Family and paid work: A critical discourse analysis of government policy and mothers' talk

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Abstract

This study, developed within a feminist social constructionist framework, examines the discourses which construct women's roles as mother and worker. It argues that government policy influences women's lives, not just materially through legislation, but ideologically through the promotion of certain discourses, which enable and constrain women's choices. In order to explore the interface between policy and experience, critical discourse analysis was used to examine two texts: the *Action Plan for New Zealand Women* (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2004a)*,* a government policy document, and the talk of two groups of first time mothers. This methodology focuses on the power of language to constitute reality and examines which institutions and ideologies are supported by discursive constructions.

Although freedom to choose a life path is part of the policy's vision for New Zealand women, paid work is consistently privileged over caring roles. Motherhood is all but invisible and is constructed as an inevitable and undesirable demand, while paid work is constructed as essential to individual well-being and a duty of citizenship. An economic rationalist discourse positions women as workers first and foremost with a responsibility to financially provide for themselves and their children. Despite drawing on feminist discourses to warrant its vision, the policy is driven by capitalist goals of increased productivity and economic growth rather than the needs of women.

The women deployed an intensive mother discourse which privileged their maternal role and positioned babies as needing parental care, and mothers as the natural providers of that care. However, they also felt the pressure of the successful woman and economic rationalist discourses in which paid work is essential and motherhood is devalued. The tension between these discourses manifested as guilt and conflict, managed in part through the emergence of newer constructions of independent mother and child. In making their decision about re-entering the paid workforce, in most instances the traditional paternal role as primary breadwinner was unchallenged, while the maternal role was expanded to incorporate not just primary caregiver, but also worker.

The thesis finishes by considering the social consequences of these discursive constructions and argues that current discourses do not serve women, children, or men well. What is needed is a more complete breakdown of the public/private divide: a society which values care and work, both as responsibilities and rewards of citizenship, and which will therefore allow both women and men to construct more balanced lives and identities.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

My interest in women's choices around family and paid work stems from my own experiences. After the birth of my son in 1992, I took 12 months unpaid parental leave, returned to part time work, and then quickly became pregnant with my daughter. My employer was not legally obliged to give me a second year's leave, so I "chose" to resign. Looking back, it is clear that my choices were influenced not just by legislation, but also by the dominant discourses of motherhood. Leaving a child of less than a year old in care was unthinkable and it was assumed that my husband would continue to work: mothers cared for the children and fathers earned the money. At the same time I felt the pressure of other emerging and conflicting discourses that positioned stay-at-home mothers as mindless and boring, and equated success with a career. In the intervening years I have added many threads to my identity including volunteer, part time employee, and student. I have repeatedly made decisions about how best to balance my family and other interests including paid work and it has never been easy.

The pressure on women to return to paid work quickly following the birth of their children has never been greater. The government is increasingly vocal in its desire to increase women's participation in the workforce and is continuing to implement legislation aimed at shifting the economic benefits of returning to work in order to influence women's decisions. From a social constructionist perspective, however, these decisions are about more than economics. An increasing body of research, primarily from the United States but also Britain and Australia, has charted the clashing of two dominant discourses: the intensive mother who selflessly expends her time and energy nurturing her child, and the successful woman who individually competes in the public realm in her challenging and satisfying career. Discursive analyses of women's talk have revealed an inevitable tension as the women attempt to weave a unified sense of self from these often contradictory subject positions (Hays, 1996; C. Hughes, 2002; Lupton & Schmied, 2002). This research suggests Western countries are in an extended period of transition where individualistic discourses, such as successful woman, are gaining strength while more traditional gendered discourses, such as intensive mother, are waning. Almost no

constructionist research has been conducted in New Zealand, however, and as discourses are socially and culturally contextual, it is vital we gain an understanding of how the identities of women, as mothers and as workers, are framed in New Zealand.

Before outlining the aims and organisation of the thesis, I first set the scene by summarising the historical trends of women's participation in the labour force in New Zealand and introducing relevant aspects of legislation in New Zealand around work-life balance and parental leave.

Women's Participation in the Labour Force

Women's increasing participation in the labour force, in all industrialised countries including New Zealand, is considered to be one of the most dramatic and important changes to labour markets in the second half of the twentieth century (L. Davies & Jackson, 1993; van der Lippe & van Dijk, 2001). Labour force participation (LFP) is officially defined as the percentage of the working age population who are either in the labour force or currently seeking work, with some historical variation regarding the inclusion of part time workers. Carmichael's (1975) review of New Zealand women's full time participation showed a steady increase from 26.3% in 1901 to 28.4% in 1951 and 38.9% in 1971. He notes that the majority of the increase is married women; the percentage of married women in the labour force increased dramatically from 3.5% in 1921 to 26.1% in 1971. In 1981, women's full time LFP had increased even more dramatically to 46% before dipping slightly to 41% in 1991, a reduction commonly attributed to the radical economic restructuring of the late 1980s (L. Davies & Jackson, 1993). More recent figures from the Department of Statistic's (2005) quarterly Household Labour Force Survey include both full and part time workers. Women's LFP has continued to rise over the last 20 years: By 2001 57.8% of women of working age were either working or actively seeking work, and by 2005 this had increased to 59.6% (W. R. Alexander & Genç, 2005). Much of the recent increase stems from a reduction in unemployment, from 4.8% in 2003 to 3.8% in 2005, rather than from an increase in women wanting to work (Statistics New Zealand, 2005).

An important aspect of the increase is the pattern. Prior to the Second World War most women worked only in the interlude between leaving school and getting married, so the LFP graph was characterised by an L shape: After a peak at the mid 20s age group, rates rapidly declined then levelled off at the mid 30s (Carmichael, 1975). In 1961 an M shaped curve emerged: a bimodal pattern with two peaks of participation in early 20s and late 40s as shown in Figure 1. The advent of contraception in the 1960s meant more women remained childless and families were smaller; this, plus the continuing trend of women returning to the workforce after children, meant the M pattern became more distinct with the second peak of women returning to the labour force getting higher (L. Davies & Jackson, 1993). At the same time, a rapid increase in the availability of part time work meant women were more easily able to combine child rearing and labour force participation (A. Clark, 1986). Figure 2, which includes both full and part time workers, shows the importance of including part time work in

women's labour force activity statistics. The dip in the graph is much shallower as many women continue in part time employment when their children are young. Figure 2 also shows that by 1991 the low point of the M curve had flattened and shifted from the 25-29 age group to the 30-34 age group, indicating the trend towards later childbirth and less women leaving the labour force when having children (L. Davies & Jackson, 1993).
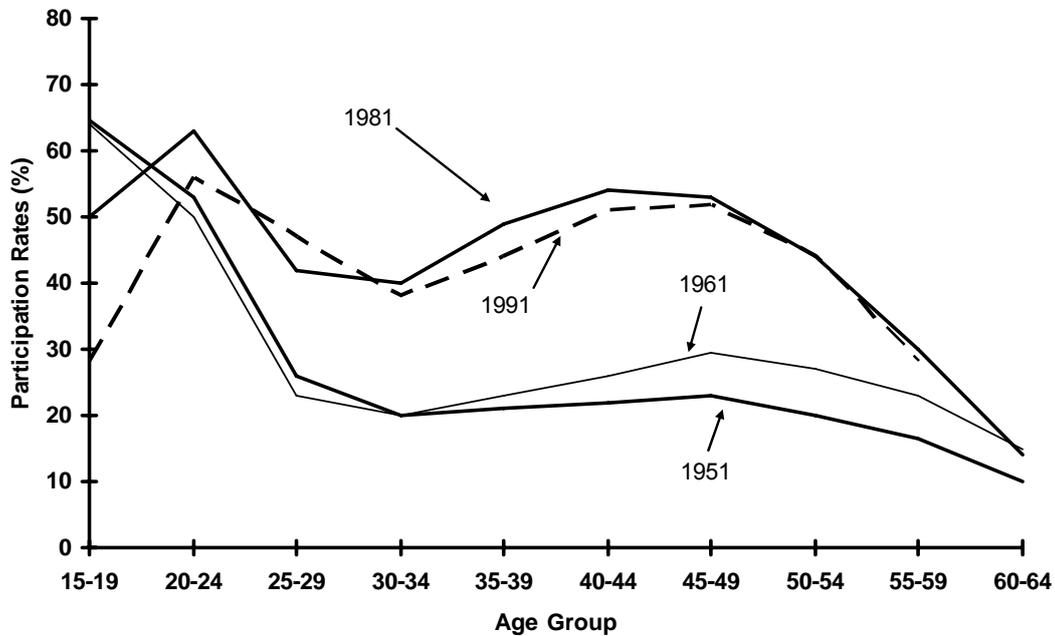

Figure 1. Female LFP, 1951-1991, full time workers only (L. Davies & Jackson, 1993, p. 70).
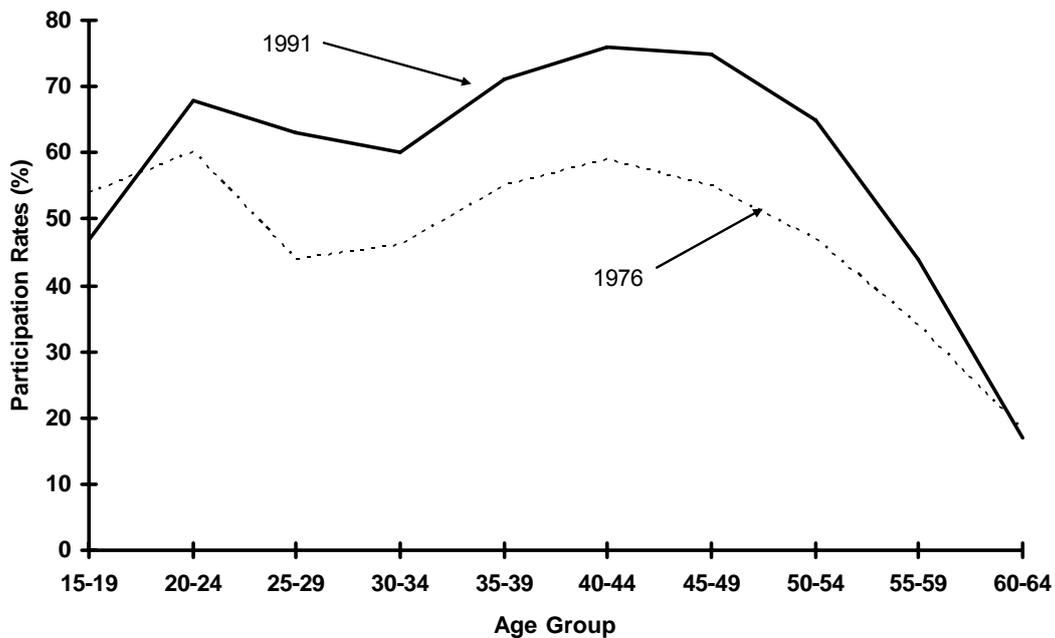
Figure 2. Female LFP, 1976 and 1991, full and part time workers (L. Davies & Jackson, 1993, p. 73).

The timing and size of the increase in women's rates varied across OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries (Jaumotte, 2003). While international comparisons are

made difficult by differences in measurement, Hyman (1978) makes the point that early increases in New Zealand rates lagged behind that of the United States and Scandinavian countries. A more recent OECD comparison notes that New Zealand has lower than average labour force participation rates for women, in particular for those aged 25-34 (Bryant, Jacobsen, Bell, & Garrett, 2004).

Carmichael (1975) summarised the historical factors that might explain these trends: technology freeing up women's time; World War II establishing women working before marriage as the norm; feminism changing women's aspirations; urbanisation and city growth; changes in family formation; changes in attitudes; and increased demand for female labour. As Hyman (1978) points out, however, it is impossible to separate these complex and intertwined factors. The Literature Review in Chapter Two summarises some of the key factors that contribute to national differences in women's work patterns, in particular structural differences in labour markets and government policies. Government policy is an important influence on both individual choices and social trends. The current state of legislation and the policy direction in New Zealand is therefore now briefly examined.

Legislative Context

The New Zealand government recently implemented the Work-Life Balance Project to gather information about what already happens to facilitate such balance and what else needs to happen (Department of Labour, 2003b). While the project acknowledges that balance is different for everyone, a key aspect is the balancing of caregiving and paid work, which remains largely an issue for women. Governments in Western countries are implementing policy initiatives such as parental leave and subsidised childcare, which aim to facilitate women's participation in the labour market. In her review of Europe, Australia, and Canada, James (2002) comments on the diversity of such legislation and the importance of the countries' historical and social development in understanding its effects. She notes "there is no direct or irrefutable link between policy interventions and particular outcomes for women, parents and families" (p. 5), therefore New Zealand policies need to take into consideration our history, values, and institutions.

Since 1987 New Zealand parents have been entitled to 12 months unpaid parental leave; in 2002 this was amended to include 12 weeks paid leave, recently increased to 14 weeks. The rationale behind such legislation is mixed. On the one hand, it is portrayed as a critical step in redressing the gender imbalance in the workforce in which women continue to earn less than men and are under-represented in higher status occupations because they bear the bulk of the caregiving responsibility. On the other hand, there is an increasing theme of the need for increased labour participation to fuel economic growth and to meet labour shortages (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2002b). This is made explicit in the Prime Minister's 2005 Statement to Parliament:

> While overall New Zealand's labour force participation rates are high, coming in seventh in the
> OECD in 2003, our women's rate lags – and in particular sits below the OECD average for women

aged 25 – 34. Treasury estimates that our GDP per capita would rise by 5.1 per cent if we lifted our participation rates overall to the average of the top five OECD nations. That's a worthwhile objective and at this time of labour shortage, it's a good time to be pursuing it. In last year's Statement I highlighted the need to increase women's participation in the workforce, and a number of steps have been taken to do that. (H. Clark, 2005)

From a social constructionist perspective, legislative changes do more than change the material costs of different choices. They also influence dominant discourses, which in turn constrain and enable women in different ways. This project aims to explore those discourses within both policy and talk.

Aims of the Research

The broad aim of this research was to examine the discourses within New Zealand surrounding women's family/work decisions. In particular I wanted to look at the interface between government policy and women's lived experience. To that end I analysed two texts: a government policy document, the *Action Plan for New Zealand Women* (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2004a), and the talk of two focus groups of first time mothers. My aim was to examine how the government positioned women as mothers and workers and then to explore the degree to which first time mothers accepted or rejected those subject positions. How did they construct motherhood and paid work? Do they experience the same tension that has been identified in other discursive research and, if so, how do they resolve that tension? As well as shaping behaviour and identity, discourses work to sustain power relations and societal practice. My analysis therefore aimed to consider the consequences of drawing on these discourses of motherhood and paid work: Who is best served by these discourses? What institutions are strengthened and supported?

Organisation of the Thesis

Chapter Two reviews and summarises the existing literature on why women choose to participate in paid work and as such represents current "knowledge" on the topic. I look firstly at economic accounts, founded on a utilitarian model of decision-making, which assume the decision is primarily a financial one. Secondly, I review psychological accounts, which suggest it is individual differences such as personality and attitudes that are most important. Finally, the review examines social accounts, including sociological explanations that focus on external structures, and social constructionist explanations that argue discursive constructions of objects and subjects work to constrain and enable women's choices.

Chapter Three outlines the research's underlying theoretical framework. Feminism and social constructionism are briefly introduced, key constructionist accounts of identity and agency are outlined, and the benefits of social constructionism to the goals of feminism are discussed. Finally I outline the key feminist values that have guided my research. Chapter Four introduces the research and I explain the methodology, critical discourse analysis, and the two data components. The benefits and

drawbacks of focus group data are discussed and the women in the groups introduced, before finishing with a consideration of relevant ethical principles.

Chapter Five presents the analysis of the policy document. The various discourses drawn upon by the policy are examined and the impact of its constructions on women's choices is considered as is the underlying economic agenda. The second data component is analysed in Chapter Six where I examine how the women in the focus groups constructed motherhood, paid work, and the decisions they are making following the birth of their child/ren.

Chapter Seven, the discussion, summarises the key findings, drawing the two strands of analysis together, and considering the broader implications for women, government, and our society. Chapter Eight concludes the thesis by looking into the future and suggesting ways in which we can perhaps move forwards as well as recommending areas for future research.

Working within a social constructionist framework means that I acknowledge that my values have influenced my research, right from the questions that I chose to study, through the facilitation of the focus groups, and the construction of the analysis. It is critical therefore that I openly acknowledge my place within this research. I am a New Zealander: middle-aged, middle-class, English born, married, heterosexual, and a mother. Of more import than such labels, however, are the relevant values that I hold. My involvement in the Playcentre movement has fostered a strong belief in the importance of parental care and education for children. In addition I believe that, as a society, we are moving too far towards an individualist and capitalist model that fails to recognise the importance of people, of families, and of communities. These are the beliefs that I brought to this research and which have undoubtedly influenced the analysis I have constructed. Throughout the earlier chapters of this thesis I have used reflexive boxes such as this one to comment on the interaction between the research and my own experiences. The later chapters, the analysis and discussion, are subjective and reflexive, and therefore these interludes proved less necessary.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

> "Social research generates the knowledge which
> underpins policy and practice and provides an
> evidential base for decisions."
> *Ministry of Social Development (2005a)*

Introduction

From a social constructionist perspective, a review of the empirical literature is essential as it is through such research that our knowledge of a topic is formed and our accepted understandings are legitimated. Research does not only record experiences of motherhood, it reproduces the discourses that shape the experience (Loveridge, 1990). As Woollett and Phoenix (1991) state: "Psychology reproduces dominant ideologies and legitimates current views about motherhood" (p. 28). A thorough review is also of particular importance in the context of this research as it looks at the intersection between discourse and legislation: Governments call for research and use the findings as one of the foundations of policy initiatives, as the quote from the Ministry of Social Development (2005a) website above makes clear. Joesch (1994) makes a similar point: "knowing what factors prolong or shorten the time women spend away from work should make it easier to develop and evaluate policies designed to influence female labour force participation" (p. 430). This review therefore aims to represent the current state of knowledge of mothers' decisions to undertake paid work.

The rapid increase in labour force participation of women, in particular mothers, has spawned a large body of research aimed at understanding women's decision-making and attempting to discover the factors which may influence women's choices. Three broad clusters of explanations can be identified although it would be misleading to suggest these are clearly delineated. Firstly, economic accounts see the decision as an individual choice determined by demographic and economic factors such as family composition, spousal income, potential earnings, and costs of childcare. Secondly, psychological accounts also argue that it is an individual choice, but consider internal factors, such as personality and attitudes, to be more important determinants. The third cluster, social accounts, is less cohesive and consists of a range of critiques of the individual agency assumption inherent in the economic and psychological models, and in particular focuses on the importance of women's sociohistorical and cultural context. Included in this final group, although even more radically different in their underlying assumptions about the nature of people, are social constructionist explanations.

Economic Accounts

One of the most common reasons for mothers working, according to both researchers and mothers themselves, is economic need (Eggebeen & Hawkins, 1990). For example, over 60% of the women in one study rated income as either essential or very important in their decision to return to work (Volling & Belsky, 1993). Considerable research has focussed on economic explanations for decision-making around family and work. This household labour-supply model, the "rational economic man model" (Duncan & Edwards, 1997, p. 30), argues that individuals and households aim to maximise their utility according to the economic costs and benefits of working versus staying at home. Three clusters of factors are seen to influence labour force participation: household income excluding the mother's, opportunity costs of remaining out of the workforce, and costs of returning such as childcare (Greenstein, 1986). Put simply, the model assumes that mothers will work if it results in net financial gain. Before examining these economic factors, research on two important demographic variables, family structure and relationship status, is reviewed. These factors have both a financial and social impact upon the work decision and are therefore directly relevant to the economic model. Following that, research on partner's income, opportunity costs, and the costs of returning to work is examined.

Demographic variables

The more children and the younger the last child, the less likely it is that the mother will be in the paid workforce (Abroms & Goldscheider, 2002; Baxter, 2005; Cleveland, Gunderon, & Hyatt, 1996; Gray, Qu, de Vaus, & Millward, 2002; Jaumotte, 2003; Klerman & Leibowitz, 1999; Leibowitz & Klerman, 1995). In Australia, according to Baxter (2005), the age and number of children were the strongest predictors of mothers returning to work, while another recent Australian study found that having more than one child under the age of four reduced the probability of the mother being employed by over 17 percent and the youngest child being older than four increased employment by 14.2% (Gray et al., 2002). However, American research suggests that this relationship between age of child and labour force status may be weakening there with only a two percent difference in participation rates at 7 and 36 months after childbirth (Klerman & Leibowitz, 1999). The most commonly accepted explanation of the effect of family structure on labour force participation is that having younger children or more children requires a greater investment of care from parents and, as will be examined later, increases the costs of childcare (Connelly, 1992).

Findings regarding the relationship between employment and being in a stable partnership are mixed. Most early research, undertaken when de facto relationships and single parenthood were much less common, examined married women only. Recently, more research has compared the labour force decision-making of lone and partnered mothers, reflecting the large increase in single parent families. One such Australian study noted that 58.5% of partnered mothers were in the work force, but only 44.5% of lone mothers (Gray et al., 2002). The analysis demonstrated that, while a third of this gap could be attributed to other group differences such as education and number of children, the remaining

two thirds is explained by variables impacting differently on lone and partnered mothers. For example, government benefits for solo mothers, which are rebated if she enters employment, work to dramatically reduce the net benefit of working for solo mothers compared to partnered mothers. McGovern et al. (2000) analysed what factors determine how soon after childbirth women return to work and found that married women were likely to return to work slower than single women. In contrast, other researchers have found that married women return more quickly (Desai & Waite, 1991; Klerman & Leibowitz, 1999) and that the presence of another adult in the household is also related to a faster return to the workforce (Wenk & Garrett, 1992).

While the tendency to use "couple" as the variable rather than "married" recognises the increase in de facto relationships, this may be masking important differences. For example, Abroms and Goldscheider (2002) compared married couples, de facto couples, and women living with another relative, and found that the marital relationship did impact on the mothers' hours of work with married women working fewer hours than cohabiting women. Similarly, Macran, Joshi, and Dex (1996) found that cohabiting mothers were more attached to the labour force than either married or single mothers. According to the economic model, being in a relationship affects the work decision through the availability of the partner's income reducing financial need. The inconsistent findings summarised above indicate that the effect is more complex however. One possible explanation for the difference between married and de facto mothers is that married couples may be more constrained by the traditional breadwinner/homemaker gender roles than cohabiting couples (Abroms & Goldscheider, 2002). Women in de facto relationships may feel less secure and therefore less willing to be financially dependent on their partner; equally the male partners may be less willing to financially support the women. It is worth noting that neither Macran et al. (1996) nor Abroms and Goldscheider (2002) determined the paternity of the children. Children in cohabiting families may be more likely to be only the woman's biological children, which may result in less willingness and/or expectation of financial support. Differences between marital and de facto relationships are also evident in analyses of income.

Financial variables

The first of the four economic influences, partner's income, is consistently shown to be inversely related to the mother's work status: A higher income is associated with a slower return to work (Barrow, 1999; Glezer, 1988; Gray et al., 2002; Greenstein, 1986; Hofferth, 2000; Joesch, 1994; McGovern et al., 2000). Evidence suggests that the strength of this association has reduced over time (Dex & Joshi, 1999). Abroms and Goldscheider (2002) compared the effect of partner income for married and de facto couples and found that, while the husband's income had the anticipated effect of reducing the wife's weekly hours of work, for de facto couples the effect was the opposite: a higher partner's income meant the mother worked *more* hours. As previously suggested, this may reflect the more long term nature of marriage and the desire on the part of de facto women to remain financially independent (Abroms & Goldscheider, 2002). This does not explain why a higher partner's income

results in the mother working more hours however. Another interesting result is Werbel's (1998) finding that while spousal income was significantly related to maternal employment six months after birth, it was not related to the mothers' intentions as measured before birth. The authors suggest this indicates financial factors can cause women to compromise their choices. Wenk and Garrett (1992) found it was the proportion of the family income the mother earned prior to birth rather than the absolute value that was significant: the greater her relative contribution, the less likely she was to leave work and the sooner she would return. The mother's income is one element of the next factor in the economic equation, opportunity costs.

The second economic influence, the opportunity costs of remaining at home, is commonly measured as either the mother's potential earnings or the status of her job. Researchers generally agree that the mother's potential income has an influence on her decision, with higher paid women more likely to remain in the workforce or return sooner (Barrow, 1999; Cleveland et al., 1996; Desai & Waite, 1991; Glezer, 1988). Similarly, a higher occupational status has also shown to be positively related to labour force participation (Baxter, 2005; Glass & Riley, 1998; Glezer, 1988; Volling & Belsky, 1993). Opportunity costs are often linked into the more detailed human capital theory. This theory views education, training, and work experience as all contributing to an individual's human capital, which increases job status and potential earnings and therefore raises the cost of withdrawal from the labour force through loss of income and deterioration of skills (Blau, Ferber, & Winkler, 1998). According to this model, it would be expected that three other variables: education, work experience, and age would also be positively related to participation in the labour force. These are each examined in turn.

The mother's education level is generally related to participation in the labour force although there are exceptions. Mothers with a higher education are less likely to leave their jobs for childbirth (Desai & Waite, 1991; Drobnic, Blossfeld, & Rohwer, 1999; Wenk & Garrett, 1992); more likely to return to work (Barrow, 1999; Greenstein, 1986; Wenk & Garrett, 1992); and return more rapidly than women with a lower education (Baxter, 2005; Desai & Waite, 1991; Hofferth, 2000; Macran et al., 1996; Waldfogel, Yoshio, & Abe, 1999). Gray et al.'s (2002) Australian study determined that education was related to employment for both partnered and solo mothers, with having at least a diploma compared to leaving school before 16 increasing the probability of employment by 21.1% and 23.3% respectively. Another Australian study found that women with bachelor degrees were more likely to return to work faster (Baxter, 2005). Contrary to these findings, Pascual, Haynes, Galperin, and Bornstein (1995) found that education was not related to the decision to work. However, they did find that women with more education tended to work longer hours. This was supported by Abroms and Goldscheider (2002) who concluded that each additional year of education increased the working week by over an hour. Interestingly, Lyness, Thompson, Francesco, and Judiesch's (1999) study of pregnant women's intentions found no relationship between education and planned timing of return to the workforce. However, this difference may be explained by the intention-behaviour gap. As

mentioned, the most common explanation for the relationship between education and labour force participation is its effect on human capital: "Education strengthens the attachment of women to the labour market, by increasing their potential earnings in the labour market and reducing the scope for specialisation within the couple" (Jaumotte, 2003, p. 7).

Despite work experience generally being considered an important human capital variable, very little of the research into mothers' labour force participation has included a direct measure of work experience. One early study did find that prebirth work experience was related to postnatal work status (McLaughlin, 1982). Hofferth (2000) found that each additional year of work experience raised the risk of working by 16%, but points out that this is a non-linear relationship that flattens at higher levels of experience. Other studies have included working in the year prior to childbirth as a variable and, not surprisingly, have found this to be a very strong predictor of work status after childbirth (Baxter, 2005; Joesch, 1994; Pascual et al., 1995). Increased work experience and better access to parental leave are cited as important reasons, but as Joesch (1994) points out, working prior to childbirth is also indicative of a stronger preference for work generally.

The final related factor that has been suggested as a human capital variable is maternal age (Macran et al., 1996) and most researchers find that older mothers are more likely to be in the workforce (Abroms & Goldscheider, 2002; Barrow, 1999; Leibowitz & Klerman, 1995; Lyness et al., 1999; Wenk & Garrett, 1992). For example, Cleveland et al. (1996) estimated that a 10% increase in the mother's age leads to an 8.1% increase in the probability of her being in the workforce. However, Pascual et al. (1995) found that age did not influence the decision to work in either the United States or Argentina. Rather than a separate human capital factor, it is likely that the relationship between age and work is confounded by work experience because older mothers will probably have greater experience and therefore greater potential income (Baxter, 2005).

Returning to the financial factors, the third variable assumed to relate to labour force participation according to economic theories is the costs of returning to work or the reservation wage (Greenstein, 1986). These include costs such as transport and clothing, but the primary variable measured is availability and cost of childcare. White's (2001) comparative analysis of 16 European countries, Canada, and the United States demonstrated that provision of adequate, reasonably priced childcare was related to increased women's labour force participation. According to Cleveland et al. (1996), childcare is a particularly important determinant because "its cost, availability and quality are subject to a substantial degree of policy control" (p. 133). Their analysis concluded that the effect of cost is substantial. They estimated the elasticity of employment with regard to the cost of childcare at −0.39 indicating that a 10% reduction in cost would result in a 3.9% increase in the probability of women being in the labour force. A second Canadian study reported a similar estimate at −0.38 (Powell, 1997), but two American studies reported estimates of only −0.20 (Connelly, 1992) and −0.23

(Barrow, 1999). A second interpretation of these effects is provided by Connelly (1992): "If childcare costs were subsidized 50%, our model predicts that 64% of married women with young children would be employed, and if there were universal no-cost childcare available, 68.7% of women would be employed" (p. 90). In order to more fully understand the relationship between employment and childcare within the economic model, Baum (2002) contrasted low-income and non-low-income mothers and concluded that childcare costs had a greater impact on the former. Barrow (1999), on the other hand, concluded that welfare recipients were not more receptive to reduced costs of childcare. This suggests it may be that the source of income is as important as the level, and matches the finding mentioned earlier that policies impact upon sole mothers (more likely to be welfare recipients) differently to mothers with partners (Gray et al., 2002).

Broadly, economic explanations suggest two groups of mothers are more likely to be employed: those in low-income families who work because they need more income and those with better education and high status jobs who work because the lost opportunities of staying home are too great. While these can both be constructed as financial decisions, they are very different. Research by Sholomskas and Axelrod (1986) supports this. They compared women with careers, defined as "committed to paid employment as a lifelong endeavour in a particular field" (p. 174), to women who held non-career jobs and concluded that the career women saw their decision as personal choice, but the non-career women felt constrained by financial necessity. However, it must be recognised that it is *perceived* financial need that is important. For example, Hughes and Hand (2005) interviewed 61 Australian mothers and asked whether money influenced their decisions to work or stay home. Only half of the women felt financial considerations were important and within both groups there was considerable diversity in actual financial circumstances and ideas of how much money was needed. The women in Himmelweit and Sigala's (2004) study frequently mentioned the influence of financial constraints, but acknowledged that this related to their preferred standard of living rather than bottom line need. It has been suggested that an ongoing decline in male wages has resulted in more families requiring two incomes (Greenstein, 1986), but Eggebeen and Hawkins (1990) argue that the meaning of economic necessity has changed. They analysed husbands' incomes in America over three decades and divided families into low-income, below twice the official poverty level, and adequate-income. They established that while the proportion of employed low-income mothers remained stable from 1960 to 1980, the proportion of employed adequate-income mothers tripled. They argue that this and other factors suggest an increase in the desired standard of living is a driving force behind mothers' increased labour force participation.

As has been shown, the research provides some support for economic explanations; however, the variability explained by the factors is generally small and the underlying theory has been widely critiqued. One of the key flaws is the underlying assumption that money is the sole reason for entering the workforce. Research by Doorewaard, Hendrickx, and Verschuren (2004) suggested three broad

motivators for paid work: financial reasons of income and security; job reasons such as interest in work and desire to use one's capabilities; and social and relationship reasons. They suggest men are more money oriented and women more people oriented. While this is nothing more than a reflection of traditional gender roles, it does highlight the inadequacy of economic explanations for explaining women's workforce participation decisions. Most researchers agree that by itself the economic model is inadequate; the employment decision is complex with a wide range of psychological and social factors, including personal preference, considered alongside the economic costs and rewards (Greenstein, 1986). This critique leads to two other broad explanations for mothers' decision-making which will be examined in turn. The first agrees with economic arguments that it is an individual choice, but argues the choice is determined more by psychological than financial factors. Hand and Hughes (2004) sum up this key approach: "work and family decisions are shaped by both circumstances and desire" (p. 49). This large body of research looks at individual differences of personality and attitude, some of which stem from life experiences and interpersonal factors. As will be seen, the second approach takes a more sociological viewpoint and criticises both the economic and psychological explanations for their failure to consider social context and their construction of individuals as having freedom of choice.

Psychological Accounts

A number of psychological factors are considered to influence women's choices. This review discusses personality and attitudes separately although this differentiation is not clearly delineated in the literature. Also, as discussed later, the stability and variability of these factors is an area of contention.

Personality differences

Surprisingly little research has examined how personality might influence women's choices, although some early research used broad personality scales and found some small differences. O'Connell (1980) classified women into three lifestyle patterns: traditional, non-traditional, and neo-traditional (returning to the workforce after a period of childbearing) and found that lifestyle was associated with personality variables. Non-traditional and neo-traditional women scored significantly higher on dominance, self-acceptance, achievement, and sociability with non-traditional women scoring higher still on capacity for status and intellectual efficiency. Lower nurturance has also been found to be a predictor of labour force participation (C. K. Morgan & Hock, 1984). Sholomskas and Axelrod (1986) found career women had the highest self esteem, then working women, then homemakers. Volling and Belsky (1993), on the other hand, found no differences in personality between stay-at-home mothers and those in paid work. More recently, Alexander (2005) found no difference in the self-confidence of employed mothers and those at home. These inconsistencies may have led to a focus on attitudes rather than personality as explanatory variables.

Attitudes and beliefs

Personal attitudes and beliefs about motherhood are commonly held to be important determinants of the decision to return to the workforce following childbirth. Early research tended to concentrate on separation anxiety and an aversion to infant fussiness, while beliefs about the nature of the maternal role have been of more enduring interest. Work/home orientation, later developed into preference theory, has also been a dominant theme of attitudinal research into women's employment decisions.

Separation anxiety was an early focus of attitudinal research, no doubt reflecting the strong interest in Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory. A series of studies comparing stay-at-home mothers and mothers in paid work found that the latter tended to be less anxious about separating from their child and believed their child was less distressed by the separation (Hock, 1978; Hock, Morgan, & Hock, 1985). Hock, Christman, and Hock (1980) looked at women who planned to stay home following childbirth and compared those who did so with those who changed their minds. They found that while both groups expressed anxiety about separating from their infants, those who returned to work perceived their child to be less strongly attached. A second attitude examined in the early 1980s was aversion to fussy infant behaviour with mothers who returned to the workforce having higher aversion (Hock et al., 1980; Hock et al., 1985; C. K. Morgan & Hock, 1984).

Attitudes and beliefs regarding the maternal role and views of childcare are of continuing interest to researchers. Unsurprisingly, it has been found that maternal employment has a moderate inverse association with traditional beliefs that a woman's role is that of caregiver (Granrose, 1984; Greenwell, Leibowitz, & Klerman, 1998; O'Connell, 1980; Werbel, 1998). Greenstein (1986) found women's attitudes towards working mothers to be the single largest factor in his decision-making model, accounting for 5.5% of the variation in labour force participation, greater than education, age, income, and husband's income. As Werbel (1998) puts it: "Those women who value the traditional family support roles will act in ways by which they can readily meet those role expectations" (p. 374). Equally, stay-at-home mothers tended to agree they were the best person to care for their children (Glezer, 1988; Hock, 1978; Hock, Gnezda, & McBride, 1984; Hock et al., 1985; Marks & Houston, 2002a; C. K. Morgan & Hock, 1984). It is of note that while earlier research asked mothers whether they were apprehensive about non-maternal care, recent research asks whether mothers feel alternate childcare is advantageous to a child's development. This reflects an important shift in societal attitudes and norms which is examined in the final section of this review. In both instances the findings are in the expected direction; employed mothers in the 1980s were less apprehensive about childcare (Hock et al., 1985) and nowadays believe that childcare is beneficial (Marks & Houston, 2002a).

While associations between beliefs and behaviour have been identified, women do not always act in ways consistent with their expressed beliefs about maternal care. For example, in Hock et al.'s (1984) research, the majority of the mothers expressed traditional beliefs about the importance of maternal

care yet 66% planned to return to work prior to their child's first birthday. Research suggesting women's behaviour does not always match their intentions or beliefs highlights two of the key criticisms of attitudinal explanations for behaviour which will be discussed later: the lack of consideration of the impact of external constraints and social context, and the distinction between personal values and ideological beliefs.

The final attitude of continued interest is work/home orientation or work commitment. Early studies by Hock and colleagues used semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to measure career orientation, "the amount of interest the mother expressed in a career, job, or occupation for herself" (Hock et al., 1985, p. 387), and repeatedly found it to be positively associated with labour force participation (Hock, 1978; Hock et al., 1980; Hock et al., 1984; Hock et al., 1985; C. K. Morgan & Hock, 1984). Desai and Waite (1991) use the term "work commitment" to describe an underlying preference for work over home and make the important point that this is distinct from labour force participation. Being in continual employment does not imply high work commitment as other factors such as financial pressure may be the cause. They construct work commitment as stable over time, but acknowledge that this is assumed. Interest in work/home orientation as an important determinant of behaviour has been revived lately with the development of Hakim's (2000) preference theory, which will be discussed shortly.

Limitations of attitudinal research

Two key limitations of earlier research into attitudes are the assumption of stability and the unknown nature of the relationship between attitudes and behaviour. Firstly, the stability of attitudes towards motherhood is not clear. Evidence from longitudinal studies such as that conducted by Hock et al. (1985), who measured attitudes at childbirth and then again after three, eight, and twelve months, demonstrated that many women change their attitudes and beliefs after the birth. For example, women who stayed home despite planning to return to work became increasingly concerned about the effects of non-maternal care in the three months following the birth. In addition, the research demonstrated that although there were no differences at birth, over the 12 month period the mothers who planned to stay home and did so developed the most positive attitude towards the maternal role, while the opposite category of mothers, those who planned to stay home but worked instead, became less positive about the maternal role. These findings strongly suggest that beliefs about motherhood are not stable and can change depending on individual experiences.

If attitudes are not stable, then a second limitation of the research becomes apparent: The direction of the relationship remains unknown. While correlational research can establish that variables are related, it cannot determine which is the cause and which the effect, or whether the relationship is actually spurious and caused by a third variable. While the traditional view is that attitudes determine behaviour, Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance suggests it is equally possible people will

alter their attitude to match their behaviour. For example, a mother who believed in exclusive maternal care but returned to the workforce for financial reasons, would be in a state of internal conflict that may well necessitate a shift in attitude (Hock, 1978). An example of behaviour changing attitudes can be seen in Pungello and Kurtz-Costes's (2000) research into selection of childcare, which found that "whereas mothers who were using nonparental care demonstrated an increase in positive attitudes towards maternal employment … mothers who used parental care only demonstrated a slight decrease" (p. 251). Dex's (1988) comprehensive analysis of British women concluded that women's work experience interacts with their attitude "mutually reinforcing each other" (p. 151). A recent attitude theory that claims to overcome these issues of stability and causal direction is Hakim's (2000) preference theory.

Preference theory

Preference theory builds on earlier attitudinal research into home/work orientation and argues that women can be broadly divided into three types based on their underlying, stable attitude towards home and work (Hakim, 2000). This preference type is seen to be a key determinant of choices. Preference theory is prospective and states that "attitudes predict behaviour, but that behaviour does not predict attitudes" (Hakim, 2003b, p. 364). In addition, as will be seen, preference theory overcomes the question of stability by categorising some women as stable in their preferences and others as variable.

Hakim (1991) developed preference theory after researching what she saw as a paradox: women reporting higher levels of job satisfaction despite being over represented in the lowest jobs. She criticises economic theories of women's choices as making the flawed assumption that women are homogenous (Hakim, 2003b) and argues that family/work decisions are different processes for different "types" of women (Hakim, 2000). At the same time, she argues that sociological theorists place too much emphasis on external factors, taking "an over-socialised view of women" (Hakim, 1991, p. 114). While acknowledging that choice is constrained by social structure and policy, Hakim (2003b) argues that, in the current Western context, the impact of preference is underestimated. She states that the importance of personal preference as a determinant of both fertility and employment decisions is relatively recent and has been brought on by five historical changes: contraception, the equal opportunities movement, the expansion of white collar jobs, the creation of jobs for secondary earners, and the generally increasing importance of personal values in lifestyle choices.

In her earlier works, Hakim (1991, 1995) proposed two broad types of women: those who give priority to market work and those who give priority to marriage and childrearing. She later expanded this to a threefold typology that estimates between 10% and 20% of women are home-centred, an equal percentage are work-centred, and the remainder are adaptive (Hakim, 1998, 2000). The adaptive women are defined as those who "want to combine work and family, plus drifters and unplanned careers" (Hakim, 1998, p. 138), something of a catch-all category. Home-centred women would prefer

not to be in paid work at all, while work-centred women always prioritise work over family and so many do not have children. According to Hakim (2003b), the majority of men are work-centred and therefore "men will retain their dominance in the labour market, politics and other competitive activities" (p. 359). She suggests the proportion of each type of women will differ across Western societies depending on which group public policy tends to support.

Research testing preference theory is increasing. Hakim (2003b) claims that "once genuine choices are open to them, women choose among three different lifestyles … these divergent lifestyle preferences are found at all levels of education and in all social classes" (p. 357). For example, in her analysis of Gerson's (1985) interviews of 63 American women, Hakim (2000) concluded that 17% were home-centred, 30% work-centred, and the remaining 53% adaptive. In contrast, a study of Australian women, with and without children, found only 0.5% were home-oriented, 11% were work-oriented, and 88% were adaptive (Kruesmann, 2003). In a 1999 survey, Hakim (2003a) found that 13% of British and Spanish women aged 20-59 were home-centred, 16% work-centred, and the remaining 71% adaptive. An interesting finding in that survey was that 40% of the home-centred women were in full time work, a finding Hakim (2003b) suggests indicates that, "in certain circumstances economic necessity can override personal preferences" (p. 364). In contrast, Marks and Houston (2002a) found work commitment was the strongest predictor of full time work. These inconsistent findings may reflect differences in measurement as discussed shortly. Davey's (1998) research with young high school and university aged women found only 3.8% thought they would be a homemaker at age 30, 8% thought they would not have children, and the remaining 81% planned to combine career and children. These findings do not fit the 10-20% range proposed by preference theory for home and work-centred women. One possible explanation for this is that the percentage of women in each group is changing over time.

Not all researchers have found support for Hakim's threefold typology. McRae (2003), for example, argues that although she found 10% of the first time mothers in her study demonstrated work-centred behaviour, they were not clearly distinguishable from other women by their attitudes. She suggests that a continuum is a more appropriate model than a typology and argues that constraints are more important than preference. Proctor and Padfield (1999) interviewed young women and found those who had not yet had children were neither career nor family oriented but wanted both, and that the young mothers were homemakers through structural constraints rather than choice. As is discussed below, these authors take the view that women's choices are determined more by their social context than by internal preferences (Crompton & Harris, 1998; McRae, 2003; Procter & Padfield, 1999).

One limitation of research into work/home orientation, including preference theory, has been inconsistencies in operational definition and measurement. For example, some researchers ask whether an individual would continue in paid work even without financial need (Rose, 2000, as cited in Marks

& Houston, 2002a), others ask how important being a worker is to them (Marks & Houston, 2002a), and others use a combination of general and individual attitudinal questions to determine orientation (Kruesmann, 2003). This last approach is particularly problematic. Marks and Houston (2002a) measured both societal attitudes (e.g. Mothers should have a choice about working) and personal beliefs (e.g. Being a worker is important to me), and found responses were not necessarily consistent: Beliefs about what is right for oneself do not necessarily match beliefs about what is right for society. An individual may believe women should have the right to choose to work but not feel this is the right choice for her. Hakim (2003c) distinguishes between personal preferences and broad social views and argues that only the former act as causes of individual behaviour, but the three questions she uses to operationalise preference do not measure only personal preference. The first asks about ideal family models to identify home-centred women and runs the risk of measuring ideological rather than personal beliefs. As mentioned earlier, the British survey using these questions found nearly half of the home-centred women were in full time work; a result that Hakim (2003b) described as unexpected. As discussed, this may suggest that economic need overrides preference, but equally it may indicate that the question used to identify home-centred women is tapping into something other than personal preference. To be defined as work-centred by Hakim (2000), an individual must agree that they are the primary income earner and that they would continue to work after winning the lottery. The first of these questions measures behaviour rather than preference and so is problematic. Further research using these measures is required to assess their validity.

The appeal of Hakim's preference theory is that it gives me agency. The feminist view, that my lack of power has constrained me, puts me in the role of helpless victim to external forces. I prefer the idea that I have chosen my path in life. Although I do accept that my choice is constrained, I would argue that my husband, Ty, is equally constrained. I guess if you see the traditional women's role as inferior to men's role then it makes sense to construct it as the women having limited choice, after all why else would they choose this terrible path in life of unvalued, untrammelled domesticity? But I don't see my role as inferior. In many ways I have far more choice than Ty and I feel that I have the better role. It isn't the traditional female role of housewife and mother; it is an improved upgraded model. Mother and home manager certainly, but with the freedom to take or leave as much of it as I want. Ty doesn't have that choice. Although thinking further, the one thing I don't have is financial independence and I guess I have the risk of being left high and dry with Ty having built up human capital over the last 13 years and me having eroded it. Although I would hope that a Masters counts as human capital! In Hakim's (2000) book she states that in modern Western societies women have genuine choice, more so than men and that men will only get the same choice if "men demand equality with women" (p. 1). I like that. It totally encapsulates how I feel in terms of my life. But I also believe that I am fortunate, it is only the privileges of the upper middle-class that afford me the luxury of choice, and not all women are so lucky.

Attitude stability

As mentioned previously, stability is a key issue in attitude research with many arguing that attitudes are influenced by other factors. Preference theory constructs the two extreme groups, work and home-centred women, as having stable preferences throughout life, but argues that those in the larger adaptive group "do not appear to have stable tastes" (Hakim, 2000, p. 190). Their behaviour is subject to external forces and so is changeable. This raises two questions: what determines which group women belong to and what factors influence the adaptive women? Searching for the source of women's preferences, Hakim (2000) examines many of the factors reviewed here including personality and sex-role attitudes, and concludes that the threefold typology represents a normal distribution curve of women's responses to family/work conflict and no single factor is especially important in determining individual type. While home and work-centred women's choices are determined solely by their preference, adaptive women's decisions are influenced by a wide range of external constraints and opportunities. Therefore many of the demographic variables considered earlier such as family structure, marital status, and spousal income would impact upon their choices. In addition, external factors and events can influence women's decision-making either directly or indirectly through attitudes. Research on three such factors is discussed here: childhood socialisation, spousal preference, and life experiences.

Childhood socialisation, including the maternal role model, is considered to influence women's decisions through its effect on attitudes, or in the case of preference theory, its effect on preference type. Most research has found that women whose mothers were in paid work are more likely to be employed (Amstey & Whitbourne, 1988; Barrow, 1999; Wenk & Garrett, 1992). According to Amstey and Whitbourne, 95% of mothers in full time work had a mother who was also in paid work compared to 44% of at-home mothers. Research examining adolescents' intentions has found that having an employed mother resulted in less traditional views on women's roles and an increased intention to work after childbirth (Granrose, 1984; Marks & Houston, 2002b; Tuck, Rolfe, & Adair, 1994). Similarly, others have concluded that socialisation during adolescence has a strong direct influence on women's employment behaviour as well as an indirect effect through sex role attitudes (Ferber, 1982; Greenwell et al., 1998). One exception to these findings was Sholomskas and Axelrod's (1986) study, which found no relationship between a woman's choice and her mother's role. O'Connell (1980) took a broader view and found that women who viewed their parents' lifestyle positively were influenced to follow a similar lifestyle, whereas those who felt their parents' lifestyle was unrewarding moved away from those choices. This suggests it is the assessment of the lifestyle rather than simply the maternal role model that influences attitudes and choices. Gerson (1985) supports this, arguing that norms internalised from childhood do not control our behaviour but rather shape how we feel. She argues that differing constraints and opportunities from life experiences change women's childhood expectations of life.

A second variable which may exert an indirect influence on decisions through attitudes, but which may also act more directly as a constraint, is spousal attitude towards maternal employment. According to preference theory, spousal attitude will only influence the choices of adaptive women (Hakim, 2000). Several studies have found that the marital partner's preference for maternal employment was positively associated with the mother's work status (Gerson, 1985; O'Connell, 1980; Werbel, 1998). Stone and Lovejoy's (2004) grounded theory analysis of high achieving women at home also identified the husband's preference as a factor. As with much of this research, the nature of the relationship is open to debate. Perhaps people marry partners with similar attitudes, or perhaps the woman's attitudes and choices influence her partner's attitudes as suggested by Ferber (1982). Either way, this body of research highlights the fact that while much of the research constructs the mother's decision as an individual one, it is often made within the context of her relationship with a partner.

The third cluster of factors that influence individual attitudes is life experiences. Gerson (1985) describes four aspects of life that might influence a woman's decision to stay at home or return to the labour force after having children. The first two relate to the economic factors discussed earlier: Having a stable partnership encourages traditional gender roles and perceptions of financial need encourage employment. The remaining factors highlight how events encountered through life influence our attitudes and therefore our behaviour. The third is described as "blocked versus expanding workplace opportunities" (Gerson, 1985, p. 194). For many of the women Gerson interviewed, constrictions and frustrations in the workplace acted as a force to push them out of the workforce, whereas for others, expanding career opportunities acted as a force to pull them away from the home. This pattern is supported by O'Connell's (1980) research, which found that women who took a traditional caregiving role tended to describe their previous work experience as negative, whereas women who had adopted working roles described their work history as positive. In a similar vein, Amstey and Whitbourne (1988) found that part time workers and homemakers tended to view their pre-children employment as a job, whereas full time workers viewed it as a career.

The fourth potentially influential aspect of life, according to Gerson (1985), is women's experiences of motherhood. As already mentioned, Hock et al. (1985) noted that women do change their plans, and work when they intended to stay home and vice versa. Marks and Houston's (2002a) UK study found that working mothers were more likely to agree that motherhood was "a boring, exhausting, stressful and socially isolating experience" (p. 533). For some of the women in Gerson's study, their personal experience of motherhood led to a change from pre-children intentions by acting either as a push or pull influence. For some, social isolation and society's devaluing of the role meant domesticity was not as appealing as anticipated, and this pushed them back into the workforce despite originally intending to stay home. Others found domesticity more appealing and fulfilling than anticipated and they also changed their plans. It is important to recognise that this process of experiences influencing attitudes and behaviour is continuous: "women's ongoing experiences of childcare and the roles of

worker and mother determine their participation in work" (Marks & Houston, 2002a, p. 534). Unlike these researchers who argue that events alter attitudes, preference theory suggests that life experiences will only influence the choices of adaptive women, whereas home-centred and work-centred women remain true to their underlying values regardless of external events.

A number of these texts construct women's decisions to be at home as an act of selflessness and nurturance that "places children, family and home above all else" (Gerson, 1985, p. 11). Hughes (2002) does the same when she states that the fact that 41% of mothers of children under 5 and 25% of mothers of children between 5 and 10 are "economically inactive" suggests that "the Bowlbian notion that children come first and a mother's needs should be subsumed to the infant's has not disappeared" (p. 52). Aside from feeling a little defensive (the image of me selflessly sacrificing myself for my family is not one I find appealing), this seems a sweeping and potentially dangerous and invalid assumption. My needs have not been subsumed; they have simply been met through different avenues than participation in the labour force. I suggest that while many women may stay home originally because of their beliefs about motherhood, the act of withdrawing from the workforce can open new opportunities and a new way of being that is more balanced and varied than that of full time employment. Likewise, meeting the needs of one's family (or any other form of caregiving) could be constructed as an equally valid role in life that meets the needs of the people doing the caring. It is an interesting commentary on our society that we almost condemn people when they put someone else's needs before their own. According to this construction, a woman who is paid to work as a caregiver is meeting her own needs whereas a woman who is not paid to work as a caregiver but chooses to do so anyway as a mother, is somehow subsuming her needs. Is the need for money the only valid need?

A network of variables

As has already been suggested, a significant area of contention in individual explanations for women's decision-making is the relationships between various factors. Variables can act directly or indirectly, can be either a cause or an effect, and can work individually or in tandem with the structural economic factors discussed earlier. As Ferber (1982) says: "there is an important interdependence between economic factors and attitudes" (p. 457). For example, being work-oriented may directly increase the likelihood of employment following childbirth, but equally a higher work orientation may promote a higher education, leading to increased job status and therefore higher opportunity costs, and thus act as an indirect influence. Another possibility is that as an individual gains education and experience leading to a higher status job, her work orientation increases. Even the direction of the most commonly accepted influence, number of children, is unclear. Not only does fertility determine participation, but attitudes towards the workforce also influence fertility (Ferber, 1982). Hakim (2003b) acknowledges the importance of marital status as a mediator between preference and behaviour: "only in the context of marriage do the three preference groups show differentiated behaviour patterns" (p. 371). She

argues that the ability of a home-centred woman to act according to her preference is dependent upon a breadwinning spouse. Australian research that demonstrates lone mothers are less likely to be in the paid workforce (Marks & Houston, 2002a) raises further questions about the nature of this particular relationship. It seems unlikely that home-centred women are more likely to become lone mothers, therefore other factors, such as government policy as discussed shortly, must be driving their labour force status. Overall, as can be seen in Figure 3, any attempt to represent the network of relationships between these factors rapidly becomes an impossibly complex model.
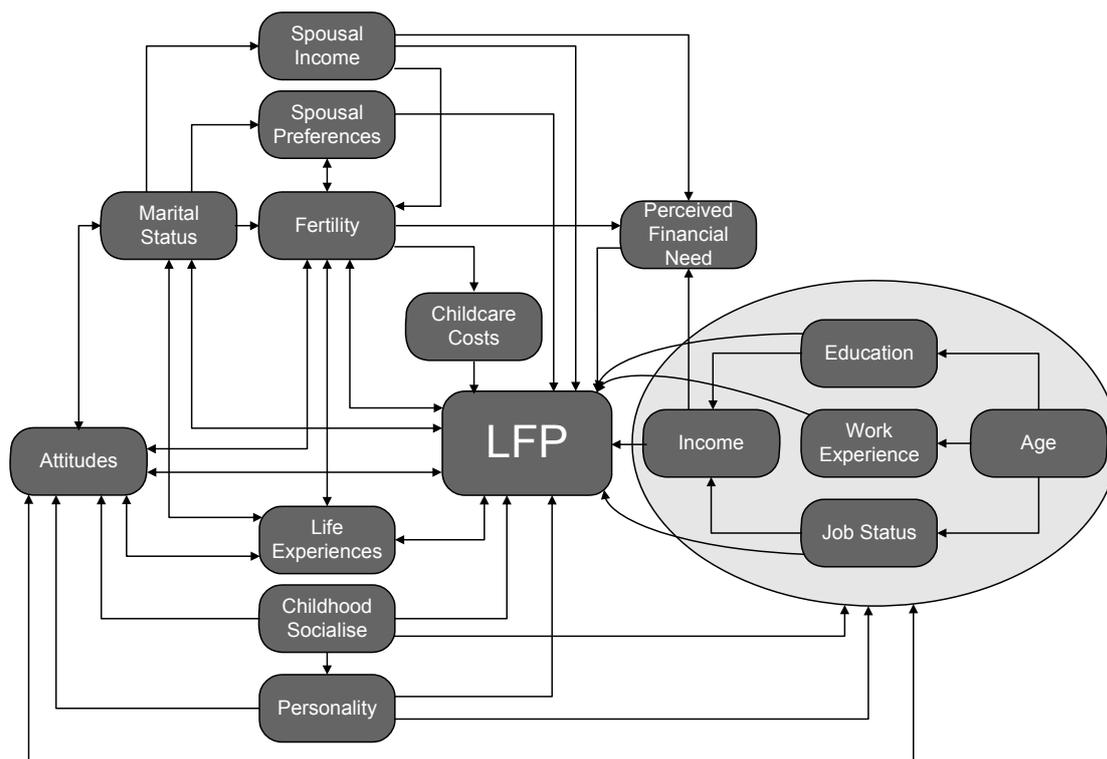
Figure 3. The complex relationships between factors influencing women's choices.

If the goal of empirical psychology is to predict behaviour, then these individualistic theories are destined to fail not only because of the complexity of the decisions and the interrelatedness of the factors, but also because of their underlying assumptions of individual rationality and agency, and their failure to take account of the social context within which women make their decisions.

In addition, these economic and individualistic accounts fail to reflect women's subjective experiences. Women's stories of the choices they have made in their attempts to balance family and work make little mention of the multitude of factors listed above. Stewart and Davis (1996) interviewed and related the stories of 12 New Zealand women, while Benveniste (1998) interviewed 14 Australian women. These women were not coldly and clinically weighing pros and cons or acting freely and easily according to their personal preferences. As one woman clearly articulated: "There's nothing rational in it. It's an emotional thing" (Stewart & Davis, 1996, p. 111). Certainly a few mentioned financial need as a motivator for returning to the workforce, but in almost all cases the

women talked of their choices in terms of struggle, uncertainty, and conflict: "It was a terrible wrench to decide" (Stewart & Davis, 1996, p. 101). Strong themes in many of the stories were of sacrifice and of guilt: "You're always branded with guilt. You reek of it" (Stewart & Davis, 1996, p. 189). This suggests that the picture of complete freedom of choice, as painted by much of the literature discussed so far, is inaccurate. If women are free to choose, why are they feeling guilty? Social accounts of women's decision-making take some steps towards answering that question.

Social Accounts

As previously mentioned, social theorists argue strongly that individualistic explanations such as Hakim's preference theory are based on the false premise that women in Western societies today are free to choose (Fagan, 2001; McRae, 2003). Instead, McRae argues, "all women face constraints in making decisions about their lives" (p. 328) and differences in labour force participation are best explained by differences in ability to overcome these constraints rather than innate personal preferences. Structural factors such as welfare regimes and political climate play a central role in sociological accounts, with most authors arguing that although individuals may have preferences, consideration of these is only valid within a social context. Agency and structure are mutually related (Procter & Padfield, 1999).

The common element within these social accounts is the focus on external factors as constraints on women's choices. A large number of studies examine how structural factors such as the labour market and government policy either hinder or encourage women's participation in the workforce. While some depict these structural factors as yet more elements in the diagram, manifesting as either practical constraints or financial influences, others accord them a more central role arguing that context serves to shape not just choices, but also internal preferences, moral values, and indeed, reality.

Structural factors

Although, as mentioned in Chapter One, all Western societies have seen an increase in women's labour force participation, there are many differences between countries. Cross-cultural research[1] highlights the danger of ignoring social context and assuming a simple relationship between individual variables such as education and mothers' labour force decisions. Not only are rates of participation different across countries, but the effect of factors also varies. For example, Drobnic et al. (1999) found that family structure had a greater impact on women's employment in Germany than in the United States, and Pascual et al. (1995) found that while in the United States a better education was correlated with longer working hours, in Argentina women with a better education tended to work

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[1] The vast majority of the research is on Western societies. This reflects the culturally specific nature of knowledge – the very question of what influences women's decision making around family and paid work may make little sense in some countries in Africa or South America for example.

shorter hours. Similarly, Gutiérrez-Domènech's (2005) comparison of five European countries[2] found that education influenced choices in all except Sweden. She suggests this is because a higher education is related to higher earnings and potential income is only a factor if childcare is expensive, and Sweden has well-subsidised and freely available childcare. This moderating effect of culture on women's choices is explained by three clusters of factors: economics such as labour market conditions and tax/welfare regimes, family policies such as the availability of childcare and parental leave, and cultural factors such as ideology. From an empirical perspective, these interlinked social elements manifest as influences upon the individual and many map onto the financial and psychological variables previously discussed.

The first cluster of factors cited as reasons for differences in women's labour force participation over time and across countries is economic factors including economic growth, unemployment, and tax regimes. Jaumotte's (2003) review of OECD countries cites a well functioning labour market as an important differential between countries with more women working and those with less. The relationship is not always clear-cut however. For example, Hofferth (2000) found that women in areas of high unemployment returned to work more slowly, probably because of the difficulty in finding work. In contrast, Edwards (2001) cites recession and economic instability as key factors in the rapid increase in mothers' employment during the 1970s in the United States. He argues that in such economically unstable times couples both want to work to protect themselves against uncertainty. Jaumotte explains the contradictory influence of high unemployment: "A high female unemployment rate tends to discourage female participation. On the other hand, a high male unemployment rate may stimulate female participation, as women join the labour market in order to compensate for the loss of family revenue due to their husband's unemployment" (p. 14).

Economic policies on tax and welfare, based on underlying political ideology, are commonly shown to influence labour force participation rates (Gutiérrez-Domènech, 2005; van der Lippe & van Dijk, 2002). Early welfare systems were founded upon a male breadwinner model with women treated as adjuncts to men (Crompton & Harris, 1997). Although welfare states have evolved considerably, some still actively support that model. Esping-Andersen (1990) outlined three different Western welfare regimes: liberal, such as the United Kingdom and United States; conservative, as per Italy and Ireland where benefits encourage women to stay home; and social-democratic, such as the Nordic countries where benefits are universal but low and full employment is encouraged. Critics have made the important point that regimes are gendered: "Different mixes of taxation, benefit and social policy arrangements have different implications for the level and nature of gender inequality" (Duncan & Edwards, 1997, p. 38). A full explanation is beyond the scope of this review, but, simply expressed, different regimes lead to different policies, which influence the effective tax rate of mothers returning to work. A system that results in a higher rate discourages employment by reducing potential earnings

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[2] Belgium, West Germany, Italy, Spain, and Sweden

(J. Hughes & Hand, 2005). In Australia, for example, welfare payments are means tested, therefore as the family's wage increases by the mother returning to work, the government support decreases, effectively reducing the net financial gain (Baxter, 2005; J. Hughes & Hand, 2005).

The tax scheme is a related economic factor. Some countries, like New Zealand, tax couples individually, others pool the incomes and tax as one, and others use a split taxation system that pools the incomes, but then taxes based on two equal halves (Smith, Dex, Vlasblom, & Callan, 2003). A review of labour force participation of married women in Britain, Denmark, Ireland, and Germany concluded that "the design of the tax system is highly important for the economic incentives that married women face and their resulting labour supply behaviour" (Smith et al., 2003, p. 417). Generally, both split and joint systems act as disincentives to married women working. Gutiérrez-Domènech (2005) found that both Spain and West Germany had low participation rates for mothers, but that Spain's was increasing and West Germany's decreasing. The Spanish move from a joint taxation system in 1989 is cited as one of the forces behind this trend. Jaumotte (2003) highlights that although most countries have moved from joint to separate tax systems, national variations ensure that in most cases the second earner in a couple continues to be taxed at a significantly higher rate.

The second cluster of structural factors is family policies. Like tax and welfare regimes, these stem from underlying political ideology. The two most commonly studied policies are childcare subsidies and maternity leave. Unlike the studies discussed earlier, which looked at these factors at an individual level, this research examines the effect of policy at a national level and finds that childcare subsidies are correlated with an increase in women's labour force participation (Jaumotte, 2003; White, 2001). As with tax policies, a country's provision of childcare tends to match its underlying political ideology, so that social democratic and socialist countries tend to have universal publicly funded or subsidised childcare, whereas conservative and liberal nations argue that childcare is the responsibility of the family not the state (van der Lippe & van Dijk, 2002). Childcare is often considered critical for increasing women's labour force participation, but evidence from countries such as Portugal, where rates are high despite a lack of childcare, suggests it is not a requirement of an increase (Hakim, 2004).

Most research agrees that availability of parental leave, paid or unpaid, increases the likelihood of mothers returning to the workforce (Glass & Riley, 1998; Jaumotte, 2003; McGovern et al., 2000; Waldfogel et al., 1999). In the United States, women with access to paid leave tend to work longer prior to birth and are less likely to return to work in the month following the birth, but return sooner once the child is two months old (Joesch, 1997). Not surprisingly, an increase in the number of weeks leave available increases the time women stay away from the workforce (Joesch, 1997). Cross cultural research from Europe supports these findings: According to Ruhm (1998), access to paid leave increases women's labour force participation rates particularly for women of childbearing age. He cautions however that access to longer leave is associated with a reduction in wages.

As discussed, economics and policy are founded in part upon ideology and this represents the third strand of contextual influence: cultural beliefs about women's place in society. Gender role ideologies are often conceptualised as resting on a continuum ranging from traditional conservative beliefs that support a male breadwinner model, to egalitarian liberal views that encourage and support women's equal participation in the workforce (J. Scott & Duncombe, 1992). While most societies are becoming more egalitarian, impelled in part by social movements such as feminism (Crompton, Hantrais, & Walters, 1990), many authors argue that the movement is incomplete. Although attitudes now favour women in the workforce, there is much less support for men to take an equal role in caregiving and home based work (Glover, 2002; J. Scott & Duncombe, 1992). As Scott and Duncombe point out, this suggests that gender role ideology is more complex than a one-dimensional scale, with people holding "both traditional and egalitarian views, depending on what aspect of gender role is being considered" (p. 41). Their research supported this: Americans held more egalitarian views on some aspects, such as the negative impact of the mother working, but more traditional views on other issues, such as the importance of a job for a woman's independence.

Despite this complexity, broad cultural patterns of gender role ideology are identifiable and, as might be expected, tend to correlate with the political ideology and policy structures discussed. For example, Britain and the USA are both liberal systems according to Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology and, despite some differences, they both hold broadly egalitarian views (J. Scott & Duncombe, 1992). While Carling (2002) describes this as the "natural alignment of family policy with political ideology" (p. 7), he warns against oversimplification and suggests a more complete examination will reveal a less clear correlation, particularly when gender roles are taken into consideration. Research has found substantial differences in gender role attitudes across Western and Eastern countries partially due to differing social histories (Braun, Scott, & Alwin, 1994; Crompton & Harris, 1997). This highlights again the interrelated nature of these factors. As Edwards (2001) points out, the increase in women's labour force participation has "partially eased the social stigma attached to combining work and motherhood" (p. 185). According to Harris and Firestone (1998), while the shift towards more egalitarian views in the USA has paralleled the increase in women's labour force participation, the movement is greater than can be accounted for by such demographic changes, suggesting that while behaviour is changing attitudes, the reverse is also occurring. Clearly the relationship between ideology and behaviour is both complex and important.

These three clusters of contextual variables, economics, policies, and ideology are mutually reinforcing and act in unison as constraints on women's lives. An excellent example of this triadic relationship is Trappe's (2000) analysis of women's labour force participation in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Due to both an ideological belief in the equality of men and women, and labour shortages caused by the Second World War and loss of skills to the West, the GDR was one of the first countries to implement policies such as subsidised, state-run childcare that actively

encouraged women into the labour force. Increased participation rates demonstrate the success of these policies. Sweden, with its very high women's labour force participation rate, is often held up as an ideal. Like the GDR, this is the result of the triadic effect of economics, policy, and ideology: Sweden's labour force shortages in the 1970s and 1980s engendered a need for more women in employment, and this, combined with an ideology of reducing inequality and redistributing wealth, resulted in a series of economic and family policies which not only increased women's participation, but also reduced the gender wage gap (Daune-Richard, 1995). However, the effects are complex and what works for one society may not work for another. James's (2002) comparison of Australia, Canada, and Europe concludes that there is "no direct or irrefutable link between policy interventions and particular outcomes" (p. 5) because of differing historical influences, combinations of economic and family policies, and government objectives. She also points out the cyclical nature of the factors: Increased labour force participation may lead to demands for better childcare, and subsequent policies may in turn lead to further increases in participation. Similarly, Procter and Ratcliffe (1992) suggest that differences in patterns of participation between France and Britain can be traced back to differences in "employment, family formation, and state policy in the process of industrialisation" (p. 73). Their analysis suggests that cultural gender norms are less important in encouraging equality of labour market participation than policy and, in particular, provision of childcare. As James points out, these diverse findings highlight the need for governments to carefully consider the complex pattern of "history, social institutions and cultural values" (p. 6) when developing policies.

While this research highlights the contextual nature of women's choices, it fails to adequately capture the full impact of social policy and ideology. Ideology's more direct influence on internal beliefs and women's identities is often ignored. In addition, as Duncan and Edwards (1997) found, mothers sometimes act "irrationally in terms of their own welfare state regime" (p. 38). This raises a key critique of individualistic accounts: Even when they consider contextual factors such as policy, they assume that "people take individualistic cost-benefit decisions about how to maximise their own personal gain" (Barlow, Duncan, & James, 2002, p. 111). Much government policy is based on this premise: Alter the costs and benefits of choices and people will change their behaviour. This has been termed "the rationality mistake" with a number of authors arguing that economic costs and benefits are secondary to social and moral concerns, considerations of what is right and proper (Barlow et al., 2002; Duncan & Edwards, 1997). A fuller picture appears only when one considers that ideology, economics, and policy act not just as material constraints, altering the financial and logistical nature of the decision, but also as social constraints, altering the perceived availability and the moral value of each choice. For example, a conservative regime, with a split taxation system and no childcare subsidies or maternal leave, sends a clear message regarding the maternal role. It is these additional effects of social context that traditional psychological research tends to ignore and sociological and critical psychological accounts include.

Sociological accounts

Most sociologists agree that choices can only be understood within context (Devine, 1994; Ginn et al., 1996; Himmelweit & Sigala, 2004). Others extend this to argue that even individual preferences are no more than an internalisation of the social forces within which the women are embedded (Fagan, 2001; McRae, 2003). According to Fagan, preferences can be considered to be the result of "the interplay between attitudes and situational factors" (p. 243). To demonstrate this, McRae presents data showing a consistent difference in beliefs about gender roles between the upper and lower income quartiles, with women at the higher end demonstrating consistently more egalitarian views. This suggests that structural class differences are important influences on, or even sources of, those beliefs. This view is supported by other research (Duncan, Edwards, Reynolds, & Alldred, 2003; M. Walter, 2003). Duncan and Edwards (1997) agree, arguing that preferences are not individual, but rather are "collectively fashioned and negotiated" (p. 56). For example, Devine (1994) examined women engineers and scientists and found that, although it could be said that it was their choice to enter the profession, "their preferences and plans were made, not in isolation, but in particular social contexts which shaped their aspirations and allowed them to exercise their choices" (p. 95). McRae takes this a step further and views internal beliefs as simply another constraint. She divides the constraints on women's lives into structural, such as labour market conditions as outlined above, and normative, their own and other people's beliefs, stemming from social context, about what is right and normal. She argues that these constraints do not just make some choices easier or harder, instead they shape women's reality, limiting the options women see as available. People create their own moral identity that defines the kind of person they are (Duncan et al., 2003). As McRae explains, for some women, their identity as a "good mother" and their understanding of what that means, makes staying at home the only option. Himmelweit and Sigala agree: Many of the women they interviewed expressed their personal identities as constraints on their behaviour such that options which did not fit their ideas of what sort of mother they were, were not even considered as choices. Identity, as a key element in understanding women's choices, is a recurrent theme in both sociological and social constructionist accounts.

This view, that my beliefs about what constitutes a good mother act as a constraint on my behaviour, really resonates with me. I stayed at home because I believed that is what is best for the children and as a good mother I have a need to do what is best for them. Now that they are older and I am developing my future career, a big part of me wants to move to Palmerston North. But I believe that stability is important in the teenage years and that moving would not be good for them and so we won't go. And constrained by my beliefs, my identity as a good mother, is exactly how I feel. Which leads me back to the image of myself as subsuming my needs in favour of theirs, an image I have already rejected as uncomfortable and inaccurate. Certainly their needs play a huge role in my decision-making, as do Ty's, but to me that is what relationships are about, finding ways that meet everyone's needs.

Duncan and Edwards's (1997) concept of gendered moral rationalities takes a similar approach to McRae (2003), but emphasises the moral value associated with choices as the key to understanding individual decisions. They argue that it is only when this is understood, that economic costs and benefits of the decision become important. While much of their work focuses specifically on lone mothers, the concepts apply to all women's (and men's) choices. They make the critical point that economic explanations of the decision to enter the workforce, even those taking social context into account, make the bottom line assumption that the rational thing for lone mothers to do is to seek paid work and if they do not then it must be because they are either prevented or would be financially penalised if they did. This ignores the fact that all aspects of the decision, what is rational, what is a cost or a benefit, what is the right thing to do, are defined socially and not individually (Duncan & Edwards, 1997). Furthermore, it ignores the reality that caring for one's children is something that people feel morally obligated to do and also wish to do (Duncan et al., 2003). Himmelweit (2002) also sees rational choice as an inappropriate model for understanding caring behaviour because of the assumption that choices are made according to one's own well-being with no regard for the welfare of others. A similar argument is made by Glover (2002), who proposes a "balance model" as an explanation for women's employment behaviour. Women are seen to be striving to preserve the balance between unpaid and paid work, and while this can be seen as simply another factor to be weighed up in the rational choice approach, Glover argues that in the balance model, potential consequences considered include not just personal well-being, but also that of the entire household.

Glover's (2002) "balance model" is another which rings true for me. I am forever expounding the virtues of balance and a desire to maintain the right balance for myself and my family is certainly a driving force in my decisions. This seems to be qualitatively different from the work/life balance rhetoric of policy makers. Theirs appears to take full time work as a necessity for balance and therefore any changes must be made on the other side of the ledger, in most cases the family. I would argue that balance is intensely personal and that we all need to identify what is necessary to our own sense of balance. It is here, in reflecting upon the positions that I adopt within these debates, that the power of discourse becomes apparent to me. Terry Locke (2004) makes the comment that "discourses are naturalised for individual subjects, who, viewing the world through their own discursive lenses, regard their own position as 'common sense' rather than a particular construction of reality" (p. 32). Despite my understanding of this at an academic level, at a personal level I struggle with it. I realise that I strongly subscribe to the discursive construction of the mother as the lynchpin of the family, whose role it is to balance the needs of everyone. However, another of my identity positions is Ella, an independent individual who has the right to put herself first, and the concept of balance for me is a way of allowing those sometimes contradictory threads to comfortably coexist.

Overall, these sociological accounts are not a picture of unconstrained choice but, while they are sometimes interpreted as overly deterministic (e.g. Hakim, 2000), most authors would argue that women are not mere puppets driven by their social context, but continue to exercise agency. Glover (2002) describes this limited agency as contingent choice rather than free choice. As Devine (1994) says, to recognise the social dimension of women's preferences is not to completely deny agency. National analyses support this. More women in Germany and Ireland are entering the workforce, and in Italy the birth rate is falling despite all these countries having conservative tax and social policies, and ideologies that support a male breadwinner model that defines women as mothers (G. Collins & Wickham, 2004). Trappe's (2000) analysis of the GDR also notes that, individually, women do make active choices that are not determined by environment: "In every period, there were women who chose unpopular and unrewarded ways of working" (p. 25). Collins and Wickham sum up the intertwining of structure and agency well:

> Just because a political/social/moral system promotes a particular role for women does not mean that women necessarily conform to that role. On the other hand, women neither have complete freedom of choice nor do they fall into neatly defined, unchanging, universal "types" with fixed preferences. Gender regimes define a series of constraints, but women work with, around and sometimes against these constraints. Irish women 'make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing'. (p. 43)

In some ways the sociological and individualistic accounts can be seen as the same story packaged differently. Preference theory sees orientation to work as an internal trait stemming at least in part from environmental factors such as childhood socialisation and life experiences (Hakim, 2000). On the surface this is little different from McRae's (2003) view that preferences are manifestations of social constraints. The packaging matters, however, in the consequences of each interpretation. If women are seen to be freely making choices based on personal preferences, then equality issues such as gender pay differences are not government concerns, instead the responsibility rests with the individuals making the choices. On the other hand, if choices are seen as constrained by social structures and cultural understandings, then inequalities are matters of public concern and require solutions.

While these sociological accounts build upon individualistic views by their wider consideration of social context and their inclusion of identity as an important concern, they do not explain how these influences work, and it is here that social constructionism, with its emphasis on the creative power of language, proves its strength.

Social constructionism

Social constructionist accounts of women's decision-making are not concerned with empirical goals of identifying causal or correlational variables in order to predict behaviour. Knowledge is seen as constructed through social interaction, rooted in both history and society (Sampson, 1978) and therefore a search for universal laws of behaviour is a meaningless goal. Social constructionism, with

its sociological roots, takes up many of the themes touched on in the previous section: agency, the construction of identity, and morality. A social constructionist agency is not dissimilar to a sociological one as both are concerned with constraints, although the nature of those constraints differs. The concept of identity is central. Burr (1995) uses a fabric metaphor to describe how we each construct our identities through weaving together threads drawn from our cultural discourses. She highlights that for each of our categories such as age, gender, race, and job there are a limited number of discourses from which to choose. We each have multiple identities, fluid and constantly changing, but as McMahon (1995) points out, this does not imply our selves are either fleeting or shallow. Instead the individual commitment to ideal selves allows "stability and continuity in the experience of the self" (McMahon, 1995, p. 19). Identity is what connects us to the world and our society, but, as is the case with mother and paid worker, identities can conflict (Woodward, 1997a). A more complete discussion of social constructionist accounts of identity and agency is undertaken in Chapter Three.

Instead of identifying economic factors that influence women's choices, or looking at how social policy acts as a constraint, social constructionist research examines how objects such as gender, motherhood, and paid work are constructed through discourse, and how dominant constructions support certain social institutions while constraining or enabling women's choices. In empirical models, ideology is often seen as an external force, but here it is an element of discourse. Brannen and Moss (1991) use the term ideologies rather than discourses as they feel it more effectively captures the moral authority and pervasive nature. This review looks first at how women are positioned within dominant discourses and then examines the effects of those constructions: the destructive consequences, the strategies of resistance, and finally reconstructions that are emerging.

Construction

Much is expected of women in Western societies. As Miller (1996) says, we are expected to simultaneously be "passionate lovers, immaculate housekeepers, great cooks, warm and nurturing mothers, and self-fulfilled career women" (p. 111). The last two of these conflicting roles are at the centre of social constructionist accounts of women's decisions about family and paid work, and are discussed here as vital threads in women's identities.

At the heart of much of this work is the social construction of motherhood, what it means to be a good mother. Hays (1996) describes the current ideology as intensive mothering: "a gendered model that advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children" (p. x). Current ideas of child rearing and motherhood are social constructions, products of a particular society and time rather than natural truths, and examining the history of such dominant discourses can help us to understand their power. Hays traces the history of parenting from the Middle Ages, when children were perceived as demons and often abandoned, through the 17th century, when ideas of childhood as a special time of innocence began to develop among the aristocracy, to the 19th century,

which saw the development of the maternal role as special. It is a mistake to see this process as linear, however, as the timeline differed across Western countries and across different classes. As Hays describes, while 19th century working class women may have been aware of increasing ideologies of intensive mothering, it was not part of their daily lives. In the 1900s, public concern for "appropriate" child rearing led to increased state intervention such as child labour laws and compulsory schooling. The ever increasing role for experts meant reading childcare manuals became the norm (Hays, 1996). In America, in 1946, Spock wrote his original guide to raising children with its dominant theme of the mother's place in the home, and then on the opposite side of the Atlantic, Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory was first published, emphasising the importance of maternal attachment to babies' development and the irreplaceability of the mother. This discourse grew and strengthened until the mother, guided by the experts, was responsible for all aspects of child development, and the male breadwinner model of the family became entrenched (Villani & Ryan, 1997). As Glenn (1994) says, the intensive mothering ideology served to justify women's place in the home and away from the centre of public power.

Alongside and intertwined with the discourse of intensive mothering is what Villani and Ryan (1997) refer to as the Perfect Mother myth: "All feelings about motherhood must be good; motherhood is instinctive; motherhood is nirvana" (p. 118). Similarly, Marshall (1991) identified "motherhood as ultimate fulfilment" (p. 68) and "mother love as natural" (p. 69) as two key discourses in her analysis of parenting manuals. Marriage and motherhood were seen to be the ultimate expressions of all that it was to be a woman, and women were expected to find the role enriching and personally fulfilling (Brannen & Moss, 1991). Comments from Villani and Ryan's (1997) interviews of women, initially conducted in 1978, revealed how deeply these discourses were felt; for example, "a mother's place is in the home" (p. 34), and "it is God's prime calling for womanhood" (p. 36). More recent research suggests motherhood is still seen as central to women's identity such that childless women are expected to justify their lack of children (Woollett, 1991). According to Vincent, Ball, and Pietikainen (2004), women who were at home full time provided less detailed justifications of their decisions than those in paid work, suggesting that being a full time carer is still considered the natural choice and so in little need of explanation. Similarly, Aveling (2002) found that young women who intended not to have children justified their stance, whereas those who did plan to be mothers depicted their choice as natural.

Intensive mothering continues to be a critical element of being a good mother (Hays, 1996). In interviewing 12 Pākehā mothers, Harrington (2002) noted mastery as an important process through which their identification with motherhood occurred, and that the good mother discourse represented the standard to master. The women shared similar views of a good mother as someone who was patient and tolerant, and was always there for her children to provide stability, constancy, and unfailing love. Recent Australian research supports the dominance of the intensive mother/good

mother discourse: Good mothers were those who "were devoted to their children to the exclusion of their own needs, and want to spend as much time with them as possible" (Lupton & Schmied, 2002, p. 105). Other Australian research highlights the difference between the good mother and the good father who is constructed as a helper and supporter of the maternal role (Lupton, 2000).

Phoenix and Woollett (1991b) highlight the role that psychology has played in the construction of motherhood: In empirical research, common sense understandings of motherhood are taken for granted, then research is used to confirm the existing views of what constitutes an appropriate mother, and the findings provide support for social policy. These psychological constructions of motherhood are judgemental and establish clear norms as to how mothers should behave (Woollett & Phoenix, 1991). Lewis (1991) notes, for example, that the body of research into the effects of maternal employment implies that non-employment is the natural way of being. Phoenix and Woollett (1991b) conclude that psychology has "both echoed and bolstered" (p. 25) broad social constructions of motherhood, but has failed to capture the reality of women's experiences.

Although these Western discourses are likely to be the most dominant for the women in my research, it is important to acknowledge that this is just one construction. In laying out such discourses there is a risk in them being seen as the only constructions of mothering and thereby reinforcing their status as the "right" way. Phoenix and Woollett (1991b) note that commonsense understandings pay little heed to women other than the dominant class and race, thus rendering the mothering of others as deficient and often as needing state intervention. Feminist theories of mothering have also tended to universalise white middle-class experiences and ignore the diversity of women's experiences across race and class (P. Collins, 1994). For example, the spheres of home and work are more interwoven for women of colour in the United States: Segura's (1994) research identified that for Mexican women in America, employment was intrinsic to their role as mother. This is not the case in the dominant Western discourses where women's employment is constructed in opposition to the maternal role.

Motherhood is constructed as simultaneously the most natural role and the least valued. As Grace (1998) points out, mothering is seen as priceless, a critical role in children's lives. At the same time, society deems the work of mothering to be non-work and paid work as the source of a "socially valued sense of self" (Vincent et al., 2004, p. 577). Barlow et al. (2002) make the point that much government policy assumes that "it is paid work that provides the basis of both economic rationality and citizenship" (p. 124). Others have defined the belief that you are only worth what you earn as one of patriarchy's main canons (Villani & Ryan, 1997). While always central to men's identity, paid worker is gaining dominance as an essential element of women's identity also.

Capitalist discourses, founded upon the utilitarian rational man model, can be seen as historically related to and stemming from the masculine domain of the marketplace (C. Hughes, 2002). Since

industrialisation and the movement of production from the home to the workplace, Western societies have been structured around a powerful dichotomy; on one side is the public sphere of the marketplace where selfish, individualistic, competitive behaviour is valued, and on the other is the private sphere of the home characterised by selfless, collective, caring behaviour (Hays, 1996). The strong contradiction between these spheres was effectively managed by separate gender roles: men in the workplace and women in the home (Hays, 1996). However, one of the key goals of liberal feminism was equality and often that goal focused on achievement in education and the market place with the right to participate in the public sphere seen as a basic human right that women were denied (C. Hughes, 2002). In Western societies, success is defined almost exclusively by achievement in paid work and education (C. Hughes, 2002), and increasingly this is seen as the ideal for women as well as men (Lupton & Schmied, 2002). The ideal worker, however, is constructed around the needs and role of men and, like the ideal mother, is based on a full time commitment (S. Lewis, 1991). This leaves women with the impossible task of managing two full time roles, an ideology that S. Lewis notes is "as oppressive as the ideology of the stay-at-home mother" (p. 197).

These competing discourses, good mother and successful woman, are both dominant and represent what Hays (1996) aptly describes as "the clash between the logic of good mothering and the logic of good business practice" (p. xii). One role demands a selfless, nurturing woman at home full time putting her children's needs first, while the other demands she participate fully as a citizen in the marketplace, competing with others, putting herself first, and striving to better herself in her work. The result of this clash is in many ways a destructive picture of ambivalence, struggle, and guilt.

Destruction

Women's accounts reveal how this tension is played out in their lives as they struggle in what Bailey (1999) describes as the "reflexive project of the self" (p. 335). Becoming a mother can be a time of passionate ambivalence for many women with the powerful and sometimes unexpected depth of feeling for the child on the one hand, and the fear of being extinguished within the relationship on the other (Gleve, 1987). Nicolson's (1999) examination of postpartum depression found that for many women the transition to motherhood is tied strongly into themes of loss, in particular the loss of their occupational identity: "Their sense of who they had been before the baby – as successful and/or independent, as powerful" (p. 174). Marshall (1991) suggests that childcare manuals tell women "to lay aside identities other than mother and wife" (p. 76). Thus loss of identity is a very real experience for new mothers and is a common theme in women's accounts of why they opt to return to the workforce (Bailey, 1999; Lupton & Schmied, 2002). In Benveniste's (1998) interviews, the Australian women's reasons for working included financial pragmatism, but also reflected the successful woman discourse: "independence, self respect, and self esteem, personal fulfilment and satisfaction, privilege and power" (p. 14). Both Australian and New Zealand women talk of their identity being tied into their jobs and of returning to the workplace to recapture themselves: "I guess I am afraid of losing

something of myself" (Benveniste, 1998, p. 142); "I must get back into my own work and my own identity" (Stewart & Davis, 1996, p. 69). But returning to their careers can create new tension. Women are caught between the two competing dominant discourses and their stories reveal the depth of their emotional turmoil, torn between their competing desires: "wanting to fulfil the traditional mother role and wanting the career satisfaction as well" (Stewart & Davis, 1996, p. 201). Walzer (1997) explains the dilemma for women who wish to seek employment: They "have grown up with the belief that mothers are 'irreplaceable' [and] must find a way of 'replacing' themselves during the hours that they are at their jobs" (p. 213).

Of course, the transition to motherhood also requires building a new identity, that of mother, and for many women the close, special relationship they have with their child is the source of much pleasure (Lupton, 2000). Bailey's (1999) analysis of pregnant women revealed that all the women felt an increase in self worth, although many also expressed uncertainty as to how this new mother identity would impact upon their sense of self. For some, the transition to motherhood provides an opportunity to escape from a career identity that is not satisfactory (Bailey, 1999). However, very few women see their newly acquired mother identity as an adequate replacement for their occupational identity (Lupton & Schmied, 2002). This is an understandable response given that the maternal role is so unvalued and unrespected by society (Grace, 1998).

Guilt is one of the strongest themes found in women's stories. Mothers feel guilt regardless of their employment status which indicates the power of the good mother discourse. Villani and Ryan (1997) argue that the myths and impossible standards of motherhood create a sense of failure and guilt that ultimately leads to a loss of the self. Harrington (2002) found that women acknowledged the impossibility of the good mother standard but felt a continual sense of guilt for not reaching it: "I think it [guilt] comes with the birth, it comes out with the placenta" (p. 119). The inevitability of this guilt is expressed by others: "the guilt that goes with being a mother" (Stewart & Davis, 1996, p. 44). As Gleve (1987) points out, with the dual discourses of motherhood and success, the guilt has become twofold: We are guilty not just for failing in our intensive mothering, but also for failing to reach the standards of success and achievement in the workforce. The power of guilt cannot be underestimated. Villani and Ryan describe mother guilt as having the potential to trigger a crisis of self worth. Harrington, on the other hand, describes guilt as self-surveillance and suggests it is a critical element in the continual identity project. Guilt highlights the differences between the self and the cultural ideal and thus opens up a space for resistance. The women in Harrington's study worked hard to ignore the guilt, which allowed them to reject some parts of the subject position on offer.

One effect of the competing discourses is the tendency for mothers to be seen as two dichotomous groups: stay-at-home mothers and working mothers. Hays (1996) describes this as the "mommy wars" and points out that while both images are culturally acceptable, their oppositional nature highlights the

ambivalence society feels about motherhood. While the reality of women's lives is, of course, far more diverse and far less divided than these images suggest, women do make arguments to support the choices they have made. Hays calls this ideological work, a way of working with the cultural knowledge available to them to make sense of what they believe and what they do. In doing this work, both "groups" highlight the negative sides of the choices they have rejected: Mothers who are predominantly at home will talk about the stress of the double shift and will draw upon the intensive mother discourse to talk about children's need for a parent at home. Meanwhile, mothers in paid work will talk about the drudgery of housework, and the boredom and lack of stimulation at home. However, women do not tend to judge each other and many women express the view that it is important for each mother to do what is right for herself and her family (Hand & Hughes, 2004; Hays, 1996; Lupton & Schmied, 2002). In addition, the dualistic construction paints a false picture of the reality of women's choices as will be seen.

I hate seeing myself in the research. In Harrington's (2002) interviews of New Zealand women who are not in paid work she notes that "almost all based claims to better living conditions for themselves, especially more leisure, in their special work as mothers" (p. 122). This was described by Harrington as a resistance to the fear of being subsumed by motherhood. For a long time now I have laid claim to a "better" life than my husband's: more freedom, more balance, and more variety have been my cries. Seeing a similar cry explained away as a justification for my choices, a defence of my position, makes me feel that my statements are somehow less true. That I feel this way seems important to my research: After all if I feel that this type of analysis somehow devalues my experiences then it is highly possible that some of the women in my focus groups will feel the same once they read my analysis. How am I going to prevent that?

Women are struggling to find ways of being that somehow counter the negative effects of the conflict, and to find subject positions within these discourses that allow them some degree of comfort. Miller (1996) interviewed new mothers who returned to their career within a year of childbirth, and described the process they went through in the transition to motherhood as improvising identities. This captures the agency within the process: Rather than passively taking on a fixed maternal identity, they were, within limits, developing new identities from the conflicting discourses available to them. The challenge for these and other women is to steer a path at a time when "cultural definitions of 'what's right' are slippery and shifting" (Miller, 1996, p. 127). On the surface their "choices" are simple: either choose one or the other, or attempt to have it all.

Solutions

Faced with a no-win situation, it sometimes seems easiest to choose either one or the other identity and certainly for some women this is their solution. The dominance of each choice is shifting however.

Women's increasing labour force participation demonstrates less are choosing "just" motherhood, while increasing numbers of childless women demonstrates more are choosing "just" a career. For example, over two thirds of the executive women in Blair-Loy's (2003) research chose to remain childless because they felt a work devotion schema was incompatible with a family devotion schema. However, choosing just one does not provide an escape from the guilt and feelings of inadequacy as both identities are seen to be integral to what it means to be a woman. In Lupton and Schmied's (2002) interviews of Australian parents, both mothers in the workforce and those at home commented that they felt condemned for their choice. An Australian woman sums up the societal view of women who opt not to be in paid work: you are seen as "really stupid if you can cope without any mental stimulation" (Lupton & Schmied, 2002, p. 100). Lewis (1991) points out that the option of remaining childless is no easier, with these women often seen as "deviant and unfeminine" (p. 210). Similarly, women who are infertile face a negative stereotype as represented by the terms barren and sterile: an image of failure not just to have children, but as a woman (Woollett, 1991). Faced with two options that each seems undesirable by themselves, the goal of many women is to have both.

According to Aveling (2002), the feminist discourses of the 1970s focussed on equality of opportunity and led to a generation of women who expected to have it all: a family and a career. She interviewed a group of young "academic achievers" in 1986 and found that these women had clear goals of becoming respected in their successful career, and most assumed they would have children and that combining the two would be unproblematic. However, as Hays (1996) points out, "having it all" is impossible if "all" consists of contradictory requirements. Twelve years later, despite their intentions to have both, the vast majority of the women in Aveling's study had found it necessary to suspend their careers whilst their children were young. She concluded that their employment patterns were no different from earlier generations: "the discourse of equality of opportunity" (p. 277) had failed them. This theme, that despite all the changes much remains the same, is seen in other research. Vincent et al. (2004) expressed surprise at the homogeneity of couples' accounts of how they managed childcaring and paid work with the mothers continuing to take the responsibility for the children whether or not they were in the workforce. The authors concluded that "these men and women are not presenting a serious challenge to a traditional understanding of family relationships" (p. 585). For many women, the impossibility of having it all led to ideals of balance and compromise, some of each.

Many woman describe part time work as their ideal and see it as a way to have the best of both worlds (Miller, 1996). This marks the intersection between the competing ideologies of selfless motherhood and competitive individual, and can be seen as a rational compromise (C. Hughes, 2002). The result is a female pattern of work characterised by breaks in employment and part time work often in lower status jobs (S. Lewis, 1991). This choice creates a vicious circle that S. Lewis argues perpetuates women's subordination by supporting gender pay differentials: part time work is usually low skill and low pay, female workers are seen as less committed than males, and gaps in participation lead to

reduced opportunities and promotions. Furthermore, women find it increasingly difficult to move back into full time work as they are not seen to have gained skills while the father's work has been given priority. An oft cited reason for the mother rather than the father acting as primary caregiver is that he earns the higher wage; a situation perpetuated by women's "choices" (S. Lewis, 1991). Within current constructions of motherhood and success, each of the possible solutions has a price. However, discourses are not stable and unmoving, and new discourses are evolving that, while they may not solve these problems, are certainly changing the positions available to women.

Reconstruction

The agency accorded by social constructionism is a much broader process than simply choosing actions; instead it provides us with the opportunity to take part in the "creation, sustenance and transformation" (Shotter, 1995, p. 387) of the culture within which we are embedded. While we are constrained by the discourses of our culture, those discourses are fluid and changing and are themselves influenced by the choices that people make (Kenwood, 1996). Gergen (1999b) highlights the importance of reflexivity in this process: In reflecting upon our understandings of the world we create new meanings. Brannen and Moss (1991) describe how British women in full time work in the 1980s, experiencing tension between the dominant ideology of a good mother and the reality of their lives, worked to keep the spheres separate as a strategy for dealing with that conflict. Lack of support for their choices was an issue, but that they made the choices anyway illustrates that a dominant discourse does not fully determine behaviour. This is not to suggest that resisting dominant discourses or creating new ways of talking is easy. As has been seen within the accounts of women, resistance has a price, and as Harré and Gillett (1994) point out, we cannot resist one position without adopting another. Bailey (1999) describes the boundary between two competing discourses as a creative space where new identities can be formed. One outcome of the tension between good mother and successful woman discourses is the gradual emergence of a new construction of motherhood.

Increasingly, mothers in the workforce are drawing upon an "independent mother" discourse that stresses the importance of a mother striving for her own "self-development, fulfilment, and actualisation though her job" (Lupton & Schmied, 2002, p. 106). While Lupton and Schmied suggest this is a challenge to the good mother discourse, it can also be seen as a modification of good mother to better fit with successful woman. Within this discourse, a woman who is not fulfilled is positioned as frustrated and dissatisfied, and thus unable to be patient and devoted with her children (Lupton, 2000; Lupton & Schmied, 2002). Hays (1996) also found working mothers drew on this discourse to argue that their working is good for their children: "happy moms make happy children" (p. 148) is a common refrain. This is a relatively recent discourse that Brannen (1992) identified as a new ideology in the late 1980s: "under-played and under-developed, overshadowed by the dominant paradigm" (p. 69). According to Hughes (2002), anxiety is a key element of discursive transitions and the evolution of the independent mother discourse is a resolution to that anxiety.

The independent mother discourse is not all-inclusive however. According to Lupton (2000), in Australia the child must be at least one before it is socially acceptable for the mother to seek her own development and autonomy. Woodward (1997b) also identifies the independent mother as a recent figure in the USA and argues that, while it incorporates the idea of single mothers, it is predominantly an image for and of middle-class, educated women. While she equates the independent mother discourse with the "have it all" image of superwoman, other research suggests it is not just mothers in the workforce who are drawing upon it. Mothers at home also reconstruct motherhood as part of their resistance to cultural imagery of the stay-at-home mother as boring and mindless. Harrington (2002) describes how the New Zealand women in her study talked about the importance of having interests outside the home to demonstrate they were not "just" mothers. This can be seen as a response to the lack of value accorded the maternal role. Like the working mothers in Lupton and Schmied's (2002) research, these women framed this new image within a good mother discourse: When asked what makes a good mother, a number included having her own interests as important to ensure her own needs were met, thus enabling her to meet her children's needs (Harrington, 2002). Hughes (2002) supports this view that the independent mother discourse has become integral to being a good mother: "someone who retains a strong sense of her own identity" (p. 69) and has the right to have their own needs met. While the independent mother discourse goes some way towards resolving the tension, it only addresses part of the equation: It works to reconstruct the mother and her identity within the parenting relationship, but does not alter the construction of the child, the father, or the workplace.

Children within the intensive mother discourse are seen as precious, fragile, and needing a mother's devoted care (Blair-Loy, 2003), and as long as this remains the case, the tension will remain. In pointing out that the most logical solution to the conflict is to take the capitalist market ideology further and apply it to child rearing, Hays (1996) asks: "Why don't we convince ourselves that children need neither a quantity of time nor 'quality time' with their mothers *or* their fathers?" (p. 5). Hays is not advocating such a response; however, it is interesting to note this discourse appearing in policy literature. For example Hartmann (2004), in her commentary on work-family conflict, argues that the solution must have a dual focus: "stressing the importance of women's career development to women's self fulfilment (a happy mother is a good mother) and the value of good-quality group child care and preschool to the healthy development of children" (p. 230). Both Himmelweit and Sigala (2004) and Barlow et al. (2002), in examining New Labour policy in Britain, make the point that policy needs to "emphasise that day care is for the benefit of the children and in children's best interests, not simply a device for getting mothers into the labour market" (Barlow et al., 2002, p. 123).

That this pressure for a discursive shift in the function of childcare is becoming stronger is evident in some studies. In Hays's (1996) analysis of how women in the workforce support their choices, she notes that as well as drawing from the independent mother discourse, they also used a strategy of extolling the benefits of childcare for children's development. The women explained how childcare

encourages independence and gives children new experiences and opportunities for social interaction. Similarly, the executive women in Blair-Loy's (2003) study viewed their children as resilient and autonomous, and some went further in suggesting that women who stay home encourage an unhealthy dependence in their children. This reconstruction of the child will certainly reduce the pressure of the intensive mother discourse on women although whether this will benefit the child is open to debate.

An alternative to the reconstruction of the child is to challenge the gendered notion of parenting with many agreeing that intensive motherhood needs at the very least to transform into intensive parenthood. Views on the current extent of this shift vary. On the one hand, Lupton (2000) argues that there has been a discursive shift towards a more egalitarian model of parenting and suggests men are wanting to be more involved with their children. On the other hand, Aveling (2002) argues that in reconstructing girls as able to do anything, we failed to reconstruct boys in the same way. Despite some movement, women continue to be positioned as responsible for the children: Even in dual-earner couples it is likely to be the mother who arranges childcare and who takes time off when the children are sick, for example (Lupton, 2000). That new parenthood continues to impact more strongly on the women is made clear in one woman's account: "my life had turned upside down completely and his life still hadn't changed at all" (Lupton, 2000, p. 59). Phoenix and Woollett (1991a) make the point that while a minority of fathers do take equal responsibility for their children, on the whole the "New Man" is little more than a "figment of the media's imagination" (p. 4).

Harrington's (2002) research highlights how desirable this shift would be to women in New Zealand. All the women she interviewed were the primary caregivers, but most talked of their efforts to include partners in the decision-making and of their preference for him to take an equal share of the responsibility for the children. A number of the women outlined an ideal of both parents working part time so that both could spend time at home. Harrington makes the point that while structural constraints limit this imagined resistance, when such imagined alternative realities become collective rather than individual, the possibility of real change emerges. The women spoke of their frustration at the constraints of a working world that offers little in the way of part time work and equates commitment with a minimum of 40 hours a week. This highlights an additional area of the picture that could (and should) be reconstructed: the workplace. As Garey (1999) points out, as long as paid work is seen to conflict with family, men will not be expected to share the work in the home.

Summary

This review has covered three different types of research. Firstly, economic accounts, which construct women as rational individuals driven primarily by financial need whose choices are influenced by demographic factors such as the number of children, and financial factors such as income, work experience, and childcare costs. Secondly, psychological accounts, which also take an individualistic approach and argue that women have internal, stable attitudes and preferences that shape their choices.

Both these bodies of research are empirically founded, construct the individual as a free agent, and fail to consider women's social contexts. The final body of knowledge is more diverse and consists of structural, sociological, and social constructionist accounts. The first focuses on broad social factors that constrain women's choices such as tax regimes, policy, and ideology. These risk being overly deterministic and positioning women as entirely constrained by their context while failing to consider the influence of gender and morality. Sociological accounts consider the role of identity and morality in women's choices and finally, social constructionist accounts emphasise the centrality of language in constructing the reality within which women make their choices through the analysis of discourse.

Although presented as a thematic rather than chronological review, interesting shifts in the research over time are evident and highlight the sociohistorical and cultural nature of knowledge. In the early research the question was whether women worked or not, presented as a clear dichotomous choice. More recent research instead looks at the number of hours women are working, or the timing of women's return to the workforce, suggesting the default assumption now is that mothers will take up paid work and it is a matter of how much and how soon. Another shift is evidenced by earlier studies examining only married women's choices while contemporary research often compares married, de facto, and sole mothers. Finally, it was noticeable that the dominant research question in the late 1970s and early 1980s was whether women's attitudes were key determinants of their choices. This shifted in the early 1990s to a focus on economic factors, and more recent research has tended to emphasise personality factors such as work orientation. These various shifts demonstrate the interrelated nature of research and discourse: The research questions that are asked are determined in part by current discourses and hence these discourses influence the answers that are found.

Social constructionism, and in particular critical discourse analysis, has the potential to draw together the individual and social aspects of this complex area in a way that takes account of the power and influence of ideology; accords women agency; and recognises the power of language in constituting reality. Although, as this review shows, various researchers have examined the discourses deployed by women as they transition to motherhood, no research has looked at government policy. Given the power of institutions such as the government to constrain and enable women both materially through legislation, and socially through the reproduction and reinforcement of dominant discourses, such research is essential. In addition, very little discursive research has been carried out in New Zealand. Social constructionism recognises that knowledge is specific to both time and place and so it cannot be assumed that discourses identified in other cultures are relevant to a contemporary New Zealand context. At a time when policy in New Zealand is rapidly changing, there is a need for a clearer understanding of women's experiences and of the discourses that are framing their choices. This is the gap which the current research aims to partially fill. In the next chapter I outline the theoretical frameworks, feminism and social constructionism, which are the foundations of this research.

CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical Framework

"Constructionism offers a bold invitation to transform

social life, to build new futures."

(Gergen, 1999b, p. 49)

Introduction

This research has been constructed within the dual frameworks of feminism and social constructionism and reflects the epistemological assumptions of these perspectives. For me, the most dramatic contrast between this style of research and the empirical studies reviewed in the previous chapter is the different aim. Traditionally, psychology's goal was the prediction and control of behaviour; however, this research, like most feminist work, aims instead to understand and interpret (Morawski, 2001). Despite sharing a number of goals and beliefs, both feminism and social constructionism are multifaceted and fragmented. The first sections of this chapter therefore articulate my position within the various relevant debates. The values of the research are then outlined: an agenda for social change, a commitment to balancing the power between myself and the research participants, and a belief in the need for reflexivity during the research process.

Feminism

To present a definition of feminism within psychology would be to suggest a singularity that does not exist. According to Wilkinson (1997), feminism shares two themes: a belief in the value of women as worthy of study and a goal of improving the lives of women. There is however considerable variability in feminist views on how best to attain that goal. In order to clarify my position within these debates, I start by briefly outlining the origins of the feminist movement within psychology, its criticisms of traditional research, and the resultant three strands of feminist research. I then move onto a more detailed explanation of social constructionism, a theoretical perspective adopted by some feminists, which is the setting for this research.

Origins of feminism

Crawford and Kimmel (1999) describe the relationship between psychology and feminism as "an uneasy alliance" (p. 6); an apt description considering the relationship is founded upon strong feminist critiques of traditional psychology as an historically sexist discipline. Despite claims of objectivity, the field was dominated by men, which feminists argue can only result in bias (Stanley & Wise, 1993). Feminists have attacked psychology at the very heart of its identity: positivism and the resulting

androcentric knowledge base (Unger & Crawford, 1992). They have argued that every aspect of the research process is problematic from the choice of topic to the underlying epistemological assumptions. Knowledge is determined as much by the questions that are asked as it is by the research itself. Traditionally, the selection of problems worthy of research was limited to topics of concern to men (Harding, 1987; Riger, 1992). Women's issues such as domestic violence and housework were marginalised in favour of topics such as leadership and power, and most research participants were male college students and yet the results were freely generalised to the wider population (Riger, 1992). The male experience was taken to be the norm against which women were measured and found wanting (Stanley & Wise, 1993). As Burman (1994) so eloquently puts it, psychology is guilty of "mangling (women's) experience … into preconceived (male oriented) categories and presenting this as objective truth" (p. 123). Other feminist criticisms of traditional psychology focused on the research process, with diverse concerns such as exploitation of participants, oversimplification of quantitative methods, artificiality of laboratory research, and inadequate dissemination of research findings (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991). Still others criticised psychology's positivist foundations: its focus on the individual at the expense of social context and its claims to objective, value-free knowledge and the discovery of universal laws of human behaviour (Riger, 1992). From these critiques, a number of different strands of feminism have emerged.

Strands of feminism

Feminist research is characterised by diversity and while a variety of epistemological foundations are drawn upon, a threefold typology is commonly suggested: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint or experiential research, and feminist postmodernism or social constructionism (Harding, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Thompson, 1992; Wilkinson, 2001). Any such typology is at best an oversimplified model however and is suggestive of more homogeneity than exists (Morawski, 2001). In addition, Stanley and Wise point out that such a model risks silencing other feminist epistemologies and not recognising that many feminist researchers work across such artificial boundaries. They suggest that the combining of sometimes seemingly contradictory elements is suggestive of the contradictory nature of social reality. Despite these concerns, the three strands do give a broad overview of feminist research and serve as the background for the approach I have adopted.

Feminist empiricism, the least radical approach, aims to correct the previous sexist bias through closer adherence to the scientific methods of positivism while studying topics of particular relevance to women (Riger, 1992). It supports the view that value free research is possible and will result in objective knowledge. Other feminists argue that the elimination of bias is an impossible goal and that it is not enough to "add women and stir" (Yoder, 1999, p. 18). Instead psychology must be transformed and its most basic values and assumptions questioned.

The second strand, standpoint research, is one such transformation and takes women's experience as its starting point with the individual seen to be the expert in her life (Wilkinson, 2001). The key goal is to give voice to women and the approach claims that women and other minorities have a clearer view of society therefore research centred on their experiences will result in better and more complete knowledge (Riger, 1992). Standpoint research has been criticised by empiricists for not producing generalisable results and by social constructionists for taking narratives of experience as unproblematic truths (Wilkinson, 2001). While the current research does not take such a phenomenological approach, it does share some of the aims of standpoint feminism: ensuring the research is grounded in women's daily lives and giving voice to women. As will be discussed later, this attempt on my part to do what Olesen (2003) describes as "borrowing across these lines" (p. 355) is not without its problems.

The third strand, feminist social constructionism, with its postmodern and poststructuralist roots, is the most dramatically reconstructed vision of psychology and it is within this broad framework that the current research has been developed. Unlike standpoint theory, social constructionism is not the exclusive domain of feminists and this leads to some tension between their respective commitments.

Social Constructionism

The social constructionist critiques of positivism are well established within psychological literature and social constructionism is an increasingly accepted alternative epistemology. Therefore I only briefly summarise the key foundational assumptions regarding knowledge, language, and discourse before examining in more detail the debates surrounding identity and agency. Social constructionism, like feminism, is characterised by plurality and therefore it is critical that I articulate my own position within the debates that are most relevant to this research. As a research project interested in women's decision-making surrounding family and paid work, explanation of the underlying assumptions regarding the construction of the self and the agency afforded that self is a necessary foundation.

Knowledge, language, and power

Social constructionists take a critical view of knowledge, arguing it is contextual, sustained by social processes, and inextricably linked to social action (Gergen, 1985). They do not accept there are universal laws of human behaviour waiting to be discovered through objective research (Sampson, 1978). Instead, knowledge is constructed in the interactions between people and is entirely contextual: dependent upon, and varying according to, the social, historical, and cultural space and time within which it is created (Gergen, 1985). All of our categories of understanding are socially and historically specific, and enable and constrain certain social practices (Gergen, 1999b). Language plays a critical role in the constitutive process and is seen as not merely expressive, but as a cultural practice that constructs reality (Sampson, 1978). Words do not passively and neutrally reflect the world or

experience, but rather they actively construct both object and subject (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994). Social constructionism therefore entails a very different vision of psychology.

Within this vision, all aspects of research are transformed. Firstly, the emphasis on language shifts the focus of study from inside the person to the spaces between people as the site of knowledge production (Burr, 1995). What were traditionally seen as internal and stable emotions, attitudes, or beliefs, become variable and unstable social processes (Gergen, 1985). Secondly, with the view that there is no singular truth, the goal of psychological research becomes the identification of the processes by which certain accounts take on the status of truths and become accepted as "reality" or common sense (Schwandt, 2000). Thirdly, if knowledge is created between people then objectivity becomes an impossible goal: We all view the world from our socio-historical perspective and we cannot stand aside from that context (Burr, 1995). The standpoint, the values and beliefs of the knower, become an intrinsic element of the research (Sampson, 1978). Finally, and most importantly, the very purpose of knowledge, and therefore of psychology as a producer of knowledge, must be questioned. Social constructionists see knowledge not as neutral and disinterested but as political and ideological (Schwandt, 2000). As Gergen (1999b) highlights, psychological knowledge is intensely powerful. It creates categories of understanding and ultimately decides what is normal. This link between knowledge and power is key and results in an explicit political aim of effecting change through overturning accepted oppressive constructions (Durrheim, 1997).

Within this vision of psychology, understanding women's decision-making around family and work cannot be done through the examination of individual circumstances, the identification of financial variables, internal attitudes, or structural constraints. Instead, understanding is achieved through exploring how the decisions are constructed between people, how the language used frames the elements of the decision, how that framing constrains and enables women's choices, what constructions of motherhood and of paid work are accorded truth status, and how that status is supported. The Foucauldian concept of discourse is vital to achieving this understanding.

Discourse

It is through discourse that social power relations are constituted and exercised (Gavey, 1989). Most poststructuralists are reluctant to pin down a clear definition of the term discourse, but the usage in this research maps most closely onto Parker's (1990) definition: "a series of statements which constructs an object" (p. 191). Discourses construct our world so that how we understand and how we experience motherhood, for example, is dependent upon the discourses of motherhood that are available to us within our particular time and place in history. The positions that we adopt within the dominant discourses of motherhood shape how we experience it, what we see as our choices, and how we enact those choices. Discourses have the power not just to describe the world, but to turn ideas or constructs into reality: to "bring phenomena into sight" (Parker, 1990, p. 191). For example, childhood did not

exist as a developmental stage until the 17th century when discourses of children as vulnerable and precious began to develop (Hays, 1996). Today, however, it is unlikely that any person in a Western society would deny that childhood is a real developmental period that is qualitatively different from adulthood.

Discourses are multiple, each offering different and often contradictory ways of constructing an object (Gavey, 1989). But discourses are not created equal. Certain discourses are dominant and have a truth status: The reality constructed by them is taken to be natural, to be common sense (Gavey, 1989). A good mother as someone who puts her children first is an example of a currently dominant discourse. It is here that the relation between discourse and power becomes more explicit. As Parker (1989) says, "what is spoken, and who may speak, are issues of power" (p. 354). Discourses are political and serve their ends through positioning individuals in certain ways. This concept of positioning, the construction of identity, is elaborated shortly. Dominant discourses are seen to be more truthful and are therefore more accessible, while marginalised discourses are less accepted and less accessible, with the costs of taking up positions within such discourses being much greater (Weedon, 1987).

However, discourses are also shifting and unstable and as Weedon (1987) explains, individuals rejecting and resisting dominant discourses is the first step towards producing new ways of knowing. Once alternative discourses exist, although initially marginalised, they open up space for resistance and can gain social power and perhaps challenge the dominant discourse. It is important to recognise that this is by no means a simple process; even small shifts in the balance of power are difficult to attain (Weedon, 1987). It is by identifying and reflecting upon the existing discourses that we can create spaces for resistance (Gergen, 1999b). The key aim of the current research is to do just that, to identify the dominant and marginalised discourses that are available to women and in particular to explore the contradictory and tension filled discourses of motherhood and successful woman.

Identity and agency

Along with its radical reconstruction of knowledge and language, social constructionism proposes an even more dramatic reconstruction of the self. If discourses construct objects then arguably the most important object they construct is that of the self (Parker, 1989). Social constructionism is anti-essentialist and argues that there is no stable, singular personality residing within each of us. Instead the Western essential self is, like all known objects, a social construction made real through discourse. Although some critics take this to mean the denial of the self entirely (e.g. Ansoff, 1996; Lamiell, 1992), most social constructionists argue instead for a relational account of the self that is multiple, fragmented, and changeable: "maintained not inside the skull but in social life" (Burr, 2003, p. 104). Rather than the term "self", with its essentialist origins, many social constructionists use "identities" or "subjectivities" to describe the constructed and plural nature of the self. However, I take the view that for all its constructed nature, I experience myself as singular and coherent and I have therefore

retained the use of the word "self" in my own thinking and writing. Harré and Davies (1990) describe the production of the self as a discursive process: We develop our sense of ourselves through learning the categories of identity and then positioning ourselves within those categories. Discourses construct the categories and make positions available which address us in a certain way (Parker, 1990). Hall (1996) describes identities as the "points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (p. 6). Once we have adopted a position, it is from that vantage point that we experience the world (B. Davies & Harré, 1990).

Two important elements of the socially constructed self are its changeability and its multiplicity. This is in stark contrast to the essential humanist discourses that view the self as stable and coherent. Instead, the self is a process, "constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" (Weedon, 1987, p. 33). There are multiple discourses and multiple positions available to us, many of which contradict each other, and within this we struggle to maintain a sense of a consistent and unitary self (B. Davies & Harré, 1990). The multiple positions should not be seen as separate parts of our self but rather as a set, a woven fabric of identity threads (Burr, 2003; Parker, 1989). This view does not deny the self: For all that we are social constructions, we are nonetheless "real" acting and unique individuals (Harré & Gillett, 1994), and, as acting individuals, we have choice.

A common misdirected criticism of social constructionism and other postmodern perspectives is that it is strongly deterministic and denies agency (Ansoff, 1996; Fisher, 1999). This view misunderstands discourses as stable structures and makes the mistake of reifying society, viewing it as an "out there" entity that determines identity and behaviour (Gergen, 1999b; Harré, 1992). Social constructionist accounts do allow agency: People are not passively buffeted by discourse, instead they are active and can, to a degree, choose the positions they take up (B. Davies & Harré, 1990; Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1987). As Kenwood (1996) points out, agency is inherent within social constructionism, people cannot construct their reality without choice. The power of a social constructionist agency goes beyond the individual however. While choices are constrained and enabled by the discourses available within culture, those discourses are fluid and are influenced by the choices people make (Kenwood, 1996). As Fairclough (1992) says, "social subjects are shaped by discursive practices, yet [are] also capable of reshaping and restructuring those practices" (p. 45). We must continually reflect on our understandings because it is through such reflexivity that new meanings are created (Gergen, 1999b). Many social constructionist writers describe agency as a process rather than an entity, something that is done rather than found (Gergen, 1999a; Harré, 1992; Shotter, 1995). It is through the doing that new, less oppressive ways of being can be identified.

It would be a mistake to suggest that choosing positions is easy and unproblematic however. As Weedon (1987) rightly points out: "often the individual is unaware that she has a choice" (p. 97). The truth status of dominant discourses obscures alternatives. In addition, we cannot choose our context

and we are constrained by the dominant ways of that context (Harré & Gillett, 1994). Burr (2003) comments that in weaving identities, some threads combine more easily than others; for example, good mother sits more comfortably alongside a heterosexual than a lesbian identity. As mentioned earlier, discourses are not equal and while the idea of people freely choosing to adopt marginalised positions is appealing, in practice the choices are not equally weighted and the costs of making certain choices can be too high. As discussed, dominant discourses are strongly tied to existing power structures and therefore any attempt to resist those discourses will itself be resisted (Burr, 2003). We cannot reject one position within a discourse without adopting another and resistance may entail a reconstruction of the self that may be neither desirable nor possible (Harré & Gillett, 1994).

Social constructionism meets feminism

While challenging and constraining, a social constructionist account of agency is also immensely liberating and empowering and it is here that the perspectives of feminism and social constructionism meet. The appeal of social constructionism to feminism is clear: If current knowledge is constructed, then it can be reconstructed in ways that will ultimately meet the feminist goal of improving women's lives. The advantages of taking a social constructionist approach are many. Firstly, in recognising knowledge as constructed, it allows the possibility that dominant accepted truths can be disrupted and displaced (Gavey, 1989). Secondly, it recognises that gender is constructed through social power relations rather than predetermined by biology, which then positions women's oppression as resulting from those unequal social relations rather than from women's deficiencies (Worell & Etaugh, 1994). Thirdly, it denies a singular female nature, which gives room to recognise and value women's diversity (Gavey, 1989). Finally, as Thompson (1992) says, the risk of the rhetoric of oppression, common in feminist writing, is its inherent suggestion that women are merely passive victims. Social constructionism overcomes this through opening up a new view of subjectivity which sees the individual as an active agent and which therefore allows resistance through the challenge of dominant gendered discourses (Fonow & Cook, 1991).

It is here that this research is positioned: as a tiny moment in the bigger challenge of reflecting upon our understandings in order to open up possible new ways of being. The historically important feminist expression "the personal is the political" remains an important element of feminist research today (Stanley & Wise, 1993). Women's everyday individual experiences are critical and need to be heard and understood, but we must never lose sight of the broader social and political context within which that experience is embedded (Thompson, 1992). This research aims to meet that challenge through examining the contextual nature of women's choices surrounding family and paid work.

Research Values

Many authors have attempted to identify the key tenets that bind feminist researchers together, a challenging goal given the epistemological diversity discussed earlier. As Webb (1993) points out,

while feminism and critical approaches such as social constructionism have much in common, they do differ on some issues. In bringing together these perspectives, the current research aims to meet the criteria of good feminist research to the greatest extent possible while recognising that working within a social constructionist framework entails compromise. The key values I have aimed to incorporate, drawn from both feminist and social constructionist writings, are an agenda of social change, a commitment to balancing the power within the research relationship as much as possible, and a belief in the need for reflexivity and clear articulation of my own place in the research process.

Agenda of social change

Harding (1987) points out that what makes research feminist is not its methodology, but its underlying agenda. Whereas traditional positivist research has claimed to be value free and apolitical, both social constructionism and feminism are openly and unashamedly political (Thompson, 1992). Stanley and Wise (1993) argue that all feminists take as their starting place the belief that women are oppressed, and certainly the emancipation of women through social change is often cited as the key purpose of feminist research (Gavey, 1989; Seibold, 2000; Webb, 1993; Worell & Etaugh, 1994). Feminist research is more than just research on women by women[3], it is research for women (Webb, 1993). Research questions must be chosen with this ultimate aim in mind: "to contribute to a transformation of gender relations and the gender system" (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999, p. 5). The current research is both politically topical and directly relevant to women's lives and their experiences of what it means to be a woman in New Zealand today. It is hoped that making visible the evolving discourses surrounding women's dual roles of mother and worker, and the social and political impact of those discourses, will result in a greater understanding of how policy and talk constrain and enable women's choices. As outlined earlier, understanding is the necessary first step to resistance. Fonow and Cook (1991) describe feminist research as having an action orientation and emphasise the importance of research in the development of policy. By exploring the past research base, by analysing the government's current policy for women, and by linking that analysis into women's lived experiences, this study aims to open up and make more visible the complex links between research, policy, and experience.

An important aspect of the agenda of social change is the dissemination of the constructed knowledge: If results are not shared openly with both the public and the policy makers, the research cannot hope to achieve its goal of making a difference to women's lives (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991). Knowledge must be shared because knowledge confers power: "Power accrues to those who say what counts as truth" (Thompson, 1992, p. 12). Such concerns over the dissemination of knowledge highlight one of the tensions between social constructionism and feminism. While feminism aims to demystify science in order to make research accessible to all women, the language and ideas of social constructionism

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[3] Even this is debated. Some feminists, like Stanley and Wise (1993), claim that only women can be feminist and therefore do feminist research, while others such as Harding (1987) argue that as "every issue is a feminist issue" (p. 12) there are many topics that are very appropriate for a male feminist researcher.

are complex and radical, making the findings incomprehensible to many, and to the less educated and arguably therefore more oppressed, in particular (Gavey, 1989). This represents a significant challenge to feminist social constructionists and highlights the need for careful explication of findings. The most immediate dissemination of the research findings, the sharing of my analysis with the women from the focus groups, is discussed shortly. I hope that through participating in this research the women themselves will approach their choices in the future from a more aware place that will perhaps allow them a greater sense of personal agency.

I also plan to disseminate the findings of the research through academic, policy, and mainstream channels. I intend to seek publication within a suitable academic journal, to prepare a press release to the wider New Zealand media, and also to look for opportunities to submit articles to media that women will more commonly read. One particular avenue for dissemination to the wider community of women is the New Zealand Playcentre Journal, a magazine which is widely read by mothers and therefore particularly appropriate. I am also hoping to share my findings with the policy analysts at the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

The potential difficulties caused by the inaccessible and technical language of research in general, and of social constructionist research in particular, was brought home to me very strongly during the ethical approval process. The research needed to meet the ethical standards of two different bodies: Massey University and the Royal Plunket Society. I initially wrote the Information Sheet (Appendix A) using the detailed guidelines provided by Massey University. However, the response from the Plunket ethics committee was that the language used was "complex and wordy" and needed to be simplified. My initial response was surprise and disagreement but on reading the sheet with this critique in mind, I realised that much could be done to simplify the writing and make it more easily accessible to all women. This highlighted to me how fully immersed I am in academia and in academic language such that I no longer realise that some of the words and terms I use are in fact specialised terms and not readily grasped by people from other walks of life. It was a cautionary experience and one I strove to remember when running the focus groups and when reporting my findings back to the women later.

Balancing the power

Past concerns with the exploitation of participants by researchers who are positioned as the all knowing and all powerful experts, has led to feminists placing considerable emphasis on balancing the power within the research relationship (Reinharz, 1992). This ethical commitment to egalitarianism and collaborative research is difficult and challenging in all research, but particularly within a social constructionist framework. Knowledge is seen to be constructed in the interactions between people and therefore it can be said that the researcher-researched relationship is by its very nature equal. In addition, as the researcher, I recognise that I am dependent upon the women for my research.

However, it is words rather than people that are the object of study and the words are not taken to be accurate and neutral reflections of experience. Stenner (1993), in his discourse analysis of jealousy, captured the problem with this when he described himself as "painfully aware of having power and control over other people's words" (p. 131). In the end, it is my analysis, my interpretation of the women's words, which will stand as the final results of this study and it is this which firmly positions me as the more powerful (Olesen, 2003; Seibold, 2000). I do not believe that this tension between the epistemology of social constructionism and the values of feminism can ever be completely overcome, but as Webb (1993) points out, it is critical that the power differential is acknowledged and managed as well as possible. I have endeavoured to do this through certain specific strategies.

Firstly, semi structured focus groups were chosen as the data collection method. Such groups are considered less hierarchical than individual interviews and thus reduce the power imbalance (Wilkinson, 1999b). In addition, while trigger questions were used, the discussion remained very loosely structured to allow the women in the groups to direct the talk towards the issues most important to them. Other aspects of the rationale for focus groups are discussed in the next chapter.

Secondly, I aimed to build rapport within the group through making my own role as equal as possible through openness and honesty. Oakley (1981) describes the traditional interviewing paradigm as based on values of objectivity, hierarchy, and detachment and suggests feminist interviewers can overcome these problems. In particular she stresses the need for empathy and to openly answer any personal questions the participants ask. Self disclosure, described by Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1991) as reciprocity, is an important tool for balancing power in the relationship. Prior to the groups, I committed to being honest and open in expressing my own on-going struggles, engaging in reciprocity, and making it clear I am not an expert on family/work decisions. However, such attempts at building rapport and equality are not without problems. Firstly, as Acker et al. point out, it is critical that the researcher not impose their definitions of reality onto the researched. During the groups I became very aware of the risk of this happening and in the end contributed very little myself until after the groups were formally finished. More importantly, Acker et al. also suggest that rapport building strategies can result in friendships forming and this risks increasing rather than reducing exploitation due to the inherent tension between a friendship and the researcher's goal of gathering information. However, as I have only met each woman once or twice this has not been a problem.

The third strategy for managing the power differential was, rather than simply take the women's words for my own use I consulted them at two later stages. Once the transcription was complete, each member of each group was sent a copy and given the opportunity to delete or change any of their own talk. Allowing editing in this way helps to reduce the objectification inherent in the research process (Webb, 1993). However Weatherall, Gavey, and Potts (2002) point out that a potential difficulty with this is that oral transcriptions appear messy and inarticulate which can make participants want to

"correct" their speech. I used a relatively "clean" style of transcription to reduce this problem and while none of the women wanted to make amendments, a couple did say that they felt they came across badly in the transcript. I was able to reassure them that this is always the case with transcribed speech, particularly with groups where there is a lot of interruption and over-speaking. Sharing the interpretation with the participants is also recognised as a useful tool (Thompson, 1992) and this was done at the end of the research. While some feminist researchers take this further and involve the participants actively in the analysis, this is not appropriate for discourse analysis. Weatherall et al. (2002) highlight the problems and risks associated with even sharing the analysis: The interpretation may be dramatically different from the women's own views, especially given that it is unlikely the participants will have an understanding of the social constructionist perspective that drives the analysis. This can be distressing to the women and can be constructed as not respecting their reality (Acker et al., 1991; Weatherall et al., 2002). For this reason I invited the women to attend a group presentation of the analysis. I felt this would allow me to more carefully explain the nature of the research and would also give the women the opportunity to seek clarification immediately. This session, while attended by only half of the women, was appreciated. For the women who were not able to attend, I prepared a written summary of the thesis.

It must be acknowledged that attempts to equalise the power of the relationship can be of only limited success. As the researcher, I designed the research, instigated the interaction, and for all that they were semi-structured, the focus group discussions were directed towards certain topics through my trigger questions. This in itself positions me as more powerful. In addition, the very act of transcribing, summarising, and analysing someone else's words is an act of objectification that therefore constitutes power (Acker et al., 1991; Webb, 1993). However, this is tempered by the fact that I present my work only as my own interpretation and, as with all discourse analyses, acknowledge it as both individual and partial. As Thompson (1992) recommends, I remain "humble about [my] conclusions and the limitation of social science" (p. 10). As an acknowledgement of the fact that this research is only my interpretation, and as a means of recognising my dependence upon the women for my research, I have finished this thesis not with my own words, but with those of one of the mothers from the focus groups.

Reflexivity

Both social constructionists and most feminists (excepting feminist empiricists) share the belief that objectivity is an unattainable and undesirable goal of research (Burr, 1995). Therefore reflexivity, critically examining the research process and the researcher's place in that process, is seen as an essential component of research (Burr, 1995; Crawford & Kimmel, 1999; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Harding, 1987; Olesen, 2003; Webb, 1993). If knowledge is constructed between people then it becomes vital that the researcher's role in that construction is openly acknowledged (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). As Thompson (1992) describes so beautifully: "constructed knowers weave together

what they know from personal experiences with what they learn from others … they mingle the procedural knowledge of their discipline with their personal knowledge of themselves" (p. 10). My values will have influenced everything: the initial choice of topic, the design of the research, and the final analysis (Gergen, 1973). This is a two way process: my identity influences my work but at the same time my work influences my identity (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999). I have attempted throughout this research to remain true to this value of reflexivity by continually questioning myself and my choices, by recording my observations, and by incorporating elements of personal commentary throughout this final report.

Summary

This chapter has laid out the theoretical foundations of the research. Grounded firmly in my own identity as a feminist social researcher, the research takes a social constructionist approach which views knowledge as socially and culturally constructed and as such able to be reconstructed. Discourse is central to social constructionist understandings of identity and agency; and multiple discourses offer multiple subject positions which are woven into an individual coherent sense of self. Choice is both constrained and free: We are constrained by our social context and by the availability of subject positions, but within those constraints we can choose our identities. In addition, the choices that we make can influence the dominance of certain discourses and thus reshape social practice.

Within this framework, understanding women's decision-making around family and work cannot be achieved by classifying women into categories or by weighing financial and psychological factors as is done within the empirical research covered in Chapter Two. Instead the research takes language as the focus of study and aims to articulate the discourses drawn upon with respect to women's choices.

As discussed, I have considered three specific values in both the design and practice phases of the research. Firstly, my ultimate aim is one of social change for women through making visible the dominant and marginalised discourses that constrain and enable women's decisions. Secondly, I have endeavoured where possible to reduce the innate power differential between myself as the researcher and the women who have helped me through their participation in the research. Finally, as a result of the social constructionist assumption that objectivity is an impossible goal, I have incorporated an exploration of the link between my own identity and the research.

The next chapter looks at the design of the research in more detail: the choice of critical discourse analysis as the methodology; the data collection including sampling and recruitment; and the ethical principles adhered to.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Design

"If we as feminists want to reconstruct the framework of
women's lives, close attention to rhetoric is vital to empower
women – and men – to reimagine a differently gendered world."
(Williams, 1991, p. 1561)

Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design and process. I firstly explain the choice of critical discourse analysis as the methodology and outline the sources of data. I then detail the data collection process including an examination of the benefits and drawbacks of focus groups as opposed to individual interviews. Finally, the chapter covers the ethical principles which are the foundation of sound and rigorous research.

Critical Discourse Analysis

The choice of methodology is driven by both the research questions and the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter. Much of the empirical research discussed in Chapter Two used surveys, self-report measures, and structured interviews to gather information about women's demographics, attitudes, and personalities in order to identify correlational relationships that could be used to explain women's choices. From a social constructionist perspective such methods make little sense: Personalities and values are not considered to be stable, inner attributes accessible through self-report and language is not a mirror reflecting people's true experience. Instead language becomes the focus of the study and the research questions shift from what factors influence women's choices, to how are women's choices constructed and what are the social effects of those constructions. Within this framework, discourse analysis, which broadly studies language and its constitutive power, is the most appropriate methodology.

Discourse analysis, however, is not a single methodology. Instead, as Burman and Parker (1993) point out, there is a bewildering array of styles of analysis. Two broad approaches that have been loosely identified are discursive psychology and critical discourse analysis. The former is a close and detailed analysis of the immediate function of the talk (Potter & Wetherell, 1994). Potter and Wetherell (1987) describe function, construction, and variability as major components of discourse analysis. People use language to construct both themselves and their social world and to present themselves in certain ways. This accounting and warranting work is a feature of all text and is worthy of analysis in its own

right. Critical discourse analysis takes a wider view and draws upon Foucault's work looking at how discourses construct objects and subjects and how they support certain institutions, ideologies, and power relations (Parker, 1990). While the methodology for the current research is more closely aligned to this broader critical approach, it would be a mistake to make such a distinction too strongly as that would be falsely suggestive of a clear divide. As Potter and Wetherell (1994) suggest, most research questions, including those of the current research, require a combined focus which takes account of discourse as both process and structure. In particular, in working with the policy document and the women's talk, I found that consideration of the more immediate function of the text enhanced my analysis and so the final interpretation is very much a blend: at times taking a close view of how the text warrants the speaker's account and at other times stepping back and considering the wider implications of the construction.

Critical discourse analysis has also been identified by a number of authors as a useful tool for the analysis of government policy (Fairclough, 2001; Jones, Lee, & Poynton, 1998; Taylor, 2004). Bacchi (1999) outlines her approach to analysing policy and makes the critical point that policies construct problems in certain ways and that, rather than looking at policies as merely solutions to predefined problems, we need to consider how policies represent the problem in the first place and what the effects of that representation might be. In particular, it is important to explore how the responses might be different if the problem were represented in a different way.

The choice of discourse analysis as the methodology for this research also sits comfortably within the feminist goals. The focus on language is seen as a strength to feminists, who have long viewed language as an important tool of oppression (Gill, 1995). In particular, the critical discourse analysis of power relations holds considerable appeal for the feminist goals of social change and has been the preferred approach of many feminist researchers (Wilkinson, 2001).

Critical discourse analysis as a methodology is not rigorously prescribed and authors differ in their process. According to Locke (2004), reading a text critically involves "developing an awareness of how texts mediate and sustain particular discourses and power relations" (p. 39). My analysis aims to go beyond the identification of discourses to look at the social effects of the discursive positioning: to examine what institutions are strengthened and supported by these discourses, and to theorise on how the discourses disrupt or sustain gender power relations. Parker (1992) sets out a stepped process which uses 10 criteria to analyse discourses within texts. While these steps are suggestive of a prescribed process, analysis is both personal and interpretive and therefore these criteria were used simply as a guide. Such guidance is particularly welcome given my inexperience in work of this nature. In addition, describing the analysis as a stepped process and the structure of the resulting written analysis, falsely suggests that this was an orderly and linear procedure; in reality it was at times a circular and disjointed process.

The initial criterion proposed by Parker (1992) is implicit in the act of discourse analysis: discourses are realised in text and therefore it is through analysing texts that discourses can be made visible. Parker takes text to mean anything imbued with meaning and suggests turning that text into written form as the first stage of analysis. In the current research, the first text, the policy document, is both written and pictorial and the second text, the focus group talk, was transcribed. My initial work with the texts involved free association and brainstorming to examine possible connotations and meanings within the texts. Parker argues that this initial phase is better done within a group and, while such collaboration was not possible, at times I discussed possible meanings of elements of the policy text with family and friends in order to tap into a wider view.

The next two criteria are related: discourses are about objects and some of those objects are subjects, sentient beings who exist outside discourse (Parker, 1992). Discourses bring phenomena into being and in so doing construct a reality. Examining how the objects of interest to the research questions, in particular motherhood, children, and paid work, were represented in the texts was an important aspect of the analysis. In addition, as Parker says, discourses themselves may be constituted and reflected upon as objects. A related phase, and a critical one, was the identification of the subjects, the categories of person that were constituted in the texts. What positions were made available by the discourses? This was of particular interest in analysing the policy document: how women were positioned by the policy, what identities were made available to them, and what rights and responsibilities were attached to those identities.

Parker's (1992) next criterion is that discourses are "a coherent system of meanings" (p. 10) and that the goal of analysis is therefore to identify the groups of statements that consistently refer to a topic. It is important to recognise that to do so researchers must bring their existing knowledge of discourses to the analysis. As part of this phase of the analysis, the "mapping a picture of the world" (Parker, 1992, p. 12) as represented by the discourse, I have, as suggested by Parker, attempted to identify what the rules are for rational and normal behaviour, and to speculate on what might happen to the people who don't follow those rules. For example, I questioned how women who do not follow the rules of the intensive mother discourse are dealt with in the picture constructed by the texts.

The next two criteria touch on reflexivity. The fifth is that discourses refer to other discourses and this highlights their interrelated nature. Discourses "embed, entail and presuppose other discourses" (Parker, 1992, p. 13); for example, the intensive mother discourse presupposes the dependent child discourse. In analysing the text I aimed to look for contrasts and contradictions between the ways of speaking and also to identify points where discourses overlap each other. The sixth criteria is that discourses reflect upon themselves and that speakers will at times actively reflect and comment on their use of certain discourses. This element is cursory as a full rhetorical analysis of the accounting that the participants are doing with such reflexivity is beyond the scope of this research. It is at this

point in the analysis that Parker suggests labelling the discourses and, importantly, reflecting carefully on the selection of such terms as labels carry their own meaning and reflect underlying moral and political choices. For the most part I used labels which previous researchers in this area have coined, intensive mother and independent mother, for example.

Parker's (1992) seventh criterion, that discourses are historically situated, recognises the dynamic and unstable nature of discourses. He suggests that the analysis examines the origins of the discourses. Although largely beyond the scope of this thesis, this has been achieved in part through the Literature Review, which examined the historical foundations of the more dominant discourses of motherhood. I also briefly examined the historical roots of significant feminist debates and discourses in the policy analysis.

Although Parker (1992) describes these initial phases of analysis as sufficient to render the dominant discourses visible, he argues that three further elements must be considered if an analysis is to be useful. These are awareness that discourses support institutions, reproduce power relations, and have ideological effects. While throughout the analysis I endeavoured to identify which institutions are supported and reinforced by these discourses, much of this final phase is accomplished in the discussion which examines who benefits from such constructions and would therefore wish to promote the discourse. Finally, also within the discussion, the ideological effects of the identified discourses are examined. While not all discourses are ideological, as Parker points out, certain discourses have ideological effects and work to justify the position of dominant groups. The ultimate goal of this critical discourse analysis is change. By identifying the discourses and relationships surrounding motherhood and paid work, it aims to change the way the discourses are used and so permit "different spaces for manoeuvre and resistance" (Parker, 1992, p. 21).

Data Collection

The data was derived from two sources: a policy document and two focus groups. As Holmes (1997) points out, people's "subjectivity is constructed and gendered within the social, economic, and political discourse to which they are exposed" (p. 264). As discussed in the Literature Review, social policy, such as that produced by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, impacts on women's lives in both material and social ways. Policy aims to influence people's decisions through legislating to make certain choices easier than others, generally by changing the financial costs. At a deeper level, however, policy is a powerful element in the positioning of certain discourses as dominant. The government goals for women as set out in policy discursively position women and in doing so attribute status and acceptability to some life choices and not to others. The relationship between society and policy is two-way: Policy is driven in part by changes in society, but at the same time society moves in the directions established by policy.

While examining policy alone would be valid and useful, I was keen to ensure the research remained firmly grounded in women's experiences and one of my key aims was to understand how government policy and legislation impact upon women's lives. This desire led to the inclusion of focus group data as a second component of the research. By examining the discourses drawn upon by both policy and people, I hoped to shed light on how they influence each other. In addition, examining two sources of text gives a more complete picture of how discourses are organised (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Policy documents

The key policy document was the *Action Plan for New Zealand Women* (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2004a)[4]. Packaged with the Plan was a *Consultation Report* (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2004b) and a small pamphlet which summarised the key points of the Plan. The Plan was commissioned by the government to articulate "the government's commitment to improving a range of outcomes for women and reducing inequalities between women and men, and between particular groups of women" (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2004a, p. 1). It was developed in consultation with various women's organisations and is being implemented by a number of government agencies. The Plan identifies three priority areas: economic sustainability, work-life balance, and well-being. My analysis examined the overall document, but focussed on the first two strands as being of particular relevance to the research questions. Elements of the accompanying consultation report, and in particular its relationship to the Plan, were also examined. In addition, at the end of each focus group, the women read and briefly discussed the small summary pamphlet.

Focus groups

As mentioned, I was keen to keep the research close to women's experiences and therefore it seemed essential to talk to women who were in the process of making decisions about family and paid work. To that end, two focus groups were held. While focus groups are not inherently feminist, they were chosen rather than individual interviews as the data collection method for a number of important reasons relating to the goals and values of the research.

Benefits and drawbacks

Firstly, focus groups are a less hierarchical method of data collection, which helps to reduce the inherent power imbalances in the research relationship. The structure of a group with a single researcher and multiple participants ensures the group retains more power (Wilkinson, 1998). In addition, the groups were largely unstructured with only broad trigger questions used. Within the constraints of the research's area of interest, this allowed the women some degree of choice as to what they talked about. However, I recognise that, as I retained control of the analysis, this did not change the power dynamics of the research, only of the data collection phase (Wilkinson, 1998).

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[4] The document is available online at the Ministry of Women's Affairs web site: http://www.mwa.govt.nz/news-and-pubs/publications/action-plan.html

A second reason for selecting focus groups was that individual interviews tend to decontextualise the participants and as such are less natural (Wilkinson, 1998). Feminist researchers have commented on how closely focus group discussions resemble everyday social interactions (Wilkinson, 1999a). Speaking from my own experiences, one of the tools that women use to make choices is discussion with family and friends, and mothers often meet specifically for such supportive conversations about shared concerns. Focus groups represent something of a compromise in that they have the advantage of being more natural than individual interviews, but allow a higher degree of control than naturalistic observation (D. Morgan, 1997). D. Morgan and Krueger (1993) make the interesting point that an important determinant of the naturalness of the group discussion is how close the topic is to the participants' ordinary conversation. It is highly likely that motherhood, employment, and choices were issues that these mothers would be discussing in their own support groups. In addition, group processes can produce richer data because members can challenge, question, and disagree with each other in a way that would be singularly inappropriate for the researcher (Wilkinson, 1998). Disagreement within the group encourages more elaborate explanations and the act of justifying and defending a point of view can produce interesting data on how women construct their identities and ideologies (Wilkinson, 1998). As it happened, this type of disagreement was limited within the groups, and although that may have meant less elaboration of their views, I was glad that the groups were predominantly supportive of each other. Mothers already face considerable judgement by society and I did not want the discussions to be an uncomfortable experience for the women.

Wanting the experience to be both enjoyable and empowering for the women was also my final reason for selecting focus groups as the method. There is evidence to suggest that women find participating in a focus group richer and more gratifying than individual interviews (Madriz, 2000). I viewed the focus groups as of mutual benefit: I obtained the data I needed for my research and the women had the opportunity to spend some time discussing an important personal issue in a safe and supportive environment. While Wilkinson (1999a) suggests that the term *focus group interview* can be used, I have deliberately used the term *discussion* to reflect the aim of a balanced and equal relationship hopefully of benefit to both myself and the participants. Feedback from the women afterwards suggested that the experience was both interesting and enjoyable.

However, focus groups are not without drawbacks. Firstly, the skill of the moderator influences the quality of the data (D. Morgan & Krueger, 1993). In this sense my own lack of experience was a potential disadvantage and while I attempted to overcome this by educating myself about moderation, reading cannot take the place of experience. Reading the transcripts later, I felt there were times when a more experienced moderator would have been able to maintain a better flow in the discussion.

Secondly, many authors discuss the risk that the group context may engender conformity and prevent certain topics or opinions being discussed (Kitzinger, 1994; D. Morgan & Krueger, 1993; Wilkinson,

1998). However, as Wilkinson points out, given the social constructionist view that identities are re/constructed in such settings, concerns over the effect of the group can be dismissed as essentialist and individualistic. The group interaction instead is seen as "an instance of the co-construction of meaning in action" (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 121). An additional related potential problem was that of overdisclosure: At times a group can take on a momentum of its own which may lead participants to disclose more than they would ordinarily (D. Morgan & Krueger, 1993). This did not seem to occur in the groups, and when I asked the women how they felt about their contributions after reading the transcript only one indicated there were a few comments she wished she hadn't made.

Finally, focus groups can be difficult and time consuming to organise and this was certainly the case for this research. I had a limited number of possible participants and finding a time that suited them proved challenging. In addition, it was difficult to balance my needs with those of the mothers. While I felt the mothers would prefer to have their babies present during the discussion, I thought this may be problematic. In particular I was concerned that the noise of a baby crying might make transcription impossible, and that the women would find it more difficult to focus on the discussion while attending to the needs of their children. The groups were scheduled on Saturday mornings so that partners would be more likely to be available and caregivers were provided in order to minimise these potential problems. Most of the women took the discussion as an opportunity for some time out from their baby with only one baby at the first group and two at the second. Having caregivers present proved invaluable and although at times the mothers of the babies were distracted and had to leave the room, this was not as difficult as I feared, although I did get the sense that these women contributed less overall. On only one occasion did a baby crying make transcription impossible.

Recruitment

The women were recruited primarily through Playcentre SPACE (Supporting Parents Alongside Children's Education) groups, a programme for first time parents. I attended two groups, one in Upper Hutt and one in Lower Hutt, and briefly explained the research before distributing the Information Sheet (Appendix A), outlining the study, what would be required of them, and their rights. I invited any of the women who were interested in taking part to give me their contact details and then I rang them a week later to confirm their interest. Information Sheets were also distributed through Plunket nurses in both Upper Hutt and Lower Hutt, but this did not result in any participants. As I did not get the response from Plunket that I had hoped for, I asked the mothers from SPACE who had expressed interest if they knew of other women who met the sampling criteria. Eventually I had sufficient women interested to invite seven women to attend each group. This was more than I required allowing for unavailability on the day.

While it is recognised that all mothers make and remake choices around family and paid work throughout their parenting years, I decided to focus my research on first time mothers who had been in

paid employment prior to the birth and whose child was under six months of age. One of feminism's key critiques of traditional psychology is the tendency to generalise findings too broadly. Consequently, feminist authors highlight the importance of feminist researchers not making a similar mistake in generalising the experiences of white middle-class women to all women (Thompson, 1992). We need to recognise the diversity of experience and not construct "the category of women as representative of all women" (Worell & Etaugh, 1994, p. 446). With its social constructionist recognition of multiple realities, this research does not aim to generalise the findings across women. In addition, the study aims to study text and talk rather than people. Because of this the sampling was purposive rather than random (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Millward (1995) suggests that sampling in such cases should select the people who will provide "the most meaningful information in terms of the project objectives" (p. 279). First time mothers were therefore ideal.

While I am not creating knowledge that is generalised to all women, the very questions that I ask risk making assumptions about all women and it is therefore important to highlight the narrow focus of my research and in particular to note that the women I have listened to were all European New Zealanders from apparently middle-class backgrounds in stable, heterosexual partnerships. This was not intentional on my part and arguably reflects the predominant identities of women who attend parenting support groups and who have the time and inclination to volunteer for research. This self selection bias, leading to the exclusion of women of different identities, has been noted as problematic in other feminist qualitative research (Cannon, Higginbotham, & Leung, 1991). For many women in New Zealand, the idea of choosing whether or not to do paid work would be incomprehensible: Their participation in the labour force is essential in order to provide the basics of life for their children and therefore to talk of decision-making would be irrelevant and potentially offensive. The women in the groups felt they had some degree of choice, and while they will construct their realities differently to other women because of their social context, the discourses they draw upon and the subject positions they adopt will none the less be familiar to all.

In addition, I feel compelled to explore my decision not to talk to both parents. By interviewing the women only, I am aware that I risk inferring that caring for children is solely the mother's responsibility and therefore it is only women who make choices following the transition to parenthood. It is not my intention to deny that fathers may also make decisions, that they have a role in the women's decision-making, or that the process is a truly joint one. However, I feel that this risk is outweighed by the fact that for all the social and discursive shifts in the last few decades, research demonstrates that it is still the mother who takes on the prime responsibility for the children (Lupton, 2000). Therefore, to construct the decision as an equal one would be to do mothers a disservice. My decision was validated by the women's talk: As is discussed in Chapter Six, the women generally assumed that it was they who would make the adjustments rather than their partner. In addition, as a feminist, my interest lies in how the discourses shape women's experience rather than men's. Belenky,

Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), in talking about their decision to listen only to women, make the following relevant point: "the male experience has been so powerfully articulated that we believed we would hear the patterns in women's voices more clearly if we held at bay the power templates men have etched in the literature and in our minds" (p. 9). Bearing in mind the view that discourses are drawn upon and identities are re/constructed dependent upon the situation of the talk, it seems highly probable that had I chosen to interview couples rather than groups of women, my text and therefore my analysis would have looked very different. This does not however invalidate this analysis; it simply highlights that it is only one possible analysis of many.

The women

The first group of five women all belonged to the same antenatal support group. All were married and the four who gave their ethnic affiliation described themselves as New Zealanders. Both Jo and Anne had been in administration positions before having their babies five months earlier. Lisa's daughter was four months old and Lisa had been a medical sales representative before having her child, while Vic had a six month old son and was previously a sales coordinator. Finally, Donna was an accountant and her son was five months old. At the time of the focus groups only Donna, whose husband was full time caregiver to their son, had returned to full time work. Anne's husband had recently set up a business and she was putting some hours into administration, and Lisa was planning to return to her previous job for one day a week shortly. Neither Jo nor Vic planned to return to paid work in the near future although Vic was doing some accounting work for a family member.

Six women took part in the second group. All were either married or in de facto relationships. Kirsten, previously an advisor, was German and had a five month old daughter. The remaining women all described themselves as New Zealand Europeans. Sarah's twin daughters were five months old and Sarah had been a contractor in a government agency. Rita's job had been as a personal assistant and her son was three and a half months old. Nicole and Debra's babies were both 12 weeks old; Nicole was a primary school teacher and Debra had recently been made redundant from her job as project manager. Finally, Diane, a pharmacist, had a seven week old daughter. Except for Sarah, all the women were on parental leave, three still within the 14 weeks paid leave. Helen planned to return full time to her job as a primary school teacher at the end of her year's parental leave. The remaining women had no specific plans but talked about either part time work or setting up home businesses as likely options either at the end of their parental leave or in the more distant future. Debra was doing some casual paid work for family, and two of the women, Sarah and Kirsten, were enrolled in part time study courses.

Procedure

I was keen to make the environment of the focus groups as comfortable as possible. They were held at a neutral venue with tea, coffee, and snacks available and, as mentioned, two trained early childhood teachers were available to help care for any babies who attended. The women had all read the

Information Sheet (Appendix A) prior to attending the group and were given the opportunity to ask any questions about the research and their rights prior to signing the Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix B) and the Consent Form (Appendix C). We all wore name tags and following a brief outline of the purpose of the research and the importance of respecting each other's views, we completed an icebreaker round with each woman introducing herself. I used trigger questions (Appendix D) at times throughout the discussion when talk was flagging and a new direction seemed to be required. The groups were recorded with both audio and video tapes. The video was used to overcome the potential difficulty of identifying the speaker within the group when transcribing (D. Morgan, 1997).

The group size was intentionally small with five women attending the first group and six the second. This was for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is similar to the size of a natural friendship group and would therefore result in more natural talk than a larger group. Secondly, it was important to me that all the women in the group had sufficient time to talk and in a larger group this may not have happened. Finally, transcription of focus groups is extremely time consuming (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001) and a smaller number of participants simplified the process.

All transcription is an interpretation and the resulting data is itself a construction (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Because the primary focus of the research was on the discourses drawn upon in the text rather than the immediate rhetorical function, a relatively simple transcription style was adopted with only major pauses and emphasis noted (Potter & Wetherell, 1995). Overlapping speech was identified with slashes (/). When including extracts in this final thesis, most of the talk was further edited with pauses, fillers, and repetitions removed to make the text more accessible to readers. This was not done on occasions when the unedited transcription demonstrated something important about the text such as pauses and restarts indicating discomfort. Where necessary for understanding, I have included my comments or questions, which are identified by my preferred name, Ella. As mentioned earlier, each participant was sent a copy of the transcription of their group and given the opportunity to amend or delete any of their own talk. The only amendment was when one participant pointed out a portion of text that had been wrongly attributed to her; an error I was able to correct after viewing the relevant section of video. Each participant then signed a Tape Release Form (Appendix E).

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted according to the guidelines set out in the *Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants* (Massey University, 2004). Ethical approval was given by the Ethics Committees of both Massey University (WGTN 05/04), and the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society. Midway through the recruitment process I was finding it difficult to get sufficient participants, so relaxed my selection criteria slightly. Approval for this change was given by the Chair of the Massey Wellington Ethics Committee. In addition, Hutt

Playcentre Association gave me permission to visit the SPACE groups to discuss my research and recruit participants. Specific ethical principles followed were informed consent, protection from harm, confidentiality and anonymity, and research rigour.

Informed consent

The principle of informed consent is central to sound ethical research. Participation in the focus groups was voluntary and informed consent was sought prior to participation. As outlined, each participant was provided with a detailed Information Sheet that they were able to take home and read before agreeing to take part. Prior to the focus groups, participants were given consent forms which outlined their rights and, in addition, these rights were verbally explained. It has been noted that informed consent with unstructured qualitative work presents a challenge: While the broad topic is known in advance, it is not possible to anticipate what specific areas might be discussed (Cieurzo & Keitel, 1999; Seibold, 2000). Informed consent must therefore be seen as an ongoing process: the right to withdraw from the focus group, to decline to answer any question, and to later delete text from the transcript are all important elements in that process and these rights were explicitly highlighted.

Protection from harm

All research participants have the right to be protected from harm. Focus groups entail the same risks inherent in any interaction between people such as embarrassment, conflict of opinion, anger, and misunderstanding (May, 1991). The women were at a vulnerable time in their lives and the topic was one where not only were differences of opinion inevitable, but moral judgement of others' views was a distinct possibility. Each group started with a discussion about the importance of listening and respecting each other's views. As mentioned, the environment of both groups was positive and supportive with no conflict evident.

Anonymity and confidentiality

When dealing with personal information, issues of confidentiality and anonymity are related to the protection from harm. While the topic was not a threatening one, it was deeply personal and the women may have shared information within the group that they would want to remain confidential. To that end, each participant signed a confidentiality agreement and the importance of this was discussed. The focus group tapes, transcripts, and participant forms were all stored securely during the research and were accessible only to myself. At the completion of the research the audio and video tapes were destroyed and the transcripts stored securely at Massey University for a period of five years.

However, the groups are a source of data and this thesis contains extracts from that data, so true confidentiality is not possible. Instead, anonymity is critical: It is vital that participants cannot be identified within the published research. Some women chose their own pseudonym, others left the choice up to me, and the remainder chose to use their own first name. In addition, during the

transcription, all names including partners and children were removed as were the names of the places they worked and any other identifying information. When reviewing the transcripts participants were asked to check that their identity was adequately protected.

Research rigour

Ensuring the research maintains the highest standards of adequacy is an important ethical concern. Various authors have suggested criteria for assessing the strength and validity of social constructionist as well as feminist research (Gill, 1995; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Seale, Giampietro, Gubrium, & Silverman, 2004). As discussed earlier, this research is founded on feminist values of an agenda of social change, a commitment to balancing the power in the research process as much as possible, and a strong belief in the need for clear articulation of my place in the research. These values contribute to the validity of the research with reflexivity in particular commonly acknowledged as an important criterion for sound qualitative research (Burr, 1995; Harding, 1987; Olesen, 2003; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997; Sherrard, 1991). Unlike traditional research, critical discourse analysis does not claim objectivity; instead it is acknowledged that all research is conducted from a standpoint and that failure to acknowledge that standpoint is dangerous. As Gill (1995) points out, discursive analysis, like all research, cannot be value free. Therefore the articulation of the values with which this research is imbued allows the reader an understanding of the nature of my biases and thus contributes to its strength.

An additional criterion for valid discursive research is coherence. Although recognised as just one possible reading of the data, an effective analysis has a sense of coherence and completeness with no loose ends or unexplained features (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). As part of that sense of completeness, I have aimed to ground my interpretation in data and to provide sufficient extracts of texts to allow the reader to assess for themselves the validity of my interpretations.

Just as research rigour is an important element of ethical research, so ethics and morality can be seen to be elements of research validity (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994). This is evidenced in the current research through the broad goal of social change, but also through the goal of catalytic validity, ensuring that the research empowers the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). I see the potential to achieve this in two ways. Firstly, participation in the focus groups has the potential to be empowering through providing a space for the women to reflect on their lives. Secondly, the process of sharing my interpretations with the women may well have opened up new ways of thinking and therefore new possibilities for the women. The women who attended the follow up session at which I summarised my findings certainly appreciated taking part in the initial group and the opportunity it gave them to talk about their own experiences and to hear other women's views. For example, Sarah expressed the view that taking part had helped her feel less isolated and more connected with other mothers. This

follow up group also talked of how my brief introduction to the ideas of social constructionism made them more aware of the influence their social context has on their lives and decisions.

Summary

Critical discourse analysis as a methodology fits comfortably within the feminist social constructionist framework. As explained, although the broadly focussed critical approach is the key style of analysis, I also at times have incorporated elements of a closer examination of the texts' warranting and accounting. Data was collected from two sources: the government policy for women and the talk of two facilitated focus groups. Focus groups were chosen over individual interviews because of the advantages of reduced power imbalance, the naturalistic nature of the resulting talk, and the potential for the groups to be both enjoyable and empowering for the individual participants. The women, chosen through purposive rather than random sampling, were recruited through local parenting groups and snowballing. They were all first time mothers with babies ranging from 7 to 26 weeks old, all were in stable, heterosexual relationships, and most described themselves as New Zealand Europeans. The research was designed to incorporate four key ethical principles: informed consent, protection from harm, anonymity and confidentiality, and research rigour.

The next two chapters outline the findings of the research, the analysis of firstly the government policy document followed by that of the women's talk.

CHAPTER FIVE

Policy Analysis

"Vision for New Zealand women:

Aotearoa/New Zealand will be an equitable, inclusive and

sustainable society where all women can

achieve their aspirations."

Ministry of Women's Affairs (2004a, p. 3)

Introduction

The *Action Plan for New Zealand Women*, developed by the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2004, is variously described in the foreword as "improving the circumstances of women", "improving a range of outcomes", and "reducing inequalities" (p. 1). In an attractive and glossy format with colourful photographs and graphics, the Plan presents as a promotional tool for government, aiming to both inform and persuade. According to Fairclough (2001), governments are increasingly using such tools to bring about change through the management of public perceptions, and the articulation and institutionalisation of new discourses. This analysis examines how the Action Plan achieves this: how it constructs the world, who benefits from such constructions, and what the social effects might be. It aims to explore how the Plan positions the subjects and objects relevant to the research questions: namely women, children, motherhood, paid work, and caring work. This analysis is individual and partial. My interpretation stems from the various aspects of my identity, particularly that of mother. No doubt a different researcher would have constructed a different analysis.

A Feminist Document?

The Action Plan is structured around three key themes: economic sustainability, work-life balance, and well-being. The well-being theme focuses on health and so is not included in this analysis. Before examining the first two themes in more detail, I look at the wider issue of how the Plan warrants itself and how, as a Plan for women, it is positioned within the key feminist debate on the route to gender equality.

Warranting

An important rhetorical function of any text is warranting, establishing the right to speak. The Plan starts with a vision, the ultimate goal towards which the various actions lead. This vision draws upon discourses of liberal feminism, individualism, and progress to establish its legitimacy.

Aotearoa/New Zealand will be an equitable, inclusive and sustainable society where all women can achieve their aspirations and in addition, Māori women, as tangata whenua, can progress the aspirations of their whānau, hapu and iwi.

Achievement of the vision requires:

- Equitable access to resources and opportunities
- Opportunity to choose and pursue a life path
- Full and active participation in society
- Adequate resources and support
- Freedom from discrimination
- Valuing women's contribution to society. (p. 3)

The Plan, and the vision in particular, draws on feminist discourses through the repeated use of terms such as "equitable", "inclusive", and "freedom". A comparison with the stated aims and ideals of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) in New Zealand in the 1970s and 1980s reveals interesting parallels. The goal then was "the total liberation of womankind, so that we can be free to determine our own futures, and realise our potential" (Dann, 1985, p. 29). Little has changed. "Total liberation" has become "freedom from discrimination"; "determine our own future" has become "choose and pursue a life path"; and "realise our potential" has become "achieve aspirations". The three themes of the Plan also echo the traditional cries of feminists. According to Dann (1985), the WLM were demanding policy and action on three main issues: equal pay, childcare, and abortion. This triad, although more narrowly focussed, parallels the Plan: Under economic sustainability a key objective is "pay and employment equity" (p. 4), and under work-life balance a key objective is "improve access to quality child care" (p. 4). The third theme, well-being, focuses on women's health issues, the most important of which in the 1970s was abortion rights. These themes are described in the Plan as key aspects of women's lives, both in terms of what women want and in terms of how their circumstances compare to men's.

These well established feminist discourses draw much of their acceptance and credibility from their alignment with the values and discourses of capitalism and democracy: equality, freedom, and opportunity are the basic foundations of Western society, and as such engender almost unquestioned acceptance and support. Elshtain (1992) describes the concept of equality as "a powerful term of political discourse and an instrument for social change and justice, one of the strongest weapons the (relatively) powerless have at their disposal in order to make their case and define their claims" (p. 124). The use of equality and other feminist discourses serves to warrant the Plan; who could not want these things for women?

Alongside feminism is individualism, an increasingly dominant discourse in Western societies that enables an emphasis on personal choice rather than tradition and custom as the driving forces behind

behaviour (J. Lewis, 2002). The Action Plan's focus on improved circumstances and more choice for individual women rather than on transforming structural gender inequalities is supportive of this ideology. However, as Welsh and Halcli (2003) argue, discourses of individual rights and meritocracy can be seen to contradict traditional feminism, and in particular to undermine any moves to positively discriminate in favour of women. The Action Plan, specifically targeting women, must manage this tension between feminist ideals and the political acceptability of focusing on just one group in society. Welsh and Halcli found that the female councillors they interviewed reconciled their feminist and political identities through the adoption of "new feminism". According to Walter (1998), while old feminism "sought to direct our personal lives on every level" (p. 4), new feminism aims to include individual choice in its rhetoric, and therefore allows women to be free to live the life they choose without being constrained by the rigid ideologies of the past. The Action Plan does the same: It attempts to meld liberal feminism with individualism to create a new feminism through the rhetoric of choice. At the same time however, it must manage the "problem" of being seen to be favouring women. In particular, the traditional discourses of the women's movement are often seen to be anti-male (Welsh & Halcli, 2003), and the Action Plan strives to resolve this tension through positioning the Plan as helping not just women, but all New Zealanders:

> Actions that improve the circumstances of New Zealand women are of benefit to all New Zealanders. (p. 1)

> Actions combine to improve outcomes for women and their families/whānau. (p. 4)

> Improvements in work-life balance achieve economic and social benefits for men, women, families/whānau and communities. (p. 12)

Feminist individualism is tempered by the idea that helping individual women will ultimately help everyone, thus negating any complaints of reverse discrimination. In addition, the Plan warrants itself and its actions by constructing itself as moving women to a better place as outlined in the vision.

A vision is suggestive of a picture in the mind of something desirable but as yet not achieved. This interpretation is supported by the use of the future tense, constructing the Plan as striving for a desirable state of affairs that does not yet exist:

> New Zealand *will be* [italics added] an equitable, inclusive and sustainable society. (p. 3)

> Implementation of the Plan works towards the realisation of a *future vision* [italics added] for women. (p. 5)

This image is further strengthened by the use of a journey metaphor: The plan is depicted as a vehicle that will take women into the future, to the better place of this vision. Metaphors are powerful tools in the construction of reality. As Fairclough (1992) says, "metaphors structure the way we think and the way we act, and our systems of knowledge and belief, in a pervasive and fundamental way" (p. 194). Many of the dominant metaphors in English are based on opposing dichotomies with the first of the two invariably privileged over the second (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). In the journey metaphor, forward

movement is preferable: "forward thinking" versus taking a "backward step", for example. The Plan repeatedly uses words and phrases such as advances, steps towards, drive the process, milestones, and progress to depict itself as moving forward. This use of a journey metaphor throughout the Plan is critical to its acceptance. The Plan will move women to a better place: a worthy and acceptable goal.

The feminist journey is well established as a valid movement, and the Plan draws upon past successes to further establish its credibility. Someone, presumably the government although this is not made explicit, has achieved these advances for women, a claim that works to establish the government's right to continue to implement actions that will improve women's lives:

> In New Zealand today, women's participation in the paid workforce is increasing, the level at which they participate is improving and more women are moving into self employment. Government funded, paid parental leave is available to assist women to balance paid work commitments and family responsibilities. Across a number of indicators, improvements can be seen in women's general health and women are performing particularly well in education. These are some of the advances achieved for women in recent years, despite persisting inequalities. (p. 1)

The phrasing "advances achieved for women" (p. 1) constructs these advances as being done *for* women rather than *by* women. This positions the women as unable to help themselves and the government as their liberator. Together, the use of dominant accepted discourses of liberal feminism and individualism, as well as the metaphorical construction of the Plan as a vehicle for taking women to a better place, all work to establish the Plan's credibility.

Setting a vision

As mentioned, the Action Plan is centred on a vision statement. Any policy aiming to improve people's lives must of necessity have a predetermined view of the ideal, in this case a picture of what women's lives should be like. After all, progress cannot be made unless the direction has already been decided. It is debatable whether policy follows or precedes social change, but within a democracy it is important that governments are seen to be responding to the needs and desires of the people rather than dictating to them. The idea that policy makers have decided what life should be like conflicts with the Western democratic value of the individual right to choose, and certainly would sit uncomfortably within a discourse of new feminism. In order to engender acceptance therefore, it is vital that the Plan resolves this tension by demonstrating that it is not telling people how they should live. The Plan strives to do this in three ways: keeping the vision broad, stressing the importance of choice, and emphasising that the Plan was developed in consultation with women. However, a key argument of this analysis is that these strategies are ultimately unsuccessful and the Plan does dictate. It privileges certain life paths over others, and in doing so, rather than freeing women, it simply changes the nature of their constraints.

The primary way in which the Plan strives to be seen to be not dictating behaviour is through keeping the vision statement broad:

> An equitable, inclusive and sustainable society where all women can achieve their aspirations. (p. 3)

Edwards and Potter (1992) highlight how the use of vague, broad formulations works to make rebuttal more difficult. It is hard to refute that which is not specified. In the Action Plan, the above vision statement does two things. Firstly, it suggests that the Plan aims to change society rather than women, and therefore avoids any potential accusations of social engineering of women's lives. Secondly, it leaves the outcomes open by suggesting that it is entirely up to the individual to decide her own aspirations. However, the words are not neutral: "achievement" and "aspiration" are more commonly associated with public roles such as education and career than private roles of relationships and care. While I might say that I have achieved my degree, I would not say I have achieved my children, and yet both represent outcomes of my life choices. So, while at first this seems like a wide vision for women which leaves individual choices open, in more subtle ways it represents the start of a recurrent theme: the focusing on, and privileging of, public roles at the expense of private.

A secondary means by which the Plan strives to avoid dictating to women how they should live is the careful inclusion of freedom of choice as a key factor. Choice is an important element of the dominant liberal humanist discourse in which the individual's right to make their own decisions about life is fundamental (Burr, 1995). This valued Western discourse is most strongly drawn upon in the vision, and is second on the list of requirements that underlie the vision:

> Opportunity to choose and pursue a life path. (p. 3)

Despite being so dominant in the vision, there are only three other occasions in the Plan where choice is mentioned, one in the executive summary and two in the section on work-life balance:

> The Plan recognises the differing priorities, choices and needs of groups of women. (p. 6)

> Women emphasised their need for opportunity and choice in relation to participation in paid work and the many other roles they fulfil. (p. 13)

> Enhance women's ability to retain attachment to the paid workforce, and make real and beneficial choices about paid work and family commitments. (p. 14)

The second statement refers to the women's talk through the consultation process rather than the Plan itself. The strong emphasis on choice that is apparent in the summary of submissions in the consultation document is not reiterated in the Plan. The final extract above is a prime example of how the Plan talks about choice while at the same time limiting those choices. The statement regarding "real and beneficial choices" (p. 14) is prefaced by an explicit aim of retaining women's attachment to the workforce making it clear that a choice involving paid work is a better one.

The final means by which the document resolves the tension between a predetermined vision and not prescribing behaviour is the consultation process that was part of the Plan's development. In our society, the process of consultation on policy has become a critical element in the construction of a government as listening to the people. The high degree of importance accorded to the consultation process is emphasised by the packaging of the Plan: It is presented in a folder with a second document, the *Consultation Report* (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2004b), which aims to summarise the views of the women consulted. Consultation also sits comfortably within the feminist warrant. Hearing women's voices is a widely recognised goal of many feminists, although they warn of the dangers of generalising across all women in the way that the Action Plan attempts to do (Harding, 1987). Repeated references to the consultation process remind the reader that the contents of the Plan are warranted by women:

> The Action Plan for New Zealand Women was developed by the Ministry of Women's Affairs in consultation with women around New Zealand. (p. 2)

> Many women around New Zealand have provided valuable input to the development of the Plan. (p. 1)

> The Plan targets improvements for women in identified priority areas. These areas reflect women's views on what is important. (p. 5).

The last quote acknowledges that the Plan only addresses "identified priority areas" (p. 5), but justifies the choice of those areas, economic sustainability, work-life balance, and well-being, by arguing that the priorities were determined not by the government but by "women around New Zealand" (p. 2). In theory, consultation serves as a powerful tool to legitimate the document and in particular its focus on the three key areas. However, a brief examination of the process reveals that it does not provide the justification claimed.

As critics of traditional psychological research have pointed out, the answers found in research depend upon the questions that are asked. Research is a highly subjective process, and government consultation is no exception. The Ministry of Women's Affairs (2002a) developed and distributed a discussion document, *Towards an Action Plan for New Zealand Women,* outlining a vision, summarising progress to date, and including detailed information on three key themes: economic sustainability; balancing work, family, and community; and well-being. Women's views on the document were solicited through written submissions from individuals and groups, public meetings, and focus groups. The three key themes are exactly those of the Action Plan. In other words, the priority areas that the Plan focuses on were determined prior to the consultation process and therefore do not necessarily "reflect women's views on what is important" (p. 5) as is claimed.

As discussed, the policy must have a predetermined view of what it is trying to achieve for women. However, that ideal is not clearly articulated, it relies on broad statements, and it does not necessarily

reflect women's views. While claiming to be founded on the freedom to choose one's own life paths, a closer examination demonstrates that, while the Plan constructs different choices for women, they are not equally valued, with some "life paths" constructed as more desirable than others.

Dualistic choices

Feminists have long debated whether the solution to women's oppression lies in striving to be the same as men or striving to be valued for our difference, described as the equality-difference debate (Guerrina, 2001). The debate centres on the historical division of roles into male/female, public/private, and production/reproduction. As noted earlier, the first element in each dichotomy is invariably dominant and more valued: in this case the male public role in the market. Chodorow (1979) takes this association between male and the public realm to its logical conclusion when she states that "society itself, is masculine" (p. 88). As discussed in Chapter Two, while the division became more visible and entrenched in the 19th century when industrialisation saw production move outside the home, it in fact dates back to early Greek society which also separated men's and women's lives (Cox & James, 1987). The view that women's natural place is the private sphere of the home, and men's the public marketplace, is described by Cox and James as so ingrained in Western culture that it was seen to be natural: "twin monoliths, not to be questioned and not to be changed" (p. 3). For equality feminists it was also seen as the root of inequality: As long as women were barred from the public world they would continue to be oppressed (Cox & James, 1987). The equality movement aims to minimise sexual difference and, at its extreme, has suggested that women's biological reproductive capability is the origin of their oppression, and reproduction outside the womb is essential to their freedom (Firestone, 1972). In other words, complete freedom from the private sphere. In many ways the equality feminists take equality to mean sameness: Only through becoming like men can women gain equality.

Not all feminists agree and some argue for equity rather than equality, aiming to construct women's traditional roles and choices as different from men's, but equally valued (Nolan, 2000). For these "difference feminists", policy needs to be developed which is "based on women's needs as women" (Guerrina, 2001, p. 34). While depicting this as a clear two-sided divide does not do justice to the complexity of the issues and negates the possibilities of middle ground, these are often seen as two separate and opposing paths: move into the public sphere or revalue the private. Glenn (1994) highlights that there are problems with both options in that employment has not brought the anticipated empowerment, and declaring motherhood as special, risks reinforcing the ideology that women are different and therefore should be limited to certain functions in society. While I have used this dualism to structure elements of my analysis, it is important to acknowledge that in doing so I do not intend to confer the status of truth upon this construction. Poststructuralist feminists have highlighted that binary debates such as this one limit our thinking and that we need to find ways to

transform pre-existing dichotomies so that we can have both equality and difference (Guerrina, 2001; J. W. Scott, 1988; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). This is discussed in more depth in my conclusion.

Rather than openly opting for one or the other, on the surface the Action Plan endeavours to embrace both sides of the debate through achieving equality and valuing difference, and therefore appeal to all women. This is represented by two key requirements of the vision:

> Full and active participation in society. (p. 3)

> Valuing women's contribution to society. (p. 3)

As with other phrases from the vision, these statements are sufficiently broad and vague to not appear to be dictating life choices to women. But what do they mean? The first statement is expressed as a desired outcome: The Plan aims to have women fully and actively participating in society which suggests this is not already the case. But what is full and active participation? That it is not commonly associated with caregiving roles was raised as a concern by women during the consultation process: "There is a perception that women raising children (rather than undertaking paid work) are not participating in society" (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2004b, p. 7). One way to assess whether this is a valid concern is to examine the kinds of activities "participation" refers to throughout the Plan:

> Women's participation in the paid workforce is increasing. (p. 1)

> To help women and their partners to balance participation in the paid workforce with family commitments. (p. 6)

> Improve women's participation in employment. (p. 10)

> Increase women's participation in leadership and decision making in the economic sector. (p. 10)

As these examples demonstrate, without exception when discussing specific activities, participation refers to paid employment. This suggests that for women to be fully and actively participating in society they must be in paid work, and this is therefore constructing the side of the debate that argues that women need to take up public roles, and paid work in particular, in order to attain equality.

The second statement, valuing women's contribution to society, is quite different. Firstly, it does not aim to change women's behaviour, but instead to change people's view of the behaviour. But what are these contributions that should be valued? Although rarely discussed, the term "contributions" refers generally to the traditional female roles of caregiving and voluntary work:

> The contribution to unpaid work in the community made by women, including voluntary work and care of dependants. (p. 13)

> Understand trends in how New Zealand women invest their time … who contribute at high levels to voluntary work and cultural obligations. (p. 14)

The different prepositions in the two key statements are worth noting: whereas the phrase "contributing *to*" positions women as outside society, "participating *in*" positions women within

society. This lends further support to the argument that people who are not in the labour force are not participating in society, but rather are outside it. That society only includes those who are in paid work is supported by other political rhetoric as the following example demonstrates: British Prime Minister Tony Blair (1997, as cited in Barlow et al., 2002) described unemployed young men and young single mothers as a new workless class who needed to be brought "back into society and into useful work" (p. 110). This positions young single mothers as not doing useful work and as outside society. Clearly it is preferable to be part of society rather than on the outside it.

The consistent use of these two phrases, "participating in" and "contributing to", reflects the dichotomy of the difference-equality debate. On the one hand are women's traditional roles: unpaid and often, although not always, in the private sphere. These contributions are undertaken from outside society, are apparently unvalued, and the Plan aims to maintain the roles but change societal views of them. On the other hand is women's participation in the paid workforce: their role in the public sphere, presumably already valued, and apparently needing to be increased.

Including both statements in the vision draws on the "having it all" discourse identified in the Literature Review. The roles are not alternatives; it is not a matter of women choosing either one or the other; rather the Plan assumes that women are already doing the caregiving and voluntary work, but need to add paid employment to the mix. The freedom to choose in this picture is limited, and further analysis demonstrates that not only are women expected to do both, but that the Plan privileges the public over the private in a way that further constrains choice.

Privileging the public

The Plan's appendices include "some of the statistical information and facts that informed the development of the Plan" (p. 25), and therefore justify the Plan's aims. Statistics are powerful persuaders: They are seen to be objective and independent, providing "a view of the social world as composed of measurable packages" (Hays, 1996, p. 34). Figure 4 below is the diagram from the Plan that presents the key statistics used to determine the areas "where circumstances for ***women are worse*** than for men" (p. 26, original emphasis), and which justify the Plan aiming to influence those circumstances. The wheel is constructed so that the centre of the circle is "bad" and the outer ring is "good". Therefore, for the measures where the women's marker is closer to the middle, women are deemed to be worse off than men. The indicators all relate to physical health, income, or employment, which again suggests the predetermined priorities. The statistics used reflect the underlying economic rationalist ideology which privileges wealth over other measures of success, and financial responsibilities over moral or ethical (Tuffin, Morgan, Frewin, & Jardine, 2000). As Yeatman (1998) says, under a neo-classical political agenda the most important policy issues are the economic ones. No doubt if other measures of life quality such as happiness, quality of relationships, and time spent with family or at leisure were included, the aims of the Action Plan would be very different.
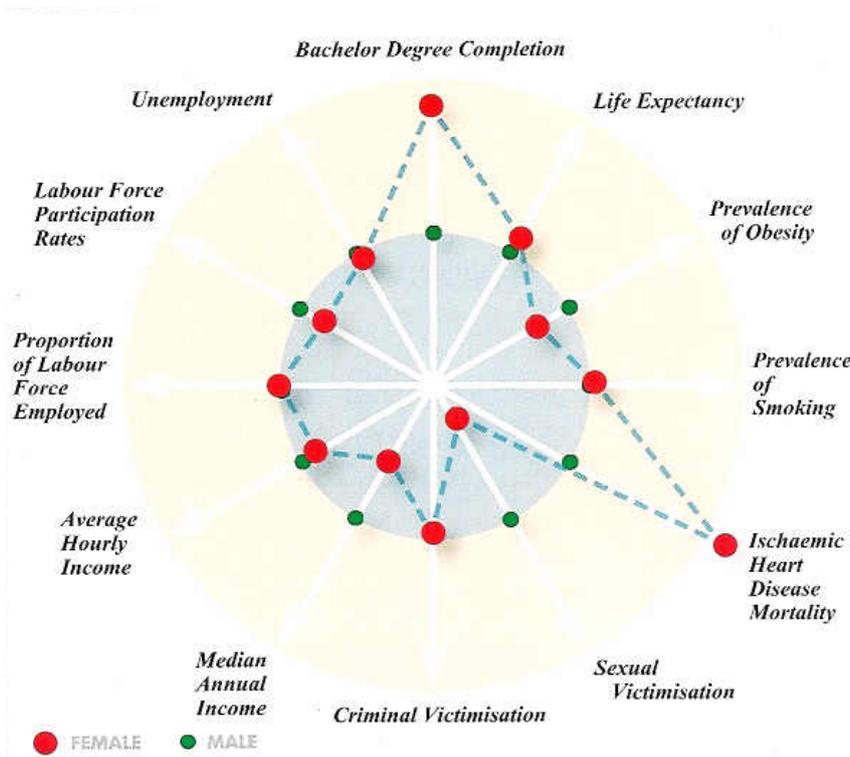
Figure 4. Female and male statistics (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2004a, p. 26).

This use of statistics is founded on two implicit assumptions. Firstly, using men as the comparative base assumes that men's lives represent the ideal that we are striving for, and that it is only when women's circumstances are the same as men's that we will have reached the vision. This draws on the equality discourse discussed earlier: That it is through women taking on men's roles that equality will be attained and that it is only through acting like men that women will succeed (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). This is also one of the key critiques of liberal feminism: In holding up the masculine role as the ideal, it simply supports the "hegemony of the masculine" (Hays, 1996, p. 135).

The second assumption inherent in the statistical data is the value judgement made by the labels "worse" and "better". Most of the statistical measures make a judgement that few would argue with; for example, women have a higher level of sexual victimisation than men and this is recorded as women being worse off. Other measures are less clear cut however. In particular, the chart shows women have a labour force participation rate of 59% compared to men's rate of 79.8%, and this is constructed as women being worse off than men. This once again positions paid work as a critical component of the ideal life. The section is entitled "Facts and Statistics" (p. 26); describing these judgements as facts works to transform the value judgement, the social construction, into an undisputed truth. Facts are considered to be objective, unbiased, and indisputably true; and according to that truth, women's labour force participation is "worse" than men's therefore more women need to be in paid employment. Where then is the "opportunity to choose and pursue a life path" (p. 3) as

outlined in the vision? If free choice regarding paid employment was the desired aim, then the goal would be to ensure that women had equal *access* to employment rather than equal participation levels. In this case unemployment would be the only relevant statistic. After all, unlike labour force participation rates, women's unemployment rates show the percentage not working of those who *want* to work. Unemployment rates for women and men are given in the Plan as 4.9% and 4.4% respectively, which suggests there are not vast numbers of unemployed women wanting to be in paid work.

Paid employment as essential to well-being is an increasingly dominant discourse in our society and is rapidly reaching a level such that it is taken for granted. In a series of OECD reports on reconciling family life and work, paid work is described as "the most important social activity of modern life" (OECD, 2004, p. 3). The goal for women of "full and active participation in society" (p. 3), meaning in paid employment, draws on this same discourse. According to Nolan (2000), feminists have long argued that paid employment is an important, if not the most important, attribute of full citizenship. The discourse is apparent in other government policy documents also, in particular the *Employment Strategy* (Department of Labour, 2003a), which according to the Action Plan "identifies the need to improve participation in employment, earnings and the quality of employment for a number of groups that include women" (p. 8).

> For most New Zealanders, work is fundamental to their financial and personal sense of well being. It can also encourage people to take a greater role in their communities. If New Zealand can increase the participation of people currently under represented in the labour market, then not only will the economy benefit, but communities will also (Department of Labour, 2003a, p. 2).

In this extract from the *Employment Strategy*, the image of work as fundamental to well-being leaves those who are not in the labour force in a precarious position. It is important to note that for all its dominance, this view of the world and of people, from a social constructionist perspective, remains just that: a social construction. It is not hard to imagine a world where not being in the workforce could be constructed as a positive state, an opportunity to spend time with family, help within the community, or participate in leisure activities. In that world it would make more sense to strive to reduce men's labour force participation rates than to increase women's. But that is not the world constructed within this Plan. The suggestion that paid work can encourage people to take a greater role in their communities is also interesting. For most mothers, paid work has the opposite effect and greatly reduces the time and energy they are able to give to their community.

The Action Plan uses feminist discourses to warrant its objectives, and on the surface attempts to achieve both equality and difference for the women of New Zealand. However, other elements, including the statistical justification of the key themes, suggest that one of the Plan's primary goals is to increase women's labour force participation rates.

It is important for me to say that it is not my intention to privilege the private over the public, to suggest that women should return to their "natural place" in the home. My thesis is not that one is better than the other, but that choice, for all the "advances" that women have made, remains an illusion. However, for all that I strive not to judge others, I have woven an identity for myself that values my identity of mother highly. If I had to choose a side in the feminist debate, I would stand closer to the difference side. Not that I believe that women shouldn't be in paid work and shouldn't have equality in the public sphere, but that what is desperately needed is more valuing of care – not just for the good of women but for the good of society. I believe that women cannot simply move into the public sphere because that results only in the destruction of the private sphere and, I believe, extracts a heavy price from the children. But neither can we remain corralled in the private sphere because that is to deny the realities of power.

Two Themes

A more detailed analysis of the two relevant themes, economic sustainability and work-life balance, makes it clear to what extent the Plan privileges paid work above other life activities.

Economic sustainability

The first of the Plan's three themes, economic sustainability, focuses on women's need for income. An initial statement provides a broad justification for the theme, which is backed up with a desired outcome and four broad aims broken down into 14 specific actions:

> If women are to sustain a reasonable standard of living and provide for, or help provide for, the future of their families/whānau, they require access to a good level of income and the skills and knowledge that will help maximise their financial resources.

> Desired Outcome: The economic independence of women in New Zealand will be improved. (p. 8)

> 1.1 Improve women's participation in employment, earnings, and quality of employment

> 1.2 Improve women's economic well-being

> 1.3 Increase the success of women, particularly Māori women, in enterprise

> 1.4 Increase women's participation in leadership and decision-making in the economic sector. (p. 10)

Two aspects of the goal are of particular note. Firstly, while the goal states that what is required is access to a good level of income, in the desired outcome this shifts to economic independence. The call for economic independence for women is nothing new and draws on traditional feminist discourse and contemporary individualistic discourse. According to Dann (1985), the WLM saw economic independence as "the foundation of other forms of independence" (p. 65). Kate Sheppard (1896), arguably New Zealand's best known feminist, suggested that economic independence for married

women was not just a matter of justice but of protection. Financial dependency upon men prevented women from leaving violent relationships (Freedman, 2002). However, these concerns related to women's dependence on men and many early feminists called for state assistance, such as the domestic purposes benefit finally instituted in 1973, as the solution to dependence (Nolan, 2000). Lewis (2002) describes this focus on economic independence as a key manifestation of the individualisation of society. The increasing dominance of an ideology of economic rationalism positions the individual as responsible for all aspects of their welfare. Western policy, including that of New Zealand, is now founded upon an ideology of labour force participation rather than welfare as the solution to poverty (Gray et al., 2002). Within this discourse, economic independence for women means from both men and state as the Plan's actions demonstrate. Only one relates to state provision of income in the form of a review of family assistance as follows:

> Implement changes to ensure social assistance improves levels of family income, reduces long-term social assistance dependency, and encourages participation in the paid workforce. (p. 11).

This refers to the *Working for Families* package which aimed to restructure benefits to ensure families were always better off in paid work than on a benefit (Ministry of Social Development, 2005b). Social assistance is described here as "dependency" and the ultimate aim of this action is, once again, to increase participation in the paid workforce. This makes it clear that economic independence for women means in paid work. One of the effects of this construction is to position women who do not earn their own income, be they solo mothers receiving government assistance, stay-at-home mothers financially supported by their partners, or even retired women, as dependent and therefore not fitting the ideal: Women must be financially independent.

The reason for this goal is the second noteworthy aspect. According to the economic sustainability theme, a major part of the reason women require independence is to "provide for, or help provide for, the future of their families/whānau" (p. 8). This requirement is even more explicitly stated in the definition of economic sustainability given in the *Consultation Report*: "Economic sustainability refers to a woman's ability to independently provide for herself and her dependants" (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2004b, p. 9). Although not stated, "dependants" presumably refers primarily to children. This positions women as breadwinners, and represents a critical shift in the underlying assumptions regarding the role of women in general, and mothers in particular. Nolan (2000) describes New Zealand as traditionally having a strong "male breadwinner culture" (p. 18) such that men in the early twentieth century were paid a family wage on the assumption that they supported a wife and children, and women who did work were paid less because they were not seen to have dependants. This model has been eroded dramatically in the last 30 years in most Western societies, and is shifting towards what has been called a universal breadwinner or universalised adult worker model where all capable adults are expected to be in full time work (J. Lewis, 2002; Lister, 2002). This model draws in part on an increasingly dominant discourse that positions paid work as not just a means of personal fulfilment as discussed previously, but also as an obligation of citizenship (Lister, 2003). Lewis argues strongly

that in the UK the policy makers' assumptions have outpaced society, and that the model represents an ideal rather than a reality. She goes on to show that labour force statistics demonstrate that for most families in the UK the reality is a one-and-a-half breadwinner model.

Which model is the underlying assumption of the New Zealand government as evidenced by the Action Plan? It is not stated explicitly, and the strong emphasis on increasing participation in paid work does not specify full time participation. However, the following extract, from Appendix 1 of the Plan, concerning the statistics presented as underpinning the economic sustainability objectives, is interesting:

> Although women's participation in the paid workforce has increased, it is still characterised by part-time work, low pay, and marked occupational segregation. Growing numbers of women are holding multiple jobs. (p. 27)

Presenting this information as support for initiatives to increase labour force participation, and putting part time work and holding multiple jobs in the same category as low pay, suggests none of these are desirable. Given, too, the requirement that women financially support their dependants and provide for their own futures, part time work would be fiscally insufficient. Once again, male behaviour is taken to be the norm to which women must aspire: in this case full time paid work. It would appear that New Zealand, like the UK, is basing its policy on a universal breadwinner model with all parents, single and couple, working full time. Like the UK however, part time work is common for New Zealand women with 38% of the female workforce working less than 30 hours per week (Else & Bishop, 2003).

The economic sustainability theme is the most dominant theme in the Plan. It is positioned first and is supported by the most actions. Its primary aim is to get women into the workforce, preferably as full time workers. This goal is supported by drawing on discourses that construct paid work as both essential to personal well-being, and as an obligation of citizenship. Women are positioned as breadwinners with an obligation to provide for themselves, their futures, and their families. This implies that women need to be the same as men, and represents the "full and active participation in society" (p. 3) required by the vision.

Work-life balance

The second theme in the Plan is work-life balance. Once again the initial statement is the justification for the theme followed by a desired outcome and four key aims. These are broken down into only six specific actions compared to the fourteen actions directed at economic sustainability. This suggests that while the rhetoric is that both economic sustainability and work-life balance are priorities, they are not of equal importance.

> Improvements in work-life balance achieve economic and social benefits for men, women, families/whānau and communities, which improve New Zealand's economic prospects and social environment.

Desired Outcome: Greater work-life balance will be achieved in New Zealand. (p. 12)

2.1 Improve work-life balance in New Zealand

2.2 Support proposals that give visibility to the role of unpaid work in the economy

2.3 Extend access to paid parental leave

2.4 Improve access to affordable, quality child care. (p. 14)

Work-life balance is an increasingly dominant discourse within Western societies and politically it is a popular area of policy. In New Zealand, the Department of Labour (2003b) is leading the Work-Life Balance Project with the express aim of identifying what is currently being done to enable work-life balance and what else can be done. In addition, the State Services Commission (2005) has published a resource to support government agencies in the implementation of work-life balance policies.

The most striking contrast between this theme and economic sustainability is the minimal mention of women. The key statement above lists women second after men as beneficiaries of work-life balance, and the desired outcome and four key aims do not mention women at all. This can perhaps be explained by a brief look at the history of the work-life balance discourse. The feminist call to redress the disadvantages that women faced in the labour market was one of the driving forces behind what was originally termed "family friendly workplaces". However, this approach was considered to reinforce the view that this is a women's issue only, and was therefore less likely to be implemented by men and organisations (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). These concerns, plus fears of a backlash against workers with families, and mothers in particular, saw a discursive shift from "family-friendly" to the more encompassing and gender neutral "work-life balance" (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). This was part of the broader shift in organisational discourse from "equal opportunities" to "managing diversity"; a shift which Lorbiecki and Jack (2000) argue is one with mixed benefits to women and minority groups. Their critical analysis of diversity management discourse suggests that while it ensures such groups no longer have to "carry the full burden of difference" (p. S24), it also renders their particular needs invisible. Interestingly, Smithson and Stokoe's discursive analysis of work-life balance in the UK found that despite the shift to gender neutral language, little has changed: Employees and managers continue to construct work-life balance as primarily an issue for women with children.

The Action Plan works hard to avoid any backlash, and to refute any suggestions of unfairness, through its careful inclusion of men as needing and benefiting from work-life balance also, as is evidenced by the following extract:

> Work-life balance is recognised as an issue for both men and women seeking to balance their roles in the paid workforce with other commitments and responsibilities. (p. 12)

However, while this positions work-life balance as not being an issue of inequality between men and women, including it in the Action Plan suggests that there are special concerns regarding work-life balance for women that are different from those of men, and therefore require specific targeted actions. An official and more detailed definition of work-life balance is found on the government's Work-Life Balance Project's web site, www.dol.govt.nz/worklife/whatis.asp:

> Work-life balance is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and the other activities that are important to people. It's not about saying that work is wrong or bad, but that work shouldn't completely crowd out the other things that matter to people like time with family, participation in community activities, voluntary work, personal development, leisure and recreation.
>
> The "right" balance is a very personal thing and will change for each person at different times of their lives. For some people the issue is being able to get into work or find more work rather than having too much work. There is no "one size fits all" solution.

As with the Action Plan, the definition is carefully gender neutral and, as might be expected, draws strongly on an individualistic discourse. The "problem" manifests differently for different people. However, one element is presumably common to all: It is a matter of balancing paid work with other roles, rather than balancing all aspects of life. The very title, work-life balance, and its placement under the umbrella of the Department of Labour, suggests either that this is only an issue for those who are in, or wish to be in, the workforce or, alternatively, that paid work is an essential component of a balanced life. Either way this serves to privilege paid work over life's other roles. Having constructed this as an issue for all New Zealanders, how does the Action Plan position women?

Unlike the economic sustainability and well-being themes, work-life balance does not have a wheel of supporting statistics as was shown in Figure 4. Instead there are four bullet points "underpinning the formulation of work-life balance objectives and associated actions" (p. 27). These highlight research showing that women do more unpaid work than men, that women are more likely to care for children and other people than men, and that 22% of mothers in one survey said that childcare was a barrier to employment. These statistics position women's unpaid roles, and in particular their caregiving roles, as central to the problem. This is reinforced in the body of the Plan as follows:

> It is also critical to take into account cultural differences, and the different demands on people brought about by circumstances, for example, the role many women play in caring for dependants and older family members, while needing to maintain a role in the paid workforce. (p. 12)
>
> In considering improvements to work-life balance, the contribution to unpaid work in the community made by women, including voluntary work and care of dependants, must be taken into account. (p. 13)

On the one hand, these statements can be interpreted as embracing the difference side of the feminist debate discussed earlier by recognising and valuing the work that women do in the home and community. However, rather than being valorised, women's caregiving is described as a "demand"

"brought about by circumstances" that must be "taken into account". This constructs the role of caring as inevitable, and as natural to women. This is one of the key critiques of the difference approach, that it risks biological determinism, which reinforces traditional gender roles (Guerrina, 2001). In addition to being inevitable, caregiving is constructed as undesirable: a "demand" is an unwelcome requirement that is imposed rather than chosen. Describing unpaid work as needing "to be taken into account" makes it clear that the Plan does not aim to reduce women's responsibility for these roles.

Looking at the solutions the Plan proposes to resolve women's work-life balance shows how it is constructed as problematic for women. Despite the rhetoric of balance meaning different things to different people, the actions in the work-life theme are strongly focussed towards increasing women's participation in the paid workforce. This suggests that the problem for women is a lack of paid work. The government's Work-Life Balance Project is the first key action, and in contrast to the web site definition given earlier, which incorporated many kinds of non-work activities, here it refers exclusively to family commitments and is concerned directly with increasing the paid workforce side of the equation:

> Work Life Balance Project: Enhance women's ability to retain attachment to the paid workforce, and make real and beneficial choices about paid work and family commitments, by developing and promoting options that improve the work-life balance of all New Zealanders. (p. 14)

As mentioned earlier this description talks about choices, but by specifically aiming to increase workforce attachment, it constructs choices that incorporate paid work as the most beneficial. In addition, it positions women as deficient. Women are not making the right choices about paid work and family commitments, and the reason for this is they lack the ability to stay attached to the paid workforce. This is a critical point because constructing it as women's lack of ability entails solutions which focus on changing women rather than on changing the workforce. An equally feasible construction is that the problem lies with the workforce, a point I expand upon in my conclusion.

"Attachment to the paid workforce" (p. 14) is a powerful construction. Historically, attachment refers to the relationship between mother and child, stemming from Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory. An attachment is an emotional bond, a tie that pulls. Using this metaphor to describe women's association with the workforce serves to elevate work to the same level as a relationship: Work becomes much more than a pragmatic requirement, it is an emotional need. Attachment is a metaphorical appeal to the emotions and Edwards and Nicoll (2001) suggest that metaphors are "particularly powerful when there is an appeal to pathos" (p. 106). It is interesting to note that the phrase "workplace attachment" only appears in the work-life balance theme of the Plan, while in economic sustainability "labour force participation" is used. Arguably this is because in the work-life balance theme a woman's commitment to the workplace is constructed as being in direct competition with her commitment to her family and using the same metaphorical construction places them on the same level.

Of the remaining five actions in the work-life balance section, one concerns extension to paid parental leave, and three involve reviews of various aspects of childcare: early childhood education, childcare assistance, and out of school care. This suggests that for women, work-life balance is exclusively one of balancing paid work and childcare. No mention is made of, and no actions are targeted at, women without children for example. In addition, while it could be argued that the actions reviewing different types of childcare might be aimed at reducing the previously identified burden of unpaid work, the rhetoric instead is on access to childcare as a mechanism for increasing labour force participation:

> *Improve and increase women's participation in employment* [italics added] through extensions to paid parental leave and improved access to early childhood education and care[5]. (p. 4)

> Review the availability of social assistance support for child care with a view to enabling families (particularly those on low incomes and sole parents households) to make the transition to paid employment, education and training, and to help women *increase and retain labour force attachment* [italics added]. (p. 14)

A final interesting element regarding how work-life balance is constructed for women is the contrast between the Plan and the accompanying *Consultation Report* (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2004b). As discussed, the consultation process is critical to the Plan's acceptance, as the following text reminds the reader:

> The need to achieve work-life balance emerged strongly during the consultation phase. (p. 13)

However, a brief examination reveals that in this area in particular, the emphasis and content of the women's feedback does not match that of the finished Plan. The *Consultation Report* (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2004b) lists the following as being "common views from all contributors regarding balancing work, family and community responsibilities". (p. 17):

> Women continue to bear the major responsibility of raising families – there is a lack of recognition for that role and the fact that this responsibility should be more equitably shared with men.

> Women's participation in the unpaid workforce is under-valued.

> Women's constraints when making choices about whether to participate in the paid or unpaid workforce are unrecognised, particularly the financial constraints in relation to unpaid workforce participation, and the lack of services that support paid workforce participation.

> There is not enough emphasis on the importance of families and relationships.

> There is an assumption that women want to participate in the paid workforce, and that all women are in a position to choose.

> Women who choose to work in the voluntary sector need to be recognised for shouldering community responsibilities for those who choose not to undertake voluntary work.

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[5] The discursive blending of early childhood education and childcare into "early childhood education and care" hides care under the umbrella of education. As noted in the Literature Review, the intensive mother discourse positions the child as needing maternal care and therefore constrains efforts to shift women into the workforce. Constructing childcare as essential education for children is an important counter to this and is increasingly evident in government rhetoric.

> Having more women in leadership and decision-making positions would be one means of generating more strategies to balance work, family and community responsibilities. (p. 17)

This list shows the diversity of women's concerns. The difference side of the feminist debate is well represented in comments about lack of valuing of women's caregiving and voluntary work, lack of recognition for the financial constraints that women face in choosing to do unpaid work, concerns that families are not seen to be important, and the point that not all women want to be in paid work. Other comments relate to public roles: the need for more support for those who do choose paid work, recognition that not everyone has the luxury of choice, and the desire to have more women in leadership roles. What the list does not convey is an overwhelming desire by these women for more paid work, yet that is what the Action Plan sets out to achieve. Only one of the six work-life balance actions relates to valuing women's traditional roles: the development of a Social Statistics package in order to "build understanding of the value of unpaid and voluntary work" (p. 14). The remaining five actions, plus twelve of the actions under economic sustainability, aim to increase women's paid work. The purpose of consultation, if the results are ignored in this way, must be questioned.

The Action Plan constructs work-life balance for women as predominantly a concern for mothers and as characterised by insufficient paid work. As a result, the ultimate goal of the work-life balance theme parallels that of economic sustainability: to increase women's participation in paid work. The work-life balance rhetoric does acknowledge that women's caregiving role must be taken into account however, so how does the Plan construct the role of mother?

Motherhood

For many women, mothering and paid work represent two of the life paths from which the Action Plan suggests they should have the opportunity to choose. Sometimes this may be felt as an either/or choice, and sometimes as a matter of prioritising one or the other. That women have a large caregiving role is acknowledged in the Plan: "Women are twice as likely as men to care for children or people who live in the same household" (p. 28). Regardless of the rights or wrongs of this gender inequity, and regardless of the debates over what needs to be done, few would disagree that children and their care do play a huge part in many, if not the majority, of New Zealand women's lives.

Despite this, mothering remains largely invisible in the Action Plan. The word "mother" is noticeable by its absence; instead this aspect of women's lives is described either as "the role many women play in caring for dependants" (p. 12), or the gender-neutral noun "parent". For example, it is puzzling given the Plan's stated focus on improving *women's* lives, that childcare is constructed as "support for *parents'* [italics added] labour market participation" (p. 14). This use of "parent" is representative of an egalitarian discourse that constructs the role of parent as the same for men and women (Lazar, 2000), fits into the equality side of the feminist debate, and links into the previously discussed resistance to constructing work-life balance as solely a women's issue. In the context of caregiving,

children are generally termed dependants, presumably to avoid excluding women who care for people other than children, but once again working to obscure motherhood and to position children as a burden rather than a pleasure:

Families requiring supported care for dependants. (p. 8)

The role many women play in caring for dependants. (p. 12)

Unpaid work in the community made by women, including voluntary work and care of dependants. (p. 13)

Time spend caring for dependants. (p. 14)

Generally, mention of caregiving or family occurs as part of the work-life equation, and throughout the document paid work is privileged over caregiving or unpaid work. Paid work is discussed first in each section and is consistently presented as the lead in the dichotomous pair as the following examples show. In many cases mothering is swallowed into the category of "other":

Assist women to balance paid work and family responsibilities. (p. 1)

Identify innovative ways to encourage a balance between paid work and life outside work. (p. 4)

Seeking to balance their roles in the paid workforce with other commitments and responsibilities. (p. 12)

A way in which paid and unpaid contributions to the economy can be measured over time. (p. 13)

Another clue as to the relative importance of different roles and paths can be found in the photographs. The Plan is illustrated with a variety of photographs of women: alone, with a man, or with a group of women. It is apparent that some care has been taken to present a variety of ethnicities and ages to represent the diversity of women. Of the photos showing women engaged in specific activities, three show women at work, five show women at leisure, and in three the activity is cultural such as tapa cloth painting. The photograph shown in Figure 5 below is the only one out of the twenty photographs that includes a child. As can be seen, a man is playing in the water with a young toddler, while a woman sits some distance away eating lunch. The woman is dressed in formal clothes, tailored trousers and blouse with black leather shoes, while the man appears to be wearing casual clothes and is bare foot. The picture gives a sense of role reversal with the mother taking time out from her office job to lunch with the father who is caregiver of their child. Certainly the photograph is not representative of "mothering" in the way that other photographs are representative of work and leisure. This lack of pictures of women interacting with children, or in any other caregiving activities, renders mothering as invisible and highlights the lower value that the Plan accords these roles despite its rhetoric of "valuing women's contributions to society" (p. 3).

Figure 5. Photograph from the Action Plan. (p. 13)

Ultimately, the Plan fails in its attempt to incorporate both sides of the difference versus equality debate. Much of the discourse speaks to a desire for equality based on women being the same as men: Women are positioned as breadwinners who have a responsibility to be in the paid workforce, and this responsibility takes priority over their previously assigned roles as caregivers. But as Lewis (2000) says of the UK government's policies, the keenness to ensure that everyone is in paid work is not matched by an explanation of who will do the caring. For all its rhetoric of valuing women's traditional contributions, these roles of caring and of community work are all but invisible in the Plan. When mentioned, they are constructed as burdens that are an inevitable consequence of being female, and that must be sidelined in order to increase women's attachment to the workforce.

 It is important in a critical analysis to look beyond the identification of discourse. An important part of the research questions of this thesis is the examination of the social institutions that are supported and reinforced by such discursive constructions. In the final section of this chapter I argue that rather than being driven by the goals of feminism as is suggested, the Action Plan is driven by an ideology of economic rationalism in support of the capitalist state.

Economic Rationalism

As discussed earlier, as a counter to potential criticisms of unfairly advantaging women, the Plan suggests that helping women also helps men, families, and all New Zealanders. It is not specified how this might happen, but there is a strong inference that the Plan will improve society, and in particular, the economy. The Plan draws on an economic rationalist discourse that emphasises financial well-being, of both individuals and state, above all else. While the vision is said to be a "Vision for New Zealand women" (p. 3), it starts with a vision of New Zealand: "Aotearoa/New Zealand will be an

equitable, inclusive and sustainable society" (p. 3). The first two adjectives, equitable and inclusive, draw on the previously discussed feminist discourses of women's rights, whereas "sustainable" is part of the economic discourse referring to the state of a nation's economy. This terminology is carried through into the Plan's dominant theme, economic sustainability.

That at least part of the Plan's aim is to improve the economy is made explicit in the following extract:

> Implementation of the Plan works towards the realisation of a future vision for women, and an improved economic and social outlook for New Zealand. (p. 5)

This can be interpreted in one of two ways. It could mean that improving the circumstances of women will fortuitously lead to an improved society and economy. This would suggest that the Plan's focus on increasing women's paid work is grounded in a belief that this is inherently better for women, and because more people in work leads to increased productivity, this will lead to an improved economy (and therefore a better society although that is subject to a debate which is well beyond the bounds of this thesis). Alternatively, the motivation could be the opposite: In order to improve the economy, more people are needed in the labour force. So what is required, among other things, is policy that aims to increase women's participation in the workforce. That this is the more plausible scenario is suggested by the following extract taken from the summary of the economic sustainability goals:

> Implement strategies that recognise the increasing importance of women in New Zealand's paid workforce. (p. 4)

The strategies are described as recognising the importance of women to the workforce rather than the importance of the workforce to women, clearly prioritising the needs of the workforce above the needs of women. Although it does not say why women are important, evidence from the Plan and other government policy makes it clear: Women are needed in the workforce to increase workplace productivity, which will subsequently help the government achieve its goals of economic growth.

As mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, a recent Treasury report noted that New Zealand has lower female labour force participation rates than other comparable OECD countries, particularly for women aged 25-34 (Bryant et al., 2004). The report concluded that this is a key target group for increasing participation, and would result in an increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 1%. While the report notes that this does not take into consideration the effect of substituting paid work for unpaid work, and it acknowledges that GDP is limited as a measure of well-being, the government's enthusiastic uptake of the report ignores such reservations. In February 2005, in her speech outlining the government's achievements and plans, the Prime Minister highlighted the report's findings, and made it clear that increasing women's participation in the workforce is a key government aim (H. Clark, 2005). This is more explicitly stated in the government's *Employment Strategy*, developed in 2000 and updated in 2005, which focuses on improving the performance of the labour market as a "key element(s) in achieving our social and economic goals" (Department of Labour, 2005a, p. 5). The

strategy adopts the view that increasing participation is necessary for the market, and one of its key goals is to improve participation and earnings of specific groups of people with women first on this list. The economic sustainability theme in the Action Plan is driven at least in part by this strategy as the following extract demonstrates:

> Major initiatives by the government to achieve improvements in employment and standards of living include the government's Employment Strategy, which identifies the need to improve participation in employment, earnings and the quality of employment for a number of groups that include women. (p. 8)

The Employment Strategy argues that "people contribute to economic growth and social outcomes through their work" (Department of Labour, 2005a, p. 5). In this construction the unpaid work that women do in the home and community is not considered to be of value: It is not incorporated in the national accounting systems that measure growth and productivity, and so does not add to economic growth (Waring, 1996). Feminist writers, such as Waring (1988), have long argued that amending such accounting systems to include unpaid labour is the most important way of increasing the perceived value of women's traditional contributions to society. As mentioned, one action in the work-life balance theme aims to measure unpaid work through Time Use Surveys and proposes satellite accounts on household and non-profit organisations:

> Statistics New Zealand has included the Time Use Survey in the Social Statistics Programme, which will provide a rich, ongoing data source on the role of unpaid work in the economy, and a way in which paid and unpaid contributions to the economy can be measured over time. (p. 13)

Interestingly, in this extract, paid and unpaid work are both described as contributing to the economy. However the Plan is not consistent on this. Under the theme of economic sustainability, it is argued that women's ability to contribute needs to be improved through economic independence which constructs only paid work as adding to the economy:

> Economic sustainability: to improve women's economic independence and ability to contribute to the New Zealand economy. (p. 6)

This contradiction between the two themes is a clear example of the difficulty the Plan has in trying to fit its economic goals into a feminist framework. Within an economic rationalist discourse only paid work counts, but from a feminist standpoint, particularly those who take the difference side of the equality debate, unpaid work is equally valued.

A clear link between the drive for economic sustainability for women and the nation's goal of economic growth is perhaps to be expected; however, what is more surprising is that the same rationale underpins the work-life balance theme:

> Improvements in work-life balance achieve economic and social benefits for men, women, families/whānau and communities, *which improve New Zealand's economic prospects* [italics added] and social environment. (p. 12)

Once again the actions in this section of the Plan are constructed as helping not just individuals, but also the national economy. That this is the key driver behind the Plan's focus on work-life balance rather than a fortuitous consequence is made very explicit in the first paragraph on that theme:

> New Zealand has an ageing population and, in the future, there will be fewer working age people available to sustain the economy. Improved work-life balance policies and practices will enable more people to enter the paid workforce by taking into account the responsibilities and activities people have outside work. (p. 12)

So, like economic sustainability, while packaged as helping individuals towards a better life, work-life balance is actually aimed at "enabling" more people to work in order to stimulate growth and sustain the economy. In addition, New Zealand's unemployment rate is one of the lowest in the OECD, leading to concerns of labour shortages: "new workers are becoming increasingly difficult to find, and skilled workers are an even scarcer commodity" (Department of Labour, 2005a, p. 3). This adds impetus to the drive to increase participation rates of groups such as women, as is made clear in the Prime Minister's speech when she describes this as "a worthwhile objective and at this time of labour shortage, it's a good time to be pursuing it" (H. Clark, 2005).

The influence of the economy and the labour market on policy and subsequently on women's lives is, as discussed in the Literature Review, nothing new. Hyman (1994), in her feminist analysis of New Zealand economics, notes how a number of government policies are designed "partly for their role in providing incentives and/or constraints to women's labour force participation" (p. 182). The current pattern, concerns over labour shortages leading to policy that actively encourages women's labour force participation, is not unique to either this time or this place. As noted earlier, the GDR embarked on a similar path as a result of labour shortages following World War II (Trappe, 2000), as did Sweden following its own labour shortages of the 1970s and 1980s (Daune-Richard, 1995). In New Zealand, the economic climate has often determined women's work status. The two cartoons in Figure 6 and Figure 7 demonstrate the similarities of pressures in the 1960s with those of today. It is interesting to note the shift in sympathies however. Unlike the current version, the 1964 cartoon portrays the mother as relatively unoccupied, suggesting she is "under-employed". During the Depression, women were told they should leave the jobs for the men, only to be actively encouraged into the workforce some 10 years later when the advent of war left jobs vacant (Novitz, 1987). Pearson and Plumridge (1979) describes the pressures in the 1930s as stemming from both active policy, such as the Education Department refusing to employ married women teachers in the 1930s, and from an ideology of a woman's place being in the home. Little it would seem has changed.

'It says here that you're a huge, untapped labour force.'

Figure 6. Evening Post, 21 November 1964 (as cited in Nolan, 2000, p. 192).
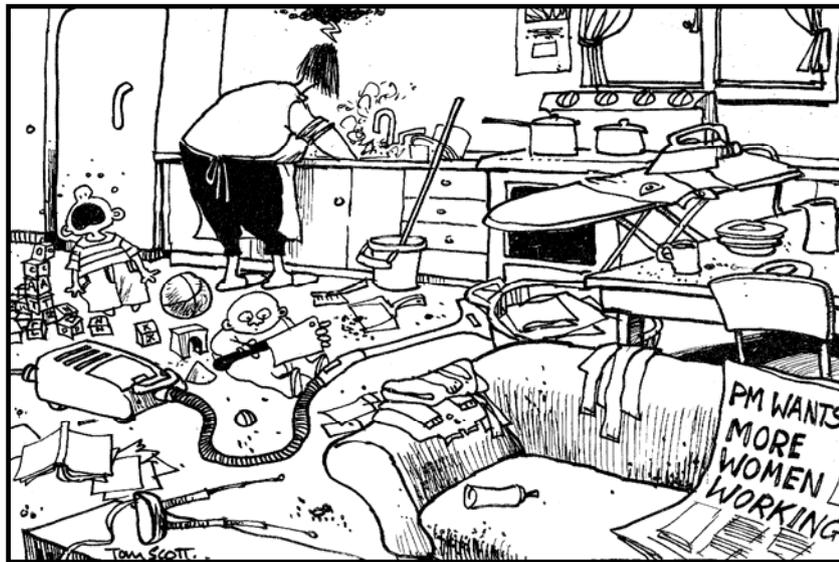
Figure 7. The Dominion Post, 1 February 2005 (p. B4).

Conclusion

As discussed in the Literature Review, economics, policy, and ideology are mutually reinforcing and have a triadic and complex effect on people's lives. Policy is informed in part by economic goals founded on an ideology of economic rationalism, and in turn informs legislation such as tax regimes and welfare systems. These aim to change the financial costs and benefits of differing life choices, and thus, working on the "rational man" model, to alter behaviour. A recent example of this process in

action is the Government's *Working for Families* package which, as mentioned, aims to ensure families are better off with parents in the labour force than on a benefit (H. Clark, 2005).

More importantly, and of much greater interest to this analysis, is how shifts of this nature work to influence behaviour through their influence on discourse, and subsequently on people's identities. The Action Plan utilises feminist and individualistic discourses to lend credibility to its goals, which are ultimately driven not by women's needs but by economic rationalism. The ideological shift, reflected in the Action Plan policy, serves to reconstruct women as workers first and foremost with their primary responsibility that of financially providing for their families while fulfilling the requirements of good citizenship by contributing to the economy through their paid work. This shift results in different positions becoming available to women, and previously available positions becoming less accessible: It is not just the financial costs of choices that change; it is the social and moral costs also.

As outlined in the Introduction, one of the key aims of this research is to explore the relationship between government policy and women's experiences by bringing together a discursive analysis of both the policy document and the women's own talk about their choices and decisions. The next phase of the analysis focuses on the women's talk and in particular looks to see if similar discursive shifts are evident.

CHAPTER SIX

Focus Groups Analysis

"I'm meant to be a career woman,

I'm meant to be a Mum, I'm meant to be a wife, I'm

meant to be a homemaker, I'm still meant to have

friends. And how do I fit all this in my life?"

Vic

Introduction

This second element of analysis aims to discern the extent to which the world the women construct in their talk is similar to or differs from that of the Action Plan. As outlined in Chapter Four, all the women were partnered[6] and prior to having their children they were all in full time work. However, most of the women did not fit the constructed ideal of the Action Plan. As couples, only one of the eleven planned to follow a dual breadwinner model, and one had reversed the traditional roles. Therefore only two of the women could be described as economically independent. The others were all planning to work part time, study or set up a home business at some time in the future. Given this contrast between the ideal constructed in the Action Plan and these women's lives, one of the key questions became how did the women manage that contradiction? Did they construct their lack of economic independence as problematic for example? This chapter looks first at how the women constructed motherhood and paid work, and then examines how they managed the relationship between these two aspects of their lives.

Constructing Motherhood

It was important to me to start with how the women talked about motherhood. There could be little doubt, listening to them, that this was the most dominant aspect of their lives. Their talk covered a wide range of emotions and experiences: amazement at the power of maternal love, uncertainty as they come to terms with the changes that motherhood has wrought in their lives, and confusion as they struggle with the conflicting discourses of motherhood and individualism. While becoming a mother was at times a challenging process, as they sought to find a position within those discourses that would fit comfortably with their identities, with children aged between just seven weeks and six months,

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[6] The majority of the women were married, but because I saw no reason to distinguish between them on this basis I refer to the men collectively as partners, but when talking about a specific couple I use the term husband if they are married.

"Mum" was already an integral part of who they were. Three key constructions of motherhood are summarised here: intensive mother, motherhood as worthless, and mothering as a job.

Intensive mother

In constructing motherhood, the women drew strongly on the intensive mother discourse which has been identified and labelled in other research on new mothers as discussed in the Literature Review (e.g. Glenn, 1994; Hays, 1996; Lupton & Schmied, 2002; Villani & Ryan, 1997). The intensive mother discourse is complex and I have structured the analysis around five important sub texts: the relationship between mother and child as powerful and involuntary; women as responsible for child care; mothering as qualitatively different from fathering; gender differences as natural and therefore immutable; and finally children as needing parental care.

The first element is the power of the maternal bond. In the following extract, Lisa talks about the love she feels for her child. She describes the love as unique, "different to any kind of love", but she also describes it as "amazing", which suggests this maternal love is extraordinary, something bigger and more wondrous than other loves:

> Lisa: And the love that you feel, it's like amazing, it's just so different to any kind of love you've felt for someone before.

Her use of the second person, you, helps to construct this as a norm. She is not the only one who experiences maternal love this way, all mothers do. Helen also uses the term "amazing" when she talks about how her relationship with her daughter has changed her. Amazement incorporates an element of surprise that suggests that the power of the maternal bond exceeded these women's expectations:

> Helen: The emotional attachment I have to [my daughter], has changed me, coz it's just amazing.

Helen describes the bond as an "emotional attachment", terminology stemming from Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory which constructed maternal love and presence as essential to children's well-being and development. While this was the only instance where the word attachment was used, the metaphorical construction of the relationship between mother and child as an unbreakable bond was used on other occasions as the following example shows:

> Kirsten: I've got a friend who's a solo Dad {? Wow}, or he was a solo Dad. The mother's turned up on the scene part time now as well again. But she walked out on him when baby was six months old {Oh no} {Oh}. So he quit his job and was looking after her and the mother turned up about a year ago when [the child] was one and a half.
> Debra: Boy how could you leave your baby?
> Kirsten: Yeah.

> Diane: I find it hard to leave them even for three hours (laughs).

This is one of the many times that the women constructed motherhood and fatherhood as different as is discussed in more detail shortly. The very mention of "solo Dad" elicits a response of amazement, "Wow", which suggests both surprise and admiration. However, it is the group's response to the idea of the mother leaving that is notable here: They do not wait for a pause but speak over Kirsten, responding spontaneously in surprised and horrified tones: "Oh" and "Oh No". Debra articulates the feelings of the group: "How could you leave your baby?" There is a strong suggestion of condemnation here: Mothers do not leave their babies. For Debra, the attachment between her and her baby is so strong that leaving him is utterly incomprehensible, a view echoed by Diane.

Within the intensive mother discourse it is not just that mothers do not want to leave their babies, it is that they cannot. This is made explicit by Lisa when talking about how she had planned to return to work sooner and for more days a week, but now that she has the child she "just can't leave her":

> Lisa: I took six months and I was adamant I was going to go back at six months (laughs) but I just can't leave her.

In this sense, the discourse acts as an internal constraint. Motherhood is far more than a role or a relationship; it is an integral strand of identity. It is not that their beliefs make certain choices easier than others; it is far more powerful. Their construction of a good mother, their sense of themselves as attached to their babies, renders some actions impossible. This is clearly articulated by Debra:

> Debra: I'm the kind of person that, well you have a baby, you don't stick them in daycare. You know, you have your baby to hang out with them.

She does not say that she believes that babies shouldn't be in daycare, instead she says she is not "the kind of person" that would do that. As discussed in the Literature Review, people's moral identity acts as a constraint by limiting the choices they see as available to them (Duncan et al., 2003; McRae, 2003). According to Benson (2003), the boundaries of our identity are "constituted by negative feelings" (p. 61). Negative emotions such as guilt and shame determine which acts are unthinkable, and it is the unthinkable acts that delineate between one kind of person and another. This is not a choice. Kirsten makes a similar point about childcare although she constructs it more as an active decision than an internal constraint:

> Kirsten: She'd be doing daycare a few days, a few afternoons a week, like two or three. I don't want to put her in a daycare full time. My attitude is I didn't have a child to leave her in daycare all day long {? Yep} {? Yeah} {mm}.
>
> Helen: Yep, I agree with that.

This comment was followed by a chorus of agreement: You have a child in order to be with them and children should not be in childcare "all day long". Later, when I asked what they thought about British idea of "dawn to dusk" care for children, the group's response was strong and clear:

Helen: /Why have a child?

?:   /Why.

?:   Yeah exactly.

Kirsten: That's what I'm just thinking.

Helen: You would only, you'd pick them up, give them food give them a bath and put them to bed.

Rita: Yeah every night.

Kirsten: So you have a child for the weekends (laughs).

Debra: Someone else is pretty much bringing up your child.

For these women, having a child is about spending time with them. As Debra said, "you have your baby to hang out with them". This is a strongly gendered construction and is founded upon an assumption of the female as primary caregiver. That most fathers have children who they see only at the end of the day and at weekends is not discussed and is not seen as problematic. It is not suggested that they should not have a child, but for mothers, bringing up a child means being with them. This links closely into the construction of children as needing parents, but mothers in particular; a component of the intensive mother discourse that is explained shortly. This construction of the maternal bond as too powerful to put a child into full time care will impact on "choices" about paid work as is discussed later. A gendered construction of parenting is strong in the women's talk as is evidenced by the construction of women as caregivers.

The second sub text of the intensive mother discourse is the construction of mothers as primarily responsible for the caregiving and fathers as helpful adjuncts. In the following excerpt, in talking about chores that are not directly related to the child, Vic and Donna work together to construct a mother as someone who looks after people, and in the case of the child does "everything that is involved" in caring for them:

Vic: Yeah, I'm happy to be a Mum, I'm happy to do everything that is involved in looking after my son but that doesn't mean that because I'm at home you're going to drop all those things that, I mean we had a pretty 50/50 split.

Donna: You haven't become his Mum (laughs).

Vic: That's exactly it.

Here Vic defines being a Mum as doing all the caregiving. Donna then suggests that she doesn't need to do everything for her husband because she isn't his mother. This links the maternal role to the

practical caring as well as the emotional caring. At other times "being a Mum" is constructed as being at home full time as in the following examples:

> Vic: I mean, I made a decision, or I've made a decision that I want to be at home for [my son] and that's why for five years, I'm going to be a Mum for five years.

> Donna: I am the youngest child, I have five brothers and they all have wives who, I love them to pieces but, they're kinda not educated, they've chosen to, they want to be Mums, that was what they wanted to do in life and that's what they've all done. But my brothers and their wives knew that I chose to be an accountant, I chose a career, so I was always going to be professional.

This can be seen as the extreme of the intensive mother discourse, only stay-at-home mothers are "being Mums", a construction that positions mothers in the workforce as not mothers at all. In the second extract, Donna frames motherhood and career as either/or choices, making her own position as full time worker and mother difficult as is discussed later.

That caregiving is the female rather than the male responsibility is also expressed by Kirsten when the group looked at the small pamphlet which summarised the Action Plan. Kirsten's first response to the pamphlet was that it was very "work orientated", which I asked her to clarify:

> Kirsten: There's not an awful lot in here for families. Okay extending paid parental leave but parental leave, yeah the maximum you can get is one year unpaid. Improving the daycare. What about the children? They're trying to encourage people to go and work, make it more attractive to be in the workforce. Who's going to be looking after the next generation? And it is women who have those children there's no way round that, so they should be focussing a bit more on that as well. I mean okay it's for the women but children is a very big part of being a woman.

In this extract, Kirsten draws very strongly on the intensive mother discourse. She makes it clear that for her, if the women are in the workforce then the children are not being properly cared for: "Who's going to be looking after the next generation?" This positions children who are in care as not being looked after, and it positions women as being the ones who ultimately should be doing that caring: "It is women who have those children, there's no way round that". By saying it is women rather than men who "have" children she constructs caring for them as primarily the mother's responsibility. This linking of caring for children to the biological carrying of children is a critical element of the intensive mother discourse which is discussed shortly. Her closing remark ties being a mother tightly into a woman's identity: To be a mother is not just part of being a woman but "a very big part". Later Rita talked about how it is the female's life that changes most dramatically when a child is born:

> Rita: I really do want to go back to work and have that time for me coz I do miss that time you know coz I think (.) the the female's life um cha-, dramatically changes where everyone else in the household changes (.) slightly but not dramatically like for the woman. Like everyone else's lifestyle oh yeah they still go to their sport they still do (.) you know they go off to work they're not (.) you know, but the female (.) you know you can't just (.) you know your your life's totally changed. Totally turned upside down type of thing. I'm not, I'm not saying it's a bad thing but it's um
>
> Debra: It's an adjustment.

This excerpt is presented unedited to show how Rita repeatedly pauses, repeats "you know", and leaves sentences unfinished. Her hesitant manner suggests she is uncomfortable with what she is saying, that she thinks it may not be accepted by the group because she risks going against the dominant intensive mother discourse. It is interesting that she never actually articulates the problem; each time this is left unspoken: "they're not, you know" and "the female can't just, you know". She could have finished this first statement with "trapped" or other words which would explain why women cannot play sport or carry on working after the child is born, but that would have made her statement too strong. This is a protest against the mother taking primary responsibility for the child and making all the changes; but to protest too much would position her as a bad mother because good mothers want to be with their babies, they want to make the adjustments because that is what good mothers do. Rita finishes her comment with a quick disclaimer: "I'm not saying it's a bad thing". This works to make her comment an observation rather than a personal protest, and thus repositions her as one of those good mothers who are happy to do this. This example demonstrates how hard it is to resist the dominant constructions of motherhood. Without an easily accessible alternative construction to call upon Rita finds it almost impossible.

Being a mother is therefore equated to being a caregiver and making the life adjustments that are required in order to be with the child. This construction is supported by an accompanying "fathers are different" discourse, the third subtext of the intensive mother discourse. Following on from Rita's comment about the female's life changing the most, I asked the group if they were surprised that it is still the female making all the adjustment. Their response constructed mothers and fathers as different:

> Ella: Are you surprised that it's still the female that makes all of the adjustment?
>
> Helen: /No.
>
> Debra: /No.
>
> ?: /No.
>
> Debra: No, makes sense.
>
> Helen: It makes sense, yeah, emotionally.
>
> Sarah: Yeah.

> Helen: It's more emotional, the emotional attachment I have to [my daughter] just has changed me. Coz it's just amazing.
>
> Sarah: 'Tis yeah.
>
> Helen: It's just, I just appreciate my mother much more (laughs) (group laughs). Yeah I didn't realise how attached I am.
>
> Ella: And you're saying that's because you're the mother?
>
> Helen: Yeah. I think it's quite different.

The strength of this discourse, that mothers should be the primary caregivers, is clear in the immediate chorus of negative responses to the question. They are not only unsurprised that it is still women who are making the adjustment, they construct it as sensible. The maternal relationship is "quite different", presumably to the paternal relationship. Helen links this into the powerful maternal bond as previously discussed: Women are more emotionally attached to their babies and so naturally they become the primary caregivers. The women's explanations for the cause of this difference were commonly grounded in a biological discourse as is discussed shortly.

Mothers and fathers were also constructed differently in a discussion on parenting style. According to this excerpt, mothers pick a child up when it cries while fathers are more inclined to "introduce discipline":

> Donna: I guess though, being who he is [husband], he's probably more willing maybe, I'm not sure that's the right word, to let [our son] cry for a long period of time. He's just like 'No, I'm not going to pick you up'.
>
> Jo: I think Dads do have the ability to do that more than {Lisa: just switch it off} Mums for whatever reason.
>
> Donna: He'll go, 'No you're going to sleep now'. I mean I certainly couldn't do that when [our son] was crying. I picked him up and carried him round.
>
> Ella: Why do /you
>
> Donna: /The instinct is different.

Donna talks about how she "couldn't" leave her baby to cry. This draws on the discourse discussed earlier in which maternal love is a constraint on action. While Donna starts by constructing her husband's ability to leave their son as a facet of his personality, "who he is", Jo shifts to a distinctly gendered construction: Dads have this ability. This constructs the mother's caring response as involuntary and the father's as optional. This is part of a discourse that draws on a traditional dichotomy of males as rational, logical beings who think things through with their heads, and females as emotional, irrational beings who are controlled by their hearts. Donna immediately accepts that it is a male characteristic rather than unique to her husband and suggests that the "instinct is different", constructing this difference as biological and therefore immutable. She goes on to suggest that babies need love:

Donna: They're probably a bit more willing to introduce discipline {Jo: yeah yeah} than we are. I mean when they're just babies, it's like, aww its just a baby (laughs) {Jo: yeah yeah} they don't know anything. They need our love all the time.

Donna is in a difficult situation here. There is a tension between the intensive mother discourse which the group are deploying and the reality of her circumstances: She is in full time work and her husband is at home caring for their son. She has argued that babies "need our love all the time" in a way that suggests it is the maternal kind of love, the picking up kind rather than the disciplining kind, that babies need. But she is not the primary caregiver of their son. This "problem" crops up again later when she expresses concern that her husband may not be "doing enough" for their son:

Donna: Even though it is [my husband] at home I still worry that you know, it's my baby and is [my husband] doing enough for him. Just because of the difference between Mums and Dads really.

Ella: Expand on that for me.

Donna: I just, what we were talking about before. Men I think generally are a little bit more willing to let babies cry for longer and they have probably a higher expectation of the child. That he's gonna be quite hard on him from a very young age and you know, he'll handle it, he's gonna be alright you know (laughs). But that sometimes they aren't. And sometimes they need to be picked up and loved and (.) yeah (.)

Ella: Mothered?

Donna: Yeah.

Lisa: Not so nurturing maybe.

Ella: Not so nurturing? Yep.

Donna: I mean sometimes it varies, don't get me wrong [my husband]'s a very affectionate man and he loves his son to pieces and you can see that when you see him with him, but yeah, he's not, he's not the Mum. When I do, there's a difference.

She keeps to the gendered construction that Jo suggested earlier: "the difference between Mums and Dads" and she more clearly positions children as needing what she is depicting as mother love: "to be picked up and loved". Despite the fact that she has constructed this kind of love as something that mothers do rather than fathers, she herself does not come up with the verb "mothered". This possibly reflects the start of the discursive shift away from mothering as special and unique; the women still talk of mother love as special but they no longer have as easy access to the word to describe it. Donna ends her explanation on the powerful comment which sums up her point: "He's not the Mum". This suggests that no matter how loving or attentive her husband is to the child, he can never replace her, the mother. This is the crux of women's conflict: Maternal love and caring is special and cannot be replaced even by the father, let alone a childcare centre. How can decisions made in the face of such powerful internal constraints be described as free choice?

These elements, the powerful maternal bond, women as primary caregivers, and fathers as different, build into the intensive mother discourse. This is strengthened even further by a fourth element, that this is a natural state of affairs caused by the biological differences between women and men. Helen talks here about being "motherly", and both she and Rita construct this as a natural instinct:

Helen: I thought it would be very hard, yeah I didn't think I'd be very motherly. I had doubts in myself but, yeah I'm [the] complete opposite now.

Ella: You are motherly?

Helen: I am. Surprisingly (laughs).

Ella: Can I ask you what motherly is?

Helen: Just being able to recognise what the baby needs, and attend to her properly, and know how to change and pick her up. Because I was afraid of picking her up, as I [had] hardly held any new babies or anything so I was quite worried about that. But yeah it just came so naturally. It's amazing. I was so shocked. I was like 'Oh my gosh, I can do this' (laughs) and yeah it was really good.

Rita: That's what I've found. Just your instinct really just takes over. It's just amazing. Just like the cry, okay the cries are all different and you know I've always been quite maternal myself but it's just amazing. It just, your instincts just kick in. I find that quite amazing.

The maternal response, the knowledge of how to attend to the baby, is described as coming "naturally", it "just takes over". Once again this positions women as being at the mercy of uncontrollable biological forces. Later, when discussing Helen's observation that mothers are more attached to their child than fathers, the group worked their way through a variety of explanations for this difference including breastfeeding, hormones, carrying the baby, and spending time with them:

Rita: Do you think it's the breast feeding thing? Like you're-

Helen: Like the connection you get.

Rita: Yeah, like you've gotta be home. I mean if you're not breastfeeding {Helen: mm} you know the father can sort of take {Helen: yeah it's true} over but you're sort of expected, you know you've gotta be there every three or four hours {Helen: uhuh} or whatever it might be.

Helen: I think that's made a difference.

…

Diane: Yeah, I think it's more hormonal.

Ella: Hormonal? {mmm} {mm}

Diane: Rather than, rather than sort of just a physical thing.

Debra: And you've felt the baby grow inside you. No one else, like your husbands do not know what it's like to be pregnant and feel the baby. You know they have their little routines. For me anyway when I was pregnant he would kick me at certain [times].

Helen draws an interesting parallel between the physical connection of breastfeeding and the emotional connection implicit in attachment. Moving away from a solely biological explanation, Rita

suggests that it is the "being there" that breastfeeding requires that forms the bond between mother and baby. Diane and Debra then return to biological causes of hormones and pregnancy. A little later it was suggested that fathers may not be so tuned in because they have spent less time with the baby:

> Helen: My husband isn't totally in tune yet. I think he will get to that stage but because he's not with her all the time he doesn't have, he doesn't know the cries yet and he doesn't know.
>
> Diane: I don't think they'll ever be able to. They just haven't got that time.
>
> Helen: I mean not, it won't be exactly the same, but it will be I think. It's taken longer for him to know her than it has for me.

Here Helen suggests that her husband will acquire the knowledge of their daughter's cries once he spends more time with her. This is in direct contrast to her earlier comment that for her such knowledge "just came naturally". In the following extract, Jo and Donna also construct the differences between mothers and fathers caregiving as instinct:

> Donna: The instinct is different.
>
> Ella: Okay so you're saying it's instinct? You think that's why it is.. {Jo: yeah yeah definitely} That mothers have a stronger -
>
> Jo: Especially maybe I don't know whether it's that those first few weeks your reaction, I don't know about you, but your reaction straight away when they're that young, coz you're going through that whole I don't know what's going on {?: that's right} Is you do pick them up so maybe you then get into a habit? It takes you longer to break that habit. I mean now [our son] is five months, I'm able to do that far more, okay it's not gonna kill him to cry for a little bit. But [my husband], from day one, would be saying No, leave him.

Jo suggests that mothers form a habit in the early weeks when their reaction is to pick the baby up because they don't know what's going on. Now, five months later she is more able to leave her son to cry. While in some ways this contradicts the maternal instinct discourse, unlike Helen and Rita she describes herself as not instinctively knowing what the baby wants, it still positions women as naturally more caring. They pick the baby up to find out what they need or to comfort them whereas fathers leave them to cry, "from day one".

The women as caregivers discourse is warranted by these strongly biological explanations. The mother carries the baby so bonds earlier, her hormones also play a role, the maternal instinct "kicks in", she breastfeeds the baby, therefore she spends more time with the baby, subsequently becomes more tuned in to the baby's needs, and is therefore the better and preferred caregiver. This logical and seemingly irrefutable chain has led some feminists to suggest that women's reproductive capacity is the very cause of their oppression (Firestone, 1972). It is also one of the reasons for the long standing dominance of the intensive mother discourse: If it is biological then it can be no other way.

In one of the few exceptions to the biological justification, Jo and Lisa suggest a structural explanation for women still being the primary caregivers:

Ella: Aside from the fact that Donna is in the workforce and her husband is at home, you're all following reasonably traditional patterns, as in the mother gives up the work, and if they do work they do it flexibly, part time, at home. Why do you think that is? I mean this is 2005.

Jo: As a generalisation, the guys are earning more.

Ella: Okay. Why is that? You've all been in the workforce for 20 years.

Lisa: Because they all, men earn more.

Interestingly, when I then asked them if they thought that had been a factor in their own personal decisions, both women said that no, they were looking after the babies because they had wanted children more than their partners.

Generally, then, the women constructed biology as the cause of gender differences in caregiving. Because they are the ones who bear the children and who breastfeed them, they are the ones who take care of them and who make the required life adjustments. However, there is one final piece to the discursive puzzle of intensive mother: the construction of the child as needing parental care.

In response to the trigger question "what do you think children need?" the women talked of parental love, security, family, and time as being essential to children. In the direct responses they did not talk of children needing mothers in particular but tended to talk in gender neutral terms:

Kirsten: Love cuddles /parents around them.

Diane: /Time. I really think it's time.

Jo: Loving consistency? Consistency I think's a big one. You know, that they can rely on you and know that you're not gonna give them mixed messages. And security.

Anne: Definitely. Lot of insecure kids out there.

Ella: So what gives a child security do you think Anne?

Anne: Oh parents. Yeah. Their home life, their family, that you know they're surrounded by family.

The need for parental love and time was matched by the women constructing full time childcare almost as neglect. In the following extract Kirsten makes this very clear when she constructs full time childcare as something that you would only do with someone who was not precious to you:

Kirsten: The first time I was pregnant, I lost my first child at 33 weeks, but the first time I was pregnant I intended to go back to work after six months and juggle the whole thing.

Ella: Go back to work full time?

Kirsten: Yep. And after having lost that child and just reassessing my whole my life as well and the whole family thing, it's just sort of you know, they're far too precious to do that with. It's you know, a couple, even if it goes to being a couple of full days a week in daycare it's fine but not much more than that.

It is interesting to note the verbs that are used alongside the word daycare. In the following extracts both Donna and Lisa describe it as "leaving" their children, which is suggestive of an almost careless desertion. Debra's use of "stick them in daycare" is an even more negative turn of phrase:

Lisa: I just thought she's so little and just to be leaving her with strangers.

Debra: I'm the kind of person that, well you have a baby, you don't stick them in daycare.

Donna: I feel, I just at this age anyway, I feel more comfortable, well just [my son]'s so small I feel more comfortable leaving him with his father rather than leaving him some place where he is surrounded by strangers and by potentially sick babies (laughs), it's just an exposure thing {mmm fair enough} I think when he gets to a year old then I'm more than willing to put him into a crèche daycare, just to have that interaction.

In the final example, when Donna is talking about the child at a year old going to a crèche for interaction, she shifts from "leaving him" to the more intentional verb "put": placing a child into childcare suggests a more careful and deliberate action than leaving. It is interesting that they do not talk of the child "going" to childcare in the way that children go to school. Leaving, or even worse sticking, a child somewhere suggests it is done for the benefit of the parents, whereas a child going somewhere suggests it is for the good of the child. In this construction, children and in particular young children do not need full time care. The idea that Donna raises, that older children will benefit from some time in an institution for social interaction, is discussed in the final section of this analysis.

While when talking directly about what children need the women did not draw on a gendered discourse of children needing mothers, at other times mothers were prioritised over fathers. For example when reading the Action Plan brochure, one group they talked about how the government should be paying the mother to stay at home rather than encouraging her into the workforce:

Helen: I think the government are coming from the wrong angle though. Coz they should be thinking about the child not the mother. It's like we'll give you this money to go back to work but really they should be saying we'll give you this money to stay home because it's the child that's important. {? Yeah} {? Yes} And like you were saying that would be good, the first two years are very vital for a child's development you know socially as well as intellectually and all that brain development that it would be better to pay the mother to stay at home.

Rita: I think they're encouraging people to go back to paid work. They're making the childcare, you know the centres cheaper so it's encouraging women to get back in the workforce where my point of view is they should be encouraging the Mums {Diane: parenting} to stay at home.

Helen positions children as more important than women: "they should be thinking about the child not the mother" and "it's the child that's important", a statement that elicits agreement from the group. Helen focuses on the first few years as being the time when maternal care at home is the most important for the child's development. Neither Helen nor Rita talk of paying or encouraging fathers to stay at home although Diane does interject with the gender neutral term "parenting".

Constructing children as needing parental love, and full time childcare as bad, leaves little room for the dual breadwinner model. Although the women drew at times on a more egalitarian parenting discourse when talking about what children need, at other times they stayed with the more traditional discourse of children needing maternal love and attention more:

Donna: I mean sometimes it varies, don't get me wrong [my husband]'s a very affectionate man and he loves his son to pieces and you can see that when you see him with him {mmm} but yeah, he's not, he's not the Mum.

Lisa: Because he thinks that it, for [our daughter], its best for [our daughter] if I'm at home.
Ella: Okay, that's interesting isn't it. And how do you feel about that?
Lisa: I agree with him.

Overall, children are constructed primarily as precious and as needing parental, and in particular maternal, love and time. This is the final element of the intensive mother reality, a reality that severely constrains women's choices. They want to put their children's needs first: children need parental care and time, mothers are naturally suited to caregiving through their biological predisposition plus they feel a powerful bond with their child. There is little room within this discourse to choose to be in the workforce. However, discourses are multiple and while the intensive mother discourse was the most commonly deployed within the groups, other constructions of motherhood were also evident including the starkly contradictory "motherhood as worthless" which is examined next.

As worthless

Within the intensive mother discourse just discussed, the role of mother is constructed as priceless. Caring for children is a vitally important role as Helen explicitly states:

> Helen: I mean it should be like, when they look at the most important jobs, Mum should definitely be on the top before anything else.

However, as discussed in the Literature Review, for all that it is seen to be priceless, motherhood is also commonly constructed as worthless: It is not considered to be work, it is not rewarded, and it is not respected (Grace, 1998). As Chodorow (1979) explains, the maternal role is devalued because it lies "outside of the sphere of monetary exchange and [is] unmeasurable in monetary terms" (p. 89). This reflects the increasing dominance of the economic rationalist discourse which values only that which is financially rewarded. It also parallels the liberal feminist discourse which sees equality as achievable only through women's increased participation in the public fields of work and education. In this discourse, full time mothering is not good enough for women: A successful woman has to do more than be "just a mother". The women drew on a mothering as worthless discourse specifically when constructing stay-at-home mothers rather than motherhood in general. Within this discourse mothering is constructed as doing nothing, as undesirable, and as a loss.

At a pragmatic level, the women talked about how their partners perceived them as doing nothing. Because the mothers were not "at work" they must either be doing what they want or nothing at all:

> Anne: He keeps telling me … I don't know what you do all day (group laughs).

> Jo: But sometimes he comes home and it's like he thinks that I've had a whole day. Cause I'm at home, I'm not working. I've had the whole day to do what I wanna do (group laughs). And I've tried to explain to him that it's not what I want to do, it's what you have to do when you're at home. Rather than what you want to do. So yeah it's quite different.
> Vic: And I don't know that they actually ever understand that kinda {Jo: no can't grasp the concept} thing. I think I can be a broken record going over and over and over it but it doesn't make a, [it goes] straight over {Jo: yeah yeah}.
> Ella: They still think you're at home doing what you want.
> Jo: Because you're not working {Vic: yeah} you're not at work yeah.

At the end of Jo corrects herself from "you're not working" to "you're not at work", an important distinction that serves to position her quite clearly as working but not in a paid job. Motherhood as a job is a critical strategy used to resist the idea of motherhood as worthless as is discussed shortly.

"Doing nothing" can mean literally not engaged in any activities as it does here, but it can also mean doing nothing of value. In this construction the indefinite pronouns "something" and "nothing" shift from referring to the quantity of the activity to the quality. This prevalent discourse links into the public/private divide whereby what we do in the public world for money is valued and counts as doing "something" whereas what we do in the private sphere for love counts as doing "nothing". This can be

seen to relate back to the Action Plan's rhetoric of full and active participation in society. Raising a family is not fully and actively participating, it is "doing nothing". Despite their positioning of motherhood as important, and their talk of how demanding the role is, the women also drew on a mothering as doing nothing discourse:

Ella: Would he [your husband] have wanted to be at home? If he had his magic wand and an ideal world?

Anne: Probably not no. He'd be bored. He has to be doing something all the time, he wouldn't be able to, I don't think he would want to.

Jo: [My husband] really enjoys what he does, so he's you know we've talked about this. Win lotto, what would you do. He'd still do it until he wasn't enjoying it anymore. But he's always said he'd be doing something.

When explaining why their partners would not exit the paid workforce either for childcare or because they had no financial need, both Anne and Jo talk of their partner's need to "do something". This positions the caregiving role as "doing nothing". At other times the women talked about how full time mother, despite being a demanding job, was not enough:

Kirsten: I sort of found that [my daughter] was taking up 24 hours of my day, seven days a week, even though [my husband] is around. But I needed something just for me {? Yeah} {mmm} which I didn't have. I love looking after her and doing everything for her, but I was just getting lost {Sarah: yeah} That's sort of how I felt. And that I just needed to do something again.

Vic: But, I think the reality of it, for me to actually just stay home and do nothing, I don't think I could ever, just do nothing {Jo: yeah} And I haven't done nothing from the, I mean the day that I, I took four weeks off before I had [my son], and of that we had [my husband]'s son for two weeks, we had Christmas, and I had four days to myself before I, he was early. …I've had periods of my life, I've been married before, where I lived overseas, I was an ex-pat wife so I've had periods where I've not worked and I've always liked it so I, I quite like that lifestyle but I think mentally having, just being at home and doing absolutely nothing, I don't think I could.

Ella: Can you just define doing nothing for me?

Vic: Well, not doing nothing, not doing anything probably, um, workwise.

Vic repeatedly refers to staying at home as "doing nothing", and then she recognises that this positions her in an unfavourable light so she quickly says that she hasn't "done nothing". When I asked her to define doing nothing, Vic added a disclaimer which narrowed it down to not working which makes this discourse clear: People who are not in the paid workforce are positioned as "doing nothing".

As well as constructing full time mother as doing nothing, the women talked of mother as an undesirable role. In the following conversation the group talk about their clothing and appearance as important because of the message it sends to other people about who they are:

Kirsten: I live in tracksuit pants at home, but I want, when I go out I still want to portray as being an independent [woman], not totally fixated around the child {? Mm}.

…

Diane: Yeah I'd agree with that. You sort of don't want to be a slobby mother. You know you want to look sexy and look-

Rita: /Mumsy

Kirsten: /Like I don't want to walk around with a baby badge (group laughs).

Ella: What did you call it Rita?

Rita: Mumsy. {? Yeah} Mumsy clothes yeah. And it's good to be able to make a bit of an effort when you go out. Like when you're at home, you know you don't worry about-

Diane: Oh yeah still in your pyjamas at lunchtime sometimes (laughs).

Rita: I don't worry about what other, (laughs) I don't care really, but when I go out it's good to be able to just, I dunno.

Kirsten: Put a skirt on occasionally.

Between them they create two images: On the one hand is someone who wears a skirt, makes an effort, and looks sexy; on the other is someone who wears tracksuit pants, doesn't care about their appearance, and looks slobby. The first of these is a desirable figure, the "independent" woman that Kirsten wants to be seen as. The second is the undesirable figure, the "slobby mother" wearing "Mumsy clothes" who is "totally fixated around the child" and is not therefore independent. It is a powerful contrast of the successful woman versus the intensive mother. With this imagery, who would position themselves as a mother?

In this final example, when Donna was talking about her mother and the impact that she had on Donna's own life choices, the choice to stay at home is constructed as inadequate:

Donna: I wanted to be everything my mother wasn't. Because my Mum was the traditional, you know, spat out five children from the age of 18 and so she bound herself to home. I mean she had five kids she didn't drive. She still doesn't and so she has no expect- well it is to say no expectations of herself, to better herself really. Like she did the Mum thing.

There was a time when this life pattern: leaving school, starting a family, and doing "the Mum thing", would have been acceptable, and in some social sectors expected. However, Donna constructs her mother's life as lacking. She had no expectations of herself or any desire to "better herself" which clearly positions worker as better than mother. This highlights one of the key critiques of the equality

side of the feminist debate: In fighting for women to take on public roles, mothering has been devalued and constructed as not enough for a successful woman. The shift from women expecting to stay home as full time mothers has resulted in another negative construction of motherhood as is discussed next, motherhood as loss.

Women now have children much later in life; they have experienced the independence and freedom of taking their place in education and in the workforce. This all changes when they have a child. The women in the focus groups talked at various times of the difficulties they experienced over losing self confidence, losing control of their lives, and losing their independence:

Vic: But I also think, my husband's fantastic, he does a huge amount of stuff, but I have had to rethink my expectations of him as well. Coz he's done so much but I still have this niggle at him that he can still go out and do what he wants to do. When he wants to do it. But for me I have to organise, like I have to organise that it's okay for him to look after [our son] today, or it's okay for him to do this. And, that's been I think that's been the hardest part for me is having to ask someone. Not just have the freedom to say Right on Saturday morning I'm going out for da da da da da and walk out the door … probably the biggest struggle that I've had, more than anything.

Donna: Yeah, your loss of independence. It's like overwhelming. Sometimes you just, if you had a bad day and you just want to have a drink or something (laughs) like not with your husband or your baby, it's like I can't go anywhere (laughs) (group laughs) {Jo: yeah yeah}. Especially when I when I was still feeding and I was still at home.

This loss of independence and freedom is a direct effect of the intensive mother discourse. While husbands are constructed as helpers who do "a huge amount of stuff", the ultimate responsibility for organising the care of the child rests with the mother; hence she is no longer free to do as she wishes. An even more powerful construction of motherhood as loss however, was the loss of the self:

Vic: The biggest thing for me is I miss my time, I miss me and I do think that sometimes it's me that's forgotten about.

Sarah: I would have to say that it would be because I was getting a bit bored, that routine, the mundaneness, and I wanted an extra bit of me back. A little piece of me back.

Kirsten: I love looking after her and doing everything for her but I was just getting lost {Sarah: yeah} That's sort of how I felt.

As is discussed later, what women do for a job is an integral part of their identity and therefore leaving has a powerful impact. It is far more powerful than simply the loss of a role; it is the loss of the self. The women position themselves as variously lost, forgotten, and missed. Both Sarah and Kirsten have

taken on part time study roles as a solution. Another solution to the loss of the self, and to the broader construction of the mother role as worthless, is the construction of motherhood as a full time job.

As an important job

Motherhood as a job is a strategy of resistance against the construction of full time motherhood as worthless, and also against full time mothers being positioned as "not contributing" to the family in a financial sense:

> Kirsten: I read somewhere recently that being a Mum at home is the equivalent of two and a half full time jobs.

The discourse is the "every mother is a working mother" rhetoric developed by women as a response to the dichotomising of mothers into working mothers and stay-at-home mothers. The strategy has a dual effect. Firstly, describing motherhood as a job, or as work, aims to accord the role the same high value which is automatically bestowed upon roles in the paid workforce, and thus resists the positioning of motherhood as worthless. At the same time it serves to justify the choice to be at home. The mother already has a full time job, so why would she be expected to hold another job as well? This is made more explicit in Kirsten's later comment:

> Kirsten: I've got a full, more than a full time job I'm doing, so he is bringing in the money.

In a similar construction, Helen responds to Sarah's comment about feeling guilty for buying a latte by constructing her mothering role as a "big job":

> Sarah: And also for me, like I'm earning the money I can go and have a latte if I want to with a friend. {? Mmm} You know, it's not all just going into the pool of the house.
> Helen: But you are the Mum. {Sarah: I know} You know, you've got a big job and so you deserve to go and have a latte every now and then.
> Sarah: Thank you (laughs) (group laughs).
> Helen: I mean it should be like, when they look at the most important jobs Mum should definitely be on the top (laughs) before anything else.

Helen uses the strategy quite explicitly to counter Sarah's suggestion that because she is not earning money she cannot spend it on herself. This resists the economic independence discourse which is discussed in the next section on constructing work. At first motherhood is described as a big job, suggestive only of the amount of time that it requires, but Helen then builds on this and reframes it as the most important job, big not just in terms of time but in terms of value. This can be seen as an example of the difference side of the feminist debate, the "valuing women's contribution" rhetoric of the Action Plan.

In another example of constructing mothering as worthless, the women talked of the difficulty of not having anything interesting to talk to their partners about because talking about their day with the baby was seen as boring. Rita resists this using the "mother as a job" strategy:

Rita: I think it's really important to talk about your day and I mean okay this is our new job now, being a Mum {yep} so why can't we talk about it? Like we used to talk about, I don't know your previous job sort of thing. Talk about, oh this one did that or you know this is happening or that's happening.

On another occasion Rita quite explicitly constructs the decision about returning to the paid workforce as a choice between two jobs:

Rita: I worked in town, loved my job, and I've been back there once and I thought oh yeah, I'll be back but then when I'm at home I love that job even better, so I just don't know. I haven't made up my mind what I want to do.

In all the above instances, it is the maternal rather than the paternal role that is framed as a job. On only one occasion was the gender neutral term parent used in a similar context suggestive of a more egalitarian construction of parenting:

Helen: I think it's still, there are still lots of people out there who do not see parenting as a job and it's really sad.
Debra: People who've had children realise that it's a job {Helen: yeah yeah} {? Yes yes} those who don't, have no idea.

Motherhood as a job is an important resistant strategy to the explicit criticism of motherhood as worthless. By drawing on the terminology of the public sphere, the discourse automatically confers on motherhood some of the status that is traditionally only accorded to paid work. Bailey (2000) makes the critical point that while this can be seen as an achievement of feminism, it also serves to validate the valorisation of paid work: It is only through constructing motherhood as work that it can be accorded the same respect and value and therefore the construction still values work above care. The discursive constructions used by the women in talking about their paid work are discussed next.

Constructing (Paid) Work

In talking about taking on paid work, the women mentioned many of the factors studied within empirical psychology as outlined in the Literature Review. They talked about economic factors such as their partner's income, their own potential earnings, and the loss of skills if they stayed out of the workforce. They talked about their beliefs about motherhood and on a couple of occasions they mentioned the influence of their own mothers as role models. If one was to try and categorise the

women according to Hakim's (2000) preference theory, most would fit the catch-all category of adaptive: neither home nor work-centred but wanting to somehow combine both.

The predominant theme in their discussions of paid work was financial pragmatism, the need or desire to earn money. In the Action Plan, women are constructed as needing to not only financially support themselves but also to provide for their families, representing an ideological shift from the traditional male breadwinner model of the past. The force of both these emerging discourses, co-provider and economic independence, was evident in the women's constructions of paid work and of their decisions. In addition, work was constructed as a source of challenge and social stimulation, something they enjoyed and wanted to return to, and on occasion it was framed as essential to their identity and sanity. The final construction of paid work that I discuss is paid work as normal: Everyone participates in the labour force.

As provision for the family

The Action Plan positions women as providers or co-providers with a responsibility to work in order to financially support their family. At the time of the groups, most of the women were not in any paid work although many of them talked of taking on some part time work in the future, and so as families will match the one and a half breadwinner model. On a very pragmatic level, the women talked of the difficulty of adjusting to the loss of one income and of the need to budget more closely than in the past. Those who did not feel that their partner's income was sufficient to support the family constructed this as a joint financial need and as a driving force behind their decision to re-enter the labour force. The women did not see it as their partner's responsibility to provide sufficient income as may have been the case under the strong male breadwinner ideology of the past. Instead the solution was that both parents should take on provider roles:

> Ella: And why do you want to go back to work? You've talked about why you don't want to go back full time, but why do you want to go back?
>
> Kirsten: Partially the money, we've still got a mortgage to pay and [my husband] still earns a wee bit more than me but not much so, and living off one income is a bit difficult.

> Debra: I do know that I have to do something within the next six months because of financial reasons. I have to start earning properly.

Financial pragmatism was also central in Donna's account of her decision to work full time while her husband takes on a full time caregiving role. She makes it clear that this is not a satisfactory state of affairs: Financial factors are acting as constraints on her free choice:

> Ella.   Okay. You all were in full time work before and Donna's gone back to full time work. Can I just ask you a little bit about that Donna? Tell me how that's come about.

> Donna: I'm an accountant and [my husband]'s a mechanic. And I earn in excess of 70 thousand dollars a year and he earns 30 thousand dollars a year. So you do the math and it's just not viable for me not to be at work. /Unfortunately.
> Ella: /Yep and how is that? For you?
> Donna: It sucks.

Rita positioned herself within the co-provider discourse in a noticeably different way. In the following extract she talks about how her husband doesn't mind whether she returns to work or not, but that she does feel some unwanted pressure to help with the "money side of things":

> Rita: He's really open about it. He basically said it's really up to me but I sort of feel a bit guilty about not going back with the money side of things coz as I said to you in the car he's got three other kids. So it's, you know, you've got to adjust your lifestyle to fit that. But I shouldn't, you know, I don't want to feel pressured from him having to feel like he's got to support us all. I just really don't know what I want to do.

A notable contrast between Rita's construction and that of the other women is that rather than talking about a practical need to earn money; she positions it as an emotional need to contribute. She expresses guilt about her husband having to support her and the children. As discussed in the Literature Review, guilt can be seen as a tool of self surveillance, the result of comparing one's identity with that of a perceived social ideal and being found wanting (Harrington, 2002). In this instance, the social ideal is that of women as economically independent and as co-providers as promoted in the Action Plan. That she feels guilty even though her husband is "really open about it", and she does not express a strong desire to work for her own reasons, demonstrates the power of this emerging discourse to exert pressure and constrain choice. Later on, in response to a question about where she sees herself in five years time, Rita talks about taking up part time work:

> Rita: Part time. Definitely. I don't think I'll be going back full time, I can't see it at this stage coz I'd like another one [child]. So yeah part time to sort of work in with whatever stage we're at you know, what age they're at. Yeah, but probably not my own business I can't see that at this stage but somewhere local I'd say.
> Ella: And that feels good?
> Rita: Yeah yep.
> Ella: Feels like the right -
> Rita: Yeah just so that you feel, you know that you're contributing a bit as well.

Her response as to why this feels right is not about needing money or wanting to be in paid work, common responses from the other women, instead it is the source of the income that is positioned as important. She wants to feel that she is "contributing", presumably to allay the guilt she feels. In her

explanation, she shifts from "I" to "you" and uses the phrase "you know" to construct this as something that is common to the others in the group and is therefore understandable and acceptable.

Despite the women positioning themselves as needing to provide financially for their families, in most cases this was not at the same level as the men. Most were planning part time work and were prioritising their caregiving role as is discussed in detail shortly. Only Helen, a teacher who is planning to return to full time work at the end of her 12 months leave, drew on the dual breadwinner discourse which is the foundation of the Action Plan:

> Helen: Well I just, I miss my job. And it's money, which is, I sort of, am not really torn but I do feel
>   that having two incomes will be better for [my daughter] in the long run.

Helen constructs her decision to return to work as one motivated by financial pragmatism but she links this more clearly into a co-provider discourse than the other women by saying that two incomes will be better for her daughter. Linking the decision to the needs of the child is a strategy for reconciling a decision to return to the workforce with the intensive mother discourse: She is still being a good mother because she is still putting the child's needs first, in this case the need for more income. This is the economic rationalist discourse functioning at the individual level; financial wealth is prioritised over other indicators of success or well-being. Helen's more detailed justification of her decision is discussed in depth later as an example of the conflict that many of the women experience.

As well as talking about their need to be co-providers, the women drew on a second financial aspect of paid work as constructed in the Action Plan: the need to be economically independent.

As economic independence

Within the Action Plan economic independence means not relying on anyone, man or state, for financial support. Within this individualistic economic rationalist discourse every individual has the responsibility to pay their own way. The pressure to fit this ideal was felt strongly by several of the women who expressed guilt at spending money on themselves that they had not earned:

> Diane: I will feel guilty about living on just [my partner]'s wage. I've had my own money for such a
>   long time that I find it really difficult to not have it and not have, I sort of feel like I've got to,
>   for every dollar I spend I've got to um -
> Sarah: Be able to justify it?
> Ella: Yep okay.
> Diane: And that's sort of, if I, at least if I feel like I'm providing then I feel like I've got a bit more
>   freedom of how I can spend.

Diane is still on paid leave but she talks about how difficult she expects to find "living on" her partner's wage. She struggles to explain her guilt until Sarah steps in with the suggestion that it is because she feels that she must justify her expenditure, an explanation that Diane accepts. This is qualitatively different from the talk of money as a pragmatic need discussed earlier. Similar to Rita's guilt over not contributing, this is a concern over the source of the money rather than the amount of money. For many of the women, not earning the money was constructed as a constraint against spending, particularly in reference to discretionary personal spending:

Sarah: Yeah like I'm earning the money I can go and have a latte if I want to with a friend or, you know it's not all just going into the pool of the house sort of thing.

Debra: Yeah it was because of money, thinking I want a bit of extra cash for me you know that's my money to spend as I like.

Helen: No and it [paid parental leave] doesn't last for much longer but at least you know there's some money there and you don't, like you were saying, sometimes you feel guilty about going to buy things.

This parallels previous New Zealand research into the allocation and control of money within families. In discussing the Pākehā component of the Intra Family Income Study[7], Fleming (1997) notes that "the strongest control over women's spending was that exercised by the women themselves" (p. 61). Even the women who were the primary financial managers in the family did not feel they had the right to spend money on themselves, particularly if they were not earning.

In the above extract, Helen is discussing the benefits of paid parental leave, income she constructs as her own, and therefore money she does not need to feel guilty for spending. Economic independence in the Action Plan includes independence from the state and it is interesting, and encouraging, that the women saw paid parental leave as their own earnings rather than as a government benefit. For example, Donna described herself on parental leave as "earning a fifth of what I used to earn". Similarly Diane expressed the view that while on paid leave she is "still contributing":

Ella: So you're still on paid parental leave. Do you think that makes a difference? Whether the leave that you're on is paid or unpaid? Does that feel different or -
Diane: Yes it does. I feel like I'm still contributing.

---

[7] The Intra Family Income and Resource Allocation Study was a substantial project by Massey University which aimed to determine whether family income was a fair measure of individual family members' financial resources. Data was gathered in 1992 and 1993 from three population groups: Pākehā, Māori, and Pacific Island families (Fleming, 1997).

In direct contrast, Sarah and her husband receive government assistance which she constructs as dependence and consequently she expresses an associated guilt for receiving it:

> Sarah: We actually get family assistance and accommodation supplement because our income's quite low and I find that I feel guilty about receiving that. Like this is from the government and this is not me earning it. Yeah that's definitely a feeling I've had. Like I've got to, I would like to be able to be in paid work eventually. Not at the detriment of looking after the children but maybe even working from [home].

Once again the guilt indicates self surveillance: contrasting her situation with the social ideal of financial independence. Sarah positions the government assistance as a direct replacement of her earnings: "this is from the government and this is not *me* earning it", but unlike paid parental leave, this is not acceptable. She starts to say that this makes her feel she has to be in paid work "I've got to" but quickly corrects this to "I would like to be able to be in paid work". She then adds a qualifier which allows her to retain her position as a good mother: "not at the detriment of looking after the children". Her priority is made clear. So while both paid parental leave and government assistance are constituted as replacements for the women's previous earnings, the former is constructed as acceptable and justified, whereas the latter is seen as unacceptable dependence.

Money, either for the family or for themselves, is an important element in the women's decision-making but at a level beyond the pragmatic. Their expressions of guilt reveal the growing dominance of the economic independence discourse and similarly, although to a lesser degree, the co-provider discourse. It would be a mistake to assume that guilt automatically leads to acceptance of the offered position however. Resistance of dominant discourses is always possible and in this case a key strategy used to resist being positioned as "not contributing" was to use a reconstructed version of the traditional gender division: The family is constructed as a business unit within which children need to be cared for and money needs to be earned. The success in this strategy lies in the severing of the link between role and income so that the money is seen to be earned by both. This strategy is employed by Kirsten when she says that she has a full time job, as a mother, so he is bringing in the money:

> Kirsten: I've always earned my own way. I've always been very independent and I'm actually surprised at how I'm coping with not bringing money in and I'm just sort of okay. I've got my fifty bucks a week I can do whatever I want with that but I'm, it's just sort of okay. I've got a full, more than a full time job I'm doing so he is bringing in the money and I didn't expect to be like that.
>
> Ella: You thought that you would -
>
> Kirsten: I thought that I'd feel guilty about spending money and not actually contributing.

Kirsten had previously explained how even before they had children both incomes went into a joint account from which each was then allocated a personal spending allowance. Despite her assurance that she is coping well with the shift in income earning, her talk reveals that this remains a struggle. Twice she describes herself as "just sort of okay". Being "okay" generally means average rather than happy and in this instance it is reduced even further by the two qualifiers, "just" and "sort of". This suggests that she is accepting rather than happy with the change.

There are two complementary elements to the family as a unit resistance strategy: constructing motherhood as a job as discussed previously and constructing the partner's earnings as family income. Kirsten's statement achieves both of these goals. She has a more than full time job and he brings in "the" money, which frames it as the family's money. At other times the women used more explicit plural pronouns, "we" and "ours", to describe their financial state or partner's income:

Sarah: …our income's quite low
Vic: … financially we're in a position where if I choose not to go back
Donna: … we still earn probably more
Donna: … we're not poor

Constructing the income as joint was not common in the groups however. Interestingly, in two of the four instances the speaker, Donna, was the breadwinner in her family. In Tichenor's (1999) American research, the wives who earned more than their husband were all "careful to say that all their marital assets were joint" (p. 645). In contrast, in couples where the husband earned more, several men expressed the view that because they earn more they get to decide how it is spent. She concluded that while money has generally been seen to be one of the key sources of power within a relationship her research suggests that it is gender rather than money or status that determines marital power.

Overall, while the women felt considerable pressure from the increasingly dominant economic independence discourse there is evidence of some resistance through the strategy of constructing motherhood as a job of equal value to that of income earner, and the less common strategy of constructing their partner's earnings as joint income. While money was an important aspect of the women's decision-making it was by no means the entire picture. They also talked of work as desirable as is discussed next.

As desirable

When talking about their previous jobs, some of the women talked about how much they had enjoyed their work, the stimulation, and in particular, how they missed their co-workers:

Kirsten: Partially the social contact. The people I work with are really good and I do enjoy the job. It's challenging and fun.

Vic: I just, I like, I love working but I think I love working with, the whole picture like I like being with people, I'm a people person, I don't like being at home by myself all day.

Debra: I had a really high stress job and I was doing really well, and so I was making my mark in [company] and was loving it … I liked having the stress and I liked being respected in my work and I liked having responsibility, and the praise which you don't necessarily get now.

In talking about the respect and praise that she got in her previous job, Debra contrasts this with her current role: "the praise you don't necessarily get now". This is another aspect of the motherhood as worthless discourse outlined earlier and relates to the public/private divide; that which is done in the public realm is recognised as being important and so earns respect and praise, whereas that which is done in the home does not. Two of the women, Lisa and Vic, talked about their jobs as important because it was a time when they were being themselves:

Lisa: I loved my job … But I ended up really loving it and that adrenalin rush I used to get when I'd, you know, close big deals (laughs). And I really miss that and I think, the independence from travelling so much and I could go away and I'd go to Australia and or wherever in New Zealand and I'd be my own, I'd be just Lisa. I wouldn't be somebody's wife, I could just be me. I could eat what I wanted for tea, I could go to the movies, I could do whatever I wanted and that I've really missed, I've really missed sometimes.

Vic: But I just thought one day a week would be nice. I'd get up, I put my corporate clothes on you know. I look nice, I feel good and I'm out. I'm away from everything. I don't have to think about bottles, food, washing all that ho hum at home and I could just be me for a day and be a business woman or be you know, in Wellington and have coffee and go for lunch and (groups laughs) do the things you'd like to do. I think it would be quite nice.

These extracts position paid work as central to the women's identity. Both women use the expression "just be me" which suggests that while at work they are just themselves in a way that they are not in their role as mothers. This discourse is founded on the dominant ideology of individualism which prioritises personal roles over relationship roles. It is an interesting contradiction: Being a worker at the beck and call of an employer is being yourself, whereas being a mother and effectively your own boss, is not. This is the reverse side to the motherhood as loss discourse discussed earlier. Historically only the masculine identity was strongly tied into their role in the workforce. With the advent of feminism and women's increased participation in the workforce, women too are constructing their identities primarily from the threads of the public realm. Their sense of themselves as a successful and worthwhile person stems greatly from their paid position. This results in an intense feeling of loss of self when women shift out of the workforce, similar to that which men have felt upon retirement. For the women then, the idea of returning to work is appealing for its ability to restore their lost identity.

At its extreme, the loss of self they experience is constructed as dangerous to their mental health as both Lisa and Vic go on to do:

Lisa: I think for my own mental health I need to do at least one day a week and he's supportive of that.

Vic: I think much the same actually. Financially we're in a position where if I choose not to go back to work for the next five years I don't need to go back and my husband is really supportive of that. And I actually feel quite, not lucky, but just that we're in a position that we can make the decision, we're not having to go back to work because we can't live on one income. But for my mental state and for just the person I am, I need to be doing something else. As much as I love being a Mum and wouldn't, you know, would never turn back the clock and not have done it, I do feel I need to be doing something else.

For both these women, money was not at all a factor in their decision-making; instead they felt strongly that participation in the workforce was necessary if they were to be healthy and happy. This is the deployment of the work as essential to well-being discourse which I discussed in the previous chapter, the importance of work to their sense of self: "just for the person I am". As mentioned previously, our sense of who we are, our construction of our identity, constrains and enables our actions. There are some things that we cannot do if we see ourselves in a certain way and equally, there are some things that we must do. Additionally, the dominant discourses within our culture facilitate some identities more than others as is evidenced by the next section: work as normal.

As normal

The women constructed paid work as the norm, regardless of gender or family situation: "Everyone works". Following the Prime Minister's state of the nation speech in February 2005, the media picked up on the government's goal of getting more women into the paid workforce. The Dominion Post's front page headline that day read: "PM wants more women working" (Small, 2005, p. A1). In addition, the focus groups were held just prior to a general election and there was considerable attention on the various political parties' promises regarding childcare subsidies so that mothers could return to work. The women raised the point about the government expecting them to return to the workforce:

Helen: I know what you mean by saying they just, they want you to go back to work.

Rita: Yeah.

Diane: I see it more as an expectation. That even the government expects mothers to go back.

Rita: Whereas back in like my Mum's day, I don't know about your Mums, stayed at home till we were five or six or even longer type of thing. Whereas these days so many women are feeling like they have to go back, you know six months twelve months whatever it might be.

Helen talks about the government "wanting" the women to go back to work, but Diane rephrases this as the more powerful "expectation". The things that are expected of us are those that are "normal", those that are considered to be doing the "right" thing. Constructed as an expectation, returning to work is quite simply what women do and this makes any decision to do otherwise far more difficult. The power of that shift, from wanting to expecting, is echoed in Rita's comment; the expectation is internalised so that the women feel "they have to go back". This final construction has no room for agency: The women are not choosing what to do, they are responding to the expectations from the government, a powerful institution that wants the women in the workforce to meet its economic goals. This, then, is the discourse from the Action Plan of women needing to work for the good of the nation exerting its pressure, and as the following extract shows, the discourse is broader than merely the government: Society itself is seen to be pressuring these women:

> Helen: Society makes you feel like you need to go back to work.
> Debra: Yeah.
> Sarah: Yeah, it does doesn't it.

Again there is a sense of compulsion. Women are made to feel they need rather than want or choose to return to the workforce. This internalisation of an ideology is what Foucault termed disciplinary power. According to Foucault, people are in a continual state of self surveillance, each modelling their behaviour according to social norms (Rabinow, 1984). Foucault (1978, as cited in Rabinow, 1984), in discussing the power of government, explains that while the state power is generally seen as one which is concerned only with the interests of groups within society, it also exercises power over individuals through this disciplinary power. There can be little doubt that these women are feeling the effects of that power with their choices limited by social expectations.

These complex constructions of motherhood and work constrain and enable the women in different and conflicting ways. The dominant discourse of intensive mother makes staying at home the most acceptable choice, but within other dominant discourses this positions women as worthless, dependent, and unsuccessful. Equally, within the work related discourses of provider, economic independence, and normality, participation in the labour force is the most accessible option, but this choice risks being positioned as a poor mother who has failed to put her child's needs first. How then do the women in the groups manage the difficult process of weaving an acceptable identity from these available subject positions?

Choice, Conflict, and Constraint

This final section brings together the two spheres to examine how the women constructed their decisions and managed the tension inherent in their constructions of motherhood and paid work. Firstly, the nature of the decision is examined: Is the division of income earning and caregiving roles

constructed as a joint decision? Secondly, I look at whether the women construct this as a pragmatic decision, carefully weighting different factors as is suggested by the rational man model discussed in the Literature Review. Finally, I examine some new discourses which are evolving to manage the tension.

Making a decision

With all of the women having partners, an interesting question was whether they constructed their decision as a joint one. Both parents have had a child and so both have added caregiving to the responsibilities that they carry. If we have moved to an egalitarian construction of parenting as the Action Plan suggests, it might be expected that the couples would decide together how the "jobs" of money earner and caregiver would be distributed. Generally this was not the case. The women positioned their partner within the decision-making process in a variety of ways as the following examples show:

> Rita: He's really open about it; he basically said it's really up to me.

> Vic: Financially we're in a position where if I choose not to go back to work for the next five years I don't need to go, need to go back and my husband is really supportive of that.

> Helen: Yeah no we talked about it. We talked about what I'd do. …

Both Rita and Vic construct the decision as theirs only and position their partners as supportive of whatever choice they make. In Helen's case the decision was constructed as joint, but her explanation demonstrates that while they talked about it, the underlying assumption was that his life would continue unchanged, but they needed to decide what her life would be like: "what *I'd* do" rather than what *we* would do. This was true of all the couples with the exception of Donna and her partner who reversed the traditional roles as mentioned. In all the other cases the decision was not about who would be caregiver and who would work. Instead the male role as primary breadwinner was assumed and the decision was about the mother's role. She was positioned as primary caregiver, and what needed to be decided was whether or not she would add paid work to her responsibilities. For all that women have supposedly gained equality, the default choice remains that men will work for wages and women will care for love and possibly work for wages as well. Kirsten also positioned her husband as supporting whatever choices she makes, but his views are made more explicit: He does not want their daughter in full time care, but there is no suggestion that he give up his job to make that happen:

> Ella: And was this a joint decision? Do you feel like this was made with your husband or was there assumptions? How did that sort of work?

> Kirsten: He's quite happy for me to go back to work or to stay at home. He's, financially he's quite happy if I went back full time but he doesn't want that for [our daughter] either. He doesn't want her in daycare all the time.

This suggests there is some pressure on Kristen to choose to work only part time. The conflict is clear; he would like her to work full time for the money but this would entail his daughter being in childcare full time which is not acceptable. This construction of the partner wanting the mother at home for the good of the child, as the intensive mother discourse dictates, is quite explicit in Lisa's talk too:

> Ella: How much is money impacting upon what you're doing as far as working or not working is concerned?
>
> Lisa: Not at all. [My husband] just doesn't want me to go back.
>
> Ella: He doesn't want you to go back. {Lisa: no} Because?
>
> Lisa: Because he thinks that for [our daughter], it's best for [our daughter] if I'm at home.

Lisa goes on to explain that her husband does support her desire to return to work part time. Earlier she had been talking about how much she loved her job and in light of that, I asked her if there was any consideration of the possibility of her husband staying home instead:

> Lisa: No I just, (.) um he wouldn't I don't think {yeah}. He's quite happy to go to work every day, and I don't think I could go back full time and when I said I would go back I was only going to ever go back three days a week at six months. So I was never going to go back full time. But then I didn't realise I'd miss it so much.

Lisa's hesitation is clear with a number of pauses and restarts. She is reluctant to support the construction that their decision was anything other than an equal one. The focus is quickly shifted away from the question of whether they considered her husband staying home. Instead she focuses again on what she wanted to do: that she couldn't go back full time. Her conflict is evident in her final statement however: "I didn't realise I'd miss it so much". A similar exchange took place when I asked Helen about her decision; she had taken a year's leave and was planning to return to full time teaching at the end of it:

> Ella: And you talked about it as a couple? {mm} Was there any suggestion of him taking time off work or anything? Or was it assumed, was the decision about what you would do?
>
> Helen: Yeah, not really, his, he's only really new in his job, well a couple of years into his job and it's not really (.) well he could take time off but (1)
>
> Ella: It wasn't talked about.
>
> Helen: No.
>
> Ella: It's alright. I'm just, you know, just asking.
>
> Helen: No we're quite, you know, I, yeah.

> Ella: You're quite?
>
> Helen: I'm quite happy for him not to take time off {yep} mmm.

Once again there is a lot of hesitation, unfinished sentences, and restarts. I remember at the time feeling that I had made Helen uncomfortable because she seemed very defensive in her reply, and my response of "It's alright" was aimed to reassure. Like Lisa, Helen finishes by returning to the inference that it didn't matter whether it was talked about or not because she was happy with things the way they were. In both these cases the women were defending their assumption that it would be the mother who took time off work rather than the father. That they feel the need to defend what is still the norm is suggestive of the tension between intensive mother and successful woman. On the one hand they strongly position themselves within the intensive mother discourse as good mothers who want to be with their children. On the other hand, a liberal feminist discourse positions wanting to be "just a mother" as inadequate; successful women want to be educated and want to have successful careers. Within this discourse, truly equal partnerships would not make the traditional gender based assumption that mothers and not fathers look after their child. In many ways this positions them as failures of feminism. Their right to make equal choices has been hard fought and the battle is supposedly won, but they are still automatically taking on the caregiving role, putting their children first, and sacrificing, at least temporarily, some of that public success.

This tension around the decision-making process was characteristic of the women's talk. Rather than a "choice", which required them to weigh and measure the pros and cons of each option, they talked primarily of conflict and of constraint: not of what they chose to do but of what they could not do.

Conflict

The Action Plan constructs freedom to choose as the ideal, but as pointed out in the Literature Review all women face constraints in making choices; no choice is truly free. As discussed in Chapter Three, within a social constructionist account of agency our task as individuals is to create and maintain a coherent sense of self. Given the many contradictions in the women's constructions of motherhood and paid work, tension is inevitable and the women's task of weaving together these seemingly incompatible strands into a unified identity is without doubt a difficult one. Lisa is one of the best examples; her talk is peppered with "I can't". She can't go back to her job, she can't leave her baby, she can't have what she wants. This is hardly a picture of free and unconstrained choice:

> Lisa: I've really missed [work], you know I've really missed [it]. Sometimes I think Oh gosh I can't just you know go to Australia now for a week and even when I go back I still can't do that. I've had to say I'll come back but I can't come back in the same role.

> Lisa: I thought there'd be no problem, she can go into the crèche or whatever, I won't have a problem with that but I just couldn't, I couldn't do it.

Ella: You couldn't do it?

Lisa: No.

Ella: Because?

Lisa: Because of the illness and I just thought she's so little and just to be leaving her with strangers, who she would get to know but it's still that whole thing and that she isn't good when I leave her and you know, just for a couple of hours and things. So yeah, I couldn't do it. So my Mum (laughs) is actually going to look after her for a day. Yeah, I just want the best of both worlds really and I can't have it.

Her ending sums it up: "I just want the best of both worlds really and I can't have it". Donna too talks about her struggle. As discussed earlier, she described herself as choosing to be a professional and as getting an education so that she was not "just a Mum". Now that she has a child however she is torn. She needs to be at work for the money, she wants to be there so as not to waste her skills and education and to feel like a successful woman, but at the same time she wants to be with her child:

Donna: I've got a Batchelor of Business and you know, I did really well at that and I'm a Chartered Accountant and have done that whole path. I haven't studied for seven years for nothing (laughs) and you know invested that money and time.

Ella: And yet you /still -

Donna: /Struggling to be at work, yeah. Yeah. It's hard.

Ella: It is isn't it?

Donna: Weird. But it is what it is.

It was noticeable that many of the women did not anticipate the level of the conflict they were experiencing. Several talked of expecting to want to return to work quickly, thinking they would be bored as stay-at-home mothers and need to escape:

Lisa: I took six months and I was adamant I was going to go back at six months (laughs) but I just can't leave her.

Donna: I wasn't ready to [go] back at three months, three months is not a long time. You kinda think when you're pregnant oh yeah it will be fine, and I thought I'd be more than ready and I'd probably be bored by then and, you know, ready to go back to work.

Debra: When I was pregnant I said oh well you know I'll be so bored.

This highlights how much the discourses are shifting. The rhetoric of mothering as doing nothing, as worthless and as boring, has led these women to expect to prefer to be at work. As mentioned earlier a number of them described themselves as being "amazed" by the maternal bond, they didn't expect to feel such a powerful attachment to their child. Lisa for example now finds that she can't leave her

child as easily as expected. Even those women who on the surface seemed to have found making their choices easier, spoke in terms of conflict and constraint. In the following extract Vic is talking about how things might have been easier a generation ago:

> Vic: I sometimes think that maybe I'd have less conflict in myself if I was just mentally this is my purpose, this is what I have to do {Jo: mm} Then I think maybe I wouldn't be, you know, how I'm meant to be a career woman, I'm meant to be a Mum, I'm meant to be a wife, I'm meant to be a homemaker, I'm still meant to have friends. And how do I fit all this in my life?

It is interesting that she does not say "I want to be a …" each time but "I'm meant to be…" reflecting the external nature of the forces, the powerful weight of a society's expectations. Talking about the government pressure to get women into the workforce, Jo suggests that people who do not have children such as Helen Clark cannot understand the nature of the conflict: "the pulls":

> Jo: She [Helen Clark] doesn't have kids. And every now and then she makes comments and I think she's making these comments and I'm not quite sure that she understands what the pulls are… Of you know, motherhood versus the career. You know, what's the right thing for the child, the right thing for you and all those sorts of decisions. It's not just what's right for you, it's got to be what's right for the kiddie as well.

Unlike Vic, Jo describes the conflict as a clear dichotomy, motherhood versus career, a construction that leaves little room for having it all. She ends by saying that it is not just her that matters in the decision to return to work, it is also the child. This shift in priority following the birth of their child was commonly expressed: The children are the prime consideration in any decision they make.

Children first

While I have already discussed the construction of the child as precious and needing parental care, this does not capture the weight that the child has within the women's decision-making process. Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards, and Gillies (2000) describe adults' desire to put the needs of the children in their care first as a "strong moral imperative" (p. 789). Not merely a guideline or a social expectation but an unquestionable requirement. This was evident in the women's talk, but it is important to highlight that this was not the negative construction of children as "a demand" as seen in the Action Plan. As Duncan et al. (2003) point out, it is not just that they feel morally obliged to put the children first, but that they wish to. For all the women, including those who were planning to return to full time paid work, their child was their highest priority and they were very willing to adjust their life so as to accommodate them. For example, Donna had made it clear to her employer that she was no longer willing to put in the additional hours so often demanded of workers. She was willing to work full time hours, but not excessive hours. Her priority is evident:

Donna: I'm always thinking about him and I've made it worse by sticking a picture of him beside my computer (laughs) so he's right there (group laughs). I think that's more important. It's more important to me in my life right now to be a good Mum.

Debra: I had a really high stress job and I was doing really well, and so I was making my mark in [company] and was loving it and then I got pregnant and my priorities changed. I was working 10-12 hour days and I thought well I've got someone else to think about now so, for the first time ever I used to leave at five o'clock and not stress and stuff. Now having the baby it's like gosh I don't even want to do that anymore.

Sarah: I would like to be able to be in paid work eventually, not at the detriment of looking after the children.

Interestingly, adjusting their lives to accommodate children didn't just start at the birth. Several of the women talked about how their work choices had already been influenced by their future plans for children. For example Vic explained how she would have left her previous job sooner had she not been planning a child because she wanted to be in a job where she was comfortable and unstressed while going through the IVF programme. Diane took an even longer term view and chose her profession partly because it would allow her flexibility once she had a family:

Diane: I will go back to work but I think only part time. That's one reason why I chose pharmacy as a profession … I can be full time, part time, temping. It gave me the flexibility if I wanted.

The women want to put their children first, but they also feel the pressure to be economically independent and successful women who do more than "just" stay at home and care for their children. A solution to this dilemma is to construct any decision to get a job as either forced upon them by financial circumstances, or as good for the child.

Financial constraint

As already discussed, paid work was commonly constructed by the women as necessary to help provide for the family or for economic independence. Working in order to earn money was framed by the women as a constraint rather than a choice; for example, when talking about women's choices generally they talked of women these days *having* to work rather than *wanting* to. In the following extract, Helen is talking about the childcare subsidy in the Action Plan. She said she felt this was probably being offered by the government because they recognised that mothers had to go back to work for money, rather than to encourage mothers to work. When I asked for clarification I unintentionally changed her meaning by using the word "want":

Ella: So you're saying that you see this as being driven by, this is something the mothers want to do and this is the government helping them do it?

> Helen: Well not necessarily that they *want* to go back to work but that they *have* to go back to
> work.

Helen was very quick to correct me; mothers were not doing this because they wanted to, but because they had to. Suggesting that mothers want to work is too much in light of the power of the intensive mother discourse in which good mothers want to be with their children. Similarly, not long after a discussion about what the women would do if money was not an issue, I made the comment that most of the group had said they would like to work:

> Ella: You're pretty much all saying that you'd work, in your current situation, you'd like to work?
> ?:   Yes.
> ?:   Mmm..
> Ella: Some. In your current financial situation (laughs) (group laughs) I've taken my magic wand
> back again.
> Debra: So have to work as opposed to want to.

This positioned the women's decisions as forced by financial circumstances, working for money is very strongly framed as "having to". Although I did not ask what the families' incomes were, I would guess that most would be average or above. This raises the question of the subjective nature of financial need, a point that Debra herself made later on:

> Debra: Coz you know hire purchases, pay nothing for 12 months or whatever and {Kirsten:
> mortgages are higher} it's so easy to get into debt these days and so to be able to support
> our lifestyles and you know the café culture and going out {? Mm} {Rita: yeah}. You know
> you always have to look nice and all the rest of it. Your baby has to wear the wear the best
> clothes and radada and, you know, yeah so I think we *have* to. Because that's what our
> generation has put ourselves into you know.

It is interesting that even following this comment about lifestyle it is still constructed as a need rather than a want: "have to look nice", "baby has to wear the best clothes". So that even as she acknowledges that these things are optional, this is constructed not as something they have individually chosen but something that is forced upon them: "so I think we *have* to". Financial need is constructed as the one exception to the intensive mother discourse; mothers should be at home unless they need the money, in which case it is acceptable to work.

Another interesting example of financial need as a justification is Helen's explanation for her decision to return to her full time teaching job. While she starts by talking about how she misses her job, she moves quickly to framing her decision as a financial one that will benefit her daughter:

> Helen: Well I just, I miss my job. And it's money, which is, I sort of, am not really torn but I do feel that having two incomes will be better for [my daughter] in the long run. You know it would be nice, it would be great for her, to be at home with her as well, but I've. I suppose it's telling yourself over and over again that my job is a really good job in the respect of the holidays and if I need to finish at 3.30 I can. And my husband with his shift work he has three and a half, four days off a week so we will be able to spend time with her as well. So she won't be in daycare all the time so that's why I feel like, I don't feel so bad to go back to work coz I know she's not going to be in there from 7 till 5.30 every day. Yeah so I feel quite happy to go back and I do miss my job. I love teaching.

Helen starts and finishes with a comment about missing her job and loving teaching which suggests that this is an important factor in her decision to return. But within the intensive mother discourse this is not acceptable because it positions her as selfish and putting her own needs before her child's. Therefore the decision is reframed in terms of financial need: "it is money". Within the dominant capitalist discourses everyone understands and accepts financial need as a motivator. Money is a more acceptable reason to leave your child while you return to work than wanting challenge or social contact. However, a danger of the financial need discourse is that it can elicit an accusation of materialism, putting the desire for material goods ahead of the child's needs. Helen defends herself against this unspoken criticism by constructing the extra income as for her daughter's benefit.

Despite describing herself as "not really torn", Helen is the only one in the group who had stated she was planning to return to full time work in the foreseeable future, and she clearly felt the need to justify her decision. She works hard to refute the unspoken criticism stemming from the intensive mother discourse: Mothers who work full time are neglecting their children by not spending time with them. Her primary strategy is to demonstrate that her daughter will not be in full time childcare; a necessary comment given the group's construction of full time care as negative as discussed earlier. Helen emphasises the flexibility of her job and the shift work that her husband does, and with the shift from "I" to "we", she also constructs the care of their daughter as a mutual responsibility: "we will be able to spend time with her" drawing on an egalitarian parenting discourse. Her resistance of the dominant intensive mother discourse is not easy however as is made clear in her comment that it would "nice" and "great" for her daughter if she was at home with her, although two incomes "will be better". At the end there is a suggestion that she does feel traces of guilt over her decision: "I don't feel so bad going back to work". The "so" suggests that she does feel bad, but not as bad as she would if her daughter was going to be in full time care.

The actions demanded of a commitment to "putting the child first" depend upon what children are constructed as needing. In Helen's case she has constructed her daughter as needing two incomes more than she needs Helen at home. Similar reconstructions, of both mother and child, are allowing the

women to call on a discourse of putting the children first to support life choices other than full time stay-at-home mother.

Independent mother

As discussed in the Literature Review, one of the more recently evolving discourses which aims to reconcile the conflicting images of intensive mother and successful woman is that of independent mother (e.g. Brannen, 1992; Hays, 1996; Lupton, 2000; Lupton & Schmied, 2002). This discourse positions women as needing to fulfil their own needs through paid work by arguing that a woman who is dissatisfied with her life will not be able to be a good mother to her children. This works as a justification to be in paid work while not contravening the requirements of good mother. The women in the groups drew on elements of this discourse, in particular they argued that time away from their babies would ensure they would not take them for granted, and this was therefore a justification for returning to part time work:

> Vic: I think one day a week would be really nice … And then I guess when you come home you'd probably appreciate that you've got this lovely baby at home and the next few days are going to be nice coz I get to spend it with you …
>
> Lisa: I feel it makes you a better mother too. I feel like if I can go away for a few hours and leave [my daughter], when I come back I'm far more refreshed and, kind of like I've missed her while I'm away so I'm refreshed and probably just better at it. For having a bit of a rest.

Vic is discussing how she would like to work in town for one day a week and raises the idea that she would then appreciate her "lovely baby" more. Lisa expands on this idea and explicitly constructs time away from her child as making her "a better mother". This reconstruction of good mother as someone who would benefit from time away from the child is used in the following instance to resist a position within the intensive mother discourse:

> Diane: I disagree with the dawn till dusk [child care] coz it, I mean even at seven weeks part of the enjoyment that you get is to see the little things change and grow and everything. Just all those little things are the excitement. Whereas if you don't see your child till seven o'clock at night or five o'clock at night then you don't get to see, you don't get to be able to appreciate or enjoy that quite the same if they're in, even if the daycare's really good, it's the adult that they're with that is seeing those things.
>
> Rita: They're missing out.
>
> Helen: I'm going to miss that. I know where you're coming from. I know I'll miss that. If all of a sudden they say that she walked at /daycare and didn't walk at home you know.
>
> ?:   /Oh my God
>
> Debra: /You'd be gutted.
>
> Helen: I can imagine being heartbroken. {? Yeah} I mean I don't know how I'll feel until it actually happens but I know that will be hard. But there is the other side of things that I know that

> me being at work is going to be beneficial for her and I will totally be in you know caring and loving for her when I am with her. I won't just be taking the time, you know, for granted. But yeah it is missing out on the little things like that.
>
> Debra: That's a good point that Helen just said. Like the time that she does have with [her daughter] won't be taken for granted. {? Mm} So you know you have limited time with them so it would probably be more special {? Yeah} and you would {? Mm} try to interact with them more or do whatever as opposed to, you know go and have a sleep so I can go and do the washing.

Diane's talk of missing out on "the little things" if your child is in full time care positions Helen negatively; a position Helen accepts in her acknowledgement "I'm going to miss that". However, Helen quickly presents an argument that puts herself in a better light and suggests her being at work will be better for her daughter because she will be able to be more "caring and loving" with her and not take her for granted. This is a strand of the independent mother discourse: The mother is working for the benefit of the child, not just for financial reasons as Helen argued earlier, but because her daughter will get better quality parenting. This is a modification of the "quality time versus quantity time" rhetoric: A mother who is in paid work might spend less time with her child, but that time will be of much higher quality than that of a stay-at-home mother. This positions women who do stay home full time as not being able to be as loving because they take their child for granted and perceive their child as a demand: "go and have a sleep so I can go and do the washing" as Debra puts it.

The rhetorical construction of this interchange, the offering and accepting of different subject positions between the women, was particularly fascinating. This type of rhetorical justification is, as discussed in the Literature Review, one of the factors underlying the so-called "mommy wars" which position women as being in one of two mutually exclusive categories, working mother or stay-at-home mother (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). As has been noted in other research (Hand & Hughes, 2004; Lupton & Schmied, 2002), the women did not explicitly judge each other. Instead, in managing their own presentation and warranting their own choices, they inadvertently positioned women who make different choices as deficient. Discursive competition like this is an inevitable consequence of any dichotomy and one of the key reasons why some feminists argue so strongly for a complete transformation away from the home/work or private/public divide.

A second and even newer strategy for resisting the role of good mother offered in the intensive mother discourse is independent child; reconstructing the child as not requiring such intensive maternal care and as benefiting from childcare.

Independent child

As noted in the Literature Review and in the analysis of the Action Plan, one way to persuade women to return to work is to construct childcare as beneficial, if not essential, for children's development.

This allows women to construct a decision to be in paid work as still meeting the criteria of good mother, still putting the child's need first. While the women did agree that some time in an environment such as a crèche or playcentre was good for the child's later social development, this was not used to justify returning to the workforce. As discussed earlier, young babies were generally constructed as being better off in parental care. While Helen talked of the need to find a childcare centre that would "academically challenge" her child, this need was not presented as a reason to put her into care. As noted earlier, on other occasions she quite explicitly stated the opposite: Children are better off at home. Only Jo, on two separate occasions, raised the possibility that a child may be better off in childcare:

> Jo: I didn't know whether the best thing psychologically for me was gonna be going back to work, or whether maybe the best thing for me was to stay at home but the best thing for [my son] was for him to be in daycare. I didn't know what sort of a little kiddie he would be.

> Jo: I've just got this thing in my mind that I don't know what he's going to need. What's going to be the best for him? You know you hear some people say it was definitely best for the child to be at daycare, you know it's what he needed, he was far better at daycare than being at home on his own.

This was the only strong example of a reconstruction of the child as being better off in childcare than in the home. It is interesting that despite this discourse's availability, it was not drawn on by the other women in the groups.

Although the child was not constructed as needing to be away from the home, there is evidence of a shift in the age at which children are positioned as still needing solely maternal care. Whereas once it was for their entire childhood, it then reduced to age five when they started school, and now there are signs it is reducing even further so that it is only in babyhood that the mother is essential[8]. The increased blending of childcare with early childhood education as mentioned in the analysis of the Action Plan can be seen as part of that discursive shift. Whereas previously children didn't start in the education system until kindergarten, aged three or four, they are now being "educated" almost from birth. Helen's comment that she wanted a centre that would "academically challenge" her child is an example of that shift. The idea of academically challenging a child at the age of one is relatively recent and comparatively rare. Generally the women constructed children as needing the social interaction offered by a centre at a later age, but certainly not before their first birthday.

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[8] An interesting related development against this trend is the growing perception that adolescents require more intensive parenting resulting in this being another time when some women leave the workforce to spend time with their family (Hartmann, 2004).

Hughes (2002), in her analysis of discourses of motherhood in the UK, identified a much stronger shift towards both independent mother and independent child: A good mother works at least part time in order to "create space for her child" (p. 135) and children need to be educated in a centre environment from a very early age. This more dramatic shift positions a mother who does not provide for that by placing a child in care as stifling her child's independence. What used to be good mothering is reframed as smothering. While the women in the focus groups did not argue that they should work in order to leave their children some space, they were still trying to walk the fine line between intensive mother and successful woman as this final section of the analysis explains.

Best of Both Worlds

Most of the women in the groups were planning a "best of both worlds" solution to the dilemma. They planned to take up part time work or work from home in such a way that would allow them to be with their child while also earning money and regaining some lost independence and sense of self. As Hughes (2002) says, part time paid employment can be seen as a rational compromise, a win-win solution. However it is not without its problems. At a pragmatic level the women talked about how wanting to return to their previous work on a part time basis was not always possible:

Rita: I don't know whether I could go back part time. From a work's point of view not from mine. I'd like to go back part time.

Jo: But the guy [manager], even though how brilliant he is, he couldn't get his head around someone not being there from 8.30 to 5.00.

Donna: I did say to the consultant who was recruiting me, I said you know, in a perfect world you'd find me a part time job. And he just said look Donna there's just, it's probably not realistic. Because people don't put up part time accounting jobs. They think accountants should be there from six in the morning to six at night (laughs).

Kirsten: He's [boss] a bit reluctant about the part time aspect and I'm not willing to go back full time straight away. There's no way I'm doing that.

Even though women want this option, the workplace is not always accommodating. In addition, there are other broader issues with "best of both worlds" as a solution. Landau (1992), for example, argues strongly that women's decisions to stay home or work part time hurt not just themselves but their children and other women. Often part time work is low skilled and poorly paid, and when women wish to return to full time work later they find that they are not considered to have gained any valid skills or experience during their time as mother and part time worker. Debra summed this conflict up:

Debra: My idea was to have three kids and not work until they're all at school. So that could be in 10 years time. What am I going to do in 10 years time? There's no way like, you know technology changes in all that time. Your skills have all gone, people look and go oh you haven't worked for 10 years. You start right at the bottom again.

Rita: You've got to work your way-

Sarah: All you've done is a Mum that's kind of the feeling isn't it.

This construction of the challenging and demanding job of mother as "all you've done" links back into the constructions discussed earlier of motherhood as worthless and as doing nothing. Little acknowledgement is given to the extensive skills of time and task management, interpersonal skills and other talents acquired through mothering and the various voluntary jobs that mothers invariably take on. As a result of this construction of motherhood as a time of losing rather than gaining skills, the women often don't regain their former level of work and tend to remain in lower status jobs with the accompanying lower pay. Then, if the relationship breaks down, both women and children are consigned to poverty.

Part of the reason that part time work is poorly paid is that it is often constructed as not just quantitatively different from full time work, but qualitatively different as in the following excerpt:

Lisa: I work in a company where all the office staff are part time and it's really inefficient.

Donna: Right. I don't think you could have the whole workforce part time.

Ella: Inefficient how?

Lisa: Oh there are just people coming and going and nobody ever really seems to know what's going on.

Ella: /So it's the continuity?

Jo: /Is that, is that, yeah, I wonder if that's, or attitude even. {Lisa: oh possibly} People's attitudes are, they're not, because they're part time they see it -

Lisa: /I think they have a part-time -

Jo: /They don't see themselves as part of a big team rather than, have a part time mentality rather than, I've got to do this and I've gotta make, you know, I'm contributing to a team.

Lisa: And a lot of them that are there, they're just come in at nine and they leave at one, they're just. I mean they have a different work ethic from me anyway.

Jo: So it's, so they have, that's financial.

Ella: But you're going to go back part time. How do you do that in your head? That these people have a different work ethic and now you're going to be one?

Lisa: I'll probably try and cram five days into one (laughs).

Jo: Yeah and that's what it boils down, work ethic.

In this extract the group construct part time work as an inefficient way to work, and part time workers as having a different work ethic. This part time mentality is seen as not being as committed to the

team, just coming in and going home without "knowing what's going on". In light of this construction, low pay for part time work seems inevitable. However, it is vital that this is recognised as a problem with the workforce rather than with the best of both worlds strategy that the women are adopting.

One final structural problem with the best of both worlds strategy relates to childcare. The childcare sector is structured around the dual worker model where the child is assumed to need full time care, plus it is more efficient for the centre to offer only full time spaces. Helen talks about this problem:

> Helen: Yeah, I mean we'll, we don't mind paying the full week, like we talked about that. We'll just have to pay the full you know as you do, pay for the full week and we'll just take her out whatever days he's got free or I'm free.

Because their jobs do not fit a pattern of regular full time hours their daughter will be enrolled in full time childcare, but they will "take her out" whatever days they have free. This rigidity within the childcare structure will potentially force an important shift. Whereas previously children were at home unless they needed to be in care, it may become the norm that children are in care unless they can be at home. Whilst in theory this makes little difference to the hours a child spends in each environment it potentially leads to a dramatic shift in the underlying ideology of what is normal for children.

Conclusion

The historically dominant discourse of intensive mother was strong within these groups. They talked of their surprise at the power of the bond between themselves and their babies; they constructed women as the natural caregivers based on their biological reproductive role and men as helpers and supporters; and they positioned their children as needing parental time and care, with maternal care more important. A more recent and very contradictory construction of motherhood was also deployed: motherhood as worthless. Here the women talked of full time motherhood as "doing nothing" and as an undesirable life path. They talked too of the loss of their independence and of part of themselves. Motherhood was also constructed as a full time job. This resistance strategy served to oppose the positioning of motherhood as worthless and themselves as economically dependent.

The constructions of work that are so strong within the Action Plan were also evident in the women's talk although not with the same degree of dominance. Women were seen to have a role as co-providers and as needing to be economically independent with the right to spend money linked to the ability to earn it. This was partially resisted through constructing the family as a business unit with two equal roles: caregiver and income earner. Work was also framed as a societal norm, as desirable and sometimes as essential to their sense of personal well-being.

The women were all in the process of deciding to what degree they would return to the paid workforce with some having made firm decisions already and others still unsure. The decision was not constructed as a fully joint decision: The couples decided together, but the decision was about what the mother would do only. For the most part the father's continued role as primary breadwinner was taken for granted. The women talked of the importance of the children in their decision; their needs were first and any decision to return to work was made with them firmly to the fore. New constructions of independent mother and child were evident to some degree. The women talked of their need to have space and time away from their babies in order to be better mothers, and they spoke of their children's later need for some kind of early childhood environment for social interaction.

For the most part the women were attempting a best of both worlds solution. They wanted to be in paid work, either now or later, but in such a way as to be able to get some of each. They wanted time to spend with this child that they loved, time to feel they were raising their child themselves, but also time to be an independent woman and income earner. It is important to me to finish this analysis on a positive note because to do otherwise would not do justice to these women's experiences. The women loved their new role as the following examples show:

Debra: I just really want to hang with him all the time coz he's so cool.

Anne: It's a lot more rewarding than what I was doing … Something to look forward to when you wake up in the morning.

Kirsten: Really enjoying being a Mum and not going to the office every day (group laughs).

Rita: I love being a Mum, yeah loving it.

The quality of the feeling is perhaps best captured by Kirsten and Rita who both talked of loving "being" a Mum. They were not saying merely that they loved taking care of their baby; instead it was that they loved *being* a mother. These women have not just taken on a new role or a new job or even a new relationship. Instead they have become a different person with a whole new strand added to their identity.

Having analysed the policy and the women's talk separately, the next chapter draws the two elements together. I look at the similarities and differences in how the two texts constructed motherhood and paid work and then consider what the impacts of those constructions might be.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Discussion

"In the midst of the doors opening in front of women it
behoves us to be aware of the doors being shut behind us….
When women are truly liberated, all of their roles, traditional
and non-traditional, will be valued and supported."

Swanson-Kauffman (1987, p. 6)

Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore the discourses used to construct women's decisions surrounding family and work within a contemporary New Zealand context. A key argument of this thesis is that research, government policy, and ideology are mutually reinforcing and exert a triadic effect on people's lives. This occurs both directly through the implementation of legislation that changes the pragmatic costs and benefits of certain life choices, but also indirectly through their influence on dominant discourses that constrain and enable choices at an ideological level through making some subject positions more accessible than others. My particular area of focus therefore was the interface between government policy and women's lived experience. To that end I conducted a critical discourse analysis of two pieces of text, the government policy on women and the talk of two focus groups. This final chapter draws together the various strands that emerged from the two phases of analysis in order to address the initial questions: What are the similarities and differences between how the government and women construct the objects and subjects of interest to this research: motherhood, paid work, women, and children? Do these New Zealand women experience the tension between the dominant discourses of motherhood and worker that has been identified in other discursive research? As discussed in Chapter Four, critical discourse analysis goes beyond the naming of discourses and aims to consider what the social consequences of the deployment of those discourses might be. Therefore, after drawing together the two analyses, I explore the questions of who is best served by the key discourses and which social institutions are strengthened and supported by their use.

Similarities and Differences

Motherhood

Motherhood is a core element of most New Zealand women's lives and identities. One of the most striking aspects of the analysis was the differences between how the Action Plan and the women themselves constructed motherhood. Within the vision, the Plan constructs mothering as part of

women's contribution to society along with other caregiving and voluntary work within the community, and it argues that these traditional roles need to be valued more. However, in rendering motherhood as all but invisible, the Plan itself fails to value the role. In contrast to paid work, which is constructed as actively participating in society, mothering is constructed as a passive activity undertaken from outside society. The Plan does not depict women in the mother role, and the word "mother" does not appear in the text. When it is alluded to, mothering is constructed as a demand on women's time, a burden that must be managed in order to free women to undertake more paid work. At the same time, women are positioned as needing to financially provide for their dependants, and in this discourse mother is constructed as identical to father, as full time breadwinner. Within the Action Plan therefore, mothers are positioned primarily as paid workers.

In contrast, for the women in the focus groups there could be no doubt that their main focus and priority was their new role as mothers. They drew on a traditional intensive mother discourse constructed from several interlinked elements: the maternal bond as powerful and amazing, women as the natural caregivers of children because of biological differences between the sexes, mothering and fathering as qualitatively different, and children, especially babies, as needing to be in parental rather than institutional care with a special need for maternal love. Within this discourse, women's traditional role as caregiver is promoted and valued: A mother's care and love are vital to the child's welfare and therefore women are positioned as needing to be home with their babies. For the women, drawing on this discourse enables and promotes staying out of the workforce.

However, discourses are multiple, and contradictions and variability are often signs of discursive shifts. In contrast to the valuing of motherhood within the intensive mother discourse, the women drew on another construction which paralleled the Plan's rendering of mothering as invisible: motherhood as worthless. Within this discourse, mothering, particularly as a full time role, is constructed as doing nothing, both in the sense of not being busy and in the sense of not doing anything worthwhile, and as an undesirable role and not sufficient for a successful woman. For some of the women, this linked into the transition to motherhood being felt as a loss of identity. In direct contrast to the intensive mother discourse, the motherhood as worthless discourse positions women who stay home as inadequate, and therefore exerts pressure on women to be more than "just" mothers, thus promoting returning to the paid workforce.

In previous research with first time mothers in Australia, America, and the UK, researchers have argued that a newer construction of motherhood, the independent mother, is gaining dominance (Brannen, 1992; Hays, 1996; Lupton & Schmied, 2002). Within this discourse, a good mother is one who does not devote herself exclusively to her children. The women in the focus groups deployed this discourse to resist the pressure of the intensive mother discourse and to justify time away from their babies, in part time work or other activities.

Paid work

The Plan deploys an economic rationalism discourse that privileges financial measures of well-being above all others, and constructs the family through a dual breadwinner model with all adults in the workforce, preferably full time. Within this discourse, women are positioned as workers first and foremost, and full time participation in the labour force is constructed as necessary for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, women need to earn sufficient income to provide for their children now and in the future. Secondly, paid work is constructed as being necessary to self-fulfilment. Thirdly, the Plan deploys an economic independence discourse to argue that all individuals have a social responsibility to support themselves, and finally, women need to be in the labour force in order to contribute to the economy, and so fulfil their obligations as good citizens.

This shift, from the traditional ideology of father as breadwinner and mother as caregiver towards a dual breadwinner model, was not strong in the women's talk with only one couple planning to have both parents in full time work while the children were young. However, the discourses of paid work as essential were evident in the women's talk. They positioned themselves as needing to earn money, wanting to contribute financially to the family. They also felt the pressure of the economic independence discourse. Their current position, out of the workforce and financially dependent upon their partners, was clearly not the social ideal and this manifested as guilt. As well as constructing work as necessary for financial reasons, the women talked of work as being an important source of social contact and respect, and as important to their sense of self. They constructed paid work as the norm, something that was expected of them. Within these discourses, full time mothering is not work, it is not valued, and it is not, therefore, an easy option.

Making choices

Having examined the individual discourses of motherhood and work, I now explore the interface between those discourses to look at how the Plan and the women constructed the choices that women have for managing their roles in the private and public spheres. While both the Plan and the women talk of the importance of individual choice, they had different priorities.

The Action Plan draws upon well established discourses of feminism and individualism, using the valued Western tenets of freedom, equity, and choice to warrant its vision for New Zealand women. It highlights the importance of freedom to choose a life path and on the surface it deploys both sides of the feminist equality-difference debate. On the one hand it talks of women needing to achieve full and active participation in society through increasing their participation in the workforce, and on the other hand it talks of needing to value women's traditional contributions to society including caregiving. However, the different life paths are not equally valued. The emphasis is strongly on the aim of equality. Statistics and facts are used to demonstrate that women are different from men, particularly in labour force participation, and this difference is constructed as a problem that the Plan aims to

resolve by helping women to become like men. Women therefore are positioned as wanting more paid work and their choice to do so is seen to be constrained by family demands which can be resolved through outsourcing the caregiving. To this end, the themes and actions of the Plan are primarily focussed on the goal of increasing women's participation in the labour force. For all its talk of choice, the choice to be in paid work is constructed as the only valued one.

The women, in talking about their choices, did not construct women and men as the same. Instead they tended to construct the family along traditional gender lines: The father was assumed to be the primary income earner and the mother the primary caregiver. However, although the ideal masculine identity remains primarily unquestioned and unchanged, aside from a more active role as supporter to the women in the caregiving, the feminine ideal has shifted so that it incorporates both mother and worker. Their choice therefore was not between caregiving and working, but a choice of how to incorporate work into the equation; the women were not deciding whether they would re-enter the paid workforce, but when and to what degree. In this, the Plan and the women constructed the feminine identity in similar terms: as both workers and caregivers. The difference lay in the priorities. Whereas the Plan privileged the worker role, the women, without exception, placed their children first and hence prioritised their role as mothers. For the women, the choice was about how they could weave the identity of worker into the dominant identity of mother.

The women's maternal role was already integral to their sense of self, and in light of that identity, their overwhelming desire to prioritise their children makes sense. Hughes (2002) suggests women who put their child's needs first are subsuming their own needs. For many women, the need to put their child first simply overrides other needs; the women in the groups, for all the sense of conflict and constraint, were not unhappy. They wanted to put their child first and they were willing to make the adjustment required. In a differently constructed world, putting someone else's needs ahead of your own would be valued, praised, and rewarded. It is only in light of the competitive individualist and economic rationalist discourses that the Action Plan deploys that this decision is seen to be negative; only in a world where financial wealth is the sole measure of quality of life and where economic independence is based on the individual rather than the family is it problematic. For these women, and I do not aim to generalise beyond these women, this was not a bad situation. They may have (temporarily) lost an aspect of their identity through this transition but they had also gained one which, for all the discursive tension around motherhood, they valued highly.

In saying that this was not a bad situation, I am not implying that the women constructed their choices as simple and clear. As in all discursive work into women's decision-making around family and paid work, the women in the focus groups struggled with the inherent contradiction between the dominant discourses of intensive mother and successful woman. On the one hand, they saw their role of mother as one which required them to be the full time caregiver of their child. On the other hand, they felt

guilty for not earning money and experienced a loss of independence and identity through moving out of the workforce. Not surprisingly, they talked of their decisions in terms of conflict and constraint.

Consequences

Examining the consequence of deploying certain discourses is important in critical discourse analysis: who benefits, and, in this instance, which discourses better serve the needs of women. The intensive mother discourse, founded in the traditional divide between the public and private spheres, evolved as a support for capitalism. Women were needed in the home to undertake the reproductive roles so that men were free to undertake the productive work in the marketplace. Hence, the intensive mother discourse promotes a family structure of breadwinning father and caregiving mother. This discourse has served to oppress women by ensuring they remained corralled in the home, unable to share the power and wealth which the capitalist patriarchy accords only to those in the public sphere. For the women in my research, the intensive mother discourse continues to exert this force: maternal care is essential to the well-being of children, care means presence, and therefore choosing full time work is difficult. In addition, if paid work is the only route to success, financial well-being, and personal fulfilment then the intensive mother discourse can only fail women in their striving for equality.

Feminists agree on the need for women to gain equal power, but as discussed throughout this thesis, they do not agree on how best to achieve that goal. While liberal feminists argue women need to move out of the home and into the workplace, difference feminists argue for a revaluing of the private sphere. They argue the problem lies not with the intensive mother discourse, but with the low value that society places on caregiving. This analysis supports the view that increasing that value has received little attention from government and so, not surprisingly, has had little success. Although the Plan talks of valuing women's contribution to society, this is revealed as token rhetoric, supported by neither word nor action. Paid work is consistently privileged with just a single action aiming to increase the value of women's traditional roles. Men's lives are held to be the ideal towards which women must strive and mothering is rendered invisible. As Bacchi (1999) explains, policies are solutions to problems and therefore depend on how the problem is represented. As long as the government continues to construct women's problem as being a lack of paid work, policy will inevitably aim only to increase women's participation in the labour force. Valuing care was more evident in the women's talk. As already discussed, they deployed the intensive mother discourse, which constructs care as important. In addition, they used the strategy of constructing mothering as a demanding and important job in an attempt to bestow the high value of paid work onto motherhood. However, the strength of the motherhood as worthless discourse was very evident as was the construction of paid work as essential to the self.

Liberal feminism, with its aim of women gaining equality through becoming like men, is currently the most dominant strategy in the Plan and is evident in the women's talk although to a lesser degree. As

the statistics in the Introduction showed, women have moved into the workforce in ever increasing numbers. The Action Plan constructs this trend as an advance for women and aims to maintain it. Discourses of economic rationalism and individualism certainly promote women moving into the public sphere, but has this freed women from oppression and given them the "true" choice which Western societies and new feminism value so highly? Do the newer discourses of independent mother and dual breadwinner position women in more positive ways? Which institutions are supported by such discursive moves and therefore benefit from promoting them?

Although discourses are neither inherently good nor bad, it is easy to assume that recent discourses are an improvement: Our society constructs change as progress. By this account, independent mother is an improvement on intensive mother, and certainly the independent mother discourse has the potential for positive benefits for women in that it frees them from exclusively occupying the private realm and opens a door to the public. It also however risks closing the door to the private realm and simply constraining women in different ways. As discussed, although the Plan draws upon the liberal feminist discourse to warrant its vision of all women in the paid workforce, the analysis revealed that it is the requirements of the capitalist economy that are driving the shift rather than the needs of women.

When looked at in the context of New Zealand's capitalist society, the dominance of equality feminism is not surprising. Nolan (2000), in her analysis of the relationship between women and the state in New Zealand, argues that historically the state has been ambiguous with regards to women's role in the home versus the workplace because policy has been subject to conflicting pressures from the interest groups of capitalist patriarchy and feminism. However, I would suggest that capitalism and liberal feminism are not always in conflict. In the past, when the single wage was no longer sufficient to sustain a family, the feminist movement encouraged women into the workforce and thus sustained the capitalist economy. The Action Plan suggests a similar situation now: Low unemployment, concerns over increasing labour shortages, and the need for increased productivity to sustain economic growth have combined to ensure that more women are needed in the labour force. Both liberal feminism and economic rationalism privilege the individual over the social, and both construct economic independence as the key to citizenship. This commonality allows the Action Plan to draw on feminist discourses to warrant capitalist goals of increasing women's participation in the labour force.

The independent mother, founded in liberal feminism, merges the good mother discourse with the requirements of capitalism. If paid work is necessary for individual happiness and only happy mothers make good mothers, then logically speaking a good mother is one in paid employment. Because the independent mother discourse retains certain elements of the intensive mother discourse, including that good mothers do what is best for their child, it serves to promote mothers moving into the workforce. But how do these evolving discourses influence the lives of women, children, and men?

For women, rather than freeing them from oppression, the drawing together of these discourses has added further to their constraints. Participation in the workforce is constructed not as a choice, but as a moral and social obligation. In order to be a good citizen, a worthwhile person, and a success, a woman must have paid work. In addition, women's increased participation in the labour force has not been matched by an equal reduction in women's traditional roles. As the Action Plan makes clear, women still carry most of the responsibility for caregiving. The result therefore is the double burden. According to Marx, under capitalism women were domestic slaves in the home and men were wage slaves in the market (Eisenstein, 1979). It would appear that women are now both domestic and wage slaves with the multiple responsibilities of providing the emotional, practical, and financial care for their families. Not exactly the freedom that feminism aspires to. While the women in this research were attempting a best of both worlds solution, structural constraints within the workforce make this difficult, in particular the construction of part time work and part time workers as inferior.

The effect of these discourses on the positioning of children also needs careful examination. As discussed in the Literature Review, children are increasingly positioned as being best served by time in childcare; needing to be away from their mothers in order to be autonomous, independent individuals (Blair-Loy, 2003; Hays, 1996). For the most part the women in the current research did not deploy this discourse, instead constructing full time care as bad for the child. However, the fact that one woman did suggest some children are better off in childcare indicates that the discourse, while marginal, is available. Most of the women also talked of how time in care would be beneficial for social interaction when the babies were older. This parallels Lupton's (2000) Australian research, which found that the independent mother discourse and its accompanying reconstruction of the child was only available to women once their children were one year old. Young babies were still positioned within the intensive mother discourse as needing intensive parental, preferably maternal, care.

There is evidence in other texts, particularly government rhetoric on early childhood education, which supports the view that this reconstruction of childhood is desirable to Western governments because of the link between perceptions of children's needs and maternal behaviour. As mentioned in the Literature Review, policy analysts in the UK and USA have explicitly stated that a focus on the benefits of childcare for children is needed in order to encourage women into the workforce (Barlow et al., 2002; Hartmann, 2004; Himmelweit & Sigala, 2004). In New Zealand, the recent discursive blending of childcare with early childhood education can be seen as part of such a move. Where previously early childhood education was constructed as a different institution to childcare, with the former aimed at meeting children's educational needs from aged three and the latter aimed at meeting parental needs to return to the workforce, the two are now blended into "early childhood education and care". This constructs care as education, and positions all children, regardless of age, as benefiting from time in a childcare setting to be educated. For mothers, this makes choosing to be in paid work the most accessible option. After all, within this reality, a mother who stays at home with her child and

who is financially dependent on her partner or the state is not only unsuccessful herself and not fulfilling her obligations as a citizen, but she is also not doing the best for her child. The reconstruction of children to serve the needs of the capitalist economy in this way needs careful consideration.

I also suggest that men are not well served by discourses that devalue caring work and elevate market work to the status of essential to personal well-being. Capitalist societies have long privileged production over reproduction and the workplace is structured around the assumption that reproduction happens elsewhere and is someone else's responsibility (Acker, 1992). Within these discourses the traditional masculine role is that of wage slave, full time worker and breadwinner, willing and able to put his work ahead of his family and all other aspects of life, supported in the home by the unpaid labour of his wife. More recently in New Zealand, the increasing demands of the workplace have pushed the requirements of the ideal worker to the extreme, well beyond the 40 hour working week for many. In addition, the move of women into the workforce means that men do not necessarily have the support at home that the model requires. This results in an excessive burden on men and ensures that even those who want to take a more active role in the family, who want to experience the pleasures and rewards of caring, are prevented by the demands of the workplace.

Conclusion

In this discussion I have compared and contrasted the reality constructed in the government policy document with that constructed by the women in the focus groups. Both similarities and differences have been identified. I argue that although the more recent discourse of independent mother has potential benefits for women in that it enables a more comfortable weaving together of the identities of mother and worker, it is a mistake to see this as the ultimate solution to the conflict. The analysis of both the Action Plan and the women's talk reveals the ever increasing dominance of discourses of economic rationalism and capitalism which elevate market work to the status of essential and diminish the importance of reproduction and care. The result is that women increasingly bear a double burden of wage slave and domestic slave; men's role as wage slave has become even more demanding and they are still prevented from experiencing the pleasure of fully participating in their children's lives; and the needs of the children are subsumed to the needs of the economy. In light of this, the final chapter suggests some future directions for policy and research.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

"We need accounts of all kinds of women in all kinds of family situations. We cannot generalise from the situation of well-off, white, Western women to all women."
Thompson (1992, p. 6)

Introduction

This final chapter looks into the future. As outlined in Chapter Three, feminist social constructionist research is openly political and an agenda of social change is one of the foundational values of this thesis. My key aim was to explore and make visible the relationship between research, policy, and experience through the critical analysis of the dominant and marginalised discourses which construct motherhood and paid work. Therefore, having argued that current constructions are not serving women well, I suggest some changes which might move both women and men closer to the vision of free choice and balanced lives. I then look at ideas for future research and finally, as an acknowledgement of the importance of their place in this research, I finish by revisiting the women who took part in the focus groups.

Making Changes

In saying that the current discourses do not serve women, children, or men well, I am not advocating a return to the traditional discourses of the past which limited both women and men to a single sphere. Lister (2002) talks of the problems of pendulum politics and the dangers of swinging from the work obsessed equality model towards politics based on gender difference. Neither equality nor difference alone is sufficient. Instead I am advocating a more complete breakdown of the public/private divide. I am advocating for a society which values care as much, if not more, than it values money. I am advocating for a society in which both women and men are enabled to lead more balanced lives which incorporate both caring and working. Lister describes such a model as "a gender inclusive citizen-worker-carer model" (p. 529) whereby caring and working are both constructed as obligations and rewards of citizenship. I believe that this requires two important shifts: a shift in the meaning of work and a shift in the value of care.

As Garey (1999) says: "as a society, we should expect work life and family life to be compatible" (p. 200). In order for that to happen, however, the workplace needs to be reconstructed. As discussed, the

public sphere is founded on a time when the public and private worlds were clearly delineated and the tension between them was managed by the gender division of roles in the family. One of the key ways that the gendering of such institutions is hidden is through the abstraction of a person such as the ideal worker (Acker, 1992). Although the gender of the ideal worker is undefined, it is an inherently masculine figure: Someone who is able to put work first in life and work long hours unhindered by other responsibilities. In order to achieve the level of commitment that the ideal requires and have a family, support from a partner at home is essential. As outlined above, with the shift of women into the labour force, neither men nor women benefit from such a construction; women because they can never be the ideal worker and men because the ideal worker is an undesirable position which excludes them from the home. However, instead of starting from the premise that it is women who are deficient, that we need to "enhance women's ability to retain attachment to the paid workforce" (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2004a, p. 14) as per the Action Plan, we need to focus more on the possibility that it is the marketplace that is deficient and needs to be changed to better accommodate the more important requirements of family and relationships. To date, "family friendly workplace" remains at the level of talk. Garey argues that as long as work and family automatically conflict, as long as the ideal worker is one who must work in excess of forty hours per week, men will not expect to share the family work load and women will not be seen as proper workers. If we are to truly value care, however, we need to word such statements carefully as they can reinforce the problem by constructing work as the desirable sphere from which women are excluded and family as the undesirable burden which men need to share. Truly valuing care is a necessary part of the solution.

Hays (1996) reminds us that although it can be argued that the intensive mother discourse has served to oppress women, it also stands as a resistance to, and a rejection of, the ever increasing competitive and materialistic individualism of the capitalist society. My analysis shows that for all the pressure of economic rationalism, the women in the focus groups continue to privilege their family over their work. Even the women who were returning to full time work were planning to do so in ways which would allow them some degree of intensive parenting: to be with their child in the way that they wanted. They continue to value care above all else. Even more important was the slight but noticeable shift towards a more egalitarian construction of parenting. Although maternal care was still valued more highly, the women often talked in gender neutral terms of children needing parental love and time. This shift, from intensive mothering to intensive parenting, is a necessary one as it values care, but does not position just women as the carers. Government policy needs to recognise and support this. Ideally, mothers should be able to choose to participate in the paid workforce to whatever degree they wish. But they are also entitled to mother their children in the way that they see as best, including being able to choose to take time out from the labour force to parent. Men too have the same entitlements to work and to parent. As a society, New Zealand needs to recognise that raising children is a valued social act. Current government policy does not enable such choice. It focuses solely on supporting women who wish to participate in the labour force but feel they are prevented by lack of

childcare. It neglects to recognise the parallel problem, that there are women (and men) who are working more hours outside the home than they desire and who would wish to spend more time with their children. One possible solution to this is an income that is not constructed as dependency. The label that is pinned onto government funded payments matters. The women in the focus groups distinguished clearly between money from paid parental leave and money from government supplements: The first was a rightful wage and the second a handout engendering guilt. Yet both are tax payer funded and it can be argued that both make it possible for them to take time out from the workforce to spend time raising their child. If the vision for New Zealand women is truly "opportunity to choose and pursue a life path" (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2004a, p. 3) as the Plan says, then government policy needs to give that choice to the families through subsidised childcare if both parents want to work or an income that would allow one parent to be at home. This would come closer to enabling choice than current policy.

Even more important than legislation, however, is how government policy constructs care and parenting in its rhetoric. As long as care is undervalued by society, men will not rush forward to play a greater part. For example, positioning the issue of care in the policy for women, and describing caregiving as women's contribution to society, reinforces the view that this is only women's work. Valuing care needs to be a central policy issue for all. As a society we tend to focus on that which we measure and so for change to occur we need to find and use measures of well-being of both the nation and individuals that go beyond economic growth and financial wealth. There is more to life than money after all. Related to the need for new and different measures, is the need for new and different research.

Future Research

All research is by its very nature limited. As stated earlier, this thesis is but a tiny moment in the bigger goal of exploring current understandings of motherhood in order to open up new ways of being. The findings presented here do not stand as a definitive truth about motherhood and paid work in New Zealand and more is needed to broaden our understandings of what it means to be a mother in this time and place.

As discussed, through self selection, the women in the focus groups were broadly homogenous in terms of ethnicity, sexuality, and socioeconomic status; as a group they could be described as advantaged in respect of education and income. I do not claim that they are representative of mothers, and I would argue that no group could be: Even within this small number there were significant differences. Nevertheless, the discourses they deployed in accounting for their experiences are available to other mothers in New Zealand and therefore the findings are of interest to all. However, more research is needed to explore how other mothers weave coherent identities from the available subject positions. As well as women of different socioeconomic status and women who are in dual

breadwinner families, it would be of particular interest to explore how Māori and Pacific Island women construct their identities of mother and worker, particularly in light of American research which has found indigenous people more easily combine the two (Segura, 1994). Also of interest would be research with lesbian mothers. Without the constraints of prescribed gender roles, it is possible that lesbian couples manage a more egalitarian partnership and have ways of talking that construct both carer and worker as equally valued roles.

As mentioned, the research was also limited in terms of the stage of motherhood. All the babies were under six months old and, as discussed, other research has found that as the children age, different positions within the independent mother discourse become more readily available. More research is required to explore how and when such shifts occur, focussing in particular on significant changes such as the end of parental leave, the birth of a second child, and the youngest child starting school.

What we research reflects what we as a society think is important. As noted at the start of the Literature Review, government policy is underpinned by the research which government departments commission. Currently, the Department of Labour (2005b) is commissioning a qualitative research project that aims to "increase understanding about the decision men and women who have caring responsibilities make about whether, how, when and why they participate in paid work" (p. 2). The request for tender document sets out the rationale for the research and talks of the importance of "removing barriers to labour market participation and enhancing real choice in employment decisions for women and men" (p. 3). Once again, as in the Action Plan, caring responsibilities are constructed as a hindrance to paid work, a barrier that prevents "real choice". In order to truly value care and reconstruct the problem of family/work conflict as one that belongs not just to women but to society, and as one that is caused at least in part by deficiencies in the workplace, the research focus needs to be broadened. Simply adjusting it from mothers' decision-making to parents' decision-making is not enough. Instead, for example, research is needed on what hinders parents, and in particular fathers, from being more involved with their children. Riley (2003), researching fathers in the UK, concluded that the male provider role defines status and success for men and is still the dominant construction of masculinity. As part of the project of valuing care we need to explore other constructions that legitimate care as a valid and necessary component of manhood. In addition, we need to examine how employers construct the ideal worker and how part time work or other more flexible models are constructed. Through exploring current dominant constructions we can identify alternative discourses that are marginalised, but which have the potential to effect change.

Finally, one of the strengths of the current research is the dual focus on policy and lived experience. More research is required to examine how other government talk constructs people's lives and choices. The government is a powerful institution which influences lives through legislation and through ideology. In light of the findings of this research, one area which would be of particular interest is

early childhood: how do the government, researchers, educators, and parents construct the needs of children and what are the effects of those constructions? This is by no means a definitive list of research which would contribute to an increased understanding of the complex relationships between family and paid work.

The Women

As discussed, endeavouring to reduce the imbalance of power between myself as the researcher and the women who took part is important to me. As part of that goal, I reiterate the point made earlier: This analysis is both individual and partial, one of many possibilities. Sharing it with the women was important and so, rather than simply send a written summary, I organised a follow up meeting. In the end I only managed to have five of the original eleven women present but it was still a valuable experience. I enjoyed the opportunity to meet with them again, to hear their stories, and to see their babies who were nearly a year old. As noted in Chapter Three, sharing discourse analysis with participants is potentially difficult due to the unfamiliar nature of the social constructionist perspective. However, I prefaced my presentation with a lay explanation of the underlying philosophy and the women did not express discomfort with my interpretations of their words. They appreciated the opportunity to hear my summary of the research and it triggered some interesting discussion about the place of women in today's society and of the nature of the influences on them. It was gratifying to hear that they had all enjoyed taking part in the research and had found both the discussion group and the analysis interesting and empowering. All the women who attended the follow up had reached the end of their parental leave and all except one had resigned. Their immediate choices varied: two were full time stay-at-home mothers, one was returning to her teaching job, one starting part time work, and one part time study. All, without doubt, will continue to be wonderful mothers.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the interface between government policy and women's lives. It has argued that discursive shifts in the construction of women, as mothers and as workers, are not resulting in the freedom for women which liberal feminists anticipated. Rather than freeing women to choose their own life path, it has resulted in women taking on a double burden, somehow expected to follow all paths. Paid work is centralised and caring work continues to be sidelined. We need to find new ways. We need to debate the meanings of citizenship such that we can break down the public/private divide to create a society whereby care and work are equally valued as rights and responsibilities of both women and men.

As I finish this thesis two events have given me pause for thought. The first relates to my own ongoing struggle to balance my life in a way that meets my need to care and my need to work. I applied for a part time job in Palmerston North, two hours from my home, planning to commute on a weekly basis with three days away. It seemed perfect. However, although the position was only 12.5 hours per week, the

employer could not guarantee the hours could be scheduled on three consecutive days as I required. I reluctantly decided to take only half the job. I am still constrained - by the employer's inflexibility but also by my own need and desire to prioritise my family. It seems sadly ironic that after spending a year reading, researching, and writing on this very issue, I am still unable to resolve it for myself.

The second event was the cover story in this week's New Zealand Listener entitled, "The mother myth" (Black, 2006). There is insufficient space to write all the thoughts that it triggered, but one point needed to be made. The chief executive of the Equal Opportunities Trust is quoted as saying "most people will say they would rather be in paid employment and feeling they are making a productive contribution to society" (p. 17). On the facing page is a case study about a woman who is currently out of the paid workforce raising her three children and "heavily involved in her local Playcentre" (p. 16). This, to me, encapsulates the problem. Why do we believe that this woman, who is raising the next generation and working voluntarily in her community, is not making a productive contribution to our society? It paints a sad picture of a society that values money above people.

It seems appropriate to end not with my own words but with those of one of the women who contributed so much to my research; a vision of her ideal world:

"We would be sharing the care of our son 50/50 and I would be working half the week and he'd be working the other half."

Donna

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Appendices

Appendix A: Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

Family and Work: A Discursive Analysis of Women's Decision Making.

Kia ora,

My name is Ella Kahu and I would like to invite you to be part of my research project looking at women's decision making around family and paid work. Please read this letter carefully to make sure you fully understand the research project and your rights if you choose to be involved.

I am doing the research as part of my Master of Arts degree through Massey University. Please feel free to contact me or my research supervisor if you have any questions or concerns regarding the research.

Researcher: *Supervisor:*
Ella Kahu   Dr Mandy Morgan
Phone: (04) 976 5995   Phone: (06) 3569-099 Ext 2063
Email: ella@kahu.org   Email: c.a.morgan@massey.ac.nz

The project will look at how women make decisions about paid work after the birth of their first child and how government policy and social expectations might affect those decisions. After analysing a number of articles on work and family from popular magazines, I will be holding two group discussions of between four and six women. The discussions will be taped, transcribed and analysed.

If you are a first time mother of a child under six months old and were in paid employment before the birth/adoption of your child then I would love to include you in the research. I would need you to attend a 1½ hour focus group discussion to be held at a local community centre. There will be a crèche available or you may choose to have your baby with you. You will be given a $10 petrol voucher to help pay for the petrol.

The group will talk about how they feel about becoming mothers and their decisions about paid work. If everyone agrees, the sessions will be audio and videotaped so I can transcribe the discussion for analysis. When the discussion is transcribed, false names will be given to each participant and any identifiable information will be removed. In addition, each participant will sign a form agreeing not to talk about the group discussion with anyone else. Before analysis, each participant will be given a written copy of their group's discussion and will be able to delete,

correct or elaborate on any of their own contributions. The tapes will be seen/heard only by myself, and the transcriptions will be seen by the members of the focus group, myself and possibly my supervisor. Quotations from the groups will be used in the thesis and any further publications. When the research is finished, the tapes and the transcriptions will be destroyed.

After the research each participant will be sent a summary of the findings and will be invited to attend an informal meeting where I will present my interpretations for the women to discuss.

You are, of course, not obliged to accept this invitation. However, if you do choose to take part then you will have the right to:

- ♦ withdraw from the study up until 1 month after you have approved the transcription of your focus group discussion;
- ♦ refuse to answer any particular question;
- ♦ ask for the audio/video tapes to be turned off at any time during the discussion;
- ♦ ask any questions about the study at any time ;
- ♦ provide information on the understanding that no identifiable information will be used;
- ♦ be given a summary of the findings of the study once it is completed.

Thank you for reading this information sheet. If you are interested in taking part in this research project then please contact me and I can answer any questions you may have.

Kind Regards

Ella Kahu

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, WGTN Application 05/04. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz.

The project has also been reviewed and approved by the Plunket Ethics Committee.

Appendix B: Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Family and Work: A Discursive Analysis of Women's Decision Making

I, ……………………………………………………………. (Full name – printed), agree to keep confidential all information concerning the project "Family and Work: A Discursive Analysis of Women's Decision Making"

I will not retain or copy any information involving the project.

I will not disclose anything discussed in the Focus Group.

Signature: **Date:**

Full Name – Printed:

Appendix C: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Family and Work: A Discursive Analysis of Women's Decision Making

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the focus group discussion being audio taped.

I agree/do not agree to the focus group discussion being video taped.

I understand that I have the right to ask for the tapes to be turned off at any time during the discussion.

I understand that the audio and video tapes will be destroyed at the completion of the project.

I agree to not disclose anything discussed in the focus group.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: .... **Date:** ....

Full Name – Printed: ....

Appendix D: Focus Group Questions

How are you finding motherhood? Is it as you expected?

What is/was your paid work and how did you feel about it before having a child?

What do you think a child needs? What kind of care? Who?

What do you see as the role of a mother? What is a good mother?

The father?

What do you see as your options for structuring your life from here?

Have you decided what you will do once your un/paid leave finishes?

How are you making your decision? What are you thinking about, who are you talking with? Was this a joint decision?

How do you feel about childcare? Government policy?

Do you think that paid parental leave is a good idea? Why? How long?

Have you found out what government support or subsidies you may be entitled to?

Where do you see yourself in a year's time?

Imagine a perfect world – what would it look like? For you, your partner, your child?

Appendix E: Authority for Transcript Release

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TAPE TRANSCRIPTS

Family and Work: A Discursive Analysis of Women's Decision Making

This form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the focus group which I took part in.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used by the researcher, Eleanor Kahu, in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature: **Date:**

....

Full Name – Printed:

....