Unmasking Motherhood

A poststructuralist study of motherhood and its meanings for women.

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Abstract

The intention of the following paper is to explore from a poststructuralist perspective the reasons why women choose to have children and the consequences resulting from this choice. Interviews were conducted with women who were mothers, and a selection of contemporary feminist literature, some related to motherhood and some to poststructuralist feminist theory, reviewed, in order to develop an understanding of the subject positions available to women in the discourses of motherhood. Two paradoxical and contradictory discourses of motherhood emerge, which are described in the concluding chapter of the paper.

Prologue

The following paper is a twelve point Education Project for a Master of Education Studies. It is about motherhood; why women choose to become mothers and the consequences resulting from this choice. The paper is based on interviews with women who are mothers, a selection of feminist texts which discuss motherhood, and personal reflection and self-analysis. It is a very personal paper, written in a personal voice, and it narrates the personal stories of individual women. A peculiar paper, it might be thought, and has been said to me on numerous occasions, for a degree in education. The subject of motherhood, I have been told, is of only peripheral concern, in a professional sense, to those interested in the education of children. I do not agree.

My reasons for choosing this area of study are both personal and educational. They arise from the belief I have in the insights which feminism provides, the commitment this gives me for change for social justice, and from my understanding of poststructuralist theory.

My belief in feminism began when I was about seven or eight, and I realised no matter the intensity of my tantrums and the ferocity of my protests, my mother was not going to relent and make my brothers do the dishes instead of me. My brothers were allowed to go out and play on balmy summer nights; I had to stay in the sweaty hot kitchen and dry dishes. The injustice and inequity of this rankled, as did my astonishment at my family's incomprehension of my perceptions of the unfairness of it all. According to them, as the only girl amongst four brothers, it was my duty to perform the domestic chores.

Sixteen or so years later, when I began teaching, I was further astounded at the resistance some colleagues showed to the ideology of gender equity. I could not imagine the dampness or barrenness of a soul who had not been set aflame, as mine had been, after hearing of the research findings of feminist educators such as Dale Spender.[1] I finished my Diploma of Education fired with a crusading zeal for reform, I wanted to do everything I could to remove the obstacles preventing girls from having full access to education. Ten years on and this desire still exists, but its early naive hope and impatience have been tempered with a growing understanding of the complexity and enormity of the changes required to achieve equity for all in education.

This is not, however, to say that I am now pessimistic. I probably would be a depressed pessimist if I had not embarked on a Master of Education Studies degree five years ago and, in the course of doing so, encountered poststructuralist feminist theory. This theory gives me great hope, for within its central premise, that society and its people are constructs of their own making, not given, fixed, concrete entities, lie wondrous

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1 Texts such as Dale Spender's *Invisible Women* and *Learning to Lose* (the latter edited also by Elizabeth Sarah) and Alison Kelly's *The Missing Half* were great fire starters to my earnest wish for change.

possibilities for change. What has been constructed can be deconstructed and reconstructed and made different. Change is possible.

To explain what I understand of poststructuralist feminist theory and the notion of a constructed world, I will focus on the idea of the construction of gender. I use the term gender here differently to how I would use the term sex. Sex I use as a physiological definition: women and men are, in certain physical ways, different. These differences are sexual, or genital. There is a belief that, arising from these physical differences, there are two distinct and separate kinds of people, two genders, female and male, each having particular characteristics, propensities and destinies. Each individual, as she or he grows up, can learn to be female or male in accordance with patterns constructed by the particular culture in which they living. I believe, and there is persuasive evidence to support this view, that these 'differences' between women and men are not innate, biological and inescapable; I believe that they are constructed.[2] I believe that girls learn how to be girls, and that boys learn how to be boys, and that if they do not learn this properly, someone else will quickly point out their shortcomings to them.

I have many times heard parents bemoan the fact that their previously 'ungendered' child has, upon starting kindergarten, become a 'real' little girl or boy. The girl who played with trucks and got happily dirty, the boy who dressed up and had morning tea parties with his dolls, the child whose best friend was not the same sex as her or himself, became, after starting school, a child who would have nothing to do with members of the opposite sex and the activities commonly associated with them.

Children know what is appropriate behaviour for each gender. In the readings I made early on in my teaching career this kind of knowing seemed more fixed and permanent. The sociological texts I read then suggested an image of girls and boys who were socialised into certain kinds of behaviour which then lead to the development of particular aptitudes and inabilities. For example, because, in general, girls were not encouraged to engage in very physical play, and were not provided with toys which allowed them to physically construct things, they were said to have developed limited spatial skills. These under-developed skills later resulted in girls experiencing difficulties in maths and science.[3] If girls were, amongst other things, given the opportunities to engage in construction activities, and were allowed to wear the kind of clothing that permitted them to run and climb and jump and get dirty with no fear of censure, then, it was hoped, they would be able to develop the necessary spatial skills and be thus 'socialised' out of their disenchantment for maths and science.

Unfortunately it was not that easy. Lego sets, shorts and jeans, single-sex maths, science and sport classes have all had an effect and still are having one on increasing girls' participation and achievement in the areas of the curriculum in which previously they had

2 See Davies, 1989, pp. 8-12, and Connell, 1987, pp. 66-90
3 See Kelly, 1981

not been so involved. And yet it has not been enough. We have not come as far as we can, I think. As shown in Bronwyn Davies' recent research, girls are still learning to be girls and boys to boys. The dualistic gender order is still firmly in place, even if it has been transformed.[4]

In poststructuralist theory, this learning to be a girl or a boy is referred to as becoming gendered. In some socialisation theories, individuals were socialised into being female or male. Each girl or boy attained a fixed, set identity as the culmination of this process. Poststructuralist theory suggests instead a subject who is continually constructing its sense of self, its subjectivity.

> The structures and processes of the social world are recognised as having a material force, a capacity to constrain, to shape, to coerce, as well as to potentiate individual action. The processes whereby individuals take themselves up as persons are understood as ongoing processes. The individual is not so much a social construction which results in some relatively fixed end product, but one who is constituted and reconstituted through a variety of discursive practices. It is the recognition of the ongoing nature of the constitution of self and recognition of the nonunitary nature of self that makes poststructuralist theory different from social construction theory.
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> Individuals, through learning the discursive practices of a society, are able to position themselves within those practices in multiple ways, and to develop subjectivities both in concert with and in opposition to the ways in which others choose to position them. By focusing on the multiple subject positions that a person takes up and the often contradictory nature of those positionings, and by focusing on the fact that the social world is constantly being constituted through the discursive practices in which individuals engage, we are able to see individuals not as the unitary beings that humanist theory would have them be, but as the complex, changing, contradictory creatures that we each experience ourselves to be, despite our best efforts at producing a unified, coherent and relatively static self.
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> If we see society as being constantly created through discursive practices then it is possible to see the power of those practices, not only to create and sustain the social world but also to see how we can change that world through a refusal of certain discourses and the generation of new ones.[5]

I take discourse to refer to the stories of our culture which tell about what it means to be a person. These stories suggest discursive practices, that is, behaviours, beliefs, values, which we as individuals can choose to adopt as our own. Bronwyn Davies defines discursive practices as, '... the ways we each speak ourselves and each other into existence through our everyday talk'.[6] In my culture, white middle-class professional Australia in the mid-nineties, being a person means positioning oneself as either female or male. Adopting as our own such discursive practices is referred to, in poststructuralist theory, as positioning oneself within a discourse.

> ... children learn to take up their maleness or femaleness as if it were an incorrigible element of their personal and social selves, and that they do so through learning the discursive practices in which all people are positioned as either male or female. By basing our interactions with children on the presumption that they are in some unitary and bipolar sense male or female, we

4 See for example Davies 1989 and 1993
5 Davies, 1989, p. xi
6 Davies, 1994, p. 1

> teach them the discursive practices through which they can constitute themselves in that way.[7]

This is of vital concern to me as an educator. Through teaching children, implicitly and explicitly, how to position themselves appropriately according to the dualistic gender order, we may also be teaching them to adopt certain practices which could be restrictive. Poststructuralist theory does not however place the responsibility for change on the individuals themselves (for example, making young girls run and climb and do maths and enjoy it), but proposes instead strategies which involve helping children to an understanding of the ways in which they become gendered.

> Unlike strategies for change based on sex role socialisation theory, this book does not seek to explore how we might act upon girls to shape them differently, or to make them want to do maths and science. Kenway and Willis (1990) have shown how such programmes rest the burden of change on girls, as if it were somehow the inadequacy of girls that needed to be called into question. Poststructuralist theory opens up the possibility of a quite different set of strategies for working with both boys and girls based on a radically different conceptualisation of the process of becoming a (gendered) person. Within the frame of this different understanding it makes more sense to introduce children to a discourse which enables them to see for themselves the discourses and storylines through which gendered persons are constituted, to see the cultural and historical production of gendered persons that they are each caught up in. In this different approach, children can be introduced to the possibility, not of learning the culture, or new aspects of it, as passive recipients, but as producers of culture, as writers and readers who make themselves and are made within the discourses available to them. It allows them to see the intersection between themselves as fictions (albeit intensely experienced fictions) and the fictions of their culture - which are constantly being (re)spoken, (re)written and (re)lived.[8]

Some of the most powerful fictions of our lives can be found in the myth of romance. This myth tells the story that there is, for all of us, a perfect sexual partner, and that if we do all the 'right' things, we will find her or him and true, everlasting love and bliss will result. Much research has been carried out on the circumscribing effects the romance myth can have on the lives of women.[9] My concern in this paper is with the effects of what I will call the sequel to the romance narrative - parenthood. Just as it is expected that most people will be in a sexual relationship with a significant other, it is expected that they will want to become parents.

The desire to be a parent is not generally seen as problematic. For many people, it is a biological 'fact' that all individuals, women especially, will want to have children. This desire for women is encoded as 'maternal instinct', instinct being defined in *The Macquarie Dictionary* as 'an inborn pattern of activity and response common to a given biological stock; [an] innate impulse or natural inclination'. Wanting to have children is thus an appropriate desire for a woman to have. It is natural.

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7 Davies, 1989, p. x
8 Davies, 1993, p. 2
9 See for example: Gilbert & Taylor, 1991; Lees, 1986; Radway, 1987; Wolf, 1990.

Not wanting to have children, on the other hand, can be very problematic, as I found out during my late teens and twenties. I did not want to be a mother then, and if I told people this, I would become embroiled in unhappy, tiresome debates about the wrongness of my lack of desire for motherhood. At the time this used to annoy me intensely. I failed to see how it was anyone else's concern whether I had children or not, and I could not understand why it evoked such ire in other people.

Looking back on these debates now from a poststructuralist perspective, I can re-interpret my friends' dismay at my 'non-maternalism' as a dismay brought on by what they perceived as my failure to be properly feminine. I was refusing to position myself in the discourse that to be a woman is to want children. My friends were engaging in what Bronwyn Davies calls 'category maintenance' work, in which people censure each other and themselves for behaving in ways that are recognised as being inappropriate for one of their sex.

> The *idea* of bipolar maleness-femaleness is something which itself has material force. This is evidenced by the continuing work each person engages in to achieve and sustain their gendered identity, and by the fact that when they fail to do so, they perceive themselves, and are perceived by others, as failing as an individual, rather than perceiving the linguistic structures in which the dualism is embedded as at fault. One of the ways in which the idea of bipolarity functions is to reduce the *actual diversity* (non-polarity) of individual behaviour to a bipolar model. This can involve ignoring or not seeing 'deviations' or actually managing to construe behaviour or categories of behaviour as bipolar, even though they would appear to lend themselves more readily to a non-polar perception.[10]

Even though my friends would have known of women who had not had children, and had lived successful, happy lives, (and if they did not know of any such women they did by the end of our discussion) they could not be dissuaded from their conviction that a woman who had children equalled a success as a person, whilst a woman without children was a failure. This kind of bi-polar thinking is, I think, still pervasive, and conveys limiting images of the potential futures for young women. I do not intend here to suggest that becoming a mother is necessarily a negative, limiting act; only that I believe that young women should be able to make choices about their futures from a diverse selection of possibilities. Choosing to become a mother because to not do so could mean being deemed a 'failure' as an individual is not what I would call a freely made choice.

Another way of considering the consequences of not choosing to be a mother is through the concepts of marked and unmarked categories. Bronwyn Davies discusses how in the male-female dualism, the male is the unmarked, the female the marked. In other words, the male is the norm, the female the deviant. Boys and men, claims Bronwyn Davies, often perceive that the activities they engage in are related to the achievement of personhood, not masculinity.

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10 Davies, 1989, p. 18

> Boys and men are often not conscious of the ways in which their activities are to do with the establishment of their male, dominant position. They perceive their activity, rather, as achieving personhood. This is because within the binary pair of male and female, male is the unmarked category, female the marked. That which is marked is visible as such. That which is unmarked is invisible as such. Because maleness is the unmarked category, and female the marked (Connell 1987), boys and men may not be able to name the fact that who they are and what they want to be is 'masculine', since masculinity and personhood are experienced as synonymous.[11]

Extrapolating from these observations, I suggest that for women, being a mother is the unmarked category, not being a mother the marked. Being a mother is an invisible feature of femininity, whereas to choose not to have children can be to call your personhood into question, to position yourself on the periphery of femininity, where life may not be easy. 'Marginality is visible, and painfully visceral. Privilege is invisible, and painlessly pleasant.'[12]

Researchers such as Janice Radway, Pam Gilbert and Sandra Taylor[13], have looked at the ways which women read popular texts and constitute themselves as feminine persons within the discourses of romantic love. I believe that it is also important to study the discourses of motherhood with a view to deconstructing the dualisms which I suspect live within.[14] 'Deconstruction involves finding the hidden metaphysical binarisms that underlie and structure western thought, finding a way in between the binarisms and breaking them open.'[15] The greater our understanding of the discourses in which we constitute ourselves as gendered beings, the greater are the opportunities to disrupt the reproduction of those discourses which may have restrictive or oppressive effects on an individual.

And thus I have chosen to explore why women want to have children. I am not seeing this desire as something to be taken for granted, something to be expected of all women. It is not, I am suggesting, a biological reality, an instinct, an uncontrollable impulse. I intend to look at it as having been constituted and reconstituted for each individual through an array of discursive practices, desires, wishes, fears and anxieties, conscious and unconscious. I wish to understand better this desire, for both personal and educational reasons. My shifting ambivalence about motherhood troubles me; I would like to be able to articulate what it is that I sense I would gain by becoming a mother. I feel the discourse has a potent and seductive lure, and I want to comprehend it before I enter its trap. I would wish then to share my understanding with others, with peers and students, in the hope that we can become more adept at resisting and disrupting the discourses which

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11 Davies, 1994, p. 16
12 Kimmel, quoted in Davies, 1994, p. 16
13 Radway, 1987; Gilbert & Taylor, 1991.
14 My intention is not, by virtue of exclusion, to convey the impression that I consider fatherhood to be unworthy of attention. I think it is, absolutely. Within this paper, however, there is not the scope to do justice to the discourses of fatherhood and motherhood.
15 Davies, 1994, p. 39

constitute a social world of individuals who hold varying degrees of personal, political and economic power.

> This is not to say that a poststructuralist analysis negates the possibility of liberatory teaching (or the illusion of it). Rather, it enables us to see precisely the constitutive power of all discourses and to open up the possibility of sharing that understanding with students. This can be done such that they and we, as teachers, can recognise the force of their and our own constitutive (discursive) acts. In making that constitutive force more visible, the possibility is opened up of informed resistance to its constitutive power. We can, as well, with the students, search for alternative discursive strategies for constituting the social world. Such a possibility does not seek to give the students the kind of agency brought about by replacing one discourse with another, but the agency that comes from giving the student the chance to see the constitutive force of any discourse and to invert, invent and break the bonds of existing discourses.[16]

This paper does not, however, suggest any practical strategies for working with students in classrooms. Such strategies and suggestions belong, I believe, in another work. This text is a beginning, and it narrates my personal journey in the discourses of motherhood. It is very much my journey, and as such, it is written in a personal voice, reflecting the thoughts and feelings and fears of me, a thirty-four year old white middle-class Australian feminist. I am a teacher and a student, interested in the practices of liberatory teaching, wishing I could do something more to alleviate the oppression of those whom I see as having been marginalised by society. To borrow from Patti Lather, who also borrowed from another: 'In the words of Poster (1989), "critical theory springs from an assumption that we live amid a world of pain, that much can be done to alleviate that pain, and that theory has a crucial role to play in that process."'[17]

The critical theory I have used in my attempt to understand this world is poststructuralist theory; I use it because for me it makes the most sense. It does not speak of desires as emanating from fixed, biological impulses; nor do I. It allows me to look at the shifting and sometimes contradictory discourses of femininity and motherhood, and does not ask me to privilege one discourse over another. It recognises the ways that we construct ourselves through our language, our desires, our discursive practices. I can follow on from the examples set by other feminists writing in the discourse of poststructuralism and insert myself clearly and evidently into the text. I do not have to hide behind a facade of academic 'objectivity'.[18] I tell my stories, the stories of the women I interviewed, and the stories of feminists writing about motherhood.

> ... feminist researchers generally consider personal experiences to be a valuable asset for feminist research. To the extent that this is *not* the case in mainstream research, utilizing the researcher's personal experience is a distinguishing feature of feminist research. Personal experience typically is irrelevant in mainstream research, or is thought to contaminate a project's objectivity . In feminist research, by contrast, it is relevant and repairs the project's pseudo-objectivity. Whereas feminist researchers frequently present

16 Davies, 1994, p. 44
17 Lather, 1991, p. 3
18 See for example Davies, 1993, in particular pp. x-xii, and Walkerdine, 1990.

> their research in their own voice, researchers publishing in mainstream journals typically are forbidden to use the first person singular voice.[19]

My hope when I began this study was that I would reach its end with a firm resolution about becoming or not becoming a mother. I have divided the story of this quest for a decision into six sections, or chapters. In the first, I explain in greater detail my reasons for embarking on the journey and foreground the theoretical concepts which influence my thinking about motherhood and the construction of femininity.

In the second chapter I describe the qualitative research methodology I used and explain my reasons for choosing this methodology. I describe the processes I engaged in when gathering the data, and how and why I chose to present it in the ways I have.

Chapter Three is a detailed discussion of the liberatory nature of poststructuralist feminist theory, with particular reference to Wendy Hollway's work on the reproduction of gendered subjectivities through the discourses of heterosexual relationships. This chapter is an elaboration and reworking of an essay I originally submitted in 1992 for a Master of Education Studies subject, 'The Education of Women and Girls'. I have included it here because Wendy Hollway's work was a major source of inspiration for this study. I found it most illuminating when I first encountered it; her deconstruction of heterosexual relationships gave me new ways of re-visiting and re-constructing my understanding of previous relationships of mine. Without wanting to sound like a star-struck disciple of a cosmic New Age creed, experiencing these reconstructions was emotionally and psychologically empowering. For example, I was able to reflect on several 'failed' relationships. Instead of interpreting the failures or break-downs as having arisen only from inadequacies on my part (I was not sufficiently interesting or attractive or intelligent or sophisticated, etc. etc.), I was able to attribute the failures partly to the contradictory ways in which my partner and I had positioned ourselves within the discourses of heterosexuality, and the consequent mis-readings we had made of each other's positionings.

I drew on Wendy Hollway's work when I was developing the framework for this study. I believe that the discourses of heterosexuality and the discourses of parenthood are closely linked. I thus decided to see if I could use her analysis of the discourses of heterosexuality as a kind of lens through which to view the discourses of motherhood.

In Chapter Four I offer a review of the literature I read concerning motherhood, which dates from the early seventies to the present. I look at the different discourses of feminism in which the writers have positioned themselves, and see if this positioning affects how the writers view motherhood.

Chapter Five is a compilation of the monologues constructed from the interviews I had with my friends. I endeavour to tell their stories regarding why they had children, and

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19 Reinharz, 1992, p. 258

what they feel now about being a mother. I will also tell my story about why I do and do not want to become a mother.

In Chapter Six I reflect on what I have learnt about the discourses of motherhood, making reference to the thoughts and experiences of the participants in my study. I look at the subject positions available to women within the discourses of motherhood, and discuss the ways in which I believe they are analogous to Wendy Hollway's discourses of heterosexuality.

This paper is only a beginning, I hope, for the re-visioning and rewriting that Bronwyn Davies calls so powerfully for in order that we can begin to live our lives differently.

> Equity strategies have generally been of an add-on kind, leaving the bulk of old discursive practices in place. The implication of poststructuralist theory is the need for a re-visioning of discursive practices and a re-writing of curriculum and of school texts that make the source of their claims to authority visible. Such visibility would invite both students and teachers to interrogate the texts and to see the constitutive force of the language and the images through which 'real worlds' are constituted, as well as the power of all that is left unsaid. If teachers and curriculum designers and authors of educational texts are to take the poststructuralist turn, we need to begin with ourselves and our own lives, to find strategies to locate the ways in which we are caught up in the multiple discursive practices that shape our everyday worlds, to find how authority is constituted and with what effect ... There are many more ways you, too, might invent to disrupt the male/female dualism, to undo the plagiarising repetition of old patterns, and to make possible a new relation with language through which the stories of our lives can begin to be lived differently.[20]

20 Davies, 1994, pp. 122-123

Chapter One

Desire

> As I walked I thought about having a baby, and in that state of total inebriation it seemed to me that a baby might be no such bad thing, however impractical and impossible. My sister had babies, nice babies, and seemed to like them. My friends had babies. There was no reason why I shouldn't have one either, it would serve me right, I thought, for having been born a woman in the first place. I couldn't pretend that I wasn't a woman, could I, however much I might try from day to day to avoid the issue? I might as well pay, mightn't I, if other people had to pay? I tried to feel bitter about it all, as I usually did when sober: and indeed recently worse than bitter, positively suicidal: but I could not make it. The gin kept me gay and undespairing ... [1]

I have written the opening sentence of this study countless times; it has been a shifting refrain in my head for many months now. The sentence, as a reflection of my thoughts at any one time, has slipped, and lurched, stopped, and slid on again, around and around, on a roundabout of indecision.

I had wanted to begin with a sentence that resonated with purpose and clarity and decisiveness. At times I wanted so much for it to be, 'Oh yes, I am going to have a child. I want to be a mother...'

At other times it was, 'No, I will not have a child. I do not want to be a mother...'

And now that I am finally writing the introduction, I still do not know. So I will begin my paper with a statement that resonates with indecision, ambivalence and contradiction: I want and do not want to be a mother.

I began this study with the belief that I would conclude it knowing if I would or would not have a baby. It was going to be like a quest for the answer to the question of whether I would or would not choose to become a mother. I had been inspired by Patti Lather's statement in *Getting Smart*, 'A final strand is my desire to write my way to some understanding of the deeply unsettling discourses of postmodernism'[2] and had determined that I was going to take inspiration from Patti Lather and try to write my way to an understanding of the deeply disturbing yearnings I was having that made me think I wanted to have a child. I did not know from whence these desires were coming, and no matter how hard I tried to make them stop, they just kept coming. I maintained an external anti-motherhood stance, but sometimes when I saw a friend with a baby I found myself overtaken by a fierce longing for a baby. I wanted one for myself! My own baby to have and hold. Even the stern lectures I gave myself concerning nappies and midnight feeds did not put a halt to these yearnings. It was extraordinary, and I did not know how to deal with it.

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1 Drabble, 1977, p. 16
2 Lather, 1991, p.1

You might think it strange that these yearnings disturbed me so much, and that I could not trust them and be convinced that motherhood was for me. I, on the other hand, always found it strange that people could so fearlessly and almost wantonly want children, and have them, so often, without ever really thinking about what it was that they were doing. Did they not take it seriously? How could they do it, I wondered, how could they be so reckless and fearless? How could they be so sure that they were doing the right thing? That was how it seemed to me, before I too was hit by an attack of the baby wish, which has left me fearless and fearful, reckless and anxious. I want to be wanton but I am not sure how.

This paper is largely about me, it is about my choice whether to have children or not. Yet it is also very much concerned with the reasons why women have children. I have interviewed women about their decisions to have children, with the intention of identifying the discourses of motherhood, the stories that women tell themselves about what it means to be a mother. I wanted to have a better understanding of why women chose to take up positions in the motherhood discourse, why they so happily said goodbye to a life of freedom and fun, renounced careers, sleep and financial independence and began a life term of imprisonment, shackled to a sink and washing machine. (I realise how negative my interpretation seems, but this is how I saw motherhood.) I felt that these women were responding to a very strong enticement, something that I was beginning to find more and more appealing. 'Scientific' explanations of an essential human urge to reproduce did not satisfy me, and I was not sure if there was something called maternal instinct in most women, and I was just starting to experience it. If there was such a thing as maternal instinct, then I suspected that it would be a social construct, not a biological fact, and I wanted to explore the motives underpinning women's adoption of it as part of their stories of being women.

> The critical distinction that we need to make is between male and female reproductive capacity and the masculine and feminine subject positionings that have usually been made available on the basis of that reproductive capacity. Male or female reproductive capacity does not have an necessary implication for the subjectivity or subject positionings that any individual can take up.[3]

My intention was to explore from a poststructuralist perspective the reasons why women have children. I am interested in how women construct themselves as mothers, what subject positions are available to them in the discourses of motherhood. By discourses here I refer to the 'coherent set of meanings'[4] which women and men make of the practices

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3 Davies, 1989, p. 12

4 See Gilbert and Taylor, 1991, pp. 7-8, 'In relation to the construction of femininity we will refer to discourse about gender as a "a language or system of representation that has developed socially in order to make and circulate a coherent set of meanings about an important topic area." (Fiske, 1987, p. 14) At a broader level such coherent sets of meanings may be referred to as ideologies, although both discourses and ideologies operate in a dynamic ideological field: ideologies "do not operate through single

of, in this particular case, motherhood, the stories of their culture which they draw upon as they make choices which will affect how they live their lives. These choices may not be deliberately and consciously made, there may in fact be no perception that choice exists. The dominant discourses can seem hugely powerful and all pervasive, and those whose interests are vested in them may endeavour to obscure and even obliterate any discourses which are divergent or oppositional or just a little bit different. Such different discourses exist though, they reside sometimes shakily on the periphery of the dominant discourses, and they offer cultural practices, ways of living or behaving, for people to take up or to reject. Wendy Hollway asserts that these subject positions are gender differentiated, but because individual women and men take them up, and because they are not the result of single discourses, there is the possibility for change in the dominance of the ruling discourses. The discourses do not repeat themselves automatically, and people who take up positions within them do not become an army of undifferentiable robots.

> Practices and meanings have histories, developed through the lives of the people concerned. These histories are not the product of a single discourse (though, depending on the hegemony of one discourse, meanings may be more or less homogeneous) ... Because discourses do not exist independently of their reproduction through the practices and meanings of particular women and men, we must account for changes in the dominance of certain discourses, and the development of new ones (for example those being articulated by feminists) by taking account of men's and women's subjectivity. Why do men 'choose' to position themselves as subjects of discourse of male sexual drive? Why do women continue to position themselves as its objects? What meanings might this have for women? ... By posing such questions, it is possible to avoid an analysis which sees discourses as mechanically repeating themselves - an analysis which cannot account for change. By showing how subjects' investments, as well as the available positions offered by discourses, are socially constituted and constitutive of subjectivity, it is possible to avoid this deterministic analysis of action and change.[5]

It is the ambivalence I (and I suspect other women) have towards the subject positions available in the discourses of motherhood which most fascinates me, the feeling I have that motherhood would be an eternal trap, but it is still something which I think I want. Sometimes. Why am I being drawn towards a feared trap? Does motherhood have to be a trap? As a woman on the verge of choosing motherhood, these concerns are vitally interesting. But I do not think that the relevance of these concerns begins and ends with me. I want to be able to become a mother, if that is what I eventually choose, without becoming a prisoner of the ideology of motherhood. And as a teacher, I do not want the young people with whom I work to be likewise imprisoned. Becoming a mother is a central component of the romantic myth, the dominant story which young people draw on as they make choices about what they will do with their lives.

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ideas; they operate in discursive chains, in clusters, in semantic fields, in discursive formations" (Hall, 1985).'

5 Hollway, 1984, pp. 236-237

Pam Gilbert and Sandra Taylor describe the particular conflicts experienced by young girls as they grow up in our society, which arise from the contradictory messages the girls receive about what constitutes appropriate 'feminine' behaviour. They group these conflicts into three contradictory discourses: the domesticity/paid work conflict, the slag or drag conflict and the adolescence/femininity conflict. Together these discourses 'define and constitute femininity in particular ways and they do so within the private, domestic sphere. Both the slag/drag conflict and the adolescence/femininity conflict work to regulate sexuality in traditional ways - towards marriage and motherhood.'[6]

So instead of being able to focus on their education and make plans for a future career, girls are worrying about being attractive and getting and keeping a boyfriend. The romance myth is central to the construction of their femininity. Girls recognise the need to become 'learned' about romance, and therein, argue Pam Gilbert and Sandra Taylor, lies the explanation for the immense popularity of the romance novel. Girls and women read romantic fiction they say, because it gives them a reason for suffering the confusion and pain of growing up feminine.

> Romance fiction can, in one way, be read as a solution to the particular 'problem' of becoming feminine. It offers the fantasy of a caring, loving and sensitive male who will eventually be won, if a woman can demonstrate such qualities as physical attractiveness, moral virtuousness, and a willingness to be submissive. There then becomes a reason for the fetish with the body, the face, the hair and the clothes; a reason for self-sacrificing one's own interests and needs; a reason for quelling anger and indignation at the humiliating subject positions on offer. 'Some day my prince will come' - a girl must be ready. Love makes the pain and anxiety of becoming feminine tolerable, for it offers the promise of an idyllic resolution to the seemingly intolerable set of contradictions that becoming feminine represents.[7]

Romantic fiction presents a world in which the arrival of the 'prince' signals total fulfilment and eternal happiness, a finale to the nagging sense of dissatisfaction that the struggle to be feminine produces. But the arrival of the prince in reality is no end, there can in fact be no end to the quest for pleasure. Pleasure, a chance for happiness, enjoyment, is out there, waiting for us to come and get it; romantic love, a handsome man, a perfect wedding, a slim and fit body, a beautiful face and silky stylish hair, a new car, a designer garden, a fulfilling job, a baby ... all these and more will remove our discontent, when we succeed in attaining our desires.

> Female desire is courted with the promise of future perfection, by the lure of achieving ideals - ideal legs, ideal hair, ideal homes, ideal sponge cakes, ideal relationships. The ideals on offer don't actually exist except as the end product of photographic techniques or as elaborate fantasies. But these ideals are held out to women - all the time. Things may be bad, life may be difficult, relationships may be unsatisfying, you may be feeling unfulfilled, but there's always promise of improvement. Achieve these ideals and you will feel better! Female dissatisfaction is constantly recast as desire, as desire for something more, as the

6 Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, pp.16-17
7 Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, pp. 77-78

> perfect reworking of what has already gone before - dissatisfaction displaced into desire for the ideal.
>
> Our desire sustains us, but is also sustains a way of living which may not ultimately be the best and only way for women. Women shopping, cooking, buying and wearing the goods produced by this society; women marrying, taking the responsibility for children, nurturing others; women decorating and displaying homes - all these practices are sustained by female desire. The pleasure/desire axis sustains social forms which keep things as they are. The pleasure/desire axis appears to be everything women want but it may involve loss - loss of opportunity, loss of freedom, perhaps even loss of happiness.[8]

I know that part of my desire to have a baby is to do with this search for pleasure, for completion, for an end to the constant yearning I have for the something more which will leave me satisfied, replete, content. I feel sometimes that motherhood would take away my grumbling discontent, my feeling that I do not quite, yet, have all that I need and want. Intellectually I know that this discontent is fuelled by cultural practices, practices which I should be able to reject, but instead feel a complex, shifting sense of guilt because I cannot. Emotionally I am caught up with it all. I am not alone with this guilt.

> Even as a feminist I've felt that sinking feeling of 'I shouldn't be doing this'. Not because anyone has told me I shouldn't be doing this, but because I know such practices have been analysed and criticized. Guilt in fact has been the habitual reaction of many women to feminism - guilt at liking conventionally feminine things, guilt about being married, guilt about wanting to stay at home with children. Pleasure may be sacrosanct but guilt is remorseless.[9]

I feel guilty because I desire children; I am deeply suspicious of my longings for maternal bliss. I feel guilty when, after a bad day at school, I come home and reassure myself by announcing, 'I can always leave and have a baby.' I think that to have a baby for such a motive is 'bad' and I think that is shows me to be pathetically unambitious. I then feel guilty because I am not ambitious enough! I wonder at the discipline I can exert when following a new diet and fitness regime, during the times when I am fired with a fierce ambition for a new body (and consequent new life, of course!), because I have rarely felt the same ambitious fire when considering advancement in my career. Whilst I have been involved in committees and extra-curricular activities at school, my real commitment has been to my students and my learning and teaching. The kind of work in which teachers engage who seek promotion interests me not at all. Well, not very much.

One version of the humanist tradition would read me, from my above statements, as being a non-competitive, nurturing, maternal and 'natural' woman who was biding her time in the workforce before taking the plunge into 'real life' and motherhood. This tradition would read my desires as having sprung from my core self, the 'conscious, knowing, unified, rational subject'[10] that it asserts me to be. I am more satisfied with Rosalind

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8 Coward, 1984, pp.13-14
9 Coward, 1984, p.14
10 Weedon, 1987, p.21

Coward's readings of desires such as these as being constructed by the dominant discourses of the patriarchy.

> The aim of *Female Desire* is to examine how presumptions about female pleasure and female desire are shot through so many cultural practices, and to look at the way our desire is courted even in our most everyday experiences as women. I don't treat these cultural representations as the forcible imposition of false and limiting stereotypes. Instead I explore the desire presumed by these representations, the desire which touches feminist and non-feminist women alike. But nor do I treat female desire as something universal, unchangeable, arising from the female condition. I see the representations of female pleasure and desire as *producing* and sustaining feminine positions. These positions are neither distant roles imposed on us from outside which it would be easy to kick off, nor are they the essential attributes. of femininity. Feminine positions are produced as responses to the pleasures offered to us; our subjectivity and identity are formed in the definitions of desire which encircle us. These are the experiences which make change such a difficult and daunting task, for female desire is constantly lured by discourses which sustain male privilege.[11]

The seductive nature of these desires lies in the way we think that the satisfaction of them will give us power. Power, the power of being in charge of one's own desires and emotions, is a very complex thing; I can only speak here of what I think it means for me, and what I suspect it may mean for other people. I do not speak of power here as strictly being having power over others, being in control of other people and making them do what I want them to. Power is often seen as being a male attribute, and is to do with having this kind of control, through physical strength or through having a higher status or position, so that one can make decisions which impinge on others as well as oneself. I do not want the kind of power which could allow me to dominate or oppress others, but I do want to be able to evoke a positive response in my significant others. In a sense then having power for me does mean having some control of others, in the sense of having a positive effect on other people's feelings. Power means feeling good about the choices I make about my life, feeling that I have done the right thing and that others think that also. It means receiving recognition and approval for my actions, feeling proud of myself, and feeling special. I wish that I did not need other people's approval so badly, because I can suffer such anguish when I think that it is being withheld. I do not think that I am alone in having this need. Most of the people I have ever known have desired love and friendship and recognition from others. This recognition can come for a multiplicity of reasons: success at work, a slim body, a completed research project for a Masters degree, a youthful, unlined face, or even a baby.

I have a sneaking suspicion that I think that having a baby would fulfil my needs for the above recognition. We all 'know' that mothers are the best at looking after their own children - we know that mothers are special for their children - they are loved and needed and wanted and impossible to replace. I perceive that to be a mother can be to be empowered, in the sense that mothers are invested with such importance and trust and love. They are in

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11 Coward, 1984, p.16

charge, they are responsible, and they are essential. I want to have that sense of empowerment. I think that this representation of female desire, the desire for motherhood, along with the desire for romantic love, is the most potent of all female desires. As I am emotionally lured by it, I am attempting intellectually to deconstruct it, understand it, and control it. I do not want this tempting desire to lead me into a situation which I may later regret. I want to be in control of the desire, and understand from what and to what I think I am escaping.

Rosalind Coward shows in *Our Treacherous Hearts* how motherhood is used by many women as an escape route from the difficulties women experience at work. The simplistic explanation often given for women who renounce their career is that it is too difficult for them to juggle a family and career, and whilst not denying these difficulties, Rosalind Coward suggests more complex motives for women returning to the home and family. She discusses at length the ambivalence with which women regard the world of work. She interviewed many women who had been very successful in their chosen careers, but were happy to leave paid employment once they had children. They experienced difficulties in reconciling the competitive and self interested nature of work with the nurturing and selfless nature of motherhood. Rosalind Coward does not believe that women are innately 'nicer', more caring people, but that women find it hard to be competitive and aggressive and ambitious.

> There's a belief that, however much like men childless women might make themselves, as soon as they have children the 'feminine', caring, nurturing principles will naturally return. A film director described how distasteful her work seemed after she became a mother. This was not because of the practical tensions between work and home (although that was difficult) but because the unpleasantness' normally required in the workplace felt too uncomfortable. 'I have to make a lot of 'snap' judgements about the people I work with, like the camera crew and the editors. If it's not going well, I just have to change them. Two years age, I wouldn't have thought twice about sacking people but I can't do it now. Motherhood has made me a nicer person.'
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> Motherhood probably hasn't made this woman a nicer person, but it has exposed the gulf between two ways of being in the world: the individualism of the professional and the altruism of the maternal bond. Motherhood and leaving work, or making the children one's priority, provides an opportunity for denial, a way of putting those uncomfortable feelings behind oneself. But the ability to make children the priority, the feelings of discomfort at competition and of being sickened by other's ambitions, isn't proof that women aren't ambitious and competitive themselves, only that they find these feelings more difficult to handle than many men do.[12]

I am seeking new subject positions which women could take up in the discourses of motherhood and in the discourses of work, in which they could be nurturing and loving mothers and/or successful and comfortable workers, depending on their choice. If the gulf between the world of home and work were not so great, then perhaps women (and men) might not experience such tension when attempting to reconcile the apparently different subject positions required by both. I am not filled with total despair at the prospect of

12 Coward, 1992, pp.42-43

change in the competitive and aggressive nature of paid work, because it is, after all, a construction. The world of work is not innately and unchangeably self-interested and ambitious, and nor is the world of motherhood fixed as selfless and nurturing and uncompetitive. There can be changes in both these ideologies. The joy of poststructuralism is that it offers the hope for such change, because it does not conceive the world and its people as being established permanently in their current positions. What is constructed can be deconstructed and reconstructed. By understanding the positions women are now taking up, we may then be able to see new positions which could be adopted.

We need to present a multiplicity of subject positions to the young people in our schools, so they can see that there are a variety of discourses from which they can choose as they construct the story of their lives. These discourses need to be presented as being of equal value, and of conferring similar 'power'. They should not be seen as though they are in a hierarchy, or as either/or choices. We need to be able to see beyond the dualisms of paid work/motherhood, individualism/ altruism.

In order to see beyond these dualisms, we need first to have an understanding of the discourses in which they are embedded. In the next chapter I will describe the processes I engaged as I attempted to come to such an understanding. I will outline the qualitative research methodology I used, and explain my reasons for having employed such a methodology.

Chapter Two

Practice, Process and Product

> The fact that there are multiple definitions of feminism means that there are multiple feminist perspectives on social research methods. One shared radical tenet underlying feminist research is that women's lives are important. Feminist researchers do not cynically 'put' women into their scholarship so as to avoid appearing sexist. Rather, for feminist researchers females are worth examining as individuals and as people whose experience is interwoven with other women. In other words, feminists are interested in women as individuals and as a social category.[1]

To explore the stories that women tell of becoming mothers, I used three main methods. I read feminist and sociological literature concerning motherhood and child rearing, I conducted interviews with women who were mothers, and I kept a journal. The women I interviewed ranged in age from the late twenties to the late forties; some were single, some were in de facto relationships, and some were married. The ages of their children ranged from eight months to twenty-two years. Some women had one child, some had two. The age of the women and the size of their families were not taken into consideration when I invited them to participate in my study. Two of the interviews were done with individual women, and one was a group discussion, present at which were five women who had children, two women who did not, and one man who also had no children. This group was my study group, present at which were my supervisor, and my fellow students, all of whom were then engaged in research for either a Bachelor of Education or a Master of Education Studies degree. The members of this group who were mothers had earlier consented to participate in a taped discussion on their experiences of motherhood. The two students who had no children were participants in the discussion by accident: they had turned up for our regular class, discovered that this particular class was devoted to my research project, and stayed out of interest. They contributed to the discussion, but because I had chosen to only interview women who were mothers, I did not take their contributions into account when I analysed the transcript of the group discussion. The interviews were all taped and later transcribed, as close to verbatim as possible, and the transcripts returned to the participants for checking, editing and clarifying. Three interviews were held through letters and follow-up phone calls. (The participants in these interviews lived too far away to be interviewed in person.)[2]

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1 Reinharz, 1992, p. 241

2 See Appendices for copies of the interview transcripts.

I wrote in my journal regularly, usually once a week, sometimes more, and recorded my feelings on different occasions about motherhood, and my speculations as to what was influencing me to feel either for or against it. I analysed the 'critical incidents' which kept me reeling and wavering on my roundabout of indecision, and tried to look for patterns in my responses to these incidents. I noted the instances when something I had felt or experienced was mentioned by a participant in an interview, or discussed in the literature. I asked a friend who is in a somewhat similar situation to me (in a heterosexual relationship, not a mother and ambivalent about becoming one) to read my journal and comment on any thoughts and feelings which were either convergent or contradictory to her feelings about motherhood. I was not necessarily looking for one simple, clear, answer, one singular interpretation of motherhood. I was interested in the multiplicity of meanings which I suspected women made of motherhood. Because I held such contradictory, complex feelings towards motherhood, I wanted to see if other women were similarly ambivalent.

I used these three methods, reading, interviewing and personal reflection concurrently; and thus what I learnt from one area impacted on what I was learning in another. The readings influenced the way I framed the interviews and responded to my friends' revelations which all coloured my reflections in my journal which then affected the meanings I was making of the literature. My ideas, desires, thoughts and speculations swirled around and around, in the kind of circles as described by Margot Ely when describing the kind of life as experienced by those who have chosen to do qualitative research, ' ... it seems that all of us have chosen to share a way of research life - a way of *life* - that sweeps us along in continuous circles within circles of action, reflection, feeling and meaning making.'[3]

I believed that what I was doing was important, not trivial, but because I was doing it, I worried that I would not do a competent enough job. I had to keep reminding myself of the law as laid down in *Circles within Circles*, regarding trusting the research process and oneself.

> Learning to trust the process of qualitative research is difficult for many students of the field, particularly at the beginning. It is of course essential if one wishes to be a qualitative researcher. In my experience, this learning is highlighted as students work in two arenas: learning to trust the research paradigm itself, to accept that it is worthy and respectable, and learning to trust oneself as a flexible instrument.[4]

I found it extremely difficult to let go and trust in myself. I was on a journey, and as this journey continued I kept changing. Sometimes I was madly excited by the study,

3 Ely et al, 1991, p. 7
4 Ely et al, 1991, p. 32

sometimes I was terribly depressed by the enormity and complexity of the task. Sometimes I felt as though I was drowning in a whirlpool of the circles of qualitative research. In the end I incorporated these feelings into my journal writings, and they have become part of my research. It is the journey itself, the travelling and learning, that is now important, not the fact that I have still to come to my journey's end. In fact, I no longer really believe that the journey has an end.

> Feminist researchers who use multiple methods conjure up for me the traditional (male) image of the 'quest for truth.' Feminists embarking on important research projects are like people setting out on important journeys ... Being a researcher-traveler means having a self and a body. It means abandoning the voice of 'disembodied objectivity' and locating oneself in time and space. As Elinor Langer wrote, 'I am writing these words at a geographical place, at a moment in time, at a point in my own history so far removed from the time I first (formulated the study).' It also means acknowledging that the self changes during the journey.[5]

It is interesting to reflect now on how different my responses were when I was asked by colleagues and friends just what it was that I was doing at university. If the questioner was a woman, I usually said that I was studying the reasons why women have children, and the meanings women make of being mothers, and how these meanings effect their sense of themselves as women. The more interested the response I then received, the more elaborate would be my ensuing explanation. But if my questioner was a man whom I did not know very well, or with whom I did not feel very comfortable, then more often than not I quickly said that I was doing research in the area of feminist theory. That was usually enough to put off any further interrogation.

I am not really sure why I acted in this way. It was not that I was ashamed of my topic, or that I thought it trivial and unworthy of academic consideration. I think I was hesitant because I did not want to make myself vulnerable to criticism; because I was central to the research I would feel personally attacked if the research was criticised. I knew also that the minute I said that I was studying motherhood a lot of questions would then be asked about when I was going to have children, and there were times when I did not feel like answering such questions. My journey into my reasons for wanting children was interesting, stimulating, exciting, but also quite distressing, because I found out things about myself that I did not really like. I did not want to think of myself as being that kind of person, and yet it was all there in my journal, glaring at me. There were many times when I wanted to escape my own scrutiny. I wanted to hide from the part of my self that had become a researcher, and was constantly and callously collecting data on all my feelings and thoughts. Seriously studying oneself is not easy, as I found.

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5 Reinharz, 1992, pp. 211-212

> So, it is possible to study oneself in interaction, and it has been done. But that is only part of the issue, not the whole. Being a studier of oneself - apart from studying oneself as the researcher - is sometimes excruciatingly difficult, sometimes impossible. Some of that has to do with developing extraordinary vision - that of seeing out of and reporting from double lenses - researcher/researchee - often simultaneously. Some of that has to do with facing the pain of seeing what we would wish not to see.
>
> I have found that making the choice of whether to study oneself is an intensely personal task. But there are some key ingredients to consider ... With such considerations, a person can make a decision - with the proviso, of course, that life often brings surprises that can turn around any decision.[6]

These difficulties often made me want to abandon my study. I became so sick of myself and so very tired of the subject of motherhood that I wished to drop it all and take up something straightforward and unchallenging. The fact that I did not drop out is due largely to the encouragement and support and constructive criticism I received from my research group at university and from my friends whom I was interviewing. They were all so interested in what I was doing, and so often expressed a desire to see the finished product, that I kept working to complete it.[7]

Because my thoughts and feelings were so central to this study, it was vital that I interview other women so as to receive a range of thoughts and feelings, in the words of the women themselves.

> Feminist researchers find interviewing appealing for reasons over and above the assets noted by social scientists who defend qualitative methods against positivist criticism. For one thing, interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher. This asset is particularly important for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women.[8]

I wanted the women I interviewed to be participants in my research, not subjects, and I wanted them to feel not only valued and appreciated, but also that their participation was purposeful and important. I wanted them to have a sense of autonomy in the research process; I did not want them to feel like laboratory mice. At the beginning of the interviews I explained that they had the right to refuse to answer any question, and to comment, negatively or positively, on any aspect of the interview process. I was interested in how they felt about being interviewed as well as what they said about being mothers.

All my participants were my friends. This was deliberate. I interviewed only friends for several reasons, the first being that I felt that familiarity with me gave the

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6 Ely et al, 1991, p. 137

7 See also Ely et al. pp. 35-37 regarding the value of support groups.

10 Reinharz, 1992, p. 19

participants more power. My friends would not, I hoped, feel daunted or overwhelmed by 'me as researcher', and would feel sufficiently comfortable and confident to be able to comment on the research process. A stranger might be more hesitant about speaking of personal concerns, and less likely perhaps to regard me as an equal. I did not need to worry about forming a rapport with my friends, or establishing trust or credibility between us. Whilst the interviews began as artificial situations, in that I had set them up to happen, I think that they did develop into 'partially structured personal conversations'[9] in which I talked also about my feelings for motherhood, and my perceptions about what it would be like to be a mother.

I have a number of friends who are mothers. The ones whom I chose to interview form, I believe, a reasonable sample of mothers. Some I knew to have consciously chosen to become a mother and had set out to conceive a child; others had become pregnant unintentionally and had been thus forced to choose between terminating the pregnancy or having the baby. A few of the participants had very young children, and were still experiencing, sometimes quite intensely, the changes involved in becoming a mother. Others had grown up children and consequently were able to reflect on the changes they had experienced as their children had matured.

A concern often expressed about interviewing friends is that the researcher might be too familiar with her participants.

> ... being too familiar is less a function of our actual involvement in the setting than it is of the research stance we are able to adopt within it. We are too familiar when we 'know' the answers ahead of time, or when we feel too close, too distressed, too disinterested, or too biased to study the situation, or when we realize that the people in it do not accept us in our researcher roles. We are too familiar when we cannot make the familiar unfamiliar.[10]

Whilst the women I interviewed were very familiar to me, their thoughts on motherhood were not. We had not talked before at such length and in such depth and detail regarding motherhood, and we all found something new out about each other during the interviews. I approached the interviews as something of a novice, ready to be initiated into the secrets of motherhood. My friends were teaching me about something with which I was unfamiliar. I felt very much that I was a 'learner and a listener', not only a researcher.[11]

Another reason that I chose to interview friends was because I wanted to interview women who were of a similar class and ethnic background as myself. I know that making such a statement leaves me open to the charge of ethnocentrism and 'classism', but I felt

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9 Reinharz, 1992, p. 34
10 Ely, 1991, p. 16
11 Reinharz, 1992, p. 29

that my project, being a twelve point education project for a Masters of Education Studies, did not have the scope to encompass a study which looked at the meanings different classes and cultures make of motherhood. The project was not big enough to do justice to the complexity of issues that such a study would raise. And as a full-time teacher and part-time student, I did not have the resources or time to study motherhood from a wide range of cultural and socio-economic perspectives. I believe that such a study would be wonderfully interesting and valuable, but its realisation did not lie within my means. There are dangers also in doing research on groups other than your own, as Shulamit Reinharz indicates.

> When not vigilant about diversity and successful in its implementation as part of a research plan, feminist research may be racist, homophobic, ageist, and ethnocentric. Given this possibility, feminist researchers may feel paralyzed by anticipatory condemnation ... Despite the overwhelming endorsement of methodological diversity as a means to combat racism and homophobia, I have also noticed a few arguments *against* such an approach. ... a researcher's search 'for diversity' could actually be a form of colonialism, manipulation, or exploitation. Black feminists such as bell hooks, for example, ask why white women should study black women in the first place. She notices with irony that 'white women are given grant money to do research on black women but I can find no instances where black women have received funds to research white women's history. She also wonders out loud if 'scholars are motivated by a sincere interest in the history of black women or are merely responding to an available market.'[12]

I have used the transcripts of the interviews as material for telling the women's stories of motherhood. From the transcripts, I constructed a monologue, or story, written in the first person, for each participant in my research study. The construction of these monologues was a long process. First I read and re-read the transcripts, and identified themes and patterns that were resonant in them. Some the themes came from the questions I had asked, others were shared by several participants, others belonged only to one or two women.

> One widely used approach to final analysis is the search for themes. A theme can be defined as a statement of meaning that (1) runs through all or most of the pertinent data, or (2) one in the minority that carries heavy emotional or factual impact. It can be thought of as the researcher's inferred statement that highlights explicit or implied attitudes toward life, behavior, or understandings of a person, persons, or culture.[13]

I then created a collage of words, grouped into ten or so themes. I had thought that I would then, after a close study of the collage, be able to write an analysis of motherhood, as experienced by my participants. But I found myself very reluctant to analyse critically the words of my friends, and I did not want to reduce the interviews to statements like, 'Three

12 Reinharz, 1992, p. 257
13 Ely, 1991, p. 150

women said that they had never felt maternal before they had their first child.' I wanted to present the women's stories in a way which would preserve their individuality and humour and vitality. I wanted them to speak in their own voices. I wanted to present the information in a way that would allow any readers of this text to first be able to read and make their own meanings of my participants' stories, with as little analysis and comment from me as possible. Yet I had to change the form of the stories, out of the original interview text, in order to make the stories, or data, more manageable.

I took a break from my study at this point, feeling totally stumped as to what to do next. I was stuck in the middle of writing both the literature review and the interview chapter. When I returned to the interviews, four months later, I decided to write up each interview into a monologue which told each woman's story of becoming a mother. I wanted a way back into the interviews, I needed to reacquaint myself with their stories, and I thought that presenting the interviews as monologues might address my concerns as expressed above. I read each interview several times, then wrote it again, removing my words, adding links and explanatory phrases where necessary, and sometimes reordering it, so as to give a sense of consistency between the different monologues. I used the framework I had provided with the interview questions to an extent to give them something of a common structure. The idea to construct monologues came from *Circles within Circles*, in which the developing of vignettes or constructs is suggested as a strategy for interpreting and presenting information.

> A construct is an inferred soliloquy based on the content of repeated observation and an interpretive composite of one child's seemingly characteristic thought and behavior ... often these themes, social rules, and vignetters/constructs are stated in the first person. When possible, they include the actual words of the participant(s). Otherwise, they are distilled from the data in as close a likeness as possible of the participant's mode of expression. The intention is to present in miniature the essence of what the researcher has seen and heard over time. Not every researcher opts to use first person, although we are of the mind that this brings readers closer to the people who were studied.[14]

Once the monologues were written, I sent them and an interview transcript to each participant, asking them to read, check, edit, change, add, delete - do anything they wanted to the monologue so that it became something that they were happy to claim as their own. I also asked their permission to include their monologue in my study. Everyone gave their permission, for which I will be eternally grateful. I have changed the names of all the participants and their partners and children.

Several participants said that they could have changed things, they could have tidied up their spoken words into more formal, written words, and they could have said more

14 Ely, 1991, pp. 153-154

about particular issues, but they wanted the monologue kept as it was, as a snapshot of the occasion when they spoke to me. They recognised that they could keep adding to and altering their story of becoming a mother, forever and ever. The story could never be said to be complete, to be finished, contained, understood, fully told. Each time we revisit past experiences, we can reconstruct them and our understandings of ourselves. We are 'always becoming' ourselves.

> The story of who we are can never fully be told since at any future point the apparent certainties of the present can be re-visited and re-vised. Because of this re-visibility, any experience of oneself exists in a ' "time" which can never be entirely remembered, since it will never fully have taken place' (Weber, 1991, p. 9). In this way, Lacan moves away from the deterministic element of Althusser's subject and focuses more on the processes of always becoming.[15]

My story of not being a mother is likewise continuous, incomplete. After having written the participants' stories, I followed the same process in writing mine. I read my journal, identified themes, designed a framework, and wrote my monologue.

All the monologues are, in a sense, joint constructions - what was constructed by the participants and me at the time of the interview, then what I transcribed, then the construction to a monologue from my reading of the interview, and finally, a reconstruction, polished by the participant. The monologues are their stories and my stories. I used their words, and my aim was to write in their voices, but my voice is still there, giving a framework for their words. I could not hope to eradicate my voice totally, just as I could not eradicate their voices from my monologue. Many of their thoughts had become my thoughts, and they have permeated my monologue and become part of my story. I make no claims for objectivity. I do not think that such a thing as objectivity exists. My study cannot be value neutral because everything that is conceived of and studied is permeated with values, the values of the person doing the study and often the values of the institution at which or for which the study is being done.

> 'Starting from one's own experience' violates the conventional expectation that a researcher be detached, objective, and 'value neutral.' In 1971 British sociologist Ann Oakley had already written that these approaches were themselves not 'value neutral' but rather were 'often simply a cover for patriarchy.' Other feminist scholars challenge the concept of objectivity, concurring instead with biologist Ruth Hubbard, that what passes for 'objective' is actually the position of privileged white males.[16]

This study is fired with a belief in feminism, a desire for social justice, and a vested interest in finding emancipatory subject positions for women who choose to be mothers.

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15 Davies, 1993, p. 23
16 Reinharz, 1992, p. 261

The stories that I tell here are my constructions of the constructions of my friends and of the literature and the journal I kept. I am not trying to depict a 'reality'; I am trying to identify stories and discourses relating to motherhood.

> Tyler (1985) refers to 'the end of description' and argues that we do not so much *describe* as *inscribe* in discourse. Narrative realism, hence, is but one of many textual strategies with its assumption of the transparency of description; such realism is challenged by the crisis of representation which is, in essence, an uncertainty about what constitutes an adequate depiction of social reality. Nancy Zeller (1987), for example, argues that we actively select, transform and interpret 'reality' in our inquiry, but that we usually conceal our structuring and shaping mechanisms behind masks of objectivity and fact ... To use language so that it gives the appearance of clear, referential meaning, is to conceal the artifice that produces the appearance of objectivity ... Data might be better conceived as the material for telling a story where the challenge becomes to generate a polyvalent data base that is used to *vivify* interpretation as opposed to 'support' or 'prove.'[17]

The women who told me their stories of being mothers all said that they had enjoyed doing so. Becoming a mother had been a profound change for them, and they appreciated the chance to reflect on the meanings they had made of this experience. My research study began as a quest for an answer to my nagging doubts and desires for motherhood, and whilst my friends certainly helped me in this search, talking about motherhood also helped them. One woman was pleased that she now was 'allowed' to talk of her feelings about being a mother.

> **Anna:** I think it's tremendous that you're allowed to talk about motherhood, how you feel about it. I have some regrets about how I felt about being deprived of self-esteem, I was sorry that it wasn't as good as it could have been. I feel happy about myself, I feel aware of issues, I feel comfortable with myself. I am happy to be a mother. We are only starting to get permission to feel this way. I feel that I am a feminist. I believe I have influenced my children, and things are thus different for them growing up than they were for me. I know that I have been making subtle changes. I have changed, myself, and these small and subtle changes are ones on which real change is based.

Margot Ely, Shulamit Reinharz and Patti Lather were my models, guides and inspirations as I developed my research methodology. In my attempt to answer Shulamit Reinharz's call for the 'production of more feminist knowledge'[18] I am pleased that I have provided this space in which women can speak of being mothers, and I hope that by doing so I may also have done something towards rendering the 'invisible visible.'

> Making the invisible visible, bringing the margin to the center, rendering the trivial important, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, understanding women as subjects in their own right rather than objects for men - all continue to be elements of feminist research. Looking at the world through women's eyes and seeing how the lack of knowledge is constructed are themes

17 Lather, 1991, pp. 90-91
18 Reinharz, 1992, p. 17

> running through feminist research. They reflect the fact that feminist research is grounded both in the disciplines and in a critique of them.[19]

Wendy Hollway's research falls into this area of making the invisible visible, in her case, the invisibility of the discourses of heterosexuality. I found her analysis of these discourses profoundly illuminating, in that it gave me a way into reappraising my understanding of sexual relationships, homosexual and heterosexual. The following chapter provides a summary of her analysis and conclusions, placed within a discussion of poststructuralist theory and the hope it gives me for the emancipation of women and men.

19 Reinharz, 1992, pp. 248-249

Chapter Three

Discourses of Love and Lust: A Poststructuralist Discussion of Heterosexual Relationships

> We seem somewhere in the midst of a shift away from the concept of a found world, 'out there,' objective, knowable, factual, and toward a concept of constructed worlds.[1]

I find in poststructuralist theory great hope for liberation. There are different forms of poststructuralism, and the one which I have adopted in this is the form articulated by Chris Weedon in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*.[2] She has produced a version of poststructuralism which she asserts will be 'useful for feminist practice. In this context, a theory is useful is it is able to address the question of how social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class and race might be transformed.'[3]

Central to the possibilities for transformation is the role played by language in the construction of an individual's subjectivity. I find this liberating, the concept that the kind of person we think we are, the kinds of behaviours we engage in, the beliefs and values we have, the meanings we accord to the practices we see or do, are not all necessarily fixed and rigid. A person's sense of self, her subjectivity, is a social construct.

> For poststructuralist theory the common factor in the analysis of social organization, social meanings, power and individual consciousness is language. Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization 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. The assumption that subjectivity is constructed implies that it is not innate, not genetically determined, but socially produced. Subjectivity is produced in a whole range of discursive practices - economic, social and political - the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle over power. Language is not the expression of unique individuality, it constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific. Moreover for poststructuralism, subjectivity is neither unified nor fixed. Unlike humanism, which implies a conscious, knowing, rational subject, poststructuralism theorisers subjectivity as a site of disunity and conflict, central to the process of political change and to preserving the status quo.[4]

However, I suspect that the majority of people would like to see themselves to be unified and rational beings, in charge of their lives. We believe that we think and act in certain ways, and make certain choices, because of the kind of people we are. Feminist

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1 Lather, 1991, p. 86
2 Weedon, 1987
3 Weedon, 1987, p. 20
4 Weedon, 1987, p. 21

poststructuralist theory proposes instead that we position ourselves within discourses, and that each discourse embodies and suggests patterns of behaviour, practices, values and beliefs in which meaning can be found. Different discourses tell different stories, and we draw upon these stories when we make choices as to how we will live our lives. We might say that we want to have children because that is what we have always wanted and that it is part of what being a woman is. But it may not be; it may be just the story as told to us by the dominant discourse. We are not in total control, in that we are not the sole authors of the stories of our lives. These stories are not only reports or recounts of what we have done and been. They embody all our desires, regrets, hopes, dreams; all that we have wished for, all that we have wanted to forget; all that we have not yet done or become. In the stories of our lives, there are a multiplicity of narratives and narrators. Yet we believe, for the most part, that we are our own narrators.

> The crucial point for the moment is that in taking on a subject position, the individual assumes that she is the author of the ideology or discourse which she is speaking. She speaks or thinks as if she were in control of meaning. She 'imagines' that she is indeed the type of subject which humanism proposes - rational, unified, the source rather than the effect of language. It is the imaginary quality of the individual's identification with a subject position which gives it so much psychological and emotional force.[5]

A theory which suggests that individuals are controlled by the discourses in which they have positioned themselves may not at first appear liberatory. But subjectivities are not fixed, unified, entities and nor are they set firmly into any one discourse. There exists a range of subject positions which an individual may or may not take up. There is some degree of choice, once the individual is aware that the choice exists. And where there is choice, there is the possibility for change.

> Language and the range of subject positions which it offers always exists in historically specific discourses which inhere in social institutions and practices and can be organised analytically in discursive fields ... Discursive fields consist of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organising social institutions and processes. They offer the individual a range of modes of subjectivity. Within a discursive field, for instance, that of the law or the family, not all discourses will carry equal weight or power. Some will account for and justify the appropriateness of the status quo. Others will give rise to challenge to existing practices from within or will contest the very basis of current organisation and the selective interests which it represents. Such discourses are likely to be marginal to existing practice and dismissed by the hegemonic system of meanings and practices as irrelevant or bad.[6]

5 Weedon, 1987, p. 31
6 Weedon, 1987, p. 35

It is within these discourses that notice and challenge existing practices that possibilities for liberation lie, as Wendy Hollway outlines so powerfully in her study on the discourses of heterosexual relationships in 'Gender difference and the production of subjectivity'.[7] Because I drew largely on Wendy Hollway's work and used it as a model when I was framing the approach I would use in my study, I feel that it is important to describe her arguments in detail. She raises many interesting issues related to power and the subject's investment in taking up a particular position in a discourse, and it was my intention when I began this study that I would consider these issues as I explored the discourses of motherhood.

Wendy Hollway analysed heterosexual relationships because she saw them as the main place where gender differences are re-produced. Her use of a hyphen in 're-production' is 'intended to signify that every practice is a production ... Hence recurrent day-to-day practices and the meanings through which they acquire their effectivity may contribute to the maintenance of gender difference (reproduction without the hyphen) or to its modification (the production of modified meanings of gender leading to changed practices).'[8] It is important to look closely at both these productions, to see how the patriarchal order is continued through 'reproduction' where people position themselves in discourses which maintain male domination and female subordination and powerlessness; and to see how the patriarchal order might be subverted and eventually made redundant, where people position themselves in discourses which challenge the notion of male power and domination.

From the readings Wendy Hollway made of discussions she had with women and men about relationships, sex and gender, she identified three main discourses pertaining to the field of heterosexual relationships: the male sexual drive discourse, the have/hold discourse, and the permissive discourse. These discourses made 'available different positions and different powers for men and women.'[9] Not all people will fit neatly into these discourses; the discourses are not prescriptive of heterosexual practices, but descriptive of the kinds of relationships in which some heterosexuals engage.

The male sexual drive discourse offers the belief that men have to have sexual relationships with women, that there is this deep seated biological urge which drives men to desire sex, over which they have no control. The need to reproduce is what supposedly propels men's biological drive and never satiated sexual desire. This discourse offers the man the position that he can desire sex with any woman, whereas the have/hold discourse

7 Hollway, 1984
8 Hollway, 1984, p. 227
9 Hollway, 1984, p. 230

suggests that sex should take place only within the confines of a monogamous relationship, that of a wife and husband.

Such contradictory discourses can coexist because of the way that female sexuality has been constructed.

> This [the have/hold discourse] has as its focus not sexuality directly, but the Christian ideals associated with monogamy, partnership and family life. The split between wife and mistress, virgin and whore, Mary and Eve, indicates how this and the male sexual drive discourse coexist in constructing men's sexual practices. In some aspects the discourses are consistent; for example both share assumptions about sexuality being linked to reproductivity, and also that sex is heterosexual. Yet the two recommend different and contradictory standards of conduct for men.
>
> This contradiction is resolved for men by visiting it upon women. Either women are divided into two types (as above), or, more recently a woman is expected to be both things. In effect we end up with a double standard (the widespread recognition and criticism of which has not wholly changed the practices): men's sexuality is understood through the male sexual drive discourse: they are expected to be sexually incontinent and out of control - 'it's only natural'.[10]

In these two discourses there is no position available for women in which they can express their sexuality and be valued. The permissive discourse was thought to offer women such a position. Its central tenet is that sexuality is natural, and that it is wrong, for women and men, to repress sexual desire. People should be able to have sex with whomever they want to, and not feel the need to have to be in a committed relationship with their sexual partners.[11]

As stated above, these discourses offered different positions and different powers for women and men. Wendy Hollway did not believe that people automatically entered discourses, and therefore she questioned what it was that made people choose to take up positions in certain discourses. Her conclusion is that people take up positions because they have something 'invested' in doing so; they expect to be rewarded and be granted satisfaction for their choice. These investments are, according to Wendy Hollway, gender specific.[12] By positioning themselves appropriately, according to their gender, in a discourse, women and men receive affirmation for their gender, reinforcement from society that they are behaving in a manner consistent with what society accepts as being the correct behaviour for a person of such genitalia. They show themselves to be 'real' women and men. The power that such positions confer or do not confer is also gender specific. From Wendy Hollway's analysis of each discourse, it is apparent that they confer power and the

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10 Hollway, 1984, p. 232
11 Hollway, 1984, pp. 234-236
12 Hollway, 1984, p. 238

right to dominate women to men. To women is conferred the almost inevitability of being placed in a subordinate position to men.

In the male sexual drive discourse, men show themselves to be 'real' men by engaging in certain practices which signify their eager appetite for sex. Men are the subjects of this discourse, and they make women its objects. This discourse oppresses women in all its manifestations. The never satisfied male sex drive is taken to be a biological fact rather than a social construct, and as such it is used to excuse all kinds of male behaviour in which men exploit women, for example, rape, sexual harassment, pornography, to name a few. Men cannot control themselves, they are 'animals', according to this discourse, and so if a man rapes a woman it is her fault because she put herself in whatever position it was that made it possible for the man to rape her. In this discourse, men are not held responsible for their actions; women are.

This discourse is also oppressive, I think, to men. The idea that men have to be powerful and dominant is really a highly restrictive one. To attain this power men have to work so hard to maintain the idea, and as Bronwyn Davies says, the idealisation of the idea, that men are in a permanent state of excited lust. Bronwyn Davies asserts that although this work is always going on, it remains unacknowledged.

> The male-female dualism is an *idea* with material force through which males are allocated positions in which they can act as if they are powerful. They thus become powerful both through developing a subjectivity which is organised around power and through the discursive practices which establish male power as real and legitimate. Females are allocated positions of weakness, complementary to and supportive of that power. To the extent that the dualism is taken to be true, it is true. It is taken to be true in large part because it is understood as given despite the vast amount of moment-by-moment work that visibly goes into its achievement.[13]

An example of such 'work' that has always puzzled (and disgusted!) me is the peculiar practice of wolf-whistling. I have often wondered why men could be bothered to leer, drool and call out inane and obscene things to complete strangers who just happened to be walking by. And why, I asked, was it that men mostly seemed to engage in this drooling and leering in the company of other men? Surely it is a very boring activity? What could they possible get from it? I do not intend to be 'classist' here. The practice of wolf-whistling is often attributed to a particular class of workers: blue collar, working class. Construction workers on a site, road side maintenance crews, often, for example, do wolf-whistle. But I have known white collar professional workers to achieve exactly the same effect with a look, a leer, a sigh, a muttered scarcely audible comment to their

13 Davies, 1989, p. 109

companions, when a woman has walked up to the bar against which, with great proprietary, they have arrayed themselves.

Wendy Hollway's analysis of the male sex drive discourse has helped me to deconstruct, as it were, this practice. What a man might get from wolf-whistling is the reward of reproducing his subjectivity as one that is aggressively and powerfully male. Perhaps men sexually harass women in front of other men in order to display their socially constructed masculinity. I do not think that many men would interpret it in this manner. Some male friends whom I have questioned about wolf-whistling assure me that men only do it because women really like it. I have great difficulty in accepting this argument, as I do the argument that men rape women simply because they think that it is what women really want. Perhaps some men are capable of grand acts of self-delusion, but the reality is I suspect that men who sexually harass and abuse women know that they are doing something unfavourable to women, but they feel the risk of meeting disapproval from women is worth the positive jolt that such practices give to their male subjectivity. A more cynical and pessimistic view is that for most men, female disapproval is not important. It is immaterial. What is important is displaying their masculine selves by engaging in dominating and oppressive practices.

It is liberating to regard the male sexual drive as not an inescapable fact of life, but an escapable construct of masculinity in the patriarchal order. I think that it could be wonderfully liberating for men to realise that they no longer had to display themselves as being in a constant state of sexual desire to feel that they were men.

It could be likewise liberating for women to realise that they did not have to position themselves as the objects of male desire. Wendy Hollway asserts that women are not the hapless victims of the male sexual drive discourse. By being placed as the objects of this discourse, women receive affirmation and recognition that they are female, 'real' women. Being a woman means being attractive, and being attractive means being attractive to men.[14] Women who meet the male standards for female beauty are conferred a kind of power and status, but it is an illusory power. A beautiful woman is regarded primarily as an object, something to be acted upon. She may receive immense satisfaction and even financial reward for her beauty, but I do not think that this kind of power, acquired through admiration, desire, and the sometimes wistful envy of those who are not recognised as being beautiful, is equal to the economic and political power wielded by men. Having power through beauty is also fraught with dangers. What is regarded as beautiful can change; any culture's construction of beauty is not fixed, it is transitory, and the power it bestows can pass. Being found beautiful can also be problematic in terms of a woman's 'moral'

14 Hollway, 1984, pp. 245-246

reputation. Women must walk a precarious tightrope between being found sexually attractive but not being thought to be sexually active. It is difficult to be the former without being regarded the latter.

> Sex is the ultimate double-edged sword. Women can use it to get what they want (for example, to be positioned as virtuous wife and mother), but through using it they can lose their virtue and thus their right of access to the safe domestic scene. Further the way female sexuality is generally constituted makes it a critical element of the process whereby girls position themselves as object of another's gaze ... the lack of legitimate agency that girls generally experience in relation to sexuality is directly related to the constitution of sexuality as an area of male domination and control.[15]

Wendy Hollway found that men hold the dominant positions in the have/hold discourse also, despite the fact that in this discourse they position themselves as its objects. Women are the subjects of the discourse, in that they are regarded as the ones desiring a committed, permanent relationship with a man. Men become the reluctant object, 'submitting' to the women so that they can have their physical needs met, but never admitting they had emotional needs that could be met by a monogamous, intimate relationship with a woman. In this way they maintain a semblance of power. The position they adopted did not presuppose that they needed a close relationship; only women did. A man could not be hurt by his female partner, because he did not need her. He needed sex, which could be obtained from another woman, if she went away. Women desire the closeness of a relationship with a particular man, and thus work hard to keep the relationship alive. Women are read as being vulnerable, needy and insecure; men as self sufficient, independent and powerful.

> [S]ex can be a cover for men's need for intimacy to be met. The reproduction of women as subjects of a discourse concerning the desire for intimate and secure relationships protects men from the risk associated with their own need (and the consequent power it would give women). Their own simultaneous position as object of the have/hold discourse and subject of the male sexual drive discourse enables them to engage in the practice of sex, and thus get what they want without recognising those needs or risking exposure. 'Sex' as male drive therefore covers for the suppressed signification of 'sex' as intimacy and closeness.[16]

Men do have emotional needs, and can be vulnerable and insecure, but because the dominant construct of masculinity denies men such feelings, we do not recognise them for what they are when they are expressed by men. Men's behaviour is read in ways that emphasise their power, and women's behaviour in ways that signify their powerlessness.

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15 Davies, 1989, p. 77
16 Hollway, 1984, pp. 245-246

> When men behave warily and defensively, women do not necessarily read it as stemming from their vulnerability or dependence. This is because women too are subject to the production of meanings through dominant discourses. The available assumptions about men are that they are, for example, powerful, rational, autonomous, in control and self-confident. These features are, by definition, positively valued in sexist discourses. The effect is to foreground men's qualities and conceal their weaknesses and to do the opposite for women. Positioned within such discourses women misread themselves as easily as men.[17]

The permissive discourse, did not, although it was supposed to, confer equal rights to sexual pleasure to women and men. Wendy Hollway found that women could not position themselves easily in the permissive discourse, because to them sex that was not in the context of an intimate relationship was not ultimately worthwhile. Men enjoyed the 'quickies' but women did not.[18] Women were still the objects of the male sex drive, but they did not have the promise of the committed relationship of the have/hold discourse.

Initially Wendy Hollway's analysis of the above discourses depressed me, because it seemed that so much of what men did was governed by their need for power, for domination over someone else, generally a woman. The positions available for men granted them power, and the positions for women rendered them powerless. Men and women were constructed as opposites: the powerful and the powerless. This construct of femininity as powerless must be changed, according to Bronwyn Davies. She believes that women must overcome their ambivalence to power, and not see it as something that is masculine, but as something which can be used to support women in their fight for equality. 'Any social struggle, including the feminist struggle, involves the use of power. An understanding of being oppressed involves the concept of fighting against oppression.'[19]

Just as power is not necessarily a 'bad' thing, Bronwyn Davies also assures us that masculinity and men are not all bad things either. I was feeling less than enamoured with the idea of masculinity after reading Wendy Hollway's work, and was beginning to perceive men as mere power-hungry brutes. I do not think that it is useful to simply despise all things male and dismiss them, not only because if we dismiss power as being something male and negative and not to be used then we are depriving ourselves of a useful means in the fight for equality, but also because I can not dismiss all the men in my life as being negative and worthless. I find Bronwyn Davies' suggestion to separate the positive aspects of masculinity from the negative ones very useful, as it gives me a way of reconciling some of the contradictions I experience as being a woman who loves some men but finds many aspects of masculinity despicable.

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17 Hollway, 1984, p. 248
18 Hollway, 1984, pp. 234-235
19 Davies, 1989, p. 89

> One of the tasks that we need to undertake, then, is conceptually to separate out the richness and plenitude of lived masculinities from the idea, and the idealisation of that idea, of oppositional, oppressive, hegemonic masculinity ... The key element that is derived from adult and adult-child discourse, though is the ideas of maleness and femaleness as opposite and as integral to each individual's identity. The problem is not so much resentment of actual female power, but the fact that the idea of what it is to be male is constructed in opposition to the idea of femaleness. This, in combination with the obligation each child experiences to be identifiably male or female, means that boys must at least in part position themselves as masculine through oppressive acts of domination and control of their environment and non-masculine others.[20]

The concept of the male-female dualism is illustrated very powerfully by Wendy Hollway, in her discussion of the 'splitting' of certain characteristics, according to gender, between couples. She describes how for some couples, one person (female) 'does the feelings', and the other person (male) provides emotional support for this person. The judgement passed on the women is that she is vulnerable and weak for having feelings, and the man must be strong and have no feelings so that he can give support. As Wendy Hollway points out, having feelings and providing support for others are not mutually exclusive practices, but they are constructed as such in this discourse.[21] This construction, which is read by so many people as a given fact, is empowering for men. They are superior because they support women. Women are weak and powerless because they require support.

In the lived experiences of many women and men, however, there are a multitude of occasions in which men 'feel' and women give support. Wendy Hollway sees these occasions as opportunities for social change. If a woman positions herself as being weak and needing support in a relationship with a man who desires the power conferred by positioning himself as a superior support provider, then gender differences may be reproduced, unchanged, for this woman and man. If, on the other hand, women and men take up positions which are considered inappropriate for their gender, and contradictions appear between what they desire and find meaningful and what the sexist discourses suggest is appropriate and meaningful, then they might begin to look for alternative discourses.

> The circle of reproduction of gender difference involves two people whose historical positioning, and the investments and powers this has inserted into subjectivity, complement each other. When there remain contradictions in each person's wants of the other, there is ground for an interruption of its reproduction. These contradictions are the products of social changes. It is through the kinds of social changes that I outlined at the beginning of this chapter that alternative discourses - for example feminist ones - can be produced and used by women in the struggle to redefine our positions in gender-differentiated practices, thus challenging sexist discourses still further. Changes don't automatically eradicate what went before - neither in structure nor in the way that practices, powers and meanings have been produced historically. Consciousness-changing is not accomplished by new discourses replacing old ones. It is accomplished as a result

20 Davies, 1989, p. 89
21 Hollway, 1984, pp. 252-257

> of the contradictions in our positionings, desires and practices - and thus in our subjectivities - which result from the coexistence of the old and the new. Every relation and every practice to some extent articulates such contradictions and therefore is a site of potential change as much as it is a site of reproduction.[22]

I became very excited after reading Wendy Hollway's work, because I felt that it was addressing an important need. To be a feminist and live with a man and work with men is not always easy. I wonder sometimes what it would be like to be a radical separatist, and if making that choice would ease some of the guilt I feel. I feel guilty when I think that I am not doing enough for the feminist struggle, and then I feel myself to be a complicit participant in the patriarchal order and its oppression of women. Wendy Hollway's work addressed these concerns because it analysed and deconstructed heterosexual relationships so clearly and showed that it is possible to change the patterns of such relationships by living in them. Rosalind Coward wrote in *Our Treacherous Hearts*

> One of the reasons for the failure of feminism to dislodge deeply held perceptions of male and female behaviour was its insistence that women were victims, and men powerful patriarchs, which made a travesty of ordinary people's experience of the mutual interdependence of men and women. Something in feminism's language of struggle, oppression and inequalities resonated with women's experience and imaginations. But at the same time the feminist discourse failed to explore the full meaning of 'loving the enemy'. The fact was, and is, that the sexes are locked in a relationship of mutual dependency, undoubtedly often tipping into exploitation, abuse or oppression, but requiring a more subtle approach for its understanding.[23]

I think that Wendy Hollway's study goes a great way in redressing this failure of feminism, as it accepts the fact that feminists do love and live with men. Men do not have to be the enemy though, and that is a liberating thought. Also liberating is the perception of the male sex drive as a construction, not a biological truth, and the realisation that women do not have to position themselves as the objects of this drive. If we become aware that the gendered characteristics normally assigned to women and men are not innate fixed features of their personalities; and that the ideologies we draw on to tell the stories of our relationships with others are social constructs, then we can see that it is possible for people and their ideologies to change. And practices we ourselves engage in, in particular the ways we parent our children, can help to bring about these changes.

The positions available to women who become mothers, and how these positions are interpreted by women writing in the different discourses of feminism, form the focus of the next chapter.

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22 Hollway, 1984, pp. 259-260
23 Coward, 1992, p. 137

Chapter Four

Discourses of Feminism, Discourses of Motherhood

> 'Oh well,' he said, 'if you want to make a fool of yourself. Don't tell me, you've probably been longing to have a baby all your life. You won't be able to keep it, though. They won't let you keep it. So you'll go and get yourself all upset about nothing, the whole thing'll be a complete waste of time and emotion.'
>
> I could not work out my response to this immediately as I was highly offended by both its implications: first, that I was the kind of person who had always had a secret yearning for maternal fulfilment, and second, that some unknown authority would start interfering with my decisions by removing this hypothetical child. I decided to tackle the first one first.
>
> 'Of course I haven't always been longing to have a baby,' I said, 'I can't think of anything that has ever crossed my mind less. The thought of a baby leaves me absolutely stone cold.'
>
> 'Nonsense,' said Joe. 'All women want babies. To give them a sense of purpose.'[1]

> Yet here she was, not at all a baby, but a creature who became every day more independent, strong-willed, determined. Caroline was that hard and unalterable fact which turned Martha's life, in spite of a pleasant and helpful nursegirl, into a routine which began at five sharp every morning, when the light first showed, and ended at seven in the evening, when she went to bed. The rhythm of Caroline's needs was in sharp discord with her own; she adjusted herself, she did what was necessary, but it was her sense of duty which regulated her. Being a mother, or rather, the business of looking after a child, as distinct from carrying and giving birth to one, was not a fulfilment but a drag on herself. Yet no sooner had she looked at this fact, admitted it, than the voices of guilt made themselves heard; and they were given sanction by the mood of deep physical tenderness and longing for another baby.[2]

Before I began this study, I had always thought that most women who had children had been driven to have them by an overpowering urge, a maternal instinct that took hold of them and made them want babies with a ferocious passion that could not be denied. I know now that some women experience a strong desire to have children, but many do not. They know that they want to have children, having children is something that they have always felt that they would do, it was part of growing up, getting married, being an adult woman in our society. But they were not necessarily driven to motherhood by maternal passion. Many women did not feel maternal until they had their own children. The reasons why women had children have not been regarded as being as important as the consequences of becoming a mother. These consequences, and the meanings women and men make of motherhood, have been explored by many feminists in the last two to three decades.

I have tried to look at these writers from a poststructuralist perspective. I was interested to see if the view each writer had of motherhood was influenced by the feminist

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1 Drabble, 1977, pp. 41-42
2 Lessing, 1984, p. 279

discourse in which she was writing. Or, in other words, if the positions which the writer described as being available for women who were mothers corresponded, to an extent, to the positions the writers themselves had taken up in the discourses of feminism.

Julia Kristeva described the discourses of feminism as forming three tiers of the feminist struggle. In the first tier, liberal feminism, women demand access and equal rights to the institutions of society, without necessarily seeking to change the patriarchal structures of these institutions. The second tier, radical feminism, is concerned with describing and celebrating the differences of femininity. The third tier rejects the male-female dualism and seeks ways of thinking and being which are multiple and diverse, not bi-polar. The third tier is poststructuralist feminism. Each tier is essential for change.

> The three tiers outlined by Moi each constitute an essential and still current aspect of the feminist struggle. It is vital to gain access to the male symbolic order (eg education and legal systems) both to use and subvert it, and it is equally vital to elaborate what it means to be female independently of patriarchal narratives which reduce femaleness to an inferior way of being. Both of these remain important as long as female persons are denied access to any particular activity in the public world, and as long as their femaleness is misconstrued by those who have held are holding women out of that public world. But these two activities, of themselves, are insufficient to bring about a non-discriminatory social order, because they can always be and are always being counteracted. (Davies, 1989) It is work at the third, combined with work at the fist and second tiers, that will eventually bring about significant change.
>
> The third tier is the most personally confronting because of the extent to which identity is constituted on the basis of, and emotions organised around, the male-female dualism. The task of evolving a thought form which goes beyond this particular dualism is almost unthinkable because of its embeddedness in our own identities, and in the language and the narrative structures through which we come to know ourselves.[3]

As the tiers of feminism are interwoven, so I found the discourses of motherhood to be. In order to write coherently of them, I have ordered them and the writers in discrete categories. I have arranged them historically, in a kind of chronological order, but that is not to suggest that each discourse sits easily in a neat little box of my making. These discourses are fluid, they move, and colour each other. Bronwyn Davies conveys very impressively the nature of the multiple and shifting layering of discourses with the metaphor of a palimpsest.

> [Palimpsest] is a term to describe the way in which new writings on a parchment were written over or around old writings that were not fully erased. One writing interrupts the other, momentarily overriding, intermingling with the other; the old writing influences the interpretation of the imposed new writing and the new influences the interpretation of the old. But both still stand, albeit partially erased and interrupted. New discourses do not simply replace the old as on a clean sheet. They generally interrupt one another, though they may also

3 Davies, 1989, p. 71

> exist in parallel, remaining separate, undermining each other perhaps, but in an unexamined way.[4]

The first layer of my palimpsest is Ann Oakley, who wrote in the discourse of liberal feminism. A sociologist, she chose to study motherhood because she believed that 'it is the moment when she becomes a mother that a woman first confronts the full reality of what it means to be a woman in our society.'[5] She interviewed sixty-six women who were all expecting their first child. Each woman was interviewed four times, twice while pregnant and twice after the child was born. Ann Oakley wanted to explore the meaning of becoming a mother through the eyes of the women themselves. She felt that feminists had been concerned with motherhood in a negative way, in the sense that they had wanted to free women from their roles as mothers, so they could be more involved in the world of paid employment and/or education. Feminists, according to Ann Oakley, were only beginning to regard motherhood as a 'valid and valuable aspect of being a woman, a resource to be drawn on rather than a burden to be disposed of.'[6]

Becoming A Mother does not however paint a glowing picture of motherhood; there are no immaculate Madonnas in Ann Oakley's portrait of the enormous changes women experience when they have a child. I found it surprising to read of the women's lack of clear, definite motives for having children. For many, it was simply because they had become pregnant, more by accident than from design, that they were going to become mothers.

> People do not have clear motives so far as having children is concerned; few organise their lives according to some overall plan. The subject of children provokes ambivalent feelings, so that 'planning' is a euphemism for allowing one particular feeling or pressure to gain an upper hand ... [the] question '*why* did you want a baby?' ... taps a vast minefield of unexplored or half-explored motives and reasons. Some women have never asked themselves this question, or when they do the answer is framed in terms of 'always' having wanted a baby: others describe a long process of critical self-examination.[7]

One woman said that whilst she had not felt compelled to have children, she felt that the lives of people who did not have children were somewhat 'poverty-stricken.' Another woman believed that having a child with her husband would be doing 'the most right thing in the world.' Having children was also seen as a way to 'cement' a marriage and a couple's

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4 Davies, 1993, p. 11
5 Oakley, 1979, p. 1
6 Oakley, 1979, p. 23
7 Oakley, 1979, pp. 32-33

love, and it was regarded as the 'natural' thing to do, to have a family of one's own, and to be able to leave something behind.[8]

Women's reasons for having children varied, as did the time it took for them to develop a sense of being a mother. This was also a surprise to me; I had always naively assumed that as soon as a mother looked upon her newly born infant she would be overcome with maternal love. Some women were, but many took time to love their children and feel secure in their new role as mothers. They all felt that they had changed, and many of these changes were positive, in that the women felt that they were now more confident, more responsible, and that they were doing something that was useful. They felt proud of their achievements, fulfilled and important. One woman said that she felt that she had 'joined the club' and now had a certain mystique; she was now a mother.[9]

Women's new found confidence and fulfilment in their maternal role is the positive side of becoming a mother; on the negative side is the tedious, never-ending nature of the work associated with being a mother and the isolation and loneliness of being confined to working full-time in the home. Ann Oakley admits that the picture she presents of mothers at home with small children in the 70's is a depressing one, and whilst she concedes that child rearing can be wonderfully satisfying, her aim was to show clearly the perils of motherhood.

> What many of the women who were interviewed said was that they were misled into thinking childbirth is a piece of cake and motherhood a bed of roses. They felt they would have been better off with a clearer view of what lay in store for them. I have constructed the book around this conclusion, perhaps amplifying it somewhat, because only in that way are messages made impressive. But the insight itself is authentic - theirs, not mine, even if it does help to interpret the way I felt back in 1968.[10]

A somewhat similar sociological study to Ann Oakley's was carried out in Australia in the late 70's by Betsy Wearing. She interviewed one hundred and fifty mothers, all of whom had at least one pre-school child, in Sydney. She wanted to explore what she termed the 'ideology of motherhood', seeing ideology as a way which enables a group to maintain its dominance over a subordinate group.

> Ideology within the present research, as operationalised here, has been chosen as an analytic concept which will be used to attempt to unmask one important aspect of the gender and class relationships of power which keep women in a subordinate and dependent position, and limit their life-chances, life-options and autonomy. The core notion of the ideology under consideration is the supposedly 'natural' propensity of women for the nurture and care of children and

8 Oakley, 1979, pp. 33-35
9 Oakley, 1979, pp. 262-267
10 Oakley, 1979, p. 6

> the associated household tasks thus making parenting and domestic labour the specific responsibility of the female gender.[11]

From her interviews, Betsy Wearing composed several tenets of the ideology of motherhood. These tenets were in response to the questions asked; different questions may have provoked different tenets. There was no universal agreement on each tenet, some women challenged and questioned the tenets, but many believed in them. The tenets are: Motherhood is an essential part of womanhood; Motherhood is hard but rewarding work; A 'good' mother puts her children first; Young children need their mothers in constant attendance; Mothering is an important but low status job.[12] Betsy Wearing explores how these tenets restrict women, how guilt becomes a prison warden, enforcing the ideal of a 'good' mother, keeping women at home, causing them endless worry and self-doubt. The lack of status accorded to mothers caused them feelings of inferiority and powerlessness, and whilst they could see that as mothers they formed a group, they did not see that the interests of their group were in conflict with the interests of men.

> Whereas mothers identify with other mothers and have a conception of their differentiation as a group, they do not see themselves as a group with a conflict of interests with men in general or with the capitalist male in particular. Even fewer mothers have reached Giddens' third level of class consciousness where there is a recognition of the possibility of an overall reorganisation in the institutional mediation of power and a belief that such a reorganisation can be brought about by the action of women themselves, or of mothers themselves. The subjective feelings of inferiority associated with motherhood, felt by these mothers generally add to their individual feelings of powerlessness and so help to keep them in a subordinate position, rather than raising their consciousness of subordination and exploitation as a group in opposition to a more structurally powerful group ... along with such feelings of inferiority goes a sense of the moral superiority of the values of nurturing, caring, etc. which are associated with motherhood as against the fierce competitiveness of the man's world outside the home ... where the domestic and public orders are clearly distinguished and woman is defined largely in terms of a maternal and domestic role, she has limited access to the sorts of authority, prestige and cultural values which are the prerogatives of men. Given such an imbalance in the exercise of power, the avenues by which women gain prestige and a sense of value are limited by their association with the domestic world and hence women's attempts to find meaning in their lives are in terms of the values associated with their housewife/mother roles. In this research it appears that the importance of their task and the positive evaluation of the values and rewards associated with motherhood are a necessary ideological support for an unpaid, low status, demanding job.[13]

Betsy Wearing argues that the ideology of motherhood circumscribes the lives of women, restricting their possibilities for an autonomous life. The women who did engage in other activities such as paid work or study did so in addition to their mothering tasks. These women remained the primary carers of their children. The women who Betsy

11 Wearing, 1984, p. 24
12 Wearing, 1984, pp. 42-71
13 Wearing, 1984, p. 71

Wearing interviewed were mostly able to see their interests and life choices falling only within the parameters of this ideology, they felt it was legitimate that they were responsible for child care. The interests of the male capitalist patriarchy are thus served: women are kept in powerless positions in industry, bureaucracy and other important social and cultural institutions, their voluntary labour as child carers relieves the state from the responsibility for caring for its dependents, and individual men are exempted from caring for their young and so have the opportunity to pursue their interests (economic, social, cultural, sporting, etc.) and be awarded status for their achievements.

What is most depressing about this study is Betsy Wearing's conclusion that the women were unable to even perceive of an alternative way of life, one in which women were not the primary carers of children.

> As the suggestions given by the mothers in this research have shown, they can imagine their lives being improved by better facilities in public places and alternative temporary child care, but everything they have ever experienced from birth onwards reinforces the view that the biological mother is the best and rightful caregiver for her children. They see this as 'natural and unchangeable' and, in many cases, value it as 'divinely ordained and beneficial'. These perceptions, in conjunction with the inability to imagine an alternative way of life, according to Lukes evidences the most 'insidious' use of power in our society.[14]

Betsy Wearing calls for a social revolution, suggesting that women be given a greater share in society's material and status resources, that they gain control of their fertility, that there is a greater sharing of domestic tasks, a redistribution of resources across classes, greater child care facilities, and a wider dissemination of the ideals of freedom, equality and justice for women. She wants there to be an attack on the male dominated capitalist system, and an attack on the ideology of motherhood, to free women from their subordinate positions. Then she asserts, it may be possible that 'utopias of parenthood' can be realised.[15]

I found these analyses of the experiences of motherhood bleakly depressing. The position available to women as mothers was one of imprisonment, with continuous, forced hard labour. Motherhood is thus disempowering to women. Women could be more powerful, according to this discourse, if they had greater access to knowledge about the realities of mothering. Equality would come through shared parenting. Once men assumed an equal role in child care, asserted Betsy Wearing, the status of motherhood would be raised, and so then would the status of women.

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14 Wearing, 1984, p. 202
15 Wearing, 1984, pp. 204-205

> When men become involved in tasks with have previously been given low status because they are performed by women, the status is raised. The ideology of motherhood has already stressed the importance of the first years of the child's life, but motherhood has had low status because it is performed solely by women. In the feminist utopia, men and women will both be constrained/benefited by daily and close association with children, women's potentialities will cease to be confined and limited by children and the status of domestic labour will be raised.[16]

Ann Oakley's and Betsy Wearing's demands for access and equality for mothers are very important. Whilst both writers gave some recognition to the enriching experience that many women had of motherhood, becoming a mother meant mostly, in their discourse, becoming a victim. Any empowerment was ultimately overshadowed by imprisonment. Motherhood could be complained about, but not really celebrated. Adrienne Rich, writing in the discourse of radical feminism, recognised both the imprisoning and empowering aspects of motherhood. She writes evocatively and passionately of the experience of motherhood, but is highly critical of what she calls the institution of motherhood.

> The institution of motherhood is not identical with bearing and caring for children, any more than the institution of heterosexuality is identical with intimacy and sexual love. Both create the prescriptions and the conditions in which choices are made or blocked; they are not 'reality' but they have shaped the circumstances of our lives. The new scholars of women's history have begun to discover that, in any case, the social institutions and prescriptions for behavior created by men have not necessarily accounted for the real lives of women. Yet any institution which expresses itself so universally ends by profoundly affecting our experience, even the language we use to describe it. The experience of maternity and the experience of sexuality have both been channeled to serve male interests; behavior which threatens the institutions, such as illegitimacy, abortion, lesbianism, is considered deviant or criminal.[17]

Adrienne Rich believes that the patriarchal order is responsible for the restrictions and limitations of motherhood. She contrasts the role of women in pre patriarchal times in which the power to 'transform' life (give birth) was seen as the 'truly significant and essential power'[18], to the powerlessness of mothers in patriarchal societies, in which their role as the primary child carers is the cause of women's oppression.

Women do not have control of their bodies in a patriarchal society. Adrienne Rich outlines the history of childbirth and the development of obstetrics as a medical science, showing how pregnancy and childbirth have been transformed from natural events to medical conditions, requiring specialist medical care. Where once the mother, with the assistance of a midwife, was in control of the birth of her child, male doctors with an array of medical weapons (eg. forceps) came to be in charge, removing a baby from an

16 Wearing, 1984, p. 194
17 Rich, 1992, p. 42
18 Rich, 1992, p. 99

increasingly anaesthetised and physically restricted woman. Women were expected to suffer, passively, the pain of childbirth; it was their punishment from God.[19]

I had never really understood the motives of my friends who opted to have their children in birthing centres. I had failed to comprehend why someone would choose pain and suffering, and refuse the numbness of anaesthesia. Having read Adrienne Rich's depiction of the dangers of medical intervention in childbirth, I now understand. Her image of the completely powerless, subjugated woman is truly terrifying.

> There are certain valid indications for the prevention of exertion by the mother - such as heart disease, tuberculosis, or a previous Caesarean, but women are now asking what psychic effect a state of semihelplessness has on a healthy mother, awake during the birth, yet prevented from participating actively in delivery. No more devastating image could be invented for the bondage of woman: sheeted, supine, drugged, her wrists strapped down and her legs in stirrups, at the very moment when she is bringing new life into the world. This 'freedom from pain,' like 'sexual liberation,' places a woman physically at men's disposal, though still estranged from the potentialities of her own body. While in no way altering her subjection, it can be advertised as a progressive development.[20]

Modern medical practices related to childbirth are just one example of the way that the institution of motherhood has wrested control of women's bodies away from them. Adrienne Rich believes that the institution of motherhood must be destroyed, but not the experience of motherhood. To do this, she asserts, women must begin to '*think through the body*, to connect what has been so cruelly disorganized - our great mental capacities, hardly used; our highly developed tactile sense; our genius for close observation; our complicated, pain-enduring, multi-pleasured physicality.'[21] In taking control of their bodies, women will end the separation of motherhood from sexuality, the 'desexualisation' that happens to women when they become mothers, and thus be able to enjoy the sexual and sensual pleasures of being a mother and a woman. Women will also be able choose the conception, the birth, and the rearing of their children. Birth will become one part of a process of a woman's life, a part of her experience.[22] And if a woman chooses not to have children, then she should not be regarded as insignificant, barren, unworthy. Men will have to change also, and take a shared role in the nurturing of children. Women will have to change the ways they love their men; not nurturing their fragile egos, but treating them as equals.[23]

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19 Rich, 1992, pp. 128-129
20 Rich, 1992, pp. 170-171
21 Rich, 1992, p. 284
22 Rich, 1992, pp. 182-184
23 Rich, 1992, pp. 215-216

Adrienne Rich believed, when she first wrote *Of Woman Born*, that the above changes would bring about significant social change. Ten years later she wrote that whilst she still believed that it was necessary for women to claim their bodies, it was also essential that women and certain men were granted other important claims, '... the claim to personhood; the claim to share justly in the product of our labour, not to be used merely as a instrument, a role, a womb, a pair of hands or a back or a set of fingers; to participate fully in the decisions of our workplace, our community; to speak for ourselves, in our own right.'[24]

The discourse of radical feminism is extremely important, in reminding us of the wonderful joy there is in being a woman, and showing how women are not in any way inferior to men. It disturbs me, however, when, in extolling the virtues of femininity it deems everything else as unworthy. After the bleak pronouncements of the liberal feminists of how imprisoning motherhood was, it was important to show how such bleakness only fitted one side of the picture; there was another, joyous, powerful side to being a mother. But such celebrations become a problem when it is only mothers who can be powerful. Adrienne Rich wrote that there should be no discrediting of women who are not mothers, but she also declared that the 'mother-child relationship is the essential human relationship.'[25]

I do not want to take any power away from that relationship, but I question how we can claim any relationship, for all time, to be the essential one for an individual. Relationships arise from the interaction of two or more people. They are not fixed, static entities; they are constructed, like kaleidoscopes, from a complex and extraordinary set of experiences, beliefs, desires, thoughts, hopes and sorrows. Saying that the mother's relationship with a child is more essential than the father's will accord some degree of power to the mother, but I do not think this kind of power will be liberatory. It will keep mothers incarcerated in the home, as the primary care givers, because only they can do the job properly. The dualism of woman as nurturer/man as hunter-worker-fighter is thus perpetuated.

Valerie Bryson shows how this dualism has been further perpetuated by the eco-feminists, who claim that women, through the experience of motherhood, have developed 'womanly values', related to caring and nurturing and peace, whilst men are characterised as self-interested, competitive and aggressive. Some writers believe that these differences are acquired, and should therefore be revalued and then acquired also by men. Others, such as Adrienne Rich, believe that the differences are innate, and that women experience the world

24 Rich, 1992, p. x
25 Rich, 1992, p. 127

differently, and are closer to nature, because of their experiences with their own bodies and with mothering.

> One of the many problems with such biological determinism is that it contradicts current scientific thinking, which queries the idea of simple sexual dichotomies by showing that there exists a continuum of chromosomal, hormonal, genital and general anatomical differences ... insistence on or denial of significant sexual difference may also be based on a false dichotomy that distracts our attention from the need to challenge the dominant values of women and men (Bacchi, 1990). Therefore to say that women's traditional role involves life-enhancing values for which they should demand a public hearing is one thing; to say that women's biological attributes give them a monopoly of such values is quite another, for this would seem to confirm traditional roles and divisions, allowing men to continue to destroy the planet while celebrating alternative virtues within the home.[26]

Such discourses are ultimately disempowering to women, as are the conclusions of the radical feminist, Shulamith Firestone. She believed that the root of women's oppression lay in their role as reproducers, and consequently liberation could be attained through the creation of artificial reproduction, outside the womb. The problem with this discourse is that it fails to recognise the other factors which impinge on women's ability to make choices concerning their fertility, and the ways in which medical advances have been and could be used to women, to limit their choices rather than liberate them.

> Therefore although feminists have increasingly come to see free access to contraception and abortion as key feminist demands, some have also come to understand their potential dangers, arguing that they can endanger women's health and lead to an increase in sexual exploitation, and that they may be used to limit the reproductive capacities of women deemed 'unfit' to become mothers (blacks, the poor, the single, lesbians, the mentally subnormal ...). Similarly, although modern medicine can greatly decrease the risks involved in pregnancy and childbirth, it can also become unnecessarily interventionist, and involve a transfer of power from female friends, relations and midwives to male doctors, while the mother herself may be unable to participate actively in the birth of her own child. Recent developments in reproductive technology have also, it is argued, been used against women to consolidate male power and make patriarchy for the first time absolute: 'Here is man's control of the awesome power of women; the last stronghold of nature which he can finally dominate' (Arditti, 1984, p. 265).[27]

Susan Faludi demonstrates in *Backlash* how the patriarchy, in response to women's increasing control over reproduction, achieved in part through medical advances in contraception and abortion, has developed legislative practices which re-impose control over women. A foetus has become, in the eyes of the law, more protected than its mother. Women may have gained more control over their bodies, as Adrienne Rich wanted, but they have not gained a powerful enough control over the law and industry. These two

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26 Bryson, 1992, pp. 210-211
27 Bryson, 1992, pp. 206-207

institutions, working together, have managed in a relatively short space of time to divest some women of the emancipatory powers attained through having greater reproductive freedom.

> Perhaps it is inevitable that even the most modest efforts by women to control their fertility spark a storm of opposition. All of women's aspirations - whether for education, work or any form of self-determination - ultimately rest on their ability to decide whether and when to bear children. For this reason, reproductive freedom has always been the most popular item in each of the successive feminist agendas - and the most heavily assaulted target of each backlash.[28]

The violent anti-abortion campaigns, proposals to prosecute women who were alleged to have behaved negligently to their foetuses (eg. by eating the wrong food), operations carried out without consent on pregnant women, to save the child but lose the mother, 'foetal protection' bills, in which who were not even pregnant were excluded from workplaces said to be potentially dangerous to a foetus, women having forced hysterectomies in order to save their jobs - women's possible roles as mothers were used to shackle them in previously unimagined ways.

> In much the way that Victorian medical manuals had categorized women as 'mental' or 'uterine', corporate foetal protection policies of the 1980s divided women into two opposing camps. As these companies would have it, women could choose to be procreators who stayed home - or workers who were sterilized. Take your pick, they told their female employees: lose your job or lose your womb.[29]

The notion that artificial reproduction would liberate women also fails to recognise the fact that for many women, giving birth and raising children can be joyful, as well as painful. Writers such as Shulamith Firestone did not speak to many women who had found being a mother empowering and pleasurable.

> Like the early criticism of romantic love and exclusive relationships which contributed to a growing silence over many women's actual sexual desires and practices, criticism of the isolation and frustrations of motherhood and caring for others - although correctly portraying the bitterness and disillusion we heard from so many women - contributed to a silence over many women's pleasure in motherhood and our strong desires to find fulfilment through motherhood and caring for others.[30]

The feminist writers who wrote from a psychoanalytic discourse sought to understand why women wanted to be mothers, and the consequences of this desire. Nancy

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28 Faludi, 1992, p. 451
29 Faludi, 1992, p. 477
30 Segal, 1991, pp. 120-121

Chodorow concluded that because it is women who mother, not men, that men and women develop different ways of relating to others. 'This is the key to understanding the contrasting or "assymetrical" ego structures and interpersonal or relational capacities in women and men. Women's relations with their daughters and their sons, in a society where women are devalued, cannot but develop in contrasting ways.'[31]

Mothers, seeing their daughters as similar, develop a close and narcissistic relationship with them. This relationship never changes. Daughters never really transfer their affection to their largely absent fathers. They develop a sense of self which is undifferentiated from that of their mothers, with a 'greater capacity for empathy and sensitivity towards others. Feminine identity and the desire to mother are therefore straightforward and almost inevitable for girls.'[32] This becomes a problem because girls are less autonomous and feminine identity is negatively valued.

Sons develop a sense of self and masculine identity which is differentiated from that of their mothers, rejecting and denying their early intense love and attachment to their mothers. Masculinity is a problem for boys, according to this discourse. Because men are not involved enough in child care, masculinity is not as easy to attain as is femininity for a girl. Boys come to see masculinity as anything that is not feminine, and this leads to a devaluing of femininity and a masculinity founded on superiority and dominance.[33]

Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach follow on from Nancy Chodorow's work and assert that the root of women's oppression is in the mother/daughter relationship, the fact that all women are suffering from not having their needs met, as adults, and from when they were children.

> Women's lives are bereft because men are incapable of nurturing them as adults, and they are bereft because they are the needy little girls of mother who, inevitably, taught them to put their own needs second ... Daughters' unmet needs provide the well from which they give to others. In this way women's ego structure comes to reflect their social position. Boys, in contrast, while taught to repress all expression of their own emotional dependency, are more likely to be taken care of by women. Men's dependency thus remains the best-kept secret, the terrifying taboo, of masculinity, as boys experience and expect nurturing simply as 'part of the fabric of life'. [34]

These three writers believe that the way to bring equality to women and consequently create a better world is therefore for men to share in the care of children. Lynne Segal, writing in the discourse of socialist feminism, offers a useful and interesting critique of the psychoanalytic discourse of mothering and its solution to inequality. She

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31 Segal, 1991, p. 136
32 Segal, 1991, p. 137
33 Segal, 1991, pp. 137-138
34 Segal, 1991, p. 139

questions its perpetration of the theory of essential gender difference, and asserts that its conclusions are based on generalisations which do not take account of the many factors, external and internal, which influence family life. Not all mothers conform to the tradition notion of mothering; not all daughters passively accept their devalued and bereft status. Becoming masculine is not necessarily a problem for boys, as it is constructed and reconstructed from a variety of social practices, all the way through a man's life. A pre-Oedipal attachment, then a consequent rejection of this bond, and separation from his mother, is not the only practice which makes a boy aware that he is different. 'It seems bizarre therefore to suggest that boys simply acquire their masculinity negatively, in the refection of their mothers' embrace, when they are embraced and boosted up constantly (with or without their fathers' presence in child care) by a myriad of social practices which will continue to place boys and men in positions of power over girls and women. The fears which will accompany the boy's struggle to distance himself from his mother - often with her encouragement and assistance - have many positive compensations. They are compensations which will continue to privilege him in relation to women throughout his life.'[35]

Lynne Segal does not want to devalue the idea that men should participate in child care, as she feels that it is a very important goal. However, she argues that there are many obstacles to its achievement. Nancy Chodorow, Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach focus on the psychoanalytical obstacles which prevent men from caring for children, but do not consider the enormous changes that are necessary to make the workplace one which could accommodate shared parenting. Employers have been reluctant to allow shorter or more flexible working hours, and when they have, it has resulted in a loss of rights (eg. salary, holiday pay, job security) for employees. In families where child care has been shared, equality has still not often been achieved. Women tend to do the more dirty, tedious, stressful work - cleaning, washing, settling disputes - whilst the men read stories and take the children out. 'Nevertheless Ehrensaft concludes that shared parenting does alter the power relations between parents and children, and between men and women, and can provide a richer and more egalitarian world for children. Both Chodorow and Eichenbaum and Orbach, it is fair to say, argued that the way in which men and women relate to children would not change within one generation.'[36]

Many women have been reluctant to share child care equally. Being the mother, the one who has the most knowledge and ability to look after her children, is a source of great power for a woman. They are essential, they are in charge, responsible, indispensable,

35 Segal, 1991, pp. 152-153
36 Segal, 1991, p. 157

trusted and reliable. They can not be replaced. While women are still negatively valued and regarded as inferior in the public sphere, they will continue to find it difficult to surrender their one, reliable source of empowerment and recognition.

> Shared parenting cannot in itself overturn the power and status of men in wider economic, political and cultural spheres. In the short term women may easily find themselves with less power in the home, the one place we were more likely to have power, while of course we are still undervalued and underpaid outside it. Not really surprisingly, one important reason why many shared child care arrangements have broken down has been the difficulty biological mothers have in sharing the parenting of their children with others, whether with the father, or other women and men in their lives.[37]

A further problem with the shared parenting argument is that it can take the focus away from the public domain: the demands for increased social support for child care, and for reform in the workplace, may not seem so significant if it is believed that individuals can and should bear the responsibility for social change and justice.

> The lasting strength of the mothering literature is its powerful assertion of the contrast between the overwhelming importance of women's commitment to mothering and other types of caring, compared with the social undervaluing of such commitment. But this paradox of how to affirm the real value of women's mothering, while seeing how it also serves to perpetuate women's oppression, can also lead to a decreasing emphasis on the public responsibility for the adequate care of all dependent people.[38]

I find Lynne Segal's analysis very impressive, because it continues to remind me of the need for adequate social support for women and men with the raising of children. It is so easy to ignore these socialist demands, for they require so much collective action and change at a high level to be achieved, and concentrate instead on what can be achieved by an individual, working with her family and friends. This is not to deny the importance of individual change, and nor is it intended as a dismissal of the worth and work of the radical feminists. They ended the silencing of the joys of motherhood, and showed a discourse which was alternative to the one that pronounced motherhood as imprisonment.

I feel though that whilst the radical feminists celebrated motherhood and femininity, articulating a position for mothers that was empowering, there was also much in their discourse that was imprisoning. Their emphasis on the 'essential' differences between women and men, for one, is imprisoning in that it perpetuates the dualism of a nurturing wonderful mother and a non-nurturing woeful father. Women can revel in their incredible competencies as mothers, but how delightful will their revels be if they feel they can not ever leave their children, because only they are able to look after them properly? Men's

37 Segal, 1991, pp. 157-158
38 Segal, 1991, p. 160

nurturing skills may not be as well developed as women's. I doubt if they will ever get a chance to develop if it is believed that as parents men are doomed to fail, simply because they are men. As Lynne Segal states, there are many reasons why women appear more caring or loving than men - and they are not related to biological sex.

> ... the most important factor in determining what is seen as women's distinctive sensibilities would seem to me to be the nature of mothering itself, rather than the fact that it is women who mother.
>
> Mothering is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by mothering, to paraphrase Marx and Engels. Young children's characteristic joy and delight in the world, their laughter and tears, the great love they offer the person or persons who 'mother' them, their vulnerability, their dependence, the great demands they make on us, could hardly fail to affect our consciousness and conduct dramatically. But not all mothers will have the time, inclination and capacity to respond to the desires and fears of children in ways which enable the children to flourish as happy, creative, confident and caring human beings. Many women do not display the characteristics of 'maternal thinking' (idealised or not) until they begin to mother. And even then, they may not.[39]

To reject the mother/father dualism is, I believe, to work at Julia Kristeva's third tier of feminist struggle. Rosalind Coward's work in *Our Treacherous Hearts* show how difficult this work is. She demonstrates that despite the work that has been done at the first two tiers, women are still troubled by something similar to Betty Friedan's 'problem with no name'. Great advances have been made in the area of employment, but women are still expected to fulfil a traditional role in the family. Men had not really changed - Rosalind Coward asserts that women are scared of really challenging men and demanding them to change. Women continue to shoulder the burden of child care and domestic duties, sometimes, where possible, passing these duties on to other women (by employing nannies, housekeepers, cleaners, for example). The expectations placed on women have increased dramatically - to be a successful career woman, ideal mother, sex goddess, to name a few - whilst the support services have deteriorated especially in the areas of health, education and child care. Things are more difficult, but women have not fought, and rejected the impositions of such an impossible role. Women have been complicit in maintaining this role.

> This area of complicity - women's deep-rooted, fundamental complicity with traditional family structures and expectations, their complicity in personal relationships with men, in the continued idealization of men and the desire for their approval - is the subject of this book. It is the complicity of continued deep dependence on men, the unwillingness to contemplate change which might improve the lot of all women. Female complicity consents to many things. Sometimes it consents to extreme forms of abuse, like violence, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. But more commonly it is a hidden complicity, a way of

39 Segal, 1991, p. 149

> living our personal lives that protects men and reinforces their habitual ways of doing things.[40]

Rosalind Coward interviewed many women who had 'given it all up' - renounced careers, businesses, education - to answer the unquenchable call of motherhood. Whilst the women explained their renunciation in terms of 'natural' maternal feelings, Rosalind Coward believes that their responses to this call are far more complex. She does not deny the intensity of the love between mothers and children, but she feels that often a woman's surrender to maternalism can hide an ambivalence to the competitive and aggressive nature of paid work.[41] Becoming a mother is no real escape from competition and aggression however; there are many conflicts concerning children's development (who walked first, who reads the most fluently, who passed her piano exam), and with relationships between children (whose child started the fight). Women critically judged other women's and their own performances as mothers, thus seeing their mothering as it could be viewed through the eyes of others. Once again, women are positioning themselves as the objects of another's gaze. And this gaze is not kind or forgiving. It is hyper-critical, fault finding, judgemental - more often condemnatory than not.[42]

What women seek to attain from motherhood can also be problematic. Pregnancy and childbirth confer a particular status to women; women receive approving attention when pregnant and feel that they are special and clever and proud. Feeling proud of their own achievements is not a common sensation for many women. 'Such positive self-evaluation comes rarely to women who on the whole do not readily regard themselves as particularly clever or congratulate themselves on a job well done.'[43] The problems can start after the baby is born though, when the mother is no longer such a centre of attention. They may no longer feel so clever, when faced with the relentless demands of an infant.

Along with the exhaustion and exasperation felt by mothers of small children is the sense of empowerment that can come from being so needed by another human being. Being the only person who can adequately meet a child's needs can give great purpose and meaning to a mother. But it can also bring dangers. As said earlier, a woman who believes that only she can look after her child may be reluctant to share the parenting of the child thus increasing the workload and stress enormously for herself. It can mean that she finds it impossible to leave the child in another's care without feeling intensely guilty. The choice then to take up paid work, or even just go out for lunch with a friend, can leave some

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40 Coward, 1992, pp. 9-10
41 Coward, 1992, pp. 30-45
42 Coward, 1992, pp. 61-74
43 Coward, 1992, p. 49

women wracked with guilt and anxiety. Furthermore, children may not always need their mothers in the ways that their mothers want them to. And ultimately children will grow up and most will move away - what then for the woman who has buried all her needs and desires into caring for others?

> Like any lure that of being indispensable can also be a trap. At some point the children will cease to be dependent. And children's needs are various and complex, so that their interaction with a needy mother is unlikely to go smoothly ... Few women can accurately anticipate the feeling of maternal responsibility, a difficulty exacerbated by the lack of real information about children and child development made available to young women. Instead, presented with a terrain criss-crossed by media fantasies, distorted images and personal dreams, women may often spend more time trying to force little children to correspond to the fantasy than to finding out what is really needed for their care ... Investing your hopes for an answer to all your needs in motherhood is dangerous. Children are unpredictable creatures; they are not simple, passive recipients of a parent's fantasy. It is the exception rather than the rule for a true symbiotic match to be made between a mother's need to mother and a child's need to be mothered.[44]

Women are burying their own needs and desires in the needs of their children, and have accepted a notion of the ideal mother which is torturous to attain. It is no wonder that Rosalind Coward found many dissatisfied women. They were trying to be the perfect mothers: totally altruistic, devoted wholeheartedly to being responsible for every facet of their child's development and learning, socially, intellectually, physically. Many women felt that they were slaves to their children, and found paid work an escape from the incessant demands of the home. But then they felt guilty that they needed an escape!

Work is not necessarily a haven, however. Women in the workforce (and those at home) are confronted with a strict notion of the ideal woman, one which dictates female beauty as equating with slimness. This ideal is similarly torturous to attain. Rosalind Coward met women who agonised over their bodies, felt guilty if they put weight on, and so dieted and exercised madly in order to stay slim. To be slim was proof of self control and will-power, and was thus empowering.

> The continuing obsession with dieting is evidence of how important it is still for women to be seen to accede to prevailing aesthetic definitions. In other words, women continue to need to be seen, and wanted, as sexy. And most younger women still feel that their moments of greatest power have been when they feel sexually powerful. Being sexually desired (and acknowledged as such by other women) is more about pure power than about trapping a 'good man'. But many of the old fantasies and dreams of being overwhelmingly desirable still exist. These feed sexual excitement and give the strongest feelings of power, even for women who have been successful in their own right.[45]

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44 Coward, 1992, p. 60
45 Coward, 1992, p. 159

Rosalind Coward believes that the real problem for women is not just that they are being restricted by these limiting and unrealistic ideals of mothering and beauty, but that women are so willing to accept them. Women are complicit, they have accepted the impossible demands set by these ideals and blame themselves when they are not achieved. Instead of directing their anger and dissatisfaction in ways which could bring about social and political change they direct their anger at themselves, and feel guilty.[46] Women have not addressed their own needs and desires. They have been complicit in that they have not told the full truth about their lives. They perpetuated the illusion that they 'have it all' and are happy. '[Complicity] means that instead of recognizing who they really are, women continue to project on to men and children what they haven't dealt with properly in themselves. It means they continue with miserable obsessions about what men can do to make them feel happier, and what children can achieve to make them feel better about themselves.'[47]

Men have not changed because they have not had to. Women shied away from the conflict that would most likely have ensued from demanding such change, and thus men have continued to assume only partial responsibility for the child care and domestic duties. Women and men have colluded to maintain the traditional structure of the family.

> Women have let men get away with it. When it came to the crunch, most made it quite clear they didn't want conflict with men. Rather than have conflict, which they saw as a symptom of disturbed and angry people, they would prefer to keep the traditional structures of masculinity and femininity intact, even if it meant not coming to terms with themselves, even if it meant burying aspects of themselves in men and in children, even if it meant harder work and more pressures for women. In exchange, they have ostensibly been given more power in the family by accepting a new mythology concerning childbirth, mothering and nurturing. But that 'gift' is ambiguous. As their significance as mothers has increased, so have the pressures to live up to the ideals of being educator, therapist and friend to their children, while at the same time bearing all the weight of decisions and responsibilities for them in the absence of any secure external authority.
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> Contemporary women are in something of a mess. Already burdened with an inheritance of obligations, guilt and splitting off uncomfortable emotions, they have taken on even more. When the possibility of real social change was opened up, they failed to tackle on the one hand their real feelings and needs and on the other the real contradictions and difficulties of their situation. Instead, women were going to combine perfect mothering with a faultless career or they were going to give everything up and put themselves in touch with feminine values. More likely they were guiltily going to try for both, and feel inadequate about both. Everyone I spoke to seemed to think the answer lay in themselves, rather than recognizing dilemmas and anxieties that reflect real social problems, requiring social and political solutions.[48]

46 Coward, 1992, p. 109
47 Coward, 1992, pp. 194-195
48 Coward, 1992, pp. 197-198

The discourse in which Rosalind Coward is writing is, I suggest, one which incorporates socialist feminism and poststructuralist feminism. She shows that women's adherence to contemporary ideals and myths of femininity and motherhood and the choices women consequently make result in the maintenance of the traditional divide between femininity and masculinity. This, of course, oppresses women. Women who choose to live the 'correct' story of being a mother can be overwhelmed and disempowered by its attendant responsibilities, anxieties and guilt. Rosalind Coward's analysis is complex and valuable, and, I think, potentially empowering for women and men. It does not portray women as the dupes of men, but rather as collaborators with them. Making the myths of motherhood explicit is an essential precursor to being able to reject them. Once we understand the reasons why we have assumed a position in a certain discourse, then we can choose to remain in it, or we can leave. But Rosalind Coward does not call for change on an individual level. Like Lynne Segal, she calls for social and political change that will benefit all women.

> In it [this book], I am trying to describe the feminine condition in order to understand which of our prevailing beliefs are choices from within and which are prescriptions from without. The last thing women need are any more prescriptions about how to live their lives. I hope if this book contributes anything, it will help release women from the burdens of other people's prescriptions. But, above all, I hope it will encourage social, not individual, solutions. Because if women try to lighten the burdens imposed by society only as individuals, it is other women who will pay the price.[49]

In this chapter I have explored the meanings made of motherhood by different feminists, writing in different discourses of feminism. The next chapter is a collection of constructed monologues which narrate individual women's stories of what being a mother means to them. My story of wanting and not wanting to be a mother concludes the chapter.

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49 Coward, 1992, pp. 199-200

Chapter Five

Riding the Rollercoaster: Stories of Motherhood

> Love set you going like a fat gold watch.[1]

> 'She's beautiful,' said George.
> 'Yes, isn't she?' I said.
> But it was these words of apparent agreement that measured our hopeless distance, for he had spoken for my sake and I because it was the truth. Love had isolated me more securely than fear, habit or indifference. There was one thing in the world that I knew about, and that one thing was Octavia. I had lost the taste for half-knowledge. George, I could see, knew nothing with such certainty. I neither envied nor pitied his indifference, for he was myself, the self that but for accident, but for fate, but for chance, but for womanhood, I would still have been.[2]

The monologues which follow have been constructed from the interviews I had with my friends who participated in the study. Each woman tells her story of becoming a mother, and the changes, good and bad, which this brought. All the monologues are, as stated earlier, joint constructions. They are compositions of what was said by the participants and me at the time of the interview, followed by the transcription, then a transformation from the transcription to a monologue, which was finally reconstructed, polished and edited by the participant. My voice is present in their monologues, as theirs are in mine, as our thoughts and perceptions became entwined in a web of reciprocal influence and effect.

I have arranged the monologues, for want of any better method, in alphabetical order. My monologue, constructed from my journal entries and my responses to the interviews and the readings I have done, is at the end of the chapter. Alphabetically it belongs there. It concludes the chapter also because in a way it exists as a result of the other monologues; many of the meanings my friends made of motherhood came to be my meanings as well. And in another way it is very different to the others, for it tells the story of a woman who is not a mother, and does not know if she wants to be one or not.

The difference in length of the monologues reflects the varying contributions made by the participants. In the group discussion some people spoke more than others. In the individual interviews, those which were taped were able to say more than the participants who answered first a written questionnaire, then expanded some of their ideas via a long distance telephone call. Each monologue is of equal value and interest, no matter its length.

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1 from Plath, 'Morning Song', in McKenzie, 1977, p. 306
2 Drabble, 1977, p. 172

Bambi

I had always wanted to have children. I think that it could be called maternal instinct - I've always liked children and babies and wanted to have my own. The factors that influenced my decision to have a child at the time I did were: being with the right partner, having financial security and my age. I was thirty-four and didn't want to leave it any longer. I was elated when I found out that I was pregnant; I felt that I was at the right "place" in my life emotionally, physically and financially.

I felt that I changed a bit during my pregnancy. I felt more "in tune" with myself and others and was more affected emotionally by things around me. I think I'm a more caring person now. I'm more practical, but I also see things on a more human level. I think that now I am more mature, less selfish, more calm, more tired, happier than ever I was - and I was happy before - and more in control and less in control but when I'm less in control I'm more accepting of it.

I had to make a big adjustment, from having been independent and used to working and being able to socialise, to having someone totally dependent on only me, twenty-four hours a day. I think I had all the skills, but I still found myself doubting my ability to be a good mother at times, like when James wasn't feeding or settling properly. I wondered if I was doing a good job, and what other people thought of my mothering skills. There were times when I wondered who I was - my life had changed so dramatically, so quickly. I wonder still how the people at my workplace think of me now, especially the men.

After a few months I became more comfortable with being a mother. I felt that I could settle James if he was upset, better than anyone else, that I knew what he wanted when he cried. James was becoming more of a little friend and not just a little baby who needed me for something. I was feeling better about everything and started to enjoy motherhood more. I realised that I had a great job to do, the best. I began to feel that I was need and special and my doubts and feeling of inadequacy began to settle down and vanish.

I feel that motherhood is as I always thought it to be: hard work but really enjoyable and fulfilling. I think that women probably see motherhood in similar ways, but I think that men might see it differently - I wonder how men, how husbands and partners, view motherhood.

Becoming a mother has been empowering for me. I have grown as a person, as I have questioned myself, and still not found all the answers. Being a mother makes me feel really useful. I am indispensable; I don't think that anyone can take the place of a child's mother. This has disadvantages, but ultimately it's worth it one hundred times over. Being a mother makes me feel that my life is a lot richer in emotion and love and experience. I feel even happier than I did before. Motherhood might not always be an empowering

experience though, for example for people who suffer post natal depression, or don't have support networks like I did, I don't think it would be exactly an empowering experience.

Other things which I'm interested in are how relationships change after the birth of a child, and what it means to women sexually to have had a child.

Diana

When Oliver and I were first married the thing that I wanted to do was have a baby. And I thought that this would then be the fruition of our love, the symbol of this wonderful romance. I can look back now and see the construction, the romance story in all the *Seventeen* magazines I ever read, in all the stories I ever heard, but I thought that it was something deeply natural and real, that this was going to be, that this would cement the love, the symbol of this great passion and love. And that was more important to me than actually being a mother. I don't think that I thought too much about the consequences, I just thought about the baby as symbolising a great love.

I think that it's interesting that the longer Oliver and I left it, the more difficult it became to actually make the decision. I was all for it immediately, the consummation of this great passion, but the longer we went on without it, and had established a very nice, quite exciting and comfortable life-style, the more difficult it was to change that. Eventually I decided, because I thought I should, in the end, not as a consummation of great love, but because it was expected. One got married in order to have children, we'd been married for so many years and it was time to have the family that one had got married for. And that's such a conventional reason ... the passion had gone, I don't think I had any deep desire for motherhood then, I think that had passed, but I did feel that it was something that was going to be. I suppose I assumed it was part of being married, and being part of a family, and so it was because of that I went off the pill, and thought that it would be quite nice if I got pregnant some time in the future and got pregnant immediately.

I never said I was a mother, I was of that generation when everyone was a mother. You just had to be a mother.

The duplicity begins right at the beginning. I found it difficult, I didn't enjoy being pregnant at all. I find pregnancy a most extraordinary thing. I was reading something the other day about transplants, how if you get a lung, most bodies reject it, but with childbirth, you've got this alien thing, yet the body accepts it, it's a miraculous thing that actually happens, which is interesting, but what I was reading also said that the thing is actually alien, it doesn't belong.

I hated what being pregnant did to my body. I found it totally alienating. I couldn't even think in terms of what one was meant to do when one was pregnant. I found the

hunger amazing, the changes to the body I hadn't anticipated in any way at all. When I'd never been hungry before in my life, suddenly to feel so ravenously hungry, I found extraordinary, I couldn't cope with that. And then as the baby grows, the changes are so mammoth to the body. The breasts get so sore, suddenly going from whatever you are to be three or four inches larger. I couldn't bear to touch them, couldn't bear the water in the shower because I was so tender, so the increase in size gave me no pleasure whatsoever.

I find it difficult, to know what to say about childbirth. You know the Dale Spender chapter where she writes on motherhood and she talks about how women are silent, as far as motherhood is concerned, well that in a sense, you are in a really ambivalent situation with your daughter. Do you say I went through agony, childbirth is just terrible, I screamed and screamed the whole time, but it was really worth it because now I have you, and here you are, my friend, and I'm here with you while you give birth to your baby, that sort of thing ... Most women don't talk about it.

I didn't enjoy being a mother, and I think that was my greatest disappointment, in that I felt an almost overwhelming love for both children, whatever love actually means, not a surge of motherhood, which I still feel, and sometimes I find that so difficult to cope with, I can't believe the strength of it, but at the same time that didn't give me much joy, because of being trapped by their existence and the knowledge that for twenty four hours, every day for the rest of my life I was going to have this responsibility, it would be a part of me forever, and I didn't know if I was going to be able to cope with that sort of responsibility. I found it absolutely overwhelming. I just felt so involved and I so much wanted to do the right thing, and I had no idea what was the right thing. I think I made purgatory for myself when actually it could have been quite blissful. But I couldn't allow it to be blissful because I wanted to do whatever was the right thing. And I didn't ever feel that I was doing the right thing.

What I hadn't anticipated was that the children would respond in ways that I hadn't thought about. I suppose I'd thought of being a mother as looking after, moulding, creating these perfect beings, yet these little beings don't want to be made perfect, they sort of resist, and cause you problems, and are sick, and do all these things that you haven't anticipated. That sort of destroyed part of the notion that I had of what motherhood was. It was good ... it shows you something of yourself, and if you can learn from that you can grow from it, but it takes quite a long time to get to the stage.

I think one of the reasons why I didn't breastfeed was because my relationship with Oliver was more important to me than my relationship with the baby, and he actually took a stronger relationship with the baby than I did. So for all the night feeds and getting up, Oliver did all of that.

I found having two children no worse than one. That was an interesting thing for me. The second one was such a placid child, he's not now, but he was then, and he fitted in to the routine that I'd established. Still the overall restraint on me, and the restraint I put on

myself, existed. I suppose one of the things I felt ... was that for me, motherhood hasn't got any easier, even though my children are now twenty-three and twenty-two, and they've been living with me all the time, there's barely been a time, several nights, when I've been without them.

One of the things that happened to me was that I hadn't actually wanted to be pregnant, the first time. I thought that if it happened, it happened. And then when I was about eight weeks pregnant, it looked as if I was going to lose the baby, and that was one of the most devastating experiences of my life, and I don't know why. I hadn't even wanted the baby, well I felt I hadn't wanted the baby, and so I don't know the psychology of that ... The doctor sent me home to go to bed, and while I was in bed the man landed on the moon, and there I was trying to preserve this baby, watching men on the moon, and every time I got up it was as if I was going to lose the baby again, and every time it happened I was equally devastated, it was just terrible. In the mean time Oliver was in the library looking up statistics, which was really very good, he'd get either the latest statistics or the latest medical article, while I was there with my feet up trying not to lose the baby. And that was devastating, I couldn't explain why I felt like that.

The other interesting thing was when Teresa was born with a lump on her head. That was a terrible experience, and I don't know how women cope who have really deformed children. Teresa was born with this lump and the doctor said that it was a malformation of the artery, and they'd operate on her when she was six pounds. So they operated on her, this horrendous operation which took hours and she was all right, we got her home again, took her to the surgeon, and the surgeon said that you'd be pleased to know that it wasn't malignant. Why hadn't I thought? It had never occurred to me, here's this great lump on my baby's head, and no-one had mentioned, and I hadn't thought of it. Why wouldn't I have thought of it?

Into the next pregnancy, which happened almost immediately after the first one, and I didn't really worry about it, I can't say it was a preoccupation, and yet the first question I asked the doctor when the baby was born was, 'Are there any lumps?' And he looked at me as though ... I'm sure that (the experience with Teresa needing an operation) influenced my response to the baby - I wanted this perfect baby, it was meant to be the most perfect baby that was every born. What was funny was that the next baby was the most perfect baby, and by the second you don't care so much.

I think the decision to have children was - well, whether it's a decision or not - absolutely changes your life, because for me still, I think, when Teresa has finished, then I will be able to think about myself. What I'm saying is - when she's finished her undergraduate studies then I'll be able to concentrate on mine. That is if nothing else comes up .... a baby, I had these nightmares the other night that there was going to be this baby, I was going to be looking after a baby, how could I do my Ph.d with a baby ...

Oliver's mother used to ask when we'd go along and watch Oliver play football, if it worried me that he was playing football and he might get terribly injured, and I'd say that no it didn't, because I believed that it was his responsibility, and if he was prepared to take this risk, then I was prepared to take it with him. But with my son, it's different. And I know that if Teresa said to me, 'Mum, I'm pregnant and I'm going to have a baby', I'd say that I'd look after the baby, you're going to finish and do your articles next year, I will look after the baby. So whatever I had going - I know that I would do that. If she didn't want to, that would be great, I wouldn't have a choice, I'd respect her choice. But if she did, if I could assist her to be economically independent and establish herself, and have a baby as well, then I would do that, and I know that I'd forget about my preoccupations of the time. Not totally, but ...

How could I say that I'd look after a baby instead of finishing my Ph.d? I should be doing my Ph.d!

Having children has totally altered my attitude to my professional work. That would be one of the most significant things for me, I suppose.

I would worry if becoming a mother was the only way you could get power. I've known women, my grandmother for one, who had thirteen children and who only felt powerful when she had a baby at the breast, and who then didn't actually want - and this is just the family story so I don't know it to be true - who rejected her children when they got to be two or three, and the baby who was currently feeding was the most important.

Elizabeth

I got pregnant because I was living with someone who didn't approve of the twentieth century, including contraception. And so at seventeen ... being alone in a strange country ... I stayed with him, and we attempted the rhythm method ... When I went into labour, I remember that he recited the 'Ballad of the White Horse', by G.K. Chesterton over and over again.

So that's why I got pregnant, and when I was pregnant I was faced with the situation of telling my parents. I was seventeen and the idea was that I would go to university. I didn't know how to tell them, so I went over to Australia for a visit, and I still didn't know how to tell them, so I started crocheting this baby rug. It went on and on, the rug got bigger and bigger, and nobody twigged at all. My grandmother came over but didn't want to say anything, and the rug got bigger and bigger, and I still didn't say anything. One afternoon there was this program that came on television called 'Beauty and the Beast', where people wrote in, and one woman wrote in to say that her teenage daughter was pregnant. It seemed a good opportunity, and so I told my mother, and she promptly burst into tears. My parents said to me that whatever you do, don't feel that you have to get

married, we'll get you an abortion, and I promptly went back and got married. I was living in New Zealand at the time.

So I went back and tried to do all the things that mothers do, but I'd never held a baby in my life. I knew nothing about children. I thought you had to do something to make children talk, I didn't know that they learnt by themselves and I didn't want to confess that I didn't know how to make babies talk. I went to all the pre-natal classes, and learnt how to breathe and everything, but then when I went into labour ... I remember being furious with my mother because she'd said that she had felt discomfort, and it was agony... I remember my husband was in there with me when the baby was born, and that was quite good, but then I was separated, put back in this room, and told to sleep, and I couldn't sleep because I was so excited, I lay awake all night.

The next morning I sat up, waiting for this baby, (I didn't know how to hold a baby), the baby was wheeled in. I sat up, and this baby was a girl, and I distinctly remembered giving birth to a boy. I said so, and the nurse said, 'Oh, sorry, it's the wrong baby.' When they finally wheeled in the right baby, I had this half-hearted smile on my face, I almost expected them to have got it wrong again.

All the way through I did not enjoy motherhood, in terms of the day to day responsibilities. Having to go to the supermarket, do all the little things, the washing up, the domestic responsibilities, I didn't enjoy it, particularly being in the house, not being able to just get up and go. I felt trapped.

I'd like to contrast the above with how I spent a recent weekend, which was going around to visit my son who was looking after a matric teacher's house. We lay around all afternoon, and talked, and lit the fire, and I felt like I was eighteen again. It was just terrific. He's nearly twenty.

It really changes the dynamics in the home, when children leave home. My son left last year to travel interstate, and at first it was wonderful, just two adults in the house for the first time. Instead of being in the kitchen at five o'clock, I could be out going for a walk, it was fantastic. But it also changes the dynamics of the relationship with your partner. And I'd been used to having someone else to talk to, if J wasn't around, or if things weren't going well between us.

Another good thing about motherhood for me ... I didn't have a career. When people said to me, 'What do you do?' I used to say that I was a mother. And I know from talking to other women that it was important that they were something. One of the situations in which I talked to other women was when I was pregnant the second time. Unfortunately after I found out that I was pregnant I had a miscarriage, and I was put in a hospital room with women who'd had hysterectomies. We could hear the new born babies crying out. One of the women talked about how motherhood meant that she could lift up her head in society again ... she was a mother ... otherwise she was nothing.

I don't know if birth is the most difficult thing. To me problems are caused by the fact that women are silent about what actually happens to you when you become a mother.

I don't think it ever changes, you're a mother until you die. There's this link, even when they're not there. Even when E wasn't at home, (he used to go off a lot to New Zealand when he was young), I used to imagine that he'd be in a terrible accident and I wouldn't be there .... it never happened, fortunately. I know that if I was in a situation where E was being threatened I would do something. But if it was another person there would be a second where I would do some mental calculation.

I imagine that having a daughter would be wonderful, to be able to share language in the same way. I have to explain my position a lot to men. Fortunately my son is often able to understand. You can feel lonely in the company of men in a way that you can't in the company of women.

Isabel

I was excited that I was pregnant but it came at the wrong time. I was doing study again. I umhhed and ahhed, do the study, or have the baby, I didn't think that I could do both. I thought I'd have an abortion. Peter knew that it had to be my decision. I talked to my women friends, and they sort of convinced me that I could have a baby and study at the same time.

I'd always thought, not when I was a teenager, but when I was going through uni, that I would like to have a baby. Peter and I had talked about it, and we thought that we would have a baby at some stage, but there was never a right time, because other things were happening in our lives.

I don't think that I felt a maternal instinct, but I wanted the possibility that I could have a baby if I wanted to. Sometimes I used to look back at my childhood, and I really enjoyed it. I remember my sister and I coming home from primary school, and Mum would always be there, making lovely dough things, and she'd let us play with the dough. It was just great, we had such a nice time. And I thought that I'd like that too. But I wanted to work first.

I liked it when I was pregnant. Physically I felt well, and once I'd made the decision to have the baby, emotionally I was fine. But as the pregnancy went on, I used to get really tearful about any little thing. And I think that has carried on still.

When I was pregnant I thought about being a mother, but only really generally. I thought that it would be so lovely to have a baby. I thought that we would continue on with our lives and the baby would fit in. And she sort of has. I thought that it would be a great change to our lives, but you don't realise how much of a change until it happens. It's

a bloody devastating thing! I didn't really think about the practical things, but I did think about emotional things. I thought that it would be lovely to have a little girl. I think I felt this way because of my mother, from when I was little and she was cuddling me. I really liked it. I didn't think that I was going to change, I thought that I'd be exactly the same. But I think I have changed, I find I get irritated about small things much easier, which is pretty disgusting.

After Mi was born I felt so happy. It was lovely. I didn't think of it as a great achievement, I just felt that she was my baby, well, that she was our baby. That high feeling has mellowed out, but I still feel very emotional towards her. I guess that feeling stays with you for the rest of your life.

Being a mother means lots of hard work, but there are nice things, like when she's happy and she's making these crazy faces ... it gives me, and Peter, a lot of satisfaction, because we're happy because she's happy, and we're doing things right to make her happy. The good parts of being a mother are as good as I thought, but the bad parts are worse. Friends of mine had said that there were bad things, but that children gave you so much pleasure. I didn't know what they were talking about. I'd liked it when I'd been out with other children and I could make them laugh, that was great, but I could never see that it could be such a permanent good feeling.

I don't want to put other people down, but I just can't understand why women have children and then leave them and go out to work. I really feel that if you want to have children, you've got to be prepared to stay with them because they're so little and they want their mother. I really think that Mi would like to be with me, or her father, someone who's there all the time, not chopping and changing. I guess it's because my mother stayed home and looked after me, and I had such a nice time.

I think that society pressures women to go out to work. It says that you should go out to work, because you're not fulfilled, you're not a real woman unless you go out to work and have a career. I don't think that mothers at home are valued, and it makes me really mad. It's as important a job as anything else. Society thinks that women who are housewives and are acting in traditional female roles are doing it because they are stupid and can't do anything else. It makes me angry because I don't get a wage for staying at home. I know lots of women who stay at home are pissed off because society doesn't value motherhood.

Now, being a mother, I feel really strong and capable, I know what I'm doing. If I go back to the workforce, I know that there are employers who are keen to employ women who are experienced as mothers because they have so many skills of managing things. They must have these skills to cope.

Before, I was doing very interesting work, but a little of everything, I was just an individual wandering around. Now I am a mother, I know what I am. If I fill out a

questionnaire, I say, I am a mother, that's what I am. It's so consuming, takes so much energy, there's no time to do anything else. It's defining - I can go to the bank and I know who I am - I'm a mother, this is my child - don't mess with me. You have to look after your baby, so people have to look after you, they have to do the right thing for you.

I think that society is changing. While more women desire to go "back to work" more and more men want to stay at home with their children. That's quite interesting.

Joy

I was thirty five when I got pregnant, and I'd never thought much about becoming pregnant, I didn't ever think I would have a baby, and I think everyone else thought that too. So no-one really believed me, and I didn't really believe me either when I realised that I might be pregnant. Having been very active and what I thought was career orientated, it was a rude shock to the system. And I was very frightened, I didn't know whether to be happy - I think I cried - I didn't know whether to be elated or really upset.

I suppose I did decide to have a baby. I feel at the other end of the fairy tale, the romance, I didn't ever think I'd have a baby, and I didn't feel fussed about having a baby, but I got to a point in my career, a stalemate I suppose, anything, a change was required, it just seemed to be the change. To say it wasn't planned, the baby was planned I suppose, but I didn't believe it would happen.

I found a lot of criticism, unspoken criticism I suppose, for not wanting to have children. We travelled a lot, did a lot, were involved in a lot of sport, we had a lot going and we did things independently of each other and we did things together. So we had quite a good balance.

During my first pregnancy it was real trauma .... my aim was to pretend to everyone that this pregnancy was not going to interfere with my life whatsoever. And so I carried on, I participated in all the sporting activities, I windsurfed until I was about eight and a half months and fell off the board because I couldn't balance, I played tennis until the week before, I just really pretended. I had a lot of grave fears about losing my independence.

I didn't have any of this maternal business beforehand, but on Gemma's birth, I just, I don't know what happened, it just gushed. It hit me, I can remember looking at her in the bassinette and thinking, "How am I ever going to let go?" She was about one day old! Six hours old! It was just incredible, having had absolutely nothing, and I suppose in the end fitting in with the expectations that we'd been married for thirteen years and perhaps really we should do something ... It was a really rude shock.

The process after the birth, when you're pregnant, that's all you think of, the birth, and that's it. You don't even conceive the next steps of the rest of your life. I hadn't really

thought much about feeding, I didn't feel very enamoured about it, and I ended up feeling very engorged at the hospital, and Gemma couldn't feed properly. But after feeding for several days, that was the only good thing. I had the choice of bottle feeding Gemma, or breast feeding, and I suddenly realised when given the choice that I may not be able to do this thing, it became a challenge. So I took it on board. With Gemma I found it very satisfying, she was a very easy baby, she'd feed, and she'd just fall asleep. Well yes there is a kind of sexual pleasure involved, it's oxytocin at its best. I wouldn't say orgasmic, just a nice little pick-up. It's sort of an instantaneous sensation, when you first feed. Very satisfying.

You don't feel sexually attractive when you are breast feeding. Your boobs belong to your baby, not your husband, and I think that breastfeeding really ties the woman because the man says that the woman has to do this. I've had friends whose partners have not allowed them to eat certain things because of course it affects the baby. The partner would be, is of no consequence if you're breastfeeding. Some of my friends have found that to be a real problem with feeding, and the partner feeling out of it.

I think that also once you stop breastfeeding that's a really nice transition, I remember with Gemma at fourteen months, that was it, I had had it, and she was an easy baby, I just wanted my body for myself. It's interesting, I found, perhaps because I was older, I met a lot of women who had careers, who were in similar positions, and you did make the most of it. Gemma went everywhere with me, she was an easy baby. I really enjoyed the free time, the time I had for myself. I could handle it for a couple of years, but things were difficult with two children, the logistics of doing study, and career, changed things dramatically.

And then not so long after I became pregnant again. With Gemma I used to be sick in the evenings, which was okay, it meant I could teach during the day and be sick at night. With Zac I was absolutely floored, I couldn't do anything for about fourteen weeks, and I think I resented that a lot. I think I resented the fact that I gained weight very easily with him and I felt that my body would never be the same again. The only gratifying thing was that Gemma was so accommodating, she'd get into bed with me and read books, and entertain herself. I'd lounge around, I couldn't do a thing. If I'd been teaching, it would have been such a different story, I wouldn't have been able to teach.

The second child was a totally different thing, the first one was the big, the highlight, the second one is expected, a playmate for the other child. Who's this little person going to play with, sort of thing. Once again, it appeared that I'd had difficulty conceiving, we didn't take precautions, and I was once again very surprised. It was a real shock, again.

After the second, we took precautions. John had a vasectomy, within a very short space of time. But it was really different because I didn't enjoy pregnancy, particularly the second one. We went to natural childbirth classes, and had to draw, imagine what it would

be like, once the baby arrived, and I drew a picture of myself at the sink with a ball and chain around my neck. I had preconceptions of motherhood being a chore and a bore.

But I became a very dedicated mum, very dedicated. And I really enjoyed it, I really enjoyed the change, perhaps if I'd had another career that might have been the same, but for me, I was at a stage in my personal development where I really needed a big change and for me it was wonderful. It was wonderful discovering new people, it was really challenging going into new situations, meeting different people, just being around mums, but I also found a strong need to be with other people, totally separate from mothers and babies. University study certainly provided this challenge for me.

I found very much that people would dismiss you if they thought you were "just" a mother. I used to be really glad that I was at uni, and first of all I'd say, when asked what did I do, that I was a teacher on leave, and later on I said that I was a part-time student. And I always say that first before I say that I am a mother. It was more as if to be a mother was a stigma. And that was something, I always felt that I had to prove something.

And it's a really nice time now, now that my youngest is two and a half, and more independent, the dependency thing is not quite so strong as it used to be, it is in other ways, but that's when all the hidden things come in and you find yourself changing so much so that the career orientated person that you thought you were is no longer. And that's a really rude shock. And you find yourself so caught up in it, you're making decisions for the here and now that are going to affect you in ten years' time.

I think that I've made more sacrifices than I ever imagined that I would. I've heard myself saying that it's really good that we're not on two incomes because I don't take things for granted any more!! Now when I go shopping I buy for my children, not for me. You just don't believe it.

I was going back to work six weeks after the birth of the child, five years, six months, and I'm thinking that I've enjoyed all this free time, it's been my time, I've used it for whatever purpose. I've made a lot of it my time, I've made the most of the situation so I've enjoyed the life-style with the children on the whole ... I can still do my things. However it is more difficult when the children get sick, and it's your day to study, and you're the one who has to stay, you're the one who has to make the decisions, and that's where it becomes difficult. And it's your career that's altered, and everybody talks about the partner's career, and how important that is, and you accept it. It's really funny.

Having had young children, and having taught, it's been a really interesting challenge. I look back and think how I was as a teacher and thought that I knew it all and really I knew nothing basically. And that - children teach you more about yourself than anything else, they make you realise all those ridiculous authoritarian things that you used to do for the sake of doing them, because someone told you to do them, and you think what a ridiculous thing to do, why am I putting this on my child.

I guess study stopped me from going back to work sooner, it filled a really big gap. At least I suppose I had a goal, so while I had children, I improved my qualifications, and personally Women's Studies has been the most empowering thing. Someone said very smugly the other day, "So what have you really gained from all of this study?" I just said a lot of personal development, just so many different things ... the two of them have gone very well together. And I have found study a challenge. Before I was always frightened of study, I never really enjoyed it, so that was another thing that has altered my outlook.

My next step is to work out what I want to do. There are so many things that you discover on the way, different pathways, I'd like to teach, and I'd like to teach in a different subject area. My big decision is whether I'd like to teach part-time or full-time. I know, I've always said that there should be part-time work for everybody, and in a way I know I'm going to do that. And yet that's a commitment that could affect me ten years hence when I might want to teach full-time. Let's hope that the ruling has changed, but I just feel with the kids that I want to have time for them too. I've even thought of taking more leave, so the kids can settle into their little schools ... So I'm not racing around, organising things ... They are very real decisions, big things.

I wouldn't have gone back to work after having Zac, because I felt I needed to give him an equal portion of time as Gemma. But of course I could never do that anyway, the equation doesn't equal out, but ... The companionship they have for each other is really good, but the decisions that have made me feel guilty are that the times that I could have had with Zac I chose not to because I had my study time. And the guilt that I've gone through just for that is amazing.

I felt quite strongly about wanting to have a girl first, I didn't care after that, it didn't matter. I found Gemma to be the easier of the two, she and I just seemed to relate, and it was Zac who was the bull at the gate, we're coming around now, but it was really important for me to have a girl.

But boys are lovely - they really are ..... Motherhood is a roller coaster ride - once you're on, you can't get off.

Katherine

I was frightened and confused when I found out that I was pregnant, and I was very nervous about telling my partner, or anyone for that matter. Although I hadn't planned my pregnancy I can see now on reflection that it was my time. It was obvious I'd have to go it alone, although I hoped that the father of my baby, the man I was so deeply in love with, would change his mind about this pregnancy and accept it. Still it seemed the right thing, the thing I wanted most to do.

I'd never planned on having children, although at different stages of my life I experienced very strong maternal urges and would want a child for short time. These urges could have been hormonal. They usually happened when I was in a relationship, and then I'd look at babies and think that it'd be horrible.

I had no idea what being a mother would be like - I just prepared things the way the book said. I thought that it would be a lot easier than it was in the first few weeks and months. I had a few doubts as to my ability. I had never really discussed motherhood as such, but children yes. The women that I looked to for advice I feel let me down. I had attended pre-natal classes as a single parent with, which must have been painfully obvious, an unrealistic approach to motherhood. I had no-one to help me and was going back to work as soon as possible. I feel a few words of wisdom at that stage could have helped to improve my situation.

I felt that I would change, that I would become more settled, more caring and stable. I would become a responsible person. Before I'd had nobody to care about. Now that somebody depended on me I had to be responsible. I'd been very selfish, I'd always done what I'd wanted to, lived for the moment. I didn't care for life, I didn't care for myself. I can see this now in retrospect. Becoming a mother made me become responsible and mature.

Becoming a mother has been empowering. Breast feeding was the most empowering experience I've had. The feeling of self worth and power was immense - wonderful, especially in the early stages. It's hard to describe the feeling of power you get from providing another human being with everything that she needs; you're her sole source of survival. I had lots of difficulties with breastfeeding and had to stop after three months. I didn't have any support, and I couldn't go on. People have an unrealistic view about motherhood and breastfeeding, that you can do it if you want to. It's not true. Again I feel the women who work at the Maternal Child Health Centre and conduct the pre-natal classes - as well as the female doctors and counsellors, really do not provide a realistic picture of motherhood. Every woman is encouraged to breast feed, and rightly so, <u>but</u> I feel all the pitfalls should be pointed out as well. The tiredness, the need to be in a stress free environment, the need to have help - to be able to feed yourself properly etc. ...

I feel that I have grown up. Things that were important two or so years ago are no longer even a consideration. I'm more responsible and have become more materialistic. Being the sole provider it's sort of like a marriage, I feel the responsibility to 'bring home the bacon'. I have to make/keep a good home for my child. Being a mum and knowing your teachings, actions etc. are going to influence the child for the rest of their life is empowering. It's also frightening. How do you set a good example for your child? Do we do what the American experts say and stay at home full time with our children, or take the realistic spproach again and return to the work force as soon as possible to pay the bills?

There are so many sole parents in this country, yet all the books, experts (for want of a better term) lean towards the family unit.

I do the best I can for my daughter and hope it's right. I have no role model, I just do it the way I feel is right. It is an empowering experience - I hope I feel the same way in twenty years.

Another area of importance, that does not concern me at the moment, is what happens to your relationship - do you feel the same about your life/sex life/social life with your partner now you are a mother? Males can feel put out - there's nothing they can do to help if a woman is breastfeeding. They can feel jealous and helpless. Socially it's more restrictive - you can still go out but it's different. Couples suffer an enormous upheaval when they have a baby. They find it difficult to spend time together; if they do get some spare time, then they're too tired to do anything.

Linda

I planned my first pregnancy, and I was excited and surprised when it happened. I never ever not wanted to have children. It was part of my marriage and part of my future, the timing was the only thing, it became a bit clinical, and was impacted on by other people. I grew up in a large family, a very traditional one, and married a man with a similar background. My husband expected of marriage to have children - that was all he ever wanted, as well as me. Part of marriage was having a family; that was where we were at the time of having our first child. Probably the timing of falling pregnant with Frances was more his timing than mine. I wasn't unhappy about it, but I still had lots of things that I could have done with my life, prior to falling pregnant. Because I was only twenty-three, and I was starting to achieve some real career goals at that stage, but because Sean was that much older, that had to be a consideration.

I had never seen anything that made me feel insecure about taking on the motherhood role. I was happy with that role. My mother was happy with it, so was everyone I knew. I can see that even if it had not always been a positive role for my mother, she wouldn't have said anything about it, because that it not what mothers do. There's a certain distastefulness if you ran around saying that you hated being a mother, once you were a mother, the effect on the children ... I wouldn't do that to my children. I might question aspects of motherhood, the role, but never have I questioned how right it was to have children.

I hadn't felt maternal before I had my children. I never looked at babies, and I don't now look at other people's babies and become overwhelmed. But since I had children, once I'd had Gabrielle and got over the barrier that you can love two children, it's not one

person's love divided in half, it's equal quantities, once I got over that, there have been times when I would have liked more children, and I put that down to maternal instinct. I think I could probably be seventy and still have this desire to have babies. Because being pregnant I found very lovely - to be perfectly honest it's the attention you get. I mean the reverence with which you're treated, so that was one aspect of it. There are times when there are private things which only you can experience. I can remember thinking that I quite liked the fact that I could feel the little baby moving, and at least for that time the baby was mine. It sounds very selfish, probably it is, but it's one aspect of your relationship that only you can experience, it's all yours. During the time I was pregnant I felt special, and I think more so than at any other time in my life, I felt not special but extra special, the sort of thing you feel on your birthday.

I didn't really think that I was going to change. I really didn't think about my children as anything other than babies, toddlers. I can't remember that I ever thought about pimply horrible teenagers. I saw the big picture stuff, like education, careers, but I never really thought about what are probably the most difficult years for bringing children up, the adolescent years.

I can look back now and see lots of changes in me, but I never foresaw those. When the children were little, on a purely physical, personal basis, I didn't feel very attractive. I can remember when I was breastfeeding and that was probably the most unsexiest period of my life. Not that I felt that I was really sexy before or after, but I was the unsexiest when breastfeeding.

Emotionally, I loved being needed, because children need you rather than want you. I was very much aware that I had a lot to give, and I really did throw myself into motherhood. I was very conscious of being a good mother, and was very proud of it. I took it on with the same zealousness that I do most things. I looked at motherhood seriously, I tried to read about practices, without following anything blindly, following my instincts, taking into account my role models. I was very conscious of my responsibilities.

I really felt needed, until the children went to school. I went through a period then where emotionally I hit the bottom. I guess what I felt more than anything was a real loss and where my children needing me had been the very essence of my existence and having given up work there wasn't a lot of other stimulation in my life. I went into a period of my life when I got to the lowest I'd ever been. I got to the stage when I thought I had terminal cancer. I really went through what was a real deep depression.

It took me twelve months to do anything about it. I'm not an attention seeker, and failing motherhood would have been failing everything I'd been doing ... acknowledging that it could have been anything to do with being unhappy at home, any of those things, would have acknowledging failure ... there was no question that what I was doing wasn't right.

When I went to the doctor, she wasn't interested in my 'cancer', instead she kept asking me about things to do with myself, like if I ever took the time to just go window shopping ... she did do tests, but she didn't just ask me about physical things. She pinpointed what my problem was, and then I started to do something about it. I first became involved at the children's primary school, and that got me from being hugely depressed and bordering on being out of control to gaining enough self-esteem to look at myself and ask myself what I wanted. I then started paid work.

Being a mother has been the greatest learning experience. It's allowed me to discover more about myself. I've looked at and been through a whole lot of experiences that I wouldn't have been through if I hadn't had children. I don't know that this is just my experience or the experience of motherhood generally. I'm really happy to have children, because if I'd not been a mother I wouldn't have felt as confident as I do. You lose some things, the carefreeness you can have if you're not a mother. I am much more cautious, on a monetary and physical basis. I would never do anything risky. Or before I'd spend money on myself, I'd measure it up against what the girls might need. It's not a sacrifice, or martyrdom, you just do it. That's why I think you would kill to protect your children. I'm doing lots of things in my life, but there's no doubt that it'll last until I die, that my children will be more important than me, absolutely.

I think there are a lot of emotions that you don't experience until you have children. It's hard to explain, but the depth of emotion - I love Sean hugely, but I love my children differently, it's really physical, very deep and touchable. I'm not making a judgement that your life will be lesser if you don't experience these emotions; but for me it's better. I don't know how happy I'd be with me at forty-two if I hadn't had children.

But I hate only being known as a "mum". It's very easy to lose your identity. The word mum is really, mum or mother, it is really a non-sexy word, that's a sexual thing. I don't know why I ever felt this because I was hugely proud of my children, hugely proud of being a mother, but I really resented being called by teachers 'Gabrielle's mum' or 'Frances's mum'. I really love being a mother, and I love my children, and as they've matured, I not only really love them, I really like them. They're people who I'd choose to be friends with. I love them, but I also like them. But I hate only being known as their mum. People do that, and it's a bit like 'wife', you do lose your identity. And that's probably why I do take care with my appearance, how I look, because also mum and mothers conjure up ... unsexiness.

I believe that mothers have many skills that aren't recognised. Societal standards say that work is the measure - what do you do? This is where I think women are really trapped. It annoys me, and has annoyed me, I believe in feminism, I believe I'm a feminist, but I don't believe in radical feminism. I think that a woman at home should be measured. You walk into a room, and someone says to you, and what do you do, you are measured ...

I've often thought that I'd like to say that I'm a nuclear physicist, and see how the conversation goes. I've often thought that I'd like to lie, not because I'm embarrassed for what I am, but ... because no-one recognises you. It comes down to this picture of mums ... You shouldn't have to work outside the home to feel valued.

I think it's tremendous that you're allowed to talk about motherhood, how you feel about it. I have some regrets about how I felt about being deprived of self-esteem, I was sorry that it wasn't as good as it could have been. I feel happy about myself, I feel aware of issues, I feel comfortable with myself. I am happy to be a mother. We are only starting to get permission to feel this way. I feel that I am a feminist. I believe I have influenced my children, and things are thus different for them growing up than they were for me. I know that I have been making subtle changes. I have changed, myself, and these small and subtle changes are ones on which real change is based.

Madeleine

I was shocked, horrified and scared when I found out that I was pregnant. I was mystified about the fact that I was actually fertile, and angry because I'd been so careless. I hadn't meant to fall pregnant at all, it was not an appropriate time at all. But if I'd never fallen pregnant by accident, I would probably not have had children. I never felt maternal. It wasn't that I hated children, I just never wanted them. I didn't own anything, I virtually lived out of my suitcase, staying at places only for a while - I never solved problems - I left them behind!

I decided to have Isabella because at that time I was in such emotional turmoil that I couldn't make a decision. On my way to Melbourne (to have an abortion) something stopped me - I knew in my heart that it was wrong. This sounds wanky, but now that I know Isabella I know that was her 'will' or 'soul' which stopped me.

I didn't think that I'd be able to be a mother, I didn't think that I'd be able to do it. Motherhood is so romanticised by the media, they make it impossible. How can you have a clean house, beautiful clothes, beautiful body, beautiful child who doesn't cry, a man who changes nappies and laughs when he goes to the supermarket ... ? I stayed with Isabella's father, thinking that would be better for the baby, but instead it was disastrous. It seemed so scary and I was always impatient, selfish, moody, etc. I couldn't find the strong me, which was silly, because of course I could do it, it's innate. Once I'd had Isabella I knew that I could leave her father and that we'd be okay.

Being a mother is bloody difficult and bloody wonderful. After I'd had Isabella I felt, apart from the pain, absolute bewilderment and love. It was a really weird, unusual feeling to love someone unconditionally, totally, and know that they would really love me back.

Becoming a mother has changed me. I'm a nicer person. I have more patience, I'm not as selfish, I'm happier and stronger. It has empowered me. It was a step in the right direction. It gave me the strength to be alone, without a partner that is. It gave me the impetus to get myself together financially. I think of consequences now. It made me believe in myself.

Sometimes being a mother is easy - sometimes it's impossible. It's just life. I don't think that people really know what is until they've experienced it. They don't see all the shit. Sometimes I want to walk away from all the responsibility but then I want to take Isabella with me - 'If you leave me can I come too!'

Rebecca

I felt really excited when I found out that I was pregnant. I wanted to get pregnant, because I'd had an abortion and I felt really guilty about it, so when I got pregnant I was excited, and then I was fearful, that Shannon would be abnormal as a punishment for the abortion. And that was really horrible. I was very anxious throughout the pregnancy, I kept thinking that if she's not right it would all be my fault, because I should never have had an abortion in the first place. But I was still really excited.

Another reason why I was excited was because maybe I was thinking that this was it, this was the ever-after ... like the get married, live happily ever after, this was it, have your baby ...

I don't think I thought about the consequences of becoming a mother, and the responsibility, because when I had Rosie I suddenly became overwhelmed at the sense of this thing that didn't give me an instant surge of mother love like you read in the magazines that you're going to feel wonderful. And it was dependent on me. You couldn't put it back, or put it away.

I was caught up in the myth that becoming a mother was a consequence of being a wife. Chris didn't want children, and when I found out after we were married that came as a huge shock to me because marriage meant children. The two were linked, and I couldn't believe he wouldn't have told me before we got married, because that was just ... So I contrived my pregnancies, he agreed that I could go off the pill, on the condition that I found a satisfactory alternative means of contraception. So I went to Dr Braddon, who was, who I'd been told was a good Catholic, and told him the position, and I said what Chris had said, and he (Dr Braddon) explained how the rhythm method worked, and I went back and told Chris, and he was all ready to abstain. I wasn't. I used the rhythm method, knew when I was ovulating, and after a planned Saturday night seduction, with the aid of some red wine, Rosie was conceived. Chris and I were and are so delighted to have her.

It used to happen that I'd go to a party and meet people and they'd say the usual 'What do you do?' and I'd say that I was a wife and a mother, and the shutters would come down and the people would say to themselves that I had nothing to contribute and so they'd move on.

When I first had my children and I was at home looking after them, I really enjoyed it, I didn't want to go to work, but it was also over time very disempowering - it deprived me of my sense of self. Society's response to being a housewife and mother was what really deprived me, I came to view myself as society viewed me. I lost confidence in my ability to make decisions relating to the broader context - it's as if I was removed from the world.

But now, with my children, I find them so fulfilling, and derive tremendous pleasure and satisfaction from their company as people, that the thought of them leaving home gives me the horrors. They value what I'm doing as a working mother. Taking up a career other than raising children and being a housewife has given me back my sense of self.

Susan

The story that follows has been constructed from two main sources: the journal which I began when I started this study, which is a construction of my agonies of indecision concerning motherhood, and my memories, which are of course themselves reconstructions. In my journal I recorded my swings for and against motherhood, and attempted to determine what was prompting these swings. My aim was to deconstruct these maternal longings. I wanted to test my suspicion that maternal instinct was not an innate, biologically determined 'fact', but was a social construct. Or, in other words, women do not choose to become mothers because they are driven by an inescapable biological urge, but because they see, perhaps subconsciously, perhaps consciously, that by choosing to position themselves in the discourses of motherhood, they will be rewarded. Their choice will be regarded with great approbation, and they will receive affirmation of their identities as women.

I wanted to look at 'maternal instinct' in this way because, as I said earlier in this study, I had been so impressed with the work Wendy Hollway had done in relation to the ways in which women and men positioned themselves in the discourses of heterosexual relationships, and her consequent theorising of the subject's 'investment' in taking up a position.

> By claiming that people have investments (in this case gender-specific) in taking up certain positions in discourses, and consequently in relation to each other, I mean that there will be some satisfaction or pay-off or reward (these terms involve the same problems) for that person. The satisfaction may well be in

> contradiction with other resultant feelings. It is not necessarily conscious or rational. But there is a reason.[3]

I wanted to find the reason to explain the great change that has happened to me over the last few years. I changed from being a person who declared with tedious rigidity, 'I will never never have children' to being a very different but still quite similar person who very recently was planning with great anticipation a maternity wardrobe. How did this all happen? It was a monumental shift which shook me profoundly. I reeled and spun and tried very hard to reject it. It has only been in the last year that I have actually accepted that I could in fact be feeling as though I did want a child. Why? From where did this change come? I feel that I need to understand it before I make my decision. I do not want to recklessly go ahead and have a child; I feel as though I have to know what I am doing.

In order to convey a sense of the shock that feeling maternal gave me, I will need to describe what I was like before. Before the baby wish, that is. This description will not give of course a 'true' account of what I was like, because there can be no such thing. What I remember of myself is a reconstruction, it is a reconstruction of the self that I constructed then. The way I remember this self has been influenced by many things, paramount is the way that I want to construct myself now.

I had, since early adolescence, declared my total disinterest for children. 'Oh no', I used to say, 'I will never have children. I would be a terrible mother. I am far too selfish, I would resent the impositions and restrictions a child would place on me. I don't want to be pregnant, how awful to think of something else in control of my body. Fat and bloated - no way. Nappies, crying, breast feeding, dependency ... horror. I don't need children; I am not so wonderful that I want my genes to continue, and nor do I want to ensure that I have someone to look after me in my old age. If there is no-one to love me then, then I do not deserve loving. What a very base urge that is, to want children simply so you have a purpose for life and then company in your later years. I'll live in a geriatric commune; that will be okay. I will look after myself, I am self-sufficient.'

I wince now at my misguided sense of moral superiority. I thought that I was so much better than my maternally-driven peers, I thought that I was self-reliant and confident and autonomous. They needed babies; I did not. I think now that I was none of those things. All of these interpretations are constructions, as I said above. I am reconstructing the person that I constructed myself to be many years ago. I am looking at myself from a different place now, a place which now acknowledges that to want to be a mother is acceptable. In this new place, I read my former rejection of motherhood as being indicative of my rejection of myself. I said that I would be a terrible mother because I thought that I was a terrible person. I thought that I was a terrible person because I thought that I was a

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3 Hollway, 1984, p. 238

terrible daughter who had a terrible mother. Because daughterhood was not for me, motherhood could not be also. I told myself that it was not something that I needed: either a mother or a daughter. Both kinds of relationships were overrated and romanticised and untrue.

When my mother died she stopped being something terrible and became someone terribly missed. I could not believe that she had died before we had reconciled our differences - I had never really admitted to myself that I had wanted to do this until after it became an impossibility. I grieve now because I miss my mother, and because I have missed the potential of the relationship that we could have had. I want to tell her so many things. I want to be her daughter now that I have felt what it is like to want to be a mother. But such things are impossible, and so I came to think of myself as someone even more horrible, and even less deserving of the now highly venerated role of being a mother. I could not allow myself to be a mother, I thought, because I had not been a worthy daughter.

This was my stance, and I worked hard to maintain it for several years, until the first construct-shattering thing happened. About four years ago, I thought that I was pregnant. And whilst I was horrified and shocked and unbelieving, there was something inside that was pleased, excited even. Excited - me - at the thought of having a baby? This was simply incredible. Instead of rushing around, working out how I could arrange an abortion in Hobart, worrying that it would not be possible, wondering how I would scrape together the fare to Melbourne, I found myself studying the calendar and contemplating the arrival of a baby. I had tried to put myself through the steps needed to obtain an abortion, and I couldn't. I wanted this baby more than I didn't want it. I had never thought such a feeling possible.

Once I had partially accepted the idea of a baby, my period came. I felt relief, and told everyone how happy I was, what a close call it had been, how hard it would have been to have had an abortion. But I refrained from telling anyone then that I had actually seen myself having the baby. Every time I tried to tell myself I reeled in shock and terror.

And after a while, I forgot it all. I resumed my life (this pregnancy scare had put a stop to everything, or so it seemed), and stopped thinking about babies, on the surface at least. And then my partner had a motor cycle accident, suffered serious head injuries, and lay for several days in the intensive care unit, just living. One night when I sat watching him, the thought flared through my mind that now I would never have children, because the one person with whom I had always thought that children would be possible was about to die. Later, when I was at home, I puzzled over the grief this was causing, for how could I be grieving over never having children with Andrew when I had always said that I was never going to have children with anyone?

Andrew did not die, he recovered and slowly we returned, to an extent, to the kind of life we had had for so long. We are both different; the accident has changed both of us in

many ways. Andrew has always wanted to be a father, and whilst that has not changed for him, I have now realised that the last few years I have been dancing, subtlely, flirtatiously, with the idea of having children. There have been three further occasions in which I thought that I was pregnant, each due to carelessness and momentary reckless abandon. I panicked and worried and prayed for infertility, but at the same time I found myself hoping and dreaming that it would be true. It never was, thankfully.

I now understand that I wanted to become pregnant by 'accident' because that was easier than having to admit to people that I really had capitulated and had decided to have a child. I did not know how to explain to people that I had changed, and because I was so busy berating myself I expected that other people would smother me with a welter of 'I told you so's'. They never did. As I spoke with more people about this study, I have become progressively more honest about my reasons for doing it. And with each more detailed explanation of my confused desires for children and my inability to reconcile these desires with my past rejection of motherhood, I have received more support and encouragement, and an increased feeling of acceptance into a society, a society of mothers. I have felt that other women want me to want to have children, they want me to 'belong' with them. If I say that I have changed my mind, they will not attack me for my contradictory feelings; they will embrace me as they welcome me to the flock. Of course these feelings could be due to my overactive imagination, I could be perceiving an acceptance that is not really there, it could all be a construction of my partially subconscious desire to have children ... but whatever it is, it has meant that I now want to have children much more than I wanted to at the start of the study.

This feeling of wanting approval from others was clearly one of the strongest motives I had for desiring children. There are many instances in my journal where I recorded seeing the attention devoted to pregnant women, and to women with young children, and instantly I felt that I wanted a child. I wanted that attention for myself. I felt that if I had a child I would make my partner, my father, and my partner's parents so immensely happy that I would be forever flooded in their loving approval. It would be glorious.

Closely related to this wish for approval was my occasional sense of being in exile, my feeling that I was being left out of something interesting and exciting. I wanted to join the exclusive society of mothers, I wanted to share in the experience of pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and be able to speak the language of mothers. I wanted the respect that mothers accord to themselves and to others. I felt somehow that I was not quite 'grown up', that my childlessness made me inferior, immature, uninteresting. Having a child would ensure immediate promotion and status.

No-one has ever told me that my childlessness renders me inferior or unworthy. Whilst my family would like me very much to have a child, and have often told me so, they are not virulently disapproving of me now for not being a mother. They would just like it

more if I brought another baby into the family. So what is the matter with me? Why do I want approval so much, and why do I think that having a baby will bring it?

I think that it has a lot to do with my wish for power, for control. As I said earlier, I do not seek power over others; I do not want to control the actions of those around me, but I do wish others to find me intelligent, interesting, engaging, challenging - the list could go on and on, but, in short, I want others to be attracted to me. This would confer a sense of power, the power to influence others' thoughts, feelings and actions in a supposedly positive manner.

When I was younger, I had moments of feeling as though I was powerful. This power came from the experience of being found to be sexually attractive. I remember these moments now with wistful nostalgia, I remember being young, slim, tanned, energetic ... however, I know that at the time I certainly was not wholly satisfied with myself. I did not feel safe within this 'power'. So why do I occasionally hark back to these times? Rosalind Coward wrote in *Our Treacherous Hearts* about the problems of women experiencing power primarily through being the objects of men's sexual desire.

> Not only is women's greatest power still seen as sex, but that sexual power is still essentially passive, courting the approval and response of men. And with the increasing sexualization of culture, a woman is under contradictory pressures: she is still essentially a passive subject, yet she is expected more and more to be defined by her ability to provoke and satisfy a sexual response in men.
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> This deep feminine identification is a highly precarious route to satisfaction for a woman. In a culture where female sexiness is tied up with a certain responsiveness to men's needs (of which the ability to lose weight is a sign), there is little valuing of older women and the maturing body. Several women I talked to described their acute difficulty in coming to terms with ageing. This wasn't just concerned with the difficulty of getting old, because that brought certain satisfactions. There was a constant fear of no longer being valuable, a fear of male contempt, and a self-disgust that their own bodies were undesirable.[4]

I reminisce over the times when I thought that I was the object of men's desire because I do not feel that I will ever be so attractive again. I think now that I am fat and frumpy; I am no Kate Moss, nor will ever be; and whilst intellectually I know that it is dangerous to have such aspirations, I keep judging myself against standards that I will never and could never attain. I know that this thinking is silly and I try to rid my mind of it, but I am not always successful. There are times, still, when I look at myself and despair. But, I sometimes think, if I cannot earn approval for my appearance, I can for having a baby. Then I will receive approval, then I will feel powerful. I will cross the dualism, step over the Madonna/whore divide, and position myself firmly in the 'right' discourse for a thirty-four year old woman - the discourse of motherhood.

But how powerful would I really be? I used to think that to have men desiring me made me powerful, I felt as though I was in control. I was not: these men could remove

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4 Coward, 1992, pp. 160-161

their desire, and that would be it. I could not control them. The ways in which I tried to be desirable I learned from popular culture. I played games, and they were games for men. I think that I am no longer sexually desirable because I do not 'fit' popular culture's definitions of what is a desirable woman. But how do I know that I would fit popular culture's definition of what is a good mother? If I allow my sense of self worth to be determined by how others see me, then I will forever be vulnerable, I will remain a victim of the changing definitions of what constitutes worthiness.

It is very difficult now to be a 'good' mother. My action in becoming a mother may be approved of, but then probably everything I did as a mother would be critically analysed and judged, and ultimately approval would be granted or withheld on the basis of how wholeheartedly I threw myself into the role. Motherhood is another form of control. It has constraints, obligations, limitations, and hidden agendas, rife with the expectations of others, often only revealed once the baby is born. It has become harder, not easier, over the past few decades.

> What is startling is that, despite decades of changing attitudes and employment patterns, there persists a traditional notion of good mothering. Truly good mothering still evokes ideas of total altruism ... however difficult and impossible the ideal, women still experience any falling short of total altruism as personal failure. No wonder everyone feels so guilty ... as more and more mothers work, the notions of the consequences of bad parenting and the duties of good parenting have become more and more alarming. And together with these obligations, duties and inadequacies, which hang over virtually all mothers, many also have a sense of being watched, usually by their own mothers, sisters or other women. One slip-up (in terms of the child's behaviour or educational failures) will be taken as proof that the mother's choices were wrong. Thus women's lives, rather than improving, have become worse.[5]

I do not know if all women suffer the kind of self doubt that I do when they think about becoming a mother.[6] I believe that my doubts are related to my memories of my relationship with my own mother. My guilt for not having been a good enough daughter (I am not really sure what a good daughter would exactly be, only that I was not one), and my fears that I would be resent the impositions of motherhood, arise whenever I seriously contemplate having children. I perceived my mother as having resented, at times, the demands of motherhood; whether she did or not cannot now be determined. My reconstruction of my childhood is tinged with resentment and guilt, and I fear that I would carry these emotions into motherhood.

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5 Coward, 1992, pp. 81-84

6 The friend who read my journal also felt that self-doubt was one of the reasons why she had not had children. She had a stong sense of her own unworthiness, and believed that if she felt better about herself she might not have been so ambivalent about having children. Believing herself to be physically unattractive, (she is not, but it is impossible to convince her of the inaccuracy of her vision) she did not want to create an ugly child who would have the same problems as she'd had growing up. She feared that this child would be angry at her later for having passed on such bad genes.

These negative feelings are further reinforced whenever I see my friends' children being tiresome and demanding. I find obnoxious boy children the most off-putting; one brief encounter with a whining, petulant, obstreperous boy can squash my baby wish instantly. I cannot imagine how I would cope if I had such a child. My visions of being a mother involve gorgeous girls, not beastly boys. What would I do if I didn't love my child? Not all people love their children, just as not all children love their parents.

As easily as I can be dissuaded from motherhood, the sight or thought or image (visual or sensual) of a mother and child can pierce me with a fierce desire for a baby. The intensity of this desire can be quite alarming; I float away in fantasies in which I am immaculately content. Part of the enchantment lies in the idea of loving totally another person, and being loved, unquestioningly, trustingly, by my child. I like the thought of having a baby all of my own, who would see me as the most important person in the world. At times I imagine that looking after a baby would be sensually very fulfilling; there is sometimes something so beautiful and perfect about infants. I feel that for some indiscernible reason I am missing this sensual enjoyment of beauty, and I need it.

My fantasy is fuelled by the desire to do something different, to change my life, not because I do not like my job, but because there are times when I do not really like me. I feel uncertain, I doubt my abilities, I worry that I am not doing a good enough job. I am also exasperated with the temporary nature of my employment, the eternal fretting about possible unemployment, and my consequent lack of control. I could eliminate these fears, I think, in one fell swoop, if I had a baby. I would then be in control of my life. I would have the certainty that I see and envy in some of my friends who are mothers. They feel a 'rightness' in what they are doing. They might still be questioning their abilities as mothers, but they seem to have this innate sense that what they want for their children is right. They know better than anyone else what is right. They can sense that other people might think differently, and they are prepared to an extent to consider these views, but fundamentally they know.

I would love to have that certainty, to feel so sure about myself. It seems so attainable in my dreams, but I suspect that in reality I would trade my insecurities about teaching and studying in for whole new set about motherhood. And there would be no holidays away from these fears! No respite! I would always always be a mother.

I become disenchanted also at the financial impositions of children. Perhaps if I was rich it might not appear so daunting, but I don't want to be a starving struggling mother/drudge. There is so much more that I want. I want to travel, I want to spend a year in France, become fluent in French, then move on to Italy and become a fluent speaker of Italian. I want a new kitchen and bathroom. I want books, clothes, compact discs ... I want to spend my holidays in the sun ... I want a dog ... sometimes, when I'm feeling quite deranged, I want to do a Ph.d. And when I'm even more deranged, I want a baby.

No matter how many rational arguments I marshal up, how strongly I determine not ever to have a baby, this yearning sneaks back. When I have declared that I do not have the patience, the willingness for self-sacrifice, the energy, the commitment, when I am full of a sharp, selfish, materialistic lust to reward myself, I am engulfed with a sense of how good it could be, how happy I could make others and myself, if I surrendered and had a baby.

This desire is not, however, maternal instinct, if we take maternal instinct to be an innate drive to reproduce myself. I do not want to populate the world with little versions of me. I do not feel incomplete without a child, and I can envisage a very satisfying life which does not include motherhood. And yet I perceive that with a child I could receive great approval from others, and enrich my life emotionally and sensually. Positioning myself in the discourses of motherhood could be thus empowering, but it could also be imprisoning. I could become trapped, confined within the boundaries of the physical, practical and financial limitations of a baby, and the idealistic expectations of myself and others. I still have enormous trouble extricating myself from the beauty myth; I do not know what kind of a fight I could put up against the mother myth. I know that my life can be enriched through many other ways which do not offer either such perils, or such passion. I sway between empowerment and imprisonment, liberation and servitude, joy and misery, and remain ambivalent, undecided, confused.

I have contradicted myself over and over again in this chapter. My story goes around in circles, and has no resolution. I wanted one very much, I wanted a strong, forceful conclusion, but I would be dishonest if I claimed to have made up my mind. Whilst I am as undecided about motherhood as I was when I began this study, I now feel that I have a greater understanding of the reasons for my ambivalence. The discourses of motherhood are contradictory; in the final chapter of this study I shall attempt to outline the complexity of the subject positions available for women who choose to become mothers.

Chapter Six

Love and Loss

> The irritable exhaustion faded at the idea of having another baby: it was so exciting to have a baby, to produce another human being out of nowhere - out of the hat so to speak! And then it would all be settled for once and for all. No escape then! And in two or three years' time the baby would be just such another little person as Caroline was now, looking at her with judging eyes. A pang of tired fear went through her. She saw it all so very clearly. That phrase, 'having a baby', which was every girl's way of thinking of a first child, was nothing but a mask to conceal the truth. One saw a flattering image of a madonnalike woman with a helpless infant in her arms; nothing could be more attractive. What one did not see, what everyone conspired to prevent one seeing, was the middle-aged woman who had done nothing but produce two or three commonplace and tedious citizens in a world that was already too full of them.[1]

> ... I certainly had not anticipated such wreathing, dazzling gaiety of affection from her whenever I happened to catch her eye. Gradually I began to realise that she liked me, that she had no option to liking me, and that unless I took great pains to alienate her she would go on liking me, for a couple of years at least. It was very pleasant to receive such uncritical love, because it left me free to bestow love; my kisses were met by small warm rubbery unrejecting cheeks and soft dovey mumblings of delight.
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> Indeed, it must have been in expectation of this love that I had insisted upon having her, or rather refrained from not having her: something in me had clearly known before I did that there would be compensations.[2]

> While we cannot but be engulfed by the categories of our times, self-reflexivity teaches that our discourse is the meaning of our longing. Derrida's 'the always already' means that how we speak and write tells us more about our own inscribed selves, about the way that language writes us, than about the 'object' of our gaze. The trick is to see the will to power in our work as clearly as we see the will to truth.[3]

The data I have analysed in this chapter is from the texts of the interview transcripts, not the monologues. I believed that when I came to describe the discourses of motherhood I had discerned from my readings and interviews, that it was important to return to the 'purer' or less constructed source, the initial interview transcripts, for evidence and illustrations of my perceptions. The transcripts are of course written constructs of spoken (and in some cases written) dialogues, but they are not as crafted and polished as are the monologues in chapter five. I wanted to use the actual words of my participants, rather than their constructed monologues.

After my analysis of the literature related to motherhood, and the interviews I conducted, I discerned two primary discourses. One presupposed that motherhood was empowering - giving women a great sense of their own importance and placing them at the centre of their families, in charge, responsible and capable - it seemed wonderful, fantastic,

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1 Lessing, 1984, p. 303
2 Drabble, 1977, p. 115
3 Lather, 1991, p. 119

it was clearly something that I wanted. The other declared motherhood to be imprisoning, in the never-ending nature of the dreary tasks which mothers had to perform, the overwhelming sense of responsibility which not ever be avoided, delegated, or forgotten. Motherhood appeared to be terrible, a limiting, oppressive drudge - it was clearly something with which I could never cope. On the one hand, to be a mother offered love and power, and on the other, loss and limitations. It seemed, from my readings, that you could not have one without the other; inscribing oneself with the different powers of a mother also meant an entrapment into a kind of bonded labour, a slavery of sorts.

The potency of the desire for motherhood overshadows the realisation of its entrapment, I think. The lure of empowerment is very strong, and motherhood is empowering in many ways. The feeling that having a baby is the right thing to do, that it is 'the natural consequence of marriage and life' (Rebecca), 'another way of fulfilment, the next step so to speak' (Bambi), and 'the fruition of our love, the symbol of this great romance' (Diana), confers to women great confidence and assurance in their choice. There is nothing wrong about having a baby - it is all right. The rightness of this choice is further solidified by the approbation and attention bestowed on women once they are pregnant. '... the reverence with which you're treated ... I think more so than at any other time in my life, I felt not special but extra special, the kind of thing you feel on your birthday.' (Linda) Pregnant women, and the people who so heartily approve of their pregnancy, are thus sharing a 'set of obviousnesses' related to the appropriateness of women having children.[4]

Even more empowering is the idea (or obviousness) that mothers have unique relationships with their children, and that they are the best at looking after them. In fact, mothers are indispensable.

> It makes me feel really useful to someone. It's really the only job in the world where you are indispensable. I don't think anyone can really take the place of a child's mother. This obviously has its disadvantages to some degree but ultimately it's worth it one hundred times over. (Bambi)

> I loved being needed, because children need you rather than want you ... when children are little, they really need you, emotionally they don't survive very well without you. I was very much aware that I had a lot to give, and did, and I really did throw myself into motherhood. I was very conscious of being a good mother, and was very proud of it. (Linda)

> ... the feeling of self worth and power was immense - wonderful, especially in the early stages. Breastfeeding was the most empowering experience. It's hard to describe, the power you get from providing another human being with everything which she needs, being the sole source of survival. (Katherine)

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4 See Davies, 1993, pp. 17-18, 'Correct membership of the social order entails being able to read situations correctly such that what is obvious to everyone else is also obvious to you. It involves knowing how to position yourself as a member of the group who knows and takes for granted what other people know and take for granted in a number of different settings. Althusser uses the term *obviousness* to capture this taken-for-granted quality of the discursive categories, and in particular of the concept of 'subject', through which we construct our lives.'

It is not surprising that becoming a mother can give such a boost to a woman's self esteem. The feeling that they know what is best to do for their children, that this capability is innate, gives women such strength and confidence that they feel they actually change. They can become assertive, and demand things for their children that they would not have demanded if they were speaking only for themselves.

> Now, I feel really strong and capable, I know what I'm doing ... now I assert myself a lot more, I get angry if they're [service providers] incompetent ... before I was more accepting of this, now I'm not ... Before, if I went to the bank, I was just an individual, the bank didn't care, but now, well, the bank doesn't really care, but I'm not a wandering individual, so I make sure the bank does care. You have to look after your baby, so the bank has to look after you, it has to do the right thing for you. (Isabel)

The feeling that they are responsible for their children makes some women become more responsible, stable and settled. 'It gave me the strength to be alone - that is, without a partner. It gave me the impetus to get myself together financially. It made me believe in myself ...' (Madeleine) They feel that they learn more about themselves, and come to question things that without children they might have avoided or ignored.

> ... it's allowed me to discover more about myself ... I've looked at and been through a whole lot of experiences that I wouldn't have been through. Some of the pain - I would have avoided ... (Linda)

> Having had young children, and having taught, it's been a really interesting challenge. I look back and think how I was as a teacher and thought that I knew it all and really I knew nothing basically. And that - children teach you more about yourself than anything else ... (Joy)

Becoming a mother for some women is defining: it tells them, and others, who they are.

> Before, I was doing very interesting work, but a little part of everything, I was just an individual wandering around. Now I am a mother, I know what I am. If I fill out a questionnaire, I say, I am a mother, that's what I am. It's so consuming, so much energy, there's no time to do anything else. (Isabel)

> ... one good thing about motherhood for me, because I didn't have a career ... when people said to me, 'What do you do?' I used to say I was a mother. And I know from talking to other women that it was important for them also ... [for one woman it meant] being able to lift up her head and say she might have left school at sixteen, but she was a mother ... otherwise she was nothing. (Deborahbeth)

Another difference which women can notice in themselves after having children is emotional - they feel that they become more caring, more sensitive, less selfish, more patient, and, for some, more happy. It seems that women can perceive themselves to be 'better' people in some ways once they are mothers. The principal reason for feeling so good about being a mother is, I suspect, the sheer joy which comes from the love mothers

feel for their children. The awe with which mothers spoke of this love, the intensity of their emotions, made me quite envious; I had never felt such selfless 'pure' love for another person, and I could not really envisage what it would be like.

> I firmly believe that your children bring out the real depths of emotions ... I love my children differently, it's really physical, very deep and touchable ... I don't think you can measure it by how you feel before you have children. (Linda)

> It was a really weird (unusual) feeling to love someone so unconditionally - totally! And know that they would really love me back. (Madeleine)

> I didn't have any of this maternal business beforehand, but on Gemma's birth, I just, I don't know what happened, it just gushed ... it hit me, I can remember looking at her in the bassinette and thinking, 'How am I ever going to let go?' She was about one day old! Six hours old! (Joy)

> Total elation. I can remember the events leading up to the birth, the previous day and night, and almost all of the labour and birth more vividly than I have ever known. Fifteen months later and I can still see Deborah when they handed her to me. I have never felt emotions like that ever before, and there was an incredible sense of control. (Katherine)

> I don't think it ever changes, you're a mother until you die. (Deborahbeth)

> ... being a mother makes me feel (apart from useful) as though my life is a lot richer in love and emotion and experience, so I feel pretty good about myself, as I mentioned before, I feel even happier than I was before (and I was very happy then). (Bambi)

The positions available to women in this discourse, that motherhood is empowering, appear thus enriching, ennobling, inspiring. Women, or more specifically, mothers, are placed at the centre of this discourse as its subject - they are in control, they have power, they are in charge of the objects of the discourse, the children. This discourse is somewhat analogous to the have/hold discourse of heterosexual relationships, as outlined in chapter three, in which women were the subjects, men the reluctant objects, relinquishing their freedom for secure sex in a monogamous relationship.

But just as the power conferred to a women from being in a relationship with a man can be transitory and illusory, so can the power conferred to mothers. A woman as subject of the have/hold discourse is dependent upon a man, and in the motherhood discourse, she is dependent upon children. Power that is based on the needs of others is not necessarily secure, because others' needs can change. Children do as a general rule need their mothers, but not all children, and few for a lifetime. And children may not need their mothers in the ways which their mothers want them to. The consequences of such miss-matches between a mother's and her child's needs can be devastating.

> When Gabrielle went to school, I went through a period where emotionally I hit the bottom. When I look back on it now I can't believe I did it, because it was different to how I was before and how I've been since. I really felt unneeded ... what I felt more than anything was a real loss and where my children needing me had been the very essence of my existence and having given up work

> and there wasn't a lot of other stimulation in my life ... I got to the lowest I'd ever been. I got to the stage when I thought I had terminal cancer. I really went through what was a real deep depression ... failing motherhood would have been failing everything I'd been doing - so acknowledging that it could have been anything to do with being unhappy at home, anything of those things, would have been acknowledging failure ... there was no question that what I was doing wasn't right. (Linda)

> What I hadn't anticipated was that the children would respond in ways that I hadn't thought about. I suppose I'd thought of being a mother as looking after, moulding, creating these perfect beings, yet these little beings don't want to be made perfect, who sort of resist, and cause you problems, and are sick, and do all these things that you haven't anticipated. That sort of destroyed part of the notion that I had of what motherhood was. It was good ... it shows you something of yourself, and if you can learn from that you can grow from it ... it takes quite a long time to get to that stage. (Diana)

The power conferred to mothers is also transitory in that it does not exist in the public sphere. Mothers are not recognised in economic or political terms, they are accorded no status for staying home and raising children. Such devaluing can cause enormous conflict and tension for women as they wrestle with decisions concerning remaining in or re-entering the paid work force. Women may want to work, so as to feel valued and appreciated in the public domain, but they feel guilty, because then they are depriving their children of their loving, specialist care.

> ... when you went to a party and met people and they'd say the usual 'What do you do?' and you'd say that you were a wife and a mother, and the shutters would come down and the people would say to themselves that she had nothing to contribute and so they'd move on. (Rebecca)

> Societal standards say that work is the measure ... What do you do? This is where I think women are really trapped. (Linda)

> I really feel that if you want to have children, you've got to be prepared to stay with them because they're so little and they want their mother, I really think that Mi would like to be with me, or her father, someone who's there all the time, not chipping and changing ... society says that you should go out to work, because you're not fulfilled, you're not a real woman unless you go out to work and have a career. (Isabel)

> ... all the hidden things come in and you find yourself changing so much so that the career orientated person that you thought you were is no longer. And that's a really rude shock. And you find yourself so caught up in it, you're making decisions for the here and now that are going to affect you in ten years' time. (Joy)

Women can be empowered by being declared the best carers for children, but this traps them, because the status of mother counts for little in the world of economics and politics. The feelings of being devalued and unappreciated, and the guilt and anxiety which accompany a decision to join the paid work force, are imprisoning of women. The confidence, assertiveness and self-esteem mothers feel are thus undermined by the 'obviousnesses' of the motherhood is imprisoning discourse.

One of the most imprisoning aspects of this discourse is the feeling mothers have of being constantly held in judgement, by themselves and others, for their mothering skills. Even when mothers recognise the impossibility of ever being a 'perfect' mother, they still question their abilities and worry that they are not doing a good enough job.

> I thought I had all the skills required and basically I did but, having someone totally dependent on you (only) twenty-four hours a day is a different story to helping others look after children. When James (baby) wasn't sleeping/feeding etc properly or wasn't settling I would lose confidence in myself and doubt my ability to be a good mother. (Bambi)

> ... I just felt so involved and I so much wanted to do the right thing, and I had no idea what was the right thing. I think I made purgatory for myself when actually it could have been quite blissful. But I couldn't allow it to be blissful because I wanted to do whatever was the right thing. And I didn't ever feel that I was doing the right thing. (Diana)

> Traditionally, if children misbehave, the first thing people say is about the mother, she's all the time doing such and such ... you're really judged, and so you judge yourself, and think about yourself, and when your children play up, you wonder, sort of question whether it's something you've done ... I can remember feeling really under pressure when they were little ... And I can imagine, only imagine how you'd feel if your baby died, how you would blame yourself, because you do, when they cry. (Linda)

> If anything the media romanticises it all which makes it almost impossible. How can you have a clean house, beautiful clothes, beautiful body, beautiful child that doesn't cry, man that changes nappies and laughs when he goes to the supermarket? (Madeleine)

Mothers judge themselves, and judge others, but many find it difficult to appraise or question motherhood. It is as though they are silenced on this point. They are reluctant to critically analyse motherhood, for to suggest dissatisfaction with being a mother might suggest that they are unhappy with their children. And this could be taken to mean that they do not truly and deeply love their children, and that would surely be a mortal sin for a mother to commit. Such silencing could become a prison for mothers unable perhaps even to admit to themselves their occasional dissatisfaction with being a mother.

> ... there's a certain distastefulness if you ran around saying that you hated being a mother, once you were a mother, the effect on the children, I would hate my mother to have run around with a big placard saying 'Motherhood is the absolute pits'. I wouldn't do that to my children, I might question aspects of motherhood, and there's been times in my life when I've questioned not motherhood, but the role, but never ever have I questioned how right it was to have children. (Linda)

> Isn't it funny, the silence that there is about it? My grandmother was not silent, she said that she had never wanted children, everything that was to do with sex, the bearing of children, the having of children, the bringing up of children, my grandmother hated it all, and she didn't recommend it to anyone. And sex was something that men loved doing and women just had to put up with it if they wanted to be married. Marriage seemed to be a good thing, but having children was definitely not a good thing at all. And she was very explicit about it. My mother was equally explicit that my grandmother was totally wrong, and that a woman's complete fulfilment lay in having children ... I find it difficult. You know the Dale Spender chapter where she writes on motherhood and she talks about how women are silent, as far as motherhood is concerned, well that in a

> sense, you are in a really ambivalent situation with your daughter. Do you say I went through agony, childbirth is just terrible, I screamed and screamed the whole time, but it was really worth it because now I have you, and here you are, my friend, and I'm here with you while you give birth to your baby, that sort of thing ... Most women don't talk about it, so ... (Diana)

> I don't know if birth is the most difficult thing. To me it's more important that women are silent about what actually happens to you when you become a mother. (Deborahbeth)

What does happen to women when they become mothers involves coping with the devastating changes that must be made in order to accommodate a baby. Adjusting to these changes is extremely difficult. Having another person totally reliant upon them, always and forever, can be quite frightening and disturbing, as is losing one's own independence. Mothers can feel a loss of carefreeness; they can no longer take risks, but must always be cautious and consider the consequences of any of their actions.

> I don't think I thought about the consequences either, and that responsibility, because when I had Rosie I suddenly became overwhelmed at the sense of this thing that didn't give me an instant surge of mother love like you read in the magazines that you're going to feel ... [she] was dependent on me. You couldn't put it back, or put it away ... (Rebecca)

> All the way through I did not enjoy motherhood at all, in terms of the day to day responsibilities. Having to go to the supermarket, do all the little things, the washing-up, the domestic responsibilities, I didn't enjoy it, particularly being in the house, not being able to just get up and go. I felt trapped. (Deborahbeth)

> ... I also thought that it would be so lovely to have a baby. I thought that it would be a great change to our lives, everyone says that it's a change, but you don't realise how much of a change until it happens. It's a bloody devastating thing! (Isabel)

> It's [being a mother] just life - you know? Sometimes it's easy - Sometimes it's impossible! ... People don't see all the shit! I don't think you know anything until you've actually experienced it. Same with everything really. Sometimes I want to walk away from all the responsibility but then I want to take Isabella with me!! 'If you leave me can I come too!' (Madeleine)

To add to the overwhelming sense of responsibility and entrapment, women may also have to adjust to being viewed differently by others. They question how others see them, and some feel that they have become sexually unattractive. Becoming a mother can mean a loss of identity, as a woman senses that she is no longer seen as an individual in her own right, but only her child (or children's) mother.

> Sexual or other, you don't feel attractive. (Rebecca)

> I wasn't prepared for the tiredness and continuous ongoing nature of the work of being a mother (that is, twenty-four hours a day) even your sleeping time isn't your own!! I thought I would adjust to motherhood in respect of the above a lot easier than I did. I thought being a mother would be very fulfilling and it is, however there was a stage where I really started to wonder who I was because my life had changed so quickly and so dramatically. I wondered how other people

> saw/thought of me - if they thought I was doing a good job - was I doing a good job? Was this all there was for the next twenty years ... (Bambi)

> ... how easy it is to lose your identity ... the word mum is really non-sexy ... I really love being a mother, and I love my children, and as they've matured, I not only really love them, I really like them. They're people who I'd choose to be friends with. I love them, but I also like them. But I hate only being known as their mum. People do that, and it's a bit like 'wife', you do lose your identity. (Linda)

Women losing their sense of identity ... Women being judged ... Women being entrapped ... The discourse that motherhood is imprisoning shares these features with the discourse of the male sexual drive, as described by Wendy Hollway, as discussed above in chapter three. In both discourses women are objects, they are viewed, judged, contained. Women enter these discourses, and are complicit in their maintenance, expecting rewards, power, security, love, which they do receive, to an extent. But they are never really safe, because as the objects of another's gaze they are always subject to possible disfavour and dismissal.

In the male sexual drive discourse, women balance between being seen as sexually attractive without being thought sexually wanton. If they are not attractive enough, they are dismissed as cold, frigid, boring, ugly - drags. If they are too attractive, if their sexuality is too overt, then they are dismissed for being sexually promiscuous, morally reprehensible - slags. Finding a safe spot between these two extremes is not easy. Women can find themselves unable to express sexuality freely, whether it be homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, celibate, bound as they are within the confines of the male sexual drive discourse and the have/hold discourse. Their reputations are always at stake. A slip, a slide, to one end of the spectrum, as perceived by those in judgement, can mean limited opportunities for becoming a wife and mother and being accorded the semblance of power and status as attained in the have/hold discourse. Women need to be the objects of the male sexual drive discourse in order to become the subjects of the have/hold discourse.

Mothers are similarly constrained by the boundaries of the discourses of motherhood. Becoming the subjects of the motherhood is empowering discourse entails acceptance of the belief that mothers are the best care givers for their children. Thus empowered and enriched, mothers may become prisoners of their homes, unable to leave their children without suffering guilt. The work required in looking after children is endless, and much of it tedious and unrewarding. But if a mother does not throw all her energies into these tasks, or passes some on to another, then she may be declared a neglectful, poor mother. If she stays at home, devoting herself to her children and domestic tasks, then she can be deemed unimportant, of no value - just a housewife. If she goes out to paid work, seeking the status and power that is accorded to one in the public domain, she is uncaring, cold, heartless, unfeminine - a very bad mother, who lets her children suffer to fulfil her own

needs. Like the slag/drag dualism, mothers walk a tightrope, teetering between being found a boring, earthmother/housewife/drudge or a selfish, superbitch/dragon.

It is in being the object of one discourse and the subject of another, I think, that the ambivalence and contradictions about being a mother lie. Finding a position from which the empowerment of becoming a mother can be shared, along with the imprisoning demands of the role, will not be easy. The subjects of the motherhood is imprisoning discourse are not only men, who benefit, and lose, by not having an equal role in the raising of their children. Children benefit, as they enjoy the love and attention from their mothers, and a capitalist economy can better prosper when half its work force are not paid for performing essential duties. But along with men, children, a capitalist economy, and the patriarchal structures of society, are women, also complicit as the subjects of this discourse. It can be frightening to see how our own beliefs and practices embed us in dualisms which oppress and restrict. Yet it is exciting to realise that the possibilities for change are also within our grasp.

> Central to any feminist deconstruction is an excitement about discovering the very mainsprings of power that have held women and other marginalised groups in place. It may also be depressing to discover how subtle, how invisible, how pervasive, and *how much our own* are the discursive mechanisms and structures through which we have learned to know our place and to remain within it. But to know how oppression is achieved is the essential first step to knowing how to change it.[5]

The purpose of this study was not to provide a detailed plan for how to change parenting practices so as to end the oppression of women. It was to attempt to come to a better understanding of the contradictory forces which make motherhood seem so terribly desirable and so terribly awful. Using the discourses of heterosexuality as a lens through which to focus on the discourses of motherhood, I can see that it is the ways which women position themselves within these discourses, as the subjects of some and the objects of others, that makes being a mother so complicated, confusing and ambivalent. I do not believe that feminist discourse has managed yet to accommodate these conflicting ambiguities, the unresolved paradoxes related to being a feminist and being a mother. Rosalind Coward is one feminist and mother who has begun the work of attaining a better understanding of these paradoxes, but there is much more which remains to be done.

I still do not know if I will have children or not, and, if I do, I do not know where, or if, I would end up on the drudge/dragon tightrope. But knowing that the tightrope is there, and knowing that it is a construct of desires and contradictory discursive practices, makes any attempt to stay off it easier. Disregarding this tightrope, and communicating this disregard to others, may then be one step towards breaking down the dualisms of

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5 Davies, 1993, p. 8

mother/father, female/male, and so imagining and creating new narratives for us to live our lives by.

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Appendices: Transcripts of Interviews

Appendix One

Group Discussion

Diana Maybe we can talk first about how we felt about being pregnant.

Rebecca I felt really excited, I wanted to get pregnant, because I'd had an abortion and I felt really guilty about it, so when I got pregnant I was excited, and then I was fearful, that Rosie would be abnormal as a punishment for the abortion. And that was really horrible.

Patrick So were you anxious throughout the pregnancy?

Rebecca I was, I kept thinking that if she's not right it would all be my fault, because I should never have had an abortion in the first place. But I was still really excited.

Diana And were there any other reasons why you were excited?

Rebecca Maybe I was thinking that this was it, this was the ever-after, like the get married, live happily ever after, this was it, have your baby ... I also thought that pregnancy was the natural consequence of marriage and life.

Diana I thought like that, because when Oliver and I were first married the thing that I wanted to do was have a baby. And I thought that this would then be the fruition of our love, the symbol of this wonderful romance. I can look back now and see the construction, the romance story in all the *Seventeen* magazines I ever read, in all the stories I ever heard, but I thought that it was something deeply natural and real, that this was going to be, that this would cement the love, the symbol of this great passion and love. And that was more important to me than actually being a mother. I don't think that I thought too much about the consequences, I just thought about the baby as symbolising a great love.

Rebecca I don't think I thought about the consequences either, and that responsibility, because when I had Rosie I suddenly became overwhelmed at the sense of this thing that didn't give me an instant surge of mother love like you read in the magazines that you're going to feel ... wonderful, even so, was dependent on me. You couldn't put it back, or put it away - did you feel that?

Diana Oh, definitely ... What did you feel?

Elizabeth I got pregnant because I was living with someone who didn't approve of the twentieth century, including contraception. And so at seventeen I ... being alone in a strange country ... I stayed with him, and we attempted the rhythm method ... he was actually a medievalist, in fact when I went into labour he recited the 'Ballad of the White Horse', over and over again.

Diana That must have been comforting!

Elizabeth So that's why I got pregnant, and when I was pregnant I was faced with the situation of telling my parents. I was seventeen and the idea was that I would go to university. I didn't know how to tell them, so I went over for a visit, and I still didn't know how to tell them, so I started crocheting this baby rug. It went on and on, the rug got bigger and bigger, and nobody twigged at all. My grandmother came over and she apparently had an idea but didn't want to say anything, and the rug got bigger and bigger, and I still didn't say anything. One afternoon there was this program that came on

television called 'Beauty and the Beast', where people wrote in, and one woman wrote in to say that her teenage daughter was pregnant, and it seemed a good opportunity, and so I told her, and she promptly burst into tears. My parents said to me that whatever you do, don't feel that you have to get married, we'll get you an abortion, and I promptly went back and got married. I was living in New Zealand at the time. So I went back and tried to do all the appropriate things that mothers do, but I'd never held a baby in my life, I knew nothing about children, I thought you had to do something to make children talk, I didn't know that they learnt .... and so I didn't want to confess that I didn't know how to make babies talk, and ... I went to all the pre-natal classes, and learnt how to breathe and everything, but then when I went into labour ... I remember being furious with my mother because she'd said that she had felt discomfort, and it was agony ... I remember my husband was in there with me when the baby was born, and that was quite good, but then I was separated, put back in this room, and told to sleep, and I couldn't sleep because I was so excited, I lay awake all night. The next morning I sat up, waiting for this baby, I didn't know how to hold a baby, the baby was wheeled in, and I sat up, and this baby was a girl, and I distinctly remembered giving birth to a boy. I made the comment, and the nurse said, "Oh, sorry, it's the wrong baby."

Rebecca I thought you were going to say .. When Rosie was born, they said, "You've got a nice healthy girl," and I said, "No, it's a boy!" And the umbilical cord, I had no concept ... I thought it was a penis ... And later when Julian ... I couldn't believe it was so small, I thought there was something wrong with it.

Elizabeth So when they finally wheeled in the right baby, I had this half-hearted smile on my face, I almost expected them to have got it wrong again. So basically it was a wrong career move for me. All the way through I did not enjoy motherhood at all, in terms of day to day responsibilities ... I didn't mind that, but having to go to the supermarket, do all the little things, the washing up, the domestic responsibilities, I didn't enjoy it, and most significantly being in the house, not being able to just get up and go. I felt trapped.

Diana I think trapped is a very good word to describe it. Despite what I might say are the joys and rewards...

Elizabeth I'd just like to contrast that with how I spent my weekend, which was going around to visit my son who's looking after a matric teacher's house, a cottage, and we just lay around all afternoon, it's a really beautiful place, and talked, and lit the fire, and I felt like I was eighteen again. It was just terrific.

Diana How old is he?

Elizabeth Nearly twenty.

Diana It's taken twenty years to get to that stage .. and even with mine, I find that a rare moment. You have them and they're very special, but they don't happen enough.

Joy I was thirty five when I got pregnant, and I'd never thought much about becoming pregnant, I didn't ever think I would have a baby, and I think everyone else thought that too. So no-one really believed me, and I didn't really believe me either when I realised that I might be, and having been very active and what I thought was career orientated, it was a rude shock to the system. And I was very frightened, I didn't know whether to be happy - I think I cried - I didn't know whether to be elated or really upset.

Diana So you didn't decide ...

Joy I suppose I did - I feel at the other end of the fairy tale, the romance, I didn't ever think I'd have a baby, and I didn't feel fussed about having a baby, but I got to a point in my career, a stalemate I suppose, anything, a change was required, it just seemed to be the change. To say it wasn't planned, the baby was planned I suppose, but I didn't believe I'd

have ... we just seemed to ... difficult to get pregnant, I'd been off the pill for a length of time, it was great ... It was a rude shock in a way when the reality ... and no-one would believe me, John wouldn't believe me, that I was pregnant.

Rebecca How did you feel about that?

Joy I could understand, because he had wanted to have children, and he'd say to everybody that we'd left it too late, basically, and I'd say that it was just as well that I we'd left it till now, for me to be able to cope with the whole thing. I had one friend who said that I might like to have an abortion, and I was horrified at that thought at the time, I couldn't have dealt with that then.

Diana I think that it's interesting that the longer Oliver and I left it, the more difficult it became to actually make the decision. I was all for it immediately, the consummation of this great passion, but the longer we went on without it, and had established a very nice, quite exciting and comfortable life-style, the more difficult it was to change that, and eventually I decided, because I thought I should, in the end, not as a consummation of great love, but because it was expected. One got married in order to have children, we'd been married for so many years and it was time to have the family that one had got married for. And that's such a conventional reason for ... the passion had gone, I don't think I had any deep desire for motherhood then, I think that had passed, but I did feel that it was something that was going to be ... I suppose I assumed it was part of being married, and being part of a family, and so it was because of that that I went off the pill, and thought that it would be quite nice if I got pregnant some time in the future and got pregnant immediately.

Rebecca I was caught up in that myth too, because Chris didn't want children, and when I found out after we were married that came as a huge shock to me because marriage meant children. The two were linked, and I couldn't believe he wouldn't have told me before we got married, because that was just ... So I contrived my first pregnancy, he agreed that I could go off the pill, on the condition that I found a satisfactory alternative means of contraception, so I went to Dr Braddon, who was, who I'd been told was a good Catholic, into having lots of children, and told him the position, and said what Chris had said, and he explained how the rhythm method worked, and I went back and told Chris, and he was already to abstain, and ... Rosie was a flagon of red wine on a Saturday night..... I don't know that we necessarily drank it all.....

Oliver Joy, I'm interested in how you decided to have another child, so soon after the first, when the first seemed to ...

Joy It was just - it was real trauma .... my aim was to pretend to everyone that this pregnancy was not going to interfere with my life whatsoever. And so I carried on, I participated in all the sporting activities, I windsurfed until I was about eight and a half months and fell off the board because I couldn't balance, I played tennis until the week before, I just really pretended, I had a lot of grave fears about losing my independence, and in a way I suppose I ... I didn't have any of this maternal business beforehand, but on Gemma's birth, I just, I don't know what happened, it just gushed ... it hit me, I can remember looking at her in the bassinette and thinking, "How am I ever going to let go?" She was about one day old! Six hours old! It was just incredible, having had absolutely nothing, and I suppose in the end fitting in with the expectations that we'd been married for thirteen years and perhaps really we should do something ... It was a really rude shock.

Diana I didn't have any of that.

Rebecca No, neither did I. I find it really interesting ... there was no instant surge.

Joy I'd looked at all the negatives, how I was going to be tied down by this little bundle, my sister had six children, I used to leave her house thinking.... that was enough. I didn't ever see myself in that position, I was never in the house.

Diana So you wanted the feeling again, after having the experience?

Joy No, not at all, it was a totally different thing, having experienced the birth, it was an amazing thing, and from then on, having become pregnant, finally accepted it. I accepted Gemma when she was born, basically.

Diana You wanted that experience again?

Joy No, the second child is a totally different thing, the first one was the big, the highlight, the second one ... Who's this little person going to play with, sort of thing. Once again, it appeared that I'd had difficulty conceiving, we didn't take precautions, and I was once again very surprised. It was a real shock, again. So the second pregnancy was a totally different thing.

Rebecca Did you start precautions after the second?

Joy After the second, definitely. John had a vasectomy, within a very short space of time. But it was a really different thing because I didn't like the thing of motherhood. We went to natural childbirth classes, and had to draw, imagine what it would be like, once the baby arrived, and I drew a picture of myself at the sink with a ball and chain around my neck. But I became a very dedicated mum, very dedicated. And I really enjoyed it, I really enjoyed the change, perhaps if I'd had another career that might have been the same, but for me, I was at a stage in my personal development where I really needed a big change and for me it was wonderful. It was wonderful discovering new people, it was really challenging going into new situations, meeting different people, just being around mums, but I also found a strong need to be with other people, totally separate from mothers and babies, whatever.

Diana I didn't enjoy it, and I think that was my greatest disappointment, in that I felt an almost overwhelming love for the child, whatever love actually means, not a surge of motherhood, for both, which I still feel, and sometimes I find that so difficult to cope with, I can't believe the strength of it, but at the same time that didn't give me much joy, because of being trapped by their existence and the knowledge that for twenty four hours, every day for the rest of my life I was going to be aware that ... well, the first one was the greatest shock, but it was going to exist forever, be a part of me forever, and I didn't know if I was going to be able to cope with that sort of responsibility. I found it absolutely overwhelming, I hadn't - it's something as a child that you don't realise how much parents, well maybe other parents don't, I don't know, I just felt so involved and I so much wanted to do the right thing, and I had no idea what was the right thing. I think I made purgatory for myself when actually it could have been quite blissful. But I couldn't allow it to be blissful because I wanted to do whatever was the right thing. And I didn't ever feel that I was doing the right thing. What I hadn't anticipated was that the children would respond in ways that I hadn't thought about. I suppose I'd thought of being a mother as looking after, moulding, creating these perfect beings, yet these little beings don't want to be made perfect, who sort of resist, and cause you problems, and are sick, and do all these things that you haven't anticipated. That sort of destroyed part of the notion that I had of what motherhood was. It was good ... it shows you something of yourself, and if you can learn from that you can grow from it ... it takes quite a long time to get to the stage.

Joy It's interesting, I found, perhaps because I was older, I met a lot of women who had had careers, who were in similar positions, and you did make the most of it. Gemma went everywhere with me, she was an easy baby. I really enjoyed the free time, the time I had for myself. I could handle it for a couple of years, but things were difficult with two children, the logistics of doing study, and career, changed things dramatically.

Diana I found two no worse than one. That was an interesting thing for me. The second one was such a placid child, he's not now, but he was then, and he fitted in to the

routine that I'd established. Still the overall restraint on me, and the restraint I put on myself, existed. I suppose one of the things I felt ... was that for me, motherhood hasn't got any easier, even though my children are now twenty three and twenty two, and they've been living with me all the time, there's barely been a time, several nights, when I've been without them.

Rebecca So although it hasn't got any easier, does that mean that you would be glad when you got home tonight and there was no Teresa in the lounge?

Diana One part of me says that I'd be thoroughly joyful that they were going, the other part of me says that I'd be devastated.

Rebecca Yes, that's what I sort of imagine.

Diana And it's almost worse now thinking of them going, in that, because they're the age they are, we have experiences such as Elizabeth has described, when you've actually got a friend, and I feel much more of a friend right now with my daughter than I do with my son. Though with my son, over his existence, I've had much closer times, and much more frustration with Teresa. With Teresa I have this very tense love-hate relationship. But at the moment we're more like friends, and so her loss to me is going to be irremediable. I'm not sure how I'm going to cope with her actually going. And the older she gets the more I feel that, because you feel that you have a friend, an ally, in her case a feminist person who is supportive of issues of social justice, there's someone in the home to support those things against a male bastion of patriarchy.

Elizabeth It really changes the dynamics in the home. My son left last year to travel interstate, and at first it was wonderful, just two adults in the house for the first time, and instead of being in the kitchen at five o'clock, I could be out going for a walk, or having a drink, it was fantastic. But it also meant ... it really changes the dynamics of ... with your partner. I'd been used to having someone else to talk to, if .... wasn't around, or if things weren't going well, and just as I'd got used to that, ... and that was a different sort of experience ... But I was thinking earlier, one good thing about motherhood for me, because I'm unqualified ... I didn't have a career, I mean, no profession, and that's what I'd been working for, ever since I was born, go to university, have a career, but still I thought I was going to get married too, my parents ... but it meant that when people said to me, "What do you do?" I used to say that I was a mother. And I know from talking to other women that was important to them too. And one of the situations which I talked to other women was when I was pregnant the second time, and that was when I had a little touch of what you could term maternal feeling. Unfortunately after I found out that I was pregnant I had a miscarriage, I was put in a hospital room with women who'd had hysterectomies, and there we were, and we could hear the new born babies crying out, and one of the women talked about how it meant that she could lift up her head in society again ... that's what she'd lost ... being able to lift up her head and say she might have left school at sixteen, but she was a mother ... otherwise she was nothing.

Rebecca Did any of you get the feeling that when you went to a party and met people and they'd say the usual "What do you do?" and you'd say that you were a wife and a mother, and the shutters would come down and the people would say to themselves that she had nothing to contribute and so they'd move on?

Joy Very much. I used to say, I used to be really glad that I was at uni, and first of all I'd say that I was a teacher on leave, and later on I said that I was a part-time student. And I always say that first before I say that I am a mother ..

Diana I never said I was a mother, I was of that generation when everyone was a mother. You just had to be a mother.

Joy It was more as if to be a mother was a stigma. And that was something ... I always felt that I had to prove something.

Diana One of the things that happened to me was that I hadn't actually wanted to be pregnant, the first time. I thought that if it happened, it happened. And then when I was about eight weeks pregnant, it looked as if I was going to lose the baby, and that was one of the most devastating experiences of my life, and I don't know why. I hadn't even wanted the baby, well I felt I hadn't wanted the baby, and so I don't know the psychology of that ... The doctor sent me home to go to bed, and while I was in bed the man landed on the moon, and there I was trying to preserve this baby, watching men on the moon, and every time I got up it was as if I was going to lose the baby again, and every time it happened I was equally devastated, it was just terrible. In the meantime Oliver was in the library looking up statistics, which was really very good, he'd get either the latest statistics or the latest medical article, while I was there with my feet up trying not to lose the baby. And that was devastating, I couldn't explain why I felt like that. The other interesting thing was when Teresa was born with a lump on her head, and I thought about that when you said that you thought that your baby would be malformed ... That was a terrible experience, and I don't know how women cope who have really deformed or....

Joy That's something that bothered me, your biological clock is running out ... We had one child, and everything being okay, I was quite concerned, and yet, pregnancy ... but I refused to have any kind of test. And I could not explain why, I would have said then, I would have taken it as meant to be, but when you look at the reality ...

Diana That was the same, Teresa was born with this lump, my response, the doctor said that it was a malformation of the artery, and we'll operate on her when she's six pounds. So they operated on her, this horrendous operation which took hours and she was all right, we got her home again, took her to the surgeon, and the surgeon said that you'd be pleased to know that it wasn't malignant. Why hadn't I thought? It had never occurred to me, here's this great lump on my baby's head, and no-one had mentioned, and I hadn't thought of it. Why wouldn't I have thought of it? Into the next pregnancy, which happened almost immediately after the first one, and I didn't really worry about it, I can't say it was a preoccupation, and yet the first question I asked the doctor when the baby was born was, "Are there any lumps?" And he looked at me as though ... I'm sure that [the experience with Teresa needing an operation] influenced my response to the baby - I wanted this perfect baby, it was meant to be the most perfect baby that was every born. What was funny was that the next baby was the most perfect baby, and by the second you don't care so much.

Joy During pregnancy I felt horrible, absolutely revolting. With Gemma I used to be sick in the evenings, which was okay, it meant I could teach during the day and be sick at night. With Zac I was absolutely floored, I couldn't do anything for about fourteen weeks, and I think I resented that a lot. I think I resented the fact that I gained weight very easily with him and I felt that my body would never be the same again. The only gratifying thing was that Gemma was so accommodating, she'd get into bed with me and read books, and entertain herself. I'd lounge around, I couldn't do a thing. If I'd been teaching, it would have been such a different story, I wouldn't have been able to teach.

Diana I hated everything about pregnancy.

(Discussion about experiences, mostly horrible, of childbirth - shaving, enemas, stirrups, unwanted drugs, inadequate information, pain, male doctors...)

Diana Elaine, would like to talk about your decision not to have children?

Elaine I chose not to have children, I don't know why, I didn't feel that I had to prove myself by becoming a mother.

Diana From early on?

Elaine Right back, from as early as I can remember. When we were married, and I discussed this before we were married, and he felt the same, so we went on and got married. Things were fine, and then after eighteen years he went off with a woman who had two children.

Diana Do you think they will have children?

Elaine They have had one.

Diana How did you feel about that?

Elaine Generally I don't care. At the time when I found out, she was six weeks off from having the baby, a friend told me, no-one else had bothered to, and her children were there when she told me so I had to keep my emotions in check, I didn't want to say anything in front of her kids ... I had a fairly difficult night, that night, a few tears, I was a bit crabby the next morning, but I got myself off to school with no hassle. And then it didn't bother me again until the same friend rang me to say that the baby had arrived, and she rang on a Thursday night because she knew that a woman friend would be there. This other friend could tell by the conversation what had happened, and when I hung up the phone she came straight over and put her arms around me and said, "Is everything all right?" I burst into tears, and ever since I couldn't care less. It was just the emotion at the time. Really I don't care, what they wanted to do, fine, I'm not envious of her at all, I wouldn't swap places with her for anything. I'm quite happy with my life as it is.

Elizabeth Do you think being a teacher helped?

Elaine I wonder ... get rid of the maternal instinct that way ... perhaps if I didn't have contact with children in any other way perhaps I would have got to the stage where I felt clucky, but I never got to that stage.

Elizabeth I know of another teacher who says that she's quite happy to be with children during the day, and that's ...

Diana I can see that if I was in Elaine's situation I could be, no, one story that I could tell myself, that would make me absolutely furious, is that I had constructed this perfect life without children, and I had thought that the person I was with had wanted that, and that now I had actually been deprived of what ... And they are all stories that we tell ourselves.

Elizabeth ... constructions of meaning that can be changed at any time...

Elaine I didn't feel any pressure from society generally that I had to be a mother, because I was married.

Rebecca ... becoming a mother was a consequence of being a wife.

Diana Well for the Royal Family it is. You can see why Princess Diana, in order to secure that link - how secure it is, I don't know - it's fairly secure, I'd say her son is going to be the king one day, that's secure - so you do that as quickly as you can.

Rebecca Did you get a period at all when people asked you about whether you were having children?

Elaine Not very often, which was probably a good thing.

Diana What about your parents?

Elaine No, they were really very good. I think Mum probably knew how I felt, and she didn't ever try to pressurise me. I found out years later that she never really wanted to have kids either, I was their little bundle of surprise. But they went ahead and had a second one, so ...

Diana Isn't it funny, the silence that there is about it? My grandmother was not silent, she said that she had never wanted children, everything that was to do with sex, the bearing of children, the having of children, the bringing up of children, my grandmother hated it all, and she didn't recommend it to anyone. And sex was something that men loved doing and women just had to put up with it if they wanted to be married. Marriage seemed to be a good thing, but having children was definitely not a good thing at all. And she was very explicit about it. My mother was equally explicit that my grandmother was totally wrong, and that a woman's complete fulfilment lay in having children.

Elaine I didn't feel that at all.

Diana And yet what it interesting with my mother and grandmother is that my grandmother was a much better companion than my mother.

Joy I found a lot of criticism, unspoken criticism I suppose, for not wanting to have children. I think ... we travelled a lot, did a lot, were involved in a lot of sport, we had a lot going and we did things independently of each other and we did things together. So we had quite a good balance. But particularly with John's family, there was this sort of ... Mum just gave up, I think she, probably because my sister had so many.

Diana Do you think that there is with some women this feeling that I've been through it all, I've suffered, why shouldn't you?

Joy Definitely. If you say to an older person, some people, not all women, if you say something, well their kids have had it too, there's just nothing, you might as well just say that you've washed your socks today.

Diana I find it difficult. You know the Dale Spender chapter where she writes on motherhood and she talks about how women are silent, as far as motherhood is concerned, well that in a sense, you are in a really ambivalent situation with your daughter. Do you say I went through agony, childbirth is just terrible, I screamed and screamed the whole time, but it was really worth it because now I have you, and here you are, my friend, and I'm here with you while you give birth to your baby, that sort of thing ... Most women don't talk about it, so ...

Rebecca You get conditioned to forget it and if you don't forget it and comment then there's something not quite right about you for not forgetting, I think.

Elizabeth I don't know if birth is the most difficult thing. To me it's more important that women are silent about what actually happens to you when ...

Diana The duplicity begins with ... from the beginning. I also found it difficult, I didn't enjoy being pregnant at all. I find pregnancy a most extraordinary thing. I was reading something the other day about transplants, how if you get a lung, most bodies reject it, but with childbirth, you've got this alien thing, yet the body accepts it, it's a miraculous thing that actually happens, which is interesting, but what I was reading also said that the thing is actually alien, it doesn't belong, and I felt that sense of ... I hated what being pregnant did to my body. I found it totally alienating. I couldn't even think in terms of what one was meant to do when one was pregnant. I found the hunger amazing, the changes to the body I hadn't anticipated in any way at all. When I'd never been hungry before in my life, suddenly to feel so ravenously hungry, I found extraordinary, I couldn't

cope with that. And then as the baby grows, the changes are so mammoth to the body, even ... the spine, the ..., the breasts ... The breasts get so sore, suddenly going from whatever you are to be three or four inches larger.

Rebecca I thought it was fantastic!

Diana I couldn't bear to touch them, couldn't bear the water in the shower because I was so tender, so the increase in size gave me no pleasure whatsoever.

Joy The process after the birth, when you're pregnant, that's all you think of, the birth, and that's it. You don't even conceive the next steps of the rest of your life. I hadn't really thought much about feeding, I didn't feel very enamoured about it, and I ended up feeling very engorged at the hospital, and Gemma couldn't feed properly.

Diana Some say it's a very sexual experience, did you ...

Joy Yes, because when you feed there's a release of oxytocin ...

Diana Did you feel it?

Joy After feeding for several days, my word, yes ... that was the only good thing. I had the choice of bottle feeding Gemma, or breast feeding, and I suddenly realised when given the choice that I may not be able to do this thing, it took on a new - it took on a challenge. So I took it on board. With Gemma I found it very satisfying, she was a very easy baby, she'd feed, and she'd just fall asleep. The physical feeling, initially it's revolting, cabbage leaves take on a whole new meaning, you stuff them down your bra in order to stop you getting engorged. There are all sorts of things that can occur ... But with Zac it was horrendous, absolutely.

Patrick ... more interested in the pleasure!

Joy Well yes there is, it's oxytocin at its best ... you have a let-down.

Rebecca That didn't give me an orgasm though.

Joy No, it didn't give me an orgasm either, but it gives you a nice sensation. I wouldn't say orgasmic, just a nice little pick-up. It's sort of an instantaneous sensation, when you first feed. Very satisfying.

Susan Other people I've spoken to have talked about being sexually attractive, how they felt about themselves as sexual beings after they became mothers, and the issue of their relationship with their partner.

Rebecca Sexual or other, you don't feel attractive.

Joy Not when you are breast feeding. Your boobs belong to your baby, not your husband, and I think that breastfeeding really ties the woman because the man says that the woman has to do this. I've had friends whose partners have not allowed them to eat certain things because of course it affects the baby.

Diana I think one of the reasons why I didn't breastfeed was because my relationship with Oliver was more important to me than my relationship with the baby, and he actually took a stronger relationship with the baby than I did. So for all the night feeds and getting up, Oliver did all of that.

Joy The partner would be, is of no consequence if you're breastfeeding. Some of my friends have found that to be a real problem with feeding, and the partner feeling out of it.

Susan I think that some people see that it could be good, for the woman to feel in power ... she is absolutely and utterly essential.

Diana I would worry about that if that was the only way you could get power. I've known women, my grandmother for one, who had thirteen children and who only felt powerful when she had a baby at the breast, and who then didn't actually want - and this is just the family story so I don't know it to be true - who rejected her children when they got to be two or three, and the baby who was currently feeding was the most important.

Joy I think that also once you stop breastfeeding that's a really nice transition, I remember with Gemma at fourteen months, that was it, I had had it, and she was an easy baby, I just wanted my body for myself. And then not so long after I became pregnant again.

Diana Wanting your body for yourself ... that's what I remember feeling, that the whole thing had taken me..

Joy And it's a really nice time now, now that my youngest is two and a half, and more independent, the dependency thing is not quite so strong as it used to be, it is in other ways, but that's when all the hidden things come in and you find yourself changing so much so that the career orientated person that you thought you were is no longer. And that's a really rude shock. And you find yourself so caught up in it, you're making decisions for the here and now that are going to affect you in ten years' time.

Diana I think the decision to have children was - well, whether it's a decision or not - absolutely changes your life, because for me still, I think, when Teresa has finished, then I will be able to think about myself. What I'm saying is - when she's finished her undergraduate studies then I'll be able to concentrate on mine. That is if nothing else comes up .... a baby, I had these nightmares the other night that there was going to be this baby, I was going to be looking after a baby, how could I do my Ph.d with a baby ...

Elizabeth I don't think it ever changes, you're a mother until you die. There's this link, even when they're not there. Even when El wasn't at home, he used to go off a lot to New Zealand when he was young, and I used to imagine that he'd be in a terrible accident and I wouldn't be there .... it never happened, fortunately... When he left home .... I think it comes down to the fact that I know that if I was in a situation where he was being threatened with being killed, and my husband was being threatened, without even thinking I would say ...

Rebecca So if you had to choose between your husband and your son ...

Elizabeth But if it was my husband .... there would be a second where I would do some mental calculation .... something going on in my brain ...

Diana That's interesting, Oliver's mother used to say when we'd go along and watch Oliver play football, Oliver's mother and father would come along, and ask me if it worried me that he was playing football and he might get terribly injured, and I'd say that no it didn't, because I believed that it was his responsibility, and if he was prepared to take this risk, then I was prepared to take it with him. But with my son, it's different. And I know that if Teresa said to me, "Mum, I'm pregnant and I'm going to have a baby", I'd say that I'd look after the baby, you're going to finish and do your articles next year, I will look after the baby. So whatever I had going - I know that I would do that. If she didn't want to, that would be great, I wouldn't have a choice, I'd respect her choice. But if she did, if I could assist her to be economically independent and establish herself, and have a baby as well, then I would do that, and I know that I'd forget about my preoccupations of the time. Not totally, but ...

Joy I think that I've made more sacrifices than I ever imagined that I would. I've heard myself saying that it's really good that we're not on two incomes because I don't take things for granted any more!! Now when I go shopping I buy for my children, not for me. You just don't believe it.

Diana How could I say that I'd look after a baby instead of finishing my Ph.d? I should be doing my Ph.d!

Joy I was going back to work six weeks after the birth of the child, five years, six months, and I'm thinking that I've enjoyed all this free time, it's been my time, I've used it for whatever purpose ...

Diana Your time?

Joy I've made a lot of it my time, I've made the most of the situation so I've enjoyed the life-style with the children on the whole ... I can still do my things, when the children get sick, and it's your day to study, and you're the one that has to stay, you're the one who has to make the decisions, and that's where it becomes difficult. And it's your career that's altered, and everybody talks about the partner's career, and how important that is, and you accept it. It's really funny.

Elizabeth But what else could you do? If you didn't accept it, and you've got your children, and then you've got to consider your children as well as yourself.

Joy Having had young children, and having taught, it's been a really interesting challenge. I look back and think how I was as a teacher and thought that I knew it all and really I knew nothing basically. And that - children teach you more about yourself than anything else, they make you realise all those ridiculous authoritarian things that you used to do for the sake of doing them, because someone told you to do them, and you think what a ridiculous thing to do, why am I putting this on my child.

Diana Having children has totally altered my attitude to my professional work. That would be one of the most significant things for me, I suppose.

Elizabeth I wonder if that works with males as well?

Diana No I don't think so.

Elizabeth It doesn't affect Oliver?

Diana It does affect Oliver, he is really good, when he sees Matthew ... what I would call social justice, or injustice, he is in there, fists flying.

Patrick Joy, I'm interested in what shaped your decision to be a full-time parent rather than go back to work sooner than you have.

Joy I guess study, that filled a really big gap. I have another woman, a lecturer, who saved me. I was doing a course at uni, I was pregnant, and I stopped attending, and because I was teaching I was so tired I didn't even bother to ring her until the last day of school, and I said that I should have rung earlier but I was pregnant, and that was why I hadn't attended classes. And she said to make sure that my assignment was in on January the .... the latest possible date. From then on I've continued to do what I've done. She was the one who steered me in the direction which has led me here. And without all of that I ... it would have changed a lot. At least I suppose I had a goal, so while I had children, I improved my qualifications, and personally Women's Studies has been the most empowering thing. Someone said very smugly the other day, "So what have you really gained from all of this study?" I just said a lot of personal development, just so many different things ... the two of them have gone very well together.

Diana The two are so intimately connected, in any work I study I don't think that you can, that you should be able to disrupt the personal from the academic or the ...

Joy And I have found study a challenge. Before I was always frightened of study, I never really enjoyed it, so that was another thing that has altered my outlook. I was given a teaching position, I was posted to Taroona High, and I was pregnant. I ended up taking leave, and thus continuing ...

Diana What is your next step going to be?

Joy The next step is to work out what I want to do. There are so many things that you discover on the way, different pathways, I'd like teach, and I'd like to teach in a different subject area. My big decision is whether I'd like to teach part-time or full-time. I know, I've always said that there should be part-time work for everybody, and in a way I know I'm going to do that. And yet that's a commitment that's could affect me ten years hence when I might want to teach full-time. Let's hope that the ruling has changed, but I just feel with the kids that I want to have time for them too. I've even thought of taking more leave, so the kids can settle into their little schools ... So I'm not racing around, organising things ... They are very real decisions, big things.

Patrick It seems that once people have children they construct their responsibilities to their children, and that ...

Joy For example, I wouldn't have gone back after having Zac, because the story is that I needed to give him as much time as Gemma. But of course I could never do that anyway, the equation doesn't equal out, but ...

Diana That's the thing that I regret, I used to treasure moments, and I still do, like Matthew and I had a conversation last night, which was an extraordinary conversation, a rare conversation ... Because he's the second one, he always missed out, and Teresa was always rah-rah-rah all the time, still does it, she said, "Matthew means" and I said that it would be a good idea if we let Matthew say what he meant. Any moment I get with him to have three sentences of conversation is absolutely precious. I have lots of minutes with Teresa, because she's very intrusive on my time in a way that he's not intrusive at all. I used to value times when I had one of them in the car, a prisoner in the car, and the only thing you could do while you were in the car was talk, and you could actually really talk about things that you wanted to, and they couldn't escape ... I think a second child is going to miss out enormously.

Joy The companionship they have for each other is really good, but decisions that have made me feel guilty are that the times that I could have with Zac I choose not to because that's my study time. And the guilt that I've gone through just for that is amazing.

Diana So what made you decide to give up that time?

Joy Because I needed that time for me.

Diana Would you have done it with Gemma?

Diana Yes, and I did, it took longer though, and so Gemma had my time for a longer period ...

Oliver What difference has it made?

Joy None really, it's just the whole ...

Diana When one's twenty-three and the other's twenty-two, and you spend the whole of Saturday working on a document that one of them is writing, you forget about the few hours you didn't spend.

Elizabeth I imagine that having a daughter would be wonderful..... to be able to share a language in the same way. A lot of what I have to do is explain my position, and fortunately he is very able to see ...

Patrick Does that romanticise the mother-daughter relationship, not all women would have that relationship ...

Diana What I was thinking when Elizabeth was saying that is my relationship with my daughter is fraught with drama. Of my two children, my son has been by far the easiest to be with. From the time when he was born, he was so relaxed, you could have him lying on your body and he would make you feel relaxed, maybe that's the second child and it's got nothing to do with male-females, but he's never been a real problem, he's always been easy to get along with, he's terribly chauvinist which has caused me a great deal of problems in the later years, but before that ... Whereas Teresa was the drama queen, and she still is, she's still the most difficult person to be with, but there is something about her femaleness which enables a communication which is impossible with people who have been constructed in the male .... It's amazingly powerful for me because she's so supportive ... You have this language, this understanding, even if one is a drama queen.

Elizabeth You wouldn't feel lonely ... you can feel lonely in the company of men in a way that you can't in the company of women, even unreconstructed women, if you like, I can still put that in a particular context which I can feel comfortable with.

Diana You have experiences that you can share...

Patrick ... in the sense that I invariably feel more comfortable in the company of women for whatever complex set of reasons ....

Joy I felt quite strongly about wanting to have a girl first, I didn't care after that, it didn't matter. I found Gemma to be the easier of the two, she and I just seemed to relate, and it was Zac who was the bull at the gate, we're coming around now, but it was really important for me to have a girl.

Susan That's why I can't have children, I know I will have a boy. I'd have ten of them in a row.

Joy But boys are lovely - they really are ... Motherhood is a roller coaster ride - once you're on, you can't get off.

Appendix Two

Interview - Isabel

How did you feel when you first found out that you were pregnant?

I was sort of excited that I was pregnant but it came at the wrong time, I thought I'd get pregnant later on, but it's always been later on, and so I was umming and ahhing, because I was doing that study ... do the study, or have the baby, I didn't think that I could do both. And so I thought I'd have an abortion.

And what did you do?

I didn't really discuss it with Peter, I thought that I had to make the decision.

Did he know that you were overdue? Was he in Sydney at the time?

Yes, he knew straight way but he knew how I felt, that I was the person to make the decision, and he didn't want to interfere. He knew that I was talking to my women friends, and they sort of convinced me that I could have a baby and study at the same time.

How did they do that?

I guess just suggesting that it's possible to do both things at the same time.

That was your only objection, that you couldn't do the course and have a baby, and they said that you could?

Yes, they all said of course you can, and it was lucky that the course finished two weeks before I was due, and so it worked out really well. I went to talk to the course co-ordinator and he said that I could always hand in essays late, in the following year or in the hospital, but I couldn't imagine doing that, having a lot of work over a period, I didn't mind one or two things, but not major things. And I'm so glad in retrospect that I didn't have a lot of work left over because I wouldn't have been able to cope with it, I wouldn't have had time to do it.

So do you think that you wanted to get pregnant but not at that time?

Yes, I'd been talking about it with Peter, for a while, five or six years, and we thought that we were going to have a baby at some stage, but there wasn't the right time, because other things were happening in our lives. Moving around....I had always thought, not when I was a teenager, but going through uni, that I would like to have a baby, and this was before I met Peter, that I would like to have a baby some time in my life. But I'd like to work first.

So you always felt like that?

Yes, always.

Can you sort of say why? Any reasons why you said to yourself that you always wanted a baby?

I suppose it sounds a weak excuse to say maternal instinct, I don't think I felt that, I don't think so, maybe later on when you're getting to thirty, that sort of time, you start to think

about it, ummm ... did I think it was my role as a woman ... I just wanted the possibility there, like later on I might change my mind about it, but I wanted the possibility that I could have a baby if I wanted to.

So it was always an option?

And also, yes, it was always an option, but also, once I was at university, sometimes I used to look back at my childhood, and it was so nice, I really enjoyed it, and I remember coming home after primary school, and Inga would be coming home too, and Mum would always be there, and make lovely dough things, and she'd let us play with the dough, and it was just great, it was such a nice time. And I thought that I'd like to do that too.

So, maternal instinct, do you think it was something?

Well, like I said when I was first at university, when I was eighteen or nineteen, I don't think it was, but later on ... like you mentioned that sometimes this great urge comes to you, but I don't think that I've ever felt that ... No, I've never felt that.

So it was more like an idea than an irrational emotion? You said that you wanted to have a baby, that was an idea, not a feeling that I said I had that I just had to have a baby?

Yes.

Being pregnant, was it good, umm, did you enjoy it?

I loved it. The only part that I found really annoying was catching the bus, to the University of NSW., and the buses are always crowded, all these students are pushing and shoving, and my stomach wasn't sticking out enough to make them realise that I was pregnant and that I wanted to sit down, Sometimes I got really tired standing up on my feet, but I didn't look pregnant at all. And I didn't feel that I could go up to some students and say "Excuse me, I'm pregnant. Can I sit down?"

You needed a sign to stick on your tummy, saying, "Baby in here.."

Yes ... I liked it, and I felt really well. I guess I was always doing exercises and stuff, and I was lucky I never got morning sickness.

Physically then you were well?

Yes.

And emotionally, once you'd made the decision to have the baby?

Once I'd made the decision to have the baby I was fine. But as the pregnancy went on, at about four months, I used to get, not highly strung, but really really tearful, about any little thing. And I think that that has carried on still. I've always been emotional about things, but not so much, so easily, bursting out crying, like this morning.

What was it then - what was the problem?

Mi was driving me crazy this morning.

I wonder what it was that made you more emotional?

I suppose it's high levels of hormones. I wonder if I had a boy baby, is it the same. Do you get as tearful? Maybe the levels of hormones, or their types are different.

I've heard of people we get really sick during their pregnancy because of the hormones of their baby. I think that happened to a friend of mine - it was something like that.

What did you think having a baby would be like, when you were pregnant?

I sort of thought, that this baby, that we will continue on with our lives and the baby will just fit in. And she sort of has, to a certain extent, but it's not like that all. That's what I thought, but I also thought that it would be so lovely to have a baby. I thought that it would be a great change to our lives, everyone says that it's a change, but you don't realise how much of a change until it happens. It's a bloody devastating thing!

What did you think being a mother would be like? Did you ever think of yourself as a mother?

Umm, yes, I think I did, but only really generally. Not the specifics of trying to negotiate carrying a baby on one hip and shopping, and trying to sign a cheque with the other hand.

All the practical things ...

Yes, I didn't think of those.

What about the emotional things?

Yes, I thought about the emotional things, I thought that it would be lovely, to have a little girl.

Were you looking forward to that?

Yes, very much.

Could you sort of articulate then what it was that was making you feel really good, or was it just this feeling?

No , I can't really articulate it, it was just feeling ... And the only people, out of all my friends, at uni, and including my mother, they all thought that I was going to have a boy. The only people that thought I was going to have a girl were these Indonesian students who were also doing the course, and they said that I was going to have a girl because I was such a nice person.

Does that mean that only nice people have girls?

I don't know ... that's sort of in their tradition, or something. I don't really understand why. Because I was a happy person, that's why.

And when you thought, that being a mother was going to be really lovely, you had this really lovely feeling ...

Like a warm fuzzy feeling..

Yes, this warm fuzzy feeling, where do you think you got this warm fuzzy feeling from?

I think I got it from my mother, and when I was little and she was cuddling me, and even when I was in primary school, if I was upset, being cuddled by mum, I really liked it.

Do you think that had anything to do with wanting a girl, cause you're a daughter?

Yes, I think so, girls are so cuddly.

Someone told me once, when I was saying that I only wanted a girl, not a boy, that boys are more cuddly.

Really?

I can't remember who told me this. ... there were a few women, wherever it was, and they all agreed. They all had children.

What kind of children did they have - boys or girls?

Both I think. But I would never have thought that.

Maybe I think that girls are more cuddly because umm they get upset easily, I think.

I know all these objectionable little boys, and so I suppose I always think of boys as being attention seeking little shits.

Did you think that you were going to change? Obviously your life would change, did you think that you would change as a person?

No, I didn't think I would at all. Again, I never thought of that, I thought I'd be exactly the same, I think I have changed. How have I changed? Well I find I get irritated about small things much more easier. (That's pretty disgusting.)

Thinking about your birth, and what happened after, well, Mi's birth, not yours, can your remember what you felt like after you had Mi?

Just so ... fulfilled, no fulfilled is a dumb word, just so happy ...

It must have been lovely....

Yes, it was lovely ... I remember Sharon, the person who's doing the other study, she asked this question and I didn't know what to say. What adjectives are you supposed to put across? I thought it was lovely, it was terrible, what else can you say? I suppose some people can say confused, or that sort of thing. I thought it was lovely. Like after, when we went up to the hospital ward, she slept with me, and it was just so nice, just lovely. I don't know if I slept at all, I must have. They all say beforehand that you're on a really amazing high, forty-eight hours or something like that after the baby's born, so the morning when they said they she had to go to the neonatal ward, I must have still been on a real high because I wasn't tired or anything, even when they came the next morning. But I think that when they took her away I slept.

It must be the most unbelievable feeling, that ...

And when you're in labour, it hurts and hurts, trying to get the head out, and once the head's out the body just sort of slips out quick. And as soon as the baby's born all the pain just stops, totally. I don't know, maybe you still feel the pain, but you haven't got time for it. I don't know, it just stops.

Cause you've got the baby there, your baby. That's what you said the other day, you said, "This is my baby."

I didn't feel, like I've read this in books, that you feel proud of this great achievement, that your body's made this baby, well Peter and me too, and you've achieved this great thing, I didn't feel this at all. I just felt that she was my baby, well, she was our baby.

And that feeling is still really strong?

Mmmm, yes.

What other sorts of things did you feel straight after the birth, and the next few days in hospital? Did you start thinking like what being a mother was going to be like?

I didn't really think about what it would be like when I got home, all those practical sorts of things. I was just really sad about her, because they took her away to the neonatal ward and they put a cannula in her arm.

A drip thing?

It's a drip, but it's not attached to a bottle. It was for the antibiotics, they squirt them in. I was just so worried that they were hurting her,. and that she didn't need them. Well, she did need them, she had staphylococcus infection.

That was from swallowing her poo?

Yes, so she needed it, but I wanted her to be, pure. But she took it all well. But the one time that they tried to find her vein in her foot, that was just awful, and they nurses were all really nice, and the paediatric doctor, I was just so concerned about it, and he, and the nurses, said that I could come along and watch, and watching was even worse, I was going hysterical, and one of the nurses had to be really firm. And at the time thought that she was being really nasty, but she just had to take me away.,

Did you think that you knew what was best?

Yes.

Did you have an idea that this is my baby and what are you doing to it?

Yes, but I also knew that they were doctors and they knew what they were doing. And other people go through it too. And they survive.

Isn't it interesting, cause you don't have a baby and you don't know anything about them, and then all of a sudden you have a baby and you can say to a doctor that that's my baby, what are you doing? Straight away, you get this, this you know what's right for your baby.

Maybe it's the hormones, they're still so high in your body. Maybe those hormones are still around, continue for a long time if you breast feed.

I find it amazing, all my friends who have babies, they look like such experts. And I say, I could never do that , I couldn't have a baby, you're so clever, you know what to do. And they say that they didn't know either.

You have to do something, anything. If it works, it's okay, if it doesn't, you try something else.

Do you feel confident?

Yes, I feel confident. I know what I'm doing with her. I don't know where that comes from.

Have your feelings changed at all, from the first few days in hospital?

Yes, that high feeling has mellowed out, but I still feel very emotional towards her, particularly if I get upset , or she gets hurt or sick. I guess that feeling stays with you for the rest of your life. I don't think it gets lesser or lesser. I know that my mum's brother is

still living with my grandmother and he must be forty-eight or fifty and she still worries about him and tells him not to be late...It's incredible....because he was her baby, well he is her baby, even though he's a fifty year old man.

That feeling doesn't change ... What do you think being a mother is like? How would you describe it?

Well, it's a lot of boring work, like changing nappies, washing out poo. There are hard things about it, but there are nice things, like when she's happy and she's making these crazy faces, and when she's having a bath, and she's happy, and it's nice ... it gives me, and Peter, a lot of satisfaction, sort of she's happy, we're happy because she's happy, and we're doing things right to make her happy.

Is that what you thought it would be like?

I didn't really have any idea, not really, I had a general idea that it would be nice to be a mother.

Is it as nice as you thought?

The good parts are as good as I thought, but the bad parts are worse. Before I had her, friends in Adelaide, Michael and Bridget, they said that sort of thing too, that there are bad things, but it's just so nice, the children give you such pleasure. I didn't know what on earth they were talking about, I couldn't imagine ... I liked it when I'd been out with other children and they were laughing, I could make them laugh, that was great, but I could never see that it could be so permanent a good feeling.

That it would always be there?

Yes, that it would always be there. I'd seen it before as a temporary thing, that you'd see a child, play, and then go away.

I haven't really seen that either, I tend to focus on all the negatives, all the work and the restrictions and the limitations. But being here I've seen lots of positives, like you said, when Mi makes funny faces ...

Yes, and waters the plants, and plays with Bruce ...

And her lovely smile, that's gorgeous. ... Do you think that other people see motherhood in any way differently to you?

Ummm ... I think that all mothers, well a lot of mothers, find all those pleasurable things about children smiling, being happy, really good, but I guess it depends on how well their pregnancy went, whether they really wanted a girl or a boy, whether it mattered to them, and what they thought beforehand, whether they wanted a child at all, and how young they were, whether they'd spent a number of years working, and had a good time before, because you don't have a good time after!

What about men?

I think they find it, well I know Peter finds it lovely to have Mi, but because he's away at work from her for such a long time every day he doesn't have the yucky parts, no, he does have some yucky things when he gets home...

You save them up for him?

Yes, but it's not as intense, the good feeling. I suppose it would be on the weekend, when he's home with her all the time. I guess it's also that he's got another interest, that he's got to maintain, his work.

Do you think that for a mother who works, then her and the father would be similar, cause they'd have the same amount of time with the baby?

Yes, I do. It's really hard, because I don't like voicing these sorts of things to other people, because I don't want to put other people down, but I just can't understand why women have children and then leave them and go out to work. I can understand that they might have job satisfaction but does that mean that they didn't have job satisfaction before they had a child, and ... sort of why did they want to be a mother in the first place. It sounds terrible ...

It's just what you think.

I really feel that if you want to have children, you've got to be prepared to stay with them because they're so little and they want their mother, I really think that Mi would like to be with me, or her father, someone who's there all the time, not chopping and changing.

Like it could be in day care, with different people caring?

Yes. I'm not really keen to put Mi in day care.

But why should you be? That's your choice, what you think is best for Mi. Did you think that you would feel that before you got pregnant? Did you always think that you would stay home with your child?

Yes, I did, and I guess it's because my mother stayed home and looked after me, and I had such a nice time.

Do you think that people who put their babies into care, that it didn't really work, did you know of anyone, friends, who were doing this?

What, now?

Yes.

Yes, like Gail and Peter next door. Rohan is such a nice baby, but every time ... Gail works three days a week, and every time, the days that she's at home with him, he's always ... well he's happy sometimes, but he's always crying and whingeing, and I don't think that he likes going away from her. And I read some article that children who bite try to get their frustration out. He's bitten her, Mi - he didn't draw blood, but he's bitten her, and it must have bloody hurt.

So, people who go out to work and put their babies in care must think differently to you - what do you think makes them think like that?

I think they think like that because of pressures of society, and society says that you should go out to work, because you're not fulfilled, you're not a real woman unless you go out to work and have a career.
Women who go out to work feel that that is the only way that they can be 'real' people, that is the only to be fulfilled. This comes from society, the media, television, newspapers, especially films. They portray really successful women who have jobs and children who they send to daycare. They juggle everything, and that is meant to be good.
Gail, next door, is always in a rush. She says that everything is so hard, she's so tired, it's so difficult, she needs a cleaning lady now. You might have a boring job, and I think that looking after children is more satisfying than having a boring job.

Do you think that society is accepting of women who don't have children?

If a woman has a responsible position, then society sees her as successful, but individuals might see her as a bit strange. Some people would be envious because she wouldn't be trying to juggle two things, her life would be relatively easy.

Would people who are jugglers be envious of women who stay at home with their children?

Yes, but they would think that they couldn't do it, maybe because of financial reasons, or maybe the mother would feel that it would be too boring to stay at home.

Do you think that mothers at home are valued by society?

No, and it makes me really mad. It's as important a job as anything else. Society thinks that women who are housewives and are acting in traditional feminine roles are doing it because they're stupid and can't do anything else. It makes me angry because I don't get a wage for staying at home. I know that lots of women who stay at home are pissed off because society doesn't value motherhood.

Has being a mother empowered you?

Now, I feel really strong and capable, I know what I'm doing. If I go back to the workforce, I know that there are employers who are keen to employ women who are experienced mothers because they have so many skills of managing things, they must have these skills to cope.
When I go to the bank, or the council, I don't feel threatened when I'm with Mi, I have the right to expect service, and they better be good, because I haven't got any time to waste. At the bank, once when I wanted to know something, it was a simple request, and I wanted an answer, they farted around, they had no conception that I couldn't wait, I couldn't keep holding Mi ... now I assert myself a lot more, I get angry if they're incompetent ... before I was more accepting of this, now I'm not.

Would motherhood be empowering like this for other women?

Yes, even for those women who go to work, their attitudes change, they feel more competent and able.

How does being a mother make you feel about yourself as a person?

Before, I was doing very interesting work, but a little part of everything, I was just an individual wandering around. Now I am a mother, I know what I am. If I fill out a questionnaire, I say, I am a mother, that's what I am. It's so consuming, so much energy, there's no time to do anything else. Before I'd relax, read, I had so many different interests, I did lots of things, but not one thing. Other people would say that they were an archaeologist, or an anthropologist, but they would do other things ... Being a mother is an all consuming interest, it's defining ... I can go to the bank and I know who I am - I'm a mother, this is my child - don't mess with me. Before, if I went to the bank, I was just an individual, the bank didn't care, but now, well, the bank doesn't really care, but I'm not a wandering individual, so I make sure the bank does care. You have to look after your baby, so the bank has to look after you, it has to do the right thing for you. If the person in the bank has children, you get a better response, you're not a blob, they're interested in you. I like that. People in banks often don't remember you, but the people in the bank at Willoughby were always so nice when I went in there with Mi, they'd make a comment about the last time that I was there.

Do you have any comments that you'd like to make, anything that you think is important that I haven't asked about?

I think that society is changing. While more women desire to go "back to work" more and more men want to stay at home with their children. That's quite interesting.

You didn't ask any questions about children, about what children think.

No, I'm more interested in what women feel about being mothers, I suppose, not about what children are feeling. That's not really part of my study.

When I came home from hospital, I was so lucky that my mother was here. I wandered around, not knowing what was happening to me. After a month my mother left, and I had to do things, I had not time to think about my feelings, I just did everything.

How did you feel about answering these questions?

It was interesting, there were things that I haven't thought about, like how I feel empowered.

Do you think I should make any changes?

It's difficult to put a distinction between ... to describe wonderful feelings ... Wonderful feelings would be wonderful for every woman, to different degrees ... you feel good and excited, but it depends on your pregnancy, and circumstances.

Appendix Three

Interview - Katherine

1. How did you feel when you found out that you were pregnant?

Frightened and confused. Very nervous about telling my partner - or anyone for that matter.

2. Did you want to be pregnant? How appropriate a time was it for you?

No. I hadn't planned the pregnancy but on reflection it was my time. Although it was obvious I would have to go it alone I still felt it was the right thing, and the thing I wanted most to do.

3. Had you always felt like this about having children? (ie., either wanted or not wanted to have children?) Can you say why - eg. did you feel something that could be called maternal instinct?

I had never planned on having children although at different stages of my life I experienced very strong maternal urges and would want a child for a short period. These urges may have been hormonal. They usually happened when I was in a relationship, but then I'd look at babies and think that they were horrible.

4. What sorts of things influenced your choice to have a baby?

My age, my doctor and my job.

5. What was being pregnant like - physically, emotionally, psychologically?

Physically it was great - a little uncomfortable toward the end of my term, but generally I was fit and healthy. Emotionally it was okay too. I remained happy most of the time. Psychologically it was the pits - but that was my partner's weird behaviour to blame.

6. What did you think being a mother would be like?

No idea! I just prepared things the way the book said.

I don't really know, but I felt it would be a lot easier than it was in the first few weeks, months. One tends to worry about the infant not the mother.

7. What made you think this way? (eg. mother, family, friends, films, books, etc.)

Friends and their books.

8. Did you think that you would change, that becoming a mother would make you into a different person?

Yes. I felt I would be more settled. More caring and stable. A responsible person. I would have someone else to care about, someone who depended on me, and had to be responsible. I had been very selfish, I lived for me. I did whatever I wanted to, I lived for the moment. I didn't care for life, I didn't care for myself. I can see this now in retrospect.

9. Can you remember what you felt like after you'd had your child/children? What sorts of things were you feeling?

Total elation. I can remember the events leading up to the birth, the previous day and night, and almost all of the labour and birth more vividly than I have ever known. Fifteen months later and I can still see Deborah when they handed her to me. I have never felt emotions like that ever before, and there was an incredible sense of control.

10. In what ways did these feelings change over the next few weeks/months/years?

They haven't really changed at all. I still marvel in my daughter's existence - obviously now she is getting older and developing her own personality and will we tend to clash occasionally but we generally get on well. In the first few weeks - (out of hospital) I was afraid of her, unable to anticipate her needs was frightening but I eventually began to understand what was happening.

11. What is being a mother like? Is it similar or different to what you thought it would be? How?

I had no real preconception to what being a mother would be like - except for a few doubts as to my ability. It's different - the feeling of self worth and power was immense - wonderful, especially in the early stages. Breastfeeding was the most empowering experience. It's hard to describe, the power you get from providing another human being with everything which she needs, the sole source of survival. I had lots of difficulties with breastfeeding, and couldn't go on after three months. I had mastitis three times, and there was no-one to give me the support I needed.

12. Do you think that other people see motherhood differently to you? How? Who?

I have never really discussed motherhood as such - children yes. Women tend to discuss their children rather than their role as a mother and women without children are not really interested - even those who want children. People who get involved in group (nursing mothers etc.) tend to have, in my opinion, and unrealistic view/approach to motherhood. There's this belief that you can breastfeed if you want to, but it's not like that at all.

13. Why do you think other people have different views of motherhood? What makes people have these views?

Media books, etc. Pre pregnancy classes etc. When you have no-one to compare with and you're excited about your forthcoming birth you tend to believe anything. Everyone has their own ideas on how a mother should be - perhaps this stems from their own upbringing.

14. Do you feel that you are different now? How?

Yes. I've grown up. Things that were important two or so years ago are now no longer even a consideration. I'm more responsible and have become more materialistic. Being the sole provider it's sort of like a marriage I feel the responsibility to 'bring home the bacon'. I have to make/keep a good <u>home</u> for my child.

15. Has becoming a mother been an empowering experience for you? In what ways? Is it like this for other women?

Yes. Breast feeding was the most empowering experience I had. Being a mum and knowing your teachings, actions etc. are going to influence the child for the rest of their life is empowering.

I hope so!

16. How does being a mother make you feel about yourself as a person?

17. Are there any questions which you think I should have asked? Anything that I have left out about being a mother that you think is important?

Perhaps now in my case but ... relationships - do you feel the same about your life / sex life /social life with your partner now you are a mother.

18. Do you have any comments you'd like to make about these questions?

19. How did you feel about answering these questions?

OK

20. Can you suggest any changes that I should make?

No.

Appendix Four

Interview - Madeleine

Pregnancy

1. How did you feel when you found out that you were pregnant?

Shocked! Horrified! Scared out of my brain! Absolutely mystified about the fact that I was indeed fertile. Pissed off at being so careless and not giving myself the opportunity to have the choice!

2. Did you want to be pregnant? How appropriate a time was it for you?

No! Nothing about it was appropriate. But is it every really? If I hadn't have fallen pregnant by accident I would probably not have had children. It just wasn't in my vocab.

3. Had you always felt like this about having children? (ie., either wanted or not wanted to have children?) Can you say why - eg. did you feel something that could be called maternal instinct?

I never felt maternal. It wasn't that I hated children - I just didn't feel goopy over babies. None of my friends had children and I had too many things I thought I needed to do. I didn't own anything - no furniture - I virtually lived in my suitcase, crashing in here and there to stay for a while. I never solved problems - I left them behind!

4. What sorts of things influenced your choice to have a baby?

I was so bloody tired and in emotional turmoil I couldn't make any decision. On the way to the airport to "Melbourne" something stopped me. I guess it was in my heart I knew it was all wrong.
Now that I know Isabella - I know it was her "will" or "soul" or whatever. This sounds really wanky Sue.

5. What was being pregnant like - physically, emotionally, psychologically?

Hard to say! Emotionally I was with a man who hated me and so I hated myself.

Physically I loved it, right till the end.

Psychologically - it was like being pre-menstrual for 9 months!!

6. What did you think being a mother would be like?

Couldn't imagine it and because of that I got myself into a worse situation than I needed!
I didn't think I could actually do it and so I tried to make a go of it with her father - thinking it would be better for the baby. Of course it was disastrous. It just seemed so scary and I was always so selfish, impatient, moody etc. I couldn't find the strong me. It's so silly Sue because, of course, I could do it. It's innate. I just doubted my strength and financial situation at the time.

7. What made you think this way? (eg. mother, family, friends, films, books, etc.)

It looks so bloody hard. Look at mothers of babies. They look tired and drawn.

If anything the media romanticises it all which makes it almost impossible. How can you have a clean house, beautiful clothes, beautiful body, beautiful child that doesn't cry, man that changes nappies and laughs when he goes to the supermarket ... etc?

8. Did you think that you would change, that becoming a mother would make you into a different person?

Yes definitely. I knew I'd change. I didn't know how. As it is - I'm a nicer person. More patience. Not as selfish. Happier. Stronger. It empowered me!

Birth and After

9. Can you remember what you felt like after you'd had your child/children? What sorts of things were you feeling?

Apart from the pain - absolute bewilderment and love. It was a really weird (unusual) feeling to love someone unconditionally - totally! And know that they would really love me back.

It really was like some sick ad. Violins, lump in my throat. The song, "Eternal Flame" was on the radio and I cried 'cos I knew I could leave her father and that we'd be ok.

10. In what ways did these feelings change over the next few weeks/months/years?

Became more realistic.

It was hard work. Lots of trauma. I had to go back to full time work when Isabella was 4 weeks old. So I'd stay up all night expressing milk and freezing it so that she could still have my breast milk during the day.

As she gets older it gets easier - she's a good communicator.

11. What is being a mother like? Is it similar or different to what you thought it would be? How?

Bloody difficult. Bloody wonderful.. All the things I'd hoped it would be but much strong..

It's just life - you know? Sometimes it's easy - Sometimes it's impossible!

12. Do you think that other people see motherhood differently to you? How? Who?

People don't see all the shit. I don't think you know anything until you've actually experienced it. Same with everything really.

Sometimes I want to walk away from all the responsibility but then I want to take Isabella with me!!

"If you leave me can I come too!"

I don't think motherhood is valued enough. Young kids romanticise it - older people dramatise it - men de-value it - infertile women place too much importance on it - married couples plan it.

13. Why do you think other people have different views of motherhood? What makes people have these views?

We are what we are made into by our environment and what we live.

So many things Sue. TV. Advertising. What our mums were like. What our partners are like. The type of person you are.

Can't answer this one.

14. Do you feel that you are different now? How?

Yes. Probably not as much fun as I was! I always think about consequences now. As soon as I have sex I wonder if I'm pregnant. If I blow some money on something stupid for me, I hope Isabella doesn't get sick or need anything.

15. Has becoming a mother been an empowering experience for you? In what ways? Is it like this for other women?

Yep - I said that before. It really was a step in the right direction. It gave me the strength to be alone - that is, without a partner. It gave me the impetus to get myself together financially.

It made me believe in myself - all those wanky things that a woman of the 90's shouldn't say!

16. How does being a mother make you feel about yourself as a person?

Conclusion

17. Are there any questions which you think I should have asked? Anything that I have left out about being a mother that you think is important?

18. Do you have any comments you'd like to make about these questions?

Very intuitive.

19. How did you feel about answering these questions?

It was bloody hard!

20. Can you suggest any changes that I should make?

PS. Sue, I hope this is ok. Some of the answers sound really stupid and I can't stand re-reading it - it makes my skin cringe.

Have a lovely holiday.
Madeleine

Appendix Five

Interview - Bambi

Pregnancy

1. How did you feel when you found out that you were pregnant?

Elated!

2. Did you want to be pregnant? How appropriate a time was it for you?

Yes. It was a good time, I felt I was at the right "place" in my life emotionally, physically, financially etc.

3. Had you always felt like this about having children? (ie., either wanted or not wanted to have children?) Can you say why - eg. did you feel something that could be called maternal instinct?

Yes. I had always wanted to have children. I suppose it could be called a maternal instinct but generally I would say that I've always liked children and babies and therefore wanted to have my own. As I became older and got married, established a career and basically got my life together, having a baby also became another way of fulfilment, the next step so to speak.

4. What sorts of things influenced your choice to have a baby?

1. The right partner.
2 Security, ie. financial.
3 Age (I was 34 when I had my first baby and I didn't want to leave it much later than that.

5. What was being pregnant like - physically, emotionally, psychologically?

Physically being pregnant was okay - I was never really sick but towards the end I was very uncomfortable.

Emotionally I was much more "in tune", with myself and with other people - eg. if I watched something upsetting on television I was more affected than before.

Psychologically - I don't know - hard to answer - think I'll pass on this one.

6. What did you think being a mother would be like?

I wasn't prepared for the tiredness and continuous ongoing nature of the work of being a mother (ie. 24 hours a day!) even your sleeping time isn't your own!! I thought I would adjust to motherhood in respect of the above a lot easier than I did. I thought being a mother would be very fulfilling and it is, however there was a stage where I really started to wonder who I was because my life had changed so quickly and so dramatically. I wondered how other people saw/thought of me - if they thought I was doing a good job- was I doing a good job? was this all there was for the next 20 years etc. etc.

7. What made you think this way? (eg. mother, family, friends, films, books, etc.)

I guess being the eldest of 8 children, having nursed and married. I thought I had all the skills required and basically I did but, having someone totally dependent on you (only) 24 hours a day is a different story to helping others look after children. When James (baby) wasn't sleeping/feeding etc properly or wasn't settling I would lose confidence in myself and doubt my ability to be a good mother.

Also having a baby at an older age when I'd been so independent and used to working etc was a big adjustment ie. now I was dependent, I didn't get to socialise as much etc.

8. Did you think that you would change, that becoming a mother would make you into a different person?

No I don't think so. I didn't think about this much. I don't think I've changed in many ways that other people could perceive easily. I think I'm a more caring person now - I look at things on a more human level and I've become more practical. Basically I thought I would be pretty much the same person but just have more responsibilities and a slightly (ha! ha!) different life style.

Birth and After

9. Can you remember what you felt like after you'd had your child/children? What sorts of things were you feeling?

Straight after the birth I was a bit dazed I think, it's quite weird one minute there's this lump in your stomach and the next you have this little baby and you're a parent! A few hours after the birth my head was all over the place. I felt a bit lonely and happy and sad - emotional! We made the mistake of ringing people straight after the birth and consequently had two lots of visitors in the labour ward, within a couple of hours after James was born! One lot of visitors stayed for a long time and Chuck and I didn't get to be alone together for long enough - next thing Chuck's gone home - the baby's sent off to the nursery and I'm in a ward with someone I didn't know from a bar of soap. Looking back it was horrible! Also I couldn't quite believe the experience - the pain, feeling so vulnerable, so open to everyone. It was hard for me to come to terms with the whole birth experience - I don't want to go into a lot of detail but having thought about it quite a lot since, I think my mother played a big role in the way I handled the process of birth and those first few months of motherhood - suffice to say mother had some rather strange ideas about sex, modesty etc etc and managed to pass a few hangups down the line!!

10. In what ways did these feelings change over the next few weeks/months/years?

I took a few months to get used to having someone totally dependent on me 24 hours a day and to get to know the baby and feel really comfortable. By comfortable I mean feeling like I could settle him when he was upset (better than anyone else at least), knowing what he wanted when he cried etc etc. As I got used to all this I started to feel more in control. James was becoming more like a little friend and not just a baby that needed me for something. Because I was feeling better about everything I started to enjoy motherhood more and more and realise that I had a great job to do (the best really). Generally I began to feel better about myself ie important, needed and special so my feelings of inadequacy and doubt as described in question 6 began to settle down and vanish.

11. What is being a mother like? Is it similar or different to what you thought it would be? How?

Now I think it is similar to what I thought it would be ie. hard work but really enjoyable and fulfilling.

12. Do you think that other people see motherhood differently to you? How? Who?

I'm not sure how other people see motherhood. Everyone sees it differently I think. I wonder how men see motherhood. I think women probably view it more alike, most women I come into contact with who are mothers have or have had similar feelings to me.

13. Why do you think other people have different views of motherhood? What makes people have these views?

This question is too hard Sue!!

I don't know how others (except my friends who have children - and we are pretty similar in our views) view motherhood. I would like to know myself - (I asked your brother and typically he said he didn't know! Basically, I don't think anyone knows really until they are in the situation of being a parent and have some first hand experience of babies etc.

14. Do you feel that you are different now? How?

Yes. I think in some ways I am eg. more mature; less selfish; more calm; more tired; more emotional about some things; happier even than I was before; more in control and less in control but I'm less in control I'm more accepting of it. (does that make sense??)

15. Has becoming a mother been an empowering experience for you? In what ways? Is it like this for other women?

Yes it has been empowering in that it has made me ask a lot of questions about myself and some of them I have found answers to, which I wouldn't have been able to do had I not had this experience. So I have grown a lot. As far as other women are concerned I guess it depends on individual experiences and circumstances - eg. some women suffer from post-natal depression, don't have the support networks I have had etc in these circumstances I don't think it would be exactly an empowering experience.

16. How does being a mother make you feel about yourself as a person?

It makes me feel really useful to someone. It's really the only job in the world where you are indispensable. I don't think anyone can really take the place of a child's mother. This obviously has its disadvantages to some degree but ultimately it's worth it one hundred times over. Therefore being a mother makes me feel (apart from useful) as though my life is a lot richer in love and emotion and experience, so I feel pretty good about myself, as I mentioned before, I feel even happier than I was before. (and I was very happy then.)

Conclusion

17. Are there any questions which you think I should have asked? Anything that I have left out about being a mother that you think is important?

Sue, this has been very useful to me, so I hope I have helped you too! The only other thing I can say that was in my mind all through this project were two other subjects which are sort of entwined in all this - One is "marriage/relationship after the birth of a child - how it changes etc" and also what it means to women sexually to have had a child. I don't know if other women feel the link with motherhood and these topics as much as I do/did but I couldn't help thinking that they would be interesting subjects to get into as well.

18. Do you have any comments you'd like to make about these questions?

The questions were very apt - I can't think of anything else you could really have included.

19. How did you feel about answering these questions?

Some were a bit hard to answer on paper and in a limited space. I think some of the questions you could almost do a paper on in their own right.

20. Can you suggest any changes that I should make?

No - sorry - it looks pretty good to me!

PS. Sorry this has been so long coming Sue - I am running off to post it now - Good Luck with it!!

love Bambi

PSS. I think the questions on how other people see motherhood is a really interesting one - I would really like to know this too! Especially when I think of what the people at my workplace think of me now, especially the men. I even wonder how husbands and partners se motherhood. Chuck doesn't give me any straight answers so if you find out Sue - let me know!!

Appendix Six

Interview - Linda

How did you feel when you found out that you were pregnant?

Excited, because the pregnancy was planned. Surprised because I didn't expect to get pregnant as quickly as I did.

How long did it take?

Two months.

That was a bit quick!

Yes. But then I suppose in that we hadn't been married a long time, it wasn't a surprise. I hadn't been taking contraceptives for a long time, so all in all it wasn't a surprise it was that quick. Probably quicker than I had anticipated.

Were you working then?

Yes, and I had thought that I might get pregnant another six months down the track. But no, I was excited, it was planned and that was what I wanted at the time.

Was it the same with Gabrielle?

No ... Yes, it was the same process with Gabrielle, but arriving at the decision to become pregnant and my reaction when I was pregnant was different.

In what way?

Frances was about four when Gabrielle was born, and coming to the decision to have another child given that I really felt that I couldn't love another child as much ... I really felt overwhelmed with love for Frances and I truly didn't believe that I could handle the emotional side of a second child. I really felt that a second child could never mean as much to me as Frances, I couldn't imagine that a second child could mean as much to me. And I felt frightened of how I would handle ... if Frances would miss out...but it was all on the emotional side. I didn't have a problem with fitting it in, because Frances was older, more independent and understanding. Frances started school the following year, Gabrielle was born in October ... no, Frances had another twelve months at home.

Did she start kindergarten?

No, playgroup. Gabrielle was twelve months old when Frances started school. But, no, I just had this terrible ... the biggest decision was to have a second child, and given that ... when we decided to have children I never intended to have an only child. I'd come from a big family, and so had Sean, and I couldn't imagine having an only child, and I never felt I wanted Frances not to have siblings, but the decision to have another, was (unclear)

So how did you come to make this decision?

I guess basically in terms of management I'd left it as late as I could. By a lot of other people's standards that might have been silly, but things like if I'd had a really new baby and Frances was starting school that would have been a lot harder to manage, the taxi business, when you're taking a child to school and a new-born baby has got to come with

you, that's a lot harder to manage. That was one consideration, I had another twelve months.

Also coping with Frances starting school.

Yes, the emotional issues that I was going through, dealing with that, I was beginning to think then of what I wanted to do for me, and the longer I delayed it, the longer I was going to be at home. So, that was how I made that decision.

And Sean felt the same way?

Yes, from Sean's point of view, fatherhood was all he ever wanted. Well, no, he wanted me too, but ...Sean loved children, was a lovely uncle to his nephews, he absolutely loved children, I don't think he ever covered up the fact that that was what he expected of marriage, to have children. That was not as absolute as it sounds in the telling, but it was part of marriage, having a family, we got married, and I suppose that was where his life had arrived at, being married and wanting children. Probably the timing of falling pregnant with Frances was more his timing than mine. I wasn't unhappy about it, but I still had lots of things that I could have done with my life, prior to falling pregnant. Because I was only twenty-three, and I was starting to achieve some real career goals at that stage, but because Sean was that much older, that had to be a consideration.

So he wasn't too old later on?

Yes, and given the way our situation is now Sean is likely to be maintaining Gabrielle in education really right up until he retires. So Gabrielle's got another six years at least, and six years onto Sean's age now..

How old is Sean?

Just on fifty, so he will be ... you can reasonably expect to retire any time on from fifty-five. I suppose time was for him of the essence. For me, I probably would not have chosen, had my partner been the same age.

Had you always thought that you would have children?

Yes.

What sorts of things ... why did you think that was something you always wanted?

Probably because I had a very traditional upbringing, I came from a reasonably large family, very big extended family, very family oriented, very happy comfortable family. And very traditional family values, so all those things impacting on, there was never any reason that having children felt insecure to me, I was happy with that role. My mother was happy with that role, everyone I knew ... I never saw occasions when that wasn't...

So it was something positive - all the mothers you knew were happy mothers?

I suppose when I look at different people now, you don't always know, and I look at myself at one particular time and I was really unhappy, and I don't know whether my own mother might have been unhappy, but never recognised it or glossed it over, but never ever did it come through that she was unhappy, and I don't think that she was, but I can't make that judgement. I don't know that a mother would run around saying ... there's a certain distastefulness if you ran around saying that you hated being a mother, once you were a mother, the effect on the children, I would hate my mother to have run around with a big placard saying "Motherhood is the absolute pits". I wouldn't do that to my children, I might question aspects of motherhood, and there's been times in my life when I've questioned not

motherhood, but the role, but never ever have I questioned how right it was to have children.

Did you feel anything that you'd call maternal instinct? Before you had children?

Not before I had children. I never looked at babies, and I don't now look at other people's babies and become overwhelmed. But since I had children, having more children, once I'd had Gabrielle and got over that barrier and proved to myself that it wasn't an issue, that you can love two children, it's not one person's love divided in half, it's equal quantities, once I got over that, there have been times when I would have liked more children, and I put that down to maternal instinct. I think I could probably be seventy and still have this desire to have babies. Because being pregnant I found very lovely. But I never, other people's babies don't make me feel maternal, and I didn't feel that prior to being pregnant. I did about my own children, once I'd had them. And the emotions that my children stir in me are emotions that I never felt prior to being pregnant and I don't feel about anything else, not about Sean, or any other aspect of my life, my mother or father, or anyone, there are some depths of emotion that I feel for my children that I don't feel for anyone else.

It's something that I think you have to have children to understand.

You do, and I remember I said it to Kate, because Kate went through ... before she fell pregnant, and then she made the decision that irrespective of her relationship, she wanted children. And I said to Kate, and I firmly believe that your children bring out the real depths of emotions, it might be frustration, I think you feel more frustration with your children than anything else. I think you probably feel sadder for your children than anything that ever happens to you. I felt unhappier when my children have felt ostracised by a friend. How I've felt is different to how I'd feel if it happened to me - the depth of it, it's hard to explain, physically I feel, inside, in a real deep way, and I can remember, well it can still happen, but particularly when they're little, when you go along and watch them in a play, the sort of emotion that can stir, when you see your children on a stage, it's nothing like watching other children. It's hard to explain, but the depth of emotion is ... I love Sean hugely, but I love my children differently, it's really physical, very deep and touchable. For me it's different.

A woman I work with, Helen, who is mild, placid, no, not placid, but she's kind and sweet, a lovely woman, would never hurt anyone, and once she was talking to me about something, and she said that you would kill for your children, and she really meant that, that if anyone was going to do anything to her children, who are all grown up now, I think the youngest is about twenty-one, she said that's what she'd do.

I imagine I would, I know that unequivocally that Sean, and I suppose this is falling into male/female stereotyping in a way, but Sean would physically become a totally different person if someone hurt his children. And I believe that he has the same depths of emotion about the children that I do, but he wouldn't express them the same way. When Gabrielle fell off her bike, I think it's the only time I've seen Sean show that sort of reaction, and he went through when my father died, and other times like that, and I think, and I wasn't the only person to make this comment, that Sean could well have had a heart attack, he was so distressed by it. You can almost touch the emotion you feel for your children. I don't think you can measure it by how you feel before you have children. I came from a really happy home, had lots of love, not really demonstrative, but those feelings, I didn't have to cover up my feelings, but definitely everything is so intensified. Almost in a way that even though your children have physically parted from you, there's almost a bit of a physical attachment. My dad used to always say that this is going to hurt me a lot more than it will hurt you, in situations when I was unhappy, crying, he'd be joking and trying to pass things off, or physically, if he was pulling a tooth, it sort of got to be a bit of thing, with dad ... but when I think about it, he really did mean it, even when we were in trouble, he'd say, this hurts me more than it hurts you. and we'd say yeah, yeah, I'm the one restricted to

my room, but I know now that it did, even punishments. And I've gone through that with the girls, when I've punished them it really does hurt you. I can feel quite physically sick, even though I know for whatever reason because of the judgement I've made that I have to go through with it ... you still get that physical hurt. But I think you have to have children, people can say it to you, and you can think that you would be different, but, getting back to Kathy, something she's said to me a number of times is that, "I know what you mean." And Kathy is so rational, but if you ask her, she'll say, "I know what you mean."

It's funny that you said that you never felt maternal. I used to think that there was something wrong with me because babies did nothing to me at all. I'd look at babies, and people who'd just had babies, and all I'd see would be piles of dirty nappies and restrictions and limitations. And I thought that I'd never have children because obviously I didn't have whatever people have ... I had some idea that people who had children must have had some idea before, that it was right for them.

I left school, went to work, and I was really stimulated by sport I played, by my achievements at work, I had big groups of friends, and I still considered myself just out of school in many ways, I was moving nicely in my career, I didn't have this huge overwhelming need to be a mother. It was other circumstances in my life that impacted on the decision, it wasn't just because ... had I not had other considerations I would have waited a bit.

This was mainly Sean's age?

Sean's age, that mostly, and choices that I had to make at that time as far as work was concerned, I would have felt a moral obligation to have deferred it for more than one or two years. There was a situation at work where I was on the brink of, Social Security was about to open regional offices, they only had one office in Hobart, and they were on the brink of opening regional offices, the first at Glenorchy, and it had been put to me that I could go out there as second in charge, and the lady who was going out there to be regional manager was in two or three years of retirement, and the idea being that I'd be in charge then. So had I gone, there is no way that within half a dozen years I would have either had the time or the focus to have a family. It then made me start to make those decisions. And I never ever not wanted to have children.

You were always going to have them?

I was always going to have children. They were a part of my marriage and a part of my future, the timing was the only thing, it became a bit clinical, and was impacted on by other people.

And you think that the reasons that influenced your choice to have children was the way you'd grown up, the way you'd lived?

They seemed a part of it.

That was life? Marriage and life and growing up....

Yes, again, the relationship I had with Sean, because it was part of his focus, then there was nothing in our relationship that could change that. He came from a family like mine, and that was where his life was heading, and that was what I expected of marriage, there was nothing ... he didn't have any huge ambitions that we would together do anything other than set up a family. He didn't have a huge desire to wander the native rainforests of South America or anything, none of those things.

You said that being pregnant was really nice?

Yes, being pregnant was personally very nice, it cam be very uncomfortable because I'm not very big and I had reasonably big babies, towards the end it was very uncomfortable, but I suppose to be perfectly honest it's the attention you get. I mean the reverence with which you're treated, so that was one aspect of it. That wasn't the only thing, it was really lovely feeling a baby inside of you, a pain in the bum towards the end, and that's quite literally ...

So I've been told! There are complex things about having babies..

Yes there are, but there are times when there are private things which you experience which no-one else can, and in your relationship, they're the nice little secrets you can have, something ... it sounds very selfish, probably it is, but it's one aspect of your relationship that only you can experience, it's all yours ... and I can remember thinking that, that I quite liked the fact that I could feel this little baby moving, and at least for that time the baby was mine. Those things have probably become clearer to me since the children have grown up and I've thought about myself now, but I know that were the feelings I had whilst I may not have acknowledged them. I did like the tender loving care that you get.

You do get a lot of fuss, don't you?

You do.

I've noticed that at school, another teacher is pregnant and people haven't made an over-fuss of her but you get a lot of approval, I think, for being pregnant.

You do, and I was the second youngest of five children, and as I've explained, I come from a very solid background, never lacking in love or anything, but probably of all the children I felt the least important, and during the time I was pregnant I felt special, and I think more so than at any other time in my life, I felt not special but extra special, the sort of thing you feel on your birthday.

Last year at Christmas, before we went overseas, we had a lunch with my two sister in-laws, who'd both had babies, Jon was a month and Hannahwas about thirteen months, and I hadn't seen my brothers or my dad for ages, and I hadn't seen the babies before either, and it was really as though they were so important, and I felt a bit left out./ I don't think I was really left out, but I must have felt that this wonderful fuss was being made and also that Karyn and Saskia could sit down and have this great conversation about babies and stuff, and I couldn't be a part of it at all.

And yet it's really funny because when you said that, that ultimately was the thing that I liked least about motherhood, that real tradition, the only thing that mothers want to talk about is babies. I loved it for a certain period of time, but in the end it's not all that satisfying. It is when babies are little, it's all balanced out by the nurturing, by your baby's need for you, but in the end when that isn't what its all about, then just continuing that major role. Once Gabrielle was at kindergarten I wasn't into perpetuating that, sitting around talking about how they could dress themselves for kinder, toilet themselves, all that ... which you find happened in a lot of circles where mothers just talk about ... discussion is limited to their offspring

They haven't got anything else in common?

Yes, I suppose so. If you walk into a room of strangers you try to find some common ground, and with mothers you know that you're on common ground if you talk about children. You can rattle on, and mothers are frequently thrown together with people they don't know, whether it be playgroups, or standing around, waiting for kids to come out of kinder, or whatever, you're thrown into situations with people you wouldn't necessarily choose to be with, not a homogeneous group, but one thing that makes you common is children, and that's where you focus. For me it changed. I liked it when they were babies,

and when I was pregnant particularly, the attention I got, because I don't generally call out for attention, I'm not an attention seeker in any other part of my life, so maybe there is a little bit of me that is, but it was met, and I haven't needed it since.

It's interesting you said that, cause all this year, watching Lauren the woman at school who's pregnant, and I've been keeping a journal, about whether I want to have a baby or not, and I've noticed that when I see Lauren getting all this fuss and attention, I come home and really want to have a baby, so someone can make a fuss over me.

You're not really an attention seeker, you don't run down the street, with a mohawk ...

And I try not to be noisy or loud, or demanding. ... and I think that with Margaret, my mother-in-law, she'll talk about someone who's just had a baby, and I think wouldn't it be nice to have someone talking about me like that. I've sort of worked out for myself that it's all an attention seeking thing.

As I say, I reflect on it and ...

What did you think it was going to be like, to be a mother?

I guess to be perfectly honest, whilst I thought about future things, like education, I thought about that a lot, what I wanted, I really didn't think about them as anything other than babies. I can't remember that I never thought about pimply horrible teenagers ... so when I pictured my baby I pictured a baby, until about a toddler. I saw the big picture stuff, like education, and the aims I would have for them, and to pursue careers, stuff like that, but I never really thought about what are probably the most difficult years for bringing children up, which are the adolescent years, I never thought of them.

Did you think that you were going to change at all?

No, I don't think I did, at the age I was, which was twenty-three, I don't think that in your twenties you're conscious of changing at all, very much. You don't see that you have changed, I don't think I ever felt anything other than eighteen until I was in my mid-thirties, and my children started to make me feel older because I started to have to deal with more difficult situations. When they were little, I felt young.

You didn't think that being a mother was going to do profound things to your ... I mean, you don't have to think that you were going to change.

No, I didn't think that I was ever going to be ... or gain huge insight that I would pass on to my children. With hindsight, I can look back now and see lots of changes in me, but I never foresaw those.

What did you feel like after you'd had Frances and Gabrielle?

Immediately - when they were little?

Yes.

I suppose on a purely physical personal basis, I didn't feel very attractive. I can remember when I was breastfeeding and that was probably the most unsexiest period of my life. Not that I felt that I was really sexy before or after, but I was the unsexiest when breastfeeding.

With both of them?

Yes.

How long did you breast feed for?

The huge, long total of six weeks for each. I was a failure.

So they never took you into the Nursing Mothers Federation?

No. I was too anxious, I think, and it was one of those Catch 22 situation, the more anxious the less well you do, and then the less well the more anxious...

Was it back in vogue then?

No, it was coming back into vogue, to the extent that those who believed in it believed in it unequivocally, and therefore I remember the clinic sister, and she is the person who becomes God in your life,

This is where you go and get the baby weighed?

Yes, and they tell you if the baby's getting enough food, and as they measure the baby you see your motherhood being measured. If the baby's grown, then you're a good mother, and if not you're terrible. And so when you say how do you feel there are those things, immense pressure. As I said, I didn't feel very attractive, when you're carrying a baby around you don't feel ... especially when you're breastfeeding. And the baby becomes an attachment to you, so you don't feel attractive. I don't remember that it worried me. Whereas when Gabrielle went to school and I started to focus on myself again, to think about doing my hair nice again, I don't think I ever let myself get horrible, it's all relative. I never let myself ... I had some standards, I never walked around in my dressing gown.

No trackie pants and curlers?

No, there were some standards I set for myself. I wore trousers practically all the time, and I can remember when I went back to work part-time, the thing I loved more than anything was wearing skirts, and very rarely do I wear trousers now, at work. On the weekends I do, as a release. At the time I liked wearing a skirt and dressing up a bit, having the time to do it. And I do it for myself.

I'm like that at work too, I like wearing skirts and jackets at work, and when I'm at home I can wear trackie pants or jeans, it sort of separates things, a bit more effort...

But you do it for yourself ...

I don't care what people at school think.

It makes you feel good, I think, but when I had babies that was harder to achieve. You'd probably get dressed up nicely and then they'd throw up on you, so I never felt attractive in a physical sense. I always took care.

What about emotionally, how did you feel about being a mother?

I loved being needed, because children need you rather than want you. I think that in other relationships with adults, people can want you, as far as Sean and my relationship is concerned, I believe that on an emotional level Sean needs me but wants me more because I can cook and he can't. But when children are little, they really need you, emotionally they don't survive very well without you. I was very much aware that I had a lot to give, and did, and I really did throw myself into motherhood. I was very conscious of being a good mother, and was very proud of it. I took it on I suppose with the zealousness that I do most things, as my career, I looked at motherhood seriously, I tried to read about practices, without blindly following anything, following my instincts, taking into account my role models, I was very conscious of my responsibilities. I really felt needed, until the children went to school.

What was it like then?

When Gabrielle went to school, I went through a period where emotionally I hit the bottom. When I look back on it now I can't believe I did it, because it was different to how I was before and how I've been since. I really felt unneeded, and it's not necessarily a criticism of teachers, because I think I have always been supportive of the profession, but teachers, and I can remember feeling the same thing when
Gabrielle was born and she was sick, professionals have a tendency to believe that they have all the answers. Gabrielle was sick when she was born, and within a matter of hours... when she was still inside me I was important, and it was important that I be acknowledged, that my well-being was important to the child. As soon as the child was born, and this is going back some time, they're taken from you and you're almost left to your own devices, the baby went to the nursery and all the monitoring, and she was sick, for a number of weeks.

What was the matter with her?

I don't really know, and this is a criticism I've got, that to this day I don't know what was wrong with her, I suspect they did.

They never told you?

No. On the fourth day, she became jaundiced, which isn't unusual, and then she got an infection of some sort, and her temperature skyrocketed, and she had febrile convulsions, and they did all these horrific sorts of tests, and I had to stand outside the door, they wouldn't let me in, you heard your baby screaming its head off, three days after delivery, and you can imagine the emotions just having been parted, physically and emotionally, and it was like, "You stand out here Mrs Poulter while we do all this." And you're allowed to hear your baby scream, the intensity of the emotion, if you hear your baby cry, if does hurt you more than it hurts the baby. And they treat you like you don't count at all, that was really difficult. And that experience singularly affected me, it affected how I treated schooling, you know how I was involved, I figured that no-one was ever going to tell me that I didn't know or that I wasn't a part of my children, because I was. What I felt, and understood, and subsequently what I intuitively knew about my children was much stronger than any other professional had read in a book. Gabrielle must have had an infection of sorts, she actually lost the circulation in her arms and legs and they went black, she had these black arms and legs ...

How long for?

That lasted only about a day or something, they bound her arms and legs to get the circulation going again, and then she had convulsions, but no-one ever told me that, the clinic sister told me later, and I could have been taking home a child who subsequently when her temperature went up had convulsions, but they never told me. Whether there was anything that they felt some blame for, I don't know. Probably she was really sick for 3 days, we were in hospital for two and a half weeks, because I refused, I sort of did a Pam Clarke, and they wanted me to go home, and I wouldn't.

Where was Frances?

She was with Sean and my mother. There was no way I was leaving Gabrielle until she came with me. It was an infection of some sort, it took her ... her umbilical cord was infected too, she was twelve weeks old before that finally cleared up, which led me to believe that there was an infection in her system. But they never really gave me any answers, they took lumber punctures and other horrible things, and never gave me any results. Because she got better, we moved on, but getting back to school, that was it again. I'd brought no we'd brought the children up, I had devoted my time in turn to each of them,

and it's as though as soon as you march your child through the school gate everyone knows better than you.

The doors shut, don't they?

They do, and they don't want to know you if you offer an opinion, they see it as a criticism. Because I understand, and some of my closest friends are teachers, I do understand that's not what you mean, but that is what happens and because I am what I am, I decided not to become aggressive, if you can't lick them join them, was the role I took. Definitely you get to the door and they know better. I remember when Frances was in Grade 1 being hugely personally offended when Frances came home and told me that one of her teachers said that her mother gave her too much lunch, and she had to share it with other children. I think because some other child didn't have any lunch, I really think what was at the bottom of it was that they weren't allowed to leave the classroom until they'd finished their lunch, and Frances would have been nattering instead of eating, and so when the time came, she always would have had more lunch ... But the criticism was of me - your mother gives you too much lunch, so you can share it.

What an extraordinary thing to say.

It is, but children never relay to you the context, you get the content, which is again what teachers get from children. I've heard a lot of staffroom conversations, and I feel that teachers judge parents on children, and how much of is necessarily true - a child's version of it ...

They'd be saying what they thought had happened.

I'm not saying that it might not be true, but ... But I guess what I felt more than anything was a real loss and where my children needing me had been the very essence of my existence and having given up work and there wasn't a lot of other stimulation in my life.

Did you have lots of friends then?

I had lots of friends.

Other women with children?

Yes, that's what I was going to say, not a lot of other interests, lots of friends but all in the same boat. I then went into a period of my life when I got to the lowest I'd ever been. I got to the stage when I thought I had terminal cancer. I really went through what was a real deep depression.

Did anyone recognise this?

My family didn't and Sean didn't in the beginning. When I took Gabrielle to school I'd go home and go to bed. I look back at it now and don't know how ... I wouldn't go back to bed for the rest of the day but I'd lie down and then force myself to get up and do something and then I'd lie down again. Physically feeling that I was absolutely exhausted, when in fact I wasn't. And it took me probably twelve months to even do anything about it, and finally I actually had diarrhoea, and I thought that I had bowel cancer, or something, and it's really silly but I went to my GP and ...

You hadn't been to your doctor before then?

No, because, as I said before, I'm not an attention-seeker, and failing motherhood would have been failing everything I'd been doing ... so acknowledging that it could have been anything to do with being unhappy at home, anything of those things, would have been acknowledging failure ... because my mother wouldn't have ... there was no question that

what I was doing wasn't right. Sean was committed to being the provider, and besides that, it would have been acknowledging that maybe we'd made a mistake. And there wasn't a lot of options at that stage. When I gave up work and had Frances, I didn't even have to consider the options because I didn't have an option.

Childcare wouldn't have been..

Part-time work or childcare ... when I made up my mind to have children I also had in mind being at home, giving up work. That was only a few years after the public service, a few years before that, when you got married you had to go on temporary staff.....

Well before that once you got married you would have got sacked.

I think that as late as 1969 when you got married you had to go on temporary staff, so this was only in '74 when I got pregnant, you weren't made to do that, but you had your maternity leave and after that you either went back to work full-time

Doing what with your children?

Well, this is it, there weren't the options, but you either resigned or you went back to work. There were no part-time options, or long term leave without pay, none of those options were available to me, so I suppose Sean recognising it, and me admitting it, and my mother even seeing it ...

You must have looked unwell. Did you get really skinny?

I did lose a lot of weight, at one particular time I think I weighed about 7 2. My own GP when I finally went was away and the locum was a lovely lady, and I couldn't believe that she wasn't interested in my inoperable terminal cancer, this is serious, we shouldn't laugh ... and she was talking about me, and because in that time, I actually miscarried.

After Gabrielle had gone back to school?

No, prior to that. When Gabrielle was about fourteen months old I fell pregnant, a third time, and that wasn't planned, it was an accident, and I found out on Christmas Eve, and I spent Christmas, I sent Sean and the girls out to visit friends while I cooked Christmas lunch, and I cried solidly all Christmas morning, because I had started to think about my future, even though Gabrielle was only a baby, I only intended to have two children, and we were in that January having our first holiday away from home, we were actually going away, and I could see that in twelve months time we wouldn't be doing that, because we'd have a baby in nappies. I cried all Christmas morning, and then spent the next month and a half feeling hugely guilty, about having not wanted this baby, and coming to terms passionately with another baby, and I was starting to emotionally change, all those maternal instincts were starting ... and I miscarried at twelve weeks.

That's late..

Yes, it is, and so my body had got used to it, and my head had dealt with all the horrible things about crying on Christmas morning about a baby and so when I miscarried I hadn't really told anyone I was pregnant, so I had to deal with that myself. And traditional, well Mum's reaction was, it wasn't meant to be, and you've got to just get over it, right. Whilst I love my mother, she wasn't hugely insightful; or, and I don't mean that as a judgement, but ...

People were like that about miscarriages though, weren't they?

That it was nature's way.

That it wasn't anything really to grieve about..

Yes, and I think there was a time when foetuses and unborn babies, you just didn't think about them, and besides, with my own mother, she had five children, and people did experience miscarriages, and then they'd get on and have another baby. I didn't ever intend to have any more children, and life was a bit more planned, so the miscarriage ...

You must have been feeling really awful about your crying ...

Yes, so I never really came to terms with that, and then obviously Gabrielle had a few more years at home, then when she went to school. Getting back to the doctor, I couldn't believe she wasn't that interested, and she kept asking me about things, did I take time to go window shopping ... she didn't ask me about the physical - she took some tests, as a precaution really, but didn't really focus on those, and the second time, she called me back, we just talked, and then Sean came in to one of these sessions, she asked me to bring my husband in, and I thought, oh no, this is the crunch, this is when we really find out about me ...

Did you tell Sean that you thought you had terminal bowel cancer?

No, but I think he had enough signs, and I think at that stage he was really worried about me, I had the symptoms, I did have diarrhoea that I couldn't stop, and I was constantly tired, and totally out of character, because when the children were at home I would spend hours with them, in the garden, reading, going to the library, doing all these exciting things, and then I'd spend the nights doings houseworky things, and I had tremendous energy. And all of a sudden that changed, my routine changed, and the house wasn't tidy, I was less motivated, and really she pinpointed what my problem was. Emotional, psychological, and that was when we ... (unclear) ... went back to work.

Is that when you went to Dora Turner?

I did some relief teacher-aiding first.

Weren't you lucky that you found such a good doctor?

Yes, and I do have this belief and a lot of other things have happened in my life since, that if things feel right you go with it, because I really feel that at the time I was really distressed that I couldn't see my normal doctor, he was away on extended leave or something, and I had to go, I got to the stage where this terminal cancer was going to get me if I kept putting it off, and it was incredible that I was treated like that.

Yes, if you'd seen some crusty old doctor who'd just given you tests ...

Or made me feel very guilty about how I was feeling, told me to get over it..

Andrew's mother told me once that when she went to a doctor, for a similar kind of thing, she was feeling really run-down and depressed, and he told her to take up smoking. That was the kind of answer she got.

That then stimulated me to do other things, and being drawn to Claremont Primary was really my first step. I decided that I would do something there, you see I still wanted to be with my kids. That was when I started to became more involved at school. And I don't know whether the principal, Ben, saw something in me, because ... I wasn't satisfied with mothers' afternoon tea groups. That was the real dilemma that I recognised, even subconsciously, that when the children were at home I was really happy, to be everything to them, and I didn't seek a lot, I maintained a circle of friends, but I didn't rely on that, I really relied on what I did with my children, what we did together, and when Gabrielle went to school what was left for me was, like a lot of mums who drop their children off to

school, go and play tennis, afternoon teas, stuff like that, but, I then got involved in school, and they recognised the talents that I didn't, creative talents that I might have, and ... That's my real argument, I don't believe ever ... my sister used to say that they use you, but the more they wanted me to go, the more I went, and in fact, it was really what brought me out of being depressed.

It was obviously what you needed.

It was what I needed, and I to this day would defend the fact that they used me. I used them far more than they ever used me. Because it got me from being hugely depressed and bordering on being out of control, to gaining enough self esteem to look at myself and ask myself what I wanted. Despite all the things that people might say about Ben, I think that he's a delightful man.

I think so too, when I think about what he did for me, after the short time that I worked there.

When you meet him he gives this huge show of being a chauvinist and uncaring, but he's a soft, understanding man. He's very supportive, but a lot of people just take him on face value. So he encouraged me a lot, and it turned out that he required a lot of me, but I still say that I did it for me, I used that situation ...

And from there to Student Services..

It was an experience ... but in fact now, I consider that I'm doing well in my work now, and a lot of that is because I think back and think I can ... you can express your views and you do, I thought at the time it was an extraordinary situation, and it was.

It was really hard to get out of all of that once you were in it, and having people around like David and Lee doing what they did.

And everyone thinking that was the centre of the universe.

That nothing else mattered.

So, go on ... I've probably totally stuffed up your interview!

No you haven't, you couldn't ... What would you say that being a mother is like?

Despite the fact ... for me, it has to have been the greatest learning experience. I know more about me, I'm sure, than ... having children obviously explores the emotions, and, I'm really happy to have children, because if I'd not been a mother I wouldn't have felt as confident as I do, that experience ... Questioning ... other people's judgements of me ... Traditionally, if children misbehave, the first thing people say is about the mother, she's all the time doing such and such. You're really judged, and so you judge yourself, and think about yourself, and when your children play up, you wonder, sort of question whether it's something you've done. And I mean, when you've got babies, I can remember feeling really under pressure when they were little. When the children were babies, and they'd cry, Sean would say, "What's wrong with them?", and I never knew any more he did, but you're meant to know all these things, and so therefore you do sort of question. And I can imagine, only imagine how you'd feel if your baby died, how you would blame yourself, because you do, when they cry.

It's always your fault.

Yes, it's what did you do wrong, and if you breast fed, then, that bit of chocolate, or one raspberry ... So what did you actually say?

What's it like to be a mother?

I think as a result you lose some things but you gain a lot. I think I've lost and I often, if I think of people like you and Caitlin the carefreeness, the, do you know what I mean? Whether it be on a monetary basis, or physical basis. I am much much more cautious. I would never do anything really risky. The mother in you puts up all those alarm bells. Everything becomes a whole picture thing.

Yes, someone was saying to me, remember the woman who went diving and died, that she had five children....

Yes, why would she do that with five children ...

They said what right did she have to go diving when she had five children, and I would never have thought that, until that woman had said that to me, I would never have thought about thinking of your personal well-being in those terms.

It's a big difference, just everything you think of in terms of, well in my case, three other people, definitely as a mother you think in terms of two other people and therefore you become intensely protective, intensely boring, for that reason ... no, you do, super cautious, I say you do, but I do. You lose that carefreeness. And the same with money, before I would spend money on myself, I would measure it up against what I thought the girls might need. It's not ... I never ever think of that in terms of martyrdom.

Or sacrifice.

No, it's not a sacrifice, it's just ..I don't know how you'd describe it ... you just do, and that's why I think you would kill to protect your children. Your well-being would become third on the list, absolutely, I know it, even with respect to buying things. Even in respect of things like, I can remember when my mother, if there were two cakes left on the plate, and they were her very favourite cakes, she would never think of them if we wanted them. And I ... if my child wanted a lolly that I had unwrapped, I wouldn't pop it in my mouth and let them stand and watch. That sounds a really simple analogy, but ... does that answer the question?

Yes, it's about being selfless ... not really selfless, but realising that your happiness depends on their happiness, so if you deprive them ultimately you're going to end up unhappy, aren't you?

Yes, I suppose I never really thought what it represents, I just know it exists, and I don't think it's because I want to be recognised as a martyr to my children, I don't see it as that, I don't seek any recognition at all, because in fact I mentioned earlier on liking attention, but that has truly gone, I'm doing lots of other things in my own life, but there's no doubt that it'll last until I die, that my children will be more important than me, absolutely. I think until you have children, there are lots of emotions that you never experience. I don't say that it's best to experience them, I'm not making any judgement on that, that your life is lesser if you never experience it, but the fact is I don't think you will experience it. For me it's better, I'm really really happy with me at forty-two. And I don't know how happy I'd be with me at forty-two if I hadn't had children.

So do you think that there are other people who feel differently to you?

I know a lot who think of motherhood like I do, but I know of other mothers who don't. And in fact one of my closest friends is having terrible traumas at the moment. She's got two children, one's eight and the other fourteen, and she still feels lots of resentment at that, and guilt because she feels she, and in fact she's a lovely mother, but she feels guilty because some of it is practised and she feels resentment on occasions.

Because she has to give up things for her children?

Yes ..... and because her daughter is thirteen now and wants to stay up after half past eight and she really treasures the time after half past eight and they've gone to bed, and how she reacts to that. as I say, she is the loveliest person and her children are lovely, but she is going through trauma.

What do you think is making her like that?

Well she and I ... we went away on that weekend, and we talked about that. She says that all the things that I talk about and feel with regards to my children, she envies, but her mother died when she was nine, and she was brought up in a family of five children, and she was the youngest. Her father was devastated when her mother died, and she never worked through the grief and she thinks it's the lack of a role model. I find it really hard to make judgements on whether things are innate or learned. With my background, I grew up in rural Tasmania, in a really secure immediate and extended family, and broken relationships and anything less than stereotypical family, parents, kids, happy families, was unknown to me. So I really don't know what I learned and what I didn't. But she thinks because she's working through a lot of this, that a lot of the things weren't present in her life, with regard to family and mothers. The sort of things, one thing she mentioned the other day was that her father worked, obviously, and brought the family up, and things were very lacking in the emotions that mothers give to the family. He'd get up in the morning and make the oatmeal, and he'd put it on the table at a given time, and whether it got cold or not you had to eat it. I think that mothers are more inclined to keep it in the pot, mothers do sneaky little things that ultimately ... just little things, if Sean goes away, we'll get take-away, it's me being soft. Sean would be less likely to soften on it, whereas I do. Her home ran like a well-oiled machine, that's how her father ran it, and she thinks that's decided her, how she is. There are some aspects of her that aren't soft enough to be a mother. She feels resentful and guilty.

How awful.

Hideously awful. She's coming to terms, at least she recognises it and is trying to address some of it. So I don't think everyone feels like it, people are different.

I think you've probably already answered this, but do you think becoming a mother has been an empowering experience? You said before that it gave you confidence?

Yes, it did, and it made me more determined, at least in some things, they might have been quite different ... (unclear) ... I'm a reasonably easy-going person and I even know now that things that affect me I'm more likely to accept if I know that they're only going to affect me, than if they will affect the children.

You'll question something.

Much much clearer - really much more clearer with my vision with the children.

Do you think it is like that for other women as well, other mothers, that it is empowering?

Yes, I do.

How does being a mother make you feel about yourself as a person?

I like... it's allowed me to discover more about myself, whether that's my experience of motherhood or whether that's motherhood generally, but I suppose I'm only talking about myself ... it has taught (?) me about myself, because I've looked at and been through a whole lot of experiences that I wouldn't have been through. Some of the pain I would have

avoided, probably, even little ... the things that hurt your children and how you cope with that, and so forth, the intensity of that brings out another dimension.

Like you were saying, if you don't have children you can be carefree and can avoid things..

You can, in your relationship with yourself, you can be a little less honest, in your relationship with your children it's warts and all. And you have the responsibility of making it good for them. I would hurt for me if I could make it better for them. Which is some of the things I'm going through for Frances now. It makes me recognise the skills that you develop ... that you really feel ... at work, my supervisor's reports say things that I've displayed commitment and intuition, and I think that is because I do feel. But I don't know that I'd feel it as strongly if I didn't have children (?).

Is there anything that you think I should have asked? Anything that I've left out about being a mother?

One thing that I don't think I said and probably fell into one of the questions but I did ramble a bit, was how easy it is to lose your identity. You know how I said about not feeling sexy, the word mum is really, mum or mother, is really a non-sexy, and that's a sexual thing, one thing, and I don't know why I ever felt this because I was hugely proud of my children, hugely proud of being a mother, but I really resented being called by teachers 'Gabrielle's mum" or "Frances's mum". I really, and Ben always stirs me about it and I've never explained, he calls me Mrs Parker ... but Linda became hugely important to me ... I really love being a mother, and I love my children, and as they've matured, I not only really love them, I really like them. They're people who I'd choose to be friends with. I love them, but I also like them. But I hate only being known as their mums. People do that, and it's a bit like "wife", you do lose your identity. And that's probably why I do take care with my appearance, how I look, because also mum and mothers conjure up ...

Track suit pants? Moccasins?

Yes all those things, unsexiness ... and that in your own on-going relationship with your partner, if you feel unsexy and feel that you've got babies attached to your breast constantly, from when you're eighteen, if that's what mum conjures up ...

And that's how you'd end up looking, you look how you feel.

Whilst, in fact, I truly believe that mothers have so many skills, I am honest about that now. I used to say I'm only so and so, but I think ... I know I've got a lot of interpersonal skills, conflict resolution skills, nursing skills, written skills, teaching skills ...

And emergency skills, when you have to do something straight away...

I think we have these skills, and they're not recognised as such. I think now when I look at people who are in the area of professional development, like Lee, they're marketable skills, and yet a lot of mothers have them. How do you manage two fighting children? You draw on skills ... a lot of parents do, some maybe not so well. To manage, you draw on a lot of skills, and I think that loss of self, unless you fight it, and some things at that ... time, have to be the best learning of my life.

How do you think you could have got out of that without working? What else could you have done?

Societal standards say that work is the measure - What do you do? This is where I think women are really trapped. It annoys me, and has annoyed me, I believe in feminism, I believe I'm a feminist, but I don't believe in radical feminism. There are still ... I think that a woman at home should be measured, but you're not. You walk into a room, and someone says to you, and what do you do, you are measured ... I've often thought that I'd

like to say that I'm a nuclear physicist, and see how the conversation goes. I've often thought that I'd like to lie, not because I'm embarrassed for what I am, but I was, not ... because no-one recognises you ... it comes down to this mum, there's a picture of mums.

It's not a very flattering picture, is it?

I feel really sorry for that. I'm no different a person to what I ever was, but I lost so much, I've gained a lot by that. But for those who choose now not to go back to work, so you can be measured against that standard, which is what everyone's ego is measured by ... I find it really hard ... it's like if you were a cup, you can't keep taking out from the cup, without topping it up, and work is the only thing that society says.

And money, the financial rewards you get from work...

Money, and the other things, the holidays you can take, the restaurants ... they don't worry me, I'm really very content, but work is very important to me. I don't measure any other material things, I'm very satisfied with the non-material things. I think I would always work, before I did voluntary stuff, and I measured myself by that and that built me up enough to take on paid work. But for mothers at home, I think it's dreadful, because they are judged ...

Do you have any comment to make about these questions? Like, were they really boring?

No, not boring..

Were they difficult?

No, not difficult either, because I've done a lot of thinking about me in relation to my family. I don't find it a problem answering questions, and I think it's really tremendous that you're allowed to say it, that you're allowed to talk about motherhood, how you feel about it. A lot of my feelings are mixed. I have some regrets about how I felt about being deprived about self esteem, but it's not regret, but it's a need to say that I was sorry about that and it wasn't as good as it could have been. Some research you almost felt obliged to say that the whole lot wasn't good ... you fell into that stereotypical outmoded whatever ... I feel happy about myself, I feel aware of issues and myself to feel comfortable with myself, that I am happy to be a mother. We are only starting to get permission to feel that way. But I feel that I am a feminist ...

How did you feel about answering these questions?

Happy, because it was you. I don't know how I would have felt with someone different, although again I feel I've developed confidence to do that, but I'm happier with you.

Can you suggest any changes I should make?

No, unless it is that when you transcribe this if my answers don't fit the questions, don't worry about the questions, just let the conversation go. I don't know whether strictly speaking I've answered your questions, but I'm happy that I've covered the positive aspects of having children ... so unless you feel ownership of the questions ... and you never made me feel that you did.

They are just a guide really.

I never got the impression that you were worried that I was waffling on.

No, not at all. ... I just had these areas, and I tried to work them out as a natural progression, from reflecting on being pregnant and so on ... and it didn't matter which order, if we jumped around.

And I think probably when I look back on my life it does all jump around. Sometimes things come up with Frances, and it's back to little-girl mode, and I have to go back to like it was when she was really young ... whereas most of the time now with her it's like woman to woman ...