Conclusion

As the judgement on the Earl of Macclesfield's bill to dissolve his marriage to Anne was read out in the House of Lords in 1698, it was not just the couple's friends, family members and servants that would have been waiting with baited breath for the result. The case and Anne's actions threatened to unpick the glue that upheld godly and elite society together: female procreative labour, and the push and pull between discretion and display. Even though the fact that the pair had been separated for ten years, the Earl and many of the peers who voted for the divorce bill including archbishops, bishops, marquises, earls, viscounts and barons thought that Anne still had a responsibility to appear to fulfil the role of a good wife and mother. This was despite the fact that servants had told the court repeatedly how the earl had often refused to speak to his wife when they did live together and had also refused to visit her chamber, let alone sleep next to her. Servants were frequently asked in the case to attest to whether the earl and his wife had behaved in ways that were honourable and fulfilled what were the perceived inviolable duties of spouses. This, however, was highly gendered. Servants were asked to comment on whether the earl had provided for his wife appropriately or whether he had spoken to his wife in ways that, as one long-time servant of the family, William Buckingham, commented, showed 'Respect' and him to be 'a Man of Quality'. Buckingham also told the court that he and all the fellow 'ffamily'(household including servants) had been ordered to 'shew her all the respect in the World and so We did'.[1] Another household servant, Mary Wethersby, told the court that Anne had lived in the Macclesfield's family estate 'in my Opinion as if she had bin the first subject of England, she had all things she Desired & never ask'd for anything but she had it'.[2] As one of several printed accounts of the case relayed, it was wholly unacceptable to many that because of 'his Wife's Fault he [Charles] should be deprived of the common Privilege of every Freeman in the World, to have an Heir of his own Body to inherit was he

[1] 'Earl of Macclesfield Divorce Act', 18 February 1697, Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/JO/10/1/496/1197, fol. 88.
[2] *Ibid*., 18 February 1697, fol. 84.

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possesses either of Honour or Estate: Or that his only Brother should lose his Claim to both, and have his Birthright sacrific'd to the Lady Maclesfeld's Loose Life'. Not only would it be 'a most unreasonable hardship upon the Earl' but 'the greatest Wrong'.[3]

The case writ large the greatest fears that many middling and elite families had about generation: that as much as it was central to the perpetuation of the Church and the family, it also could bring profound and troubling domestic disorder. Having babies, this book finds, in a prescribed way, was fundamental not only to male status but the entire social apparatus of honour and estate in the period, across society at different levels but especially for the aristocracy and burgeoning middling sort. Anne's 'Loose Life' decimated not just her soon-to-be ex-husband's reputation but it reverberated right through the whole family and elite society more broadly. Anne's crime was not solely taking a lover, or even getting pregnant with his child, but behaving in a way that made this obvious to London society. A big part of this was keeping her pregnancy secret from her family, delivering the child in a way that excluded her and her husband's family, arranging the material aspects of her birth without recourse to her husband, and perhaps worst of all, naming her children after herself and her lover. These actions violated the idealised expectations of the household, godly maternity and the ways in which women ought to, as one seventeenth-century correspondent called it 'Multiplying in the World', or in a way that displayed and confirmed the family's ascendancy.[4] Anne's behaviour must have been a stark reminder to elite families of the ways that women's bodies could threaten their grasp on respectability with very little recourse to remedy. The successful dissolution of the marriage must have been a deeply comforting outcome for many.

But whilst Anne might have represented some kind of anti-mother in gossipy print of the period, we have heard in this book how easy it was for most women to transgress the restrictive model of godly and careful childbearing furthered in medical and religious prescriptive texts of the period. Ideally, early modern women would get pregnant easily and quickly; be constantly attentive to their bodies and minds; keep assiduous records; struggle through the discomfort and pain of pregnancy and birth with forbearance; accurately pinpoint when they would deliver; allow their husbands to coordinate the collection of things for birth but only items that were strictly necessary; travel a substantial distance to give birth in their or their husband's family's home; deliver a large, lusty (preferably male) baby painfully but without complication; and rest for a month and then wholly return to their normal lives and selves, including swiftly getting pregnant again. These normative perspectives

[3] *The Earl of Maclesield's Case* (London: 1697–1698), 4.
[4] Earl of Northampton to earl of Dorset, 12 January 1656, KHLC, U269/C86/3.

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are also keen to point out that during this time babies had to be carefully watched, held, rocked, rubbed, bathed, changed and suckled, although one does not always have a sense from these texts who completed these tasks. Some of this work was meant to be done publicly with the regular intrusion of family members in this decision-making, and these labours were writ large in family paperwork, whilst other bits were deemed more favourable to be performed discreetly and without fuss.

Examining family archives as a whole has revealed many moments of tension in which the practice of making babies failed to live up to the expectations of prescriptive authors. So too has it also pointed to a profound anxiety that male and female family members felt about the process, the unknowability of procreation and people's attempts to impose order and understanding on it. Childbearing was habitually and almost exclusively represented as women's work in the letters, diaries, recipe books and almanacs that elite families compiled and were careful to keep for posterity. But this was often a fantasy. Male family members were everywhere in the experience of having babies, and they often put considerable physiological, emotional and financial efforts into securing positive procreative outcomes. This was in equal parts motivated by how central childbearing was to male status and honour in an individual sense, and by its prominence in larger familial narratives about godliness and fruitfulness.

The idea that men 'got' women pregnant and furnished them with material goods to 'bring' their conceptions to term that was often expressed in family correspondence is undermined by the substantial amount of medical work that men took on in households. This finding supports the work of historians who have pointed out that although it did not always meet prescriptive ideals of the division of domestic labour, medical practice and knowledge-gathering were often a collective exercise.[5] There are hints revealed in manuscript family archives of male family members desperately and secretly seeking treatment for their own perceived impotence and weak seed, of predicting when and how women might give birth, what babies might look like, who should feed the baby, and what had caused miscarriages. Many men were so interested and invested in procreation that they kept records of their wives' menstrual cycles, potential pregnancy symptoms and when (and where) they had sex. Many husbands, fathers, uncles and sons felt entitled and comfortable weighing in on important medical decisions with practitioners and were at home to facilitate

[5] Leah Astbury and Elaine Leong, 'Medical Knowledge and Practice' in Amanda Capern (ed.), *Routledge History of Women in Early Modern Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019); Elaine Leong, 'Collecting Knowledge for the Family: Recipes, Gender and Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern English Household', *Centaurus,* 55, no. 2 (2013): 81–103; Lisa Smith, 'The Relative Duties of a Man: Domestic Medicine in England and France, ca. 1685–1740', *Journal of Family History* 31, no. 3 (2006): 237–256.

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the birth of healthy infants and maternal survival. They were well versed what a healthy, godly and ideal pregnancy should look and feel like, and authoritatively interpreted bodily signs such as large bellies or exuberant kicks from the baby within. Added to this, men were key negotiators in obtaining linens, clothes, alcohol, practitioners and other things in the months leading up to a woman's 'reckoning'. In this way, this book does not simply suggest that childbirth was important to men but that the medical and social rituals involved men in a very tangible and practical way, even if this did not always sit easily with the stories they wanted to tell about their effortless virility.

This book's findings also have implications for our understandings of the early modern family more broadly too. It suggests that within elite society particularly the importance of homosocial spaces and customs may have been overstated. Procreation continues to be a prime example of female friendship and solidarity in accounts of community and its centrality to life and status in early modern England. Bernard Capp thus notes that childbirth and child rearing represented effectively 'a semi-separate female domain, a subculture which existed uneasily and at times almost invisibly alongside the dominant, masculine culture of the age' that provided a 'refuge from patriarchal authority and a means to contain and accommodate it'.[6] Likewise, Tim-Reinke Williams suggests that motherhood 'brought women together since female friends, relatives and neighbours shared childcare duties'.[7] As we have heard, Linda Pollock and Laura Gowing have convincingly shown the ways in which female alliances, particularly during childbearing, were not always convivial and supportive.[8]

Making Babies n Early Modern England instead confirms that as historians of masculinity have pointed out, domesticity and domestic activities were intrinsic to male status. Childbirth and the medical work it demanded was no different, and as Joanne Begiato has commented, this co-dependency in which male status depended on household order often 'worked against male autonomy'.[9] Perhaps the greatest evidence of this instability and interleaving of masculinity and the family into childbirth practices is in the fact that it was

[6] Bernard Capp, 'Separate Domains? Women and Authority in Early Modern England', in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 117–145, 139.

[7] Tim Reinke-Williams, *Women, Work and Sociability in Early Modern London,* Genders and Sexualities in History (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2014), 158.

[8] Laura Gowing, 'Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past & Present* 156 (1997): 87–115; Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Linda A. Pollock, 'Childbearing and Female Bonding in Early Modern England', *Social History* 22, no. 3 (1997): 286–306.

[9] Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1660–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 199.

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almost always men that kept records of women's bodies. Tawny Paul notes of the eighteenth century that although men frequently kept accounts of their wives', servants' and children's bodies and behaviours, the diaries and account books of women rarely fuss over the work of their husbands in the same way.[10] In drawing these conclusions, this book builds on the work of historians of the family who point to its fundamental instability in this period. Notably, examining familial paperwork reveals the many individuals like Mary Wethersby and William Buckingham, servants in the Macclesfields' household, who laboured to further wealthier and more ascendant families at the expense of their own. This is most poignantly apparent in the work of nurses who often kept middling and elite babies in their own homes or resided in their employers' home for years. Naomi Tadmor's work has been instrumental in pointing to the ways that wealthier households considered these employees part of the 'family' in affective and practical terms, albeit in unequal ways.[11] Considering the work of bearing and rearing children, this becomes an even more important intervention. Although family may have been central in the organisation and experience of daily life over and above community in the period, this was an invented category and had to be constantly remade, and by others who were not blood related.

Perhaps the most confronting and difficult take away from a deepened historical understanding of bearing children within households is the ways in which the contours of the cultural conversation in early modern England might not be too unfamiliar to a contemporary reader. While writing this book, it seemed everyday there was a new study or news article about how parental, but mostly maternal, behaviour might subtly secure poor outcomes for children, amounting to what has often been called 'intensive parenting'. Diet during pregnancy, sleep training and breastfeeding are, like in the seventeenth century, key topics that are also felt to have a bearing on one's own identity as well as the future wellbeing of one's child. Ironically for this book, one of the underpinning narratives of this style of parenting according to the sociologist Charlotte Faircloth is that this very period – the pre-modern one – represents a haven of natural birthing and parenting choices that we would do well to return to now. This is seen most powerfully in discussions about maternal breastfeeding and the ways in which many parents are made to feel inadequate, embarrassed and secretive about the need or the choice to bottle feed infants. The key to good practice in the present day is represented as being able to tap into one's intuition (of which women had greater access to in the seventeenth century),

[10] K. Tawny Paul, 'Accounting for Men's Work: Multiple Employments and Occupational Identities in Early Modern England', *History Workshop Journal* 85 (2018): 39.

[11] Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

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which is additionally revealed through scientific findings and validated by evolutionary as well as historical 'facts'.[12] In contrast, we see that cultural norms profoundly conditioned what was perceived as correct medical and spiritual practice in the early modern period. In particular, what was 'natural' was similarly hotly contested in scientific literature and in familial correspondence. They too were confronted with the ways in which their bodies did not always map onto what medical professionals said they ought to be able to do in breastfeeding and ministering to their infants. In many ways, these values and normative models are inherited from the medieval and early modern period, and thus it might not be a surprise that these conversations have continued for hundreds of years. Other parts of the early modern experience, like understanding birth marks as the result of unsatisfied cravings or babies being gestated on the left or right side of the womb according to their sex, are alien to a modern reader. It is this mix of familiarity and unfamiliarity that might also help in understanding the modern impulse to tie reproductive experiences and labour to identity and in turn making it seem less inevitable or inimical.

This book has shown the ways that generation was central to family life. It was long, fluid and defied specificity despite the certainty that individuals sought to impose upon it. It demanded considerable financial, intellectual, practical and medical investment from family members, but the bulk of this labour fell on women. Family paperwork is forthcoming about some aspects of this process – namely the appearance of women's changing bodies, the outward signs of what the unborn child might be like, details of when and where women might give birth and the materials they might need to do so safely – and secretive about others. Men's generative failures, excessive pain, difficult and prolonged recoveries, the tedium of daily childcare, the emotional difficulties that men and women might feel after delivery or the death of mother or child were all left out at times because they were uninteresting and at other times because it was thought it reflected poorly on the family as a whole. As people made babies, they also made and remade favourable narratives about the family (their own or the one they worked for). Whilst this system benefited husbands, fathers and other male members of a given family, not everyone reaped the personal rewards of their labour.

[12] Charlotte Faircloth, *Militant Lactivism? Attachment Parenting and Intensive Motherhood in the UK and France* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013).

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