'FIT TO PARENT?'
PSYCHOLOGY, KNOWLEDGE AND POPULAR DEBATE

PAMELA KAY ALLDRED

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
University of East London
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 1999

Abstract

This thesis examines the powerful appeals to psychology that are made in contemporary popular debate in Britain about parents. It focuses on the political implications of psychological discourse and the knowledge claims on which it rests. Using feminist and discourse theory, it critically examines psychological discourse, psychology as a knowledge practice, and considers the dilemmas of feminist knowledge production given the practices and relations it bolsters.

Constructions of mothers and fathers in parenting magazines and news-media images of lone mothers, lesbian mothers and 'absent fathers' are found to be profoundly gendered and conservative (hetero-gender normative) in spite of the rhetorical shift towards the gender-neutral discourse of 'parents'. Gender essentialist and identity/status-bound understandings are most striking where people's 'fitness to parent' is questioned, often implicitly, which suggests that such understandings are naturalised in representations of parents who are not problematised.

It is argued that the notion of 'fitness to parent', rather than contributing to discussion of parent-child relationships, obscures how impoverished popular debate is, because it has little ideological coherence despite its mobilisation of judgemental scrutiny and powerful condemnation. Ideas about 'unfit' parents do not, by exclusion, define a culturally ideal parent, but their implicit nature paves the way for common-sense appeals which deny their value-bases, reducing opportunities to challenge normative assumptions or superficial identity categories.

'Second wave' feminist analyses of family ideology are employed, but are criticised from a feminist post-structuralist perspective which highlights the limitations of 'identity' (for prematurely foreclosing understandings of subjectivity and desire), and of 'social influence' as a model of individual-society relation. A critique of identity politics is employed to highlight how parental identities deployed in popular debate are imbued with psychological presumptions, without necessarily referring to psychologically/emotionally meaningful qualities of relationships between parents and children. Instead, a relational, performative approach to thinking about parents, and a psychosocial approach for considering the politics of cultural discourses are advocated. An examination of recent social policy debates suggests that the former may be gaining in persuasive value and impact on policy.

Examining the authority of contemporary childrearing expertise suggests that arguments about parents are persuasive when they refer to psychological issues, whether or not they make explicit claims to expert knowledge. Paradoxically, as pop psychology becomes ubiquitous in Western cultures, the rising status attributed to the emotional realm can provide a means of contesting expert psychology, by undermining the valorisation of objectivity. However, the 'psychologisation' of contemporary social life reinforces psychology's conceptual framework, which can, in turn, naturalise its conventional epistemology. This dilemma is explored in two spheres: feminist research and research with child participants. It is argued that feminists, and those critical of psychology's modernist foundations, might employ their 'expert' warrant strategically in public debates about parents, but should also expose the politics of psychological knowledge. Similarly, despite theoretical limitations, identity politics might be put to good effect, such as to help children's voices be heard today.

Finally, it is argued that, today, psychology is powerful, not only through experts or professionals, but as *expertise*, such that people draw on psychological discourses in their own reflexive projects of the self. Thus, psychological discourses, including implicit notions of fitness to parent, are implicated in the construction of contemporary parental subjectivities.

Acknowledgements

To borrow the African saying that *it takes a whole village to raise a child*, a whole community has helped me write this thesis, including others beyond those I mention here.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge, with thanks, the support of my supervisors over a period of eight years altogether: Professor Margaret O'Brien, University of North London (previously University of East London), Professor Erica Burman (Manchester Metropolitan University) and Professor Barry Richards (University of East London). In particular, I am grateful to Erica for her generous support, which has been without formal institutional recognition. I hope I manage to acknowledge fully in my writing the theoretical and political debt my thinking owes her work and her thoughtful supervision.

I am very grateful to Dr Alan White at the University of East London whose help and support, well beyond the call of friendship, probably amounted to informal supervision over the last 6 months. Dr Rosalind Edwards and Professor Miriam David have been very supportive and I appreciate their flexibility in our work together over this final year.

I am particularly thankful for the intellectual stimulation, warmth and friendship of colleagues in the Department of Human Relations, especially Psychosocial Studies, and among the staff and post-graduates, past and present, in Sociology and in Cultural Studies, at the University of East London. Many people generously offered me teaching and publishing opportunities, and my teaching in university departments across London supported the thesis by providing stimulation (from staff and students), welcome diversion and income. Over the final two years, I have also enjoyed the support of colleagues at South Bank University, particularly in the Social Science Research Centre. I am grateful for a scholarship from the University of East London that allowed me to work on the PhD full-time for six months in 1996.

The Discourse Units at the Manchester Metropolitan and Bolton Universities have provided seminars, conferences and a network of people whose theoretical and political commitments and support I have valued immensely. The approach I adopt comes from their critical, feminist, discursive psychology, as well as Psychosocial and Women's Studies. My thanks to fellow members of the *Challenging Women*, and *Psychology, Discourse, Practice* book collectives, and to Erica for initiating them. Thankyou to past and present members of the *Women's Workshop on Qualitative Family and Household Research* for their long-standing encouragement. These have each provided space to discuss dilemmas of feminist politics and of engagement with academia.

I have appreciated critical discussions with friends and activists who have supported me even as they questioned my academic labours. I am grateful to those on either side of (and especially those straddling) the academic/activist divide who re/inspired me in moments of doubt in the available narratives of progress and liberation. Particular sources of inspiration, probably unbeknown to them, include Svati, Angel, Lisa, and Erica.

I am pleased to have the chance to thank my family for all their support over the years: John, Vivienne and Judie Alldred. Thanks too to Eleanor Alldred and my extended family for their encouragement. I suspect flatmates and close friends deserve a particularly big thankyou: especially Iris, Car, Sarah, Miles, Shaun, Rachel, Beth and Maria. My special thanks to Simon 'Rebecca' Pollock for his support in all kinds of ways, political, grammatical and domestic, over the past three years.

This thesis is dedicated to the personal, political and academic communities (real and virtual) who enable and sustain critical debate, and to all the friends whose contribution, through passionate debate, is obscured by the myth of the solitary, originating author.

Contents

Appendix

Alldred, P. (1998b) Making a Mockery of Family Life? Lesbian Mothers in the British Media, *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, *2* (4): p9-21.

List of illustrations

Chapter 1

<u>**Disciplinary Roots and Discursive Routes**</u>

At this time of political and popular concern about the family, much public debate focuses on who brings up children and how. The failure of parents to inculcate decent social or 'family' values in their children and the loss of parental authority are looked to as the causes of diverse contemporary social problems. Amidst today's mounting prescriptions for 'good parenting', even politicians, including the present Home Secretary, Jack Straw, propose solutions to their concerns in the form of appropriate parenting, and legislate for parenting classes, home-school agreements, and on the responsibilities of the parents of young offenders, in addition to pre-existing legislation on the responsibility of all parents to their children, including after relationships between parents have ended.

The further extension of legal measures to personal relationships is only part of the erosion of previous boundaries between the public and the private sphere. Discussion of 'private lives', relationships and emotions now occurs in the 'public sphere' and the language of psychology infuses politics and popular debate. This thesis examines the powerful appeals to psychology that are made in contemporary popular debate about parents, focusing on the political implications of psychological discourses and the knowledge claims on which they rest.

To examine common-place or 'popular' understandings of parents in Britain today, I draw from feminist and other strands of critique and aim to identify aspects of popular accounts which hamper, limit or prejudice debates about parents, such as the much maligned identity categories of 'lone mother', 'absent father', 'lesbian mother', and the appeals to value-laden psychological knowledge which can regulate and pathologise whilst claiming to be value-free. My aim is to contribute to the opening up of discursive spaces for thinking beyond identity categories for parents and moving beyond static evaluations of the role of the expert; and to contribute to feminist debate about the dilemmas of engaging in the production of academic knowledge. In order to do this, I explore the cultural construction of contemporary parents in popular media, firstly in a medium marketed at parents, and then more

extensively at sites at which 'fitness to parent' is implicitly questioned. I then consider how expert psychological knowledge can be understood to function for contemporary parents, and the possibilities of feminist intervention in public debates by producing alternative expert knowledge. By focusing on a particular element within understandings of parents: the notion of 'fitness to parent', I explore contemporary claims to expertise about parents and question the ungendered nature of the term 'parents'. In the final chapter, I consider 'fitness to parent' as one aspect of how psychological discourses function at a personal level, that is, its place in the 'project of the self' for adults today, whatever their parental status, and consider the value of post-identity approaches associated with Queer theory for social policy concerning parents.

The 'politics of psychology' are made visible by a multidisciplinary perspective, drawn from cultural studies and contemporary social theory, which enables the discipline of psychology to be an object of inquiry, rather than a disciplinary perspective. The approach taken to the study of popular images of parents, the language of psychology and the power of psychological knowledge is one identified with the notion of 'discourse' as it has been developed in feminist readings of post-structuralism (Barrett, 1991; Burman, 1990; Butler, 1990; Fraser, 1989; Sawicki, 1991; Walkerdine, 1990). The theoretical shifts such work allows from a focus on the individual and identity, to identifications and subjectivity, are applied to thinking about parents. In particular, the implications of the critique of identity politics are explored in terms of potential feminist-informed strategies for resistance to the normalising effects of psychological discourses at individual and academic or policy levels.

The first section of this chapter introduces some key themes within current expressions of concern about the family. It also aims to place them, and the thesis itself in a broader context. The following section provides some personal background to the thesis, which serves to highlight the historical location of both topic and approach in relation to 'second wave' Western feminism. The third section describes the points of departure for the study, and the fourth, the disciplinary influences on the approach adopted. The final section describes the chapters that follow.

1.1 'Family values': parents and children in 1990s British politics

Feminist historian Linda Gordon places today's concern about the family in historical context and views the anxiety itself as a cultural phenomenon:

> 'For at least 150 years there has been periods of fear that 'the family' - meaning a popular image of what families are supposed to be like, by no means a correct recollection of any actual 'traditional' family - was in decline, and these fears have tended to escalate in periods of social stress.' (Gordon, 1999: p3)

The notion of the family that has entered our common-sense through post-war popular culture and disciplinary practices is the 1960s' sitcom image comprising a male 'head of household', who is the family breadwinner, a female 'wife and homemaker', and their dependent, biological children. Today, many people mistake this 'modern' form of family for 'an ancient, essential, and now endangered institution' (Stacey, 1998: p6). Contemporary concern about the family is prompted by demographic change, and arguments deploy varying figures as their evidence to support differing conclusions. Often, although not exclusively, concern about changes in family life exist in tandem with calls for a return to 'family values' which posit a romanticised nuclear family as the bedrock of society and the guardian of decent social values. Responses to this include the argument that there has not been an all-out rejection of family, just the emergence of diverse ways of living it (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995), and that such changes that there are can be interpreted as pro-feminist (Smart, 1997) or pro-democratic (Beck, 1997). Either way, claims to know are the currency of political debates about social change and family policy.

Since the 1980s, 'family values' rhetoric has come to be strongly associated with those on the political right, and is often accompanied by socially conservative or authoritarian, and anti-feminist sentiments. By the mid 1990s, one line of argument was that the left had made an error of judgement in vacating what was evidently a site of popular concern, so that by the 1997 General Election, all the major parties, including the Labour Party, were claiming to be 'the party of the family'. When New Labour was elected to office, this now centre-left party spoke in the same terms as the Conservatives about 'encouraging' individual and family 'responsibility', which would be allowed to flourish by pruning back the over-protective 'nanny state' welfare system.

These contested assertions of 'family values', and debates about the degree of change regarding families, take place in the context of increasing social conservatism, the privatisation of social institutions, the triumph of neo-liberalism and market capitalism, and the most rapid shifts in gender relations in a whole century of cultural change. Indeed, gender is a sustained theme throughout all manner of contemporary debate about the family and in the current concern over social cohesion. When the whole fabric of social relations between men and women has undergone deep and seemingly irreversible transformations (McRobbie, 1994), it is not surprising that the 'traditional' nuclear family seems endangered. Economic changes have also made the family's conventional distribution of paid labour unviable for many people, and when New Labour promotes the uptake of paid work by mothers and even lone mothers in the name of (individualised) financial self-sufficiency, and alongside neo-conservative rhetoric about 'the family', ideological markers dissolve. But were its rigidly gendered roles really the family's most important contribution to society? Were the desirable qualities of parenting and 'doing family' really the sole prerogative of this particular family form and its identities?

An important tool for the analysis of cultural politics in the 1960s and 70s was the idea of the moral panic. Moral panics express anxiety about the pace of social change and provide a normative and consensual language for understanding the turbulence caused by change. Dramatic changes in economic patterns, as well as shifts in gendered social relations increase inter-generational differences which exacerbate misunderstandings and tension. According to McRobbie (1994), moral panics now express a fear of being out of control. The calls for a return to 'family values' respond to the end of the sense of consensus on social values and presumed consequential loss of social cohesion. Even if this 'cohesion' was a coercive, authoritarian, mono-cultural one and any consensus on social values and morality more apparent than real, its loss is mourned. The fear is the loss of control or certainty conveyed in the phrase a 'moral vacuum': a spiralling downwards into social disorder and amorality. The perceived threat from 'below' leads to an Othering of certain people and a pathologisation of their culture, illustrated in the discourse of an 'underclass'. Selfish

individualism is condoned in the name of the 'free' market, but condemned where it conflicts with the financial responsibility which is constructed as a 'family value'.

Young offenders, 'young' mothers and single parent families (especially those living on council estates) have been recurrent figures for concern in the early 1990s (McRobbie, 1994). Historically though, certain anxieties have arisen with startling regularity, as Geoff Pearson's work illustrates (1983; cited in McRobbie, 1994). While moral panics inevitably construct a 'golden age', historical studies such as Pearson's show that, even 'back then' (in the mid 1960s and mid 1940s), concerns about the 'youth of today' focused on their rowdy and undisciplined nature, their immorality, their increasing criminality and the absence of parental control. Most prominent among the folk devils of contemporary (reputedly 'popular') concern are lone mothers. These are women with dependent children, with no resident father, who run 'female-headed households'. In most of the moral panics that characterise the 1990s, much of the language is ungendered, whilst in actuality 'lone parents' are mostly mothers, 'youth crime' and 'school exclusion' mostly apply to boys, and 'social alienation' to men. However, there is further cause for worry when problems that were 'contained' by gender now leak across that boundary: boys suffer increasingly from eating disorders, girls are increasingly amongst those excluded from school, and playground violence is being explained as girls kicking out literally in the name of 'Girl Power'. When striking figures are presented, they sometimes show racial, as well as gendered, differences. However, different conclusions are drawn about the causes and consequences of these issues, especially on the significance of 'race', in relation to class or economic factors. Furthermore, different sets of figures construct an issue differently thereby producing different 'findings' and revealing the socially fabricated nature of statistics.

This thesis is concerned with the rhetorical or 'discursive' aspects of such social changes, that is, with the language and images of 'family', 'mothers', 'fathers', 'parents' and children. Their study is important because apparent clarity and certainty about the meanings of these terms in fact obscures contested aspects of their meanings, including who is represented by them, and what moral attributions are made to them. However, the thesis is 'not only' about cultural politics, as if this is

aside from the 'cut and thrust' of 'real' politics or policy analysis. The way particular groups are represented places them in status hierarchies through which the 'politics of representation' are conducted (Fraser, 1989; Hall, 1992). Not only do these cultural meanings place people in relations of power, they impact materially in psychological and economic ways, as illustrations about welfare show most literally. They are the ideas and images with which 'real' politics is waged, and are viewed as illustrating some of the tensions of contemporary social democratic culture. The power that 'ways of talking' have is demonstrated by the fact that describing a particular family form as 'traditional' allows it to be presumed ideal. There is a slippage from supposedly neutral description to normalising prescription like that that Burman (1994a) shows for developmental psychology. This puts those living in other forms of family on the defensive and can pathologise them/us for deviating from this supposed norm. Thus, 'ways of talking about' parents is key to the approach adopted, and leads to the study of cultural texts *about* parents, rather than research *with* parents themselves. It therefore draws heavily from cultural studies, uses contemporary social and feminist theory, and in particular, approaches associated with the concept of discourse.

The concept of the moral panic is a starting point for my study of representations of parents. It was drawn on to understand events following the death of James Bulger in 1993, when the circumstances of his murder led to a spiral of anxieties, punitive measures and new groups of stigmatized individuals emerging in the landscape of the public imagination (McRobbie, 1994). This event was significant in drawing together two issues of concern: juvenile crime, and 'inadequate' families, lone mothers in particular, who were apparently failing to inculcate appropriate social values in their children (Roseneil and Mann, 1996). The concept of the moral panic and of media amplification are now such common currency that journalists themselves ask 'Was all this just media hype?'. However, what is particular about moral panics of the 1990s is the hugely expanded mass media, and the emergence of media literate organisations and pressure groups who answer journalists' calls for immediate sound-bite responses to counter moral panics and defend its folk devils (McRobbie, 1994). The media is now recognised as playing an active part in constructing particular meanings which have ideological effects, and in generating and amplifying concern. Importantly, the media sets the terms of public debate, outside of which it becomes very difficult to get

heard. To this earlier form of sociological analysis of the media, I add a feminist post-structuralist approach to language as *constitutive of* social reality. Thus, the significance accorded the media is heightened by understanding it as constructing, rather than merely reflecting, our experience of the world. However, the dominant meanings provided in mainstream media are contested, even where the alternatives are muted. I argue that this approach goes some way towards answering the psychosocial problematic of according popular images and discourse their due personal, as well as political, significance, yet according the individual subject a complexity and agency that earlier analyses sometimes compromised.

Following the work of Stuart Hall *et al.* (1984), ideology is here understood not as a simple distortion of truth by dominant powers, but as working continuously through the mobilisation of popular notions of 'common-sense'. Common-sense accounts are powerful because they are naturalised as consensual meanings and uncontentious truth. Popular discourses of 'psychology', in the broadest sense of concerning the mind or emotions, function powerfully in common parlance even though they are divorced from the epistemological claims of the discipline of psychology. They can therefore be even more powerful, since it is hard to challenge the perspective on which the knowledge is based when no disciplinary perspective is acknowledged, as when a knowledge presents itself as perspective-free.

My interest is in the ideological consequences of the particular discourses or images of 1990s British public policy debates about parents. What meanings and expectations are brought into play when mothers are referred to, when fathers are specified, or when the increasingly popular term 'parents' is employed? What knowledge sources are there about parents/children/families and how do we know what 'good', 'bad' or 'ordinary' parents are? Who are the experts on parenting? Psychologists, paediatricians, social workers, health visitors, parents or children might each make a claim. How could each party assert their opinion? Through its specific focus on discourses of parents, this thesis explores broader issues concerning contemporary conflicts over knowledge, expertise and truth. How might one intervene in popular debates to counter aspects of moral panics when appeals to better knowledge and

truer accounts are undermined by a 'loss of faith' in the ways knowledge used to be guaranteed, the 'crisis of legitimisation' (Lyon, 1984; Lyotard, 1984)?

In spite of an overarching framework which calls into question narratives of progress towards enlightenment or liberation, I have not wholly been able to resist such a narrative for the thesis itself. A feminist-informed post-structuralist approach is presented as an improvement on a socialist-feminist framework for understanding the way ideological images of mothers operate. My intention is not to present this as better simply because it is newer, but to recognise that post-structuralist approaches developed from auto-critique within earlier (structuralist) approaches, such as Marxism and, to some degree, rest on them. To omit this history risks losing such a strong emphasis on politics and power. However, the thesis does follow a conventional format in criticising old approaches and embracing newer ones and in attempting to apply the preferred framework to a novel topic. An approach to identities as 'performative' has been developed in relation to gender and sexuality in feminist theoretical work. This thesis considers whether this might be useful for thinking about parents today. It concludes that such an approach avoids some of the problems of mainstream psychological approaches and of identity politics, and ends optimistically, with an argument that recent changes in social policy seem to be compatible with such an approach. I could not resist the modernist discourse of progress for its political force, nor could I have sustained the production of a thesis without this belief (although at times it has been shaky). This paradox is examined as an issue in its own right because it echoes a key point of tension between contemporary theory and feminist or socialist politics.

Whilst this Enlightenment belief underpins the thesis as a whole, a linear, modernist narrative of scientific investigation is only partially in evidence. The chapters do not narrate the rational selection of a topic, then a method, its application and the presentation of more-or-less assured 'findings'. Instead, the narrative linking the chapters is partly chronological and partly a retrospective construction of an argument *in spite of* the original chronology. In particular, the structure conveys the shift in emphasis from representations of parents, to the knowledge claims embodied in these representations, and the operation of power through them. The thesis can be seen as a

map of interdisciplinary approaches to a particular cultural terrain. In some ways though, the thesis maps a route I took as a PhD student, and as a person, over the 1990s. Seeing it as a travelogue, a representation of route or chronology, of my journey through different disciplines, and the shifting vantage points they allowed on my object of inquiry, allows acknowledgement of the processes of its own production and refuses to obscure the fact of its fabrication *post hoc* as an account which re/constructs the original journey.

1.2 The political is personal: mothers and daughters today

As with most PhDs, my interest is not 'purely academic'. As Acker (1981: p96) observed, 'many of us study aspects of our autobiographies partially disguised as a "detached" choice of an interesting problem.' As a childless (or 'childfree') woman who is interested in living and working with children, a series of changes in the way I have defined my identity and considered my relationships, sexuality, and living arrangements have prompted me to think about how others might view these and on them base judgements about my fitness to parent, teach or do youth work. The motives of someone whose relationships might easily be amongst those scrutinised and deemed unfit for childrearing to write about the forms of expertise which judge parenting are, at some levels, self-evident. Trying to understand the mechanisms of power of such judgements is a personal project, as well as a political one. I am also invested personally in the theoretical challenge of a more satisfactory understanding of subjective desire, since before beginning the thesis, (perhaps I imagined) feminist, same-aged friends viewed my interest in having a child as naïve and unquestioning. I wondered initially how I came to be interested in being a mother whilst cringing at so many cultural expressions of 'mother'. Was I 'buying' into 'rosy images of motherhood' by splitting off and protecting my emotional life from my political understandings? It is now observed that as 'women's libbers' of the 1970s moved through their 30s and 40s, feminist writing about motherhood (and heterosexuality) softened and now often enjoy a more celebratory tone. By the end of the 1990s, the more fundamentalist lesbian-feminist analyses have waned, and many of my friends have had babies. The shift away from identity politics that the thesis traces both within feminist theory and in cultural politics more broadly, is also part of my own biography.

Personalising the thesis also helps to historicise it. My experience of personal, particularly reproductive, choice cannot be understood outside the history of the struggles of second wave feminism in Britain. For this reason, I am fascinated by the contrast between my experience of choices regarding relationships and childbearing, and my mother's, 25 years earlier. We share more common ground in our ideas about childrearing than on other issues it seems, but on the issue of agency or self-determination and the articulation of decision-making around having children, our differing language can cause us some pain.

At the start of their book, ***The Normal Chaos of Love***, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim quote from a novel called *A Home at the End of the World* by Michael Cunningham. A daughter asks her mother:

> "'Why did you marry the man you did?"… "You never worried that you might be making some sort of extended mistake, like losing track of your real life and going off on, I don't know, a tangent you could never return from?" Her mother "waved the question away as if it were a sluggish but persistent fly. Her fingers were bright with tomato pulp. "We didn't ask such big questions then," she said. "Isn't it hard on you, to think and wonder and plan so much?"'(Cunningham, 1991: p189-90, cited in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: p1).

My own mother is jarred slightly by my articulation of a decision about childbearing in terms of decisions about my employment, income, accommodation, geographical location, co-parents and circle of friends for babysitting. For her, having me, and three years later, my sister, 'followed naturally' from courting, getting engaged and then marrying my father at the age of 22, and 'finding herself' pregnant just before her 24th birthday. To her, my way of talking about such issues sounds a little 'too calculated'. It seems cold, controlling and overly cerebral: falsely separating myself from others (particularly the father of any child), and with an omnipotent sense of control over my life, my biological fertility and independence of the will of God. Rendering them my 'decisions' is to bring them into the realm of rational, conscious reflection. Some of the cultural understandings on which I draw reject the idea of 'doing what's natural', 'letting a baby come along' and do not presume that motherhood is an inevitability. I am conscious of the debt that reproductive choice and currently available discourses of sexual relationships owes the women's movement of my 1970s childhood, and am aware that I probably take-for-granted

ideas about femininity that have changed considerably over the course of my mother's and grandmothers' lives. That I am troubled by the possibility of having made her sound naïve, passive or unreflective shows the implicit superiority attributed to the language of decision-making (at least, in my social circles) today.

It is this culture of personal choice and individual responsibility for making one's life and seeking emotional satisfaction which Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (*ibid*.) see as marking a new era. The pace of change at this cultural moment creates social differences between generations which provide the potential for tensions and misunderstandings. Whilst some critics point out that this sense of choice and agency that I experience is a privilege of the (new) middle classes (Leonard, 1996) and there are certainly limits to its generality, it is, arguably, part of what other commentators may describe as the 'threat to the family'. Whatever intergenerational patterns commentators claim to discern, the meanings of 'family' are strongly contested, and some arguments make powerful claims to 'the natural' and to common-sense. This thesis explores a small component of the complex of ideas around family, focusing on discourses of parents and the claims to knowledge by which they can be judged. Of particular interest are the discourses through which a decision to parent might be articulated, or through which medics providing fertility services and social workers conducting foster/adoption placement assessments decide who is 'fit to parent'. What is considered a healthy desire to be a parent?

The 'big questions' facing individuals today are often expressed through the same discourses available to the professionals: discourses of popular psychology, or which map the same terrain of psychological, emotional or subjective issues. The reflexive individual identifies and pursues their own goals which are articulated in psychological terms, such as, emotional satisfaction and intimacy needs (Giddens, 1992; Rose, 1989a; 1993). Indeed, discourses of emancipation and rights now extend from the civil, into the psychological sphere, to include aspects of identity and self-definition (Richards, 1994b). As the pursuit of love becomes more highly valorised, values which have bound the traditional family together (including gender and age status hierarchies, 'duty' and 'obligation') have less pull on us. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) argue that this does not constitute a threat to family, but merely its diversification as people try different ways of meeting their needs in negotiated,

'alternative' or post-divorce families. It is precisely *family* that fills the void left by *the family*, they claim. We are already formed through the desires that sustain these patterns of living so are not likely to adopt radical alternatives which do not meet the same needs for intimacy and security. A more likely tension, already evident for the work-rich, is between work and family life when both are seen as important to subjective well-being and personal development. According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 'our New Era' is marked by the collision of interests between love, family and personal freedom. Even if this characterisation of the reflexive articulation of desire, doubt and deliberation over romantic/sexual relations and childbearing is an over-generalisation at present, such discourses certainly co-exist as possibilities amongst the contemporary ideas about childrearing, family and sexual relations. Whilst more traditional notions of family and duty still impact powerfully to particular gendered effects, the discursive space has been opened up whereby love and 'the family' can be seen to operate in tension with each other.

The price to pay for prioritising personal satisfaction is the burden of responsibility for one's experience and self-development, and it is mistaken to imagine that people simply apply rational planning strategies to achieve their goals. So the difference between the experiences of my mother and myself (and our peers) can produce envy on both sides. How ungrateful younger women must seem for choices which previous generations of women did not have, how sneering about 'the way they did things then', and superior the rationalist language of choice. Yet how loaded the choices and burdensome the consequent responsibility today, and how 'easy' this aspect of life can appear to have been back then.

Discourses of psychology and psychoanalysis are some of the particular, and most powerful discourses through which to articulate Beck's 'project of the self'. They could provide the means of analysis especially for studying expressions of the desire to parent, as I intended at one stage, in which case they might have been both object and tool of analysis. Instead, I am writing about particular contemporary cultural understandings of self, 'the individual', 'identity' or 'subjectivity', but would use common discourses to construct understandings of my relationship to (the topic matter of) the thesis, my investments in academia, or my experiences of the writing

process. In addition, discourses of psychoanalysis or psychology offer ways of thinking about the processes at work at a cultural level, such as the anxieties surrounding children in British cultural politics in the 1990s, or the 'reflexive turn' (see chapter 5) itself. Since a central challenge of modernity, according to Giddens (1991) is to live one's life in a rewarding way, there might be conflict where family members' or ex-members' interests or desires clash. However, the struggle might be an intra-personal one towards identifying goals or desires, in which case psychoanalytic approaches are promising for the reflexivity they allow at the subjective level. Whilst psychoanalytic approaches have often made conventional, modernist, knowledge claims, they have also been important to the development of feminist and post-structuralist perspectives from which the 'post-identity' approaches employed here emerged.

Mary O'Brien noted that 'Theorists, like all of us, come from somewhere, and where they come from is a significant factor in their theorising' (1981: p4). Putting the 'I' into the text voices an authorial presence which is usually obscured by academic writing styles, and helps reveal the process by which an authoritative account is produced - showing that since it is 'made', it could be 'made up'. Putting my 'I' into the text might illustrate some of the individual-level implications of the political shift from 'identity politics' to 'post-identity' approaches. However, to allow personal significances to 'leak' into the account is only to reveal chosen aspects of what 'goes on' within/behind a text, and to explicate them through recognised discursive modes. Furthermore, it can simply be to draw on conventional understandings of identity which, as the thesis explores, retain a coherent 'I' or self 'behind' the text, thus retaining the privileges associated with the modernist ('psychological') individual. Challenging this felt too risky a discursive strategy for a PhD, and could only have been articulated as a political gesture in the later years of the thesis. The fact that I felt there were limits to how far I should be and wanted to be reflexive, where this deconstructed the subject and so undermined the speaking position of the author, shows that its privileged status remains, and highlights reasons for the limits to reflexivity in certain kinds of academic writing today.

Answering feminist calls to reveal something of 'where the writer comes from' has tended to be answered in terms of identity disclosure and confession. Since I describe theoretical shifts that enable a move 'beyond' stable, coherent or exclusive identities, I would not be content to make a short declaratory statement, nor see this as helpful. It would also not adequately reflect the complexity of self, positioning and investment, which is itself a rationale for the thesis. In addition, the 'I' that articulates the thesis has not, of course, been left unchanged by the experience of doing the PhD, yet simple cause and effect relationships between the two cannot be disentangled. One consequence that can be noted here is that the PhD process not only allows me to engage with the arguments that could challenge my parenting, but that my academic labour, provides me with a professional status and class location which themselves make negative judgement from outside less likely. Furthermore, fears of judgement or of actual unfitness sit amongst ambivalent feelings about 'mastery' of disciplinary knowledges, of academic writing practices and about location within the academy.

1.3 Points of departure

This thesis began as a study of who the popular media depicts as fit to parent. I wanted to make a feminist-informed critical study of the harsh public criticism of lone mothers, mothers on benefits ('welfare mums'), 'home-alone mums' and members of the 'underclass'. Mothers were the focus in expressions of concern about 'family values', the 'crisis of masculinity' and youth crime rates and seemed to be being blamed for these and other social problems, including their own poverty. Moreover, they were condemned in the abstract as a category, and when particular incidents brought individual women to the attention of the press, their unfitness to parent was sometimes assumed to follow inevitably from aspects of their social identity, such as their sexuality or relationship status. A particular media event that sparked my interest in doing the thesis was the fascination of the British news-media and subsequent near moral panic over 'virgin births' in March 1991. A second key interest was in the legal situation of lesbian mothers and co-mothers, and the campaign waged in the early 1990s for lesbians and gay men to be considered as potential foster carers or adoptive parents. Since the parenting of particular women could be pronounced suspect simply at the level of identity attributed to them, the study broadened into the particular identities that could clash with, or render suspect, someone's parenting.

An early rationale was that by examining alongside each other those mothers who were publicly condemned or scrutinised, I would be able to elucidate, by exclusion, those constructed as the cultural ideal. 'Good mothers' would be defined indirectly by those explicitly placed outside of the category, and this would show the idealisations at work. I imagined a narrow band of mothers who did not meet social disapproval consisting of white, middle-class women, married and financially independent or supported by their spouse. In retrospect, it appears naïve to have imagined a 'safe space' between the negative media images where women were not subject to scrutiny and condemnation. This assumes that ideology operates as a logical, coherent entity. Instead, I found contradictions between what 'good mothers' were supposed to be, and 'no-win situations' where a woman might be criticised, for instance, whether or not she took paid work outside the house, or could be characterised as 'feckless' for having unplanned children, or cold and calculating for choosing to have children 'as if they were commodities'. I was struck by the depth to which politics suffused the question of who is fit to parent and by the absence of clear or unified contributions to the debate from feminists or those on the left. Moreover, the 'debate' itself seemed to be going on implicitly, with very little explicit discussion of the criteria by which we are to consider how well children are cared for. I saw the apparent quietness on the part of psychology as a striking omission given the 'territory' it laid expert claim to. I recognised how powerful psychological ideas were around childrearing and that the implicit nature of these judgements made them even harder to challenge. My interest in who was seen as 'fit to parent' became a study of the values mainstream culture assigns to categories of identity and the role of psychological concepts and ideas in popular culture and public policy debate.

I was convinced from the start that arguments about who made good parents were always from particular political perspectives, which is why feminist, and socialist perspectives were needed to examine the mother-blaming for (male) youth crime; the attacks on feminism for supposedly having alienated men from the family; the stigmatisation of families on benefits; and the veiled racism behind slurs about large families or domineering mothers. However, what I increasingly came to realise was that there was no place beyond politics to work from to identify better parenting

practices. Escaping the preoccupation with identities would not allow me to access necessarily fair criteria about what parents should provide; and authoritative claims to know, including my own, would subjugate other forms of knowledge, including those of mothers themselves. Not only is knowledge of 'parenting' or of what constitutes good mothering as ideologically formed as are the superficial categories of mothers in the popular media, but the very bases of these claims to knowledge rest on particular ideological assertions of the way the world is and can be known that have dominated Western thought since the Enlightenment. It seemed I could not criticise popular images of mothers on the basis of their ideological function if that required me to provide truer representations that I could guarantee were 'better for mothers'. This is the political problem that prompts such a large focus on theory and epistemology in the thesis, and the political strategy approach to research.

Thus, I became increasingly interested in the nature of 'knowledge': the practices of its production, the theories that assert, and the language that bolsters, its status. The emphasis shifted from who was seen as 'fit to parent' to the types of knowledge claims made about 'fitness to parent' in arguments within the political sphere, from different experts, practitioners and disciplinary perspectives. By 1994/5, I had come to see the thesis as centred on epistemology and was reading contemporary feminist philosophy on the nature of knowledge. In the final two years my focus returned to policy debates, through the 1997 general election campaign and then as the Labour Party's trumpeted attention to parents and children merely translated into compulsion for attendance at parenting classes and appeared to be entirely rooted in concerns about the economic cost of crime.

If I describe the period of study for my PhD (from 1992-1999) as a journey, then the written thesis is a map of that journey, constructing it in a particular way, for particular imagined readers. It is a verbal map, a travelogue. The final part of this chapter charts the terrain ahead. This next part illustrates the existence of alternative ways of mapping this journey.

1.4 Disciplinary routes, personal routes

I have difficulty stating my disciplinary perspective today for several reasons. Firstly, in my studies I have moved through a number of academic disciplines. Second, and relatedly, I feel heavily influenced by interdisciplinary work, particularly strands associated with feminist theory, post-structuralism and postmodernist analyses. These two have enabled me to teach in a range of different subject areas and departments, which, in turn, have provided for me various academic identities. Thirdly, the discipline that has been most significant for me, Psychosocial Studies, is itself a new interdisciplinary 'discipline', formed from the mutual critique of psychology and sociology, influenced also by cultural studies and psychoanalysis (described further in chapter 5).

My undergraduate studies were of mainstream (cognitivist, scientific) psychology. The course was not critical or reflexive, nor did I myself bring a coherent feminist critique to it. As I remember it, only one course, and one taught by a visiting lecturer, made any attempt to place psychology in a broader context (which it did through an account of the history of psychology). Only when, as a post-graduate, I began teaching Psychosocial Studies in the Department of Sociology (as then was) at the University of East London (UEL), and studying discursive psychology at the Discourse Unit at Manchester Metropolitan University, was I able to question its perspective, its authority and its narrow focus on the decontextualised, rational individual. This has proven to be a powerful motivator to write about psychology and its authority.

After my degree, I worked on the 'Children's Representations of Family Life' project with Margaret O'Brien, in the above department, and was generously granted time for beginning the thesis. I was introduced to Psychosocial Studies through teaching on its introductory courses and later, on courses about the individual and society, individual development, social psychology and social constructionism, family sociology, childhood, life histories, identities and qualitative methods.

I also attended part of the Department's MA in *Social Policy Research* which was about ethnography, depth interviewing and grounded theory. Although I did not employ ethnography in either thesis or project work, this influenced me greatly. I was

struck by the lecturer's passionate conviction about the role research could play in politics, but struggled with my dissatisfaction at particular aspects (such as the limited researcher reflexivity) until I was able to articulate it as a question of epistemology. In spite of the critique of deductive methods, inductive methods might adopt the same epistemological certainty. Thus, the liberatory promise of ethnographic research - through the possibility of showing the perspectival nature of knowledge - need not bring in its wake a profound challenge to the basis of knowledge or recognition of the role of the researcher's own perspective in forming the account. I came to know this lecturer as an 'unreconstructed' scientific Marxist, and debate issues of politics and knowledge with him and others in the department, and these form key themes throughout the thesis.

I then studied on the *Cultural Studies* MA at UEL where I read postcolonial, postmodernist and feminist theory and philosophy, including Foucault, Kristeva, Lacan and Said. This interested me in the different backgrounds and influences on writers within discourse analytic work in psychology (see chapter 7).

Over the next few years I taught communication studies at UEL, and the psychology of communications, and briefly on the MA in *Subjectivity and Cultural Production* at Goldsmiths' College (both of which overlapped psychosocial studies through post-structuralist critiques of psychology), I also taught contemporary social theory and the sociology of postmodernity, developmental psychology and Women's Studies. Each of these was a valuable stimulus for reading and forum for discussion, and I was interested in some of the continuities across disciplines, including the impact of feminist and postcolonial writings, of 'perspectivism' and of the disaggregation of the unified subject into subject positions, readings or identifications.

After writing and teaching a Women's Studies course about researching and representing women and a Psychosocial Studies course about identities, my paid work has taken me back into empirical social research, and I feel acutely aware of the potential impact of authoritative knowledge claims. After an early PhD plan to use material from the Children's Representations of Family Life project in order to contrast social psychological and discursive/critical developmental research

approaches, then taking a route through feminist and postmodern critiques of empiricism, I am again involved in claiming to represent children's views in my work with Rosalind Edwards and Miriam David. It is from and to these two projects that chapter 8 speaks.

Although I was teaching on Psychosocial Studies courses and recognising continuities in the themes across cultural, communication and psychosocial studies, I only began to identify myself with it and the formation of my thesis study through it in the last few years. It was when we began to discuss an edited collection from the psychosocial studies staff team that I identified connections between my interests and the work of others in the subject area. Describing the above disciplinary influences might sound like a productive breadth of sources for a thesis. However, the process has not been as linear as this would suggest. It has involved various re-orientations and re-focusings of the thesis and the production of several chapters which were cut out to write it up as this text. Thus, rather than romanticising disciplinary nomadism, I would want to highlight the difficulties such disciplinary 'homelessness' can engender for establishing a disciplinary identity and core narrative.

Since I began my studies clearly *in* the discipline of psychology, I cannot say I am academically 'rootless', but I do not cherish these roots as a sustaining source. Psychology is a key point of reference on my map and one that I have, in some senses, returned to. However, I like to think I have done so critically and from perspectives that are not themselves psychological. It is, though, important for me in terms of motivation. One of the less direct influences of teaching in media and communications was finding that students were so familiar with post-structuralist and postmodernist critiques of psychology that such criticism seemed 'old hat' and work that had already been 'done'. This highlighted for me the importance of finding a way to express how powerful psychological discourses are, and of arguing that in spite of academic 'deconstruction' of its authority, it remains an authoritative discourse sustaining and sustained by many different institutions. This also warned me of a complacency that can accompany academic criticism and pointed to the relation between what is said in the academy, broader public discourses and institutional power.

The above map marks my most officially recognised stops because they relate to my studies and employment which provide markers of disciplinary location. However, an alternative way of narrating my thesis-journey is by tracing the people who were important in influencing and supporting me. This is difficult to map, not only because it jars with the usual practice of obscuring people and personal relations in the production of knowledge, but because of the impossibility of chronologising it as if it comprises discrete events and because it is constructed in hindsight through the lens of my current relationships with people and to their work. However, I could begin by recognising the importance of Lisa Blackman for the conception of the PhD and my perception of myself as someone who could do a PhD. She introduced me to feminist psychology texts, social constructionism and the work of Michel Foucault. After attending the Manchester Metropolitan University Discourse Unit's conference on discourse analysis I asked Erica Burman to supervise the thesis. She and Lisa were very influential in shaping the PhD. In the first few years of study many members of the Psychosocial Studies staff gave me much needed personal and intellectual support and encouragement, especially Amal Treacher and Alison Thomas and, in Sociology, Alan White. Through teaching on their courses, as well as through staff seminars, I was influenced by Heather Price, Carole Satyamurti, Shelley Day Sclater, Jo Van Every and Sandy Brewer, as well as most importantly, Alan, Amal and Lisa. Karen Lyons, Cordelia Grimwood and Ann Hollows each gave me much encouragement to think about family discourse in social work practice. For learning about post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, research epistemology and Foucault, several post-graduate study groups (and shared offices) were significant, and these involved Annette King, Mary Wallis-Jones, Iain Macrury, Chris Cooper, Heather, Amal and Jo Brown. Others who have influenced the thesis academically and been very encouraging personally include: Sandy Brewer, Ian Parker, Barry Richards, Celia Kitzinger, Bill Schwartz, Couze Venn, Tim Jordan, Merl Storr, Valerie Walkerdine, Nikolas Rose and Mike Rustin.

There are, of course, many points of overlap between people and disciplines. A casual corridor conversation with Barry Richards about how psychology's original questions were still of interest to him, helped me distinguish my rejection of mainstream

psychology for its ability to normalise and pathologise, from the subject matter or terrain that psychology lays claim to. Thus the thesis considers how much psychology can be reformed, and whether alternative approaches to social research can avoid replicating these problems. Identifying psychology as a place *en route* allows me to locate it in a narrative that moves away from it, in a conventional discourse of progress. It also allows me to see psychology as a place that has been both revisited and looked back on from other places, and for me to map my meandering amongst several disciplines as these other places.

Although naming people helps acknowledge their contribution, and challenges the notion of the isolated intellect as originator of academic texts, it clearly cannot convey what, how or how much they contributed.

Several groups and organisations provided direction(s) and markers along the thesis trip: the **Challenging Women** and **Psychology Discourse Practice** book collectives; the *Women's Workshop on Qualitative Family and Household Research;* the *History of the Present* workshop; the *London Childhood Studies* group; the BSA's *Marriage and Divorce Study Group,* a lesbian studies/feminist psychology group, the *Sexuality, Identities and Changing Values*, and *Modern Feelings* seminar groups; conferences of the *Psychology of Women Section* of the BPS and the *Women's Studies Network.* It was my involvement with organisations outside academia, such as Rights of Women, which helped me feel that my (sometimes highly abstract) academic scholarship, or the skills I could gain from studying, could be put to some use.

Even the above stays within the bounds of those from whom academic influence might be expected and neglects the contributions of friends inside and outside of academia, lovers, family and fellow activists. Leaving behind the idea of a travelogue that charts the journey, this final section maps the main route through the chapters as they stand in the final thesis.

1.5 A map of the thesis chapter by chapter

The second chapter considers whether the increasingly common reference to 'parents', as opposed to 'mothers' or 'mothers and fathers', might suggest a new,

emergent constituency in British culture: a gender-neutral identity of 'parent'. It examines the social construction of parents in the relatively new niche-market of 'parenting' magazines. This chapter adopts the academic convention of using an historical account to 'contextualise' advice to parents. It privileges feminist accounts of the history of childrearing experts, and highlights the politics of knowledge of childrearing, but makes only small moves towards destabilising the account's authority as historical truth, by revealing the analytic consequences of different feminist perspectives. It does not undermine the claims of (particular) feminist authors to know and represent history, but such an epistemological challenge is developed later (in chapter 6). Here an historical account is used comparatively (What tone do contemporary experts adopt in the presentation of advice to parents? Do they 'speak' with the same authority as did the authors of childcare manuals a generation or more ago?), and to explore the specificity of current practices of expertise (Do readers today want advice, or simply *information,* on the basis of which *they* decide how to act?).

The focus is then broadened from this new form of consumption to representations of parents in the popular news-media in order to contextualise, and probe the limits of, the gender-neutral discourse of parents. Chapter 3 therefore examines popular concerns about mothers in the mid-1990s and identifies a distinct set of issues surrounding specific categories of women regarding ideas about their 'fitness to parent'. These include the 'problem' of lone mothers and their 'fatherless' children, and the 'selfishness' or 'immaturity' of women who deliberately have children without a male partner. Discourses of implicitly 'unfit' mothers carry popularised ideas about women's psychology: about their 'maturity', 'normality' and psycho-sexual development.

Chapter 4, following the same approach, focuses on a key aspect of popular debate about fathers in the 1990s. It describes the polarisation of images of fathers in discussions about child support, such that 'absent fathers' were constructed in contrast to 'family men' in terms of class, culture, morality and financial circumstances, even though any particular man could, in fact, be both. The criteria by which men's implicit 'fitness to parent' was judged in this debate were economic,

rather than psychological. It appears then, that the discourses through which men's parenting is scrutinised are particular to men. This section therefore concludes that discursively ungendered construction of parents in contemporary legal and policy rhetoric is compromised by a multitude of profoundly gendered understandings of parents (and of children) in popular debate. Negative and condemnatory discourses appear to be particularly gender-differentiated: different issues are identified when women's 'fitness to mother' is questioned compared with when men's fitness as fathers is under scrutiny.

The following chapter, chapter 5, considers the status of such images. How do they affect individuals personally and how can we think about what this means politically? How does 'the social' get 'inside' people? This chapter starts with a socialist-feminist framework for recognising the ideological significance of the idealised or condemnatory images of mothers, but finds it limited for understanding the cultural formation of individual desire. Its reliance on the modernist subject risks reducing a woman's desire to mother to a passive, uncritical acceptance of dominant cultural discourses. Desire is rendered inauthentic or superficial, and people are over-simplistically categorised according to either/or options that solidify into identity categories. Post-structuralist understandings of power and subjectivity are considered, particularly where they allow a shift to 'post-identity' thinking, and an emphasis on identification, instead of identities.

Chapter 6 considers some of the epistemological arguments underpinning claims to know about parents. It develops the focus on experts' advice to mothers in chapter 2's discussion of parenting magazines and outlines some of the political implications of psychological knowledge. Chapter 2's illustration of the shift from powerful experts to powerful expertise is considered through the Foucauldian concept of 'governmentality' which understands the power of contemporary discourses as being through their production of subjectivities, thus linking how psychology functions politically as knowledge and how cultural images produce subjective experience. A feminist-Foucauldian understanding of discourse must be able to recognise fully both the considerable power of psychological discourse, it pervasiveness in contemporary culture and the possibilities and actualities of resistance to it. Emphasising the

political significance of claims to know about parents leads to a discussion of what claims might be made for feminist accounts, and what knowledge practices feminists might engage in. Potentially resistive approaches are identified, but arguments for and against them must be viewed in the light of the strategic thinking and localised practice which become necessary in the light of critique of prior certainties about knowledge.

Chapter 7 discusses social psychological approaches to discourse analysis and their compatibility with the epistemological critiques discussed in chapter 6. Discourse analysis can provide a powerful means of contesting normative psychological accounts and knowledge claims because it can be presented as a 'new improved' method in psychology, and so retain psychology's conventional authority. This chapter highlights some of the ironies of engaging with conventional knowledge practices whilst being critical of them, including the contradictions inherent in the production of a PhD thesis about the critique of modernist understandings of knowledge.

Chapter 8 considers a particular post-structuralist discursive approach to research in the light of the discussion of conventional knowledge practices and feminist strategies in chapter 6, and of specific discourse analytic approaches in chapter 7. It explores further the theoretical shift from unified subjects to 'subject positions' which was introduced in chapter 5. It considers the ethical dilemmas of feminist-informed research which strategically responds within 'the terms of the debate' by focusing on issues arising in research with child participants. The central dilemma is that whilst research from children's perspectives can effectively employ the political discourse of 'voice', this discourse rests on the notion of identity which chapter 5 problematised in general terms, and which, more particularly, risks emphasising children's otherness to the adult-centred model of the subject. This chapter considers whether eschewing a mainstream approach to knowledge allows the researcher to retain their powerful position with respect to interpretive authority, or any political warrant for representing participants or criteria for judging their research's intervention in cultural politics.

Chapter 9 draws together the previous chapters to consider how cultural ideas about 'fitness to parent' function today. It places current popular debate about parents, and the theoretical dilemmas identified in the thesis about contesting dominant images, in the context of understandings of the emergence of the reflexive, self-governing, 'psychological' self. It considers a particular element in how parents produce themselves through popularised psychological ideas about parenting, and whether the 'triumph' of psychological discourse has paradoxically produced contemporary men and women as *psychological* subjects, but simultaneously 'deconstructed' the unified rational subject of conventional psychology by emphasising emotionality, non-rationality and the unconscious. It considers whether recent social policy shows the popularisation of post-identity or 'post-psychological' ideas in understanding parenting as 'performative', rather than status-defined. Struggles to assert authoritative accounts about parents display the complexity of potential political strategies around knowledge after the 'crisis of legitimation'. These must be seen in the context of the mobilisations of anxiety around the figure of the child at the end of the millennium, the incomplete rejection of the modernist enterprise, and our formation by it as contemporary Western moral subjects.

Chapter 2

Popular Advice for Today's Parents

Analyses of representations of contemporary parents could examine a range of cultural sites from legal documents or social work texts, to popular fiction, film and TV. This chapter, however, focuses on texts which address parents directly as their readers: parenting magazines. Commercial parenting magazines seldom distinguish between parents and so this chapter examines aspects of the social construction of parents at a site at which it operates as a broad, inclusive social category, and where the images sometimes idealise the 'everyday' parents they depict. In contrast, the following two chapters examine more specific representations, of mothers, and separately, of fathers, from a broader range of sources, including news-media and social policy documents. These are sites at which parents are spoken of, not to, and where it is those whose parenting is problematised who receive attention. This chapter therefore examines positive images of parents in accounts which are written *for* them, whereas chapters 3 and 4 examine negative and critical accounts written *about* (particular) parents.

Over the last ten or fifteen years in the UK, parents have emerged as a new consumer market for glossy magazines about childrearing. The content of these magazines overlaps that of child-care books and manuals. While the books remain popular today, I argue that they represent an older genre of advice literature in which the views of a particular expert - usually a doctor - are presented as authoritative advice. The fact that parenting magazines contain pieces written by different authors raises the possibility of them presenting a range of views and types of expertise. This chapter explores how parents are positioned in relation to experts and expert knowledge about children in contemporary parenting magazines. Is advice presented with the same authoritative tone as in the child-care manuals? Firstly, an historical account of expert advice to mothers is presented, which puts the claims of 'modern science' into some socio-political perspective and raises questions about the role of expertise in mothers' lives. Secondly, this chapter examines the ways in which mainstream parenting magazines advise parents today, and thirdly, it looks briefly at the particular niche market of 'alternative' parenting magazines.

The use of history in this chapter is a 'naïve' one in which the claims to historical truth made by the accounts remains unproblematised. Feminist accounts are privileged, without an epistemological defence of this. The teleological presumption of historical progress is questioned, since this sits *within* the focus on the knowledge claims within, and the politics of, childrearing advice. However, a further questioning of the nature of the historical accounts of advice is reserved for the broader epistemological discussion in chapter 6. This relates to the fact that this chapter was not informed explicitly by a discourse analytic method, although it may be indirectly influenced by incomplete understandings of 'discourse'. This allows the conventional understandings of Truth as guaranteed by empiricism to remain dominant. It therefore shows how this epistemological approach operates as the default and, even in the absence of any warranty or explicit rationale, is highly persuasive. Chapters 5 and 6 return to look critically at such accounts, showing how discursive approaches destabilise their knowledge claims and how the linguistic style of empirical accounts conveys epistemological authority. For now, the focus is on knowledge claims within texts about childrearing, but later in the thesis when the necessary theoretical resources have been developed, the focus shifts to another layer of knowledge claims which allow the questioning of the claims to know within my own account.

2.1 The promise of better knowledge

In her study of advice about infant care from the mid-18th century onwards, Christina Hardyment traces the largely continuous line of men who were convinced that their knowledge of babies was superior to that of mothers (1983: p10). One of her earliest sources is William Cadogan's 1748 booklet advising nurses on the physical care of babies born to those so poor they were abandoned to the foundling hospitals: many of whom did not survive. It begins with his statement of relief:

> 'It is with great Pleasure I see at last the Preservation of Children become the Care of Men of Sense. In my opinion, this Business has been too long fatally left to the management of Women, who cannot be supposed to have a proper Knowledge to fit them for the Task, notwithstanding they look upon it to be their own Province.' (Cadogan, cited in Hardyment, 1983: p10)

Childrearing practices hitherto governed by 'old wives tales', tradition or superstition would, in future, be governed by new knowledge provided by the application of the minds of rational men. Cadogan's relief stemmed from the understanding that this

was a superior form of knowledge supplanting old, inferior knowledges: the heroic salvation of children by the application of rational knowledge to childcare. It represented the triumph of mind and reason over superstition, disorder, impulse and emotion. The 'ignorance', 'error positive' and 'prejudice' of midwives and nurses that Cadogan warned against is echoed in some present-day advice, when, as Hugh Jolly puts it, it can be taken for granted that the new mother

> 'will have the advice of the experts, and will not have to rely on the advice of her own mother. The previous generation of mothers may not be the best advisors of the present generation' (in Hardyment, *ibid*.: p10).

In both past and present cases, the proferring of 'better' knowledge reflects the Enlightenment promise that new knowledge would better lives. Faith in the insight of the Men of Sense was in the genuine hope of improving the treatment of infants. Nature was sometimes to be opposed or tamed by reason, although not always, as shown in Hardyment's description of apothecary James Nelson's 'rational and natural methods'. Competing claims about the status of expert knowledge and 'the natural' are a feature of child-care literature today.

2.2 The 'discovery' of the child

The nineteenth century saw demographic shifts in the position of Western children as improved sanitation reduced infant mortality. Moreover, this century is marked by what Ehrenreich and English, in their 1979 book *For Her Own Good: 150 years of expert advice to women*, call the 'discovery of the child'. As the industrial revolution transformed UK and US societies and work moved out of the home and into the factory, relations between older and younger workers changed, paving the way for a different understanding of youth. Previously, young workers learned as apprentices from experienced older workers, but now the pace of change meant that experience was valued less than malleability, and child workers were quick to adapt. By virtue of their rapid adaptation to new industrial conditions children came to be seen as ideal workers, and as the embodiment of progress. Once the continuing progress of humanity was tied to industrial 'development' hope for the evolution of the race rested on children which lent increasing importance to upbringing. This emphasis served the American dream that social distinctions amongst its culturally diverse inhabitants would be reduced by common socialisation. This model of society

improving through slow processes of social evolution, rather than political upheaval, compounded the emphasis on children.

The image we have of Britain at end of the nineteenth century is a Dickensian scene of contrasting experiences for children: privileged, cherished and cosseted in wealthy Victorian homes, or poorly and fatigued by working gruelling shifts in treacherous conditions in mills, mines or factories. From then onwards, (and still today), socio-economic class position produced differing experiences of childhood, as of motherhood and fatherhood. In addition to children living lives in contrasting material conditions, different cultural meanings could be attributed to childhood. Ehrenreich and English describe how 'the turn-of-the-century exaltation of the child was both romantic and rationalist, conservative and progressive' and how

> 'only the figure of the child held the key to a future which could contain both behemoth factories and nurturing hearthsides, the cold logic of Wall Street and the sentimental warmth of Christmas' (1979: p170).

2.3 The professionalisation of motherhood

Ehrenreich and English link the rise of the US mothers' movement to this 'discovery of the child', for 'In the reflected glory of the child, motherhood could no longer be seen as a biological condition or a part-time occupation; it was becoming a noble calling' (*ibid*.: p172).

Charlotte Perkins Gilman supported the call for mothering to become 'brain work and soul work' rather than brute instinct (*ibid*.: p176). At this time, an objection to the education of women was that it could destroy 'maternal instincts' and even reduce fertility, so drawing mothering within the remit of the mind undermined this argument. Instead of posing a threat to 'the family', women's education could only be to its betterment. In 1898, a (male) writer in *Cosmopolitan* magazine urged that motherhood be formally instituted as a profession, open only to those who could demonstrate 'fitness': "Doctors and lawyers and teachers and clergymen fit themselves to have charge of human lives. Why should not mothers?" (cited in Ehrenreich and English, *ibid*.: p176).

The movement to professionalise mothering was an attempt to raise its status and thereby the status of women. It was with this aim that the mothers' movement 'invited

in' the experts. However, they needed no invitation since this was merely the next new area to which the 'Men of Reason' would extend their expertise.

For mothers who were trying to gain recognition for the job of motherhood, it sometimes meant constructing it as a huge and daunting task. A speaker at the US National Congress of Mothers' convention in 1897 asked:

> "What profession in the world, then, needs so wide an outlook, so perfect a poise, so fine an individual development, such breadth and scope, such depths of comprehension, such fullness of philosophy as the lightly considered profession of motherhood?" (*ibid.*: p183)

Indeed, raising children came to be valued as an experience which provided knowledge, since to study and rear a child was to 'know the race'. In such a demanding task, with such a noble form of knowledge, it is not surprising that the 'professionalised mother' was quickly joined by experts.

Once instinct and maternal love were no longer assumed to be enough to guide a mother, and she needed to apply the latest scientific information, she could fail either to have the new information, or to apply it faithfully. In either case she would be failing in her moral duty to do the best for the children and to be a 'modern' mother. The identification of the child with the interests of the nation (Gittens, 1998; Burman, 1994a) placed new, evolutionary responsibilities on mothers. Mothering for the good of society meant a harsher package of responsibility and blame, with individual mothers viewed as culpable when things 'went wrong' (see chapter 3). In addition, with such an important task to do in the home, women's attempts to fill public roles could easily be condemned. Trying to get educated and join the professions supposedly paled into insignificance compared with the new vocation of motherhood, and 'if one wish[ed] to transform society, why not start with the little child?' Furthermore, there arose the idea that mothers might not be the best judges of their own mothering, or even their fitness to do it. As the professionalisation of motherhood raised the status of mothers, so it raised the status of those who could claim to know better than mothers. But to whom might it be imagined women would prove their fitness to join the profession?

2.4 Expert advice to mothers

Women were, by now, used to being advised, since a whole series of medical experts, domestic scientists and hygenists had advised, through radio in particular, on new and better ways of doing things. In the US especially, the house had been the object of concern during the domestic science era, and so the stage was set, but no longer was the patriarchal husband the key actor, Ehrenreich and English argue. Instead, the child came to be the central focus, rather than a mere helper about the house. The child study movement had changed childrearing from an unproblematic status as instinctual, to something a wife-and-mother could turn her whole attention to.

Why, at this point in Western culture, did it begin to seem crucial that women devoted their minds to the study of their infants? Was the 'fixation on children' and enrichment of childrearing just 'another advertisement for female domesticity' to absorb the whole (now educated) woman and fill the void resulting from production leaving the modern household? Or, was it a result of changing understandings of the nature of the human subject and the will to do well by children? Perhaps increasing recognition for the importance of mothering raised the status of mothers, so that (at least middle-class) women could now make greater claims about their status in the domestic sphere, where they could reign supreme, just as their husbands supposedly did outside.

Even if one accepts that the quest for knowledge was in good faith, it had some negative consequences for mothers. As the tasks of motherhood came to be seen as more complex, anxieties about what could go wrong increased, and individual mothers were the locus of blame. Given this intensified pressure, and the links between responsibility for 'the child' and the future well-being of society, was it good for mothers that experts were taking childrearing seriously? Or were they, as Ehrenreich and English see it, intruding, usurping and colonising yet another sphere of women's knowledge? After the child study movement had roped mothers into documenting and studying their child, mothers' knowledge and experience had been relegated and denigrated until mothers came to be seen not only as the main agents of child development, but also as the main obstacles to it. (Ehrenreich and English, *ibid*.; Parmenter, 1993). This professionalisation of the tasks of motherhood, rather than raising the status of mothers, could construct them as inadequate, ignorant or

pathological (and their mothering potentially insensitive, neglectful or overbearing), in contrast to knowledgeable, objective and benevolent experts.

Raising the status of childrearing from something automatic, and seeing it instead as something consequential, legitimated men's interest in children - albeit initially only the white, class-privileged men deemed fit to represent the civilising rationality of science - and carried the potential for broader social responsibility for childrearing. But instead, the male Anglo-American childraising experts of 1950s 'had no material help to offer, but only a stream of advice, warnings, instructions to be consumed by each woman in her isolation' (Ehrenreich and English, 1979: p184). No longer seeing it as merely women's business also held the possibility for fathers to be more actively involved in parenting - or, since it is likely that in poorer homes this had been a necessity anyway, for its public recognition, and a challenge to the exclusive association of the intimacies of childrearing with women. Indeed, once viewed as a matter for the mind, parenting could henceforth be understood as theoretically independent of gender. Here lie the conditions of possibility for the contemporary discourse of 'parents', and the reformulation of questions of gender for parents around gendered subjectivity, rather than biology and instincts.

It is difficult to assess overall, whether mothers came to be granted more or less respect as a result of mothering coming under expert gaze. The different feminist positions in relation to science are echoed in the ambivalence amongst feminists towards the emergence of 'scientific motherhood'. These reflect what seems to be its double-edged nature for women.

The relation to the expert was also changing. By the mid twentieth century, advice about domestic life was becoming embroiled in consumerism. This embodied a different relation to and status of knowledge. Home economists, for instance, were no longer seeking to 'educate' women, but to 'convince' them. They sold ideas about needs which would be met by the gadgets they peddled. Perhaps this changed the way experts were seen, no longer disinterested and sometimes even contradicting each other.

2.5 The rise of the psychologist

At the start of the twentieth century, experts had advised mothers on the physical health of infants. From the 1890s onwards, however, the new discipline of psychology had begun to claim the psyche, leaving the body to medicine - a division of labour which allowed them both to pronounce on issues such as childrearing. In the early days of psychology, religion was a 'no go' area for its objective scientific gaze (Miller, 1964), but few other areas, least of all mothers' relationships with their children, were granted sanctuary by virtue of their being of the subjective realm (Ehrenreich and English, 1979). By mid-century, the psychologist was beginning to usurp the medical doctor as key expert on 'the child' (Ehrenreich and English, *ibid*.; Hardyment, 1983; Newson and Newson, 1974). Perhaps the link between children and the interest of the nation added justification for scientific scrutiny. As the power women had through their mothering came to be recognised, so mothers' knowledge was subjugated to the knowledge of the men (and, today, women) of science.

Psychology now offers knowledge about childrearing which can compete with, and sometimes be more persuasive than, medical discourse. The powerful claim of psychological discourses can rest upon the moral superiority that can be imputed to the more sophisticated concern with the emotional needs of the child over what can thereby be constructed as the limited and mechanistic concern of medicine with 'mere' biology, and is underpinned by the implicit understanding that newer knowledge is better knowledge (see chapter 6). Viewing the mind as of higher order than the body results from Cartesian dualism, but there is also a more recent shift towards a re-valuing of the 'subjective' which also supports psychology's status (see chapter 10).

For about the first twenty years of the twentieth century, the ethos of hygienism which predominated in physical care persisted in the shift to psychological care (Newson and Newson, 1974). From the late 1920s into the 1930s, expert advice was characterised by absolute regularity in feeding, sleeping and toileting, and limited cuddling and holding (Urwin and Sharland, 1992). These abstemious qualities continued with the reign of experts such as J. B. Watson, who firmly warned against the dangers of 'mollycoddling' babies and creating weak, undisciplined, hedonistic individuals (Newson and Newson, 1974*;* Hardyment, 1983). Here, in the dangers to

be guarded against we see the emergence of a concern with 'character', rather than physical health. Such psychological concerns about infants' mental and moral well-being, expressed at this time through discourses of 'moral fibre' and self-discipline were, of course, the privilege of those gazing upon well fed, Western babies. Objective scientific knowledge and the control and regularity of a rationally ordered care regime were to protect children from the irrational elements of women's mothering. The development of the industrial model of childraising automatically undermined the professional aspirations of the mothers' movement, since following the schedule for feeding and sleeping and waking needed less judgement by mothers thereby reducing them to 'semi-skilled employee[s] with punched-card instructions to follow' (Ehrenreich and English, 1979: p183). The 1930s expert advice on the child is commonly characterised as environmentalist. Knowledge of the child's learning in response to environmental influences might be put to effective use in the production of 'better adjusted' children, which meant adjustment in the psychological sense. Whilst Watson's regime was austere to a degree often viewed as cruel today, it was advocated in good faith, in the belief that scientific knowledge and methods were the way of progress.

Imperialist thinking and motives cannot be left out of this modernist belief in progress. The Second World War provided the context for an explicit regimentation of mothering and the increasing attention to the development of the child (Urwin and Sharland, 1992). After the War, the general shift in emphasis changed the tasks of parenting from one of control and management of the child's health and character, to one in which surveillance and nurturance of the child's mind and emotions was emphasised (Rose, 1989). This meant a step back from 'working on the child' to a more relaxed approach which sometimes emphasized the child's 'natural' development as unfolding at its own pace (Gergen *et al.*, 1990; Reese and Overton, 1970). The influence of psychoanalytic thinking, particularly the work of Susan Isaacs, was to make possible an emphasis on understanding the child's perspective. Once the child's emotions were seen as reasonable, parents ought to try to understand them. An understanding of emotional development as something complex superseded the idea of emotions as simply fuelling progression along an already mapped route (see Burman, 1994a; Urwin, 1985). This allowed a discourse of individual differences to emerge, which not only admitted both environmental and child-originating aspects,

but lead to the construction of the child as an active subject in their world of relationships. Indeed, the complexity and relational nature of the child's emotional development was foundational for conceptualising what is now the 'parent-child relationship' (Urwin and Sharland, 1992). This can also be seen as a step towards according renewed respect for the subjective realm. Since this approach accorded the child aggressive, as well as loving, feelings it became possible for the child to be seen as in conflict with its environment. Newman, in 1914, had stated that 'The environment for a child is its mother' (cited in Urwin and Sharland, *ibid*.) and this was the starting point for D. W. Winnicott: mothers provide the environment for the infant, and are therefore responsible for their physical, emotional and psychological health. Chapter 3 highlights some of the implications of this. Recognising the potential for conflict allowed the possibility that the interests of the child and of mother might not be harmonious, which was a crucial distinction for feminist writings on motherhood (see chapter 5).

2.6 Child-care books and manuals

Sir Frederick Truby King, one of the earliest popular childrearing 'gurus', was a New Zealand doctor who promoted breast-feeding and hygienic bottle-feeding practices through lecture tours of England in the inter-war years. His *Motherhood Book* was popular in the 1940s, and his advice met what Parmenter (1993) identifies as a post-war need for firm direction. Even though society was becoming more secular, the imagery of baby Jesus at his mother's breast, and appeals to nature were used to promote breast-feeding, and Truby King's book opened with Milton's scolding words: 'Accuse not Nature, she hath done her part; Do but thine.' He decried the tragedy of 'ignorance, fear and mismanagement' of a baby being denied breast milk, 'his' 'birthright' (*cf* Parmenter, *ibid.*: p6).

Dr. Benjamin Spock is today the most famous and perhaps most significant of the child experts. *Baby and Child Care* outsold everything except the Bible in the fifties and sixties (Boseley, 1998). His ideas influenced a generation of north-American and British parents - the consequences of which are pointed to by those who claim society owes him a great debt, as well as those who say he is to blame for a selfish, hedonistic, undisciplined generation. His advice was dramatically different from what had gone before - he advocated the expression of love and affection, the toleration of

thumb-sucking and he discouraged smacking - but what was most significant was the landmark change of tone. He was not chiding or patronising towards parents, and he even urged that parents trusted their instincts. Shortly after his death in March 1998, Sarah Boseley wrote:

> 'If the opening words of his child-care manual are often quoted, it is because the change in thinking they offered was so radical at the time. It felt like freedom. "Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do".'(**The Guardian**, March 17th, 1998)

From the 1960s and 70s onwards, increasing numbers of child-care manuals have been produced and bought. These books mostly address first-time mothers (Marshall, 1991), and most mothers have consulted at least one at some point (Clarke-Stewart, 1978, cited in Marshall, *ibid*.). Their distinguishing feature is that they contain sustained advice from an expert, who almost always has a medical background, sometimes with a paediatrics or gynaecology specialism, and whose personal experience of parenting get a brief mention in the preface or on the back cover. They are often large 'coffee-table' books which are presented in a consistent style, format and tone. In addition to Spock's **Baby and Child Care** which has undergone many revisions and remained a best-seller for 40 years, some of the most famous of the British experts still writing this type of book include Hugh Jolly, Penelope Leach and Miriam Stoppard (each of whom are medical doctors).

Most of the others refine Spock's approach and some develop the more child-centred aspects. To his 'trust yourself' statement (above), Leach adds 'And you know more than anyone else' (cited in Boseley, 1998). Spock's reassurances still echo, and are important, but there is some irony in mothers being 'told' or 'allowed' to trust themselves by an expert, although perhaps after the rolling waves of advice this is not altogether surprising. One could view experts' attempts to be encouraging and confidence-inspiring for parents as not necessarily because they really believe that parents *will* naturally know what's best, but because, in the end, a baby needs a 'cheerful mother more than he [sic] needs breast milk', as Spock put it when he 'allowed' bottle feeding in his 1957 edition of **The Commonsense Book of Child-care** (cited in Parmenter, 1993: p6). Either way, this values the psychological and emotional dimensions of parenting above the practical details. The guarded

recognition of parental instincts and greater trust of 'gut feelings' illustrate the increasing admission of the emotional and subjective aspects of raising children.

The enormous growth in numbers of 'baby books' (Hardyment, 1983*; Marshall, 1991) is viewed by some feminist commentators as a colonisation of mother's knowledge by (mostly) male experts (and chapter 5 examines this type of analysis), but this 'growth market' needs to be viewed in the context of the growth of literacy and development of mass markets in general (Jordanova, 1985) and the professionalisation (and array of 'how to do it publications') common to many areas of Western life today (Woollett and Phoenix, 1991).

These books have attracted considerable attention from historians of childrearing practices (Newson and Newson, 1974; Hardyment,1983) and from feminist critics for their normalising and blaming of mothers (Hardyment, *ibid.;* Marshall, 1991; Singer, 1992). Marshall describes the way contemporary child-care manuals construct the 'modern' mother as informed and concerned, and as listening to, then acting on, the advice of experts. She quotes Hugh Jolly in his 1986 **Book of Child-care**:

> 'Today's doctors no longer sit on a pedestal doling out orders to their patients. They must have your partnership as parents if they are to get your child well as quickly as possible…' (Marshall, 1991: p3).

Rather than the patronising, didactic tone of the earlier experts, ever since Spock's first book, they attempt to address parents as equals who simply lack knowledge in that area. They are often descriptive and chart how the child 'ought to be' growing and developing month by month. Burman notes that 'normative descriptions provided by developmental psychology slip into naturalised prescriptions' (1994a: p4), so that even a 'descriptive' text functions powerfully to produce culturally specific sets of requirements of parents. Chapter 8 examines the way different models of child development produce different understandings of what mothering ought to be, focusing on the period after Spock and Jolly, from the 1970s to the 1990s. Today's experts are cautious, tending not to pit their knowledge against the natural impulses or feelings of parents, instead offering suggestions about how to understand them or put them into practice. From the 1970s onwards, as criticisms of expertise gained popularity alongside a general 'permissiveness', mothers consulted baby experts in order to seek reassurance that what they chose to do was right, rather than to be told

what to do (Parmenter, 1993). However, whilst there may be discourses of partnership, and of 'you know best' - or at least, 'you know *your* child best', in taking up the tone and manner that signify 'expert' there is an assertion of the superiority of expert knowledge, and an authority that can still sometimes sound rather patronising. In what tone are today's parents advised in contemporary parenting magazines?

2.7 Informing Today's Parents

Parenting magazines are a genre of glossy magazine which are on the shelves in newsagents and supermarkets in the UK today. They are 'special interest' magazines about babies and children that are addressed either to *parents* or specifically to *mothers*. These monthly magazines are popular (having a 1,086,000 readership, which is about a fifth of the glossies' - NRS Jan-Jul 1998), widely available (prominently displayed for sale almost anywhere newspapers are sold) and cheap ('magazine', as opposed to 'book', price: from £1.80-£2.50 at 1998 prices). Rather than being freely distributed as is healthcare literature on mothering, they are bought and consumed privately by individual parents. Their magazine-style format and colour photography makes them accessible, appealing and more like popular monthly women's magazines (***Cosmopolitan**, **Elle**, **Marie Claire***), than childrearing books. Magazines are a relatively new forum for material addressed to parents about the care of children. However, like child-care books, they are a medium through which messages about what is viewed culturally as contemporary good child-care and parenting behaviour are communicated and in which particular consumer 'needs' are constructed (Burman, 1994a). The next part of this chapter describes the topics covered and the tone adopted in the advice provided in parenting magazines, and considers how 'parents' are constructed in terms of gender, that is, whether they address mothers and/or fathers, or mothers in particular.

Amongst those currently on sale are: ***Practical Parenting***, ***Pregnancy & Birth, Parents***, ***Mother & Baby***, ***BABY Magazine***, ***Our Baby*** and ***First Steps.*** When the original study for this chapter was conducted in 1995, ***M & M*** (***Maternity and Mothercraft***) was 'available free at health centres, GPs surgeries, ante/post natal clinics, parentcraft classes'. It was not sold commercially, but was supported through the advertisements it carried. However, it adopted the same glossy format as commercial magazines, as opposed to the more sombre, information-centred style of

healthcare leaflets, which indicates the (at least perceived) success of parenting magazines. The different magazines vary slightly in their focus, mainly in relation to the age of child, so that, for instance, one might cover pregnancy, birth and babyhood; another, babies and toddlers; or early to middle childhood. However, none focus on children over 8 or on teenagers, and when they carry articles about these age groups, as occasionally they do, they imagine them to be the older siblings of children within their usual age-range.

Initially, I compared issues from Winter 1995-1996 of each of the above seven titles, and I later examined *Practical Parenting*, *Mother & Baby,* and *Parents* in more detail, examining 4 issues of each from mid-1994, mid-1995, early 1996, and additional issues from 1992 and 1998. Across the different titles, but fairly consistent over time within each title, are sections that correspond to each other, such as, issue-based articles focusing on different developmental or health related topics; shorter first-person experiential accounts (e.g. '3 mothers tell their birth stories'); an advice or 'problem page'; anecdotes, photographs and letters from readers; competitions and special offers and consumer news and product reviews. The form and the contents are remarkably similar across titles which, I would argue, constitutes them as a genre, but each title has a particular 'house style'. The details of format, layout, and names for the sections convey subtle differences giving each title a slightly different 'flavour'. In describing the titles of magazines or sections, I retain the original capitalisation where it may help convey the overall tone.

The largest sections in each are concerned with core issues that reflect the age range focused on, so for *Mother & Baby* and *Practical Parenting* this is pregnancy, birth and babyhood*. Mother & Baby* has a 'Development Section', *Practical Parenting* has one called Early Education and *Parents* has both an Early Learning and a Development section. *Mother & Baby*'s consumer section is called 'Wise Buys' and carries pictures and descriptions of goods, whole-page 'On test this month' articles and readers' consumer views ('Mums Check Out'). Readers' letters in *Parents* are in a section called 'From You to Us'*,* in *Practical Parenting* 'Parent to Parent'*,* and in *Mother & Baby* 'Here's your chance to air your views' and 'Mums in Touch (Make a friendly pen pal)'. The advice-seeking letters' page in *Mother & Baby* is titled 'Q & A. Our panel of experts can help you with your problem'; and in *Practical Parenting*

is 'Ask Our Doctor'. Many of these sections give advice in some form or other, but these letters pages encode the most explicit parent to expert advice-giving relationship. Like **Mother & Baby, Parents** has a team of experts to answer the letters according to their specialism. It includes an experienced midwife, a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist, a clinical child psychologist, a breastfeeding counsellor, a health visitor and a community paediatrician. Under the title 'we can Help', it says

> 'Are you worried about a crying baby, breastfeeding, a clingy toddler or your child's health, and feeling the need to share your anxieties with someone? Whatever your problem, big or small, write to us and one of our experts will be able to help you.' (July, 1994)

Although the experts will be in a position to 'help', the problem is parents' worries and the need to be met is their need to 'share it'. This suggests that a big part of the experts' role lies in reassuring parents, which accords with Parmenter's comment about what mothers want from their doctors today, and matches the increasing emphasis on mental well-being which prioritises a child's need for a confident parent over any particular childrearing approach or technique.

2.8 The tone adopted

In each magazine, the contents'/first page includes a short address to readers from the editor and a photograph of them. In **Practical Parenting**, the editor is pictured cuddling her child and, below her welcoming message to parents, she signs her name simply 'Jayne'. Both **Mother & Baby** and **Parents** introduce their staff team by labelling small photographs of each of the staff with brief, but personal (and identificatory?) descriptions, for instance, stating that the consumer writer is the mother of six-year old twins, or that the fiction editor's daughter has just started secondary school, as opposed to their writing or research credentials. These presentation devices create a friendly tone and the impression of the magazine's team as 'down to earth' and 'just like you', as opposed to being disinterested journalists or superior experts.

Across articles and letters pages, the over-riding tone is of *support for* parents - from the staff, the experts and from other parents. This helps make the information features into information *sharing*, rather than lecturing or advising. Sometimes this is from the

experts and at other times it is from parents' or readers' experience, which is therefore valued by being given a place in the magazine's main articles. It contrasts with the knowledgable expert who authors a childrearing manual, and instead, has people 'just like you' who have looked into (what the experts say about) an issue and are simply (re)presenting the information.

The fact that every issue has different sections provides variety in the tone with which readers are addressed. The key format in which information on child health and development is provided are the topic-based 1-3 page features which are written in a factual tone, sometimes as editorial, and sometimes by a named and introduced expert whose relevant expertise is stated. Sometimes, when the article is not name-authored, experts are quoted in small caption-like comments to supplement the main body of text. Articles in which a parent, usually a mother, gives an account of their experience, whilst being presented as testimonial and satisfying our appetite for Oprah Winfrey-style intimacy, sometimes have a didactic element. Not only do they express values and presumptions about good parenting anyway, but they are sometimes also 'used' as a vehicle for information or advice-giving. In *Practical Parenting*, October 1998, the Pregnancy Diaries of three women are presented. Alongside each woman's own account and photograph are 'boxes' displaying facts about her stage of pregnancy and a medical advice box which answers its own questions on related issues (for example, explaining what a breech birth is). These 'boxes' clearly distinguish testimony from technical information, and the authentic feel of each woman's account is maintained by not interrupting it to provide explanatory information. 'Sharing experience' is the key theme in these and the significance of first person narratives is indicated by the fact that in *Practical Parenting*'s October 1998 issue, four of the five cover stories which are written as information articles by a main author, draw on personal stories in the form of short vignettes with pictures, which supplement or illustrate the piece. The use of what appear to be real-life experiences do add interest, and the feeling of intimacy and authenticity. However, the accompanying photographs always show remarkably photogenic people and fortunate timing on the part of the photographer, which makes one wonder whether the production of intimacy - in which the photograph plays a key role alongside the first person narrative - is more important than their actual authenticity or veracity.

Often regular staff writers introduce experts to parents thereby providing some form of mediation, or perhaps a form of vouching for the expert, by 'setting up' an article, introducing the expert, describing his or her credentials and then 'handing over' to the expert. Alternatively, in confessional or mock-intimate style staff raise 'their own' questions and concerns. The role of the staff here is significant in producing the tone of information rather than didacticism. Perhaps this helps to retain this construction of the relationship between magazine staff and readers as one of equals with the staff simply using their access to the experts for the wider benefit of parents. The mediating role is most prominent in *Mother & Baby,* and is very rarely used in *Parents,* in which an article by a particular expert is more often presented without personal introduction by a regular member of the magazine's staff and the expert's qualifications are stated matter-of-factly in the prose.

2.9 From advice to knowledge

Mother & Baby magazine contains the most 'advice' of the three, yet still illustrates the tone of neutrality that accompanies what is, supposedly, simply 'information', and often 'new' or 'better' information. What feels like old news is sometimes superficially framed in a new way. The appearance of new information must help the magazines sell, and keep selling, to parents who have bought them before, but it also seems that emphasising newness avoids insulting readers as might implying that they do not yet know about issues that are already popular knowledge. A perceived need to 'save face' illustrates and reinforces the implicit moral imperative to be up-to-date with the latest advice on best practice. However, an empowerment discourse is often implicit in the way information is provided and practices suggested, and sometimes there is an explicit 'it's up to you to decide'. Perhaps there is a tension between the 'newness' needed to sell frequently published magazines and not undermining parents' existing knowledge so much that it knocks their confidence, their pleasure in reading the magazine and therefore knocks sales.

Parents strikes a slightly different tone regarding the relationship between parents and experts than *Mother and Baby* and *Practical Parenting*. It emphasises information, rather than advice, for instance, 'Breastmilk - 'There is no substitute' *New research* shows that breast really is best' (June 1995, italics added), and the pull-out-and-keep monthly installments, including the 'instant expert' series which began in July 1994.

It pays close attention to the precise specialisms of experts, for example, 'Ask the Experts - Your questions answered by our school specialists' (June 1995). It does have didactic articles such as 'Dressing your new baby: We show you how to make dressing easy and stress-free for you both' but it maintains a clearer distinction between information and experience pieces than, say, **Practical Parenting.** Either type of article has a particular, consistent tone. Different boxes of the layout give different sets of information, but there are no boxes of contrasting 'tone', for instance, of 'one mum's personal story'. By 1996, the 'we can Help' page started to be called 'Dilemmas', focusing on an issue that 'has come up again and again in readers' letters' and having an appropriate expert responding to the help request letter, alongside several responses to the letter from readers, and next month's 'problem letter' inviting readers to write in giving their advice.

The tone of parenting magazines suggests a concern to appear knowledgeable and confident in their assertions, and the process of sounding so often leads them to generalise. The balance to be struck by these writers is between being perceived as well-informed and having (access to) expertise, yet not being too authoritarian or condescending. The weak attempt to present experts as 'just like you' and 'facing the issues most parents face' (which is less successful than for the magazine staff) sets up an identificatory, rather than hierarchical, relationship with them. The importance attached to stating their credentials shows that they are accorded respect not because they *are the experts*, but for their knowledge. Hence it is *expertise*, as opposed to *the expert* which is the site of authority and the reason why parents should listen. There is no invocation of abstract authority, or 'divine wisdom', but rather a rational appeal to the knowledge of an expert in their field. 'Their fields' demarcate specific areas on which they each offer advice, and they do 'offer' it, as opposed to giving it in a didactic manner.

Today's experts would not dream of telling parents how to raise their child, they simply 'help' them to make (the right) decisions. This style of presentation illustrates the commodification of knowledge. The literal or metaphorical question is 'Which line of expertise will readers buy?'. This discourse of consumption presumes an 'empowered' consumer who can choose between different varieties of expertise. However, this is a false 'freedom of choice', since psychological ideas are

institutionalised in practices such as social work and health visiting. Competing expertises, for instance, spiritualism, holism, and even medicine in particular moments do not, of course, operate in the 'free market' that this rhetoric assumes.

The removal of a single authority and the range of formats for 'information' presents an evident multiplicity of expertise. This inevitably produces contradictions, although these are seldom acknowledged. So, for instance, the articles on osteopathy in *Parents* are printed alongside conventional medical discourses, but the magazine format allows them to co-exist between its covers. This alignment of magazine staff with parents, that is, as parents who are interested in the same information, might offer potential alignments *against* experts or against offending companies or organisations, without explicit commitment to such positions.

Psychological discourses on parent-child relationships are not specific to this medium of parenting magazines, of course. A whole 'family' of professionals surround the family (Rose, 1989a) and even paramedics who provide authoritative sources of help and advice to mothers (such as midwives, health visitors and GPs) might employ psychological discourses. Once the child became the key object of concern in parent-child relationships, developmental or child psychology came to be a dominant discourse through which we construct parenting in contemporary western cultures (see chapter 8). However, parenting magazines illustrate the broad shift from prescriptive advice and authoritative tone to a more equal, empathetic tone emphasising supporting and informing parents. They help parents gather information in order to improve their knowledge, but let them decide how best to act on the basis of this knowledge. The superior and patronising authorial tone of the manuals is replaced by an identificatory stance which manufactures a feeling of intimacy and so denies any hierarchical relationship between reader and author/s, and the explicit invocations of expertise naturalises accounts that are not attributed to particular experts.

Expert discourses, rather than the experts themselves, provide the claims to authoritative knowledge in this advice literature. Whereas Ehrenreich and English focus on the power of the experts in relation to mothers' knowledge and experience, this suggests the need to focus examination of expert power and authority on the

'discourse' itself (see chapters 6 and 7). The term discourse is being used here to refer to a set of concepts and social practices through which we understand an object (Foucault, 1977; 1981a and b; Parker, 1992). The 'invitation' to parents to think of themselves, their tasks and their relationships through the discourse of psychology echoes the way 'self-help' discourses encourage people to form themselves through, and thus regulate themselves within the terms of psychological or psychiatric thinking (see Allwood, 1996; Rose, 1985; 1993).

2.10 Imagined Readers

Two major publishing houses, **Emap elan** and *IPC* **Magazines**, currently dominate the UK market, each publishing several parenting magazines. **Emap elan** presents itself as a company with 'a fresh approach to women's magazines', and their titles include glossy monthlies *Elle*, *New Woman* and *more!*, 'teen mag' *J17*, *Slimming* and *Here's Health*, and *Period Living & Traditional Homes*. Their women's monthlies (*Elle*, *New Woman* and *more!*) are generally seen as being a little more risque than some of the long established women's magazines, such as *Woman's Weekly*, and their greater explicitness about sexual matters is in line with the 'modern woman's' reported sexual assertiveness. Its three parenting magazines are *Practical Parents, Pregnancy & Birth,* and *Parents*. **Emap elan's** titles do not necessarily specify *women's* interests, but they do map onto conventionally female domains of family, health and home.

Emap elan's media pack provides a short profile of each magazine. These make explicit the differing markets, emphases and tones of their three magazines. *Mother & Baby* is presented as follows:

> 'The essence of **Mother & Baby** is the love between a mother and her child. Our reader is a woman who has always wanted to be a mother – being a parent is instinctive and natural. **Mother & Baby's** name, together with its warm, reassuring tone and image is exactly what appeals to her.'

It is described as a practical magazine, providing 'consumer and expert advice, information and encouragement'. It is the only one of the three that specifies real-life stories, and it is described as in 'an easy-to-read, accessible format'.

In contrast, **Parents** is 'news-led' and 'information-packed', offering 'an intelligent, up-to-the-minute read, for mothers wanting more from their magazine than just basic babycare'. Open about its appeal to the 'quality end of the market' and in a more expensively bound format, it differs in that it is more specific about expertise, experts and areas of knowledge even in its one-paragraph description: **'Parents** fulfils the desire of these readers to give their child the best possible start in life through their role in its *physical, psychological and educational development*. As well as the important areas of pregnancy, birth and child-care, **Parents** contains a crucial section dealing with *development and early learning*. It boasts a panel of heavy-weight writers including Sheila Kitzinger, Irma Kurtz and Penelope Leach' (italics added).

Pregnancy & Birth too provides information and advice, but also entertainment 'on the all absorbing subject for her and her partner.' Its specific focus on pregnancy creates its market niche, and despite the fact that it 'uniquely, looks at pregnancy from the woman's point of view', the motive for this emphasis becomes more apparent when, in addition to listing 'what to buy for her baby?' as one of the 'most crucial decisions in her life', it goes on to state: 'As [she is] an inexperienced shopper, **Pregnancy & Birth** is a hugely influential sourcebook. For advertisers this is an opportunity to gain her trust, awareness and purchase of your products – early.' Whilst they all attempt to woo advertisers, none of the others makes such a direct appeal to them in their profile.

2.11 A Gendered Readership?

One might expect magazines with titles like **Mother & Baby** and **Pregnancy & Birth** to attract more female readers than the gender-neutral titles **Parents** and **Practical Parenting**, unless the discourse of *parents*, as opposed to *mothers and fathers*, is now general, mainstream and normalised. Does today's 'modern' mother identify as a parent, more than as a mother? Does the term *parents* have particular positive connotations, so that she is pleased to be addressed as a parent? If so, it could be because it is less associated with appeals to natural and instinctive knowledge than 'mother', and more with discourse on parenting as an object of legitimate concern and thought, that is, parenting as a matter for the mind. Is there indeed a constituency of mothers, let alone parents, such that generalisations across the category are meaningful? Do the two **Emap elan** titles **Mother & Baby** and **Parents** attract

different readerships or display any differences in content? Before looking at their content regarding gender, I will describe their self-conscious market orientations.

From the readership information provided by **Emap elan** in their media pack, it is curious to note that a higher proportion of the readers of *Parents* are women (44% of the 'adult readership'), compared with the proportions of female readers for the titles with more female-gendered titles, that is, *Mother & Baby* (38%) and *Pregnancy & Birth* (29%) (**Emap elan**, 1997). This suggests that the gender neutral address of *Parents* does appeal to women. However, despite claims that men are finally getting in touch with their parental sides in the 1990s (Biddulph, *The Guardian,* 23rd September 1998), *Parents* does not attract a readership comprising significantly more men than the maternal titles. Indeed, proportionally more men read *Mother & Baby* and *Pregnancy & Birth*. Could it be that this pattern is explained by men reading parenting magazines concerned with earlier stages of the parental experience because it is a new experience, and then reading less as their parenting career progresses (perhaps when women have become established as primary carer)? Whilst a higher proportion of women with children 0-4 read *Parents* than either of **Emap**'s other two, *Mother & Baby* has over twice the total circulation of either *Pregnancy & Birth* or *Parents*. The differences in tone and emphasis are recognised by the publishers who distinguish different readerships for the three magazines.

The media (advertisers') pack describes mothers as 'desperate for information to help them in their task of being a good parent'. A table entitled Looking for Information, presents figures comparing where mothers gain information. The magazine itself is rated (around 70%) against 'other mothers/friends' (65%), grandparents (40%), child-care books (30%), and TV programmes and ante-natal classes. The figures vary slightly between the three magazines, but the real interest in these figures is revealed in smaller type: 'where do they look for ideas on what to buy?' and, below the table, 'Readers find their buying ideas in their magazine'. This supports the argument that parenting magazines have come about as a vehicle to promote the consumption of goods for children and babies, and as Burman (1994a) argues, are therefore active in the production of particular consumer 'needs'. Perhaps the top priority is to attract the readership from amongst those who make the majority of the household and baby and child-related purchases.

2.12 The ungendered discourse of 'parents'

On closer inspection some apparently gender neutral titles make references to mothers on their covers. *Parents*, between 1995 and 1996 had introduced under the large letter title 'Parents': 'Smart solutions for today's mums'. Similarly, *First Steps* has 'Getting the most from motherhood' written beneath the title on the cover. *Practical Parenting* also added a more specific subtitle: 'From Pregnancy to Pre-school', between 1994 and 1996. So, it seems that whilst these magazines embrace the image promoted by their gender neutral titles, the presence on their covers of the word mother suggests either that they wish to retain some associations that the reference to 'mothers' provides or that they address women as their most likely buyers. Perhaps there is a tension between appearing relevant to mothers specifically as their primary market, whilst not wanting to appear unfashionably out of step with the language of 'parents' or connote any of the old-fashioned or supposedly unflattering 'mumsy' meanings that the term 'mother' can have.

Whilst it is not so surprising that *Mother & Baby* carries articles addressing mothers such as 'When only mum will do: why your baby wants YOU most' (October, 1998), *Practical Parenting* very frequently places mothers in the first person, for example, '"I want a natural birth" four mums in labour' (July, 1994). Sometimes, even an explicit address to 'parents' is contradicted by the more frequent address and orientation of its articles to mothers, or presumptions within a piece. *Parents* magazine actually clearly genders its readers at times through references to 'your breasts' or 'your [post pregnancy] body' and articles such as 'Distant Dads' in which women describe what it's like when 'your partner' is never there when you need 'him'. *Practical Parenting* stands out even more than *Parents* for the disjunction between its gender neutral title and gendered address to readers as mothers. The October 1998 issue has a cover article entitled '"I'm really frightened, mum" Help your toddler overcome common childhood fears' and in Family Cookery section an article 'What's for tea, mum?' The last article is called 'And Finally - How one dad coped at his caesarian birth', but the only other man 'present' is the doctor writing the article about childhood fears, and every other first person experience is by a woman. The father's birth experience is in the regular 'Readers' File' section, whilst the 'Parent to Parent' page of 'Your latest news, views and photos' and the 'Meet Our

Babies' photograph section only contains contributions from women. It seems therefore that sometimes the magazines determinedly address 'parents' and do not gender the titles of sections, thereby keeping open the possibility of contributions from fathers, but that mothers are by far the more likely contributors and therefore, visible readers. Of course it could be that men read the magazines, but are less likely to contribute to them. In addition, or perhaps as a consequence, it appears to be mothers to whom articles are really addressed. The gender-neutral address to parents or readers in titles functions to include fathers in an abstract way, but is undermined by the fact that discussion of concrete issues, the detail of practical tasks, 'parents' bodies' and 'readers' experiences' are mostly oriented towards mothers in particular.

The mainstream, popular parenting magazines inform parents, rather than advise mothers, as advice literature did in the past. However, whilst they do not maintain the tone associated with advice-giving, they do still value expertise, and (while not taking the position of expert themselves) draw on expert discourse and do 'invite the experts in'. Similarly, whilst on the surface, they present discussions as being about 'parenting', they are discussing practices and people who are often implicitly gendered, and in the conventional ways. So despite appealing to the 'modern' discourse of parents, they reflect and reinforce the practice of gendered parenting, that is of the majority of the work of parenting and responsibility for children being women's. While there may be many parents who do not identify with the mainstream magazines for a variety of reasons, there are some sites at which particular alternative perspectives on parenting are articulated consistently. The final section examines whether these might embody similar parent-expert relations and shifts from the authority of experts to expertise, through the study of a particular example.

2.13 'Alternative' parenting magazines

There are a few alternative magazines for parents which contrast with these 'glossy' ones, although even taken together, their circulation is tiny and highly specific. They are more specialist, writing for self-consciously 'alternative parents', and produced on shoestring budgets by editors whose concern is political or to spread the word about their approach to parenting, rather than strict commercial success. ***Radical Motherhood*** and ***natural parent*** are two independent publications 'by parents, for parents' which take a critical stance to the advice of the experts.

Radical Motherhood is a North-east London based monthly subscription magazine that reflects explicitly feminist, critical and anti-consumerist perspectives. It has a different relation to consumer products than the mainstream magazines because it does not take advertisements and because of its articulated anti-consumption theme. The spaces into which readers are welcomed are also significantly different and this produces a more explicit alignment between readers and writers. Parents are encouraged to write articles, or to comment on or disagree with previous pieces. There are no pre-set forums or styles for readers' contributions and journalistic pieces are welcomed. The emphasis is local and participatory, so there are appeals for other local parents to get involved in the magazine's production and to influence its direction, which contrasts sharply with the editorial control over the mainstream magazines. It highlights how limited the contributions welcomed from readers are in them, when they invite contributions to particular sections, for example in the *Say Hello!* and *Parent to Parent* sections, which are therefore circumscribed by their formats.

Apparently more commercially successful, is **natural parent** magazine. When this chapter was first drafted in 1994 it was published as **Mothers Know Best**, but in late 1997, it was relaunched as **natural parent**. Its key theme is the critique of mainstream medicine and professional intervention around children's health and education. It is sceptical about the knowledge of mainstream experts. **Mothers Know Best** articles often presented detailed critiques of allopathic (conventional Western) medicine and arguments in favour of alternative or naturalistic methods, for instance, criticising the (routine) inoculation of infants. The focus of **natural parent** is perhaps slightly broader with more coverage of educational issues, particularly alternatives to state schooling (such as Montessori and Steiner schools). Regular features include 'Diary of a Home-schooler', astrology and homeopathic first-aid. The main emphasis remains children's emotional and social development and spiritual well-being, so, for instance, helping children cope with loss and separation, or 'deal with anger naturally' are approached holistically and therapeutically, in ways which might involve the whole family or in conjuction with natural remedies and alternative approaches to health. Articles are often advice-giving, but not didactic or patronising;

rather the writer's claim to expertise is stated, and they are unabashed about their passionate belief in their particular approach. Its small circulation is probably mainly amongst parents who are politicised and highly educated, with relative independence from, and confidence in the face of, professionals. Its range of strategies for resisting 'the experts' includes information-based challenges to conventional advice, espousals of preferable alternatives, or asserting the right to be autonomous and self-directed in one's childrearing. However, discussion of alternative/complementary medicine is not totally restricted to the 'alternative' parents' media, *Parents*, at least, is notable for its supportive coverage, for instance, running 'Does your child need antibiotics? Why medicines aren't always the answer', and 'How osteopathy can help your child', and also 'Independent nursery - could this be the right Pre-school option for your child?' in June 1995.

The editors, Bryan Hubbard and Lynne McTaggart, are husband and wife, and are pictured with their two small daughters next to the editorial introduction. They describe ***natural parent*** as 'a different style of parenting magazine' and encourage readers to spread the word to 'like-minded friends' (September/October 1998). The re-launch upgraded the format and overhauled the image to a slick and professional one which more closely resembles the mainstream magazines in its aesthetic appeal - glossy, attractive and with close-up colour photography. It did not noticeably reflect a change of emphasis or readership. The change of title is a shift from addressing mothers to addressing parents. It seems to echo the increasing use of the discourse of parents, not only amongst the mainstream magazines, but also in social policy and legal rhetoric. Whilst ***natural parent*** has a critical perspective on gender, it is not as overtly feminist as ***Radical Motherhood*** (or the US magazine ***Hip Mama***). It seems to embrace the gender neutral discourse of parents wholeheartedly. It is 'men-friendly' and includes fathers in the address and topic of articles, as well as in the letters and photographic images. It employs a very positive discourse of family, and describes itself as *'your guide to holistic family living'*. The imagery, language and lifestyle choice presented suggest an orientation towards middle-class nuclear families, and as well as the presumption of nurturant, 'involved' fatherhood, is an implicit notion of heterosexual complementarity. Unlike ***Radical Motherhood*** and ***Hip Mama*** it does not cover issues to do with poverty and thrift.

Its readers are critical and challenging, and comment on the new-look magazine. Alongside a letter congratulating them on the new format, is one which says 'it's a bit glossy, isn't it?' revealing the expectation that the magazine's 'alternative' outlook includes an environmental concern:

> 'Surely your original format was professional-looking enough to appeal to the shallowest of us who may have "holistic" leanings? How much of the recycled (and recyclable) content of the magazine has been compromised to achieve this unnecessary face-lift? The magazine now has a definitely unnatural feel to it.' (letters, page 7, September/October 1998)

That the editors saw fit to make it more professional-looking perhaps relates to their concern to challenge conventional professional practice and wisdom regarding the education and health care of children. However, the fact that some readers have a critique of professionalism or of attempts to convey it through presentation, suggests differences amongst even the relatively specific group of 'like-minded' natural/alternative parents, which might be about ideological principles or priorities or about strategies for resisting conventional expertise.

A reference to popular parenting magazines in the September/October 1998 issue emphasises their self-conscious difference. The first UK website for parents, *UKmums Online*, which was launched in May 1998, is described as 'pitched more at the mass market of parents': its 'features and letters, for instance, would be more at home in the pages of **Practical Parenting** than **natural parent**' (p60). The site publicises itself as providing 'practical advice to mothers, particularly if they are isolated and unable to compare notes with other mothers'. This reference to mothers as studious tallies with the construction of parents as information-seeking in the mainstream parenting magazines. Such images are reminiscent of the child study movement, and are an extension of the early problematisation and 'professionalisation' of motherhood which first took mothering into the realm of the mind.

2.14 Popular psychology and the modern parent

Over the past forty years there has been a shift from scientific advice *to mothers* to psychological knowledge *for parents*. This comprises of psychological ideas coming to dominate how we speak of children; a shift from an advising to an informing role

for experts, and sometimes a changed orientation to parents rather than mothers. The shift to a consumer-driven role of expert knowledge places parents as consumers. It produces not only the option of consuming knowledge, but a moral imperative to seek out and assimilate knowledge that will enable them to do their task well. This provides the market for monthly 'throw-away' magazines, as opposed to books that might have been handed down from mother to daughter. There is some popular recognition of the historically changing nature of childrearing advice, as Figure 1 illustrates. However, the pace of change has implications for relationships between generations, for mothers and daughters in particular.

Our understandings of 'what children are', and therefore what parenting ought to be, are already formed through psychological ideas and theories, so that we already 'know' that the most important tasks of parenting are psychological. Indeed non-psychological constructions would probably not make sense and would stand out in a culture now saturated with a language of psychology. Being a good, and 'modern', parent now involves being up-to-date with current thinking on child psychology, being knowledgeable of this particular form of knowledge of 'the child'. Moral attributions attach to the effort one makes in order to keep oneself informed, however, the financial ability and the will to consume products in order to inform oneself is assumed. The shopping mall analogy for parents selecting an expert discourse fails to recognise that the discourse of psychology is supported by a network of institutions. and also, that ideas are sometimes popularised beyond their original frameworks as Denise Riley explored for Bowlbyism (Riley, 1983). Ordinary parents are expected to be able to draw on psychological discourses and so since, as a culture, we are already convinced of the value of psychology, parents need only have 'new' concepts or findings presented to them. Therefore the expert is not powerful in the same way that he (most usually) used to be. Yet whilst this might imply a more fragile authority, the naturalisation of the status of expert discourses such as psychology perhaps makes them even more pervasive. Certainly there is a greater possibility of competition from alternative discourses, but these need to present themselves as expertise in order to contest authoritatively and it seems very unlikely that discourses on parenting that did not address psychological, emotional and inter-subjective aspects would be accredited much status.

Figure 1: 'Momma's Fault!'

This cartoon strip by Posy Simmonds, shows popular recognition of the fact that there are historically changing vogues for, and fears about, childrearing, and captures the potential this provides for mothers to be blamed for getting it wrong. There is also a subtext about reacting against our parents' approach to childrearing and attempting to do it 'better' for our own children.

53

That fact that mothers want reassurance or confirmation, rather than advice from the experts indicates the broader cultural shift concerning knowledge. Mothering practices are already informed by expert discourses, but the centrality of the expert is eschewed, yet, as Urwin and Sharland (1992) note, this displaces rather than altogether removes 'him'. There may be increased skepticism about experts, but no less a respect for expertise in general amidst shifts in vogue and status of particular ones. Problematising psychological knowledge, in an account such as this, is not simply to condemn it as 'bad' knowledge (inaccurate or maliciously motivated), but to question the extent to which its authoritative status makes it difficult to contest. It can render other forms (such as mothers' own knowledge) pathological or simply irrelevant such that alternative discourses are often not only depicted as inaccurate, but those espousing it are depicted as charlatans (Foucault, 1980), or perhaps in the case of readers of **natural parent** as eccentric (see chapter 6).

Parenting magazines make no direct statements about fitness to parent. This is unsurprising given that parents are the consumers that magazines rely on. The representation of parents as gendered results from market pressures, not purely ideological forces. The following two chapters examine forums which speak about, rather than to, parents, in which judgemental discourses about who should and should not be parenting are found. The next chapter examines some of the powerful effects of psychological ideas about mothers and childrearing - in terms of their categorisations and value-judgements - despite being in popularised forms and fora, and not attributed to specific experts.

Chapter 3

<u>'Unfit to Parent?' Monstrous and Selfish Mothers</u>

This chapter focuses on discourses of mothers in contemporary British culture in order to examine some of the exclusions from popular understandings of fitness to parent. It examines representations of women whose mothering is scrutinised, criticised or condemned, that is, those who are constructed as unfit parents. Through these, it questions whether some of the ideas which circumscribe 'good enough parents' are, in fact, gendered, so that dominant discourses of *mothers*, more particularly than discourses of *parents,* inform popular depiction of unfit parents. It considers how ideas drawn from psychology, and discourses of 'the psychological', function in these popular debates about mothers.[1]

Whereas in the previous chapter the material examined was drawn from a particular type of textual source - parenting magazines - this chapter looks at images from a broader range of cultural sources. In the main, the material is drawn from British daily newspapers, and occasionally from national radio or magazines. All the quotations are from popular, non-specialist sites. The articles are written for lay audiences (sometimes with particular political orientations) and are mostly 'rapid-fire' responses to current affairs, such as next-day articles by journalists after the release of policy documents, or about other newspaper articles or 'media storms'. Rapid-response articles in newspapers aim to be accessible and to communicate 'information' and opinion concisely. They draw on images that have popular currency, address issues that are deemed newsworthy and so provide an insight into cultural ideas and preconceptions. Chapter 4 applies the same approach to representations of fathers. Together these chapters provide a broader cultural backdrop to the discussion of parenting magazines in chapter 2, since it is drawn from discussions *about*, not *for* parents, but it is specifically about those whose parenting is problematised. This chapter questions how far gender-neutral discourses of parents apply when the broader context is of a culture saturated with ideas about gender, and in which

mothers are both idealised and denigrated (Dally, 1982; New and David, 1985; Hollway, 1997). Documenting the popular use of psychological discourse reveals some of its implications for everyday life, particularly its 'normalising' functions. It demonstrates some of the rhetorical tools for popular, as well as clinical, judgement of mothers.

Recent policy-related discussions of families take place in the context of ongoing moral panics about children and about particular mothers. It is the representation of these particular mothers that this chapter focuses on. Arguments that growing up without a father is (necessarily) a bad thing question whether 'children's needs' are fully met in 'mother-headed' households which 'lack' a man – an argument which can apply to either lone mother or lesbian (two-parent) households. The 1980s saw negative depictions of 'single mothers', and particularly of young mothers (McRobbie, 1989; Phoenix, 1991), but the hostility and sense of moral outrage in criticisms of 'lone mothers' (as they are now more commonly referred to) has further intensified since then. Lone mothers have been an object of concern throughout the 1990s, and the Governments of Margaret Thatcher, John Major and Tony Blair have each constructed them as a social problem and couched policy proposals in 'problem-solving' rhetoric. Most recently, the New Labour Government sought to encourage all parents including 'lone parents' into work, by which is meant paid work outside of the home. Concern about the state's financial support of families often reveals strong trans-Atlantic influences, and the discourses are reminiscent, or borrow directly from, the USA on 'welfare moms' or the 'underclass'. As chapter 4 demonstrates, calls for 'a return to family values' and the Major Government's 'Back to Basics', have often been underpinned or prompted by concerns about money and fiscal policy. The focus here is on several particular media events, articles and policy changes. These include: the 'Virgin Births Scandal' of 1991; the legal headway made by lesbian mothers in 1994 – officially designated International Year of the Family, but which Maureen Freely described as 'the Year of Parent-Bashing' (1994: p24, cited in Ribbens, 1994: p7); and the representation of lesbian mothers during the 1997 pre-Election clamours to be 'the Party of the family' (Alldred, 1998b, included as Appendix A). These have occurred in the context of debates about reforming the welfare state; moral panics about childhood and youth crime; the regulation of new genetic and reproductive

technologies; the legacy of 'Section 28'; and the outspoken condemnation of lone mothers by Government Ministers at the 1993 and 1994 Conservative Party Conferences (Phoenix, 1996; Roseneil and Mann, 1996) which heard some of the harshest rhetoric against families that don't match the 'cornflake-packet' - or Victorian 'family values' - ideal. Specific articles are drawn on to illustrate some of the available, and often powerfully mobilised, discourses of mothers in 1990s Britain. However, many of the themes they draw on have rich histories of association with women or mothers across Western cultures.

3.1 Monstrous mothers and selfish women

Marina Warner (1994) noted the co-occurrence of two cultural events in Britain in the 1993-1994 period. The first is the massive success of the Steven Spielberg film, *Jurassic Park,* in which the all-female population of dinosaurs (bred by twentieth century scientists from genetic material in fossilised mosquito blood) develop the capacity to reproduce. The second is the moral panic expressed by some cultural commentators about (the numbers of) lone mothers having children, and having '*yet more'* children (Warner, *ibid*.). In *Jurassic Park,* the dinosaurs were deliberately all made female so that they could not breed and could therefore be controlled, but the crafty inhabitants of the Park (referred to in Michael Crichton's book as a matriarchy) mutate some gender-ambidextrous frog DNA. Thus, nature - coded female - proves itself 'uncontrollably fertile, resistant to all the constraints of the men of power' (Warner, 1994: p2).

It seems that today's lone mothers, lesbian mothers, and single women seeking donor insemination are related to *Jurassic Park*'s female monsters by the cultural fantasies and fears they evoke. These are women who are having children without husbands, or making families without men. They are breeding outside of male control, or allowing men only marginal roles in reproduction. One of the fears is that by doing so they are undermining 'society as we know it'. However, alarmist reactions to this fail to see 'the everyday world as problematic' (Smith, 1987). If the core of this anxiety is the power women have by virtue of their reproductive capacity, are women thereby able to destabilise patriarchy or do the fears arise at a more individual level from a recognition of maternal ('parental') power which shatters infantile fantasies of

omnipotence? Fears about how women wield such power produce representations of them as monstrous. Both film and moral panic echo the association of women with nature, men with culture, and nature as threatening and needing to be brought under the control of 'man'. In the considerable media attention to today's mothers-without-men, psychological discourses have been mobilised in relation to the women themselves, as well as to their children, and can question whether they are 'natural' women or deviant and dangerous. Just as chapter 2 described how childrearing was 'civilised' by the rational men of science, here, which women are 'fit to mother' might be known and regulated through the scientific knowledge of psychology.

Warner aligned the recent moral panics about mothers with fears that are expressed within myths of Medea, the Greek mother who, in some versions of the myth, kills her own children. This act shocks us deeply, it is 'monstrous'. Characterisation of *the feminine* as monstrous in Western culture has taken a variety of forms and still exists in many contexts: from the she-monsters of ancient mythology to the evocation of images of the all-devouring or toothed vagina in science-fiction and horror genres (Creed, 1986). Images of the *monstrous mother* have included the over-protective mother who refuses to relinquish the child and so smothers or subsumes them; the selfish and withholding mother; and the all-powerful and sadistic mother who threatens to castrate or emasculate men (Kaplan, 1992; Creed, 1986; 1993). Such narratives can be understood as revealing the intensity of fear about women's power over children, and therefore indirectly, over men. As Freely put it in relation to today's concerns: '*We're arguing about who controls the next generation*' (1994, cited in Ribbens, 1994: p7). The significance of such cultural imagery is that they construct mothers who deviate from the supposed ideal as dangerous, not merely different, but threatening. It produces a sharp polarisation between the ideal, wholesome and dependable 'good mother', and the deviant or dangerous woman who is unfit to parent. The fears revealed at this particular cultural moment are about the consequences for men of women bearing and rearing children without them, and the danger of these 'monstrous' women breeding 'monstrous children'. Hence the concurrent demonisation of certain mothers and of certain children (Holland, 1998) are not purely coincidental.

Sophie Laws (1994) discussed some of the social policy suggestions that have rested on either discourses of lone mothers as bad mothers, or of single mothers as selfish teenagers who become pregnant in an attempt to jump the (long) queues for public housing. She laments the lack of feminist responses to the types of condemnation, vilification and scapegoating of mothers witnessed at, and since, the 1993 Conservative Party conference. Then Home Secretary, Michael Howard, later drew on 'family values' rhetoric when he argued that it would be a good thing if more single mothers gave their children up for adoption, and an editorial in the ***Daily Mail*** (19th January, 1994) argued that even if such a policy damaged the real children of today, it would be a kindness to children as yet unborn, since people would be deterred from having more. This discourse of protecting the child's best interests is, of course, highly persuasive and is enshrined in the 1989 Children Act. Precisely what these interests might be and how they are to be assessed is, however, seldom detailed and indeed the whole discourse is problematic (Woodhead, 1990; see also Fraser, 1989, as discussed in chapter 6). This allusion to 'the best interests of the child', because it is so vague, can be used to draw moral backing for a wide range of arguments and it leaves unquestioned any 'common sense' ideas invoked. The above can be seen as instances where children's and women's interests are counterposed, and this conflicting rights approach supports the reasoning for the 1991 Child Support Act (see chapter 4). In addition, the very idea that 'a child whose mother is alive and kicking' (and wants to care for the child) can be considered available for adoption is shocking, and reveals its historical roots in '*fatherless*' children being described as 'orphans' because it was men who owned, and were the financial guarantors for, children (Armstrong, 1995).

Whilst during 1994 and 1995 the pitch reached in condemning lone mothers in the mass media approached hysterical, the most venomous rhetorical attacks were reserved for women deliberately choosing to raise children without men. However, the distinction between the general category of lone mothers and this particular subset sometimes collapsed, and it was implied that all lone mothers were intending to parent alone when they conceived. Arguments about psychological development were applied to women in either situation. An earlier media event in which the women in question were choosing to parent without involved or even known biological fathers

was what came to be known as 'the Virgin Births Scandal'. The media fascination with, and treatment of, these women sparked this thesis.

The 'Storm over Virgin Births', as the *Daily Mail* headline put it on the 11th of March 1991, was when the British popular press sensationally revealed that fertility services were being used to allow 'virgins' to have babies. 'Virgins' was used to designate women who were not in relationships with men, and the media story was about three women who were being provided donor insemination (DI) by the Birmingham British Pregnancy Advisory Service clinic. One of the women did describe herself as heterosexual and a virgin. Three tabloid newspapers capitalised on the chance to have the word 'virgin' across their front pages (the *Today* newspaper, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror*, 11th March, 1991) and the journalists salaciously enjoyed this aspect of their stories. They seemed to relish the opportunity to scrutinise and put into doubt the sexual (and implicitly developmental) status of these women to whom they had applied the term virgin in the first place. Not only were these women single, but the heterosexism of hegemonic discourses of sexuality made not being procreatively sexually active with men, equivalent to 'not fully sexually active', providing the implicit, but offensive, suggestion of the women's immaturity or incomplete development. On Radio 4's topical discussion phone-in programme, *Call Nick Ross,* that week (13th March, 1991) a British-trained clinical psychologist called to say that, in his expert opinion, women who were 'not mature enough to be able to maintain relationships' were evidently unfit, or perhaps if they were lucky, just *not yet fit*, to mother children. By 'relationships', what he apparently meant were specifically heterosexual, long-term, monogamous sexual relationships, which involved penetrative sex. This hegemonic construction of 'a proper relationship' allowed him to presume it without having to specify its nature. Its normative power is thereby reinforced because it can be presented as an issue about which there is consensus, or on which 'common-sense' can be relied, and to which his clinical judgement lent weight.

The supposed 'selfishness' of these women was a key theme and the Archbishop of York, John Hapgood, was one of the 'moral authorities' the newspapers quoted making this accusation. His statement was about selfish or pathological motives for

wanting a child and the danger this might pose to the child. This point might not be controversial in the abstract, it functioned in this debate not as a general background comment but to condemn these women, who Hapgood had not met personally in order to cast his judgement:

> 'A child wanted because the parent wants something to love, wanted as an act of defiance, wanted in extreme cases, as a kind of accessory, has to carry too much of the emotional burden of its parent's needs. It can be the victim of dangerous selfishness' (**The Guardian**, 12th March, 1991).

According to MP Dame Jill Knight (whose remarks in Parliament were quoted widely in these articles) the deliberate bringing into the world of a child with only one parent was '*highly irresponsible and with no thought for the child*' (**Daily Mail**, 11th March, 1991). Lack of forethought or regard for the needs of others are associated with a selfishness and irresponsibility that is popularly associated with immaturity. Hence, these comments too undermine the women's developmental status and suggest immature recklessness. Yet there is an inconsistency in the condemnation of women who have chosen to parent alone, especially, for instance, those who conceive through donor insemination, since theirs has clearly been planned parenthood.

The leading sentence of the same article in the **Today** newspaper was '*A CAREER woman has chosen the colour of her unborn child's skin, hair and eyes in what will be Britain's first virgin birth*' (original capitalisation). The term 'career woman' functioned as a signifier of the selfish, demanding greediness of women who actively choose to have children without adopting a traditionally gendered role and division of labour. This title also mobilised fears about genetic engineering for dramatic effect. This conflated several issues of popular concern: about women mothering without men; about 'rising tides' [sic] of babies being born to lone mothers (especially those on benefits); about the selection of embryos on the basis of genetic characteristics (and the production of 'designer babies'); about the eugenicist potential of the acceptability of racial selection; about the implications of genetic selection for the treatment of physically disabled or homosexual people, and about the commodification of babies, which can represent the triumph of capitalist values over family values. Concern about parents' control over their offspring's genotype raises much broader issues about the practices of fertility clinics, the regulation of genetic

engineering and the socio-political conditions for eugenics. However, the fact that these concerns were alive in the public imagination at this time (as a result of debates and new practices stemming from the 1990 Human Embryology and Fertilisation Act), did not help the case of single women wanting even 'low tech' fertility services such as donor insemination.

There are differences in the public attribution of selfishness to different women. A woman can be considered selfish if she is heterosexual but is not interested in having children (without evidence of psychopathology - although lack of interest may be evidence enough! See Morell, 1995); or if she has chosen to have a career and has also chosen not to have children (though 'yet' can be assumed for younger women). Yet paradoxically, if a woman wants a child, but is single; or if she does not work and can therefore provide full motherly care, but then happens to be financially dependent on the state, she can again be accused of selfishness. In effect, women deemed fit to mother are considered 'selfish' for choosing not to have children, whilst women who want children, but who are not deemed suitable, are 'selfish' for wanting or having them. Women's desires to have or not to have children are thus an area of public comment and moral judgement. There is not simply a pronatalist ideology which assumes and naturalises motherhood for all women. Women are differentiated on the implicit basis of purported 'fitness to parent' which is only read from superficial indicators at best. Furthermore, financial circumstances are often a key element in public questioning about whether someone is 'fit to parent', such that having babies whilst on benefits is judged negatively and in some cases, this financial issue is accorded greater significance than issues that might have previously drawn disapproval, such as a mother's lesbian identity, and more psychological questions (Alldred, 1998b).

Being seen as selfish in one's decision to have a child is also applied with double standards between men and women. 'Absent fathers' may have received moral condemnation at points during discussions of the 1991 Child Support Act and Agency, but this category of father-who-is-lacking applies to a man who has moved out of co-residency with his children, has usually moved out of close contact with them and who no longer takes financial (or emotional) responsibility for them (see

chapter 4). Condemnation and a charge of being lacking or absent is levelled at mothers who have 'chosen' to go out to work even whilst remaining primary emotional and financial support for their children. A man's absence from his family might be considered 'a pity' and his irresponsibility seen as a weakness. A woman who moves out of the family home on separation, leaving her children to their father, is more likely to be met with disbelief, condemnation and her pathologisation as 'not right', or 'not normal' (see e.g. *Mother Love* programme in the Having It All season, BBC TV, 1998). The difference between expectations of mothers and of fathers sets up differing moral judgements on and differing criteria for defining their 'absence'.

One might suspect that this preoccupation with selfishness related to the concern about men's loss of - or 'denied' - familial and sexual roles (Radford, 1991), but this was not how it was actually expressed. Discourses of selfishness were, and are, very powerful because they refer or allude to negative effects on the child. Exactly how the child would be affected was not spelt out, but vague suggestions and leaving crucial points unspecified managed to provide common-sense validity and the impression of consensus about these views. As Radford (*ibid.*) points out, the appeal to populist moralism remained powerful as long as the confused and partial nature of the assumptions was not revealed. Figure 2 illustrates the responsibility that is often attributed to lone mothers for being without a partner, and the way this can blame or pathologise them. Figure 1 illustrated mother-blaming for the childrearing principles adhered to, whereas Figure 2 highlights the blaming of mothers for their relationship circumstances.

3.2 Lesbian mothers

A generation after Stonewall, in the context of increasingly liberal sexual values and the defence of minorities, illustrated by the rise of 'political correctness', lesbians and gay men still face actual, and rhetorical, homophobic violence. The late 1980s witnessed intensified rhetorical attacks on lesbian mothers, in the context of harsher criticism of mothers in general (Harne *et al.*, 1997) and a particular 'attack' on lesbian and gay families.

Figure 2: Did lone mothers eat their husbands?

This image, from a postcard published by Hallmark Cards, mocks the blame attributed to lone mothers for raising their children alone. It plays with the 'low-life' underclass discourse, or even the threat posed by the supposedly monstrous women feminism produced, using stylised conventional accessories to (over) gender the bugs.

'Section 28' (eventually section 2A of the 1988 Local Government Act) was a conservative, homophobic move resulting from the media storm (over 100 newspaper articles and 20 television/radio programmes, see Cooper, 1994) sparked by the London Borough of Haringey's extension of their 'positive images' policy, beyond redressing racist imagery, to cover heterosexist imagery in schools. Simultaneously, in autumn 1986, there was the initial outcry about this policy from Haringey's Parents Right Group, and the discovery by then Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker, of a children's book, *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin,* held by the ILEA school library service. This picture-book for primary school-aged children is about a girl growing up in a household with her dad and his male partner. Kenneth Baker demanded its removal. The media debate was not about the 'positive images' strategy, or about how schools should deal with issues of sexual preference which arise anyway, but was framed provocatively, as 'should homosexuality be taught in schools?' (Cooper, 1994; Levidow, 1989).

'Section 28' aims to 'restrain local authorities from promoting [sic] homosexuality' and prevent in schools 'the promotion of homosexuality as an acceptable family relationship' (cited in Colvin and Hawksley, 1989). It remains on the statute books until the New Labour Government 'finds time' to act on its pre-election promise to repeal it, but the Government Minister responsible in the Lords acknowledges that it is unnecessary and open to harmful misinterpretation. Many view it as policy which was rushed through Parliament to build on popular sentiment and of little legal significance. In this respect, it is similar to the Dangerous Dogs Act, speedily enacted after a pit-bull terrier had savagely bitten a child's face, since both were firm, protective, (over)reactions. However, as Levidow (1989) notes, whilst acting decisively to assuage or contain anxiety, 'section 28' did not draw support for the Conservative Party. Although it has never been tested in court, its social significance has arguably been greater than its legal significance. Its codification in law is a powerful marker of dominant meanings of 'normal' family life and sexuality, and the boundaries of acceptable difference from these, and it has prompted such over-cautious acts as the cancellation of touring theatre company visits by a secondary school headteacher and even a county council's ban on the distribution of a directory of voluntary work opportunities for young people (Colvin and Hawksley, 1989).

However, it is also said to have stimulated newly politicised alliances of lesbians and gay men.

More recently, similar themes have been illustrated in the harassment of Norrina Rashid, a, lesbian, Muslim youth worker, employed on Bradford Council's Youthreach project (Rights of Women, 1997). Norrina has received death threats, and homophobic leaflets circulating incite harassment of her, of the project, and publicise her personal details. Whilst the anonymous group, the Muslim Awareness Campaign, attacks the council's equal opportunities policies and the defence of equal rights for lesbians and gay men, it is significant that their vicious attacks have targeted someone working with young people. The juxtaposition of children or young people and homosexuality ignites particular discomfort and concern, illustrated in extreme case here. The social anxiety mobilised assumes firstly, that homosexuality is bad, and secondly, that young people are subject to such a degree of influence by such a 'role model' that they might adopt or develop homosexual feelings, relationships or identities. It assumes a model of young people as extremely impressionable, in discourses of 'social influence' which, although much more palatable and reasonable sounding, still rest on models of the 'corruption' of youth by/into perverted ways (ideas most strongly associated with older men seducing younger men and boys). This model of 'influence' on an individual is examined in chapter 5. These instances of homophobia and heterosexism are part of the broader picture of popular responses to homosexuality and the following discussion focuses on lesbian and gay *parents.*

In the early 1990s, the 'Paragraph 16' campaign was so-called because it objected to this section of the Guidelines for the Implementation of the Children Act (1989). This paragraph was about the consideration of people for fostering or becoming adoptive parents and it stated that some people, by virtue of their 'lifestyles' were unsuitable to parent. It specified no further and it was feared that this vagueness could allow the discriminatory rejection of lesbians and gay men purely on the grounds of their sexuality. It is important to note that this statement was not about criteria for the detailed, particular assessment procedures, but about those who might be allowed into the assessment process. Lesbians, gay men and allies campaigned not to be discounted before the stage of rigorous individual assessment, but tabloid journalists in particular,

framed it as homosexuals demanding 'equal rights' to foster or adopt. Many LEAs, in fact, already had adoption teams that took seriously the council's non-discrimination policies (and some, at times, have specifically requested lesbian households), but the public concern whipped up around this invoked implicit narratives of corruption, abuse, and - as with Section 28 - of a 'loony Left' out of control in local government. Social workers' training increasingly encourages them to reflect critically upon the criteria they use, and the personal bases of their judgements, however, adoption panels, comprising of representatives of community groups and professions, are more likely to be influenced by currents of popular concern which lead them to avoid 'risk' by approving adoptive parents who are unlikely to attract any controversy (Campion, 1995; and see Gaber and Aldridge, 1994).

An opportunity for renewed popular questioning of the fitness to parent of lesbian mothers arose in June 1994. This was when, under the 1989 Children Act, a lesbian couple who had organised the conception of their child together were the first to be granted what journalists described as 'joint legal parenthood'. In actual fact, since then, many lesbian co-mothers have obtained parental responsibility, and these cases are often uncontroversial (Harne *et al*., 1997; Woodcraft, 1997). Examining *popular* discussion reveals more about possible concerns over lesbian mothers than their official treatment in law would suggest. Articles in **The Guardian** and **Observer** on the 2nd and 3rd July, 1994 reporting this case both drew on empirical research findings and expert testimonies to provide reasoned arguments in support of their generally sympathetic positions. The **Observer'**s piece was called 'Why is it wrong to have two mums?' and its caption read '*As lesbians win the legal right to be joint parents, Lisa O'Kelly discovers that children can get on very well without a father figure'*. It began by reporting some of the exclamations of outrage and disgust at the court's decision, which included statements by Conservative MPs Emma Nicholson (who has since 'defected' to the Liberal Democrats) and (again) Dame Jill Knight. The late Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (former Scottish Solicitor-General) was quoted: '*It's ridiculous. We don't put children in the hands of the insane. Why should we put them in the hands of the perverted?'* This comment, which questions the 'normal', 'healthy' development of the women, was not credited with being worthy of engagement on its own terms. Instead the article discusses the development of children in lesbian *or*

mother-only households, that is, households that do not contain a father figure irrespective of the mother's sexual preference. The concern is with the child's 'normal' development, specifically their adoption of gender roles which are conventionally aligned with their physical sex. The concern that they might 'grow up gay' was not aired in these left-liberal papers.

Mothers in these images are divided by a simple, well-worn good/bad distinction which maps onto the dominant discourse of marriage and motherhood as women's primary duty (Kaplan, 1992). The bad mothers in this schema are deviating doubly from their role: failing in their duty as mothers to provide an 'adequate family', (often implied to be *the* adequate family), instead selfishly denying their children a father; and failing to be 'wifely' by selfishly denying men children (or, as 'implacably hostile' mothers are accused, of denying men access to their own children). Of course, selfishness in a mother is supremely deviant; it is antithetical to representations of true motherliness (Kaplan, *ibid*.; Woollett, 1991).

Taken together, these representations of lone, lesbian, and fertility-aided mothers illustrate the demonisation of women who mother (or wish to do so) outside of the conventional ideal mother image. They each 'fail' to meet the same aspect of the ideal, that of mothering within the heterosexual nuclear family. The intensity of their popular condemnation has been startling. Such representation in the media cannot simply be dismissed as inconsequential popular 'small-talk' because, although the relationship is not unidirectional, the concepts popularised in them have been addressed and developed in policy debates. In the 1970s, Anglo-American feminists challenged the dominant cultural discourses of motherhood (Dinnerstein, 1976; Oakley, 1979; see chapter 5), and expressions of 'concern' that the 'selfish' generation of women that the 1970s spawned is responsible for the moral development of today's children sometimes follow political opposition to these analyses. Perhaps concern is often less consciously articulated resistance to what has been a dramatic pace of cultural change around gender relations and the family. The anxieties such change provokes can be for the cohesion and morality of society, and/or for personal security and certainty of a place within it. The loss of certainty about social roles is understandably threatening, for the fear of displacement it can

engender, especially for some men, as lone mothers are seen, if only as a result of media attention, to manage to run families well enough without them. As Levidow (1989) and others have argued, 'nothing is ever just a moral panic': 'At some level it always involves real distress, even authentic grievances, whose sources – internal and/or external – get personified in the form of folk devils' (Levidow, *ibid.*: p181). Whatever arguments there may be about demographic statistics or about the direction of causality, the anxiety is real. Only a Labour Government that was seen to share these concerns could have been elected in 1997, and the displays of macho, conservative, 'no nonsense' rhetoric, reflect a seemingly accurate recognition of collective anxiety.

3.3 'Non-traditional' families

Women 'carry the burden of gender', by being Other to the privileged masculine, as many feminists have described from de Beauvoir (1949) onwards (e.g. Burman *et al.,* 1996). Similarly, white people have not been used to having to think of themselves as racialised (Collins, 1990; Davis, 1990; Frankenberg, 1993; Min-Ha, 1989), since whiteness's privileges have also produced its naturalisation so that only its Others are marked as 'raced'. In mainstream British culture, 'black' is an established descriptive term and identity category (although sometimes masking diverse identities), whereas 'white' is only just coming to be used commonly as a descriptor and therefore visible as a 'race'. Similarly, 'the family' is used as if it requires no definition or justification. The 'nuclear' family has become naturalised as family and this particular form of family is assumed by default when broader definitions, its use as an analogy, or gay appropriations are not made explicit. If you 'belong' to one you are not likely to be asked why. Similarly, heterosexuality does not often have to be specified, let alone explained causally. Heterosexuality is, of course, one of the key assumptions within common deployments of the term 'family', but the concept of 'otherness' can be used to consider how mothers who are in one way or another seen as different from the norm, are positioned as marginal to the naturalised category of mother. The Othering of 'unfit' or 'deviant' mothers reinforces the naturalised status of the narrow definition of the ('normal') mother.

People whose living arrangements do not resemble the conventional family are asked 'why not' or when they will change their situation, so their non-conventional living arrangements are tolerated only because they are assumed to be temporary. Families that are defined as different are more likely to be considered problematic, and to be scrutinised by professional bodies, such as psychologists, as well as in public discourse. The illustrations in this chapter happen to be the usual, recognisable 'non-traditional' family constellations, (lone parent families and lesbian/gay families). They are minority, but clearly identifiable forms of family, but are only some of those that are made Other by the normative formulations of family. The labels 'non-traditional' or 'alternative families' set them outside 'the traditional', which therefore retains its central position as the norm. Such terms may, therefore, sustain their own construction as Other, or their marginality in relation to the category 'families'.

The term 'traditional' evokes a history, by virtue of which the object is naturalised. This then confers a moral weight so that it becomes possible to argue that it *ought to be* simply because it *has been*. As with many invocations of history and tradition, in the British context the image evoked is of white families; positioning Black families as Other and outside the body of the nation (Gilroy, 1987). Ann Phoenix (1996) shows how this outsider status attributed to Black people produced a silence on 'race' in the recent condemnation of lone mothers by Conservative politicians. Thus lone mothers not being racialised in this debate is not necessarily something to celebrate, it is not the absence of 'race', but a naturalisation of whiteness. Thus, the supposedly general concept of family is often actually quite particular. Jo Van Every (1991) describes the way this construction of 'the family' takes as its central defining characteristic the existence of children, though it rarely states this, and besides presuming heterosexual relations and marriage, the children are assumed to be the genetic children of the couple and to have been conceived 'naturally'. She argues that British social policy replicates and reinforces this set of assumptions.

3.4 Mothers who are Other

The cultural criteria by which someone is constructed as 'fit to parent' is rarely explicated. Instead, we understand what is constructed as 'normal' from the more explicit representations of difference from the norm. The category is not defined

directly, but its boundaries are maintained through the Othering and often pathologisation of those who fall outside of it. Doubt is cast on parents who are seen as marginal. Those described here are viewed as marginal because of their household, relationship status, or sexuality. Over the 1990s we have also seen the scrutiny of different categories of mother including those at the margins of typical age ranges; teenage mothers (see Phoenix, 1991), and older mothers (see Berryman, 1991). Harsh scrutiny of older mothers was stimulated recently in media coverage of the conception, then birth to a 62 year old woman, a case with the additional moral complication that she had lied about her age in order to receive fertility treatment (*'Granny's Baby Son',* in **The Sunday Times**, 29th March 1998). Those who mother at later ages are accused of selfishly bringing into the world a child whose mother will die prematurely, or of 'trying to have it all' by concentrating on a career and then wanting motherhood as well.

The argument about the shift from the all-powerful expert to persuasive expertise in chapter 2 must not be over-stated. There may be a shift to the more subtle and seemingly autonomous power of expertise (and perhaps especially for the middle-classes and particularly reflexive parents), but not to the exclusion of expert judgement, which is still powerful for those mothers, and particularly working-class mothers, who are subject to professional gaze. Although the focus on the family by a range of professionals and professional discourses which are allied with the psy-complex (Burman, 1997; Ingelby, 1985; Rose, 1985; 1990) is a general feature of contemporary social life, some mothers are more likely than others to be scrutinised and 'it is mothers in the more vulnerable social groups that are most likely to be negatively evaluated by such discourses, and subjected to the imposition of expert-defined models of 'correct' mothering (David, 1988; Edwards, 1992, Lewis, 1986)' (Ribbens, 1994: p7).

For people positioned as Other, there can be significant political (Spivak, 1988) and psychological (Fanon, 1969; Walkerdine, 1996) implications. Like Bhabha's (1984) understanding of the colonial subject, Valerie Walkerdine argues that understandings of the working-class are constituted through a mixture of 'fear, phobia and fetish' (1996: p146). She continues:

It is the working-class woman as mother who is to be held responsible for the future of democracy by the adequacy of her rearing of its future citizens. On the one hand she may be the basis of her child's success in school and therefore upward mobility, and on the other, her very inadequacy may produce the very anti-social and criminal behaviour which poses the greatest threat to the liberal order.' (p148)

Therefore, 'her fitness to ensure that the erstwhile masses become proper democratic citizens must be watched at all times'…'through the available medical, educational, social work and legal apparatuses' (1996: p146). This is how a set of mothers come to be seen as not only not good enough at raising their children, but are pinpointed as positively harmful to society (Roseneil and Mann, 1996) in a process akin to that which Levidow (1989) traces whereby making children aware of (the social existence) of homosexual families is transformed into the intolerable threat of annihilation by dangerous Others. Chapters 5 and 6 examine arguments about how psychological knowledge 'soft polices' mothers.

Writers such as Burman (1994c), Ribbens (1994) and Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) have each argued that the hidden value judgements around differences in childrearing are particularly significant in relation to social class. Ideas about 'proper', 'modern' parenting often involve particularly middle-class cultural values, in contrast to which working-class parenting is seen, not just as different, but 'as stupid and morally degenerate' (Ribbens, 1994: p10) and pathological. Ribbens describes this as a consequence of experts being middle-class, so that the 'cultural circles between middle-class/better educated mothers, middle-class researchers and middle-class educational institutions may all *reinforce each other* in their implicit evaluations and understandings of what childrearing is all about' (*ibid*.: p12), but in addition, there is the non class-specific superiority attributed to 'new' knowledge that chapter 2 described.

Working-class mothers are often popularly characterized or parodied as dictatorial, restrictive, harsh, punitive, severe, 'love-withdrawing', irrational and impulsive, and experts, such as psychologists and researchers, have contrasted their authoritarian childrearing with the more permissive, sensitive, rationalising parenting of middle-class mothers. 'Child-centred' approaches which are seen as enlightened, modern and

good have been described as particularly bourgeois (Walkerdine, 1984; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). Ribbens (1994) reviews some of the expert attributions to working-class mothering and points out that in research by Newson and Newson (1978), working-class mothering is depicted as inferior, yet the authors do not reflect upon their own perspectives and experience as they employ quite particular educational discourses. Similarly, the responsiveness and stimulation required of 'good mothers' by developmental psychologists such as Sylva and Lunt (1982) presumes for mothers a particular kind of educational role. Education in this sense is defined by particular abstract measures of ability, and these abilities are not necessarily accorded the same priority by working-class mothers (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). In British culture, education is so bound up with understandings of class already that it provides a way of demarcating class membership. Walkerdine and Lucey (*ibid.)* produced an important analysis of the way middle-class researchers could depict working-class mother-child relationships as authoritarian and less educationally oriented, without exploring their own values, and therefore lending expert endorsement to particular styles of parenting, and withholding it from others. They placed the more overt conflict observed between working-class girls and mothers in a broader cultural context and questioned the presumption that middle-class mother-child interaction was necessarily better, when hostility might simply be covert, sublimated or repressed.

Similar accusations of inferior mothering have been leveled at Black mothers, which supports the idea that they reflect cultural anxieties about changing demographic patterns and gender relations. Black mothers generally have been seen as failing to discipline their children (an expression of a mother's total responsibility for their 'product') or emasculating sons and defeminizing daughters and 'retarding their children's academic achievement (Collins, 1992: p215). For African American mothers, Patricia Hill Collins describes how high rates of divorce, births outside of marriage and female-headed households are used to imply that Black mothers 'wield unnatural power in allegedly deteriorating family structures' (*ibid*.). It seems the polarised images of mothers are even sharper for African American mothers who are depicted as either dominating matriarchs or passive, indolent 'welfare moms' (Collins, 1990). Furthermore, despite discourses attributing a 'more natural' maternal

identity to Black women in Britain (Lawler, 1996), illustrated by presumptions that they need less postnatal care (Torkington, 1988 cited in Lawler, *ibid.*), Black women seem more likely to attract scrutiny than to be presumed good mothers, and racist policies underlie the promotion of contraception to Black and Asian women in the UK (Bryan *et al.*, 1985), as well as by Western agencies in the South. In the British context, the class structure of disadvantage overlaps 'race' to such a degree that it is possible to argue that the demographics associated with Black families or Black unemployment are to some degree explained by class. Although, as Gilroy (1987) argued, there are important specificities of 'race' which Marxist analyses sometimes failed to acknowledge, arguments of the significance of socio-economic class for Black people in Britain are important in order to challenge racist discourses which would see problems associated with poverty, such as of crime, as intrinsic to Black or immigrant communities, paving the way for psychological discourses of criminality which essentialise 'deviance'. Whilst 'race' is implicated in the US underclass discourse, the existence of an established Black middle-class does mitigate somewhat against its 'over-racialisation'. In Britain, popular accounts of race are sometimes confounded by class, and the discourse of an underclass is sometimes heavily racialised.

How class is defined is immensely problematic today. A woman's class location is no longer assigned on the basis of her husband's occupation (and the Census allows 'Head of household' to be self-defined or to relate to income), but much contemporary sociological work disputes the neat class binary, adding, for instance, variables which define groups on the basis of patterns of consumption and social status (e.g. neo-Weberian approaches). While the middle/working-class duality may still have 'gut validity', there are queries about how education, income, occupation, political orientation, values and aspirations function in defining class. As the previous chapter suggested, rather than being a side-issue, consumption may be of particular significance for what parents in different class locations can provide, or can be seen to provide, for their children.

Whilst we must recognise that some children do not receive good enough parenting, the pathologisation of certain mothers can involve (a) a lack of recognition of

structural factors, and/or (b) an inability to tolerate different cultures of childrearing without asserting a normative hierarchy, and/or (c) a lack of critical self-reflection on the part of those judging. As Gans (1962, cited in Ribbens 1994) noted, there may well be a failure on the part of middle-class researchers or professionals to accept that what they are observing in working-class life could constitute an active rejection of middle-class values and culture. A parallel argument might be made about ethnocentrism, and denial of structural and cultural racism in the judgements of white experts on Black families and a failure to recognise that such 'unnaturally powerful', domineering Black mothers can also be seen as having provided for Black children the 'homeplaces' which sustained them by providing a refuge from the racist values of mainstream culture (hooks, 1991).

In these representations of mothers in popular culture, the implicit norm common to each is of the 'natural mother'. In the 'virgin births' debate, Dame Jill Knight's description of 'these women' (single women choosing to become mothers) who have 'none of the natural feelings about the matter' (**Daily Mail,** 11th March, 1991) constructs their motherhood as something Other to the natural motherhood of 'normal' women who can be trusted to have appropriate feelings and motives. Since motherhood is so naturalised for ('normal') women, and still constructed as a woman's ultimate fulfilment (Marshall, 1991; Morell, 1995), it is only women who fall outside of the category of 'natural' whose desire to be a mother is questioned. Anne Woollett (1991) describes how women requesting fertility services are asked to articulate their desire and convince medics of their suitability to parent in ways that biologically fertile women do not have to. Michelle Stanworth (1987) describes how women's mothering is so naturalised it is assumed that all women desire it, but single women, lesbians and disabled women are expected to forgo it in the interests of the child. Lawler (1996) points out that it is not women's desire for a child that is questioned in the virgin birth 'storm', but women's acting on that desire in circumstances deemed inappropriate. However, in the reasoning of Peery (1994), even this 'natural desire' to be a mother, when held by 'unnatural' women, such as, in his view, women who are lesbians, makes them not 'more natural', but doubly deviant. A popular illustration of this was in **The Sun**'s (29th April, 1997) representation of a lesbian couple in their twenties, who live together, describe themselves as 'in love'

and construct their relationship in romantic, couple, and family unit discourses, who have had a child whom they planned together, as outside of 'family values'. Their desire to have a child and to live as a family, which might easily have been depicted as an 'emulation' of family values, was described in the editorial as *'Making a mockery of family values'* (see Alldred, 1998b).

3.5 The monstrous children of monstrous mothers

Moral panics about children co-occur with those about mothers. It seems there need be no particular concern about children born to 'natural mothers', but that 'unnatural mothers' may breed monstrous children. The imperative to be conventionally gendered applies to children as well as mothers. The accusation that mothers are emasculating their sons - and to a lesser degree, defeminizing their daughters - expresses a concern that 'natural', 'normal' boys and 'natural' 'normal' girls are raised. Heterosexuality is key to the regulation of these conventional gender roles and indeed, can be seen as the defining characteristic of 'proper' masculinity or 'mature' femininity. As Judith Butler (1990) showed, the 'heterosexual matrix' requires and produces the gender binary. Although often couched in terms of concern for *children*, the children in these narratives are usually gendered, and concern has almost exclusively centred on boy children. It follows in the wake of a series of panics about boys: from joy-riding in the early 1990s, violent crime and murder committed by children which peaked in the mid-1990s, and the more general, on-going concern about youth crime and school exclusion rates (see Campbell, 1993; Phillips, 1993).

The intense interest in child murderers shown by the British media in 1993 and 1994 (see James and Jenks, 1994) is one example of how a phenomenon with a considerable history (Smith, 1994; Wilson, 1973) is presented as a new phenomenon, which adds fuel to the moral panic. Deborah Marks describes how children whose actions do not fit the dominant cultural constructions of childhood as innocent and ineffectual are marked as deviant individuals, and outside of 'natural childhood' (Marks, 1996a). The 10 and 11 year old boys who were convicted of the murder of James Bulger have, at their conviction and since, been represented as monstrous children (James and Jenks, 1994). Keeping these 'monsters' outside of the category of children, means childhood can be kept comfortingly innocent (Marks, 1996a).

Media coverage often constructs *concern* over the gendered development of boys growing up 'without a father figure'. Concern about this 'problem' is already confounded with *cause*: assuming the absence of a father figure to be a problem for boys' masculinity. 'Problem boys' are sometimes assumed as 'outcomes' in discourses of lone mothers. This incident brought the suggested links between the 'problem' of lone mother families and the psychological and moral development of children into the open. After John Venables and Robert Thompson were charged with the violent murder of James Bulger, the attention of the media turned immediately to their home backgrounds, and their mothers particularly, to try to understand how such monstrous children had been bred. The BBC documentary *Children of Crime* (7th April, 1998) asked 'what was it in the background of these two seemingly normal boys' who 'wouldn't have been considered potential murderers' that allowed them to become 'capable of such evil'? As viewers, we generated our own characterisations from the sparse, though disturbing, details of their home lives: the fathers of both had left, one boy's father had been an alcoholic and violent and the other boy was the 5th of 7 brothers, two of whom had been taken into care, several had been in trouble with the police and were allegedly abusive to each other. In the media debate, much was made of the violent videos at John Venables' home (and *Child's Play 3* achieved notoriety) which, although there was no confirmation that he had watched this, marked his mother as remiss. The documentary suggested that these 'low achievers, lacking in adult supervision', lacking 'other role models', had had a disturbing impact on each other and 'unleashed a spiral of violence which neither could control'. Their mothers had, perhaps mainly by omission, allowed their boys - 'left to their own devices' - to become capable of monstrous behaviour.

While there may have been some concern for boys growing up without a father figure during war-time, there might be differences in the particular fears for the boys. The conditions of possibility for the role-model discourse of concern today include the increasing dominance of psychological discourses of development, psychoanalytic discourses of family dynamics and broad shifts in gender relations. The 'crisis of masculinity' and fear of the loss of socially useful roles for men are part of what produces the discourse of a threat to the traditional family today. Whilst away from

hearth and home, the 'masculinity' of men who had gone to war was not in question, indeed their actions were socially-sanctioned and 'manly' in contrast to the socially disapproved and alienated 'absent fathers' of the underclass discourse (see chapter 4).

3.6 Lone mothers and their children: scapegoats and 'scape-kids'?

The fear of crime, and moral panics about children who are beyond control, connects to fear of disorder 'from below' in the discourse of a dangerous and growing 'underclass' (Mann and Roseneill, 1994). This discourse has racialised as well as gendered associations, through the danger attributed to unbridled Black masculinity, seen as aggressive and hyper-sexual (Fanon, 1969; Mercer, 1994), and the 'unnatural' power wielded by Black mothers (Collins, 1992). Economic factors such as long-term unemployment and increases in the employment of mothers, mean that the traditional expectations of gendered family roles, that is of men as breadwinners and women as full-time homemakers are not necessarily possible. Changed gender expectations are drawn on to account for the sense of 'being adrift' that is observed in many young men today, compared with the increasing self-confidence and positive sense of identity more girls display. However, structural factors are often missing from the analysis and instead, the discourse of concern for the children of lone mothers blames mothers for the conditions in which they raise children. These are the context for the rising incidence of, and attention to, lone mothering.

The writings of Hall *et al*. (1978) about the moral panic around 'mugging' in the early 1970s resonate with the construction of moral panics today. Just as the increasing crime rate in the early 1970s was proposed as an index of disintegration of the social order, so the rate of increase in lone parent families (mostly mother-headed) is interpreted. The themes of 'race', crime and youth identified within the mugging crisis are also part of the contemporary discourse on the crisis of the family. Reporting that there are a higher proportion of Black mothers than white mothers who are single is 'easily' misinterpreted as suggesting that Black mothers outnumber white mothers among the 'rising tides' of lone mothers, and this fuels popular racism. It provides reminders of the racist and xenophobic discourses of the 'swamping of "British culture" by "immigrants"' that has received various revivals since the 1950s. Chains of association run in both directions: 'youth' are out of control and engaging

in crime because the now weakened family is unable to socialise them properly into 'family values'; and, because women have taken men's jobs and 'pushed them out of the family', men are left without their expected social roles and so, midst this despondency, grows a culture of social alienation and further disintegration of 'the family'. The 'underclass' debate in the USA, originally associated with the work of Charles Murray (e.g. Murray, 1984) is heavily racialised and illustrates similar themes. Maxine Baca Zinn describes how in one of the two models of the underclass in the U.S. debate (a 'structural deficiency model') the cause of the swelling underclass is seen as a value system which is 'characterised by low aspirations, excessive masculinity, and the acceptance of female-headed families' (1992: p72).

The rhetoric of a moral panic can sometimes become melodramatic, as claims about the threat to 'the family' in the 'virgin births' debate illustrate. The **Daily Mail's** opening sentence was: "In a scheme which *strikes at the very heart of family life*, women who have never had sex are being helped to have a baby" (11th March, 1991*, emphasis added*). Emphasising the newness of a phenomenon, and any increase (or better still, 'escalation') that can be associated with it, build the tension for journalistic pieces. The same article made this explicit as it continues with: *'and will seriously undermine the ideal of the family unit by encouraging more single mothers'*. It is interesting that the type of 'family unit' is not specified here. What is meant by 'the family' is so common-sensical as to not need specifying, as was the case for 'relationship' in the 'virgin births' media coverage.

Hall *et al*. (1978) argue that, in moral panics, irrelevant or peripheral aspects are raised into sensational focus distracting attention from the deeper causes. The preoccupation with women's relationship status and identity diverts attention from questions about the quality of the children's experiences of care and relationships. It supports an analysis in which the sphere of influence on a child extends no further than the household, where responsibility is therefore located, to the occlusion of broader cultural influences. Writers such as Campbell (1993) and Warner (1994) understand the social changes that have produced or accompany, these moral panics as centring on masculinity, such that anxiety about the 'crisis of masculinity' is displaced or projected onto mothers as they provide a convenient scapegoat for social

problems and political ills. When children do things we find shocking, it appears that our anxiety is lessened once we have someone to blame. Blaming individual mothers deflects broader social and economic analyses of the problem. In actual fact, when women's power within the family is hailed as a cause of the problem, to credit mothers with having produced the 'crisis in masculinity' seems to be to bolster their power. Analysing moral panics about lone mothers and 'virgin births' we can see how they function as an authoritarian backlash, and a sense of conservative consensus about the meanings or causes of 'social problems', both of which function to restrict women's freedom and autonomy around motherhood (Falludi, 1992).

3.7 Psychology and the popular

Academic knowledge produced by psychology (and other disciplines) informs broader cultural representations of children, but the relationship between the two is not as straight-forward as the rhetorical style of academic knowledge and the 'top-down' model of 'truer' knowledge filtering down to non-professional people suggest. Instead there is a much more reciprocal relationship whereby each informs the other and the two cannot be completely disentangled (Riley, 1983). Academic research (and funding) is stimulated by political questions and it becomes productive both through its popularisation (see Riley, *ibid*.) and through promoting particular policy or legal interventions into children's lives. Denise Riley analyses the processes of popularisation of psychological concepts around mothers and children, and Goldberg (1996a) shows how the psychoanalytic concept of containment is used beyond its theoretical framework. Convergences of scientific and popular moral rhetoric can be seen in the types of questions that academic psychologists ask, as well as the areas in which, or assumptions *upon* which answers are sought (Burman, 1994c).

Because psychology produces knowledge about children and their needs, it has consequences for what parents, especially mothers, are required to be and do. Developmental psychology reinforces cultural gender roles and relations by reproducing a limited range of gendered positions, for adults, of man and woman, and for children, of boy and girl (Burman, 1991). Motherhood is increasingly defined in terms of psychological discourses of children's needs and potential. There is a growing emphasis on mothers' roles as educators (David, 1988; Phoenix and

Woollett, 1991), and as health workers (Stacey and Davies 1983, cited in Ribbens, 1994). These increasingly specific and professionalised demands of motherhood produce the notion that certain women are 'unfit to parent'. As well as informing and reinforcing normative policies and institutional practices, such discourses are productive through the anxieties generated by the apparent fragility of children's 'normal' and healthy development (Urwin, 1985; Woollett and Phoenix, 1991). In addition, there are specific locations at which professionals employ psychological discourses on health, development and normality as they implement policies and provide services (Burman, 1997). It seems non psychologists have more control and authority over matters relating to parenting then professional psychologists, for example, social workers' assessments of potential foster carers or adoptive parents, and medics' decisions in the case of access to fertility services both regulate who becomes a parent.

3.8 Psychological discourses, mothers and feminist critique

Feminists have found good reason to criticise psychological discourses of motherhood (Urwin, 1985; Woollett and Phoenix, 1991) and the construction of mothers through ideas about children (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; Burman, 1991). By virtue of women's positions as primary carers for children, alongside the narrow focus on the infant-parent dyad as the key influence on a child (Riley, 1983), psychology constructs mothers as objects of surveillance and regulation. Since the emergence of the concept of 'mother-child relationship', childcare advice has become less concerned with the problems of managing difficult children or difficult childrearing tasks and more about the problems of in/adequate mothering (Urwin and Sharland, 1992). Problematising mothering makes it the key site of scrutiny and blame and leads to psychology's provision of polarised subject positions for mothers to occupy. Such positions permeate cultural meanings of motherhood and also sustain social work and legal practices that would, however, sound unreasonable to us if they did not employ psychological discourses.

What can be described as normal, can often then be constructed as natural. Discourses of what is natural are powerful across the cultural spectrum, but feminists have often criticised their use in challenging women's reproductive decisions in particular

(Stanworth, 1987). The professionalisation of childrearing practices can be seen as the 'colonisation' of an area of women's (mothers') knowledge by male-dominated professions (Ehrenreich and English, 1979; Margolis, 1984). It is also an instrument of colonisation in the international sense of Western cultural domination. Western expertise carries considerable authority elsewhere in the world because of the modernist promises of scientific knowledge and processes of commodification and globalisation. But the supposedly universal individual whose development is the concern of Western child psychology is, of course, a particular form of individual - a rational, individualist subject embedded within capitalist desire and consumption. (See the critique by Burman, 1994b, of the Western ethnocentric presumptions about the individual and 'development' in international aid and development programmes).

Psychological discourses, because they can describe what is 'normal', have the power to define what is pathological. Critical psychologists such as Billington (1996) and Burman (1994c) highlight the power of psychology to pathologise children who do not conform to psychological norms, or women who do not fit the dominant cultural subject positions for women (see, Goldberg, 1996b and Warner, 1996a). In the public debates described, it is women whose age, relationships and/or sexuality do not conform to conservative images of mothers whose mothering is presumed to be lacking. Through its authority on childrearing, psychology replicates and reinforces particular cultural ideas about individuality, rationality and maturity. Discourses of nature abound, in part through their close association with children, and, fuelled by our emotional investments in children and our own fears of vulnerability (Burman, 1994a), the toleration of children or mothers/parents who are different from the norm is limited so that they rapidly become pathologised (O'Hagan and Dillenberger, 1995).

Denise Riley (1983) described psychology's narrow focus as a 'bell-jar approach'. In line with their scientific aspirations, conventionally psychologists would imagine the bell-jar over mother and infant, isolating their object from the wider environment and thereby excluding 'contaminating variables' in order to draw cause-and-effect conclusions about the mother-child relationship. Placing '[m]other and child … on a psychological desert-island', as Chodorow and Contratto (1992: p201) put it, is

inadequate for understanding cultural influences on children, and is also damaging for the way it reinforces the idea of a mother's sole influence and responsibility. Adrienne Rich (1977) described how this responsibility creates a form of psychological isolation, 'that of the single adult woman who, though physically surrounded by others, bears the total task of mothering. The successes, failures and day-to-day burdens of childcare are hers' (Chodorow and Contratto, 1992: p201). Indeed, many mothers find themselves mothering in physical isolation too, which can be exacerbated by poverty, which limits movement and activities. More recently, the focus has been broadened slightly from the mother-infant dyad to the household unit. In discourses of concern about the absence of 'a father figure' in women-headed households, focusing on only a limited sphere of influence on the child means that a male role model is viewed as needing to be co-residential in the household. Another recent concern about the effects of violence on television undermines this view of a very limited sphere of influence, and directs our attention to a more important aspect. The presence or absence of an actual man in the home does not necessarily provide 'a positive role model', without assuming he presents a 'model' masculinity, and that *any* male role model is better than none. Surely what is more important is precisely what kinds of masculine identities a child experiences, which is where psychologists might benefit from a cultural studies approach (see Edley and Wetherell, 1996).

Discourses of development are common in the discussion of children's well-being, but the 'virgin births' discussion saw the questioning of the development of the mothers under scrutiny. A woman's relationship status was taken to be an indication of maturity (yet relationship was defined in the crudest of senses as whether she was planning to co-parent with her male sexual partner). The quality of any relationship was not the issue (apparently any relationship with a man would have removed the need to challenge her right to parent). No questions were asked about the emotional or practical support these women had. The unspoken underpinnings of such discourses are assumptions about development. It is implied that there is both a consensus about psychological criteria for, and a means of assessment of, a person's developmental status or maturity. In fact, there is neither. Rather, a tautological argument circulates whereby the 'normal' development of an individual to a certain point of 'maturity' indicates their fitness to parent, yet parenthood is also seen as producing or defining

83

maturity. A mother's 'normality' is constructed as an indicator of 'successful outcome' for themselves, and through the model of 'influence on the child', this is seen as the best predictor of successful/normal outcome in the child. It is paradoxical that in some discourses a woman who is not 'mature enough' should have her mothering prevented or closely scrutinised, whilst in other discourses being a mother is constructed as a, or the, route to maturity (Woollett, 1991) or to full, proper, femininity (Walkerdine, 1990).

The fact that the 'virgin births scandal' subsequently gave its name to a 'syndrome' (Donovan, 1992) indicates that the desire to have a child when exhibited by women in this category is considered worthy of professional attention. It is designated an identifiably peculiar desire, something other than the norm and a category of pathology. The British organisation Families Need Fathers report that, in the USA, there is now public recognition for a syndrome, called Parental Alienation Syndrome (Palmer, 1988; Gardner, 1992), which describes mothers who are poisoning the minds of their children and maliciously turning them against their fathers.

Burman (1994c) identifies how the assumption of a causal relationship between mothering behaviour and outcomes in terms of qualities of the child - what she terms the 'developmental myth' - justifies close scrutiny of mothers to ensure that 'our' (the Nation's) children are to develop healthily. A model of education as 'investment' relies on (and reproduces) *the developmental myth* and places increasing pressure on parents to stimulate their child in order that they 'capitalise' on their potential. The social 'ownership' of children, which is illustrated in this discourse of concern for 'our children', is soon 'forgotten' when it comes to allocating blame for having raised 'bad kids'. Similarly, responsibility is rapidly re-individualised when questions about financial obligations are raised, when, as chapter 4 shows, the cost of childrearing is seen as the responsibility of the nuclear family or, even more narrowly, the biological parents. It seems that individualism and the narrow focus of psychology work most perniciously when deployed to account for negative influence on children.

3.9 'Fit to parent' or 'fit to mother'?

The term 'fit to *parent*' masks the fact that discourses of parents and parenting are profoundly gendered. Even when gender-neutral terms are used, as they are in most recent social policy and family law these usually do have gender-specific addresses and effects (Day Sclater and Yates, forthcoming 1999; Harne *et al*. 1997; Hester and Radford, 1996; Smart and Sevenhuijsen, 1989). Deborah Marks (1996a) describes the different gendered positions produced by ideas about the care and education of children and the rhetorically ungendered roles of 'parents' and 'professionals'. Shelley Day Sclater's work suggests distinctly gendered patterns in the way 'parental responsibility' is interpreted by post-divorce mothers and fathers (Sclater and Yates, forthcoming 1999) 'Parental involvement in education' usually means more work for mothers in the home (David, 1988), or unpaid work in the classroom (Standing, 1994), and mothers usually do, and are looked to by professionals to negotiate their child/ren's service needs (Graham, 1984). The skill(s) of 'parentcraft' are discursively ungendered, yet women offered or seeking help are likely to be viewed differently to men. The naturalisation of women's maternal care (Rich, 1977) means that a woman requesting help could be seen as unnatural, deviant, and a possible danger to her children, whereas a man might receive a (condescending) congratulatory pat on the back for being willing to learn about parenting.

Recent discussions of parents in the media have actually been highly gender-specific; concerns are precisely about *how* women are 'parenting' and *how little* men are 'parenting', or, according to some, 'being allowed' to take up their role as father, and furthermore, the criteria by which parenting is judged are different for mothers than for fathers. Moreover, the work of all of the above authors demonstrate how the gender-neutral discourses of parents works to disadvantage women, for instance in legal decisions on child residency (Harne *et al*. 1997; Smart and Sevenhuijsen, 1989).

To summarise, women who fail to conform to culturally dominant sexual, reproductive and gender positions continue to be pathologised in some of the misogynistic representations of women in popular culture. Among the implications of this are that childbearing on the margins of the narrow 'normal' category of mothers can render one's parenting suspect, pathological, or, in some circumstances, prevent

it. This chapter has described some of the particular ways in which women can be seen as unfit to parent, and how their sexual relationships and identities, as opposed to their (actual) parenting skills, become the focus. The implicit attributions of selfishness and immaturity were linked, but muted themes. The particular impact of these terms for women reveals the extent to which it is mothers - rather than 'parents' - who are still expected to take responsibility for children. In addition, mothers are positioned as the guardians of liberal democracy through their responsibility for the production of responsible citizens and are sometimes even held responsible for preserving the nuclear family and men's position within it. It is 'failing' to meet the expectations of *motherhood,* not 'parenthood', which earns women the label of selfish, which can be seen as indicating her immaturity or worse, her pathology and consequent unfitness to mother. The discourse of fitness to parent impacts differentially on women and men because of different understandings of how they ought to be responsible and of how they might be dangerous. The gender-neutral discourse of 'parents' reaches its limits when women are disapproved of, or when the child - as the outcome of the woman's mothering - has gone 'off the rails'. In fact, it seems that most popular representations of *unfit parents* are of mothers, or at least that these discourses are the most intense and severe.

The following chapter will explore a particular strand of popular representations of fathers and explore the ideas through which men are judged fit, or unfit, to parent. Chapter 5 will then examine the significance of such images, that is, how we are to understand their impact on individuals. The approach adopted in this chapter will be examined critically in chapters 5, 6 and 7, and the empirical claims embodied by this style of rhetoric, the implied relationship between ideological representations and 'the real', and the concept of moral panic will be questioned.

Chapter 4

<u>Supporting Children? Absent Fathers and Family Men</u>

This chapter examines a key feature of representations of fathers in British culture in the 1990s: fathers' responsibilities to their children after a relationship between parents has ended. It focuses on the public policy discussions concerning fathers' *financial* obligations, in terms of the payment of child maintenance by 'absent fathers' to lone mother families, because this has been a topic of intense debate from 1990 to the present, centring on the 1991 Child Support Act and Agency. In the context of very little public representation of fathers' private lives (Burgess and Ruxton, 1996; Hearn, 1992), fathers in the particular position of no longer being in a sexual relationship with their 'baby mothers', and their 'financial responsibility' especially, have come to dominate discussion of fathers in the public arena in recent years.

Following the account of mothers in the media in chapter 3, this chapter identifies some of the prominent themes in popular representations of fathers. In chapter 3, it was argued that the popular sphere displays a distinct set of ideas about *mothers*, as opposed to *parents*. This chapter explores further the generality and limitations of the discourse of 'parents' by considering the particularity of discourses of fathers in mainstream British culture. However, by comparison with the discussion of mothers, this chapter has a narrower empirical focus on the construction of fathers in debates about the implementation of policies concerning the financial support of children. The themes that emerge are unsurprising, except for their starkness and simplicity: fatherhood is defined biologically, and its prime responsibility is viewed as financial. In spite of all the commentary on fathers, and the moral attributions made to the different 'father figures' characterised in popular debate, the relationships it is imagined, expected or hoped fathers have with their children, besides a specifically economic one, remain under-articulated. Indeed, the rhetoric of the debates further obscures the issue by assuming consensus or trying to persuade.

In this debate, public criticism of 'fathers' centred on their inability or unwillingness to provide financially for their children, whilst mothers were sometimes criticised for having 'pushed men out of the family'. There is concern about the alienation of young men and fears about an 'underclass'. Discourses of a negative impact on child

development (again) refer to 'the effect' of growing up amongst the 'dependency culture' associated with 'passive welfare', and, for boys, of growing up without a 'father figure'. These issues also apply to lone mothers on benefits. Concern about the cost of social security and the 'crime bill' appear to underpin harsh rhetoric about both absent fathers and mothers on benefits. Economic concerns and fears about social cohesion seem to be expressed through psychological discourses. Focusing on this particular debate illustrates the complexity of contemporary images of fathers. This raises questions about how such representations function ideologically, which will be explored in chapter 5.

4.1 The Child Support Act 1991

It is possible to argue that much vilified lone mothers are only part of the picture, since 'it takes two to tango'. The fathers of their children are the missing piece of the jigsaw. However, this image is complicit with the fantasy that 'absent fathers' can be 'matched up' with the lone mothers who are raising their children. Even to imagine them theoretically matching up oversimplifies the demographic picture, and of course, grossly oversimplifies the emotional picture. Such an approach reveals a pre-occupation with macro/social, at the expense of micro/individual level analyses (for instance, with economics, rather than human relationships), and is compatible with the presentation of social policy initiatives as problem-solving. Here, two 'social problems': the state's support of lone mothers, and 'the erosion of the family' - or men's place within it - can be seen as opposite sides of the same coin. Thus, John Major's Conservative Government could present the Child Support Act - a legacy of Margaret Thatcher's commitment to chasing 'absent fathers' for unpaid maintenance (Radford and Rupal, 1993) - as helping to solve both these 'problems'.

The rise in the numbers of lone parent families to almost one in five families with dependent children, along with the increasing proportion of them on benefits, meant that the cost to the state of supporting lone parent families increased rapidly over the 1980s (DSS, 1990). In 1989, 30% of lone mothers were receiving maintenance from their child/ren's father, but for those on Income Support the proportion was only 22% (Clarke *et al.*, 1995). In addition, over the 1980s the proportion of never-married lone mothers has increased dramatically relative to those who are widowed or divorced (Millar, 1992). Late in 1990, the Government's White Paper, *Children Come First*

(DSS, 1990), set out plans for what, with astonishing speed, became the 1991 Child Support Act ('CSA'). Its aims were to reduce the financial cost to the Treasury of supporting these children, and 'to make absent fathers face up to their responsibilities' (Anderson, 1995: p6). The Act established a body, the Child Support Agency, with responsibility for calculating and collecting child maintenance payments from the non-residential parent, initially in cases where the parent who the child was living with was on benefits, and later to be extended, as a service, to any separated parents. According to the White Paper, one of the things it sought to rectify was that lone parents had to actively seek and obtain maintenance orders in courts and that the level of orders made varied between courts, but were generally so low as to 'in no way reflect the real cost of caring for a child, or of the absent parent to pay' (Clarke *et al.,*1995). Press coverage concentrated on the fairness of maintenance bills in relation to the 'absent' parent's ability to pay, while whether the actual costs of childrearing were met was relegated as a peripheral issue. In effect, focusing concern on the formulae used to calculate the amount payable rendered discussion of *how* children ought to be supported outside the remit of the debate (Anderson, 1995). The CSA and operation of the Agency have been extremely controversial (e.g. Smith 1997) and, arguably, have not provided an effective means of meeting the real costs of raising children, nor achieved their stated objectives (Bradshaw, 1996, cited in Smith, 1997; David Rendell MP, cited in Perkins, 1998).

In spite of the fact that the Act refers to 'parents', and distinguishes them by their residential status in relation to the child, popular discussion of the Act and Agency reflected a widespread understanding of parenting, and therefore, the operation of the Act, to be significantly gendered. The Act refers to 'the absent parent', as distinct from 'the parent with care' with whom the child, or children, live. Overall, the ratio of lone mothers to lone fathers is 9:1 (Millar, 1992), so the overwhelming majority of 'parents with care' are mothers, and 'absent parents', fathers. Furthermore, the fact that the basis of the Act's concern with absent parents is money reinforces the broad cultural - and cross-cultural (Lewis and O'Brien, 1987) - notion of the male parent's role as the provision of material support. Although the Act itself employs a gender-neutral discourse of parents, and so also applies to the few cases in which mothers are absent parents, in practice it reinforces the connection between fathers and financial support. The Act requires that lone parents claiming Income Support, Family Credit

or Disability Living Allowance co-operate with the Agency. It is not that they *may,* if they wish, initiate proceedings in order to get or increase the maintenance they receive, but that they *must* facilitate the Agency's work in collecting money from the absent parent. Lone mothers on benefits have to provide information to allow the Agency to trace an absent father, and if they do not, because they do not wish him to be contacted, they face deductions from their benefit as a penalty. The fact that there is no obligation to involve the Agency for those not on benefits, but that it is compulsory for those who are, along with the punitive benefit deductions, mean that the Act has an image of being harsh, unsympathetic and coercive to poorer parents. That parents with care on benefits are mostly mothers is significant here. Referring to parents without gendering them allows both the Act's practical consequences, and the meanings that it reinforces, to be ignored. It obscures the relevance of the general disparity between men's and women's incomes, and the preponderance of women and children living in poverty.

The gendered impact of the Act and Agency were central to opposition from feminist organisations such as the *Campaign Against the Child Support Act* (*CACSA*) and *Rights of Women*. The Act specified that in addition to maintenance for the child, the calculation of maintenance should include support for the parent with whom the child is resident: 'A child needs not only to be fed and clothed. He [sic] also needs someone to look after him.' (DSS, 1990: para. 3.4). In practice, when most lone parents are mothers, this reinforces both the idea that mothers should be financially dependent on men, and the actuality of women's reliance on their children's fathers for money (albeit via the Agency). Furthermore, for any individual woman, this is abstracted from the nature of her past and present relationships, and even from her wishes on the matter. It forces the perpetuation of a link with the biological father not only where it was not desired (including by all parties), but even for men who had been violent or abusive. Feminist campaigns tried to expand the clause that exempts women from penalisation for 'non co-operation' with the Agency when they conceived as a result of rape or incest, to include those who feared violence or abuse from ex-partners. The resultant exemption rule (Section 6) allows Agency workers some discretion where a mother claims that the Agency's approach to the children's father will cause 'harm or undue distress', but the emphasis is on mothers convincing staff there is 'good cause' for their fears. There is evidence of variation in the way this is applied and of Agency

staff not believing women's fears and so making the harsh benefit deductions penalty (of around £9 per week for the first 6 months and half that for the following year) (Clark *et al.*, 1995; Smith, 1997). There were even cases of women being sent to prison for non co-operation, which clearly ran contrary to their children's interests (Cook and Bahl, 1998). In some cases where mothers expressed a concern about the possibility of violence, mishandling by Agency staff allowed men access to the addresses, exposing them and their children to further threats or actual violence (CACSA, 1995).

Furthermore, it seems that men who are having to make a financial contribution are more likely to feel they are 'owed' some contact with children with whom they had lost touch, and, as a result, initiate contact proceedings under the Children Act 1989 (Clarke *et al.*, 1995). One could read into this an intention for the Act to prompt fathers to maintain contact, or even, as Mitchell and Goody (1997) note, a 'disincentive' to separate. The presumption that contact with the father is necessarily in the child's best interests has been over-applied, so that even where the father has previously been convicted for abuse or domestic violence, this has not been taken into consideration in court decisions about contact and as a result, mothers and children have received further abuse (Anderson, 1997; Hester and Radford, 1996; Women's Aid Federation, 1996). The CSA is, therefore, out-of-step with much contemporary thinking about children and families, and with the intent of the 1989 Children Act (CA) (to promote the principle that the child's best interests are paramount), and its overriding concern with getting money from fathers can, in practice, work against children's best interests.

There is now wide acceptance that the Child Support Act has, in many cases, been coercive, punitive, or at least, unhelpful for the mothers who have come within its jurisdiction. Although, as Fox Harding (1996) notes, it may gain support since future clients will include parents (with care) on better incomes, its operation until now has left parents with care on means-tested benefits without any financial gain and often with even less regularity and reliability of income (Clarke *et al.*, 1994; 1996). However, at a broader political or ideological level, it is harder to judge its consequences for women in general. Feminist evaluations face the dilemma that whilst the principle of fathers' economic contribution might be welcomed (as it is by

lone mothers in the study by Clarke *et al.,* 1996), this risks reinforcing women's financial dependence on individual men, and that whilst it holds the potential to redistribute wealth from men to women, for the benefit of children (Anderson, 1995), many individual women have suffered as a result of its intervention.

4.2 The Act on 'the act' - Fathering as biological

Central to the Act is the idea of a biological father's financial duty to his child/ren. This is seen as an inalienable responsibility. It is not affected by the present relationship between parents, nor the existence or otherwise of a past relationship, or the father's social or emotional links to the child. Indeed, there is no allowance for consideration of the actual relationships involved, so that either it is presumed that social parenthood necessarily follows from biological parenthood, or that if it does not, it *ought* to. It is imagined that caring for children, financial responsibility and biological parenthood all coincide, as the norm (see for example, the reference to 'ordinary family life', DSS, 1990, para. 3.21), and the Act insists that the latter two remain inextricably inter-linked without regard to the relationship of the parents to each other and to the child' (Clarke *et al.*, 1995: p135). Many pressure groups drew attention to the reliance on a normative construction of family to which lone parent families were being compared, 'found lacking', and forced to mimic as regards financial arrangements.

Financial responsibility for children is so tied to biology in the Act that it applies not only where a father has no continuing contact with the child (as is the experience of 50% of children after their parents' relationship ends, Bradshaw and Millar, 1991), but even when the child has never known their father. This shows the Act's concern with finance or with moral lessons in so-called 'family values', rather than the child's best interests. Even where a social parent, such as a step-parent, wishes to take financial responsibility for a child, the Act prevents this. It explicitly states that step-parental relationships do not override the biological parent's responsibility for maintenance as long as the child needs it (DSS, 1990, 3.19). This is even extended to the level of genetic material: a woman who conceives with the sperm of a donor, in the absence of sexual intercourse must provide details to the Agency because the donor is liable. So, sperm, rather even than sexual intercourse, is the marker of fatherhood. As Fox Harding (1992: p132) puts it, 'A rapist, a casual sexual partner or

a sperm donor in a private arrangement are all potentially financially liable parents for the purposes of the Act (DSS, 1993b)'. One cannot wilfully absent oneself from this responsibility and only full legal adoption transfers it to a non biological parent.

The only legally fatherless child, as far as the Act is concerned, is one born through donor insemination (DI) at a Human Fertilisation and Embryology Agency licensed clinic. The clinic assures anonymity to its donors, and only children so conceived will not be expected to receive support from their fathers. Donor liability is therefore a concern for women who do not want medical services, cannot afford private clinics, or are not accepted for 'treatment' because they are deemed unfit to mother, as lesbians might be. Even signed and witnessed letters of intent ('contracts' between mother and donor) may not withstand the Agency's insistence. As the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill was debated in Parliament, there was some resistance to full donor anonymity on the grounds that a child had a right, or a need, to know the identity of their biological father. Guidelines for licensed clinics stipulate that the decision to provide a woman with DI must take into consideration the need of any child so conceived for a father. This relates to media-fuelled concern about the number of women, lesbian and heterosexual, who are having babies through DI. Indeed the Birmingham British Pregnancy Advisory Service clinic closed after news of its provision of DI to lesbians broke the news in 1991 (see chapter 3). Here, psychological claims are asserted about children's needs and development, which are far from universally accepted or supported by the evidence (Burman, 1994a; Cooke and Bahl, 1998). The argument that people might want to know their biological father's identity cannot here be a psychological or emotional one about knowing about the man *with* whom their mother conceived, (since he would not know either their mother or of their existence), and the agency holds merely medical history and basic genetic information about donor's ethnicity, height, eye and hair colour.

That the crudest biological marker is invoked to define fatherhood (in actual fact, paternity) fits with a more general shift to biology as 'the new religion' (as Melvyn Bragg called it on his Radio 4 programme *In Our Time* in March 1998) (see also Bragg and Gardiner, 1999). 'Fathering' as a verb, is taken at its most literal in both the 1991 Act's definition, and in the popular derogatory depiction of 'feckless men fathering away on council estates'. Having described some of the legal discourses of

fathers, this chapter now describes the vivid images deployed at different moments during the popular debate over the Act and Agency.

4.3 The bad guys and the good guys

As the Bill passed through Parliament in 1991, popular media images became increasingly caricatured. Absent parents were depicted as 'runaway' fathers who were errant or feckless men. **The Daily Telegraph** on 26th February 1991 retained the gender-neutral language in the title of its piece: '*Child aid agency will track down errant parents*', although explained in its second paragraph that …'*it is part of the Government's measures aimed at fathers who abandon their families and do not fulfil their maintenance obligations*' (Anthony Looch, p12). **The Western Mail** (11th March, 1991) under the heading '*"Tighten-up" call in crisis over runaway fathers*' stated that: '*More than 30,000 Welsh children are thought to have lost contact with their fathers*'. These reflected the idea that fathers had 'run away', 'deserted' or 'abandoned' their families or children, and constructed the women and children 'left behind' as deserving of pity. The mothers 'left holding the baby' were seen as somewhat passive, having been left by men, rather than, for instance, having ended their relationships, agreed to separations, or having 'got rid of' violent men, etc. The portrayal of children sometimes drew on the pathos of the 'little orphan' image: '*Tragic children who "lose" their fathers*' was the **Daily Express**'s headline *(*11th March, 1991). 'Tragic' mobilises ideas of pitiful, abandoned children, but referring to them as losing their fathers, as they might a toy, almost implies that they are responsible for the loss of contact.

The discourse of 'missing fathers', which carries a sense of unknown whereabouts and also, perhaps, of longed for, marked the first wave of reportage, but the tone of journalists soon hardened and became more condemnatory. The intensity conveyed by the word 'crisis' was reinforced by the use of words that suggested harsh, stern responses, such as the Agency implementing a 'crackdown on errant fathers' and 'tracking them down' in order to collect money. The depiction of the men concerned increasingly used a language which criminalised them, such as 'runaway fathers brought to book', and representing the Bill as a 'crackdown from "the party of law and order"'. Alongside the strong discourse of responsibility, assumptions were made about the class and economic circumstances of the men in question. They were

depicted as young, working-class and poor. Commonly invoked was an image of rundown council housing on large estates in deprived areas where the breakdown in law and order was so severe that all semblance of social order had been lost, and society was spiralling out of control into lawlessness and 'anarchy'. Later, James Pirrie of the Family Law Association (**Independent**, 1st July, 1993) referred to this bogeyman of the absent father as 'wandering around council estates siring children without a care in the world'. This image was unsympathetic to say the least: these were 'bad lads'. However, this stereotype abstracted men from the contexts of their lives - most importantly from the loss of semi-skilled male employment, a key feature of the particularly depressed areas journalists documented – and its social and psychological, as well as economic, consequences (Campbell, 1993; Phillips, 1993).

That the 'new agency [was] to *pursue* absent fathers' (**The Guardian**, 11th December, 1991, italics added), that they would be 'tracked down' and 'Caught in the manhunt', provided connotations of criminality, and, through associations with being hunted, constructed men as like wild animals. Being hunted suggested that these men were roaming, lost to society, uncommitted, and free to move on. This was sometimes linked to the idea that their roles as husbands and fathers had been undermined by feminists, and now they were ousted from the family, 'out in the cold'. This connects with the increasing attention to men as 'the new victims' in society, and of the backlash against feminism which constructs men as victims of it. However, there were also more 'Jack-the-Lad' type accounts. These represented men as feckless and irresponsible in their 'matings', but as forgivable in their laddish 'naughtiness' at 'playing the field' or 'sowing their wild oats'. Associating men's sexuality with animal instincts invokes the discourse of male sex-drive (see Hollway, 1989) which functions to reduce to the biological, and hence make men less culpable for coercion or force in pursuit of their 'uncontrollable' desires. However, another aspect of the 'manhunt' imagery is lighter and ironic. Judy Hirst's 'Caught in the Manhunt' article in **The Guardian** (11th December, 1991) playfully mobilises the long-standing imagery of women as predatory, and as trying to lure and entrap men. The phrase 'a good catch' to refer to a wealthy or otherwise 'desirable' man illustrates the idea that the goal of (heterosexual) femininity is about 'getting' and 'keeping a man', that is, marrying him or being 'on track' to. The irony is that not only are women not the ones 'after men', (rather, the state is), but they are seen to be 'getting along fine' without

men, which is what appears to provoke the real fear underlying the reported 'crisis' of the family that lone mothers are seen as representing.

4.4 Polarised images of fathers

Images of fathers had become polarised in these popular representations. 'Absent fathers' were contrasted with the ideal of proper fathers tacitly imputed with moral goodness. Its implicit nature meant that what exactly good fathers were believed to be and do was not specified. Their defining feature, by virtue of their contrast with absent fathers, was that they were 'present'. In practice, this was defined as being physically co-present in the same house as their children, as distinct from being emotionally present for them. Such men were, however, fulfilling their social obligations by taking up their rightful familial role. The image of the 'family man' carried a maturity, respectability, and an association with 'family values', in contrast to those other men who needed to be forced to accept their familial responsibilities.

Politicians spoke as though the Act was conceived of as targeting the 'lower orders' as the Agency's first Chief Executive, Ros Hepplewhite, recognised (**Sunday Telegraph**, 27th March, 1995). In particular, its targets were the 'Jack-the-Lads fathering away on the council estates' (Poly Toynbee, **The Guardian**, 2nd February, 1994). In contrast to respectability, veiled in the more class-neutral sounding 'responsibility', the crude assumptions were that 'errant fathers' and 'feckless single mothers' were financially or selfishly motivated individuals as opposed to respectable folk who upheld traditional 'family values'. The Government imagined that those needing a lesson in family values would not be amongst their own, but this splitting of good and bad characteristics into separate groups of fathers did break down.

Between 1991 and 1994, there was a series of high-profile media revelations about the extra-marital affairs of Ministers in the Conservative Government, which in some cases had had children born of them. Journalists criticised the hypocrisy of these men who made public pronouncements about conservatively defined family values in the 'Back to Basics' polemic, but who had fathered children by women other than their wives, and, as Phoenix (1996) notes, had helped create lone mother households. Suzanne Moore, amongst others, expressed astonishment at the resilience of women who publicly stood by these men, whether as wives or as Conservative 'ladies' of the

constituency, despite having been wronged by them. A cartoon by Janis Goodman in the feminist magazine **Trouble and Strife** in Spring 1994, captured this hypocrisy and the 'them-and-us' split. It depicted a white man in shirt and tie delivering a lesson in 'Back to Basics: Grammar' which 'explained' the distinction: *'I have a love-child, you have a bastard. You are feckless, I am foolish'* (see Figure 3).
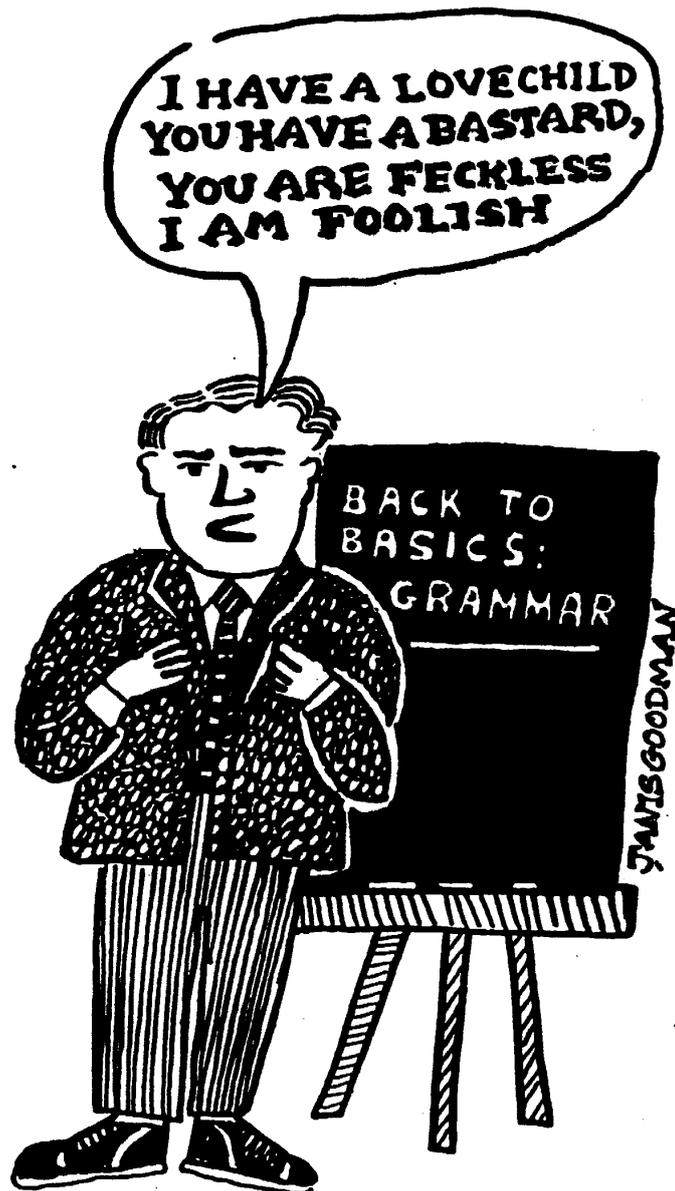
Figure 3: Lesson in 'Back to Basics' (Double) Standards

This cartoon by Janis Goodman, published in **Trouble & Strife** in Spring 1994, mocks the hypocrisy of Government Ministers whose double-standards allowed them to condemn 'feckless fathers' and lone mothers, whilst themselves having children not only 'out of wedlock', but by women other than their wives.

This polarisation of images of fathers did, and does, a disservice to several constituencies of fathers: those who are themselves lone parents; those who successfully co-parent with their ex-partners (so whilst not co-residential, are not absent emotionally); and indeed, co-residential fathers who do not endorse traditional, patriarchal 'family values'. Residential markers do not necessarily indicate levels of involvement in parenting, but refinements to the categories of 'absent' or '(good) fathers' (such as 'actively involved, non-residential fathers') did not emerge. These impoverished categories simplified the picture in several other respects: by assuming that all children have known and socially acceptable fathers, and that having fathered a child makes one a parent in a socially meaningful sense. The crude present/absent dichotomy sometimes relied on the stereotypical images of fathers as distant authority figures. This is out of step with contemporary popular culture. British soap operas increasingly allow men's emotions to be in focus, and Hollywood narratives, whilst often clumsy and patronising, now portray men as nurturant, involved fathers – even though they often rely on the juxtaposition of 'conventional' and 'new man' images or the 'conversion' of 'hard' men to protective fathers (e.g. Schwarzenegger as the male scientist who conceives in *Junior; Leon;* the *Rocky* films; *Three Men and a Baby*).

Policy-related discussion in popular media did not much engage with either the actuality of fathers' lives, or with the complexity of the feelings men and women might have about fathers' roles and shifts concerning them. It was striking that in arguments which were quick to make moral attributions, discussion of the actual roles that fathers ought to play in children's upbringing remained largely absent.

4.5 'Teaching them a lesson'

The compulsion of the Act is justified by 'the rights of children who continue [after their parents' relationship break-up] to be entitled to be maintained by their parents' (DSS, 1990, para. 5.31 cited in Clarke *et al., ibid.*). However, for lone mothers on income support the money the Agency received from the absent parent was, in the original formula, deducted pound-for-pound from the benefits, so simply replaced state support, although lone mothers in paid work did receive some or all of the maintenance. Similarly, 'absent parents' on income support might have £30 deducted per week from benefits, whereas for those not on benefits a margin of protected

income kept them above benefit entitlement levels. The Act is therefore understood to have a disproportionate impact on the poor. With no financial benefit to the child or residential parent (or - after a small maintenance disregard was introduced in the revised formula - a few pounds difference), it is hard to see how the Agency acts in children's best interests, at least regarding their financial well-being.

When the Act was introduced, it was widely recognised that it was intended to relieve the tax-payer of the burden of the social security bill for lone parents, rather than to support children or enact their rights. Articles and campaign T-shirts referred to it as 'the Treasury Support Act'. The rhetoric claimed that the Act 'put children first', but since there was little financial advantage, the strongest argument for this was that a child benefited from the knowledge that their absent parent contributed to their upkeep. The Foreword to the White Paper described the payment of maintenance as a way in which children learn about the responsibilities which family members owe each other (cf Clarke *et al.,* 1995). However, benefit entitlement is a marker of poverty, whereas, at the level of rhetoric, vivid images of parents stirred further meanings in the public imagination. The 'lower orders' seen as needing the lesson in 'family values' were marked in terms of class.

They were 'feckless fathers', and 'welfare mums'. The women were depicted as welfare scroungers, and sometimes as the victims of bad, restless, uncommitted men. The (absent) fathers were associated with delinquency and immaturity, as well as criminality. The discourse of 'an underclass' was mobilised. TV reports showed dismal estates in deprived areas such as in parts of the north east of England, where women with children were trapped in poor quality council housing with no money to go out. The men-folk were seldom caught on film, reinforcing their absence/exclusion from family homes, and when they were, the footage was shot outdoors conveying a sense of their alienation and aimless roaming in the wilderness. McKee (1983, cited in Lewis and O'Brien, 1987) notes the resilience of the fathers-as-breadwinners discourse even in economic recessions which make it ever more difficult. Such unsurprising pressures on relationships were overshadowed by images of self-sufficient women who chose not to have an extra adult in the home, so that although less money might come in overall, she would have full control of how it was spent. The assumption that lone mothers base employment decisions on strictly economic

factors, as the model of 'rational economic man' implies, was contradicted by the particular gendered moral reasoning used by the women in a study by Edwards and Duncan (1997). Black lone mothers prioritised demonstrating self-sufficiency to their children, which correlates with the fact that they have higher rates of employment than white lone mothers (Edwards and Duncan, 1997; Phoenix, 1996). The current silence over 'race' in conservative discourses of lone mothers might be explained by a primary motivation being reduction of the welfare bill (see Phoenix, 1996).

A favourite of journalists was the infantalisation of the men concerned, when women said things like: 'I've already got two kids, why would I want someone else to look after?', which fed into the immaturity theme. The idea that these men were being taught a lesson could construct them as naughty boys being brought to order by a paternalist state, which was stepping in to teach them their responsibilities because the absence of 'father figures' in their own upbringing meant they had failed to learn lessons of 'family obligation'. This attributes inadequate socialisation into dominant ('decent') cultural values to lone mother households and positions the state as benevolent pseudo-parent. Primarily financial motives for reducing the welfare bill could therefore be hidden behind discourses that the Act was 'for their own good'.

When Ann Chant succeeded Ros Hepplewhite as head of the Agency in 1994, Sally Hughes wrote a piece called 'New nanny for the state's troublesome child', commenting that 'Placing women at the head of disciplinarian agencies that chases naughty boys distances politicians from policies that would undermine important male support and consent' (Hughes, 1994: p35). Both directors were cast as 'middle–aged battleaxe[s] wielding a rolling pin', exercising personal grudges, rather than doing a difficult job, and Hepplewhite's resignation, midst personal attacks and scapegoating, seemed to attract less public sympathy than might the sacrificing of a man's career. The 'nanny' reference conveys the delegation of responsibility, alludes to the discourse of welfare as overprotective, or as interfering, and invokes the figure of a scolding matriarch who knows best and will teach her charge a lesson.

The Act could thus be presented as helping solve the problems of family breakdown, youth criminality, and urban disorder, in analyses which presume simplified causal links between them (Roseneil and Mann, 1996). Popular debates over 1993 and 1994 made *explicit* the connection between lone parenthood and the emergence of a so-

called underclass. Lone mothers on benefits have become an emblem of the 'underclass' discourse, but are positioned as both symptom and cause of the social ills conflated in this analysis. Chapter 3 described some of the discourses of lone mothers in contemporary Britain, but these are further bolstered and become even harsher when associated with the idea of a growing and dangerous underclass which has taken hold of the popular imagination (Roseneil and Mann, *ibid*.). According to Charles Murray, leading proponent of the underclass thesis, its three symptoms are 'crime, illegitimacy and economic inactivity amongst working-aged men' (Murray, 1994: p2). Despite claims of empirical and analytic integrity, the underclass thesis (particularly in Murray's own writing) is supported by little evidence, has been too readily adopted from the US context, and conflates description with analysis, its 'victims' with its cause (see David, 1994; Edwards and Duncan, 1997; Mann, 1994; Morris, 1994; Slipman, 1994).

From generalisations about class, presumptions about culture are made. The discourse of 'welfare dependency' laments a 'culture of dependency' in which people do not aspire to work. It assumes that people ought to embrace 'the Protestant work ethic', and is usually fuelled by welfare bill concerns. Like the idea of an underclass, it has been popularised despite little conceptual development, and it is problematically assumed that families where several generations are long-term unemployed share this culture of dependency. This concept 'psychologises' material reality, so that unemployed people themselves, rather than their economic and social circumstances, are seen as the cause of their need for benefits. Furthermore, 'dependence' is valued negatively, which re-stigmatises benefit receipt, over-emphasises individual responsibility and romanticises 'independence'. There seems to be 'an intolerance of all dependency' (Rustin, 1998: p8), and parents are viewed as responsible for avoiding passing on a culture of dependence to their children (e.g. in many of David Blunkett's 1998 speeches as Secretary of State for Education).

New Labour continues the Thatcher Government's attack on 'dependency culture', rather than adopting a structural analysis as might have been hoped, and retains the view of social policy as a means of instilling decent values in citizens. The 1998 Budget clearly problematised those who do not work, even those (including *lone* parents) who are at home to care for their children. The tough talk about expecting all

who can to work and providing benefits only for those who absolutely cannot work assumes that jobs are available. When benefits are framed as 'disincentives' to work, and their withdrawal is understood as promoting an active work-ethic, critics can see it as a Government tackling financial issues under the guise of a moral crusade.

The underclass discourse has its roots in the long-standing British tradition of 'social pathology' views of the poor. In right wing social and economic thinking (e.g. the Institute of Economic Affairs), it is often accompanied by anti-feminist and racist motives (Edwards and Duncan, 1997). It is moralistic and judgmental about poverty and assumes that poverty and cultural alienation necessarily go hand-in-hand. It presumes a consensus about cultural values, then pathologises those who do not hold it. Moreover, these culturally deviant families present the threat of 'contamination' to higher, 'more civilised', levels of society. Constructing them as dangerous has a long history in the perception of threat from the unruly masses (Morris, 1994). So, men who father children without joining the household are seen as threatening in terms of crime they may commit, their 'promiscuity' and their moral cultures. The women are seen as 'encouraged' to breed by 'over-generous benefits' and having children for instrumental reasons such as for social housing and benefits, although this is not supported by research with 'young' mothers (Phoenix, 1991). The concept of an underclass conflates class and financial situation, assumes intransigent class cultures, and polarises the supposed differences in social values held, enabling 'the threat' to be contained only by the discursive expulsion of the 'menace' from the body of ('decent') society.

There then emerged a constituency of men who explicitly claimed this absent father identity, but who presumed themselves to be men of morals, not feckless or evading their responsibilities. They happened not to live with their children, but were distinctly different from the absent fathers so far depicted. This represented a challenge to the image of absent fathers and began its transformation.

4.6 Family men after all: absolving (some) 'absent fathers'

Over 1992 and 1993, there was hardly a let up in the Child Support Agency's bad press. A stream of unjust seeming cases described in newspaper and magazine articles suggested the complicated formula needed serious attention. The sums of money

requested by the Agency were portrayed as too high, unreasonable or financially crippling for the men concerned. Typically, an article would describe the finances of a man (I have not seen a single article about an absent mother's finances) who would have to move house or would not be able to afford to visit his children, because of the amount of his income the Agency demanded. Amongst these were stories of men who had since re-partnered, and were now supporting other children. They and their new partners appealed about the unfairness of the requests. Claims that eight men had been so overwhelmed by the Agency's demands that they committed suicide spearheaded an emotive campaign that eventually claimed supporters on both sides of the political divide (Hughes, 1994). Articles often pitied unfairly treated men or ridiculed the Agency for its incompetent procedures or bills too small to be worth their administrative cost, which made it appear petty, irrational, and even vengeful (feminised forms of monstrosity, as chapter 3 argued).

By 1994, there had been a shift in the representation of absent fathers. Articles in **The Guardian** had titles such as *'Fathers who are reduced to paupers'*, *'parents at the bitter end of the new child support system'*, *'financial stranglehold on hard-pressed fathers'* and *'Payers angry at "victimisation"'*. Sub-titles reported *'The agency has created a nightmare world, say fathers facing demands'* and sympathetically described *'middle-class fathers who already pay up'*. The villain of the piece was the bureaucratic, insensitive state agency. Absent fathers had become the new victims: hard-pressed, in strangleholds, or facing demands. Their complaints were no longer irresponsible reluctance to pay what they ought, but legitimate claims that the system, or at least the formula, was unfair. Significantly, they might be 'reduced to paupers', but they were not already poor. These absent fathers were of a different ilk to those of the feckless father discourse, they were the mostly middle class men who suddenly found themselves expected to pay far more than anticipated. They differed in class and economic circumstances, and as commentators observed, in their success at getting their complaints heard. These were articulate, middle class and educated men who knew how to present their claims persuasively, could 'use' the media to their advantage and therefore formed a peculiarly effective lobby. They were also a constituency quite unused to being constructed as problematic, who were coming to the attention of the state for not meeting their responsibilities, and arguing that the demands were unreasonable, put them in the morally more justifiable position of

being unable, rather than unwilling to pay (Phoenix, 1996). This 'unable/unreasonable' argument dominated accounts, so that these fathers, interestingly, were not accused of being selfish.

The polarisation collapsed as it became recognised that some absent fathers were family men after all. A man could be both an absent father to one set of children and the (other sort of) father to children born to another partner. These might be his second family or step-children. Moreover, men who could demonstrate themselves to be present and financially responsible fathers for their second family did not fit the Jack-the-Lad image. They were family men and responsible fathers after all - just elsewhere. This pulled the rug from under the 'family values' argument that absent fathers were immature men who were not meeting their responsibilities. However, a second family might not necessarily entail financial support if maintenance payments from the children's birth father came into the household.

Second families were only ever portrayed as respectable, reputedly because journalists and editors recognised themselves in the figure of the 'absent father'. Middle-class absent fathers formed an articulate lobby, and had political clout. In addition to their greater financial means, their impact was popularly understood as because they addressed their peers and 'in the corridors of power walk many twice and thrice married men' (Hughes, 1994: p35). The imputation of fecklessness and irresponsibility to 'gentlemen' of ministerial rank shook the categories, and the 'civilising' lesson in family values was of course 'inappropriate'. Indeed rallies organised on behalf of protesting 'absent' fathers by fathers' rights organisation Families Need Fathers comprised families, rather than men (Mitchell and Goody, 1997) showing these to be (second) family men after all and importantly, drawing public sympathy for families forced into competition with other families, rather than men who'd left women holding the baby.

Collapsing the polarisation of fathers meant that the easy attribution of good and bad to family men and absent fathers could be rethought and some discretion allowed. It admitted the significance of social relationships, and required a climb-down from rigid ideological positions. It also popularised a broader range of terms for family forms and relationships, such as 'second families', 'second wives', 'earlier children',

'birth parents', 'co-residential parents'; reconstituted, reconstructed recombinant or divorce-extended families (see Stacey, 1990); serial families (Mitchell and Goody, 1997) and exercised the step-family terms.

4.7 Breadwinners and losers

Protests about the steep demands of the Agency, coupled with complaints against it - which by February 1995 totalled 30,000 (Anderson, 1995) - had led to an enquiry by the House of Commons Social Security Select Committee. The 1995 White Paper *Improving Child Support* proposed five key modifications to the formula: the introduction of a ceiling of 30% of an absent parent's net income to be paid as maintenance; for wealthy absent parents, halving the maximum additional element of maintenance payable; introducing the recognition of property settlements (usually the parent with care keeping the family home), and of the costs of housing a new partner and step-children. This last point indicated that financial obligation was no longer seen as applying to biological children only, and similarly, any exceptional costs of caring for step-children could be recognised in claims of particular hardship, for which a new element of discretion was introduced.

Anderson called these changes 'an absent fathers' charter' because 'virtually all the demands of the largely white middle-class absent fathers lobby [were] met, in most cases significantly reducing liability for maintenance under the Act' (1995: p6). The Child Poverty Action Group agreed that the package was overwhelmingly in favour of absent parents and much opposition centred on the fact that it offered nothing to alleviate the hardship of parents with care (Mitchell and Goody, 1997). According to Anderson:

> 'By introducing these changes, the Government has effectively acknowledged the massive failings of the Agency; and in the face of opposition from an organised group of potential voters, has ditched its supposed ideology that the Act was designed to make absent fathers face up to their responsibilities' (Anderson, 1995*:* p6).

Juliet Mitchell and Jack Goody (1997) describe how protesters against the Act fall into three main categories:

> 'First, absent fathers who object to paying maintenance or higher maintenance than they want to; they are supported by some women, largely second wives, with new children to maintain. Second there are a wide range of women's

interest groups who argue that the Act has worsened the situation of lone mothers. Third, there are those who see the Act as indicative of a wider crisis of the family in which fathers are being scapegoated and cast out in the cold' (*ibid*.: p204).

Since the changes to the formula, the middle category of protest has waned, the first are seen as more intransigent. According to Frank Field MP, who chaired the Social Services Select Committee, the first group expresses the 'raw gender conflict at the heart of the CSA row', since 'Even if the legislation is right – which it is not – there will always be fathers who don't want to pay.' (cited in Hughes, 1994: p35), and the third group is small in numbers, but is 'an articulate exponent of a virulent backlash against feminists and all women who are not attached to men' (Mitchell and Goody, 1997: p207).

The powerful 'absent/second family fathers'' lobby was notable by its absence during the first phase of media coverage which painted crude, unsympathetic images of the absent father bogeyman. Perhaps they managed not to identify with the absent fathers so depicted because of their different general class location in a similar way to Duncan and Edwards' (forthcoming, 1999) findings that more middle-class lone mothers did not self-identify as 'lone mothers' in spite of meeting the sociological criteria, because of its 'welfare mum' associations which implied certain class and economic positions. It seems one is 'allowed' to have out-of-wedlock children if one can afford to support them, since financial provision is a 'privatised' responsibility of the family's (and Tim Yeo and Cecil Parkinson used this defence). The breadwinner discourse, coupled with conventionally gendered care patterns, means that where lone mothers struggle to get by, individual men, whether involved or not, are deemed responsible and at fault if they do not pay. However, they may be redeemed as good fathers if they can show they have taken up further family responsibilities (instead), and earlier on, if they were wealthy enough to make private arrangements or (ensured) their ex-partner did not claim benefits. The implicit distinction between 'fit' and 'unfit fathers' centres on the presence of their money, hence the condemnation of material absence through absence in person, unemployment or 'underclass' membership. Fathers are reduced to having a solely financial role, and if the state's role in supporting families was to be minimised, individual men needed identifying as fathers, so biological paternity provided a marker with a measure of 'proof'.

4.8 Ideological lessons

How, then, might the Act's ideological intentions be summarised? Can the positions within the debates and campaigns on the Act be understood ideologically?

Whilst Tories tried to unite behind the 'family values' banner in order to make party political gain from the anxiety mobilised, there was clearly never consensus within the party. Indeed, contradictions within the Act are understood as a result of different opinions in the Party and tensions between Government Departments. Even *Children Come First* contained sections which justified the Act differently: was it to make fathers face up to their responsibilities, to teach children about familial obligations, or to tackle the problem of the rising welfare bill?

The Act's primary ideological lesson might be said to be the universal financial responsibility of biological parents for their children. However, as Clarke *et al.* (1994) point out, the Act gives the impression that absent parents only really become financially responsible for their children when the parent with care is on benefits (cited in Burns, 1995). So 'family values' ideology seems to be deployed where it is in the interest of benefit savings.

Generally, the Act has been understood as promoting conventional family ideology which presumes, as the norm, a heterosexual, ideally married, couple who live together and raise their mutual biological child/ren on their private income in a household comprising them alone. It therefore feeds into the problematisation, and stigmatisation of families who do not fit this model (see chapter 3). Insisting on an ongoing administrative/financial link between biological parents and children can be seen as trying to support this model of family and institution of marriage, and perhaps even to discourage separation. The Act evidently 'recognize[s] shifting patterns of family life and child care, [and] the enormous rise in lone-parent families [yet] by enforcing two-parent responsibility it could be seen as trying to be a rock in the flood waters of social change...' (Mitchell and Goody, 1997: p202). However, despite its rhetoric of supporting/promoting the family, '[a]t end of its first year in operation it was admitted that, out of £210 million collected from fathers, £203 million went to

the Treasury and only £3 million to families. So while taxpayers generally have benefited at this stage, few families have' (Hughes, 1994).

Technically, the Act asserts the role of 'absent parents', which in practice, reasserts the role of (absent) fathers, so some see it as reacting to a perceived and lamented erosion of the nuclear family and men's position within it. Reaffirming 'the institution of fatherhood' is sometimes a reaction against feminism - men wanting back their seat at the head of the table, as the patriarchal head of household. Significant here is the paucity of discourse of contemporary father-child relationships so that the dominant image of fathers remains the breadwinner or even the distant disciplinarian. The sole focus on responsibility for financial support, even if justified as teaching (potentially broadly interpreted) 'family responsibility', regrettably reinforces the notion of fathers simply as breadwinner and reaffirms mothers in caring roles financially supported by (individual) men. The Act defines fatherhood biologically, and goes to extreme lengths to maintain this principle. It also expects that mothers (with care) will know who the father is, that he is socially acceptable and can be contacted, and resists recognising that it could be otherwise. The popular images in the debates over the Act construct absent parents as irresponsible men and other fathers are assumed to be responsible parents and good fathers.

The Act reflects the 'Once a parent always a parent' idea of the 1989 Children Act (Roache, 1991). A man might be an ex-partner to a mother, but to a child, there is no such thing as an ex-father (Mitchell and Goody, 1997). A man's kinship to his children is no longer linked to his relationship to their mother. So the Act tries to separate out adult partnerships from (father-child) kinship relationships. In principle, I would welcome this because it might pave the way to think further about how children can be protected from difficulties in adults' relationships, but in practice, it can falsely separate the mother's interests and the child's as regards relationships with the father. The Act's initial non-recognition of the potential obligations of step-parents was softened by subsequent revisions, but public discussions never took off around social parents, biological parents and about (whether rules can be set about) their financial and other responsibilities.

Other aspects of the Act's ideological stance could have broader implications. It attempts to shift the boundary between public (state) and private (family) responsibility (Edwards and Duncan, 1997), so that the state no longer has responsibility for supporting mothers without partners, or rather as the Act would have it, whose ex-partners do not pay maintenance. It also illustrated negative meanings accorded to benefit receipt or 'dependency'. The discourse that 'over-generous benefits' reduce the 'work incentive' is highly debatable within its own terms, but it surely has no place if children's best interests are central, nor if maintenance is the child's right. It also demonstrates the state's intervention in private relationships.

However, trying to make explicit the Act's ideological intentions does not provide a map of politics/perspectives from which opposition can easily be predicted. Initially, campaigns and positions on child support seemed to be about the 'raw gender conflict' over money and the care of children. But it was soon recognisably more complicated. The debates brought into public view some anti-feminist sentiments, such as 'blaming' women raising children without men on feminism 'gone too far'. Whilst some lone mothers can be seen as having the reproductive, sexual and financial independence from men that feminists fought for, (e.g. some never-married mothers and those using DI), other mothers might see themselves as having been 'left holding the baby' and unable to earn wages which covered childcare costs, if they wanted work outside the home. Similarly, it is possible to interpret the Act along these contrasting lines. It can be viewed as bolstering the traditional nuclear family, or as trying to prevent women being left holding the baby and promoting shared responsibility for childrearing.

The Act and responses to it cannot be understood simply in gendered terms. The sides of the debate were never wholly populated by people of opposite genders: some men support the principle of men paying, as do some women. Men and women could occupy opposing sides of the argument (as absent and residential parents pulling money between them) or could unite in opposition to the Act, arguing (for instance, as CACSA) that the state should provide support, or that the Act intruded into personal relationships. Women might unite behind feminist ideas about women's financial independence and autonomy in their relationship with the child's father, or mothers

might be pitted against each other in the tug over money between first and second wives/partners, (or mothers of children versus current partners with children). In addition, whilst there were judgemental discourses of 'absent fathers' as against (good) (present) fathers, the same man might be an absent father to one family and a present, financially contributing father to a second family. Similarly, a mother might have an ex-partner who is the father of her children and a current partner who is an absent father to some other children, so that gendered and parental identities were not simple and could not straightforwardly predict views about child support. Recognising that some absent fathers are good fathers to other children suggests that it is not the family *per se* that is in crisis, but *first* families.

Men and women on benefits might have united against wealthier parents so that reactions to the Act might have divided along class or socio-economic lines. However, even though the popular discussion of the Act made presumptions about the class and culture of those on benefits, proponents and protesters cannot simply be lined up in terms of social class. Neither do right-left political distinctions mark the positions with stable coherence. The CSA had had wide cross-party support in parliament, which is why the strength of reaction against it was unexpected, and more broadly, the lone mother 'bashing' which blamed them for the underclass, was seen to have drawn support from a considerable range across the right/left divide (Roseneil and Mann, 1996). Ideological objections came from both sides:

> 'On the left the argument centres on the system's rigid imposition of paternal over societal support for families. On the right there is outrage at the denial of individual bargaining power to men who have for generations assumed they were entitled to discard first families and start new ones'. (Hughes, 1994: p35)

Or, whereas the left might reject it for its limited and rigid 'family values', some conservatives condemned it as an attack on the institution of marriage because it erodes the distinction between married and unmarried fathers (or marriage and cohabitation) (Mitchell and Goody, 1997). Similarly, instead of being seen as resisting the changes brought to marriage by women's increasing economic independence, it could be seen as responding constructively to these and not leaving women solely responsible for children after/outside relationships.

Some libertarians and feminists might criticise its regulative intervention. As Roseneil and Mann (1996: p196) point out: 'Whereas choice is usually portrayed by the right as a tremendous benefit to society and the economy, it is seen as inappropriate for women who want to have children without the support of an economically active man'. Similarly, non intervention by the state into systems that will therefore 'self-regulate' or into the private affairs of individuals, would be the principle in neo-liberal 'free market' thinking, yet the CSA represents the setting up of a Governmental agency with powers to find out about and intervene in private financial relationships between individuals. While this is not new for those drawn into the benefit system, a commentator quoted by Mitchell and Goody (1997) noted that it was a first for those not on benefits.

The absent father/lone mother/underclass discourse could draw together different ideological strands and those from different political traditions:

> 'With its different strands, emphasizing morality or economics, the discourse united Tory traditionalists concerned with "family values" and morality, Christian socialists and liberals with similar interests, and Thatcherite hardliners keen to continue "rolling back the welfare state"'. (Roseneil and Mann, 1996: p193)

Mitchell and Goody (1997) describe how protest against the Act was both feminist and overtly anti-feminist, and how misogynist men's groups co-operated with some feminist campaigns in opposition to the Act. Strange bedfellows, indeed. Some feminists and 'family values' moralisers might together insist on men's responsibilities to their children.

There were various responses to the Act from amongst feminists too, for instance, prioritising redistribution or shared responsibility for children (and so, supporting its aim), or prioritising women's financial independence of individual men or the state's responsibility. Even from within socialist perspectives, the Act could be justified as a redistributive tool or be seen as a privatisation of childrearing costs. The Act and much of the opposition to it might claim to be putting children first.

The Act was not, therefore, a lesson from a Government with clear ideological principles, as the contradictions and climb-downs show. It clashed with the same

government's 1989 Children Act (see Clark *et al.*, 1995), and revealed divisions amongst Conservatives between hard-line welfare reformers, family values moralisers and more liberal strands of thought. Furthermore, the Government's attempt to bring back 'traditional family values' works against another government objective – getting lone mothers off state benefits and into the labour market. The two are ideologically inconsistent since traditional 'family values' motherhood is full-time home-based, and inconsistent with the idea of mothers as workers (Edwards and Duncan, 1997). Different models of fatherhood underpin the two Acts; either as a 'parent' and thereby having/potentially having 'parental responsibility' (CA), or as family breadwinner in a conventional division of labour between parents (CSA) (see Burghes *et al.*, 1997). Even if its intent was ideologically clear, its consequences certainly are not.

4.9 The absence of discourses of good fathers

It may be the confluence of concerns about lone motherhood and about a dangerous, growing underclass that produces the harsh judgements about parents which chapters 3 and 4 describe. Moreover, while these debates raise important concerns - about the alienation of some men from social ties of kinship and community, the caring and parental roles young men aspire to, and the social exclusion of men, women and children as a result of poverty – they are not helpful where they caricature and condemn people at the level of abstract identity categories. This chapter shows the complexity and intensity of the cultural politics of child support. Many broader cultural tensions are drawn on, including concern about the family, about morality, about social roles for men and women, and responses to feminism. The complexity of positions in response to the Act are a result of the nature of the terrain and the various struggles waged on it, rather than only the result of an ideologically confused Act itself.

The radical men's magazine *Achilles Heel* ran a special issue on men and families in autumn 1994, in which a contributor wrote:

> 'The debate around the CSA has, rather, thrown into question the meaning of responsible fathering in the first place. It is not only about father absence in other words - it is also about what we understand by father presence in the family. It is frequently assumed that we know what we're talking about when we refer to absent fathers: but do we? What does it mean to be an errant father? Or a good father? These are questions which are central to the development of

any anti-sexist politics aimed at tackling men's power in the family…' (Collier, 1994).

Whilst this debate may have been sparked at marginal sites associated with critical approaches to gender or to parenting, it did not develop in the mainstream media. Like the idealised figure of 'mother' against whom the mothers described in chapter 3 were compared and found lacking, the concept of the good father was at the centre of these debates, though barely ever gestured towards directly, let alone described. Virtue could be assumed for fathers who did not come to the attention of state as a result of needing benefits. Failing to explore good fathering left it open for 'family values' arguments to be drawn on, presuming moral superiority. However, 'family values' itself is an 'empty' category, with competing accounts of its meaning. Such limited imaginative space for discussing the roles of mothers, fathers, or 'parents' implied these roles could be taken-for-granted at precisely the moment they needed reconsidering. Changes in women's employment, men's employment, sexual relationships, and parent-child relationships have important implications for parenting roles and the everyday work of parenting, yet progress towards 'family friendly' employment practice is slow, in part because we are not having the necessary debates at a popular cultural level. This absence left an oversimplified dualism between those constructed as bad fathers and those assumed to be good fathers, with unhelpful presumptions about class and wealth within them.

It is not easy to describe the intentions behind the Act, and amendments to it compromised them. Nor is it easy to appraise it as a piece of legislation. Lone mothers experience it differently according to their economic position, their relationship to the father and his economic circumstances. So too do absent parents, for the above reasons and perhaps also, according to which children are the focus. These are difficulties in assessing any complex policy where the outcomes for different parties cannot easily be summarised, but in addition to this, here it is apparent that at times there are different parties, positioned in opposition to each other to gain at each others' expense, but that either relationships between them may vary or the parties do not remain static. At times during this debate, it was possible to imagine positions divided along the lines of gender, class, politics, but these could not be sustained.

This chapter supports the conclusion of chapter 3 that much discussion of parents occurs alongside distinct understandings and expectations of 'fathers' and of 'mothers'. 'Father absence' is seen primarily as an issue of financial support in powerful policy discourses and secondly, but perhaps increasingly, as a psychological discourse about its consequences for identity and role. There are different understandings of being motherless to being fatherless. Fewer children are motherless, and if they are left by an able mother, she is condemned for her selfishness in a way in which men are not, both morally for 'abandoning' her children, and psychologically for being able to do such a monstrous, unmotherly thing. The poignancy of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, showed the significance attributed the loss of their mother for her two teenage sons as a result of the dominance of constructions of mothers as primary caregivers/emotionally central. Paternity has historically been so much more disputable than the identity of one's mother, but so much more loaded in a particular sense that is reproduced here: the fatherless child was at a loss for inherited wealth and status, of professional direction/apprenticeship for boys, and has been viewed as identity-less. There remains a paradox that the status implications of being fatherless still seem to outweigh the emotional ones. Such parental functions map onto different aspects of identity, such that fatherlessness has conventionally undermined external, social or bureaucratic aspects of identity, as opposed to the subjective or psychological aspects of identity (Richards, 1994b) with which mothers' conventionally greater intimacy with children has linked them. However, more recent discourses about father absence, raise concerns about identity in the psychological and personal sense.

The current intensity of feelings about the financial support of children when mothers and fathers are not together, is illustrated by the shocking suggestion by Newt Gingrich, in 1994 in the USA, that the children of young unmarried mothers on benefit should be removed to orphanages, and in the UK by comments by Michael Howard and Peter Lilley at 1993 and 1994 Conservative Party Conferences that it might be better if these children were adopted. Louise Armstrong (1995) notes 'the exquisite canard of implying that children with an alive-and-kicking mother were *orphans*', but shows how '[o]rphanages have, throughout history, been populated with children who were - not *parentless*, but *fatherless*' (1995: p8). The concept of welfare itself has a gendered history, since, in the US it developed from 'mother's aid' which

was given to widows who were the sole support of children: precisely for husbandless women and fatherless children (Armstrong, *ibid.*).

What significance should be accorded to these discourses of fathers? Analysis of the ideological meanings of such representations is needed, but this chapter shows some of the difficulties of ideological analyses when images are complex, there are competing accounts of them, different analyses of them and the images themselves are not static. The following two chapters draw together the accounts given in chapters 2, 3 and 4. Chapter 5 focuses on the nature of such discourses of mothers and fathers, how their political implications can be understood, and what they mean for personal experience. Moreover, what is the relationship of the two: how does a model of ideology allow us to conceptualise the subjective implications of particular imagery?

Chapter 5

Ideological Images or Cultural Discourses? Frameworks for Psychosocial Studies

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 have characterised representations of 'parents', mothers and fathers in contemporary British media. Parenting magazines were criticised for naturalising women's care for children in spite of the language of 'parenting'. An account of the unsympathetic images of lone and lesbian mothers identified some of the psychological ideas employed, and an account of the 1990s child support debates argued that the polarised imagery of fathers divided them on the basis of wealth and paid little attention to fathers' *emotional* relationships or responsibilities towards their children. What approach should be adopted for the political critique of such images? What do they mean for the personal experiences of individual men and women?

Cultural images such as these are political because particular value-judgements inform them and they place people in status hierarchies and relations of power. Moreover, the values themselves are often obscured and naturalised. Should the representations depicted be seen as expressions of dominant family ideology which construct certain people as fit or unfit to parent? Amongst 'second wave' Western feminists in the 1970s were socialists and others who employed the concept of ideology in order to examine the political implications of dominant cultural ideas about mothers. 'Ideology' and the feminist analyses it prompted have been very important for feminist struggles, but Marxist approaches proved limited for understanding the relation of ideology to individual experience. They did not provide a satisfactory model of subjectivity or of the formation of individual psyche by the social world. What is needed is an approach that recognises the immense power of cultural images, without positioning individuals as passive in relation to them. Emphasising the cultural (re)production of personal desires must not devalue emotional investment, nor leave us 'trapped', unable to resist dominant ideas, from which we fantasise liberation.

This chapter explores some of the limitations of the ideology framework for critically examining representations of mothers and outlines a post-structuralist approach. (Distinctions between the two frameworks are explored further in the

following two chapters). It therefore begins the explicit discussion of approach and methodology in the thesis, including the approach that has informed earlier chapters. Ideology critique has implicitly informed earlier chapters, in part because of its impact on sociology, cultural studies and some discursive psychology. This runs counter to the idea that the empirical chapters were, or ever could be, devoid of theoretical presumptions about the nature of the representations 'described'. A particular epistemological perspective is already constructed in the words 'describe' and 'representation' – the default, empiricist one. This theoretical and epistemological approach was 'at work' in these accounts even though it was not stated. This approach was unremarkable for its conventional understanding of media images as reflective, and potentially distorting, of reality, or, by the absence of alternative claims it allowed empiricism to operate as the default.

5.1 Family ideology

In late 1960s counter-culture, marriage and the family were seen as sexually repressive, authoritarian institutions. However, missing from this critique was a recognition of the structure of male dominance/female subordination and of the objectification of women in dominant discourses of heterosexuality (Segal, 1983). The growing women's movement heard women's accounts of their lives, of feeling isolated, frustrated and undervalued as housewives. Women's private unpaid domestic work made them economically dependent and often therefore physically and emotionally vulnerable. Those in paid work found they were still expected to do housework as well – a 'second shift' (Hochschild, 1990) - which prompted feminist criticism of men's absence from domestic work and childcare (Nava, 1983). Some of the strongest support for 'traditional' family ideology in the latter part of the 20th century has come from dominant views of childrearing.

Critiques of family ideology showed just how particular was the supposedly universal model of 'the family', and how by privileging certain domestic arrangements over others, it renders what is seen as other to this image inadequate or pathological (Barrett and McIntosh, 1982; McIntosh, 1997). So problems with family ideology are not only the particular roles and relationships it depicts and legitimizes, but also those it excludes and marginalises. As with the depictions of 'common sense' knowledge about parents, it naturalises its own status, so that its particular value judgements are not

explicit. This results in an over-simplistic splitting, on the basis of which it is assumed that families which match the nuclear family ideal are good for children, and those which do not, are not. The concept of ideology is important for highlighting how ideas have social roots and perform social functions (Donald and Hall, 1986; Parker, 1992). It has provided a way of recognising and critiquing the particular version of the family which saturates the media, advertising and popular entertainment (Barrett and McIntosh, 1982). Figure 4 parodies naturalised (and idealised) images of 'the [nuclear] family' and highlights its pathologising function.
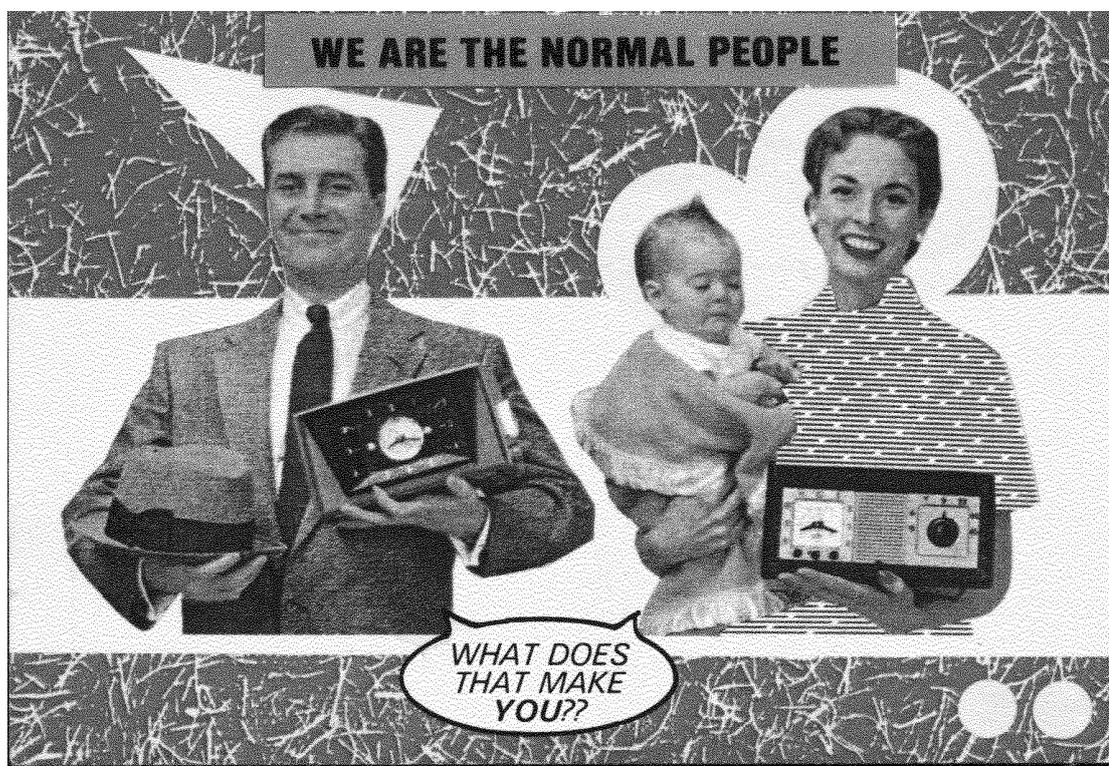
Figure 4: We are the normal people: What does that make you?

We are the normal people. 'What does that make you?' is written on this Chic Pix (London) postcard. This irreverent image highlights the normalising effects of the hegemonic definition of 'the family' as the (1950's image of the) nuclear family. The wording conveys the smugness possible amongst those who fit the image, and its (or their) questioning of the normality of its Others. The image mocks the celebration of domestic consumer goods, and the graphics mock such a naturalised image of the family.

Whilst it can be argued that the seed had been sown for greater attention to women's domestic exploitation in Engel's argument that women's sexuality must be freed from financial dependence (and Lenin's argument that domestic labour should be

socialised), this phase of critique of the family did not challenge the ideological construction of femininity and masculinity, and the idealisation of heterosexual love as the basis for family relationships. The ideology framework therefore allowed feminists to stimulate recognition of the gendered division of labour, domestic labour and sexual and domestic violence within, and beyond, Marxist circles (see e.g. Comer, 1974; Oakley; 1972; Zaretsky, 1976).

5.2 Feminist critiques of ideologies of motherhood

Marxist-informed analyses provided a powerful way of articulating a political analysis of intimate relations (e.g. of family and heterosexuality), particularly after Althusser's influential (1971) essay describing 'ideological state apparatus' which, importantly, suggested that Marxist analysis should also consider the cultural realm and the way social institutions positioned people differently in relation to their labour, capital and each other. The organisation of everyday life could thereafter be understood as political, but such understandings lacked a gender analysis, since all other social stratifications were subordinated to class. Some feminists used the framework to draw analogies which theorised gender oppression as the most fundamental, such as Firestone's (1970) 'sex class' and to develop the concept of patriarchy to understand the trans-cultural/historical nature of women's subordination (Crowley, 1999; Eisenstein, 1984; Fraser and Nicholson, 1990). However, within Marxist and other liberatory discourses formed by modernist metanarratives, there is not the theoretical space to address adequately issues of subjectivity. This section examines some of the limitations of the (historically inevitable) reliance on the modernist (liberal-humanist) subject through the issue of motherhood.

Motherhood was a key focus of 'second wave' Western feminist critique. The dominant Western cultural constructions of mothers were criticised for idealising motherhood, abstracting it from actual social and material conditions, and for pathologising and condemning women whose mothering, or desire to do so, fell outside of the normalising discourses of mothers, as chapter 3 argued. The 1970s women's liberation movement challenged gender roles in particular to counter views that:

> 'women's exclusive role is mothering and nurturing; that the seat of authority in the home is the father; that working mothers neglect their children; that women can't have a career and a child; that men expect women to service them in the home; that children have to be raised as role-gendered

boys and girls and that men wouldn't enjoy being present at the birth of children' (Clarke, 1982: p172).

Feminist writings identified the pronatalism of Western societies (Riley, 1983), and the way being a mother is conflated with being a woman, or can mark a woman as adult (Chodorow and Contratto, 1982; Woollett, 1991), or truly feminine (Rich, 1977). Attention was drawn to the physical and social isolation within which most women mother in the West, and the psychological isolation and responsibility this produces (Rich, 1977; Riley, 1983). Most feminist analyses, but especially socialist-feminist ones, also rejected the emphasis on the private provision for childcare and the individualised nature of a culture which only emphasises caring for one's own.

The women's movement campaigned for women's autonomy in choosing whether to have or not have children, and to raise them in conditions of their choosing (Segal, 1983). It was of central importance to undermine the association of women's social position and the 'natural' order (Lawler, 1996; Stanworth, 1987), especially around mothering and women's sexuality, which can be reduced to the 'biologically determined' in dominant popular (and academic) understandings. The naturalising of caring for children (and others) as women's work, and of women's heterosexuality, or even submissive sexuality, was challenged, along with some of the ways these come to be naturalised. Thus, Rich (1977) distinguished women's experience (or potential experience) of motherhood, from the institution of motherhood, to which actual mothering has been subjected and therefore drawn under male control. Barrett and McIntosh (1982), in critiquing 'the anti-social family' – a term which disrupts the presumption of a benign institution guaranteeing benign relationships - identify the family as both ideology and a social and economic institution. These are mutually reinforcing such that cultural meanings reinforce the institution, which has material effects, which in turn sustain cultural meanings. They identify the discrepancy between the ideology and most people's lived reality which (even at the start of the eighties) did not match the nuclear family stereotype.

These critiques have been important for Anglo-American feminism, both as a bed-rock of critique, but also as the ground on which painful lessons were learned. Since motherhood, heterosexuality and family connected with the experiences of many

women, they were issues on which those outside of academic circles had their own views. The particularity of what was presented as *the* feminist analysis, was identified, particularly by African Caribbean and Asian women, working-class women, lesbians and others whose experience did not match that described (e.g. Amos and Parmar, 1984; Carby, 1982; Hooks, 1991; Riley, 1988). A movement of predominantly white, middle-class women was perpetuating the mainstream's exclusions by the over-generalisation of experiences assumed to follow from the identity of 'woman' (Barrett and McIntosh, 1985; *Feminist Review* 17 and 22; Riley, 1988; Spelman, 1988). Chapter 3 described how for black women in racist cultures, the family and homeplace might be a valuable site of resistance to racism and ethnocentricism, regardless of its gender politics and that this might be highly significant for women's overall experience of family (hooks, 1991). Similarly, women whose identities beyond home are dominated by meanings assigned class or dis/ability might also find their family roles and relationships an important source of respect. As a consequence, the meaning of family for women cannot be generalised and perhaps neither can it be simplified to an overall positive or negative.

The consequences of this for feminist theory (and perhaps activism) have been profound. 'Women's interests' can no longer be understood as unified and the factors most commonly recognised as structuring women's experience (class and educational privilege, 'race' and ethnicity, sexual orientation) cannot simply be understood as summative, but might be more profoundly and unpredictably inflected by each other (Brah, 1992). That feminists could not speak for all women spawned the expansion of identity politics, but was also its first and deepest crack. It produced the attention to difference and insistence on opening up space for diverse analyses that characterises 'feminisms' today (Hall *et al.*, 1999). The difficulties of treating women, analytically, as a class, not only showed the limitations for feminists of appropriating a Marxist approach (Barrett, 1991; Bhavnani and Coulson, 1986; Ramazanoglu, 1986) but, along with the collapse of Eastern European and Soviet communism from the late 1980s, presented a profound challenge to class unities and hence to Marxism itself, at least among Western left intellectuals (Fraser 1989; Lovibund, 1989; Soper, 1991). Even if the theoretical necessity of common interests had not posed a problem for socialist and other forms of feminism at this time, recognition of the problematic understanding of subjectivity was a second, and related, key issue, to which this chapter now turns.

Western feminism can be divided into distinct historical periods each characterised by the dominance of a particular style of political struggle, or for Julia Kristeva (1986), 'signifying space'. In the early part of the twentieth century, the campaign for women's suffrage was a struggle for women to be recognised as equal to men, and therefore involved identification with the dominant values of masculinist rationality. In contrast, Kristeva characterises the women's liberation movement of the 1970's in the West ('second generation' feminism) as distinctive in its concern with the symbolic order. 'Post '68' feminism refused insertion into existing dimensions of politics, criticising dominant values and asserting women's difference from men. Within second generation/'second wave' feminism, Ann Snitow (1992) describes three phases of influential US writings on motherhood between 1963 and 1990. The first two are of interest here because they are 'counter-ideological'. The first phase is from 1963 to 1975, the second is from 1976 to 1979, and taken together, these are typified by Betty Friedan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique* and Shulamith Firestone's (1970) *The Dialectic of Sex*. These books challenged the dominant images of motherhood, and the presumption of families as the harmonious, functional, 1950s model, but are recalled with embarrassment among many feminists for their outspoken critique and negativity. They have been demonised as anti-family and mother-hating. Firestone argued, in 1970, that 'the heart of woman's oppression is in her child bearing and child rearing role', and that gender oppression was more basic than class conflict. Her coup was in using arguments about biological difference for struggle against, rather than for, the status quo (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990), but the mode of grand explanatory narratives meant her lack of attention to historical detail troubled others (e.g. Mitchell, 1973) even before the eruption of the feminist auto/critique described above.

Snitow's third phase is of texts which tended to romanticise and idealise motherhood, such as the autobiographical writings of feminists who are sometimes described as having 'changed their minds' once they had children themselves (e.g. Betty Friedan, who came to see the family as essential to human happiness), or which claimed the principles behind mothering produced particular forms of moral development and as a potential basis for a female ethic of peace (e.g. Sara Ruddick). These texts can be seen as displaying a 'knee-jerk' reaction to the inadequate recognition of emotional

investment in 'family' in earlier writings, for reasons which include those explored below.

5.3 Choosing to mother as 'voluntary enslavement'

The damning indictment of family life was a prominent, if not consensus, view (Barrett and McIntosh, 1982) and 'the contradiction between motherhood and liberation has been key to feminism' (Gieve, 1987: p38), or certainly to twentieth century Western feminism. The analogy of gender with class in Marxist approaches allowed popular analyses of how women's domestic labour was exploited and functioned to subordinate women to men, and led to the popularised formulation that having children was 'against women's interests'. This analysis of gender within terms familiar to class theorists was an appealing move since analysis of the exploitation of women as workers had not recognised reproductive labour and care, leaving class analyses 'gender-blind'. However, as feminist critiques became more sharply articulated and broadly recognised, reactions to women who wanted children (and admitted wanting) were sometimes hostile or patronising (Attar, 1992; Leonard, 1992). There may never have been an outright rejection of mothering (Rowbotham, 1989), but a certain tone emerged amongst some feminists. Kristeva (1986) describes how the desire to be a mother was considered alienating and even reactionary among some 'second generation' feminists, and the sense of it as a betrayal of feminism or other women. Women who had chosen to have children, or wanted to, were sometimes made to feel defensive. Claire Duchen conveys this hostility: 'Freewheeling childless feminists could appear to be saying, 'You made your bed, now lie on it' as a result of the 'ironic equation: enslaved motherhood + voluntary motherhood = voluntary slavery' (Duchen, 1986, cited in Rowbotham, 1989: p60).

Constructing women as duped into their 'collaboration with the state' or obediently adopting their prescribed role in the reproduction of patriarchal social relations must be rejected along with other implications of 'false consciousness', as Michele Barrett (1991) argues, but it is particularly regrettable for feminism to patronise and blame its subjects. Worse still, after feminism had 'revealed' that childbearing was not 'in women's interests', women who 'failed' to learn this lesson appeared stupid, and those who acted against their interests could be seen as failing to be rational, self-preserving subjects, which risks playing into older accounts of women's irrationality or/as

pathology. The rational individual is clearly the ideal here and, taken to extremes, a rationalist utilitarianism – that if it wasn't good for us we wouldn't do it – seeks a causal motivation which socio-biological arguments are quick to answer, and do so in terms which feminists have long sought to contest.

The degree to which this was ever defended theoretically is perhaps less important than women's perception, then and now, that they are blamed for their complicity with their oppression. The wave of articles in early 1999 which consider young women's views of feminism illustrate this perception. In response to Germaine Greer's lamentation that complacent young women have foolishly settled on 'equality' rather than 'liberation', Tracey Emin says 'I'm a strong woman …free to make her own choices. If I feel like wearing nail polish I will', and Clare Rayner says 'We should not feel guilty for cleaning our toilets if we want to' (**The Guardian**, 24th February, 1999). Seeing women as complicit in their own oppression led to an individualist politics of guilt, (Kaufmann, 1998) and 'victim'-blaming (Burman, 1997) because of an overarching liberal individualism (Seidler, 1994). Emin's defiance of a feminism which is perceived as condemning and censorious emphasises her sense of active desire. It was the moral condemnation by some feminists of other women's 'politically incorrect' desires that were the heart of the feminist 'sex wars' over pornography and lesbian sadomasochism in the 1980s and early 90s. Any approach which individualises the problem to see the solution in each woman's individual restraint or purging of forbidden desires, is inadequate as a political or psychological model. Understanding women's adoption of mothering roles as a result of ideological pressure leaves no room for a desire to mother as anything but passively accepted, emotionally superficial and inauthentic. It imagines an either/or investment in mothering/not mothering - with these positions seen crudely as collusive or resistive (Alldred, 1996b) - which oversimplifies feelings and loses the possibility of recognising the complexity of many women's feelings about motherhood and the ambivalence many mothers feel (Eichler, 1980; Gieve, 1987; Hollway and Featherstone, 1997). It also allows a devaluation of the desire to nurture which we may wish to salvage from easy criticism.

The problems with this are common to sociological and social psychological approaches to 'social roles', including the criticisms of 'sex roles' that feminists developed. At a sociological level, sex role theory presented an oversimplified

description of social life, reducing the complexities of actual behaviours and characters of men and women to two categories, glossing over within-group differences. At a psychological level, the complexity, depth and potential contradictoriness of feelings and 'attitudes' are not recognised. Referring to motherhood as a role fails to recognise that it forms part of many women's 'core identities', is 'invested with blood, sweat, tears and toil' (Elshtain, 1981, cited in Edwards, 1993: p12) not something women can easily split off from the rest of themselves. Role theory fails as an explanation because it does not allow for variation, complexity, or for a notion of 'self' other than a cluster of roles (Stanley and Wise, 1983). Tension and conflict are only explained as the consequence of multiple roles clashing or failing to mesh, implying that conflict would be avoiding by simply reducing the number of roles or juggling them more skilfully (Edwards, 1991), thereby leaving individuals responsible for their own 'role strain' (Kessler *et al*., 1985). The dramaturgical metaphor thus risks failing to view roles within the material and structural constraints of peoples lives (Edwards, 1991) and making them sound ahistorical 'givens' (Smith, 1987). Whilst 'role strain' and 'role conflict' allow the recognition of an individual's occupancy of multiple roles, they deal only at the level of unified subjects so that conflict is between their social roles rather than internal multiplicity, contradiction and incoherence, such as ambivalence about motherhood.

The concept of roles has been popularised far beyond its sociological (especially social interactionist) origins and, like ideology, is immensely pervasive. It was valuable for enabling psychology to attribute significance to the social context of individuals' lives, such that, for instance, the demand of ones' work role to be at work by 9 o'clock could clash with ones' mothering role which is not disciplined by the clock. However, we are more than 'merely roles'. These describe a sociological, rather than psychosocial level of experience, and are anyway altered by their uptake by psychology, which maps them onto a core person (Henriques *et al*., 1998). The explanatory framework of ideologies of motherhood, family, femininity, maturity is of these having *effects on* the subject. This requires that the subject is understood as existing prior to 'the social' and is 'imprinted upon' by social images, which can be seen as having a contaminating effect. It is this construction of the subject as epistemic, whose pre-social ontology is the point of origin for desires and guarantees authentic

selfhood which leads to the problem of disentangling 'real' desires from those that have been socially produced (Duchen, 1986, cited in Rowbotham, 1989). If the desire to bear or raise children is deemed inauthentic because it is a 'mere' product of culture, what are 'real' desires, and how are these to be distinguished? This understanding of a pre-social subject, bounded and independent of the social world is a feature of the European Enlightenment worldview within which Marxism – and modernist feminism - was conceived. Retaining a unified subject allows the fantasy that the contradictions can be smoothed out leaving a comfortable, integrated subject. However, this subject's occupancy of social roles is static, not dynamic and 'the reality of struggle and resistance as a permanent part of social life is left untackled (Anyou, 1983)' (Edwards, 1991: p29) as Foucauldian feminists also have emphasised (e.g. Bell, 1993; Butler, 1990; Sawicki, 1991). A psychosocial perspective recognises intrapsychic complexity, such as the clashing of pulls, drives or emotional commitments within the experience of an individual at a given time, yet need not individualise these as emanating from the epistemic subject.

Psychosocial studies emerged from the mutual critique of sociology and psychology at a time (around the late 1970s and early 80s) when sociology emphasised the structural constraints on people, including dominant social meanings and systems of organisation, but paid little attention to emotional life, and psychology's object, the individual, was theorised as if abstracted from society, only peripherally influenced by 'social factors'. As politically motivated social psychologists tried to relocate the subject in the wider social world they were limited by the model of the bounded individual in their social context. This dichotomy between 'the individual' on the one hand, and 'the social' on the other, was what post-structuralist writers radically reworked: 'From the individual to the social – a bridge too far' as Henriques *et al.*, (1984/1998) described it. Psychosocial studies is also informed by cultural studies approaches to examining 'the social world' and psychoanalytic approaches to understanding the intrapsychic world of dynamic processes. Barry Richards, who has led psychosocial studies at the University of East London throughout the 1990s, describes his own 'psychosocial study' (Richards, 1994a) as exploring 'the psychic meanings and emotional resonances of some key cultural phenomena while also attending to their historical and political dimensions' (p13). This thesis has been formed through my teaching work in that department, but probably has a reversed

emphasis. It has focused on the political dimensions of cultural phenomena concerning parents and knowledge about parenting while attending to the subjective implications of the theoretical approaches to studying it.

5.4 Contemporary 'fitness to parent' ideology?

This section will consider the value of ideology analysis for the accounts presented in earlier chapters and will then consider the popularised psychology which provides resources for understanding subjectivity in everyday discussion of parents and children.

Chapters 3 and 4 argued that the cultural images of mothers and of fathers contained negative meanings attributed to working-class mothers and fathers, but in neither case were all negative discourses reducible to a class value hierarchy. In chapter 3, an analysis which replaced class to see gender oppression as the fundamental dynamic would have neglected the mobilisation of meanings of class, 'race', sexuality and of 'normality' and 'naturalness' in relation to mothers. Even dominant mainstream understandings of motherhood may position women differently, and women are pitted against each other competitively in discourses of child development, of disadvantage, or for resources. In addition, whilst an ideology analysis can criticise negative representations, silences and absences are difficult to examine as ideological representations, yet are important. For instance, Ann Phoenix (1996) argues that the absence of 'race' in recent conservative criticisms of lone mothers does not mean that there are no troubling racial meanings at work. Rather, precisely this silence presumes and therefore normalises whiteness thereby constructing black families as outside of the British nation (Gilroy, 1987).

The original aim of this thesis is changed by the recognition of the multiple, contradictory nature of contemporary ideology, (Billig, 1990; Billig *et al.*, 1988). Drawing together the various understandings of 'unfit' mothers would not reveal she who is deemed fit to mother. The images of 'unfit' mothers are not consistent with one another, they overlap and sometimes contradict. The culturally ideal mother is not a fixed point of reference. There is not a 'safe' space between criticisms of mothers which is free from criticism. Indeed, for any given woman, there may be contradictory judgements. A black, working class woman may find her mothering suspect on account of her class background, naturalised on account of her 'racial'

identity, but applauded if she remains in paid work. But within such ideas are contradictions. The recent emphasis on mothers going out to work to provide financially for their children suits the Government's welfare agenda and has come to be commended – in psychological terms - for 'modelling' financial self-sufficiency to children. However, it is contradicted by older, still powerful, psychoanalytically backed ideas about the value of mothers' full-time care for their children. Instead of a coherent object of scrutiny and judgement within an ideology of fitness to parent, each eruption of debate or condemnation re/constructs the 'qualities' defining unfitness. 'Fitness to parent' does not appear to have the unity of an ideology and it does not promote identifiable interests which always work for/against particular social groups. It cannot be seen as the coherent distortion of truth and neither is resistance to it coherent enough to be identified in the abstract. However, it remains important to analyse the ideological implications of strands within it.

In chapter 4, resistance to the Child Support Act and Agency was difficult to map ideologically because, although ideological arguments within the Act and within opposition to it can be identified, the arguments were not articulated by homogenous groups of people, nor did the various parties remain constant, as Mitchell and Goody (1997) also argue. For example, resistance to the principle that absent fathers pay child support to ex-partners might unite: men who have no contact with their children; poor men; men with second families; the second partners or mothers of such men; women wanting financial independence of men; and socialists or feminists wanting state provision for children. While ideological positions can be identified, particular political *arguments* cannot be reliably assigned to particular groups of *people*. Neither gender, nor class group interests remain distinct. Nor even critical perspectives: various different arguments or accounts present themselves as feminist. Similarly, family ideology is not only articulated by those on the right, as Barrett and McIntosh (1982) showed through calls from those on the left for 'a family wage'. Indeed, even if the principles of a feminist critique are agreed, alternative analyses are possible, as the discourse of parents can illustrate. In parenting magazines, referring to mothers reinforces the idea that women should be the ones to raise children, but referring to 'parents' obscures whose labour it usually is, and in relation to feminist historical analyses of childcare books, those that advocate more participation by men can be interpreted as doing so because the task

is 'too important to be left to women', whilst those emphasising the maternal role can be seen as denying women an autonomous existence outside the home (after Jordanova, 1985). The question of warranting any particular (say, feminist) analysis raises a bigger question about warranting any descriptive account that claims to be 'pre-analysis'. The previous chapters are, of course, my accounts of popular images of parents, with little explicit warranting but the inference that they are descriptive and as unveiling the truth behind the depictions, but I have no defence against the charge that mine are just another set of ideological accounts. Should a feminist reader believe my account because I identify as feminist? Chapter 6 explores how any warrant is supported once the unity of the identity group whose perspective it 'admitted' is shattered.

Modifying this PhD title from 'fitness to parent' - a psychological quality, an object with putative coherence - to 'fit to parent?' was to emphasise its function as a question in popular debate. Even when implicit, it is a threatening query about someone else's fitness to raise children, and is often therefore accompanied by process of social distancing whereby those in question are made other to the questioner and the presumption of the questioner's fitness is bolstered. In spite of its questioning nature in popular debate, and the contested nature of popular understandings of parents, it is not a question psychology answers directly.

We need a way of criticising the powerful, normative meanings of family which still operate through explicit appeals to 'family values' and popular presumptions about 'good parents' and 'nice families'. So how can we understand cultural images of mothers, fathers and ideas about fitness to parent as affecting individuals? How do those of us who cringe at some of the images of mothering and are critical of its naturalisation come to identify having children with our own satisfaction and adopt conventional subject positions within the dominant cultural discourses of wanting children? As argued above, the satisfactory theorisation of the subjective implications of romantic imagery of mothers and family life has been limited within 'second wave' feminist theory because of the individual/society dichotomy and modernist subject, but these are both challenged by post-structuralist approaches which inform psychosocial studies. However, it is unsurprising, given that these underpin the Western post

Enlightenment worldview, that these features of the subject, and relation of the subject to the social is presumed in the popular sphere.

Earlier chapters showed how concepts of role models and of social influence are pervasive in popular debate providing an unproblematised common-sense understanding of how 'the social' affects 'the individual'. In chapter 3, concerns expressed about 'unfit mothers' were about the influence they might exert on their children. Concern over lesbian mothers, or lesbian or gay foster carers/adoptive parents, is often that the children will grow up gay. This was even more crudely expressed in the fear about the lesbian youth worker's influence on the sexuality of the young people she worked with. Similarly for mothers, the idea that letting single women have donor insemination would 'encourage' others to do the same was what allowed the 1991 'virgin births' to be seen as 'striking at the heart of the family'. Thus, women were constructed as highly suggestible, whilst, of course, the media's own moral panic gave much publicity to (these women's) rationales for mothering without a man. The media does not, therefore, simply reflect, but produces what it claims to depict, even what it laments (see Watney, 1997 for a critique of the concept of moral panic in chapter 1).

In chapters 3 and 4, concerns about boys growing up without a male role model assume the family or household delineate the sphere of influence on the child, underplaying the influence of the peer group (Rich Harris, 1998) and of broader cultural meanings (Burman, 1994a; Riley, 1983). Concern about 'father absence' is clearly about some abstract level of role or identity because, as Phoenix and Woollett (1991) argue, little concern is expressed about 'the development of those children whose fathers frequently go away on business, or as Hardyment argues, whose jobs keep them out of their homes for most of their children's waking hours' (1991: p4-5). The discourse of the 'father figure' role model for children, particularly boys, has prevented consideration of the quality of interaction between the fathers and children, whether coresident or not. This results in powerful appeals to children's wellbeing attaching to a superficial concept of role model which is empty of meaning in any psychological sense, as Hester and Radford's (1996) research shows for contact disputes where '[t]he quality of a child's relationship with the father was rarely questioned. A father who simply expressed an interest in

seeing his child was usually accepted as a 'good father'. Contact was not terminated until there was strong evidence that a child was suffering from abuse as a result of seeing the father' (cited in Cooke and Bahl, 1998: p11). In each of these cases, the concern is about individuals being subjected to bad influences, in its strongest form, 'corruption', and mostly on the psycho-sexual development of children and young people. The same model of influence is invoked in understanding the effects of TV violence, and is referred to as an 'injection' model of media influence. The concept of roles has entered popular discourse, where it can allow for a feminist critique of women's roles, but can reinforce this understanding of the individual-social relation. This highlights the difficulty of ascertaining its (political) value (to any woman) in the abstract.

5.5 The 'turn to language'

The above concerns reflect the critique of ideology developed by post-structuralist writers. Michel Foucault, in particular, identifies three problems with ideology: that it is inevitably constructed in opposition to truer knowledge; that it relies on a liberal humanist model of the subject; and, as Michelle Barrett argues in her later work, that 'it is enmeshed in the unsatisfactory and determinist base-and-superstructure model within Marxism' and understood as functioning to cause and express particular economic relations (1991: p123). Post-structuralist approaches are united broadly by an argument about the centrality of language in human social life and consequent reconceptualisations of the relationship between language, social institutions and individual consciousness, particularly by Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Althusser and Kristeva (Weedon, 1987). The rest of this chapter focuses on issues of the subject/subjectivity, but chapter 6 returns to questions of knowledge and truth.

Post-structuralist approaches radically undermine the conventional Western view of language as a transparent medium, merely reflecting meanings by providing a label. Instead, language is understood as constitutive of social reality:

> 'Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organisation and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is *constructed*' (Weedon, 1987: p21, original emphasis).

The power of language lies in calling into being what it names. That is, it is perfomative (Butler, 1990), not in the volitional sense of 'free' agency, but in the power of reiteration to produce the phenomena it regulates and constrains (Butler 1993). Language is ambiguous and plurivocal, a site of continual conflict and contestation (Sawicki, 1991; Weedon, 1987). The language and social practices through which we understand an object are incorporated within the term 'discourse' (Foucault, 1972; 1977a; 1981b; Parker, 1992) (which is discussed further in chapter 7). Through challenges at the micro-level, hegemonic systems of thought (such as phallocentric discourse) are not in possession of total power (Sawicki, 1991). Even dominant discourses remain contestable, their effects, and that of resistance to them, remaining unpredictable (Bell, 1993; Foucault, 1981a; Walkerdine, 1996).

The view that personal decisions, for instance, about having children, were individual choices within the 'private sphere' could pre-empt broader political analysis (Marshall, 1986). However, the rhetoric of the personal being political seemed to create moral imperatives for personal life. The inadequacy of the ideology framework to theorise the desires and motivations of an individual (Hollway, 1989), and the individualism these engender (Venn, 1985) are features which relate closely to individual/society dualism. This reconceptualisation of language as productive challenges this, along with other binaries, such as language/practice, ideology/institution, private/public and impacts on arguments about reform/revolution, structure/agency and determinism/voluntarism. Dissolving the boundary between the subject and social means that there can be no subject prior to the social. Experience is constructed through, and against cultural discourses of family, maternity, maturity, femininity, masculinity, satisfaction, life purpose etc., which is not to imply any delusion, or superficiality. The opposition between any 'real' and 'socially produced' desire to have children is dissolved once the epistemic subject is problematised: 'the real' is as much the product of cultural discourses as 'the ideological'. Thus, discourse avoids the distinction between truth and ideology (Weedon, 1987) and authentic/inauthentic distinction between desires which have ontological significance.

Understanding discourse as powerful in this way entails a reconceptualisation of power itself. In contrast to 'sovereign power' (the conventional model of power that was available to Marxist and first and second wave feminism), where it is exercised

from above as negative or repressive, it is understood as circulating throughout the social body, never fully possessed by those 'in power', but existing in action, in what it produces, as well as what it represses (Foucault, 1981a). Thus, in modern society, according to Foucault, power operates at the level of the body, and through 'technologies of the self': it 'reaches into the very grain of the individual, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives' (1981a: p39). Such 'disciplinary power' is associated with the emergence of modern social institutions and knowledge forms and a self-disciplining individual (Gore, 1995; Rose, 1990; Dean, 1994). It is highly pervasive, yet aspects of its operation are invisible to earlier forms of socialist/feminist analysis. Thus, despite concerns that, as structuralist analyses are undermined and attention turns to language, power and materiality are neglected, power is foremost in post-structuralism and individuals are seen as positioned midst relations of power, where even their resources for understanding are, and themselves produce effects of power. Despite this, we are not determined and the possibility of social/political change is retained (Hollway, 1989).

5.6 Cultural discourses and 'governmentality'

Power operates through, not over, subjectivity: individuals are not 'disciplined' against their will, but are enjoined to regulate their selves (Deleuze 1977; Foucault, 1977; 1981a; Martin *et al.*, 1988). Discourses of family are not powerful through coercion, but because they command our subjective investments (Rose, 1987; 1990; 1993; Van Krieken, 1991). Mothers and fathers, husbands and wives 'themselves regulate their feelings, desires, wishes and emotions and think themselves through the potent images of parenthood, sexual pleasure and quality of life' (Rose, 1990: p73). What can be viewed as the ideological effects of images of family, are not passive effects on individuals, but are dynamically productive through subjectivity, through the production and regulation of our own active desire and emotional investments (Dean, 1994; Foucault, 1981a; Rabinow, 1984).

This does not require rejecting the idea that certain social objectives are at work in particular discourses, however, their political consequences cannot be guaranteed. Families can still be understood as reproducing workers for capitalism 'not in spite of the wishes of women and men, but because it came to work as a private, voluntary and

responsible agency for the rearing and moralising of children and promoting their mental and physical welfare' (Rose, 1989a: p130). The 'shaping of wills, desires, aspirations, and interests, the formation of subjectivities and collectivities is more typical than the brute domination of one will by another' (Rose, 1987: p67) and more effective (Van Krieken, 1991). Mothers do not need coercing or persuading to try to do their best for their children in general. While condemnatory discourses of ('unfit') mothers do depict failure to be a 'good mother' or construct some women's mothering as dubious in advance on account of social identity categories, it is not that negative external images scare women into trying to mother well, but that cultural understandings of motherhood, amongst them perhaps feminist discourses too, produce mothers' genuine personal investments, pleasures and frustrations. Thus, cultural discourses are powerful at the level of subjectivity. Parents 'govern' themselves through the operation of guilt, personal anxiety and private disappointment, as well as through discourses of emotional reward, personal satisfaction and the pleasures of intimacy, interpersonal relationships and self-knowledge.

In *The History of Sexuality* Volume 1, Foucault showed how sexuality has come to be seen by Westerners as a site through which we uncover authentic desires, come to know our 'real selves' and thereby re/construct our true identities. Parenting too now occupies a central place in our self-identities, our relationships, our life projects, and is seen as revealing aspects of ourselves. Our personal qualities are tested by the demands of childrearing, revealing hidden qualities, and we are brought face-to-face with, or may re-enact, the dynamics of our own childhood. There are psychoanalytic and popular discourses of the relationship between our own behaviour as parents and that we experienced from our parents. Intimate relationships among 'parents', between parents and children, as well as between lovers, are sites of the production of (our)selves as identities and subjects (Sawicki, 1991).

Whereas the self has long been the object of reflection and practices

> 'whereby individuals, by their own means or with the help of others, act[ed] on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being in order to transform themselves and attain a certain state of perfection or happiness, or to become a sage or immortal' (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: p208-9),

contemporary self-reflection can constitute a new self positively without renouncing the (old) self, in contrast to Christian and Graeco techniques of verbalisation of the self. The Christian examination of inner thoughts with respect to purity of self appears a 'condition of possibility' for Freudian thought, and the shift to understanding and working with the self. In the modern world, where knowledge of oneself is a fundamental principle, reflection upon childhood experience and its consequences forms a primary element. The life story expects it, and causal relations are read into it beyond the clinical sphere (e.g. on Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs* etc.). It is because of these cause-and-effect narratives that the self is to be known and accepted, not blamed for its moral failings. We make ourselves our own projects, but allow others, and particularly parents, to have produced us as we are.

Foucault's 'technologies of domination' included the way people are objectified and divided by oppositional categories of madness/sanity, normal/perverted etc. (1977a; 1980). The discursive questioning of fitness to parent can be seen as a 'dividing practice' (Rabinow, 1984) excluding certain people from the social body of normal adults who are assumed to make decent parents. The assignment of fathers to either polarised image in the child support debates was a dividing practice on the basis of benefit receipt. Other meanings concerning their virtue as a father were attributed on the basis of this classification, as with the stigmatisation of benefit receipt in general. Foucault's technologies of domination are linked to technologies of the self by what he calls 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1988; Dean 1994). Parents govern themselves through their reflection upon self, behaviour and relationships and not even attempting to do so today would mark parents as old-fashioned and perhaps uncaring, because it would fail to show concern for the psychological health of relationships. The reflexive individualisation expected of today's subjects (Beck, 1992) might include particularly psychological, teleological narratives for parents and would-be parents, which is what supports the market for parenting magazines.

5.7 Why feminism can't counter ideology

Understanding power as productive through subjectivity allows the conceptualisation of desire as active, genuine, dynamic and complex. As Kristeva (1986) reminds us, feminist analyses of women's desire for children '*in spite of* feminist critiques of motherhood' are important in order to counter essentialist analyses, whether of

biological determinism (e.g. sociobiology) or psychic determinism (e.g. some psychoanalytic approaches), particularly given the rise of fundamentalist religion and popular moralism about 'family values'.

Valerie Walkerdine discusses the relationship between cultural representations and the psychic production of 'feminine' desire in her essay, *Some Day My Prince Will Come* (reprinted in Walkerdine, 1990). Drawing on psychoanalysis, she develops a model of subjectivity which allows for desire in ways that neither conventional media effects models or conventional developmental approaches have. She describes the ideological effects of representations of girls and women in girls' comics in the 1970s in terms of their preparation of girls for heterosexual romantic love. The comics' key narrative is that the heroine's feminine virtues - her uncomplaining self-denial, passivity and deference to her father or male suitor - will eventually be rewarded by romantic success. Rather than seeing girls as passively accepting conventional heterosexual relations as natural or inevitable, Walkerdine recognises both the power of ideology, and highlights the complexity of its mode of operation.

> 'Contrary to some classic approaches to feminine role models, I shall not argue that young girls passively adopt a female role model, but rather that their adoption of femininity is at best shaky and partial: the result of a struggle in which heterosexuality is achieved as a solution to a set of conflicts and contradictions in familial and other social relations.' (Walkerdine, 1990: p88)

The images or cultural narratives 'insert girls into ideological and discursive positions by practices which locate them in meaning and in regimes of truth' (p87) so producing femininity. Such meanings come to be part of women at the level of desire and through dynamic social processes, including direct interpersonal relations and rather than a simple accept/reject of ideological messages, these dynamic processes allow for complex outcomes.

Walkerdine's analysis develops from her recognition of the limits of providing 'positive images' of women to children in order to counter sexist imagery. 'Positive images' approaches risk constructing a subject who is passive in their absorption of cultural images and perhaps overly-rational in their selection, when available, of 'more positive' images. This neglects the role of the unconscious in the production of desire and relegates the emotional realm to the playing out of superficial, static

cultural roles. Instead, cultural discourses can be seen, not simply as biased accounts of reality, but as producing subject positions, which, through processes of identification, we take up and from where certain realities are experienced. Not only our minds but also our feelings and desires are culturally formed. Walkerdine emphasises the role of the unconscious and the irrational in the formation of the subject. This could explain how intellectual critique does not wash away say, a feminist's fantasy that the Prince will be her romantic saviour. Even toddlers are already positioned as little boys or little girls, and little girls quickly come to understand this idea that the rewards of femininity are future ones. Not only is she positioned as a girl, but she may often actively position herself as girl where there may be straightforward benefits or strategic 'solutions' given the penalties of doing otherwise, and it may indeed bring her later happiness. To imagine a little girl will simply give up her princess fantasies is to assume she has no emotional investment in them, or that any investment was misjudged. Instead, understanding women's subjectivities as constituted through such narratives raises the possibility of thinking beyond identities, to consider, for instance, how feminists may identify with romantic, maternalist or essentialising imagery or how even lesbians may find the Prince's eventual arrival amongst their fantasies.

It is the idea that 'lifting the veil of distortion' will let girls see beyond culturally prescribed femininity that Walkerdine responds to because it makes it sound as if femininity were merely a superficial social role, easily cast off, rather than something that has engaged their/our emotional investment. It can also appeal to an underlying true nature that will surface and can be relied upon to be in their interest. The idea that awareness of political critiques of dominant cultural discourses might render them less 'effective' is evident in some feminist and Marxist writings. When feminist values or alternative discourses are seen as a counter-ideological an 'enlightening' and protective function is sometimes inferred. Such 'enlightenment' relies on an ideology/truth distinction that comes from Marx's critical or epistemological definition of ideology as distorted knowledge ('the mystification that serves class interests'), rather than Lenin's 'descriptive' definition (Barrett, 1991). This hope that feminist analysis will protect women from pronatal or maternal ideology or make the 'knower' immune to their 'effects' remains implicit in some popular feminist writing. For instance, the publisher's recommendation of Tuula Gordon's

(1990) book, *Feminist Mothers*, says that 'Feminism...can be significant in providing protection against the myths of motherhood'. The same conceptual apparatus underlies accusations from the other end of the political spectrum that feminism is to blame for turning women off men, motherhood or the family (Falludi, 1991). Feminism cannot simply 'counter' ideology as an intellectual critique once ideology is understood as operating through the unconscious and emotional levels, and needs formulate challenges to dominant cultural discourses in terms that do not neglect our formation as subjects already through such discourses or require the rational identification of interests. As Foucault highlighted, to imagine that cultural analysis or political critique of certain ideas can in some sense 'do away with' them is to neglect to consider their imbrication with power which operates through their production of subjectivity. Such expressions illustrate the rethinking of strategic responses to cultural discourses once their power is understood as productive, not merely repressive.

5.8 From identity to identifications

Identity categories did not work to explain experience or politics, as argued above. Nor do they adequately map behaviour or 'attitudes' (a concept which itself is deconstructed along with the bounded individual). They meant having to choose one aspect of self above others (Lorde, 1984), which always required a disavowal or exclusion of other parts (Hall, 1996). Identity assumes a unity or internal coherence which leaves no room for the multiplicity of identifications, a stability or 'definability' which precludes the recognition of change over time or radical incoherence, and it often sets up oppositions that polarise (such as male, female) and categories which foreclose (such as homosexual/heterosexual). As Judith Butler shows, the binary gender identity system sustains heteronormativity - not only the classification of relationships, but with powerfully normalising and naturalising consequences (1990).

Whilst feminist discourses cannot inoculate, they can, however, provide for alternative subject positions which may facilitate resistance to specific ideas for an individual woman at a given moment. The popular recognition of a discourse as feminist or the association of certain subject positions with feminist ideas may, in some circumstances, provide a position of resistance or it may simply be that moving between different discursive positions – such as 'mother' and 'parent' (see Alldred,

1996b) - allows the strategic evasion of certain meanings. Recognising the impossibility of identifying subject group interests leads to a focus on resistance that can occur at the level of the individual. Similarly, the critique of identity politics that accompanies this recognition promotes a focus on identifications rather than identities for understanding subjective investments in cultural forms, seen in contemporary literary, media and communication studies. And the critique of the unitary rational subject from feminist, post-colonial, post-structuralist, psychoanalytic and postmodern theoretical directions all promote a focus on intra-psychic processes.

Feminist writers such as Butler (1990; 1993), Hollway (1984; 1989), Kristeva (1986), Urwin (1985) and Walkerdine (1984; 1990) use psychoanalytic understandings of subjectivity, which, since Freud's writings of an unconscious, enable the deconstruction of the unitary rational subject, and challenge the role reason and rationality have been assumed to play in human life and social organisation. Whilst psychoanalytic approaches provide the foremost theoretical resource for conceptualising *subjectivity*, rather than assuming a unified *subject*, they presuppose gender, knowing man through reflection on representations of woman and woman as the lack of masculinity (Warner, 1996a). Freudian and post-Freudian work sometimes relies on identity categories or whole-subject positions, most obviously in Oedipal relations. Resolution of Oedipal conflict and the Electra complex require subjects to hold coherent identity categories (a heterosexual parent of each gender), for the production of children whose sex-typed (i.e. normative) gender identity is consolidated by a heterosexual orientation. As Sam Warner writes:

> '[Judith] Butler (1990b) argues that while psychoanalytic stories disrupt the notion of a gender stability, they nevertheless institute gender coherence through the stabilising metanarrative of infantile development. The construction of infantile development thus "instantiates gender specificity and subsequently informs, organises and unifies identity" (Butler, 1990b: p329-330)' (1996a: p44).

Whilst it is arguable that pre-Oedipal dynamics do not require gendered identities or a heterosexual parental partnership (Hollway, 1997), some object relations approaches have bolstered conservative evaluations of sexual identity categories (e.g. despite some feminist Kleinian therapists today, other Kleinian psychoanalysts continue to view homosexual identities as pathological - immature, narcissistic or masochistic (see critical account by O'Connor and Ryan, 1993).

It is a paradox of psychoanalytic theory for feminists (and see e.g. Brennan, 1989) that it both enables the deconstruction of the modernist subject, which the concept of identity maps onto, yet often fundamentally generalises across crude identity categories (of boy, girl, mother, father) and is often highly hetero-gender normative. Even feminist psychoanalytic writers, such as Nancy Chodorow (1978), can be viewed as reifying, and her followers sometimes essentialising, gender difference by attributing differences they find between men and women to universal features of male and female psychosexual development (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990; Pollitt, 1992). The questions she poses, such as Why female mothering produces the next generation of women inclined to mother and men not so? are still very important, but the reliance on identity categories polarises and entrenches difference and can seem to block further conceptual development by the simplifications they force. Whilst Chodorow's analysis is culturalist and she advocates men's increased involvement in mothering to promote more profound social change, the different male/female psychic forms, orientations or capabilities can reinforce conventional essentialist understandings, and make it hard to 'offer up' the first generation of children to be reared by men who themselves were produced as less relational subjects. Its cause-and-effect narrative makes radical change hard to envisage: by reinforcing the social influence model within the modernist subject/society relation, including the understandings that children's relationship with their primary carer produces a deep sense of self, which remains relatively constant thereafter and has particular impact on behaviours and relationships. (The 'gut validity' of such narratives for us now relates to the popularisation of psychoanalytic, certain psychological and feminist discourses (Parker, 1997), but as Pollitt (1992) argues, Chodorow's arguments about the production of male denigration of women makes her far less idealising of women's relational selves than popularised versions can be.) Furthermore, the drive for explanatory theory leads to overarching cross-cultural and trans-historical analyses which loose sight of differences in mothering practices and understandings, and social and economic power relations within which other or more complex relations may operate. Besides glossing over differences between mothers who share a culture, it also draws other cultures' practices within particular Western understandings of childrearing, gender, self, etc.

Nancy Chodorow did, however, challenge the psychological superficiality of understandings of 'sex role socialisation'. Similarly, psychoanalysis asks valuable questions and reveals the limitations of mainstream psychology, but sometimes stakes its claims to modernist metanarratives. The conceptual framework of male and female was simply all that was available for second wave feminisms and other modernist liberatory discourse, (and, likewise, the liberal model of power), so inevitably the 'generic individuated concepts of 'women and 'men', in their 'bifurcated one-dimensionality' were the 'conceptual protagonists of the patriarchy debate' (Crowley, 1999: p133). As Warner (1996a) argues:

> 'Like Butler, we believe that we need to challenge the fixedness of sex/gender binary distinctions by disrupting the place of sex as standing outside cultural practices: "it seems crucial to resist the myth of interior origins, understood either as naturalised or culturally fixed. Only then, gender coherence might be understood as the regulatory fiction it is - rather than the common point of liberation" (Butler, 1990b: p339)'. (*ibid.:* p51-2)

Feminists informed by post-structuralist approaches, such as Fraser and Nicholson (1990) highlight the need to interrogate the terms themselves, the historical specificity of the problem and the conceptual resources we have available for its study. So, for instance, we might look at the histories of the terms 'woman' and 'mother' and the social conditions within which they are in particular relationship to each other. We might explore further the conditions of possibility for the emergence and popularisation of the term 'parents' in contemporary Britain, its genealogy, as Foucault called it, amongst the struggles over gender over the course of this century, or longer histories of particular understandings of the child.

Foucault argued for a shift from resting our understandings of self and knowledge on the 'knowing subject' to looking at the discursive practices by which we construct the subject and knowledge (Rabinow, 1984). Stuart Hall argues (1996) that this need not mean abandoning the subject or any sense of agency, but 'thinking it in its new, displaced or decentred position within the paradigm' (p2) and rearticulating the relationship between subjects and discursive practice. Asking how we 'do' subjectivity or 'know' ourselves, (within which identity is one, albeit dominant, discourse or technology of the self), shifts attention to the processes and dynamics that allow the production of subjects such that subjectivity is experienced as relatively stable, and self as relatively coherent by most of us. Freud's formulation

of identification was, from the start, partial and ambivalent, so identifications were not seen as forming a coherent relational system (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1985). Judith Butler (1990; 1993) writes about the radical productivity or 'performativity' of identities. Within them are the seeds of resistance as well as perpetuation of dominance because

> 'Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted, and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability. They are that which is constantly marshalled, consolidated, retrenched, contested, and on occasion, compelled to give way' (1993: p105).

The contemporary formulation of the notion of identity has been popularised over the past 30 years as a political and often empowering technology. It produces or corroborates this sense of self, even as it limits, constrains or reveals its artefactual nature in the slippages and leaks it fails to contain. Psychoanalysis highlights how the excluded parts (whose very exclusion permits identity) return to disrupt and trouble the prematurely foreclosed categories of identity. It is the violence of this disavowal at the subjective or intrapsychic level, as well as at the interpsychic or cultural/political level (where emphatic self/Other splitting allows processes which sustain cultural imperialism) that Couze Venn (1985) points to in arguing the political urgency of reconceptualising subjectivity (as do others such as Barrett, 1991; Minh-Ha, 1989; Spivak, 1988; 1999).

Approaches incorporating discourses of psychoanalytic process would allay the concern of Henriques *et al.* (1998) that discursive psychology which rejects cognitivism in favour of 'subject positions' can neglect individual internal processes and the unconscious dynamics which allow/produce the uptake of certain subject positions. Many feminist theorists find psychoanalytic discourses of *process* more useful than its gendered roles/identities and many draw on Lacanian work for its 'turn to language' (e.g. Judith Butler, Theresa de Lauretis, Jane Flax, Julia Kristeva, Toril Moi, Valerie Walkerdine). Thus, 'post-identity' readings of psychoanalysis which focus on processes and relations, rather than identities and family roles might offer ways of developing post-structuralist psychosocial work further.

The implications of the popular discourses of mothers, fathers and 'parents' discussed in earlier chapters for particular individuals cannot therefore be predicted from identity categories. Media theory first emphasised the power of ideological

messages in cultural images; then recognised differences among the audience and audience agency; and now might emphasise, not only the possibility of resistive readings by active, critical subjects, but also their unpredictability. Identity categories cannot guarantee or fix particular readings, nor could their stability be assumed for any particular person, that is, their readings might differ at different times (Mills, 1994). The fact that multiple discursive subject positions are potentially available to an individual at a given time is not to imply that they are all equally available. As Walkerdine and Butler, after Foucault (1980: p141) highlight, people are 'always already' constituted in ways which mean differential access to other subject positions because they will require different investments from, and may produce different consequences for them. Harsh characterisations of certain parents in the media do not only impact on us as we are divided dichotomously by being either object of the discourse or part of the safely normalised body that they are 'othered' from. Our subjectification by/in the discourses may be much more complex. Individuals may be emotionally invested in particular ways through diverse processes of identification and may also be interpellated or positioned within certain meanings, that is, through both techniques of the self and of domination. Importantly, because an individual's positioning in particular discourses is not fixed or determined, multiple and even contradictory desires or elements of identity can be acknowledged without implying that inconsistency suggests 'irrationality' or pathology.

These critiques challenge the media's reliance on generalisations to the level of identity categories. Identities represent qualities of parents or of parent-child relationships as little as they guaranteed politics or experience. The labels 'lone mother', 'virgin' mother, 'absent father', lesbian mother, married/single, heterosexual/gay do not mean anything reliable in terms of 'fitness to parent' even if we reify that as a quality. To imagine they might do means operating at the level of abstract social identities and roles both to identify those in question and to understand their relationships with actual or potential children, and assuming the identity categories have stability, internal ('construct') validity and coherence. Even if the categories mapped onto people, rethinking the individual/social binary means that parenting is not understood as a matter of qualities that reside in the individual. Furthermore, recognising the relational nature of subjective experience means that

dynamics and relationships are more psychologically meaningful than 'family roles'. This is also important in order to provide the conceptual space to acknowledge children's active co-construction of parent-child relationships (Burman, 1994a; James and Prout, 1991). So, even if identities had sociological validity (the labels distinguished social groups and were applied to the right people), their psychological validity (whether they have any emotionally relevant meanings and what they exclude/identify) is questionable. This is a distinction between roles and relationships. For instance, we do not know about the emotional presence/value of a father to his children from his residential absence, about a mother's relationship with her child/ren from her sexual orientation, nor does household composition tell us about meanings and relationships within it. Thus, the discourses identified in chapters 2, 3 and 4 can be understood, in Foucault's terms, as *individualizing* characteristics deemed pathological; as *differentiating*, *classifying* and *ranking* individuals (or families); as *excluding* some by defining limits of difference or normality; and *normalizing* all by defining, invoking or contrasting with 'the normal'.

The concern of this chapter has been to identify an approach to understanding the significance of dominant cultural representations for individual experience. It has explored some limitations of socialist-feminist analyses of the family as ideological, and outlined the possibilities of a discursive approach to subjectivity. This approach might provide a framework for understanding the cultural production of desire (to parent). Ideally one would retain the political force of the concept of ideology in order to understand how discourses of mothers, fathers and 'fitness to parent' function politically, but develop a more sophisticated understanding of power and of subjectivity than was available in the liberal model of power and sociality common to modernist 'enlightenment' and 'liberation' discourses, including radical feminist and socialist frameworks. A post-structuralist approach which deconstructs the individual/social boundary allows the exploration of the cultural reproduction of women's desire to mother whilst avoiding the problems of 'social effects' models and of identity politics.

Liberalism and socialism have been powerful accounts of the relationship of individuals to society (Mills cited in Denzin, 1987), but the radical pluralism of

post-structuralist approaches (e.g. Butler, 1990; 1993; Sawicki, 1991) is distinct from liberal pluralism because it rejects the idea that political power is shared between competing interest groups whose identities are relatively stable and who compete on an equal basis for political influence. Such approaches are potentially valuable for psychosocial studies because they operate with a 'relational and dynamic model of identity…constantly in formation in a hierarchical context of power relations at the microlevel of society' and recognise plurality both within and between subjects (Sawicki, *ibid*.: p8). It suggests a focus on resistance at subjective levels, which I begin to outline in relation to mothers' resistance to psychological 'expertise' about childrearing in ***Psychology, Discourse, Practice*** (Burman, Aitken *et al*., 1996). The following chapter explores what this loss of faith in the founding subject means in terms of the guaranteeing of knowledge. It considers the implications of post-structuralist approaches for collective resistance to psychological expertise about mothers. Might feminists produce better knowledge(s), and would they admit their own perspectives? The final chapter attempts to apply Judith Butler's notion of performativity to contemporary parental identities.

Chapter 6

<u>Mothers, Experts and the Politics of Knowledge</u>

The family has been a site of ideological and political struggle since the late eighteenth century (Donzelot, 1979; Rose, 1989a), and, as chapter 1 illustrated, remains so today. In the second half of the twentieth century in particular, an 'army' of professionals has grown up around the family, and central amongst them are psychologists and social workers (Ingelby, 1985; Rose, 1985). They rely on understandings of 'family' which reflect particular historically and culturally specific notions of sexual morality, and gender and generational relationships, which none-the-less are taken to carry general moral weight. Furthermore, what are often particularly middle class values implicitly form the basis of professional practices which impact disproportionately on working class and disadvantaged families and others who may not share their cultural values. For these reasons it remains imperative that we maintain a critique of 'family ideology' and what passes for 'family values'. It is therefore important not to throw out the baby of ideological critique with the bathwater of the liberal-humanist subject of modernist liberatory promises. However, political critique needs to find means other than through identity politics (as argued in chapter 5) or appeals to Truth guaranteed through scientific knowledge.

Since the late 1960s, there has been wide-ranging criticism of the role, power and discourse of the expert, reflecting the emergence of the contemporary 'crisis of legitimation' and experts of childrearing have been a particular focus of feminist critique. Chapters 2 and 5 suggested that expertise is of increasing significance, aside from professionals' practices and interventions, at an individual level, through self-government. This chapter explores aspects of the politics of expert knowledge by considering expert psychological knowledge of childrearing. It discusses how feminists might engage with debates about parents in political forums and engage with representations of mothers and fathers in popular culture. How can we make claims to know who is 'fit to parent' when we may wish to criticise the conventional basis of knowing, as well as some of the presumptions about 'good parenting'? What are the implications of the model of power as productive for psychological expertise

and parents, and what does this mean for how we think about resistance at individual level and how we might attempt it through research.

6.1 The politics of knowledge

The Enlightenment promise, since the eighteenth century in Western Europe, has been that the triumph of rationality over moral reasoning will offer 'emancipation from the dogma of tradition' (Giddens, 1990: p48). Thus, higher status is attributed to knowledge derived through the application of rational and objective 'scientific methods' such that it carries more weight in almost every Western cultural context than knowledge whose claim to truth is not guaranteed by science. The discipline of psychology was born through the application of scientific method to the study of the human mind (Miller, 1964). Chapter 3 described the promise that scientific rationality held of better knowledge to rear children by, and showed how the status accorded to experts was reflected in the longer statements they were allowed in the articles cited from *The Guardian* and the *Observer*, and the way in which they were given 'the last word' on the matter (De Swaan, 1990).

The 'God's eye' view of the world that science and academic scholarship claimed to have has long been challenged by Marxists, as well as by feminists and those in the black and gay liberation movements this century, revealing the particularity and partiality of its supposedly objective view (Barrett, 1991; Nicholson, 1990; Spivak, 1988). Moreover, writers associated with post-colonial and postmodern critiques of the metanarratives structuring Western Enlightenment thought have more recently shown how the very idea of a 'God's eye' view, let alone arrogant presumptions of access to it, must be situated in Western modernist worldview. Those positioned on the margins of society by the elevation of white, masculinist rationalism show how this sense of rational self and of potentially rationally-organised society was always at the cost of maintaining certain exclusions: of women, children, 'non white' peoples, the 'mad' and the criminal from full subjecthood and civic participation; of emotion (devalued, feminised, sanitised); the body (shameful, unclean, to be hidden or controlled); and the unconscious (disavowed, sought to be mastered). Thus, the foundations of such a worldview were never as firm as they were made to appear (Lyon, 1994); the structuring metanarratives as much a part of the culture as the 'reflections' of it they claimed to provide (Lyotard, 1984). Modernist beliefs

themselves emerged from and came to prominence as a worldview because of particular socio-historical conditions. The increasing dominance of Europe economically and politically provided intellectual support for the assumption that the modernist view of the world was superior, and colonial exploitation provided the material resources and economic advantages. The master narrative of progress presented imperialist relations as bringing 'civilisation' to primitive countries, just as expert-lay relations presented rational knowledge as an undoubted development from 'old wives tales' and folk wisdom about childrearing. Thus, knowledge so produced is infused with politics even before we look at its current sites of operation around parents in particular.

To the Nietzschean view of 'truth' as merely the solidification of old metaphors or opinions that have forgotten their nature, Foucault added the understanding of the radical productivity of language and hence the imbrication of 'knowledge' - that is, that which presents itself as knowledge - with power. Foucault (1980) said: 'It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or "manufactures" something that does not yet exist, that is, it fictions it'. The putative objectivism and realism of science denies its political nature. The political problem lies in, not simply the status such knowledge has accrued, but the obscuring and naturalising of the particular perspectives of its own production and therefore its value base. This negation of particularity and presumption of generality is the process of naturalisation which chapter 5 argued was a feature of the discourse of 'family'. Similarly, in relation to media representations considered earlier, it is the naturalisation of particular values and concerns that is the problem with the construction of consensus values in 'moral panics'.

The stories that psychology produces are fictions that function as truth, not necessarily untruths, but accounts fabricated from a peculiar set of knowledge practices which sanitise and exclude that which they cannot isolate and measure (Hollway, 1989). Psychological expertise carries immense authority and, through acting on relations of power between people, it 'does' politics. It can either draw on an empirical objective-realist warrant for its knowledge, or be a 'better', more 'human' science than the hard, uncaring 'natural' sciences. For example, in contemporary Western morality tales, emotional neglect figures as a cruelty that

surpasses physical deprivation, perhaps because physical neglect is assumed to be due to a lack of understanding or acute poverty, whereas emotional neglect is presumed to be due to malicious intent or sinister pathology. It is assumed therefore, that we know what emotional 'needs' are. Psychology is powerful when mobilised as truth, but also, in addition to values inherent in its production, the knowledge it 'reveals' functions with moral force in relation to parents, and mothers in particular. So we can see that in the putative objectivism of scientific claims to know 'children's needs', politics are done.

Nancy Fraser (1989) shows how arguments about *what people need* 'do' the politics in US welfare debates. These debates involve disputes about what exactly various groups of people really do need, whose knowledge of their needs is truest and 'who should have the last word in such matters' (p161). Needs talk functions as a medium for making and contesting political claims: an idiom in which political conflict is played out and through which inequalities are symbolically elaborated and challenged. 'Objective fact', such as 'needs', used to be seen in opposition to politics, for instance, in the Marxist science/ideology dichotomy, but in welfare state societies it has become a major, institutionalised political vocabulary.

Following Fraser's analysis, the culturally specific 'resources' for argumentation can be conceptualised as: the 'officially recognised idioms in which one can press claims' e.g. needs talk, rights talk (of child's best interests, the cost to society, of promoting a fair and just society, rights due to every individual, mothers' needs/abilities); and the different vocabularies for instanciating claims of the above (e.g. child-centred, feminist, psychological, medical, therapeutic, educational, patriarchal, post-feminist, religious, spiritual, economic). There is then the issue of how competing claims are adjudicated authoritatively (e.g. expert judgement, majority-rule voting, religious doctrine, the interpretations of those in question); and of how competing parties are positioned (as parents, 'unfit' parents, campaigners, clinicians, politicians). Psychological knowledge is therefore drawn directly into contemporary politics and social policy debate as a power vocabulary for instanciating needs claims.

Fraser is a feminist political theorist whose engagement with the work of Foucault can be seen in her arguments about need. Needs are not given and unproblematic, and it

matters who is making claims to know about needs. Claims to know often assume their way of knowing are adequate and fair, and fail to problematise the social and institutional logic of processes of need interpretation (the social relations in force between interlocutors). Just as Fraser writes about 'the politics of needs interpretation', not about the actual distribution of needs satisfactions, so this chapter is not about children's needs of parents, but contemporary claims to know such needs. Fraser identifies three analytically distinct moments in struggles over needs – identifying 'needs', arguing about how they are to be met and by who, and meeting the needs. This chain shows how representational politics are heavily implicated – perhaps 'productive of' – distributive/material politics: symbolic struggles need to be won before the fairer distribution of resources (even though materiality also produces and reinforces status). This thesis focuses on theoretical issues about the cultural 'politics of representation' (Hall, 1992) in the first two of Fraser's stages.

The juxtaposition of 'needs' and 'rights' discourse has implications for the boundaries between 'political', 'economic' and 'domestic' spheres of life (Fraser, 1989). It appears to illustrate the 'psychologisation' of the political sphere, which will be considered in chapter 9.

6.2 'Psycho-politics'[1]

Similarly, accounts of children's needs are politically significant through their construction of what parents ought to be and do in order to meet these needs (Burman, 1994a; Day Sclater *et al.*, forthcoming 1999; Woodhead, 1990). For instance, feminists might argue that state provision should meet *parents' day-care needs*, whilst social conservatives might argue that *a child's need for his/her mother* means she should meet these needs, or economic conservatives, that the market is the best institution for *meeting these needs*. The indeterminacy of 'children's needs', yet their prominence today within the family justice system (Day Sclater and Yates, forthcoming 1999) means that discourses of developmental psychology currently 'do' family politics. Psychology, and developmental psychology in particular, functions powerfully in political debates as scientific knowledge, at a personal level (see

---

[1] I borrow this phrase from Shelley Day Sclater (e.g. Day Sclater and Yates, forthcoming 1999). I use it here to mean both the politics of psychological knowledge in the sense outlined above, and the intra-psychic 'politics' and the social relations these produce, which is taken up in a later section.

chapter 5 and later), and at an institutional level as a key resource for the wide range of welfare professions (health visitors, social workers, community psychiatric nurses and teachers, as well as clinical and educational psychologists) which have arisen in industrialised countries 'to supervise, evaluate and "support" families' (Burman, 1997: p135). Moreover, particular knowledge forms and practices are naturalised in 'needs'. Needs claims are bound up in understandings of 'in order to' relations (Fraser, 1989), which for child psychology Burman (1994a) calls 'the developmental myth' of linear, causal narratives. 'Children's needs' are connected, in chains of cause-and-effect, to particular ideas about what outcomes are desirable. Their assertion as scientific truths obscures the lack of consensus about 'natural' development and 'normal' outcomes, for instance, about what forms of adult sexuality are psychologically healthy, or about what are tolerable levels of thwarted wishes, work or sweets in a child's life. Critical psychologists have demonstrated the socially constructed nature of 'children's needs' (Kessen, 1991; Phoenix and Woollett, 1991; Woodhead, 1990), questioned the universalism of developmental psychology, its narrow focus, and the foundations of its knowledge, including its denial of its political nature. A Western understanding of individual development is naturalised and exported internationally as an objective universal, whilst it embodies and idealises a particular capitalist individualism and social organisation and hides the particularity of the political values it embraces (Burman, 1995a).

The theoretical problems with the modernist underpinnings of psychology that were identified in chapter 5 also have political consequences for 'families', mothers and fathers. Through its claims to empiricism, psychology conceals normative prescriptions under the guise of scientific descriptions (Burman, 1997). Since the critiques of psychology from the 1970s onwards (see chapter 5) and the publication of Richards (1974) in particular, most British developmental psychologists have sought to recognise the *social context* of children's development (Woodhead *et al*., 1991) (e.g. Richards and Light, 1986) and, indeed, amongst the authors in these collections are some whose work has been significant in the development of social constructionist and discourse analytic work in social psychology (see chapter 7). However, whilst critical developmental psychologist, such as Erica Burman (1991; 1992; 1994a; 1997) and John Morss (1990; 1995) (and see Broughton, ed., 1987; Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992) highlight the problems inherent in the discipline's approach,

much British developmental psychological research continues within the parameters of conventional psychology. So, some contemporary work continues to challenge the narrow focus on parental (or maternal) influence on children's development, instead emphasising siblings (e.g. Dunn and Kendrick, 1982) or the peer group (Rich Harris, 1998), but it still relies largely on a 'social influence' model which constructs the prior individual 'affected' (a secondary process) by 'the social'. The individualising that results from this individual-society dualism means that parents are seen as the locus of responsibility and potential blame, and as earlier chapters argued, problematised parenting tends to point most sharply to mothers. As a consequence parents are seen as producing certain characteristics in their children, rather than seeing children as actors within particular dynamics and relationships with particular carers. The secondary nature of social context means that individuals are too easily abstracted from the social so that 'instead of poverty, unemployment and frustration, we have evil children, bad mothers, absent fathers and broken homes' (Burman, 1997: p142). Thus, social inequalities are legitimated as flowing from individual differences in a liberal moral culture (Seidler, 1994). Moreover, what dominant groups prefer as the desirable way to rear children is portrayed as the 'natural' way for everyone to rear children, with severe consequences for those whose lives do not match these conservative cultural expectations. Such differences from the socially constructed norms for this natural universal process are seen as unnatural, and through being individualised and depoliticised, difference 'can only be envisaged in terms of deviation, deviance or inferiority' (Burman, 1997*: p137) (as chapter 3 illustrated).

Feminists and others might therefore challenge both who makes claims to know about mothers, and how, that is, question the discipline of psychology and the authority relations it produces. The certainty and clout it has as a scientific knowledge and its popularisation mean that contesting psychology's authority on parenting is incredibly difficult. Its popularisation can obscure the fact that the discourse itself may be at issue in 'needs politics', and the naturalisation of its values and epistemology blocks broader discussion of them (which might challenge their status).

Politics can therefore involve asserting or contesting epistemology, the status attributed different ways of knowing, as well as questions of 'which people' (or the state versus the individual), should bear a given responsibility. In advance of

questions about the power to meet or withhold provision are questions of interpretation and about the power to define. Arguing about who ought to meet a need, reifies the need itself as fact. For instance, over the past thirty years, parental interaction with children has been colonised by professional discourses of education and learning which has attracted feminist criticism for increasing the pressures on parents, having a disproportionate impact on mothers, and providing increased opportunity for professional interference in mothering (David *et al.*, 1993; Woollett and Phoenix, 1991). A particular issue is whether children should be taught reading/word recognition before starting school. Arguing that this should be the job of a professional educator, rather than an addition to mothers' responsibilities is to accept the idea that pre-school children should be taught to read. Thus, political debate about provision enclaves the need itself as 'non political'. So some debates about the 'politics' of an issue assume and thereby reify the knowledge of the issue. There may be political gains from distinguishing challenges at these different levels in relation to a specific issue. The following section considers what types of knowledge claim were made in the presentation of advice to parents in the contemporary British parenting magazines studied in Chapter 2. The section after that tries to use these to suggest strategies for resistance to expert/mother relations or for feminist research interventions.

6.3 Contemporary knowledge claims about parenting

Chapter 2 gave an account of the politics of expert-mother relations historically and of the contemporary expert/expertise-parent relations in parenting magazines. This section will identify what some of the different expertise-parent relations 'do' in terms of their epistemological bases or their claims to know. Focusing on expertise in this (abstract) way highlights the possible commonalities across settings. The different knowledge claims and the various positions they provide for different speakers to take up can be understood as some of the theoretical 'resources' available either to a mother when speaking directly with an expert (at a clinic, in a psychologist's office, or speaking with a teacher at the school gate), or to the reader of a parenting magazine at the individual, probably intra-psychic, level of the processes of identification and resistance to the text.

Experts such as psychologists and doctors can draw on an empirical warrant to present their accounts as expertise. The scientific epistemology constructs their knowledge as formed by objective perception of the real - enabling them to say, for instance, that 'this is normal for a 2 year old'. What is absent from the account is recognition that 'the real' is perceived from their particular social position and through the lens of their professional discourse. Two similar bases on which their accounts can rest are their abstract knowledge-base or disciplinary discourse, and their experience of professional practice. For the former, they are the bearers of superior knowledge and for the latter, their knowledge claim rests on an appeal to their own direct perception (an empirical claim), enabling them to say, for instance that they themselves have seen many 2 year olds having temper tantrums. Since these rest on the same epistemology, similar questions can be asked of them: how many 2 year olds have they seen? were these typical 2 year olds? etc.

Each of these are so conventionalised that they hardly need stating, and can sometimes be mobilised without making them explicit. This was the case for many of the topic-focused articles in the parenting magazines where a 'qualified' knowledge claim (as Foucault calls medicine and psychiatric discourses in Foucault, 1980) was seldom elaborated. A statement of job title or status, such as 'Consultant paediatrician, John Barker explains…', asserts that this is an expert/someone with official access to expert discourse and that their professional judgement and authority can be trusted. In popular journalism, as chapter 3 showed, the opinions of such figures assume a quick authority, carrying more weight than those of lay persons ('parents') but which close scrutiny sometimes reveals overreach the legitimate territory of their expertise.

The problem with this authority is that it omits to mention that it has value judgements within it, for instance, about what is an acceptable 'two year old tantrum' and what is unacceptable behaviour. Furthermore, it pretends to be value-free knowledge. Thus, dominant cultural perspectives are naturalised, often reinforcing particular ethnocentric, middle class meanings and values to the detriment of those who not share them. In this way the values that inform expert knowledges are not explicit and so can escape direct challenge. However, experts avoid inviting angry challenges or direct resistance either, as Van Krieken (1991) and other Foucauldian

writers have argued, because it is simply less effective to try to assert their will through top-down pronouncements, or because they possess genuine faith in the emancipatory promise of better knowledge. This latter is underlined by the construction of experts' benevolence in the discourses of 'help' and 'support for' parents. 'Support' is increasingly the preferred term for professional intervention in families, for instance, in the area of social work practice which used to be called 'child protection', which is now 'family support' (Margaret O'Brien, pers. comm.) and the 1998 Government White Paper, *Supporting Families*.

In parenting magazines, explicitly 'factual' articles are not always attributed to a named expert suggesting that the epistemological claims of the discourses provide adequate status for the article. This suggests that the authority of the expert as someone placed in a position of respect and esteem is being superceded or displaced by the authority of the expert knowledge form itself. Hence the value of the reconceptualision of power through discourse (power/knowledge), rather than embodied by experts, as argued in chapter 5. When articles are attributed to an expert, if any more attention is paid to them beyond their professional role/title, it is sometimes a reference to their place of work (say, a prestigious London teaching hospital), but is more often about their own status as a parent (of a certain number/age of child/ren). This is an allusion to experiential knowledge which will be discussed shortly.

It is sometimes not clear whether the named expert actually wrote the piece themselves. Here, scientific writing's convention of using the third person evades the issue by not requiring an 'I' in the text. Many of the articles in parenting magazines are not attributed to experts but are attributed to regular feature writers or remain unattributed. However, epistemological claims may not be made explicit in the piece, but are either assumed to be already attached to the disciplinary approach or to the language and rhetorical forms employed. Thus, articles in the magazines need not state claims of objectivity or of validity and reliability about the medical or psychological knowledge they present, but mobilise the understanding of scientificism simply by their style of assertion. In such cases, claims to expertise or common-sense are possible and can sometimes blur. Indeed, it seems that precisely the absence of any such explanatory, justificatory, legitimating statements at the start lends an article

the status of expertise. Other articles that do not explicitly or implicitly invoke expertise begin with a warrant, such as 'One mother's own story of…'. Thus for an experiential account more justificatory 'work has to be done' by the editor than either the 'Our expert writes' or unattributed 'expertise' articles. However, the journalistic production of either of these remain obscured.

The most explicit advice-giving relation is evident in the 'problem page'. It is interesting that these occupy such a 'back-seat' in magazines, often near the back and never announced or sensationalised (thankfully) on the front page, when, anecdotally at least, problem pages are widely read sections. Perhaps this suggests an ambivalence on the part of many contemporary parents to expert advice. There is the possibility for more complex interaction between readers, experts and magazine staff in the readers' letters page, but whilst it may be called 'From You to Us' in *Practical Parenting*, parents do not, of course, have any editorial control over what goes in the section.

Similarly, the first-name familiarity of the editor does make her seem approachable, but it is, of course, an empty promise of intimacy of personal support. We might welcome the egalitarian intent of the 'sharing' discourse and 'we're parents just like you' orientation, but it can be seen as liberal rhetoric that denies the real relations of power at work. The friendly, identificatory tone in parenting magazines obscures the relations of power between the knowledge base and parents, as it does the authorial power that the writer and editor have over interpretation of the information.

Discourses of needs run throughout the different magazines, mainstream and alternative, and throughout their difference section: parents' needs (for professional advice or reassurance, for labour-saving, child-stimulating or child-safe gadgets); children's needs (for their parents, for attention, for professional surveillance (health and development 'checks'), for educational 'stimulation' and hence for toys, games and equipment). Consumer 'needs' are constructed in articles, and advertisements present their products as meeting needs which have a big subjective pull on parents in line with the 'educationalised' role of parents to stimulate their child to develop better and faster. Indeed the difference between articles and full-page glossy advertisements seems to narrow as advertisers inform parents of needs, goals and sometimes 'studies which show…'. Calling the consumer section 'Wise Buys' in *Mother & Baby* seems

to evokes a less rationalist knowledge base than other 'information' sections. Using the word 'wise' rather than, say, 'sensible', which is more cerebral, or 'cost-effective' which through rational economics is even more cerebral, seems to invoke the idea of a quiet, patient wisdom and practicality. This can be interpreted as the celebration or recognition of the 'other' kind of knowledge, more associated with 'old wives tales' and advice exchanged between mothers through experiential accounts.

The discourse of experience of mothering/parenting can be understood, like a religious or mystical discourse, as a 'subjugated knowledge' relative to that of the medical or psychological expert. These are 'naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity' (Foucault, 1980: p82). Appealing to one's experience as a mother as the basis for one's knowledge would probably constitute, for Foucault, an 'unqualified' knowledge, like that of the ill person in relation to the doctor's. It is granted little legitimacy as truth, but is however, attributed some coherence, unlike the 'disqualified' knowledge of the psychiatric patient. This indicates the historical shift in women's position in Western European cultures since William Cadogan's time when an account of knowledge on the basis of women's parenting would have been disqualified since he was certain that women could not even be supposed to be able to master the proper knowledge to fit them for the task of rational childrearing. Foucault calls such (unqualified) knowledge 'popular knowledge', 'though it is far from being a general commonsense knowledge, but is, on the contrary a particular, local, regional knowledge …which owes its force to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it' (Foucault, 1980: p82). Criticism, he believed, works through mobilising such knowledges.

The authority of personal experience was a central tenet of second wave Western feminism and henceforth provides an implicit epistemological challenge to scientific objectivism through its warrant for subject knowledge. In magazines, the first-person accounts are sometimes critical of treatment by healthcare professionals. In a clinical setting, a mother's discourse of experience might be one of the stronger positions parents can take up in order to oppose expert discourse. For instance, everyday formulations such as 'he's not normally like this' could be seen as a claim that epistemologically asserts empirical and reliability (generality, for that child's behaviour) claims. A maternal knowledge claim could be bolstered by reference to

having raised several children. It could challenge the pathologisation by expert gaze by, for example, 'His brothers were like this at his age, but grew out of it', or could emphasise the reliability of a mother's extended experience of/with her child in contrast to the expert's limited vantage point of the clinical session ('He's not normally like this'). Here, a mother's subjective investment bolsters rather than weakens her knowledge claim. Appeals to the particularity of a child, perhaps through a psychological discourse of individual differences, challenge the application of a certain expert discourse to this child, rather than mounts an epistemological challenge. These are 'familiar' equivalents to the issue of sample size and reliability in scientific accounts. The first-person accounts in parenting magazines carry the realist ('true story') epistemological claim and are warranted by personal experience, but they obscure or minimise the advisory functions they are often put to, as illustrated by the use of 'fact' boxes in such articles.

Today there are both commonsense and popular resources for challenging objectivism by appeals to the relevance or importance of subjective accounts (and some even have institutional validation). These sometimes celebrate experience, as opposed to abstract knowledge, or practice as opposed to (mere) theory. For instance, the New Labour emphasis on parenting classes is mocked in the cartoon below (Figure 5) through the mobilisation of the idea that theory might not translate into practice: indeed, taken to humourous lengths, might even distract from it.

One of the points of overlap between Foucauldian analyses and radical feminists is in attending to what cannot be said in the existing linguistic system, or what is hard to say by whom and when (Sawicki, 1991). Communication between a childcare professional and a mother is structured by their differential access to expert discourse to make their statements authoritative. In theory, each has access to the experiential knowledge warrant, but it is likely to present a mother's most powerful option. Personal accounts from professionals may create particular intimacy effects through breaching the personal/professional boundary around self-disclosure. But a professional's allusion to psychological issues can imply an objective-realist warrant when it might only be their own common-sense 'pop psychology'. This concern was raised in chapter 3 in relation to the use of psychological discourses of parents and children by non-psychologists, such as medics working in fertility services. The

productive nature of discourse means it has become hard to distinguish the discourse of psychology (as a expert knowledge) from popular discourses of 'psychology', that is, of what has become psychological terrain (the emotional, intra/interpersonal, subjective and individual cognitive realms).
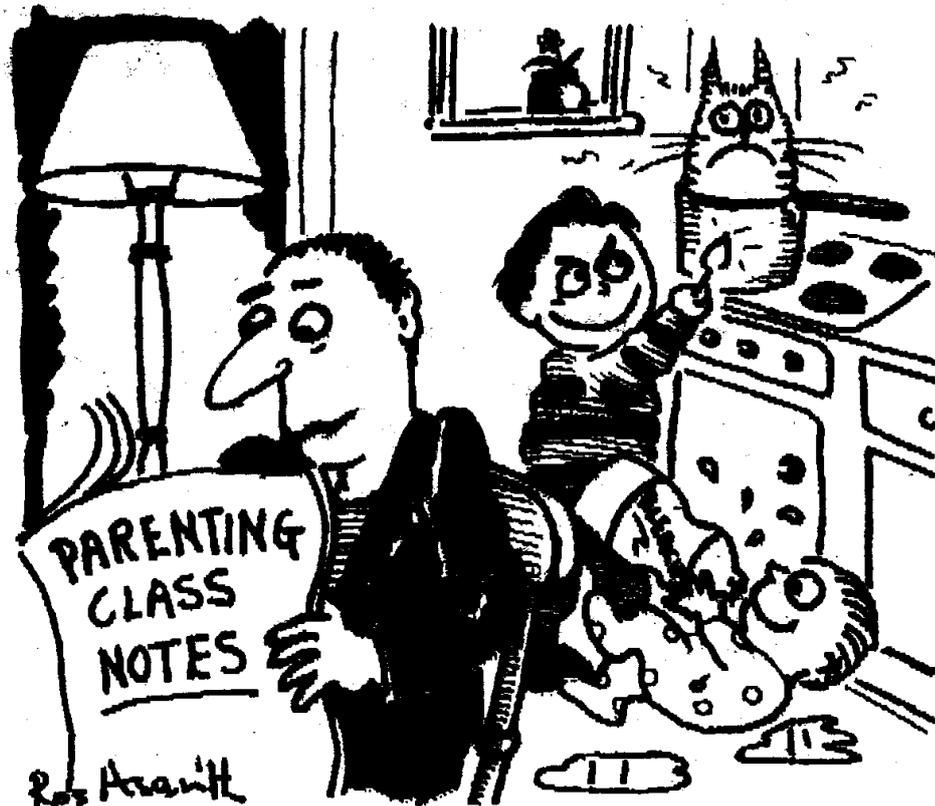
Figure 5: Checking his parenting class notes

Ros Asquith's cartoon, published in *The Guardian*, December 3rd 1997, shows a father studying his parenting class notes while the child unseen cooks the cat and the baby drinks bleach. It mocks parenting classes by pitting theory against practice. Theory or written advice about parenting looks a foolish distraction from the fairly obvious immediate practical parenting these children need.

Among the experts, between different articles in one issue, for instance, are alternative accounts of psychological expertise. The discipline has lost its unity, as sub-disciplines and even writers within them have different approaches. This multiplicity means that discourses that can be described as 'psychological' do not produce the same 'suggestions' for parental behaviour, and, as I began to explore in Alldred (1996b), provide the possibilities for resistance to each other. For instance,

discourses of child development as a process of socialisation construct parenting as more interventionist than discourses of child development as the 'natural' unfolding of a self-regulative adaptive organism, and thereby produce greater responsibility for parents (Gergen *et al.*, 1990; Reese and Overton, 1970; Ribbens, 1994; Walkerdine, 1984). Recognition of the plurality of claims to truth means that scientists are now more modest and tend to offer opinions, rather than definitive statements. They should no longer legislate, but merely interpret (Bauman, 1988). However, any such qualifiers tend to get dropped from popularised accounts or in their journalistic representation. It is less useful to consider the power of psychology as a discourse, than the distinct moments of its impact, since there are times at which its truth status remains undiminished and instances when any of the above manoeuvres challenge it.

A particular psychological evaluation of a mother, for instance, as 'insensitive' (see Woollett and Phoenix, 1991), can be challenged by newer knowledge from the same discipline. In this case its claim may be to make further progress in the pursuit of truer knowledge (the 'up the mountain' model of scientific progress, see Kitzinger, C. 1990; Rorty, 1980). In this case no epistemological challenge is made. However, self-identified 'alternative' knowledge forms, such as alternative medicine and holistic health approaches, (which sometimes surfaced in the mainstream parenting magazines as well as the specialist ones), were about the status accorded different epistemologies, and sometimes explicitly criticise scientific, Cartesian and allopathic thinking. Within even a mainstream magazine are often contradictions in the status accorded 'the natural' as a basis for knowledge, e.g. the discourse of trust your instincts, 'you'll just know what to do when your baby cries' and the 'don't worry, everyone's a beginner with their first baby'.

Ideas which are about the topic matter of psychology sometimes manage to imply the discourse's knowledge status for itself. In a similar way to that of the titles 'Dr' or 'Professor', speaking of certain 'objects' (e.g. 'attachment', 'egocentricism' or 'containment') invokes expert psychological discourses which may be popularised beyond their original bounds (see Riley, 1988). Similarly, a particular style of expression - of impersonal/third person, past (perfect) tense, using the rhetoric of light, vision and perception – creates the impression of empiricism. Thus objective realism comes to be presumed even without making explicit claims. This occurs in

many of the magazine articles that are unattributed to experts and was used for chapters 2, 3 and 4. This dominant epistemology is the default and enables an account to function as if it had made truth claims. It becomes more obvious through the chapters that the accounts are written from particular perspectives produced through aspects of my own location and formation, because I become more conscious/self-conscious of the rhetorical forms and techniques for implicitly claiming objective realism.

Knowledge is indeed the important currency in parenting practices but there is not the certain faith in rationality to guide childrearing as was in Cadogan's day, and there are more minor discourses of forms of knowledge illustrated by 'trust your instincts' reassurances. There are many discourses of legitimation (Lyon, 1994), producing a plethora of discourses jostling in political and popular debate: psychological expertise, discourses of experiential knowledge as empirical, or as intuitive, 'pop' psychology of undeclared origins, and layers of discourse of psychological issues, often from earlier expert discourses, which are superseded but not washed away by newer expert accounts. Mobilisation of claims to know reveal processes of both power and everyday resistance.

6.4 Expertise and the self

Feminist and Marxist scholars have criticised the regulating and normalising functions of expertise which meets moral, military and industrial objectives (e.g. Billington, 1996). However, as the previous chapter suggested, it does so, not through threat of sanction, but through the production of mothers who want 'hygienic' homes and 'normal', 'healthy' children: 'it has become the will of the mother to govern her own children according to psychological norms and in partnership with psychological experts' (Rose 1989a: p131). Avoiding repressive measures that would prompt people's resistance, 'the domesticated private family was …to be both freed from detailed prescription of conduct and to be permeable to moralisation and normalisation from outside' (Rose, *ibid.:* p127).

That is, psychological understandings have not remained the province of professionals. They have come to frame the way we understand our own experiences as family members, as people in or not in relationships. Psychology and

developmentalism invade the lives of all contemporary Western subjects, through techniques of the self as well as techniques of government (see chapter 5). Developmental psychological theories infuse everyday discussions about children's natures and qualities, about processes of psychological growth and change, and about family life (Burman, 1997). What does the shift from the power of individual experts to the power of expertise mean for challenging the individualising and decontexualising tendencies of psychological knowledge? It means that responsibility is more likely to be experienced as individualised, and that earlier feminist critiques of the role of *the expert* are no longer appropriate. It is not a colonising, but a constituting power, enjoying subjects to govern themselves and making the 'effects' of psychological discourse highly pervasive.

The productive nature of discourses of parents undermines the idea that the 'empowered' consumer of 'throw-away' childcare literature can take or leave from what they read. Similarly, this raises interesting questions about the degree to which the critical reading of mainstream parenting and family texts by 'alternative parents' who consume more specialist 'holistic' magazines enable them to escape such meanings. Certainly, there is recognition and explicit discussion of the struggle to find alternative services or to negotiate with midwives, health visitors and GPs about child health issues. However, there appears to be very little mention of doubt on the part of parents or of conflicting hopes for their children and their parenting that thinking about their own formation through many dominant cultural meanings might suggest. Perhaps editors of alternative magazines face a tension between recognising such issues and writing confidently to construct alternatives to them. There might be room for reflective writing by parents about the difficulties encountered of consciously trying to do certain things differently in their parenting than they experienced in their own childhoods.

Nikolas Rose, in *Governing the Soul*, writes:

> 'Parental conduct, motherhood and childrearing can thus be regulated through family autonomy, through wishes and aspirations, and through the activation of individual guilt, personal anxiety, and private disappointment. And the almost inevitable misalignment between expectation and realization, fantasy and actuality, fuels the search for help and guidance in the difficult task of producing normality, and powers the constant familial demand for the assistance of expertise' (Rose, 1989a: p130).

Expertise has to achieve harmony between 'the private authority, self-concern and aspirations of the autonomous family' (Rose, *ibid*.: p129), which according to Donzelot (1979) it does through 'the regulation of images'. Thus, representations of motherhood, fatherhood, family life and parental conduct generated by expertise infuse and shape the personal investments of individuals, the ways in which we form, regulate and evaluate our lives, our actions and goals. Modern 'psychological subjects' reflect upon ourselves through popular psychological discourses, and might draw on psychological discourses to argue, decide or justify. This includes our (for some, potential) qualities as parents, mothers and fathers (though also extend to, say, our efforts in our studies).

Just as the nineteenth century mothers' movement 'invited in' the experts, so too do today's parents as they create a demand for parenting advice which the magazines satisfy. However, complex layers of self-formation through discourses of expertise create the desires which are mobilised to create this 'market demand'. Since as chapter 2 argued a strongly positive moral value is attributed to staying up to date with information about parenting. Thus, earlier feminist critiques of childrearing experts' 'unwarranted intrusion…into the private lives of families' needs rethinking. The productivity of discourse is what means expert-parent relations cannot be simplified to didactic imperatives, nor can parents wilfully ignore advance and look to their own knowledges, as if there might be a reservoir of untainted knowledge. Thus, Ludmilla Jordanova's stinging critique of Christina Hardyment's book:

> 'On the surface it appears to be a book designed to liberate parents from the tyranny of the experts, and so cashes in on a superficial radicalism which is sceptical about professional authority; and it seeks to return confidence to the people in their own authentic responses to life's challenges. Liberal readers are easily made complicit with the book's arguments, which hinge on a strong defence of individualism, and attack on state intervention as unjustified interference, a concern to prevent maternal anxiety about child-care, and a belief that, somehow, a true and real picture of children will one day emerge. (Jordanova, 1985: p112-3).

Commentators tend to concur over a shift in authority from traditionally defined relations embedded in institutions such as the church, 'family' and 'community', to the location of authority in the individual. Bauman (1996) sees this as the ethical

paradox of modernity. An expansion of the ethical arena has occurred alongside a decline in authority which means that although we have to make up our own minds on a greater number and range of issues, our beliefs and choices no longer provide us with any certainty. The issues and choices about how we live our lives that come under this personal surveillance and responsibility are above and beyond those that previous generations felt obliged or enabled to think about. This produces a sense of more individual responsibility, an expectation of more control, which can further the individualism that Burman (1997) and Seidler (1994) highlight. This increasing responsibility is in the name of 'freedom' (Blackman, 1994; Rose, 1990). The individual is free from the strictures of religious conduct, and 'the family', by occupying the private realm, free from state intervention. This fantasy is contradicted by the understanding of power and self-government that chapter 5 introduced. Older generations can therefore perceive younger generations as selfishly individualistic when their decisions are articulated in terms of personal and individual or perhaps immediate family needs and preferences, in contrast to older appeals to 'it was, so it will be', 'how things should be done', or 'it's for the best'. However, drawing on a psychological discourse to make a particular personal decision does not bring any certainty because of the plurality of discourses described above. Such 'decisions' are therefore contingent, contextual and particular, rather than absolutes, drawn from pure (psychological) reason and stable over time.

These meanings do not of course only impact on parents. The depth of cultural infusion by discourses of psychology (including psychoanalytic psychology, see Parker, 1997) and the social significance of parental and familial status mean that being a non-parent, or not being interested in being a parent in future, do not leave one free from the pop psychological discourses of parenting, especially those which link one's parental status to one's psychology. Through both technologies of domination whereby others' interpretations and judgements define you and through technologies of the self it is asked whether the childless, middle-aged, heterosexual couple are selfish, the 'batchelor' is immature and self-centred, the same-sex couple narcissistic, with immature sexual object choice. An intellectual awareness that producing children biologically and raising them as 'your own' is only one particular, and individualistic, way of defining family and nurturing does not stop one from making psychologically normative assessments of the self. One questions whether

perhaps one really is selfish/non-nurturant/'not ready yet'/'healthy'/'well-adjusted'. If, by these normative discourses one has negative, 'immature' 'answers', these are not a moral failure, whereas to be totally unreflexive is (and goes part way towards a psychiatric diagnosis). To be reflexive about ones' qualities as a parent is an increasing requirement of responsible decision-making, expressed in the books and articles aimed at women (*'The Mother of all Decisions: Not everyone should have a child'*, **Cosmopolitan**, July 1994; and books called *'Why Children?'* (Dowrick and Grundberg, 1980) and *'A Child: Your Choice'* (Shapiro, 1987) and this is important given women's historical lack of choice around reproduction and mothering. The moral persuasiveness of being self-reflective turning psychological discourses upon the self might even be such that, paradoxically, in circumstances under which ones' 'fitness to parent' is being judged, 'admitting your faults' might be looked upon more favourably than not drawing attention to them if this can be read as unawareness.

The absence of an embodied/authorial expert makes it apparent how much government and regulation occurs through parents'/mothers' own self-government: through the wilful adoption of expert discourse to understand her own childrearing behaviour and experience. However, once one has read the expert's accounts of how, say, your own parenting might have produced the angry tantrum, it is not easy to 'read it' the way one could previously. To reflect upon it further would pull one further into the reflexive psychological self, to consider psychological teleologies of one's own formation. Neither can we simply counter its claims, as chapter 5 argued. In addition, such critique might soon become appropriated (Richards, 1994b). Exhaustive critique of developmental psychology is therefore futile because it speaks to such a wide range of issues, so popularly, and through us, not 'at' us. Thus, both modernist sets of promises of freedom proved illusory: the promise of truth, and the promise of its ideological critique. Greater knowledge of discourses of child development is not to gain freedom, but to gain imperatives and cautions, to become even more self-conscious and self-scrutinising about one's parenting and the 'health' of one's relationships. To have a feminist critique of the ideological functions of expertise neither rids us of such ideas at unconscious levels, nor guarantees that knowledge produced with this understanding will be truer or better.

It is a loss of credibility by the 'grand narratives of legitimation' such as these Enlightenment stories of progress towards freedom through Truth and reason, which characterise the contemporary 'crisis of legitimation' that Lyotard (1984) calls 'the postmodern condition'. These narratives are no longer seen as overarching timeless inevitable processes, but peculiarly modernist Western narratives. Rationalism is no longer the guarantor of safety, security and a harmonious society, but is the conceptual machinery of the Holocaust and the promised freedom illusory (and see chapter 5). In particular, feminists and post-colonial theorists have criticised the dominant philosophical project of seeking objectivity as something transcending situation or perspective.

6.5 Feminist Knowledge Strategies

How could we know who is 'fit to parent' when the traditional means of knowing have been shown to be unjust and are relativised? If we have no guaranteed means of knowing or describing the world, how do we assert a political critique? Lyotard's critique leaves no place for feminist social criticism of pervasive axes of stratification or broad-based relations of dominance and subordination along the lines of gender, race or class (Lyon, 1994) hence the impasse which many feminists and theorists on the left feel threatens to disable political critique. However, Fraser and Nicholson (1990) argue that it is premature to abandon social criticism or politically engaged intellectual practice. Rather, it is possible to have a 'robust postmodern-feminist paradigm of social criticism without philosophy' (p34). Out of the political need for social criticism of large-scale inequalities, new paradigms of criticism must be forged which do not rely on traditional philosophical metanarratives. Critique must be warranted without reifying modernist beliefs that it is the next step in the progress towards more truthful accounts of the world, or which claims divine wisdom or pure and privileged access to knowledge. Thus, whilst agreeing with Lyotard's critique of Marxism, and sharing feminist critiques of modernism, they do not join him in rejecting social theory tout court.

Many feminists argue, similarly, that whilst 'feminism must remain alert to issues of difference and specificity, it is also necessary to retain theoretical tools capable of analysing general structural tendencies in order to understand how difference becomes inequality' (McNay, 1992: p154-5). We need to be able to locate people in relation to

structures of power, and overcome the self-centred preoccupations of the postmodern individual, so, 'what follows is not that we should renounce theory to avoid its dominating discourse, rather we should find forms of theory that will be consistent with a localising...participatory, community oriented politics' (Wolin, 1988, cited in McNay, *ibid*.: p155).

Fraser and Nicholson (1990) argue that that we can avoids appeals to foundationalism by avoiding the arrogant truth-claims that accompany essentialist, transcultural or historical analyses, and by acknowledging the situated nature of our own critique, and applying the same scrutiny and critical reflection to our own analysis. Patti Lather (1991) argues that our reflexivity about our practice must try to prevent our analyses becoming exclusionary. There is the risk that we polarise local knowledge as only liberatory against oppressive theoretical metanarratives (McNay, *ibid*.). There are no unproblematic, alternatively warranted epistemologies, so two types of move present themselves: we can either strategically deploy conventional ones, or try to create new hybrid epistemologies. The rest of this chapter considers the former, and chapter 8 explores the two, considering whether even limited empirical claims position oneself at the centre of things, glorifying ones' perceptions and reifying ones' own cultural framework.

Chapter 5 gave an account of Walkerdine's (1990) argument that it is not enough only to critique cultural meanings: we need to examine how they form us. In addition to criticism of representations, we should consider their role in our own formation and explore our intra-psychic investments, as distinct from and potentially in conflict with, our political commitments. This can be applied to the identification and choice of options here. The motives expressed are those of the modernist subject (to strive for better understanding, for critique that can promote social change for the better). Recognising my subjective and political formation through such Enlightenment understandings of emancipatory progress means that intellectual critique relativises the foundational metanarratives, but does not wash them away. I reject lapsing into an infamous postmodern shrug of resignation to relativism and retain some belief in my analysis as more truthful than some others and as promoting social change for the better. Thus I recognise my modernist narrative of cultural progress from identity politics to post identity politics.

This is a pragmatic response to the absence of theory as guide and guarantor, but it forces specificity, allows flexibility and avoids re/producing exclusions. It suggests the possibility of employing approaches associated with 'second wave' feminism, such as adopting identity politics, employing strategic essentialism, where they may be helpful. For instance, more essentialist discourses of women's mothering may be drawn on to argue that a lesbian mother should not lose her children on account of her sexuality, or a woman's 'natural' desire to parent might be deployed to challenge attempts to deny lesbians access to donor insemination. What does the call for feminists to maintain pluralist strategies of intervention mean in the context of the representations of mothers as deviant and to blame for social problems? It means that there might be a role for simultaneously criticising the terms of the debate (the limited analysis, individualising of blame); and criticising the ideological assumptions and epistemological basis of psychological theories, and, further, for presenting psychological research 'findings' that will support a preferred analysis. These different strategies are valuable for different sites of intervention, such as mainstream media debates; academic and policy forums; and individual struggles, such as through the courts. Above all, pluralist strategies of critical intervention urge ongoing reappraisal.

Continual shifts in cultural practices and meanings with time and location will inevitably mean that the precise implications of ones' political position cannot be guaranteed, as Foucault and Derrida have shown. Cultural life involves the texts we produce, 'intersecting with other texts that influence ours in ways we cannot ever unravel' (Lyon, 1994: p13). Therefore, not only would postmodern feminists not want to fix a single privileged feminist position or mode of response, they would urge the continual reinvention of specific interventions. While some celebrate the rejection of fundamentalism of any kind, Nancy Fraser admits her ambivalence about the loss of socialist and feminist grand narratives for their political force, and speaks of 'not making a virtue of a necessity' (Alldred, 1999).

6.6 Using the Master's Tools?

Chapter 3 described how psychological discourses pathologise certain mothers and construct some women as unfit to parent. Whether one is responding to lone mother

blaming in the media or offensive claims about lesbian mothers, claims that are backed up by academic research 'findings' or invoke discourses of popular psychology, what is needed are interventions in cultural politics, or what Nancy Fraser (1995) calls 'the politics of recognition'. How can feminist and critical writers intervene in these debates to resist the status hierarchies produced by psychological discourses? In particular, how might feminist academics engage with expert knowledge about mothers, and claims to know what is normal and natural? One response is to contest the claims from within, that is by doing psychological research informed by feminist theoretical critiques and to deploy research findings to make counter claims. The second is to take issue with the agendas that inform the appeal to psychology, or the conceptual framework of psychological 'answers'. What might these two strategies - of 'using' or critiquing psychological research – suggest in relation to the representations of parents discussed in earlier chapters.

The first approach is in the hope of producing better, less oppressive psychology. This generally embraces or leaves unquestioned the Enlightenment belief in progress, but intervenes in terms recognisable to the same audience. Presenting alternative findings to challenge specific meanings is intervening in the debate on 'their' terms, and this means tacitly accepting the legitimacy of the question and this approach to answering it. Much feminist debate in Women's Studies and elsewhere has concerned the extent to which 'the master's tools' can be used to dismantle 'the master's house' (Lorde, 1984) and the possibilities of reformatory engagement within the rules of the (knowledge) game (Burman, 1990; 1998, Crowley, 1999; Kitzinger, 1987; Unger, 1996).

Chapter 3 described how, in popular debate, women who want a child without a male partner are sometimes accused of being selfish which implicitly or explicitly questions their fitness to mother. McCartney's (1985) study of single women who requested donor insemination concluded that there was no support for describing these women's motivations as 'purely selfish'. This study responded directly, within the terms of 'the debate' and produced counter claims which employed a scientific epistemological warrant. It was published in a gynaecology journal and so intervened at the level of academic debate and professional practice. It does not disclose a 'feminist' intent.

Popular fears about children growing up in lesbian or gay families sometimes include whether they will grow up gay, be 'confused' about their gender, be 'tomboys', 'sissies' or get bullied. On each of these points recent psychological research findings can provide reassurance, as psychologists have studied children's 'gender identity', 'sex-typed behaviour', sexual orientation and experience of social stigma. Golombok and colleagues have conducted research employing psychosexual and psychiatric assessments of the children of lesbian mothers, and in one study compared the children of lesbian and single heterosexual mothers (Golombok, Spencer and Rutter, 1983). They found that all the children in the study (37 in lesbian and 38 in heterosexual mother-only households) had 'gender-role identities' or 'self-concepts' that corresponded to their physical sex. There were no differences in sex-role behaviour (behaviour deemed appropriate to their gender) between the two family types for either boys or girls, and, in fact, children in both types of family were shown to be 'rather traditional' in their choices of toys, activities, friendships. Whilst sexual orientation can probably not be meaningfully assessed, the children mostly reported heterosexual crushes, with no differences according to family type. By virtue of its direct response to the questions raised, its use of rhetorical style and the 'objectivity' of its appraisals, this is a powerful study which can be drawn on to support policy discussions or individual legal cases concerning lesbian mothers. For campaigning and casework on legal and policy issues this kind of study can be invaluable. The fourth 'concern', that children in lesbian/gay families face stigma and prejudice has been used as an argument in child residency disputes, and one can respond to this on a variety of levels: with studies which show it not to be the case, or which relativise homophobic stigma in relation to the other playground abuse and bullying (about weight, wearing glasses, etc.); by rejecting the concern as a victim-blaming form of response to discrimination (and that the response to racial abuse would not be to segregate); or as Harne *et al.* (1997) argue that to assume such prejudice is to reinforce it. In legal cases, such deconstructive arguments are seen as risky and lawyers usually want to be able to respond within the terms of the debate with UK empirical research.

One could challenge Charles Murray's account of an underclass (see chapter 4) by studying the values of those he claims hold anti-social values. Challenging the debate

might include insisting that it is poverty, not lone parenthood *per se* that is often the problem for lone mother households. However this leaves unchallenged the presumption of causal narratives - that certain family forms produce particular types of children - and could reinforce Murray's assumption that all lone parents are on benefits (Slipman, 1994). To argue about the amount of financial support a lone mother should get from the father of her child can be to assume that children should be 'privately financed' by 'the family' (defined narrowly as parental couple) as opposed to receiving adequate state provision. To argue about who meets the/a child support bill can be to accept the existing terms of debate about children's 'needs', which it has been argued include their need for a father. Edwards and Duncan (1997) consider how their study of values about mothering and paid work amongst lone mothers risks giving the concept of an underclass credibility by engaging with although it can challenge specific aspects of underclass rhetoric and policy responses to it.

In each of these examples, the potential value of such research responses can be seen, but, as Kitzinger (1987) argues, the crucial limitation of this approach is that the same agenda is preserved and there is no chance to challenge the terms of the debate. In the case of research about the children of lesbian mothers, this means that tacit support is provided for the assumptions that if they are to be considered normally/naturally/heathily developing beings, a child's gender-identity needs to correspond to their biological sex; that their behaviour needs to be that prescribed for their gender; and that their sexual preference needs to be heterosexual. It can affirm the identity categories and presumptions; that is, reinforce the idea that the identities/categories have conceptual integrity and meaningful implications for behaviour, even as it challenges the precise meanings attributed. This is similar to the way that, in Fraser's (1989) account, validating the issue as of concern reifies it as fact. The dilemma lies in the fact that as we intervene effectively in specific debates, we also reinforce the idea that complete, appropriate and normal outcomes require the production of 'proper' boys and 'proper' girls. Given the status accorded knowledge which makes conventional truth claims, those of us for whom it is available, who can deploy 'qualified knowledges', perhaps ought not to abandon it too hastily. Chapter 8 considers whether it is possible to deploy truth claims strategically whilst also

challenging the discipline's knowledge practices within the discipline and critiquing the politics of knowledge in the popular sphere.

The second approach involves reflecting upon the character of contemporary debates, to identify epistemological presumptions, perhaps to reveal their partiality and thereby break 'the master's tools' or question the terms of the debate or reflect upon the popular pre-occupations and cultural fears it reveals. Deconstructive approaches might destabilise the identity categories deployed or the cause-and-effect relations presumed. For instance, challenging the idea that mothers are responsible for what their children become or for their living conditions, or insisting on economic analyses rather than psychological assertions. Walkerdine (1990) suggests that we need to question not only the veridicality of claims to truth, but also the 'will to proof' which lurks behind them. This must include our own, so for instance, she comments on the defensiveness behind her own work on girls' mathematics performance to 'disprove the proofs, counter[ing] evidence with other evidence, showing that "we can do it too" (p61).

Sometimes one can simultaneously engage in and reflect upon a debate. Whilst challenging the psychological terms of the debate and responding with better 'findings' are logically opposed, Tasker and Golombok (1991) criticised assumptions in the research literature such as that homosexuality is a negative developmental outcome, and that influence on the child is merely seen in terms of the parents, whilst also providing answers in these terms (such as the sexual orientation of the children of lesbian mothers). It prioritised the strategy of providing counter claims, but shows that critical arguments can be made alongside (reassuring) 'findings'. Similarly, Ann Phoenix (1991a) provided an empirical account of young mothers which challenges the popular notion that women who become pregnant in their teenage years are either instrumental or ignorant by countering this with their own (diverse) accounts, as well as highlighting the very presumption that young women have 'different reasons from mothers who are over 20' (Phoenix, 1991b: p87) and the contradiction between representations of young mothers as reckless and irresponsible for having unplanned pregnancies and as 'getting pregnant' in a calculated move to get a council flat.

Burman *et al.* (1996a) argue that both strands of response by feminists are valuable and that neither should be precluded, and Erica Burman has argued that 'strategy may prevail over logic; sometimes there are good reasons for not wanting to deconstruct authorial authority, particularly when seeking to make a credible case of innovation' (Burman, 1990: p216). So, 'while we may seek to de-construct "expert" knowledge, we may also at times want to assert our authority and "expertise", perhaps making strategic use of such contradictions in different contexts' (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998: p204). Prince and Hartnett (1993) argue that challenging psychology must involve interrogating both the 'content of psychology, that is psychological terminology and theories, methodological prescriptions and their applications' and its 'power, [and the] political, ideological and institutional structures within which the content of psychology is generated and applied' (1993: p219).

Erica Burman (1998) highlights the compromises that arguing with psychology on its own terms entails by constrasting the potential intervention of *feminist psychology* with that of the sub-discipline of the *'psychology of women'*. The *'psychology of women'* retains women as an object of psychological gaze, which sets up the problematisation of women's difference from what is easily understood as the 'normal' subject of psychology. By abstracting gender as its focus, it can easily neglect to consider other significant factors which structure experience or easily subordinate these to gender, and it accepts that identity categories distinguish people unproblematically, and are stable, coherent and summative for a given person. Furthermore, whilst it implicitly points out the inadequacy of earlier work, it bolsters the discipline as a whole, as would any reformatory moves, lending further support to the ethos of instrumentality, control and knowledge of. In contrast, *feminist psychology* is explicitly political (Wilkinson, 1999) and avoids positioning women as the object of study, which broadens the range of possible topics of feminist analyses and avoids reinforcing the idea of women's 'psychology' as intrinsically different to men's, and as homogenous. However, either approach invests in the 'master discourse' of psychology which is to accept the institutional conditions and rules about what counts for knowledge, about how it is produced or disseminated. Therefore, it is, to some degree at least, to accept its fundamentals of empiricism and objectivism. Burman wonders:

'If we approach psychological practices with the feminist suspicion they merit, then how can we intervene without also perpetuating those same practices of exclusion and oppression? Are those of us who would assume (or presume the viability of) the designation "feminist psychologist" deluding ourselves about the extent of critique and space for contest that we can initiate?' (1998: p5).

The risk that 'feminist psychology' allows a feminist critique of psychology to be ghettoized while the rest of psychology/the department's staff carry on regardless is considered in chapter 7. It considers how psychology is bolstered by claiming to be 'developing' in response to 'new approaches to language' which means that post-structuralist critiques are effectively silenced as they are incorporated.

Foucault's analytics of power also enable us to see how we may unwittingly participate in reproducing systems of domination despite our conscious protests against specific elements of it. There is the danger of reifying what we try to critique, such as the categories of mothers whose popular representation we seek to improve, and of sustaining the knowledge practices that produce them. The tension is about bolstering broader arrogant knowledge claims or specific power relations, as we use the tools that allow us to make an authoritative intervention. Thus, as I try to intervene around the pathologisation of lesbian mothers, I bolster my own 'speaking rights' at the expense of theirs.

Within this chapter, mothers themselves remain the objects of my concern and children have remained the objects of expertise. However, the discourse of experiential knowledge can make their perspective(s) and experiences legitimate positions to speak from too, and allow them to take up a position as expert of their own condition, or of their own relationships with parents. Only recently have children come to be seen as full subjects and seeing them as competent research subjects is a recent move - one more developed in the new sociologies of childhood (Edwards and Alldred, 1999b), than in psychology. A whole new realm of questions can be asked of research about parents and parenting once children have been granted the status of research subjects (of active subjects within parent-child relations, and not just the object of parents' actions or affections) which the following chapter explores. Whereas the psychological research interventions considered in this chapter have been research on children, chapter 8 considers research *with* children. In Fraser's terms,

'the interpretations of those in question' are another of the ways competing claims can be adjudicated and it is likely to draw on a warrant of subjective experience, if not explicitly then by its public representation as specific voices of children. In Foucault's terms, children's knowledge is a form of subjugated knowledge. Furthermore, it can be seen as a perspective which has been disqualified by developmental psychological constructions of the child as a person-to-be, less rational and controlled, more emotional, impulsive and imaginative: not what the subject of psychology, or of research was hoped to be.

Identity categories illustrate well the limitations of accepting the terms of the debate, but also the impossibility of attributing resistance to any particular strategy. The gender-neutral discourse of parents might sometimes make what is considered a pro-feminist intervention, at other times it might not, or it might work for or against a particular mother at different moments. Identity is only, as Jill Johnston put it 'what you say you are, according to what they say you can be' (cited in Kitzinger, 1987), but it has been immensely valuable as a means of resistance and visibility for devalued groups through 'identity politics' over the past 30 years. To warrant 'voice' by appeal to identity is certainly to be bound by the limits of that identity, and by the modernist subject, but as a strategy it remains highly effective. So, whilst hearing children's voices in research is relatively new, the problems of the discourse of experiential knowledge are well recognised. Thus, considering how researchers might listen to children's voices draws together particular political and epistemological arguments from chapters 5 and 6, and a specific research approach from chapter 7.

Chapter 7

'Discourse' in/and the Discipline of Psychology

The previous chapter examined the politics of powerful knowledge claims and the epistemological implications of the 'crisis' of representation or legitimation. The 'crisis' or 'discursive turn' provides a fundamental philosophical challenge to how conventional approaches within psychology might have produced knowledge about *fitness to parent*. Chapter 5 outlined ways in which a post-structuralist informed discursive approach transformed the object of study and the questions that could be asked of it. Since the discipline of psychology makes the strongest truth claim on parent-child relationships this chapter examines the implications of the 'turn to language' for psychological research. How would a discursive psychology approach the study of 'who is fit to parent'? It then asks whether this still constitutes *psychological* research.

7.1 The method chapter?

Chapter 6 presented critical arguments about epistemology and articulated a *methodological approach*. This chapter presents a particular *method* which rests upon this post-structuralist approach. The 'method' in question is discourse analysis, but the argument here concerns whether it is more appropriately viewed as an 'approach' than a method, because it embodies a particular methodology. This makes it distinct from, and not interchangeable with, other psychological methods, an argument taken up in chapter 9.

Chapters 6 and 7 are 'the methodology' and 'method' chapters of the thesis. In a conventional *Introduction, Literature Review, Methods, Results, Conclusion* format, Chapter 3 might describe the method/s, and the positivist-objectivist hegemony means that there might be relatively little discussion of epistemology or methodology. Engagement with a discursive approach has prompted a different way of writing a thesis, to which chapter 1 refers, and which this chapter should explain. Contrary to the conventional narrative of a thesis, the 'method' described here has to some extent already been adopted earlier in the thesis. It would be naive to assume that topics and approaches emerge entirely independently and that approaches do not inform the

kinds of questions that are asked even at the start of a piece of research. Once I had begun to study this approach, my awareness of the epistemological assumptions and rhetorical techniques of mainstream psychology and social science meant that my Ph.D topic and question were reformulated and developed in a particular way - most notably in the emergence of a concern with *how one might claim to know* who is 'fit to parent'. Conventionally, method is presented as 'pure' technology, without reference to the particular object of study, and empirical material is only presented after the methods have been elaborated: an order which sustains the impression of neutral technology being applied objectively to the substantive topic. It would have been disingenuous to have written review or empirical chapters in a style that I had become critical of and self-conscious about. However, I did write empirical chapters in such a way as to omit explicit reflection on both the position from which I speak and the practices through which I 'know' the material. These chapters present themselves as unproblematised (and therefore implicitly objective) literal re-presentations of the real. They are much more persuasive accounts for maintaining this convention. Having method/ology unannounced colludes with the view of knowledge as independent of politics, and reifies selected 'objects' as real. The accounts of parents in chapters 2, 3 and 4 can now be used illustratively for what might otherwise have been an abstract discussion of method.

I intended a discursive tone for this chapter in order to recognise that there are neither uncontested criteria for judging this approach, nor any fixed evaluation of it to which I would commit (see chapter 6). However, the more powerful and familiar style of academic rhetoric proved seductive, and this chapter implicitly charts a progressivist course through debates about 'discourse' to identify the best definition and approach with apparent objectivity. I discuss the appeal of modernist narratives in the final part of this chapter (and this remains a core theme of the further two chapters). However, differences and disagreements amongst discourse analytic approaches are not ignored (see sections 7.2 and 7.3), and the tensions or even contradictions surrounding its adoption are not suppressed (see sections 7.3 and 7.4). Rather, disputes are seen as a resource; both to aid the understanding of different approaches to discourse analysis within psychology (through contextualizing particular approaches within researchers'

theoretical and political orientations); and to keep the approach open and flexible to avoid producing another orthodoxy and limiting the directions of future work.

Firstly in this chapter, I locate institutionally some key writers whose work has been significant for the development of discourse analytic work in social psychology in the UK. Secondly, I discuss the way these writers each define 'discourse'. Thirdly, I discuss whether discourse analytic approaches are seen as an extension of, or a challenge to, social psychology. These sections review some of the debates amongst discourse analysts in social psychology, in particular, contrasting the approach of Potter and Wetherell (1987) with that of Parker (1990; 1992). Finally, I reflect upon the irony that the development (or appropriation) of this approach has renewed critical interest in social psychology when it can be seen as radically undermining the modernist project of psychology. Overall, this chapter aims to discuss some practical implications of adopting a discursive framework, and then to reflect more broadly upon this approach to consider how it is functioning for the academic institution.

7.2 Studying 'discourse' within psychology

Discourse analysis has, over the past five years in particular, established itself as a major alternative approach within social psychology (Potter *et al*., 1990). However, the term itself has been used both to refer to different areas of work, and different approaches. Potter *et al*. describe four distinct strands of work laying claim to the title of discourse analysis in the early 1980s: a cognitive science approach to discourse processes (e.g. patterns of recall for different types of discourse); accounts of verbal interaction considered in relation to speech act theory; a strand emerging from continental philosophy and the analysis of culture; and a fourth strand of analyses of scientific discourse within the sociology of scientific knowledge. They also note the way in which conversational analysis can be either a sub-variety of discourse analysis (e.g. van Dijk, 1985) or a competing theoretical position (e.g. Sharrock and Anderson, 1987, cited in Potter *et al.*,1990*).* Another distinction can be drawn between discourse and text analysis where the former denotes analysis of actual speech/writing and the latter analysis of underlying structures of coherence (Halliday, 1978, cited in Potter *et al., ibid*.). Thus, 'the term is used with radically varying degrees of specificity and

subtle theoretical inflection' (Potter *et al., ibid.* p206). In ***Discourse Analytic Research***, Burman and Parker argue that

> '…it is very difficult to speak of "discourse" or even "discourse analysis" as a single unitary entity, since this would blur together approaches subscribing to specific and different philosophical frameworks. In so far as there could be said to be commonality, these approaches are united by a common attention to the significance and structuring effects of language, and are associated with interpretive and reflexive styles of analysis.' (Burman and Parker, 1993: p3)

That the diversity amongst researchers extends to their adoption of different philosophical frameworks, suggests that the epistemological position upon which discourse analysis rests in this thesis is not its only or inevitable methodological perspective. These parallel the different approaches or research strategies described in chapter 6. In chapter 9, I explore further some of the different epistemological positions between and among researchers using discursive and/or ethnographic approaches.

Up to this point in the thesis, I have distinguished only two broad forms of discourse analysis: one more clearly located within social psychology and including key texts such as Potter and Wetherell (1987) (which I have described as closer to psycholinguistics or Speech Act theory); and one informed by post-structuralism and more associated with broader, and interdisciplinary, discussions around feminism/postmodernism, (e.g. Burman, Alldred *et al.* 1996; Burman, Aitken *et al.*, 1996; Butler, 1990, 1993; Fraser, 1989; Fraser and Nicholson, 1990; Probyn, 1993). The more refined breakdown offered by Potter *et al.* prompts a closer examination of the distinguishing features of these bodies of work. Accounts of background influences and disciplinary location inform discussion of the differences between approaches to discourse. Firstly, some of the significant UK discourse analytic researchers will be located within the work 'clusters' (Burman and Parker, 1993) that represent differing approaches in UK social psychological discourse work. The rest of this section locates these study groups geographically.

Several key centres for the study of discourse within psychology (as a discipline, if not a department) can be identified. Whilst the current academic climate of short-term contracts, as well as the mutual exchange of ideas formally and informally between

these centres means that they have not developed in isolation from each other, they have produced work with distinctive approaches and themes. The development and/or presentation of work in this factional way indicates the institutional culture which results from intensifying competition for funding, whereby research groups emphasise what is distinct about 'their' approach, to present their research as occupying a 'market niche'. Constructive exchanges between groups have continued in spite of such pressures to compete (for instance, the Constructionism/Realism debate between Manchester and Reading groups in 1996). In representing these groups, a tension emerges between wishing to identify differences of approach through which to elucidate my own, and yet not wishing to overstate these differences, or to construct the positions as static and fixed.

Manchester Metropolitan University's Discourse Unit has the full title of the *Centre for Qualitative and Theoretical Research on the Reproduction and Transformation of Language and Subjectivity* and is based in the Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology. Erica Burman convenes the group, and Ian Parker, was co-convenor until his move to take up a Professorship at Bolton Institute in 1996. Subsequently, a separate Discourse Unit was established at Bolton, but for the purpose of distinguishing approaches, these will be grouped together, as indeed they identify themselves within a Tri-Discourse Unit structure (of Bolton, Manchester and Bradford). Their orientation differs from the other UK units in its post-structuralist influence - acknowledging a debt to Foucault - and although it shares theoretical sources with some Cultural Studies work, it retains a standing in the discipline of psychology. This is because of a concern to critique contemporary psychological theory and practice and to involve critical/radical practitioners (educational psychologists, clinical psychologist, psychotherapists), and it relates to the particular interests of Ian Parker in psychiatry, and Erica Burman in developmental and educational psychology, and in feminist psychotherapy. The Unit has strong feminist and Marxist influences, and supports diverse work, including many Ph.Ds - this one amongst them.

The *Discourse and Rhetoric Group* is the base for a substantial group of researchers which includes or has included Jonathon Potter, Michael Billig, Derek Edwards,

David Middleton, Ros Gill, and allied writers such as Celia Kitzinger. It is based in the Department of Social Science at Loughborough University (which comprises Psychology, Sociology and Social Science). Its orientation is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the work of Jonathan Potter and co-authors, and in Michael Billig's work, but, in particular, by two key early texts: *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour* (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), and *Ideological Dilemmas: A Social Psychology of Everyday Thinking* (Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton, Radley, 1988). Margaret Wetherell is keenly associated with the Loughborough group particularly through her co-authorship with Jonathan Potter (especially of *Discourse and Social Psychology,* and *Mapping the Language of Racism*), although she is based at the Open University as Lecturer in Psychology, from where she co-ordinates a *Discourse and Representations Group*. Research employing conversational analysis (such as by Rob Wooffitt) has also been conducted within this group.

Wendy Stainton Rogers is also based at the Open University, where she lectures in Health and Social Welfare. More significantly, however, her intellectual work in this area has centred around a group connected to the Psychology Department at Reading University. Her close link to Reading was through her partnership and co-authorship with Rex Stainton Rogers, who died in February 1999. Together they wrote *Stories of Childhood: Shifting Agendas of Child Concern* (1992) and were seen as the 'convenors' of a collective named *Beryl Curt* which has also supported many postgraduate researchers. The group's name is a spoonerism of the name of a prolific, acclaimed British psychologist, Sir Cyril Burt. Burt's influential twin studies in the second quarter of this century were later shown to have been faked, since neither the impressively large twin sample, or the researcher he published with, appear to have existed. This is a deliberate display of the group's irreverence towards, yet location within, psychology. The group have published *Textuality and Tectonics* (1994) and *Social Psychology: A Critical Agenda* (R. Stainton Rogers, P. Stenner, K. Gleeson, W. Stainton Rogers, 1995) and are a site of current lively debate.

As these book titles show, these discourse units are generally orientated towards psychology and provide a niche for discourse analytic research within the discipline,

usually in social, but occasionally in developmental psychology. However, in psychology departments at Reading, and Manchester Metropolitan, Universities, (and also at the University of East London), this work goes on alongside more mainstream psychology which can, having granted it a place, keep discourse work ghettoized and marginal to the undergraduate syllabus, thereby containing its critique of the discipline and its practices. This is one of the three possible responses of psychology as a discipline to discourse analytic work which Potter and Wetherell set out in 1987. For more detail about UK groups see descriptions by Ashmore (1985, 1989), Parker (1991a) and Potter (1989, 1990) (cited in Parker, 1992).

7.3 Defining 'discourse': 'discourses' versus 'interpretive repertoires'

In 1987, in their key text, ***Discourse and Social Psychology***, Potter and Wetherell develop the concept of 'interpretative repertoires'. They use the term 'discourse'

> 'in its more open sense, following Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), to cover all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal and written texts of all kinds. So, when we talk of "discourse analysis" we mean analysis of any of these forms of discourse' (p7).

They describe the work of Gilbert and Mulkay (1980, 1984) on the accounts given by scientists about research work, and sometimes use the word 'discourse' in this general, commonsense way: 'Gilbert and Mulkay designated [the] two situations in which scientists generated discourse the "formal" and "informal" contexts, respectively' (p147). So, in order to refer to a particular kind of account which the scientists sometimes employed, they use the notion of 'interpretative repertoires'. Thus, an account characterised by empiricism was from the 'empiricist repertoire', as opposed to an alternative repertoire.

> 'Interpretative repertoires are recurrently used systems of terms used for characterising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena. A repertoire, like the empiricist and contingent repertoires, is constituted through a limited range of terms used in particular stylistic and grammatical constructions. Often a repertoire will be organised around specific metaphors and figures of speech' (Potter and Wetherell, *ibid*.: p149).

Thus, 'interpretive repertoire' is an analytic concept to identify a sub-set of the linguistic/conceptual resources available.

Parker builds on Potter and Wetherell's definition of 'interpretive repertoires', but shows, by sounding three notes of criticism, why he prefers the term 'discourse':

> 'We should be cautious, though, about three aspects of this label "interpretive repertoire": (i) to talk about "grammatical constructions" is inappropriate and risks getting bogged down in formalism at the expense of content; (ii) the assertion that there is a "limited range of terms" feeds the positivist fantasy for an ultimate complete picture of a particular system, a totality of meanings; and (iii) the term "repertoire" has uncomfortable resonances with behaviourism, especially when we are invited to look for systems of terms which are "recurrently used"' (Parker, 1992: p11).

From this he concludes that 'it is surely better to label sets of metaphors and statements we find as "*discourses*"' (*ibid*.).

Parker's rejection of grammatical markers for an interpretive repertoire/discourse, and his preference for markers that are about content, suggests a greater concern with semantics, than with linguistics. It therefore reflects his concern with ideology and the political consequences of meaning, and thus indicates his distance from a psycholinguistics or conversation analysis approach. It implies a broader focus than does Potter and Wetherell's more grammatical delineation, and this paves the way for the differences of opinion as to where the edges of a study are drawn.

Whilst both Parker, and Potter and colleagues are concerned with 'discourse analysis', examining what constitutes appropriate material for analysis reveals subtle differences. Comparing their 'objects of study' reveals that their concepts of 'discourse' and 'interpretive repertoire' do not, in fact, coincide fully. Potter and Wetherell apply discourse analysis to 'spoken interaction ..and written texts', and describe discourse analysis as 'focus[ing] on the role of discourse in interaction and sense making rather than being concerned with, for example, abstract questions of semantics, text coherence or aesthetics' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: p184). Theirs is a more inter-subjective focus, such as in conversational analysis, on the specific interaction between two individuals.

In contrast, Parker wishes to open up the field of study to 'texts', defined far more broadly as 'delimited tissues of meaning reproduced in any form that can be given an interpretative gloss' (Parker 1990a: p193). Texts have 'discourses "at work" in them'

or contain 'pieces of discourse' (Parker, 1992). Since for Parker, all tissues of meaning are texts, they are all potential objects of study. Such a broad definition renders any aspect of our social world studyable and the range of forms which the object of study may take is expanded - one only need specify. Once everything can be thought of as textual and the process of interpretation and reflection has been started, 'we can adopt the post-structuralist maxim "There is nothing outside of the text" (Derrida, 1976, p158)' (Parker, 1992). Parker argues that this need not necessarily commit us to a particular position on the nature of reality, textual or otherwise, and this point will be taken up in chapter 8.

Thus, as one examines the discussion of definitions of 'discourse' and 'discourse analysis', it becomes apparent that despite their closeness in the broader picture of psychological methods, there are subtle distinctions between 'discursive approaches' within contemporary social psychology. Parker, and Potter, together with Wetherell and colleagues, are not, in fact, speaking about precisely the same approach, nor object of study.

7.4 'Discourses' and 'texts'

Parker's preferred definition of discourse - following Foucault (1972) - is 'a system of statements which constructs an object'. He points out that 'people too can be the objects of discourse' (1990a: p191). Discourses are 'linguistic sets of a higher order than the sentence (while often reducible to a sentence) and *carried out* or *actualised* by means of texts' (Marin, 1983: p162, cited in Parker, 1990a). Parker's definition and approach draws a post-structuralist influence not only from the work of writers such as Foucault, Barthes, Derrida, Lacan, but also from the UK writers who have applied such work to psychology and its 'subject' (Henriques *et al*., 1984; Hollway, 1989). He quotes Henriques *et al.* and notes the explicit link to the work of Foucault:

> 'The metaphors, analogies and pictures discourses paint of a reality can be distilled into statements about that reality. It is only then that it becomes possible to say that a discourse is "any regulated system of statements" (Henriques *et al*., 1984: p105, cited in Parker, 1990a: p192).

This makes clear the fact that the identification of discourse is an act of analysis by researchers. A discourse is about objects, and *discourse analysis* is about discourses as objects (Parker, 1992). Although discourses are quite coherent in their historical

context, it is through the process of elaborating or interrogating them that they become more carefully systematized (Parker, 1990a). It is this condensing or abstracting (reducing, say, to a sentence) which produces what we can then refer to as a discourse. Thus, the active role of the researcher, and the status of discourse as artefact are explicit in this definition. This helps to avoid reifying discourses as pre-existing social objects. In contrast to this, Potter and Wetherell tend to speak of discourses 'emerging' from, and through, the reading and re-reading of the text (1987: esp. chapter 8). This replicates the conventional practice of obscuring the processes by which analysis occurs, and furthermore, implies that any given analysis was inevitable, would have been 'found' by any researcher and is therefore objective (independent of perspective of the researcher). This contrasts with the explicit role of the researcher's own (political) perspective for Parker.

According to Parker, one does not find 'a discourse' in a piece of text, one finds fragments or elements of a discourse, and this is why a researcher needs to bring in their knowledge of the culture of which they are a participant. This shifts away from the image of a researcher looking onto culture, as if detached, as in objective-positivist models of research, (or onto an other culture as if free of the lens of their own culture as in the classical ethnographies of cross-cultural anthropology). The different implications of these perspectives are examined further in chapter 8. In order to disentangle a discourse from within a text, Parker, in a characteristically post-structuralist move, states that 'we have to bring a knowledge of discourses from outside onto any example of fragment of discourse for it to become part of a coherent system in our analysis' (1990a: p193). This distinguishes different forms of discourse analysis. In practice, analysis can either be focused tightly on text such as an interview transcript (as Potter and Wetherell tend to), or can be broader than a delimited source. The focus could be on the meanings produced by a visual image, or a combination of visual and verbal, such as Parker's (1992) analyses of a badge and a computer game, or Whelldon's (1992) analysis of the contradictions between ideas about mothers in the visual imagery and verbal accounts within South African women's magazines.

This latter position has been the approach adopted within this thesis. In chapters 2, 3 and 4, I made interpretations of a range of cultural sources or texts. For Chapter 2, in particular, my account implicitly identified discourses from a range of cultural forms, not only linguistic within parenting magazines, including, for instance, the way close-up photography of women's faces helps constitute the discourse which 'genders' the reader, or snapshot photographs authenticise the first person accounts as 'real-life'. Discussion sometimes broadened out from the original text, and I drew on information from other aspects of my cultural experience. This is perhaps most obvious in chapter 4, where discussion of campaigns and reference to campaign sources – as well as my more polemical tone - make politics more explicit, but the less explicit ways in which my political and personal investments informed the analysis of chapters 2 and 3 are no less significant. My use of examples from fiction, newspapers and policy documents alongside each other relied on the view of them as texts within which cultural discourses could be discerned. However, I did not make explicit my own acts of interpretation, nor the processes of selection, abstraction and articulation which produce (rather than simply 'discern') discourses from texts. I therefore colluded in the presentation of method as a neutral tool, applied to material from which these analyses, with appropriate methods, would emerge. By not specifying otherwise and by employing a comfortable, conventional language style, I produced an implicitly realist warrant for the account even though I did not always seek to present the account as necessarily objective. Therefore, I reinforced an objective-realist epistemology and, as Potter *et al.* warn against, I reified the particular discourses of mothers/fathers/parents that I wrote about. Chapter 6 considered this problem of reification and chapter 9 considers the dilemmas raised when it is apparent that accounts which retain realist and objectivist warrants are more powerful than those which admit that they are produced and partial.

7.5 Discourse analysis versus the analysis of discourse

Potter *et al.* (1990) highlight the dangers of reifying discourses as objects and argue that by calling something 'a discourse' - and approaching discourse analysis with criteria for identifying a discourse, as does Parker - one implies it has the status of something prior to analysis. This is one of the three key problems they identify in Parker's approach. They claim that discourses are objectified in being defined as 'sets

of statements' and they illustrate the danger through an analogy with geological plate tectonics: that discourses sound like great plates sometimes crashing against each other, sometimes slipping quickly past each other, with the possibilities of volcanic eruptions and unseen forces working below. Despite Parker's intention to the contrary, according to Potter *et al.*, the problem is that

> 'discourses in this view become formed as coherent and carefully systematized (Parker, 1989, p5) wholes which take on the status of causal agents for analytic purposes. That is, the processes of interest are seen as those of (abstract) discourse working on another (abstract) discourse' (p209).

(However, despite these possible dangers, the Beryl Curt collective make broad and extended use of geological metaphors for their theoretical approach in their 1994 book ***Textuality and Tectonics***). According to Potter *et al.*, what is missing is the 'actual working of discourse as a constitutive part of social practices situated in specific contexts' (*ibid.*: p209). Concern with the 'pragmatic work that is done in text and talk' (p209) reflects their concern with the function of language, and indeed, carries strong echoes of Speech Act Theory. Parker's proposition that discourse analysis *requires* treating discourses as objects of study makes explicit the nature of discourse as artefact. He argues that 'discourse analysis *deliberately* systematizes different ways of talking so that we can understand them better' (Parker 1992: p5). That treating something formulated (not non-empirically) by the researcher 'as if' it has the status of object allows one to 'hold it still' for long enough to consider its ideological functions and connections to wider relations of power. This is why Potter *et al*. reject Parker's conflation of 'discourse analysis' with the 'analysis of *discourses*' (p208). The concern of Potter *et al.* with pragmatics or with *what the discourse is doing in the particular context* is a very similar concern to that of Parker (1990a; 1990b; 1992) and Parker and Burman (1993), but is focused at a different level - at one closer to the individual and their experiences in interactions:

> 'From our perspective, objects are constructed in talk and text in such a way as to perform actions, and actions can be studied precisely in terms of their context - fittedness and variability, including their uptake - the ways in which phenomena such as next turns, responses and reactions implicate them as actions' (Potter *et al.* 1990: p210).

In contrast they propose that 'interpretative repertoires' be understood as '*abstractions* from practices in context' (Potter *et al.*, 1990: p209). Extending this

argument yet further, some writers, such as Stenner (1993), avoid using either term ('discourse' or 'repertoire') as a noun in order to avoid this problem of reification. That is, to avoid making it sound as if the object (which we might call 'discourse') is real, something that pre-exists, rather than is an analytic invention of, the researcher. Instead, Stenner conducts a 'close reading which attempts to separate a given text into coherent themes or stories', which he calls a 'thematic decomposition' (Stenner, 1993: p114). His themes, or different stories inevitably become objectified within his analysis - and it is hard to imagine how one could discuss them without doing so - but he attempts to avoid granting them existence beyond his analysis by insisting on calling them 'his readings' as opposed even to *his* interpretation (of something already there). Stenner's approach might be located closer to the post-structuralist influenced strand, than that of Widdicombe (in the same edited collection) who prefers instead to focus on the 'dynamic and pragmatic aspects of language use' (Widdicombe, 1993, cited in Burman and Parker, 1993: p2).

However, Parker and Burman (1993) believe that we are 'ineluctably caught in the trap of reifying the discourse' (p162). This danger is particularly acute when discourses are depicted as 'abstract and autonomous meaning-systems that float above social practice' and their delineation is merely an academic pursuit (p162). In this sense, the study of discourse is doing to its object what empiricism does as it treats that which it can 'measure' as the real. Several features of what Parker and Burman consider good practice could help to reduce these problems, including attention to the complex inter-relation of language and social practice, and reflection on the way we try to articulate this, and attempting to avoid constructing discourse as the sum total of, rather than the manifestation of, structural power relationships.

Following a Foucauldian approach to discourse as comprising both language and social practices (see chapter 5), there is no conceptual distinction between the discourse (or linguistic resources) with which *to speak of* lone mothers, and, say, the payment of social security which constructs her as 'single', head of household, having dependents, and, in turn, positions her in some discourses, as 'welfare dependent'. Parker and Burman (1993) maintain that there is a role for identifying material practices distinct from linguistic ones, as a strategic way of emphasizing the material

aspects of linguistic practice, but see the two as fundamentally bound up with each other and integral to each others' power.

The discussion of authority regarding childrearing practices in chapters 2 and 6 provides an illustration of this. Discourses provide the means by which institutions are structured and re/produce particular power relations. The institutionalized authority positions around children are maintained through the provision of rights to speak within psychological discourse. Any of us might express opinions about appropriate childrearing practices employing psychological discourses, but our authority can be challenged by, and our discursive position subjugated to, someone employing a discourse which constructs their knowledge as expertise. A discursive statement warranted by reference to personal experience that a mother may make can be relegated to the status of mere lay knowledge by those holding an institutionalised expert position (health visitor, GP, etc.) at a site at which the supposed objectivity of expertise implicitly (or explicitly) devalues experience as 'merely' subjective.

It is sometimes argued that the post-structuralist postulate of the all-encompassing nature of discourses - reflected earlier in the Derridean comment about all the world as textual - and the emphasis on the powerful way discourses operate and their connections to institutions leaves no room for resistance. It makes them sound too powerful, and as if they are monolithic structures of meaning bearing down on helpless individuals. In response to the criticism that discourses sound too fixed, and leave no room for a person to say something that has not been said before, Parker (1992) cites Henriques *et al.* (1984: p105-6):

> '[t]he systematic character of a discourse includes its systematic articulation with other discourses. In practice, discourses delimit what can be said, whilst providing the spaces - the concepts, metaphors, models, analogies - for making new statements within any specific discourse.'

He continues:

> 'This point raises, in turn, two further issues. First, metaphors and analogies are always available from other discourses, and the space this gives the speaker to find a voice from another discourse, and even within a discourse they oppose, is theoretically limitless. (It is not limitless in practice…)'. (Parker, 1992: p13)

In reflecting upon whether discourses have been reified in her research account, Deborah Marks asks: 'Have "discourses" come to look like ideological apparatuses? The implication here is that people are imprisoned within their texts and that there is no such thing as communication, but only the battle between different, untranslatable ways of seeing' (Marks, 1993: p150). This was a key starting point for the elaboration of the concept of discourse in this thesis (see chapter 5). To be useful, I have argued that a discursive approach needs to recognise both the power of (psychological) discourse, and the room for manoeuvre within it, resistance to it, and the unpredictable nature of its political effects such that critique needs continually reworking. These points have been persistent features of feminist engagements with, and criticisms of, the work of Foucault.

Potter, Wetherell and colleagues emphasise the constitutive and functional aspects of language. Indeed, the body of work they prefer to identify as discourse analysis is marked by the presence of these three strands: (1) a concern with the functional orientation of language, (2) a concern to 'address the constructive processes that are part and parcel of the functional orientation, and (3) an awareness of the variability thrown up by this orientation' (Potter *et al.,* 1990: p207). Agreeing with post-structuralist and social constructionist approaches about the constitutive nature of language, there is a danger that a concern with 'the functional orientation of language' could leave as little room for individuals to resist dominant discourses as some critics felt of a Foucauldian approach. However, Potter *et al.* argue that this must not be understood in a mechanical way. They point out that meanings and outcomes cannot be guaranteed, and offer Billig's (1987; 1989b) approach to the study of discourse as an analysis of rhetorical struggles.

Parker retains each of these aspects, but builds on them to develop a slightly different emphasis. He is more concerned with the social relations of power that discourses support, than with the technical details of the operation of a given grammatical structure in interaction between individuals. Hence, in addition to his seven necessary and sufficient criteria for identifying a discourse, are three 'most important' auxiliary criteria which research *should* focus upon: that discourses support institutions, reproduce power relations and have ideological effects (Parker, 1992: p17).

Parker does not want to use grammar as a marker of discourse because, for him, this would limit the approach. An emphasis on semantic links better allows a politically informed analysis. Alongside the issue of the extent to which one ought to 'go beyond the text', these indicate something coherent in the differences between the orientations of these two centres of discourse analytic work. It can be argued that the approach of Potter and his colleagues is closer to a psychological, or linguistic focus on language, and that Parker's broader analysis is closer to a cultural studies or contemporary social/political theory. This difference appears to be a feature not only of backgrounds in different theoretical traditions: where psycholinguistics, and microsociological approaches such as ethnomethodology (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), as opposed to semiotics and post-structuralism, orient these researchers in different directions, but also a matter of political and/or academic investments. Where Potter's interest is in developing 'a coherent discourse analytic programme *in* Psychology' (Potter *et al.*, 1990: p205, my emphasis) or 'a new social psychological orientation to such [discursive] research' (*ibid.*: p207), Parker's interest is reflection on and criticism of the knowledge practices and truth effects of psychology and the institutional practices such theory sustains. This is supported by his belief that such 'attention to language can also facilitate a process of progressively politicising everyday life' (Parker, 1992: p21).

Of course, my presentation of the debates undoubtedly relates to my own interests and emphases in this study. My aim is not to produce knowledge about the significance of these writers' backgrounds from a 'superior' vantage point which implies I can see (know) what they cannot. This is why their comments on each others' work is of interest. Indeed, the authors may feel the differences are more significant than I have conveyed, since they might resist my initial placing of them within the same category and therefore as comparable. Potter *et al.* (1990) mark a significant difference when they locate Parker's approach amongst those influenced by semiology or post-structuralism and describe it as 'centred in the entirely different tradition of continental social philosophy and cultural analysis' (1990: p206). My rhetorical use of the construction of two 'camps' is not intended to reify and fix (two) oppositional theoretical positions. Indeed, interesting collaborative work has been produced since

191

this chapter was first written (e.g. Nightingale and Cromby, 1999; Parker, 1998; Parker and the Bolton Discourse Network, 1999). My aim is to explore some of the issues raised by the use of discursive approaches within psychology and the distinctions between researchers who have taken 'the linguistic turn', yet remain within social psychology.

7.6 Doing 'discourse' *within* psychology?

In the introduction to **Discourse Dynamics** (1992), Ian Parker develops his 1990 position, putting politics first, before an investment in bettering the discipline of psychology. He writes:

> 'it is better to start with a wish to deconstruct power and ideology and *then* look at how a study of discourse dynamics could help. You have to be, in some senses, outside psychology to do that. Inside psychology, the emergence of a discourse framework starts with the "turn to language".' (pxi)

In contrast to this, some researchers begin 'inside' the discipline - perhaps being already located in psychology, their personal investment in this as 'what they do' means that 'valuable work' is defined solely within the terms of the discipline itself. These are terms which do not rate political intervention or ethical 'application' centrally. Potter and Wetherell (1987) emphasize the development of the approach from influences within, or close to, psychology (e.g. psycholinguistics, linguistic philosophy, ethnomethodology). This creates the sense of legitimacy for discourse analysis (Burman, 1990). As Burman argues, restricting the focus to within the discipline precludes recognition for the impact of broader influences, including critique and resistance, in the same way that Reason and Rowan's (1981) account of post-positivism fails to locate it within the history of feminist criticism and current critical debates. This narrow focus also reinforces the idea of the natural, evolutionary development of the discipline (which is constructed as a 'healthy' discipline responding to change). Firstly, it was argued by those influenced by feminist, post-colonial or post-structuralist writing that the object of the discipline was actually an historically and culturally specific form of human subject. This required that psychology amend its assertions of universality and ahistoricity, and qualify the presumed centrality of its perspective (see chapter 8). It adapted though, because being a science, disproving old theories to develop new ones is its trade. By reducing difference to graspable (indeed measurable) 'factors' it was able to incorporate 'non-

standard' subjects - and it now looked at the individual in his (now 'his or her') social context and provided a gender or class analysis of difference between subjects. However, its knowledge of even these differentiated individuals was problematised as the individual-social dichotomy was undermined by the 'turn to language'. This is the point at which this discussion - of whether discourse work is incorporated into, or stands outside of psychology – can be located.

Potter and Wetherell's position is contradictory. At times they present discourse analysis as the next step in developing better methods in psychology, and at other times they use it to deconstruct the conventional approach and rhetoric of psychological research (Burman, 1990). Discursive work can occupy an ambiguous position inside or outside (and against) psychology, and overall, Potter and Wetherell emphasize their location within social psychology and retain their authority as experts. Despite criticizing psychologists' use of particular rhetorical techniques to convey authority, they are largely unreflective of their own position as producers of knowledge. This is particularly significant given the 'key text' status that this book now has within the field. Section 7.7 continues the discussion of reflexivity in this text.

Parker describes discourse analysis as 'both a symptom and part of the cure' because he sees the 'preoccupation with language in contemporary psychology [as] a symptom of an evasion of the material basis of oppression (in the practical order) on the part of academics' (1990a: p201). Psychology's conventional perspective has been a narrow focus on its object of study, the individual. This individual is constructed through the 'fantasy of bounded and knowable beings, and '"sold" on the "best-selling stories" of "the Cartesian Family": about minds without bodies, mental skills rather than embodied and situated collective performances' (Macauley and Gordo-Lopez, 1995: p17), that it is not difficult to see that social psychology - as we have known it - might be conceptualised as humpty-dumpty (Burman, 1990: p218). That is, it's hard to see how psychology can be put back together after such challenges to its fundamental nature and ways.

Discourse analysis has succeeded in provoking a reflection on psychological practice, and its philosophical underpinnings, by examining psychologists' discourse (Potter, 1988b) and it 'reframes the object' - individual psychology - and allows us to treat it not as truth, but as one 'truth' held in place by language and power (Parker, 1990a). By employing his three auxiliary criteria, Parker believes we can 'describe, educate and change the way a discourse is used' and so shift the relationships it encodes/produces: 'Discourse analysis should become a variety of action research, in which the internal system of any discourse and its relation to others is challenged. It alters, and so permits different spaces for manoeuvre and resistance' (1990a: p201). Though as Parker and Burman (1993) identify, in our efforts to make discourse analysis more accessible, we can end up teaching it as 'a technology, as a theory-free method' (p162) and allowing it to function in ways that are compatible with conventional empiricist research. Without attending to Parker's three supplementary points, there is the danger that the analysis of discourse becomes just another method (Parker, 1992). Politics are not tied to, or guaranteed by, this method, but rather, when applied within a 'progressive' political framework this approach may facilitate 'progressive' analyses.

Discourse analysis alters the questions that are asked (Gergen, 1989; Harre, 1989). Abrams and Hogg (1990) in an exchange in *Philosophical Psychology* ask whether discourse analysis can look at the same things that social psychology does. They want to integrate discourse analysis into social psychology, are keen to emphasise interpretative aspects and stress that discourse cannot be analysed in the abstract, but needs empirical study of its operation in context and attention to 'what the reader does with it'. Their concern is that although 'discourse can be regarded as the social process *par excellence*, it is portrayed by Parker as abstracted, reified and unconnected with individual or social psychological processes' (1990b: p230). Their emphasis is on social processes underlying people's use of discourse, and they argue that Parker attributes agency to the discourses (constructing objects) instead of to the people using them. They keep Mead's (1934) usage of reflexivity and read Parker's 'we have to take a position [as a subject within discourse]' as too strong, as attributing too much power to discourse. It becomes apparent, however, that their criticisms of Parker's work stem from their non-post-structuralist position on language:

'It does seem plausible that power relations are reflected in discourse, but not that discourses reproduce these relations. Discourse is not an agent, it is a medium for, and form of, communication' (p221).

A useful aspect of discursive approaches which could benefit work throughout psychology is the reflexivity urged upon researcher and reader (Parker, 1992). Reflexivity is about trying to look critically, in a way that makes the everyday, and our place within it, seem strange (after Dorothy Smith, 1987), which is to say, make it visible as opposed to taken-for-granted. Parker's position is that 'reflexivity needs to be grounded and post-structuralist work can locate discourse and meaning historically' (1990a: p190). Reflexivity is not, however, a panacea, it does not dissolve discourse, though it can help us reflect on what happens when we speak or write (Parker and Burman, 1993). Parker, like Nancy Fraser (see chapter 6), notes that reflexivity itself, as well as the discourses it might reflect upon, is culturally and historically specific. Some of the forms reflexivity commonly takes in social research are explored in chapter 8.

Harre, Shotter and Gergen have been key writers in the uptake of social constructionism in psychology. At times, their approaches to discourse have been more constructionist than post-structuralist informed in that they have shared a focus on individual interaction, and 'small scale or intimate forms of social life' (Morss, 1995: p55). This position sometimes presupposes a liberal analysis of society comprising 'distinct individuals with rational awareness of needs' (*ibid*.: p56). Two problems with this are that there sometimes remain elements of humanism in which the unitary subject is left intact (Bowers, 1988), and that this voluntaristic model of the individual sustains a naïve model of the free market in which it is assumed all individuals are free to make their rational choices, denying the structural inequalities which prevent equality of access. Abrams and Hogg (1990) view Parker's approach as allowing no room for psychological processes, but symbolic interactionist approaches, and therefore the notion of reflexivity which they adopt from Mead, rely on this modernist (psychological) construction of the subject.

7.7 The *new improved* psychology

Post-structuralist informed critiques of psychology challenge its fundamental assumptions. They destabilize the discipline by relativizing its claims to knowledge. It is therefore difficult to see how the project of psychology can be maintained whilst these critiques are acknowledged, yet it appears that certain new approaches within psychology claim not only to acknowledge, but actually incorporate post-structuralist or postmodernist ideas. This section will consider the way in which some texts present themselves as informed by the radical arguments of post-structuralism, yet manage also to present themselves as authorities on the latest 'developments' in ways of doing psychological research. General paradoxes surrounding the uptake of post-structuralist ideas in the academy are illustrated through the particular ironies of these texts. Potter and Wetherell's (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology* (described above) is of particular significance within British social psychology, and occupies the tenuous position of espousing an approach which radically destabilizes conventional psychological study and the authority of researchers, yet secures for itself a location on the bookshelf as an authoritative pronouncement of the latest way to do psychological research. Kenneth Gergen, a well-known and prolific US psychologist, occupies a similar position when he describes a 'postmodern psychology' in Steiner Kvale's collection *Psychology and Postmodernism* (1992). I characterise these texts in order to draw out the potential ironies of postmodernist academic theory, without claiming that they represent each author's work or necessarily characterise their later work.

To summarise some of the arguments presented in chapters 5 and 6, post-structuralist approaches within the social sciences problematise the conceptualisation of language as a mirror of social reality; the existence of 'the individual' prior to and distinct from the social; and the conceptualisation of the subject as unitary and rational. Postmodernism questions the epistemological presumptions to challenge the scientific method's claim to provide privileged access to truth. The existence of truth, as something objective and independent of the perspective from which it is viewed (Truth) is undermined. As a consequence, the presumed universality of knowledge so generated is doubted. In place of Truth are more modest culturally-specific knowledges, within which are even more partial subject positions or vantage points

which an observer might occupy. Furthermore, the attempt to claim such knowledge is subject to contestation or political deconstruction (chapter 6 and 8).

Each of these arguments provide the grounds for a radical critique of psychology. Its whole project is fundamentally problematized: firstly, as a modernist practice (seeking objective truth through the evolution of special methods providing privileged ways of looking at reality); and secondly, as a discipline for which the objects of inquiry have been conceptualised as essentially pre-social objects (the mind, the psyche or the individual). Neither psychology's object nor methods of inquiry remain unproblematized, yet somehow, the radical nature of this critique can be contained and the approach can be incorporated back into psychology as a 'new method' (Parker and Burman, 1993).

Changing the Subject, the collectively written text by Henriques *et al*. (1984), was a key text in which the implications of post-structuralist ideas for psychology were elaborated and a new approach to the theorization of subjectivity was developed. Venn, in a chapter which presents a critique of the theoretical presuppositions underpinning the discipline, demonstrates that the new approach 'cannot occupy the theoretical space of existing psychology but is part of a wider project' (p152).

However, despite the fact that, as Gergen notes, the majority of contemporary psychological inquiry is still conducted within a modernist framework (scientific psychology remaining 'insulated from both extraneous stimuli and disagreeable ideas' (1992: p20)), there has been a significant, although perhaps relatively confined, interest in social constructionism and deconstructionist approaches within the sub-discipline of social psychology. Sage publications now has at least nine books in the Inquiries in Social Construction series. The series editors are Kenneth Gergen and John Shotter, both of whom are important figures associated with the uptake of post-structuralist ideas into psychology, and both of whom have a chapter in a 1992 book in the series, *Psychology and Postmodernism*.

In Gergen's chapter, 'Towards a Postmodern Psychology', one of the indications of the 'damage limitation' exercise he performs on potentially undermining arguments,

is the way he mentions, in passing, that the reason he engaged with postmodernism in the first place was because it 'promised to be an interesting intellectual adventure' (1992: p26). This somewhat reduces the urgency of responding to these ideas, as if the discipline might confidently elect not to engage with these culture-wide shifts, such as general challenges to scientific authority (Lyon, 1994; Richards, 1999). Furthermore, it becomes apparent that Gergen does not share the political concerns of writers who developed post-structuralist approaches in tandem with their critiques of the individualism inherent in the individual-social dichotomy (e.g. Henriques *et al., ibid*.). His motivations are therefore not, (or are not made explicit as), political ones which can be allied with theorists whose work is drawn on in chapters 5, 6 and 8, who are, at least historically, associated with the left, and/or feminist or anti-racist struggles.

After discussing features of 'the postmodern turn' that are problematic for psychology, when Gergen says 'Yet, such a rapid exit seems both unwise and unwarranted' (p25), it becomes apparent that he is not referring to an exit from psychology, but from postmodernism! His explanation as to why such a move is unwarranted comes close to the argument that taking up or responding to new ideas are all part of the inevitable march of progress:

> "It is unwise because postmodernist views, once savored, can scarcely be abandoned. They are, as one young man put it, like a 'sweet poison'. Once tasted, the appetite becomes insatiable. They are an outgrowth of our historical era, and *once sophisticated there is no return to virginal purity*."(p25) [emphasis added]

This discourse of progression from purity or naïvite to sophistication retains the 'civilizing' project of science. It is a developmental narrative of progress. Interestingly, whilst the language of 'appetite' and 'savouring' echoes this narrative through the idea of biological urges being brought under control by (rational) knowledge, this mind over body construction is employed with a twist: sophistication is not healthy and wholesome, in fact it is an ambivalent and ultimately damaging 'sweet poison'.

It becomes clear that departure would be unwarranted: because postmodernism does not present such a terrible threat after all. The purported challenges to psychology are,

according to Gergen, over-exaggerated because, what 'the postmodern turn' actually does is 'begins to offer psychology new ways of conceptualising itself and its potentials' (p25). This promise of renewal for psychology again draws upon the progressivist 'up the mountain' discourse, so that newness is advance and betterment. This is the conventional way of presenting change within a scientific (or pseudo-scientific) discipline. Gergen's 'better' psychology might be something that I would agree is more ethical, but because he does not present 'progress' as politicized, as informed by political criticism of psychology, but as inevitable (simply by drawing on the default rhetoric), his text does not offer any evidence that it may be. Whilst a postmodernist position might reject any 'betterments' as suspect, a feminist post-structuralist position might 'permit' that I allow myself to be convinced by a discourse of progression/progressivism when it is explicitly politicized (so that the criteria are rendered visible and hence subject to reassessment), and with a degree of reflexivity that acknowledges the critique is as much a historical product of culture as the phenomenon. By remaining politically non-committal here, Gergen appears to retain, largely uncritically, the project of psychology. The potentially radical nature of the critiques is not recognised, and the position he assumes is one of reformer of the discipline. Far from challenging the psychological project, it is reinforced. That the challenge post-structuralist or postmodernist ideas present might be so easily dropped if they prove too difficult is a position more easily available to established and tenured academics who feel they can retreat into mainstream psychology if needs be, where shifts in perspective will be viewed positively as progress in 'new directions'. In places, his comments have the tone of reassurances to petulant psychologists that 'it's not so bad really'. He continues to identify himself with a psychological perspective, which underscores the stability of the discipline, as well as his location within it, and promotes the option of ignoring (these or other) potentially 'poisonous' ideas.

What does Gergen's new psychology look like then? It includes

> 'various forms of therapy, skill training and minority education programs [which] serve as useful technologies for various groups' and is accompanied by the caution that psychologists must not 'objectify terms such as "performance", "deficits", "evaluation" and "psychotherapy", but instead must remain sensitive to the social and valuational implications of such work, then such technologies would be congenial with postmodernism' (*ibid*.: p26).

That we ought to be reflexive about the politics of our practice is, I agree, an imperative, but one which very modernist critiques of psychology (Marxist, feminist and humanist) have long since pointed out. As Parker is at pains to stress, 'reflexivity needs to be grounded if it is to have progressive effects' and it seems post-structuralist work can usefully ground discourse and reflexivity (1992: p4).

Gergen's retention of a modernist role for psychology is confirmed when he writes that 'psychologists should not be dissuaded by postmodernism from *forging ahead with technological developments*'. To justify this reassurance, he writes that 'It is not technology (or "knowing how") that is called into question by postmodernism, but the truth claims placed upon the accompanying descriptions and explanations (the "knowing that")' So psychologists can retain cause-and-effect narratives of 'how (e.g. mainstream developmental psychology) and psychology itself can be saved from what might have been a damning critique - so long as psychologists omit to say 'and this is true' they can avoid the criticism that they're making authoritative statements that embody a claim to superior knowledge. Even a position which is careful to only 'know that' is necessarily presuming and thereby reinforcing all kinds of things upon which the 'knowing that' rests. Given that the authority of psychology as a discourse is already so well established that it remains powerful without either making explicit its knowledge warrant or being associated with the body of an expert (as chapter 2 and 6 discuss) it would seem that its claim to be providing a superior truth will remain wherever it is not explicitly undermined. Gergen's position here implies a failure to acknowledge existing power relations, and to recognise that different discourses, for example, that of a child's psychological 'adjustment' against one about 'short, sharp shocks' at detention centres, or a teacher's account of a child as hyperactive versus his mother's position that he is a naughty boy, do not operate 'on an level playing field'. He even states explicitly his position that 'discourse exists in an open market' (p26). Post-structuralism has been drawn on within this thesis to counter precisely this position. This fantasy of the 'free market' is closely linked to neo-liberal (e.g. Thatcherite) 'non-intervention' in the economy. To imagine that competitors begin with equal advantage, from the same starting point is, at best, naive, and at worst, a dereliction of moral duty in allowing existing relations of power to be perpetuated. There is no neutral or 'free space', rather the 'space' as it is imagined is already

marked with power relations and investments (including corporate, institutional, disciplinary and professional). This includes the realm of meaning, where there is no clean slate onto which only new meanings can be projected (unlike fantasies of cyberspace sometimes presume), instead there is a struggle to assert our preferred meanings and continued tensions with those of the past (Alldred, 1996c). To fail to appreciate this represents the worst of postmodernist relativism.

Despite Gergen's 'nod' of recognition to Foucault for pointing out that 'matters of description cannot be separated from issues of power' (p23), it is not clear how 'know how' avoids being bound up with power. Would it not be a well-meaning, predominantly white psychology providing the 'minority eduction programs'? Even 'know-how' rather than 'know-that' presumes some validity for its knowledge, so how would the power inherent in these claims, and in the relations between (white or black) psychologists and black/minority clients be managed? This mirrors the well-intended attempts to conduct more egalitarian research (see e.g. chapter 8) or to have less imbalanced therapeutic relationships and the critique of the notion of empowerment that has since developed. Gergen does not seem to recognise the power vested in psychology to any degree that would require he reflected on the investments he and others have in psychology and in the position of psychological expert.

Despite not articulating a political project, Gergen holds onto the idea that psychology has emancipatory potential through transforming discourses and therefore promoting cultural change. He believes that psychology can furnish people with alternative options by challenging taken-for-granted concepts and allowing other concepts to replace them, and by 'telling it like it may become' rather than simply 'telling it like it is'. This creative gesture could go beyond the merely descriptive role Gergen outlined above. However, it is not clear what will ensure that the replacements are preferable to the old concepts since he does not state any political objectives, nor make his values explicit. It is interesting that he can avoid using the word 'political', (and avoid agitating a discipline whose scientific epistemology has allowed it to present itself as politically neutral), by using the less contentious term 'cultural change'. This is less threatening because it can be linked with a discourse of inevitable, even evolutionary change. Gergen does convey the impression of progressive intent in a general sense.

He writes of a 'postmodern consciousness' which is imbued with the motive of 'attempt[ing] to bring psychologists and society closer together' (p28). This rather implies the independence of psychology from society. It also reveals Gergen's implicitly humanist orientation (Morss, 1995).

Within British social psychology, the use of approaches which are described as 'discourse analytic' is becoming increasingly popular. By far the most widely acknowledged single text on discourse analysis is Potter and Wetherell's (1987) **_Discourse and Social Psychology_**. The subtitle of this book is '_Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour_' and a detailed critique of the psychological concept of attitudes is presented which, indeed, forms the basis of what might be a broader critique of the way the discipline has framed its objects. However, as in Gergen's (1992) account, discourse analysis is presented as the latest modification to an ever improving psychological method. Hence a sense of legitimate influence is created and the concept of academic progress is retained.

Instead of acknowledging the direct influences of post-structuralist approaches, the development of the approach is attributed to disciplines which have been seen as much closer to psychology and so from which fruitful influence might well be expected. As Burman (1990) notes 'the potential of discourse analysis to surprise, disrupt and unsettle psychology is instead safely attributed to developments in ethnomethodology, ordinary language philosophy and linguistics' (p216). The discourse of a discipline which is constantly evolving, supports the presentation of this 'new psychology' as simply the next step, and an improvement on the old, so there is no need to panic about the threat that it appeared the 'turn to language' presented.

In fact, as Burman (1990) highlights, what better way to disarm what promised to be a radical challenge than to appropriate its arguments and to claim to have incorporated its insights? Deconstruction can be watered down to such an extent that it loses the critical potential that made it of such promise originally, and this makes it even more difficult to bring the full force of these critiques onto the practice of psychology (Burman, 1990). The more radical possibilities can be lost by the inability to make

political positions explicit. The new 'postmodern' psychology is not even a phoenix rising up from the ashes of psychology, since the majority of mainstream psychology appears relatively unchanged by these arguments. It is more like a strain that has mutated from the old body of psychology and now provides the body with resistance to the challenges with which it will be presented (Gordo-Lopez, pers. comm.).

There are inconsistencies, though, in the way Potter and Wetherell present themselves. Sometimes they write of the role of discourse analysts being to criticise social psychology and at other times they present themselves as 'the new' social psychology. As with Gergen, the teleological assumptions behind the rhetorical construction of 'new developments' are retained. Again, like Gergen, Potter and Wetherell fail to deconstruct their own positions as social researchers. Whilst they begin the book with a reflection on an alternative first paragraph which raises profound questions about academic authority, knowledge claims and rhetorical style, and do work 'deconstructively' on psychology, they offer little reflection on the way they employ similar techniques to work *for* them. In presenting discourse analysis as the new improved psychological method they employ the same devices to produce their own textual authority. Perhaps the tension between revealing a discipline's production of its own authority, and undermining or retaining the same pillars for one's own account is an inevitable one. Avoiding undermining one's own authority is, of course, a useful strategy to adopt when one is trying to intervene politically (Burman, 1990; Sawicki, 1991) or produce a convincing account. Indeed, this thesis illustrates this tension. Potter and Wetherell might, however, have provided some degree of reflection on the ways in which their own accounts function, the power invested in their statements, and on how and why they retain their position of privilege in terms of their 'access to expert knowledge'. If they had reflected on the tensions they faced in wanting to employ both a conventional warrant for their work, and take a critical perspective on such a warrant, it would avoid creating the impression of issues of power and the politics of author(ity) being tacked on in a *post hoc* fashion.

There is an amusing irony in social science writing which - in a realist tone - describes, promotes or presumes a deconstruction of the realist empiricist discourses

of knowledge. Leaving the tone or rhetorical style of their own writing unproblematized is a form of 'having one's cake and eating it', and suggests that the authors are not being reflexive about their own knowledge practices. However, the meaning of 'being reflexive' is given an ontological or empirical distinction by Woolgar and Ashmore (1988). They adapt a three-stage model of self-consciousness to draw a parallel with research decisions about reflexivity. First, there is the unself-conscious 'habit' (e.g. employing the conventional progressivist rhetoric); then a self-consciousness out of which one withdraws from (or blocks) this 'habit'; then finally, there may be a self-conscious choice to resume the habit, only it is no longer an actual 'habit' (Cohen and Taylor, 1976, cited in Woolgar and Ashmore, 1988). Therefore, to the reader, the witting use of, say, conventional presentation style, might be indistinguishable from the unreflective use of it as default or dominant understanding. Potter and Wetherell, and Gergen, in their pieces could be making deliberate decisions not to undermine the status of their own authorial voices. They could 'be' reflexive, but be deciding to conceal it so as to intervene in an academic climate where (like most places) realist presumptions prevail. Potter and Wetherell might have chosen their words in the light of publishing, marketing and career pressures, and Gergen might be amused to see that I missed the irony in his use of 'naïvite-sophistication' and 'sweet poison' imagery. The following chapter considers the strategic implications of this in relation to research dilemmas about representing children's opinions.

There are certain contradictions then within these forms of 'postmodern psychology'. One element of which is their adherence to certain features of Enlightenment or modernist thought. However, there is also a degree of irony in my criticism of an approach which is claiming to be postmodern for its lack of logical consistency, particularly when, in order to write convincingly about it myself, I retain most of the conventions. Perhaps the structure of any *argument* is fundamentally modernist. Even in academic writings on postmodernity and post-structuralism, in order that the essay functions as a persuasive piece of rhetoric (in the way in which we are accustomed), it must take this form, and must, for instance, imply *progression from* the ideas of which it is critical, *to* those it advocates. Because 'progress' is such a fundamental narrative of Western culture, it is difficult to imagine being able to write convincingly

without its rhetorical customs and imagery. Hence it appears difficult to avoid ironies, or even direct contradictions, between the arguments made and the rhetorical devices employed to make them, when we seek to convey authority and to be persuasive either in academic or political spaces. Just as modernist 'up the mountain' (Rorty, 1980) (progressivist) rhetoric is often used to create a convincing argument about the 'loss of faith' in the grand narrative of progress, so it is the case with the presentation of a thesis which reflects on some of the knowledge practices it employs itself. Refusing modernist rhetorical styles for presenting knowledge would not only be a problem because of the constraints of academic thesis writing, or of producing knowledge which counts as psychology, but is one of making convincing, meaningful arguments at all. Thus, the issue of the authority of an account is obviously very important politically and is considered in more depth in the following chapter.

Chapter 8

Research *with* children: representational dilemmas [1]

Psychology positions children as the products of parenting or of family and would therefore treat them as the objects of psychological gaze in studies of parenting. In contrast to this, however, second wave feminism and other struggles waged through forms of identity politics have paved the way for the children's rights movements and the recognition of children's political perspectives, providing the conditions of possibility for children to be attributed full subject status. Once children are considered to be subjects researchers may do research *with*, not merely *on*, them. Children's views therefore become 'a perspective' from which parenting can be studied.

Certain forms of discourse analytic work, as chapter 7 described, refuse to give any text the status - of unitary and objective truth - that children's accounts were denied previously. Thus, children's accounts are granted the same status as any other text. However, researching children's perspectives would require representational claims of some sort. The 'crisis of representation' (which was described in chapter 6) challenges conventional empirical claims that the researcher simply provides a 'window in' onto children's views, and leads to a set of difficult theoretical questions and political dilemmas about whether and how we take up positions in which we claim to represent others. Rather than offering solutions to these dilemmas, this chapter opens up for critical scrutiny some of the decisions we make as researchers, and argues that explicit, reflexive discussion might help us to make better strategic interventions into policy debates or broader cultural politics. It therefore focuses on one particular set of options for feminist research interventions around the cultural politics of parents and children.

8.1 Deconstructing 'representation': objective re-presentation or political re/presentation?

Particular ethical and political dilemmas arise in representing the lives of people who

are marginalised within, and by, the domain of professional knowledge and public debate. In order to remain critically reflexive about the decisions we take as researchers we need to make explicit both the nature of the dilemmas we face, and the losses, as well as gains, that result from our decisions. This chapter discusses some of the representational dilemmas of research work with children which arise in the production of research accounts for dissemination in the public sphere. What claims to represent children's voices can researchers make? What political issues arise as a result of adopting representational claims for others? For instance, what meanings may we unwittingly reinforce as we make such public re/presentations?

Different methodologies provide different claims for the status of the knowledge produced. How do these claims relate to the epistemological positions described in chapter 6? Whilst both discourse analytic and ethnographic approaches enable a response to the political call to 'hear the voices of children', and provide a means of re/presenting their opinions in, say, policy debates, they often entail radically different ideas about language. Thus, their epistemological foundations differ. As a consequence they make different kinds of representational claims about the status of their accounts. What are the implications of these different claims and warrants for knowledge in terms of the strategies they provide for feminist or critical researchers?

In order to intervene in cultural politics, or engage in academic knowledge practices, some form of representational claim is often required, whether this is to support a characterisation of popular debate (as in chapters 3 and 4), to support particular empirical accounts (such as chapter 2), or to claim to represent others politically or empirically. Since the foundations have been laid for children to be research subjects on issues concerning parents or parenting, I may wish to produce research accounts which claim to represent their views as expressed to me. Yet the main concern of this thesis is with political and theoretical doubts about the representational claims that have conventionally warranted research. It has made 'the reflexive turn' (chapter 6) and is critical of the modernist foundations of empiricism. However, political dilemmas arise from my recognition, or suspicion, that despite these doubts, the discourse of voice and the claims of objectivism and realism to guarantee my 'findings', still provide the most powerful warrant for my research account. In addition to the modernist presumptions around knowledge, another set of concerns

arises about the particular notion of 'the subject' to which children have to conform in order to be potential research subjects, and, in particular, how metaphors of 'voice' serve this model of the individual. What then are the options? What dilemmas arise as the possibilities are viewed alongside the pitfalls of responding to the 'voices of children' discourse within the terms of existing debates? Does research work which adopts a 'hybrid' approach of discourse-ethnography offer a way forward?

This chapter also asks to what extent these representational issues are common to research with any marginalised group, or specific to research work with children. It concludes that the issues themselves apply to research with any less powerful social group who have little access to the practices of public knowledge production. However, the dilemmas we face must involve the consideration of the specific meanings attributed particular social groups since, for instance, in the case of children, certain ideas about their psychological development can allow them to be more easily disqualified as participants of research. Exploring the dilemmas in relation to children therefore engages both specific discussion within contemporary childhood research (Alanen, 1990; James and Prout, 1990; Kitzinger, 1990; Mayall, 1994; Waksler, 1991), and more general debates in feminist theory about the status of knowledge after the 'crisis of representation'.

This chapter does not draw on research material in the form of 'original data', but my experience of research fieldwork on the *Children's Representations of Family Life* project with Margaret O'Brien (O'Brien *et al.,* 1996) stimulated my thinking on many of the issues raised in this chapter. At an early stage of my Ph.D journey, I intended to analyse some empirical material from this project and contrast developmental psychological with discourse analytic approaches. I felt overwhelmed by the political dilemmas described here and uneasy about adopting different approaches at work and in the thesis. Six years later, I am exploring these dilemmas further in research on *Children's Understandings of Parental Involvement in Education* with Ros Edwards and Miriam David, and this is a key part of the context for my writing about impure strategies and representational dilemmas.

Children's 'voices', or rather, my re-presentations of what child research subjects have said to me, are absent from this chapter. Instead, I focus on the claims of adult researchers, and how we may warrant our accounts of what children say. Of course,

some of the arguments I make about the difficulties surrounding researchers' claims to represent children, apply to my representation of the work of other researchers. However, there are also significant differences: firstly, I am representing *adult* researchers, not *child* participants (although I will consider whether this alters or simply intensifies the issues); and secondly, material I re-present is from published accounts of research (so I am not serving up privately elicited accounts for public consumption, as is the case for much research). The researchers themselves have placed it in the public arena and have therefore had a chance to reflect upon how they (re)present themselves. Following Spivak's (1988) distinction between representation meaning *proxy*, or meaning *portrayal*, I am representing other researchers in the sense of portrayal (the 'photographic' meaning of representation), but not in the sense of advocacy. However, in our research roles, these two may not be clearly distinguished, or indeed, we may wish to 'represent children' in both senses. Interrogating the doctrine of empiricism raises problems with both these meanings of 'representing children'.

James and Prout (1990) note the elision of a temporal (re-presenting) and a significatory meaning of 'representation'. Whilst the temporal meaning of re-presenting as repeating raises the possibility of seeing representation as an active process, and therefore one which is conducted from a particular perspective, the word 're-presentation' itself does not insist on this. Indeed, both of these meanings may assume that an object exists and is then truthfully reflected in (portrayed by) its representation. I think this ambiguity about what the word means epistemologically is what Hall (1992) identifies when he notes that the term is used currently not only as an unproblematic notion of 'image of' (portrayal or signification), but also to indicate a radical displacement of that notion. I prefer to use the terms 're-presentation' and re/presentation to indicate that my research account is actively produced by me and embodies my perspective, using the former when emphasizing process (repeat) and the latter when emphasizing an active representation, a portrayal by me, which might be 'political' for its role in cultural/'recognition' (or 'representational') politics. However, these do not provide a distinction between the epistemological positions which this chapter discusses. By making reference to the word 'representational' (even with a critical note) they each suggest both an empirical meaning of portrayal, and the significance for cultural politics of either images of a social group or their

advocacy. I like the way in which 're/presentation', to some extent, admits this ambiguity of meaning.

8.2 Childhood research: giving voice to children?

As the children's rights movement has been developing in the UK, ethnographic research has 'given voice' to children, enabling them to begin to play a more direct part in the production of sociological knowledge than the adult/researcher determined categories of survey or experimental methods (James and Prout, 1990). Hence discourses of 'giving voice' offer a way of constructing children as active subjects, not objects, and of recognising that they may have distinct perspectives on the world. The recognition that meaning embodies perspective is at least an implicit challenge to objectivism and the arrogant assumption that a perspective is universal, an account definitive. Ethnography has the most established place in the social sciences and humanities as an approach which attempts to place subjects' own perspectives centrally. Its ethical promise rests on its (compatibility with) voice metaphors; its political force, on the salience attributed identity in contemporary political discourses; and its immense appeal, on its 'promise to delve into the "concrete" (in the hope of finding "real" people living "real" lives)' (Probyn, 1993: p72). Because it matters 'that some speak and that others are merely spoken' (Probyn, *ibid.*), it offers to meet feminist concerns to 'give voice' to those whose opinions are rarely heard.

This discourse of 'voice' must be distinguished from the specific approach of Carol Gilligan and co-workers. I am referring to the particular, but loose, set of metaphors of voice which circulate in popular political discourse and link (political) perspective closely with 'who the speaker is'. Ethnographers might use the discourse of voice to mean something akin to perspective, and perhaps some use it in non-literal, illustrative ways. Whilst discourse analysis is an approach which can be employed to analyse the things children say, it rejects some of the theoretical underpinnings of the voice-as-perspective discourse. However, both approaches can recognise that interviews are a particular form of social interaction in which meaning is constructed jointly in the discursive exchange between researcher and participant; see meanings as grounded in their contexts; and base analysis and interpretation on a theory of discourse and meaning (Mishler, 1986).

What Oakley (1981) called the 'hygienic', traditional approach to interviewing obscures the relations of power that characterize the research relationship. However, a post-structuralist discursive approach requires us to consider reflexively the institutional power carried by researchers, and to avoid creating the illusion of 'democratized' research through the fantasy of empowerment (Marks, 1993). Whilst ethnography can lodge a powerful critique of the conventional research practices Oakley described, it can also be employed within an otherwise conventional approach. The following three sections describe key tensions that can arise within the ethnographic study of children, which are, I believe, general representational dilemmas for researchers. They challenge the assumption that adults' benevolent attempts to represent children (as proxy or advocate) are necessarily always in their interests, and the simplicity with which it is assumed that what children say can be represented (portrayed) through research.

8.3 Ethnography of 'children's culture'

In order to gain access to children's perspectives, William Corsaro employed the ethnographic technique of participant observation through which he became 'a participant in children's culture' (Corsaro, 1981: p118), 'joining in the children's activities whilst not affecting the nature or flow of peer episodes' (*ibid.:* p133). Notions such as 'entering *the child's world'* (Mandell, 1986; 1991) and interacting 'with children *in their perspective'* (Mandell, 1991: p59) (emphasis added) imply that adults and children occupy separate social worlds. This risks constructing children as (little) alien(s) to the dominant culture, as the exotic objects of some other culture. 'Other', that is, to the presumed norm or centrality of adult culture (which is thus itself imputed with homogeneity and harmony or consensuality). The centrality of the researcher and the pseudo-colonialist relation of rendering the strange in terms familiar to the observer culture - which is sometimes reinforced by metaphors of travel (Pratt, 1986a, cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) - is, of course, not particular to work with children. For contemporary childhood research there is surely a tension between studying children simply as people, and giving them research (or political) attention because they are currently marginalised, which then risks reinforcing the idea of them as a 'special case'. So fundamental is our 'knowledge' of adult-child difference that it is difficult to imagine research in which participants happen to include adults and children, yet no between-groups comparison is made.

Although, for the present, a strong case can be made for the benefits of 'special case' attention.

When considering his power as researcher, Corsaro notes that 'adults are much bigger than children and are perceived as being socially more powerful' (Corsaro, 1981: p118). Physical size may well have been significant (although he did not attempt the 'least-adult' role that Mandell, (1986; 1991) developed), but it is only one of the features that may have affected the interaction between the children and himself. He might also have considered the ways in which the interaction was informed by dominant cultural meanings assigned to his age and gender, and ideas about paternal playfulness and/or pedagogic authority. However, in later debates amongst researchers about the extent to which adults can enter children's worlds, Corsaro (1985, cited in Mandell, 1991) insists that age and authority continue to separate adults and children and so qualifies his participation as partial, whereas others argue that all aspects of adult superiority except physical differences can be cast aside and that adults can participate fully in children's culture (Goode, 1986; Waksler, 1986, both cited in Mandell, 1991).

Beyond the interactions during fieldwork, in later stages of the research process, there is also an unequal power relationship. Not only are adult researchers 'perceived as being socially more powerful', they *are* more powerful by virtue of their role as researchers, through which they are in a position to interpret, as well as to represent (Burman, 1992). Reflexive consideration of researchers' power and status can be limited by a focus on the dynamics of the interaction 'in the field', with little consideration of the broader power relations within which this is constituted. This is a criticism that Probyn (1993) makes of even some recent ethnography: that reflexivity extends only to the immediate context of meaning production (in Corsaro's research, the classroom), and not adequately to the production of meaning in the account (processes occurring back in the academy). Corsaro does identify the problem of adult assumptions and interpretations of children's behaviour and abilities, so recognizes that *how* children are heard is an issue. He believes that an adult perspective is the result of removing the interaction from its full social context. 'Contextualisation' is, as in chapter 8, the guarantee of validity of interpretation. However, although Corsaro (1981: p118) recognises that 'adult interpretations and assumptions about children's

behavior are themselves topics for inquiry (Schwartzman, 1978)', such a study is viewed as separate:

> One of the central aims of ethnographies of childhood culture is the suspension of such interpretations. The researcher must attempt to free himself [sic] from adult conceptions of children's activities and enter the child's world as both *observer* and *participant*. (*ibid.*: p119, original emphasis)

The idea that it is possible to suspend, or step outside of, the cultural meanings assigned to childhood must be viewed with scepticism. From where might the researcher's conceptual framework - indeed, the words to speak - then come from? A more realistic aim might be to attempt to examine the 'adult conceptions' closely alongside, and in relation to, the observations that one makes. In this way one could begin to reflect upon the concepts and processes of the analysis as an 'interrogation of the methods ...simultaneously with, and as an integral part of, the investigation of the object (Woolgar, 1982)' (Woolgar and Ashmore, 1988: p8).

The approach adopted by both Corsaro and Mandell is realist and implicitly objectivist: children's culture is seen as existing prior to, and independently of, the researcher's gaze, so that they may enter that culture, observe it without altering it, then objectively report without distortion what they have 'merely observed'. Therefore, the ethnographer's perception is the guarantee of the knowledge produced. Corsaro's 'escape from' an adult perspective into the 'real' children's culture demonstrates his reliance on conventional notions of language as reflective or representational (rather than constitutive) and consequently he presents his work as a straight-forward representation (re-presentation) or portrayal of children's culture. Claiming this representational status is so conventional in Western scientific discourse that the warrant need not be made explicit. Ethnographic techniques can embody a realist epistemology even where they have rejected (unitary) objectivism. So that whilst a researcher explicitly recognises the existence of different perspectives (hence studying the participants' perspective as particular), it is simply assumed that readers of the research will rest their faith in the researcher's own perspective.

8.4 Otherness and the centre

Ethnography is 'a writing practice in which the other is inscribed within, and explained by, the power of the ethnographer's language' (Grossberg, 1989: p23) with

'the onus on the other to fit her experiences into an understandable order' (Probyn, 1993: p63). As in the classical anthropological monographs documenting the West's cultural Others, the crucial relation is of the observed culture to the researcher's culture. Can a description by an outsider remain faithful to the framework of the subjects, as it is inevitably rendered in the observer's terms? Is the representation to a dominant group or culture of 'other' perspectives necessarily 'imperialist', serving to bolster their own sense of centrality and extend cultural power through 'knowledge of'? But, even if it is, what other means are there of challenging (or relativising) that centrality ('self-centredness')?

Adult-(ethno)centrism can be seen to operate at both an individual level, whereby adults tend to interpret the actions and utterances of children as immature versions of their own speech and behaviour (Bruner *et al.*, 1976), and also at a cultural level. A researcher employing a discourse analytic approach might share the concern with adult-centrism, without expecting to be able to avoid it entirely as if such a thing were possible voluntarily. Since representation is through language, and the language and hegemonic concepts are those of the dominant culture, marginalized groups have described how the dominant conceptual framework which is not 'their own' may be imbued with negative meanings for them (for instance, Spender, 1985, on the androcentrism of the English language). For adult-dominated culture, language is, 'by definition', reflective and productive of adult power, status and authority. Since the whole frame of reference is adult-centred, it is difficult to see to what extent children could, as ethnographic subjects, present 'their own' account of their worlds. Furthermore, it can be argued that children are having to render themselves meaningful in adult-centred terms, and explain themselves convincingly to those in power over them (this parallels the discussion by Edwards and Ribbens, 1998). Seen in this light, children's interviews, because they entail the requirement to make sense for adults, might not necessarily be empowering occasions for children. The idea that any ethnographic subjects are free to present their own meanings in any radical sense fails to acknowledge that dominant culture provides hegemonic meanings.

Post-structuralist approaches to language disallow the fantasy of speaking from outside of the language system, which is why feminist writers influenced by post-structuralism (Barrett, 1991; Butler, 1990; Diamond and Quinby, 1988; Fraser, 1989;

Sawicki, 1991; Weedon, 1987) emphasize the recognition of resistance to powerful discourses. Recognizing the fact that in providing a research voice for a particular group we may simultaneously reinforce their construction as Other, and concurrently our own perspective or the dominant cultural perspective as central, prevents us from naively assuming that our work is bound to be liberatory. Patai (1991) believes that ethical research is simply not possible in an unjust world, since researchers replicate structures of privilege through the institution of knowledge. Taking up a position as one who knows, in relation to those who are oppressed, is fraught with ethical problems which are not assuaged by good intentions. At the very least, this requires that we focus on the potential losses as well as gains of particular approaches to research. In relation to placing children's voices in 'the public sphere', we need to examine the broader context of meanings that will be brought into play. Through what cultural understandings of children are the words of any child heard?

8.5 How we hear what children say

Corsaro (1981) notes that adults often describe as 'silly' or unimportant what they do not understand in children's speech or behaviour. Berry Mayall describes how discussions of 'methodological issues' in childhood research sometimes constructs children 'as cognitive incompetents, […] routinely wrong and misunderstand[ing]; likely to confuse fact with fiction; and ...give the answers they think adults want rather than reply accurately' (1996: p13). She reminds us that adults also vary in our knowledge and experience, and that 'we [all] interweave fact and fiction both consciously and unconsciously and tell interviewers what we think they want to know' (*ibid*.). This illustrates how the specific cultural positioning of children within developmental discourses of incompleteness, and as 'not yet there', can further extend the doubts that some have about the validity of 'subjective' research in general. Where objectivism prevails, the subjectivity that is understood as a problem for research, is seen as exaggerated in the case of children. There are also particular discourses of children's 'more limited' communication skills, knowledge and self-reflection. Therefore, it is not just a case of hearing children's 'voices', but of *how* we hear them. In terms of feminist intervention, it might be that providing a public platform for children's perspectives is not enough. We need to attend to the meanings that will be made of the accounts.

Both possible meanings of the title of this section are in operation. By emphasizing the *how* of 'How we hear what children say', I am arguing that, as researchers, we face ethical decisions about *how to go about* trying to hear what children say. Different methods are underpinned by alternative epistemological perspectives which provide different ways of thinking about the relation between participants' voices and the knowledge that is produced about them. Alternatively, when *hear* is emphasized, attention is drawn to the way in which children's voices are actually heard. This problematizes the passivity which 'to hear' usually conveys and highlights issues of interpretation. How do both specific context and broader cultural discourses affect the ways in which what children say is understood? Although they are not conceptually distinct in a discursive approach such as that taken here, we can consider this at the level of how researchers hear children, and then how research reports are 'heard' in the public sphere.

Children's voices are heard through cultural constructions of childhood. It is simultaneous attention to child*hood*, as opposed to a sole focus on (particular) children, that distinguishes writers influenced by social constructionism, such as Burman (1992), Marks (1996b), Mayall (1996), and James and Prout (1990), from more conventional ethnographers such as Corsaro (1981; 1986) and Mandell (1986; 1991). As chapter 7 argued, discourse analytic approaches, such as Parker's (1992; Parker and Burman, 1993), prompt us to take into account the social construction of childhood, by insisting that we bring in knowledge of discourses from 'outside' the research, including those that our politics identify as broader power relations, in order to analyse discourse.

8.6 Discourse Analysis: Power, Politics and (Subject) Positions

Like ethnography, discourse analysis allows researchers to emphasize children's interpretation of and active participation in the social world, which reveals the influence of symbolic interactionism and interpretive approaches on its development. However, difference between these approaches regarding their epistemological perspective results in different kinds of representational claims. Because knowledge is seen as socially constructed and powerful through its productive nature, direct representational claims would not be made by (most) discourse analysts. Although some strands of discourse analysis focus on the detail of linguistic features of the

interaction and are therefore closer to conversation analysis, psycholinguistics, or microsociology, the strand I consider here is influenced by post-structuralism and tends to define discourse more broadly, and so might analyse cultural texts (as well as specific interview material, etc.) (Potter *et al.*, 1990). Writers I associate with the latter strand include Parker, Burman and Marks, and are concerned with the ideological and subjective implications of the discourses (at/in specific moments and contexts). Burman (1990; 1992) employs a post-structuralist informed discourse analytic approach in order to facilitate a feminist analysis without accrediting the politics to the approach. Indeed she warns against investing too heavily in a method that could, in fact, be appropriated from opposing political positions, and suggests feminists might consider its adoption strategically and in context-specific ways. Parker (1992) argues that discourse analysis ought to be about the ways in which discourses support institutions, reproduce power relations and have ideological effects, but again, both the background cultural knowledge and the motivation for such an analysis are the researcher's politics, not the approach's. The consequence of this is that one cannot rely on any particular warrant for knowing to produce a politically informed analysis. Whilst both ethnographic and (post-structuralist) discursive approaches locate meaning socially, I would argue that the latter can be stronger politically because they offer the conceptual space for contested meanings and resistance, and, in some formulations (e.g. Burman, 1992; Fraser, 1989; Parker, 1990a; 1990b; 1992) direct attention to broader institutional power relations in addition to interpersonal ones. Within a discursive approach, speaking of multiple meanings within which some are more dominant (as well as multiple *subject positions* instead of unified *subjects*) could help avoid giving an over-rosy, neatly consensual impression. It might then be possible to speak of meanings in which one is powerfully enmeshed, but is not consenting to, or that are not in one's interest.

A discursive approach locates the power relationally in the subject position(s) the researcher can occupy, rather than in the researcher as a person (as 'a subject'). Burman's (1992) study illustrates both the researcher's power to define the parameters, topic, tone and diction of the discussion, and ties this power to the role, and therefore the respective subject positions taken up by researcher and researched. When she invites the child she is interviewing to swap roles and ask questions of her, Burman finds herself acutely embarrassed at being obliged to divulge personal details

without being able to define the terms in which she speaks of her relationships and friendships. About being asked if she 'has a boyfriend', she writes that not only had she to position herself in the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1983), but that she 'could not negotiate the meaning this term held, not introduce other terms, without departing from the fragile 'role-exchange' [I had] set up, that is without breaking the rules of the encounter as voluntary and collaborative' (1992: p55). Thus, even this negotiated 'role' exchange allows those in structurally less powerful positions to wield considerable power in this specific moment. Use of the word 'role' is qualified in order to distinguish 'subject positions' - understood as *constitutive of* a person's subjectivity at a given moment, from 'roles' which imply a pre-social individual adopting a superficial cultural mantle. For Burman, the analysis of power relations between herself and the child participants is not merely a *post-hoc* exercise in reflexivity, it is the explicit concern of her study.

Losing faith in objectivity means losing the reassuring promises that validity is guaranteed, that particular 'findings' were inevitable (since from where, except faulty science, might other versions come?), and that our research produces knowledge which is politically neutral. Instead, questions of epistemology and issues of interpretation within research become hugely significant. Within a discursive approach, one may still wish to conduct research interviews. Indeed, one may share the political concerns that make the discourse of 'giving voice to children' appealing to ethnographers of childhood. However, rejecting naive objective realism must have implications for how interviewees' 'voices' are heard. Can one still employ a discourse of 'giving voice' when a discourse analytic approach contradicts some of the assumptions this contains? Do the dilemmas that arise pose making use of a currently effective political discourse of voice, against retaining theoretical coherence?

8.7 The status of 'voice' in discourse analytic research

In post-structuralist informed discourse analytic research, representations of interviewees' account are made without a realist, objectivist warrant. Research is recognized to be a practice of re-presentation, and 'findings' a re/presentation through a particular lens. This invites reflexivity about the production of the account. The participant's 'voice' is seen as produced from what was culturally available to them,

rather than from a private reserve of meaning. The fantasy of the authentic subject, one whose subjectivity is imagined to be independent of, or prior to, culture is rejected. Deborah Marks interviewed young people about exclusion from school. She writes:

> researching into people's experience is fraught with epistemological and ontological dilemmas. Social constructionist theory has warned that giving our 'subject' a 'voice' involves the fantasy that it is possible to have unmediated direct knowledge of experience (James and Prout, 1990). Derrida has challenged the phonocentricism implicit in the notion of speech as a direct and immediate form of expression. Giving primacy to interviewees' talk about their experience of exclusion suggests that their speech may refer to themselves as a unified authentic subject. This Cartesian subject, whose self-consciousness acts as guarantor of meaning, is challenged both by versions of psychoanalysis (Althusser, 1971; Frosh, 1987) and discourse analysis (Parker, 1992), which see the subject as being fragmented and constituted within language. (Marks, 1996b: p115)

Marks does not treat the accounts obtained as final and fixed, rather they are 'often ambivalent, contradictory and changing' (*ibid.*: p115). She notes that 'the relationship between an original exclusion and the way pupils talk about it in their interview or discussion group is highly complex', and therefore she doesn't ask about their experiences in order to try to establish 'what really happened'. She does not position herself as able to 'penetrate the manifest content in order to reveal its hidden kernel' and so she is not central in her warrant for the research knowledge: 'I cannot say how participants *really* experienced the exclusion. However, asking about the experience of exclusion brings forth a number of productive ways of seeing the event' (*ibid.*: p116). For some pupils, the tone of the interview was confessional as they took responsibility for bad behaviour. For others, their accounts took the form of factual reports and had a disengaged tone, and in a third type of account, pupils protested their innocence. The complexity of thoughts and feelings about their exclusions meant that they might be positioned in conflicting ways. Whilst identifying how these may have functioned psychologically and emotionally for the individuals, and indeed for herself - since she too experienced exclusion by the children during a group discussion - she deliberately avoids 'establishing an opposition between emotional, conflicted and hence "authentic" accounts and generalised, jargon-laden "inauthentic" accounts' (Marks, 1996b: p129). The imperative that discourse analysts attend the broader social meanings within which research occurs leads Marks to consider these interviews in relation to powerful psychological discourses of self-regulating

individuals who, on reflection, repent their misdemeanours. The possibility that the interviews functioned to regulate further some participants by providing a space in which they drew themselves under disciplinary gaze to produce themselves as good children and self-governing individuals, prevented Marks from assuming the interviews to be necessarily (or only) liberating.

8.8 Warranting discourse analytic work

Many feminist theorists (including those cited above) use post-structuralist approaches to show how knowledge claims entail plays of power. Without an appeal to objectivity and without asserting the centrality of one's own perspective, with what authority can one present discourse analytic research? Is there an alternative rhetoric of research? Most importantly, could an alternative support effective feminist or critical intervention? This issue is key in debates about feminism and postmodernism, as well as having exercised researchers who have taken the reflexive 'turn to language'. Burman, Alldred *et al*. (1996) argue that rejecting conventional ideas of authorship and of knowing through personal identities need not mean losing the relevance of individual experience, nor the possibility of political critique. Losing faith in objectivity need not mean completely undermining our own warrants for speaking critically (Burman, 1990). As chapter 6 argued, a case can be made for feminists and other social critics to present local empirical accounts, without the grandnarratives which universalize and ahistoricize (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990). That is, that there can be social criticism without the conventional metaphilosophical warrants that modernist narratives provide. Empiricism without objectivist foundations requires us to extend self-reflexivity to recognize that our analyses, as well as their objects, are culturally specific.

Erica Burman (1992) interviewed primary school-aged children, but neither warrants her analyses by appeal to objectivism, nor grounds her interpretation solely in her ontology. Her own psychological processes form part of her reflections on her interpretation, but are not the warrant for it. She argues that reflexivity must include the broader context; relations not just within, but also beyond, the interview:

> One of the places where feminist and post-structuralist concerns meet is in affirming reflexivity, both as structured within research relationships (no longer colluding in the sanitization of subjectivity, identification and emotion from

research encounters) and within the theory-method relation (e.g. Hollway, 1989; Walkerdine, 1986). (*ibid*: p47)

Through an analysis of interview excerpts, Burman demonstrates how the structural relations of power and discursive positioning (of interviewee and interviewer), as well as broader social relations of power and knowledge, can inform the micro-analysis of statements from an interview. She argues that drawing on the broader context in this way prevents her refusal to claim objectivity from collapsing into a complete relativization of her analysis. This theoretical position treads a careful path between 'naive realism', and an idealism which might, in a pure form, fall prey to relativism and immaterialism.

In her research, Burman set up an agreed exchange of interviewer and interviewee roles with the children, which allowed moments in which the children occupied powerful positions in relation to her. The concept of researcher and researched occupying particular 'subject positions', (rather than being thought of as subjects whose position is fixed and unitary), facilitates recognition of the complexity of the play of power in these exchanges. She shows how a particular statement from a boy is open to various interpretations, including as a threat to steal her bicycle. Her interpretation of it recognizes cultural adult-child power relations, the specific context of the co-operative switch of 'roles', and her actual retention of authority despite this. She comes to understand the statement as a request that the topic of conversation shifts. Its implicit nature, which prevented the shift from being abrupt or from directly challenging her (supposedly relinquished) conversational control, shows the subtlety of recognition of the power relations at play. Thus, such an analysis can conceptualise power as operating through both the manipulated ('role exchanged'), and the underlying, positions of researcher and researched (and show the children's understanding of this distinction), without simplifying to a model of power as summative. Burman goes 'beyond simply affirming different accounts' and warrants her own interpretation by arguing it is produced and fixed by the particular power relationships, although it is not the only one warranted by them: 'The point here is not to arrive at a unique and unambiguous interpretation, but to demonstrate that an analysis of power relations privileges some interpretations over others' (*ibid.*: p54). Indeed, this indeterminacy, she argues, is itself only a function of the text being taken

out of its linguistic and wider discursive context. Thus, discourse analytic work which is informed by post-structuralist understandings of power can demonstrate how power enters into the interpretation, as well as the production, of discourse (Burman, *ibid.*). This includes how power inheres in the processes of analysis 'back in the academy', as well as in the research encounter. However, this type of micro-analysis still, inevitably, abstracts the interaction from its context to some degree, and places it in another context for viewing from other perspectives. We can be critical of a researcher's (political) judgement, and hopefully, such critical scrutiny is allowed by a reflexive style that acknowledges that the analysis is an artefact, produced in a particular moment, by a person occupying particular subject positions, and within particular power relations.

8.9 A 'new ethnography'?

Some discursive approaches employ qualified empiricism, as the above illustrates, and some ethnographic approaches recognize that representation is an active, not merely reflective, practice. So, moving beyond my oppositional account - which is, therefore, revealed as partial, perspectivised, artefactual - there are now, in fact, researchers who occupy a range of epistemological positions 'within' each approach.

Ethnography has not remained untouched by the 'turn to language'. In addition to radical critiques across the disciplines of cultural studies, critical anthropology and sociology (Ticeneto Clough, 1992; Nencel and Pels, 1991; Probyn, 1993), there are also ethnographers who are developing a 'more textual' ethnography within sociology (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: p239), for instance, Plummer's (1995) sociology of sexual stories. In a chapter about the rhetorics or poetics of ethnographic writing - perhaps tellingly at the end of the book - Hammersley and Atkinson argue that an ethnography 'is produced as much by how we write as by the processes of data collection and analysis' (*ibid.*: p239). Therefore, unlike in Corsaro's work, (which, admittedly, was conducted much earlier), their reflexivity does include textual production within its remit. However, they maintain a broadly objective-realist perspective, illustrated by their remark that it is 'knowledge of', rather than politics, which motivates them.

Similarly, Berry Mayall's (1996) research with children is strongly influenced by ethnography, yet - as with many others in contemporary UK childhood studies - is

also informed by social constructionism. She writes of how children's lives are framed within adult understandings of what children are like, and problematizes the conceptualization of children as Other. She partially relativizes her account by recognizing that 'no doubt another approach would lead to another story of where and how children's lives are lived' (*ibid.*: p19), but retains an empiricist warrant and employs the 'up the mountain' discourse of new scientific knowledge improving on the old (Kitzinger, 1987; Rorty, 1980). Her position is neither that of radical social constructionist nor 'naive' objective-realist, but the empiricist epistemology locates her closer to realist ethnography than post-structuralism.

Mayall presents statements from children's accounts 'contextualized' within comments from interviews with adults. Inevitably it is Mayall's own conceptual frame that allows her to articulate the comments from children with those of adults. She recognizes the power imbalance between herself and the child interviewees and is modest about the extent to which it can be rectified. She even wonders: '[i]f one is not a child, can one and should one attempt to understand and convey what children's experiences are?' (*ibid.:* p1). She describes child-friendly measures she took during the interaction (sitting on low chairs, letting children choose their companions), and she briefly reflects upon her position as author of 'children's accounts', acknowledging that it is her own argument and mentioning her hope that in future research she will co-write with participants. She therefore engages both of Probyn's (1993) two levels of reflexivity: that is, within the interaction, and in the interpretation and production of the research account. However, on the issue of textual authority, whilst she is explicit about the authority of her account *vis-à-vis* the child participants, she does not open up issues of the text's authority as one claiming an empirical warrant. This might have been explored if she had been (openly) reflexive about the processes by which she produced her analysis (for instance, how she 'meshed together' adult and child accounts) and the rhetorical style in which it is presented.

This raises several points. Firstly, we are reminded that how researchers present their work, including their epistemological warrants, relates to considerations of forum, format, and funding. Working within a research unit that is grant-dependent, (as does Mayall), does not lend itself to radical critique of the research enterprise. Secondly, it illustrates the complexity of positions we may take up as researchers: recognizing the

productivity of language, yet incorporating such insight into empiricist ethnographic methodology. The radical challenges the concept of discourse may present can be neutralized by an appropriating gesture (Burman, 1990), and the 'findings' of discourse analytic research (about interaction between researcher and 'subject') can even be taken up to 'improve' mainstream experimental work (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Thirdly, the issue of research strategies provides an alternative way of seeing this second point: retaining an objective-realist research warrant provided Mayall with a more powerful position and may have made the particular intervention she desired more effective. As readers of the study, we cannot actually distinguish between an unreflexive conventional style, and an account which for strategic purposes employs conventional rhetoric and 'deliberately conceal[s] any ostensive signs of reflexivity' (Woolgar and Ashmore, 1988: p6). Thus, Mayall's approach may either be straight-forwardly realist, or her account may reflect a decision to take up the authoritative 'voice' of the researcher.

8.10 Some pitfalls and possibilities of hybrid approaches

The warrant we claim for our research knowledge, whether stated explicitly or implied by rhetorical style, is the basis of its authority. Feminists have identified the danger of 'kicking the platform from under our own feet' (Burman, 1990) by deconstructing the warrant for our preferred account, but some (Burman *et al.*, 1996; Weedon, 1987) see feminist possibilities in the selective use of post-structuralist arguments such as those employed here. The privilege accorded empirical knowledge makes research powerful, and because the discourse of 'hearing the voices of children' is highly persuasive in contemporary UK cultural politics, ethnographic realism probably provides the most effective warrant for intervention, say, in debates about health or education services for children. So, might I adopt the discourse of voice and employ qualified empirical warrants, in spite of having 'lost faith' in objectivism at a philosophical level? The sections above illustrated how empirical claims are sometimes made alongside differing degrees of reflexivity, or recognition of ethical issues surrounding a researcher's power to interpret and to produce an account and the significance of the broader cultural meanings assigned childhood. If one refuses to employ arrogant, 'self-centred' assertions of objectivity, yet can see current political value in them, could a self-reflexive, re-presentation of others' 'voices' enable partial uptake of research authority? This would not resolve the

dilemma once and for all, but neither is that desirable. Burman *et al.* (1996) argue that we might consider our research as a series of strategic decisions, rather than wed ourselves to any particular approach. Such commitment to an approach would be to imagine that any approach could embody, and therefore guarantee, (our) politics; that 'politics' remain fixed; and that little attention need be paid to the context which informs how our research is heard. As a temporary strategy, it allows movement beyond the impasse, but is tentative and resists closure, thereby requiring its context-specific reinvention.

A strong case can be made for presenting research as 'hearing the voices of children', and children as deserving and capable of articulating their perspectives, whilst there are still important political gains for children in being granted full subject status. However, we must consider the potential risks of employing the voice rhetoric in each particular case: generalized assertions cannot be made about how it may operate. So, for each research account, we must assess whether the particular research issue or the general affirmation of children as subjects outweighs the pitfalls described above: the reification of 'the centre' at the expense of the margins, or of 'the Other'; the re-assertion of objective-realism; and the obscuring of the researcher's role and denial of perspective in the discourse of representation as portrayal.

Might a 'hybrid' position be possible in which the discourse of voice is employed, but subjects are not attributed authenticity outside of (dominant) culture? Instead, we can present them as finding 'their voices' within and through the networks of meanings made available to them, including where they resist the dominant meanings ascribed them (as does Marks, 1996b). Employing the discourse of voice risks reinforcing ideas about 'the psychological subject', the Cartesian construction of the individual, but perhaps there are some ways of limiting this, such as by surrounding the term voice with quotation marks to indicate its metaphorical status. Referring to 'subject positions' allows for an individual to be multiply or shiftingly positioned and hence avoids complicity with the fantasy of unitary, logical beings whose experiences are stable, fixed by identity and internally coherent (Butler, 1990). We might retain the distinction in this chapter between *children's voices* themselves and the discourse of *'the voice(s) of children'* and sometimes it may be appropriate to make this distinction explicit. The discourse may still be heard in the singular ('the voice of the child'), but

here, in a thesis, I can avoid reinforcing the idea of homogeneity amongst children since no compromise is needed such as might be in a piece for a popular readership. The argument for the recognition of differences amongst children might appear, in the abstract, to be robust and incontestable, but there may be times when we decide this oversimplification is worthwhile. James and Prout (1990) suggest that we use the past tense in empirical narratives, because the present tense fixes children in a timeless place devoid of context thereby contributing to their objectification. These suggestions sketch an approach which could still link perspectives to social location, but would aim to avoid relying on the concept of identity in such a way as to fix and over-simplify this relationship. In these ways, local empirical narratives employing the voice metaphor in a qualified way - what we might call discourse-ethnography - could provide ways of doing politics and research without grounding positions in reified identities.

However, some cautionary notes are needed: methods rest upon methodologies, which themselves embody particular epistemological positions. Given that the most crucial aspect of the context of the public research account to be considered relates to the authority necessary to intervene, the risk of a hybrid method is that it makes neither epistemological claim authoritatively. For instance, it would be problematic to present a realist warrant, (such as for ethnography), within an account that has set up a non-realist framework. 'Triangulation' - using more than one method to study an object - could not employ a discursive approach alongside a non-discursive one, because triangulation assumes realism for its object. Such separation of methods from their epistemological perspectives is not only an issue of theoretical coherence: in order to take up 'the voice' of knowledge authoritatively one usually has to state one or other type of claim. However, the dominant epistemological perspective of empiricism, means that it can be assumed where it is not made explicit, and the rhetoric of light and vision surrounding knowledge can imply the adoption of truth claims. If we assume that such epistemological inconsistencies may go unnoticed in a given forum, questions arise about how explicit we ought to be about our epistemological commitments. Should chapters 2, 3 and 4 remain as they are with the rhetorical style of empirical accounts, even as they display their political positionings, or ought they to be more carefully qualified and situated with disclaimers that limit extrapolations? In which case, which audiences do they convince and which do they exclude?

8.11 Reflexivity

If reflexivity involves being explicit about the operation of power within the actual processes of researching and representing people (Burman, 1992; Ribbens, 1989), we become suspicious of the techniques (as well as epistemological claims) through which accounts are rendered authoritative. Researchers' power can be conceptualized as operating through multiple levels: through the hegemonic cultural perspective contained within the language we (must) use; through the subject positions we take up and are positioned within (including our deliberate claims to researcher positions); and through our particular individual relationships with participants and to our field of inquiry. In relation to research with children, the first was illustrated earlier through the adult-centrism of language and the second was explored through Burman's study, where a particularity of research with children is the conflation of adult/child with researcher/researched. The third level raises very interesting questions in relation to research with children: how do we account for our own unconscious projections and fantasies concerning children, which include those stemming from our own experiences, above and beyond (though not outside of) culture-wide ones?

Ethnographic research raises questions about how much to listen and how much to interpret (Ribbens, 1989), but discourse analytic approaches highlight how the two cannot ultimately be separated out. If we necessarily hear others through culturally dominant meanings, an unacknowledged perspective is most likely the hegemonic one. The task of reflexivity, according to Mishler (1986), is to make explicit the theoretical basis of interpretation. Deconstructing the photographic meaning of representation, as a critique of objectivism begs, means taking greater caution over our representational claims and avoiding obscuring the perspectival nature of knowledge. This issue emerges in considering how close to keep to participants' actual words (see Standing, 1998; 1994). Whilst their language and concepts will be of central interest if we wish to (and believe it is possible to) re-present (portray), we might wish, or be drawn, to employ more politically relevant terms and analytic frameworks when we want to make representation for/about children either as advocacy, or when we take it upon ourselves to intervene in 'the relations of representation' (Hall, 1992) or in the 'politics of recognition' (Fraser, 1995). The options can be understood as being about the representative role we adopt. Finch

(1993) described the conflict she faced between using women's own terms, and providing the structural analysis she felt their position called for, and Ribbens (1989) argued that if we do not agree with what our participants say, we will have to decide in the context whether and how we try to respect their opinions. In research with children, this conflict is between promoting particular re/presentations of children as a social group, and re-presenting the accounts of the particular children who participated. We must be clear about when our priority is to make an admittedly flawed (say, qualified empirical) re/presentation of children's voices, and when it is for the presentation of *our* analyses, reflecting an adult, and perhaps personal, agenda within cultural politics. The dilemma can then be located within the realm of research strategy if, from the start of a given piece of research, we are clear about whether we are engaging in representational politics, and in which case will present aspects of the research in particular ways to intervene on particular issues; or we are attempting to hear and re-present particular children's voices. I would want to be decisive about this from the outset in order to be explicit with my participants about which type of representational role I was taking, and clear about my priorities for any particular representative act, though not necessarily explicit within it. In short, it appears that in either case, we might employ literal ('naive'), or reflexive, or covertly reflexive representational warrants.

Of course, the two-horns of the dilemma are an ideal separation because even if we adopt an empirical warrant for placing the 'voices of children' in the public sphere, we surely retain responsibility for not re-presenting uncritically, say, a racist discourse. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) and Parker and Burman (1993) agree that the researcher's responsibility extends to consideration of the default meanings of the context of research publication. What we consider to be progressive re/presentations could be subverted and carry undesirable meanings in another context. We cannot completely control the meanings that can be made of our research (Foucault, 1983). Not only might our careful wordings, qualifiers and warrants be lost, but another context might produce meanings that we could not have predicted. We cannot ensure our preferred readings, but we must attempt to ward off ones we believe to be oppressive. These, as well as decisions about how to frame, how to write, how and where to publish, are more than mere 'editorial control' over the accounts, and our politics are clearly highly significant, yet because of the taboo on

speaking of politics in academic work (a legacy of objectivism), I have been very relieved to find a few spaces - such as the Women's Workshop on Qualitative Family/Household Research and the Discourse Unit at Manchester Metropolitan University - for discussing these concerns. Without recognition and discussion of these dilemmas we risk relying on unexamined assumptions. Reflexive discussion amongst researchers and activists can thus inform our strategies, but are sometimes blocked by the presumption of realism. Hopefully, being reflexive enables us not simply to reproduce the cultural positions, but to ask new questions about the existence of these positions.

Reflexivity can be extended to make explicit the warrants we employ for the status of our accounts, to attempt to disassemble them where we feel it is appropriate, but perhaps we may take up positions of authority and present our research as 'knowledge' where we feel it is politically expedient to do so. To demonstrate our recognition that we actively provide narratives for our material, and construct the authority of knowledge, we may use active verbs such as 'producing' (also avoiding the realist implication of pre-existing data), and might undo the specular metaphors of research which obscure the processes, deny the particularity of perspective and the different investments in particular kinds of knowledge. However, it might sometimes be useful to *exclude* discussion of our methodological dilemmas in our finished reports. This goes against the grain of recent feminist research debates about making explicit both our practices and dilemmas, but there might be good grounds for considering which 'public' we are open with about issues; contrasting, for instance, an audience of feminist and critical researchers, with a hostile policy forum, or a broader audience when we aim to disseminate our accounts widely. Could we choose a strategy of omitting the discussion of decision-making processes or the political nature of knowledge production, that is, maintaining these conventional silences? For instance, might we deliberately employ the specular metaphors of research despite their implicit objective-realist warrants? The description earlier of different epistemological warrants within either discourse of representation suggests moments at which this might be useful. However, is it ever acceptable to present a piece of research with a contradiction between its re/presentational claims and our actual confidence in these claims? This is one of the ethical questions that politically motivated researchers might begin to discuss more broadly. One of the contributions

of a book such as Ribbens and Edwards (1998) is the opportunity to voice questions and discuss the dilemmas we work with, without the pressure to find 'answers' that writing for a broader public usually requires.

8.12 How our accounts might be heard

Being critical of the presuppositions of the voice discourse would not necessarily prevent me from insisting 'that children be heard' in a particular forum. However, when employing it, I would be concerned that my research might satisfy the demand that 'the voices of children' be heard, without actually altering *how* they are heard, or challenging the limited impact that what children say usually has. This illustrates the limits and risks of answering within the terms of the debate, as chapter 6 put it.

Discursive approaches, by rejecting the possibility of escape from the cultural web of meanings, direct our attention to the consideration of what ideas we unwittingly reinforce. Given that the cultural construction of childhood is dominated by discourses of developmental psychology, there is a danger of reifying these particular ideas about children through our research. Even our strategic use of 'voice' metaphors may endorse the hegemonic notion of the rational, integrated, psychological subject (of which post-structuralist positions and some non post-structuralist feminist positions are critical), but furthermore, these may have particular implications for children.

Children, in particular, can be closely associated with the emotions, through ideas which link them to nature, and through discourses of their development towards rationality (Walkerdine, 1988). Where rationality is privileged, 'emotionality' can disqualify them as research participants. Similarly, failure to meet the expectations of conventional interview research (of consistency, and of 'independence' from the researcher), can be interpreted as failings of children to be successful interviewees, rather than problems with the mythical notion of the 'individual' which underpins the approach. This too can function to undermine the idea that children can, or should, be 'given voice'. The concept of attitude (or opinion) involves a single, stable or consistent perspective (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). However, interviewing anyone about 'family', for instance, will elicit a range of contradictory ideas (as I found in my research with Margaret O'Brien), so a contribution of discourse analytic work is to

demonstrate that multiplicity, complexity and contradiction are features of our linguistic repertoire, rather than the limited cognitive sophistication, or incompetent expression, of a particular child. In conventional accounts, the ambiguity of children's talk would either not be recognized, or, if acknowledged, would be interpreted as evidence of immature logical reasoning or loss of narrative control because of its abstraction from social relationships (Burman, 1992).

For the above reasons, we may be critical of children being 'given voice' only if they can present themselves as subjects or individuals in this (Cartesian) sense, and ambivalent about some of the policy changes which require such bases for recognition. For instance, my support for the 1989 Children Act's requirement that children's wishes be heard on decisions that affect them, is tempered by the knowledge that popular psychological notions about children (about fantasy, 'impressionability', reliability as witnesses) form the inescapable context within which statements will be heard. The complexity of issues that we face is illustrated by the fact that these same psychological discourses of the subject which allow some children to be heard, will disallow other children, including those who present contradictory or illogical accounts and don't manage to make themselves understood by (particular) adults, in 'adults' terms'. Attaining subject status in current hegemonic discourse is fraught with risks as well as benefits for those currently on its margins.

Even after we have adopted a strategy either of engaging in representational politics or of claiming to re/present particular children, further issues may arise which repeat this question. Within either approach, particular discourses may have apparently contradictory implications. For instance, a discourse of child protection can reinforce the idea that children are weak, vulnerable and in need of (adult) protection (Kitzinger, 1990), even as it simultaneously provides help for particular children. Alternatively, there may be times when this kind of emphasis benefits children as a social group, say in securing funding for services, but is unhelpful for an individual child.

Even though 'the voices of children' discourse is deliberately plural, there is the danger that invoking the category, despite taking care to speak of particular children, risks reifying children as an homogeneous social group whose 'nature' is different

from that of adults. As discussions amongst feminists have elaborated, for the category 'women', there too may be times when the benefits of naming the social group outweigh the costs. Throughout this chapter, I have retained 'children' as an unproblematized category in order to focus on questions of representation. I have presumed the constituency of childhood when, perhaps, a key dilemma in representing children relates to *which* children's lives are represented in discourses of childhood.

Standing (1998) also explores the risk that our research reinforces assumptions about the research participants. There is the danger that our critiques reify what we would rather dispel if we concentrate too much on dominant meanings, with too little attention to times and places in which they are contested (Alcoff, 1988). Parker and Burman remind discourse analysts of the importance of theorising the 'fluctuations and transformations in discursive relations to ward off a reading of them as unchanging' (1993: p164). This dilemma can be aligned crudely with the tension between 'gritty realism' ('showing it like it is') and 'positive images' (presenting the 'good news' or a preferred version) (for instance, explored in Roach and Felix's (1988) discussion of cultural images of black women). It re-states the alternative between re-presentation (understood as empirical, realist) or re/presentation (as an intervention in cultural politics). I have argued that, although this is a false opposition (as Walkerdine,1990, and others have shown) and risks reasserting a truth/ideology distinction (see chapter 5), it can be useful for thinking strategically about our research.

8.13 Representations in the public sphere: choosing a strategy

To summarize, our strategic decisions might include, not only which approach to adopt and what representational claims to make, but also, precisely how reflexive to be about these in a given forum. One could be aware of the rhetorical ploys and epistemological imperialisms by which one's textual authority is supported, but choose not to deconstruct it at a given point, in which case, the strategic use of conventional research rhetoric might be indistinguishable from its unreflexive use (Woolgar and Ashmore, 1988). However, in doing so, hitherto taken-for-granted notions may have been displaced. For example, James and Prout (1996) call for children to be studied within family contexts once again because they are an

'important social context in which children discover [sic] their identities (James, 1994)' (James and Prout, 1996: p42), rather than, unthinkingly, because the family has been naturalised as the place where children exist. Another illustration might be using the discourse of 'public sphere' in order to emphasize the broader political consequences of our research, despite rejecting theoretically its implication that there is a separate sphere of (private) meanings which are not cultural. Perhaps another illustration is my use of the notion of strategy despite its implication of rational, goal-oriented subjects (and its militaristic resonances) (Edwards and Ribbens, 1991). Yet another, is the fact that I have deconstructed the modernist construction of the subject in relation to interviewees, whilst retaining it to speak of us decision-making researchers! Indeed, throughout this thesis, I write about the mythical status of the rational, bounded individual, but do so in a linguistic style and tone which tacitly reaffirms it. I also write myself into it in ways which are contradictory, at times adopting, and at others claiming to 'reject', identity categories.

In the same way that researchers set the terms for discussion in an interview, so public debate may already be framed in such a way - again by adults - that intervening within the terms of the debate is a compromise. 'A sense of perspective' is needed to weigh up whether an idea is worth challenging, or whether granting it research attention bolsters its status (but there are no external referents set up as ideals or guarantees for this perspective). This issue can be thought of as a question about whether to try to make gains within the existing terms of the debate or to challenge those terms (Alldred, 1996a; Kitzinger, 1987; Prince and Hartnett, 1993, and see chapter 6). The dilemma, again, concerns the risk of reification by critiques.

How specific to research with children are the dilemmas discussed here? It seems that the theoretical issues are not specific. Rather, they apply 'across the board' in feminist and critical research. However, the precise meanings assigned childhood in this culture make the detail of the dilemmas of research with children particular. Ideas about marginal groups may be structured similarly in relation to the presumed centre, but do not necessarily require the same responses. It is the specific forms of these dilemmas to which researchers must attend in relation to the participants' social group, and in relation to the precise moment and location of their research intervention. Thus, the possible losses and gains of employing the discourse of

hearing voices must be considered in relation to children (as a rhetorical category), and perhaps in relation to particular children, and the discourse might then be drawn on with varying degrees of literality.

Whilst much feminist research is concerned with adequately recognizing difference, representing children within research is always characterised by Otherness across the construction of a defining adult-child difference. Unlike Women's Studies, Childhood Studies has not arisen from a politics of experience (Oakley, 1994) and is conducted by adults on those who are Other to them. Children do, of course, make political representations on their own behalf, as well as on behalf of others (Hoyles, 1989), but more often through direct action, rather than through re/presentational or recognition politics. As adults representing children we can try to recognize the ways in which our researcher status may confound and exploit our adult status, and clarify whether we are representing children in the realist, photographic sense of portrayal, or using our political perspective to make judgements about the way they are represented as we engage in struggles about 'recognition' or meaning. Referring to 'children's perspectives', naming their particularity, even though inevitably drawing into play their Otherness and our cultural centrality, we may be able to make use of the benefits this can provide in claiming that people who are marginalised 'as children' ought to be heard. Researchers interviewing children need to consider how we hear children's voices, meaning not only the approaches we employ, but also how the representations we make of their voices will be heard in the public sphere. Children's voices need to be heard alongside critical attention to the way childhood is constructed. This should then inform a more preliminary question, which, as Alderson (1995) notes, is often bypassed: not how, but whether the research should be done, and, I would add, not just how, but whether each particular re/presentational act should be made.

Chapter 9

Parents, Popular Psychology and Performativity: 'Post-Identity' Parenting?

This thesis has examined theoretical shifts in the social sciences from approaches which take a modernist model of the individual as their unproblematic centre, to approaches which develop the notion of subject positions and an understanding of identities as *performative*. Chapter 5 also narrated changes in British cultural politics over the last thirty years from the primacy of 'identity politics' to the emergence and popularisation of cultural and political strategies which neither presume a modernist subject, nor that representation is a literal matter. The theoretical narrative of the thesis therefore parallels broader shifts in cultural practice/s, as well as those in theory itself. These are illustrated in, and are popularised through, cultural forms which challenge the authenticity of the subject and of representation (e.g. 'postmodern' cinema, performance art, sampling, pastiche, and retro-fads, the significance of advertising and of direct action politics in/and 'the media age'). But what are the implications of 'post identity politics' for parental identities? Are they to be welcomed?

This chapter brings a 'performative' approach to identities to bear on some of the current debates and themes in British social policy. Firstly, it considers some of the implications for contemporary parents of a post-structuralist informed discursive approach to subjectivity, through particular cultural discourses of 'fitness to parent'. This is framed by accounts of broader change in family and social life, (or perhaps in *ways of thinking about* family life), which highlight the value of psychosocial approaches for linking the subjective with the cultural. Secondly[1], it outlines some of the potential implications of viewing identity as performative for thinking about parents: that is, how such an approach might work ideally, and then goes on to look at contemporary social policy concerning parents and/or families with this in mind. It draws together disparate, and admittedly selective, arguments and concepts within social policy to argue that they illustrate a shift towards understandings of identities as

---

[1] Earlier versions of this argument were presented at the *Discourse and Cultural Practice* conference, in Adelaide, Australia, in February 1996, and to the *Women's Workshop on Qualitative Family and Household Research* in 1997, and I am grateful to members of the workshop for critical feedback and discussion.

performative, rather than as static, all-embracing categories. It argues that such moves towards the principle of performativity for thinking about families, whilst not guaranteed, tend to be for the better.

9.1 'Fitness to parent'

This thesis has examined popular debates in the British media about parents, mothers and fathers. Journalists' implicit questioning of whether a person or identity group were 'fit to parent' suggested a focus on the discourse of fit*ness* to parent, as a quality or qualities. 'Fitness to parent' appears very powerful as a moral discourse, yet it is 'vacant' of 'qualities' that might be expected to give it meaning. This lead to a focus on the claims to know, and the politics of knowledge, psychological expertise in particular, surrounding 'fitness to parent'.

Psychological discourses are popularised and morally persuasive today (e.g. promoting child/ren's self-esteem, improving communication skills, maintaining appropriate 'boundaries' and healthy relationships). Partly because of their popularisation, they invoke a range of types of warrant or epistemological claims to back them. Their epistemology, like the psychological discourses themselves, is often naturalised. Different chapters have described discourses that relate to, but no single authoritative discourse of, fitness to parent. Indeed, the argument here is that no single discipline holds an uncontested territorial claim over fitness to parent, and that this is what allows various mobilisations of this powerful notion.

'Fitness for' suggests a functionalist or utilitarian ethos. 'Fitness to parent' evokes ideas about genetic quality and evolutionary progress which have supported social engineering programmes and eugenicist atrocities. Perhaps a painful association with Nazi eugenics only 60 years ago explains its mutedness. Although such a discourse is not explicit, there is sometimes a eugenic flavour to popular conservative arguments about parents today, such as those expressing concern over the birth-rate amongst 'the underclass'. Whilst they do not reduce characteristics to crude biological terms, arguments about the cost to society of delinquency, crime and welfare 'dependency' suggest 'social pathologies' which can ultimately have similar implications, and at many cultural sites we are witnessing a resurgence in sociobiological ideas.

'Fitness to parent' is a term whose meaning is more vague than its apparent 'confidence' would suggest. It is not a concept with coherence and integrity. There is no current consensus on it, but various, contradictory popular and expert accounts. As a 'vacant' but powerful idea, it is subject to competing attempts to 'fill in' its meaning, just as is 'family values'. Neither is it truly a discourse according to the definition adopted here of a distillation of statements which cohere around a core meaning and are reducible to a sentence or so (Parker, 1992, see chapter 7). Whilst no particular discipline makes an over-riding claim to it, psychological discourses are most highly valorised around parent-child relationships. Direct assertions of 'fitness to parent' would not be in the style of contemporary psychology. Indeed, the discipline would not hold together if 'it' tried to produce a unitary view. However, professionals other than psychologists hold the jobs which specifically regulate access to parenthood through reproductive technologies or adoption. This split between psychologists and those whose work administers psychology through institutional regulation and surveillance of parents allows popular/psychology to remain powerful, naturalised and without official challenge or update at these sites of practice.

The dominant British popular cultural understanding of fitness to parent then, rather than being viewed as an ideology, is better understood as a site at which a whole range of discourses about parents and children, individuals and society intersect. Among these are some of the discourses that have featured in this thesis: of modern parents, good mothers, (good) fathers, and of maturity, selfishness and responsibility; of children as the object of parental concern and outcome of parental behaviour, and of their needs, individuality and normal development; of childrearing, the natural, fitness for the job, cost to the tax-payer, threat to the family. Instead of trying to articulate a coherent discourse of fitness to parent, the multiplicity and complexity of this site is recognised. These various discourses straddle or intersect each other, at times competing, and at others merely present by virtue of their assertion as contemporary common-sense or self-evident truths. It can be seen as a discursive complex, a site at which the web of discourses pertaining to it produce the appearance of solid meaning, where it can be imagined there is conceptual integrity.

Within this complex, psychological discourses (as topics or warrants) operate powerfully today. However, 'psychological discourses' may either be statements of

dominant mainstream psychology, which carry the power of disciplinary knowledge (i.e. operate as warrant/epistemological basis), or they may be alternatives which (can) contest these, but whose power rests on the fact that they nevertheless answer the same concerns (i.e. as topic). They might thereby 'beat psychology at its own game', using the 'psychological' or subjective to pose an alternative to disciplinary knowledge.

Psychology, therefore, rules this domain. There are, though, many reported sightings of the 'king', sometimes in different dress, and sometimes the prince is mistaken for him and carries out public duties in his place. Still within popular memory though, are stories of the previous king, biology, whose fitness was judged through ideas about a broader good than simply how individual subjects fared, and there are some who herald his return. Memories of cruelty committed in his name (such as the exile of certain of his subjects) appear less significant in people's minds than the truth and rational order that he promises.

Even if it were a coherent discourse, fitness to parent itself is seldom articulated because it is mostly defined by its absence. Most significant for understanding what dominant social expectations of those who are 'fit' to raise children, are the powerful, negative discourses that construct 'unfit' parents, particularly in the popular sphere. A discursive approach, with the concepts of muted or subjugated discourses, can recognise the significance of 'silences' and absences such as those indicated in what Phoenix and Woollett (1991) identified as the normalised absence/pathologised presence of devalued subjects/positions. For example, the clearest indications of what presence in children's lives mothers, and, differently, fathers are expected to have comes from sharp characterisations of absent fathers (or mothers), or neglectful mothers (or parents). Mothers who meet social disapproval reveal some of the implicit expectations of mothers. Chapter 3 saw how 'virgin birth' mothers were constructed as selfish for depriving men of the opportunity to take on family responsibilities, just as lone mothers are sometimes constructed as depriving their children of a father (Phoenix, 1991), and partnered mothers are sometimes held responsible for their partner's relationship with their (mutual) child (Marshall, 1991). This shows how much responsibility for the family falls on mothers, or, more precisely, how much blame falls on mothers when there is concern about the family. It is therefore through

the negative discourses of women who are not seen as making fit mothers that we can see what good mothers are expected to be and do. This is not, however, in the coherent way I first imagined: specific negatives point to their implicit, often normalised, opposites, but there are many contradictory 'negatives' (such as whether 'good mothering' means staying at home or doing paid work outside the home, see e.g. Edwards and Duncan, 1997) and they do not 'add together' to define negatively the perfect, or even a 'good enough', mother. Because the range of discourses at work culturally do not form a coherent whole, they do not each, nor any one of them always, work against mothers/for fathers. While currently they most often have a disproportionate impact on mothers, to assert an inevitable anti-feminist consequence would be to essentialise the politics of a particular discursive formulation and abstract and over-generalise unhelpfully.

9.2 The psychosocial imagination

C. Wright Mills, writing in the 1950s, offered a prognosis of our 'postmodern' present. We would, he argued, see the collapse of liberalism and socialism as the reigning ideologies theorising the relationship between the individual and society (Denzin, 1987). A central premise of this thesis is that Mills was correct and that the collapse of these existing ideologies creates the conditions of possibility for psychosocial studies to map the same terrain differently. Some of the questions Mills thought 'the sociological imagination' might address have, in this thesis, been subjected to the, actually *a* (my), 'psychosocial imagination': He asked 'what type of man, woman and child would appear at this historical moment?' and 'what manner and form of human problems would this new generation create?' (cited in Denzin, *ibid*.).

In chapter 5, it was argued that we are now 'psychological subjects', which is to say that we constructed and construct ourselves and our relationships through psychological discourses. Whether these are drawn from the expert knowledge base or popular folk wisdom, they concern 'psychology' as a topic or terrain. This may or may not accompany the rejection of the (unitary, rational) subject on which psychology was founded. The persuasiveness and pervasiveness of psychological discourses is illustrated by the fact that they are the objects of criticism here, yet also arguments through which I make some of my points. For example, in chapter 4, I

claim that a powerful discourse of 'father absence' accepts residential markers of presence as a basis for judging fathers, as opposed to emotional or psychological ones, which would be preferable. Similarly, in chapter 5, I argue that the concept of 'role models' is superficial in an emotional or psychological sense. These show how psychological discourses are persuasive because of their appeal to 'real life experience', to a dimension of life whose significance is newly appreciated, and the possibility therefore, of 'beating psychology (the discipline) at its own game'. The criticism of psychological concepts for being psychologically inadequate suggests either (or both) the failure of the discipline to live up to its claims, or the rapid cultural adoption and development of the discipline's terrain. I would argue that both of these have occurred. Chapters 6 and 7 show the particularity of the epistemological and methodological paradigm through which mainstream psychology was forged, and which took the discipline away from other, more philosophical and existential, intellectual resources. Section 9.4 takes up the issue of the 'psychologisation' of the popular sphere. Speaking of 'psychological subjects' requires careful qualification, since it assumes a particular reconceptualisation of subjectivity, rather than the reification of 'the subject of psychology' (the discipline).

A feminist Foucauldian approach to discourse, power and the self, and a Butleresque approach to identity has enabled me to begin to think about the significance of cultural discourses of parents, mothers and fathers for the experience of individuals at this historical moment, without reducing subjectivity to the passive adoption of socially-prescribed parental roles. It allows an understanding of the formation of subjects whose desire to parent children is culturally produced, but no less real for that. It therefore provides a way through the psychosocial problematic. The conventional concerns of psychology, of emotions, relationships and identity, can be approached without neglecting their socio-cultural production or individualising their implications. It recognises the powerful role played by culture whilst allowing a dignified, complex subjectivity, and recognises an unconscious without making it the source of authentic desires beyond the reach of culture. Subjective desire is both culturally produced *and* genuine. This problematic is not only that of psychosocial studies, and, as previous chapters have suggested, echoes sociology's structure/agency debates, communication studies' audience/ideology, and cultural and literary studies' reader/text tensions.

This approach constructs parents, and would-be parents, as 'governing' themselves and the discourses surrounding fitness to parent as elements in their self-formation and self-regulation. The desire to parent might sometimes be in conflict with discourses around fitness to parent. Whilst people are positioned differently regarding 'fitness to parent', by the discourses described throughout the thesis and others, and will 'take up' different positions themselves, they will share the operation of power through their subjective will, not to the same ends, but to produce their (varied) experience - from their most fulfilling to their most anxious moments - of parenting. No greater imperative is needed (no instructions from psychologists, nor the threat of social workers) to think through how fit one is to parent than the will to do the best for our child/ren, and the fear of doing otherwise, coupled with our increasing obligation to do ourselves proud by our children and be fulfilled through our intimate (especially sexual and parental) relationships. The personal agonising heard in certain liberal, middle-class quarters from women who are able to choose when to conceive is part of governing ourselves through the whole constellation of discourses around fitness to parent, responsible parenting, what children need, women wanting to 'have it all', pleasure and life satisfaction.

The thesis of the 'triumph' of a preoccupation with the self, and the powerful epistemology of experience and subjective knowledge has, according to some contemporary social theorists, a much larger cultural resonance, which section 9.4 considers. As section 9.5 attests, I envisage this general shift, and a performative approach in particular, as potentially helpful for thinking about/representing parenting, but I am ambivalent about its application to certain issues, in a way which echoes the concerns many feminists have about postmodernity (Burman, 1990; Burman *et al*., 1996a; Jackson, 1992; Lovibund, 1989; Soper, 1991). For example, a recurrent concern of the thesis is with the merits and dangers of referring to people who parent children as if they are ungendered, given the profoundly over-determining nature of gender in Western culture - and especially, it seems, around children and their carers. There are of course, quite different meanings given to mother absence than to father absence, and quite different markers of deviance, immaturity and irresponsibility for adult men and women, as chapters 2 to 4 attempted to show. So the shifts I describe must be seen in the context of these less pro-feminist discourses.

In the examples mentioned above the emphasis is on differences in meanings attributed to mothers and fathers in cases of negative judgements. From these, I surmise that it is at the boundary between fit and unfit, and particularly in the demarcation of women who are deemed unfit to mother, that the differences in expectations according to gender are either intensified or more starkly revealed. This is where they stand out as needing feminist responses because they are where women are judged particularly harshly according to conventional markers of femininity, wifeliness and motherliness. A preoccupation with the self and with individual responsibility distracts from the social and material conditions *only within which* can we be expected to 'take responsibility'. Even then, what is the price to pay for the reassertion of 'the responsible subject' when is it not founded on the rational subject? Section 9.4 allows a glimpse of the way the responsible subject might not deny their irrationality, but be reflexive about it. But a problem that attends this triumph of the self is that confessing one's failings or revealing one's unconscious motivations can replace any imperative to change. So can reflexivity sometimes mitigate responsibility? C. Wright Mills also proposed questioning how 'the family' might respond to this 'new generation' and new period in Western history, and the rest of the chapter considers this.

9.3 Parents and 'parenting': expertise and authority

In addition to the popularisation of the gender-neutral term 'parents', (which chapters 2 and 6 discuss), recently we have seen the emergence and popularisation of the verb 'to parent'. Speaking of the activity of 'parenting' clearly avoids constructing it as an essentially gendered activity, but it also dissociates it from mothers (or fathers) as people. Taking these aspects separately: as a strategy, creating an ungendered identity of 'parent' has the potential to challenge some of the gendered discourses of mothers and fathers, as chapter 6 described, and may serve feminist ends. Retaining an identity category, but 'vaguing' its gender can undermine the gender binary, but will sometimes simply allow gendered discourses to map onto or exist alongside it, which is where mothers, and perhaps sometimes fathers, can find themselves 'caught between' gendered and ungendered discourses and failing on both counts. Thus, I do not assume that the ungendering is necessarily progressive (see chapter 6).

Mukti Jain Campion's (1995) book, ***Who's fit to be a parent?***, as the title suggests, focuses on people, and asks which people have the individual qualities for the job of being a parent. By contrast, my emphasis is on the discursive constructions of fitness to parent, that is, how it is constructed as a(n assumed) quality, and object of knowledge and I have become particularly interested in the limitations of mapping meanings onto particular people/groups. The distinction is between highlighting *parenting* as a relational activity, or *parents* (and parenthood) as a noun naming an identity category (or state/status). In addition, whereas Campion's title posits parents as her objects whom she looks in upon, my concern is with 'fitness to parent' as of subjective importance to people (including myself) and as part of the meanings through which we (or many of us) 'psychological subjects' are constituted and govern ourselves.

Referring to 'parenting' offers the possibility of recognising doing parenting as performative and producing 'parents' (see chapter 5). This commonsense understanding of parenting as performative in the sense of being about childcare activities, which clearly produces 'relations', is extended in the specific theoretical development of the concept of performativity. However, there are firm definitions of who 'has' the identity of parent and non-parent in legal and social policy, in contrast with, say, racial identity which is not directly legislated upon (at least not aside from immigration legislation which seems to use 'nationality' as a proxy for race'), yet which is understood as a matter for self-definition. Neither of these are popularly understood as radically performative in the theoretical sense because it rests on an understanding of language as productive which is not fully popularised. The popular discourse of parenting both enables, and is produced by, the professionalisation of motherhood (Phoenix and Woollett, 1991) and now, the professionalisation of parenthood (Campion, 1995), either of which produce a newly problematised activity and way of being (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Urwin and Sharland, 1992). I share much of Campion's analysis, but draw different emphases around the popular consequences of expert knowledge:

> 'The very appearance of the word parenting signifies its transformation into a category for study and expertise, no longer just one aspect of daily living but something that requires particular skills, behaviours and knowledge - which only professionals can know' (Campion, 1995: p117).

Certainly, professionals have built up new ways of looking at parent-child relationships through their language and processes, but, I would argue, this does not function simply to create a 'growing gulf' between professionals and ordinary people. They have not, as Campion describes it, 'unwittingly created closed systems largely impenetrable to an outsider not versed in their professional rules' (*ibid*.: p117). I have argued that psychological expertise on parent-child relations is powerful precisely because it 'makes sense' to parents, and to Western subjects more generally. The discourse functions authoritatively in the popular sphere. It remains powerful because we want what it claims to offer, and 'functions as truth' because we sometimes make sense of our experiences through it, thereby making it 'come true' in a performative sense.

The disciplinary power of psychological knowledge means that mothers, fathers, foster carers etc. are subject to professional judgements, assessments and categorisations, but I have also argued that the power of psychological discourses can be brought to bear by using the language of psychology, even without institutional backing as pop-psychology. Even explicitly non-expert appeals to psychology operate powerfully as the terrain of 'the psyche', the subjective and the emotional, become increasingly valorised, seemingly across British culture. This is not to imply that the latter can necessarily oppose the former, but that the outcome of struggles between them is not determined in advance purely by an expert's claim to knowledge. The particular discursive positions that open up, and how they fare when forced to compete, are subject to so many contingent understandings that their operation can only be understood in each specific context.

As chapter 2 argues, the 'colonisation' by experts of the terrain of concerns we have about the everyday treatment of children, was a consequence of the shift from traditional to rational forms of authority (Weber, cited by Richards, 1999) on childrearing and, later, 'parent-child relations'. Whilst we may no longer trust the experts as we once did, we still seek out expertise. As subjects born on the promises of modernity, we have a 'will to truth' and a desire for the comfort of an external authority whose answers to our concerns we may be guided by, even though we may also contest, criticise and query. We want expertise, even as we criticise and scoff at particular experts, particular 'answers' or even their theoretical frameworks.

Barry Richards (1999) argues that it is not so much a 'crisis of authority' as the emergence of new forms of authority. Social institutions are powerful for us because of what we project into them, and it may be that particular projections are no longer channelled into the particular authorities that they were. He suggests a Freudian topography for thinking about the different forms of projection we make into different forms of authority (institutions, religious figures, knowledge forms, experts, politicians). In what we might call a 'classical modern mode of emotional management' different forms of projection were invested in distinctly different sources of authority, such that we had superego investments in moral authorities, ego investments in practical/rational authorities, and libidinous energy might be projected into charismatic figures. Whereas this contemporary form of (post-'crisis', perhaps post-1950s) emotional investment in authority might be characterised by a collapse of these boundaries, such that different psychic investments are no longer channelled into different forms of authority. If we look to rational knowledge bases such as mainstream psychology for containment of our fears around the care of children, then not surprisingly as we critique one form of expertise, we look for another to replace it. Valorising the expertise and professionalism of 'alternative' knowledges or approaches to childrearing, health or 'holistic family life', which chapter 2 described, seems less surprising in the light of this.

What does this account mean for children's investment of authority in their parents? Are their libidinous pleasures any less forbidden than they used to be? This would also suggest a way of understanding the possibility of over-investing in a discursive framework, in the hope that it is essentially progressive. Perhaps we can see ourselves torn between wanting to be able to trust in an external authority for the answers, and yet wanting to be 'independent' of it because we know the limitations of the discourse, and accept its critique. Once again, to have a critique of a knowledge form does not free us from it. Thus, we are ambivalent subjects in part because we recognise, and perhaps resent, the power that expertise has over, in and through us, yet realise we still seek it out in the belief that it will meet some of our needs. Acknowledging the limitations of our own knowledge, and moreover, the limitations of any knowledge form, can be interpreted as reaching the depressive position in a Kleinian developmental framework. As reflexive subjects we might recognise in

ourselves something of what our desire for, and investments in, knowledge are about individually, but can a culture that makes a 'reflexive turn', such as in postmodernity, be said to be more developed, more mature? Whilst psychoanalytic interpretations of cultural phenomena have much to offer (e.g. Creed, 1993; Fanon, 1969; Kaplan, 1992; Richards, 1994; Walkerdine, 1990), a characterisation of postmodernity as maturity clearly risks re/asserting the superiority of Western culture, normalising its particular development. Erica Burman (1995) presents a parallel critique of the normativity of the masculinist subject of developmental psychology and the imperialist presumptions of the Northern hemisphere's 'development'. In both cases peculiarly 'Western' development is naturalised as progress and exported. As regards the truth status we accord psychoanalytic (or indeed, developmental) interpretations of society, as Ian Parker argues in his recent work (Parker, 1997), this analysis makes sense because Western culture is already saturated with, and formed though, psychoanalytic understandings. Rose (1985, 1990) and De Swaan (1990) each look then to the wider cultural shifts by which we come to see the experts as engaged with our concerns.

9.4 Parents in 'the postmodern'

Some theorists prefer the term 'reflexive modernity' to postmodernity or 'the postmodern condition'. This makes the link with the epistemological arguments made in this thesis and their implications for research work. It also highlights the continuities, that is, it avoids implying that there is a new age upon us which is qualitatively different from that which went before. Instead it suggests that modernity turned its gaze, reflexively, upon itself and this usefully allows that, for all the significance made of this shift (in this thesis/in social theory) the old order has not been overturned, and that, alongside change, much remains the same.

Recent sociological work describes how relationships are becoming less status bound and more negotiated *in situ* between individuals. Research on intimate relations in contemporary, post-traditional society argues that we are moving towards more 'pure' and voluntaristic family relationships (Finch and Mason, 1993; Giddens, 1992). Finch and Mason (1993) stress the way responsibility and reciprocity are negotiated between individual family members. Even back in the late 1950s, Wilmott and Young described how fathers in the working-class families they studied not only 'took a

hand' in childcare, but that the boundaries of gendered parental roles (of mothers as nurturers and fathers as breadwinners) were less rigidly defined and were performed in consultation (Young and Wilmott, 1957/1962: p30, cited in Day Sclater *et al*., forthcoming 1999). Giddens (1992) argues that intimacy in its modern form entails a radical democratisation of the interpersonal domain 'because it assumes not only the individual being the ultimate maker of his or her own life, but also equality between partners and their freedom to choose lifestyles and forms of partnerships' (Weeks *et al*., 1996: p4). This is core to understanding changing attitudes to homosexuality (see Weeks, 1995), and also suggests that heterosexual relationships may be becoming more like homosexual ones to the extent that lesbian and gay relationships have always been free from at least a gendered dynamic of inequality and, once outside of the dominant discourses of heterosexuality, have had to invent relationships afresh (Weston, 1991). Indeed, recent research with lesbian co-parents shows that heterosexual couples might learn from their more equal sharing of childrearing, earning and housework (Dunne, 1998, see Saffron, 1999). Such findings complement the writings of Beck (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), in which individuals are seen to, and come to be expected to, take more personal responsibility for relationships and biographies than in previous times. Judith Stacey's (1990) work on contemporary family life in the USA draws similar conclusions, and from a different theoretical approach, one informed by Foucault, Nikolas Rose's work (1990; 1993) on the invention and government of the self through 'psy' discourses results in a subject who sounds very similar to Beck's (1992) 'reflexive individual'.

Beck writes from the perspective of contemporary Germany, Stacey's work was with the inhabitants of Silicon Valley (though not only middle-class and/or white), and some critics (e.g. Leonard, 1996) have questioned whether 'reflexive individualisation' is a middle-class privilege, and for Britain, a phenomenon which is rather more applicable to the 'Guardian-reading liberal middle-class' than these generalising analyses imply. This may well be true, and certainly the metropolitan London that introduced me to these features of 'the postmodern condition' was of specialist cultural practices and tastes (I am thinking particularly of the ICA, and of Soho's aesthetic/consumer fads). But the everyday London that convinced me of its relevance was of my own experience of shifting between different social spaces and meanings which can be aware of and challenge each other's meanings. Is a 'gut

feeling' argument, that performative approaches 'made sense' to me personally, unsatisfactory because it relies on the author's ontology, or should I unhesitantly warrant my account with an appeal to personal experience? If the role of ontology, the limitations of the identity-based dominant framework for speaking of it, and the subjective nature of the account are admitted, then does an account do all it can to avoid the imperialist tendencies of assertions of knowledge? I am convinced by the accounts of writers such as Beck in that they resonate with my own experience, and whilst I suspect that they have broad currency, I should try to avoid the temptation of asserting broad-based characterisations of contemporary social life by reminding myself of the aim to examine the potential value of new theoretical approaches to identity for thinking about parents, rather than to assess its prevalence. However, I explore points at which I believe I can see it surfacing to provide examples for thinking about its potentiality.

Writers such as Weeks (1995) describe the loss of old certainties concerning roles, expectations and duties, and increasing freedom from rigid religious and cultural pressures (particularly for indigenous white populations of mostly Christian heritage, and perhaps too for minority ethnic groups under the influence of multiculturalism or 'Westernisation'). That our identity is not assigned once-and-for-all on the basis of our familial, religious or occupational role by our local community, but is already made multiple by the range of spheres we inhabit in contemporary social life, lays the foundations for performative approaches to identity (Butler, 1990; 1993, Grosz, 1995; Hall, 1996; Henriques *et al.*, 1984; Mercer, 1994; Sarup, 1996; Probyn, 1993). Whilst the above writers celebrate the loosening of rigid social expectations, they recognise the burden that such responsibility can bring to bear upon individuals. Being given decisions about aspects of one's life which might have been mapped out in earlier times can feel daunting. It can produce a paralysing degree of choice and an 'unfixedness' that can feel like the loss of identity, value and place in society. Being given responsibility for undesirable aspects of one's life or one*self* is pressurizing and normalising. Once the conditions for achieving 'normality' have been realised for everyone, deviance is attributed solely to personal failure - or to an individual impairment or pathology which the appropriate expert should (help you) correct (De Swaan, 1990). This attributes an unrealistic, and therefore unfair, degree of

responsibility because it occludes political analysis of the constraints some people face.

The association of old certainties of identity with value allows Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) to express this as the tension over 'love *or* freedom'. It is, therefore, no liberation from social judgement, but more of a heightened requirement of reflexivity and responsibility. Not surprisingly then, there is much ambivalence about this 'mixed blessing'. One 'must' devote time and thought to imagining every potential judgement by others and by the self. As before, whilst the multiplicity of subject positions provides a range of possibilities for the self, access to these is still produced through structures of differential disadvantage. Here again freedom has limits. As chapter 5 argued, the discourses from which we are 'liberated' may be part of our formation and so 'old' ideas about duty, obligation, 'goodness' or responsibility may still be felt sharply, only they may be felt alongside secular, consumerist, or otherwise contradictory ideas. Furthermore, 'reflexive individuals' in 'postmodern families' (Stacey, 1990) are still subject to powerful judgements by professionals or interventions by agencies. And when their individual responsibility is emphasised, structural understandings of disadvantage and the restrictions on individual choice and freedom get forgotten and can individualise social problems and expect those most disadvantaged to take individual responsibility for avoiding or ameliorating disadvantage. This is where one needs to recognise that from some positions less freedom is allowed, and where the post-structuralist concern with power should prevent analyses lapsing into relativism.

The 'mixed blessing' of reflexivity about parenting means that one might, for instance in my own social milieu, be expected to be able to articulate one's desire to parent through a whole set of reflexive discourses. This might include acknowledging the contribution of layers of 'rosy images' of motherhood and of narcissistic investments, of feminist critiques, up-to-date and liberal disciplinary discourses, popular disapproval and complex ethical quandaries about what 'children need', 'parents need' and what mothers are 'allowed' without feeling guilty. These all exist alongside 'stop rationalising and just do it', 'trust your instincts' and 'you'll soon see how significant biology is' discourses of over-intellectualisation.

In addition, nothing can be assumed about either the partnership or parental relationships, or the residential and financial arrangements, or the practicalities of child-care, employment, life-stage, job opportunities or career paths/breaks. Here alternative discourses compete to provide the trump card in the reflexive dilemmas between say, how much a child needs you there, versus how much better the quality of your parenting if you have fulfilling relationships outside the home. There are fewer intrinsically positive or negative decisions, but what is crucial is that they are narrated through these types of discourse, to display this form of reflexivity. In addition, there are further forms of reflexivity to be addressed in their particularities: we are impelled to relate our decisions to our own hopes and fears of family which 'must' somehow involve reflection on not only our own childhood but also the effects and consequences this had, and may in future have. Regardless of critiques of developmental assumptions and limited perspectives, we risk serious approbation if we do not imply a degree of reflexivity here. Our future or actual child, and our own 'inner child' have a particular place in our narrations of self and in understandings of interiority from Shakespeare onwards (see Steedman, 1995). As Burman (1994c) shows, the child is key in how contemporary Western culture(s) sees the relation of individuals to society. Furthermore, parenting is at the very crux of dominant and critical understandings of how individuals are produced in the particular cultural form recognised in the West, at the interface of 'the social' and what we experience as the individual, constructing their child's identity before it is born, interpellating it into sets of culturally specific meanings before it can talk.

There is an irony that relates to the discussion in chapters 6, 8 and here, of the presentation of the researcher or author as strategic and goal-oriented, yet deconstructing the rational Subject for interviewees, parents, etc. It is that the reflexivity produced in us by the development of these emphases on individual responsibility for personal satisfaction 'require', and so produce, the sense of coherent self-identity and if not 'life-plans', then 'route rationales', at the same time as many of the discursive strands that comprise self-reflexivity disavow this modernist subject and encourage recognition of the parts that over-spilled. Thus, writing a thesis requires me to perform a particular mode of (authorial) subjectivity which, through my performance of it, I (sometimes) experience as if it were essential.

9.5 The potential of performative approaches

A performative approach to identities has the potential to refocus our thinking about parents on relationships, rather than identities. It therefore facilitates the continuing move away from the presumptions of identity politics, and could prove valuable for thinking about parents and parenting. By distinguishing between roles and relationships, one can move away from ideas about (assumptions based on) who someone is, towards more detailed focus of who they are in relation to something or someone. That is, leave stereotypes for actuality, and construct a more relational approach. This allows that family relationships are defined differently from different vantage points, which allows us to recognise the complexity of today's families - for instance, that 'who someone is' to me, is not necessarily 'who they are' to someone else (e.g. the parent of a child may be a step-parent of another child in the same family). Shifting the focus from identities to relationships acknowledges the complexity and non-unitary nature of one's position in 'family' by theorising at more detailed levels, through concepts such as subject positions, and identifications. Rather than the identities or roles of mother, father or parent, which assume stable, fixed and oversimplified relations, are 'parenting responsibilities' or relationships. Identities are only useful where it is understood that they are fleeting and situated, always performed *in situ* and produced as real through that performance. Relationships are the important elements, and these produce subjects who are, at a given time and place, positioned as, and identify as, 'parent'.

This relational emphasis has the potential for emphasising family dynamics over and above family forms. It might therefore mitigate against the prejudging of families, in the abstract, on account of their 'form' (usually the constellation of gendered adults that comprise them). Attempts to judge how good a family is for the child/ren reared within it, can therefore at least be nudged to concentrate on the actual relationship dynamics between its members. Similarly, we might open up the space to consider the actual quality of boys' relationships with their fathers, rather than merely the presence of fathers. This amounts to a recognition of the limits of sociological (or demographic) views of families, and to according higher priority to 'psychological' ones which focus on subjective, emotional, interactive aspects.

A deconstructive approach to the discourse of family allows the recognition of parent-child relationships as distinct from adult partnerships or sexual relationships. These are conflated within dominant discourses of family. We know too that there remains no inevitable link between biological and social parenthood, and that there are many cases in which biological kinship does not predict care relationships. When the use of the family discourse is not limited by identities, same-sex couples might co-parent on the same terms as heterosexual couples, 'families' will define for themselves their boundaries, and might comprise one, two, three, four co-parenting adults of whichever gender, and relations of care need not be limited to those between adults and children. (As more of the population come to need care in their old age, perhaps we will be able to define families as units of care relationships rather than, as hitherto (Van Every, 1991), by the presence of a child.) When relationship markers are not identity restricted, certain socially recognised relationships would not be restricted to use by those conservatively defined as suitable, e.g. discourses of family (which are already in use) amongst lesbian and gay adults and the children in their care (Weeks *et al*., 1996), same-sex marriages (Sherman, 1992), and perhaps we could usefully extend our terms to recognise co-parents who are neither lovers or kin.

It is quite obvious that in making decisions about children's well-being, the focus must be on the emotional and practical relationships as they are lived, not the way the family looks from outside, nor whether it conforms to the narrow image of the nuclear family. This is an argument that relationships should be defined subjectively, but one can also argue this on the grounds that it is a more child-centred way of thinking about family. Research on children's own perspectives on parenting argues that children themselves describe having a safe and loving family, rather than any particular family form as important (Smart and Neale, 1999). When they define as family those who 'look after them', who are 'there for them' after school etc. they are defining in performative and relational terms. I think such a performative approach to thinking about parents is politically desirable: not only because it provides a more realistic understanding of how people live their family lives (an empirical warrant for it), but primarily because it allows a less conservative, restrictive understanding of parenting and a more inclusive (political warrant) discourse of 'family values'.

Before presenting an account of possible performativity in actual policy, a brief note on the claims made for the account: The emotional and intellectual investment most academics have in their analysis must make confirmatory examples more easily identified than contrary ones. The final stages of a PhD might be analogous to the common account of reading a medical dictionary, whereby even if one recognises this dynamic, one sees in abundance the symptoms of whichever condition is in focus. This is similar to the 'desk drawer phenomenon' whereby positive experimental findings get reported, while negative or inconclusive findings are 'left in the desk drawer' and do not receive the same academic or public attention. In the intrapsychic version, both conscious processes (such as decisions about re-presenting examples) and unconscious processes (whereby confirmatory examples are noticed and seized upon whilst contrary illustrations slip past unnoticed) can work towards the same ends. What follows is then, inevitably, a selective account, and it is possible that an account to the contrary could be produced. The question would be how persuasive they were to the reader, which in part would relate to the use of an authoritative, empiricist rhetorical style. Hence I do not claim that this is an objective account of policy developments, indeed I would not know 'from where' that might be possible. However, I will use a conventional rhetorical style that obscures myself and the processes of production of the account. Moreover, since I identify what I consider to be positive examples, all I can do is admit its selective nature and reflect upon the possible implications of my own investment in a positive reading of social policy and the production of an account of a world which is gradually getting better. The very engagement with policy work relies on a modernist belief in progress to more just mechanisms of social regulation and is what chapter 6 called 'using the master's tools' and as such carries the risks attendant to accepting the terms of the debate.

9.6 'Post identity' thinking in the popular sphere

Over the past few years there has been a general shift in preferred terminology such that we no longer refer to 'blacks', 'gays' or 'the disabled', but instead speak of 'Black/black people', 'African Caribbean or Asian people', 'people of African decent' or 'people of SE Asian decent', 'women who are lesbian', gay men, and 'people with disabilities'. This 'people with/of' formulation helps prevent one aspect of identity being seen as definitive, recognises that people are not exhaustively represented by

these category labels, and points to diversity within a group and hence the need for more specific markers.

Challenges to racist and sexist stereotyping which had much popular and institutional attention throughout the 1980s helped to open up space for more considered thinking about identities and diversity amongst those accorded the same sociological identities. Has this helped challenge the meanings attributed to black/African Caribbean mothers as much as it has challenged, legally at least, the prejudices against lesbian mothers (Harne *et al.* 1997; Woodcraft, 1997)? Theoretical deconstruction of 'race', stimulated by increasing recognition of the multiplicity and complexity of ethnicity, as well as of racial heritage, has challenged the black-white binary of 'race' (e.g. 'new ethnicities', see Hall, 1992). Similarly there is more public unravelling of other binaries, as demonstrated in the increasing visibility of bisexuality, and popular curiosity about sexual minorities, especially about transgendered people. In health education work on HIV prevention, the recognition that identity categories did not necessarily confine sexual practice accordingly, has lead to the now customary reference to 'men who have sex with men', rather than 'gay men', in order to more accurately identify 'riskier sexual practices' and not exclude on the basis of identity definitions.

With the influence of feminism, ideas about gender have become increasingly liberalised, which helps divorce expectations of behaviour, abilities and personality from gender identity. Similarly, discourses which link personality or psychological qualities to sexual preference are heard less frequently and there is a general liberalisation around homosexuality in policy, and increasing recognition of same-sex relationships and desires. For instance, the 1996/7 Housing Act passed through Parliament without comment to rule that Local Authorities treat homosexual couples like heterosexual ones in cases where a tenant dies (and indeed is employing a broad meaning of relationship when it also obliges councils to re-house long-term carers or companions). As chapter 3 described, fostering and adoption agencies do consider unmarried couples and single people, and sexuality may not be seen as relevant by a social worker whose assessment suggests they could provide good enough care for a particular child.

Firstly, I will look for signs of performative approaches to parenting in the New Labour Government's 1998 consultation paper *Supporting Families.* I will then draw illustrations from a range of parenting-related policy issues.

It is interesting that this first piece of British social policy to address the family directly does so at a time at which its object is hotly disputed. Alongside the newly problematised activity of parenting, the family has now become an explicit problem for policy, whereas previously it was naturalised. Perhaps its status as such is now waning. *Supporting Families* refers to 'parents', as opposed to mothers and/or fathers, and the activity of parenting, and so is in line with the 1989 Children Act, the 1991 Child Support Act, the 1996 Family Law, and Adoption Acts which enact concepts such as 'parental responsibility', and refer to 'absent parents' or 'parents with care'. It argues that the Government's role is to provide support and advice services for parents, including parenting classes, and it proposes an extended role for Health Visitors; a national parenting free-phone line; and most significantly, a new National Family and Parenting Institute. The Institute's name is interesting, since the 'and' can be interpreted as admitting that parenting is not wholly contained within 'family'.

One of its suggestions is of secular baby-naming ceremonies for parents who are non-religious but wish to show publicly their long-term commitment to their child/ren. This is a desirable move towards recognising the distinct nature of the parents' relationship to each other, from their relationships to their child. It allows marriage to be seen as a matter of personal choice, but commitment to a child to be important regardless of marital status (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, forthcoming 1999). That the Government would/could not legislate for marriage, but will for children's parenting shows their different moral statuses and reflects the uncontested idea that parental commitment is in children's interests (contestation only begins over which parent) compared with the disputed social significance of marriage.

The following aspects of the Green Paper also seem compatible with performative approaches: it seeks greater recognition for the role of the wider family, especially grandparents; proposes child-care tax credit to help working parents; and a guaranteed

minimum income for 'working families'. It states that excessive workloads detract from family life and makes provision for up to 3 months unpaid 'parental leave' when a baby is born *or adopted*. In making the child's need to be housed the priority in court settlements, it refers to the 'primary' and 'secondary carer', which follows from the emphasis on the continuity of parent-child relationships beyond adult partnerships.
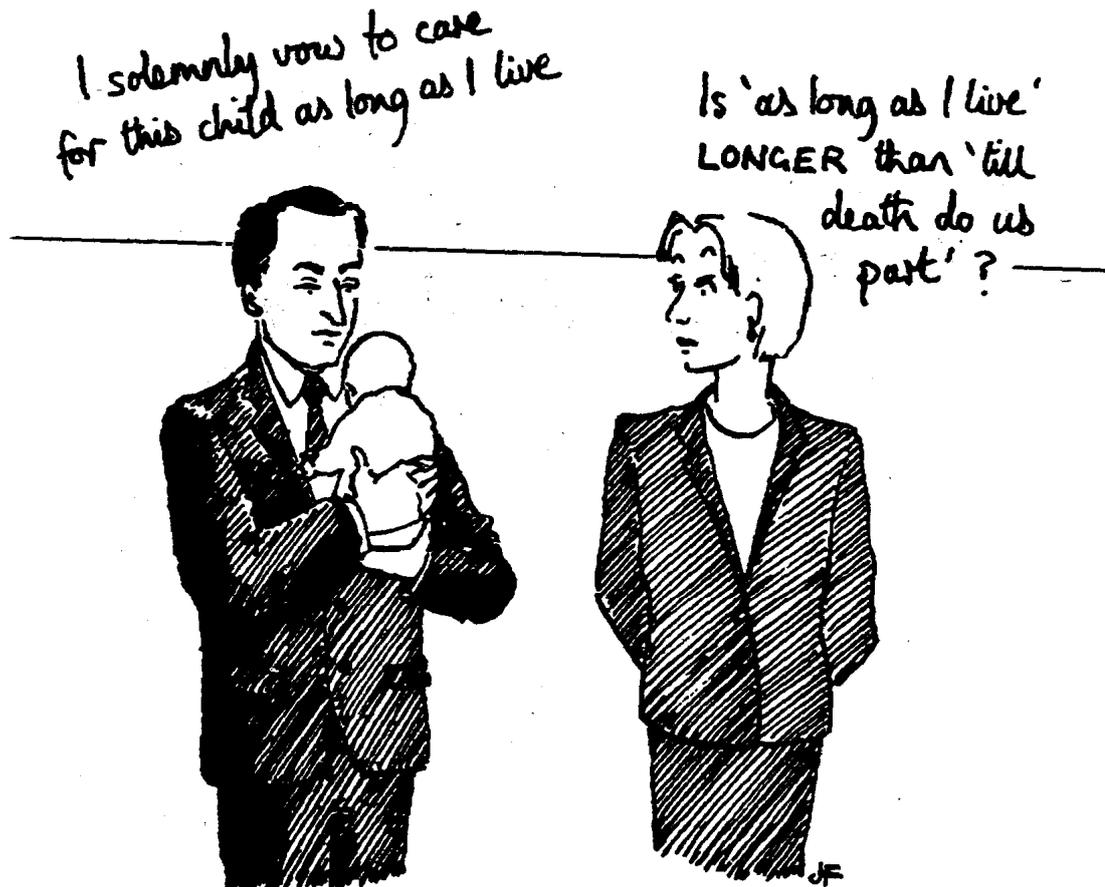
Figure 6: A parent's vow to his child

Jackie Flemming's cartoon, published in ***The Guardian***, December, 1998 shows a father making a vow of parental responsibility, but questions whether the commitment will be more lasting and unshakable than that promised in marriage vows.

I agree with the document's opening statement that 'strong and stable families provide the best basis for raising children', but not with the following assertion that 'marriage provides the most reliable framework for raising children'. Lone parents and same-sex couples can provide equally strong and stable families for children, and furthermore, many cohabiting couples are both registered on the child's birth certificate and

provide long-term stability for their children. There is nothing intrinsic to marriage that makes for better parenting, although social recognition itself often conveys some advantages over unmarried co-parents. Privileging one form of family is not good for children living in other familial environments (Creear, 1998). The focus must be on the quality of parenting, rather than the type (e.g. legal status) of the parents' relationship to each other. Instead, this focus on marriage constructs as the norm something not available to same-sex couples in Britain, thereby automatically privileging heterosexual couples and excluding gay couples from those seen as providing stable families. *Supporting Families* does recognise that a child's parents may not be their biological parents in the case of step-parents or adoptive parents, but I would argue that this logic should be extended explicitly to lesbians and gay men with parenting responsibilities and relationships. In spite of aspects that are compatible with a performativity framework, the privileging of marriage reinstates necessary categories of (gendered) identity. Such an exclusion could have been avoided by referring to long-term/stable relationships or partnerships instead.

There is an acknowledgement that 'families have changed', are now more complicated, and that parents do not want to be nagged, nannied or preached to (p4), and the document urges that advice seeking by parents be seen, not as failure, but as responsible parental behaviour. The emphasis on inclusion - that all families must feel able to use the services provided - notwithstanding, the advice and educative functions set out for the Institute have the potential to be highly normalising. It is easy to imagine a failure to include lesbian/gay/sexual minority communities in consultation exercises because of a presumption that child/family-related issues are not of relevance to them. In a response to the Green Paper from the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights, we insist that the Institute needs to be inclusive at every level: its imagery and rhetoric, staff and service providers, and community consultations (Exall *et al.*, 1999). Even within a progressive ('performative') framework there remains the danger that inclusive intentions do not always guarantee that discrimination does not occur. The use of gender-neutral language and avoidance of specifying identity categories allows that lesbian and gay parents may theoretically take up provision for 'parental leave' etc., but not explicitly referring to lesbian and gay men will leave heterosexist assumptions unchallenged in many contexts. Some employees may not feel confident about disclosing their family responsibilities, for

instance, where this means 'coming out' to their employers. 'Inclusive' legal provision is not enough: in order to allow access by all families the Institute must challenge heterosexism and homophobic prejudice. As chapter 8 argued, it is necessary to intervene in the fields of meaning within which provision for 'voice' or service use is made. This also highlights how attempts to allow access by same-sex parents which rely on identity categories can fail to recognise diversity amongst them, which might include whether or not they identify as 'family', as lesbian/gay, and if they do, whether or not they are 'out' to their employer.

While the Paper is candid about the role of poverty in family stress and problems, it makes a (qualified) causal link between parenting and broader social problems:

> 'It is the Government's view that strains on family life and inadequate parenting are having a serious negative impact on the lives of children, and that family difficulties are contributing to a range of other economic and social problems - such as educational underachievement, anti-social behaviour and youth crime.' (childRIGHT, December 1998: p5).

This risks defining social problems as the problems of families and individuals thereby reifying more conservative analyses of the relationships. Concluding that what is needed is confident parents individualises and 'psychologises' issues, when many parents under pressure need money, access to cultural pleasures and means of self-expression, and a sense of being valued socially. Tackling the problem through targeting parental behaviour and particularly through mentoring schemes, such as the programme to provide male role models for boys with absent fathers, 'over-estimates the degree of influence over their children, and underestimates the severe pressures that many of them are under' (childRIGHT, December 1998). As Creear (1998) is at pains to point out, poverty is only associated with single parenthood because of the way society is currently structured socially and economically (because of women's wage inequality and the lack of good, affordable child-care). What is most apparent in the chapter on family-friendly employee rights is that the document is a response couched within the existing terms of the debate (modifying employment law rather than questioning whether work should occupy such a large part of the lives of the 'work-rich'), as 'sensible' policy from conservative New Labour, rather than creative proposals from any pro-socialist party.

The 1989 Children Act provided welcome recognition for the fact that not all adults parenting children are biological parents. The concept of 'parental responsibility' (PR) which it introduced is not limited by biological status, in fact, it precisely allows adults other than birth mothers and married fathers (who are granted it automatically), to gain legal recognition of their (parental) status regarding a particular child. Grandparents and co-parents of various kinds (a partner of parent with PR, such as a lesbian co-mother, resident unmarried fathers, or 'mum's boyfriend') can apply to the court for PR, and since the marker is of time spent co-residing with the child, a friend/flatmate/godparent who has co-parented a child can apply. This has the potential to grant legal recognition to those parenting in 'unconventional' arrangements and by centring on the relational quality of responsibility and a marker of actual practice (length of time in co-residence), instead of 'parental rights and duties', shifts the focus to the actual relationships and existing actual practical care arrangements, rather than abstract, pre-ordained roles. In addition, the number of people PR can be awarded to in relation to a particular child is not limited, and referring to 'child residency', rather than custody, helps emphasise both the everyday practice of it, and that, in line with the increasing proportion of joint residency arrangements, it is not necessarily an all-or-nothing thing. The Children Act therefore illustrates several aspects of a performative approach. Contrary to this, however, has been the recent suggestion that unmarried fathers be granted automatic PR (Lord Chancellor's Dept. consultation paper, May 1998). This would allow a merely biological marker to be the basis for conveying legal rights. This seems more in line with the thinking that lay behind the Child Support Act (that is wanting the legislation to connect fathers - who aren't already socially connected - to their biological offspring), and run contrary to what a performative approach, focusing on existing social relationships, would suggest. In the cases in which I believe PR would be appropriate, social markers would be adequate.

Making presumptions of 'fitness to parent' from identity categories for lesbian or lone mothers appears to be possible only for particular 'discourse publics' (Fraser, 1989), although the collapse of distinctly ideological positions means that homophobic discourses do not necessarily map neatly onto particular political positions. At the close of the1990s, an increasing tolerance of lesbian mothers is seen in the popular media. Lesbian mothers are treated in the liberal press, as they are in court (Harne *et*

al., 1997), 'as mothers first and lesbians second', so that the left-liberal *Guardian* is comfortable referring to 'mothers' partners' and acknowledging the possibility of female partners (e.g. Dr. Louisa Dillner, writing on health/medical issues). More surprisingly, in the *Sunday Express* on 14th February, 1999 (Valentine's Day, no less), was an article 'Lesbians Can Make Better Parents' about the equal sharing of childcare, earning and housework amongst lesbian couples in Gill Dunne's (1997) study (see earlier). The editorial urged politicians, employers and all families in Britain to 'take heed of the valuable lessons in equality that can be learned from lesbian parents' (Saffron, in *Diva*, April 1999). More interestingly, in a hostile front-page article about (particular) lesbian mothers in *The Sun* (April, 1997), in spite of the sensationalising misrepresentation of payment in the headline: 'LESBIANS PAY £5 FOR A BABY: Fury at DIY birth', the article fails to come up with arguments against lesbian parenting *per se*. Instead, reading past the rhetoric of outrage and fury and the editorial concern about the 'mockery [made] of the family', these women are actually being criticised for having a child whilst claiming benefits. There is no mention of concern about there being no man in the household, instead it is about there being no earner. The tentative conclusion I draw from this is that it now appears hard to make principled arguments against lesbian mothers on the basis of that aspect of their identity alone (Alldred, 1998b, see Appendix A). No psychological objections could be raised, (for instance, concerning the child's psycho-sexual development), and the most powerful argument mustered was that the child might be stigmatised or face bullying at school, which I describe as a sociological argument, and one that blames the victim of discrimination (Burman, 1997) in a way that would be unthinkable regarding 'race', or other bullying issues such as weight or social skills.

The arguments made against lesbian mothers who faced the courts in the 1970s are no longer convincing even in popular polemic, but it appears increasingly permissible to condemn those who are poor for having children. This is part of the conservative backlash against benefit claimants and a key site of the mobilisation of the 'underclass' discourse. Its deployment in *The Sun* relies on a splitting of an 'undeserving poor' from an honourable working class. In several examples in chapters 3 and 4, and particularly regarding child support (both treatment by the Child Support Agency and popular imagery), gender at first seems key, but economic circumstances, which traverse gender and sexual identity, are in fact more significant. It is 'parents

with care' on means-tested benefits who are worse off as a result of the CSA, and although most of these are mothers, many commentators agree that whilst its family and gendered ideological interventions drew much attention, the Act was crucially about money. Lorraine Fox Harding argues that whilst the CSA may 'attempt to reinstate a form of private patriarchy, in the sense of making more women economically dependent on individual men, it appears more strongly to be a part of a project of rolling back the state' (1996: p131). Together, these illustrations show there is more intense concern about 'state dependency' and the cost to the taxpayer of 'the breeding underclass', than about their (homo)sexual identities, or the erosion of 'the family' symbolised by 'absent fathers'. The 'old' stigmatised identity categories no longer 'hold' the psychological attributions they used to. The concern centres on money, and it is through this that gendered identities become embroiled. Psychological discourses are only deployed in the service of financial concerns, such as by using the devalued term 'dependency' to pathologise benefit receipt.

Recent years have seen a concern to distinguish fostering from adoption, such that they are now regarded as distinct ways of caring for children. The earlier conflation in the term 'foster or adoptive parents' has been replaced (and encoded in legislation by the time of the 1989 Children Act), by 'foster carers', which marks them as substitute, and more temporary, *carers*, and 'adoptive parents', which signifies the formation of a *parental* relationship. This reflects their respective legal positions in relation to the child, and for children in foster care, the state. There is a distinction between roles and relationships here. Foster carers are performing a role (for which there is sometimes a small payment towards expenses), whereas adoptive parents are adopting a child into their family and attendant to that relationship is their private financial provision for the child. In practice, of course, some children spend years in the same foster home. This distinction has come about in conjunction with attempts to promote 'inclusive' care by fosterers, so that a child's care is shared with their birth family and the Social Services department, and 'open adoption' where children have knowledge of, and often contact with, their families of origin, both of which require the careful delineation of relationships *with*, and relationships *to*, the child, (both to the child, as well as to others concerned).

The proportion of children placed in families which resemble 'the traditional family' (with two parents, one of whom works full-time, the other is not in work, with older children, and homes with three or more bedrooms) is higher than the proportion of children whose families resemble this in the general population (Bebbington and Miles, 1990) (although it may be that a foster 'mother's' receipt of even low pay for her labour alters the picture). But it seems that there are some cautious moves away from such a search for idealised 'normal family life'. The pressure Social Service departments face in recruiting foster carers has led some of them to encourage applications from 'less traditional' carers, such as from those without older children or without employment, from single carers, and for some, from lesbian or gay couples (Nutt, 1998). This challenges the identities and sociological markers of family forms that were not previously considered 'fitness to foster' (Nutt, *ibid.*). In addition, there has been an increasing emphasis on the *specific* 'fitness' of carers for the particular child 'being placed', and emphasis on placement-specific, rather than initial, assessments. The individual case challenges to foster/adoptive carer eligibility that have received media attention have mostly been about identity limitations to approval criteria, such as age-limits, racial matching, racial discrimination awareness, sexual preference, being 'overweight' or 'smokers', but perhaps these are simply the cases in which arguments that assessments are unfair can be made precisely through appeals to identity categories.

Because the procedure has been seen as sequential, adoption is almost automatically preceded by a term of fostering, and older children have often been through a series of foster placements before eventually being adopted. Sometimes they must leave successful foster placements (or adults approved as fosterers, but not adopters) in order to move to a permanent placement. Removing or reducing the dichotomy between fostering and adoption could provide a speedier route to permanency. Bury and Salford Social Services have launched a scheme under which prospective adopters will initially work as foster parents alongside professionals to reunite their foster child with their birth families. However, not all foster carers want to become adoptive parents, and some might value the possibility of a care relationship with a child which does not bring full parental responsibility.

Debates about transracial adoption in recent years have challenged what had become the orthodoxy of prioritising the 'colour and culture matching' of carers for minority ethnic children (see Gaber and Aldridge, 1994). The arguments employed have illustrated broader problems with identity politics. To some degree the identity categories revealed their own limitations in practice, such that social workers have faced difficult decisions about the degree of cultural specificity to strive to achieve when racial colouring, ethnicity, language, religious and political identifications, class/caste/wealth, and for some, historical and political context of immigration to Britain might all be considered. Gilroy (1987) argues that 'race' and ethnicity should not be awarded automatic privilege over other dimensions of social difference (class, language, location) in making placements, and must not be reified as essentialising categories. One could argue that prioritising 'race' as a marker for placement selection is 'superficial' to the intimate, *psychological* parent-child relationship (unless adult projections of racial difference profoundly structure this relationship) and is a more sociological concern (about how this family is constructed from 'outside', like household structure might be seen for lesbian or lone-mother households) or political concern (that black families are not stereotyped as dysfunctional, and black babies are not sought as 'cute' adornments to white families in which it is assumed they are better off). However, the importance of learning strategies for dealing with racism, including self-esteem issues, has been highlighted in these debates (and is beginning to be heard in relation to dealing with homophobia for children of lesbian mothers, see Woodcraft, 1997), but there might be other priorities for infants. In arguing for a less restrictive approach to placing minority ethnic children, Richards (1994b) sees claims about the importance of racial matching for infants as confusing a child's social or sociological identity (which includes gendered and 'classed' as well as racial, ethnic and religious aspects), with personal or psychological identity. Personal identity, he argues, is fundamental to the child's sense of self as separate from, and in relation to, the carer/s, and is a necessary foundation for the child's further elaboration of their identity in cultural and relational terms. This suggests that, rather than delaying the placing of infants in order to achieve a higher degree of 'matching', it is more important to enable them to begin a process of relating securely to long-term carers.

The legal definition of single is no longer a reliable indicator of relationship status. Popular usage of 'single' contrasts it with 'being in a relationship', as opposed to be legally married. Since legal documents continue only to offer the options of 'single, married or divorced, those in long-term relationships and even childrearing partnerships somewhat misrepresent their situation by ticking 'single'. Some recent sociological work by Jane Lewis (1999) suggests that while most unmarried long-term cohabitees do not wish for full legal recognition of their coupledom, they would like greater social recognition for their relationships. As popular responses to the Child Support Act demonstrated (see chapter 4), a broader range of terms for relationships than legal or conventional social identities provide was being met by their invention.

The changing names given to welfare benefits traces a fascinating political narrative. The concern of the Major Government to distinguish Unemployment Benefit from Income Support makes an identity distinction between those who are unemployed but have previously worked and paid national insurance contributions, from those whose income remained low perhaps after part-time work. In practice, this has tended to differentiate 'professionals between jobs', from those caught in the poverty trap of low-paid work and long-term poverty. The name-change to 'Job Seekers Allowance' was to 'remind' the unemployed that benefits are conditional on their actively seeking work, and justifies a withdrawal of benefits if such activity cannot be proven. Rather than being based on *being an unemployed person*, as an identity or status, it is based on an activity to be performed.

The idea behind the existing child-care cost 'allowance' (a benefit disregard of £28 per week) for lone and low-income mothers claiming Family Credit, has been extended in the 1999 Budget so that all families with child-care costs can benefit. The abolition of the Married Couples' Allowance, a merely status-based entitlement, was announced, with the money saved being 'ear-marked' for parents, to be distributed through the increases in child benefit, and in future, a new Children's Tax Credit, neither of which are dependent on particular parental relationships. There is a reconsideration of the Widow's Pension which, as its name suggests, is paid to widows irrespective of their wealth, and a question over whether widowers too should be eligible if their partner was the primary earner. The emphasis on activity in the JSA

name-change has echoes in a range of current welfare reforms concerned with families. Family Credit was a means-tested in-work benefit, but its replacement with the Working Families Tax Allowance, illustrates a deliberate rhetorical shift from families as a unit of entitlement, to the activity-based qualifier 'working'. The rationale for the unpopular benefit cut for lone parents in autumn 1997 was that benefits were not due on the basis of identities (i.e. *lone* parents), and that those among them who are poor parents would be eligible for other benefits. Similarly, for New Labour being a mother, or a lone parent, is no longer an acceptable reason not to be pursuing paid work outside the home.

Criteria based on income or needs relate to actual circumstances more than do identities, and can be considered to be more 'performative'. These examples therefore suggest a discernible shift in current British social policy towards performative understandings of identity and social life, or at least, of movements away from identity categories and in directions compatible with performativity. However, in spite of the previous section's optimistic account of the possibilities, the benefits examples show that performative thinking does not necessarily produce results of a particular political hue, and cannot be relied upon to promote, for instance, fair, generous benefits, let alone wealth redistribution. Furthermore, an approach cannot be relied on to deliver particular results over time. For instance, in practice, means-testing to assess needs in the past became identity-linked, and unpopular precisely because of its production of stigmatised identities. As the potential to replace a focus on identities with circumstances is celebrated, we must be aware of the possibility of attempts backfiring in such a way. This is a reminder that the political implications of a particular theoretical approach cannot be guaranteed.

9.8 Reflections on a happy ending

I would argue that these policy examples illustrate an increasing flexibility and tolerance for complexity, which means that thinking about parents and children is less constrained by identities, and more centred on relationships. This is part of a triumph of 'the psychological', in the sense that it is an increased recognition of and esteem for the realm of the subjective, the psychological or the emotional. This has raised the value accorded reflexive and responsible selfhood, personal growth/self-development, emotional expression and intimacy, self-expression and self-definition, mental well-

being and interpersonal dynamics. Closely related to these discourses of the subjective, is the more context-limited triumph of a discourse of specificity, over general, abstract, 'objective' knowledge. A detailed interrogation of the relationship of this popularisation of psychological/subjective discourse in Western culture, to the academic discipline of psychology could take Denise Riley's (1983) work as an historical and theoretical starting point, and perhaps use Parker's (1997) study of psychoanalytic discourse in Western culture as a framework. One consequence of this popularisation is that psychological professionals are increasingly called upon to be consultants to the corporate world: for business, management, advertising, and statutory/voluntary sector service-providers. However, where this disciplinary knowledge employs scientific epistemological warrants, it may sometimes be challenged by discourses of experience, as opposed to (abstract) knowledge (as Figure 5 illustrates). Such challenges might deploy 'the subjective' against the 'objective'; might argue that there are different perspectives as opposed to one truthful account; or that the specific is more relevant than the general. I am arguing that each of these are available within the contemporary popular repertoire. Assessments for foster carers/adoptive parents might be a rich and fascinating site at which to study how such competitions between epistemologies can be played out.

In this final chapter, the thesis has returned to focus on social policy concerning families. Chapters 2 to 4 focused on specific issues and later chapters broadened the view to allow these to be seen in the context of characterisations of the contemporary condition: a conventional thesis structure. However, discussing methodology in later, rather than earlier, chapters allowed *ways of 'doing knowledge'* to become an object of enquiry itself, and disrupted the conventional narrative whereby a rational, reflexive researcher describes the lens through which they will view their object. Instead, it is argued that there are limitations to such reflexivity, which include the dominance of empiricism and of the conventional narratives and specular rhetoric which imply it, including in evidence in chapters 2, 3 and 4. At a cultural level, the limitations of reflexivity are being recognised at precisely the same time at which its value is popularly emphasised. This reflects the deconstruction of the subject at the same time as marginal subjects were making it 'to the table' and appeals to subjective warrants for knowledge were being seen to challenge mainstream knowledge more powerfully.

The concept of discourse and the attendant dissolution of the individual-society dichotomy means being able to see how processes of change (regarding gender in particular) between individuals are not in simple unidirectional cause and effect relationships with culture. Cultural shifts in gender expectations and the critique of conventional masculinity and femininity have profound consequences for, yet also resistances from, individuals whose psyches are formed through conventional meanings. Individual struggles to live with the anxieties such changes bring in their wake are manifest at a cultural level in popular expressions of anxieties which are at the same time reflections, consequences and causes of shifts in relations between gendered individuals (Day Sclater and Yates, forthcoming 1999; Richards, 1989; Walkerdine, 1990).

The very formation of the self must now become a site of struggle. Deconstruction of the self/Other dichotomy needs to be put to constructive use in trying to forge new modes of subjectivity which avoid the violence this splitting does to Others, and to the self (Bhabha, 1994; Lorde, 1984; Spivak, 1988; Venn, 1985; Walkerdine, 1990). However, in doing so, we need to avoid simply transferring the projections of Otherness elsewhere. For instance, this thesis highlights the risk that promoting the gender-neutral discourse of parenting might serve to reinforce the adult-child split, and we must engage with cultural representations of parents and children to challenge points at which it does simply reinforce the construction of child as Other, and naturalise children's fulfilment of this psychic role for adults. A thoroughly 'post-identity' form of psychoanalysis could be valuable here. It needs to emphasise process and relations, over identities and family roles, avoid universalising across or within cultures, avoid being psychically or culturally reductionist and determining and recognise the situated nature of its own cultural production as just one interpretive approach. For instance, the generalisation of patterns of psychic constellations and formation is in tension, though not irreconcilable when done cautiously, with the concern not to restrict analyses to a reliance on gendered identity because it is not an exhaustive account of our differences from each other, and our different individual formations. As chapter 5 tried to show, psychoanalysis holds a complicated position in these debates as both object of critique (in its metanarrative form), and as key element in the 'new improved' approaches. This is because there exist today different

strands of psychoanalytic theory whose epistemological positions vary sharply: it has both archetypally modernist, as well as postmodernist forms.

There are fascinating parallels between the 'erosion of the traditional family' and the methodological/theoretical shifts this thesis depicts: symbolised by a loss of patriarchal authority, where the patriarch was also the one who knew. Recent historical social change involving critique and subsequent partial erosion of authority relations between men and women has a crucial role in each it seems. For the decentring of the Western subject and 'his' authority, 'post-colonial' critiques, and for the family, critiques of power relations between adults and children, have also been important. The *Supporting Families* document shows the breadth and significance of contemporary concern about authority, and an apparent contradiction: it reflects both the concern that parents have lost their authority *vis a vis* their children and seeks the return of this, but yet when speaking of the advisory role for new body, it is careful to avoid implying old-style authoritative experts. This highlights again, (as did the contradictory *Sun* article), how even meaning-producing institutions do not manage to present a sealed ideological viewpoint, that politics are no longer straightforwardly ideological (more than the U-turns that produced New Labour), and the complexity of current social relations and concerns, or rather their mediation within the popular. The loss of traditional authority, and then challenges confronting rational authority, are what - at a theoretico-cultural level - allow this thesis to take psychology as its problematised object rather than disciplinary gaze. The loss of faith in objectivity means that it is now recognised that seeing, let alone interpreting, family change is infused with politics. As Beck (1997) asks:

> 'cannot the indicators of radical change in the family, such as high divorce rates, declining numbers of children, extramarital ways of life, mothers working outside the home and so on, also be interpreted in keeping with… a 'democratisation of the family'? Might this not even be a compromise between those who claim to be able to discern dissolution in the data and those who claim to be able to read a constancy of familial structure from that same data? (p152).

Parallel between the empirical observations of family change, the fact that these very observations are disputed, and the features of this thesis which reflect certain characteristics of the socio-political moment - radical challenges to the knowledge form of a discipline, methodological divergence within a discipline, questioning the

notion of objectivity, and an opening up of epistemology. Each of these has a parallel in what Beck describes for the family. Rather than simply taking up its terms and arguing about degree of change, he reflects upon the debate:

> 'Does not the family (quite similarly in the churches, political parties, trade unions and organisations) reveal the break-up of traditional structures of dependency and authority that typically goes hand in hand with taking advantage of freedoms (and with all the same conflicts, dilemmas and decay of order)?' (Beck, *ibid*.: p152).

A major irony is that such a narrative - one of development of ideas as part of the development of knowledge - is part of the Enlightenment fantasy of civilisation and progress. Whilst explicitly undermining this, I have used it to make irrelevant an extended discussion of my own investments/positionings, in line with academic conventions. Such modernist narratives are more difficult to avoid than rational critique alone might imply. I have more invested in it than can be deconstructed in a thesis - since its focus at least is at the conscious level of rational argument. Even if one works to reject the understanding of Western 'civilisation', it is disturbing to accept the idea that society is not 'progressing' towards one's vision of social justice and that one's actions do not bring it even slightly closer. Even Fraser's position, which chapter 6 argued allows movement beyond the impasse, can engender disillusionment as one recognises the limitations of one's own perspective and therefore the contingency of its political analysis. Just as feminism cannot liberate us from particular cultural ideas about mothers, so it was naive to imagine that deconstructing modernist narratives of knowledge and progress would liberate me from my investment in their promises. As Walkerdine (1990) showed, one cannot simply be liberated from the discourses through which one is produced. As an academic and activist, I remain formed through ideas about political change and progress, and am invested in them and in the idea that there is value in academic work towards this end. Only through my understanding of academic production as engaging in re/presentational politics, and of redistributive politics requiring struggles over meaning, do I find investment in academic work, yet this investment has shaped my analysis, producing it as optimistic. Perhaps what might be said to make a contemporary thesis most 'postmodern' is the recognition and toleration of such contrary strands within in. Engaging with post-structuralist ideas has allowed a particular form of 'reflexive turn' whereby I am able to see some of the modernist

tropes that I rely on in (and beyond) the thesis. Others are implicit, and will remain undeconstructed until my investment in the thesis wanes, and yet others will perhaps remain so because my investment in them is more than academic.

After a celebratory adoption of post-structuralist feminist ideas (because they did feel 'true' and 'liberating'), an epistemological 'come-down' is most evident in chapter 8's recognition of the limits of communication that the fallacy of 'representation' points to (i.e. 'how can I ever hear anyone without dominating their meaning by my conceptual framework?'). The thesis has therefore elaborated on and traced paths through (from?) the struggle I had in doing empirical work with children, once I had 'savoured the "sweet poison"' of postmodernist views (Gergen, 1992, see chapter 7) which is referred to in chapter 1. A position of ambivalence towards contemporary theory - because it robs even as it 'reveals' - can be interpreted as a bid for 'maturity' in particular discourses of individual development, whereas a wholly 'good news' thesis might be interpreted as immature and naïve. So how is an optimistic ending read? That I experience post-structuralist writing as 'revealing', reveals myself as formed through modernist discourses of knowledge and enlightenment, moreover, that I can feel positive about postmodernist ideas through which I am thinking slides easily into a thinking-feeling dualism. As Fraser and Nicholson (1990) argued, one can only begin from where one is, and must recognise that one's analysis is limited by that positioning. My thesis journey has, of course, moved my own positioning and indeed, reflecting upon the journey metaphor, I now want to reframe the thesis using Bauman's (1996) tourist, rather than pilgrim metaphor.

This thesis has considered a deconstructive approach for challenging some of the particular understandings of family mobilised in contemporary debates about parents, children and society, and the naturalisation of conservative definitions of family. It has also discussed more 'constructive' approaches, in terms of supporting 'giving voice' to those who are in less powerful subject positions or for promoting subjugated knowledges. It has, however, considered the potential pitfalls of replying within the terms of the debate (such as, within the terms of the discipline) and the repercussions of engaging with the knowledge game as it is currently played. It has tried to reflect on the limitations of each of these approaches as strategies for promoting social change through the medium of cultural politics.

References

Abrams, D. and Hogg, M. A. (1990) The context of discourse: let's not throw out the baby with the bathwater, <u>Philosophical Psychology</u>, Vol. 2 (3): p219-225.

Acker, S. (1981) No Woman's Land: British sociology of education 1960-1979, <u>Sociological Review</u>, Vol. 29 (1): p77-104.

Adler, P. A. and Adler, P. (eds) (1986) <u>Sociological Studies of Child Development</u>, Vol. 1 Greenwich, CT.: JAI Press.

Alanen, L. (1990) Rethinking socialization, the family and childhood, in P. A. Adler, P. Adler, N. Mandell and S. Cahill (eds) <u>Sociological Studies of Child Development: A Research Manual</u>, Vol. 3, Greenwich, CT.: JAI Press.

Alcoff, L. (1988) Cultural Feminism Versus Post-structuralism: the identity crisis in feminist theory, <u>Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society</u>, Vol. 13 (3): p405-36.

Alderson, P. (1995) <u>Listening to Children</u>, London: Barnados.

Alldred, P. (1996a) 'Fit to Parent?' Developmental Psychology and 'Non traditional families', in E. Burman, P. Alldred, C. Bewley, B. Goldberg, C. Heenan, D. Marks, J. Marshall, K. Taylor, R. Ullah, S. Warner, <u>Challenging Women: Psychology's Exclusions, Feminist Possibilities</u>, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Alldred. P. (1996b) Whose expertise? Conceptualizing resistance to advice about childrearing, in E. Burman, G. Aitken, P. Alldred, R. Allwood, T. Billington, B. Goldberg, A.J. Gordo-Lopez, C. Heenan, D. Marks and S. Warner <u>Psychology, Discourse and Social Practices: From Regulation to Resistance</u>, London: Taylor and Francis.

Alldred, P. (1996c) A/sexual Citizens of Cyberspace? Feminist 'clean slate' fantasies of gender in cyberspace, Signs of the Times Conference 1996, (29th June, 1996).

Alldred, P. (1998a) Discourse Analysis, Ethnography and Representation: Dilemmas in Research Work With Children, in J. Ribbens and R. Edwards (eds) <u>Dilemmas of Feminist Research: Reflecting the Private in the Public</u>, London: Sage.

Alldred, P. (1998b) Making a Mockery of Family Life? Lesbian Mothers in the British Media, special issue <u>Journal of Lesbian Studies</u>, Vol. 2, Issue 4 (Fall).

Alldred, P. (1999) Not Making a Virtue of a Necessity: Nancy Fraser on Postsocialist Politics, in T. Jordan and A. Lent (eds) <u>Storming the Millennium: The New Politics of Change</u>, London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Allwood, R. (1996) I have depression, don't I?': From regulation to resistance, in E. Burman, G. Aitken, P. Alldred, R. Allwood, T. Billington, B. Goldberg, A. J. Gordo-Lopez, C. Heenan, D. Marks and S. Warner <u>Psychology, Discourse and Social Practices: From Regulation to Resistance</u>, London: Taylor and Francis.

Amos, V. and Parmar, P. (1984) Challenging Imperial Feminism, <u>Feminist Review</u>, 17, p3-20.

Anderson, L. (1995) Child Support Changes - an absent father's charter, <u>Rights of Women Bulletin</u>, Summer, London: Rights of Women.

Anderson, L. (1997) <u>Contact between children and violent fathers - in whose best interests?</u>, London: Rights of Women.

Armstrong, L. (1995) <u>Of 'Sluts' and 'Bastards': A Feminist Decodes The Child Welfare Debate</u>, Monroe, ME (USA): Common Courage Books.

Attar, D. (1992) The Demand That Time Forgot, <u>Trouble and Strife</u>, 23, (Spring, 1992): p24-29.

Barrett, M. (1991) <u>The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault</u>, Cambridge: Polity.

Barrett, M. and McIntosh, M. (1982) <u>The Anti-Social Family</u>, London: NLB.

Barrett, M. and McIntosh, M. (1985) Ethnocentrism and socialist-feminist theory, <u>Feminist Review</u>, 20: p23-47.

Bauman (1996) Morality in the age of contingency, in P. Heelas, S. Lash and P. Morris (eds) <u>Detraditionalisation</u>, Oxford: Blackwell.

Bauman, Z. (1988) <u>Legislators and Interpreters</u>, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bauman, Z. (1991) <u>Modernity and the Holocaust</u>, Cambridge: Polity.

Beauvoir, S. de (1949) <u>The Second Sex</u>, translated and edited by H. M. Parshley, London: Jonathan Cape, 1953.

Beck, U. (1992) <u>Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity</u>, London: Sage.

Beck, U. (1997) Democratization of the family, <u>Childhood</u>, Vol. 4 (2): p151-168.

Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1995) <u>The Normal Chaos of Love</u>, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1990) 'Everything for the child' - For Better or Worse?' in Bjornberg, U. (ed.) <u>Parents in the 1990s: Conflicts, Contradictions and Change</u>, New Brunswick, NJ.: Transaction Publishers.

Bell, V. (1993) <u>Interrogating Incest: Feminism, Foucault and the Law</u>, London: Routledge.

Benjamin, J. (1990) <u>The Bonds of Love</u>, London: Virago.

Berryman, J. C. (1991) Perspectives on Later Motherhood, in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett and E. Lloyd (eds) <u>Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies</u>, London: Sage.

Bhabha, H. (1994) The Location of Culture, London: Routledge.

Bhavnani, K.K. and Coulson, M. (1986) Transforming socialist feminist: the challenge of racism, Feminist Review, 23: p81-92.

Billig, M. (1987) Arguing and Thinking: A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Billig, M. (1989) Psychology, rhetoric and cognition, History of the Human Sciences, 2: p289-307.

Billig, M. (1990) Stacking the cards of ideology: the history of the Sun Souvenir Royal Album, Discourse & Society, Vol. 1 (1): p17-37.

Billig, M., Condor, S., Edwards, D., Gane, M., Middleton, D. and Radley, A. R. (1988) Ideological Dilemmas: A social psychology of everyday thinking, London: Sage.

Billington, T. (1996) Pathologising Children: Psychology in Education and Acts of Government, in E. Burman, G. Aitken, P. Alldred, R. Allwood, T. Billington, B. Goldberg, A.J. Gordo-Lopez, C. Heenan, D. Marks and S. Warner Psychology, Discourse and Social Practices: From Regulation to Resistance, London: Taylor and Francis.

Blackman, L. (1994) What is doing history – The use of history to understand the constitution of contemporary psychological objects, Theory & Psychology, Vol.4 (4): p485-50.

Blackman, L. (1996) The Dangerous Classes: Retelling the Psychiatric Story, Feminism & Psychology, 6 (3): 361-79.

Boseley, S. (1998) Mothers' Biggest Helper, The Guardian, March 17th.

Bradshaw, J. and Millar, J. (1991) Lone Parent Families in the UK, Department of Social Security Research Report No. 6, London: HMSO.

Bragg, M. and Gardiner, R. (1999) On Giants' Shoulders: Great Scientists and Their Discoveries - From Archimedes to DNA, London: John Wiley and Sons.

Brah, A. (1992) Difference, Diversity and Differentiation, in J. Donald and A. Rattansi (eds) 'Race', Culture and Difference, London: Sage.

Brannen, J. and O'Brien, M. (1996) Introduction, in J. Brannen and M. O'Brien (eds) Children in Families: Research and Policy, London: Falmer Press.

Brennan, T. (ed.) (1989) Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis, London: Routledge.

Broughton, J. (ed.) (1987) Critical Theories of Psychological Development, New York: Plenum Press.

Bruner, J. S., Jolly, A. and Sylva, K. (1976) <u>Play, its role in development and evolution</u>, Penguin Education.

Bryan, B., Dadzie, S. and Scafe, S. (1985) <u>The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain</u>, London: Virago.

Burgess, A. and Ruxton, S. (1996) <u>Men and Their Children: Proposals for Public Policy</u>, London: IPPR.

Burghes, L., Clarke, L. and Cronin, N. (1997) <u>Fathers and fatherhood in Britain</u>, London: Family Policy Studies Centre, Occasional Paper 23.

Burman, E. (1990) Differing with deconstruction: A feminist critique, in, I. Parker and J. Shotter (eds) <u>Deconstructing Social Psychology,</u> London: Routledge.

Burman, E. (1991) 'Power, Gender and Developmental Psychology' <u>Feminism & Psychology,</u> Vol. 1 (1): p141-153.

Burman, E. (1992) Feminism and Discourse in Developmental Psychology: power, subjectivity and interpretation, in <u>Feminism & Psychology</u>, Vol. 2 (1): p45-60.

Burman, E. (1994a) <u>Deconstructing Developmental Psychology</u>, London: Routledge.

Burman, E. (1994b) Poor children: charity appeals and ideologies of childhood, <u>Changes: International Journal of Psychology and Psychotherapy</u>, Vol. 12 (1): p29-36.

Burman, E. (1994c) Innocents abroad: intrapsychic investments and political limits of child imagery, special issues of <u>Disasters: The Journal of Disaster Studies and Management</u>, Vol. 18 (3): p238-53.

Burman, E. (1995a) Developing Differences: Gender, Childhood and Economic Development, <u>Children & Society</u>, 9 (3): p121-142.

Burman, E. (1995b) What is it? Masculinity and Femininity in the cultural representation of childhood, in S. Wilkinson and C. Kitzinger (eds) <u>Feminism and Discourse</u>, London: Sage.

Burman, E. (1997) Developmental Psychology and its Discontents, in D. Fox and I. Prilltensky (eds) <u>Introduction to Critical Psychology</u>, London: Sage.

Burman, E. (ed.) (1998) <u>Deconstructing Feminist Psychology</u>, London: Sage.

Burman, E. and Parker, I. (1993) Introduction - discourse analysis: the turn to the text, in Burman, E and Parker, I. (eds.) (1993) <u>Discourse Analytic Research: Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action</u>, London: Routledge.

Burman, E., Aitken, G., Alldred, P., Allwood, R., Billington, T., Goldberg, B., Gordo-Lopez, A. J., Heenan, C., Marks, D. and Warner, S. (1996) <u>Psychology, Discourse, Practice: From Regulation to Resistance</u>, London: Taylor and Francis.

Burman, E., Alldred, P., Bewley, C., Goldberg, B., Heenan, C., Marks, D., Marshall, J., Taylor, K., Ullah, R. and Warner, S. (1996) <u>Challenging Women: Psychology's exclusions, feminist possibilities,</u> Buckingham: Open University Press.

Burns, D. (1995) <u>'The Construction of Single Parenting: a voice for women',</u> Unpublished dissertation, Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology, Manchester Metropolitan University.

Butler, J. (1990) <u>Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,</u> London: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1991) Imitation and Gender Insubordination, in Fuss, D. (ed.) <u>Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories</u>, New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993) <u>Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'</u>, London: Routledge.

Campbell, B. (1993) <u>Goliath: Britain's Dangerous Places</u>, London: Methuen.

Campion, M. J.(1995) <u>Who's Fit To Be A Parent</u>, London: Routledge.

Carby, H. (1982) White Women Listen! Black Feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood, in CCCS (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) <u>The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain</u>, London: Hutchinson.

Cauldwell, L. (1984) Feminism and 'The Family', <u>Feminist Review</u>, 16: p88-97.

Chodorow, N. (1978) <u>The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender</u>, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Chodorow, N. and Contratto, S. (1992) The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother, in B. Thorne and M. Yalom (eds) <u>Rethinking the Family: some feminist questions</u>, Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Clarke, K.; Craig, G. and Glendinning, C. (1996) <u>Small Change: The Impact of the Child Support Act on Lone Mothers and Children</u>, London: Family Policy Studies Centre.

Clarke, K.; Glendinning, C. and Craig, G. (1994) <u>Losing Support: Children and the Child Support Act</u>, London: The Children's Society.

Clarke, K.; Glendinning, C. and Craig, G. (1995) Child Support, Parental Responsibility and the Law: An examination of the implications of recent British legislation, in M. O'Brien and J. Brannen (eds) <u>Childhood and Parenthood: Proceedings of the International Sociological Association Committee for the Family Research Conference</u>, London: Institute of Education.

Collier, R. (1994) Child Support, Class Subversion, Crass Scapegoating, in <u>Achilles Heel</u>, Autumn, p18-21.

Collins, P. Hill (1990) <u>Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment</u>, Vol.2, Cambridge, Mass.: Unwin Hyman.

Collins, P. Hill (1992) Black Women and Motherhood, in B. Thorne and M. Yalom (eds) <u>Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions</u>, Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Colvin, M. and Hawksley, J. (1989) <u>Section 28: A practical guide to the law and its implications</u>, London: National Council for Civil Liberties.

Comer, L. (1974) <u>Wedlocked Women</u>, Leeds: Feminist Books.

Cook, P. and Bahl, A. (1998) <u>Rights of Women Bulletin</u>, Summer, London: Rights of Women.

Cooper, D. (1994) <u>Sexing the City</u>, Rivers Oram Press.

Corsaro, W, A. (1986) Discourse Processes Within Peer Culture: from a constructivist to an interpretive approach, in P. A. Adler and P. Adler (eds) <u>Sociological Studies of Child Development</u>, Vol. 1: p81-101, Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Corsaro, W. A. (1981) Entering the Child's World - Research Strategies for Field Entry and Data Collection in a Preschool Setting, in J. L. Green and C. Wallat (eds) <u>Ethnography and Language in Education Settings</u>. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.

Creear, M. (1998) The surest foundation? Comment on Supporting Families, <u>childRIGHT</u> No. 152: p6.

Creed, B. (1986) Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection, <u>Screen</u>, Vol. 27 (1): p63-89.

Creed, B. (1993) <u>The monstrous feminine: film, feminism, psychoanalysis</u>, London: Routledge.

Crowley, H. (1999) Women's Studies: Between a Rock and a Hard Place or Just Another Cell in the Beehive, <u>Feminist Review</u>, 61, Spring 1999: p131-150.

Curt, B. (1994) <u>Textuality and Tectonics: Troubling Social and Psychological Science</u>, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Curt, B. (1995) <u>Social Psychology: A Critical Agenda</u>, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Dally, A. (1982) <u>Inventing Motherhood: The consequences of an ideal</u>, London: Hutchinson.

David, M. (1988) Home school relations, in A. Green and S. Ball (eds) <u>Progress and Inequality in Comprehensive Education</u>, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

David, M. (1994) Fundamentally Flawed, in <u>Charles Murray's Underclass: The Crisis Deepens</u>, London: Institute of Economic Affairs.

David, M., Edwards. R., Hughes, M. and Ribbens, J. (1993) <u>Mothers and Education: Inside Out? Exploring family-Education Policy and Experience</u>, London: St Martins Press.

David, M.; Davies, J.; Edwards, R.; Reay, D. and Standing, K. (1997) Choice within Constraints: mothers and schooling, <u>Gender and Education</u>, Vol. 9 (4): p397-410.

Davis, A. Y. (1990) <u>Women, Culture, Politics</u>, London: The Women's Press.

Day Sclater, S. and Yates, C. (forthcoming 1999) The Psycho-Politics of Post Divorce Parenting, in A. Bainham, S. Day Sclater and M. Richards (eds) <u>What is a Parent: A Socio-Legal Analysis</u>,

Day Sclater, S., Bainham, A. and Richards, M. (forthcoming 1999) Introduction, in A. Bainham, S. Day Sclater and M. Richards (eds) <u>What is a Parent: A Socio-Legal Analysis</u>,

De Cecco J. P. and Shively, M. G (1984) From Sexual Identity to Sexual Relationships: A Contextual Shift, <u>Journal of Homosexuality</u>, Vol. 9 (2/3): p1-26.

Dean, M. (1994) <u>Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault's Methods and Historical Sociology</u>, London: Routledge.

Deleuze, G. (1977) Intellectuals and Power (Foucault in conversation with Gilles Deleuze) in, D. Bouchard (ed.) <u>Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews</u>, New York: Cornell University Press.

Delphy, C. (1992) Mothers' Union? <u>Trouble and Strife</u>, 24, (Summer, 1992): p12-19.

Deluze, G. (1988) <u>Foucault</u>, translated S. Hand, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Denzin, N. (1987) Postmodern Children, <u>Society</u>, Vol. 24: p32-35.

Department of Social Security (1990) <u>Children Come First</u>, Cmnd. 1264, London: HMSO.

Department of Social Security (1993b) <u>Child Support Act: Secretary of State Guidelines on the Application of the Requirement to Co-operate</u>, London: HMSO.

Diamond, I. and Quinby, L. (1988) <u>Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance</u>, Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Diamond, I. and Quinby, L. (1988) Introduction, in, Diamond, I. and Quinby, L. (eds) <u>Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance,</u> Boston, U.S.: Northeastern University Press.

Dingwall, R. and Eekelar, J. (1986) Judgements of Solomon: psychology and family law, in M. Richards and P. Light (eds) <u>Children of Social Worlds: Development in a Social Context</u>, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Dinnerstein, D. (1976) <u>The Rocking of the Cradle and the Ruling of the World</u>, London: The Women's Press.

Doherty, T. (ed.) (1993) <u>Postmodernism: A Reader</u>, Harvester/Wheatsheaf.

Donald, J. and Hall, S. (eds.) (1986) <u>Politics and Ideology</u>, Milton Keynes, Open University Press.

Donzelot, J. (1979) <u>The Policing of Families</u>, London: Hutchinson.

Donovan, C. (1992) <u>Keeping it in the Family: An analysis of Doctors' decision-making about access in the provision of Donor Insemination</u>, Unpublished PhD thesis, Edinburgh University.

Dowrick, S. and Grundberg, S. (eds) (1980) <u>Why Children?</u> London: The Women's Press.

Dreyfus, H. and Rabinow, P. (1983) <u>Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics</u>, Brighton: Harvester.

Dunn, J. and Kendrick, C. (1982) <u>Siblings: Love, Envy and Understanding</u>, London: Grant McIntyre.

Dunne, G. (1998) Introduction: Add Sexuality and Stir: Towards a Broader Understanding of the Gender Dynamics of Work and Family Life, in G. Dunne (ed.) Living Difference: Lesbian Perspectives on Work and Family Life, special issue <u>Journal of Lesbian Studies</u>, Vol. 2, Issue 4 (Fall).

Edley, N. and Wetherell, M. (1996) Masculinity, power and identity, in M. Mac an Ghaill (ed.) <u>Understanding Masculinities</u>, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Edwards, R. (1991) <u>Degrees of Difference: Families and Education in the lives of mature mother-students</u>, PhD, South Bank University, London.

Edwards, R. (1993) <u>Mature Women Students: Separating or Connecting Family and Education</u>, London: Taylor & Francis.

Edwards, R. and Alldred, P. (1999a) Children and Young People's Views of Social Research: The case of research on home-school relations, <u>Childhood</u>, Vol. 6 (2): p261-281.

Edwards, R. and Alldred, P. (1999b) Home-school Relations: Children and Young People Negotiating Familialisation, Institutionalisation and Individualisation, Paper at the 4th European Sociological Association Conference, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 18-21st August.

Edwards, R. and Duncan, S. (1997) Supporting the family: lone mothers, paid work and the underclass debate, Critical Social Policy, Vol. 17 (4), Issue 53, November: p29-49.

Edwards, R. and Duncan, S. (forthcoming 1999) Lone Mothers and Paid Work, London: Macmillan.

Edwards, R. and Ribbens, J. (1991) Meanderings around 'strategy': a research note on strategic discourse in the lives of women, Sociology, Vol. 25 (3): p 477-89.

Ehrenreich, B. and English, D. (1979) For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Experts' Advice to Women, London: Pluto Press.

Eichler, M. (1980) The Double Standard: A Feminist Critique of Feminist Social Science, London: Croom Helm.

Eisenstein, H. (1984) Contemporary Feminist Thought, London: Unwin.

EmapElan (1998) Media Pack , London: EmapElan.

Exall, M., Sexty, C. and Alldred, P. (1999) Striving for Inclusion or 'Marriage is best': A Response to Supporting Families Consultation Document, London: Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

Falludi, S. (1992) Backlash, London: Vintage.

Fanon, F. (1969) Black Skin, White Masks, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Feminist Review (1984) Many voices, one chant: black feminist perspectives, Feminist Review, Vol. 17.

Feminist Review (1986) Feedback: feminism and racism, Feminist Review, Vol. 22.

Finch, J. (1993) 'It's Great to have Someone to Talk to': Ethics and Politics of Interviewing Women, in M. Hammersley (ed.) Social Research: Philosophy, Politics and Practice, London: Sage.

Finch, J. and Mason, J. (1993) Negotiating Family Responsibilities, London: Routledge.

Firestone, S. (1970) The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution, New York: William Morrow.

Flax, J. (1990) Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West, Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press.

Foucault, M. (1970) The Order of Discourse: Inaugural lecture at the College de France, given 2nd December, 1970. trans. Ian McLeod, in R.Young (ed.) <u>Text, Discourse, Ideology</u>, London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1972) <u>The Archaeology of Knowledge</u>, London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1977a) <u>Discipline and Punish</u>, London: Allen Lane.

Foucault, M. (1977b) Intellectuals and Power (Foucault in conversation with Gilles Deleuze) in, D. Bouchard (ed.) <u>Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews</u>, New York, Cornell University Press.

Foucault, M. (1977c) The political function of the intellectual, <u>Radical Philosophy</u>, Vol. 17.

Foucault, M. (1979) On Governmentality, <u>Ideology & Consciousness</u>, Vol. 6: p5-22.

Foucault, M. (1980) <u>Power/Knowledge</u> (ed. C. Gordon), Brighton: Harvester Press.

Foucault, M. (1981a) <u>The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction</u>, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1981b) 'The Order of Discourse' in R. Young (ed.) <u>Untying the Text</u>, London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1982) 'The Subject and Power', Afterword to H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, <u>Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics</u>, Harvester, Brighton.

Foucault, M. (1983) Preface, in G. Deleuze and F. Guattari <u>Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia</u>. Translation R. Hurley, M. Seem, and H. R. Lane, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Foucault, M. (1988) Technologies of the Self, in L. H. Martin, H. Gutman and P. H. Hutton (eds) <u>Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault</u>, London: Tavistock publications.

Fox Harding, L. (1996) 'Parental responsibility': the reassertion of private patriarchy? in E. B. Silva (ed.) <u>Good Enough Mothering: Feminist Perspectives on Lone Motherhood</u>, London: Routledge.

Frankenberg, R. (1993) <u>White Women, Race Matters</u>, London: Routledge.

Fraser, N. (1989) <u>Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory</u>, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fraser, N. (1995) From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age, <u>New Left Review</u>, Vol. 212: p68-93.

Fraser, N. and Nicholson, L. (1990) Social Criticism without Philosophy, in L. Nicholson (ed.) Feminism/Postmodernism, New York: Routledge.

Friedan, B. (1963) The Feminine Mystique,

Friedan, B. (1981) The Second Stage, Joseph Books.

Fuss, D. (1989) Essentially Speaking, London: Routledge.

Gaber, I. and Aldridge, J. (1994) In the Best Interests of the Child: Culture, Identity and Transracial Adoption, London: Free Association Books.

Gardner, R.A. (1992) Parental Alienation Syndrome, Cresskill, New Jersey: Creative Therapeutics.

Gergen, K. (1989) 'Warranting Voice and the Elaboration of Self' in J. Shotter and K. Gergen (eds) Texts of Identity, London: Sage.

Gergen, K. (1992) Towards a Postmodern Psychology, in S. Kvale (ed.) Psychology and Postmodernism, London: Sage.

Gergen, K., Gloger-Tippelt, G. and Berkowitz, P. (1990) The Cultural Construction of the Developing Child, in G. Semin and K. Gergen (eds) Everyday Understanding: Social and Scientific Implications, London: Sage.

Giddens, A. (1990) The Consequences of Modernity, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Giddens, A. (1991) Modernity and Self Identity, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Giddens, A. (1992) The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gieve, K. (1987) Rethinking Feminist Attitudes Towards Motherhood, Feminist Review, 25: p38-45.

Gilroy, P. (1987) There Ain't No Black In the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation, London: Hutchinson.

Gittens, D. (1998) The Child in Question, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Goldberg, B. (1996a) In a bad humour …with psychology, in E. Burman, P. Alldred, C. Bewley, B. Goldberg, C. Heenan, D. Marks, J. Marshall, K. Taylor, R. Ullah, S. Warner, Challenging Women: Psychology's Exclusions, Feminist Possibilities, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Goldberg, B. (1996b) Come to the carnival: women's humour as transgression and resistance, in E. Burman, G. Aitken, P. Alldred, R. Allwood, T. Billington, B. Goldberg, A.J. Gordo-Lopez, C. Heenan, D. Marks and S. Warner Psychology, Discourse and Social Practices: From Regulation to Resistance, London: Taylor and Francis.

Golombok, S., Spencer, A. and Rutter, M. (1983) Children in lesbian and single-parent households: Psychosexual and Psychiatric Appraisal, <u>Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry</u>, Vol. 24: p551-572.

Gordon, L. (1988) <u>Heroes of Their Own Lives</u>, New York: Viking.

Gordon, T. (1990) <u>Feminist Mothers</u>, London: Macmillan.

Gore, J. M. (1995) Foucault's Post-structuralism and Observational Educational Research: A study of power relations, in Smith, R. and Wexler, P. (eds) <u>After Post-Modernism: Education, Politics and Identity</u>, London: Falmer Press.

Graham, H. (1984) <u>Women, Health and the Family</u>, London: Wheatsheaf Books.

Griffin, C. (1998) Review of <u>Between Voice and Silence: Women and Girls, Race and Relationship</u> by J. McLean Taylor, C. Gilligan and A. M. Sullivan, in <u>Feminist Review</u>, 60: p121-123.

Griffin, S. (1982) The Way of All Ideology, in Keohane, N.O.; Rosaldo, M.Z.; Gelpi, B. C. (eds) <u>Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology,</u> Chicago, U.S.: University of Chicago Press.

Grossberg, L. (1989) On the Road with Three Ethnographers, <u>Journal of Communication Inquiry</u>, Vol. 13 (2): p23-26.

Grosz, E. (1995) <u>Space, time, and perversion: essays on the politics of bodies</u>, New York: Routledge.

Hall, C., O'Sullivan, S., Phoenix, A. Storr, M., Thomas, L. and Whitehead, A. (1999) Snakes and Ladders: Reviewing Feminism at Century's End, <u>Feminist Review</u>, Vol. 61: p1-3.

Hall, S. (1992) New Ethnicities, in J. Donald and A. Rattansi (eds) <u>'Race', Culture and Difference</u>. London: Sage, in association with the Open University.

Hall, S. (1996) Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'? in S. Hall and P. du Gay (eds) <u>Questions of Cultural Identity</u>, London: Sage.

Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., Clarke, J. and Roberts, B. (1978) <u>Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order</u>, London: Macmillan.

Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., Clarke, J., and Roberts, B. (1978) <u>Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State and Law and Order</u>, London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1995) <u>Ethnography: Principles in Practice</u>, London: Routledge, second edition.

Hardyment, C. (1983) <u>Dream Babies: Childcare from Locke to Spock</u>, London: Jonathan Cape.

Harne, L. and Rights of Women (1997) <u>Valued Families: The Lesbian Mothers' Legal Handbook</u>, London: The Women's Press.

Harris J. Rich (1998) <u>The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out The Way They Do</u>, London: Bloomsbury.

Hearn, J. (1992) <u>Men in the Public Eye. The Construction and Deconstruction of Public Men and Public Patriarchies</u>, London: Routledge.

Henriques, J., Hollway, W., Urwin, C., Venn, C. and Walkerdine, V. (1984) <u>Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity</u>, London: Methuen, and London: Routledge (1998).

Hester, M. and Radford, L. (1996) <u>Domestic Violence and Child Contact Arrangements in England and Denmark</u>, Policy Press.

HMSO (1998) <u>Supporting Families: A Consultation Document</u>, London: The Stationery Office, ISSN 011341225 8.

Hochschild, A. (1990) <u>The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home</u>, London: Piatkus.

Holland, P. (1998) Representations of children panel, at <u>Spoilt Children, ICA</u>, London (September).

Hollway, W. (1989) <u>Subjectivity and Method in Psychology</u>, London: Sage.

Hollway, W. (1997) <u>The maternal bed</u>, in W. Hollway and B. Featherstone (eds) <u>Mothering and Ambivalence</u>, London: Routledge.

Hollway, W. and Featherstone, B. (eds) (1997) <u>Mothering and Ambivalence</u>, London: Routledge.

hooks, b. (1991) <u>Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics</u>, London: Turnaround.

Hoyles, M. (1989) <u>The Politics of Childhood,</u> London: Journeyman Press.

Hughes, S. (1994) New nanny for the state's troublesome child, <u>Rights of Women Bulletin</u>, Autumn/Winter, p34-36, London: Rights of Women.

Ingelby, D. (1972) Ideology and the Human Sciences, in T. Patemen (ed.) <u>Counter Course</u> Harmondsworth, Penguin.

Ingelby, D. (1983) Freud and Piaget: The Phoney War, <u>New Ideas in Psychology</u>, Vol. 1, (2): p123-144.

Ingleby, D. (1985) Professionals as socializers: the 'psy complex', in S. Spitzer and A. T. Scull (eds) <u>Research in Law, Deviance and Social Control</u>, Vol. 7: p79-109.

Jackson, S. (1992) The amazing deconstructing woman, <u>Trouble & Strife</u>, Vol. 25: p25-31.

James, A. and Jenks, C. (1994) Public Perceptions of Childhood Criminality, Childhood and Criminality Seminar, <u>ESRC Seminar Series – Childhood and Society</u>, University of Keele, 15 April.

James, A. and Prout, A. (1990) Re-Presenting Childhood: Time and Transition in the Study of Childhood, in A. James and A. Prout (eds) (1990) <u>Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood</u>, London: Falmer Press.

James, A. and Prout, A. (1996) Strategies and Structures: Towards a New Perspective on Children's Experiences of Family Life, in J. Brannen and M. O'Brien (eds) <u>Children in Families: Research and Policy</u>, London: Falmer Press.

James, A. and Prout, A. (eds) (1990) <u>Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood</u>, London: The Falmer Press.

Jordan, T. (1994) <u>Reinventing Revolution: Value and difference in new social movements on the left</u>, Aldershot: Avebury.

Jordanova, L. J (1985) Fantasy and History in the Study of Childhood, <u>Free Associations</u>, Vol. 2: p110-122.

Kaplan, E. A. (1992) <u>Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama</u>, London: Routledge.

Kaufmann, T. (1998) Oi! You! Where are your dungarees? <u>Sybil,</u> March/April: p25-27.

Kelly, L (1994) Stuck in the Middle, <u>Trouble & Strife</u>, Vol. 29/30: p46-50.

Keohane, N. O. and Gelpi, B. C.(1982) Foreword, in N. O. Keohane, M. Z. Rosaldo and B. C. Gelpi (eds) <u>Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology</u>, Chicago, U.S.: University of Chicago Press.

Kessen, W. (1991) The American Child and other Cultural Inventions, in M. Woodhead, P. Light and R. Carr (eds.) <u>Growing up in a Changing Society</u>, London: Routledge (in association with the Open University).

Kessler, S., Ashenden, D. J., Connell, R. W. and Dowsett, D. W. (1985) Gender Relations in Secondary Schooling, <u>Sociology of Education</u>, Vol. 58: p34-48.

Kitzinger, C. (1987) <u>The Social Construction of Lesbianism</u>, London: Sage.

Kitzinger, C. (1989) The Regulation of Lesbian Identities, in J. Shotter and K. Gergen (eds) <u>Texts of Identity</u>, London: Sage.

Kitzinger, C. (1990) The rhetoric of pseudoscience, in I. Parker and J. Shotter (eds) <u>Deconstructing Social Psychology</u>, London: Routledge.

Kitzinger, J. (1990) Who Are You Kidding? Children, Power and the Struggle Against Sexual Abuse, in A. James and A. Prout (eds) (1990) <u>Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood</u>, London: The Falmer Press.

Kristeva, J. (1981) 'Les temps des femmes' trans. as 'Women's Time' by A. Jardine and H. Blake reprinted in T. Moi (1986) <u>The Kristeva Reader,</u> London: Basil Blackwell: p187-213.

Kuper, J. (1987) <u>Key Thinkers, Past and Present</u>, London: R.K. & P.

Kvale, S. (1992) Introduction, in, S. Kvale (ed.) <u>Psychology and Postmodernism,</u> London: Sage.

Lanser, S. S. (1991) Feminist Literary Criticism: How Feminist? How Literary? How Critical? <u>NSWA Journal</u>, Vol. 3, No. 1, (Winter, 1991): p3-19.

Laplanche, J and Pontalis, J.B. (1998) <u>The Language of Psychoanalysis</u>, London: Karnac Books.

Lasch. C. (1977) <u>Haven in a Heartless World</u>, New York: Basic Books.

Lather, P. (1991) <u>Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/in the Postmodern</u>, London: Routledge.

Lawler, S. (1996) Motherhood and Identity, in T. Cosslett, A. Easton and P. Summerfield (eds) <u>Women, Power and Resistance: An introduction to Women's Studies</u>, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Laws, S. (1994) Un-Valued Families, <u>Trouble and Strife</u>, Vol. 28 (Spring): p5-11.

Leonard, D. (1992) Baby Talk, <u>Trouble and Strife</u>, Vol. 24 (Summer) (Letters): p3-5.

Leonard, D. (1996) Review of Beck, U and Beck-Gernsheim, E. 'The Normal Chaos of Love', <u>Sociology</u>, Vol. 30 (4): p837-839.

Levidow, L. (1989) Witches and Seducers: Moral Panics for Our Time, in B. Richards (ed.) <u>Crises of the Self: Further essays on Psychoanalysis and Politics</u>, London: Free Association Books.

Lewin, E. (1994) 'Negotiating Lesbian Motherhood: The Dialectics of Resistance and Accommodation', in E. Nakano Glenn, G. Chang and L. Rennie Forcey (eds) <u>Mothering: Ideology, Experience, Agency</u>, London: Routledge.

Lewis, C. and O'Brien, M. (1987) Constraints on fathers: research, theory and clinical practice, in C. Lewis and M. O'Brien (eds) <u>Reassessing Fatherhood: New Observations on Fathers and the Modern Family</u>, London: Sage.

Lord Chancellor, Secretary of State for Scotland, Secretary of State for Social Security, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Lord Advocate (1990) <u>Children Come First: The Government's Proposals on the Maintenance of Children</u>, Cm.1264, London: HMSO.

Lorde, A. (1984) <u>Sister Outsider: Writings and Speeches by Audre Lorde</u>, Trumansberg, NY.: The Crossing Press.

Lovibund, S. (1989) Feminism and postmodernism, <u>New Left Review</u>, Vol. 78: p5-28.

Lyon, D. (1994) <u>Postmodernity,</u> Buckingham: Open University Press.

Lyotard, J-F. (1984) <u>The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge</u>, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Lyotard, J-F. (1986) Defining the Postmodern. <u>Postmodernism ICA Documents</u>, Vol. 4: p6-7.

M. Richards (ed.) (1974) <u>The Integration of a Child into a Social World</u>, London: Cambridge University Press.

Macauley, R. and Gordo-Lopez, A. (1995) From Cognitive Psychologies to Mythologies: Advancing Cyborg Textualities for a Narrative of Resistance, in C. H. Gray, H. J. Figueroa-Sarriera and S. Mentor (eds) <u>The Cyborg Handbook</u>, London: Routledge.

Macdonald, M. (1995) <u>Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media</u>, London: Edward Arnold (Hodder).

Macnaghten, P. (1993) Discourses of nature: argumentation and power, in E. Burman and I. Parker (eds) (1993) <u>Discourse Analytic Research: Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action,</u> London: Routledge.

Mandell, N. (1986) Peer interaction in day-care settings: implications for social cognition, in P. A. Adler and P. Adler (eds) <u>Sociological Studies of Child Development</u>, Vol. 1, Greenwich, CT.: JAI Press: p55-79.

Mandell, N. (1991) The least-adult role in studying children, in F. C. Waksler, (ed.) <u>Studying the Social Worlds of Children: Sociological Readings,</u> London: Falmer Press.

Mann, K. (1994) Watching the defectives: Observers of the Underclass in the USA, Britain and Australia, <u>Critical Social Policy</u>, 41: p79–99.

Mann, K. and Roseneil, S. (1994) 'Some Mothers do 'Ave 'Em': Backlash and the Gender Politics of the Underclass Debate, Paper presented at the Good Enough Mothering?: Feminist Perspectives on Lone Motherhood Conference, Leeds, June 6th, 1994.

Mann, K. and Roseneil, S. (1994) "Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em": backlash and the gender politics of the underclass debate, Journal of Gender Studies, Vol. 3(3): p317-31.

Margolis, M. L. (1984) Mothers and Such: Views of American Women and Why They Changed, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Marks, D. (1993) Case-conference analysis and action research, in E. Burman and I. Parker (eds) Discourse Analytic Research: Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action, London: Routledge.

Marks, D. (1996a) Gendered 'care' and the structuring of group relations: Child-professional-parent-researcher, in E. Burman, P. Alldred, C. Bewley, B. Goldberg, C. Heenan, D. Marks, J. Marshall, K. Taylor, R. Ullah, S. Warner, Challenging Women: Psychology's Exclusions, Feminist Possibilities, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Marks, D. (1996b) Constructing a Narrative: Moral discourse and young people's experience of exclusion, in E. Burman, G. Aitken, P. Alldred, R. Allwood, T. Billington, B. Goldberg, A. J. Gordo-Lopez, C. Heenan, D. Marks, and S. Warner Psychology, Discourse, Practice: From Regulation to Resistance, London: Taylor and Francis.

Marshall, H. (1991) The Social Construction of Motherhood: An Analysis of Childcare and Parenting Manuals, in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett and E. Lloyd (eds) Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies, London: Sage.

Marshall, K. (1986) Moral Panics and Victorian Values: Women and the Family in Thatcher's Britain, London. Junius Publications (2nd edition).

Martin, L.H., Gutman, H. and Hutton, P.H. (eds) (1988) Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault, London: Tavistock Publications.

Martin, R. (1988) Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault, in L. H. Martin, H. Gutman and P. H. Hutton (eds) Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault, London: Tavistock publications.

Mauthner, M. (1998) Kindred Spirits: Stories of Sister Relationships, Unpublished PhD dissertation, Institute of Education, University of London.

Mayall, B. (1996) Children, Health and the Social Order, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Mayall, B. (ed.) (1994) Children's Childhoods: Observed and Experienced, London: The Falmer Press.

McCartney, C.F. (1985) Decision by Single Women to Conceive by Artificial Donor Insemination, Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics and Gynaecology, 4: p321-328.

McFerran, A. (1998) Motherland, London: Virago.

McIntosh, M. (1996) Social anxieties about lone motherhood and ideologies of the family: two sides of the same coin, in E. B. Silva (ed.) <u>Good Enough Mothering: Feminist Perspectives on Lone Motherhood</u>, London: Routledge.

McNay, L. (1992) <u>Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self,</u> Cambridge: Polity Press.

McRobbie, A. (1989) <u>From Jackie to Just Seventeen</u>, London: Macmillan.

McRobbie, A. (1994) <u>Postmodernism and Popular Culture</u>, London: Routledge.

Mercer, K. (1994) <u>Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies,</u> London: Routledge.

Mercer, K.(1994) "1968" Periodizing Politics and Identity, in K. Mercer (1994) <u>Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies,</u> London: Routledge.

Mestovic, S. (1993) <u>The Barbarian Temperament</u>, London: Routledge.

Millar, J. (1992) Lone mothers and poverty, in C. Glendinning and J. Millar (eds) <u>Women and Poverty in Britain in the 1990s,</u> London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Miller, G. A. (1964) <u>Psychology: The Science of Mental Life</u>, Hutchinson.

Miller, P. (1987) <u>Domination and Power</u>, London: R.K.P.

Mills, S. (ed.) <u>Gendering the Reader</u>, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Minh-Ha, T. (1989) <u>Woman, Native, Other</u>, Bloomingham: Indiana University Press.

Mishler, E.G. (1986) <u>Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative,</u> London: Harvard University Press.

Mitchell, J. (1973) <u>Woman's Estate,</u> New York: Vintage Books.

Mitchell, J. and Goody, J. (1997) Feminism, Fatherhood and the Family in Britain, in A. Oakley and J. Mitchell (eds) <u>Who's Afraid of Feminism? Seeing through the Backlash,</u> London: Penguin Books.

Mohanty, C. T. (1988) Under Western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses, <u>Feminist Review</u>, 30.

Moors, A. (1991) Women and the Orient: A Note on Difference, in L. Nencel and P. Pels (eds.) <u>Constructing Knowledge: Authority and Critique in Social Science</u>, London: Sage.

Moraga, C. and Anzaldua, G. (1981) (eds) <u>This Bridge Called My Back,</u> Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.

Morell C. M. (1994) Unwomanly Conduct: The Challenges of Intentional Childlessness, London: Routledge.

Morris, J. (1997) Gone Missing? Disabled Children living away from their family, Disability & Society, 12, 2: p83-86

Morris, L. (1994) Dangerous Classes: The Underclass and Social Citizenship, London: Routledge.

Morrow, V. (1993) Rarely Seen and Never Heard? Methodological and Ethical Considerations of Researching Children, Paper to BSA Conference, University of Essex, April, 1993.

Morss, J. R. (1990) The Biologising of Childhood: Developmental Psychology and the Darwinian Myth, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Morss, J. R. (1995) Growing Critical: Alternatives to Developmental Psychology, London: Routledge.

Murray, C. (1984) Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980, New York: Basic Books.

Murray, C. (1994) Underclass: The Crisis Deepens, London: Institute of Economic Affairs.

Nava, M. (1983) From Utopian to Scientific Feminism: Early Feminist Critiques of the Family, in L. Segal (ed.) What is to be done about the Family? Crisis in the Eighties, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Nencel, L. and Pels, P. (eds) (1991) Constructing Knowledge, authority and critique in the social sciences. London: Sage.

New, C. and David, M. (1985) For the Children's Sake: making childcare more than women's business, London: Penguin Books.

Newson, J. and Newson, E. (1974) 'Cultural aspects of childrearing in the English-speaking world', in M. Richards (ed.) The Integration of a Child into a Social World, London: Cambridge University Press.

Newson, J. and Newson, E. (1978) Seven years Old in the Home Environment, Harmondsworth: Pelican.

Nicholson, L. (1990) Introduction, in L. Nicholson (ed.) Feminism/Postmodernism, New York: Routledge.

Nightingale, D. and Cromby, J. (1999) Social Constructionist Psychology: A Critical Analysis of Theory and Practice, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Nutt, L. (1998) Public Care in a Private Place: The Paradoxical Situation of Foster Carers and the Issue of Payment, Paper to the Social Policy Association's Annual Conference, University of Lincolnshire & Humberside.

O'Brien, M. (1981) The Politics of Reproduction, London: Routledge Kegan Paul.

O'Brien, M., Alldred, P. and Jones, D. (1996) Children's Constructions of Family and Kinship, in J. Brannen and M. O'Brien (eds) Children in Families: Research and Policy, London: Falmer Press.

O'Connor, N. and Ryan, J. (1993) Wild Desires and Mistaken Identities: Lesbianism and Psychoanalysis, London: Virago.

O'Hagan, K. and Drillenberger, K. (1995) The Abuse of Women in Childcare Work, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Oakley, A. (1972) Sex, Gender and Society, London: Temple Smith.

Oakley, A. (1979) Becoming a Mother, Oxford: Martin Robertson.

Oakley, A. (1981) Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms? in H. Roberts (ed.) Doing Feminist Research, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Oakley, A. (1994) Women and Children First and Last: Parallels and Differences between Children's and Women's Studies, in B. Mayall (ed.) Children's Childhoods: Observed and Experienced, London: The Falmer Press.

Palmer, N. R. (1988) The legal recognition of Parental Alienation Syndrome, American Journal of Family Therapy, Vol. 16 (4): p361-363.

Parker, I. (1990a) Discourse: definitions and contradiction, Philosophical Psychology, Vol. 2 (3): p189-204.

Parker, I. (1990b) Real things: discourse, context and practice, Philosophical Psychology, Vol. 2 (3): p227-233.

Parker, I. (1992) Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology, Routledge, London.

Parker, I. (1997) Psychoanalytic Culture: Psychoanalytic Discourse in Western Society, London: Sage.

Parker, I. (ed.) (1998) Social Constructionism, Discourse and Realism, London: Sage.

Parker, I. and the Bolton Discourse Network (1999) Critical Textwork, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Parker, I. and Burman, E. (1993) Against Discursive Imperialism, empiricism and constructionism: thirty-two problems with discourse analysis, in E. Burman and I. Parker

(eds) <u>Discourse Analytic Research: Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action</u>, London: Routledge.

Parker, I. and Shotter, J. (1990) Introduction, in I. Parker and J. Shotter (eds) <u>Deconstructing Social Psychology</u>, London: Routledge.

Parmenter, J. (1993) <u>Looking After Baby: Yesterday, today...tomorrow, Trends in Infant Care Practice, Bristol 1951-1991</u>, Bristol: Redcliffe.

Parton, N. (1992) <u>Governing the Family: Child Care, Child Protection and the State</u>, London, Macmillan.

Patai, D. (1991) US Academics and Third World Women: Is Ethical Research Possible? in S. Berger Gluck and D. Patai (eds) <u>Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History</u>, London: Routledge.

Patterson, C. (1992) Children of lesbian and gay parents, <u>Child Development</u>, Vol. 63: p1025-1042.

Patton, P. (1979) Of power and prisons, in M. Morris and P. Patton (eds) <u>Michel Foucault: Power, truth, strategy</u>, Sydney: Feral Publications.

Peery, J. C. (1994) Should sexual orientation be a consideration in custody proceedings? Yes, in M. A. Mason and E. Gambill (eds) <u>Debating Children's Lives: Current Controversies on Children and Adolescents</u>, Thousand Oaks and London, Sage.

Pennington, S. Bisnovich (1987) Children of Lesbian Mothers, in F. W. Bozett (ed.) <u>Gay and Lesbian Parents</u>, New York: Praeger.

Perkins, A. (1998) Divorce: pay to see children, <u>The Guardian</u>, February 10th.

Phillips, A. (1987) <u>Divided Loyalties: Dilemmas of Sex and Class</u>, Virago, London.

Phillips, A. (1993) <u>The Trouble with Boys: Parenting the Men of the Future</u>, London: Pandora.

Phoenix, A. (1990) Theories of Gender and Black Families, in T. Lovell (ed.) <u>British Feminist Thought</u>, Oxford: Blackwell.

Phoenix, A. (1991a) <u>Young Mothers?,</u> Cambridge: Polity.

Phoenix, A. (1991b) Mothers under Twenty: Outsider and Insider Views, in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett and E. Lloyd (eds) <u>Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies</u>, London: Sage.

Phoenix, A. (1996) Social constructions of lone motherhood: A case of competing discourses, in E. B. Silva (ed.) <u>Good Enough Mothering: Feminist Perspectives on Lone Motherhood</u>, London: Routledge.

Phoenix, A. and Woollett, A. (1991) Motherhood: Social Construction, Politics and Psychology, in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett and E. Lloyd (eds) <u>Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies</u>, London: Sage.

Phoenix, A., Woollett, A. and Lloyd, E. (eds) (1991) <u>Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies</u>, London: Sage.

Plummer, K. (1995) <u>Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds</u>, London, Routledge.

Pollitt, K. (1992) Marooned on Gilligan's Island: Are Women Morally Superior to Men? <u>The Nation</u>, December 28th.

Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987) <u>Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour,</u> London: Sage.

Potter, J., Wetherell, M., Gill, R. & Edwards, D. (1990) Discourse: noun, verb or social? <u>Philosophical Psychology</u>, Vol. 2 (3), p205-217.

Prince, J. and Hartnett, O. (1993) From 'psychology constructs the female' to 'fe/males construct psychology', <u>Feminism and Psychology</u>, Vol. 3 (2): p219-225.

Prince, J. and Hartnett, O. (1993) From 'Psychology Constructs the Female' to 'Fe/males Construct Psychology', <u>Feminism & Psychology</u>,Vol. 3 (2): p219-225.

Probyn, E. (1993) <u>Sexing The Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies,</u> London: Routledge.

Quest, C. (ed.) (1994) <u>Liberating Women …from Modern Feminism</u>, London: Institute for Economic Affairs, Health and Welfare Unit.

Qvortrup, J. (1987) Introduction: The sociology of childhood, <u>International Journal of Sociology</u>, Vol. 17 (3): p3-37.

Rabinow, P. (ed.) (1984) <u>The Foucault Reader: An introduction to Foucault's thought</u>, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Radford, J. (1991) Immaculate Conceptions, <u>Trouble and Strife</u>, Vol. 21 (Summer): p8-12.

Radford, J. and Rupal, R. (1993) Child Support Act 1991: What's it about and why does it matter? <u>Rights of Women Bulletin</u>, Spring, London: Rights of Women.

Ramazanoglu, C. (1986) Ethnocentrism and socialist feminist theory: A response to Barrett and McIntosh, <u>Feminist Review</u>, 22.

Reason, P. and Rowan, J. (eds) (1981) <u>Human Inquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research</u>, Chichester: Wiley.

Reese, H. W. and Overton, W. F. (1970) 'Models of development and theories of development' in L. R. Goulet and P. B. Baltes (eds) <u>Life-span Developmental Psychology: Research and Theory</u>, New York: Academic Press.

Ribbens McCarthy, J. and Edwards, R. (1999) Contemporary Parenting: Biological or Social? <u>THES</u> (on hold, December, 1998)

Ribbens, J. (1989) 'Interviewing: An "unnatural situation", <u>Women's Studies International Forum</u>, Vol. 12 : p579-592.

Ribbens, J. (1994) <u>Mothers And Their Children: A Feminist Sociology of Childrearing</u>, London: Sage.

Ribbens, J. and Edwards, R. (1998) (eds) <u>Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives</u>, London: Sage.

Rich, A. (1977) <u>Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution</u>, London: Virago.

Rich, A. (1983) Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence, E. Abel and E. K. Abel (eds) <u>The Signs Reader: Women, Gender and Scholarship</u>, London: University of Chicago Press.

Richards, B. (1994a) <u>Disciplines of Delight: the psychoanalysis of popular culture</u>, London: Free Association Books.

Richards, B. (1994b) What is Identity? in I. Gaber and J. Aldridge (eds) <u>In the Best Interests of the Child: Culture, Identity and Transracial Adoption</u>, London: Free Association Books.

Richards, B. (1999) <u>Authority and Popularity in Britain 2000: a psychosocial analysis</u>, Inaugural Lecture, University of East London, 10th March, 1999.

Richards, M. and Light, P. (eds) (1986) <u>Children of Social Worlds</u>, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Richters, A. (1991) Fighting Symbols and Structures: Postmodernism, Feminism and Women's Health in L. Nencel and P. Pels (eds) <u>Constructing Knowledge: Authority and Critique in Social Science,</u> London: Sage.

Rights of Women (1997) Challenge Homophobic Injustice Now (CHIN), <u>Newsletter (September),</u> London: Rights of Women.

Riley, D. (1983) <u>War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother,</u> London: Virago.

Riley, D. (1988) <u>'Am I That Name?' Feminism and the Category of 'Women' In History</u>, London: Macmillan.

Roach, J. and Felix, P. (1988) Black Looks, in L. Gamman and M. Marshment (eds) The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture, London: The Women's Press.

Roache, J. (1991) The Children Act 1989: Once a parent always a parent? Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law, Vol. 5: p178-192.

Roche, J. (1996) The Politics of Children's Rights, in J. Brannen and M. O'Brien (eds) Children in Families: Research and Policy, London: Falmer Press.

Rorty, R. (1980) Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Oxford: Blackwell.

Rose, N. (1985) The Psychological Complex, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Rose, N. (1987) Beyond the Public/Private Division: Law, Power and the Family, Journal of Law and Society, Vol. 14 (1), (Spring).

Rose, N. (1989a) Governing The Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self, London: Routledge.

Rose, N. (1989b) Individualizing Psychology in J. Shotter and K. Gergen (eds.) Texts of Identity, London, Sage.

Rose, N. (1990) Psychology as a social science, in I. Parker and J. Shotter (eds) Deconstructing Social Psychology, London: Routledge.

Rose, N. (1993) Inventing Ourselves, London: Routledge.

Roseneil, S. and Mann, K. (1996) Unpalatable choices and inadequate families: lone mothers and the underclass debate, in E. B. Silva (ed.) Good Enough Mothering: Feminist Perspectives on Lone Motherhood, London: Routledge.

Rowbotham, S. (1989) To Be or Not To Be: The Dilemmas of Mothering, Feminist Review, 31.

Rustin, M. (1998) Editorial: The New Labour Project, in Soundings, Vol. 8, Spring, (Active Welfare issue).

Saffron, L. (1999) 'What about the children?' Sons and Daughters of Lesbian and Gay Parents Talk About Their Lives, London: Cassell.

Sarup, M. (1996) Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Sawicki, J. (1991) Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body, New York/London: Routledge.

Scottish Law Commission (1992) The Report on Family Law, HMSO Edinburgh, No. 135.

Segal, L. (1983) 'The Most Important Thing of All' - Rethinking the Family: An Overview, in L. Segal (ed.) <u>What is to be done about the Family? Crisis in the Eighties,</u> Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Segal, L. (ed.) (1983) <u>What is to be done about the Family? Crisis in the Eighties,</u> Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Seidler, V. J. (1994) <u>Recovering the Self: Morality and Social Theory</u>, London: Routledge.

Sereny, G. (1998) Keynote speech at <u>Spoilt Children, ICA</u>, London, (September).

Sethna, C. (1992) Accepting total and complete responsibility: New age, neo-feminist violence against women, <u>Feminism & Psychology</u>, Vol. 2 (1): p113-119.

Shapiro, J. (1987) <u>A Child: Your Choice</u>, London: Pandora.

Sherman, S. (ed.) (1992) <u>Lesbian and Gay Marriage: Private Commitments, Public Ceremonies,</u> Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Singer, E. (1992) <u>Child-care and the psychology of development</u>, London: Routledge.

Slipman, S. (1994) Would You Take One Home With You?, in Murray, C. (1994) <u>Underclass: The Crisis Deepens</u>, London: Institute of Economic Affairs.

Smart, C and Neale, B. (1999) <u>Family Fragments?</u>, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Smart, C. (1997) Wishful Thinking and Harmful Tinkering? Sociological Reflections of Family Policy, <u>Journal of Social Policy</u>, Vol. 26 (3): p301-321.

Smart, C. and Sevenhuijsen, S. (1989) <u>Child Custody and the Politics of Gender</u>, London: Routledge.

Smith, D. (1987) <u>The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology</u>, Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press.

Smith, D. J. (1994) <u>The Sleep of Reason: The James Bulger Case</u>, London: Century.

Smith, R. (1997) Paying the Penalty: the impact of the Child Support Act, <u>Critical Social Policy</u>, 53, Vol. 17 (4): p111-119**.**

Snitow, A. (1992) Feminism and Motherhood: An American Reading, <u>Feminist Review,</u> 40: p69.

Soper, K. (1991) Postmodernism and its Discontents, <u>Feminist Review</u>, 39: p97-108.

Spelman, E. V. (1988) <u>Inessentially Speaking: problems of exclusion in feminist thought</u>, London: Women's Press.

Spender, D. (1985) <u>Man Made Language</u>, London: Routledge.

Spivak, G. Chakravorty (1988) <u>In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics</u>, London: Routledge.

Spivak, G. Chakravorty (1999) <u>A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present</u>, London: Harvard University Press.

Stacey, J. (1990) <u>Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America</u>, New York: Basic Books.

Stacey, J. (1991) Can there be a feminist ethnography? in S. Berger Gluck, and D. Patai (eds) <u>Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History</u>, New York: Routledge.

Stacey, J. (1996) <u>In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age</u>, Boston: Beacon Press.

Stainton Rogers, R., and Stainton Rogers, W. (1992) <u>Stories of Childhood: Shifting Agendas of Child Concern</u>, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Stainton Rogers, R., Stenner, P., Gleeson, K., Stainton Rogers, W. (1995) <u>Social Psychology: A Critical Agenda</u>, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Standing, K. (1994) <u>Lone mothers' unpaid schoolwork as a household issue</u>, Paper for the Gender Perspectives on Household Issues Conference, Reading, April, 1995.

Standing, K. (1998) Writing the Voices of the Less Powerful: Research on Lone Mothers, in, J. Ribbens and R. Edwards (eds)) <u>Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives</u>, London: Sage.

Stanley, L. and Wise, S. (1983) <u>Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology</u>, London: Routledge.

Stanworth, M. (1987) Reproductive Technologies and the deconstruction of motherhood, in M. Stanworth (ed.) <u>Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood and Medicine</u>, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Steckel, A. (1987) Psychosocial Development of Children of Lesbian Mothers, in F. W. Bozett (ed.) <u>Gay and Lesbian Parents</u>, New York: Praeger.

Steedman, C. (1995) <u>Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780-1930</u>, London: Virago.

Stenner, P. (1993) Discoursing Jealousy, in E. Burman and I. Parker (eds) (1993) <u>Discourse Analytic Research: Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action</u>, London: Routledge.

Stoppard, M. (1995) <u>Complete Baby and Child Care</u>, London: Dorling Kindersley.

Supporting Families: The Government's Green Paper on Family Policy, <u>childRIGHT</u> No. 152: p3-5.

Swaan, A. de (1990) <u>The Management of Normality: Critical Essays in Health and Welfare</u>, London: Routledge.

Sylva, K. and Lunt, I. (1982) <u>Child Development: a first course</u>, London: Grant McIntyre.

Tasker, F. and Golombok, S. (1991) Children Raised by Lesbian Mothers: the Empirical Evidence, <u>Family Law</u> (May): p184-187.

Ticineto Clough, P. (1992) <u>The End(s) of Ethnography: From Realism to Social Criticism</u>, London: Sage.

Treacher, A. (1989) 'Be your own person' Dependence and Independence in Women's Magazines 1950-1980, in Richards, B. (ed.) <u>Crises of the Self: Further essays on psychoanalysis and politics</u>, London: Free Association Books.

Trebilcot, J. (1983) (ed.) <u>Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory</u>, Totowa: Rowman & Allanheld.

Unger, R. (1996) Using the master's tools: Epistemology and empiricism, in S. Wilkinson (ed.) <u>Feminist Social Psychologies: International perspectives</u>, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Urwin, C. (1985) Constructing Motherhood: the persuasion of normal development, in C. Steedman, C. Urwin and V. Walkerdine (eds) <u>Language, Gender and Childhood</u>, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Urwin, C. and Sharland, E. (1992) From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature: Advice to parents in inter-war Britain' in R. Cooter (ed.) <u>In the Name of the Child</u>, London: Routledge.

Van Every, J. (1991) Who is 'the family'? The assumptions of British Social Policy, <u>Critical Social Policy</u>, Vol. 33 (Winter 1991/1992): p62-76.

Van Kreiken, R. (1991) The poverty of social control: explaining power in the historical sociology of the welfare state <u>Sociological Review,</u> Vol. 391 (1), p1-26.

Venn, C. (1984) The subject of psychology, in J. Henriques; W. Hollway, C. Urwin, C. Venn and V. Walkerdine <u>Changing the Subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity</u>, London: Methuen, and London: Routledge (1998).

Venn, C. (1985) A Subject for Concern: Sexuality and Subjectivity in Foucault's History of Sexuality, <u>PsychCritique</u> Vol. 1 (2): p139-154.

Waksler, F. Chaput (ed.) (1991) <u>Studying the Social Worlds of Children: Sociological Readings</u>, London: Falmer Press.

Waksler, F. Chaput (1986) Studying Children: Phenomenological Insights, <u>Human Studies</u>, Vol. 9 (1): 71-82.

Walkerdine, V. (1984) 'Developmental Psychology and child-centred pedagogy' in Henriques, J. et al <u>Changing the Subject: psychology, social regulation and subjectivity</u>, London: Methuen and London: Routledge (1998).

Walkerdine, V. (1988) <u>The Mastery of Reason: Cognitive Development and the Production of Rationality</u>, London: Routledge.

Walkerdine, V. (1990) <u>Schoolgirl Fictions</u>, London: Verso.

Walkerdine, V. (1996) Working-class women: psychological and social aspects of survival, in S. Wilkinson (ed.) <u>Feminist Social Psychologies: International Perspectives,</u> Buckingham: Open University Press.

Walkerdine, V. and Lucey, H. (1989) <u>Democracy in the kitchen: Regulating Mothers and Socialising Daughters</u>, London: Virago.

Warner, M. (1994) <u>Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time, The 1994 Reith Lectures</u>, London: Vintage.

Warner, S. (1996a) Constructing Femininity: Models of child sexual abuse and the production of 'woman' in E. Burman, P. Alldred, C. Bewley, B. Goldberg, C. Heenan, D. Marks, J. Marshall, K. Taylor, R. Ullah, S. Warner, <u>Challenging Women: Psychology's Exclusions, Feminist Possibilities</u>, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Watney, S. (1997) <u>Policing Desire: Pornography, Aids and the Media</u>, London: Cassell.

Watson, J. B. (1928) <u>Psychological Care of the Infant and Child</u>, London and New York: Allen & Unwin.

Weedon, C. (1987) <u>Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory</u>, Oxford: Blackwell.

Weeks, J. (1995) <u>Invented Moralities: Sexual Values in an Age of Uncertainty</u>, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Weeks, J., Donovan, C. and Heaphy, B. (1996) <u>Families of Choice: Patterns of Non-heterosexual Relationships: a literature review</u>, London: South Bank University.

Weeks, J., Donovan, C. and Heaphy, B. (1999, forthcoming) <u>Families of Choice</u>, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Weston, K. (1991) <u>Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship</u>, New York: Columbia University Press.

Westwood, S. (1996) 'Feckless fathers': masculinities and the British state, in M. Mac an Ghaill (ed.) <u>Understanding Masculinities</u>, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Wicomb, Z. (1994) 'Motherhood and the Surrogate Reader: Race, gender and interpretation', in S. Mills (ed.) <u>Gendering the Reader</u>, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Wilkinson, H (1994) <u>No Turning Back: generations and the genderquake</u>, London: Demos.

Wilkinson, S (1999) Feminist psychology: Values and visions, <u>Psychology of Women Section Review</u>, Vol. 1 (1): p20-32.

Wilson, A. (1985) <u>Family</u>, London: Tavistock.

Wilson, P. (1973) <u>Children Who Kill</u>, London: Michael Joseph.

Women's Aid Federation (England) (1996) <u>Children's Experience of Domestic Violence</u>, Briefing Paper, Autumn.

Woodcraft, E. (1997) 'Lesbian parents - changing attitudes', <u>Rights of Women Bulletin</u> (Summer): p27-30.

Woodhead, M. (1990) Psychology and the cultural construction of children's needs, in A. James and A. Prout (eds) (1990) <u>Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood</u>, Basingstoke, Hants: Falmer.

Woolgar, S. and Ashmore, M. (1988) The Next Step: an Introduction to the Reflexive Project, in S. Woolgar (ed.) <u>Knowledge and Reflexivity: New Frontiers in the Sociology of Knowledge</u>, London: Sage.

Woollett, A. (1991) Having Children: Accounts of Childless Women and Women with Reproductive Problems, in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett and E. Lloyd (eds) <u>Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies</u>, London: Sage.

Woollett, A. and Phoenix, A. (1991) Psychological Views of Mothering, in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett and E. Lloyd (eds) <u>Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies</u>, London: Sage.

Young, R. (1981) Post-structuralism: An Introduction, in R. Young (ed.) <u>Untying the Text</u>, London: Routledge.

Zaretsky, E. (1976) <u>Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life</u>, London: Pluto Press.

Zinn, M. Baca (1992) Family, Race, and Poverty in the Eighties, in B. Thorne and M. Yalom (eds) <u>Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions</u>, Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Publications

Alldred, P. (forthcoming 2000) Review of *Critical Issues in Social Research: Power and Prejudice* International Journal of Social Research Methodology: Theory and Practice, 3 (3) p263-266.

Alldred, P., Bertram, V. and Brah, A. (forthcoming 2000) Editorial: Political Currents, Feminist Review 64, p1-4.

Alldred, P. and Dennison, S. (forthcoming 2000) Eco-activism and Feminism: Do Eco-warriors and Goddesses Need It? Feminist Review, 64, p124-127.

Alldred, P., Bertram, V., Coombes, A., Edholm, F., Storr, M., and Treacher, A. (forthcoming 2000) Feminism 2000: One Step Beyond? Feminist Review, 64, p1-3.

Alldred, P. (1999) Not Making a Virtue of a Necessity: Nancy Fraser on Postsocialist Politics, in T. Jordan and A. Lent (eds) Storming the Millennium: The New Politics of Change, London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Alldred, P. (1998a) Ethnography and Discourse Analysis: Dilemmas in Representing the Voices of Children, in J. Ribbens and R. Edwards (eds) Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives, London: Sage.

Alldred, P. (1998b) Making a Mockery of Family Life? Lesbian Mothers in the British Media, special issue Journal of Lesbian Studies, Vol. 2, Issue 4 (Fall). (Also published in G. A. Dunne (ed.) Living 'Difference': Lesbian Perspectives on Work and Family Life, New York: The Haworth Press, Inc., and Harrington Park Press, an imprint of The Haworth Press Inc.)

Alldred, P. (1998c) *The Sun*, Labour and lesbian mothers, Rights of Women Bulletin, Summer 1998.

Alldred, P. (1997) Review of C. M. Morell's *Unwomanly Conduct: The Challenges of Intentional Childlessness*, Feminism & Psychology, Vol. 6 (1) p80-85.

Alldred, P. (1996a) 'Fit to Parent?' Developmental Psychology and 'Non traditional families', in E. Burman, P. Alldred, C. Bewley, B. Goldberg, C. Heenan, D. Marks, J. Marshall, K. Taylor, R. Ullah, S. Warner, Challenging Women: Psychology's Exclusions, Feminist Possibilities, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Alldred. P. (1996b) Whose expertise? Conceptualizing resistance to advice about childrearing, in E. Burman, G. Aitken, P. Alldred, R. Allwood, T. Billington, B. Goldberg, A. J. Gordo-Lopez, C. Heenan, D. Marks and S. Warner, Psychology, Discourse and Social Practices: From Regulation to Resistance, London: Taylor and Francis.

Alldred, P. (1992) A Report of the *Feminism, Psychology and Discourse Analysis* Conference at Manchester Metropolitan University, British Psychological Society Psychology of Women Section Newsletter, No. 10: p3-6.

Alldred, P. (1992) Review of Ann Dickson's *The Mirror Within: A New Look at Sexuality*, <u>Feminism & Psychology</u> 2 (3): p483-84.

David, M., Edwards, R. and Alldred, P. (forthcoming 2000) Children and School-based Research: 'Informed Consent' or 'Educated Consent'? <u>British Educational Research Journal</u>, 27 (3 or 4).

Edwards, R. and Alldred, P. (1999a) Children and Young People's Views of Social Research: The case of research on home-school relations, <u>Childhood</u>, Vol. 6 (2): p261-281.

Edwards, R. and Alldred, P. (forthcoming 1999b) A Typology of Parental Involvement in Education Centring on Children and Young People: Negotiating Familialisation, Institutionalisation and Individualisation, <u>British Journal of Sociology of Education</u> Vol. 21 (3)

Exall, M., Sexty, C. and Alldred, P. (1999) <u>Striving for Inclusion or 'Marriage is best': A Response to Supporting Families Consultation Document</u>, London: Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

O'Brien, M., Alldred, P. and Jones, D. (1996) Children's Constructions of Family and Kinship, in J. Brannen and M. O'Brien (eds) <u>Children in Families: Research and Policy</u>, London: Falmer Press.