

**Baby on Board: The impact of sling use on experiences of family mobility with babies
and young children**

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Today many parents in the UK are choosing to carry their children in slings. Despite this, there has been no research on how babywearing might change families' experiences of journey-making. Based on interviews with parents in the North of England, this paper uses literatures on affects and mobilities design to contribute to a growing range of studies on infant mobilities. In doing so, it extends our understanding of the importance of relationality in family mobility practices and highlights the importance of understanding the dynamism of mobility during early family life.

Keywords: mobilities, children's geographies, families, emotions, affects, relationality, design, materiality

“When people connect with other people, objects and their environment, they feel a wholeness, a potential, a connection that isn’t located, and isn’t finite.” (Tahan 2013 p.46)

Introduction

This article, which explores parents’ experiences of carrying their children in slings, is about the kinds of connection described by Tahan (2013). Why does it happen? How is it experienced by parents and their children? And, perhaps most importantly, what we can learn about family mobilities as a consequence? Such talk of wholeness and connection perhaps implies a kind of rosy idealism that seems very far from the often stressful and difficult experiences of travelling with young children (Boyer and Spinney 2016) and I do not wish to imply that sling use is always a panacea for these experiences. Indeed, as this article reveals, understanding connection involves encountering the moments of exhaustion and dread (Boyer and Spinney 2016) just as much as it does the more positive experiences that we may have on the move. Nonetheless, I will argue that the experiences of sling users have much to tell us about how relationality is experienced by families in the process of becoming mobile, with the possibility of understanding these experiences (both positive and negative) in different ways.

Inspired, in particular, by themes from phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1968, Heidegger 1992), this article brings concepts such as skinship (Tahan 2010), interembodiment (Lupton 2013) and affective atmospheres (Anderson 2009) into conversation with recent literatures on family practices (Hall and Holdsworth 2016; Valentine 2008) and the importance of design and materiality for mobilities (Jensen 2016, Jensen 2017). In particular, I take inspiration from the new focus on infant geographies (Holt

2013) and the mobility experiences of new parents and babies (Boyer and Spinney 2016; Clement and Waitt 2018). The article makes the following contributions:

1. This is the first major study of sling use from a mobilities perspective. This is significant for the mobilities literature since previous work on family mobilities has tended to concentrate on modes of mobility that are more common in the global North, such as those involving the pram (Clement and Waitt 2018) or the car (Jensen et al. 2015, Dowling 2000). The article shows that slings have the potential to help parents and children overcome some of the challenges to mobility that can occur in early family life.

2. The research offers new and important insights into the nature of family mobility by extending our understanding of the importance of the affectual and relational experience of intimate mobilities for families. Specifically, I will argue that sling design actively facilitates the interembodiment (Lupton 2013) of child and caregiver in a way that has the potential to facilitate the kinds of multi-way connection between people, place and space as characterised by the Tahan (2013) quote with which I began the article. In developing this argument, I make a theoretical contribution by bringing the recent burgeoning literature on design and materiality in mobilities thinking (the ‘material pragmatism’ of Jensen 2016) into conversation with discussions on the affectual and relational element of intimate family mobilities (Boyer and Spinney 2016). This, in turn has implications for the ways in which new families are supported by policy makers and planners.

3. This research provides new and important claims about the dynamism of mobility in early family life and the skill which is involved in responding to this.

I start by introducing the UK sling scene before going on to explore the academic concepts that I use in this paper.

Sling use in the UK

There is nothing new about slings *per se*. For all of human history, societies across the world have had to find ways to transport their babies at the same time as keeping them warm, safe and fed (Knowles 2016) and, until the relatively recent invention of the pram, carrying was generally the most common way of accomplishing thisⁱ. Indeed, there are many parts of the world where sling use continues to be the norm today. In these places, studies of sling use really would be investigating a routinized activity, much in keeping with the current focus in social science on studying the everyday (Shove et al. 2007).

However, at a *societal level*, the situation for the UK and much of the global North is very different with pram use being the standard point of reference for parents. It is therefore very interesting to explore the interest in sling use – also known as babywearing – that has occurred in recent decades.

To date, no data exists on the number of sling users in the UK. However, this timeline produced by South East Slings (2017): <https://southeastslings.co.uk/sling-libraries-timeline/> gives some indication of the developments which appear to be taking place. Providing dates of the foundation of sling libraries in the UK from 2006 to 2017, it appears to indicate a growth in the UK sling community since 2010, in particular. Sling libraries, which tend to be run by volunteers, provide instruction in sling use and allow anyone to borrow slings to use at home, in exactly the same way as books can be borrowed from a ‘regular’ library. They are

therefore crucial in broadening the demographic of babywearing by making slings easily accessible and changing social norms around parenting practices.

The expansion in libraries has also been paralleled by developments in sling design. Sling manufacture is now becoming a cottage industry and this has led to considerable innovation in the types, styles and price points of slings available. Capturing all these changes in the limited space of a journal article is impossible. However, the box and photographsⁱⁱ below gives an indication of some of the principal changes that have occurred:

Developments in sling design

Until recently, UK parents were unlikely to encounter anything other than standard high street 'narrow-based' carriers and framed rucksacks. Today, however, parents have a wide range of options available and the babywearing world has a whole lexicon of its own to describe the almost infinite variety of design features and variations available. The images below give some indication of the different options. Just some of the key differences to observe include:

- The variety of carrying positions: baby facing in or out, front, back or hip carries, etc.
- Size and age of child: carriers are no longer just for young babies – there are now options for toddlers and pre-schoolers as well as tandem carrying options for twins or siblings of different ages. Increasing adjustability also makes it possible to buy one sling that will work for a range of ages, from new baby to toddler.
- The variety in materials used – from stretchy fabrics to cotton or more synthetic 'rucksack-style' material and different kinds of fastenings, including different kinds of knots, clips or buckles.

Why does all this matter? Simply because what is experienced as easy, comfortable, affordable and desirable varies greatly and is contingent upon a range of factors that will change during early family life. Examples of these factors include:

- the body size, shape and personality of parent and child (this can become more complex still if two parents with very different body shapes want to use the same carrier)
- the type of mobility being undertaken (is it a quick trip to the corner shop with the dog, a ride on the bus or a hike in the mountains?)
- the practical competency of the parent and child and the resources available to support them learn (do they find it easier to fasten a buckle or a knot, how used is the child to being carried, can they access a sling library or YouTube video for instruction etc.?)
- the weather and environment (is it hot, cold, muddy, busy with commuters, etc?)
- the identity and personality of the parent (and older child) – e.g. what colours, styles, and aesthetic appeal most?

Now that many of the above variations can be catered for, parents have more options for using slings flexibly in ways that afford different possibilities for a whole range of mobilities in different circumstances.

Picture 1 Back carry with buckle carrier



Picture 2 Hip carry with ring sling



Picture 3 Tandem carry with woven wrap



Picture 4 Tandem carry with newborn twins in a stretchy wrap



Despite this innovation, there is very little research on the impacts of babywearing (Kerr 2015) beyond a few specific contexts, including research on the benefits of slings for

postnatal depression, premature babies and hip health in infants (see Knowles 2016 for an excellent summary of the existing literature here).

I will now discuss the literatures on family and mobility which are significant for this research.

Family and mobility

Recent years have seen big developments in research relating to family and mobility. In terms of the family-focused literature, one significant move has been to recognise that family is not so much a pre-existing *object* but rather something that we *do* (Holdsworth 2013, Luzia 2010, Finch 2007). This shift has been vital for a number of reasons. Firstly, it provides a way of avoiding potentially discriminatory assumptions about what family is in favour of a more nuanced recognition that families come in all shapes and sizes (Holdsworth 2013). Secondly, the idea that family is actively produced and reproduced through particular family practices (Luzia 2010) foregrounds the importance of research into seemingly routine aspects of everyday life (the school run, the organisation of household chores etc.). The various kinds of mobilities in which family members participate are prime examples of such family practices at work. Here, then, the connection between the literature on families and the literature on mobilities is very strong, and I will explore examples of research that draws on both fields.

In contrast with earlier approaches which viewed mobility as a threat to family, all these studies recognise that mobility practices (commuting, holidays, etc.) are an instrumental part of the way in which family is produced (Hall and Holdsworth 2016; Holdsworth 2013, Urry 2007). Again, this has been a big step forward, since many commentators have noted that, in the early days of the mobilities turn particularly, the majority of studies focused on the

movement of lone individuals through space, rather than the (often very different) experiences of those travelling with others (Holdsworth 2013, Urry 2007). In contrast, studies exploring the experience of travelling with other family members have emphasised the importance of relationality to experiences of mobility (Clement and Waitt 2018, Boyer and Spinney 2016). This is something I will explore shortly. However, for now, it is enough to note that relationality – and the role of mobilities in producing family – is an important concern within the mobilities literature. In addition to this, insights from mobility biographies research have illustrated the ways in which mobilities may change throughout the lifecourse. For example, becoming a parent can precipitate a profound transformation in how you engage in – and experience – different kinds of mobilities (Rau and Sattlegger 2017). Thanks, largely, to these developments, there is now a strong literature exploring family mobility experiences, with studies exploring the school run across different modes of transport (Dowling 2000, Jensen et al. 2015) and family holidays (Hall and Holdsworth 2016). Within children's geographies, scholars have also explored older children's experiences of independent mobility (Mitchell et al. 2007; Pain 2006; Valentine 1997), including in a context of physical disability (Pyer and Tucker 2017). However, until recently, there have been few studies exploring the mobility practices of infants and new parents. This is now beginning to change as the following section explores.

New parental and infant experiences and the importance of design in mobilities

The small but exciting field which focuses on infant mobilities has been energised by developments in related literatures. For example, Holt (2013) makes an important plea for a focus on infant geographies, while Clement and Waitt (2018), in their study of pram mobilities, concur that too many contemporary accounts focus exclusively on parental experiences. Their work demonstrates Holt's point that, despite the methodological

challenges, a focus on the experiences of very young children is both possible and timely. Specifically, Clement and Waitt “rethink the right to the city as co-constituted through the relationships between spaces, prams, routines, routes, subjectivities and (non)humans encountered when out and about” (2018, p.2). In focusing on a right to the city, their work echoes that of previous scholars who argue that urban landscapes are, by and large, not designed with the needs of families in mind, but instead focused on the needs of corporations and capital (Boyer 2016, 2014; McDowell 1993). This is an important equality consideration in the context of the present study since I will argue that slings have the capacity to potentially reclaim space for parents and children through their ability to skilfully negotiate some of the challenges of the urban landscape.

Also cited heavily by Clement and Waitt, is Boyer and Spinney’s excellent work on new parental mobilities in London. Crucially they “consider the emotional and affective dimensions of parenting in public that emerge through journey-making” (2016, p.1113) and emphasise the importance of mobility as a relational practice. Both these themes make their work an important reference point for my own. Interestingly, they also mention slings, albeit briefly, and suggest that these can provide an important way of reducing the complexity of journey-making for new parents.

Another notable study is Jensen’s (2017) work on pram strolling in Copenhagen, in which he argues powerfully that walking with a pram is “much more than an instrumental act of pushing a pram from A to B” (p.2). Instead: “it is understood as a rich and situated mobile experience that entails both distinct corporeal efforts (pushing, pulling, lifting) and affective states (such as tiredness, stress, excitement, irritation, nervousness) all shaped by the affordances of designed environments” (p.2).

Underlying all these discussions is what has been described as a ‘turn to materialities’ in the mobilities literature (Jensen 2016). Inspired by a whole range of approaches including Actor Network Theory (Latour 2005), Non Representational Theory (Thrift 2008), and Heidegger’s (1992) focus on understanding ‘things’ through their relationship with the wider world, this approach opens the door to a reconsideration of the importance of material objects and design decisions for mobilities (see for example Jensen 2017, Jensen 2016, Larsen 2017).

The key question, however, is *how* to engage with the material. Jensen’s excellent article on ‘material pragmatism’ (2016) argues that a material focus is of little use if we try to consider the role of objects in the abstract. Rather, he argues that we should follow the lead of designers and architects who have a much more detailed vocabulary for thinking about the material in specific situations. By asking “what design decisions and interventions afford, enable, or prevent concrete mobile situations?” (Jensen 2016, p.590), it becomes possible to think about the ‘dynamic interplay’ of people and the environment in a different way (Jensen 2016). This is relevant to the present discussion since it gives us a starting point for exploring how the specific interface between sling design, parents, children and the wider environment can create particular possibilities for intimate mobilities in early family life.

I will now explore the importance of affectual experiences, since this is also a crucial piece of the jigsaw.

Affects, emotions and journey-making

Becoming a parent is an intensely affectual experience (Boyer and Spinney 2016) which can precipitate a huge change in your sense of self and the ways in which you relate to those

around you (Bailey 1999). Unsurprisingly, then, a focus on affects and emotions has been central to research on family journey making. Helpful starting points are work by Anderson (2009) on affective atmospheres and Ahmed's (2004) phenomenology-inspired work on the emotions as relational.

Such ideas have been used very successfully in mobilities-focussed work, including Jensen, Sheller and Wind's (2015) study which uses the idea of 'affective affordance' to explore the relational nature of family mobilities:

“Movement elicits affects and feelings that are neither located solely within the person nor produced solely by the mode of transport, but occur as circulations of affects between different persons (including especially family members), different vehicles and infrastructures, and historically situated mobility cultures and geographies of mobility”
(2015, p.370)

Such work can be complimented and extended by drawing in concepts from studies exploring relationality with very young children. Specifically, here, I focus on Tahan's (2010) exploration of 'skinship' through a study of co-sleeping infants and carers in Japan and Lupton's (2013) writing on interembodiment. Whereas skinship is often described as 'intimacy through touch' (Tahan 2010) and often developed through practices such as co-sleeping and co-bathing, Tahan points out that its experience is not limited to moments of physical proximity:

“The space between them [child and caregiver] is shared and meaningful, even if not in physically proximal ways. There is an intimate quality to this space which is embodied and sensuous – skinship is not locatable in their separate contained bodies but occurs through the

relationship and shared experiences between them. Skinship becomes felt and experienced differently according to mother-child and father-child relationships but still continues as the child grows older. What is important to note however is that the meanings and experiences ascribed to skinship change over time.” (2010, p.228)

Elsewhere, Tahan elaborates on these ideas further through a discussion of ‘touching at depth’ (2013) while Lupton (2013) also picks up on a similar theme through her writing on ‘interembodiment’ in relation to infant care. According to Lupton:

“Interembodiment encapsulates the notion that apparently individuated and autonomous bodies are actually experienced at the phenomenological level as intertwined. It is a concept of relation with other people which accepts that individuals’ bodies are inevitably lived alongside and in response to others’ bodies”. (2013, p.39)

Such approaches, which draw on phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1968), have the potential to explain why the design of a sling, where the child is held on the adult’s body, can facilitate the kinds of relationality that are emphasised through a focus on affects and emotions in mobilities research.

Methods

In recent years, mobilities researchers have been developing an exciting range of mobile methods including walking interviews, self- video, photography, surface ethnography and mobility diaries in an attempt to better explore the detail of people’s mobility practices (see for example Jensen 2017; Jensen et al. 2015; Myers 2011; Spinney 2011; Bissell 2009).

Equally, researchers interested in capturing the changes in family mobility practices over time have adopted longitudinal study designs (Boyer and Spinney 2016). While I would have

liked to adopt such approaches for my study, time and funding constraints meant that I had to opt for the more ‘traditional’ option of one-off semi-structured interviews taped and transcribed with the participants’ permission. However, I tried to ensure that the opportunity to investigate routinized practices and longitudinal elements was not lost. For example, I made a point of asking about routine, everyday activities (emphasising that I was interested in the mundane) and I also took a biographical approach to some of the questions – for example, asking people how their experiences had changed over time.

A bigger challenge was that of reflecting on my own positionality. The idea for this project came to me while on maternity leave with my son when I realised that using slings had completely transformed our experiences of space, place and mobility. I had found myself getting really into slings – a process which was facilitated by Morecambe Bay Slings (MBS), my local sling library. By the end of my maternity leave, I had started helping out at the library as a peer supporter. Indeed, to this day, I am part of a team of volunteers that hires out slings and helps teach parents how to carry their babies.

On the one hand, then, I was coming from the position of a committed sling advocate. Indeed, an ongoing commitment to research activismⁱⁱⁱ was one of my motivations for engaging in this project. I was frustrated that the sling’s potential contribution to parents and babies was often overlooked due to a lack of concrete research evidence and/or ‘othering’ from those hostile to carrying. (There is not space to discuss these debates here but suffice to say that many participants had encountered hostility from relatives, friends or even strangers with comments like “get him out of that thing!”, “can’t she walk?”, “you’ll make him clingy” etc.). For this reason, I sought to follow a participatory action research (PAR) methodology (Kindon et al. 2010) for the project. I talked to other babywearing professionals about my

ideas for the project and tried to involve them in the design of the study and research questions. I also tried to post ideas, thoughts and initial findings regularly on the library's blog and participated in a related citizen science research project to spark conversation about the research (see for example Whittle, 2018, Parenting Science Gang 2017).

However, it sometimes felt tricky to balance my 'default' position as an advocate of slings with my commitment to the wider feminist critique that we should resist making normative judgements about what constitutes good mothering. This is something that Lawler (2000) writes powerfully about in her work on mothers and daughters where she illustrates the way in which middle-class values come to be naturalised in the idea of the maternal self and what it means to be a good mother, to the exclusion of those who do not live up to these ideals. Consequently, while I wish to highlight the possibilities of sling use for parents and children within this paper, I do not want this to be a 'prams vs slings' article. In particular, I want to avoid making a normative judgement that slings are always and necessarily 'better' for parents and children, since this is invariably contextual upon the particular experiences of each family. Indeed, every parent that I interviewed had used a pram at some point in their parenting journey and most could point to contexts in which they'd been a better option than the sling – for example, when needing to keep a child contained at the doctors or if the baby was sleeping and they wanted to do serious gardening. Instead, I see slings as offering different possibilities that have the potential to be used as a creative alternative – or more likely *addition* – to the mobility affordances offered by prams and car seats.

Participants and case studies

I focused my research on the Morecambe Bay and Sheffield areas as both have thriving sling library networks and a strong community of babywearers. I also had personal contacts in both these areas – firstly, through my work as a volunteer at MBS and, in the case of Sheffield, through Dr Rosie Knowles of the Sheffield Sling Surgery, who had trained me as a peer supporter. Importantly, considering my limited budget and family responsibilities, both were easily accessible from my home. They also encompassed considerable diversity both geographically and socially (Figure 2)

Figure 2 – A description of the study areas

Morecambe Bay includes the Lancaster and Morecambe urban areas as well as the surrounding rural hinterland. It has a population of 143,517 (Lancaster City Council, 2018). Geographically, this area encompasses a range of conditions, from the steps, cobbles and hilly streets of historic Lancaster to the mud, stiles and narrow pavements of villages in the surrounding area. Socially and economically, there is tremendous diversity in the region, with south Lancaster and the rural areas tending towards the relatively affluent, while North Lancaster and Morecambe both contain areas of high social and economic deprivation.

Sheffield is a much larger city with a population of 575,400 (Sheffield City Council 2018) and a big public transport network including a system of trams. Geographically it is extremely hilly and, like Lancaster and Morecambe, it has a very rural hinterland which includes the Pennines and other areas of natural beauty which are very popular for outdoor activities. As a city which grew rapidly during the industrial revolution, it contains areas of high and low income and also considerable ethnic diversity, with 19.2% of Sheffield's population at the 2011 census being of black or minority ethnic origin.

In terms of the participants, I aimed to get as much diversity as possible in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, family status and also sling experience (I wanted to speak to people who were relatively new sling users, as well as those who had carried for many years). This was largely successful and I ended up with a diverse profile of 24 interviewees, including men and women, ranging in age from 20s-40s and with children from under 6 months to 9 years. Some had one child but many had two or more (including one interviewee who had twins), and some women were pregnant with a subsequent child at the time of the study. Consequently, some had been carrying for years and others only for a matter of months.

Money was tight for some participants, while others had professional jobs and houses in more affluent parts of town. Importantly, while most of those I interviewed were white British, I also had interviewees from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds, which led to important insights in terms of the research as a whole.

For the analysis, I adopted an approach very much inspired by grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1994), where I focused, firstly, on trying to identify core themes arising from the data itself. I subsequently turned to the literatures that seemed most in tune with those themes to bring these into conversation with the data.

The following sections begin to explore the experience of mobility for parents. I start by focusing on some of the key challenges that parents face and examine how the participants used slings to relate to them differently. Here, I focus on three kinds of challenges: new affectual landscapes, new materialities and new temporalities.

New affectual landscapes of parenting

Previous researchers have written about how pregnancy, birth and lactation often leads to dramatic changes in how women experience their own bodies, and this research supports these findings as several women in my study talked about pain and exhaustion being an impediment to their mobility, particularly if they had experienced a difficult labour or Caesarean Section. However, what is less acknowledged is that new parents are also simultaneously negotiating a dramatically changed affectual landscape, the experience of which acts as a powerful reminder that it is impossible to separate the bodily and the emotional nature of experience. This was particularly the case for mothers experiencing depression and low mood.

“I had a horrible labour so I didn’t get out until about day five or six and... then I got post-natal depression and so, yes, it was... horrific. She had really bad colic, so... originally I wasn’t getting out because I physically couldn’t do anything and then after that I couldn’t get out because baby wanted to sleep or I couldn’t settle her and that was, I needed to get out because I’m an outdoor person and to be stuck in the house it was not good for me” (Erica^{iv})

This quote illustrates some important themes in this work. Firstly, we see how the huge transformation in a parent’s affectual landscape can be experienced as disorientating and debilitating. Secondly, and crucially, we see that this is not just about Erica’s affectual experience, but also about her *baby’s* affectual experience, which is acutely uncomfortable in this moment.

Previous researchers have made the important observation that mobility is always relational but I would argue that a new baby’s arrival makes this relationality explicit in a very immediate way. So, as Erica’s quote shows, you are now no longer coping with your own body, affects and emotions, but also responding to the same kinds of shifts in your baby’s. This is why the idea of affects as shared and circulating (Ahmed 2004) is particularly helpful here.

Furthermore, when a new parent does succeed in ‘getting out and about’, this relationality is often manifested in concerns about the baby’s physical wellbeing. Several of the parents I interviewed found themselves worrying about their new babies a lot: are they too warm? Too cold? Breathing? Hungry or thirsty? This may be particularly problematic if your baby was premature or unwell in any way after the birth.

“I was absolutely petrified of... cot death and that kind of thing. So I found... and like lots of Mums say this, that basically with a pushchair, they would keep stopping their pushchair and checking that the baby was still breathing. And they’d just keep doing this and I just found that it was taking me like half an hour to get twenty yards or something, because I kept checking.” (Nivedita)

Again, while Nivedita’s concern is for making sure her baby is physically well, her own experience in response to this is a strong feeling of anxiety and it is this relational experience of affects and emotions which impacts on her mobility.

In acknowledging the importance of affects and emotions – and what this can teach us about the centrality of relationality to the experience of mobility as a parent – we also encounter themes emerging from Boyer and Spinney’s (2016) work where they talked about the intense experience of being out in public with an upset baby. This was echoed in this work which highlighted that, if your baby was unhappy, then your experience of being out and about became miserable too. Indeed, for some interviewees, the upset brought on by their baby’s distress would lead to them staying at home or returning sooner than planned, if there was the option to do so:

“I would find myself getting back home because she was upset, I couldn’t calm her and I didn’t know what was wrong” (Clare)

Alongside Boyer and Spinney’s (2016) work, this acts as a strong reminder that shared emotions and affects are crucial to the experience of journeys for both children and their parents. This is vital since so many accounts, including the advice given to new parents by

parenting guidebooks and retailers, tend to focus on the *physical* challenges experienced when getting out and about, and neglect the crucial question of how a parent and child might *feel* about that experience. This neglect of the affectual dimension of experience may help to explain why, for many parents, the expectations and realities of mobility with children can be very different. For example, Kate had hoped to go on relaxing pram walks with the other new mums in her neighbourhood only to find that:

“The second you tried to put him in the pushchair or the pram he absolutely screamed his head off. ... for about the first year really he just wouldn’t go in the pram or the pushchair at all.”

For these parents, slings provided an alternative which enabled them to manage the affectual challenges of parenting mobilities in new ways.

Several interviewees also found slings useful in terms of helping their body recover from the challenges of pregnancy and birth. For example, Mair was diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome during pregnancy – a painful condition which leads to hypermobility and joint instability. As a result, she had to be particularly careful to listen to her body and be mindful of activities that could lead to pain and difficulty – particularly since the pain tended to be worse later if she had pushed herself too hard. She felt that using a sling helped her be more aware of her body and how it felt on a given day, thus enabling her to work more creatively with her limitations and rest where appropriate. She also herself developing core strength over time as her baby increased in weight. She felt this helped her body recover from childbirth and get stronger again.

“I feel like I can actually do more, I can get out and about more because with the, with just the pram I am really worried that I am going to push myself too far and not recognise it. Whereas with the sling I can tell.” (Mair)

Of course, everyone’s experience is different, and some mums find using a pram more conducive to recovery in the postpartum period, particularly since it can be used to carry shopping as well. Nevertheless, Mair’s experience is a reminder that it is important not to make assumptions about what will be easier in advance but rather to be open to seeing what works through practical experience.

In addition to promoting an awareness of – and care for – your own body, the interviews also showed that slings had the potential to give parents a greater sense of confidence in their baby’s physical wellbeing from moment to moment. For example, Nivedita found that having her daughter in a sling enabled her to have a greater sense of reassurance as she could easily and seamlessly tell what her daughter was ‘up to’ and alert herself to any potential problems.

Claire also explained:

“You can just sense so much can’t you? When they are right here, how they are and how they are feeling and everything.”

However, it was in relation to the affectual and relational challenges of distress and difficulty that slings proved particularly helpful for the participants. Evidence suggests that slings can help a distressed child to settle, perhaps even more than the experience of being held in arms, because of the extra security provided by the containment of the cloth (Knowles 2016). This was supported by the experiences of the parents in my study and was particularly important

for those with unsettled babies that were difficult to calm and get to sleep as Erica and Christina described:

“The Caboo was amazing and kind of made it a lot easier to get out and about. And made me less stressed because when they are sad in their sling you can cuddle them, you can sort them out and they are less likely to be sad because they are on you in the sling. Whereas if they are in the pushchair there’s not a lot you can do if you are on the bus with the pushchair with a screaming kid because you don’t want to get them out of the pushchair.” (Erica)

“Tom was just, he was a really unsettled baby, he wouldn’t be put down ever, he was always screaming, he had terrible reflux, he didn’t sleep and things were just really difficult and I just really struggled with becoming a mum and having to deal with him and I was really depressed and I just found it really awful. So I needed sling wearing as a necessity so that I could, you know, calm him and keep him calm and keep myself calm and just managed to cope really” (Christina)

Again, we see the relationality between the parent and child’s affectual experience and how crucial this is to mobility and everyday life. I also think it is interesting to note that, even when the sling did not succeed in calming the child, its design – where the body of the child is held against the body of the parent, as shown in images 1-4 – was still important in terms of giving parents a new way to be in relation to the distress which seemed to help their own feelings of impotence and upset.

In the following section, I will turn to explore the ways in which parents responded to challenges relating to the acquisition of new things. I am not suggesting that the material challenges to mobility can be separated from the affectual challenges (as we are about to see,

the two are intimately related). However, for simplicity of explanation, I am considering ‘stuff’ separately here.

New materialities

Along with the aforementioned challenges of coping with the changes in bodies and feelings, there is, of course, new ‘stuff’ that parents have to get used to and new skills that must be acquired in assembling and using it.

For example, interviewees' experiences supported the lay view that activities such as fitting the car seat and preparing the pram were a challenging rite of passage for new parents during late pregnancy. A further challenge was that the design of the urban environment is often indifferent or even hostile to the needs of new families and the stuff that comes with them. The parents I spoke to mentioned examples such as lifts, cobbles, steps, narrow doorways and pavements as obstacles to their progress which restricted where they could go or, at the very least, made them feel out of place. Even relatively micro scale features, such as narrow doorways or a step up to a building, can make a massive difference when you are dealing with a baby in a pram, as this example from Hannah illustrates:

“I was trying to use this buggy when my husband had just gone back to work and I was by myself and I thought, ‘I want to get out of the house, I don’t want to feel trapped’. So I got out of the house and I went to get a coffee and I realised I couldn’t get the buggy through the door of the shops and I was sitting there like trying to get it through the ramps and things and I didn’t want to wake up the baby, it was so embarrassing people having to help me. And I just looked like a mess so that’s when I knew I needed a sling.”

Here an apparently small incident – a struggle with a doorway – has bigger ramifications, as it leads Hannah to challenge her sense of self as capable and confident. The strong affectual aspects of this experience are also apparent. It wasn't that Hannah couldn't physically access the shop (even if it was very difficult). However, feeling embarrassed and out of place led to her choosing not to go to that place again. Abi also recounted a similar experience with her first child.

“Shops that were a bit tight or a bit awkward I just didn't bother going to. Like our corner shop is all very narrow aisles and steps going up to it. They've got a bell you can ring but to be honest if I had [son] in the pram I just wouldn't go there. So that would be more a case of when [husband] got home from work, 'right I'm nipping to the corner shop'”

These findings are important. Studies of public breastfeeding have already shown the importance of affects and safe spaces in terms of supporting Mums to feed their babies. (If you feel uncomfortable and judged whether in public or private space then you will be less willing to do it. (Boyer 2016)). Here, we see that the same is true of mobility practices generally: if parents find somewhere to be awkward, difficult or embarrassing to access with a pram then they may not return, even if it is physically accessible to them. Such findings have parallels in literatures that discuss the importance of sensory engagements with the material (Yaneva 2009, Jensen 2016). They also resonate with Jensen's (2017) assertion that “accessibility is not a causal effect of built environments. Rather... designing for accessibility means staying open to situated contradictions, multiple practices and sensuous geographies of mobility; it means keeping an open eye (and ear, nose and entire body) towards the affective, the atmospheric, the social, the cultural and the material and how these 'soft' components are central parts in the creation, stabilization and reimagination of urban mobility systems” (p.14)

It is also important to mention experiences with public transport. Previous studies have shown that the transition to parenthood is often marked by an increase in car dependency (Rau and Sattlegger 2017). However, several of those I interviewed either could not drive or did not have access to a car during the day when they were at home with a child. Slings could provide a valued additional option in these kinds of situations as Anthea, who relied on the bus to get around, explained:

“When I got the sling it was like, well this is... a lot easier... because... I have to walk over a big hill to the bus stop. So pushing that big pram up a hill was a nightmare. So the sling suddenly made that so much easier and it made on the bus a lot easier... the pram I had I couldn't get down by myself, so the amount of times I had to wait for the next bus, because it was late, whereas with the sling I don't need to worry about that, I literally just walk straight on and it's really convenient” (Anthea)

Other interviewees made similar points in relation to the other obstacles mentioned earlier (steps, cobbles), with the general consensus of opinion being that a sling enabled you and your child to negotiate the urban environment in a very similar way to that experienced pre-parenthood. For example, Lynn recalled having to rethink how to get out of the shopping arcade when she was there with the pram – with the sling, she hadn't had to think about avoiding the big steps at the exit that she normally used. In contrast, then, the need to accommodate a pram can involve quite a change in your 'mental map' of places that you thought you knew very well.

Interestingly, then, the experiences of the sling-using parents in this study seem to recover the possibility of some kind of lightness and freedom in mobility practices in contrast to the findings of Boyer and Spinney which stressed a sense of “slowness, discomfort, premeditation, and feelings of exhaustion (if not dread)” (2016, p1114). Here Sharon describes her first experience of going out without the pram:

“I remember the first time I took him out... and people actually said to me “You’re brave coming out without a pram or anything, just a baby”. And I was like, “But I’ve got everything here”... He’s here, I’ve got me, I don’t need to bring any bottles because I’m breastfeeding, you know, a change of clothes, a nappy, we’re sorted. And so it was actually, at that point, people were thinking it was brave but I actually thought it was easier.”

Crucially, however, the experiences of the parents in this study also illustrated the way in which the design affordances of a sling led to new affectual and relational possibilities for parents and their children.

This was a prominent theme from many of the interviews, but it was something that Claire and I discussed at length – primarily because it had been hugely important to her across her experiences of parenting her two children. However, she had also studied Geography at university and was thus interested in – and able to articulate – her experiences of space and place especially clearly. Like a number of the parents in my study, she had only discovered slings with her second child, meaning that she was able to explore how her mobility had changed as a result.

“I guess what I missed [with child number 1] we couldn’t get to the Peak District and we couldn’t get to the woods and I found that difficult. So we just went to places that were more accessible by buggy... I found that a bit hard and it was kind of like mourning the life that I’d lost because it was so different to what I’d had.” (Claire)

She contrasted this to the experience with her second child: *“because I got her in the sling from day one she’s always in the sling, it just, I don’t know, it just felt that normal life had resumed more quickly...”*

“I suppose for me and my husband... we can continue with bits of the life we had before, in terms of getting out... In terms of the sort of geography and a spatial thing it’s enabled us to get to places like the Peak District that we wouldn’t have been able to do. We would have been on the most boring walks where you’re on a relayed path, I think for my kind of mental state of mind, I like, I grew up in a rural area, I’m not a city girl, I find it, I don’t mind living in the city but it’s not ideal... I feel like I can still get out and get space, I’m not surrounded by lots of other people. Because that’s the other thing, if you are on walks that are buggy friendly they are really busy. I can get to the top of Burbage, get some fresh air, I’m just a happier person for getting out. I can still do it because it’s major isn’t it?, having a baby and the changes... I guess maybe because I’m a geographer, but I do appreciate being able to get into empty spaces, fresh air and I couldn’t do it without a sling, you just can’t do it can you?”

Here we see a very clear example of the importance of mobilities design for young families (Jensen 2016). Specifically, we see how the design of a sling creates new possibilities for engaging with particular kinds of environments and activities in a way that is potentially very

significant. This is important not only in terms of the parent's sense of identity and wellbeing (as we see here, the possibility of keeping some continuity with what can otherwise feel like a previous life and self is deeply important to Claire), but also because there is also often a desire to share this with your child. James – also a keen walker – elaborates further here:

“I wanted to share those experiences with my children and you know, just thinking ‘here we are in this beautiful place, I want to be able to take the children to these places’ ... And then you discover all sorts of stuff like how lovely it is spending 90 minutes on a Tuesday morning with... your baby warm and snuggled fast asleep and every time you look down and see those little eyes and you can feel them moving, it’s so lovely. All of that sort of carried on from this practical thing, ‘I want to go up that hill over there, I want to take my child up that hill, I can’t take the pushchair and if I do I’ll be dead by the time I reach the top’.” (James)

Here we see how an ability to be mobile in particular ways and in particular places facilitates a strong sense of connection, not only with those landscapes but, crucially, with yourself and your baby. This resonates with the literature on relational mobilities and also with Jensen’s (2016) comments on the ‘body-in-place’. Here, Jensen picks up on Schusterman (2009)’s phenomenology-inspired work which argues that we can only really experience our bodies through also experiencing the environment in which we are in contact in that particular moment. In this case, however, the contact that James is describing is not only with the environment but also with the child he is carrying (the ‘skinship’ described by Tahhan 2010). Thus sharing cherished places or activities with your child brings us back to our understanding of mobility as relational: what we see here seems to indicate a multi-way relationship (parent, baby, wider world), which is deepened in all directions and facilitated by the design affordances of a sling. You are sharing those places because they are deeply and

fundamentally a part of who you are and how you understand yourself and the world around you. The ability to enrol your child into these relationships is therefore vitally important.

In this way, then, we can begin to understand how a sling can provide a solution to the *physical* obstacles encountered by a pram (mud, walls, gates, cobbles etc.), whilst offering different *affective* affordances too (Clement and Waitt 2018; Jensen et al. 2015). As we saw in images 1-4, by holding the child on the body of the caregiver (the interembodiment of Lupton 2013), allowing you both to go somewhere you would otherwise struggle to access in each other's company, and raising the child up to the same height and viewing angle as an adult, the sling makes possible an ongoing mutual embrace and a shared experience of the landscape. In short, the sling's design actively facilitates and encourages a multi-way relationality between child, adult and the wider world *in a way which deepens this relationship in all directions*. There are already echoes of these connections in the literature – for example, in phenomenology inspired accounts which argue that both the body and 'things' can only be understood in relationship to the wider environment (Heidegger 1992). However, the *affectual* elements of mobility are seldom foregrounded in these accounts and it is here, I believe, that bringing Tahan's (2010, 2013) concept of 'skinship' into conversation with the relatively recent literatures that stress the importance of mobilities, materiality and design (Jensen 2016, Jensen 2017) can be so helpful. In this way, we can appreciate that a sling is *inherently* as much about relationships as it is about 'getting out' in the popular sense of the phrase.

New temporalities

In addition to the new stuff of parenthood, there are also new timings to contend with. New babies sleep a lot and need regular (but often unpredictable) feeding and changing. It can therefore be hard to find a window of opportunity when you can leave the house.

The interviews showed that, as parents' confidence and skill in using a sling developed, they found it possible to manage the baby's needs more seamlessly whilst out and about. For example, several of my interviewees used the sling to breastfeed whilst mobile, and to enable naps to be taken anytime, anywhere, thus helping to overcome the kinds of temporal constraints on mobility that many new parents are faced with. Indeed, since a young child in a sling will often fall asleep quite easily, the common parenting stereotype of pounding the pavements with a pram to get a child to sleep was completely absent from my study. This was especially important for parents who already had an older child's needs to attend to, meaning it was imperative that the new baby fit alongside the already established rhythms of family life. As Abi explained:

“with [older son] I just remember hours and hours of pounding the streets to try and get him to go to sleep by pushing the pram around. And it was like, actually, I already have a child, I need to be able to leave the house to do school run at regular times irrespective of what's going on with his nap. It's like, quick we need to go... So in the early days it was definitely 'I am using a sling because I have a sleepy little baby who doesn't need much from me at all apart from cuddles and milk and nappies. And I have a responsibility to my child that is still here that I want to be there and do stuff'.”

Again, this is not to imply that slings are somehow 'better', or that the use of a pram involves less skill – recent research on pram mobilities indicates the creativity with which parents use prams to accomplish a whole range of tasks – for example, combining shopping with naptime (Boyer and Spinney 2016, Clement and Waitt 2018). However, the different design affordances of a sling (such as the obvious way in which, with a little care, a baby can be shuffled down onto the breast to feed while you continue walking or queue for the checkout)

offer parents another set of options through which they can multitask mobility and the needs of different members of the household.

The preceding examples illustrate some of the ways in which a sling can help to overcome some of the various mobility challenges that parents and their children may experience during the first few years of family life. However, building on these examples, we can also go one stage further in order to examine how mobility can shift during the early years of family life.

Dynamic mobilities in early family life

Up to this point, this paper has been operating on the assumption that becoming a parent often precipitates a major challenge to mobility which then gets gradually easier as your parenting skills develop and your baby becomes more settled and predictable, culminating in the moment when he or she is able to move around independently. However, a closer inspection of the data reveals that this is not at all the case. Instead, we find narratives of early family mobility which are much more dynamic and unpredictable. This new understanding of early family mobility is a key contribution of this paper and it is to this subject that we now turn.

The first and most obvious point to mention is that many parents do not experience a significant post birth challenge to their mobility. Sling using parents, in particular, often found that life continued fairly seamlessly since, as we have already explored, a young baby settled into a sling – who could feed and nap there – often proved extremely mobile, in contrast to what we might expect about this time:

“It sounds awful but you can almost forget you’ve got them because I think I wore [daughter] for the first eight weeks... I would just get up, put the sling on and just wear her constantly... And it was almost like she was, I don’t know, still inside. It sounds weird, but she was just still there but could carry on doing everything” (Lynn)

However, crucially, even for those who do experience difficulties, the challenges may not arise until later in early family life. For example, it might be assumed that families with toddlers and pre-schoolers are more mobile, since these children do not have the same intense physical needs for milk and sleep as a young baby and they can now walk independently, perhaps for some considerable distance. However, once again, the parents in my study revealed that this is not necessarily an accurate picture for a number of reasons.

As babies grow into toddlers and pre-schoolers, they become more active participants in the journey-making process, often expressing strong feelings about when and how they travel and how much (or how little) they feel about walking on a given day. For example, James and Thirza liked to go out for hill walks as a family and carrying their children in slings proved useful here, since they could easily negotiate obstacles like stiles. However, their daughter, in particular, was very keen to walk independently from an early age and they wanted to respect her choice here. As a result, they were restricted to shorter walks that were “a walkable distance for a fairly robust four year old” (Thirza) until she was able to walk longer distances of her own accord.

There are several things to be said here. The first is that this is a direct illustration of the ways in which family mobility is not necessarily conditioned by life events in a predictable way (for example, the assumption that mobility will be ‘harder’ with a new baby than a pre-

schooler). Instead, we see that intimate family mobilities experience constant flux and change during early family life. Secondly, and crucially from a theoretical perspective, this supports research which stresses the importance of relationality in terms of understanding family mobility experiences (Boyer and Spinney 2016). Without exception, the detailed accounts of journeys with toddlers and preschoolers in the study shows how mobility practices must adapt constantly in order to balance the changing capabilities and affectual experiences of all the family members as the children grow. In this way, regular journeys are often reimagined (and sometimes practiced) to accommodate these shifts. For example, Erica talked about her preschooler's growing love of bike riding – starting with a balance bike and progressing gradually to competence on her first pedal bike, which culminated in her deciding that she'd be able to manage the journey to preschool on it, to the mutual delight of both parties:

“I let her come on her pedal bike the other day because I figured the journey was suitable for the level she'd got to and I was really chuffed that she could do it.” (Erica)

This is an example of a slightly longer-term shift in mobility practices as the child's confidence and competence in cycling grew. However, within the context of these longer-term shifts, there can also be a need for moment to moment fluxes in mobility practices for a host of reasons, such as safety concerns (when a busy road is encountered, for example), time pressures or, indeed, how everyone is feeling about the journey. It was in the context of these virtually instantaneous and sometimes unpredictable fluxes that slings had a role since, as Anthea succinctly put it: “I can't carry a pram in my handbag”. In contrast, a sling could be packed away, worn as a scarf, or clipped around the waist for those moments when a child who was previously moving independently, wants or needs to be transported by an adult.

In this example about the journey to preschool with her three year-old son, Abi reveals how she uses a sling to respond to the physical and emotional work of being mobile with a young child in a way which attempts to balance everyone's needs:

“Sometimes I have the mental energy to let Arthur walk or scoot or ride his bike. And sometimes I either don't have that mental energy or I just want to make sure we get there quickly. And so it's like 'I just want to go in a straight line to get there today so you're coming in a sling'.”

Again, to return to a central theme in the paper, if we accept that mobility is relational and affectual, as well as simply a practical means of getting from A to B, we can see that Abi is able to use a sling as a flexible solution to meet the various challenges that arise during the journey. In particular, she is able to swap some of the emotional work of parenting (the need to keep her child safe in a busy street and get somewhere on time) for the physical work of carrying him, enabling the journey to be accomplished whilst also developing their relationship. Elsewhere, she explains:

“It's really nice actually when he does come in a sling because we just have cuddles and chat and it's really nice to reconnect when he's been at pre-school all morning. We came home from pre-school today and we nipped into the new ice-cream shop... And ate ice-cream together in the sling having a chat on the way home.”

The balancing of needs facilitated by the sling was also revealed to be important during the arrival of a new sibling. Again, very interestingly, and perhaps contrary to expectations, some of the parents in my study found that the real challenge to their mobility came not with their first baby but their second – particularly if there was a relatively small age gap and number

two arrived before baby number one was reliably walking. In this case, there were a number of issues to consider. Firstly, parents often wrestled with the practical question of how to transport two children (a double buggy was often rejected as being really too big and unwieldy or expensive) as well as the equally thorny question of how to accommodate everyone's varying needs. Parents facing this scenario often felt very concerned about their ability to manage both practically and emotionally.

Here, again, slings often became a flexible tool that could be used to balance the needs of the whole family. This extended example from Clare shows how a sling enabled her to be available – both physically and emotionally – for her older daughter and, how this changed how she felt about becoming a mum for the second time:

“With a second child, I felt really guilty before she was born that this was going to ruin my relationship with Rowan, she’s going to be jealous that I’m tied up with the baby all the time. But actually I’m not tied up with the baby all the time because I can breastfeed in the sling if I want to so it doesn’t have to slow us down. I can be sitting down, use the sling to support her when I’m breastfeeding sitting down, so that I’ve got a hand free to read a book to Rowan. And then the rest of the time Rowan can be climbing on a climbing frame and I’ve got two hands to help her if I need to. Hold her hands across the road... if I was trying to push a pram I’d just really struggle with a toddler that wants to walk.” (Clare)

Again, this quotation shows the fluid and varied work of parenting which involves eyes, hands, hearts and minds – and how a sling can enable these to be balanced from moment to moment to accommodate the fluxes in mobility and care practices as a family grows. The tremendous accomplishment of the parent is to respond skilfully to the incredible dynamism

of early family mobility. Indeed, doing so is a crucial part of what it means to ‘do’ family (Holdsworth 2013) and a reminder that this ‘doing’ happens very much on the move (Urry 2007). Equally, the examples given here illustrate how the design affordances of the sling (small and ‘packable’ size, different carrying positions and the ability to facilitate easy conversation between parent and child) enable these fluxes to be managed relatively seamlessly from moment to moment. In this way, it becomes possible to ‘do’ family in different ways (Jensen 2016, 2017) – for example, by using the affective affordances/skinship (Tahan 2010, 2013, Jensen 2017) enabled by the sling to manage potential challenges (tiredness, busy roads, cold weather) differently. Equally, such conclusions are a reminder of the importance of exploring early family life ‘in the moment’, as it were, since research over a longer timespan of months or years tends to obscure these momentary fluxes in mobility through a focus on the growing independence and capabilities of children as they grow (Rau and Sattlegger 2017).

Conclusion

This is the first major study of sling use from a mobilities perspective. It leaves us with a number of implications.

Throughout the paper I have provided evidence of the ways in which slings (either alone or alongside a pram) have the potential to enable families to manage the physical, emotional and relational aspects of parenting while mobile in a flexible and seamless fashion. As I have illustrated, this can be incredibly important in terms of making everyday life more ‘doable’ (as Claire put it) and enjoyable for new families at an important time of transition in their

lives. Indeed, I would argue that this rediscovery of the possibility of an enjoyment in family mobilities is very important as it contradicts Boyer and Spinney's (2016) findings of the stressful experiences of predominantly pram-using parents.

However, this research also extends our theoretical understanding in a couple of directions. Firstly, I have illustrated how a focus on mobilities design (Jensen 2016, Jensen 2017, Larsen 2017) can be combined with a concern for the affectual and relational experience of mobility for families (Boyer and Spinney 2016) to explain why slings work in the way that they do. It is not that prams, car seats or other child mobility devices are non-relational (this study also found many instances of children being fed, comforted and relationships developed in the pram, car etc.) However, these objects (and, crucially, the advice and sales talk directed at prospective parents) are often designed and approached with the very different starting point of mobility as a practical accomplishment connected with 'going places'. (Brochures often focus on the rugged wheels, for example, the coffee cup holder for drinks on the move, or the extensive space for shopping to be stored.) These are the kinds of practical considerations with which prospective parents are encouraged to approach mobility. And yet this research highlights quite clearly the impossibility of separating the practical and the affectual aspects of mobility. I would argue that we could engage these aspects of experience more specifically by extending Jensen's (2016) pragmatic focus on design decisions: for example, what specific innovations [in slings, prams or the urban environment] could support parents and children to have positive *affectual* experiences of mobilities? This work therefore calls for affects to become a specific consideration – both in the mobilities design process and also in the advice offered to prospective parents when considering how they will manage journeying with young children – thus putting the 'material pragmatism' of Jensen (2016) into action, so to speak.

A final contribution, which I believe is new to the mobilities literature both empirically and theoretically, is an understanding of the sheer dynamism of mobility during early family life. By offering a day by day, 'live' account of the ins and outs of family mobilities, I have shown that practices must constantly flux and change in response to things such as a child's growing capabilities, emotions and affects as well as the particulars of the situation (the journey, environment, weather, time of day, etc.). I would argue that it is crucial to understand these much shorter-term fluxes since it will enable us to provide better support and advice to prospective parents and a more realistic understanding of their experiences.

Based upon this new and more in depth understanding of the affectual, relational and dynamic nature of mobilities for families, I would argue that there is a need to improve access to slings and support parents in learning to use them. Thankfully, we already see the signs of such initiatives emerging, for example in the burgeoning network of sling libraries across the UK and crucially through the inclusion of a sling in the Scottish Baby Boxes scheme (Baby Carrier Support Scotland 2017). Initiatives such as the latter are particularly vital, firstly in terms of making slings accessible to all, regardless of age, income or cultural background. However, more needs to be done since many such projects remain driven by the voluntary sector, meaning that many parents today live in areas where sling use is not promoted or supported. Better support and promotion from public sector could change this. Equally more awareness and discussion of the relational and affectual elements of mobility during antenatal classes could help parents plan more realistically for their mobility during pregnancy, including in crucial decisions about what 'stuff' to acquire (or not). I hope that,

through this research, and through continuing to volunteer at Morecambe Bay Slings, I can be some small part of helping these changes come about.

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ⁱSee van Hout (2008) for a fascinating record of the ways in which local materials, climate, cultural, social and spiritual significance have all played a part in the design of baby carriers across the world throughout history.

ⁱⁱ Photographs kindly provided by team members from Morecambe Bay Slings.

ⁱⁱⁱ Other researchers have written on exactly this topic, including Askins (2009)

^{iv} In keeping with the PAR ethos of the study, the participants were given the choice of using their real names or a pseudonym.

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