was simply perceived as a disturbance to this ideologically loaded image of a happy close knit family.

Having said this, the notion of cultural exchange was still embedded in the host parents' view of the scheme. Six host parents described their *au pair* (apart from being either worker or fictive family member) is also a 'visitor' to the UK for a temporary period and as such is likely to be interested in visiting different cities/places as well as

taking part in local events (Goose fair, local craft and garden markets, sports events) and national events (Halloween, Guy Fawkes night, Christmas fairs etc.). Although these host parents recognised the cultural exchange as a part of the scheme, there were different attitudes towards how often to invite the *au pair* to what was perceived as a cultural activity. Some host parents would invite the *au pair* to 'cultural activity' every week, such as weekend leisure shopping in the nearby mall, or going to the pub for a drink, whilst other parents reserved this time for 'their genuine family time' and invited *au pairs* to national celebrations such as Bonfire night firework display. Similarly to Cien's (2009:84) study of Norwegian *au pair* scheme, I have also found out that '*host families may not per definition be disinterested in cultural exchange although they have the au pair for other reasons*'.

Sunday lunch and weekends - construction of general family time

One family occasion, which the majority (twelve) host parents mentioned specifically within the 'general family time' classification, was the 'Sunday lunch'. Also referred to as 'Sunday Roast' and THE family meal (Jackson et al, 2005), host parents gave this as an example of including *au pair* in their family. Symbolising family togetherness, it was not until the middle of the 19th century that 'the big Sunday dinner came into being' (Gillis, 1996:94). According to Gillis (1996) '*meal times permit those around the table to imagine themselves to be sharing more than food. The ritual quality of a meal allows them to think of themselves*

as having more in common with this set of people than with any other' (1996:93). In this way, 'Sunday Roast' is emblematic of 'family time' in a way that it is ideologically loaded with images of 'happy family'.

In relation to the current study, the invitation to Sunday lunch was frequently mentioned by host parents as the first example of spending 'family time with the *au pair*'. For example, host mother Theresa noted '*you know for Sunday afternoon, it is very very family, and you know, we always invite the au pairs*'. Similarly, host mother Beverley said: '*during the weekends I cook and we sit to eat together for the Sunday lunch. She is either with us, or I put her portion on a plate to have later on*'. Other host parents also used this example of weekend family time, although they expressed how 'their family time' is not an activity they want their *au pair* to feel she is forced into, and rather they left it up to the *au pair* to decide whether they wanted to join in or not. For instance, host father Richard commented:

We always say to them [*au pairs*]: on the weekends, don't feel that you can't spend time with us, we will take you to Sunday lunch or anywhere, you can come with us, but if you don't want to see us during the weekend, we are fine too. If you feel like you want to go to Sunday lunch with us, we will always take you, but if you don't feel like it that is fine. Some of our *au pairs* always did come and some would rather chill out by themselves.

Host father Richard referred to Sunday lunch and weekend as the epitome of family time, which was contrasted against the working week filled with demanding routines. Apart from three *au pairs*, weekends were defined as time off, when neither the host parents nor the *au pairs* were working. And it is because of this separation of the working week

and the weekend, that Saturdays and Sundays imply there is even more opportunity for 'family time'. To other host parents, Sunday lunch represented much needed family time, which the *au pair* was almost required to join. Host father Tom explained:

Sunday lunch **to us as a family** is very important to us. So if like the rest of the week is busy, Sunday lunch is very important to Jenny (host mother). It's the most important meal of the week for you isn't it? So if you are in this house **with us** on Sunday, you will sit down and eat with us. Whether you are the *au pair*, blacksmith or whatever. You will sit and have lunch at that table.'

Tom described Sunday lunch as an idealised ritual symbolizing the most important meal of the week. However, what is apparent in the statement above is the mandatory nature of this supposedly 'leisure time filled with happy memories'. This further implies that perhaps some host families made family time 'compulsory' for the *au pairs*? Having said this, because families are embodied with an unequal distribution of power, not only in terms of gender (chapter 5) but also based on age, perhaps the *au pair* was not perceived to be an adult who is not only responsible, but also 'in control' of their child(ren)?

'Just a helping hand'

On the opposite end of situating *au pairs* as fictive family members were three parents who clearly placed *au pairs* as domestic workers. These host parents suggested that their *au pairs* are not viewed as family members, for example host father John stated:

'I would say that she is a member of it but not a part of it. She (*au pair*) is a member of the family, she lives in the house, you know she uses the food out of the fridge you know, she cooks, she uses the electricity the water, so she is a member of the family but at some point there is going to be that; you are an employee, and you know I think there is going to be this 'you are only here for I don't know 12 months' so you know, if somebody was here for three, four five years, then...

Host father John described the *au pair* as an employee, who 'only uses their house' as a part of her job and her live-in status. John and Richard were the only host fathers who did not associate the *au pair* scheme with a romanticised '*au pair* family': for them *au pairs* were simply carrying out their work as any other domestic workers might do. Yet another host mother Donna told me that although she was looking forward to welcoming her first *au pair* as a part of the family, her experience with *au pair* Pavla made her change her mind. Thus, when I asked her how she would describe their relationship, Donna replied:

Well, someone who is here in the house, I would not even consider myself as a friend. I mean, I treat her well, but she is just not professional, she does not have any social skills whatsoever, she is moody, she has no connection with the children. She does not even look after them properly, there were couple of times when I came back home and she was downstairs, she left the children alone in the living room watching TV. So, I told her that she cannot leave them alone. She does not have any motivation or initiative, she does not even know how to cook. You know, she even burns sausages, and it would be nice sometimes if she just cooked something. Even if she is not supposed to, you know I love cooking but sometimes it feels like a chore and it would be nice to

be surprised sometimes. But she does not do that. I don't even know, I don't think that we are going to stay in touch to be honest.

Although Donna's statement relates to the above debate on idealising domestic work, she was the only host mother who openly admitted that 'she does not get along with the *au pair*'. When I spoke with Donna's *au pair* Pavla, she described her working day as follows:

'My day today started at 8.00am, the host mother Donna take the oldest child to school, I am at home with the two younger children, I dress them, then we tidy up and wash clothes, then Donna comes back.

L: and what time does she come back?

P: at 8.45am. She then takes the younger children to the nursery and I am free until 2.00pm, then I have to be home and look after the smaller ones until 4.00pm. Then I have two hours off until the evening, when I help her (Donna) to put the children to bed and help with dinner and everything, they go to sleep at 8.00pm.

Pavla's normal day seemed to be scheduled around the 'morning and evening pressure points', where the busiest times are normally the mornings (dressing children, feeding, taking to school) and then the evenings (eating dinner, bathing, bedtime). What is more striking however, is the differences in how Pavla and Donna perceived their relationship. Whereas Donna stated that she would not describe their relationship as a friendship, Pavla told me why she feels like a member of her host family when she stated the following:

It feels like home, I feel really integrated, it is difficult to explain, I just feel it.

L: and how do you feel integrated?

P: if they are making a cup of tea they always ask me if I want one too. Hmmm. And when it was the St Nicolas Day in Germany, my host mother made me my shoe with sweets and the presents and all, it was so sweet.

The contrast with Donna's statement above could not be more striking. Pavla clearly felt content and integrated into the host family. Perhaps her image of St Nicolas day, a celebration that happens once a year highlights her idealised version of host family? But then Pavla also implied that she feels part of the host family when drinking tea, narrating the image of every day. Undoubtedly, the live-in aspect of *au pairs*, together with the nature of their work creates a set of complex relationships. Zimmerman et al (2006) highlighted that care work entails not only home management tasks (domestic duties, meal preparation etc.) but also involves a protective and affective elements (showing concern, love, support) (2006:4). What is more, Pavla also described that she received presents in her shoe for St Nicolas day. Drawing on research of gift exchange systems, particularly on the Maussian (1969) view of 'The Gift', Carrier (1991:122) pointed out that a '*gift does not identify either the object or service itself, instead what makes a gift is the relationship within which the transactions occurs*'. Within the current study, *au pairs* mentioned giving and buying presents for host children and host parents, either on occasions such as birthdays, but also on 'family holidays' such as Christmas. Interestingly, host parents did not

mention buying presents for *au pairs* as an indication of family membership, although I know from *au pair* interviews that they received those gifts. *Au pair* Iva was the only one who epitomized giving Christmas presents to her host family as an example of belonging to the 'host family' and when her gifts were not reciprocated, she recognized herself as 'just *au pair*', when she told me:

I came back after spending Christmas with my boyfriend, I came on the 26th of December, and I went to her (host mother) room and I gave her my present. I bought her a diary and really nice chocolate and I bought some presents for the kids as well, and she said: Oh, that is really nice, this is only my second present this Christmas, and she started complaining about her Christmas and that she did not get any presents, and I was thinking: 'Hey, I did not get anything AT ALL! You did not buy me anything and now you complain about your two presents?' So at the beginning, I thought she is more of a friend rather than a boss, but now, of course she is my friend but I keep more distance now, I don't tell her everything about my life.

Iva clearly felt disappointed about the lack of Christmas gift exchange between herself and her host mother, and was upset when she was retelling me this incident. Later on, she described other occasions in which she was unfairly treated, such as babysitting up to five times a week and excessive working hours when she had to look after ill children all day and night whilst the host mother was away working. By the time I called Iva the following month to organise a follow up interview, she had left the host family. As such, the fact that Iva bought her host family Christmas presents whilst she did not get any illustrated as 'the example'

why her host family perceives of her as just an employee, therefore her host mother was her boss. According to Finch (2007:77) the concept of gift giving could be viewed as *'carefully selected for a particular individual to convey the meaning of the relationship' and as such could illustrate how 'physical objects are an important part of the process of family display'* (Finch, 2007:77). Similarly, in their research on gift giving as an indicator of involvement between friends or family, Komter and Vollebergh (1997) described gifts as 'tangible and concrete and, therefore, measurable expressions of feeling toward other people' (1997:748)¹³. Yet, according to Carrier (1991) gift giving could be perceived as a family obligation, where *'family and household members are expected to do things willingly for other members and to accept willingly what other members do for them'* (1991:124). Carrier (1991) continued to explain that the obligation of gift giving is in this way constructed as endorsing the relationship, and as such *'the gift generates and regenerates the relationship between giver and recipient'* (1991: 125). However, within Iva's narrative, her Christmas gift, that according to Carrier should reaffirm the relationship of friendship with her host mother, did not take place. In this case, Carrier (1991) further noted that *'if one party to a gift relationship feels regularly and unjustly slighted, he or she will consider ending the relationship'* (1991:124

Returning to the earlier example of *au pair* Iva, reciprocity could also be distinguished not only in relation to gifts, but also to actions that individuals carry out. According to Newcombe (2004), the set of these newly created and complex relationships between the host family and the

¹³ Quoted in Pahl and Spencer (2003:22)

au pair is underlined by the reciprocal and/or hierarchical arrangements. Perhaps then, Pavla viewed her role within the host family as reciprocally constructed sets of relationships? Later on Pavla said:

I think it is a lot of money for the things I do, I have to do washing, and the dishwasher and cooking and somebody pays me for it, because I do all of this at home already, but here it becomes money because somebody pays me for it.

As such, Iva's perception of her *au pair* work was associated with a 'labour of love', as she described herself carrying the same tasks in her home. What is more, her *au pair* status made 'this same work' back at home being renumerated in the UK.

According to Bakan (1997) using familial ideology in describing domestic workers as family members does not resolve the hidden and unregulated sphere of this type of work. Domestic workers as part of the family are left inside the private sphere of the household and within the invisibility of the family where their working rights become blended within the responsibilities of the employers' family rather than actual work (Bakan, 1997:19,20). As such, Bakan (1997) suggested the two following measures that should be taken in order to make the domestic work less obscure sphere:

- applying the distinction between family (biological) and household (spatial division) as this helps to distinguish the invisible aspect of domestic work within the employing family (referring as de-familiarization)
- increasing the visibility of the household sphere as an area that belongs within the legislative measures of the government

policies, and as such improving the working conditions as well the citizenship rights of domestic workers. (Bakan 1997:20)

Acknowledging the importance of the domestic work literature discussed above, it should be also pointed out that when analyzing family forms it is essential to keep in mind that even biological families are embedded in social contexts where power and status are distributed unequally (Demo et al 2000:2). Therefore, oppression based on racism, ageism, sexism and ethnocentrism can be maintained in all family forms. Moreover, the hierarchical power structures manifested in family life should be addressed, as the status and power associated with being a father/husband is different to the power and status associated with mother/wife and child/ren. The prescribed and unspoken roles within families imply power, control and responsibilities that fluctuate according to particular roles underlined by gender and age (Muncie et al, 1997; Bernardes 1997). Additionally, Stiell and England (1997:198) argue that the current domestic work literature does not account for the migrant workers' *'diversity and complexity of their female experience'* and suggest that not all employer-domestic worker relationships are exploitative.

***Au pairs'* perceptions**

As highlighted in the Literature chapter, existing research conducted in relation to *au pairs* has mostly been done as a part of gendered migration and domestic work divisions (Anderson 2000, Parreñas 2001, Newcombe 2004, Hess and Puckhaber 2004). What is

more, these studies have mostly focused on the negative aspects of *au pair* experiences, as they (rightly) highlight the ambiguous and often confusing position of *au pairs*, potentially placing *au pairs* in a vulnerable position. For example, in their research report regarding the position of *au pairs* in Netherlands, Boer and Wijers (2006:81) commented that since violations of rules with regard to the labour relations between the *au pair* and the host family were systematically occurring, the category of *au pairs* indeed provide cheap and flexible labour. Additionally, *au pairs* are not protected by labour laws and do not build up any working rights. This is underlined by the fact, that the government itself although applying the term 'work' when discussing the *au pair* contract, subsequently contradicts itself by not perceiving the *au pair* contract as a form of labour. In relation to the current study, four *au pairs* felt they were working excessively long hours. For example, *au pair* Nora commented:

But the thing is, if they [children] were at home and I was at home, she [host mother] expected me to help her out or whatever, which wasn't fair I think. It was my day off, but she was always like, oh, can you do me a favour and what was I supposed to do? I didn't feel right saying, sorry but it is my day off. She always expected me to help out when I was there, even with little things. So, even at the weekend, I always felt like I was working.

According to Nora, her working hours were well in excess of the recommended 25 hours a week. Williams and Balaz (2004:1821) argued that 'given the social construction of the (*au pair*) scheme, combined with

weak enforcement mechanisms in the private sphere, protection of the rights of individual *au pairs* is at best uneven’.

Whilst it is necessary to highlight the vulnerable position and of exploitation of domestic workers and *au pairs*, it also needs to be stressed that the *au pair* experience is not always the same and not always perceived as a negative one. From this viewpoint, Williams and Balaz (2004:1831) commented:

‘Some of the more pessimistic conclusions of research on Third world live-in domestic servants are not generally applicable to *au pairs*. There is potential for loss of control over personhood, and for abuse, but this seems less widespread than is reported in much of the literature on migrant women in waged domestic labour.’

Whilst the mainstream domestic work research (mostly) highlights the negative aspect of *au pairs* and domestic workers, there is also an increase in literature that focuses on other aspects of *au pair* placements. Although this research still remains quite limited (Burikova and Miller 2010; Williams and Balaz 2004) they bear one similarity, and that is that working and living as an *au pair* can be perceived and have a positive effect on *au pairs*. For instance, in their study on returned Slovakian *au pairs*, Williams and Balaz (2004:1931) commented that ‘*enhanced language skills, self-confidence, personal skills and occasionally formal qualifications were used to achieve better jobs and higher pay, and au pairs are reflective agents using au pair migration for a variety of end goals*’.

Similarly to Williams and Balaz (2004:1820), the *au pairs* in this study reported mixed views and experiences on the issue of blurred public/private sphere. One *au pair* told me that only on Sundays, when she is not working, only then she feels like part of the family. The rest of the week, she noted, she feels 'only like an *au pair*, working'. Similarly, *au pair* Monika described:

And you really, you really find a new family, and last night I was watching TV with them, and I thought how crazy is this, because I am in another family? How crazy is that? But also, I would always be just the *au pair*, you know, working, but when we have Sunday Roast dinner I am like a part of the family, like a real part of the family because we are sitting around the table, having a chat. Or when I have tea with the kids I feel really close to them.

Similarly, Ivana noted:

I really like to be *au pair*, I like my work, but is in not really a family. Sometimes when I am with Jo (child) I feel like family, but I am an *au pair*, not really part of the family. It is more like work. They are very good and they help me a lot, and they buy me things but it is very different from Germany, from home. Maybe on Sundays, on Sundays I am part of the family, but the rest I am just *au pair*, working here.'

These quotes summarize a view also shared by another 8 *au pairs*, which is that they only considered themselves as a part of the family when they were not working but sharing their free time with the host family. In this way, *au pairs* referred to family time not only in terms of being with the host family when they were not working, but also as a time that is perceived as 'happy'. For example, (and not surprisingly)

none of the *au pairs* mentioned family time when they were doing homework with the children, or when they were preparing the dinner with the host mother, as this was not necessarily viewed as the 'happy leisure time', but rather as part of their working schedule. Even though *au pair* Tina told me she enjoyed cooking and considered it as a hobby (she also had an A level in culinary arts), she did not mention feeling like part of the family on this occasion, it was only during or after the Sunday Roast or watching TV with the rest of the host family that she related to 'family time'. According to Daly (2001:289) the notion of family time is idealised '*when everybody is rested, everybody is happy, everybody is in a good mood and everybody is doing something that they enjoy*'. Similar association could be made in relation to host parents' narratives, where symbolic occasions, such as birthdays, Sunday lunches and sport events were described as 'general family time' which they spent with *au pairs*.

Another of the *au pairs*, 21 year old Sonia described how spending a 'family holiday' with her host family changed how she felt as 'part of the family. She told me:

I was holding back at the beginning, I thought to myself, I am only an *au pair*, I can't be part of the family in completely different stranger family, but they were really nice and inviting and now I think because I stayed through Christmas, I really feel like part of their family. I even cooked the Christmas meal with Ariane, because hostdad does not cook, we found a recipe, and it was quite tasty.'

For Sonia, the integration as a member into her host family followed after spending Christmas with them. Unlike other *au pairs*, it seems that Sonia was rather conscious regarding her status as somebody

who is paid for the work she carries out. What is more, it seems that the temporal nature of the *au pair* stay also affected how Sonia conceptualised her status. It seems that she perceived herself as a foreigner or perhaps as a visitor who is temporarily employed. But the fact that she spent Christmas with this 'stranger family', considered to be the 'family holiday', seems to make her feel more integrated into the 'familiar family'.

Following in the theme of *au pairs* perceptions of becoming part of the host family, the notion of having to 'work hard' at becoming one of the family, as mentioned previously by *au pair* Sonia, was also mentioned by another seven *au pairs*. For example, *au pair* Petra made this point clearly when she told me:

Well the *au pair*, so it is a help to the family. The *au pair* should know that this help is, well, it is never 25 hours a week exactly, the *au pair* should be flexible with this from the start. And the *au pair* should be really tolerant and patient, because with the kids it is always a bit difficult. And on the other side it is a joy and if she gets a great family it is great. For example, for me, I feel like I am here on holiday, I am really happy here. And also the *au pair* should realise that it is not going to be easy straight from the beginning, she needs to put some work into it. It takes a while until she meets some new people, so it is a lot to do with being patient. So, I know here some *au pairs* who are strictly counting down their 25 hours working time, and when they work this out they start to say something back to the family, or they ask for more money directly, and this would really never occur to me. So, when we had a new bathroom installed here, of course I was working more hours, I had to clean things around or sometimes stay there for a whole day, but I did not mind. I thought, well, I am a part of the family so I should sometimes make a bit of

sacrifice. It would NEVER occur to me to ask for more money, that is just unthinkable!’

From this quote, it is apparent that Petra felt she had to work ‘extra hard’ at fitting in with her host family. Also, Petra’s view of being like a family member is made on the premise that she was able to make sacrifices of her own free time in support of ‘the family’ she was now part of. As a result, Petra’s observation could be approached from the viewpoint of family ideology, as it is believed that ‘families are there for each other no matter what’. In this regard, Bernardes (1997:27) argued that the prevailing ideology of family and its associated roles has a huge impact on what individuals perceive as proper or wrong family life. Being part/member of a family therefore bears certain expectations of duties and responsibilities. Providing help to other family members might seem an almost natural and expected action, and as such, classing the *au pair* as being part of the family (by either host parents or *au pairs* themselves) might simply mean that the *au pair* is supposed to carry out certain tasks, free of charge, and because this is what families do (Finch and Mason, 1993:5). According to Morgan (2002:157), the negotiations of family duties and responsibilities mostly occur on an informal level during daily activities. Individuals’ perceptions of their roles within the family circle are mostly affected by informal guidelines rather than formally recognized laws. Moreover, Finch and Mason (1993:170) argued that material services are only a part of the means by which family responsibilities are negotiated. It is the moral dimension, where people’s identity, for example as a good daughter or giving mother, get

shaped and formed through processes of complex negotiations. In the same way, Marsh and Arber (1992) argued that the concept of family involves not only biological and legal ties, but also a range of relationships that impose norms of behaviour for each member. Social rules within the family unit are a key part in prescribing obligations for each member. In their study of family responsibilities, Finch and Mason (1993) examined the significance of kin relationships and the responsibilities, such as financial, practical and emotional assistance and they looked at whether these responsibilities have any contemporary meaning¹⁴. The authors point to the widely-held assumption that giving and receiving help is common within family life, normally regarded as ordinary everyday practices and as something that is undeniably part of notions such as 'being part of a family' (1993:163). Furthermore, the authors demonstrated that people's understanding of the terms kin/relative/family member implies a network which normally facilitates some kind of support, such as emotional, financial or practical, but it is also believed that this support is not acted upon in everyday life, but rather it should be 'reserved' for times of emergency or crisis (Finch and Mason 1993:164).

As mentioned in Chapter 5, most of the host mothers commented that they appreciated their *au pairs* for being flexible in terms of their working schedule. In this way, host mothers described how the 'good *au pair* that becomes a family member should not count working hours rigidly, but instead should be available when needed and this is then reciprocated when *au pairs* are given three days off instead of one, etc'.

¹⁴ This study was conducted between 1985 – 1988.

This notion of 'flexible help' was also referred to as 'little things that make the difference' and *au pairs* who were not seen as flexible were seen as 'lazy' or 'not interested in family life'. What is interesting however, and as suggested by Petra's quote above is that most *au pairs* (eleven) also viewed their role as being largely affected by similar reciprocal arrangements as described by Finch and Mason (1993). The *au pairs* who felt that this reciprocal relationship was mutual were more inclined to feel like a member of the host family. For instance, *au pair* Lily told me:

Two weeks ago, I was at a friend's house from Thursday to Sunday and it was fine. It is really easy and we help each other, if there is something to do extra in the evening I will do it, I am really like a family member, which is really good, because if I need help my hostmum helps me. Last week I was ill and my hostmum said, ok, if she takes the big one (child) to school, then I have some extra time to stay n bed, and I only take the smaller one (child) and in the afternoon he was at a friend's house, so its is really good and we help each other'.

In this way, Anna felt treated as an equal family member as the 'offering' and 'giving back' was mutual. On a similar note, *au pair* Denise was clearly aware of the 'proper' reciprocal arrangements in families, as she said:

I can't say that just because I am not paid for it I am not going to help, otherwise that is really bad. When you are a family sometimes you have to do that, so yes, sometimes I look after them. But I have to say, I really really love them...

According to Cox and Narula (2003:340), in *au pair* employing households, 'house rules are an important part of delineating the *au pair's* relationship to her employer's family'. As mentioned in previous chapters, some host parents interviewed for this study adopted strict rules regarding house space, where two *au pairs* were forbidden to enter the kitchen after eight o'clock, in order to give the host parents their own privacy or 'couple time'. From the eighteen *au pairs* I spoke to, only three were subject to strict house space restrictions in terms of being directly told not to spend time in certain parts of the house. The rest of the *au pairs* were not subject to strict house space rules, however, this does not imply that they would use the house space as they pleased. From the fifteen *au pairs* who had no strict house space rules, eleven described how despite there being 'no rule' they felt uncomfortable sharing the living space with the host family and preferred to spend time in their own bedroom. It should also be mentioned that six *au pairs* felt they did not want to spend time with their host families during their free time, as they would still be asked to work. For example, *au pair* Magy described:

If I would spend any time with them when I am supposed to be off, the boys always want something. So, for example, the mum goes to her bedroom or something, to get some alone time and the boys then ask me for stuff. I don't like spending unnecessary time with them, I do need my time, to be by myself, I am with the boys already all day and they sometimes upset me or misbehave, so I don't need it in the evenings, their mum is there for that.'

In a similar way, *au pair* Pavla shared her own experience:

'They (host parents) showed me Nottingham, but I don't really spend any time with them, it was just at the beginning, because they always want me to work even on my day off, so I

don't want to spend any time with them now. I know that some families take their *au pair* to places, and they go to, I don't know, parks and *au pairs* go and join the family, but I don't do it.'

Asking Pavla how she copes with this situation, she replied:

'I try to spend all my time out. Of course not always, but I try to spend time out as much as possible. I am trying to organize things out, and now it is different, because I am spending time with my boyfriend.'

Cox and Narula (2003:338) suggested from their *au pair* questionnaires responses that the more restrictions in terms of the use of space the more likely were *au pairs* to feel that they are not members of the host family. On the other hand, the *au pairs* that had considerably less restrictions were much more likely to reply that they felt like a member of the host family. Furthermore, Cox and Narula (2003:338) noted that '*some au pairs spent their free time in family rooms and interacted freely with family members, but the majority did not use family rooms because they felt unwelcome or were asked to carry out work if they met family members in shared spaces*', such as in the case of *au pair* Magy and Pavla.

As a result of these expectations of how family members should behave, it is important to consider not only the *au pairs'* perceptions of their role within the host family but also the view of the host parents. What seems to matter is how both parties (*au pair* and host parents) understand and view their roles and their relationships. In other words, the nature of the relationship could be recognized from a working point of view, where the *au pair* is perceived as an employee who has

specific tasks and responsibilities and gets paid for them, or the *au pair* is assumed to be more incorporated into the host family, where she is expected to spend some of her leisure time with the host family. At times, the understanding of *au pair's* role (by both host parents and *au pairs*) is positioned somewhere in the middle, where the *au pair* is viewed as both working but also as spending time with the host family, and as such blurring the working relationship. At other times, the relationship is perceived as a friendly employee, who due of the location of their job becomes with time viewed as a 'family member'. What is important to note is that within *au pairs'*/host parents' relationships, the difference of understandings of the *au pair* scheme by host families and *au pairs* can bring tension to the relationship. For example host mother Debbie and her *au pair* Jana had a dispute because each believed the other person was not reciprocating as they should have. I first interviewed *au pair* Jana, and when I asked her about her relationship with host mother Debbie, she replied:

Recently, I've been feeling that she (host mother) I think, she is quite selfish. Like she puts her needs and her family's needs first. The major thing that happened was that this weekend, a friend of mine in London, her father passed away, and I wanted to stay with her until Monday, but on Monday I usually work, so I called and explained that this is really important to me, but she wanted me to take the children to the school, she wanted me to come only for that, because there are ways of organizing other people to take them, there must be...So I called her again later and I said that I am not coming back and then she said that I need to organize for somebody to pick up the children, but the thing is, it is not my task taking them to the school in the morning, like it is not something that I should do, it is a favour that they have asked

me to do, and now she said that I need to find someone, but now it is fine, I found someone.'

Jana probably viewed her role as a family member whose equality would be displayed by prioritizing her own personal needs, and she was very disappointed in the way her host mother reacted to her request of taking an extra day off. Interestingly, when I spoke with host mother Debbie, the same incident came up in her interview (I could not comment on it due to confidentiality obligation to the participants) and in the same way, Debbie also felt that Jana had acted in a selfish manner. Debbie was very upset when on Sunday evening, one day before Debbie's important work deadline, Jana called to let her know that she would not be returning and resuming her work. Debbie told me that this evening phone call left her no time to arrange another suitable babysitter and she asked *au pair* Jana to find the babysitter herself. One could argue that both Debbie and Jana were right at disputing the other one. This is perhaps one of the clearest examples of how miscommunication and, more significantly, the different understandings of the *au pair* role can lead to a dispute. Both Jana and Debbie commented on this situation as leading to the breakdown of their previously good relationship. Mellini et al (2007:54) suggested that *au pairs* tend to define their role as an equal member of the host family when '*their interactions with the host family are not merely work-related but extend into non-work time*'. In this way, spending the Christmas period with the host family, or going out for dinner and meeting extended host family members was perceived by Sonia and Nora as being a part of their host family. What was also

became apparent in the current research is that '*reciprocating and sharing information was also viewed as central in establishing an equal relationship*' (Mellini et al, 2007:55).

Within this research, it should also be considered that most of the *au pairs* interviewed were relatively young (between the ages of 17-20) when they first came to the UK. Therefore, coming to live and work in the UK as an *au pair* was the first time they had left their parental home, where they were indeed in the role of the children. The sudden change of going to live abroad also gave *au pairs* many new freedoms that they did not have back at the parental home. At the same time, living with a host family provided them with a safety net whilst living abroad. Some *au pairs* commented how, although they were welcomed by the host family to spend free time in the evenings with them, they chose not to, not because the offer from the host family was not felt as genuine, but because they simply wanted to go out to meet with friends. Some *au pairs* preferred spending time using social media sites (such as Facebook and Twitter) as this was considered one of the favourite pastimes of many *au pairs*, or they just wanted to be by themselves. Almost half of the *au pairs* also commented how visiting the city centre, and in particular shopping one of their favourite past times, such as *au pair* Marta who said:

'At the weekends, I usually go out, because in the week I am at home and during the weekend I like to go out of the house, to go to see the shops, I don't normally do that back home, it is fun.'

Other *au pairs* also commented how they felt uncomfortable spending time with the whole host family, especially when they felt that the host family should have some quality alone time. Pavla also described how she negotiated the space boundaries in her host family:

‘I am quite a polite person, and so I was quite shy around the house and I was afraid to enter the room when they were there without asking and things like that. So, at the beginning, I was not so sure, I thought, oh, my host parents they only see each other during the weekend and I don’t want to disturb that, and let’s leave them their free time I don’t want to interrupt them. But now I know it is fine when I am with them watching films and like that, they always ask me if I want to join them and I know that I am welcomed’.

In one case, *au pair* Kathy described how it was her host parents who would ‘disappear’ early after the dinner from the living/dining room every night:

‘Most of the time when they (host parents) are at home, they spend the time in their bedroom, they have big bedroom with a bathroom and TV and when they get home in the evening, they go to their room. So, from seven in the evening they are already in their bedroom preparing to go to sleep, because they have to wake up early.’

Kathy added that both of the host parents work as doctors and have very busy working schedules. When asked whether she would like to be more involved in host family time Kathy replied:

No, because I am also very, I like my space, so it is good. I like to be by myself, I like how it works. If it would be a family who likes to be together all the time and want that evening time and

during the weekends, then I would not be happy and I don't think I could stay with the host family. So, this works for me.'

Similarly, Burikova and Miller (2010:37) described how 'some *au pairs* were happy to reciprocate the lack of interest. In such cases, the *au pair* often goes out within a few minutes of the mother returning from work, and the two in effect become shift workers, spending virtually no time together'. In another case though, *au pair* Tanya described how her arduous working conditions became even more difficult when she was asked to overstep the general house space into the area which she defined as belonging to host family's privacy:

Well, the kids really like sleeping with their mum, so they always end up in their mum's bed, but the mum asked me to wake them up. So sometimes I have to go to the bedroom, to the mum's room, yes, the mum is there, and I have to go there and wake up the whole family, so yes, there are some weird things going on.'

Tanya's *au pair* conditions were the most demanding and exploitative in this study, and consequently she left her host family few days after the interview.

Lastly, *au pair* Sona told me her own experience of negotiating the host family's house space, when she said:

The house where we live is a bit on the small side, I do have my own bedroom, but it is this classical *au pair* bedroom where I only have space for my bed and wardrobe with small desk, but on the other side, I don't live with a family that tells me: look you finished your work so now you should go upstairs, I wonder around the house and I found nice spot in the kitchen/diner at the table, this is where I always bring my laptop and where I work and do my things, so I am normally wherever I feel like in the house, I

don't feel like I have to stay in my room as such. We do have only one bathroom, so there is nothing to talk about, but maybe this is better because we are a bit closer as a family.

Space and boundaries as a way of excluding *au pairs* from 'doing family'

Whereas the section above focused on how host parents and *au pairs* navigated the intimate boundaries of familial relationships, this section outlines the perceived importance of the 'space' boundaries. Ten host parents felt it was important to have a house which was 'comfortably big enough' to accommodate the host family as well as the *au pair*. As previously mentioned, the current *au pair* guidelines advocate that host families accommodate the *au pair* in her own room. For example, BAPAA (2013) outlines the following when describing the *au pair* scheme:

Accommodation for an *au pair* should be welcoming and pleasant and part of the home, yet private. It is imperative to allocate a comfortable bedroom to the *au pair*, with a bed, a wardrobe and a small desk and of course a window, a door that can be closed and adequate heating. Most families provide internet access in their home. Optional extras would be to provide sole use of a bathroom and TV, music and computer in the *au pair* bedroom.

BAPAA's emphasis is set on the *au pair's* privacy. Yet the depiction of the *au pairs'* room, in particular the importance of a window is in line with BAPAA's belief that *au pairs* are to be treated as family members and not domestic workers.

Most of the *au pairs* in this study had their bedrooms located furthest away from the bedrooms of the host family. It was normally in the attic, basement, or a garage converted into a 'granny flat'. On one occasion, I conducted an interview with host mother Anna at her home, and after the interview she insisted to showing me the house by giving me a tour. What was interesting, was that I was not shown into the host parents' bedroom, but the tour included the inside of the *au pair's* bedroom, her bathroom and briefly the children's bedrooms. Perhaps Anna wanted to demonstrate to me, as somebody who researches *au pair* families that she treated her *au pair* fairly, equally to her children? However, the *au pair* was not at that point in the house, and she was not asked to give her permission for visiting her bedroom, a gesture which I considered to be a lack of respect for the *au pair's* privacy. In her research on Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan, Lan (2003) described employers and employees as having a 'tacit agreement' in regards to the separate use of house space. For example, the Filipina domestic workers had clearly a demarcated appropriate space, which was normally their bedroom, kitchen, balcony and the children's bedroom. This spatial detachment was also evident in the bedroom allocation to domestic workers, where their rooms '*could be found in the attic or basement in dramatic contrast to the spacious bedrooms in the main part of the house*' (Lan 2003:531). Similarly, in her research on migrant domestic workers in London, Bott (2005) analysed the '*structure of proximity and distance relations in terms of social hierarchy and the notion of 'the other''*'. Even though the main focus of Bott's (2005) article was on the exploration of racial difference as a marker of managing domestic work

relationships, she also linked her analysis to the organisation of contemporary homes in Britain. Within these lines, Bott (2005) argued; *'compared to Victorian model of domesticity, domestic work is now carried out much more in the midst of family life rather than in separate designated areas, and because of this there is a fear that workers' physical presence might steal into social presence, presenting intimacy dilemmas for employers.'* Correspondingly, in light of the current study, the size of the host family's house was perceived by four host parents as almost a condition for deciding to employ an *au pair*. For another three host parents, a big house with 'enough' bedrooms and living space was a necessary element in accommodating and integrating the *au pair* to the realm of the host family, as host mother Diane noted:

I think that is the other reason why we work so well as *au pair* family, because there is PLENTY of space, we can all be doing our own thing or we can do it all together.

Host mother Jenny described how having a live- in *au pair* had impacted on the family's decision when choosing a house:

It isn't an option to be taken lightly because there is somebody else in your house. And when we've moved, we have looked at many many many many houses which would have been okay if we didn't have an *au pair*. But I am very conscious that they (*au pairs*) need their, for me its bathroom but whatever it is, they need a little of space where they can go and just scream if they want to, or whatever it is, you know how host mums is absolute cow or whatever it is. They need to be able to have that opportunity, they need their privacy. So, we've looked at an awful lot of houses that would have been ok for us, for the three of us, but they were not okay for having an *au pair*, which I think for them it makes a difference and I think we are set up for it now.

In this case, Jenny emphasized the need for a private space for the *au pair*, and for the rest of the host family. However, other host parents spoke of the need and importance of having a house that is 'big enough' to accommodate the host family as well as with the *au pair*. Specifically, host parents declared that the size of house is seen as a prerequisite for a happy *au pair* and happy host family, not only in terms of the *au pair's* privacy but also to allow for the host family's independence and undisturbed 'family time' within the house. For example, host father Phillip commented '*I think that you have to have a house that is set up to allow your independence. We are very fortunate that we have a house where we can do that*'. Similarly, host father Richard told me one of the reasons behind hiring an *au pair* compared to other child carers was:

Well, because we have a big house and I knew that we have two lounges and we have got three to four living spaces, so we knew that we would have enough space to spread out, with bathroom and things like that.

Similarly, host mother Joan stated:

I think that the house is set up in a way that, (pause) we are very lucky. So, she has got her own bathroom downstairs and sitting room and it is her own space and we don't interfere and utilize that area that much. In terms of the evening, it is all her area. And she has got her own privacy and we know that.

And host mother Anna replied as follows when I asked her whether she would recommend other families hiring an *au pair*:

Yes. Definitely, I would only say, make sure you have got your own space really, your own bathroom. I think you need big house, I would not recommend it if they have like a little house,

because you know, like with one seating area, I think you would be too much on top of each other and for it to work you would have to get on really well. But yes, I would definitely recommend it to people.

From the examples above, it is clear that the size and/or layout of the house was a relevant factor for these host parents in accommodating the *au pair* into their house. Within the context of boundaries and navigation of intimacy, Marchetti (2004: 16) noted that the household is a location '*where the employer lives and the employee cleans, since the same house represents rest after the workday for one woman, but professional activity for the other. Most of all, this space is crucially constituted by the explicit, almost overwhelming, presence of the intimate life of the employer.*' In works such as Davidoff (1973, 1974) and Jamieson (1990), attention was centred on the domestic service in Victorian Britain. In Davidoff's research (1974) '*the reproductive space of the Victorian middle-class household was shown to be socially and spatially segregated. The domestic workers, referred to as 'servants' were shown to have been confined to certain social spaces, to have been constrained in their use of other spaces*' (quoted in Gregson and Lowe, 1994:54). Similarly in the context of the current research, by positioning *au pair* bedrooms further from the host families' bedrooms warranted host parents to use 'their' space within the house without unnecessary disruption by the *au pairs*. The following quote from host mother Donna is quite revealing in reference to the above literatures:

She (*au pair*) is down there and we are up here it is easy. I think it is because of the way the house is, because she is downstairs and we are upstairs, and if she was on the top floor and

we were in the middle floor and she had to come up and down the stairs that would be more difficult, because she has her own bathroom downstairs and her own bedroom, her own sitting area, she is quite separate. I mean she would come up to make drinks to the kitchen but that is fine.

What is interesting about this statement, is how Donna demarcated the use of space by the host family and the *au pair* in lines with the upstairs/downstairs dichotomy. Such division of space is comparable to the Victorian model described by Davidoff (1974) and Bott (2005), where the *au pair's* bedroom was actually positioned in the basement of the host family home, similarly to many domestic workers in the Victorian *era of Britain*.

Overall, having a house big enough to accommodate the family and an *au pair* all living together, was perceived as vital by host parents. This was not only in terms of personal space but also in terms of dealing with genuine family time versus general family time with the *au pair*. Fifteen out of the nineteen *au pairs* I interviewed had their own bedroom with bathroom and only four *au pairs* were sharing the bathroom with the rest of the host family or children. Most of the host parents revealed that their house was 'big enough' to accommodate the *au pair* and the host family and in this way navigated their boundaries of privacy. However, the special segregation of *au pairs* could be also perceived as a means by which host parents negotiated living with *au pairs* as a form of domestic work and thus wanted to ensure that the criteria of 'part of the family' were abided by. The use of rules regarding access to certain parts of the house were also employed, as host mother Trisha described:

Because I would find it very difficult if they would be on top of me all the time. You know if they would be sharing a bathroom with us and be with us all day long, I would find it very hard. We are very lucky that we have a very big house, so they are on a different floor than us. And we sort of have, we are strict about the hours that they do, and after eight o'clock they should not be with us, to be upstairs or anything like that, we don't have meals together, so we keep this quite separate. They have their separate space and we have as well, they have got a lot of space upstairs, a lot of space.'

In her study of US live-in domestic workers in relation to house space and house boundaries Romero (1992:117) argued: '*While most modern middle class North American homes are not built with 'spatial deference in mind, live-in domestics are expected to render themselves invisible through their spatial practices'*. Romero (1992) went on to say: '*Household workers are often confined to particular parts of the house and are expected to respect employers' privacy, whilst their privacy is denied*' (Romero 1992:117). Whereas two host parents specifically mentioned the 'necessity of their *au pair* to disappear ' into 'her area' (namely bedroom), in order not to disturb the host parents' 'evening quality time', other host parents were also trying to be respectful of their *au pair's* privacy.

Conclusion – Chapter 6

This chapter continued with the theme of how host parents and *au pairs* conceptualised their relationships in terms of the blurred boundaries of 'family membership'. From the analysis above, it is apparent that in terms of this research of families with *au pairs*, the 'happy family ideology' assuming families are harmonious units is more than prevalent but also multileveled (Council of Europe, BAPAA, host parents). This is in line with the argument presented by Cox and Narula (2003:334) that '*au pairs are constructed as family members, not workers, by official discourses and their role as one of the most important groups of domestic workers in Britain is hidden*'.

The reconstruction of family and family time occurred as a result of adopting the *au pair* as a member of the host family, and as such was hiding the real aspect of the *au pair* programme, which is of childcare and domestic work. The negotiations of family time, Sunday lunch, privacy at home and couple time all highlight how host parents attempt to address the blurred boundaries of *au pair* work. As such, the '*au pair* family' could be broken down into several layers, each with different amounts of intimacy attached. Even though some host parents said that they invited *au pairs* to family gatherings and cultural events, this was not necessarily meant as family inclusion, but rather as fulfilling the 'cultural exchange' criteria of *au pair* guidelines. The concept of 'family time' was presented as an example of how host parents negotiated their new status of '*au pair* family'. This was apparent in the separation of 'general family time', to

which the *au pair* was invited, and the 'genuine family time', which the *au pair* was not invited to be part of. Whereas some host parents constructed clear boundaries of how they viewed their position in relation to the *au pair*, others revealed the difficulty of negotiating the 'family member'/domestic worker' boundary. Similarly, in relation to the use of house space, host parents clearly described how the house size mattered to them. In these examples, having 'plenty of space' and a house which was 'big enough' was necessary in order to provide host parents and *au pairs* their space for privacy. However, it also became apparent that some host parents adopted the 'domestic work' model comparable to Victorian era. In this regard, such data points to Bikova's (2008:60) argument that; *'the fact that au pairs are spatially segregated from the rest of the family only emphasizes their status as NOT family members'*.

One of the research questions presented in this study was to assess to what degree we can we describe these *au pair* families as entities which are based on a concept of 'individualisation' compared to 'traditional' norms? Is the notion of family losing its meaning (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) and that is why host parents created two sets of family time, or was it because it is so precious, that 'real and genuine family time' had to be protected? One of the proposals of how to study contemporary family life was suggested by Morgan (1996). As mentioned in the Literature review chapter, for Morgan, families are fluid entities that are constantly renegotiating and redefining their boundaries.

According to the data presented in this chapter, most host parents actively re-constructed their 'family time' as a means of incorporating the

au pair into the core of the family. In this way, *au pair* families appear to be fluid and adaptable. However, the notion of 'family practices' and 'family display' has to be applied carefully in the context of these *au pair* families, as some family practices were performed as activities occurring in isolation, away from the daily routine of *au pair* work. Dermott and Seymour (2011:10) suggested that 'the idea of *'displaying family'* is a tool which operationalises a fruitful middle way, a socially interactive and dynamic understanding of family life which also acknowledges the ongoing significance of structural contexts'.

For example, Sunday lunch was described by host parents and *au pairs* as an activity they 'practised' together as a family. This 'general family time' however, was contradicted on other occasions, where host parents would exclude *au pairs*. What is more, the re-construction of family time, was also affected by how host parents viewed the *au pair* scheme. For example, some host parents had clearly set out their family time by introducing house rules, and as such resonated more with the domestic work model. Other host parents acknowledged the 'cultural exchange' premise of the *au pair* scheme and made an effort to invite *au pairs* to national celebrations and events. In this way, 'family displaying is linked to power in that it involves making family claims that are more or less readily recognised and validated according to how relationships approximate the interlinked cultural ideals of 'normal', 'proper' and 'good' families' (Heaphy, 2011:21). What is more, according to past studies on domestic work, and as highlighted by the presented data, the use of familial language comparing *au pairs* to 'daughters' for example, was yet another way of creating hierarchical relationships.

As I have exemplified from the interview dialogues, families with *au pairs* attempt to adapt their boundaries, using for example the concept of family time. This is in line with theoretical studies of both modern fluidity (Bauman 1992) and modern heterogeneous families as described by Morgan (1996), in which families adapt, change and redefine their identities. However, host families' flexibility is not unlimited and indeed families who host an *au pair* do draw boundaries as to how far they are willing to adjust their relationships in order to accommodate the *au pair*.

CHAPTER 7

Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this chapter is to conclude and discuss the main findings of this research. Firstly, the main reasons for studying '*au pair* families' will be restated. I will then draw conclusions within the context of theories related to family and migrant domestic work. The chapter then addressed this study's limitations as well as scope for further research.

Why *au pair* families?

According to the theoretical overview in Chapter 2, past research on *au pairs* has been carried out from the migrant domestic work perspective only, whereas family scholarship has not addressed (to my knowledge) this type of family structure. I have suggested that by integrating family scholarship with perspectives of migrant domestic work, namely by viewing employers as host parents who negotiate their status of fictive kin, friend or employer, it creates a more comprehensive picture of *au pair* families. Bernardes (1997) argued that the investigation into various family structures, such as unconventional families or multicultural families, revealed that family living is relatively adaptable. The main aim of this research was to examine how these '*au*

pair families' adapt and respond to the change of incorporating its new 'member' – the *au pair* – into its core. This was investigated in relation to hiring practices, relationships and the management of space.

The role of women and their relationships with domestic workers has been often presented in the academic literature on migrant domestic work (MacDonald, 2010). However, my research also addressed the position of men in *au pair* families. Often overlooked by mainstream research on domestic work, the role of host fathers was analysed in relation to 'de-traditionalisation of fatherhood' (Doucet 2007, Miller 2010) and the traditional 'breadwinner role'. I suggested that more research should include father's perceptions in order to understand better their experiences and perhaps the factors that influence their (lack of) involvement in care-work. In this way, I have demonstrated that gaining perceptions from multiple members, in this case of *au pairs*, host mothers as well as host fathers, created a more grounded account of adaptable family life with *au pairs*.

In order to sociologically explore the *au pair* families' dynamics of gender, space and family time, the concept of 'family practices' was particularly significant in the analysis. By adopting the concept of 'family practices' (Morgan 1996) this research of *au pair* families allowed for increased as well as more realistic understanding of contemporary families. Through their self-narratives, *au pair* families 'practiced' themselves as culturally idealised form of the family, portraying happiness and togetherness through images such as weekend family time and Sunday lunch. But *au pair* families also 'practiced' (in

some cases) deliberate exclusion of *au pairs* from 'general family time', imposing strict rules over privacy and space boundaries that resulted in *au pair's* exploitation. Gender roles associated with traditional families were also practices that contributed to how relationships were shaped.

In summary, this thesis directed attention to the study of *au pair* families from two different, yet complementary perspectives, addressing not only the domestic work elements of this scheme, but providing an angle from the field of family scholarship thus leading to a more integrative understanding of *au pair* families

***Au pair* families: representing individualisation of family life?**

Without a doubt, remarkable social changes have occurred over the last decades. For example, there are rapid advancements in technology, changes in law and increasing number of women able to access higher education and employment. One means of studying social change is through the lens of families, and family scholars have been interpreting these effects in this regard. As noted earlier, there is a general agreement over the diversification of families, yet contemporary scholarship on family studies offers different explanations in how this diversity impacts on family life. As previously mentioned in the first two chapters, individualisation has been one of the most debated theories within family scholarship. Drawing on recent social changes, the individualisation thesis proposes that people today are less affected by traditions and obligations as previously as they are more deliberate in

search of their own personal biographies, which –in turn– leads to democratisation of family life (Beck 1992, Giddens 1992). In particular, individualisation suggests that previous structural constraints such as class and gender are loosening as individuals are increasingly freed from these norms.

Based on the data I have collected and the theoretical readings underpinning my research, I posit that in spite of the generic changes in the structure of families since last century, my participants are not entirely free agents and indeed are embedded within the larger societal structures (such as class, gender, ethnicity); they are not entirely able to choose their own path and according only to their own wishes and desires independently of societal structures. To the contrary, as demonstrated in the interview data analysed throughout the thesis, individuals are still to a large degree guided by their perception of what they believe to be a 'proper family', 'proper wife', 'proper host daughter', a 'proper husband' or a 'proper *au pair*'.

In Chapter 4 I have examined the *au pair* recruitment process and how it relates to the wider concepts of social class position. I showed that the means by which host parents commodified their vision of an ideal *au pair* candidate was influenced by their socioeconomic middle class position. The way host parents wanted to ensure that their children are being cared for by an *au pair* who is from a particular family setting, with a specific educational background, and having well defined skills, can be conceptualised as 'understanding class as a dynamic process' in which class values are something that are to be continually strived for (Savage,

2000). The social class position of these families allowed host parents to display their middle class habitus in the way they applied specific criteria in their search for their future *au pairs*. Although some may argue that class is no longer a relevant category (Beck 1992; Giddens 1990) my data would suggest otherwise.

Moreover, the host mothers and host fathers in this study conflicted with the image of individualisation, as their responsibilities seemed not only different, but were also affected by larger norms of what women and men are supposed to 'do' within families. For example, host mothers commented on the fact that employing an *au pair* offered them some relief from the burden of housework and childcare (both physically and emotionally), especially after a full day at work. Host fathers were not expected to carry out housework and childcare tasks, and yet their (sometimes almost complete) absence from this type of work was at times rationalised by host mothers' as 'doing his best'. In terms of relating to *au pairs*, host fathers themselves described their role as 'trying to stay detached', 'not being involved' and 'acting as a second option' when it came to *au pair* management. I argued that this finding of how host fathers constructed their distance indicates a contradiction with the literature on contemporary fatherhood implying 'greater emotional involvement and intimacy' and 'de-traditionalisation of fatherhood' (Miller 2011) and was more in line with the body of literature highlighting 'traditional breadwinnerism' (March and Arber 1992).

From family studies point of view, this research suggests that by hiring and living with a migrant domestic worker, families can become

adaptable in their day to day living, negotiating daily routines and developing new sense of 'family time'. At the same time, this research highlights the need to study families alongside indexes of class and gender, borrowing from Morgan's (1996) suggestion where family practices become gender or class practices, as they are significant markers of personal identity. What also became evident was that despite certain flexibility in negotiating '*au pair* family', host parents' views of 'traditional family and traditional family values were loaded with perfect, nuclear, stable and morally grounded family images. Such idealisation suggests that even in a contemporary world full of flux, uncertainty and risk (Beck 1992) the traditional (nuclear) family is still strong in people's imaginations.

Migrant domestic work literature and *au pair* families

This study has drawn on migrant domestic work literature revealing that even prior to *au pairs*' arrival; there are global structures and processes influencing the *au pair* scheme. In particular, this body of literature highlighted that it is crucial to understand the larger forces that impact on the supply and demand of *au pairs* (as a category of migrant domestic workforce). Here *au pairs* are viewed as part of globalized care-work system, where (predominantly) women from poorer countries migrate to more affluent ones in order to sustain their families back at home (Anderson 2001, Parrenas 2003). Also referred to as 'care chains' (Parrenas 2003), past research has indicated that migrant domestic workers are often highly vulnerable to abuse and unfair working

conditions due to their 'invisible' labour carried out in families' homes, together with the fact that their work is obscured from official legislations (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003). Whilst this macro perspective of *au pair* demand is important to address, I was also interested in how demand is played out at the level of families themselves. In this way, investigating the perspectives of both the host parents and the *au pairs* adds to the body of migrant domestic work literature by increasing the understanding of how choices to either become or hire an *au pair* are carried out at an individual level.

The main reason for employing *au pairs* was to get help with housework and childcare, in other words, to free host parents from these daily activities in order to spend more 'quality time' together as a family. Set within a context where living and working in contemporary Britain involves increasingly longer working hours for both genders, these families could therefore 'afford' to buy some more free time to spend together as a family or as a couple. Host parents extensively commented that one of the main reasons they considered hiring an *au pair* was because they could then spend more time with each other, and be freed from some of the routine domestic responsibilities such as washing up, ironing, or picking up their children from school. With both host parents overworked and having to cope with the demands of growing children, (happy) family time had become something scarce and the flexibility of *au pair* scheme allowed host parents to purchase it. This is in line with research conducted by Cox (2006:85) where middle class families '*are able to afford the support that many mothers of young children crave.*

For these families, it is possible to give their children all the attention they may need and still have time for leisure.'

In the case of the *au pair* scheme in the UK, scholars have highlighted the factors shaping the recent increase in the demand for migrant domestic workers. In particular, causes such as changing family forms, increased numbers of women entering employment outside of the home together with ageing populations and reduced social provisions all impact on this increase in demand (Anderson 2001). Whilst some of the migrant domestic work research focused on the outflow of women from poor countries resulting in 'reproductive crises' and 'brain drain' (Williams 2012), other scholars centred attention on the receiving countries, where employers look for the most financially sound solution within the existing domestic work services (Cox 2011). My findings support the above studies, for example participant host parents drew on the increasing availability of *au pairs* as a cheap and flexible solution in addressing their childcare needs. Furthermore, my findings in relation to national and ethnic stereotyping of *au pairs* is consistent with past research carried out by Anderson (2011), where migrant domestic workers' nationalities and racial background became commodified notions. Participant host parents drew on stereotypes in their search for *au pairs*, where certain nationalities were believed to be more suitable for *au pair* work than others. For instance, one of the host parents explicitly preferred German *au pairs* based on the stereotype of order, while another host mother perceived Mediterranean *au pairs* as potentially too laid back.

Similarly to past research conducted on migrant domestic workers (Parranas 2003, Zontini 2011) I have argued that the current set up of the *au pair* scheme in the UK is not sufficiently thorough to be able to monitor that cultural exchange guidelines are met. Together with the fact that most *au pairs* coming to the UK originate from EU states, and as such do not require any visa, nor do all *au pairs* arrive by means of an agency, there are missing statistics on the *au pair* population (Burikova and Miller 2010). As such, it is not possible to correctly identify the number of *au pairs* in the UK, their nationalities or even their ages. Moreover, I have demonstrated that due to the informal set up of the *au pair* scheme, particularly the hidden family-like aspect that is deeply embedded within *au pair* institutions, it suggests that each host family and *au pair* are left to their own interpretation of these guidelines. According to the findings, this informal set up was one of the main factors leading to *au pairs'* exploitation. In particular, the notion of *au pairs* being like a family member more often resulted in ambiguous working hours where *au pairs* were asked to 'help out' beyond their normal duty because they were 'part of the family'.

The discourse of familialism is well established within the *au pair* employment, as suggested in Chapter 6. The implication of this is that *au pairs* are put in highly vulnerable position, as their already low salary is being further lowered by work they are supposed to carry out 'as a member of the family'. However, the findings in this thesis also revealed that some *au pairs* relied on the familial setting of their work as a source of comfort and support. Other *au pairs* described fondly the times they spent with host family watching TV, dining, or attending host families'

birthday celebrations. One of the aims of this study was to illuminate the diversity of domestic work experiences (*au pairs* in this case). Whereas the approach of family studies helped to better understand how families negotiated relationships, space and family time the migrant domestic work literature allowed for further investigation into the lives of *au pairs*, their experiences and how they are shaped by the demand for this kind of work. Whereas some *au pairs* described exploitative conditions, others talked positively about their experience. For example, *au pair* Tanya had to take care of two small children for extensive period of time, including weekends and was treated unfairly by her host mother, *au pair* Anna was enjoying her *au pair* work and felt content with her hosts. Also, whilst some *au pairs* preferred to go out and to spend their free time with other *au pairs*, others enjoyed spending weekends with their host family, going shopping and watching TV. Similarly to Lutz (2011) I argue that *au pairs* can be both a 'victim' or an 'agent of change' as 'both aspects are part of the same phenomenon and both must appear in the presentation and analysis and be considered in conjunction because they represent two sides of one and the same coin' (185:2011).

Limitations and potential for further scope

Without a doubt, additional exploration including the viewpoints of other family members (such as children and grandparents), would further increase the understanding of *au pair* families. This thesis is based on sample that is largely homogenous, as host families that were recruited

were heterosexual and white. For these host families, hiring an *au pair* was considered a decision based on best economic value, and what was perceived as the best option in terms of childcare arrangement at that time. 'People's perceptions of childcare are varied, and influenced by social class, thus the middle class sample of host parents could be presented as both limitation and as strength in this research. What is more, only one host was a single father, and research including other family forms such as single parent, same sex and different ethnic and racial families would undoubtedly increase the understanding of these families.

Additionally, further concepts that would add to the study of *au pair* families, but were beyond the scope of this thesis are differentiation between the household and family and the concept of 'family display'. Within the family and household boundary, feminist approaches to household analysis recognised that resources and decision making are organized according to reproductive and productive tasks. Because these tasks are highly gendered, the household decisions are thus affected by the gender roles and the power relations embedded within them (Chant and Radcliffe 1992:21-24). Moreover, Marsh and Arber (1992:5) noted that separating the definition of household and family would allow for deeper analysis of any changes occurring in each notion, and Chant (1997) recommended to use the concept of household when analysing the functions of families at only one particular point in time. In regards of the second suggestion, Finch (2007) suggested analysing family relationships in terms of their 'display'. Drawing on Morgan's 'family practices', Finch also perceives families to be 'sets of activities which take

on a particular meaning associated with family at a given point in time' (2007:66).

In order to address the unequal distribution of childcare and housework, these *au pair* families hired an *au pair*. In this way, they 'got away' from the conflicting situation of negotiating unequal gender responsibilities. However, it were still other women, i.e. *au pairs*, who were deemed responsible for these tasks, and what is more, the gendered aspect of this work created hierarchical positions between the employers and employees, as it was host mothers who were in charge over the management of *au pairs*. Hence, how can we demolish the traditional gendered division of work, which is so deeply entrenched in the society? As it became evident throughout the findings presented in data chapters, the notion of traditional family is highly valued in contemporary British society, both culturally and politically. As such, further research should be carried out in order to better understand this gendered order in which it is the mother that is perceived as the best suitable option for childcare. Anderson and Shutes (2014:214) have fittingly highlighted that 'reproductive work is concerned with the social and cultural reproduction of human beings, the actual doing of the work, who does it when and where is a crucial part of the meaning'. Gender inequalities are clearly evident in the organisation of *au pair* families, but also in contemporary British society at large evidenced, for example, in the lack of appropriate state provided childcare, maternity leave, and a society where women still earn less for the same job compared with men. Even though the majority of host mothers were employed full time (suggesting democratization of families on broader level according to

Beck 1992), they were still expected to carry out the 'second shift' at home. This confirms sociological literature examining the concept of housework which highlighted its invisibility and low value (Oakley 1974, Hochschild 1989) as well as the reality that this work is performed predominantly by women, even in cases where both couples are in full time employment.

'We all have two families, one that we live with and another we live by. We would like the two to be the same, but they are not. Too often the families we live with exhibit the kind of self-interested, competitive, divisive behaviour and are often fragmented and impermanent, much less reliable than the imagined families we live by. Constituted through myth, ritual, and image, families we live by must be forever nurturing and protective, and we will go to any lengths to ensure that they are so, even if it means mystifying the realities of family life.)(Gillis, 1996:xy)

As indicated throughout the thesis, families are socially constructed concepts and there are differing theories describing their changing character in contemporary society. Whereas some argue for their continuous influence on peoples' lives, others suggest families are less relevant in today's highly individualised world. This thesis intends to contribute to the theories on family and migrant domestic work studies. The debate around migrant domestic workers is still narrow and only now begins to open up its spectrum in including research on different aspects of domestic work experiences and to include employers as a key area of study. In this way, this thesis contributes to this body of knowledge by dwelling deeper into the complexities of host families as employers. Taken as a whole, the understanding of these families does not only has

an academic remit but also aims at broadening the general understanding of the meaning of family in contemporary society.

According to Cheal (2002:2) *'family living for the twenty first century must be open to many possibilities, which in turn means asking some very basic questions about how family life works'*. The concepts of family, family values, family time and other closely associated concepts (such as the value of marriage) are highly topical in contemporary Britain and their applications and use are vastly loaded with presumptions and stereotypical beliefs. Although this research is limited by its relatively small scale size, it nevertheless offers valuable findings. In terms of theoretical studies of contemporary family life in Britain, this dissertation supports claims that ideologically, the family is perceived as a powerful arrangement within people's lives offering moral support and stability, but at the same time it is presented as a site where inequalities based on gender, age or class are profoundly played out. In this way, I have contributed to family studies debates by demonstrating how the traditional nuclear family continues to be idealised and adhered to in contemporary British society. I agree with Gillis (1996:239), who critiques the singular idol of family life as it *'obscures the diversity of family forms and inflicts real pain on those who do not conform to a single, narrowly defined notion of family'*, adding *'it is time to abandon one and for all the idol of 'The Family' and time to recognise the richness of our contemporary family cultures'*.

Afterword

My personal journey changed considerably during the process of researching and writing this thesis. I started out thinking about this topic, researching literature, compiling interviews and writing this thesis as an *ex au pair*, who had worked for a British host family for two years. At the end of this journey I became a mother who, in order to finish writing up the thesis with a six-month old baby, employed a temporary nanny.

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Appendix 1 – Interview plan for *au pairs*

- Why did you decide to become an *au pair*? (opening question)
- How did you find your host family? (strategy used for finding family)
- Expectations before you started
- Describe the first week of living with the host family
- Describe normal working day – housework/childcare
- Relationships back home, how do you stay in touch?
- How do you spend your free time?
- Free time spent with the host family. What do you normally do?
- Relationships with host parents. (Are there any differences between host mother and host father?)
- If you were to explain to somebody (your friend) about what it is to be an *au pair*, what would you say?
- Do you feel like you became part of the host family? (In what way if no, in what way if yes?)
- Reflect on the whole experience.

Appendix 2 – Interview plan for host parents

- Why did you decide to hire an *au pair*?
- How did you find your *au pair*? (*au pair* strategy)
- Could you describe the beginning of living with an *au pair*?
- How would you describe the relationship you have/had with the *au pair*? (How did it change)
- What do you like most/least about having an *au pair*?
- What does the *au pair* do?
- In terms of household division, ironing, cleaning etc, what changed once hiring an *au pair*?
- Do you feel the *au pair* became part of your family? How?
- Does the *au pair* spent any time with the family as a whole? If yes, what do you normally do?
- How do you think your role as a mother/father changed after hiring an *au pair*?
- If you were to explain to a friend who has no experience about the *au pair* programme, what would you say? How would you explain the experience has been for you?
- Would you recommend your child when he/she get older to work as an *au pair*?
- Would you recommend another family having an *au pair*?
- Reflection on the whole experience

Appendix 3 - example of facebook message to potential *au pair* participants

- Hello XXX,

How are you? My name is Lenka and I used to work as an *au pair* 10 years ago in Bristol. I found your contact from facebook on the *Au pair* group in Nottingham.

I am now studying and I am meeting with *au pairs* and host families in East Midlands as a part of my research project. I already met with few *au pairs*, but I am still looking to speak with more people. I would love to hear your experience as an *au pair*.

I live in Nottingham (Wollaton Park) and can meet up anytime during the day.

Thank you very much in advance!

take care, Lenka

Appendix 4– Invitation letter for participant

ARE YOU A FAMILY WITH AN *AU PAIR*? IF YES, WOULD YOU LIKE TO TAKE PART IN MY STUDY?

Dear family,

My name is Lenka and I am currently studying towards a PhD in Sociology at the University of Nottingham. My research project explores the impact of hiring the *au pair* on the family dynamics.

I am looking for families who have a live-in au-pair and who would be willing to participate in this study. The study involves interviews (from adults only) and it is voluntary, confidential and anonymous. I have the permission from my department to carry out this research and I have obtained the necessary ethical approval (ethical approval copies and consent forms will be given to participants prior to the study). Although the study does not include children, I do have a current CRB check. The specific details of the project, such as the arrangement of times will be all negotiated with the family and I am very happy to meet out of office hours and weekends if necessary. The interview takes as much or as little time as participants wish, and can be conducted anytime from now until November 2011.

This is a unique opportunity to share and explore your views and experiences. Your valuable insights will contribute to the overall academic knowledge, especially in the area of family studies.

I originally come from the Czech Republic, I am 30 years old and I have worked as an au-pair myself nine years ago in Bristol. Since I decided to come and stay in the UK, I have become personally very interested in sociology, especially in family studies, gender studies and migration.

I would be extremely grateful if you could consider taking part in my study and I am more than happy to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you very much in advance,

Lenka

Appendix 5 – Participant information sheet

Family number/Name	Role	Age	Nationality	Interview type	Child/ren
1 - Karima	<i>Au pair</i>	18	German	Two meetings, one individual interview	One child aged 10
1 - Craig	Host father (IT development)	42	British	One joint interview with Andrea	
1 - Andrea	Host mother (HR director)	44	British	One joint interview with Craig	
2 - Anna	<i>Au pair</i>	23	Hungarian	One individual interview	Two children, aged 6 and 8
2 - Sharon	Host mother (owns small business, works part time)	43	British	One individual and one individual follow up interview	
2 - Nathan	Host father (own company)	43	British	One individual and one individual follow up interview	
3 - Cathy	<i>Au pair</i>	18	Germany	One individual interview	Three children aged 2,4,6
3 - Adele	Host mother (Stay at home)	44	British	One individual interview	
3 - Walter	Host father (business director)	46	British	One individual interview	
4 - Beatrice	<i>Au pair</i>	19	Austrian	One individual interview	Three children aged 10,12,15
4 - Jackie	Host mother (HR team leader)	45	British	One individual interview	
4 - Gordon	Host father (company director)	47	British	One individual interview	

5 – Katy	<i>Au pair</i>	18	Austrian	One individual interview	Two children aged 2,4
6 – Stephany	Host mother (General Practitioner part time)	38	Austrian	One joint interview with Richard	
6 – Richard	Host father (IT consultant)	44	British	One joint interview with Stephany	
7 – Judy	<i>Au pair</i>	19	German	Two meetings, One individual interview	Two children aged 7, 10
7 – Diane	Host mother (company manager)	45	British	Two joint interviews with Jim	
7 – Jim	Host Father (IT developer)	42	British	Two joint interviews with Diane	
8 – Yuri	<i>Au pair</i>	21	Swedish	Three meetings, one individual interview	Two children aged 5,7
8 – Adriane	Host mother (university lecturer)	36	Rumanian	One individual and one follow up interview	
8 – Theodor	Host father (architect)	39	British	One individual interview	
9 – Natasha	<i>Au pair</i>	20	German	Three meetings, one individual interview	Two children aged 10, 13
9 – Alice	Host mother (primary school teacher)	41	British	One individual interview	
10 – Isabelle	<i>Au pair</i>	18	German	One individual interview	Three children aged 2, 5, 7

10 – Penelope	Host mother (stay at home)	40	Spanish	Three individual interviews	
11 – Monica	<i>Au pair</i>	24	Czech	Two meetings, one interview	Two children aged 14,17
11 – Samir	Host father (divorced, General Practitioner)	43	British (Indian origin)	One individual interview	
12 – Michael	<i>Au pair</i>	24	Slovak	One individual interview	One child aged 12
13 – Samantha	<i>Au pair</i>	24	Italian	One individual interview	One child aged 12
14 – Amy	<i>Au pair</i>	19	German	One individual interview	Two children aged 7, 10
15 – Penny	<i>Au pair</i>	22	Spanish	One individual interview	One child aged 5
16 – Olivia	<i>Au pair</i>	25	Hungarian	One individual interview	Two children aged 4,6
17 – Della	<i>Au pair</i>	18	Polish	One individual interview	Three children aged 7,9,11
18 – Mary	<i>Au pair</i>	18	Hungarian	One individual interview	Two children aged 3,5
19 – Darina	<i>Au pair</i>	23	Slovak	One individual interview	Two children aged 10, 12

Appendix 6 – Example of *au pair* agency registration form for host families

East Midlands Nannies and *Au pairs* agency

East Midlands Nannies and *Au pairs* Registration Form - Parents

Family Name: *

Address 1:

Address 2:

Town:

County:

Postcode:

Family Members

Mother	Name	Occupation
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Father	Name	Occupation
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Children	Childs Name	Age	Sex
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Contact details

Home Telephone *

Home Fax

E mail address

Work Telephone	Mother's	Father's
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Mobile telephone	Mother's	Father's
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Family Information

Parents' Ages between

- ☐ 20-30 years
☐ 30-40 years
☐ 40-50 years
☐ 50-60 years

Nationality

Language spoken by family

Religion

Interests

Do You Have any Pets ?

Accommodation

Location of house
(city/town/village)

Accommodation

- ☐ Detached House
☐ Semi-detached House
☐ Flat
☐ Other - if other please give details below

Number of

Bedrooms

Bathrooms

Reception
rooms

Nearest town distance

Nearest Language School

Au-Pair Facilities

Will *Au pair* have

Own bedroom

Own Bathroom

Own TV

Other

Access to the internet
(yes/no)

Employment details

Length of employment
required

☐ 3 months

☐ 6 months

☐ 1 year

☐ 1-2 years

Starting date

Do you require

☐ Au-Pair (25 Hours per week/£70)

☐ Au-Pair Plus (35 hours per
week/£95)

Additional details

Do you require a driver?

☐ yes

☐ no

Is a car provided?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If you are thinking about having a driver, please be aware that insurance can be very expensive. We cannot guarantee the standard of any of our candidate's driving and we strongly recommend that you arrange a few lessons from a qualified driving instructor who can assess their capability before allowing them to drive your car.

Is smoking permitted inside the house?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Can the Au-Pair smoke outside?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Have you had an Au-Pair before?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Would you accept male/female?

Would you accept a vegetarian?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you require a swimmer?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Au-Pair Duties

Describe the duties required

What days will the *Au pair* have off?

How often will babysitting be required?

Will you collect the *Au pair* on his/her arrival or pay for alternative transport?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Please supply any further information that you consider necessary for us to find you the right Au-Pair:

How did you hear about East Midlands Nannies and *au pairs*?

☐ recommended ☐ BAPAA ☐ Search Engine ☐ Other

☐ I have read and agree with East Midlands Nannies and *au pairs* terms and conditions *

Appendix 7 – Example of agency registration form for *au pairs*

Au pair Registration Form:

QUESTIONS FOR AU-PAIRS APPLYING TO COME TO THE UK

Name: *	<input type="text"/>
Address 1:	<input type="text"/>
Address 2:	<input type="text"/>
Address 3:	<input type="text"/>
Town:	<input type="text"/>
Country:	<input type="text"/>
Telephone Numbers	Home * <input type="text"/>
	Mobile <input type="text"/>
E-Mail	<input type="text"/>
Personal details	
Date of birth	<input type="text"/>
Male/Female?	<input type="text"/>
Are you single?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
Nationality	<input type="text"/>
Place of Birth	<input type="text"/>
Driving	
Driving licence?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
How long have you held your licence?	<input type="text"/>
How often do you drive?	<input type="radio"/> Daily <input type="radio"/> Weekly <input type="radio"/> Monthly
When can you arrive?	
Arrival date	<input type="text"/>
How long do you intend to stay in the UK?	<input type="radio"/> 3 months <input type="radio"/> 6 months

- ☐ 1 year
- ☐ 1-2 years

How good is your English?

- ☐ 1- Poor
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 - fluent

Education

What did you study
at school?

What did you study
at University?

Please give details
of your
current/previous
job

Family

Fathers profession

Mothers profession

Do you have any
brothers/sisters?

What are their ages?

Do you have boyfriend/girlfriend?

☐

Yes

☐

No

Health

Do you suffer from any medical conditions?

Do you have any allergies?

Is there anything you cannot do?

Do you have personal health insurance?

Diet

Do you have a special diet?

Are you a vegetarian?

If so are you happy in a meat eating family?

Will you be happy to cook fish or meat for the children?

Smoking

Do you smoke?

☐

Yes

☐

No

Please be honest – families who specify a non smoker are entitled to terminate your stay with them if they find you do smoke.

Tattoos

Do you have any tattoos?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Body piercing?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Are they visible?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Sports

Can you swim?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Do you have any first aid certificates?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Other sports

Experience with children

Have you had experience with newborn babies?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please specify what age group you are familiar with

☐

2-4 years

☐

5-7 years

☐

6-13 years

☐

other - please specify below

Can you change a nappy?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Have you looked after children before?

☐ Yes

☐ No

What were your duties?

Were you ever in charge of the children alone?

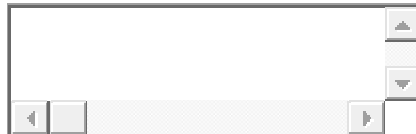
☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you have any experience with children with special needs?



Location

Are you happy in a city, town or village?



Cooking

How good is your cooking?

☐ Poor ☐ Average ☐ Good

Housework

Are you a tidy person?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you do ironing?

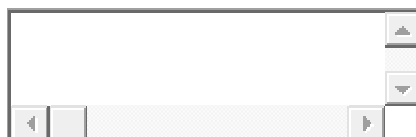
☐ Yes ☐ No

Animals

Do you like animals?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you allergic to any animals?



Your Interests

What would you do on your days off?

(Go to the park, read a book, shop, walk? Please go into detail.)



Do you play a musical instrument?

Do you sing?

☐

Yes

☐

No

Your character

Describe yourself. Are you quiet, do you like to laugh, are you outgoing, do you mind being criticised?

All our families are used to having some privacy. Are you good at allowing people their own personal space?

☐

Yes

☐

No

Have you ever looked after yourself i.e. lived alone?

☐

Yes

☐

No

Your religion

Do you need to go to church? How often?

Your long term plans

What are your long term plans?

Would you like to stay in the UK?

Hobbies and interests

Please state any hobbies or interests that will help us to find you a suitable family.

How did you hear about Nottinghamshire Nannies and *au pairs* ?

- ☐ recommendation ☐ BAPAA
☐ other

I declare that all the details given by me on this application form are correct.

Name *

Date *

Please send a recent photograph, two references and a letter to the family.