

NEGOTIATING MOTHERHOOD IDENTITY: REPRESENTATIONS,  
RESISTANCE AND REGULATION

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## **Contents**

<b>Abstract</b> .....	1
<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Chapter One</b> The Historical Construction of Motherhood in New Zealand.....	9
<b>Chapter Two</b> Methodology.....	38
<b>Chapter Three</b> Subjectivity, Identity and Popular Culture.....	74
<b>Chapter Four</b> Social Constructions of Motherhood.....	112
<b>Chapter Five</b> Pregnancy, Birth and Breastfeeding – Embodiment and Motherhood.....	146
<b>Chapter Six</b> Families – The Motherhood Workload, Self-Regulation and Relationship Trouble.....	190
<b>Chapter Seven</b> Institutional Encounters.....	234
<b>Chapter Eight</b> Princess Diana – Fairytales, Feminism and Media Motherhood.....	270
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	302
<b>References</b> .....	318

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the negotiations of motherhood identity of four Pakeha New Zealand mothers. During unstructured group interviews the four women were asked to talk about their experiences as mothers and the representations of motherhood they encountered in popular culture. Rather than focus on media texts, the research was designed to explore the embeddedness of media reception in these mother's everyday lives. The death of Princess Diana part way through the research process provided an illuminating example of the differences between discussions of media texts and those of everyday mothering practices. Three sites of analysis were examined – the embodied experience of pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding; the home and family; and the institutional encounters these four women described. The women engaged in a complex and contradictory process of constructing their identities as mothers against the powerful regulatory processes of the Good Mother discourse identified in the media and throughout the culture. Identity construction involved both compliance and resistance to the Good Mother discourse, often requiring a careful positioning of each woman as a Good Mother in relation to other mothers. The disjuncture between the ideological representations of motherhood and the lived daily practices of mothering produced resistance, most clearly in the shape of rejecting the Idealised Nuclear Family by choosing to mother alone rather than remaining in unhappy relationships. Powerful constructions of childhood remained largely unquestioned, however, creating a motherhood workload that was exhausting and marked by feelings of guilt and anxiety. The increasingly unstable and contested nature of family life in New Zealand today brings with it the possibility of new definitions of motherhood, family and childhood that may allow mothers like these to construct new meanings of the Good Mother that more closely reflect their own lives.

## Introduction

For many, if not most women in Western societies, motherhood has been considered inevitable, a natural desire and evidence that they have achieved full adult status. Although many women are unable to have children, and others are choosing not to do so, there is still considerable social pressure for women to become mothers. At the same time the valorisation of the nuclear family as the most appropriate setting for the raising of children has a new momentum. The 'family values' debates circulating throughout the West at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century increasingly blame many of the ills of modern society on the breakdown of traditional family structures. Often these debates have centred on single mothers and their children, held responsible for rising crime rates, unemployment and juvenile offending. Politicians and the media portray mothers on welfare as a drain on public resources, necessitating increased state intervention and control.

However, the normalisation of motherhood within the nuclear family is increasingly at odds with the realities of many women's lives. By the mid-1990s when this research was conducted, single parent families (mostly headed by women) comprised 25% of all families in New Zealand and were the fastest growing family group in the country (Kedgley, 1994). Reformulated families, often containing children from two or more previous relationships, are becoming more common as are children born to unwed parents. The notion of the traditional nuclear family with a male breadwinner and a female responsible for housework and childcare is becoming increasingly unstable with the result that taken-for-granted definitions of 'the family' as well as motherhood have become highly contested domains of culture. It is within this contested domain that this study of motherhood in New Zealand is situated.

Ann Phoenix and Anne Woollett (1991) have argued the importance of making conceptual distinctions between the *meanings* that motherhood has

for women, the everyday *practices* of mothering and the *ideologies* that produce common sense understandings and theoretical work on motherhood. They recognise that, although distinct, these concepts are always interlinked. Thus it is necessary to consider "the implications of current social constructions of motherhood for mothers" with analysis of "the ways in which motherhood is ideologically and structurally situated" (5).

To make problematic that which is sacred is to understand it as neither natural nor given but as a socially constructed reality (Hays, 1996; 13).

In this thesis I will argue that prevailing constructions of contemporary motherhood need to be understood as exactly that – constructions. While many of these ideas are so intrinsic to our understandings of family as to appear self-evident or natural, they are in fact a result of the development of particular ways of understanding the nature of women, families and children in recent history. These understandings are intrinsically linked to changes in economic and social conditions in the West during the last two centuries (Hays, 1996; Kedgley, 1996; Mein Smith, 2002; Richardson, 1996; Thurer, 1994;). Industrialisation, and with it the separation of the public and private spheres, increasing urbanisation, the nuclearisation of the family and the growth of scientific discourses of human behaviour, have all contributed to a particular notion of motherhood that is "neither natural nor given" (Hays, 1996). In order to understand motherhood as socially constructed it is important to recognise that there have always been alternatives to dominant child rearing practices and ideologies in any culture (Cheal, 1999; Hays, 1996; Stacey, 1994). In New Zealand Maori women have, from early colonial times, continued to mother in ways that reflect their cultural traditions as much as Western middle-class norms (Kedgley, 1996; McCarthy, 1997). It is also important to understand, however, why it is that some mothers and mothering practices become socially sanctioned while others, such as those of Maori or Pacific Island women, have been virtually ignored or constructed as 'bad' practices.

Current constructions of motherhood in the West, then, emerge out of specific historical and social conditions and tend to reflect the values of white middle-class society (Bryder, 1991). Whether or not the majority of mothers actually engage in the mothering practices extolled by such values, they have remained powerful indicators of what is considered Good Mothering in Western culture. At the same time the values and practices of other groups have been marginalised or excluded from dominant notions of motherhood. Many of the attributes considered essential to Good Mothering, however, have only acquired this meaning in recent times: “The idea that correct child rearing requires not only large quantities of money but also professional-level skills and copious amounts of physical, moral, mental, and emotional energy on the part of the individual mother is a relatively recent historical phenomenon” (Hays, 1996; 4).

This thesis explores the mothering experiences of four Pakeha New Zealand women as they described them during unstructured group interviews over 10 months in 1996. It explores these women’s own mothering practices in relation to ideological constructions of motherhood found in popular culture, in particular television and women’s magazines. My interest in this field of study grew out of my fascination with the role the media plays in the construction of subjectivity and identity in New Zealand Pakeha culture, along with my recent induction into the world of motherhood. I began the initial work for my thesis proposal when my son Louis was only four months old and my own constantly shifting experiences of motherhood have meant that I have ‘lived’ my research in ways that I never imagined when I set out to interview other mothers.

My interest in this topic was based on the notion that the media is a powerful force in the dissemination of dominant discursive constructions of motherhood, but that how audiences engage with the representations of

Mother they encounter are complex and worthy of investigation. I was also keenly interested in exploring women's engagements with popular culture in relation to their everyday lived experiences, so chose to focus on an ethnographic exploration of motherhood in everyday life rather than on specific media texts. The death of Princess Diana part way through the interview process provided a timely and illuminating example of the disjuncture between the way that women make meaning of the lives of celebrity mothers such as Diana and the more complex negotiations involved in constructing their own motherhood identities.

Chapter One will provide an historical overview of the construction of motherhood within Pakeha New Zealand from the early days of colonisation. I will explore the emergence of particular forms of regulation and surveillance of mothers' lives as a response to the gendered constructions of colonial life and within it Pakeha female identity. Chapter two will explore the methodological underpinnings of the study, in particular focusing on how feminist research methodologies produce new challenges for understanding research relations and the effects of power in the research setting.

Chapter three will continue with a discussion of methodological issues as they pertain to ethnographic audience studies. This discussion will centre on the challenge from within Cultural Studies to produce new types of research that pays attention to the everyday lives of media audiences. I will then explore postmodern theories of subjectivity and identity, in particular focusing on Michel Foucault's contribution to rethinking power and subjectivity in everyday life. I will consider the important contribution of feminist engagements with Foucault's work and the need to explore more closely the gendered nature of power effects that work to regulate women's lives as mothers. Chapter four will examine current constructions of motherhood amid the extensive body of feminist writings about mothers and family life in recent decades.

The following three chapters will explore three 'sites of analysis' for the study of motherhood in four Pakeha women's lives. Chapter five will focus on the body, in particular the pregnant, birthing and breastfeeding bodies of three of these four women. I will explore how pregnant and postpregnant bodies become bodies 'out of place' in that they challenge dominant notions of femininity that emphasise the control of women's bodily desires and functions. Media images that subject pregnant, birthing and breastfeeding women to scrutiny and regulation are examined and contested alongside the lived experiences of these women's own pregnant and postpregnant embodiment. For these three women pregnancy involved a heightened sense of scrutiny and surveillance of their bodies as well as a heightened awareness of the instability of categories that define femininity in particular ways. Thus pregnancy allowed these women the opportunity to resist these categories in ways that were highly visible.

Chapter six examines these four women's experiences within their families as another highly contested site of mothering practices. The varied and contradictory ways in which they negotiate their positioning within the Good Mother discourse highlight the difficulties these women face in resisting this discourse. At the same time their rejection of media images of the Idealised Nuclear Family allows possibilities for redefining meanings of family and motherhood at a time of increasing fluidity and change in family formations in New Zealand culture. I explore the demands of the motherhood workload in the context of the expanding participation of women in paid employment and tertiary education. The exhaustion, anxiety and guilt that these women experience as a result of the motherhood workload are examined in relation to their opportunities for time away from family responsibilities and the strain that this workload puts on their relationships with the men they form intimate relationships with. Again, surveillance and regulation are key themes in the discussions that took place around family life.

Chapter seven examines the institutional encounters these four women discussed during the group interviews. The discursive separation of public and private spheres serves to highlight the difficulties these women experienced when attempting to combine motherhood with paid work and university study. Anxieties around employing other women to care for their children are juxtaposed with their own experiences as paid child minders and render childcare as another highly contested arena of contemporary culture. A television documentary warning of the dangers of children spending many hours in childcare facilities began a lengthy discussion of the problems women encounter trying to combine paid employment and motherhood. Encounters with welfare agencies are also discussed as a site where the institutional regulation of mothers, in particular single mothers, becomes highly visible and invites strategies for resistance and non-compliance. At the same time the surveillance and regulation of other mothers remains a common theme in the group's discussions of institutional power, illustrating the pervasive nature of regulatory practices and ideologies.

Chapter Eight explores the group's responses to the death of Princess Diana part way through the research process. As these four women openly embrace Diana as a symbol of natural motherhood and resistance to institutional power, they abandon much of the contingent positioning employed to negotiate their own subjectivities in relation to discursive constructions of the Good Mother. The connections they make between their own experiences and the mediated representations of Diana's life, produces a compelling narrative that celebrates the feminine traits of love, nurturance, relationship and vulnerability. Yet it is clear from the many conversations throughout the ten months of interviews that the ease with which they accept Diana's imperfections and mistakes is not mirrored in the stories they tell about their own lives or those of other women. Diana, as a symbolic representation of scrutiny and surveillance, provides a point of departure for resisting the regulation of women's lives. At the same time this research illustrates time

and again the pervasive strength of regulatory power to shape women's understandings of their lives and their mothering practices. The 'Diana interview' highlights the importance of locating studies of audience activity within the everyday lives of the people participating in the research.

## Chapter One

### The Historical Construction of Motherhood in New Zealand

In providing an historical overview to the interview data, I wish to trace the development of particular forms of regulatory power, surveillance and resistance in Pakeha women's experiences of motherhood. As they struggle to make sense of their complex lives, mothers in New Zealand today face similar tensions to women throughout the West. However 21<sup>st</sup> Century New Zealand culture also carries the reminders of its colonial origins. Pakeha New Zealand mothers struggle with many of the same competing ideological representations of motherhood that circulate throughout Western culture and juggle the increasing demands of home life and paid work like so many women the world over. At the same time, constructions of motherhood here are steeped in the legacies of a past where particular manifestations of femininity and domesticity evolved to meet the needs of a fledgling nation, transported from Britain to the South Pacific at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Geographical isolation, harsh living conditions, the need to populate a new nation in an often hostile environment and fears that any decline in the Pakeha birth rate would signal the failure of this endeavour, tied motherhood to the development of policies and practices governing health, hygiene and family life in the burgeoning colony (Bryder, 1991; Du Plessis, 1995; Kedgley, 1996; Mein Smith, 2002). The regulation of motherhood in New Zealand has, since early colonial times, been associated with national survival and current constructions of motherhood must be understood within this context.

#### From Paternal Authority to Moral Motherhood: 1800s - early 1900s

During the nineteenth century there was a gradual change in emphasis from harsh puritanical child rearing practices to the notion of the 'moral mother'. Prior to this time the responsibility for teaching children moral virtue and self-discipline rested with the church and with fathers as figures of authority in the family. A woman's primary role was as a wife rather than a mother. Harsh

discipline was deemed necessary to turn inherently sinful children into virtuous, god-fearing citizens (Hays, 1996; Gittens, 1998). Children were also viewed as economic assets and were put to work for the family as early as possible (Giddens, 1999; Gittens, 1998). The gradual shift in emphasis to the moral mother in the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of a new expanded role for women and the introduction of the notion of the Good Mother: “the good mother must not only lavish affection on the child; she must also be constantly vigilant in maintaining her own virtue and using the proper methods to instil like virtue in her child” (Hays, 1996; 32). While the father remained the primary source of familial authority, mothers were now expected to educate their children in morals, particularly by setting a good example through their own virtuous behaviour. Maternal love, which had previously been considered a dangerous indulgence, was now encouraged, and the threat of the withdrawal of this love replaced physical punishment as a means of discipline. At the same time children were no longer portrayed as sinful, but were now accorded the virtues of innocence and purity, as childhood became a period of extended protection and education (Gittens, 1998; Hays, 1996; Kedgley, 1996).

It was during this period of changing roles for mothers and changing conceptions of childhood that the rapid expansion of the British Empire led large numbers of British women to a new life in New Zealand. During the late 1800s when plans were made for the organised settlement of the new colony, married women and those of marriageable age were given priority for assisted passage. As well as providing wives for the single men already here, it was hoped that these women would quickly settle down to the business of producing children to populate the new colony. Colonisation provided new challenges for mothers, amid high expectations that they would extend a moralising influence over the wild and untamed new colony and the men who inhabited it (Du Plessis, 1995; Kedgley, 1996; Mein Smith, 2002).

At the same time in Europe, the emergence of the moral mother coincided with the rapid rise of industrialisation. During this time manufacturing gradually shifted from home based work to industrial factory production. The growing distinction between the public and private spheres was not just a matter of the physical separation of workplace and home, however, but increasingly entailed an ideological distinction between the rationalised and individualistic public realm and the warmth and communality of the private (Collier et al, 1993; Glenn, 1994; Hays, 1996). The home became a place of respite from the harsh realities of working life, and the woman's role as wife and mother was to provide love and nurturance for her husband and children. At the same time the emerging notion of "social childhood" necessitated a new conception of mothers as selfless, constantly attentive and devoted. Women were deemed to possess biologically the natural qualities to nurture children through infancy (Elkind, 1994; Gittens, 1998; Glenn, 1994; Smith, 1995). In reality, many people's lives did not conform to this ideology. Middle-class women often had servants to perform domestic duties, and for poor and rural women there was still little separation between work and home life and children were still expected to contribute to the economic survival of the family from an early age (Glenn, 1994; Stacey, 1994). However, this period does distinguish the beginning of a separate sphere for women, where responsibilities for home and family overtook economic productivity as their major contribution to social life.

The early female settlers found conditions in New Zealand very different to those they had left behind in England. Most women travelled here alone, without their mothers or other extended family support (Kedgley, 1996). These women had left behind an England where the industrial revolution had separated domestic and productive labour, and factory production had taken over many of their traditional domestic functions. Things were very different in pioneering New Zealand, where "women reverted to pre-industrial roles and worked alongside their husbands growing vegetables, separating milk by

hand into whey and cream, milking cows, feeding animals, and making candles, soap, butter and cheese, as well as bringing up children and caring for their families" (ibid, 2-3). For most women this meant long days of arduous work, often with very little help or even contact with other women. This was especially true for rural women who remained isolated in the new colony. Even in the towns, there were few domestic servants and middle-class women undertook the household and childcare duties that would have been performed by staff, often without support even from extended family members (ibid).

The long hours spent completing household tasks and the shortage of domestic labour meant that the amount of time mothers could spend with their children was severely limited. While constructions of childhood were changing in Britain, childhood was not yet thought of as a special time in the colonies and little attention was paid to the emotional needs of a child (Kedgley, 1996). Children were left largely to fend for themselves, and as soon as possible were expected to contribute economically as productive members of the family. Even with the passage of the Education Act in 1877, when schooling was made compulsory for children aged 7-13 years, many parents kept their children home to look after younger siblings or help with other household tasks. Others were expected to work long hours at home outside of school hours. Overall, the man remained the ultimate figure of authority in the household and until the passage of the Married Women's Property Act in 1884, a woman, her possessions and her children belonged to her husband (ibid).

Changes in women's status were afoot, however. The importance placed on women's moral character in the new colony was further highlighted during the depression of the 1880s, when many of the men in the growing cities and towns were unemployed. The uncertainty of the time led to "growing public concern about delinquency, wife desertion, drunkenness, sexual immorality,

poverty and 'licentiousness' in society" (Kedgley, 1996; 27). Middle-class women began to argue that it was not just in the home that women's superior moral character could benefit society, and that their influence should extend into public life. The establishment of the Women's Christian Temperance Movement hailed the onset of the suffrage movement in New Zealand and with it the first public debates about women's roles as wives and mothers (ibid; Mein Smith, 2002). This culminated in 1893 when New Zealand became the first modern nation to allow women to vote.

In fact, most suffragists believed that a woman's place was at home with her children, but that this should not be her only interest in life. They argued that, not only would their influence help to raise men to the level of moral superiority enjoyed by women, thus benefiting the whole of society, but that gaining the vote and the same rights and responsibilities as men would acknowledge the importance of women's roles as wives and mothers (Du Plessis, 1995; Mein Smith, 2002). While those who opposed women's suffrage argued that giving women the vote would confuse the roles of the sexes, the reality was that after the passage of the Suffrage Act in September 1893, "housewifely concerns continued to dominate the lives of New Zealand mothers" (Kedgley, 1996; 30). The suffrage movement did, however, serve as public acknowledgement of the importance of women's role in society, and the leaders of the movement, now able to assert their political influence over the legislation of the day, continued to campaign for women's issues. Organisations such as the National Council of Women, formed in April 1896, were vocal in campaigning for improving the conditions of family life and, more radically, for economic independence for married women (Kedgley, 1996).

This period saw the organised colonisation of New Zealand coinciding with the beginnings of changes throughout the West in understanding the role of mothers and the nature of childhood that were to pave the way for current

social constructions of motherhood. For many mothers, in New Zealand and elsewhere in the West, the disjuncture between new ideological representations of motherhood and their actual mothering practices were beginning to emerge. Motherhood remained very much the concern of individual mothers and their families and there was little state intervention in mothers or children's lives. At the turn of the new century, however, new scientific knowledges and the medical technologies that accompanied them were soon to alter the conditions of pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood for Western women very rapidly. These technologies, aligned with ongoing concerns about the declining Pakeha birth rate, combined to introduce new forms of surveillance and regulation into the lives of white New Zealand mothers.

#### The Progressive Era: Scientific Motherhood in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The turn of the twentieth century saw the emergence of new 'scientific' methods of childrearing in the West. Science was already credited with contributing to falling infant mortality rates and the new popularity of all things scientific was soon to impinge on many other aspects of motherhood. Of significance during this era were the rise of the male childcare 'expert' and the publication of the first childrearing manuals. During this time mothers were expected to adhere to rigid sleeping, feeding and toileting schedules. Undue affection was discouraged and babies were left to "cry it out" rather than be comforted by mothers picking them up (Cheal, 1999; Hays, 1996; Mein Smith, 2002). At first the experts who advocated this approach to child rearing were primarily concerned with matters of hygiene and disease prevention – excessive handling and kissing of babies was seen as a means of spreading contagious disease. Scientific methods soon gained an added moral dimension, however, with parents being told they could shape their children into acceptable adults using "techniques of precise scheduling, detached handling, and behavior modification" (Hays, 1996; 39). As a result, childrearing techniques became "an expert-guided, scientifically structured

method of disciplining mothers and children in the service of the nation's greatness" (ibid, 42).

Phillida Bunkle (1992) argues that it was during this time that doctors, as experts in physiology, began to replace religious leaders as "authoritative interpreters of women's nature". As she notes, "defining women played a crucial part in establishing who could, and who could not, really be professional; that is, who could or could not have the status of an authoritative knower" (61). Scientific knowledge of women and children, in the hands of male experts, came to dominate childrearing practices in New Zealand and throughout the West for much of the twentieth century. Women's knowledge, previously handed down from generation to generation by neighbourhood midwives, was no longer trusted, lacking presumably in scientific rigour. In addition, policies and laws that claimed to safeguard children and families became mechanisms for increasing state intervention in the previously private domain of motherhood and family life (Goldson, 1997).

In New Zealand scientific methods of childrearing gained popularity in the context of a declining Pakeha birth rate and the ideological construction of maternalism as patriotism. "Maternalism was described and discussed in terms of woman as maternal citizen and woman's maternal duty to the nation and the empire" (Mein Smith, 2002; 306). Falling infant mortality rates meant that women no longer felt the need to have large families, and compulsory schooling meant that it was no longer possible to have large numbers of children engaged in productive labour for the family. Improving social conditions also meant that women were less prepared to put up with constant pregnancy and childbirth, and the toll this took on their health. According to Kedgley (1996), "women's use of contraceptives and desire for smaller families also reflected the fact that their expectations had risen, partly as a result of the new ideas about the rights and privileges of women that had been promoted during the suffrage campaign" (37). At the same time the

expanding State bureaucracy of the growing colony meant that there were more employment opportunities for women, particularly in the fields of nursing and teaching.

In 1904 a Royal Commission into the falling birth rate in Australia and New Zealand concluded that women's selfish behaviour and their increasing use of contraceptives to control their fertility was behind what was seen as a threat to national survival. This precipitated an upsurge of interest in the doctrine of eugenics, which was gaining popularity in Germany and Britain at the time (Goldson, 1997; Kedgley, 1996; Mein Smith, 2002). Eugenicists were alarmed that falling birth rates might indicate a weakening of the progress of white nations and argued that motherhood was "a duty of racial, national and imperial importance" (Kedgley, 1996; 40). In particular, they wanted children from "good stock", and emphasised the importance of middle-class women having large families. Part of their argument was that women were being too well educated and this was diminishing their commitment and ability to mother (Goldson, 1997; Kedgley, 1996; Mein Smith, 2002).

In New Zealand these ideas were promoted by Dunedin doctor, Frederic Truby King. King developed a highly structured routine for the care of babies as well as his 'humanised' milk formula for those women who were unable to breastfeed. King's theories were originally aimed at lowering the infant mortality rate, especially among the working classes, by educating mothers about hygiene and proper infant care. His ideas influenced doctors, health visitors and social workers and were largely responsible for the establishment of the Plunket Society in 1907 (Bryder, 1991; Mein Smith, 2002). King advocated strict regimes for infants and children, including daily exercise routines to promote physical health. While he believed that women's maternal instincts made them desire and care for children, King claimed that they did not naturally possess the skills required for proper scientific child rearing. The key to the Plunket Society's success, King believed, was to train mothers

'scientifically' and teach them in their own homes. He was concerned that most mothers relied on traditional 'unscientific' methods of child rearing, so he trained a team of nurses in his 'scientific' system of infant management and sent them into women's homes to dispense "sound, reliable instruction, advice and assistance" on issues of mothers and children's health and development (Bryder, 1991; Kedgley, 1996; Mein Smith, 2002).

Word of King's success with sick infants soon began to spread during this time of growing interest in all things scientific. King was effective in his use of the press of the day and quickly impressed leading politicians and the influential and wealthy in the young colony (Kedgley, 1996). In 1907 an influenza epidemic resulted in the death of many young children and public concern over the infant mortality rate surged. By then the government had already begun regulating childbirth with the passage of the Midwives Registration Act in 1904 that introduced compulsory training for midwives and established maternity hospitals in major towns and cities throughout the country. Eight years later Truby King was given State support for his 'mothercraft' programmes and the State backed regulation of motherhood in New Zealand began in earnest (Kedgley, 1996; Mein Smith, 2002).

By 1912 branches of the Plunket Society had been established in 50 New Zealand towns and the Health Department commissioned King to write a book, *Baby's First Months*, which was given to each mother after the birth of her child. In 1916 the government began issuing his earlier publication *The Expectant Mother and Baby's First Months* to every man who applied for a marriage license (Kedgley, 1996). By the 1920s Truby King's ideas had penetrated every sector of Pakeha New Zealand society and had completely changed the way New Zealand women mothered (Du Plessis, 1995; Kedgley, 1996). As Linda Bryder (1991) notes, however, King's advice was much more applicable to middle-class mothers than other groups. The amount of time and attention necessary to strictly adhere to his regimes required a mother to

be constantly vigilant, something that a working-class mother with a large family who undertook paid work to supplement the family income would find difficult to achieve. Maori mothers were also excluded from King's efforts, which were aimed specifically at the preservation of the Pakeha race (Bryder, 1991; Kedgley, 1996; Mein Smith, 2002).

With backing from successive governments, Plunket's methods of baby and infant care dominated mothering practices in New Zealand throughout much of the twentieth century. The local Plunket nurse was trained to ensure that King's methods were strictly adhered to, and because she visited women in their own homes, few Pakeha mothers remained outside her watchful eye. Gone were the days when women relied on their own mothers, lay midwives and other neighbourhood women for advice and help with mothering. Motherhood had become a 'craft' to be learned and performed with scientific rigour. Despite his preoccupation with mothering practices, however, King was more concerned with supplying the nation with healthy young men than the plight of mothers themselves. Sue Kedgley (1996) explains:

Although King genuinely believed he was 'helping mothers and saving babies' (the Plunket motto), he was more concerned with moulding the character of future generations of children than he was with the welfare and well-being of mothers. He saw mothers, essentially, as vehicles for producing the right kind of citizen, rather than as women with their own needs and rights (55).

King's focus on hygiene and his encouragement of breastfeeding did save many lives at a time when childhood diseases killed large numbers of infants. And once traditional networks of support had broken down, Plunket nurses provided advice and comfort for many women with young families. King's work was officially sanctioned in 1920 when he was made director of the newly formed Department of Child Welfare. By this time he had become an internationally renowned expert on childcare and had travelled widely spreading the word about his methods to an international audience (Kedgley,

1996; Mein Smith, 2002). In 1922 the Plunket book was introduced for mothers to record their baby's progress in. As Kedgley notes, the Plunket book soon became a "symbol of mainstream motherhood" which "was as much a record of a mother's actual or reported conformity to the Plunket nurse's instructions as it was a record of her baby's feeding schedule, sleeping pattern and growth" (92).

The scrutiny and regulation of Pakeha New Zealand motherhood established through the Plunket Society was to survive two world wars as well as an economic depression and would last until the latter part of the twentieth century. At the same time, what Bryder (1991) has called the "cult of domesticity" continued to confine married women to household and childcare duties. The scientific approach to mothering was echoed in the new 'domestic sciences' in schools, where girls were taught the household skills they previously would have learnt from their mothers. Thus, domestic tasks, along with motherhood, were "subjected to rational scientific management" (Cheal, 1999; 58). Clearly the notion of women as naturally and biologically disposed to keeping their homes and caring for their children had undergone considerable revision during this time and the enactment of various legislative measures designed to safeguard the welfare of children and families introduced a new era of state regulation and intervention in Pakeha mother's lives.

### The Emergence of the Welfare State

By the end of the 1920s almost half the houses built in New Zealand were funded by the state. According to Bryder (1991; 40) the then Prime Minister Bill Massey believed that "good homes led to a contented and loyal citizenry", and that "social control and national efficiency" were the primary aims of the state-housing programme. During the 1920s the Reform Party government introduced further measures aimed at solidifying the importance of the family as a cornerstone of society. The 1925 Child Welfare Act reflected these

beliefs, as did the introduction of Family Allowances in 1926 for every third and subsequent child, a measure that also encouraged people to have large families. After the Depression of the 1930s the Labour government introduced the notion of the welfare state with a range of measures designed to further solidify the place of men in the workforce and women in the home. Rosemary Du Plessis (1995) has described this as a “men’s welfare state” which was organised as much around the national award system and protectionism as it was around free health care and education, state housing, the provision of unemployment benefits and family allowances (245; See also Bryson, 1995; Shaver, 1995).

Although the emergence of the New Zealand welfare state has often been hailed as leading the world in progressive social policy, Bryder (1991), along with Du Plessis, argues that it was aimed at producing a socially conservative rather than a progressive society, with clearly demarcated roles for men in the public and women in the private spheres. Labour’s vision of society was firmly founded on the notion of the patriarchal nuclear family, epitomised by the introduction of the ‘living wage’ designed to allow a man to earn enough money to support himself and his family. The 1938 Social Security Act introduced public health, free hospital treatment and prescriptions, subsidised doctors’ visits, pensions and superannuation, all designed to support a man in his role as the breadwinner and woman as homemaker (Bryder, 1991). At the same time, the government’s assimilationist policies were based on the idea that Maori needed to display a willingness to “help themselves” before they were entitled to state support (ibid).

Nancy Fraser (1989) describes the emergence of the welfare state in the West in terms of supporting gendered and conservative “structural inequalities” with the state increasingly overseeing “forms of caregiving” (147). She argues that the “separate spheres norms determine the structure of the social-welfare system”, requiring that it contain “one subsystem related to the primary labor market and another subsystem related to the family or

household" (149). Women were therefore doubly disadvantaged, as their domestic and childrearing responsibilities kept them from full participation in the workforce, which in turn determined their economic dependence on their husbands (Cass, 1995; Shaver, 1995; Smith, 1995). It was not until 1973 that the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit provided financially for single mothers in New Zealand, allowing women the possibility of escaping unhappy marriages without suffering severe economic hardship (Bryder, 1991; Du Plessis, 1995).

The emergence of the welfare state coincided with changing attitudes to mothering in the West. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century mothers throughout the West came to be seen as the guardians of the next generation, responsible for the physical, moral and psychological well being of the nation's children. As such they were no longer trusted to carry out this role without the help of expert advice and scientific methods. Whereas previously the focus of child rearing had been the child's moral development, it now became the "scientific categories of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development" (Hays, 1996; 44). Mothers were beginning to acquire knowledge of each of these developmental categories and increasingly looked to childcare professionals to provide them with this knowledge. This shift had the paradoxical effect of raising the status of motherhood as an occupation, while at the same time devaluing women's own knowledge and experience in favour of professional, usually male, expert opinion (Bunkle, 1992; Richardson, 1993). This was a trend that has continued to dominate constructions of motherhood up to the present day.

During the Progressive era a mother's duties became more demanding and were open to increased external scrutiny and intervention. The increased professional interest in child welfare allowed greater social control of women's lives. State regulation and intervention, enacted in legislation, was applied to mothers whose own behaviour, or that of her children, deviated from

prescribed social norms and categories: “Women could expect social disapproval, the possible removal of their child and, in some cases, were liable to prosecution if they were perceived as not ‘adequately’ fulfilling their new maternal duties” (Richardson, 1993; 37).

Over the next 50 years intervention and regulation would increasingly govern Western motherhood. At the same time constructions of childhood would alter dramatically, requiring ever more complex and demanding mothering practices.

#### Attachment Theory and Child Rearing since the 1950s: The Permissive Era

From the Second World War onwards childrearing in the West took a new direction. After the authoritarian, rigidly scheduled Progressive Era, a new emphasis on child-centred approaches to mothering emerged. ‘Natural’ development and the fulfilment of children’s needs and desires became the basis for mothering practices that encouraged women to put their child’s needs ahead of their own (Elkind, 1994; Glenn, 1994; Hayes, 1996; Richardson, 1993). At the same time experts became less concerned with children’s behaviour than with the mother’s emotional state and the effect this had on her infant. Central to this notion of motherhood were the theories of maternal attachment and maternal deprivation espoused by psychoanalyst John Bowlby. According to Bowlby (1953), a child’s future psychological well-being is dependent on the early attachments or bonding between the child and the mother. In order to form this attachment a mother must be constantly available, allowing her child to experience a “warm, intimate and continuous relationship with the mother, in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment” (Hays, 1996; 43). According to Bowlby (1953), women possess the inherent qualities to form such relationships with their children and need only act according to their natural instincts and take the necessary time to get to know their infants for this to occur.

In New Zealand the new ideas about raising children were relatively slow to take effect, largely due to the ongoing influence of Truby King and the Plunket Society (Kedgley, 1996). The traumatic events of the first half of the 20th century had, however, impacted on women's lives in significant ways. Two world wars and an economic depression had broken down some notions of gender divisions, due mainly to women's participation in the paid workforce. After the Second World War some married women continued to work even when their husbands returned home. Thousands of others had lost husbands or fiancés in the conflict and would remain single for the rest of their lives, focusing instead on their careers, particularly in the fields of nursing and teaching. The vast majority of women, however, would still become full time mothers, marrying at an increasingly young age and producing several children within the first few years of marriage (Kedgley, 1996).

During the 1950s the Plunket nurse and King's *Modern Mothercraft* still reigned supreme as the primary source of information about mothering in New Zealand. Suburban isolation, coupled with a hospital system that did little to encourage women to interact with their newborn babies, meant that once the mother and new baby came home from the hospital, the Plunket nurse became an invaluable source of advice for many new mothers. Women's attitudes to Plunket nurses appear to have varied during this time, according to Kedgley (1996), often due to the temperament of the nurse in question, who was described as anything from a "ministering angel who reassured them at a vulnerable period of their life" to "an intimidating woman who was preoccupied with applying Plunket rules to the letter, rather than listening to their needs and concerns" (172).

Things were set to change, however, with a new generation of popular childcare manuals written by psychoanalytically inspired authors like Donald Winnicott and Benjamin Spock. These books also advocated natural maternal instinct, that what benefits a child must necessarily be in the mother's best

interests. These authors were influenced by Freud's notion of psychosexual maturity to be achieved by successfully negotiating a series of stages of childhood through to adulthood. The outcome of normal development would be apparent when sexual desire became "genital in aim and heterosexual in object" (Gittens, 1998; 25). According to these authors, the Good Mother was a woman whose psychosexual maturity was expressed in her desire to have children, and who "found her own fulfilment in meeting her child's needs" (Hays, 1996; 40). Expert advice was still deemed necessary to inform mothers of the appropriate care to enable optimum child development at the same time as the construction of motherhood as natural was given scientific backing. While the idea that children's desires should guide parenting practices may be seen as a reaction against the authoritarian methods of the Progressive Era, it may also be understood in terms of wider societal changes, in particular the new consumerist society emerging during this time. Children who were used to having their every need met were more likely to grow into well-trained consumers in the new commodity economy (ibid).

The influence of Sigmund Freud's theories of personality development on a whole new generation of childcare experts extended to New Zealand in the late 1940s and 1950s. These ideas ran counter to King's methods of regularity, strict discipline and emotional restraint. However the notion that fostering a child's emotional development was just as important as controlling their physical growth was appealing to many mothers in the more prosperous and liberal climate of post-war New Zealand (Kedgley, 1996). Previously King's *Mothercraft* had been the major source of information for mothers, but during the 1950s and '60s a whole new genre of 'baby books' emerged. The first of these to arrive in New Zealand in the early 1950s was Benjamin Spock's (1961) *The Commonsense Book of Baby and Childcare*. Spock, an American paediatrician, influenced by Freud, advocated leaving babies to develop their own routines for feeding, sleeping and toileting and encouraged mothers to nurture and love their infants from the moment of birth.

Christchurch doctor Maurice Bevan-Brown, also a Freudian, wrote *The Sources of Love and Fear* in 1950, which soon became a bestseller in New Zealand. His ideas, radical at the time, were similar to Spock's and he emphasised the importance of the early mother-child relationship for the future development of a healthy, well-balanced adult. While these books sold well, according to Kedgley (1996) most women still followed the advice of their Plunket nurse, or if they did experiment with the new ideas, did so in secret, afraid of being 'found out' by Plunket. Kedgley believes that many mothers only discovered the new ideas about infant care as Plunket slowly absorbed some of them into its philosophy and developed a more flexible approach.

While patterns of infant care were slow to change in New Zealand, the philosophical shift to a child-centred approach to mothering eventually flourished in the post war period, influenced in particular by the ideas of John Bowlby: "After decades of ignoring the emotional needs of infants and the importance of the mother-child relationship, Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation swung the pendulum the other way and led to an almost exaggerated emphasis on the importance of the maternal bond" (Kedgley, 1996; 179). The popularity of Bowlby's attachment theory must also be viewed within the social conditions of post war Britain, America and New Zealand:

Fuelled by the post war concern with what was considered to be a dangerously low birth rate, women were subjected to a good deal of rhetoric about the importance of maternity and the significance of the role of women within the family as homemakers and mothers. Motherhood, it was stressed, was an important job. Women, as housewives and mothers, did real and vital work (Richardson, 1993; 46).

Women were encouraged to return to the home after the war, with the promise that modern technology and child-rearing methods would make the life of the housewife easier and more comfortable. Bowlby's theories were

employed by the state, and by professionals working for state institutions to admonish working mothers. This coincided with the growth of child welfare movements during the 1950s, in turn increasing the pressure on women to avoid the “social consequences of ‘bad mothering’, which included mothers working” (ibid, 47). Bowlby's ideas were attractive in post war New Zealand and gained considerable media attention and government backing here, as elsewhere in the West during the 1950s and 60s. Mother's groups such as Playcentre and Parents Centre enthusiastically adopted these ideas, as did policy makers opposed to funding for daylong childcare (Kedgley, 1996).

This period marked the onset of the ‘science’ of child development that has dominated notions of childhood during the second half of the twentieth century (Gittens, 1998; Goldson, 1997; Prout and James, 1990; Skolnick, 1998). Greatly influenced by Bowlby's (1969-80) attachment theory, outlined in his three-volume work *Attachment and Loss*, the field of developmental psychology has produced what Prout and James (1990) have described as a “massive corpus of knowledge” about children's development. Child development theories have been based on the notion of a natural progression from childhood to adulthood and from immaturity and irrationality, to maturity and rational thought and behaviour. The fields of child psychology and child development focused on this natural progression, through preordained stages of cognitive development, to full adult status. Thus ‘the child’ became conceptualised as a natural and universal biological fact rather than a product of particular historical, social and economic circumstances. As Gittens (1998) explains, “theories of child development are concerned first and foremost with the individual child in its embodied state. None of them, for instance, pays attention to the different social, economic, political and cultural contexts of childhood” (26). This notion of ‘the child’ ignores the differences between children and childhoods, as well as the ways that childhood is socially constructed and subject to change (ibid; Prout and James, 1990).

The scientific construction of 'the child' has had enormous implications for motherhood and mothering practices. New categories of children who did not 'fit' the developmental theories were constructed, defined and studied during this period (Goldson, 1997; Prout and James, 1990). The 'problem child' emerged as a social construct and with it the problem parent was defined as incompetent or neglectful. Norms of child development were prescribed by a growing array of psychologists, psychiatrists, educational experts and welfare professionals and new child welfare laws were aimed at regulating children's and with them, mother's behaviour. Goldson (1997) describes this as the renegotiation of the boundaries of the family as a private domain "as state agencies sought to define and claim interventionist space" (10). Mothers faced renewed scrutiny, although this time it was not their children's health and hygiene alone that were examined, but also their emotional and psychological well being (ibid). A woman's role as primary caregiver took on a new significance when the idea that the absence of her constant attention meant that her child's future emotional security was under serious threat (Elkind, 1994; Goldson, 1997; Skolnick, 1998).

In the second half of the twentieth century families became smaller and geographic mobility more common. As New Zealand society became increasingly urbanised during the 1960s, women's domestic duties were being made easier with the ready availability of new appliances and labour-saving devices. Economic conditions were buoyant and married women were now more likely to enter the labour market, albeit in a part time capacity and in a limited range of occupations. Attitudes to women's role in society had not changed a great deal however. Most women were still expected to devote their lives to being housewives and mothers, and single mothers were still denigrated and given little or no social support (Kedgley, 1996; Ritchie, 1997). There were increasing demands for equal pay for women during this time and the Equal Pay Acts of 1960 and 1972 meant that women and men in the same occupation were finally paid at the same rate. However, despite the end

of legalised discrimination, women were still highly represented in the lowest paid, least secure sectors of the workforce, due largely to their continued role as unpaid workers in their homes (Du Plessis, 1995).

During the 1960s women were increasingly isolated in the new suburban housing estates and, due to smaller families and household appliances, found themselves with more time on their hands but little to occupy their days. As Kedgley (1996) notes, some women turned to the tranquillisers and barbiturates that doctors readily supplied to cope with isolation and loneliness. Women were four times more likely to be admitted to a psychiatric institution and twice as likely to attempt suicide as men during this time (221). As the decade progressed the pressure and unhappiness that sacrificing their own needs for those of their children brought to many women gained official attention. In 1968 Dr Fraser McDonald, a psychiatrist at Kingseat Psychiatric Hospital, began using the term "suburban neurosis" to describe the symptoms he was observing in his middle-class female patients (ibid). McDonald had treated large numbers of women for depression and believed that suburban neurosis occurred when the realities of marriage and motherhood failed to meet a woman's idealised expectations (ibid). McDonald's concerns were published in *Thursday* magazine in October 1968, in an article entitled *Who Says I'm a Cabbage?* He followed this with a public speaking tour and the issue became widely debated. The dissatisfactions women were experiencing in their lives were now being discussed in women's magazines and newspapers and the image of the contented housewife became less entrenched although still the norm for most young Pakeha women (Kedgley, 1996).

A shortage of labour and the post-war baby boom meant that the health and education sectors were seriously understaffed during the 1960s. At the same time television and other forms of advertising were increasing the demand for consumer products, which also encouraged women to seek work outside the

home in order to bring more money into the household. There was still little in the way of quality childcare facilities in New Zealand during this time, however. In 1961 the National Association for Child Care Centres was established and by the end of the decade it had become an important voice in the fight for readily available quality childcare for working mothers. As Kedgley notes, there was considerable opposition to this fight from already established organisations such as the Free Kindergarten Association and the Playcentre Federation, who ideologically opposed mothers working. The 1972 Equal Pay Act and the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit for single mothers in 1973 both attracted considerable opposition, confirming that the nuclear family and the stay-at-home mother were still firmly entrenched in the psyche of many New Zealanders as the most natural and appropriate social institutions (Bryder, 1991; Du Plessis, 1995; Kedgley, 1996). Despite the opposition, however, mothers have joined the paid workforce in increasing numbers since the 1970s and the divorce rate, which rose dramatically after the introduction of the DPB, has continued to demonstrate the troubled status of the nuclear family in New Zealand in recent decades (Shirley et al, 1997).

By the 1970s motherhood had become, in Sharon Hay's words, "fully intensified". Mothers were now responsible for the physical, emotional, psychological, and intellectual development of their children and were held responsible for any apparent inadequacies or abnormalities. While supposedly driven by their maternal instincts to love and care for their children, they were also required to seek expert professional advice to ensure they provided the appropriate stimulation at the appropriate developmental moment. Attachment theory required mothers to be in constant attendance and to ensure that children's needs and desires were instantly met. These methods of childrearing were time consuming, emotionally demanding and financially expensive (Hays, 1996; Kedgley, 1996; Richardson, 1993). At the same time state regulation and intervention in the care of children continued

to increase through what Foucault (1979) has described as a range of 'disciplinary networks'. Goldson (1997) explains:

The role of the state is mediated through a range of what Foucault (1979) identifies as 'disciplinary networks', not exclusively punitive or corrective through legal control and regulations, but also through bureaucracies whose purpose is to manage and tutor children by identifying and promoting their 'best interests'. Medicine, psychology, psychiatry, education, law, social work, for example, provide a regulatory network which blurs the boundaries between 'care' and 'control' (13).

In 1976 the Matrimonial Property Act made it possible for women who chose to leave their husbands to make a financial claim on assets such as the family home, providing them with some economic security after divorce. It seemed that finally women were gaining some financial independence outside the confines of the traditional nuclear family where historically they had remained economically dependent on their husbands. However, this new legislation, along with the introduction of the DPB, brought with it new forms of surveillance and regulation of mothers' lives. Single mothers in particular came under intense scrutiny during the late 1970s. In 1975, the new National Government began a campaign to "crack down" on alleged benefit abuse by single mothers and the new minister of Social Welfare, Bert Walker, advised the department to cancel the benefit of any woman who was having a relationship with a man (Kedgley, 1996). The Domestic Purposes Benefit Review Committee of 1976 was formed to investigate the rapidly increasing rate of benefit applications and concluded that solo mothers were 'acquiring a certain status' that might threaten the survival of the traditional nuclear family (Kedgley, 1996). As a result the government reduced the benefit and made it even harder for single mothers to engage in any sort of relationship with a man without their benefit being stopped.

Access to quality childcare was still very limited during the 1970s in a culture where theories of infant attachment and maternal deprivation underpinned both government policy and popular beliefs. In 1973, during a visit to New

Zealand, John Bowlby stated that the links between childcare and future social problems were as clear to him as the links between smoking and cancer (Kedgley, 1996; 259). The childcare debate was aired frequently in the media during this time and by the late 1970s the issue had become highly polarised. Despite the professionalisation of childcare workers in recent years and the increasing numbers of working mothers of young children, the percentage of preschool children in childcare facilities in New Zealand remains low compared to many European countries, while the cost remains relatively high (Baker, 1997). The fact that the debate over the dangers of young children spending large amounts of time outside the care of their mothers is still an issue of considerable cultural anxiety is illustrated in the discussions explored further in chapter six.

#### New Right Economics

Since the early 1980s the New Zealand economic and welfare systems have been radically restructured in a rapid shift to New Right economics. At a time when more mothers than ever before are in paid employment, the conservative policies of neo-liberal governments have generated debates over 'family values' that reinforce the separate spheres norms, while strengthening the privileging of economic productivity over unpaid caring work (Baker, 1997; Cass, 1995; Du Plessis, 1995; Fraser, 1989). At the same time the deregulation of the labour market, cuts in state benefits and restructuring in social services such as health and education have increased state control and intervention in many people's lives (Du Plessis, 1995; Else, 1992). In particular, the deregulation of the labour market, enshrined in the Employment Contracts Act (ECA) of 1991, has resulted in many of the benefits of Equal Pay and Employment Equity legislation being undone as individual salaries and wages become tied to productivity and performance. Under the ECA collective bargaining has become increasingly difficult for those employed on small work-sites such as women in clerical positions (Du Plessis, 1995). Although not aimed specifically at women, the Employment

Contracts Act has “gender specific effects because women, especially Maori and Pacific Island women, are concentrated in a limited number of gender-specific occupations”, argues Du Plessis (1995; 251).

The other side of labour market deregulation has been the reduction of state benefits, which has resulted in a decline in living standards for beneficiaries, many of them women. It also resulted in the introduction of measures designed to keep low income earners in paid employment, often earning little more than they would on a benefit (Du Plessis, 1995). In particular, single mothers have once again been subject to increased scrutiny and regulation as the discourses of “self-sufficiency” and “moral responsibility” are used to mask the effects of “structural unemployment” and the “inadequacy of social programmes to cope with structural changes in families and the labour force” (Baker, 1997; 44). Maureen Baker argues that in New Zealand, single mothers have been particularly targeted because of their visibility as a social group – New Zealand has higher numbers of single mothers than Australia and Canada, for instance – and the numbers of Maori and Pacific Island women mothering alone in a culture marked by racial tensions amid conflict over Maori economic rights (1997, 42; See also Kelsey, 1995). Chapter four examines in more detail the social construction of the idealised nuclear family and its implications for single mothers. Chapters five and six explore the experiences of three of the women in this study, both in their decisions to become single mothers and their encounters with state welfare agencies.

The focus on individuality and competition inherent in much New Right discourse is particularly at odds with the notion of selfless, nurturant motherhood that emerged during the second half of the twentieth century in the West. In fact market economics requires two fundamentally opposed notions of human nature to succeed. The market individual is required to be “naturally self-interested, self-directed, rational, and independent” (Else, 1992; 241) but is, nonetheless, dependent on the unpaid caring work carried out in

the home. Those who provide this care are “essentially other-directed”, their identity “formed and embedded in altruistic, emotional, long-term relations with unique ‘significant others’” (ibid). Market economics not only reinforces the gendered differentiation of paid and unpaid work, but in an environment when more and more mothers are also in paid employment, requires these women to pursue two highly contradictory modes of being and relating to others. Chapter four will address this issue in more depth as it pertains to changing constructions of motherhood in general and for the women in this study in particular.

The heightened surveillance and regulation of single mothers discussed above is not merely indicative of the dismantling of the welfare state under New Right economic policies. Changes in family structures during the closing decades of the twentieth century have been wide-ranging, from the rising age of marriage and childbearing, to the increase in divorce rates and the numbers of couples living in de facto relationships. Many couples are now deciding not to have children at all, or deferring childbirth until they have advanced further in their career objectives. Alternatives to the traditional nuclear family are more visible and meanings of parenthood have altered as more openly gay and lesbian parents speak out, while surrogacy and new reproductive technologies challenge the notion of ‘natural’ biological parenthood. Reformulated or ‘blended’ families are increasingly common as previously married couples attempt to combine children from several different relationships into a new family formation. These families often vary considerably in size and make-up from week to week, even day to day. The ‘family values’ debates that focus on single mothers among other non-traditional parents demonstrate the considerable anxiety and tension that exists around the ever more complex construction of ‘the family’ in Western culture today. In fact such is this tension that scholars, among other social commentators, are beginning to articulate the notion of the ‘death of the family’ as it has been understood during much of the twentieth century, and

the emergence of a new, 'postmodern' family (Cheal, 1999; Collier et al, 1993; Elkind, 1994; Goldson, 1997; Prout and James, 1990; Stacey, 1994 and 1996).

### The Postmodern Family

It must be acknowledged straight away that any notion of the death of 'the family' takes as a starting point the acceptance that 'the family' is a knowable object. 'The family' however, like motherhood or childhood, is a socially and ideologically constructed set of norms that incorporates the notion of a male breadwinner, plus a female whose primary responsibility is the care and upkeep of her home and children (Cheal, 1999; Collier et al, 1993; Elkind, 1994; Goldson, 1997; Skolnick, 1998; Smith, 1995; Smith, 1996; Stacey, 1994 and 1996; Young, 1995;). Any contention that this is a 'natural' structure ignores the many variations in family formations as well as the class and ethnic differences that have always existed among families and between cultures. It also renders invisible the structural inequalities that have evolved over time to produce the gendered differences between men and women's roles in traditional families that have been discussed above. For some time those working in the field of family studies have been "very sensitive to the multiple forms and multiple meanings of family life, as these emerge from different social contexts" (Cheal, 1999; 64). It is acknowledged therefore that 'the family' is a rhetorical tool employed in the regulation of social life more than an explanation for the many and varied ways that women, men and children experience kinship ties (Stacey, 1994).

Collier et al (1993) argue that, while there is much talk about families today, there is also much that is left out of these discussions in terms of "what families are 'really' like" (9). They view the formation of the modern family "not as a concrete institution designed to fulfil universal human needs, but as an ideological construct associated with the modern state" (ibid). Thus families alter according to economic and social conditions, and the current notion of

the family has emerged as a result of the need for “complex nation states” that evolved during the twentieth century to regulate and control populations (ibid). While the nuclear family norm has reflected changing attitudes to relationships in the last 100 years – the emergence of romantic love as the basis for marriage, for example – it also shapes people’s expectations and experiences. At the same time the notion of the family as a haven of love and security fails to account for the dramatic rise in reported accounts of domestic violence and childhood abuse in the West in recent decades (ibid).

In the same way that constructions of motherhood have reflected white middle-class experiences and values, variations in family structures have often been viewed in comparison to similar norms, thus rendering those families who do not conform to these norms as deviant and in need of state intervention (Dahlberg et al, 1999; Moss et al, 2000; Smith, 1995; Smith and Taylor, 2000). While this was relatively unproblematic when cultural expectations largely mirrored the traditional nuclear family, recent changes in social formations, fuelled in part by second-wave feminist critiques of the gendered inequalities of domestic relations and rendered highly visible through the global media, have presented serious challenges to the conservative politicians and religious right who still maintain the ‘naturalness’ of traditional family roles. It is the diversity and visibility of changing family structures, along with radical economic restructuring, that have exposed the family as a highly contested cultural arena and led to scholars employing the term postmodern to describe the complexity and fluidity of current familial ties (Cheal, 1999; Elkind, 1994; Goldson, 1997; Prout and James, 1990; Stacey, 1994 and 1996).

Writing about contemporary American society, Judith Stacey (1994) describes how people have “crafted a multiplicity of family and household arrangements that we inhabit uneasily and reconstitute frequently in response to changing personal and occupational circumstances” (645). The unstable and fluid

nature of today's families have greatly altered the contexts within which women raise their children, leading Stacey to offer a new conceptual tool for understanding family life; the postmodern family:

We are living, I believe, through a tumultuous and contested period of family history, a period following that of the modern family order but preceding what, we cannot foretell. Precisely because it is not possible to characterize with a coherent descriptive term the competing sets of family cultures that coexist at present, I identify this family regime as postmodern. I do this, despite my reservations about employing such a controversial and elusive cultural concept, to signal the contested, ambivalent, and undecided character of contemporary gender and kinship arrangements (645).

Postmodernism as a theoretical perspective grew out of increasing scepticism in the academic world about the project of modernism that sought to explain social change in terms of a gradual progression to a greater understanding of the human condition. It "questions the Enlightenment idea and hope that there is objective, or innocent, knowledge, through the accumulation of which we can get nearer the truth that will tell us how the world is, who we are and how to act in the world in ways that are universal and just" (Dahlberg et al, 1999; 55). The postmodern project is concerned, instead with knowledge as "perspectival and ambiguous, contextualized, localized, incomplete and paradoxical, produced in diverse ways" (ibid).

The inability of modernist thinking to grasp the complexities and contingency of the human condition and disillusionment with its promise of greater understanding through the application of scientific knowledge has generated a new philosophical and theoretical project concerned with embracing diversity, multiplicity and contradiction. Postmodern thinking rejects any notion of a universal 'truth' waiting to be discovered and instead looks at the many truths that function in disparate and contradictory ways to construct human subjectivity and knowledge (Dahlberg et al, 1999; Lather, 1991; Popkewitz, 1998).

From a postmodern perspective, there is no absolute knowledge, no absolute reality waiting 'out there' to be discovered. There is no external position of certainty, no universal understanding that exists outside history or society that can provide foundations for truth, knowledge and ethics. Instead, the world and our knowledge of it are seen as *socially constructed* and all of us, as human beings, are active participants in this process (Dahlberg et al, 1999; 23).

It is the active construction of identity within specific historical and social contexts that is of central concern in this thesis. I will explore how a group of four Pakeha women negotiate their identities as mothers using a postmodern feminist analysis of gendered subjectivities. These subjectivities are constructed through these women's engagements with discursive regimes<sup>1</sup> that produce dominant notions of motherhood, childhood and family life. The regulatory processes that discipline mothers to 'do their mothering' in particular ways, to engage in particular mothering practices and carefully monitor their own and other mothers' behaviour, will be explored in relation to images of motherhood in popular culture. As David Elkind (1994) writes, "postmodernist theories of popular culture attach considerable importance to the ways in which mass-mediated meanings penetrate all corners of contemporary social life" (76). At the beginning of the Introduction I discussed how Phoenix and Woollet (1991) argued that motherhood must be explored at the interface of actual mothering practices and ideological constructions of motherhood and it is at this interface between mass mediated ideologies of motherhood and these four women's 'real' experiences that the analysis that informs this study occurs.

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<sup>1</sup> The work of French philosopher Michel Foucault is central to this approach and will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

## Chapter Two

### Methodology

The question I need to answer in a methodology chapter is 'how did I come to know what I know?' This raises other questions: What were my intentions, academic, personal and political? What assumptions underscored these intentions? What research questions did I attempt to answer? What techniques did I employ to produce data for this study? What was the rationale behind my chosen methodology? How did I approach the analysis - what informed my interpretations? What theoretical framework/s did I utilise? And how do I choose to present these interpretations in a written text? As I begin to write, I realise that these questions imply a linearity, a gradual unfolding of the research process and a simultaneous increase in my understanding of the topic I write about. This appears to have little connection with the complex and contradictory process I have struggled with for more than seven years.

As I began to write this chapter I found myself increasingly troubled by some of the assumptions embedded in the criteria many feminist qualitative researchers employ to assess the validity of their work. As is obvious by the shift from present to past tense, there is nothing linear about writing this chapter. I find myself constantly inserting myself into the middle of something I had considered completed, as I grapple with how to express the difficulties I have in presenting the information I feel is necessary in order to write 'how I came to know what I know'. The structure of this chapter reflects these difficulties. In order to highlight the problematic nature of any attempt at producing a seamless text out of a highly contradictory, complex and (seemingly) never completed process, this chapter will interrupt itself several times to reflect on some of the more troubling aspects of writing about methodology as I have encountered them during this research. I have

focused in particular on my own relations to my research topic and my research participants. The next chapter will examine in more detail the theoretical underpinnings of the study, including the theoretical frameworks of audience studies and issues of identity, identification and ideology.

In studying motherhood I attempt, along with other feminist postpositivists, to place women's lives and experiences at the centre of my research agenda (Anderson and Jack, 1991; Devault, 1990; Mies, 1983; Reinharz, 1983; Sacks, 1989; Smith, 1990). I am impelled to include a detailed description of my own positioning - my relationships with my participants, and the personal experiences that have informed my analysis (Bloom, 1998; Court and Court ; Ellingson, 1998; Fine, 1994; Griffith, 1998; Jones, 1992; Packwood and Sikes, 1996; 1998). In this way I put myself on the same 'critical plane' as my participants, acknowledging and attempting to limit the power imbalance inherent in the research setting (Harding, 1987). This overtly self conscious or reflexive approach is designed to alert the reader to the subjective and partial nature of any research account. In broad contrast to the neutral, objectivist stance of the positivist, a feminist postpositivist employing qualitative research methods proudly asserts her subjectivity and emotional involvement in her work (Allen and Baber, 1992; Bloom, 1998; Ellingson, 1998; Fine, 1994; Lather, 1991; Mies, 1983;).

At the same time a feminist postpositivist acknowledges that the research setting is permeated with inequalities and power relations that consistently resolve themselves in favour of the researcher (Bishop and Glynn, 1999; Bloom, 1997 and 1998; Cotteril, 1992; Limerick et al, 1996; Ribbens, 1992; Young and Tardiff, 1992). She attempts, therefore to acknowledge the ways that both researcher and researched actively construct the stories and interpretations on which the final research text is based (Bishop and Glynn, 1999; Court and Court, 1998; Griffith, 1998; Harrison et al, 2001; Jones, 1992; Limerick et al, 1996; Packwood and Sikes, 1996; Richardson, 1998). At

the same time she accepts responsibility for the determining role she plays in the production of the final text and with it her claim to authoritative knowledge about 'other' women's lives (Bishop and Glynn, 1999; Bloom, 1998; Harrison et al, 2001; Jones, 1992). She attempts to employ notions such as reflexivity and reciprocity to further acknowledge and ameliorate the power imbalance inherent in the research process (Bloom, 1997 and 1998; Ellingson, 1998; Fine, 1994; Lather, 1991; Renai, 1992; Ribbens, 1989; St. Pierre, 1997; Young and Tardiff, 1992). And at the end of it all she might be left pondering the contention that there is no research without exploitation, no writing without othering, that power is a fact of life and researching an incredibly privileged undertaking.

As I write this I carefully insert the names of other scholars who have influenced my thinking into the brackets at the end of each sentence. I place my ideas within an important tradition of questioning how academic knowledge is produced as truth and how feminist scholarship constructs its stories about women's lives. I have chosen authors whom I have recently consulted or whose work is particularly pertinent to this study, but I could have selected any number of the well over 100 research articles and books on research methods and methodology I have collected over the years of this study. During this time my interest has shifted from striving to employ methods that privilege the voice of my participants and allow the 'truth' of their lives to 'emerge' from the data, to a critical understanding of the multiple voices, shifting subject positions, partiality and constructed nature of any research text (Fine, 1994; Jones, 1992; Lather, 1991). When I completed the interviews for this study, however, I was only beginning to emerge from what Leslie Rebecca Bloom (1998) identifies as a "feminist phenomenological" approach to research with its emphasis on participant-led interviews and researcher silence, towards a more "feminist methodological" focus on conversational interviewing and co-constructed research stories (19). My shifting engagement with feminist research methodologies has implications

for how I conducted the interviews for this study, how I interpreted the data from the interviews and how I now attempt to represent this process in a written text. I will explore some of the tensions produced by my changing methodological and theoretical perspectives later in this chapter, as well as their implications for understanding power and reciprocity in the research process. For now I want to present my initial rationale for embarking on this research and the techniques I employed in doing so.

### Rationale For The Study

I embarked on this research to explore how women make meaning out of aspects of their identities as mothers. In particular I wanted to examine how they talked about identity in relation to images in popular culture, especially television and women's magazines. Given the media saturated nature of everyday life, I wanted to explore the dense entanglement of media and lived experience (Ang, 1996; Radway, 1996). Once I had begun interviewing, the discussions between these women also alerted me to the importance of media silences; the aspects of their experiences and identities absent in popular cultural representations of motherhood and family life. It is in both the presence and the absence of meaningful representations that the discussions that formed the basis of this study took place. I would place this research, therefore, in the tradition of ethnographic audience studies in the field of Cultural Studies. There is a growing tradition in Cultural Studies of qualitative research that explores people's engagements with media texts including, for example, specific television or literary genres (Liladhar, 2000; Radway, 1988; Spigel, 1991), specific television programmes or popular magazines (Brown, 1994; Glynn, 1999; McKinley, 1997; Modleski, 1982; Rowe, 1994;) and specific celebrities or media personalities (Rowe, 1994; Schwichtenberg (Ed), 1993).

Apart from the interview held shortly after Princess Diana's death, discussions in the interviews that inform this study did not focus on specific celebrities, television programmes or women's magazines, however. Instead the women would often use these as starting points for a much wider ranging conversation incorporating the media imagery into their narratives and using them to explain, naturalise, critique or refuse the discursive constructions under discussion. Thus these women's engagements with popular culture was one thread that wound its way through the discussions, at times dominating the conversation, at others disappearing altogether only to emerge later as a point of departure for another story of lived experience. I believe this is due to the fact that I emphasised the importance of the participants' own experiences, stressing that while I was interested in their engagements with popular culture, I primarily wanted them to talk about their own lives in relation to this. I was looking for some understanding of the many ways media imagery moves in and out of consciousness as women construct and negotiate subjectivity in their everyday lives and in their social interactions. This thesis, then, represents a relatively new direction in audience studies that pays attention to people's every day lives in a way that previous 'text down' research has not. I will clarify this point and expand on this new direction in detail in the following chapter.

Several assumptions underlie the rationale for this research. The first is that representations of femininity in popular culture address issues of immediate concern to women as they negotiate their subjectivities in their everyday lives. Often these areas of concern are articulated through so-called "women's genre" such as talk shows, soap operas and women's magazines (Brown, 1994; Lewis, 1991; McKinley, 1997; Press, 1991). This is not the stuff of mere escapism or ideological dopism (see Chapter Three); popular culture provides sites where the tensions and contradictions of many women's lives are played out time and time again, sometimes reaching resolutions that appear deeply

embedded in traditional notions of femininity, at others highlighting resistance and opposition to these notions, often (as is the case with soaps) refusing closure altogether (Brown, 1994). However it is not necessarily the moments of closure and resolution that engaged the women in this study - many times a moment along the way to closure provided the basis for a lengthy and passionate discussion. At other times a passing comment or even a visual image appearing during the opening credits to a television programme incited much interest and discussion. Pleasure, desire and fantasy also played a part in these women's engagements with the popular (Ang, 1996). At times the chance to wallow in enjoyment of the impossible or the possibility of the unobtainable was reason enough for the women in this group to gain considerable pleasure from what they consumed. As middle class, formally educated women however, this was often problematic and overlaid with expressions of guilt and attempts to qualify their enjoyment – for example Sarah saying she watched soap operas primarily to criticise them for their stereotypical portrayals of women.

A second assumption is that women use the media texts they encounter to think about and talk about their own lives, incorporating storylines from fictional narratives into their own personal stories in a process of constant negotiation with dominant ideological imperatives - the discourses of romantic love, marriage and motherhood that define women's lives within traditional notions of femininity (Ang, 1996; Gledhill, 1988; Radway, 1996). It is therefore vital for a researcher interested in exploring the place of popular media in society to talk with women (Brown, 1994). For this study I felt it was just as vital to do this with a *group* of women in order to further explore the social formation of meanings and generation of narratives in the context of other women's lives. I believe that it is in the discussion of shared experiences and exposure of differences that women come to better understand and theorise their own lives as well as the representations of 'woman' they encounter along the way (Fine, 1994; St. Pierre, 1997).

Taking women's experiences as a starting point then, the aim of this study was to explore some of the myriad ways in which women negotiate their identities as mothers, partners, students and workers in relation to popular images of motherhood and family life. I wished to explore the complex and contradictory negotiations involved in the construction of self within the specificities of the historically, socially and culturally located experiences of four women: Bridget, Sarah, Penny and Hannah. In the spirit of poststructuralist feminist critiques of the positivist tradition discussed earlier, this study was never intended as a representative analysis that could be used to make claims to truth or provide universal understandings of women's engagements with popular culture. Indeed every woman will experience motherhood and family life differently and will engage with media images of this in multiple and shifting ways.

Like other feminist researchers I have a commitment to social change and the development of research practices that work against the academic 'othering' of women's lives. I also desire concrete social change in the 'real' world. This project has the potential to inform new approaches to teaching media studies in schools and at tertiary level. Increased understanding of how subjectivity is constructed with/through/despite pervasive media images is important for those developing programmes that acknowledge and wish to harness notions of active media consumption, multiple readings of media texts and the social production of meaning in relation to popular culture. I am particularly concerned with efforts at rethinking the articulation of gender in media, especially those efforts that acknowledge difference and diversity among women and work to better understand the importance of fantasy and desire in female viewing practices (Ang, 1996; Radway, 1996).

Hannah, Penny, Sarah and Bridget

Before I continue with a description of the research procedures I employed I would like to introduce the women who have made this study possible, whose hours of time and commitment have contributed so much to my work and to whom I am deeply indebted and grateful.

Hannah is a woman in her early 40s, of Dutch descent. At the time of the interviews she was living with her second husband and their two-year-old boy, Simon. Hannah also has a 22-year-old daughter from a previous marriage. This relationship was violent and abusive and after it finished Hannah spent several years raising her daughter by herself until she met and married Mike. She has recently returned to university to study music. She plays several instruments and finds that the guitar especially helps her to maintain muscle control in her hands despite a degenerative illness that limits her mobility and dexterity. Hannah could be described as a quiet, softly spoken person, although she is very willing to offer her opinions and advice once she gets to know someone. She would often sit quietly listening to the others talk during the interviews, tending to comment on what others said rather than telling long stories about her own life. Often her contributions would involve introducing alternative perspectives than those already discussed and would therefore generate further exploration of the topic amongst all four women. She was especially vocal in her resistance to traditional female roles in marriage and family life.

Penny is in her mid-30s and has English parents. Her three children, Sally, Benjamin and Philip are aged four to eleven. She was married until shortly after her youngest child was born and is now divorced. She is studying feminist studies part time and does paid childcare work for other parents in her own home. Penny is the quietest of the group and would often wait and listen to what everyone else had said before offering her views. In a one on one situation she is very relaxed and talks freely. She grew up in a wealthy

hill suburb of Christchurch and describes her family's lack of understanding of her financial difficulties now she is a single mother. She became involved in the study after seeing an advertisement in the newsletter of a community organisation that works with single mothers. Although quietly spoken, her contributions to the group usually caused the other women to stop and listen carefully, as her stories and opinions were often very personal, moving and illustrative of the difficulties of life as a single mother with three children and three mortgages. She is adamant that she will remain single at least until her children are older and she has more time to put into a relationship.

Sarah is in her mid-20s and describes herself as a Pakeha New Zealander. She has one child, Flora, who is four. Sarah had recently broken up with Flora's biological father when she discovered she was pregnant, although she was in a new relationship by the time Flora was born. At the time of the interviews she was single again and studying postgraduate Law full time at university. Sarah is a vivacious and independent woman who encourages her daughter to be expressive and outgoing. Sarah's appearance and readily offered opinions reflect her strength and individuality as well as a rebellious streak – she would probably be labelled alternative in her taste in clothes, music and lifestyle. She grew up in a fairly conservative family and describes what she calls her “boardroom parents” as disapproving of many of her choices – particularly to have a child when she was young, single and living off part time earnings while she studied full time. Sarah was confident and animated during the interviews, often introducing the topic of conversation and telling stories of her own experiences and those of other women she knows. She would often relate the conversation back to things she had seen in the media and offered a detailed analysis of much of what she viewed. Humour played a large part in the stories she told and she would often have the rest of the group laughing along with her as she found humour in some of the most difficult experiences she had faced.

Bridget is in her late 20s. She is a Pakeha New Zealander, but spent much of her childhood living in India where her father worked. She is married to Philip, a school teacher who is Lebanese. They had two children – Alex, aged 6 and Andrew, aged 2, at the time of the interviews. Bridget was working on her doctoral thesis in an Arts department at the time of the interviews. She is very quietly spoken, although an outgoing, talkative woman. She has a ready laugh and is a great storyteller, using humour to engage others in her tales. She would often tell long and complicated stories about herself and other women she knew. Bridget was never hesitant to address painful and difficult issues and was very open about her relationships to herself and her body, her family and her work at university. Along with Sarah she contributed a lot by introducing topics of conversation and bringing women's magazines along to the interviews, which would then introduce the main topic of conversation for the day.

These paragraphs introduce you to the participants in this study. They tell you a little about each woman as I have chosen to represent them. I have selected certain things about each woman to give a little context and because I believe they are important in understanding what is to follow. Any other researcher may have written different things – these are my constructions of these women – a little bit of family background, information about their children and partners and some descriptions of how they engaged in interactions with the other women in the study. I recognise the partial and constructed nature of these representations, which in no way encompasses how I conceptualise the four women I spent over 10 months talking with. I feel at a loss to begin to describe how I experienced Penny, Sarah, Hannah and Bridget's involvement in the study, let alone to imagine how they might conceive of their relations to each other. I know that they all expressed considerable enjoyment of their participation in this research and that their relationships developed such that, to greater or lesser degrees, they all spent

time together outside the research setting during 1997. My hope is that the chapters that follow will illuminate some of the dynamics of these women's lives and their interactions, embedded in the contexts of our conversations, not as isolated and superficial biographic descriptions.

These descriptions are also representative of these women's lives during one year and in a specific context – the interview setting. While certain stories were repeated over the months, it was never in the same words or with exactly the same emphasis. Certainly themes emerged from the conversations and certain issues were addressed regularly, but they may be considerably different from the themes that would emerge were I to interview this group of women several years later. Since the interviews were completed all four women have experienced life changing events: Bridget has had another child, has completed her doctorate and is living with her family on an island in the Pacific; Sarah has moved to another city, begun a new relationship and entered full time employment; one of Penny's children has been diagnosed with a serious hearing impediment and has been receiving specialised schooling; Hannah's marriage broke up for a time and she and Mike have moved to a rural town in an attempt to resolve some of the marital issues they were facing. In the same way my own life has altered considerably. When I began these interviews I was married with a one-year-old infant. Since 1997 my marriage has ended, I spent several years as a single mother and now I am in a new relationship and preparing for a second marriage.

Of course there will be many other changes that have altered the stories we tell about our lives as mothers and how we tell them. That these women, including myself, had shared concerns, and that these concerns may be relevant to many other mothers does not imply that women can be simply placed into categories of identity such as mother, wife or student. This issue of identity will be addressed in chapter three. The stories I have chosen to

use to illustrate my interpretations in this thesis represent some moments in an ever changing engagement with the complexities of life. The ongoing negotiation of identities is always contextual and contingent and a major aim of this thesis is to explore some of that complexity in relation to images in popular culture.

### Research Procedures

Before I begin this section I need to interrupt the narrative to introduce some other people who have played a major part in contributing to this study. While I was initially writing this chapter I was also writing a conference paper with two other PhD students, Missy and Lesley<sup>1</sup> (Harrison et al, 2001). This was a very valuable experience as all three of us found ourselves struggling with changes in our thinking about methodologies and our responsibilities as feminist researchers. I found our conversations extremely productive in terms of exploring ways of expressing some of the difficulties I have encountered in trying to document my own research process. Recently I attempted to locate the words that I had written in that paper so that I might insert some of them into this chapter. This was an impossible task. Many of the sentences I had originally written had been changed in consultation with the other authors and as a consequence of feedback from other students and our various thesis supervisors. Many of the main themes in the paper were developed over time after intense discussions with Missy and Lesley and I could never claim to 'own', by myself, any part of the paper.

This caused me to reflect further on the notion of the lone scholar, designing and implementing a research project. While I talk constantly about 'my' study and use the singular 'I' when I write about my work, this thesis has been

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<sup>1</sup>This paper was one of three prepared by nine PhD students from Canterbury University as part of a symposium entitled Regimes of Rigour for the AQR conference held in Melbourne in July 1999. The two other papers were entitled Power and Position: Issues of Credibility in Qualitative Research and Hard Work: The Rigours of Emotionality.

produced by many people. Of course the participants in the research have played an inestimable role. My thesis supervisors, informal advisors, fellow students and other friends have all informed my work in innumerable ways. My changing personal relationships with my husband and son, my relationship with my new partner, along with memories of my childhood, my family and my upbringing have had a huge impact on my analysis. I believe these people have played such an important part in producing my thesis that they should not be relegated to an acknowledgements section at the beginning, but accounted for in a methodology chapter at least. Knowledge is always constructed within the author's relations to others and from its inception this study has been greatly influenced by others. While I meticulously account for those scholars whose writing I have made reference to, I believe it is just as important to account for these other influences here.

To return to the narrative, I chose largely unstructured, in-depth group interviews for this study. I wanted to use qualitative research methods that focused on exploring women's understandings and the meanings they made of the events in their lives in relation to other women. As Lesley, Missy and I talked about writing a methodology paper focusing on reciprocity and trustworthiness we pondered the political implications of our methodological choices:

As researchers we make political decisions, consciously or unconsciously, when deciding who we want to ask to speak about what, and when we figure out how to do the asking, observing or measuring. We make decisions about whether or not we, the researcher, or the people the research is about/with, will be the final authority on what is said. We make decisions about whether or not we will appeal to a higher authority in our research, and who the higher authority will be. Sometimes we researchers are not self-conscious about these decisions, do not realise that sometimes the decisions have already been made by adopting particular research *protocols*. Ferguson, Ferguson and Taylor (1992) draw attention to the importance of researchers distinguishing between methods and between paradigms. Failure to make this distinction might result in disgruntled post-positivists who have used qualitative methods, but are

still trying to fit these methods into a procrustean bed of objectivist standards of reliability and validity.

Conscious recognition of the relationship between values and research present researchers with exciting possibilities for their research. We think of ourselves as feminists, and want to do research that is consistent with our descriptions of ourselves. As feminists, we are drawn to topic areas that are important to women, as well as to other groups of people who have been marginalised. We want to participate in research that contributes to and pursues social justice. We are drawn to research approaches that do not dehumanise people, to research approaches that acknowledge the complexity of people's lives, approaches that challenge preconceived notions of what is already known and "established scientific fact." The research we are drawn to is presented to other people without the author(s) claiming to know better than the participants what the participants really thought and meant. Increasingly, when this research is presented, the author(s) works hard to understand, and share with readers what they have learned about, the ways their own experiences, values and positions of privilege in various hierarchies influence what and how they do their research, and do writing about their research (Harrison et al, 2001; 324-5).

The following discussion, then, attempts to present some of the motivating factors behind the decisions I made in conducting this study and using the procedures I did. I was initially motivated to study motherhood and popular culture after the birth of my son, Louis. I was planning to return to university and complete my doctoral thesis and had a keen interest in studying the media. This was in part because I am an avid consumer of what gets labelled 'trash television' and women's magazines, in part because I am fascinated by how women come to learn what it is to be female - how gender is articulated in discourse and how those articulations are negotiated by women actively constructing their everyday understandings of gendered identity. As a first time mother I knew it would be a topic that would remain intensely interesting to me. I was overwhelmed at times by the responsibilities I had taken on becoming a parent and how my previous relationships with other mothers had in no way prepared me for the changes I was to experience in my own life when Louis was born. I knew this was a topic I would remain passionate about and was eager to explore other women's experiences of motherhood.

As Pat Sikes (1996) notes, much research into motherhood is rooted in personal experience: "Women who had children found it affected and changed them much more fundamentally than they could ever have imagined. As a consequence, they chose to work on and write about issues and concerns affecting mothers" (341).

When I first began to think about how I might pursue my interest in women's understandings of motherhood and family life in relation to popular culture I was already familiar with a long tradition of feminist research that attempted to place women's experiences and understandings at the centre of research agendas (Anderson and Jack, 1991 ; Mies, 1983; Reinharz, 1983; Sacks, 1989; Smith, 1990). I was particularly taken with research accounts that moved beyond this and worked to incorporate notions of difference and diversity among women into their projects (Allen and Baber, 1992; Mies, 1983). I wanted to do research that acknowledged the differences among women and did not attempt to 'fit' all women into canonical theoretical frameworks.

The women in this study, however, are all from fairly similar backgrounds in terms of class position, educational achievement and ethnic origins and thus enjoyed similar sets of understandings about many things - what might be termed shared value or belief systems. These commonalities were something I aimed for as part of my desire as a researcher to provide a setting where participants would feel reasonably comfortable. I did this in order to facilitate ease of communication and avoid feelings of out-of-placeness or alienation from other group members. I recruited the research participants by advertising at the childcare facility attached to the University of Canterbury, at several local kindergartens and by advertising in the newsletter of a community organisation that worked with single mothers in Christchurch.

Originally my intention was to interview several very different groups of women with the aim of achieving relative homogeneity within and diversity among groups. However, as the time approached for me to move on to another interview group in April 1997, I realised that these four women had now formed sufficient rapport to begin to explore the conflicts and differences that had emerged in their discussions - moving away from an unspoken desire for consensus that occurred during the earlier interviews. As this happened the richness of the data I was collecting was such that I decided to continue working with this group of women until I felt that the issues they raised had been sufficiently explored. By November that year I realised that it was not feasible to interview other groups to the same extent and that I had more than enough data for my thesis. I thus decided to limit my interviews to this group of women. By making the decision not to interview other groups I have privileged the voices of middle class Pakeha mothers. As I will argue, however, this process has brought me to doubt the usefulness of reducing women's diverse experiences into such static categories of identity. At the same time it is clear that this thesis does not include the voices of Maori or Pacific Island women, those of working class origins or those who are not engaged in heterosexual relationships.

While I acknowledge critiques of research that merely reproduces the experiences of privileged groups such as these white middle class women (Allen and Baber ; Court and Court, 1998; Fine, 1994;, 1992; Smith, 1990), I believe it is less than useful to imagine this particular group of women's lives in such simple terms. These women have, between them, experienced times of extreme financial hardship, physical disability, abusive relationships, depression, the strains of inter cultural marriage and single-parenthood as well as the many forms of disadvantage any woman faces when trying to combine pregnancy and motherhood with work and study. Their experiences, though sometimes shared, are in no way homogenous and I believe they

provide a great many insights into the struggles women face as they negotiate their identities as mothers, partners and actors in the public sphere. Their understandings are shaped by the social and historical context within which they live and will never be the same as those whose class position, racial identity or sexual orientation demand different struggles and strategies for negotiation of identity.

I am also aware that the similarities between our social, ethnic and educational backgrounds and the fact that I was also a student and a mother of a young child when I interviewed these women, allows me the possibility of claiming 'insider' status in the research process. Rachael Griffith (1998) describes the research 'insider' as "someone whose biography (gender, race, class, sexual orientation and so on) gives her a lived familiarity with the group being researched". Those who undertake insider research claim that this "tacit knowledge informs her research producing a different knowledge than that available to the Outsider – a researcher who does not have an intimate knowledge of the group being researched prior to their entry into the group" (362). Insider status has been used by those engaging in these type of research projects to make claims to epistemological privilege; that knowledge is somehow tied to experience and therefore shared experiences between researcher and researched produces more authentic understandings of the lives of the participants.

However, as Griffith also notes, shared biography does not translate easily into shared experiences and research relations evolve over time in studies where participants are interviewed repeatedly. Depending on the topic under discussion, a researcher may shift back and forth between insider/outsider status, and certain similarities or differences between the researcher and her participants are highlighted at different times in the research process. Referring to her own research with mothers, Griffith acknowledges that motherhood is a complex and varied social construct and that simply caring

for children in no way surmounts the considerable differences in the circumstances in which women undertake this task or the meanings they give to it.

To use my research as an example, when I began interviewing Hannah, Bridget, Penny and Sarah my own situation was probably closest to Bridget's. We were both Pakeha, from middle-class backgrounds, married with a young child or children and were both studying for our doctorates. Our childhood histories, however, were significantly different. Bridget had grown up in India, I had lived for much of my life in Christchurch. Bridget met her husband when she was a teenager and married in her early twenties. I had several de facto relationships before I met my husband and had married when I was 29. Bridget's husband was from the Middle East, mine from Auckland, New Zealand. Bridget is still married, now has three children and has moved with her family to live in a Pacific Island nation. I am divorced from my first husband. I lived as a single mother for several years, entered a new relationship and now live with my new partner and my child, who spends several weeks every school term with his father and his new partner. My changing circumstances have at times shifted closer to Hannah, Sarah or Penny's experiences, then, with more changes have shifted again. I cannot possibly claim to 'know' any one of these women's lives, but instead use my understandings of my own changing personal circumstances to question any static notion of subjectivity and motherhood. As Griffith concludes:

The researcher is always located somewhere. Her knowledge is situated in particular sets of social relations. But that is the beginning of the research story and not the end. ... At the beginning of the research process, inside knowledge of social groups is invaluable, bringing an authenticity to the research that is almost impossible to reach from the outside. However, a theory of knowledge grounded inside social boundaries is simply not sufficient. It is embedded in a static conception of social difference, assuming that gender, race, history and sexual preference are socially immutable (375).

Once I had recruited these four women, fulfilled the requirements of the university Human Ethics Committee and achieved written consent from the participants, I began interviewing in February 1997, initially meeting with the women on a weekly basis in a small room in the Education Department. Morning tea was provided and, if necessary, I also employed someone to mind their children. The interviews were informal and unstructured. During an initial meeting we provided each other with some autobiographical background, largely as a means of introducing ourselves, and spoke a little about our media consumption habits. Succeeding interviews were based around topics that had been raised in earlier discussions, usually when time constraints had prevented further exploration of them. My intention was to let the participants guide the research, using their own interests and experiences as a starting point for discussion and analysis (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Ely et al, 1991). All interviews were taped and fully transcribed.

As much as was possible, analysis took place concurrently with the research, enabling me to revisit issues that had arisen during earlier interviews and provide my participants with some sense of the direction the analysis was taking during subsequent discussions. I offered to provide more detailed descriptions of analytic procedures and summaries of my analysis so far in the hope that this would demystify the research process and involve the participants in theorising their own narratives (Bishop and Glynn, 1999; Bloom, 1998; Young and Tardif, 1992). However, it became clear that there was little interest in taking part in this type of discussion from any of the participants - their interests appeared to be in more immediate discussions of everyday life and media consumption, not academic analysis of it. This is not to say that these women were not constantly theorising their lives (Fine, 1994; St. Pierre, 1997), but did not appear to be particularly interested in how I went about doing this. Although I repeatedly brought my ideas about where the

data was leading me analytically to subsequent interviews, the group consistently rejected my suggestions that they read and discuss these and I am still left wondering whether I could have done more to encourage them to participate in this process.

In 1997 I was struggling with the issue of power relations in the research process. I had implemented several methodological strategies aimed at reducing the power differential between myself and the interview participants. These were not always successful, however, as the above example illustrates. As I have already mentioned, my engagements with writing about feminist research at this time was engendering a change in my thinking about research methods and a shift away from a phenomenological approach. Some of the tensions that arose for me around issues of power and control in the research setting were a result of that shift. My recent readings about reflexivity and reciprocity in the research process (Bloom, 1997; Busier et al, 1997; Cotterill, 1992; Ellingson, 1998; Fine, 1994; Larson, 1997;) impelled me to offer 'something back' to the women I was interviewing.

During 1997 my commitment to reciprocity meant that I spent considerable time with Hannah, Penny, Sarah and Bridget. This involved long phone calls discussing children, partners and studies, helping them with academic work and meeting regularly for coffee. I arranged to take the group out for lunch several times and also attended children's birthday parties with my son along with other members of the group. What originally began as my attempt to offer something back became, over time, mutually supportive, complex social relationships between myself and these four women – they developed into friendships. I valued these friendships a great deal as I struggled with juggling my studies, part time work and motherhood. The opportunity to spend time with other women with similar commitments was important to me and I believe we all enjoyed our time together during that year. The relationship I

developed with each woman varied in its intensity and intimacy, but all four shared some very personal experiences with me as I did with them.

These developing relationships, however, stood in stark contrast to my positioning of myself in relation to each woman during the interviews. In this setting I worked hard to leave the talking to the participants, often despite a strong urge to join in the conversation. At the time I was relatively satisfied that I was pursuing a research agenda that privileged participants' voices over those of the researcher. As I transcribed the interviews, my silence, punctuated only by carefully worded questions aimed at producing elaboration and explanation, indicated to me the success of this agenda. When I heard myself occasionally interrupt the discussions with a story of my own I would cringe at how easily I could lead the others to pursue a new topic of conversation. What I was not recognising was that this was how the discussions progressed throughout all of the interviews. As the women moved from one story to another they would build on a point, digress to a different topic, relate something back to an earlier conversation. The discussion would wind its way through stories, memories, explanations, exasperations and disagreements. It was this wonderfully dynamic, explorative type of discussion that was the reason I had decided on group interviews in the first place and while I celebrated the way these women influenced each others' thoughts, I remained convinced that my influence was not only unnecessary, but actually detrimental to the research process.

The interview data, therefore, is often marked by my silence, punctuated only by carefully worded questions aimed at clarifying points or gathering additional information. This approach is deeply dissatisfying to me now, and reading back over the interview transcripts I remember that it was difficult and felt very unnatural for me to sit in a room with four other mothers of young children and not participate actively and passionately in their conversations.

In fact many times I failed in my endeavours to do so, and so my voice inserts itself into the data more often than I was comfortable with at the time.

My fluctuating involvement in the conversations that produced the data for this study is apparent in the chapters that follow as my own experiences come and go from the discussions. This was not, however, dissimilar to the other participants in the interview process. Although my silence as the researcher was more common and probably more self-conscious and intentional, there were times when one or other of the research participants chose not to speak. Sometimes this was when other commitments required them to be absent from the interviews. At other times they did not participate in conversations that were not relevant to their experiences or expectations. For example, Bridget was silent during long discussions about relationship break ups and single motherhood. She had been in a relationship with her husband since she was a teenager and had never experienced mothering alone. While she did participate to some extent in these conversations, it was to a much lesser degree than when we were talking about other issues that she had direct experience of. Similarly, when the group discussed juggling paid work and motherhood and their expectations that they would eventually be employed in professional occupations, Penny, who did not wish to work outside her home until her children were older, participated very little in these conversations.

Recently feminists committed to qualitative research methods (Bloom, 1997; Busier et al, 1997; Cotterill, 1992; Ellingson, 1998; Ellis et al, 1997; Fine, 1994; Larson, 1997) have highlighted the importance of intimacy and friendship in research relationships, of engaging in dialogues with participants – “vital experiences which move us into learning and understanding more about others, ourselves and our world” (Busier et al, 1997; 165). This work has motivated researchers to examine more closely the dynamics of the interview and the influence of the researcher in the mutual construction of

research stories (Court & Court, 1998). Michelle Fine (1994) describes attending to relations between researcher and researched as “working the hyphen” between self and other in order to:

...unravel, critically, the blurred boundaries in our relation, and in our texts; to understand the political work of our narratives; to decipher how the traditions of social science serve to inscribe; and to imagine how our practice can be transformed to resist, self-consciously, acts of othering (75).

Elizabeth St. Pierre (1997) employs Deleuze’s notion of working within a fold to describe her experiences as “both identity and difference, self and other, knower and known, researcher and researched” (178) as she interviewed older women in the town in which she had grown up. Her research caused her to theorise her own life as she theorised those of her participants, and in doing so she found herself “working much harder to understand (her) participants, to respect their lives, to examine (her) relationships with them, and to question (her) interpretations” (181). For St. Pierre, “the examination of one’s own frailty surely makes one more careful about the inscription of others” (ibid).

Both Fine and St. Pierre’s words spoke to me as I began to examine the production of knowledge within my study - how I had come to ‘know what I know’, the methods I had employed and the ‘data’ that informed my analysis. By remaining silent, by privileging researcher distance in the name of reducing the researcher/researched power imbalance, I had missed the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the women in my study despite my increasing intimacy with all of them outside the interview setting. Interviewing a group of women meant that there was plenty of dialogue between the research participants, so the study was never lacking dialogical engagement. It was, however, lacking any explicit acknowledgement of my own positioning in relation to the participants. By this I mean the ongoing construction and negotiation of my own subjectivities in relation to the discussions taking place

in the interviews. Colleen Larson (1997) writes of the importance of researchers engaging in dialogue with those whose lives they are studying:

Dialogue makes understanding the life world and lived realities of others possible. When researchers share their ways of seeing, understanding, and interpreting life events with story-givers, they surface the fissures between their own life worlds and those of the people they portray. Disparities between the meaning that researchers make of the lives of others and the meaning that story-givers make of their own lives become points of entry into understanding human experience...By failing to engage in deliberative dialogue and inquiry, researchers put themselves at greater risk of not seeing, not understanding, and misinterpreting people whose lives and life experiences differ from their own (459).

My hesitance to engage in dialogue with these women during the interviews had two negative impacts on the research process. First, it increased my 'othering' of the participants, as I remained silent about my own personal and emotional life while collecting and analysing intensely personal details of theirs. Secondly, it ignored the relationships I had with these women outside of the research, relationships that continually informed my analysis and my understandings of each of the participants' lives. While the multiplicity of sites of analysis afforded by my friendships with these women greatly enhanced my capacity to produce interpretations that I believed would resonate with their lives, it also provided me with numerous opportunities to exploit these growing friendships in the name of such analysis.

As an example, two days after my marriage broke up I met Penny at a local shopping mall. She asked how I was and I told her what had been happening. We sat down together and she offered support and advice and shared some of her experiences with me. Now as I analyse and write my representations of this group of women's stories about their relationships, I know that I am greatly influenced by my own experiences, my conversations with Penny and the other women in the study outside of the research setting, as well as the interview data found in the transcripts. Again this multiplicity of sites of analysis enhances my understandings and intensifies my resolve to rigorously

interrogate both my analysis and my methodology and will no doubt improve the quality of my scholarship.

I am left wondering, however, if Penny had any idea that we were constructing data for my study when she comforted me on the steps of the fountain at the local mall. When she reached out to me in friendship she probably had no idea I would take her words into my analysis, which I inevitably do. While I may not directly use the information she offered me, I carry a sense of the meanings she attaches to her marriage break-up and the emotionality we explored in our conversation with me when I write about these things in my thesis. In feminist research, the leakiness between relationships inside and outside of the research context confuses positionality and constructs moments where the possibility of exploitation becomes real. I am not arguing against reciprocity as an important component of a methodology/ies that acknowledges the subject position of the researcher in relation to her participants and the need for offering something back to those who participate in research. However, notions such as reciprocity are necessarily complicated by the ongoing intricacies of research that is social and dynamic in nature. Where power effects may be reduced in some areas, the potential for exploitation of more intimate relationships remains wherever reciprocity and friendship are implicated in feminist research processes. Acknowledging this is part of a feminist practice that realises the complexity of all human relationships, research included, and constantly interrogates any attempt at inscribing method as an antidote to power, or what Packwood and Sikes (1996; 336) describe as using "research as a recipe" for feminist practice.

Despite the attention I paid to issues of power in the research setting, interviews were always permeated with power dynamics. During this study I found myself continually working with the women I interviewed as we attempted to construct conversations that acknowledged our various

agendas. I experienced frustrations and confusion as my participants rejected my attempts at imposing order on their involvement in the study. This occurred throughout the study. While I would phone each of the participants the night before our arranged interview to remind them, I was never sure who would turn up the next day or what time they would each get there. They were all leading extremely busy and unpredictable lives and while I am sure each woman was committed to the research, it was by no means central to their lives in the way it was to mine. Other priorities would from time to time make it impossible for them to attend or result in their arriving late and the consequent discussions would reflect the different interests and changing types of interactions that occurred as the group membership altered.

At other times we would have agreed on a topic for discussion next time at the conclusion of the previous interview. I would arrive at the next scheduled meeting prepared to explore this topic with the women only to find that one or other of them had something else they wished to discuss. Often someone would bring a women's magazine with an article she had found interesting and this would provide the impetus for the next two hours of conversation. There was a constant process of negotiation, not only between myself and the participants, but also among the four women as they decided what they would talk about. I noticed over time that Sarah and Bridget were much more likely to introduce the topic for the week than Hannah or Penny. At times I tried to intervene in this and explicitly asked Hannah or Penny what they wished to discuss, or mentioned something one of them had raised during the course of a previous interview as a possible topic.

My attempts at imposing some sort of democratic order on the discussions were based on an assumption that equal participation is a requirement of power sharing. They were usually unsuccessful, however, with Hannah and Penny appearing unwilling to challenge the apparent dominance of Sarah and Bridget in setting the agenda. During the one interview that neither Sarah nor

Bridget were able to attend, I found myself leading the discussion and doing a lot more talking than I usually did. I was often concerned about the relative quietness of Hannah and Penny and worried about their comfort levels during interviews. However, during conversations outside of the research setting I attempted to probe this area of concern and both women assured me that they very much enjoyed the discussions and were pleased that they did not feel pressured to talk more than they felt comfortable with. Having said this, I know that Hannah discussed her disability at great length with me in conversations between the two of us and barely mentioned it during the interviews. I wonder why this was, and realise that while there were many advantages in conducting group interviews, the power dynamics inherent in any group may have precluded some of the participants from discussing issues that meant a great deal to them. Of course another possible explanation is that the study's focus on motherhood and popular culture allowed Hannah to emphasise other subjectivities and put her disabled self to one side during the interviews.

Negotiations of power, and my relative powerlessness to control all aspects of the research process were also evident when I attempted to provide television diaries to Hannah, Sarah, Penny and Bridget. I asked them to write down any responses or comments they might like to make on their television viewing between interviews. While all four agreed to take the notebooks home, they were rarely written in. Again, I had to acknowledge that four very busy schedules did not often allow time for my research agenda. I am also aware that I was not taking into consideration the domestic arrangements of much television viewing, so clearly articulated in David Morley and Roger Silverstone's (1990) study of the gendered nature of television consumption in the home. For women, watching television is usually done in the context of domestic labour and is constantly interrupted by the many demands of such labour. Expecting the women in my study to be able to find the time to also complete written evaluations of their viewing was unrealistic.

At one stage in the research I attempted to show a videotaped documentary on childcare issues that had recently been screened on national television and had generated much discussion in the media. None of the women in the study had watched it and I thought it might be interesting to show it to them and hear their comments. However, as I stopped the recording each time the discussion overtook the viewing, I realised that this was not going to be possible. After two hours they had watched only seven minutes of the documentary. The programme raised so many issues for discussion that it would take many interviews to cover if I continued this way. Instead we agreed to spend the next interview session discussing childcare issues. I was reminded of my original intention of privileging the women's talk over media texts, and wondered who had taken charge of this research agenda.

Power exists everywhere (see discussion on Foucault in Chapter Three) and is constantly negotiated between researchers and researched, the latter being active participants in the construction of knowledge during interviews (Court and Court, 1998; Limerick et al, 1996). We cannot rid our research of power or hope to create a static balance of power during interviews. I believe the aim of my research is greater understanding of these women's lives and the meanings they give to them. What I do with these understandings, how I interpret and represent them, and what audiences I present them to, are all sites where the trustworthiness of my research comes under scrutiny. I have learned a lot about the importance of exploring my relations with the women I interviewed and this would not have been possible without paying attention to notions of reflexivity and reciprocity. However the trustworthiness of my research does not end with the methods I employed (Bloom, 1998; Griffith, 1998). I must continue to strive to represent Hannah, Penny, Sarah and Bridget's conversations in ways that I believe honour their commitment to my study and my commitment to their desire to contribute to a project that will be used to enhance our understandings of women's lives.

To complete the methods narrative, analysis of the interviews involved my reading and re-reading the transcripts, familiarising myself with the data to the extent that I was able to identify certain recurring notions in the discussions. In order to do this I developed a list of conceptual codes from my initial readings of the interviews, which I then applied to the transcripts. Initially I began using more formal coding methods such as those advocated by Bogdan and Biklen (1993), but found it more useful to think about the broader conceptual categories that I produced when I began writing analytic memos (*ibid*). I used these memos to make connections between the codes and broaden the conceptual framework I was working with. Initially I was searching for emerging themes in the data. However I found that many of the interviews were thematic in that they dealt with a particular set of issues that did not reappear in much detail in later discussions. Contrary to what I read in some qualitative research handbooks, the themes did not simply 'emerge' from the data, although certain issues were addressed many times during the conversations. What I did identify as recurring were a number of sites within which the participants explored these themes - in particular the body, the family and state institutions. I decided to focus on these as important sites where ideology, through discourse, shapes identity and as sites where the contradictions inherent in negotiating identity expose the workings of ideology. I will elaborate on this focus in chapter three. While I experimented with different ways of organising my analysis of the data, I found myself returning to these three sites - body, family and institution - as a means of exploring these women's experiences of motherhood at different levels of social interaction. I decided to use these sites to organise my writing and provide an overall framework within which to present my interpretations of the interview material.

Of course the sites I identified do not exist independently of each other - all experience is embodied experience and a woman does not leave her identity

as a mother at home when she attends university or visits her local department of social welfare office. In fact it was often the moments when the boundaries between these sites became increasingly blurred, such as when these women's pregnant or breast feeding bodies disrupted their sexual relations or university study, that the contradictions inherent in the discourses that attempt to dichotomise maternal/sexual embodiment and private/public spheres created particular tensions for them. It was this blurring or leakage between these sites that enabled dominant, common sense notions of female identity to become problematic in the discussions these women had about their lives. And of course pregnancy and birth, sexual intimacy, and motherhood all provide ample opportunities for leakage and messiness, both metaphorically and in the most 'real', physical sense (Frosh, 1997).

#### Conclusion: Power relations with/in the research

Exploring issues of methodology has helped me to understand that addressing issues of power relations in research involves a rejection of methods and forms of writing that objectify and 'other' research participants and a commitment to reflexivity and reciprocity in order to produce an analysis and text that is self-consciously partial (in both senses of the word), politically engaged and understood as actively constructed by both researcher and researched. According to Rosanna Hertz (1997), reflexivity requires a researcher to engage in "internal dialogue, and constant (and intensive) scrutiny of 'what I know' and 'how I know it'" as she produces texts that allow audiences to understand both researcher and researched as "situated actors", as "active participants in the construction of knowledge" (viii) Of course the researcher has the ultimate control and authority over the text she produces; it is her interpretations, her choice of material, her representations of others' stories that prevail in any written work she produces. What follows, then, is my representation of the research stories I collected during the 10 months of interviews. I outline the theoretical perspectives that have informed

these representations, the dominant constructions of motherhood that circulate in Pakeha New Zealand culture and the three sites of analysis I have focussed on.

This, then is the official version of my research process - a description of what I did and some of the reasons I used certain procedures. It raises some of the issues around research methodologies that I have been exploring during the last two years and locates this study within the feminist postpositivist tradition. However it is also deeply dissatisfying for me. It implies a linear, rational procedure that changed a little over time, but basically was informed by a set of ideas about what makes good research that I then put into practice. There are, however, other stories from the year I conducted those interviews and each telling will be different. I want to tell one version here to illustrate the superficiality of a methodology chapter that merely describes procedures and theoretical underpinnings and to attempt to document how my changing personal circumstances impacted so greatly on my understandings of the women I interviewed and my own involvement in the research process.

### 1997

1997 was a very difficult year for me in many ways. I was juggling full time study with three part time jobs and a one-year-old child. My partner was working long hours and spending most of his time away from his son and me. The partnership I had envisioned when we decided to have a child had become a distant dream as I coped alone with most of the housework and childcare as well as my other commitments. I was feeling tired, lonely and unsupported. My supervisor took leave early in the year when she had a baby and was unavailable for most of the time I was interviewing. As well as this she assigned responsibility for a large undergraduate course to me and several other graduate students. It was the first year this course had been offered in a new format and I spent a considerable amount of my time working

with the other tutors and counselling students, often with only a vague idea of how I should be directing them. Eventually this supervisor left the university altogether, leaving me to find a replacement. I was avoiding my other supervisor (in another department), as I was embarrassed about the lack of progress in my thesis work.

In August my partner underwent knee reconstruction surgery and was immobilised for three months. I was now needing to spend much of my time at home tending to him and my son, and my relationship with the other tutors in the undergraduate course was increasingly strained as they perceived me backing away from the difficult and demanding work involved. I found this hurtful, but was too distressed by other concerns to adequately confront the situation. I felt resentful towards my supervisor who had assured students that she would be unavailable for only a short period of time, but I also knew the difficulties of juggling university life and a new baby and was hesitant to place demands on her. By the end of the year I was exhausted, depressed and getting close to breaking point, certainly close to ending my marriage and/or giving away my studies.

There were two things that year that stand out as times of respite and rejuvenation amongst the difficulties. On Friday's I would take my son Louis and visit with two women I had met in antenatal classes. We would share lunch and spend the afternoon watching our children explore, drinking cups of tea and talking about nappy rash, teething, sleepless nights, breast feeding, child care - baby stuff. Often we would pack the children into backpacks and spend hours walking along the beach nearby still talking baby stuff. The mutual support was wonderful, but more than anything it was a chance to talk about all those things that make people who aren't new parents' eyes glaze over yet were of such immediate concern to us. I treasured my Friday afternoons.

The second highlight was the interview sessions with Sarah, Hannah, Bridget and Penny. I loved listening to their stories, empathising with their pain, sharing their convictions, being surprised by our differences, watching the relationships between us develop. It was wonderful to see their enthusiasm for my project and their usual willingness to disclose very personal experiences while the tape was running. I was inspired by the stories of how they faced challenges, transformed their lives or just managed to keep it all together sometimes. I also worried about the comfort levels of various participants during some conversations and agonised over my own fluctuating involvement in the discussions. I was unsure how to position myself, how I was being positioned and how much I should disclose about my own situation. My resolve to transcribe each interview as I went and present my initial analysis to the group at the beginning of the next session was thwarted by OOS preventing me typing and lack of money to pay someone else to transcribe them for me. Sometimes I had time to listen to the tapes several times and take some ideas back to the group, but often I didn't. When I did the women would listen politely but had little to say in response. The overwhelming impression I got was that they were there to *talk*.

Because I had few opportunities to talk with my supervisor, I was not able to address many of the concerns I had about the research process with someone more experienced than myself. Discussions with other students were helpful, but tended to raise more questions than they answered. I was working from intuition much more than methodological conviction a lot of the time. I don't want to labour this point too much, as I was experienced in qualitative research methods, including unstructured group interviews, and had a good grounding in epistemological and theoretical approaches to this type of research. I will discuss some of the limitations and advantages of the procedures I used later, but for now what I want to emphasise is the impact of all of these other concerns, which usually get excluded from consideration in

discussions of methodology and methods, on how I did what I did and how I came to know what I know.

What had by far the greatest impact on my study was that I was *living my research* in ways that I had never imagined when I began. As the women I interviewed discussed problems with their partners; juggling jobs, study and family life; their dismay at the permanent changes in their bodies after pregnancy; feelings of guilt for leaving their children in day care; boredom, exhaustion and sleep deprivation; frustration with partners' lack of involvement in household responsibilities; fear of being judged a 'bad' mother and a myriad of other issues, I was able to identify passionately with their need to *talk* about it all, to connect with other mothers and to try to make sense of their lives as mothers, as women, as students. I would sometimes cry as I listened to the tapes or read the transcripts, expressing my own disappointment at my failing relationship and feeling deeply a sense of helplessness and despair at the difficulty of altering some of the circumstances within which we do our mothering, our loving and our working.

### 1999

Writing this over a year later, I am no longer in the relationship I was in, my son's father has custody of him half the time leaving me with much more time to work. I have completed a graduate course in media theory and have written and presented conference papers relating to my research, so I am feeling a renewed sense of confidence in my abilities. I no longer work three jobs and I usually get enough sleep. I have regular supervision meetings with two committed supervisors, which are extremely constructive. Looking back on a year that was very difficult I am able, with the benefit of hindsight, to acknowledge the importance of many of my experiences that year in informing my understandings and analyses of the stories I listened to and the

data we constructed during the interviews. There are still many aspects of the lives of the women who participated in my research that I can empathise with but have never experienced myself. An enhanced recognition of the value of living aspects of my research only increases my awareness of the difficulty of interpreting stories about the things I do not know. Having the opportunity to reflect on the impact of my personal experiences on my analysis has alerted me to the importance of fully exploring the relation between self and other in the research process.

### 2003

Several years later again and I look back on those years of juggling work, thesis and single motherhood and feel exhausted just thinking about it. There were many more times when the need to work overtook opportunities for study, many times when Louis required my time and attention in such an immediate way that a thesis could not begin to compete, times when ill health prevented me from writing, times when a new relationship or the need to resolve conflicts with my ex-husband distracted me considerably. As I approach the end of the writing process and look back over five years of endeavouring to construct a written text out of my research experience, I reflect anew on how much I have *lived* so many aspects of this thesis. My life experiences inform my writing at the same time as they tell me how limited any academic text on mother's lives must be. I have included this highly personal account of my research process in an attempt to locate myself openly and honestly in the words I write and to account for the absence of my voice in other chapters, when my methods and interview techniques implied the impassioned observer that I never was.

I hope that this discussion of the research process that I have been so deeply enmeshed in has highlighted some of the methodological issues that inform and challenge feminist research. More than anything else, this discussion has

alerted me to the constantly shifting ground of motherhood as it is lived through ever changing social and personal experiences. It is with this in mind that I now turn to issues of subjectivity and identity formation, so crucial in any attempt to better understand women's lives and academic claims to 'know what we know'.

## Chapter Three

### Subjectivity, Identity and Popular Culture

This chapter will outline some of the key theoretical perspectives that have helped shape my interpretations of the research on which this thesis is based. This discussion will examine a number of key texts as examples of specific ways of thinking or “regimes of truth” that certain theoretical orientations have mobilised to direct academic understandings of women’s lives and popular culture. In doing so I will trace some of the development of theories of identity and subjectivity as they relate to feminist theory, cultural studies and ethnographic audience research. Each of these threads is interlinked and together illuminate aspects of what has been described as a paradigm crisis in the humanities and social sciences, as the challenge of postmodern/poststructuralist thought has impacted throughout these disciplines. I will argue that, while the challenges of feminism and postmodernism have been crucial in troubling notions of static, unified gender identity, and a privileging of class over other axes of subordination within the critical tradition, there are still important contributions to be made by theories that conceptualise power in ways that can explain how power blocs have systematically excluded certain groups from social dominance, as well as how individuals negotiate and resist such power. Rather than invoking feminism or postmodernism as a theoretical metanarrative I will attempt to use these theories as perspectives with which to inflect my interpretations of the research data. I will invite feminist, structuralist and poststructuralist theories into dialogue with each other in ways that contribute to greater understandings of this particular research project.

#### Introduction

In constructing narratives about their experiences of motherhood, the women I interviewed explored a variety of subject positions and negotiated a

multitude of tensions produced between/within competing discursive constructions of motherhood and femininity. An overriding tension in the discussions was the disjuncture between two distinct but overlapping understandings of motherhood in Pakeha New Zealand culture today:

1. The ideologically constructed notion of Motherhood that restricts the subject positions available to women and constitutes the Good Mother as a static, almost monolithic identity. The definition of the Good Mother implies a set of ideological constructions of mothers as intuitive, nurturing and self-sacrificing and is inscribed in a range of discursive processes including media representations of Good and Bad Mothers.
2. The diverse range of practices which make up mothering as a daily activity which requires multiple, ever-shifting subject positions as women negotiate the many tasks and obligations involved in the day-to-day business of being a mother. These tasks are always performed in conjunction with the other activities in their lives, often impinging on their ability to enjoy both social and leisure times and to work or study outside the home. Thus mothering practices were often described by the women I interviewed in terms of managing, juggling, negotiating, organising – often management of mess such as personal and household waste, emotional excess or lack of discipline.

It is the tensions produced by the contradictions between the Good Mother and mothering practices that interest me in this thesis, as they provide sites to explore the construction of identity for the women in this study and the ongoing negotiations involved in this process. Children in many ways pose a threat to order and necessitate the containment of disorder and this is often a central concern for women as they attempt to manage their domestic lives. A defining feature of media representations of motherhood identified by the women in this study was the lack of mess and noise associated with their experiences of raising children in the media images of motherhood they

viewed. When crying babies or soiled nappies do appear on television, for instance, they are frequently presented as a sign of bad mothering or a deviation from the usually ordered nature of family life, requiring the intervention of social services, the acquisition of mothering skills or the latest in baby products designed to eliminate mess and disorder. It did not go unnoticed in the interviews that crying babies were much more likely to be associated with young mothers, women of colour or poverty in media representations. There are many more examples of the contradictions between Motherhood as ideologically represented and the mothering practices of 'real' women, which will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

As the women in the study negotiated, discussed, played with and despaired over these tensions, they were involved in the work of constructing identities. These identities needed to take account of the disjuncture described above and often entailed a redefinition of the Good Mother to more closely fit the experiences of motherhood each woman described during the interviews. At the same time the discursive construction of the Good Mother was never rejected altogether and instead was often evoked as an imperative that informed and justified the decisions each woman made as she attempted to juggle the competing demands in her life. Thus identity work was often contradictory, exposing the constructedness and impossibility of Motherhood as an ideological imperative. And yet this same imperative remained embedded in the understandings of what it is to be a mother that each woman produced. While they did not do away with the notion of the Good Mother altogether, this group of women did attempt to redefine, qualify and redirect it in ways that better reflected their own experiences and self-constructions as able parents. Good Motherhood, therefore, occurred for these women as shifting moments within the ongoing struggles and negotiations found in the day-to-day practices of mothering. Rather than the fixed and static image of the Good Mother inscribed in cultural representations, motherhood was, for

these women, a tenuous and shifting identity produced through multiple and contradictory discourses.

From this analysis I suggest that for the women in this study, subjectivities of motherhood are constructed within, and limited by, the discursively produced subject positions available to them within the culture (Weedon, 1991). Identity formations as I am describing them are attempts to negotiate the contradictions between competing discourses and subject positions to construct identities that include/account for the tensions and contradictions these women encounter in their mothering practices. As I have said, these tensions are made most visible when discussions turned to the disjuncture between ideological constructions of Motherhood and the (still discursively constituted) practices of mothering. Such an analysis necessitates a theoretical approach that considers issues of identity and subjectivity, matters that have received considerable attention throughout the humanities and social sciences in the 1990s.

### Critical Theory, Subjectivity and Identity

Media texts are always already embedded in ideological frameworks, as are the social processes through which audiences make meaning. At the same time, the contexts within which global media are produced are multiple and complex, as are the conditions of consumption and interpretation. What then is the relationship between text and reception? And how can identity-construction be conceptualised in relation to popular culture? In order to construct a method for interpreting and theorising the narratives produced by the women I interviewed, it is necessary for me to locate my project within some of the current debates around subjectivity and identity within cultural studies which, as a discipline, has been concerned with issues of ideology, subjectivity and audience activity in relation to popular culture.

Whereas feminist identity theory (discussed later) has concentrated on issues of gender, cultural studies grew out of a Marxist critical tradition, focused primarily on issues of class. Early analyses of the workings of ideology in mass culture favoured a “hypodermic” model, which “assumes a one-way flow between image and viewer, with the image acting on the viewer by prescribing roles and behaviors to a largely unspecified and undifferentiated receiver of the cultural message” (Walters, 1995; 41). Epitomised in the writings of the Frankfurt School of Marxists, this is a pessimistic view of the masses as cultural dupes and mass communications as a means by which the ideological work of capitalism is ensured. However, this privileging of class over other sites of identity and the lack of agency accorded the viewing subject has been radically critiqued in the last thirty years. The introduction of the notion of the socially constructed subject was central to this critique.

A key moment in the development of notions of subjectivity and agency in cultural theory was Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. Gramsci was not an academic theorist, but a socialist activist and his fragmented theoretical writings were specifically concerned with the historical conditions in his native Italy during the 1920s and 30s. He understood that Marx’s ideas had to be constantly revised and expanded on if they were to explain the historical developments in Europe since 1870. He was especially critical of the tendency towards economic reductionism in classical Marxist thinking and thus his major contribution to Marxist theory was at the level of the social formation rather than the economic base.

Gramsci saw subjectivity as actively constructed, through ideology, in everyday material practices. For Gramsci, the work of the dominant classes to win consent from the subordinate is never easy or complete. He introduces the notion of hegemony to describe the constant struggle over ideological terrain that must occur because of the disjuncture between that ideology and the lived experiences of the subordinate. Following from my discussion of the

disjuncture between ideological representations of Motherhood and the lived realities of mothering, hegemony theory is a useful place to begin my interpretations of this research data. According to Gramsci, within the hegemonic struggle people actively resist dominant social forces and culture becomes a site of this constant struggle between those who have power – the power bloc – and those who do not. Important in Gramsci's argument is his rejection of class unity as something that can be assumed, a priori:

It is understood that classes, while sharing certain common conditions of existence, are also crosscut by conflicting interests, historically segmented and fragmented in this actual course of historical formation. Thus the 'unity' of classes is necessarily complex and has to be produced – constructed, created – as a result of specific economic, political and ideological practices. It can never be taken as automatic or 'given' (Hall, 1986; 423).

Thus Gramsci introduces the realm of culture as the site of these practices, and hence the centrality of systems of representation in shaping people's subjectivities, as an important site of ideological struggle.

According to Hall (1986), Gramsci rejected the notion of the "pre-given unified ideological subject" and instead recognised the "plurality' of selves or identities of which the so-called 'subject' of thought and ideas is composed" (433). This plurality is a result of relationships between the subject and the ideological realm and involves the "analysis of ideology as a differentiated terrain, of the different discursive currents, their points of juncture and break and the relations of power between them: in short, an ideological complex, ensemble or discursive formation" (ibid). Such an analysis requires understandings of the complexity of the ideological field, considerations of social and historical differences and a notion of popular agency (Fiske, 1993).

Fiske and Hall both argue that the usefulness of hegemony theory lies in Gramsci's understanding of the complexities of ideological struggle and the multi-axiality of relations of domination and subordination. This understanding

enables them to employ his theoretical perspective to explore the ways in which axes of subordination such as race and gender intersect with class differences in modern societies. Gramsci's insistence on locating any analysis of the hegemonic process within specific historical and social conditions has alerted scholars to the specificities of the social formation and conditions in which a particular power-bloc is able to win the consent of the majority of people at any one time. It has produced analyses of how ideologies can be altered over time, within the cultural terrain of any society: "Consequently, ideologies are not transformed or changed by replacing one, whole, already formed, conception of the world with another, so much as by 'renovating and making critical an already existing activity'" (Hall, 1986; 434). New ideas are introduced into the cultural terrain within the hegemonic struggle and work to change the status and meanings of existing discourses. Thus ideological change is conceived "not in terms of substitution or imposition but rather in terms of the articulation and the dis-articulation of ideas" (ibid).

### Hegemony and Audience Studies

The notion of hegemony has been employed by scholars of popular culture, including feminists concerned with textual analysis (Gledhill, 1988) and audience studies (Brown, 1994; McKinley, 1997; Press, 1991) and others concerned with issues of race and ethnicity (Fiske, 1993; Hall, 1986;). The idea that negotiations occur within hegemonic struggle to produce resistant and oppositional readings of cultural texts has been particularly productive within cultural studies, in particular in ethnographic audience research. As noted above, Gramsci provided a theoretical perspective that can be applied to the complex interactions of different axes of domination and subordination in the cultural landscape, and thus has been useful for exploring a range of subcultures or audience groups. This is largely because it is "not, ultimately, tied to any particular form of power or social formation. What hegemony is

and how it works has therefore developed within cultural studies to embrace a sophisticated understanding of social determination" (Lewis, 1991; 40).

Lewis highlights the important role feminism has played in influencing understandings of how hegemony functions on a number of different planes at the same time and how any single instance of television viewing, for example, involves the viewer in "serious engagements in the battleground of meaning" (42).

As TV viewers, we are usually innocent of our inevitable part in the struggle for meaning. As we put our feet up in front of the television, our mood is more likely to be relaxed than combative. And yet, like it or not, our regular encounters with the kaleidoscope of words and images that flow in to our living rooms form an inexorable part of our semiotic universe. It is inextricably linked to the complex of determinations that produce the particularities of the society we live in. The study of the audience is not politically innocent; it forces us to consider the power structures that shape social reality (ibid).

Studies of audience activity, then, are studies of individuals' engagements with these power structures, and struggles over the meanings that define and position them within these structures.

In particular, feminists have been concerned with how women negotiate their subjectivities as they encounter cultural products that often, on the surface, appear to construct femininity as lacking within a patriarchal hegemonic culture. Christine Gledhill (1988) deployed the term negotiation to describe women's engagements with media texts. She is critical of feminist psychoanalytic film theory that, while able to account for "the alternate misogyny and idealization of cinema's female representations", persists in offering "largely negative accounts of female spectatorship, suggesting colonized, alienated or masochistic positions of identification" (66). Instead she argues that the notion of negotiation might bridge the gap between textual analyses and the experiences of 'real' audiences, without reducing

female pleasure to the unknowing and passive acceptance of prescribed gender positions. She describes negotiation as

...the holding together of opposite sides in an ongoing process of give-and-take. As a model of meaning production, negotiation conceives cultural exchange as the intersection of processes of production and reception, in which overlapping but non-matching determinations operate. Meaning is neither imposed, nor passively imbibed, but arises out of a struggle or negotiation between competing frames of reference, motivation and experience (67-8).

Gledhill's use of negotiation is underpinned by the Gramscian theory of hegemony, "the ever shifting, ever negotiating play of ideological, social and political forces through which power is maintained and contested" (68).

Gledhill argues that hegemony is an important conceptual tool for analysing media at the levels of production, the text itself and reception. Its strength lies in creating the space to explore the experiences of actual reading or viewing subjects in particular historical contexts, as they bring their own subjectivities, identities and pleasure into the viewing process. This notion of "process" suggests flux, discontinuities, digressions, rather than fixed positions. It suggests that a range of positions of identification may exist within any text; and that, within the social situation of their viewing, audiences may shift subject positions as they interact with the text" (73). While Gledhill confines her paper to a feminist textual analysis of the film *Coma*, she concludes that this type of analysis alone will never provide adequate understandings of these political effects. Rather, the work of ethnographic audience researchers is required to explore the concrete contexts within which ideological struggles and negotiations for meaning take place as women engage with media texts.

As I have said, the concepts of hegemony and negotiation have been widely employed in feminist audience studies. These studies tend to delineate two major strands within feminist audience research (and audience studies generally) – those who claim that the hegemonic task of television and other popular cultural forms usually designated as female (for example soap operas

and romance novels) is largely successful and that women's pleasure in consuming these products requires their acceptance of a subjectivity steeped in notions of traditional femininity; and those who claim that these forms of popular culture provide a space for women to take seriously concerns, such as emotionality and relationships, that are usually denigrated in a masculinist society that values rationality and productivity. The first strand tends to stress the predominance of traditionally female roles such as mothering and family life, and the emphasis placed on physical appearance, romance and winning a husband within women's genres. The second stresses the 'gaps' in the texts which women can fill with their own meanings based on personal experience, the valuing of feminine concerns and the social and communal aspects of viewing and reading which all produce opportunities for negotiations, resistance and opposition to the patriarchal meanings within the texts. The first tends to emphasise how the hegemonic process works to naturalise dominant ideologies, while the second emphasises the process of negotiation within hegemony as exposing the workings of dominant ideologies and thus becoming productive of resistance and social change.

Two examples of studies that have used hegemony in these opposing ways are E. Graham McKinley's (1997) research with young women viewers of *Beverly Hills 90210* and Mary Ellen Brown's (1994) study of women's talk about soap operas. McKinley's study focused on the "identity work" that girls and young women engaged in while viewing and talking about *90210*, using a social constructionist model of discursive identity construction as "talk that presents the speaker as a particular kind of person, within a particular community, subject to certain constraints and alive to certain possibilities" (7). She believes that this approach, along with a feminist poststructuralist perspective based in discourse analysis, "can show how talk about media can be both resistive and active, but still hegemonically wins consent to repressive female identities" (8). While the viewers she interviewed may have opposed some of the show's discourses, and actively explored alternative

aspects of female identity while watching and talking about *90210*, McKinley argues that ultimately the values of the text determine the meanings women take from the show, meanings steeped in patriarchal discourses: "Viewers attend to the show in ways determined by their own experience (active reading) – and the meanings they made revealed the text to be wonderfully polysemic – then cycled back to attend to their own identities and lives using values set out by the show (hegemonic reading)" (9).

McKinley argues that Gramsci's theory is useful for enabling a complex theory of the interaction between people and culture, but ultimately explains how the process of viewing, while active, only "serves to rewin her consent to the dominant ideology, especially the patriarchal and capitalist status quo" (35). Central to this argument is the notion of resistance and agency. Feminist agency, according to McKinley, must produce some form of social change and must be linked to interrogation of, and preferably changes in, power structures. For McKinley this was not possible for her young viewers, precisely because of the over-determination of patriarchal textual meanings in the viewing process, and the ways in which this was concealed from the viewers who believed they 'authored' their own interpretations.

Mary Ellen Brown (1994), in her work on women's talk about soap operas, used hegemony theory in a decidedly different way. Brown describes how hegemony explains:

...the formation of dominant culture by a shifting coalition of elites who make use of the complex cultural elements to maintain a power base. The coalition first incorporates elements of a subordinated culture into a form of popular culture. The subordinated group then recognizes some of their identity in the very culture that exploits them, and it is the recognition of their own identity that draws the subordinates to use and experience pleasure from dominant mass culture. Theoretically, through this means, subordinate groups are said to participate in their own exploitation (40).

Here Brown's argument sounds very close to McKinley's. However, it is in her focus on women's talk about soap operas that she highlights the differences

between the two approaches. Brown describes hegemony as “leaky”, for women don’t necessarily receive the intended messages about their place as consumers for their households in an uncomplicated way: “Hence the process of hegemonic struggle is messy, contains overlapping ideologies, and is contradictory and never pure” (8).

Because they necessarily contain aspects of subordinate groups’ experiences, the ideological work of cultural texts is always open to contestation. For Brown it is the conversations that women have about soap operas that enable them to “regain their space” when the “construction of meaning gets back into their own territory – the spoken text” (66). Central to her argument is the notion of a distinctively feminine discourse, which she describes as the type of talk that “can problematize women’s position in society by acknowledging their position as arbitrarily subordinate,” (x). This discourse “recognizes and relates to dominant discourse. However, while the discourse of the powerful seeks to construct reality for woman in ways that suit the dominant, feminine discourse constructs reality for women in terms of her perceptions of the social order in which she is subordinate” (17). Thus it is part of a larger discourse system and carries meanings over time and space. Entry into this “discursive meaning system” is not open to all, only the women whose experiences enable recognition and participation in it (Weedon, 1991).

Brown argues that soap operas enable the deployment of feminine discourse because their open-endedness and focus on orality make them particularly conducive of gossip and it is in the soap opera ‘community’ that women’s talk becomes empowering: “...it is often assumed that women must leave their feminine pleasures behind in order to become liberated; but, in fact, these feminine pleasures may give them space to evaluate their lives in light of existing dominant notions of femininity as well as some nondominant strategies with which to challenge the system on another level” (167).

According to Brown, when women talk to each other about soap operas they

gain an awareness of their own position as subordinate, and this produces resistance and the potential for political action.

Brown identifies the importance of ethnographic audience research for exploring some of the ways in which women make sense of the media texts they engage with, and to uncover the workings of containment and resistance in the hegemonic process. Ien Ang (1996) has described the “profound embeddedness of television consumption (and of media consumption in general) in everyday life” which can only be explored in all its “irreducible heterogeneity and dynamic complexity” using ethnographic methods (69). However, much of the ethnographic research on popular culture has focused on specific genres such as soap operas (Ang, 1990; Brown, 1994; Mumford, 1995), romance novels (Modleski, 1982; Radway, 1984), science fiction (Jenkins, 1992), or specific celebrities such as Madonna (Schwichtenberg (Ed), 1993), or particular television programmes (Ang, 1987; McKinley, 1997) rather than the practices of everyday life. The focus of the research this thesis is based on takes women’s experiences of pregnancy and motherhood as a starting point, with their consumption of media in general as a focus for discussions about the construction of identities. I am primarily concerned with how the women I interviewed negotiated/construct subjectivity and identity through experiences of pregnancy, motherhood and family life within a media saturated world, but the study is in no way confined to discussions of media. Rather, the intersections of popular culture and identity work represent a thread that winds its way throughout the discussions. This approach, while indebted to the contributions of hegemony theory to understanding the complexities of media reception and the negotiation of feminine subjectivities within culture, requires a departure from the focus on media texts of studies that have employed hegemony as a fundamental theoretical framework.

Studies such as McKinley’s and Brown’s are limited by the primacy they place on the media text as a site of resistance/compliance to dominant discursive

constructions of femininity. Arguments that focus on texts primarily can quickly become circular because they fail to explore all of the other sites of identity formation in women's lives. The primacy given to the texts and the meanings within them results in a failure to ask questions concerning other experiences in women's lives that influence their readings of these texts. In particular they ignore the fact that any reading of a particular text is one moment in an ongoing engagement with discourses of femininity and, for this study, motherhood at all levels of social life. Such studies, while recognising the embeddedness of media reception in everyday life, fail to explore the effects this has on how particular texts are received at particular moments and how these may change over time. There is no room in these analyses to explore women's own awareness of factors such as the processes of media ownership and production or how these work in the interests of economic power. This is something that the women in this study appeared to be acutely aware of, even as they participated in positioning themselves within the constraints of the Good Mother discourse. By exploring several levels of social interaction – from embodiment, to family relations, to institutional encounters – I can place the conversations these women had about the media within a much broader social framework. In this study the focus shifts from the 'micro workings of the hegemonic process' as McKinley calls it, to look at the discursive formation of identities in relation to the media and how this is related to other aspects of women's lives – and provides an empirical basis for my analysis. The following discussion places this study within the growing critique in Cultural Studies of ethnographic audience research that privileges the text over everyday life.

### Cultural Studies as Cultural Populism

The emergence in the 1980s of numerous small-scale ethnographic audience studies has been described as a period of cultural populism in Cultural Studies (McGuigan, 1992). Reacting against the earlier, pessimistic

'ideological effect' theorists, researchers such as McKinley and Brown turned to the notion of the 'active audience' to explore reception as a site of analysis, concentrating on television's embeddedness in the domestic sphere and the micro-processes of hegemony at work in everyday viewing practices. As I have said, while these studies were useful in exploring the construction of meanings at the point of reception, they have been criticised for failing to make the necessary links between the consumption of popular culture and increasingly complex global political and economic structures (McGuigan, 1992; Swanson, 1996). Accusations of political naivety have been directed at studies that increasingly celebrated moments of resistance in individual responses to specific media texts without addressing how such resistance might translate into political action or social change (Budd et al, 1990; Corner, 1991; Morley, 1992). As Jensen (1988; 3) argues, "oppositional decodings are not in themselves a manifestation of political power ... the wider ramifications of opposition at the textual level depend on the social and political uses to which opposition may be put, in contexts beyond the relative privacy of media reception" (cited in Morley, 1992; 30-31). This requires greater emphasis on the "significance of the institutional forces which shape the subjectivities, interpretive communities or values which are adduced as the explanation of different individual (or collective) decodings" (Morley, 1992; 37).

However, as Morley (1992) and McGuigan (1992), among others have argued, these studies are of value precisely because they can inform our understandings of media power within the micro-processes of consumption, as long as they are understood in terms of wider macro-structural processes: "If micro-studies alone suffer from the 'So what?' problem, if they just pile up an endless set of ethnographic descriptions, then, equally, any theory of hegemony which is not grounded in an adequate analysis of the process of consumption will always tend to be so over-schematic as to be ultimately of little use" (ibid; 40).

These debates have sparked a number of calls for a refiguring of the notion of 'the audience' in Cultural Studies, along with more complex theoretical considerations of concepts such as subjectivity, cultural identity and methodology in audience research.<sup>1</sup> In a review of feminist audience research since the 1970s, Charlotte Brunsdon (1997) identifies how feminist constructions of 'woman' have shifted as the focus of the research has moved. She argues that "feminist critical discourse itself constructs and produces, rather than simply analyses, a series of positions for 'women'" (117). James Anderson (1996) also argues that the audience is a discursive subject, constructed differently by different research methods and theoretical positions. He goes on to note that within academic writing, the production of the audience as a "working element of a given perspective" is often submerged "making it appear as if writer and reader held to the same concept" (75). Similarly, Martin Allor (1996) describes how recent research that begins with a fixed category – the audience – "works to produce audiences as objects of knowledge and intervention" in ways that "work to ground the claims of our research". He argues that such "figures of audience ... often work to condense contradictory assumptions about the social field and ... often occlude the political implications of our work" (209).

To me, these authors, as well as emphasising the impossibility of capturing 'the truth' about 'the audience', highlight the centrality of understanding the contexts within which any cultural product is consumed. And herein lies a major problem for the 'new ethnographies' in audience studies: by focusing largely on individual or group responses/resistance to particular genres or texts, this work often fails to come to grips with the myriad contexts within which such texts are made to make meaning and impact on the subjectivities of those consuming them. At the same time, audience activity always occurs

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<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of these debates, see *The Audience and its Landscape* (1996), James Hay, Lawrence Grossberg & Ellen Wartella (Eds), Westview Press: Boulder.

within the networks of power that constrain and construct all meanings and subjectivities within a particular culture at a particular historical juncture. As Jensen (1987) reminds us, “meaning is the stuff that the world of everyday life is made of, individual instances of communication make no sense before they have been interpreted in the total context of the audience’s lifeworld” (cited in Morley, 1992; 185).

To address these concerns, Ien Ang (1996) has called for a “radical contextualism” in Cultural Studies – an acknowledgement that, while never able to account for every contextual factor in media reception, audience studies must strive to integrate their research within the contexts of everyday life. The areas on which any individual study focuses need to be explicitly articulated as political arenas chosen exactly because of their usefulness for the purposes of exploring specific realms of power relations within the culture. Such a call moves away from the notion that, through rigorously applying certain ethnographic procedures, some truth about the audience might be exposed in the research process. Instead Ang acknowledges the partiality and constructedness of any research project. She argues that the responsibility for framing both theoretical and empirical questions lies in the space between fictional narratives and social science claims to truth. Thus the work of the researcher is to develop understandings of actual experiences in relation to wider social, political and economic concerns, always alongside a commitment to a fully articulated political project. As Tony Bennett (1996) argues, most active audience research is concerned less with “describing audience behavior than with altering it, less with accounting for reading practices than with changing them” (151).

Among others calling for an approach to audience studies that more adequately addresses the embeddedness of media reception in everyday life, Janice Radway (1988) suggested a new direction for audience research:

Instead of segmenting a social formation automatically by construing it precisely as a set of audiences for specific media and/or genres, I have been wondering whether it might not be more fruitful to start with the habits and practices of everyday life as they are actively, discontinuously, even contradictorily pieced together by historical subjects themselves as they move nomadically via disparate associations and relations through day-to-day existence. In effect, I have begun to wonder whether our theories do not impress upon us a new object of analysis, one more difficult to analyze because it can't be so easily pinned down – that is, the endlessly shifting, ever-evolving kaleidoscope of daily life and the way in which the media are integrated and implicated within it (366).

In 1996 Radway was still lamenting the genre/text-based nature of much of the research in the field. Added to her argument for more understanding of how popular culture is integrated within daily life was a call for a more complex understanding of the construction of subjectivity. Critiquing her own earlier work on women who read romance novels, Radway argues that such genre based scholarship may well enable “the easy formulation of a research project, but it may also fundamentally simplify the entangled set of activities whereby a woman is multiply, often contradictorily, constituted as a subject who is a mother, romance reader, feminist, *Thirty-Something* fan, professional nurse, and volunteer at a battered women’s shelter” (244). As well as constituting one part of a woman’s life (romance reading) as indicative of its whole, this type of research may mistakenly render her a stable subject, existing outside of the practice of romance reading – the ‘woman’ who reads the romance.

As Radway acknowledges, this type of model of media consumption is woefully inadequate when it comes to “capturing the intricate process whereby historical individuals are constructed as *subjects* by discourses embodied within practices and texts”. She argues that discourses may be dissolved into subjects rather than impinging on them, “thereby functioning as the enabling condition of their existence at that moment, as a subject of a particular kind” (245). Thus at different moments a woman’s subjectivity might

be constructed quite differently. Any assumptions of coherence and community must be “investigated as hypotheses rather than postulated as givens” (ibid). Radway concludes her argument with a call for a new ethnography, one that will “take the fluid *process* of articulation as its topic, that is, the process whereby the historical human subject is constructed through the linkage, clash, and confluence of many different discourses, practices, and activities” (245). For Radway, this ethnography must begin with the everyday rather than texts and it could not presume that the subjectivities of its participants would remain static or unified. Such an approach would require new research processes: “It would have to devise instruments designed to render comprehensible that osmotic process whereby individual and text, individual and practice dissolve into each other, thereby producing a distinct and recognizable *subjectivity*” (ibid).

If I am to place this study within the context of Ang and Radway’s radical critique of ethnographic audience studies I need to add to my methodological writings a method of analysis that addresses the construction of multiple and shifting subjectivities produced in and through the discursive formations of femininity, motherhood and family. Such an analysis goes beyond (but does not altogether leave behind) the hegemonist insistence on power residing with the dominant power bloc and the institutions that serve their interests and leads me to more directly engage with theories of identity and subjectivity. Cultural critics, influenced by psychoanalytic analyses of film, ethnographic audience studies and poststructuralism, are attempting to better understand the inner worlds or psychic workings of people’s engagements with the popular as well as the material and social conditions of reception. It is common for these works to focus on how subjectivity and identity are socially produced (Cherland, 1994; Hall, 1998; Holland et al, 1998; Miller et al, 1998; Sarap, 1996; Walters, 1995; Walkerdine, 1997).

### Theorising Identity

One example of an approach that directly addresses issues of identity formation is Holland et al (1998) who employ a range of anthropological and Cultural Studies perspectives – theorists such as Bakhtin, Vygotsky and Bourdieu – articulated within postmodern understandings of identity as plural, located within discourse and produced through practice:

Identity is a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations. We are interested in identities, the imaginings of self in worlds of action, as social products; indeed, we begin with the premise that identities are lived in and through activity and so must be conceptualised as they develop in social practice. But we are also interested in identities as psychohistorical formations that develop over a person's lifetime, populating intimate terrain and motivating social life. Identities are a key means through which people care about and care for what is going on around them. They are important bases from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being (Holland et al, 1998; 5).

Central to their conceptualisation of identity is the idea that people are always subject to discursive powers, but that there is also the need to recognise people's "generativity, their capacities – embedded always in collective meanings and social relations – to imagine and create new ways of being" (ibid). There they want to "respect humans as social and cultural creatures and therefore bounded, yet to recognise the processes whereby human collectives and individuals often move themselves – led by hope, desperations, or even playfulness, but certainly by no rational plan – from one set of socially and culturally formed subjectivities to another" (6-7). In taking this approach they do not ascribe identity to major structural features such as race, class, or gender, although they acknowledge that the identifications of people within the "worlds" they explore are usually "structurally marked". For Holland et al (1998) the focus is on "the development of identities and agency specific to practices and activities situated in historically contingent, socially enacted, culturally constructed "worlds"" (7).

Studies such as these move beyond analysing moments of resistance or compliance with hegemonic ideologies and instead explore the myriad ways that identities are both constituted and produced through engagements with popular culture. They construct subjects as active or “generative” and locate their analyses within specific historical and social contexts. At the same time such an analysis employs a number of different theoretical approaches to understanding identity construction as a series of lenses through which to view the researcher’s interpretations. Because this study is concerned with how mothers both embrace and reject dominant constructions of bodies, family and motherhood, and at the same time acknowledge the contradictory nature of their responses, such an approach promises a broader theoretical spectrum within which to place my analysis, including attending to the inner emotional worlds of my participants. The tensions between the ideologically constructed, monolithic identity Mother, and the daily lives of ‘real’ mothers are negotiated within mothering practices, but also within the realms of emotionality. However it is constructed (see Chapter Four), mother love is indeed a powerful force and one that cannot be ignored in a study that claims to enhance understandings of motherhood in Pakeha New Zealand society today. While at times producing alternative or counter-hegemonic discourses, the women I interviewed often located their resistance to cultural representations of Motherhood within the discourses of the dominant ideology. Hegemony theory would leave me little choice but to reduce the status of the women in this study to cultural dupes perpetuating their own subordination as they embraced these oppressive discourses, albeit through a process of active negotiation. The interplay of resistance and compliance I encountered in these interviews requires a different analytical approach that more adequately represents the complex and contradictory nature of identity formation for these women. With this in mind I now turn to postmodern theories of subjectivity and identity.

## Postmodernism

Feminists in the academy have been debating the usefulness of postmodernism for understanding women's lives since these theories were first articulated in the academic realm and a considerable body of work has been produced around these debates (See, for example MacNay, 1992 and 1994; Nicholson, 1990; Ramazanoglu, 1993; Sawicki, 1991). The postmodern project, with its critique of Enlightenment thinking (see Chapter One) has challenged such notions as universal truths, stable identities existing outside of culture and the possibility of liberations through social revolution. For feminists this critique has been both productive and problematic. Notions of plurality and shifting subjectivity have been helpful in exploring the differences among women allowing for more complex understandings of the intersections of race, class and gender inequalities. At the same time many feminists feel that postmodernism threatens the political and liberatory aims of feminism that have been based on the construction of their collective identity as women. The highly theoretical nature of much of this debate has been charged with exacerbating an already increasing divide between academic feminists and those involved in grass roots political struggles.

Within this debate the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault has been of particular interest to some feminist academics. Foucault has been criticised by feminists for his androcentrism and his refusal to provide an adequate explanation for the sources of power or how specific groups of people have been systematically dominated by others (Hartstock, 1990; MacNay, 1992; Ransom, 1993; Soper, 1993). These critiques will be discussed in more detail below; for now I want to address the ways in which many feminists have found Foucault's work useful despite its contradictions and limitations. In particular how Foucault's reworking of the notion of power and his rejection of monolithic power structures such as patriarchy enables the possibility of a 'politics of difference' that acknowledges plurality and differences among

women. Rather than calling for social revolution, such a reworking suggests the formation of strategic alliances between groups of women in the pursuit of new political struggles that uncover the effects of power at particular locales in order to redirect it in their favour (Ali, 2002; Bailey, 1993; Sawicki, 1991; Butler, 1990; Dahlberg et al, 1999; Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998).

Key to his contribution to feminism and Cultural Studies, therefore, is Foucault's notion of power. Power, in the Foucaultian sense is "exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions – an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated" (1979; 138). Thus, for Foucault, power does not reside with the dominant class, but can be measured instead by its effects which permeate daily life as people are embedded in the relations of power that work to regulate social conditions. In this way Foucault focuses on the productive rather than the repressive functions of power and how these are played out in particular localised settings:

What gives power its hold, what makes it accepted, is quite simply the fact that it does not weigh like a force which says no, but that it runs through, it produces things, it induces pleasure, it forms knowledge, it produces discourse; it must be considered as a productive network which runs through the entire social body much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression (Foucault, 1978; 36).

In re-examining power as effect rather than domination, Foucault rejects the Enlightenment belief in a universal truth 'out there' to be discovered and employed as a means of liberation. Instead he describes how knowledge and power are intertwined, how power produces certain knowledges as truths which in turn become the instruments of power. In Foucault's (1980) words: "The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power" (52). As one side of the power/knowledge nexus, knowledge becomes a means of understanding how the world is and how we should act in and make sense of that world. There is

not universal or just truth or knowledge, merely the inscription, through power effects, of dominant ways of thinking or, in Foucault's words "regimes of truth" that impose limits on how individuals can know themselves and their place in the social world (Dahlberg et al, 1999; Moss et al, 2000; Ransom, 1991). These regimes of truth become embedded in social practices through discourse. Discourses can be understood by looking at how what is said fits into a network that has its own history and conditions of existence (Sarup, 1996). Foucault rejects the Lacanian notion of the subject as constituted through language, and instead looks at the practices that constitute the subject: "The focus of Foucault's work is discourse – the structured ways of knowing which are both produced in, and the shapers of, culture. Discourses are not merely linguistic phenomena, but are always shot through with power and are institutionalized as practices" (Ransom, 1991; 123).

Foucault argues that the language we use shapes our beliefs and actions, becoming a type of convention that produces particular subjects implicated in historically and socially prescribed networks of power (Moss et al, 2000). Those ways of thinking and acting that constitute certain knowledges and the practices that accompany them as truth become dominant discursive regimes or Foucault's regimes of truth. These regimes of truth work to regulate and normalise certain ways of thinking and acting while excluding alternative knowledges and practices. "Discourses *produce* knowledge because they operate through implicit sets of regulatory rules that restrict what can be said, done and represented" (Nadesan, 2002; 402).

This notion of regulatory or disciplinary power is central to Foucault's explanations of how individual subjectivities are constructed within the power/knowledge nexus. His genealogies of sexuality, prisons and madness, for example, describe the emergence of disciplinary power from the seventeenth century onwards in an increasing shift from sovereignty to what he calls governmentality. Moss et al (2000) describe this as "a power not

about sovereignty and the overt coercion of people, but concerned instead with their management, organization, orchestration and shaping, and with the determination of conduct" (235). As the agents of governmental power, the role of the state becomes one of defining, monitoring and managing difference (Baker, 1998). These tasks fall to the education, medical, welfare and other state institutions that apply a range of techniques to regulate and normalise human conduct.

These techniques of control are applied to individuals and groups through scientific and psychological categories that define what is normal and determine strategies for intervention where these norms are not adhered to (Nadesan, 2002). In Chapter One I examined the extension of governmental power into the lives of mothers and their families in New Zealand and throughout the West, through the application of scientific categories of appropriate mothering and normal child development as well as the interventions in family life that the welfare state enabled. It is through policing or monitoring processes that such techniques of control are implemented, requiring constant self-examination and ever more careful scrutiny of human behaviour within discursively defined norms (Foucault, 1988). And it is these policing or regulatory processes that produce the modes of discourse and practices that shape our understanding of human nature (Sarup, 1996). Increasingly we are required to place ourselves in the hands of experts – medical professionals, educators, psychologists and the like – to conform to these discursively regulated norms.

According to Majia Nadesan (2002), these strategies of regulation of governmentality "generate complex interrelationships between the forces and institutions labelled 'political' and those sites and apparatuses which produce and manage individual behaviour in relation to norms and objectives". She argues that the power of governmentality is continually extended as "more and more dimensions of life are identified and problematized as in need of

intervention" (421). This notion of governmentality through disciplinary power provides a theoretical base for understanding how communities and individuals come to accept normalising discourses as truth, and to engage in self-regulation as they work to position themselves within the regimes of truth they are immersed in. According to Foucault, the individual is carefully fabricated, through discourse and disciplinary practices, into networks of power.

The concept of disciplinary or regulatory power has contributed significantly to my understandings of the interviews I conducted for this research in three overlapping ways. Firstly, this group of women repeatedly described a sense of their mothering practices being watched and judged by others. At times they were explicitly aware of who was doing the watching, but at many others there was no apparent watcher, merely a pervasive sense of being under surveillance permeating their discussions. Secondly, they described many instances when they became the watchers, participating in the covert surveillance and regulation of other mothers and other women's children. Finally, the powerful regulatory discourses that prescribe motherhood and construct childhood in particular ways (see Chapter Four) for Western women produced numerous examples of the kinds of self-regulatory practices that Foucault alludes to. Throughout the interviews these women demonstrate how they became the means of surveillance in the regulation of their own mothering practices.

This regulatory power, although pervasive, was never guaranteed, however. According to Foucault, wherever there is discourse there is resistance; power is always contested and resistance can take many forms. The apparent pervasiveness of power can be challenged precisely because it is effective at the micro-level of daily life where individuals encounter these effects in a multitude of conflicting and contradictory ways every day. There are ample opportunities to recognise and alter particular aspects of dominant discourses

during these encounters (Nadesan, 2002). Referring to dominant discourses of motherhood, Janet Ransom (1991) writes:

So, for example, discursive constructions of the perfect mother exist, but are challenged by competing feminist conceptions of what women can be or of the ways in which women can be mothers. Women's identity as mothers is contested; a woman can resist the traditional discourse of motherhood by refusing to be a mother, by setting up alternative parenting arrangements, by taking her children on 'reclaim the night' marches or doing an evening course in roofing (134).

There were many examples of the women in this study resisting the regulatory processes they were embedded in. As Jean Steans (1988) writes, "all women can, and do, think about, criticize and alter discourse" (179). When Bridget said she wanted to "take them (her children) every day and spill their cheese" in response to a letter to the editor of the university student's magazine criticising mothers for taking their young children to the university café; when Sarah declared that breastfeeding in public was her "feminist challenge to the world" despite the discomfort she experienced at times when exposing her breasts in front of male visitors to her parent's house. When Hannah visited her local social welfare office and stated that she wanted to be legally declared an individual because, as a wife, she was financially disadvantaged by a welfare system that denied her and her daughter an income because of her husband's employment record; when Penny continued to sleep with her young son in her bed despite being told by those close to her that she was using him to replace her husband after their break up. On these and many other occasions, these women resisted disciplinary power on a daily basis and their identities as mothers were marked by the tensions that compliance and resistance brought to their mothering practices.

Identity, in Foucaultian terms, is constructed in and through discourse and regulatory discursive practices. However, because discourses are neither monolithic or total and function as a means of struggle and contestation, often competing with other conflicting discourses, the identities formed through them are necessarily tenuous and shifting (Butler, 1990; Sarup, 1996; Lather,

1992). Thus identities are multiple and contradictory, always constituted within particular localised historical and social contexts and may alter over time, between individuals and even within the self:

We are seen to live in webs of multiple representations of class, race, gender, language and social relations; meanings vary even within one individual self. Self-identity is constituted and reconstituted relationally, its boundaries repeatedly remapped and renegotiated ... Identities are continually displaced/replaced. The subject is neither unified or fixed (Lather, 1992; 101).

This notion of shifting, multiple identities, constructed in and through regulatory discourses was reflected in the responses the women I interviewed gave when I asked them how motherhood had changed the way they perceived themselves. Bridget describes motherhood as one of many changes to her life that effects how she acts as well as how others see her:

But I do think, yes I do think that people treat you differently, see you differently and you life does have to change. But I don't think that that's a bad thing. I think your life has to change when you get a job, I think your life has to change when you grow out of being a teenager, I think your life has to change when you get into a serious relationship with someone else. But I don't think it's ... um, I'm still essentially Bridget and I'll always be that person.

Sarah evokes motherhood as one of a number of subjectivities that make up her identity, none of which alone defines who she is:

I see it as part of my identity, yeah, part of Sarah. Sarah student, Sarah mother, Sarah musician, whatever. Sarah sexpot, you know (laughter), all those different things, and it's just part of that persona and so yeah, I don't see it as a, as the all encompassing image.

These two quotes illustrate a sense of multiple, shifting identities that are in no way restricted to any particular subject position. Interestingly, however, Bridget added a cautionary note to Sarah's description of her multiple identities by replying, "I think some people do, they see you and they think 'mother', and they judge you. Is she a good person?" This sense of surveillance was seldom absent from any of the discussions in the interviews

and Penny's response to my question was framed entirely within her experience of regulatory power:

I find the whole issue very problematic for me. I have positive feelings towards being a mother to my kids, most of the time. Um, but I get very negative feedback, very negative images. I always feel that it doesn't matter what I do, I won't be seen as a good mother by most people.

These shifting, multiple identities, regulated but resistant, are shaped by and in turn shape the discursive constructions of motherhood that are explored throughout this thesis. A Foucaultian approach, then, seems a fitting theoretical tool with which to construct my understandings and representations of the conversations Hannah, Penny, Bridget and Sarah engaged in over the course of this study. Foucault's work directs me to look at the daily practices of these four women, and the discourses that constitute those practices, to explore how power produces effects that define and limit their lives as mothers, but also invites resistance and redirection. This struggle over meaning is played out in all the intricacies of everyday living, including activities such as reading a women's magazine or watching television. As Len Ang (1996) reminds us, "(t)elevision viewing practices are always related to the operations of social power (and) Cultural Studies is interested in understanding media consumption as a site of cultural struggle, in which a variety of forms of power are exercised, with different sorts of effects" (43).

### Foucault and Feminism

Foucault's reworking of the notion of power discussed above has been widely debated among feminist academics. For some, his failure to specifically address how power works to maintain gendered inequalities and his refusal to acknowledge his own gendered perspective in his work make his theories incompatible with a feminism that pays particular attention to these issues. An example is Kate Soper (1991) who writes:

Foucault has been justly charged with offering an account of power which not only ignores those highly specific forms in which it is exercised in any sexually hierarchical society, but also overlooks the differential impact on the lives of men and women of the general 'disciplining' procedures to which he does not attend (47-7).

Similarly, Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland (1991) argue that Foucault's blindness to his own gendered perspective, his "supposedly neutral analysis of truth, power and sexuality" in fact produce their own discursive truths that ignore the gendered experiences of women that are central to feminist politics (249). They argue that Foucault's notion of power underestimates the "intransigence of the powerful in defending their privilege" and does not adequately address how in fact women might be able to successfully resist "entrenched male power" (254). Foucault's insistence on power as effect leaves them unable to enquire into where men's sexual power comes from and why it is so pervasive in both men and women's lives and the institutions that govern them. Feminism, they argue, has provided considerable insights into *how* men exercise power over women, in the detailed descriptions and analyses of women's experiences that abound in feminist literature. Thus they criticise Foucault's focus on discourse: "The question of *why* men have power over women cannot be entirely reduced to analyses of discourse, since the links between individual relationships and the institutionalised power of heterosexuality and masculinity cannot then clearly be traced" (256).

Such critiques of postmodernism in general and Foucault in particular, raise important concerns for research that focuses on women's experiences as this study does. It is clear that feminist research employing a Foucaultian approach must address the specifically gendered nature of categories such as mother as well as the intransigence of male power despite rapidly changing social conditions for women. In this thesis I am particularly concerned with how the women I interviewed experienced motherhood as an identity marker distinct from father or parent. Constructions of motherhood are

located within discourses of femininity in general that constrain the possibilities for shared parenting that many feminist accounts of motherhood proclaim as the key to women's liberation from domestic drudgery (see Chapter Four for a discussion of this literature). Therefore, along with a Foucaultian analysis of power and subjectivity I must pay attention to the particularly gendered nature of motherhood.

Despite the concerns addressed above, Foucault's work has been particularly productive in contesting a feminism that relied on an analysis of power as sovereignty and oppression – namely patriarchy – and therefore cast men in the role of oppressor. As Ramazanoglu and Holland (1991) concede, “theories of patriarchy have not been able to explain in sufficient depth why men so generally have power over women, even when men can be frightened, vulnerable, emotionally dependent, anxious to give pleasure and oppressed themselves by masculinity” (247). In this study there are times when the women I interviewed expressed considerable regret that men are often dislocated from their families, spending long hours working to provide for them financially. They also acknowledge the differences among men, that some struggle to resist dominant notions of masculinity while others use them to avoid caring for their children or participating in unpaid work in their homes. Thus I believe these women recognise that it is the discursive constructions of masculinity that shapes men's lives just as the discursive constructions of femininity shape their lives. It is not male power per se that reproduces gendered divisions of labour and caring in families, but the powerful regulatory processes through which these divisions are made to make sense most of the time. A Foucaultian approach, paying particular attention to gendered identities, enables me to address these issues.

The other key contribution postmodern theorists have made to feminist analyses is the disruption of the notion of a unified feminine identity, shared by all women. Young (1990) writes of the ways such an understanding of

women's identity has highlighted the experiences of white middle-class women and excluded many others from academic theories and feminist politics. Central to the problematic Young identifies is the notion of identity, one's sense of self and relatedness to others. She asks how feminists or others similarly politically motivated are to proceed if political action is not possible without identification with others who share common struggles, yet that very identification serves to exclude. How can a politics of difference be conceptualised, let alone mobilised? These questions become even more complex when applied to conceptions of identities as not just social categories, but as "a felt sense of self, a culturally conditioned or constructed subjective identity" (Butler, 1990; 324). Writing in 1990, Judith Butler describes the ways in which feminist theory had assumed the foundational importance of the category 'women', often without realising the exclusions afforded by such a move:

The descriptions of women's oppression, their historical situation or cultural perspective has seemed, to some, to require that women themselves will not only recognize the rightness of feminist claims made in their behalf, but that, together, they will discover a common identity, whether in their relational attitudes, in their embodied resistance to abstract and objectifying modes of thought and experience, their felt sense of their bodies, their capacity for maternal identification or maternal thinking, the non-linear directionality of their pleasures or the elliptical and plurivocal possibilities of their writing (324).

As well as being normalising and exclusionary in nature, Butler argues that most feminist theory had failed to account for the intersections of gender, race, age, class and other identities. She goes on to argue that the notion of a unified subjectivity had been central to much feminist work in which "one tells a story that constructs a discrete gender identity and discursive location which remains relatively fixed" (329).

Butler's chapter 'Gender trouble, feminist theory and psychoanalytic discourse' that I am referring to appeared in the book *Feminism/Postmodernism* (1990), which was an important early exploration of

feminism's engagements with postmodern theory. Her argument represents an important departure, within feminism, from notions of gender as fixed and in some way reflective of biological sex. She sees the construction of a sense of coherence between sex, gender and desire as part of a "regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence" and argues that by disrupting this sense of coherence, the "regulatory ideal is exposed as a norm and a fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law that regulates the sexual field that it purports to describe" (336). Instead, Butler posits identification as fantasy, imbued with the desire for coherence and produced on the surface of the body: "In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause" (336). Thus, for Butler, gender and sexuality are performed, they are a "fabrication", and represent the "public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body" (ibid). By creating the illusion of a core identity, the political regulation of heterosexuality can be displaced, and thus masked, by the location of gender identity within the self.

This dissolution of the 'truth' of gender identity is a key aspect of Butler's challenge to feminism: "If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (337). Thus, feminist theory cannot presuppose the coherence and stability of the category women, and indeed needs to understand that the construction of this coherence is itself an effect of power relations. The arguments Butler introduces in this chapter and expands on in two of her other books, *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), challenge the notion of gendered identity and the normalisation of heterosexuality that accompanies it: "Butler's project is to disrupt dominant understandings of sex, gender and

sexuality, which assume that there are two bodies, two genders, and that heterosexuality is the inevitable relation between them” (Gregson and Rose, 2000). While she sees this as a major challenge to feminist theory, Butler suggests that rejecting the reification of gender relations opens the way for a more complex and generative theory and the possibility of “coalitional strategies” rather than political activism that fixes the identity or subject positions of its adherents.

Butler’s writings are key texts in this discussion in a number of respects. Her work represents a departure for feminism from fixed notions of gender identity and introduces the notion of multiple subjectivities and performativity of gender that neither static nor essential. Butler’s use of the Foucaultian notion of regulatory fictions, produced through discourse and discursive practices, inscribed on the surface of the body, provides useful insights into exploring the ways in which the women I interviewed both inserted themselves into dominant discourses of femininity and motherhood, and were able to resist these discourses with reference to their own embodied experiences, as well as their ability to perform gender identities differently. For this reason I have chosen to focus on the body, in particular pregnant and post-pregnant bodies, as one important site of identity construction in this thesis (see Chapter Five).

Feminist academics have taken up Butler’s challenge and her notion of gender as performativity to reframe questions around women’s subjectivities and resistance as well as disruptions to heterosexual norms (See for example Bell et al, 1994; Gregson and Rose, 2000; Longhurst, 2000;). Robyn Longhurst (2000) for example has explored how pregnant women parading through the streets of New Zealand’s capital city Wellington in bikinis, disrupted traditionally held notions of pregnancy and respectability, causing “pregnancy trouble” and inviting public debate about how pregnant bodies are discursively constructed in New Zealand. She argues that the bikini contest, which received front-page headlines in New Zealand and worldwide press

coverage, exposed the covert policing of pregnant women's bodies that occurs in New Zealand and elsewhere in the West.

### Postmodernism and Childhood

As well as focussing on women's gendered identities, Foucault's work has been influential in theories of childhood that are emerging in the social sciences and early childhood education fields. These theorists are challenging some of the taken-for-granted notions of childhood that underpin many of the discussions in this thesis (Aries, 1992; Baker, 1998; Dahlberg et al, 1999; Jenks, 1992; Moss et al, 2000; Nadesan, 2002; Smith and Taylor, 2000). In doing so they also critically examine the place of the child in the family and the place of the family in society. In the same way that feminists like Butler have challenged the notion of a unified female identity, Dahlberg et al (1999), following Foucault, dismiss any notion of childhood as a given state:

From our postmodern perspective, there is no such thing as 'the child' or 'childhood', an essential being and state waiting to be discovered, defined and realized, so that we can say to ourselves and others, 'that is how children are, that is what childhood is'. Instead there are many children and many childhoods, each constructed by our understandings of childhood and what children are and should be (43).

This perspective allows Dahlberg et al to critique dominant discourses of motherhood, particularly those that require mothers to be in constant attendance to their children. They use a postmodern perspective to "move away from the restrictive, dualistic thinking" that dominates debates around childcare for young children, arguing instead that "*both the home and the early childhood institution have important, complementary but different parts to play*" in a child's life (52). These theorists argue that not only are current constructions of childhood, and therefore motherhood, produced through dominant discourses of children and families, they are in turn productive of particular discourses and practices that guide policies and interventions in mothers' and children's lives (Moss et al, 2000). I will pursue theoretical

understandings of childhood and motherhood, both feminist and postmodern throughout the following chapters, using Foucaultian theories of power and subjectivity to inform my analysis of the interview data.

### Conclusion

Foucault's work has been seminal in problematising notions of power and subjectivity. The notions of discipline, surveillance and his highlighting of the body as a site of regulatory truths has been very influential in the analysis I bring to this study. However, while Foucault has dispersed the notion of power, allowing a much more complex understanding of how axes of subordination are constructed within discourse and discursive practices, I am left wondering if this dispersal shuts down avenues for exploring the systematic functioning of power in a society where the subordination of certain groups of people is structured into ways of knowing, discursive practices and social agencies. Foucault (1991) has stated: "I have always been concerned with linking together as tightly as possible the historical and theoretical analysis of power relations, institutions, and knowledge, to the movements, critiques, and experiences that call them into question in reality" (374). In doing so he has highlighted the changes in how power works in postindustrial societies that are not adequately reflected in the Marxist traditions of Gramsci and hegemony theory. Popkewitz et al (1998) employ Foucault's theorisation of the shift from sovereign to governmental power to highlight these changes. They argue that Foucault's usefulness lies not in the wholesale dismissal of previous critical traditions, but in his reframing of questions about how power constructs individual subjectivities through discursive practices:

Strategically, the study of the effects of power enables us to focus on the ways that individuals construct boundaries and possibilities. In some ways, we can consider the work of Foucault as expanding on and providing a historical specificity to the observations of the early Frankfurt School. The early theorists focused on the expanding rationalization and instrumental reasoning that underlie modernity. Foucault enables us to

understand that such reasoning has multiple trajectories and to explore the various strategies through which individuality is constructed as both disciplining and productive of power (19).

In particular a Foucaultian approach requires me to problematise taken-for-granted notions of motherhood, families and childhood in order to “make the familiar strange”. By exploring how certain discourses came to dominate thinking about motherhood and families, these discourses are exposed as constructed in and through modes of power. Such a project carries with it the possibility for social change because “as soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible” (Foucault, 1988; 155). Social change cannot occur, however, without an understanding of the ways in which male power is deeply entrenched in Pakeha New Zealand culture. As Ramazanoglu and Holland (1991) caution, “the political experience of women daily subordinated by men, by masculinity, by the social construction of their bodies, makes resistance and change much more complex and problematic than Foucault seems to allow” (260). I would add to this the deeply held beliefs about the nature of childhood and young children that the women in this study expressed (see Chapters Six and Seven). These beliefs are reflected in profound feelings of guilt and anxiety over engaging in practices that challenge them and are reiterated in social institutions as well as the personal relationships of each of the women I interviewed. This study must take seriously, therefore, the hegemonic power of institutionalised constructions of motherhood and childhood and the perpetuation of masculinist ideologies inherent in the welfare, education and medical institutions these women encounter in their daily lives.

I would conclude, with Popkewitz et al (1998) that Gramsci’s notion of power as sovereignty and Foucault’s governmentality are both concerned with the politics of social change and recognise that “neither interpretive stance is totalising but both are complementary: the former considers larger historical

structures through which daily life is constructed; the latter focuses on the concrete practices through which power circulates and is productive in daily life” (20). I would add to this a feminist politics of difference that seeks to understand the gendered experiences of women as one aspect of power that intersects many axes of domination and subordination in New Zealand today. The chapters that follow then, will explore current social constructions of motherhood alongside the particular experiences of four Pakeha women whose descriptions of the regulatory discursive processes they encounter are part of an ongoing struggle to construct their identities as mothers.

## Chapter Four

### Social Constructions of Motherhood

#### Introduction

I quoted Sharon Hays (1996) at the beginning of Chapter One, writing that there is nothing “natural nor given” about how motherhood is constructed (13). This chapter returns to the examination of socially constructed notions of motherhood in contemporary Western culture. As Shari Thurer (1994) reminds us: “(O)ur current ideal of the mother is, like all ideals, culture-bound, historically specific, and hopelessly tied to fashion. And, of course, fashions change ... Good mothering, history reminds us, is a cultural invention – something that is man-made, not a lawful force of nature” (xxx, 300).

In this chapter I will argue that the powerful constructions of motherhood that circulate throughout New Zealand culture and that were identified by the women in this study have developed as a response to the specific historical and social conditions discussed in Chapter One. The regulation of mothers' lives is embedded in powerful notions of natural motherhood and nuclear families. These notions are inscribed in law and state institutions, and circulate widely through popular culture. However, no matter how powerful current constructions of motherhood are, the fact that they are constructed means that there is always room for resistance and the creation of alternative ideologies and practices. Since the 1960s, feminists have challenged and resisted dominant notions of motherhood, arguing for greater control for women over their own reproductive health, more male involvement in domestic work, paid parental leave and more adequate and less expensive childcare facilities. This chapter combines a discussion of current constructions of motherhood with a variety of feminist challenges to the taken-for-granted notions that govern women's mothering practices. Integral to any discussion of motherhood is an examination of current social constructions of childhood which have been relatively uninterrogated by many feminist

scholars and which, I will argue, may hold the key to understanding the pervasive and persistent power of dominant discourses of motherhood.

### Current constructions of motherhood

When Phoenix and Woollett (1991) discuss mothering, they refer to “the daily management of children’s lives and the daily care provided for them. Incorporated within the term ‘mothering’ is the intensity and emotional closeness of the idealized mother-child relationship as well as notions of mothers being responsible for the fostering of good child development” (6). This definition introduces several of the central constituent components of current social constructions of motherhood. These include the mother as the person responsible for the daily maintenance and management of the household within the nuclear family, the mother as the key provider of emotional nurturance, and the mother as vital in monitoring fostering appropriate emotional physical and intellectual development in her child. The flip side of these constructions is that if anything goes wrong in any of these areas it is the mother who is primarily, if not solely, held to blame. Thus, in current constructions of motherhood, the child’s well-being is constantly under threat from ‘bad’ mothering and women are under constant pressure to deliver a “child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive” form of “intensive mothering” that often leaves them guilt-ridden and exhausted (Hays, 1996; 8). That many women today combine motherhood with paid employment only serves to increase the difficulties of juggling several demanding and conflicting roles.

In order to unpack contemporary ideological constructions of motherhood it is necessary to examine how these are composed of several interlinked assumptions. These include the notion that motherhood is natural (and thus normalised); that the role of the mother is to foster ‘normal’ development in her child, a job that requires expert professional guidance; that this is best

achieved within a traditional nuclear family; that a mother's primary responsibilities lie in the private sphere; and that any deviation from these prescriptions is inherently problematic and potentially damaging to the child. At the same time it is important to understand how these assumptions have worked to further state and corporate interests, individualising women's experiences and often ignoring structural inequalities facing women such as racism, poverty and unemployment.

Underlying all of this is an assumption that mothering tasks are women's responsibilities, that a man, although a vital member of the nuclear family, will play a limited role in domestic and childrearing labour. Thus notions of motherhood are located within discourses that work to clearly distinguish between the male dominated public and the female dominated private spheres. As more women move into the paid workforce there have been growing calls for men's increased participation in domestic labour, but there is little evidence that men are engaging in substantially more housework or childrearing duties than previously (Baxter, 1993; Bianchi et al, 2000; Dempsey, 2002; Wolcott and Hughes, 1999). For those women with adequate financial resources, it is often the employment of other, less privileged women in childcare and domestic labour that allows them the opportunity to escape some of their assigned responsibilities in the home in the pursuit of paid employment. Even for relatively privileged women this is rarely unproblematic however, as current constructions of motherhood and childhood often produce feelings of guilt and anxiety in women when they leave their children in the care of others (Villani, 1997). The following discussion will examine the various components of current social constructions of motherhood in more detail.

### The Good Mother as Natural Mother

Dominant discourses of motherhood evoke the Good Mother as an ideal. She is a monolithic identity, steeped in notions of nurturance and self-sacrifice. The desire to have children is portrayed as an inherent part of a woman's nature in Western constructions of motherhood. Women are assumed to have a natural 'maternal instinct' that produces the desire to both want to have and care for children. Women are expected to "submerge their own needs and interests in those of their children, a degree of self-effacement which in relationships other than the mother-child one would be judged pathological" (Woollett and Phoenix, 1991; 36). Nurturing and caring for others is constructed as an essential component of femininity in Western society, a fact which is illustrated by the expectation that women will take care of those around them, be they family members, friends or work colleagues (Glenn, 1994; Richardson, 1993). However, in the case of motherhood, women are expected to completely put aside their own interests in favour of their children's. In fact these are often conflated so that women and children's interests become one and the same (Marshall, 1991; Richardson, 1993; Villani, 1997). While a mother may be constructed as powerful in her ability, through good or bad mothering, to control the future successes or failures in her child's life, this is done at the expense of her own desires:

Yet, even as mother is all-powerful, she ceases to exist. She exists bodily, of course, but her needs as a person become null and void. On delivering a child, a woman becomes a factotum, a life-support system. Her personal desires either evaporate or metamorphose so that they are identical with those of her infant. Once she attains motherhood, a woman must hand in her point of view (Thurer, 1994; xvii).

The assumption that women naturally possess the qualities of love, sensitivity, warmth and empathy required to nurture children and others around them stems from the biological fact of reproduction. It is assumed that because women are the ones who bear and give birth to children, they possess the inherent qualities necessary to raise them (Glenn, 1994; Thurer,

1994; Villani, 1997). This construction of female biology and sexuality stands in contrast to constructions of masculinity that highlight fatherhood as evidence of a man's virility. Whether he becomes a father or not, however, a man is assumed to retain his status in the public sphere, while a woman's identity and status is often dependent on her ability to reproduce and care for children (Richardson, 1993; Villani, 1997). Because of this, motherhood can be seen as central to a woman's feminine identity and sense of self, confirming her "physical and psychological adequacy" and providing her with "identifiable social functions" (Phoenix and Woollett, 1991; 53).

The four women I interviewed for this study expressed contradictory views on the naturalness of motherhood. Hannah spoke of her own mother as possessing the natural maternal qualities of love, selflessness and acceptance, qualities she obviously greatly admired. At the same time she rejected her mother's full time domestic role and described herself as "more like my father", wanting independence and a career. She added that this "doesn't make me a bad mother though", indicating her resistance to notions of self-sacrificial, natural motherhood. Sarah also evoked the image of the natural mother, both in her belief that she "just knows" when her daughter needs her and when she spoke of the death of Princess Diana and the "true mother's love" that Diana's sons would now be without:

I think that the royal family and the way that those people are brought up in isolation like that with nannies and huge draughty castles is hideous. And what she did for those boys in giving them some humanness and real motherly love ... she gave those boys some access to humanity and we just saw that all fall apart, and we felt for those little boys who, she'd really given them a true mother's love, you know, and it had all been taken away and that was the thing that really, really upset me.

Bridget also evoked the image of the natural mother when describing Princess Diana:

I think she was actually quite naturally drawn to children as well. I think it was something in her, she's drawn to people, she's a people person, so it came to her rather naturally that she would do the very best for her sons

... she's a warm mother and gave them love, which often children do miss out on.

At other times, however, the group described motherhood as a set of skills learned from other women, from childrearing manuals, or through trial and error. Although they alluded to natural mothering qualities in other mothers, these women clearly experienced motherhood as something that they acquired over time through their own experiences of being mothered and engaging in mothering practices.

Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1994) argues that it is the mutually constitutive relationship of motherhood and gender that constructs the gendered allocation of mothering as flowing inevitably from reproductive function. For this reason “mothering – more than any other aspect of gender – has been subject to essentialist interpretation: seen as natural, universal and unchanging” (3). Glenn argues that this dominant ideology of motherhood serves as a lens to “filter and, to varying degrees, distort our experience and understanding” (9), making the existing order appear inevitable. “Thus, by depicting motherhood as natural, a patriarchal ideology of mothering locks women into biological reproduction and denies them identities and selfhood outside mothering” (ibid). The women in this study clearly rejected the notion that motherhood alone would provide them with identity and a sense of fulfilment, as all four were undertaking university studies. They did, however, participate in the discursive construction of motherhood as natural, but usually when applied to other mothers rather than their own lives.

As Sharon Hays (1996) points out, pregnancy and childbirth may be universal, but notions of appropriate mothering differ widely over time and culture: “It is the socially constructed *meaning* of pregnancy and lactation that is important; it is the ideas and practices attached to childbirth and childrearing that constitute the culture of socially appropriate mothering” (14). In Western societies, what Hays calls the “ideology of intensive mothering” is

a “very specific and highly elaborate set of ideas that goes well beyond any simple emotional response to children. The beliefs and practices that follow from a mother’s feelings toward her child, in other words, are no more natural or inevitable than those that follow from a mother’s lactation” (ibid). In other words, biology is far less important in defining a mother’s relationship with her child than the socially circulated meanings of motherhood available to women.

Dominant ideologies that construct motherhood as natural can thus be understood as producing normalising discourses that serve to prescribe it as inevitable and those women who are unable to, or choose not to have children as deviant. These discourses work in the interests of patriarchal power to produce “regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1979) that reproduce gendered divisions of labour and situate women in the domestic sphere. The implications of this for women whose experiences do not feel ‘natural’ or ‘instinctive’, is a cause for deep-seated anxiety. “To fail to carry out certain childrearing practices is failure of one kind: not to feel instinctively close and warm to one’s infant is personal failure of quite a different order” (Richardson, 1993; 48). Constructions of motherhood that ignore women’s experiences, that fail to take into account the effects of structural inequalities, lack of resources and the often monotonous and exhausting daily regimen of childcare, can leave women feeling at best ambivalent, at worst inadequate and abnormal as mothers. Such constructions completely fail to address the contexts in which mothering occurs, instead viewing depression, boredom and hostility toward childrearing as indicators of individual pathology and therefore bad mothering (Woollett and Phoenix, 1991; Parker, 1997; Villani, 1997; Milkie et al, 2002). This individualisation of the difficulties women face as mothers is a direct consequence of the social construction of motherhood and maternal love as normal and natural. How this all plays out in the lives of the four women I interviewed for this study will be explored in Chapter Six.

### Motherhood and the Nuclear Family

While motherhood is portrayed as natural and normalised within dominant discourses, these same discourses clearly invoke the traditional nuclear family as the ideal environment for raising children. The assumption that children's needs are best met within a family consisting of a heterosexual married couple where the man is employed outside the home and the woman is primarily responsible for domestic duties is pervasive in Western societies. This is illustrated by the growing concern expressed by politicians and in the news media about the 'problem' of single mothers and working mothers. That working fathers are never referred to in this context illustrates the taken-for-granted nature of men's role as financial providers for their families (Bryder, 1991; Cass, 1995; Fraser, 1989). Despite growing numbers of women-headed single parent families, de facto relationships, reformulated families, women choosing to have children outside of permanent relationships and lesbian and gay couples seeking to adopt or bear their own children, the idealised nuclear family persists as a powerful cultural image (Cass, 1995; Fleming, 1999; Goldson, 1997; Prout and James, 1990; Stacey, 1994 and 1996).

As Ann Phoenix and Anne Woollett (1991) argue, "(t)he family' is a civil institution which is important for the passing on of state ideologies. It is arguably when 'the family' changes in ways that conflict with a state's political aims that concerns about motherhood and 'the family' are expressed because state practices contain prevalent cultural constructions about women" (16). The family is seen as a site of cultural reproduction, with mothers being primarily responsible for ensuring their children grow into good, law-abiding citizens who do not threaten the status quo. Thus, public debates about 'family values' may be seen not merely as considerations of social morals or children's welfare, but as attempts to maintain existing unequal social conditions (Cass, 1995; Du Plessis, 1995). There are compelling reasons for

those in positions of power to want to retain women as unpaid domestic workers and as a pool of potential low-paid temporary workers available when economic conditions require them. Idealised images of the nuclear family must be viewed in terms of their ideological function, enmeshed in networks of power that position women as wives and mothers (Cass, 1995).

Diane Richardson (1993) argues that it is “the web of beliefs which lead women to feel that they cannot do without a man” that limit women’s chances for defining the conditions of their own lives: “In our society, women’s emotional and psychological dependence on men is strongly encouraged by the fact that not having a man, and not having his child, are both seen as representing a failure of ‘femininity’, that glittering prize which from an early age all women are expected to compete for and, moreover, win” (26-7). Women who do not have a man, such as spinsters and lesbians, are portrayed as abnormal and unattractive. Thus many women still find it difficult to imagine alternatives to marriage and childrearing, and harder to imagine one without the other. While these images may be pervasive in Pakeha New Zealand culture, they do not represent the reality of many women’s lives. In this study three of the four women I interviewed had experienced the breakdown of a marriage-like relationship. Sarah and Penny were single mothers at the time I interviewed them, while Hannah had remarried and had a second child with her new husband. At times during the interviews these women actively resist the compulsion to reproduce the idealised images of the nuclear family they encounter in the media:

Hannah: In the glossy brochures that you get through the junk mail, advertising clothes, you get the ideal family. And also on the Purex packet, the toilet paper packet there is an ideal family.

Jane: What do they look like?

Hannah: Umm, very classically beautiful with even teeth (laughter).

Penny: Usually white aren’t they?

Jane: Yeah, white, and how many children?

Hannah: Two children. A boy and a girl. The mother has blonde flowing locks, doesn’t she?

Penny: Yep, and the daughter also has blonde flowing locks and the boy usually has dark hair like the man.

Hannah: Yes, it's the stereotype. Actually there's a Timotei ad on telly that was obviously shot in Queenstown with the Earnslaw and there, that was a case too, the woman with the long blonde hair being whisked out to the lake and her beautiful daughter with long blonde hair, great ad for Timotei. And you must get a handsome, roughly handsome man (laughs).

An article in a *Woman's Day* magazine also provoked some discussion about the types of families that are represented in these magazines during a later interview:

Jane: And look at all of the women and what they look like.

Hannah: And the children and what they look like. Yeah, very well adjusted middle class aren't they? And beautiful.

Sarah: Everybody is blue eyed aren't they?

Hannah: Yeah, Hitler would be proud (laughter).

The women identify the image of the ideal media family as white, physically attractive (and able-bodied), middle class and gender balanced, while Hannah's final comment hints at the more sinister aspects of the racialised nature of this ideal. This is an image that is continually sold to us, appearing in advertisements for anything from clothes, toilet paper and shampoo to car tyres or financial investments. It is an image that most Pakeha children in New Zealand have, quite literally, grown up with, at least until recent changes in family structures have meant an increasing number of children are raised in (usually woman-headed) single-parent or reformulated families. Through constant repetition the Idealised Nuclear Family has become a powerful normalising discourse, based on notions of compulsory heterosexuality and romantic love, and held together by the ever present, ever patient, ever loving Good Mother figure.

One implication of these constructions of the Idealised Nuclear Family is that many women's experiences are ignored or marginalised within dominant discourses. Single women who become pregnant are often portrayed as

needy and selfish, while lesbian mothers are constructed as unnatural and potentially harmful to their children (Richardson, 1993; Stacey, 1996). Women whose family structures deviate from the traditional notion of family are stigmatised by societal attitudes and disadvantaged by social policy (Baker, 1997; Fraser, 1989; Mink, 1998; Shaver, 1995). Overall, the construction of the idealised nuclear family works alongside the construction of motherhood as natural, to produce a normalising discourse, positioning women as wives and mothers within traditional family structures. However, as I have said, the experiences of the women in this study reflect changing family configurations throughout the West (Cheal, 1999; Elkind, 1994; Giddens, 1999; Goldson, 1997; Prout and James, 1990; Stacey, 1994 and 1996). In Chapter Six I will examine the changing shape of family structures in New Zealand and their implications for altering some of the deeply entrenched images of family life that circulate throughout the culture.

#### 'Normal' Child Development and Expert Advice

At the same time as they are expected to take primary responsibility for childcare and monitor their husbands' involvement with children, mothers are also expected to monitor and foster 'normal' development in their children. This emphasis on child development, originating out of psychoanalytic and psychological theories since the 1950s, means that, increasingly, women are expected to look to the experts for information on appropriate childrearing practices. While motherhood is still deemed natural and instinctive to a large degree, the specific skills required to foster the healthy physical, emotional and cognitive development of a child must be acquired with the help of professionals. Thus the good mother is constructed as "active and interventionist", responsible for facilitating and monitoring her child's normal development (Marshall, 1991; Nadesan, 2002). Again, if the child's behaviour does not match these norms, the mother is seen to be at fault.

This is a highly individualistic account of child development. Individual mothers are held responsible not only for the development of healthy, well-adjusted children, but also for the moral behaviour of future generations. Hariette Marshall's (1991) study of popular British childcare manuals found the emphasis on expert guided, active mothering resulted in wide acceptance of a "direct model of influence" in these texts:

If her child's development is not normal, the blame falls on the mother. The guilt induced in a mother whose child does not meet the relevant yardstick at the right time would seem to be one obvious consequence of following the word of the manuals. Another implicit consequence is to level the responsibility for the next generation's moral welfare on individual women's shoulders and to locate any social problems in faulty mothering. Again, society and structural influences are omitted from the equation (83).

Yet, despite claims that they are based on scientific and universal 'fact', according to Marshall, current theories of child development are located within the discourses of a psychology that has ignored or pathologised many women's experiences.

Most studies of 'normal' child development have concentrated on white middle-class infants. This is often justified with the claim that there are too many external 'variables' in the lives of other women to allow the collection of 'objective' scientific data. At the same time, studies of those families considered problematic or pathological are much more likely to contain large numbers of working class or non-white mothers (Phoenix and Woollett, 1991). Thus psychology has produced theories that construct white middle-class experiences as 'normal' and reinforce the notion that other groups are much more likely to be engaged in 'bad' mothering practices (Nadesan, 2002). As with the childcare manuals, these studies ignore the structural conditions of women's lives as well as their own ethnocentric, class-based assumptions. The sort of intensive mothering practices these experts advocate are time consuming and expensive and many mothers simply do not have the

resources available to them to engage in this type of mothering (Hays, 1996; Nadesan, 2002).

The women I interviewed were not only aware that media representations of the Idealised Nuclear Family and its related Good Mother ideals were based on white middle-class imagery, they were highly critical of media images that portrayed women who deviate from these norms as bad mothers:

Sarah: And the bad mothers, that's another thing, it just reminded me. The bad mothers are, I don't say this, but a lot of the time they're black or they're poor or if they're dealing with those welfare issues, or poor mothers, but poor, in a lot of the cases they're poor. Yeah the one poor person is the bad mum.

Sarah's repeated use of the word poor clearly demonstrates how, for her, media representations of good and bad mothering were inextricably linked to financial resources. The discursive linking of economic resources and mothering practices reflects the dominance of discourses of intensive mothering that require the ready availability of consumer items aimed at middle-class parents and designed to enhance an infant's intellectual development (Nadesan, 2002). The connection between poverty and bad mothers that Sarah identifies is particularly visible in medical dramas where poor women are used in storylines that depict child neglect or abuse. The following exchange came after a comment from Penny that she hardly ever sees crying babies on television, particularly when they belong to the idealised Good Mother:

Bridget: The women who do have crying babies on TV are the welfare ones, or the black, the ones on Casualty or something, are about to whack their kids, going mad, in situations of poverty who...

Penny: They're negative aren't they? They're either 'cause the mother's hit them or they've been hurt so it's mum's fault.

Bridget: Or they've been really ill and the mother didn't take any notice of it. And I think it's this kind of thing that, if you're rich and if you have money, your kids will never get sick, end of problem. And if you are poor it's your fault that they do.

Here the conflation of poverty, race, reliance on welfare benefits and child neglect is actively constructing poor and/or non-white and/or single mothers as inadequate, even dangerous, capable of harming their children either intentionally or through ignorance or neglect. In a later interview Bridget and Penny commented that they seldom see poor mothers who are coping well portrayed in television programmes. The discursive linking of good mothers with financial resources is significant in the context of this study because all four women were living with considerable financial constraints at the time I interviewed them, so the invisibility of poor, coping mothers rendered their own experiences invisible. While economic hardship caused problems for this group of women, it in no way precluded them from positioning themselves as good mothers.

The professionalisation of childrearing has further implications for mothers from marginalised social groups. State welfare policies are based on notions of childrearing defined by professionals often working in state institutions. These have been used to monitor and intervene in the lives of families deemed to be inadequate in their childrearing practices: "The aim of child welfare policies is surveillance, with the threat of removal of children as the ultimate sanction of the state and thus the greatest inducement to parents to reform their behaviour" (Phoenix and Woollett, 1991; 19). This power of the state to intervene in some families lives contradicts dominant social constructions of the family as distinct from public life and affords 'inadequate' parents little of the privacy from outside interference that other families might expect (Dahlberg et al, 1999; Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998). As Phoenix and Woollett (1991) argue, the "major impact of child welfare policies is on poor mothers who are often made more powerless through such interventions. The process by which this happens is one in which professionals responsible for guaranteeing child welfare operate on the basis of stereotypic constructions of what good mothers are like" (19).

For some mothers the requirement that they foster 'normal' child development is particularly problematic. When a child is diagnosed as having a disability, the way society views that child is altered and at the same time, how the child's mother views her role also changes. Because constructions of mothering are based on caring for healthy, able-bodied children, a mother of a child with a disability finds herself in a contradictory position – "a mother because she undoubtedly has a child, yet somehow not a mother in terms of the conventional notions of motherhood which pervade our society" (Gregory, 1991; 123). Discussions of children with disabilities are often left out of baby books, in a silence that "serves to exclude mothers of disabled children from inclusion in the category of motherhood" (ibid; 125). Instead, popular culture often portrays these mothers as heroic and brave, emphasising the sacrifices they make and constructing them as deserving of pity and charitable aid (ibid; Gartner et al, 1991).

The discourses of normal child development have been used to encourage mothers of children with disabilities to strive to help their children achieve 'normal' developmental milestones as early in their lives as possible. This presents these women with a paradox: "To embrace the ideology of normalization carries with it the danger of failure, but not to do so can mean exclusion from motherhood as it is generally understood" (Gregory, 1991; 141). Thus those women whose children do not meet the requirements of normal child development are marginalised by discourses that construct their role as mothers as primarily to foster this development. In striving to make their disabled children as much like 'normal' children as possible, these mothers confront failure on a regular basis. Yet, as Gregory argues, refusing to accept normalisation as an aim can lead to feelings of exclusion from current constructions of motherhood. This discussion is particularly relevant to the mothers I interviewed as both Penny and Bridget have had children diagnosed with disabilities since the year of the interviews.

In recent years the focus of childcare literature has shifted from an emphasis on children's emotional development to an added concern with their intellectual growth (Nadesan, 2002; Richardson, 1993). While mothers are still expected to be on hand twenty-four hours a day to provide love and nurturance, they are also expected to provide the appropriate stimulation that will encourage enhanced intellectual development in their children. This has led to a growth industry in educational toys as well as childcare centres that teach pre-school children to read and write, use computers and play musical instruments. Infomercials on television admonish parents to buy books, flash cards, computer programmes and CD-ROMs all aimed at giving their children a head start in the learning stakes (Nadesan, 2002).

Social constructions of normal child development work to further increase the intensity of the mother's role. At the same time they are likely to reinforce feelings of anxiety around mothering as women are encouraged to seek expert advice rather than listen to their own mothers or other women around them. The message here is that the often male experts, with their scientific theories, are the most valid source of information on raising children. Women, with their own experiences of motherhood, are excluded from these accounts. However much the experts may intend to aid and reassure women, the vast array of information available, and the emphasis on medical/psychological discourses which ignore women's experiences, can "foster a nagging sense of bewilderment, wrongdoing, and guilt" in many women (Thurer, 1994; xvii). As Sharil Thurer (1994) argues, the messages that the childcare experts convey is:

...merely kindly, humane folklore, not incontrovertible fact. Their advice is based not so much on scientific comparisons of childrearing as on their experience with babies, on child development theories still in flux, on studies of discrete child behaviors that do not lend themselves to broad childrearing generalizations, along with a big dollop of their personal philosophies. What they offer is informed opinion, not child-raising absolutes" (xxiii).

### Motherhood and Work

All of the above constructions of motherhood position a woman in the domestic sphere, primarily responsible for taking care of her home and family. However many women, through necessity or choice, combine their domestic duties with paid employment. Attempting to juggle motherhood and work is an area of great conflict for many women. For many women the decision to seek employment outside the home is a matter of financial necessity. For others it is an opportunity to escape the social isolation of domestic life and gain a sense of identity independent of their role as mothers. However, the cultural logics of both motherhood and the market place make combining motherhood and paid work problematic for many women. Discourses that prescribe mothers as selfless nurturers run in contradiction to discourses that construct the logic of the market place as demanding self-seeking, profit maximising enterprise (Hays, 1996). Attempting to succeed in both arenas can be difficult and exhausting as women negotiate the conflicting demands of paid work and childcare, often resulting in feelings of inadequacy in both spheres (Hays, 1996; Richardson, 1993; Villani, 1997). Because leaving young children in the care of those other than their mothers is construed as potentially harmful and professional childcare is expensive, anxiety and financial pressure are likely to increase with participation in paid work.

Motherhood and employment are often seen as incompatible, with women being expected to choose between one and the other (Villani, 1997). When a woman does choose to combine the two, it is expected that her children will remain her top priority and work interests will be sacrificed in necessary to attend to the needs of her children (Hays, 1996; Woollett and Phoenix, 1991). For this reason women may be seen as poor prospects for employment or promotion by employers who expect a high level of commitment and long hours on the job from their workers. The ideology of motherhood as natural and inevitable means that some employers may hesitate to employ young

women in positions of responsibility, assuming that at some time they will leave their job to have children. These factors, combined with the cost of childcare and the devalued status and lower pay rates of jobs designated women's work, may mean that for many women work outside the home is less attractive and accorded less status than motherhood. Recent increases in the numbers of mothers with pre-school children working have been largely in part-time, low paid, low status jobs with few opportunities for promotion and few benefits such as holiday pay or paid sick leave (Du Plessis, 1995; Richardson, 1993). It is easy to see then why "motherhood as an occupation and a means of acquiring adult identity is often compared favourably with other outlets and the jobs available to most women. Motherhood is seen as providing women with more control and autonomy over their lives than many of the jobs available to them" (Woollett and Phoenix, 1991; 49).

Ann Phoenix's (1991) interviews with mothers under the age of twenty found that many of these young women saw little reason to defer motherhood. Their social positions and educational backgrounds meant that their employment prospects were clearly limited before they had their children and thus motherhood was a positive viable alternative to low-paid work or unemployment. For these young women, the structural conditions of their lives left them with few options other than early marriage and motherhood. The ideology of feminine fulfilment through romantic love and motherhood meant that, despite the stigma attached to women who have children 'too young' or out of wedlock, motherhood was one avenue for personal achievement and a sense of identity within the structural constraints of these young women's lives.

Women may avoid some of the stigma attached to being a working mother if they are perceived as having to do so for financial reasons. In the past, working mothers' income was often seen as "pin money", a little extra to pay for luxuries (Richardson, 1993). Although women's rates of pay are still

significantly less than men's, these days a woman's wage is often vital to the financial survival of the family, and for the increasing number of single parent families a mother may have no choice but to take whatever employment she can find. If a woman is working out of necessity, she can still 'fit' the construction of the self-sacrificing mother, helping her family rather than attempting to escape it (Hays, 1996; Richardson, 1993; Villani, 1997). When a middle-class woman chooses to work outside the home for other than financial reasons, her actions are more likely to be perceived as selfish and working against the interests of her child:

The public does not warm to mothers who are otherwise engaged, especially when they don't have to be. We grudgingly accept it when a woman "has" to work, meaning that her family's survival depends on her income. It is when a woman chooses to pursue a career that a shadow is cast over her motherliness. After all, what kind of mother could leave a shiny new baby unless her bottom line depended on it? (Thurer, 1994; xvii)

Suzan Lewis (1991) argues that it is social constructions of the "ideal mother" and the "ideal worker" that produce the contradictions women face when trying to combine motherhood with paid employment. The ideal mother stays at home with her children, especially when they are very young and never allows paid work to overshadow her domestic responsibilities. Thus, the working mother, particularly one who is very committed to her career, is constructed as deviating from this notion of the ideal mother. On the other hand, the ideal worker is expected to work "full-time and continuously" throughout his lifetime, and the working mother who takes time out from her career to have children or look after them when they are unwell is constructed as deviating from this notion also. If a woman attempts to modify the "male-defined pattern of continuous, full-time employment" she can be accused of a lack of commitment to her work. "Employed mothers are thus doubly stigmatised by social definitions which cast them as deviant both as mothers and employees" (197). The disjuncture between the ideal mother and the

ideal worker is a product of social constructions that reproduce a gendered opposition between the public and private spheres. But, as Glenn (1994) argues, "mothering takes place not only in the "private" sphere, but also outside the household and family, and at the boundaries of private and public" (16). She believes that the public-private and labour-love oppositions need to be deconstructed:

When mothering is set up in opposition to economics and politics, it is seen as originating from love or altruism, and thus as needing no reward. This reinforces the conception that mothers should be endlessly self-sacrificing. Seeing mothering as not just labor and not just love, but encompassing both, is thus a necessary step in releasing women from encapsulation within all-consuming motherhood (ibid).

A recent disruption to the notion that women have to choose between motherhood and career is the emergence in the 1980s of the "superwoman". Sharon Hays (1996) describes this woman who combines her home and work lives with apparent ease: "Effortlessly juggling home and work this mother can push a stroller with one hand and carry a briefcase in the other. She is always properly coiffed, her nylons have no runs, her suits are freshly pressed, and her home has seen the white tornado" (132). But as Lewis (1991) points out, this image is just as oppressive as that of the stay-at-home mother in that it assumes that women are able to "comply with the cultural prescriptions of a good mother and a good worker, without modifying the demands of either" (197). Clearly, for most women this is not possible and for many the struggle to excel both at home and at work is the cause of anxiety, guilt and exhaustion.

Paid employment can provide women with a means of escaping the isolation and loneliness of full-time mothering. It can also provide them with a sense of achievement and identity outside of the domestic realm. However, it also greatly increases the amount of working hours in many women's days as they still maintain primary responsibility for much of the work around the home

(Baxter, 1993; Bianchi et al, 2000; Dempsey, 2002; Wolcott and Hughes, 1999). Women with the economic resources to employ someone else to take on some of their domestic labour experience this to a lesser degree. Often it is women who themselves have children who perform domestic labour for more privileged women. Rather than modifying the conflicting demands of home and work, the status quo is maintained by the employment of cheap female domestic workers. Even for those women who can afford to pay for help around the home, feelings of anxiety and guilt persist when they leave their children in the care of others. Often a great deal of time and money is spent by women in the search for appropriate childcare arrangements.

Sharon Hays (1996) interviewed both working and stay-at-home mothers and found that both groups felt less than adequate in their roles as mothers. "...many supermoms feel guilty about their inability to carry out both roles to their fullest, while many traditional moms feel isolated and invisible to the larger world" (133). Both groups described their decision to either stay at home or take on paid employment in terms of the benefits for their children, positioning their own interests as secondary. There was no difference between the groups in their acceptance of "intensive mothering" practices, and in fact the women who were working were "twice as likely as their stay-at-home counterparts to respond that home and children are more important and rewarding than paid work" (150). Her research illustrates how powerful and pervasive notions of appropriate mothering are and the difficulties many women face in trying to perform in both the domestic and public spheres.

The women in this study were all combining motherhood with university study and part-time employment. Sarah, Bridget and Penny all cared for other women's children to earn some extra money as well as employing other women, through the university crèche, to care for their children when they were attending lectures and studying. These women were caught in both

sides of the double bind that working women face – both employing others to care for their children and caring for other working women’s children.

Bridget: It’s just the whole society seems to be geared towards this whole thing that families don’t count, that human relationships don’t count. The fact that you sort of...

Sarah: You have to work, work, work.

Chapter seven explores the contradictions and dilemmas these mothers experienced trying to juggle their studying/working and domestic responsibilities.

### Feminism and Motherhood

The social constructions of motherhood discussed so far all work to individualise and normalise women’s experiences as mothers. Any difficulties faced by women in their roles as wives and mothers are seen as problems of individual failings and lack of knowledge or self-confidence. Feminists, however, have focused on the social conditions of motherhood and the way childcare is organised in our society as a cause of female oppression. They also point to the idealisation of motherhood as problematic for women whose own experiences fail to match the ideal mother-child relationship portrayed in childrearing manuals and popular culture. In many ways motherhood has been central to feminist discussions of gendered power relations in Western culture. Within feminist discourse motherhood has been portrayed in an array of competing and contradictory ways – ranging from motherhood as the primary source of women’s oppression to motherhood as the key to a new and equitable society based on values of creativity and nurturance. Lauri Umansky (1996) argues that the sheer volume of feminist writing about motherhood indicates how “the questions that inhere in an analysis of motherhood sit at the nexus of many feminist concerns” (3). This is not surprising given the centrality of motherhood in the construction of femininity

that I have addressed above. Umansky also describes how feminist discourses are not just products of ideas, but are always situated socially:

Discourse involves not just interaction between minds, but between individuals and groups situated socially. And while people engaged in discourse sometimes share "ideas," they also, because they are socially situated, often have somewhat competing interests and agendas. Thus participants in the discourses that make up feminism share a common goal, roughly stated as the desire to understand and change women's subordination. They interpret that goal and the means to its achievement in many different ways as they actively define themselves within the rubric of feminism, and as they generate new questions that further their common cause. The discourses of feminism, defined in this way, have occurred on many levels, ranging from spontaneous kitchen-table conversations to elaborately planned scholarly conferences (6-7).

While feminists have differed in their understandings and explanations of how constructions of motherhood shape women's lives, there was an identifiable shift from the radical critiques of motherhood in the 1960s and early 1970s towards an increasingly pronatalist approach during the 1980s (Snitow, 1992). By the 1990s many feminists had turned their attention to issues such as surrogacy and new reproductive technologies as sites for the deconstruction of traditional notions of motherhood and family.

The primary concerns of nineteenth and early twentieth century feminists, including the suffragists in New Zealand, were improving the conditions of women's lives within the home (Kedgley, 1996; Mein Smith, 2002). They worked to establish welfare and health-care organisations aimed at improving child health and allowing women greater access to safer contraception and childbirth. Suffragettes emphasised essentialist notions of a woman's good character and her role as moral guardian of the nation's children to argue for access to the vote. Often there were alliances between the suffragette and temperance movements aimed at encouraging women to prevent their men from deserting their families in the pursuit of pleasures of the flesh. This early feminism did little to challenge women's traditional roles as wives and

mothers or the notion that women were best suited to life in the domestic realm.

During the 1950s feminists like Simone de Beauvoir began to focus on motherhood as a primary source of women's oppression and began to question the exclusion of women's experiences of motherhood from idealised notions of motherhood. By the early 1960s Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) identified a nagging discontent among the white middle-class mothers of America. Friedan spoke of the 'problem that has no name' which lay:

...buried unspoken for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night, she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question: "Is this all?" (Friedan, 1963; 13)

In Britain similar questions were being asked by feminists and Hannah Gavron's (1966) study of the lives of women from both the middle- and working-classes described the dissatisfaction these women expressed when talking about their lives as wives and mothers: "The 'captive' wife and the 'housebound mother' were about to emerge as a new social problem (Richardson, 1993; 49). In New Zealand Dr Fraser McDonald coined the term 'suburban neurosis' to describe this problem among his middle-class female patients (Kedgley, 1996).

The feminists from Friedan's generation were soon joined by a new generation of radical young writers. Whereas Friedan and her contemporaries formulated arguments centred on individual rights and "sought redress through public, legal and legislative channels", the new radical generation grew out of the counter culture of the 1960s and formed "its philosophy, its

members, and its modus operandi from the radical cultural and political movements of that decade (Umanski, 1996; 10). Many of these early radical feminists have been construed as 'anti-mother' because of their strident opposition to traditional mothering roles. Their strongly worded critiques of mothering and claims that escape from oppressive family structures required a complete rejection of motherhood, were perceived by many as woman blaming. Ann Snitow (1992) has defended these early texts as examples of "utopian" writing aimed at breaking the "inexorable tie between mothers and children" (36). Their "extreme rhetoric", she claims, was designed to "establish a harsh self-questioning about a motherhood which formerly had been taken for granted" (37). Emerging out of New Left politics, feminists subjected the nuclear family to intense analysis and critique: "That analysis led at times to starkly rejectionist views of marriage and motherhood. More often, however, early radical and socialist feminists added to the utopianism of the cultural left provisions that would allow women, as well as men, to participate fully in the creation of new and liberated family arrangements" (Umansky, 1996; 17).

During the mid-1970s feminists began examining the social conditions of motherhood in earnest. The aim of much of this work was to shift understandings of women's dissatisfactions with motherhood away from a focus on the individual and towards understanding how the organisation of childcare oppressed women by reducing their opportunities for personal fulfilment outside of their roles as wives and mothers. Ann Oakley's (1979, 1980) studies of women's experiences of childbirth and motherhood uncovered the sense of loss that women described feeling after having children. This included a sense of loss of status, independence, privacy, social networks, and above all, loss of personal identity and individuality. Women also expressed a sense of loss when their experiences as mothers did not fit their belief in an idealised and romanticised notions of motherhood (Richardson, 1993; Villani, 1997). The Women's Liberation Movement

encouraged women to meet in 'consciousness raising' groups to discuss their dissatisfactions and begin to understand these not as individual failings, but as a consequence of inhabiting a patriarchal society in which women are subordinate and relatively powerless to change their lives. These discussions signalled the onset, in the West, of a period of radical questioning by feminists of dominant notions of motherhood and family life. The increasing numbers of feminists entering the academy at this time meant that many of these discussions became immersed in the discourses of the social sciences (Kedgley, 1996; Richardson, 1993; Snitow, 1992; Umansky, 1996).

At the same time as some feminists were exploring the daily practices of motherhood in detail, others were exploring the symbolic meanings of motherhood. Ecofeminists, feminist peace activists, spiritual feminists and those involved in the anti-pornography movement all "treated mothers and motherhood in abstract, metaphorical, and symbolic terms, as an antidotal to the ills of 'patriarchy'" (Umansky, 1996; 133). These movements focused on the differences between men and women, citing women's reproductive and nurturing qualities as "the curative for troubled human relations and the erosion of authentic community" (ibid). Maternal images were invoked in opposition to the threat of mass destruction in the nuclear age and the environmental devastation wrought by big business as well as the increasingly individualistic and commodified nature of public politics and global capitalism. Anti-pornography feminists pitted a benign maternal sexuality against the exploitative sexual imagery of pornography, unleashing fierce debate within the feminist movement (Snitow, 1992; Umansky, 1996). These debates lasted well into the 1990s and mark a central point of conflict within feminism which can be characterised as the divide between radical and cultural feminism's essentialist and other nonessentialist approaches to understanding gender relations in Western culture.

While much radical feminism focused on women's similarities and shared experiences, especially in their reproductive and nurturing capacities, this homogeneous approach was soon under attack from women whose differences from the usually white middle-class academic feminist meant that their experiences were being marginalised or ignored within mainstream feminism. In particular, women of colour, working-class women and lesbians launched their own attacks on the universalising discourses of radical feminism. These new debates, which centred on the differences between women, were also often situated around issues of motherhood and family life. Patricia Hill Collins (1994) discusses the important role black mothers play in instilling a positive racial identity in their children in a society that privileges white culture and denigrates people of colour. She argues that universalising theories of motherhood often ignore such experiences because they fail to take account of the connection between theory and context, and so "decontextualise" the mothering experience: "Survival, power and identity shape motherhood for all women. But these themes remain muted when the mothering experiences of women of color are marginalized in feminist theorizing ... While such decontextualisation aims to generate universal "theories" of human behavior, it routinely distorts and omits huge categories of human experience" (57). Thus any existing theories of motherhood can only be partial, and are themselves located within existing structures of power and privilege.

Black feminists have highlighted the importance of the family as a site of support and safety for many black women and the failure of white feminists to recognise the importance of kinship ties for black women (Jackson, 1992). Accusations of racism have also been levelled at the abortion rights movement that failed to address the issues of forced family planning and sterilisation of black women. This has resulted in a shift towards a more general campaign for reproductive rights for all women, which encompasses "campaigns against forced sterilizations and abortions as well as the right to

have children how and when we want” (Richardson, 1993; 121). Other issues highlighted by black feminists around issues of family and motherhood have been a critique of the notion that all women perceive their worth in terms of their ability to achieve individual autonomy (i.e. through working outside of the home) and financial security, and that often, when white women do undertake paid employment, it is working-class and coloured women who take over many of the domestic and childrearing duties they are so eager to escape (Glenn, 1994). These types of challenges to a universalising feminism have contributed greatly to the complex and diverse feminist discourses of the 1980s and 1990s. Within the various strands of these discourses motherhood and women’s domestic responsibilities remained of central concern.

During the 1980s the family became central to the political discourse of the New Right. Thatcherism in Britain, the Reagan era in the United States and Rogernomics in New Zealand all heralded a new conservatism (mirrored throughout the West) that decried the loss of traditional ‘family values’ in a world of rapidly expanding global corporate economics and widening gaps between the rich and poor in Western societies. Proponents of New Right economic policies cited the so-called erosion of the nuclear family as a determining factor in increasing violent crime, juvenile offending and social disruption. While such claims provoked strident opposition from the Left and feminists alike, this focus on the family in public discourse meant that feminist responses were often similarly located within the sphere of the heterosexual, nuclear family. Lauri Umansky (1996) described the emergence of a pronatalist feminism in the era as, in part a response to this pro-family public discourse. She also argues that, as some of the young radical feminists of the 1970s reached their thirties and began seriously considering or were already experiencing motherhood for themselves, their attention turned more towards reclaiming the value of mothering. On top of this, the new psychoanalytic feminism, of which Nancy Chodorow’s *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978) was an early example,

focused on the two-parent heterosexual family as the site of the future emotional and psychic development of the child. While Chodorow was clearly critical of domestic arrangements where women were responsible for childcare, thus reproducing in their female children the desire to mother, this analysis nonetheless had moved a long way from early critiques of the nuclear family per se, to one which merely suggests rearranging the allocation of tasks within the family so that men share more in childrearing duties.

By the 1990s feminists were struggling to reconcile the debates within their own disparate movement and to find new explanations for the persistence of dominant constructions of motherhood. Writing in 1992, Ann Snitow laments women's failure to achieve some of the basic demands of the previous 25 years despite changing social conditions: "Broad societal events like the steady rise of divorce and women's increasing workplace participation collide with women's failure to get day care, child support, fair enough custody laws, change in the structure of a work day and a typical work life, and finally any reliable, ongoing support from men" (41). She goes on to equate feminist pronatalism with the desire to value motherhood in a world where women struggle to combine their increased participation in the public realm with the fact that they still retain responsibility for the bulk of the work in the home: "Our discouragement is, in my view, the subtext of most of what we have written about motherhood in the past decade. I think women are heartbroken. Never has the baby been so delicious. We are – in this period of reaction – elaborating, extending, reinstitutionalizing this relation for ourselves" (ibid).

In contrast to the pronatalist approach, Sharon Hay's *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (1996) documents what she calls the increasingly "intensive mothering" practices of the last 20 years: "The ideology of intensive mothering is a gendered model that advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their

children" (x). She describes the emergence of the "supermom", the woman who effortlessly combines motherhood and domestic duties with paid work, who maintains a flawless appearance, an immaculate home and whose children excel at both schoolwork and an array of extracurricular activities. While she admits that the supermom is an ideal rather than a reality for most women, she uses her own interviews with a variety of both working and stay-at-home mothers to argue that many women feel there is increasing pressure on them to excel in both their working and domestic lives. Hays argues that the ideology of intensive mothering highlights the cultural contradictions between home and work life. Within a rationalised market economy, the opposition between the child-centred self-sacrificing mother and the profit-maximising, self-seeking businessman have persisted, according to Hays, despite women's increased participation in the workforce, precisely because of the importance of maintaining this opposition: "The cultural logic operating here (the ideology of intensive mothering) offers an alternative account of what might count as status, power, or self-interest. In this sense, the ideology of intensive mothering persists not only in spite of the fact that it runs counter to the logic of impersonality, competition, and personal profit but precisely because it does" (171). She believes that mothers are actively participating in a rejection of the logic of the market place that has pervaded so much of our lives.

While there are other sites of resistance to market-place logic, such as Trade Unions or environmental activism, motherhood remains particularly powerful in this regard because it is constructed as "more distant and more protected from market relationships than any other" (174). Hays argues that the historical separation of public and private life has reduced people's participation in wider social life and brought increasing pressure to bear on the family as the major site of intimate social relationships. With the breakdown of family structures the logic of the market place has begun to infiltrate even here, placing even more strain on the mother-child relationship

to “stand as a central symbol of the sustainable human ties, free of competition and selfish individualism” (ibid). While Hays provides a compelling and complex explanation for the persistence of current constructions of motherhood, her solutions to the gendered nature of these constructions bears a striking resemblance to many of the earlier feminist writers – increase women’s public power, encourage men to participate more actively in childrearing, and improve the public status of those involved in childrearing. And in doing so she fails to account for the context within which so many women mother. Women who raise children alone, lesbian mothers, mothers who depend on the income of men working long hours, mothers whose income is derived from taking on the domestic labour of more privileged women, often at the expense of spending time with their own children – few of these women are in a position to attain the education, financial resources or public power necessary to implement such changes. For years feminists have been making sweeping demands for changes to childcare arrangements, yet they continue to be responsible for most of the domestic labour.

However, this is not to say that women have accepted current constructions of motherhood without resistance. Women are delaying having children, having fewer or choosing not to have children at all, indicating that motherhood is no longer the mandate it used to be for young women. Women are much more likely to raise children on their own than was the case prior to the introduction of single parents benefits. Gay and lesbian couples seeking to adopt or employ methods of artificial insemination (either through official channels or more unconventional means) have become more visible in recent years. Many more women are in paid employment than 25 years ago and women are represented in high status occupations and public positions of power in far greater numbers than they used to be. In New Zealand at the time I first wrote this chapter, the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Attorney General and Governor General were all women. At the same time a

recent attempt to introduce paid parental leave had been defeated in parliament, illustrating that the presence of women in positions of power does not guarantee women-friendly legislation or a progressive government.

### New Reproductive Technologies

Feminist discussions of motherhood are increasingly focusing on surrogacy and new reproductive technologies as challenges to the view that biology determines parental status. While some feminists argue that new reproductive technologies have merely increased male dominated medical control over women's reproductive health, others highlight the possibilities for new constructions of family and mothering that emerge out of these technologies. Often public discussion of reproductive technologies focuses on their legal, medical and ethical implications, ignoring the significance of these changes for women's lives: "Besides affecting our rights, obligations and abilities to be mothers, it poses a radical challenge to many of the basic assumptions about reproduction and sexuality (Richardson, 1993; 87). Evelyn Glenn (1994) reminds us that reproductive technologies can carry the race and class distinctions of motherhood even further – as far as actual reproduction itself: "That a woman of color can now bear a 'white' baby for a 'white' couple breaks the last barrier to women of color doing all reproductive labor for white women, and greatly expands the possibilities for exploiting poor women's lack of economic options" (8).

While these technologies may potentially further already existing inequalities, they may also trigger deep-seated cultural anxieties, as Sharil Thurer (1994) points out: "The fragmenting of the female sexual and reproductive body, through implantation or surrogacy, or through the removal of eggs, is a breaking up of that object – Mom – which has been made to symbolize so much of the social order for so long" (295). This anxiety is the basis for feminist optimism over the potential of the new technologies to allow new possibilities for defining what it means to be 'Mother' in Western culture. For

many, the first step towards changing motherhood is to deconstruct taken-for-granted meanings of motherhood and it is in the realm of surrogacy and reproductive technology that the most radical deconstruction of these meanings is taking place. Diane Richardson (1993) highlights the close association between childrearing and childbearing in Western society. She sees the potential for surrogacy – where one woman bears a child, while another will fulfil the roles of mother – to challenge this association, and “thereby threatens those structures, both social and psychological, which ensure that it is women and not men who have primary responsibility for childcare” (96). In this way, Richardson argues, surrogacy has the potential to challenge traditional views of motherhood and family. Others, however, would argue that, as long as women have to rely on the legal profession for access to surrogacy or conservative, male-dominated, medical institutions to gain access to reproductive technologies, there is little hope for radical changes to traditional notions of socially appropriate mothering.

While these debates continue, one thing that seems certain is that new reproductive technologies and surrogacy make it more difficult to pin down exactly who ‘mother’ is, and thus do present challenges to traditional notions of ‘natural’ motherhood. Similarly, increasing numbers of reconstituted families, sometime including children from several previous relationships, also serve to blur the distinctions between ‘natural’ and non-biological mothering. At the same time this may place increasing pressure on women to take responsibility for children within complex and relatively fluid family arrangements – adding yet another dimension to an already exhausting regimen of childcare, domestic labour and paid employment (Fleming, 1999). There is also little in these new family arrangements or reproductive technologies that directly challenge the “privileged position of heterosexuality as the only socially and legally valid foundation for family life” (Richardson, 1993; 99). It seems clear that, from the radical and utopian critiques of motherhood and family structures of the 1960s to the in-depth studies of

everyday mothering practices of the 1970s, the pronatalist '80s and the deconstructions of the 1990s, feminist struggles to transform cultural constructions of motherhood remain at the forefront of discussions and debates over the meanings of what it is to be a woman in Western society at the beginning of the new millennium.

The following chapters will examine how Sarah, Bridget, Penny and Hannah position themselves within the powerful discursive constructions of the Good Mother. I will explore three sites of identity construction for analysis – embodiment as experienced during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding; the home and family; and the institutional encounters described during the interviews. These discussions will examine in detail how these four women experience motherhood in relation to ideological representations of the Good Mother, their compliance and resistance to this ideal, and the negotiations they employ to construct themselves as good mothers.

## Chapter Five

### Pregnancy, Birth and Breastfeeding - Embodiment and Motherhood

Pregnancy is a site of embodiment that provides valuable insights into the surveillance and regulation of women's lives. In part this is because it is considered a particularly "natural" state; women have been getting pregnant and having babies since time began. Women are expected to experience their bodies as childbearing bodies, whether they have children or not, with menstruation as a monthly reminder of a pregnancy that has not (yet) occurred. And yet pregnancy is also considered to be a time of high risk for women. The increased medicalisation of pregnancy and childbirth has raised public awareness of a vast array of environmental and medical risks to the foetus. In addition there are social and medical expectations of how pregnant women should act and look: they should not drink, smoke or visit places where these activities are the main focus. There is an appropriate amount of weight to be gained during pregnancy, but one should not be too 'big' or too 'small'. Appropriate levels of physical activity are prescribed socially as well as in the popular literature. Exercise such as walking, swimming or yoga is fairly mandatory these days, while sports or more adventurous pursuits are discouraged.

If pregnancy is depicted as a particularly natural event, the level of anxiety and surveillance that surrounds pregnant women exposes the stringent policing of the 'natural' that exemplifies current Western life. One explanation for the intense scrutiny that pregnant women are subject to is that the state of pregnancy itself challenges some of the more taken-for-granted notions of bodies and embodiment that have dominated Western thinking in recent times. These include the notion of a clear distinction between the self and the other - the idea of bodily integrity. Young (1990) describes the unsettling disruption to previously held notions of self in describing her own pregnancy: "Pregnancy challenges the integration of my body experience by rendering fluid the

boundary between what is within, myself, and what is outside, separate. I experience my insides as the space of another, yet my own body" (163). Longhurst (2000) also writes of this transgression of bodily integrity: "Pregnant women undergo a bodily process that transgresses the boundary between inside and outside, self and other, one and two, subject and object" (55).

Pregnancy also challenges commonly accepted notions of femininity being equated with sexuality and, in public, sexual availability. This sexualised femininity relies on external and self-regulation of women's bodies, in particular the need to control the size and shape of feminine bodies. The vast array of advertisements for cosmetic, dietary, exercise and even surgical 'solutions' to imperfect bodies available in modern consumer culture attests to the pressures brought to bear on women to control their bodies in order to signal their femininity (including the display of their sexual desirability). The pregnant body conforms neither to the expectation that the female body should be sexually available, nor to the stringent control of body size that marks femininity in this culture. Yet, as Longhurst (1996) reminds us, pregnant bodies, while often considered taboo, are "also sexualised in that pregnant bodies are bodies which display a previous engagement in heterosexual intercourse" (124).

Thus pregnancy both marks and disrupts taken-for-granted notions of femininity. The pregnant woman has obviously fulfilled her requirement to be sexually available to a man, yet at the same time presents a body that is not subject to the same stringent controls as before, particularly in terms of controlling body size. Here the nature/culture dualism, where nature is associated with femininity and lack of control, and culture with masculinity, rationality and control constructs pregnant bodies as deviant, particularly in the public realm where culture (and masculinity) dominates. Longhurst, who undertook a study of pregnant women in Hamilton, New Zealand in 1996, argues that despite claims that pregnant women need no longer hide their

changing bodies or remove themselves from the public realm, many pregnant women's lives become increasingly confined to the domestic realm as their pregnancies progress. She contends that "discursive constraints and surveillance function in Hamilton to exclude pregnant women from the public sphere" (124). Bridget, Penny and Sarah's conversations about their pregnancies describe a similar sense of discursively constructed surveillance and regulation of their lives during this time, resulting, in this analysis, in an increasing sense of a pregnant body as a body 'out of place'<sup>1</sup>.

### Pregnant Bodies – Size DOES Matter

The first time the group discussed pregnancy was when Bridget brought a women's magazine to an interview in April 1996 that proclaimed pregnancy the "celebrity trend of the nineties" and went on to assess the best and worst maternity 'looks' among the pregnant celebrities.<sup>2</sup> As Bridget pointed out, this 'look' was not so much about fashion as about size, weight and the ability to appear healthy and energised. The article described Jennifer Flavin as managing to "not look pregnant at all", Gemima Khan as looking "pretty good", Madonna as looking "okay but packing on the weight" and Melanie Griffith as "frowsy". A photograph of the pregnant star accompanied each comment (need reference). These descriptions generated a lively discussion:

Bridget: It made me so mad, 'cause I saw her (Madonna), did you see her in Evita? How she was really heavily pregnant in Evita and she looked skinny. And I kept thinking, 'gosh she's skinny'. And I thought if they call her packing on the weight, well I must have really packed on the weight.

Sarah: But that's hard though because, like I ate tons when I was pregnant, but I was quite thin.

Bridget: My whole face puffed out.

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah was not present for the interview that I have drawn much of the material for this chapter from, so I have not included her in this chapter. Although there were comments that Hannah made in other interviews that would be relevant here, they would remain out of context to the lengthy discussion that took place on April 29<sup>th</sup> 1996.

<sup>2</sup> I had asked the women to bring along any examples of media texts that they encountered that would contribute to the discussions. Bridget regularly brought examples of Women's Magazines to the interviews, while Penny supplied several newspaper articles, particularly about social policy and benefits for single parents, which was a matter of some debate in the New Zealand media in 1996.

Sarah: Oh it did in the last bit for me too. But you're right, and Jennifer Flavin, I mean she managed to not look pregnant at all, but she had a sick baby. I mean she had a premature sick baby.

Bridget: Yeah.

Sarah: And it wasn't like, I don't think it was her fault that the baby was sick, but the fact that the baby was sick made the baby smaller, you know, 'cause she had a heart condition. It wasn't like what she, the way that she was living, but yeah...

Bridget: Then they've got Melanie Griffith with 'Melanie Griffith looked frowsy'. And if you ask me she just looks like a normal mum. ... And it just makes me feel so good (ironic tone, laughs) you know? I'm sure when I was pregnant if I read this I probably would have gone to bed and cried (laughs).

Sarah: All of them are small pregnant women, they're all small. None of them are huge pregnant women.

Sarah and Bridget's responses highlight the differences between the magazine's and their own perceptions of what represents a 'normal' pregnant body. The magazine editors depicted anything deviating from the usual female celebrity body (very thin) as less acceptable, defining successful pregnant bodies as those that looked least pregnant. The stringent regulation of female celebrity bodies creates the ultra-thin norms that these pregnant stars were being compared with. In Hollywood any deviation from the ultra-thin is met with comment in the popular press and a pregnant body becomes very much a body out of place in this world of compulsory thinness. As consumers of popular media, women encounter discourses that prohibit even a small amount of weight gain in the women they watch on television and cinema screens and read about in the pages of magazines and newspapers. It is a common feature in the "gossip" pages of women's magazines to include photographs of ultra-thin celebrities who might be sporting a "bump" – a slight increase in stomach size that is the tell-tale early sign of pregnancy – and considerable speculation often accompanies these photographs until the pregnancy is either confirmed or fails to eventuate. Such scrutiny works to reinforce the discourses of compulsory thinness and pregnant bodies as deviant and out of place.

According to the magazine, Jennifer Flavin produced the most successful pregnant body, “managing to not look pregnant at all”. Sarah explained that Flavin had a sick, small baby, which may have been why she did not look as obviously pregnant as the other women in the article. However she is also quick to point out that the baby’s illness was not due to Flavin’s lifestyle, reminding us again that a pregnant woman is under constant surveillance, being somehow expected to balance the need to provide the optimum healthy environment for her unborn child, while managing to appear relatively thin and radiant at the same time. Sarah highlights the contradictions inherent in these two competing discourses, while at the same time participating in the very surveillance she resists. By engaging with the media text of the magazine she is immediately implicated in the construction of pregnant celebrity bodies as out of place, requiring explanation and regulation. This participation in the policing of bodily boundaries, accompanied by a sometimes vehement resistance to regulatory practices imposed on their own bodies, was a feature of many of the discussions in these interviews and was particularly apparent in this discussion of pregnancy. The media texts explored by Bridget, Sarah and Penny highlighted many of the overt contradictions that construct pregnant bodies as out of place. However, by relating these celebrities’ pregnant bodies to their own experiences of pregnancy, the women immediately placed themselves and other non-celebrity women into the same regulatory paradigm that constructed pregnant bodies as out of place. While at times resisting this construction, it was impossible for these women to altogether escape or avoid participation in the regulatory process.

An important constituent of this regulatory process was the discursive connection made between pregnant bodies being larger than usual and food consumption. This connection is already over-determined in a society where women are expected to be constantly vigilant about their size and how much they eat, and work hard to produce acceptably thin bodies to signal their femininity. For Bridget, Melanie Griffith’s ‘frowsy’ look was the closest to her experience of pregnancy – a ‘normal’ expectant mother, obviously pregnant and looking somewhat tired. She also commented on how skinny she thought

Madonna was during her pregnancy and connected the magazine's comment that Madonna "packed on the weight" with her own, much larger pregnant body, noting that she must have "*really* packed on the weight" (Bridget emphasised the word "really" in her comment). Here, Bridget participates in the regulatory process by comparing the changes in her own body with the magazine's construction of larger pregnant bodies as out of place. Sarah, however, experienced fewer changes in her physical size, except "in the last bit". She hastened, however, to make the point that her smaller size was not due to consuming less food when she was pregnant. Once again this connection places her own experience within the discursive construction of pregnant bodies as out of place, requiring pregnant women to equate their increased size with a need for self-regulation around the amount of food they consume, rather than understanding it as their bodies' responses to the physical changes that take place during pregnancy.

As the discussion began to shift from the magazine article to the women's own experiences of pregnancy, it became clear that the discourses that constituted pregnant bodies as bodies out of place in the magazine were also circulating in the wider cultural milieu that Bridget, Penny and Sarah inhabited when they were pregnant. It has been documented (Bailey, 1999; Davidson, 2001; Longhurst, 1996, 2000) that pregnant women often experience a sense of 'becoming public property' as their pregnancies become more obvious. Many women report having total strangers approach them and touch their 'bump' and question them about their pregnancy and their plans for life after the baby is born. Such overt public interest in the body of another is unusual in many Western cultures. Yet, as Davidson (2001) argues, a pregnant woman's "condition' ostensibly confers rights on 'the public' to take an active and open interest in their bodies, not only by looking, but also by commenting on and even touching – behaviour that would not, ordinarily, be socially sanctioned" (290). Longhurst (2000) explains how others take on the role of "societal supervisors of pregnant women's behaviour" as expressing a desire to "look after that property, that potential citizen, in which there is a collective interest" (468).

Such public attention was met with considerable resistance by the women in the group, although Penny admitted to enjoying it at times, particularly during

her third pregnancy when her husband was “ignoring the fact that I was pregnant anyway”. She added, however, that she also found it unusual and a little disquieting. Bridget said she “hated it” and Sarah commented that “it made you feel like you’re public property, like they think they’ve got the right to tell you what to do”. Penny made the comment that it was women who usually touched her and that they inevitably commented on her size, telling her she was “very big, you know, like too big, like I must be eating too much”. Again the discursive link between pregnant bodies and excessive eating is made, this time in comments made by people Penny already knew, or at times by people she had not met before.

Longhurst (1996) found that the lives of the pregnant women in her study “became increasingly policed – both in covert and overt ways – by loved ones, friends and strangers”. This is the result, she argues, of pregnant women coming “under surveillance – the gaze – in an attempt to ensure that they take care of themselves, but more importantly, that they take care of their unborn child” (142). Longhurst also reminds us that pregnant women are expected to “engage in self surveillance” (ibid). The regulatory process being described by the women she interviewed and the women from this study has clearly shifted from images in the popular media of the woman’s magazine to the general culture, where surveillance of pregnant women’s bodies appears to be practiced, to a large extent, by other women. Bridget commented that men, particularly young men, tended to give her a wide berth when she was pregnant. She suggested that this space indicated that, once pregnant and no longer sexually available, a woman is excused from the male gaze, leaving the task of scrutiny and regulation to other women.

Such scrutiny is driven, in part, by the requirement that women, even before their babies are born, must adhere to expectations of how a ‘good mother’ will behave. As Longhurst (1996) writes, “The ‘becoming mother’ must follow prescribed behaviours; to transgress these norms is to risk the well being of her fetus (who in the eyes of many already has full or at least protohuman status) and to be labelled as “irresponsible”” (144-5). This is due, in part, to the development of new medical technologies such as the ultrasound sonogram that allows not only the monitoring of the foetus’ development, but means that the first ‘baby photo’ is often taken prior to the birth of the baby. Weir (1998)

describes this as the “social birth” – the recognition of a human form in the sonogram, sometimes accompanied by allocation of sex and even naming of the child before the biomedical birth occurs. Today many baby albums have a space for the first photograph before the page describing where and when the baby was born. Strathern (1992a, cited in Weir, 1998) concludes “culturally speaking, we can see the person when the person appears as an individual, and we can see an individual when we see a body” (86). Such technologies enable the foetus to be deemed an individual, with individual rights, both for the expectant woman and her family and for society at large. However, it appears that it is not just the well being of the foetus that is at stake in the regulation of pregnant bodies.

Later in the interview I asked about the messages women received from magazines such as the one we had been looking at.

Bridget: A pregnancy should be as short as possible, as less noticeable as possible.

Sarah: Because it detracts from your sexuality.

Bridget: Yeah and um, the whole role of women is to be sexual objects.

Sarah: Yeah that's all it says...

Penny: But not bearers of the product so much.

Bridget: And if you get fat it's not because you're retaining water or anything else like that, it's because you're not watching it.

Here the women identify the magazine's norm of femininity represented as youth, beauty, thinness and sexual availability. And yet they see “bearing the product” of sexual activity as problematic, adding weight to the construction of pregnant bodies as out of place. Bridget claims that “the whole role of women is to be sexual objects”, a claim that prioritises the promotion of women’s sexuality in, through and sometimes over the numerous articles on women’s roles as wives and mothers that dominate women’s magazines. While Bridget did not clarify her statement, it is clear from this exchange that the three women agree that sexual availability, marked by youth, thinness and physical attractiveness, is a vital component in the successful production of female subjectivity, at least in the world of women’s magazines. It is also clear that pregnancy is seen as a disruption to this production process, and thus, no longer sexually available, the pregnant subject is marked as deviant and out of

place. Joyce Davidson (2001) argues that pregnant women, subject to a new and different kind of gaze, feel a heightened sense of loss of self:

The *kind* of look directed at pregnant women is, admittedly, likely to be different, yet it could arguably intensify individuals' sense of being objectified, alienated, and instrumentalised by the other's gaze. While the pregnant woman is not, perhaps, as likely to be considered a *sexual* object, she is still the *object* of a different kind of look, certainly not fully a 'subject' in her own right. One could argue that she is attributed merely *instrumental* value, as the 'vessel' for her unborn child... (289).

There is a complex interplay of external scrutiny, both from the media and other women, as well as practices of self-surveillance that impact on these women's experiences of pregnant embodiment. When Bridget says "And if you get fat ... it's because you're not watching it", she demonstrates how the magazine article equates increased size during pregnancy with a lack of control on the part of the pregnant woman. Again this is an overdetermined meaning in a society that discursively constructs overweight people as out of control - yet this same notion is applied here in the context of pregnant bodies that, by the very nature of pregnancy, increase in size as the foetus grows and develops. Bridget, Penny and Sarah are clearly resisting the messages they encountered in the magazine, yet it is clear that this is neither simple nor straightforward. The discursive construction of the pregnant body as out of place has become more powerful when linked with the idea that if she "watches it", if she regulates her behaviour in such a way as to avoid the excesses of too much weight gain, a woman can take back at least some control of the pregnancy process. Both Bridget and Penny had experiences of being put on 'bed rest' by medical practitioners during their pregnancies due to concern over their own or their babies' health. Both women experienced weight gain during this time and were reprimanded by medical staff:

Bridget: I even had a nurse say to me, my waters broke early with Andrew, I was put on bed rest. And I was put on bed rest for 8 weeks, and after that I went back, away from the specialist again 'cause everything seemed to be going all right, back to my doctor. And the nurse at the rooms was weighing me, you know how sometimes they weigh you and sometimes they don't? This particular nurse wanted to weigh me and she weighed me and she looked at the chart. And up until that time I'd actually lost weight. So I got pregnant, I lost 5 kilos and then I started putting it on. And then I

got up to, just over that 8 weeks I'd been completely in bed rest, but nothing was wrong with me and I was as hungry as a horse, you know, and I'd eat everything I could get hold of (laughs). I was bored, and I always eat when I'm bored. And I'd put on about 8 kilos. Even more. And she said to me, 'you're getting fat young lady, you'd better watch what you eat.' And I was so mad.

Again Bridget's body was being compared with a norm, this time a medical notion, indicated by the nurse using a chart of appropriate weight gain during pregnancy. Her description of being weighed by a nurse, with the comment "you know how sometimes they weigh you and sometimes they don't?" imparts a lack of agency and control over this medical scrutiny. The seemingly arbitrary decision by the nurse to weigh Bridget, a form of external scrutiny, was accompanied by the requirement for self-surveillance identified earlier in the media discourses when she was told, 'you'd better watch what you eat'. While the responsibility of women under the media gaze is to remain sexually appealing and available, the medical gaze implies a responsibility for the health and well being of self and unborn child. Again, this is an overdetermined meaning in a culture that equates healthy bodies with thin bodies. While the magazine's discourses of compulsory thinness, even during pregnancy, are obviously contradictory, the use of medical authority to reinforce such notions provides a powerful and much more difficult to resist compulsion. While Bridget is resisting the regulatory comments of the nurse, she is also participating in the discourse that links pregnant bodies and food consumption by saying she was as "hungry as a horse" and that she always eats when she is bored. At the same time as she denies that she had put on unnecessary weight she admits to consuming a greater than usual amount of food during this time. Clearly Bridget's resistance is constrained and limited by the regulatory discourses that link diet and enlarged pregnant bodies.

Penny had a similar story:

Penny: Well I found that out when I was in hospital, bed rest, 4 weeks before the first one and, I didn't have puddings you know they had a set menu, I didn't have puddings 'cause I didn't want to put on too much

weight. I still put on the weight because of the toxaemia, and I still got, you know, 'look at the scales' sort of attitude, and yet I was eating the diet that they gave me. I didn't eat any extras, other than maybe a piece of fruit here and there. Um, if people brought chocolates or anything I sent them away again because of the weight concern, but I still put on that weight. And yet with the last one, I maintained the same weight the whole way through the pregnancy, and yet still got the same remarks. So I didn't actually gain weight for the third one ... it's bizarre, it's really bizarre.

Penny describes how her medical condition of toxaemia was responsible for her weight gain and yet she was still made accountable, as if her own lack of control over her eating was at fault. She also describes how she worked hard to minimise weight gain during her period of bed rest. Her diet was regulated already by the hospital's set menu and yet she was unable to maintain the level of weight gain deemed acceptable within the medical environment. This experience seems to imply that there is something wrong with gaining weight during pregnancy, as the pregnant body moves away from the norm of the healthy skinny woman. Penny worked hard at minimising weight gain, despite her knowledge of her medical condition, yet she was still held personally accountable for her increased weight. And during her third pregnancy when she was able to control her weight much more, she was still treated as though her increased body size was due to overeating, getting fat. Penny was caught in the contradiction between realising how "bizarre" the idea of pregnant women being fat is, yet still feeling compelled to watch her weight while pregnant. This raises issues of women working to control their pregnant bodies in order to minimise criticism, both personal and medical, while perhaps endangering their own health and that of their babies - with a foetus growing rapidly one would assume that weight gain would be an expected and welcome sign of a successful pregnancy. It seems that the notion of the least noticeable pregnancy was reinforced through Bridget and Penny's encounters with medical staff intent on regulating their eating habits. The contradiction between enforced immobility (bed rest) and a requirement to watch one's weight was blurred by the authority given to medical discourses, particularly at a moment when the health of a woman or her unborn baby may have been at stake.

Bridget, Penny and Sarah acknowledge the differences between pregnant bodies - that some stay smaller than others, that a sick baby can influence the size of a pregnant body, that some people's perceptions of 'packing on weight' are very different from others. They understand that every woman's bodily experience of pregnancy is different and influenced by many factors. However, because they themselves are part of the same regulatory processes that are illustrated in the original magazine article, and because these processes are enforced in the wider culture, particularly through medical institutions, they also acknowledge the power of normalising media constructions to effect how women feel about their bodies. As Bridget says, she'd have "gone to bed and cried" if she had read the article when she was pregnant. It is unlikely that the magazine article in isolation would have produced such a reaction. Rather it is the reiteration of powerful normalising discourses that construct pregnant bodies as out of place and successful pregnancies as those that are the least noticeable, that work to create tension and anxiety for women who are pregnant.

Within this context of surveillance and regulation Sarah, who chose to have a home birth, and whose care during her pregnancy came from midwives with a "woman-centred focus", was not subject to the same kind of scrutiny as the others. However, she also described how she remained slim during her pregnancy (she is a much smaller woman than the others now as well), so it is unlikely that she was as affected by normalising discourses as the larger women. She was the only one in the group to describe feeling "sexy" during her pregnancy, and wore clothes that enhanced the shape of her pregnant body rather than attempting to disguise it:

I know that when I was pregnant I felt very, very sexy and I wore, I wore dresses that were really, really slim and went right over my tummy. I had this great crocheted dress that was really, really long and like my tummy was like this big basketball thing. I felt great. And, and Jason found me really, really attractive when I was pregnant. And I felt really sexy, whereas I know other people just don't want to, just don't want to be touched. So I think it depends on how, also you've got to realise the whole number of things that come into play. Some women get really turned on when they're pregnant, some women don't. And, as far as their men go, I think they've got to, well obviously they've got to respect how we feel. But I think maybe they feed off that as well. If you're feeling really good and sexy, then

perhaps they will be more able to feel comfortable about having sex with you, does that make sense?

Sarah provides an alternative subjectivity where pregnant bodies are not to be hidden or minimised, but exposed, delighted in and enjoyed as a part of female sexuality. However, Bridget and Penny's muted response to Sarah's comments indicate that their experiences were perhaps very different to hers. Bridget went on to describe her embarrassment about her pregnant body and her inability to find clothes that she felt comfortable wearing during her pregnancy. She explains how she was able to camouflage parts of her body that she felt uncomfortable with prior to her pregnancy, but was unsure of how to dress to deal with her increased size once her pregnancy started to become more noticeable. Longhurst (2000) also found in her study that "many of the pregnant women stated that when they went out they tended to adopt a manner of dress, comportment, and motility that enabled them to blend in rather than marked them as pregnant" (459). For many pregnant women, Bridget and Penny included, their changing bodies were obviously problematic, for themselves and for others. However, Sarah's altogether different experience does indicate that there are possibilities for avoiding the scrutiny of the medical profession, and that some women may reject the discourse of the least noticeable pregnant body, choosing instead to proudly display their changing shape. Longhurst (2000) and Bailey (1999) both found that some pregnant women they interviewed, while not as openly celebratory about their pregnancies as Sarah, did report a feeling of being able to discard previous preoccupations with physical attractiveness when pregnant, enjoying a sense of freedom from the tyranny of feminine standards of physical perfection, albeit temporarily. In her review of literature on studies of pregnant women, Wiles (1994) reports that the opportunity to enjoy a larger body without the stigma normally attached to this is possible during pregnancy for women who were overweight prior to becoming pregnant. Again, different women obviously experience their bodies differently during pregnancy and it is clear that Sarah's experience differed from Penny and Bridget's in her enjoyment of her changing body. While this body may have constituted a body out of place within the regulatory processes explored above, Sarah was able to reject the expectation that she needed to cover this body up, to avoid the risk of exposing it too much. Sarah's resistance to normalising discourses of

pregnant embodiment were embedded in her 'natural birth' approach, an increasingly popular resistance to medicalised childbirth practices, and one which was reiterated to varying degrees by Bridget, Penny and myself as we sought alternative understandings of our pregnant selves.

### Natural Childbirth– The 'Knowing Body' as Resistance and Compliance

Sheila Kitzinger, one of the leading proponents of the natural childbirth movement in the West since the 1960s, describes natural childbirth as involving:

...the conscious participation of the woman. She is no longer a passive, suffering instrument. She no longer hands over her body to doctor and nurses to deal with as they think best. She retains the power of self-direction, of self-control, of choice, of voluntary decision and active cooperation with doctor and nurse (or midwife). She needs to know about the processes of pregnancy and labour. She must also have a mind, which is not only relatively free of fear but filled with pleasurable anticipation of labour. To achieve the rhythmic coordination and harmony which is the essence of a beautifully controlled labour she must, above all, *have learned to trust her body and her instincts* (1984, 24; emphasis in original).

Kitzinger romanticises the moment of birth, while at the same time clearly outlining the importance of agency and control during childbirth, achieved through a combination of education and trusting one's body and instincts. Sherwin, (1992; 191, cited in Shildrick and Price, 1998; 6) makes the point that "(t)he reality that medicine creates is socially accepted; given the power and authority that are awarded to medical expertise, its reality is generally socially dominating", Shildrick and Price (1998) add that "although functioning as the dominant discourse, bio-medicine is constantly under challenge from resistant discourses, from subaltern knowledges which disrupt its totalising claims" (6). Women began to resist highly medicalised childbirth in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the natural childbirth movement provided an opportunity to regain what obstetrics and medical technology had removed from women's experiences – a sense of control over and involvement in her pregnant and birthing body. This movement also paved the way for much more involvement from male

partners in the birthing process, as men had been practically removed altogether from delivery suites by the 1950s.

The discourse of natural childbirth emerged in opposition to a medical discourse that constructed pregnancy as a condition requiring medical intervention. Longhurst (2000) found that the word natural recurred many times, both in her interviews with pregnant women, and in the responses to a questionnaire she sent to local midwives. She credits this approach to feminist discourses that “stress the naturalness of pregnancy and birth” (461). The natural childbirth movement also requires a woman to learn as much as possible about the (natural) changes that take place in her body during pregnancy as well as the experience of birth itself. This educated, knowing pregnant subject is the antithesis of Truby King's Plunket mother who was unable to locate her mothering instincts and required strict training in scientific methods in order to properly care for herself and her infant. Central to the construction of the knowing pregnant subject is the notion of the knowing body. In the natural childbirth approach a woman must trust her body and her instincts – the knowledge required for successful pregnancy and childbirth comes from within, from the ‘natural’ functioning of a woman’s own body.

The discourses of natural pregnancy and childbirth were raised in resistance to the contradictions implicit in the media and medical discourses that worked to normalise the least noticeable pregnancy as Bridget, Sarah and Penny discussed their own understandings of nutrition, health and psychological well being during pregnancy. In these discussions the women position their own knowledge and their knowing bodies against the logic of the least noticeable pregnancy and thus the compulsion to attend to matters of exercise and weight control during pregnancy. In responding to Bridget's description of being reprimanded by the nurse for weight gain, Sarah replied:

That's really sad, 'cause that's what I thought my goal like was in pregnancy (laughter) was to eat as much as I possibly could (laughter).

Bridget: Ok if I wanted something I thought...

Sarah: It was my chance that I had to do that, to see if I could do that, 'cause I can eat like a horse anyway, and it just doesn't affect me, and so it was this time, where I knew that ... eating was a really important thing.

Bridget: And I kept thinking like if I had a craving, it might be because the baby needs something (laughs).

Sarah: Isn't that true? Isn't that what it is anyway?

There is an obvious tension here between the women's understandings of the importance of 'listening' to their own bodies and the predominance of the media and medical discourses that demand the least noticeable pregnancy and encourage women to look to those with medical authority as possessing the necessary expert knowledge on health and nutrition during pregnancy. There is no straightforward choice to be made here, as the earlier discussions showed that Bridget and Penny both worked on minimising weight gain or felt guilty for failing to do so, and how the media images made Bridget want to "go to bed and cry". Sarah also, while appearing not to be so concerned as the others with matters of weight gain during her pregnancy, participated actively in the discussions that evoked normalising discourses of the least noticeable pregnancy. These women lived the contradictions of competing discourses throughout their pregnancies, simultaneously participating in and resisting normative regimes of truth.

A discussion on food cravings during pregnancy certainly centred on the knowing body, where cravings were seen as being connected with the increased nutritional requirements of pregnancy. As I joined in this conversation I noticed how much we all appeared to 'know' about our nutritional needs during pregnancy and the types of foods that would provide them:

Jane: I was amazed, when I was first pregnant, I craved carrots, raw carrots, all I wanted to eat was raw carrots in the very first weeks of my pregnancy and then read up about folic acid and the need for folic acid, and what has loads of folic acid?

Sarah: Carrots.

Jane: Carrots. And then like later on when I had really bad heartburn and I had these cravings for peppermints ... and that helps heartburn and I found my cravings were really connected with the needs of my baby.

Penny: Mmm, same.

Bridget: See I ate two crates of grapefruit...

Sarah: I ate tons of grapefruit.

Bridget: And that's because you can't absorb, um, iron without vitamin C. And I had a really low iron store. So it was quite interesting, and then with the second one I had dried apricots, again high in iron, and raisins.

Jane: Oh, I had lots of dried apricots.

Penny: Yeah, dried fruit is really high in iron, particularly dried apricots and fish and things.

Sarah: I ate lots of, before I heard about the listeria thing, I really wanted mussels, and that's the iron thing.

In this discussion women's bodies/foetuses are seen as generating the signals they needed to provide for additional nutritional requirements during pregnancy. The knowing body produced in this discussion resists the passive body of medical discourses, while remaining embedded in a general discourse of pregnancy as a time of heightened awareness of the importance of maintaining a healthy body. This discourse is rooted in the notion that a pregnant woman is primarily responsible for the well-being of her unborn child, even to the point of making her own needs and desires secondary to those of the foetus (excellent preparation for the self-sacrificing role of the Good Mother that is to come). It is important to note here that a knowing body, located within the discourses of natural childbirth, requires the same constant monitoring and regulation as the more passive pregnant body located in the medical discourses. The emphasis may be much more on self-regulation, but regulation nonetheless. While the woman who decides to 'trust her body' whilst pregnant may avoid some of the more invasive controls and procedures of medical science (women who are planning to give birth at home or opt for midwife-only care during their pregnancies are less likely to undergo procedures such as amniocentesis, regular ultrasonic scans, or internal examinations), she is nevertheless expected to adhere to an appropriate dietary and exercise regime.

It is misleading to represent a straightforward dichotomous relationship between medical/natural childbirth discourses as if they exist in simple opposition to each other. Obviously the attention paid to diet and exercise

during pregnancy and the nutritional requirements of both pregnant women and developing foetuses owe much to the development of scientific and medical understandings of the human body. The differences between the two discourses lie more in the amount of power and control a woman is seen to have over her body during pregnancy rather than disagreement on the regulation of pregnant subjects.

Most popular books on pregnancy published around the time of this study (e.g. the *New Zealand Pregnancy Book*, 1993) contain sections that deal with natural health, nutritional supplements and exercises such as yoga that are regarded as safe for pregnant women. There has been a certain conflation of the medical/natural childbirth discourses, so that, as in the discussions between Bridget, Sarah, Penny and myself, many women who remain within the care of medical practitioners, also employ the notion of the knowing body and natural medicines to make sense of their changing bodies during pregnancy. The important point is that this conflation may give women a greater sense of control over their bodies, but it in no way excuses them from scrutiny or regulation as pregnant subjects. Indeed the pregnant subject is urged to *produce* a particular type of pregnant body (healthy, fit, not too big) in order to produce a healthy and happy infant. And such a production requires a healthy mind as well as a healthy body.

### Pregnancy – A Case of Matter over Mind?

In the *New Idea* article discussed earlier, the photograph that accompanied the description of Melanie Griffiths as 'frumpy' showed her as larger than the other pregnant celebrities but it also showed her looking tired and unhappy. Images of pregnant women in magazines and popular texts such as pregnancy manuals are inevitably of healthy, smiling women – the idealised image of the radiant mother-to-be. There are few images available of pregnant women looking tired or unhappy and when they do appear they are usually

treated as deviant in the popular press.<sup>3</sup> During one interview the women in the group were delighted to find an example in a woman's magazine of a pregnant celebrity who openly admitted to not enjoying her pregnancy. The comments accompanied a photograph of the pregnant celebrity, Julia Dreyfuss, as well as a photograph taken of her prior to her pregnancy wearing a low cut gown.

Bridget: 'I am not one of those happy, pregnant women'. (group laughing).

Sarah: That's great!

Hannah: Who's that?

Bridget: Julie, um the woman from Seinfeld. 'I am not one of those happy pregnant women'.

(Group laughter).

Sarah: That's great.

Bridget: There she is there looking stressed. But they have to juxtapose it with the picture of her looking sexy, with her tits showing. (Laughter)

These comments, displaying obvious enjoyment of a less than glowing pregnant celebrity, demonstrate resistance to dominant representations of pregnant women as radiant. The group are not expressing pleasure that Julia Dreyfuss personally was not enjoying her pregnancy, but rather at the representation of an alternative reality. Considerable pleasure can be gained from finding an alternative when so few exist in the popular media. At the same time Bridget acknowledges the manipulation of these media images through the use of 'before' and 'after' photographs. She comments on the use of an image of the celebrity before her pregnancy, an image that underlines the temporary and deviant nature of pregnant bodies and carries with it the assumption that this woman will return to her sexy and sexually available former self once the baby is born.

Lurking beneath the popular image of the radiant pregnant subject, however, is the troubling notion that if a pregnant woman is not radiant there is probably something wrong with her. In fact having 'something wrong' is highly likely, as

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<sup>3</sup> A recent example of this (2002) is the considerable space given to model and actress Liz Hurley's pregnancy in women's magazines after she was dumped by her billionaire boyfriend Steve Bing, amid accusations that the baby was not his. Photographs of her looking tired and unhappy, while obviously pregnant, were circulated widely, along with accompanying articles questioning her ability to raise a child alone.

the pregnant subject is rendered out of place in a more underlying sense. The changes the women in this study encountered in their physical bodies during pregnancy were accompanied by less tangible, but nevertheless noticeable changes in their emotional and rational selves. This discussion started with another example of a media text, this time from the university's student magazine. In the following conversation the women struggle to understand their own experiences in the face of reported 'scientific evidence' that was being used by a woman identified with feminist issues – a pro-choice advocate in the abortion debate - to reinforce dominant notions of pregnant women as less capable:

Bridget: But it's a problem again with what was in the *Canta* about the, pregnant, you know talking about abortion, WCA debate and we had pro-abortion, anti-abortion. The person who was pro-abortion was saying we should be um, promoting abortion and saying it's all right no matter what the circumstances because otherwise women can't study 'cause you can't study when you're pregnant because women are less intelligent.

Jane: Mm, their brains get smaller when they're pregnant.

Bridget: The initial bit of the brain is actually getting smaller.

Sarah: If the brain is in itself exactly the same, it's just going a little bit, deflating a little bit, 'cause surely it's, I mean I don't know much about the brain but isn't it just like fluid supported, therefore the things that are in the brain are not going to be changing are they? Exactly the same.

Bridget: Well no, they're talking about, no well see they're talking, they were saying how, they haven't actually linked it to people being less intelligent or anything else, they just say that they've noticed that the brains get smaller, and they say perhaps that's the reason why women get, you know burn things (laughs). Well I did, I mean I used to burn things, I used to forget things, my keys, my credit cards, you know some days I'd forget like 10 things. And I'd be walking round behind myself picking them all up (laughter) going back over my tracks, and yet, academically, I think I had the best year I ever had.

Jane: I found the same, I did my Honours (degree) over 2 years, and I got exactly the same marks both years, one year I was pregnant, um I got very vague in other ways as well, but in terms of this is my job and I know how to do it, and I've been doing it for years and I do it quite well, and...

Penny: Yeah, it doesn't matter.

Jane: It didn't stop me being able to achieve that standard of that, and because it was important to me I put the energy into getting that bit right.

Sarah: I got irrational in other aspects. I got quite emotionally irrational.

Bridget: I got emotional.

Sarah: Really emotionally irrational and I can see, um, it's so difficult because when you've got all, lots of different theories and you know you

see biological determinism and you go, 'no!' But you can see bits of that, of what happened to me when I was pregnant that you can see why people point to that and go women are crazy when they're pregnant, you know? And, and I really got that emotional, irrational thing, but you're right the same thing with here (university), it didn't effect that.

This exchange illustrates how powerful scientific discourses that privilege rational thinking over emotion can be employed to regulate pregnant women's lives and construct them as out of place in the rational world of the university. The pro-abortionist quoted in the *Canta* item was utilising the discourses of science and biology to promote what has typically been conceived of as a feminist position. The contradiction in this is that these same discourses have been used to devalue women's domestic roles, and here they are used to claim that women lose their capacity for rational thought and intellectual reasoning when pregnant. According to Longhurst (2000), it is common for feminist positions to evoke the discourses of natural birth that equate changes in a woman's mental functioning during pregnancy with naturally occurring biological events. While such a position may resist the notion that pregnancy is a medical condition, requiring intervention, it also leaves "the longstanding Cartesian division between abstract, rational, cultural Man, and embodied, emotional, natural Woman ... intact and unquestioned" (462).

Rejecting the idea that we were incapable of succeeding in our studies during our pregnancies, our discussion nevertheless sought to explain and understand our own experiences through those same scientific discourses - an understanding, albeit limited, of the (natural) functioning of the human brain and a perception of the intelligent, rational subject as the norm. Thus our increased emotionality and vagueness or forgetfulness during pregnancy is seen as irrational and problematic. Despite Sarah's dislike of biological determinism she equates changes in her emotional state to biological changes during pregnancy. Nowhere in the discussion are such changes located within a society that refuses to accommodate pregnancy or the stress that results from this refusal. We fail to understand forgetfulness or vagueness as a result of trying to carry on with normal lives despite the immense physical effort of just being pregnant and the emotional strain of preparing for an event that was to be life changing in many ways. And nowhere is increased emotionality regarded as something positive or even unproblematic.

For some women, such as Penny, however, the immediate demands of caring for a family and earning money may outweigh any concerns about changes in their emotional lives. If a woman is not involved in paid work or study outside the domestic realm, these issues may not seem particularly relevant or important. At the same time it is common for women to carry on with all of their domestic work, often without any extra assistance, when pregnant. When I asked Penny if she noticed changes in her intelligence or emotional state while she was pregnant she replied that she was coping with “too much other stuff” to notice and went on to talk about the lack of support and help available to her around the home. Penny was looking after other people's children as well as her own during her last 2 pregnancies.

Penny: I did notice that people around me still expected me to be able to maintain the, the pace, especially my partner. 'Cause we had boarders and I was looking after kids, so I did that right through, especially the third pregnancy, it was like I would have liked a bit of space, put my feet up occasionally, um I would have liked some time out, I would have liked, um, perhaps some acknowledgement, although he didn't acknowledge that I was pregnant at all anyway.

Penny's husband was unhappy that she was pregnant a third time and she contributes her marriage break up shortly after the birth of her son to his reluctance to have another child. For this reason he may have also been reluctant to assist Penny with household chores. While there are obviously some partners who take on extra domestic duties when a woman is pregnant, or women who can afford to pay someone else to help around the house, another aspect of the least noticeable pregnancy is that which interferes as little as possible with a woman's domestic responsibilities. Longhurst (1996) writes that pregnant women may be advised not to perform certain activities such as “hurrying, bending, stretching and lifting” in public, but are still expected to do them at home: “Housework most certainly involves bending, stretching and lifting and yet it was permitted, sanctioned in the privacy of the home” (138). I have certainly not read any pregnancy literature that advises women not to attend to their house and family. And if there are already children in the house a woman is expected to continue with her child rearing duties during her pregnancy.

So, while Penny found that life continued very much as usual at home when she was pregnant, the conversation that followed between Bridget and Sarah illustrates the intense pressure they at times felt to perform like 'normal', 'unpregnant' women at university. A tired pregnant woman may decide to leave the vacuuming, but it appears that a tired pregnant student does not feel permitted to leave an assignment. Sarah, Bridget and myself clearly refuse the claim in the *Canta* article that women are unable to study while pregnant. All three of us succeeded academically during our pregnancies, yet as the discussion continued, it was obvious that there was considerable pressure to achieve this success without any concessions to the effects of pregnancy.

In these discussions the least noticeable pregnancy becomes about more than mere physical changes in a woman's body. Emotionality and irrational behaviour are located within the realms of the feminine and relegated to the domestic sphere. These changes are also embedded in medical and scientific discourses. Lucy Bailey (1999) described how, in her conversations with pregnant women "any behavioural changes in pregnancy could be ascribed to the temporary effects of hormones and were embedded in the discourse of science" (347). Emily Martin (1987) describes how, during pregnancy, "women are perceived as malfunctioning and their hormones out of balance rather than the organization of society and work perceived as in need of transformation" (123). Longhurst, similarly, found that both the pregnant women she interviewed and the midwives who participated in her research via questionnaire, regarded changes in a woman's hormones as the main precipitating factor in emotional difficulties faced during pregnancy. They failed to identify social factors, and the lack of accommodation for the needs of pregnant women in society as contributing to these difficulties. It is important to remember that the hormones in question are female hormones and thus "malfunctioning" hormones are exclusively feminine.

If pregnancy is constructed as a time of increased emotionality and irrationality, then a woman's place in the public world of an academic institution becomes more tenuous than ever. Her pregnant body becomes even more out of place. The least noticeable pregnancy takes on a new meaning here – to display no sign of loss of emotional or mental stability in the

public realm, but also to maintain levels of activity and energy that most closely resemble those of a non-pregnant subject. The days of the pregnant woman 'putting her feet up' and considerably reducing her workload seem to have disappeared in the age of the 'superwoman' who maintains her home, works outside the home, studies, exercises and decorates the nursery – all in a days work!

### They'll Never Let a Pregnant Woman in Again – Earning a Place in the Public Sphere

Sarah, Bridget and Penny all recognised that they were not physically able to do as much during their pregnancies as they had previously. Exercise, or in fact any activity in certain circumstances, may threaten a woman's health as well as that of her foetus during pregnancy, an idea that challenges the notion that an active body is a healthy body. These women acknowledge that bodily changes during pregnancy may mean that women's levels of activity need to change accordingly, moving from an active lifestyle to more of an "incubator", "sitting on a nest" to use Sarah's words. These understandings, borne of the women's own experiences, appear in contrast to media images of pregnant women they encounter:

Sarah: This is another image in the media, that we look at these women doing all this stuff when they're pregnant. And we think yeah, we can do that, there's lots of women out there doing that. And I think a lot of women need to step back more, but we've got these images of women doing whilst pregnant, a lot more. And I had problems with it, you know the whole um, issues of perhaps, pregnant (women) aren't capable, pregnant women are you know, they're, I don't believe any of that, but I still believe that women need to step back from that superwoman thing when they're pregnant, if they need to (yeah). Like you (indicating Bridget), and that people should encourage that.

Bridget: I still did really well in my year at university, I mean I still did, I wrote my first chapter for my doctorate, and I still um, yeah but that whole nest building thing was there, you know? I was embroidering and smocking and you know, tidying the house and stripping wallpaper and everything. So I had lots of energy, but I just couldn't do things like cycling, like aerobics, like all those kind of things that I really wanted to do.

All three of the women in the group kept very busy while they were pregnant - studying, working, minding other people's children and a vast array of domestic work. Longhurst (1996) found that most of the women in her study "seemed to increasingly orientate their daily activities around the home (and the coming baby) and withdraw from public activities" (136) during their pregnancies, although this withdrawal from public life did not include withdrawal from paid employment or study, rather from social and sporting activities in the public realm. Despite Bridget and Sarah's claims to be taking things slower, being "low key", their lives were very busy. These women clearly feel that it was expected that they would maintain basically the same lifestyle as they did pre-pregnancy, yet Sarah in particular resists this insistence, this refusal of the effects of pregnancy on a woman's ability to work long hours. And she clearly identifies media representations as promoting this discourse. When I asked the group if they felt that pregnant women on TV were still treated as if they couldn't do much and needed to sit down and put their feet up they disagreed:

Sarah: I feel like the majority thing is, like if they were doing that the woman would go, 'no, no, no, I can do this, I can do that', and of course we can but I feel like women, it's that whole thing, we want to work, but do we really want to work thing (yeah), you know what I mean? Like that, that whole yeah sure we fought for the, the right to be able to work, and that's great and everybody should be able to do that, but there are women who want to be able to step back and go 'hey, I don't want to do that, I want to do part time or I do want to stay at home with my kids'. You know that whole thing, of it being, now that's not really ok to do, and I think it's the same thing with pregnancy, women who need to...

Bridget: But it's like catch 22 again, isn't it, because on the first hand we've had to fight for the right to work while we're pregnant (yeah that's right) and now it's become compulsory. Know what I mean? (So we have to) And so if you actually say, 'ok I'm fighting, I'm fighting, I really want to do my doctorate, I really want to do it', but if you're going to get the funding you have to do it full time. And um, no one's going to say 'oh yeah part time because she's a mother as well'. If you say 'I do it part time because I'm a law clerk' or something else, 'part time because I'm making money on the side' you know, great (yeah), that's a good reason to go part time, but you know, you're just a mother, or you're just a pregnant woman or whatever.  
Penny: No, that's not a reason, not a good enough reason.

As these women took their pregnant bodies into the public sphere where traditionally such bodies have been excluded, or at least discouraged, they felt a lot of pressure to act as 'unpregnant' as possible, aware that their place in this realm became increasingly tenuous as their bodies betrayed their deviant status. Women have fought hard to continue working or studying during their pregnancies, but this discussion suggests that this has now become compulsory and that there are few allowances for the pregnant woman who might want to reduce her workload. Bridget felt a sense of responsibility for other pregnant women, a need to secure for herself and others the right to a place in the university: The notion of the least noticeable pregnancy compels women to earn their place; it is not something they can take for granted:

Bridget: And you're fighting, you're not just fighting for your right, you're fighting for everybody else. I mean you feel like you've failed all pregnant women out there (yes) like you say, if you have to drop a course. And I didn't even want to ask for an extension, I thought 'they'll never let pregnant women come back in again'.

The tension arises from a society that does not seem able to incorporate acknowledgment of the effects of pregnancy with an acceptance of the many ways pregnant women can and do carry on as normal - the insistence that pregnant women act as if they aren't pregnant in order to occupy places in the workforce or educational institutions. Thus Bridget and Sarah felt the need to fight for their place in the university, their pregnant bodies constructed as even more out of place in this traditionally male dominated realm of rational, objective knowledge. The discourse of the least noticeable pregnancy discouraged these women from taking the "step back" that Sarah advocates, at times putting their own health at risk. Their insistence on continuing with extremely busy lives, often without emotional or practical support from those around them resulted in the medical problems each of these women encountered at the end of their pregnancies and the ensuing imposed bed rest they all faced. However, as the previous discussion demonstrated, there was a sense of not being able to ask for extra assistance when pregnant. Often this sense was reinforced through the media. For example, Bridget described a newspaper article about a woman at a university elsewhere in New Zealand who was refused aegrotat consideration when she failed to sit an examination the day after she had given birth:

Bridget: ... can you imagine the day after you've given birth, turning up for an exam, with your baby under your arm? (laugh)

Sarah: And that's the whole expectation of, that we've been...

Bridget: Snap out of it woman!

Sarah: ...we've been telling the patriarchal society that we can do this, we can do this, don't not let us do this. And yet they turn it around on us and go, you can work a 40 hour week still, even though you've got three kids and you don't, you know, you've told us you can do this.

The fact that this was reported in the media illustrates that such events are not unproblematic and that pregnant bodies and motherhood are sites of ongoing struggle and cultural tension for women seeking to situate themselves in the public sphere while continuing with their reproductive roles. There were times when Bridget and Sarah were offered support and encouragement to continue with their studies and one university department gave Sarah until several months after the birth of her daughter to complete her coursework for the year. My own experiences of studying when pregnant and those of other women I have spoken to show that negative attitudes are not at all universal, that some workplaces are more accepting of pregnancy than others, as are some people within institutions such as the university. However both Longhurst (2000) and Bailey (1999) found that many of the pregnant women they interviewed reported changes in attitudes from workmates as well as subtle forms of discrimination in the workplace. She also found that "a number spoke of finding themselves going out of their way to ensure they proved their competence at every turn" (350). The women in the current study identify a general perception 'out there' that pregnant women are less capable and that it is not acceptable to expect 'special' treatment when pregnant. It is important to note that this feeling does not necessarily arise from concrete experiences of discrimination and exclusion, but is generated through the complex and gendered normative discourses that regulate pregnancy and pregnant subjects, and which render pregnant bodies particularly out of place in the university.

Longhurst (1996) argues that "discrimination occurs not through pregnant women being singled out but rather through their 'difference' not being respected and accommodated within the workplace" (160). The affects of such

discrimination means that “the surveillance and monitoring of pregnant women’s behaviour in work places is undertaken by colleagues, employers and so on, but it is also undertaken by pregnant women themselves” (154). In short, pregnant women participate in these normative discourses by altering their own behaviour or refusing to ask for concessions that would acknowledge their pregnant condition. They are participating once again in the regulatory processes that limit and define pregnant women’s lives. Again, this participation is not without resistance, and women are able to strategically use their pregnant state to their own advantage. Bridget acknowledges that there were some benefits to studying when pregnant. Despite feeling that she had to fight for her right to study, she was considering (although probably not seriously) another pregnancy to help her focus on her studies:

Bridget: ‘Cause see I’m actually thinking should I get pregnant again, so that I can do this doctorate and finish it. Isn’t it stupid? No just because I get, I don’t want another child (laughter)...

Sarah: So you can get in the head space you need to be in to buckle down (laughs).

Bridget: But yeah, yeah. It’s like it takes the pressure off, ‘cause you’re thinking all of a sudden, hey the, I don’t know, maybe I just don’t work that well under that kind of pressure, but when it’s a secondary thing (yeah) and it’s a pleasure and it’s a privilege then I find it much easier to work (mm, hmm). And people, I don’t know people’s attitudes affect me so greatly that when they’re sort of saying, ‘wow you’re doing it, you’re here, great’, I feel really good, but when I’m like, ‘oh the kids have kept me up all night’ you know, it’s just like, ah huh, like blaming it on the dog again (I know) and you’re saying like ‘no, no, really, I really am having troubles at the moment’.

Sarah: Remember that pregnancy that you admired 2 years ago? Well it still lives (laughter). And it wakes me up, yeah.

An interesting aspect of this exchange is how Bridget harnesses both opposition to, and admiration of her pregnancy at university to focus on her studies in a way that was not necessarily possible before. When Bridget spoke of study being a “pleasure and a privilege” during pregnancy, she contrasted this with the ongoing effort of mothering which goes largely unrecognised at university. She talks of having another pregnancy, not because she wants another child, but because during her previous pregnancy she was able to achieve a lot academically. Although in part this achievement was driven by her need to prove that pregnant women can achieve as well as anyone, it was

also due to people's positive attitudes and encouragement towards her studying during her pregnancy. Sarah also identified that people admired her pregnancy. This seems to confirm that the least noticeable pregnancy is not so much about explicit and universal exclusions as about perceived understandings and internalised acceptance of norms. It also indicates that it is difficult to ignore a pregnancy – while children can easily be excluded from some public spaces, a woman takes her pregnant body wherever she goes. Because of the very physicality and visibility of pregnancy, it is something that has to be addressed wherever a woman takes it, as opposed to children who can be relegated to child care centres, schools, nannies etc. Thus the fact that a child kept you up during the night can be ignored, while it is much harder to ignore a pregnant body and the threat this body might hold for traditional notions of what places and spaces women, in their reproductive role, should occupy.

If pregnant bodies are rendered out of place, it seems that this increases as the pregnant woman moves further from the domestic into the public sphere. Joyce Davidson (2001) argues that this is a continuation of the process, identified by feminist theorists such as Bordo (1990) and Battersby (1998), whereby “women generally are subjected to ideological imperatives to look and act according to certain gendered norms – behavioural standards that still lean towards domesticity and servility as opposed to authority and sociality”. These theorists, she continues, “have further shown that women tend to be represented as having more fluid boundaries than men, and as such, they are less suited to and even threaten the stability of, the rational order of the masculine realm”. Thus women’s bodies “require a degree of ‘confinement’ within the domestic sphere. In pregnancy ... this feminine boundary situation apparently reaches something of a crisis point, as the need for confinement intensifies ... (and) women are treated to ‘*more of the same*’” (296). According to this argument pregnant bodies are not out of place because they are fundamentally different to non-pregnant bodies, but because they threaten the integrity of the rational, masculine subject in the same manner as all female bodies, only *more so*.

That concerns over the emotional and rational stability of pregnant women is of far greater significance in the public realm is demonstrated by Penny's silence during much of the previous discussion. As she said, she had "too much other stuff going on" - working at home, caring for her children as well as other people's children, cooking and cleaning for boarders and dealing with a failing relationship – to worry about any particular changes to her emotional or rational self during her pregnancy. Her pregnant body did not produce excessive anxiety (except for her husband who did not want another child) or gain particular admiration, as it remained in the domestic realm (where it belongs?) for much of the time. While she was affected by the need to 'watch it' and not put on too much weight, her life continued very much as usual during her pregnancies. The normative discourses that construct pregnant bodies as out of place impacted on Penny during her time in hospital and when she encountered those who commented on her size, but she remained relatively unaffected by the discourses that construct pregnant women as out of place due to impaired rational or emotional performance.

On the other hand, Bridget and Sarah's participation in the public realm increased the scrutiny they experienced as they worked hard to regulate their emotional and intellectual functioning in this arena. As Bridget noted, she burned things and forgot things at home, but she was very focused on her studies and achieved excellent results during her pregnancy. Sarah became "emotional and irrational", but not at work or university. To separate the domestic and public spheres so clearly, however, simplifies what is a complex blurring of the boundaries between these two realms that is rendered highly visible when a pregnant woman occupies public space. The bodies of pregnant women occupying the corridors of the university disrupt the male/female, public/private, mind/body dualities that have dominated Western thinking in modern times. And as the pregnancy progresses and these bodies deviate further from the norms of acceptable femininity they threaten to allow leakage from one side of the divide into the other. Longhurst (2000) describes the threat of leakiness posed by pregnant women:

Their bodies are often considered constantly to threaten to expel matter from inside – to seep and leak – they may vomit (morning sickness), cry,

need to urinate more frequently, produce colostrums which may leak from their breasts, have a 'show' appear, have their 'waters break', and sweat with the effort of carrying the extra weight of their body (463).

It is not surprising that such a threat requires constant surveillance and regulation, as these leaky bodies further demonstrate the lack of control that pregnant women appear to hold over their corporeal selves. Leaky pregnant bodies also further signal a woman's lack of sexual availability during this time. There is little in the image of a heavily pregnant (and leaky) body that corresponds with normative images of the desirable female body. A pregnant body not only signifies a woman's lack of control over her bodily functions during this time, but also indicates a lack of masculine control over those parts of the female body imbued with sexual meaning. This theme was introduced to the group when Bridget described a television talk show hosted by a man and involving a panel of male guests urging other men not to attend the birth of their children because of the consequential loss of sexual desire for their partners. While there was a lot of laughter among the group during this discussion, indicating they found this notion somewhat extreme and not to be taken too seriously, the conversation that followed belied their initial dismissal of the topic:

Bridget: There were all these men who were saying, 'do not go in, to your wife giving birth. Because the...' I think the way he put it was, 'the love canal becomes (laughs) the baby canal (laughs) and the blood canal, and you're not sexually attracted to them anymore'.

Sarah: Oh, that's crap.

Bridget: And all these fathers were saying they haven't slept with their wife, (laughter) haven't slept with their wife for, like some for several years.

Penny: Oh my god.

Bridget: Because they were turned off by it.

Although Bridget's description of this television show produced much laughter, both Sarah and Penny had experiences where the biological father of a child admitted not being able to cope with the "messiness" of childbirth. The women became serious when I asked them what it was about childbirth they thought these men were not coping with. Bridget suggested that men have access to copious images of naked women, but that women's genitals are usually not exposed. She argued that, whereas images of naked men usually clearly show

a penis, women's genitals are more hidden and therefore surrounded by a certain mystery. Sarah then added that in ancient "goddess imagery", the vagina was represented as "a thing that would trap a man, so men were obviously horrified". Here Bridget and Sarah appear to be articulating a mystical and symbolic element to women's genitals, one that is accompanied by a certain level of risk or danger for men. These concealed female genitals become clearly and, at least for some men, grotesquely visible during childbirth:

Bridget: And then they suddenly see, you know blood, and...

Sarah: You see that was Robert's excuse really was that he couldn't handle blood and things...

Bridget: Yeah, but I think that's a lot of the vagina thing, they mix up sex and birth and...

Penny: Too, I think it's their territory. I think men reckon the vagina and the breasts are their territory, and they resent babies having access to...

Bridget: They do.

During this exchange the women spoke rapidly, usually adding a new idea before the previous speaker had finished her sentence. There was emotional intensity in this rapid exchange of ideas, indicating that the women felt strongly about this issue and that the experiences that evoked these emotions were of some significance. From their experiences, the birthing body is a powerful example of a body out of place. As the previously concealed female genitalia are not only exposed, but also distorted through childbirth, they take on a symbolic meaning that, imbued with blood and fear, was problematic for the men in their lives. On another level the sexual meanings of women's genitalia are also rendered unstable by the process of childbirth. As Bridget says, men can "mix up sex and birth", as if the "blood and things" would be less problematic if they were seeping from another part of the body, one that was not so clearly marked with sexual meaning, in, as Penny puts it, "their territory". It is at the moment of birth that women's pregnant bodies most visibly manifest themselves as out of place, challenging discourses of female embodiment embedded in notions of regulation and control. This is the moment when the female body most clearly challenges Cartesian notions of the "universalised (male) subject", as Shildrick and Price (1998) put it. In

contrast to this subject, they argue, “the overflowing of corporeal boundaries – through illness or impairment, and notably through being female, with its inherent potential for the leakiness of menstruation, lactation and childbirth ... characteristically signifies not just disruption of the unmarked, universalised body, but disqualification from full personhood” (5). In this account, having control, particularly of mind over body, is integral to being human. During childbirth, not only does a woman appear to lose control, perhaps even possession of her own body, but men also relinquish any sense of control or ownership they might have felt over their partner’s body.

It is hardly surprising then that women are urged to return to their pre-pregnant selves (and bodies) as quickly as possible following the birth of their child. Yet birth does not restore things to the ‘way they were’ in a straightforward way. Obviously a woman’s body takes time to recover physically from the stresses of pregnancy and childbirth. Most women take at least some time off work or study to care for their newborn infant, and family life must allow for new routines and the challenges of caring for a baby. Intimate relationships and those with older children may also undergo significant changes with the arrival of a new family member. Most women are unlikely to return immediately to sporting pursuits and social activities may be limited, at least for a time.

It is not only in changes to her lifestyle and relationships that a woman’s experience of pregnancy and childbirth is transformative, however. As Davidson (2001) reminds us, “self-identity and corporeality are inextricably intertwined” and “changes in the latter will necessarily have some bearing on the former. ... the embodied experience of pregnancy will not leave the shape of the self unaltered; one cannot be the selfsame individual postpartum” (286). The women in this group experienced changes in their bodies and in their sense of selves that continued after their babies were born. In particular, the fact that they all chose to breastfeed their babies produced continuities in their sense of bodies under scrutiny and bodies that are problematic in a masculinist society. The notion that men experienced their breastfeeding bodies as out of place continued the earlier discussion around birthing bodies and men’s sexual ownership of certain parts of women’s bodies:

Penny: Like I really think that with breastfeeding. So, the baby's taken over their part of the body.

Sarah: And the sexual bits that are theirs to play with and theirs to share with you if you've got a better relationship than that (laughs). You know, and then it becomes, it has a different purpose and, 'oh my god am I being like...?', you know, like, my partner was weird about drinking my breasts, you know, like, and I thought that was the sexiest thing in the world but, at first he was like, really like, 'oh no, should I be doing this', you know? But like, when the baby's not feeding, then it's not baby zone, ok? (laughter) It's all right.

Bridget: I don't know whether they think it's...

Sarah: Like you say sexual...

Bridget: Like it's something like, you know, now the breast's a baby's breast should I be, have sex with, and then there's the whole thing, well, if they're sexual should the baby be doing it? (laughter).

Here discourses that construct female bodies as sexually available to men are challenged by the breastfeeding bodies of women whose breasts function as a source of nutrition for an infant, while at the same time they continue to provide sexual pleasure for an adult male. The fact that some men find this problematic exposes the ways in which certain parts of women's bodies are constructed as serving the needs of others rather than belonging to the woman whose physical body they are part of. The idea that the same part of a woman's body that gives and receives sexual pleasure can also provide comfort and nutrition to a baby troubles the notion that sexuality belongs in the adult world and children are not yet sexual beings. The idea that a woman's body or parts of her body may not belong to her, but rather may be possessed, or at least shared, by another, or even multiple others, works to further reinforce the notion that her body is not her own, and that other interests necessitate the ongoing policing of her bodily boundaries. This group of women certainly experienced surveillance and regulation in relation to their breastfeeding bodies, although there was also the sense that the nature of this surveillance had changed over time:

Penny: They (breasts) become dirty when you're feeding a child. The number of times I got asked not to feed a child around other people.

Sarah: Wow.

Penny: This is my oldest who's nearly eleven. Yeah, and even my mother said, you know, 'out of the room'.

Bridget: Oh, that's so unfair. In church I was... (talking at once, laughter)

Sarah: The biggest one for me was, my family's a big rugby family, and it was like other big boy members of the rugby team would come over and then that was when my mother would quake in her boots, like, 'how are these people going to cope?' and they actually were red faced. You know, here I am, feeding Flora and not giving a shit, although feeling uncomfortable, but I was thinking no, at that stage she was really little, um, but I've never had anybody tell me not to feed her. But I've had people look at me as if it's ... that's the stage it's at now, it's that kind of, well we can't say anything but we don't like it.

Bridget: We can't say anything now.

Sarah: That's right, but ...

Jane: Do you think that's a change in the times?

Penny: The times, mmm. There was a difference between the first and the third, yeah. It was quite incredible, my sister-in-law actually came up to me years later and said she was actually glad that I didn't listen, 'cause like with her parents she would never have breastfed her kid if I, if I hadn't had my child first and done it. So in some ways I paved the way for her. 'Cause she would have been too conservative to, she'd have gone into the other room.

Penny described how attitudes towards her breastfeeding body have changed over time, although the sense of breasts being 'dirty' when exposed in front of others remains. It is interesting that Penny's mother asked her not to breastfeed when others were present, illustrating that, as in pregnancy, breastfeeding bodies are likely to be regulated by other women, in this case on behalf of men who might be experiencing discomfort. Once again a breastfeeding woman's body is constructed as out of place as it deviates from the sexual norms that require breasts to be covered in public and only made available to men for sexual pleasure in private.

In recent years there has been considerable promotion of breastfeeding as the best possible means of providing infants with the nutrition they require for healthy development. The New Zealand government has funded a number of campaigns to promote breastfeeding, particularly in the Maori and Pacific Island communities where childhood diseases and problems associated with poor nutrition have traditionally been much more prolific than among the Pakeha population. Images of breastfeeding women are scarce in popular culture such as the women's magazines discussed previously, but baby books and government publications increasingly include advice and information about breastfeeding. Over time it has become more acceptable for women to

breastfeed in public or at least around close friends and members of their families.

Bridget noted, however, that images of celebrities' breastfeeding are absent from popular culture: "You don't see celebrities breastfeeding their babies at the Grammy Awards". Sarah added, "No, I wish we would though". It seems that such images would indeed be out of place, for similar reasons to those discussed around the lack of representations of pregnant celebrities in popular culture. The intense scrutiny of female bodies in this arena would place considerable constraints on any attempt to expose a nursing breast in such circumstances. Here women, and their breasts, are constructed as sexual and any other meaning would be very much out of place.

The conflict over the meanings attached to breasts in nursing mothers was further complicated in Sarah's experience, by the fact that she continued to breastfeed her daughter beyond the culturally expected age of around one year old. At the time of this interview she was still feeding 3 year old Flora and believed that this would have been highly problematic if Flora was a male child:

Sarah: That's the other thing. Like I can see the sexual stuff, as the baby gets older it's ... I'm lucky 'cause Flora is a girl and people don't bring that up...

Bridget: A 3-year old boy, you know...

Sarah: I'd be in trouble, they'd be thinking naughty things about me.

Here the construction of breasts as primarily sexual renders a mother breastfeeding an older child, particularly if that child is male, as problematic and suspect. This theme will be further elaborated in the following chapter when the group discusses sharing their beds with their children at night. However it was not only the age of her child, but also the changing physical appearance of her breasts that Sarah believed others found problematic as she continued to breastfeed Flora into her fourth year:

I found it that when Flora was younger and I was feeding and my breasts were really big and voluptuous and the young breastfeeding mother kind of thing, that people coped with that better now than, now that Flora is 3 and my breasts are getting down to my waist (laughter). And it's this thing that doesn't look like a breasts that they normally, you know it's like a stretchy kind of breast thing (laughter). No, that's what it's like, you know, and I find that they find that harder to cope with. I find that interesting because I always had small breasts and when I had bigger, full of milk, early baby breasts, it was, all you'd see is, she's a breastfeeding, big, voluptuous sort of thing and okay we can deal with it because the baby's small, you know? And now that my baby's big and I think people actually look at my breasts, I can see people surprised at how, you know they can stretch so far, they go (gestures as if pulling breast out) ping (laughter) and they, I think they find that really incongruous, I think they're a little bit more embarrassed.

Once again, there is a comparison with normative images of female bodies, in this case breastfeeding bodies as voluptuous. In breastfeeding, as in pregnancy, women are caught up in a regulatory process that limits where breastfeeding should take place, who may be present, the age of a breastfed infant, and the appearance of their breasts. Within this regulatory process there is considerable tension around the contradictory construction of breasts as sexual and breasts as nurturing. In many ways this conflict over the meanings attached to a woman's breasts mirrors the conflict over meanings attached to other aspects of her femininity as she is expected to make the transition to the type of self-sacrificing motherhood that is valorised in Western culture. No longer valued as a sexually available subject, the new mother is expected to conform to images of motherhood that place the needs of her infant ahead of her own and require her to pay constant and vigilant attendance to these needs.

This new maternal subjectivity does not excuse a woman from attending to matters of physical appearance, however. Once her baby is born she is expected to work hard at regaining her previous physical form. The out of place pregnant body, having now served its purpose, must be replaced by one that again closely resembles the ideals of femininity valued by the culture. If she is breastfeeding a woman may be permitted larger breasts for a time, but it is expected that she will remove all signs of the 'bump' that marked her out of place pregnant form. While the issue of celebrities' breastfeeding is virtually ignored in women's magazines, there is intense scrutiny around their post-

pregnant bodies. Bridget brought another woman's magazine to the interview that included an article describing Madonna as "back in the swing" after having a baby and another that suggested that some celebrities might be harming their babies by taking extreme measures to lose weight after childbirth. The group was quick to point out the contradictory messages in these articles:

Bridget: It's sort of like the baby pops out and then you have to be back to yourself, you know, when is she going to get on the catwalk because if she doesn't get back up on the catwalk she's, you know, she's going to be too old (laughs). But I brought this along. This is, 'Madonna is back in the swing with a night out on New York's Broadway. Bitchy critics noted her tummy', not her pregnancy, 'and the fact that she was with a mystery man'. And I read in a magazine which I don't have, that after she'd given birth she went on a popcorn diet. And Jennifer Flavin has got really skinny after giving birth as well. And there are some other names in the article and it's in exactly the same magazine, and it just made me laugh. It was saying, 'are these mothers harming their babies by going on these super diets? Tut, tut, tut. Is Madonna putting her child's health at risk?' And I was thinking, but when bitchy critics are always noticing tummy (laughter) and I was just thinking, well, what do you want?

Penny: It's the transition too, between the tummy being her body and her being naughty and going and having a baby, and the difference becomes now she's not Madonna, she's a mummy.

Sarah: Yeah, I think that's interesting. Oh, and there was something that I saw about 'at least Madonna has made the transition, she's put her pointy bras behind her'. So Madonna's recreating a respectable Madonna now that she's a mother.

The complex and contradictory discourses surrounding the bodies of new mothers in the popular media are apparent in this exchange. Celebrity mothers are urged to both return to their pre-pregnant selves and bodies by getting "back up on the catwalk", while at the same time they are expected to relinquish aspects of their selves to take on the new role of mother, with all of the self-sacrifice and attention to the needs of others that this entails. Their bodies are scrutinised for any signs of the bump they recently carried, yet attempts to remove the bump are also scrutinised for fear that extreme weight loss measures may prove harmful to their babies (presumably this refers to breastfeeding mothers in particular). These types of contradictions are not unusual in women's magazines that often carry articles about conditions such as anorexia nervosa, while in the same issue extolling the benefits of the latest

diet and publishing advertisements and articles featuring ultra-thin models and celebrities. The scrutiny surrounding these particular celebrities, however, is fuelled by concern for their babies. The article that Bridget brought to the interview focussed on the effects of the super diets on the women's babies, rather than their own health and well-being. As Penny reminds us, Madonna's tummy is part of her body, subject to the usual surveillance and regulation celebrity bodies experience. The baby, however, creates a "difference", as she's "no longer Madonna, she's a mummy". As such she gained approval from the magazine for putting her "pointy bras behind her", indicating that Madonna's previous highly sexualised image is not appropriate for a mother. The issue of motherhood and sexuality will be explored further in the next chapter, but it is clear here that post-pregnant bodies are scrutinised not only to ensure that they have returned to their rightful place in terms of eliminating signs of deviance from societal norms of feminine beauty, but also adhere to notions of sexually appropriate behaviour for mothers.

Bridget, Penny and Sarah experienced anxieties around their own post-pregnant bodies also:

Bridget: But I did get a shock after I gave birth, and suddenly, I don't actually know what I expected, but I did not expect this huge piece of skin that you know, that (laughter) I could sort of like roll my tummy up and stick it in my pants, and I could suddenly see my legs again and I got lots of stretch marks on the top of my thighs, and I saw things like that and I thought, 'I can't go swimming, how can I get fit, how can I go out again looking like this?' And somebody said to me, 'it took nine months to put the weight on, it'll probably take that long to take it off'.

Sarah: And it does. 'Cause I can remember looking back a year after I had given birth to Flora and I felt like I could fit my clothes again, and I went through a whole year of not knowing, 'cause it's easy when you're small, you go, 'I like those clothes I'll put them on'. It's really easy being little and that was the first experience I had, apart from being pregnant, which is kind of different, you know it's going to be over. But that year afterwards I could see things I wanted to wear, but I couldn't fit it. It wouldn't look all right 'cause I was bigger, you know? And it was hard.

Bridget: I found it hard. I've always been big thighed and big bottomed, but I've always been really little up top. And suddenly I had these huge breasts and I never had huge breasts. And I really didn't know how to dress because the way I'd disguise (laughs) sounds really stupid, I'd disguise being big down below was by wearing baggy things down below and quite

fitting up top. And suddenly I couldn't wear these little fitting things because I had this huge cleavage (laughs).

Penny: The thing is you weren't prepared for the changes that happened and were still there, six, nine months, a year later. They still are (laughs), they're still there.

It is clear from this discussion that post-pregnant bodies do not simply fall back into place. All three women experienced prolonged changes in their physical form after their babies were born, and all three found these changes difficult to manage. I have argued throughout this chapter that Western femininity requires the production of certain types of bodies and that pregnancy clearly disrupts the production process. Pregnant women experience intense scrutiny around their deviant bodies as they, along with others, attempt to regulate this unruly process. Once the baby is born, however, their bodies are expected to once again conform to normative images of femininity. In order to achieve this women must work hard, through diet, exercise and self-control.

Again this discussion demonstrates the women's active participation in the regulatory process. While Sarah could display her pregnant body proudly and describe feeling sexy while she was pregnant, she felt unable to wear certain clothes because her body was "too big" afterwards. As a temporary and deviant state, pregnancy allows women to escape some of the norms of femininity that are prescribed in the popular media such as the women's magazines they discussed during this interview. Once the baby is born, however, it seems that it is much more difficult to resist these norms. Bridget previously adhered to such norms through the strategic wearing of clothes that hid what she considered problem areas of her body. She was concerned to find that her strategies no longer worked effectively with her changed post-pregnant body. Post-pregnant bodies disrupted Bridget and Sarah's understandings of their bodies and their femininity and were thus problematic. At the same time however, these experiences highlighted the scrutiny and regulation that women, and mothers in particular, are subject to:

Bridget: I think something too about losing weight after having a baby, I just noticed it in the two (articles), in the media ... it seems to me that they can judge mothers, are entitled to judge mothers. ... 'they can tell you that this is the way you've got to look after (the baby)'.

This sense of being judged prevails throughout these interviews about motherhood, where it recurs again and again in different contexts and with differing effects. And again and again the women's (often simultaneous) compliance with, participation in and resistance to the regulatory process is evident in their discussions. This is always a clearly gendered process that frames women's lives as mothers in relation to normative discourses of femininity. The embodied experience of pregnancy marked continuities in Bridget, Sarah and Penny's (as well as my own) experiences of regulatory processes in relation to producing acceptable female bodies (Davidson's (2001) "more of the same). However, as Longhurst (2000) reminds us, "Gender relations are played out in and across the depths/surfaces of the pregnant corpus in ways that are regulatory yet unstable" (455).

Despite the powerful discourses working through the media, the medical and education systems and the workforce that demand the least noticeable pregnancy and situate responsibility for this in women's own demands for the right to be treated as able and capable people whilst pregnant, the women in this study were able to articulate their resistance and harness these discourses for their own strategic purposes. During the earlier discussion about pregnant bodies they frequently used the same medical discourses that normalise the least noticeable pregnancy to resist this notion. They discussed how each woman's bodily experience of pregnancy differs according to her physiological makeup and the physiological development of the foetus. They also identified how medical problems may influence the outward signs of pregnancy - a sick baby will be smaller; exercise may effect the size of a pregnant body but also lead to health problems later on in the pregnancy; cravings for certain foods and the desire to eat a lot whilst pregnant can be a woman's knowing body responding to the nutritional requirements of the baby.

Pregnancy then was a time of heightened awareness of bodies under scrutiny and the constant need for vigilance in maintaining an appropriate pregnant body, but at the same time pregnancy highlighted, for these women, the possibility of resistance, of even rewriting aspects of their identities, in particular their embodied identities. During this time certain practices of femininity could be relinquished, at least temporarily, and alternative ways of experiencing their bodies became available to the women in this study. For

example, while accepting that they did experience changes in their emotional and rational selves when pregnant, Bridget and Sarah also rejected the idea that this made them incapable of achieving academically and instead claimed that it enabled them to focus on their studies in a way that they had not previously. Penny dismissed the notion of her pregnant body somehow altering her emotional and rational functioning with the simple statement that she had “too much other stuff going on” to be concerned with those discourses that construct pregnant women as emotionally or intellectually unstable.

### Conclusion

This chapter has been particularly concerned with the ways in which the women in this study experienced surveillance and regulation of their bodies, as well as their own self-regulatory practices during their pregnancies. In addition, I have explored resistant discourses and practices that can be identified from the conversations, although I have argued that these often relied on alternative regimes of truth that have emerged from the same compulsion to police bodily boundaries as the more medicalised discourses they seek to displace. In exploring pregnant subjectivity I have employed the Foucauldian notion of power as “exercised rather than possessed”, something that, rather than being wielded over people, “invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them” (1977; 27). This Foucaultian notion of power is productive and decentralised rather than repressive and exercised from the top down. Central to his understanding of power relations is the notion of discourse – “the structured ways of knowing which are both produced in, and the shapers of, culture” (Ransom, 1993; 123). Thus it is through discourse and discursive practices that power works to produce the normalising truths about women’s bodies that became increasingly obvious to these women as their pregnant bodies deviated more obviously from them. In this way pregnancy became a site of anxiety around bodily control, but also a site of contestation of discursive truths and norms. This anxiety was particularly highlighted in the act of childbirth itself, and

continued as the women breastfed their babies and attempted to manage their post-pregnant bodies.

As Foucault argues, wherever there is discourse there is resistance; power is always contested and resistance can take many forms, a point made by feminist academics employing such an approach. According to Mary Ellen Brown (1994) in her work on women viewing soap operas, “the ideological work of cultural texts is always open to contestation” and it is in the conversations that women have about popular culture that they are able to “regain their space” when the “construction of meaning gets back into their own territory – the spoken text” (66). Such resistance through discussion was clearly visible during the interview I conducted that centred on pregnancy. During this conversation Bridget, Sarah and Penny discussed a number of articles on pregnancy from current women’s magazines that they brought with them to the interviews. These articles proved illuminating in terms of highlighting how contradictory messages about pregnant bodies are both produced and received through the popular media. The articles functioned as starting points for discussions that both employed and challenged dominant discourses of femininity and pregnant embodiment. Pregnancy created a state of altered normality, of deviation from expected bodily norms, which exposed the socially constructed nature of such norms while at the same time requiring particular forms of regulation to manage this deviance. The pregnant body became a body ‘out of place’, and it was from this very ‘out of placeness’ that the opportunity to resist normative regimes of truth emerged.

I have argued that it is nothing new for women to feel the need to regulate their bodies. McWhorter (1999) describes the ongoing policing of women’s bodies:

Being a woman in our culture means, among other things, that you live out your life in subjection to the virtually constant demand to police your body, to keep it always under strict mental control – lest it become too fat or too thin, too pale or too dark, too wrinkled, too hairy, too provocative, too

needy, lest it be obtrusive or loud, lest it smell of sweat or blood or garlic, lest it leak vaginal secretions or break a nail. You must master that body and keep it under strict surveillance at all times (139-40).

Yet she also claims that this “injunction to police” means that women might well be more aware of the blurring of the boundaries between mind and body precisely because they are expected to pay so much attention to it. “We find ourselves in the grip of mind/body dualisms, but we also simultaneously find ourselves in the midst of their continual instability and threatened disintegration” (140). It seems that pregnancy, as a time when women experience a heightened sense of scrutiny and surveillance of their bodies, might well be a time of heightened awareness of the instability of categories that define femininity in particular ways. Thus, pregnancy allows women the opportunity to resist these categories in ways that are highly visible. An out of place pregnant body is hard to ignore and pregnant women acting in ways that alter or challenge dominant discursive constructions of femininity are able to cause “pregnancy trouble” (see Longhurst 2000). It is the ongoing resistance of pregnant women to normative regulatory processes that have paved the way for women such as Bridget, Penny and Sarah to work and study while pregnant, stay single or have a relationship with someone who is not the biological father of the child, and breastfeed in front of other people despite the discomfort it causes. These resistant practices are not always easy however. As Longhurst (2000) argues, “

The regulatory practices that shape pregnant bodies have not disappeared. Constant contestation of these practices by pregnant women and others have meant that behaviours have changed (slowly and slightly) over time. To claim that pregnant women are now free agents to act in any manner and in any place that they choose, however, is to fail to understand the discursive modes that operate in relation to pregnant bodies (458).

## Chapter Six

### Families – The Motherhood Workload, Self Regulation and Relationship Trouble

#### Introduction

Bridget: Sometimes you just haven't got emotions enough ... It's like you give birth to this baby and you really want to love this baby and you want to be this great mother and all the media images tell you, you know, it's going to be this beautiful mother with this glowing face that uses Ponds soap, cuddling her beautiful baby, sitting down, laughing together, and this kid is screaming non-stop, red, colicky, spotty, throwing up, shitting everywhere (laughs), wrecking your life, changing everything that you do, and you have still got these beautiful images of what motherhood is supposed to be about and emotionally you just can't be that mother.

This chapter will explore the many contradictions between popular representations of the Good Mother and the Idealised Nuclear Family and the lived realities of motherhood and family life for the women in this study.

Bridget's quote above not only clearly identifies the wide gap that often exists between media images and 'real' life but also illustrates the effects of the regulatory processes that produce feelings of guilt and inadequacy when women find that they are not able to live up to the idealised images inherent in these discourses. The notion of the Good Mother, discussed in Chapter Four, is a central component of the Idealised Nuclear Family found in Western culture. Like the extremely thin, cosmetically enhanced celebrity bodies of the previous chapter, however, it is an unobtainable truth, constructed in and through powerful regulatory discourses that privilege certain constructions of femininity while ignoring the reality of most women's lives. Anything that occurs outside of the bounds of the discourse of the Good Mother is likely to be construed as deviant and in need of regulation. Already subject to external scrutiny, mothers are also expected to participate in the regulatory process. Thus mothering, like pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding, requires constant surveillance, with women expected to actively regulate both their own and other mothers' behaviour.

In the following discussions of what I have called the motherhood workload – the relentless demands of mothering within the context of current constructions of motherhood, childhood and intimate relationships – each of the women in this study attempts to make meaning of her life as a mother and position herself as an active maternal subject. This subjectivity, at times reproducing dominant discourses, at times actively resistant to discursive regimes, is always mediated by the self-regulatory processes described above. Within the context of home and family life, self regulation becomes a powerful tool in the reproduction of the Good Mother discourse as women look inwards to find the cause of their dissatisfactions (Villani, 1997). It is in the negotiation of the contradictions that Bridget identifies above that the power of such regulation becomes most visible and most open to resistance and contestation. In this chapter, therefore, I will explore the ways that these women's subjectivities are always produced in and through powerful discourses. At the same time, while impossible to escape altogether, these hegemonic discourses are always open to resistance and the following discussions illustrate how motherhood remains a highly contested discursive domain, where contradiction and resistance produce opportunities for change.

The material in this chapter comes from a number of interviews held throughout the eleven months of this study. The themes that emerged from these discussions were explored during many conversations and revisited continuously throughout the interview process. In particular the issue of the motherhood workload - the exhaustion and stress of constantly juggling family and work/study commitments - recurred in almost every interview, defining the experience of motherhood for Bridget, Sarah, Hannah and Penny at many junctures. While I will explore issues around working/studying and childcare arrangements in detail in the following chapter, it is important to note that these are not excluded from discussions of home and family life. In particular, tertiary study is often pursued at home, as mothers attempt to find space in

their days (and nights) to work on assignments and, in Hannah's case, to practice her music. This chapter, however, will focus specifically on the group's experiences as mothers, partners, wives and unpaid workers in their homes, covering both their past and present living situations. It also contains a lot more of my own experiences as I begin to participate more actively in the discussions than I had in the pregnancy interview held early on in the interview process. Thus I add more of my own voice to those of my participants in the analysis that follows.<sup>1</sup>

I begin by examining the meanings of being a Good Mother according to the women in this group before exploring in detail how these meanings shape our experiences of the motherhood workload. I will then discuss the impact of this motherhood workload on our intimate relationships and the 'relationship trouble' that often occurs after a baby is born. I will conclude with a discussion of single motherhood as resistance to both the Good Mother and Idealised Nuclear Family discourses. I will argue that constructions of free choice and romantic love work to mask the structural effects of the Good Mother discourse and limit opportunities to escape the motherhood workload when single parenting becomes, for some women, the primary means of resisting dominant notions of motherhood and family life. I will also argue that the changing shape of family organisation in New Zealand society today may allow possibilities for new meanings of family and motherhood to emerge.

### What Makes a Mother 'Good'?

In Chapter Four I discussed at length the discourse of the Good Mother, how she has been inscribed in culture, and how she presents a monolithic image of self-sacrifice in serving the needs of her children and family always before her own. While subject to change over time, the Good Mother remains a symbol of maternal love, nurturance and selflessness that is increasingly

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Two for a detailed discussion of insider research and interviewer subjectivity in this study.

difficult to reconcile with the realities of many women's lives today. Sue Villani (1997) describes the relentless pursuit of perfection that she encountered in a study of American women's experiences of stay-at-home motherhood:

Women are still out there chasing after the same myth, the realization of the "Good Mother" personified. Not surprisingly, none of them ever catch up with it. Many times larger than life, the image is far too perfect and undergoes a subtle metamorphosis, generation after generation, along with society's changing values. What is "maternally correct," today might be condemned as bad mothering tomorrow. And while glorifying the image of the "Good Mother," society continues to repudiate at-home motherhood as an occupation requiring little intelligence and few, if any, marketable skills (7).

Villani's 1995 study was designed as a follow-up to Jane Ryan's (1978) research with stay-at-home mothers. She found that pursuit of the Good Mother ideal remained central to many women's experiences of motherhood, and that despite the changes in women's economic and career opportunities over the 17 years between the two studies, there were many women who chose to stay at home with their children in pursuit of this ideal. The Good Mother remains clearly visible in media representations that idealise her image, safely ensconced in the nuclear family that it is her responsibility and duty to nurture and serve. This is the family of the toilet paper packet and the Timotei shampoo advertisements that Hannah described in Chapter Four. It is also the family that was subjected to critique and ultimately dismissed by the women in this group as excluding their experiences of motherhood. Having said that, I have found that the endless stories that were shared about how exhausting and demanding motherhood could be over the eleven months of this study provide some interesting insights into the persistent nature of the seemingly unobtainable ideals of the Good Mother discourse. I found myself asking why it is that generation after generation of women appear to expect the realisation of this discourse from themselves and their daughters, despite knowing that the lived reality of motherhood hardly, if ever, matches the idealised images our culture (re)produces.

The invisibility of many mothers' experiences in popular culture (see Chapter Four) and the polarised images of Good and Bad Mothers creates a void, a space in between where the material existence of most women's lives unfolds. I was keen to explore this space, to uncover what this group of women believe about mothering, where they learnt to mother, and how they see themselves as mothers – how do they negotiate their identities as mothers? As we left discussions of television and women's magazines behind, the group began to piece together a much more complex notion of the maternal subject. Their understandings, at times very similar, at times markedly different, of what motherhood *means*, produced a more active, more resistant, and at times decidedly more ambivalent (Parker, 1997) maternal subject than the Good/Bad Mother imagery suggests. It also allowed the contradictions they negotiated daily as they struggled to reconcile their own needs with a Good Mother discourse that requires selflessness, to emerge through the discussions. These points of contradiction required a careful positioning of ones self as each woman both participated in and resisted the demands of the Good Mother discourse.

In an interview that only Penny and Hannah were able to attend we explored, in a conversation about our own childhood experiences, the question of what makes a good mother and where women learn to mother:

Jane: So when you say your mum's a really good mother, what do you mean?

Hannah: She's caring and very loving. You know, she will take all the things that you do wrong and okay, it hurts her feelings, but still she'll forgive and there will always be that love there. Like she never shuts the door. I think you can always feel safe with a mother who never shuts the door on you, would never push you away. Same with my father, but I think mothers are more intuitive aren't they? I think we are, I think women are more intuitive.

Jane: Yeah, I think we are, we certainly learn to use our own intuition a hell of a lot more than men do anyway.

Penny: I think we are forced to, I don't think we have a choice. I think sometimes when we are dealing with a child's illness, our intuition tells us for instance whether it's serious or minor. And I think this nurturing thing comes to us from our mothers and um, we learn to recognize the signs, through the female side of our family and I don't think that men get that.

They haven't been taught that, they are not taught to nurture like women are.

The message here is that women are taught mothering skills by their own mothers. The attributes of a good mother Hannah describes very much mirror the discourse of the Good Mother inscribed in popular culture and through social norms. She is loving, nurturing, forgiving and, more than men, intuitive. Both Penny and I intervene in Hannah's evocation of the intrinsically good mother by arguing that this intuition is learnt, not natural. Women are more nurturing than men because they are taught to be, by their own mothers. Penny believes that if women are not taught such skills by their mothers they will struggle to provide adequate care for their own children; that while good mothering is passed down from one generation to the next, so too is bad mothering:

Penny: You can see that in families where the mothering has been disrupted, like for my grandmother. Her mother died when she was little, and that mothering disruption has carried through. She probably would be termed an adequate mother in today's world, but she was one of the first mothers that had to work and be mother you know? And my mother was one of the first latch key kids that carried the key to school and came home while mother was at work. My other grandmother taught my mother how to do a lot of the domestic stuff, that her own mother hadn't been able to teach her. The mother-in-law taught her, and mum changed a lot of that disruption for us, but some of those hiccups are still there. I know my sister and I discussed where some of these issues have come from ... it's very much a learning process, how to mother and how to mother well.

Jane: So how do you think you learnt to mother?

Penny: I used to watch a lot. I was a third child so I had two older siblings and then two younger ones, so I watched how the older ones, my older brother and sister were treated and decided what I would and wouldn't do. And how the younger ones were mothered and my friends.

Here, as above, the responsibility for raising children and teaching mothering skills to future generations lies firmly in the hands of women. This is a powerful regulatory discourse that not only holds women accountable for any problems that occur in their families, but also excuses men from similar responsibilities. Mothering skills are clearly demarcated by gender here, as

these women suggest that men are not taught and therefore do not possess, the necessary nurturing, intuitive qualities needed to raise children. Even while resisting the notion of an intrinsically Good Mother, the discourse of learnt mothering fails to allow Penny, Hannah or myself to escape the normalising truths that position women as those most suited to raise future generations of children. Yet, while participating actively in this discursive process, the women in this group were clearly not satisfied with the traditional role of wife and mother:

Hannah: Yes, and I was taught good mothering skills from my mum. My mother is a very good mother who, her aspirations in life were to have a family, and to look after them wonderfully well. And she was totally happy with that. But I am not at all like my mum. I am like my father, I am ambitious and I want to be successful. And well, men have children and be successful, so why can't women?

The maternal subject produced in and through the discourse of learnt mothering is active; she is made not born out of some intrinsic feminine nature. This active maternal subject allows Hannah the possibility of rejecting definitions of the Good Mother held by previous generations of women when she likens her ambition to her father's. Hannah is part of the new generations of women who want careers as well as children, as are Bridget and Sarah. Penny alone in the group expects to remain at home with her children, undertaking part time study "just to keep my brain alive" rather than following a career path. I will explore a number of issues for women who combine their working lives with motherhood in detail in the following chapter. Here I want to focus on meanings of motherhood within families and the way these meanings impact on women's home lives.

The possibility of rejecting at least some aspects of previous discourses of motherhood, as Hannah does above, must be understood against the reality of what this rejection means in women's daily lives. Usually it entails rejection of the "just a mother" aspect of earlier generations of women's lives. Women today want to and often, due to economic circumstances, have to participate

in the paid workforce as well as becoming mothers. As Melissa Milkie et al. (2002) point out in their study of men's and women's levels of satisfaction with their marriages, "(m)others more often experience the "second shift" as they add hours of market work to domestic caregiving, activities that continue to be identified as mothers' responsibilities" (23). Their study found that women reported considerably more stress and dissatisfaction with their marriages than men as they struggled to cope with the competing demands of paid work and motherhood. These women found that the rejection of traditional mothering roles in actuality required taking on more of a workload, more stress and more expectations from others to fulfil multiple obligations in both the public and private domains. This is a choice that many women readily make, however. Hannah explains:

Hannah: But the thing is we don't like the images of our mothers, that's what I don't like. I didn't like the image of my mother, I didn't like what she had as a workload, I didn't aspire to what my mother did. That doesn't make me a bad mother though. See, and that's it. I wanted to be more than what my mother did. Although my mother was happy with what she did, I wasn't. You know, I am still not. I am certainly not going to sit aside and not have a career just because I have a child. That's one of the nice things about being alive in this era, isn't it, we can have this opportunity.

Here Hannah sees a career as an opportunity for a better life, rejecting her mother's role that kept her tied to the domestic realm. At the same time as she idealises her own mother as an archetypal Good Mother, Hannah wants more than this domestic role and does not believe that this desire makes her a bad mother. She is working hard to position herself within the conflicting normalising discourses of the career woman and the Good Mother. In short she is participating ideologically in the 'double shift' of juggling career and family obligations. The impact of this second shift on women's 'real' lives has been the subject of numerous studies that show that women's increased workforce participation has not been matched by increases in men's participation in domestic work and has left many women feeling stretched, and at times exhausted and inadequate (See for example Baxter, 1993; Bianchi et al. 2000; Dempsey, 2002; Milkie et al. 2002; Ritchie, 1999; Wolcott

and Hughes, 1999). The following chapter will explore in more detail the conflicting expectations and desires that the four women in this study negotiate daily as they attempt to reconcile their work/study commitments with the demands of the Good Mother discourse.

The discussion below examines the other side of this double shift - how each of the participants in this study attempts to manage their domestic responsibilities and family life. What emerges in these stories about struggling to juggle the second shift is the power of self-regulation to keep women focussed on what they see as their own failings when their domestic world does not fit the idealised images of the Good Mother discourse. The power of the Good Mother discourse is indeed power in the Foucaultian sense that “invests” women, is “transmitted by them and through them”. In the following section there are few examples of resistance to the demands of the Good Mother discourse in the domestic sphere. When resistance does occur it tends to be couched in terms of men’s failure to participate fully in family life or the previous generations of mothers’ unrealistic expectations of their daughters. While gendered divisions of labour in the home are highlighted in these discussions, the structural and social conditions of motherhood that produce these divisions are often overlooked as self-regulatory processes construct the motherhood workload as a matter of personal success or failure. These feelings are exacerbated in a culture that expects women to be able to successfully juggle the double shift, to become what, during one interview, Hannah called the “super mother ... the typical wife, the person who runs the show, plus takes all the shit (laughter)”. Sue Villani (1997) gives a more detailed description of the image of this “supermom”:

The definition of Supermom implies that to have it all, a woman must do it all – work for pay, keep the house, raise the kids, nurture the marriage. Many women – like many men – do want it all. They simply lack the resources and/or the support to hold onto it once they get it. The Supermom myth suggests, however, that women who fail to meet its standard are somehow deficient (118).

The following discussion explores how the Good Mother discourse, along with these “supermom” expectations, has resulted in times when exhaustion, guilt and feelings of inadequacy have dominated motherhood for the women in this group.

### Housework

The often mundane and routine work of keeping the family home clean, looking after children, keeping the laundry up to date, shopping for food and clothes and other domestic tasks falls mainly on women’s shoulders in Western families (Baxter, 1993; Bianchi et al. 2000; Dempsey, 2002; Milkie et al. 2002; Ritchie, 1999; Villani, 1997; Wolcott and Hughes, 1999). At the time of this research Penny and Sarah, as single mothers, took sole responsibility for all domestic work, while Bridget and Hannah fulfilled the majority of household duties in their homes as both of their husbands worked full time. Research has shown that even when women undertake substantial work outside the home they retain primary responsibility for housework and childcare (Dempsey, 2002; Milkie et al. 2002). The women in this group expressed a strong sense of anxiety in relation to their housekeeping duties. An untidy house is a daily reminder of deviance from the Good Mother image. Bridget sums up the pressure a woman feels to keep her house immaculate, despite the other, often conflicting, demands of motherhood:

Bridget: You, as a mum, because you love your child you keep your house tidy and neat (laughter), never mind that because you love your child you’ve been up 4 times in the night while they throw up into a bucket (yeah). Better have that ironing done!

The need to maintain a tidy house can mean that women have little respite from the self-regulation they employ as they attempt to live up to the expectations that emanate from the Good Mother discourse:

Sarah: I actually find, because don’t you find that you consistently, whenever you are in a room, I find that whenever I’m in a room, like even just sitting feeding Flora or we are just having a play, I will be looking and I will be going, ‘that needs to be picked up, I should vacuum over there,

those windows need to be washed', and every time I am in the room I am thinking those things.

Jane: Where do those expectations come from?

Sarah: My mother!

Sarah identifies the constant 'voice' in her head that she employs to regulate her own housekeeping. At the same time she identifies clearly where she learnt to participate in this regulatory process. Again she suggests that it is the previous generation of mothers rather than media images and cultural expectations who prepare their daughters for the role of mother and housekeeper. Unlike many women of the previous generation, however, women like Sarah are facing the double shift, sometimes as single mothers, and thus find it extremely difficult to achieve the standard of tidiness they feel is expected of them:

Bridget: My house is a tip at the moment and I am just going, 'what's happening?'

Penny: I was saying to someone this morning, in the morning I just look at the mess and then I think, I am going, and just close the door".

Bridget: I did that today, I closed the door.

Group: Yeah, yeah.

Bridget: And I know when I get home I will be depressed, but I have to get out the house.

Group: Yeah.

Bridget: Because all I can see is this mess and I just think, no I just can't do it.

Sarah: I usually do my dishes at night for that very reason. I always get my dishes done at night because I just think I have just got to get them done or else when I get home tomorrow I am going to cry.

Because their lives are so busy, Bridget, Penny and Sarah find there are times when they have to leave the housework in order to fit everything else into their daily schedules. But it is clear that this is not a happy choice. Bridget speaks of being depressed when she has to come home to a messy house and Sarah describes how a sink full of dirty dishes could make her cry. These women obviously feel dissatisfied with leaving an untidy house in the morning and have no desire to return to a home requiring extra energy at the end of a busy day with children yet to be fed, bathed and put to bed. And yet it is very

easy for working/studying and/or single mothers to experience days when there just is not enough time to keep on top of domestic duties. When a woman does find time for domestic work, the presence of children can mean that regular household tasks become extremely energy sapping. The following conversation, with its two-and-fro nature and the build up in intensity of feeling, effectively illustrates the emotion that can be generated by talking about something as simple as vacuuming the floor or preparing food when women with young children are already tired and trying to fit housework into a busy schedule:

Penny: I would like to have this sort of, you know how they have those vacuum cleaners that actually go around and vacuum unaided?

Sarah: Wow! No!

Bridget: I would just love one of those ... Andrew does the vacuuming now, my son does the vacuuming now.

Jane: So does Louis.

Bridget: It's such a pain in the butt (laughter).

Sarah: Flora is turning the vacuum...

Jane: Louis is like, ah, ah, ah (demonstrates trying to grab the hose)...

Sarah: That's why I did it at night because it was too much of a struggle when Flora was awake and when I do it now, when Flora is looking it's like, she turns it off, 'turn it on Flora', she turns it off, 'turn it on Flora'. I don't want to yell at her, and I am getting so uptight because I really want...

Bridget: It's like the hairdryer, it's like everything.

Penny: Yep. You want to cook tea, but they want to help and I really do think that kids should help with household chores because then they get into the habit of something, yes this is something that I do as well.

Hannah: But you give them things that they can achieve and yet they still want to hold the sharp knife and chop up the garlic (laughter).

Bridget: You know there are some times, there are some nights where you think, 'no, no, no I don't'...

Penny: You need the...

Bridget: I don't want that, I'm in a hurry.

Sarah: I did that, I yelled at her.

Jane: Louis just stands and like pulls on my skirt and my pants and I just try and take a step and it's like, oh this kid attached to me, sometimes I just want to...

Sarah: And you can't stand it and you just go, 'aaargh'.

Jane: I just don't want to be touched...

Sarah: And usually you're all right with it and that's why it's so confusing for them, it's so terrible. I had a night like that last week when it was like, 'just don't touch me, I just need to get this chopped up'. I was chopping up

pumpkin for pumpkin soup and I just didn't want her to be near my arms because I didn't want to hurt her, and she's going, 'I'll do it, I'll do it, I'll help you, I'll help you', and I am going like, 'get out of my space', and you know, you know to say, 'look Flora I can't cope', that's my big thing, I say, 'I can't cope, I am really concerned that I am going to hit you with the knife by accident if you are around my arms', and then they just burst into tears and just lie at the bottom of your feet and they are screaming and screaming and ohh!

Sarah's anguish at the end of this exchange illustrates the guilt and anxiety many mothers feel when they think that their children might be suffering because they are too tired and busy to accommodate their needs and wants (Villani, 1997). Although she tries to explain to her two-year-old that it is dangerous for her to be around a sharp knife, the child, who is also likely to be tired and hungry at the end of the day, bursts into tears, leaving Sarah feeling guilty and exacerbating her already high level of stress. The need to get things done conflicts with her desire to actively encourage her child's involvement in household tasks. It also conflicts with the notion that children require constant attention and stimulation. This conversation exposes these contradictions within the Good Mother discourse itself that can result in women feeling that they are not performing either their housekeeping or their childrearing tasks adequately. The combination of work/study commitments, expectations that women will be largely responsible for household tasks and the child-centred approaches of current constructions of childhood (see Chapter Four), work together to make what might have once been a simple, even pleasurable task such as cooking food, a stressful, guilt-inducing labour. Herein lie the moments when, as Bridget said at the beginning of the chapter, "emotionally you just can't be that mother".

In discussing their struggles with the demands of the motherhood workload, these women position themselves in ways that makes these problems their individual responsibilities. The power of the Good Mother discourse works through them in such a way that they remain focused on themselves rather than the social conditions that produce the motherhood workload. In short

they engage in a self-regulatory process that reproduces the expectation that a woman is primarily responsible for her home and the care of her partner and children. In turn, these processes construct them as deviant if they do not find continuous enjoyment and fulfilment in these roles. The Good Mother discourse has individualised the motherhood workload in a way that can make it extremely difficult for individual women to effect change in their own lives or even ask for help when they need it (Coward, 1997; Parker, 1997; Villani, 1997).

It is not just tidiness or other housekeeping duties that can make a woman feel inadequate as the person primarily responsible for maintaining her home, however. Bridget and Sarah describe how the expectation that there will be clearly defined spaces within a home for adult and children's belongings and activities also makes them feel inadequate at times:

Bridget: See I apologise for being poor. 'Cause you know we just haven't got the money to renovate the whole house, just a few little pictures and things and we haven't got any kiddies furniture, just a toy box and I just apologise (laughter), you know, we've got these adult beds and adult duvet covers and things (laughs).

Sarah: My equivalent of that is my house, and my lounge, because it's just me and Flora living together. And you know I have people like my mother and other friends of mine who have got great taste and great, even though they're poor they've got nice set out houses. Our lounge is, the rocking horse is in the middle of the lounge, which would be a great lounge if you had style, you know, has got the toy box in the corner, 'cause that's our main room, and the blackboard in the other corner, and the chalk, and I feel like that when people come in. And I think, god sometimes I think maybe I should have moved all that stuff out, you know, it's the way you parent and the way you live, if it doesn't fit into that typical mould you do, even though you're comfortable with it and that's the way you want to be, you still, because it doesn't fit in that mould of the media mother, that everyone perceives, you still, it does get to you.

Not only are they expected to maintain a tidy house, Bridget and Sarah feel that they also need to present a family image that mirrors dominant images and clearly demarcates adults' and children's spaces and belongings.

Financial pressures, along with the practicalities of sharing a small home with

a young child highlight another avenue for guilt and anxiety. The anxiety and stress of the motherhood workload can be exacerbated by other factors, too, such as breastfeeding a growing infant and tending to children who wake during the night, especially when these tasks fall to women most of the time. Add to this a change in circumstances such as illness in the family, and a woman can quickly start to feel depressed and angry about her situation:

Bridget: But I actually find that with Philip being sick or if the kids are sick, like Philip was shaking through the night, all night ... and then he started vomiting, and it only takes an incident like that, the next morning you wake up and you are really tired and you get the kids dressed and you make their lunches and everything else and you take them off to crèche and by the time you get home they are ragged and they want their food and you give them food and meanwhile sick husband should be taken to the doctor, blah, blah, blah. And you only need like two days of that and the housework is out of control. And everything is a mess, that's what's happened.

Penny: Yeah, because you just don't have time to think about housework.

Bridget: And then you are just so tired and so sick, and so depressed and it's like when you are the most depressed you have the least energy to do it and I just look at the place and I just think, 'I hate this!'

Again, these problems are individualised within the Good Mother discourse. Bridget was describing her own circumstances at the time of the interview and the rest of the group immediately empathised with her sense of helplessness and unhappiness at how tired and stretched she was feeling. With her husband and her children unwell there was no one to help her, despite the fact that she herself was also suffering from the same gastric complaint as the rest of her family. In short Bridget was sick and tired and there was no relief in sight. Her parents were both living in Christchurch, but were working full time themselves and most of her friends were working, studying or minding their own children. There was nowhere for Bridget to turn for help and so she continued with her busy life, despite her illness and the additional workload of caring for her sick husband and children.

Bridget's situation was familiar to all of us in the group. Having young children means that women often have to carry on despite being unwell, and having a

partner does not necessarily guarantee that a woman will receive the help she needs, particularly if he is also ill:

Hannah: "Well it's true, women often say, I often say it too, that a sick man is like an extra child".

Jane: Whereas a sick woman tends to get up and keeps doing what she does anyway.

Hannah: Well it's true.

Penny: It's true, yeah.

Hannah: Unless we demand otherwise, unless we say to our partners, 'oh I am sorry, I am not well today, I would like some help today'. And actually they are quite obliging aren't they?

Penny: Oh mine never was. He never took a day off when I was sick, not ever.

Hannah: Oh really?

Penny: He'd take a day off to take the car to the garage, but never if I was sick.

Hannah obviously received help when she was unwell, despite having to ask for it. That was not so for Penny, Bridget and myself, with Penny clearly perceiving her needs as lower on her husband's list of priorities than his car. The discourses that require women's constant attendance to household and childcare duties mean that it can be difficult for many women to take time out from these duties, even when their own health is suffering (Villani, 1997). This reflects a continuation of the times during their pregnancies when Bridget, Penny and Sarah had to remain on bed rest due to health problems that resulted from maintaining their hectic schedules. Even when a woman becomes so ill that she is hospitalised, it is often other women that take over the domestic and childcare responsibilities in her home:

Jane: My husband, I went into hospital last year, suddenly, and was really sick for a while and Lance moved in with my mum, which everyone thought that actually it was the appropriate thing for him to do, and so he was still bringing Louis into crèche and brought Louis to the hospital so I could feed him, and then he'd take Louis home to my mum's place and everything would get done, he'd have his meal cooked and Louis would get put to bed and everything else like that, and I thought, 'well, if my husband was sick I would not move in with my mum. I would just carry on and do business as normal'.

Hannah: I think we're educated into that by our mums, our mums teach us how to mother don't they?

Penny: Yeah, but I think society does it too, because when I went in for six weeks when we had Nigel, my husband got invited out for a meal every night for six weeks and one meal he did some pathetic meal to thank everyone and that was one night out of six weeks. Now when I got sick, or anything happened to me, like when I separated, I didn't get invited out for one meal, although I was left with three kids, and he still got invited out when he had the kids. You know, there is a huge difference in who gets invited, who gets the special treatment when something goes wrong in the family. It really brought it home to me.

The same discourses that keep a woman working in her home when she is ill, require others, particularly other women, to do that work when a man is left alone with children. Hannah again locates the origins of this requirement with the previous generation of mothers, while Penny sees it in terms of broader societal norms that perpetuate the need for women to look after both children and men. This is one of the few times during these discussions of the motherhood workload that one of the group identified wider social forces that reproduce the conditions in which the Good Mother discourse requires women to sacrifice their own needs, even their health, in the interests of their families.

However, even when such an awareness does exist, there is no guarantee that a woman can successfully alter the distribution of domestic responsibilities in her home. In his study of men and women's perceptions of who benefits the most from marriage, Ken Dempsey (2002) found that "(u)nfortunately, awareness that things need changing is rarely transformed in a straightforward way into a more equitable or satisfying situation. Women often fail to get onto the table for discussion the things they want changed" (98). He cited a study by Benjamin and Sullivan (1999) that purposefully included women with proven negotiating skills, but found that many of these women wouldn't talk about housework with their partners because "one or both partners believed to include it would be tantamount to challenging the relationship itself" (808). Dempsey concluded that such deeply entrenched attitudes as those that construct housework as the primary domain of women

will only change when men begin to accept that their behaviour must change if they want their marriages to succeed.

In the discussions above, however, the women in this study have identified the powerful regulatory discourses that require a woman to maintain a spotless home and also work to excuse men from domestic duties when she is not available. Obviously there are men who share in domestic work, care for their wives or partners when they are ill and look after their children. However studies again have found that there is a substantial gap between the amount of extra paid work women have taken on in recent decades and the concomitant amount of extra time that men spend on domestic and childcare tasks (Baxter, 1993; Bianchi et al. 2000; Dempsey, 2002; Milkie et al. 2002; Ritchie, 1999; Wolcott and Hughes, 1999). Milkie et al. (2002) have described this as a “stalled revolution”:

In times of rapid but uneven social changes, revolution in one area, such as women’s massive movement into the paid labor force, is not necessarily paralleled by complementary actions in other domains, in this case, a similarly strong shift in men’s involvement in families. Thus, meanings about important societal roles come to be out of sync with behaviors, and can become contested boundaries among groups (22).

Obviously such contestation of social roles can create conflict between women and men, putting strain on their relationships. I will discuss this issue shortly, but here I will explore how the consequences of the increased workload that this stalled revolution creates for women can range from exhaustion and health problems to depression and decidedly ambivalent, if not negative, feelings towards their children. These feelings can be exacerbated by media representations that deny the degree of difficulty required to juggle the double shift as they reproduce endless images of celebrity ‘supermoms’ effortlessly juggling demanding careers with family life (Coward, 1997). For mothers like Bridget, there are times when the motherhood workload has deeply affected how she feels about her family:

Bridget: And I've just been so tired. ... I'm just waking up and I'm thinking, what am I doing in this house, I hate this house. And the kids come up to me and I think, I don't even want to know you (laughs), go away, talk to someone else, find another mother. And it's not, you know, I mean you probably feel horrified when I say it (no, no, we all have days like that), it's you know, I'm feeling so tired and I just don't want to do anything when I'm just not interested.

Bridget told the group she had a "three-part plan" to reduce her exhaustion – get fit, wean her youngest child and have a holiday:

Bridget: So I thought, three-part plan. First of all I want to get fit, 'cause I think when you're fit you can mentally cope with a lot more and physically cope with a lot more. Secondly, I want to have a real holiday (yeah) and I can't have a real holiday with Alex latched onto my breast (laughter). I mean just, I love him, I mean I want a real, real, real full holiday, even if it's only two days. One night on my own, no Philip, no Andrew or Alex. They probably feel like really hurt (laughter), to go on my own, get a cottage somewhere, nothing, nobody.

It is interesting to note that Bridget's plan did not involve asking her husband or anyone else for more help. She took it on herself to 'fix' the problem of her exhaustion. The regulation of self required by the Good Mother discourse leaves her seeking solutions that will further stretch her limited reserves. While she is undoubtedly correct that being physically fit would increase her energy levels, it would require scheduling another activity into her already over full schedule, and as far as I am aware she did not manage to find the time or energy to do so during that year. Neither did she have her holiday, her two days of solitude and rest. Instead she continued with her busy life and often expressed feelings of guilt and inadequacy, particularly when work on her thesis was progressing slowly. By the end of the year she had fallen considerably behind her desired rate of progress and was pregnant with her third child. Her younger son had been diagnosed with a disability that was going to require a lot of her time and energy, as well as placing considerable emotional and financial strain on herself and other family members.

Despite all of this, Bridget completed her Doctoral thesis in 2002 and graduated in December of that year. Like so many other mothers, she

managed to achieve considerable success in both her family and working life, yet remained at times plagued by feelings of guilt and inadequacy. Sue Villani (1997) describes these feelings as the “double whammy” that occurs when intense public scrutiny of mothers’ behaviour combines with already existing feelings of guilt and self-doubt to “challenge even a strong woman’s sense of adequacy” (8). I do not want to paint a picture of Bridget as particularly unhappy, however. She remains a very sociable, outgoing woman, with a contagious sense of humour and a positive approach to life. Given this lively personality, her admissions of how much she was struggling to cope with her double shift at the time of these interviews provides a compelling example of the difficulties that many mothers encounter when faced with the discourses that construct an idealised image of the Good Mother. In a culture that denies the stresses of the motherhood workload, it can be difficult to ask for help. Bridget is well-educated, Pakeha and married to a professional man. She represents a close fit with the dominant notions of what makes a Good Mother. Yet, at times, she expressed considerable dissatisfaction with her life as a wife and mother, feelings that in turn produced anxiety and guilt about her own ability to care for her family.

In discussing her struggles with the motherhood workload, Bridget once again individualises her problems and seeks solutions within the self-regulatory processes of the Good Mother discourse. She fails to recognise the social conditions of motherhood that produce the exhaustion, guilt and anxiety of the motherhood workload, focusing instead on her personal struggles, while continuing to take primary responsibility for the domestic and childcare labour in her home. As I have already argued, the Good Mother discourse that individualises the motherhood workload can make it extremely difficult for women to effect change in their own lives or ask for help when they need it (Coward, 1997; Parker, 1997; Villani, 1997).

Despite the pervasive nature of the Good Mother discourse, the increasing demands of motherhood have produced some changes in attitudes over time. Studies by Milkie et al. (2002) and Dempsey (2002) both found that working mothers spend less time on housework than previous generations of women did or stay at home mothers do. Both Penny and I found that our mothers had become more accepting of our less than perfect homes over time and did not apply the same stringent standards of cleanliness to our lives now that they had to their own during our childhoods:

Penny: Yeah, but it's interesting how it's flipped over. I think my mother said to my sister the other night, she thinks the house is always messy, but I do the basic essentials, like the kids have always got their clothes and things and the beds are always made and we spend time going to the parks and things like this, but I don't do all the extras, like mum when we were kids, focused on the housework, even if we were sick we had to get out of bed and do the housework. And I decided I wasn't going to be like that. And yet it's taken 12 years of me being a parent for her to recognize that difference and that that difference is okay. I'm finding that she's finally acknowledging that difference is okay, you don't have to have a perfect house. It's quite fascinating.

Jane: Yeah, my parents are obsessively tidy, everything is immaculate, but there was no way I wanted to live like that. And I knew if I was going to have a child and work and study and all the rest of it, I can't, I will make the surface he's playing on clean, you know I will clean up the kitchen and bathroom, but that's it. I dust every now and then when I get around to it and stuff like that. But the other day my mum was around and there was just stuff everywhere and I had been painting the study and I said, 'oh we really look like slobbers compared to you don't we?' and she went, 'yeah, but who cares, it's nice and relaxed here', sort of thing and it was different but it was okay.

Hannah: And she's accepted you for who you are, which is very nice, isn't it?

Jane: And she's also seen that Louis is happy and he would have been less happy if we'd been trying to stop him making a mess or I'm so busy doing housework that I didn't have time for him.

Hannah: Yeah, we wouldn't have done this 20 or 30 years ago probably.

This exchange reflects our perceptions of changes in standards of housework over time, but it also reflects changing constructions of childhood in recent times. Women are expected to be much more 'child centred' in their approach to raising their children than previous generations of mothers were (see

Chapter Four). In some ways this approach, along with an ever growing array of household appliances, labour saving devices and pre-packaged food, excuses women from the excessive demands of domestic labour that our mothers adhered to, as attitudes have shifted from a focus on cleanliness as the most important aspect of mothering, to a focus on spending 'quality time' with children. In this way Penny and I found that our mothers both agreed that, while our houses may not be as clean and tidy as would have been expected in their day, we were providing well for our children by spending time on child centred activities such as taking them to the park and joining in 'messy' play with them. Having said that, I also remember spending a lot of time cleaning up the mess after Louis had gone to bed, time I might otherwise have spent studying or resting. Jane Ritchie, who has conducted interviews with New Zealand parents every decade since the 1960s found in her most recent study (1999) that mothers spend much more time on child-focused activities than they have in the past. A child centred approach can mean that women work in the evenings after their children are asleep in order to achieve this 'quality time' with them during the day.

Despite some changes in attitude, the mothers in this study, like those in the other studies cited, were struggling to cope with the demands on their time that motherhood requires in a culture steeped in images of the idealised Good Mother while simultaneously expecting women to enter into paid work and, at least for middle class women, follow a career path that provides them with challenging and fulfilling roles outside motherhood. The number of times that discussions of workload dominated the conversations and the obvious distress that feeling exhausted and inadequate created for the women in the group raised the question of what types of strategies women employ to cope with this workload.

### Time Out/Time to Oneself

The immediate answer to the above question is that most of the time they just kept going. I have recently employed a woman to do housework in my home once a fortnight. As I struggle to find enough time to finish this thesis, earn a little money and care for my family, this is one way that I can hand over some of my domestic responsibilities to somebody else. It is also one more expense to cover in a household with only one principal earner. In the past when I was a single mother I probably needed such help much more than I do now, but there was never any money to pay for it during those years. Now I watch myself participating in the processes that position poor women as those who can alleviate the motherhood workload for middle-class women. I know that this reproduces the very discourses I write critically about here. And yet, with my thesis deadline rapidly approaching, I do not have time to dwell on the many ways that I am deeply entrenched in gendered discourses of caring and keeping my family and home or reproducing gendered inequalities. This year I have no desire to change the world, I just want to finish my thesis and having someone else to take care of some housework once a fortnight is liberating and wonderful, regulatory processes or not. It also reminds me of the privileged position I occupy. To purchase another woman's labour is indeed a sign of power in the face of the motherhood workload. At the time of this study, however, none of the women in the group had the financial resources to employ someone to work in their homes, so they continued to struggle to find the time to keep their houses and care for their families.

There was very little time in 1997 for a life outside motherhood for Penny, Sarah, Bridget and Hannah. There was not much talk of social events, apart from occasionally having friends or family around for a meal, during the discussions. None of the women had regular activities that they participated in outside their homes such as sports, clubs or hobbies. Ken Dempsey (2002) has found that women with young children spend significantly less time pursuing outside interests than their partners or women without children,

more time working in their homes than men and significantly less time sleeping than many other people. This appeared to be true for Penny, Sarah, Bridget and Hannah also. Hannah did pursue her musical interests as part of her university study. None of the other three discussed any outside interests at any time during the interviews, although Sarah once mentioned attending a free rock concert with her daughter. I am sure there were times when all four women went out, but their social lives were almost exclusively centred around their families and homes. There was the occasional mention of additional work around the home such as painting and decorating, but this could hardly be considered an outside interest, rather a continuation of domestic labour. It appears then, that having young children left these women with virtually no time for leisure activities outside the home. Penny believes that the media portrayal of mothers as totally entrenched in their homes and domestic duties reinforces the attitude that women don't need time for their own interests:

Penny: In the media, they don't show that. There's no recognition that a woman with kids needs time out.

Hannah: That you need a life outside the family.

Jane: I get time out, I get to go to the supermarket (laughs).

Penny: Take the kids to the doctors (laughter).

Bridget's earlier wish for two days to herself was accompanied by the comment that "they (her sons and husband) probably feel really hurt" by this desire. Sarah commented that she feels she needs to work when her daughter is at a childcare centre to justify not caring for her child herself. Both these examples illustrate the fact that, for these women, taking time out for themselves is not only difficult, but can also produce feelings of guilt and inadequacy. The regulatory discourses that position women as largely responsible for caring for their families and keeping their homes clean and tidy, induce the self-regulatory effects that Sarah and Bridget describe. Once again there is little need for overt external scrutiny, as powerful Good Mother discourses mean that women position mothers, including themselves, who take time out from their families as selfish (Villani, 1997). While the women in this study are critical of media images that do not allow women time out, they

find it difficult to claim such time for themselves. Villani's study also found that even women who "recognised and spurned" the Good Mother discourse described themselves as selfish and neglectful when they took time away from their families. It is clear that recognition does not necessarily excuse a woman from participation in self regulatory processes, producing yet another contradiction that must be negotiated within the family structure. Hannah describes how she successfully manages that negotiation to obtain some time for her studies:

Jane: (to Hannah) I saw you on Sunday.

Hannah: Yeah, Sunday. I had my time out, I insisted. It was my mother's day present from the family, so I took myself off with my project. I sat on the side of the road in the car, just sort of thinking about it and then went off to the café and thought about it some more at the table with a nice cup of coffee and a little something to eat, and it was just wonderful. It was just the present I wanted. And then I had more time out yesterday, I was able to come, Matt was sick so he looked after Sam, it wasn't a big hassle for him, and did my double bass practice here. Wonderful. Wonderful because you are just able to concentrate so much better, and that's actually the biggest present he can give me at the moment, is just to give me time out.

While Hannah describes time out as a gift from her family, she also points out that she "insisted" she get it, indicating that this gift is not always offered freely but must be negotiated. And although this was indeed time out from family responsibilities, she used the time to work on a university project and practise her double bass, also a requirement of her university studies. This was time out to work, not time out for leisure. Hannah's obvious enjoyment of having time to concentrate on her work without the distractions of a young child and the rest of the group's comments that they never really have time out indicates the relentless nature of mothering within the context of the discourse of the Good Mother. It was clear from the conversations among the women in this group, myself included, that we did not feel justified in spending much time away from our families unless that time was spent working. However even this was problematic, as the Good Mother discourse positions children as requiring constant care and attention from their mothers (see

Chapter Seven). Life outside paid work, for many women including those in this study, tends to revolve very much around home and familial relationships. These relationships, however, can be put under considerable strain when there are few outside avenues for interests and support.

### Relationship Trouble

One area where the stress of the motherhood workload clearly showed was in the primary relationships in Hannah, Sarah, Bridget, Penny and my own lives. The extent to which each woman's relationship with the father of her child/ren was put under pressure during the early years of her child's life varied among the group. Hannah recalled two very different relationships in her two marriages, while Sarah had ended her relationship with the biological father of her daughter shortly before she discovered she was pregnant. She did however begin a new relationship while she was pregnant, one that lasted for the first 18 months of Flora's life. Penny was divorced at the time that these interviews were conducted. Both Hannah and myself were married at the time of the interviews and we both separated from our husbands early the following year. After several months apart Hannah and Matt reunited and remain married today. I am now divorced and in a new relationship. Bridget alone has remained married to the same man without a break, while Sarah was in a new relationship and Penny was still single when I last heard news of them in 2002.

I have already mentioned the relatively fluid nature of family circumstances in New Zealand today in Chapter Four. In an 18-year longitudinal study of a cohort of babies born at Christchurch Women's Hospital, the Christchurch School of Medicine recently reported that at least 30% of New Zealand children live in reformulated families (website). Many more are raised by single parents, usually their mothers. Many of those women becoming mothers today have come from single parent or reformulated families and despite the discursive construction of the nuclear family as normal and

natural, there is considerable variation in the family structures children are raised in today. This is a pattern that is repeated throughout the West as the meanings of family become increasingly contested (Fleming, 1999; Giddens, 1999; Gilding, 2002). In particular, what Rob Fleming (1999) calls "remarriage families" raise questions about commonly held notions of family life, such as the family being a unit where all family members are related, both parents are involved in parenting the child and the family income is all the money that is available for the child. They also challenge the notion that people always live in the same house and all members of the family are always there. Despite these changing family formations, however, and the challenges they represent to dominant images, the Idealised Nuclear Family continues to dominate media representations on television and in the pages of women's magazines in particular.

Yet despite the proliferation of these images it is clear that traditional marriage-type relationships are in trouble and women's dissatisfaction with the motherhood workload is a contributing factor to this relationship trouble. Studies throughout the West have shown that women report more stress and unhappiness in their marriages when they have children, and when they are juggling childcare and paid employment (see for example Dempsey, 2002; Milkie et al., 2002). These mothers also report more dissatisfaction with their marriages than their husbands, are much more likely to believe that they carry an unfair burden in the distribution of household tasks and that change is necessary to make their relationships more equitable. On top of the motherhood workload, the majority of women in these studies believe that they do the bulk of emotional caring in their families and express a desire for more emotional responsiveness from their husbands (Dempsey, 2002; Milkie et al., 2002; Wolcott & Hughes, 1999). In a study of recently divorced couples in Australia, Wolcott & Hughes (1999) reported that the majority of both men and women believed that the breakdown of their marriage was due to men's

lack of emotional caring and support as well as their not spending enough time at home.

The following discussion highlights how some of these issues, particularly those of emotional intimacy, have affected the relationships of the women in this study. Penny said on several occasions that she believed that her former husband was jealous of her second child and this was the reason for his lack of help around the home and the tension in their marriage after this child was born. A further conversation revealed that there was a pattern of marital problems occurring after the birth of each of Penny's three children:

Penny: Well the first one was a huge adjustment and I thought we came through it, then the second one he lost interest in him. In fact he was never interested as soon as he knew it was a boy. He was very jealous and it wasn't until after we'd split up that that came out in counselling. Jealous of me breastfeeding, jealous of the time I spent with this baby, even though it was the son he always wanted. Incredible! And by the time I came home from hospital with a baby that he didn't want, but didn't tell me, you know, it was months before he told me and then we sort of had some counselling and worked things out and then planned for the third one a few years later and things seemed to be going fine and they all fell apart.

Penny identifies a time after each child was born when considerable stress was placed on her marriage, which eventually "fell apart". At the time I understood only too well some of the problems relationships can encounter when a couple is trying to combine two working lives with raising a small child. Hannah and I found that we were facing similar difficulties in our own marriages:

Hannah: So from my point of view, I have always been an independent woman and Matt's always been an independent type of a guy. Having a baby has actually put the cat amongst the pigeons for us. We had a tremendous amount of adjusting to do. We actually argue quite a lot now. Jane: Um, I was just thinking how much I can relate to that, yeah. We had what I thought were both independent, both very busy doing lots of stuff, but when we came back together, you know, good relationship. And um, when Louis came along and for a while there I thought, 'oh my god my relationship was going to end', I thought it was all over, we just couldn't adjust together to the situation and the demands of it. I think, I mean, what

women do, and I did all this nurturing and looking after and I just coped with it all, even though I hadn't slept for all that time (laughs). You know, I think women are just much better at that. And I think Lance poured loads of love into Louis and didn't have the energy left for anything else. So I was thinking, 'what about me?' you know, here's me doing all this work and it was so hard and I thought we had such a bloody wonderful relationship. And it was dodgy as for a while, it took us about a year. It's only recently that it came right and it's so much better.

Hannah: Same for us. Our sons are about the same age, so probably we went through the same process at the same sort of time.

Jane: Yeah.

Hannah: And I am finding that now we have reached an equilibrium, we can actually sit down and talk about things ... but the thing I noticed most of all was that he was jealous of the attention I was giving to Sam and he felt that he had a right to all of my undivided attention. And I think that's a problem for partners, either or.

Jane: Mmm, it was the opposite for us. It wasn't that ... I was angry at Lance at not having enough to go around. I loved seeing Louis and Lance together, it was wonderful, I loved how much, what a great relationship they had, and Louis has always been, 'dad, dad, dad', and he loves his dad to bits. But I thought, why can't you give me that as well, I am loving you and him, I want it back sort of (laughing). I got really resentful of that.

Hannah: But you talked about it though, didn't you?

Jane: Oh we, we didn't talk, we had huge screaming rows and blow ups, because it was all wrapped up in 'I do all the washing and you know?'

Hannah: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jane: And I breastfed this baby and I want to sleep in every weekend for the next year to make up for it, you know, it was that sort, the workload that women take on. So it was not only was he not giving me the attention I wanted, but he was also tired and grumpy, like we were both really tired, but I was doing way more of the work around the house.

Hannah: And you are still doing a degree.

Jane: And trying to do a PhD and tutoring and you know?

Hannah: You know, that's that super mother stuff again.

Jane: It is and it's exhausting and I mean I felt it was not maintainable.

This conversation reveals in some detail the types of strains that the motherhood workload places on primary relationships. While Hannah found that Matt wanted more of her time and attention than she was able to give while her child was very young, I found myself feeling deprived of the time and attention I had previously expected from my husband. Penny describes what she believes was the jealous reaction of her husband towards her second child resulting in him refusing to help her with domestic or childcare

responsibilities while still expecting her to be in paid employment. These feelings of deprivation, jealousy and resentment, while contributing to the motherhood workload, are also deeply embedded in the notions of romantic love that underpin the marriage and motherhood discourses discussed in Chapter Four.

In her study of stay-at-home mothers, Villani (1997) found that “(m)any of the 1990s moms ... looked exclusively to their husbands to meet their emotional needs and frequently resented them when they weren’t able to do so” (163). The loss of a sense of independence and changes in the amount of time and energy available for a couple’s emotional life after a child is born challenges some deeply held beliefs about romantic love and the roles men and women should play in intimate relationships. Anthony Giddens (1999) describes the emergence of the “pure relationship” between men and women since the shift from marriage being a primarily economic institution to one based on emotional communication and intimacy.

The pure relationship has quite different dynamics from more traditional social ties. It depends upon processes of active trust – opening oneself up to the other. ... The pure relationship is also implicitly democratic. ... A good relationship is a relationship of equals, where each party has equal rights and obligations. In such a relationship, each person has respect, and wants the best, for the other. The pure relationship is based upon communication, so that understanding the other person’s point of view is essential. ... Talk, or dialogue, are the basis of making the relationship work. ... there has to be mutual trust. And trust has to be worked at, it can’t just be taken for granted (3).

Such relationships take time and energy, two resources that are scarce when a busy couple has a baby or young child/ren. They also carry expectations of equality that are not reflected in the reality of family life in the West. Popular images of the Good Mother and the Idealised Nuclear Family fail to account for how couples need to adapt to the changes in their relationship that a baby brings over time and can produce feelings of anger, resentment and anxiety about the future of the relationship that are likely to emerge soon after the child is born. The “pure relationship” that Giddens describes is based on the

notion of personal choice, where both men and women choose to enter into a relationship for love and emotional closeness. These intimate bonds are always constrained by the discourses of romantic love, the Idealised Nuclear Family and the Good Mother, however. The notion of free choice can mask the power of these discourses to invest women and men and shape their expectations of family life.

Most of the studies cited above report that both women and men expected to share in the care of their children and that structural constraints such as the need for men to work outside the home for long hours contributed to the uneven distribution of household tasks (see for example Dempsey, 1999). The contradictions between egalitarian beliefs and actual child rearing practices contribute to women's dissatisfaction with their marriage relationships. As Milkie et al. (2002) explain, "much of the stalled gender revolution is related to men's behavior, which has not "caught up" to cultural changes towards a more nurturant father ideal" (24). As a result of this gap between ideology and 'real' life, "mothers may experience day-to-day stresses in their attempt to "fill in the gap" left by partners' inability or unwillingness to contribute, or they may feel more deeply dissatisfied with the marital relationship. Tensions center on daily difficulties in managing mothering, plus strains that relate to how her partner is living up to the "good father" image in which she believes" (24).

When Hannah and I discuss our marital problems we are describing these very tensions. By evoking the "super mother" image Hannah resists the notion that women are able to effortlessly incorporate all the demands of working/studying and domestic/childcare responsibilities into their lives. I also comment that the motherhood workload is not sustainable. Yet at the same time we both blame our relationship difficulties on our husbands' inability to adapt to the extra demands on time and energy a baby brings. We also describe how the emotional intensity of the pure relationship is interrupted by

the arrival of a baby. In the end we conclude that our marital problems are more to do with the inadequacy of the fathers of our children than the social pressures and regulatory processes that create the motherhood workload in the first place. We are positioning men and women in opposition to each other, with women coming out on top because of our desire to sacrifice more of our own lives in the service of our husbands and children than our partners are. We are, in fact, applauding women for the very characteristics that tie us to the Good Mother discourse. On top of this, the powerful discourses that construct romantic love as a matter of personal choice mean that marital problems are easily construed as a result of making the wrong choice, choosing the wrong person, rather than something that needs to be addressed at the level of policy around issues of childcare, employment and social support for families. We might recognise that the motherhood workload is unsustainable and yet we expect that, with the 'right' sort of man, it can become manageable.

### Single Motherhood

When motherhood is represented as the pinnacle of a woman's personal fulfilment and the ultimate finishing touch to an intimate relationship, involving an apparently natural and seamless transition for the couple, the difficulties of negotiating changes and managing the extra workload, both physically and emotionally, can seem insurmountable in some circumstances. Statistics show that more marriages in New Zealand are breaking down earlier and while children are younger than ever before (Statistics New Zealand, 2001) indicating that both men and women are choosing not to remain in an unhappy relationship despite having young children. Whereas in the past many couples would have stayed together until their children were independent, this is no longer the case in New Zealand and throughout the Western world. There are many factors that have contributed to the current rise in the number of single parent and reformulated families, but for the women in this study the birth of a new baby certainly contributed to their

relationship trouble. Indeed Bridget was the only member of the group not to experience a relationship breakdown in the first three years after the birth of a child, although she also describes feelings of resentment over her role as the primary parent in her household:

Bridget: You know I was lucky, Andrew was healthy and he was a happy kid and was settled and Philip did a lot of help, but he was working nights which meant he wasn't at home as much and when he was at home I had to keep the baby quiet 'cause we didn't want to wake him up. And then I felt a lot of resentment for the fact that he wasn't around much during the day. But when he was there he was great, he changed nappies, he got him changed, he you know, he did everything. And I kept thinking, I would hate to be doing this on my own.

Bridget's resentment was mediated by the fact that she was getting some help from her husband and the thought of parenting alone did not appeal to her. For many other women, however, single motherhood may allow them to regain a sense of control and independence, at least when it comes to running their family. The discourse of the Good Mother works to exclude women who are single mothers, yet Hannah, Penny and Sarah all describe significant improvements in their lives after leaving unhappy relationships and position themselves as better able to provide for their children as single mothers. Penny also found that she copes well, despite the financial strain, because as a single mother she now has much more control over how the money is spent in her household:

Penny: People have asked me, and they say, 'oh how do you manage, you know, three kids, isn't it stressful?' you know, and I say, 'well it's actually easier. I was doing all the work before and I am still doing all the work now, but I haven't, like you were saying, all that emotional blackmail and emotional torture that was going on, and the control games that were going on, and sure it gets hair raising and I am thinking this fortnight there is actually going to be no money left over. But in the three and a half years I have been on my own I have actually achieved so much more financial security for myself and for the kids. I have got three mortgages, I say one for each kid, you know? (laughing) but I am financially better off, I have got the kids stuff, they have got more toys now, they have got more clothes, they have got, you know, I am controlling the money and I am buying far more wisely than we ever bought as a couple because I wasn't allowed

any say in where the dollars went, and yet we were earning double what we have got now.

Sarah, Hannah and Penny all feel that their lives improved both emotionally and economically as single mothers. Statistics show that women are financially disadvantaged through single motherhood (Statistics New Zealand, 2001), but while there might be less money coming into their households and they may be dependent on State support for money, the fact that being on their own allows them control over when and where money is spent means that these women feel they can more adequately provide for their children now than when they were in relationships with men who did not always prioritise spending for family needs.

Penny, Sarah and Hannah mostly attribute the improvement in their lives after leaving unhappy relationships, however, to the release from the emotional strain these relationships were causing. The use of phrases such as “crush my spirit”, “emotional blackmail” and “emotional torture” indicate how stressful these relationships were and the consequent sense of liberation experienced by these women when they were over. All three women were able to regain a sense of power over their own lives when they became single mothers. It is interesting that this discussion again illustrates a ‘choosing the wrong man’ discourse. In discussing their ex-partners both Hannah and Penny described the conflict that arose over where household money should be spent. As single mothers they were able to make the decision to make personal sacrifices in the area of finances for their children. During the same interview I have quoted from above, both Sarah and Penny talked about the fact that, as single mothers they do not have money to spend on clothes for themselves and when there is some spare money available, they spend it on their children. They both say that they are pleased that they have learnt to be less focussed on their own appearances and more concerned with providing for their children, fulfilling further the requirement for self-sacrifice that epitomises the Good Mother. They also, along with Hannah, express pride and

admiration for their ability to cope so well as single mothers, despite financial hardship and lack of support.

As long as they continued to put their children's interests foremost, embracing this aspect of the Good Mother discourse, these women were able to reject the powerful discourse of the Idealised Nuclear Family and choose to become single mothers while still positioning themselves as good mothers. They also recognise the resistant nature of lone mothering and are very aware that being a single mother threatens the hegemonic power of the Idealised Nuclear Family discourse. Sarah sees this threat articulated in media representations that reproduce the nuclear family as the only natural family formation and refuse alternative possibilities:

Sarah: They always have to complete the circle, they can maybe be happy for a little while, but they always have to complete the circle and bring it back to the nuclear family. Like that *Three Men and a Baby*, have you seen that? Yeah, I saw the end of that movie, it was on Sunday night. And they completed the circle. They, it was four people bringing up this child together equally, and it worked very well. But in the end one of the men married the wife, married the mother, and so it came back to the nuclear family. And it was because the child wouldn't have been able to cope with having this fatherless family. And if they show single mothers having a good time then the numbers of single mothers would soar through the roof (laughter). It's responsibility, it's like the whole Murphy Brown thing, they were just shattered that these women, here's Murphy Brown, she can cope without a man, now what's going to happen to fathers? That's what the whole issue with that was. Every child's got to have a father. What happens if the father's, you know, coping without fathers and not really wanting the fathers around, is another big issue, yeah.

Here Sarah refers to the bizarre situation that occurred when the Vice-President of the United States wrote a letter to a fictional television character chastising her for having a baby when she was unmarried and single. That Murphy Brown's single motherhood elicited such a response from the White House indeed highlights the intensely political and contested nature of motherhood in Western culture today. According to Anthony Giddens (1999) "there are few countries in the world where there isn't intense discussion

about sexual equality, the regulation of sexuality and the future of the family. ... There is perhaps more nostalgia surrounding the lost haven of the family than for any other institution with its roots in the past. Politicians and activists routinely diagnose the breakdown of family life and call for a return to the traditional family" (1). That such a call was played out in the world of network television in the Murphy Brown case illustrates how those in positions of power perceive media images as highly influential, a position that Sarah also takes when she declares that "the numbers of single mothers would soar through the roof" if they were portrayed in a more positive light on television.

The highly political act of leaving a relationship is also a very personal and often painful one, however, particularly for a woman with young children. There is considerable social stigma attached to single motherhood in our culture and women often experience a loss of economic and social status that can be difficult to manage (Andrews, 2000). Even when a relationship is over, if there are children involved, a continuous process of negotiation over custody, access and child support payments may require the couple to remain in close contact, maintaining at least some form of communication and enabling a continuation of emotional strain and conflict. The following conversation indicates that these women believe that many men find it extremely difficult to accept a woman's newfound financial and personal independence and may try to involve their children in disagreements between parents as a way to prolong their influence over her life. They see this issue very much as one of individual men attempting to maintain power and control over women:

Bridget: Why do guys, why do guys use the children to fight?"

Sarah: "That's the last thing they have got control over. You have got your financial independence, you are coping, *you* are coping.

Penny: You have independence from them.

Sarah: Yes, you can be having other relationships, but the child is still biologically theirs and that's the only thing that they can grasp on to.

Bridget: There is a lot of people I think who, when the wife walks out, if it's the wife who left, feel angry with her for taking the kids away and sort of, decide to get back that way and use the kids.

Sarah: But that's what they're trying to make you think. It's still a power and control thing, it's still, they know that that's the essence of their, well for me Flora is the essence of my life and I love her with all my heart and if anybody tried to take custody of her away from me it would rip out my heart, and partners know that.

Hannah: They do too.

Penny: But it depends on the partner though. If you've got a destructive partner who is into the violence and control stuff, they will do anything they can to wind you up.

Sarah: They don't care about the children.

Hannah: It's not the same as a guy that is sensitive and caring and loves his kids for who they are, it's a whole different scenario.

The group continues to construct a good man/bad man dichotomy, reiterating the notion that relationship breakdowns are due to choosing the wrong man. In another conversation Hannah and Sarah discuss their concerns that their children will think less of them when they are old enough to realise that they made bad choices, picking the wrong men as their fathers. Hannah is relieved that her older daughter has chosen to have nothing to do with her father and Sarah hopes that her daughter will make a similar choice. Again the discourse of individual choice masks the structural constraints that place relationships under considerable strain when a couple is juggling the demands of paid work and the motherhood workload along with high expectations of romantic love in Western cultures. The power of men over women is seen in terms of individual men's behaviour, not in the structures of marriage and economic life that privilege men and reproduce gendered inequalities in family relationships.

Despite the numerous stories these women told of their own and other women's experiences with men who have treated them or their children badly, they still believe that choosing the 'right' man has brought or would bring them personal happiness and provide a stable family life for their children. While Sarah and Penny strongly resist the notion that they *need* a man in their lives to provide their children with a good upbringing, or for their own personal happiness, they both commented that they would like a good male "role

model” for their children and would welcome a happy relationship. Penny is highly sceptical that she is likely to find the “right man for the job”, declaring that she is “off men” until her children are older and she is less immersed in domestic responsibility. Sarah says that if the “right man comes along”, she would happily enter into a new relationship, albeit more cautiously than she has in the past. In the same way that the Good Mother discourse continues to regulate women’s lives, the discourses of romantic love and free choice remain central to notions of personal happiness in Western culture.

Despite the power of the discourse of the Idealised Nuclear Family, women like Sarah, Hannah and Penny have been able to reject it as the most appropriate site for family life. While it might be desirable, these women do not believe that it is necessary for children to be raised by both a mother and a father who live together. The choice to parent alone, however, increases the demands of the Good Mother discourse on these women’s lives as they position themselves as the lone provider of the emotional, physical and material needs of their children. Escape from the discursive regime of the Idealised Nuclear Family, it seems, does little to diminish the motherhood workload or the discursive power of the Good Mother to regulate women’s lives. On the other hand, it does allow resistance to some aspects of this discourse, in particular that good mothers are married women, devoted to both children and husband.

### Conclusion

The many conversations this group had about how exhausting and demanding motherhood could be provide some interesting insights into the persistent nature of the seemingly unobtainable ideals of the Good Mother discourse. Why is it that generation after generation of women appear to expect the realisation of this discourse from themselves and their daughters,

despite knowing that the lived reality of motherhood hardly, if ever, matches the idealised images our culture (re)produces?

Women's entry into tertiary education and professional occupations has opened up many more avenues of paid work for mothers, but this has not coincided with considerably lower expectations of housekeeping or childcare standards. Neither has it resulted in men taking on considerably more of the motherhood workload. In fact the current more child centred approach to raising a family, along with more paid work, arguably increases the amount of time and effort needed to be a mother today. At the same time, access to contraception, along with many women delaying their entry into marriage or marriage-like relationships and waiting longer to begin a family, has granted women, particularly middle-class women such as Bridget, Penny, Sarah and Hannah, a lot more control over their career paths as well as the size and nature of their families. The availability of government approved childcare facilities run by professionally qualified early childhood teachers, along with less privileged women prepared to undertake paid domestic labour in their homes, means that middle class women appear to be freer than ever before to pursue both a career and motherhood.

Once they have given birth however, many women, like those in this study, are inevitably drawn into the regulatory process that inscribes the Good Mother as a monolithic identity, where any deviance from her idealised image produces guilt and anxiety:

...our society continues to have grandiose expectations of mothers. And mothers, with their profound desire to be good mothers, both reproduce and resist these expectations. Wanting to control the uncontrollable, a mother feels painfully culpable when things go wrong. Yet, even while mothers are accorded overwhelming responsibility for their children's development, their authority is all the time circumscribed, subjected as they are to the critical gaze of a network of social structures (Parker, 1997; 34-5).

This gaze, or scrutiny, is often masked, however, by the discourses of romantic love and free choice. A central aspect of this process is the notion that well educated, middle-class, Pakeha women freely *choose* their life paths. In a free choice discourse the fact that they live in a culture where women are able to choose *not* to marry or have children, the fact that they *have* chosen to do this means that mothers should then be satisfied with the consequences of their decision (Villani, 1997). Not only this, but the workload that accompanies this choice remains primarily their responsibility. Within this context it becomes extremely difficult for women to ask for help, or even admit that they are having difficulty coping (Villani, 1997). The celebratory manner used by the women in this group to proclaim how well they have coped as single mothers sit alongside the many other stories of stress, guilt, financial difficulties and utter exhaustion that have accompanied their lone parenting.

This same doctrine of free choice governs the way the women here talked about their relationships with the fathers of their children. If the relationship did not work out, it was because they made the wrong choice, with all of the consequences that this brings. In a discourse of free choice and romantic love, the 'right' man will treat a woman well, while the 'wrong' man is unable to cope with the demands of fatherhood and family life. In a culture steeped in images of romantic love and the "pure relationship", the "stalled revolution" where men's participation in family life fails to mirror more egalitarian beliefs about men's and women's shared involvement in raising children can put considerable strain on intimate relationships. Milkie et al. (2002) describe this as a "lack of fit or lag between structural changes and cultural meanings at the societal level" which "can translate into increased stress and conflict among married parents" (21). Such conflicts highlight the gendered division of labour in the home, yet may do little to challenge the Good Mother discourse when the notions of self-sacrifice and putting the needs of others ahead of ones own remain unquestioned.

These conflicts do, however, both highlight and challenge the discourse of the Idealised Nuclear Family, enabling women to position themselves as good mothers while simultaneously rejecting traditional family settings. According to Dempsey (2002) “(m)arriage, like many institutions in modern society, is organized in such a way as to deliver more cultural, material and social power to men. It is a hierarchical institution in which domination and negotiation occur simultaneously” ( 92). When they were not able to negotiate a satisfactory relationship with the father of their child/ren, women like Sarah, Hannah and Penny chose to enter into single motherhood. The decision to do so comes with the recognition of the power that men gain through marriage, often at the expense of their wives, and so they described leaving these men as regaining power and control over their lives and their families.

However, even as single mothers, the discourse of romantic love remains a powerful force, always threatening to pull women back into the nuclear family, to “complete the circle” as Sarah puts it. Hannah remarried, declaring, “the second time I got married I got married for love, you know? It was a celebration of our love for each other. We proved it, showed it to the world”. While Penny and Sarah both approach the subject of romantic love with some scepticism, both declaring that they do not need it, and Penny doubting that she will indeed ever find it, both women also state that they would definitely like to find it one day. We live in a culture steeped in images of love, romance and the nuclear family, where women who parent alone are often isolated and unsupported. It is hardly surprising that a close and intimate relationship, not to mention some help with the demands of the motherhood workload, is ultimately desirable in such a world.

In these discussions Penny, Bridget, Sarah, Hannah and myself mobilised a number of discourses that clearly articulate the self-sacrificing, altruistic motherhood that dominates cultural representations of the Good Mother. At times we evoke images of motherhood as natural and intrinsic, at others as a

set of skills passed down through generations of women. Once again this chapter illustrates the ways in which women simultaneously participate in and resist the regulatory processes that define motherhood in Western culture. It also explores how emotionally complex women's experiences of motherhood are, a complexity that is not reflected in polarised images of good and bad mothers. Ross Coward (1997) describes how the lack of acknowledgment of motherhood's conflicting emotions often leaves women feeling unsupported both physically and emotionally:

Mothering is difficult. It demands changes in your life and it changes you, sometimes unleashing feelings that can quite literally drive you crazy. Women can find themselves up against unexpected emotions of anger and gnawing guilt, instead of living up to the idealised version of goodness poured out to good children. Mothers need support, particularly if they are on their own. Yet this current idealisation of motherhood denies women the chance to come to terms with the confusing mixture of emotions that motherhood involves (118).

In a research setting where this group of women were able to get to know each other over time and discuss their experiences of motherhood at length, their feelings of guilt and inadequacy emerged in stories of the days when they felt they were not coping with the motherhood workload. These stories intermingled with those that celebrated their ability to cope with difficult times as they positioned themselves as good mothers despite the days when "you just can't be that mother". As relatively privileged women they could resist the images that portrayed poor and/or single mothers as inadequate, yet their experiences were always mediated by powerful images of the Good Mother. Like the women in Rose Villani's (1997) study of American mothers, these women described the "...vacuous feeling of inadequacy, caused by a lack of support, feedback, validation, and affirmation that work together to undermine their self-esteem" (11).

Yet despite struggling with the guilt and anxiety produced through the Good Mother discourse, these women can and do actively resist its regulatory effects. And they do this by exercising their (if not free, at least relatively

extensive) choice. The very notion that works to individualise their decisions and experiences as mothers, also allows these relatively privileged women the opportunity to reject some aspects of the Good Mother discourse. The most powerful resistance came in the form of rejecting the nuclear family by leaving an unhappy relationship or choosing to continue with a pregnancy as a single woman. This rejection did not however alleviate the demands of the motherhood workload, but instead increased the burden of caring for children, tending to domestic responsibilities and pursuing study and paid work without financial, emotional or physical support from a partner. It did provide these women with a renewed sense of power and control over their lives, however, as well as increasing their critical awareness of the pervasive nature of images of the Idealised Nuclear Family.

The changing shape of families in New Zealand today reflects changes occurring throughout the Western world. According to Anthony Giddens (1999) "Among all the changes going on today, none are more important than those happening in our personal lives – in sexuality, emotional life, marriage and the family. There is a global revolution going on in how we think of ourselves and how we form ties and connections with others. ... There are few countries in the world where there isn't intense discussion about sexual equality, the regulation of sexuality and the future of the family" (1). Whereas in the past families have been a site where gendered identities were shaped and reproduced, where girls learnt to nurture and mother and boys were prepared for the role of economic provider, the fluid nature of today's families allow for diverse and multiple roles for both men and women. The stalled revolution makes the family, in Manuel Castells (2000) words "a contested domain, rather than a sphere of cultural reproduction". He writes of a "fundamental redefinition of relationships between women, men and children ... and thus, of family, sexuality and personality" (cited in Gilding, 2002; 4).

Hannah, Bridget, Sarah, Penny and myself have all described our participation in this redefinition. As we struggle to position ourselves within powerful discursive regimes we search to find new ways to understand motherhood and personal relationships, to understand our own lives both inside and outside the discourses of the Good Mother and the Idealised Nuclear Family. This is a struggle because families no longer represent a simple, social structure with clearly defined roles for each member. Giddens (1999) writes of the family as a “shell institution”, one that still has the same name “but inside their basic character has changed”. He argues that “when people marry, or form relationships, there is an important sense in which they don’t know what they are doing, because the institutions of marriage and the family have changed so much” (2). Within these changes in family life women struggle to juggle the demands of the double shift, the exhaustion of the motherhood workload and the desire for emotionally fulfilling relationships, all under the powerful gaze of the Good Mother discourse.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Institutional Encounters**

This chapter will explore how discourses of the Good Mother impact on Bridget, Sarah, Penny, Hannah and my own life as we move from the relatively private institution of the family into the realm of public institutions – including government agencies such as the New Zealand Social Welfare and Inland Revenue Departments and a university run childcare facility. It is at these sites that the visibility of the embedded regulatory processes that govern our lives became apparent. This visibility invites resistance, while at the same time reinforcing the strength of dominant discourses, through institutional power, to circumscribe women's lives. It is here that the workings of discursive power comes into the open, so to speak, to be scrutinised anew by those whose lives are produced and reproduced through its normative effects. Yet, as always, resistance is also embedded in discourse and women are again the agents of participation and self-regulation in the same discursive regime that at times they seek to escape. In particular, the issue of childcare is a highly sensitive one as mothers negotiate the loosening of the ties that bind their children's experiences of the world to their own beliefs and values. Current constructions of childhood that determine a mother's continuous care of her child the optimum condition for growth and development make this a problematic process, requiring careful discursive positioning as women who use childcare facilities seek to remain within the bounds of the Good Mother discourse.

In this chapter I will argue that mothers and children occupy public spaces in discursively constructed ways. The positions that women occupy within these spaces are both hegemonically inscribed as well as open to contestation and negotiation. Motherhood, at the level of the public institution, is a site of ongoing cultural struggle to generate meaning and produce disciplined maternal subjects (who in turn will produce disciplined children). The visibility of this struggle in the public arena, along with its highly contested nature, allowed the women in this group to produce more complex and contradictory maternal subject positions than in their discussions of family life, as they

attempted to position themselves within the complex and contradictory discourses of motherhood and economic productivity. It also highlighted again the financial and time constraints that contributed to the overwhelming sense of exhaustion and stress produced by the motherhood workload discussed in the previous chapter. I will begin by discussing some of the general ways that these mothers have felt scrutinised in public spaces before discussing in depth the institutional encounters that have helped shape their maternal subjectivities.

### Mothers and Children in Public Spaces

The previous chapter examined how the women in this study experienced surveillance and regulation within their homes and families. In this chapter, as we move into the public arena, this scrutiny turns outward from the guilt and anxiety of self-regulation to the discomfort experienced when the overt attention of others, even total strangers, appears to pass negative judgement on a woman's mothering practices. For while there are certain public domains - the beach, the park, movie theatres and fast food restaurants - where children and families are welcome and expected, there are also constraints around which cultural spaces mothers with children should occupy. Sarah found that, even among young people her own age, she experienced surveillance and regulation when her mothering practices did not meet cultural expectations:

Sarah: That's what we did, we actually took, and it was so funny, people our age group who we thought would have different ideas. It was the Aids concert in Victoria Park and it was in November and there were three quite full on bands, *Supernette*, *3-D's*, something else, oh *Head Like a Hole*,<sup>1</sup> playing. And we got these excellent like blue tack earplugs for kids. And they all had them in their ears and they were dancing up a storm, and we took them right up the front for *Head Like A Hole* and had them on our shoulders and we had people making comments to us about how inappropriate it was to have our children up with all this loud music and they, you know this whole criticism.

Bridget: Bright blue things in their ears.

Sarah: They weren't blue, they were clear, they couldn't see, but you could still see they had something in their ears and you could tell from their enjoyment that they weren't concerned about the noise. And that whole

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<sup>1</sup> These are three New Zealand bands that could be categorised as alternative rock. All three have a reputation for playing loud rock music.

judgement, that that was not appropriate because it wasn't classic family behaviour, you know?

Sarah was not expecting the disapproval that constructed children, and therefore mothers, as out of place at an outdoor rock concert. Christchurch has a long history of providing free summer entertainment in the parks and riverbanks that dominate the central city and many of these are explicitly aimed at families. However, the loud rock music of this particular concert deemed it, according to some members of the audience, an inappropriate place for mothers and children. In this case Sarah was directly approached by members of the public and criticised for taking her child to the concert. There are also subtler means of regulating the spaces women may occupy with their children, however. In the following exchange Bridget and Sarah are referring to a letter written to the university student's magazine, *Canta*, that criticised mothers for displaying their young children in the university café, like "fashion accessories":

Bridget: I mean some of them, like letters to the editor as well. I read those and some of them are awful to mothers. I mean talking about mothers that bring their children in the café...

Sarah: Like fashion accessories.

Bridget: Like fashion, and I ...

Sarah: Like no idea.

Bridget: And I just saw it and I thought you just have no idea how hard it is for us to get here in the morning, if that's how you feel. How often do we, you know, the kids are here every single day, and how often do we take them over to the café?

Sarah: And it's a treat for them, in a sense, or else it's an emergency for us, like we've forgotten their lunch, or, I know with Flora it's...

Bridget: I was actually quite affected by that and worried about taking Andrew there...

Sarah: Mmm, it's all that good mother, bad mother guilt thing isn't it?

Bridget: Yeah.

Bridget and Sarah's responses were resistance and anger, but Bridget also hesitated about taking her son to the café again. In publishing letters such as this, the student newspaper was participating in the good mother/bad mother discourses that construct some mothers as inadequate because of the spaces they occupy with their children. In another interview Bridget raised the issue of the letter again, describing her conflicting responses to this external regulation:

Bridget: I do, I apologise for that to people, if I don't think I'm living up to what mothers are portrayed to be. That *Canta* thing was quite close to home. I definitely thought about that when I went to the café. But I don't, I don't feel I have to apologise every time, and I think there is a side of me that wants to...

Sarah: You want to do it.

Bridget: And I always felt like I had to fight for everything that I was doing. Yeah, I was really on the defensive being here and I read this thing in *Canta* about mothers. And one half of me was going, 'I shouldn't be doing this', and the other half thought, 'I'm going to take them every day from now on and I'm going to spill their cheese', but then part of me was going to apologise. And Alex, breastfeeding and when I was going to change his nappy, and oh I have to do it in the toilet, where is it safe to change? Outside in the park? (laughter)

Bridget is conflicted because she feels, as she did when she was a pregnant student, that she has to "fight" for the right to attend university with a baby. During other interviews both Bridget and I described times when we had been approached by university staff, always women, and told that we should not have our babies at university, that we should stay home and "do it properly" or that it was inappropriate for us to breastfeed or change our babies' nappies in certain places. I have described in Chapter Five how the university is constructed as a site of masculine rationality, rendering pregnant bodies out of place and here the presence of mothers with their children is also marginalised and excluded as inappropriate in the academic realm. Stephen Frosh (1997) describes the prevailing attitude that constructs motherhood as out of place in masculine spaces: "Mothering is so *messy*, after all, so full of bodily functions. All that dripping and cleaning up, all that food on the floor, and much else besides, not to be confronted in the man's clean world. Children stop you thinking; everyone knows that they turn your brain to porridge" (37). It seems that it was this mess - food, nappies and breastfeeding - that elicited the anxiety we encountered as mothers in the university.

As well as regulation through media such as the student's magazine or direct reproach, Sarah describes the general feeling that people disapprove of her taking her young child into a space deemed part of the adult world in

Christchurch:

Sarah: And why is it inappropriate for them to go to the café at the university? ... I mean that's the whole thing as well, they don't think it's

appropriate for us to take our children out for lunch in town either do they? I mean, sure, I mean as Flora has got older it's not, practically, it's not a good idea really. I mean, but if you want to go out and meet a friend once in a blue moon, you do it. But people seeing you there with your child think, 'tut, that poor child, that woman must drag her out all the time'. You know?

In Chapter Five I wrote how pregnant bodies are regulated in different ways - directly through personal interaction, indirectly through the media or through a pervasive sense of social disapproval of certain acts. Bridget, Sarah and I experienced a similar feeling of being under scrutiny on a number of different levels when we took our children places that were constructed as appropriate for adults rather than children. Interestingly, both the rock concert and the letter to the student newspaper provide examples of young people employing discourses that seek to exclude women with children from certain spaces, illustrating the persistent reproduction of regulatory processes through the generations.

The discourses that separate adult and children's spaces work alongside the Good Mother discourses of the previous chapter to confine women's lives to the domestic realm (Longhurst, 1996) unless they are able to successfully negotiate a means of escaping their domestic responsibilities. Most women today who choose to pursue employment or study outside their homes pay others, usually women, to care for their children, either in their own homes or in childcare facilities such as the university crèche. The decision to employ others to care for their children, however, was far from straightforward for the women in this study.

#### Childcare: A contested arena

Changing patterns of maternal employment have meant that meanings of motherhood have become enmeshed in discussions of childcare (Keary, 2000). During the last twenty years debates have raged over the potential harm of childcare on young children, often based on research that has varied considerably in its conclusions (Keary, 2000; Mott, 1991; Parcel and Meneghan, 1994; Greenstein, 1995; Harvey, 1999; Baum, 2003). Choosing to pay others to care for their children challenges the Good Mother discourse that

requires mothers to retain primary responsibility for the care and welfare of their children. This is not only a practical task requiring physical care, but also a moral one. Current constructions of childhood position children as a 'blank slate' dependent on appropriate nurturing for their future emotional and intellectual development (Nadesan, 2002; Dahlberg et al, 1999; Smith and Taylor, 2000). Based on the notions of attachment and bonding that have dominated Western thought around child rearing since the 1950s, the Good Mother is expected to sacrifice her own needs to remain in constant attendance to her child's.<sup>2</sup> While the rapid increase in the number of working mothers in recent years and the proliferation of childcare facilities and professionally trained early childhood teachers has enabled working women in New Zealand the choice of good quality alternative care for their children, this has not necessarily alleviated the pervasive fear that leaving a child in the hands of those other than their mother can be harmful to that child's emotional development (Baker and Tippin, 2002; Villani, 1997; Parker, 1997; Gornick and Meyers, 2001). In short, childcare is a contested arena in Western society and one in which the women in this study must negotiate both their children's needs and their own career and educational aspirations.

Central to Bridget, Sarah, Penny and Hannah's anxiety around using childcare facilities is the notion of moral guidance, of maintaining control over the shaping of their children's values and beliefs. The degree of this anxiety differs for each woman in this study, depending on her view of the amount of influence childcare workers wield over those in their care and her own experiences of looking after other women's children. Bridget describes her concerns about leaving her baby at the university crèche; concerns that she now feels were unjustified:

Bridget: I thought a lot about putting Alex into childcare and I hadn't enrolled him or anything. Um, I took him to my lectures when he was a really tiny baby. And thought that the crèche had far more influence on what he was like and that.

Penny: In terms of what sort of thing?

Bridget: You know I thought that my values and my morals would be put aside for all those years at crèche. And now it didn't happen.

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Four for a discussion of attachment theory.

Bridget's statement immediately sparked a lively discussion between her and Sarah about the degree of influence that university crèche workers have over the children in their care, particularly in relation to gender roles:

Sarah: But yeah I think I worried about that, but I still think they do have an influence ... but I felt like with me I was still the primary voice through which she sort of learned, but I felt that that was my, 'cause we spent more time together at home. She still gets influenced by, what they're, you know they talk about, um, pretty little ladies and all that kind of stuff at crèche and I'd love to find a crèche that didn't buy into that crap.

Bridget: But isn't she into that crap?

Sarah: But that's because she's, she wouldn't be into that crap if I was the only caregiver that she had...

Bridget: I don't know, I'm going to argue with you.

Sarah: I think that, yes we are the main influences. But that they do, it still does influence them.

Bridget: See I think Andrew has, because of his personality, has chosen to pick up on certain things that the staff say or do ... and he adores Christine (childcare worker) over anybody ... I don't think she has the influence on him to choose what position, who he plays with, who he talks to, how he talks, how he reacts and responds to situations. I think I have more influence. I mean he talks to me about them. With Christine, she doesn't actually sit there and say, 'how'd your day go? Did this happen? Shall we talk about it? How are you going to deal with it if it happens again?'

Whereas I do ... Maybe Flora is a little girl who likes little girl things and maybe unfortunately...

Sarah: No, no, that's not the point...

Bridget: Because she wouldn't be influenced if she wasn't like that, she wouldn't be influenced by those children.

Sarah: But that's not the point, the point to me is ... that people who teach in childcare should be a bit more gender neutral and, that's the point. No matter, okay sure maybe Flora will love playing dolls and wear pink for the rest of her life, but the point is that the childcare people who are working in the industry should be more aware of not putting that on them.

Bridget and Sarah contest the arena of parental and outside influences on the formation of gender identity in young children. They both claim to be the major influence in their children's lives, but accept that outside care impacts on how children see themselves as gendered subjects. While Bridget believes that gender roles emanate from natural tendencies, Sarah resists any outside attempts to construct a stereotypical gender identity for her daughter. She believes that those working with children should be "gender neutral". However, later in the same conversation she laments the lack of attention paid to Maori culture at the university crèche, calling for more active promotion of this and other cultural perspectives in the day-to-day crèche activities. Obviously Sarah

does not expect the crèche staff to be 'culture neutral', only gender neutral. This contradiction illustrates the many contested areas of Western culture that impact on a mother's choice to place her child in the care of other women.

Sarah's awareness of the influence that early childhood teachers may have on Flora's ideas and identity are mediated by her own experience of caring for another mother's three young children in her home:

Sarah: When I looked after kids I found that I had, I was a big influence on them, 'cause I was different from their parents. Their parents were a middle-class Catholic kind of family and I'm not. And they would ask me questions, and it shows you that, of course their parent's base is what they know and they believe. And like they'd see my tattoo and they'd say, 'what's that?' and, you know, think it was really strange and we had a Ken doll dressed in a nightie and they said, 'oh, what's that?' and I said 'oh, some boys like dressing in nighties' and of course that was way too much for them. And then it was something about the Ellen Degeneres show was coming out about gay and lesbian relationships and so, and they said something really terrible about how that was, you know gay and lesbian people were evil and horrible and stuff like that, so I say, 'well I don't believe that, some people do', you know, and they really, like you could see them absorbing it like a sponge and they had that base that their parents had told them, but because I looked after them and I was with them three days a week, for four hours and they came to my house, they were very absorbent and going, 'hey Sarah doesn't think this is bad', you know?

Sarah is happy to influence the young children in her care, to offer them alternatives to their parent's "middle-class Catholic" values. She completes a highly contradictory process of positioning herself as both mother and carer of another mother's children, resisting any outside attempts to offer her daughter alternative views on the one hand and on the other actively working to contest the taken-for-granted notions of gender and sexuality in the children she looks after. She is hardly gender neutral in her challenges to the "base" that these children's parents have provided for them, although she calls for neutrality from those working in the university crèche. Underlying this obvious contradiction is her belief in the 'correctness' of her views on gender and sexuality.

Bridget has also cared for another mother's children, but this time in their home and she felt that she did little to influence their beliefs, describing herself

as going "to their house and I was doing it in their home. And I knew the mother and I knew the set-up that she had, and I basically just switched in on her set-up". She also believes that gender identity is more 'natural', emanating more from internal drives than external influences. Added to this is her acknowledgment of the other people in her son's life who impact on his gender identity:

Bridget: Andrew loves his grandfather, since he was three, he loved the manly things he did. He was always out in the buggy thing. And I did not encourage that, we've got dolls and things and I couldn't decide if, oh well he's really influenced by this person who he spends a lot of time with, his grandfather. 'Cause he gets, you know, 'cause he says things like, 'we're real men, we're gonna do this, ra ra ra'. And I think, oh no, dad's got this really sexist influence on him. But the other way of looking at it is, he's also around me who makes him cook and clean and I've taught him how to embroider and crochet and this sort of thing. But he never sees them as interesting as the things that he does with his grandfather. And it's not because I've told him, 'boys don't do that, girls do this, da da da'. It's just who he is and everything else.

Bridget is more accepting of the influence of her father on her son, while providing Andrew with alternative gender roles herself. She is also less outspoken in her critique of dominant notions of gender and sexuality than Sarah and so is less concerned about the influences of the crèche workers on her sons' beliefs and values. Penny and Hannah are also less anxious about the influence of others, while still advocating that mothers work to instil the 'right' values in their children. They have both raised children as stay-at-home-mothers during their preschool years and also both have older children so they have experienced the many external influences that starting school brings to a child's life:

Penny: I've been on both sides of the coin, I've been the primary caregiver for my own, these two, they never went to day-care or crèche and I was that, that took 24 hours, seven days a week. Then I looked after other people's kids. Oh you met Rose and the others, I looked after them from when Paul was a month old, you know? So I've been a second mum for other kids all the way through, and I think that has been a huge influence on them.

Jane: So is the influence of people in childcare and other places, is that a bad thing really?

Penny: No, it's not a bad thing because they're going to have that one day anyway when they go to school. You can't protect your children from the world.

Penny and Hannah were less concerned with the influence of childcare staff on their children because they believed that attitudes and values are formed over a child's lifetime and as mothers they are able to discuss issues and help shape their children's views of the world. The quotes in this section came from a long discussion where each woman expressed her opinion and shared her experiences both as a mother and, in the case of Sarah, Penny and Bridget, as a carer for other women's children. As the conversation drew to a close Sarah again reiterated her belief that early childhood facilities have a responsibility to present children with certain 'correct' values to provide a base for their later development:

Sarah: But I feel like at preschool, preschool's the most formative time and it's a time when they're really getting their attitudes and sure they're going to hit it once they get to school, but if we had some kind of learning, a better base. I mean the ultimate thing for me is okay, just keep her at home and don't send her out into the world, but all I mean is that they're supposed to be teaching them those premises anyway.

Sarah repeats two discursive truths that underlie much of the anxiety around the effects of childcare on children's development in New Zealand and other Western societies today. First, that the preschool years are a child's most "formative" and therefore any influences on their development during this time will stay with them for life, and second that the ideal place for a young child is at home with its mother. I have discussed the second of these in detail in previous chapters. The former draws on child development theories and child psychology (Gittens, 1998; Collier et al, 1993; Nasedan, 2002). Originating in Bowlby's notion of maternal deprivation, the idea that even children in traditional nuclear families can suffer negative long term effects from being placed in the care of those other than their mothers, underlies the type of anxieties women like Sarah experience about the influence childcare workers have over their children. Such fears, however, emerge from particular constructions of 'the child', constructions that scholars working in the areas of family studies and early childhood education are beginning to deconstruct.

Moss et al (2000) discuss the term "child-centred" and how it is linked to a particular modernist notion of the child as a decontextualised, unified and essentialised subject. This 'child' is constructed within dominant discourses

that regulate the practices that surround childhood. These include mothering as well as educational practices and work to define relationships between mothers and children, childcare workers and children, as well as mothers and the childcare professionals and facilities they utilise. The dominant discursive constructions of childhood, therefore, not only shape understandings, but produce certain practices and pedagogies that inscribe how mothers (as well as children and childcare workers) experience placing their children in the care of others (Dahlberg et al, 1999; Moss et al, 2000). Constructions of childhood that consider the child an empty slate, requiring constant care and particular, pre-ordained methods of training and education to become autonomous adults, produce what Dahlberg et al (1999) have termed the 'poor child', "weak and passive, incapable and underdeveloped, dependent and isolated" (48). It is not surprising that such a construction of childhood evokes anxiety for mothers who wish to undertake paid employment or study.

In their studies of the Reggio Emilia preschools in Italy, Dahlberg et al (1999), along with Moss et al (2000) are highly critical of such constructions. They argue that the more children are hidden away from the world, the greater the children and their mothers are disadvantaged. They use the example of Scandinavian countries with high maternal employment rates where children are expected to spend long periods of time away from their mothers. In these countries, "(c)hildren are both part of, but also separate from, the family, with their own interests that may not always coincide with those of parents and other adults. Children have a recognized and independent place in society, with their own rights as individual human beings and full members of society" (49). Similarly in the Reggio Emilia preschools, children are seen as 'rich' rather than 'poor' and as co-constructors of their identities, of knowledge and of understandings about the world they inhabit. These children are perceived as actively participating in shaping their own lives; they can and do resist the power that dominates relationships between children and adults.

It also means that the young child is not only included, but in active relationship with that society and that world. He or she is not an innocent, apart from the world, to be sheltered in some nostalgic representation of the past reproduced by adults. Rather, the young child is in the world as it

is today, embodies that world, is acted upon by that world – but also acts on it and makes meaning of it (50-1).

Dahlberg et al do not argue for the wholesale replacement of other Western childcare philosophies with the Reggio Emilia model; instead they employ it as an example of an alternative to open up the subject of early childhood education to new scrutiny, based on a Foucaultian notion of understanding how certain aspects of identity have come to be formed historically through regulatory power. They ask questions about the nature of our understandings of childhood to uncover how these have been constructed and to move the debates away from the dualistic thinking that has produced the pro and anti childcare arguments, towards a new set of questions: “Instead, we can open up the possibility of a childhood of many relationships and opportunities, in which both the home and the early childhood institution have important, complementary but different parts to play” (52). Such an approach has profound implications for mothers, who, along with fathers, would continue to provide “an environment and relationships of vital and unique importance to the young child”. These relationships are not exclusive however, and the child's inclusion in society and their participation as citizens requires active interaction with other adults and children, relationships which also play a vital role in their development. For early childhood institutions and those who work in them, there would be no requirement to provide an environment that closely resembles the home, but instead new pedagogies that recognise a child's ability to theorise and construct knowledge in relation with other adults and children could be developed.

I introduce these two studies at this point because they offer interesting insights into the kinds of contradictions that the women in this study are attempting to negotiate, as well as possibilities for rethinking the whole relationship between families and childcare facilities, between mothers, children and society. Despite Sarah's comment that she would rather keep Flora exclusively at home with her, none of these women expressed an ongoing desire to remain totally outside the world of paid employment or academic study. At the same time they were all conflicted, as I also was, by

the powerful regulatory discourses that, if not requiring women to remain with their children 24 hours a day, certainly produced feelings of guilt and anxiety the more hours each day our children spent at crèche. The views expressed by the women in this study also tended to mirror the notion that children are actively constructing knowledge for themselves, however. The knowledges that become 'truth' for children are very much determined by dominant discursive constructions of gender, for example. But according to the discussions in the interviews, alternatives are provided by these mothers, with a belief that they will impact on a child's understanding and influence their future behaviour. Despite the power of normative discourses of the 'poor' child to heighten a woman's anxiety around leaving her child in care, the process of negotiation enables each woman to do so and still position herself as a Good Mother.

The women in this study did make the choice to send their children to the university crèche while they studied, having negotiated the tensions between their needs and those of their children. None of us chose to place our children full time, however, because as students we were able to work in the evenings and none of us felt that full time childcare would be beneficial for our children. The decision to share the care of our children with paid childcare workers was one where we 'fitted in' as much time with our children as we could and spent extra hours working, sometimes late into the evening, to juggle our domestic and study responsibilities. This way we felt able to maintain as much control and influence over our children as each of us felt was necessary according to our own beliefs and values about mothering, embedded as they were in the Good Mother discourse. In many ways it was the flexibility of the university timetable that allowed each woman to do this, something that is more difficult in the highly regulated world of paid employment.

#### The 'Right to Work' vs. 'Children's Needs'

Sarah: But society is so geared so that we can't live on one income anymore.

Penny: I think it's becoming reality that you have both parents working.

Hannah: They have no choice, no longer, society's set up so women don't have a choice but to work.

Bridget: But you can choose to work now. Women choose to work 18 hours or you can choose to work four and I've chosen to cut it down, right?

These quotes, made at different times during different interviews, clearly articulate how this group perceives the dilemma facing mothers in paid employment today. While they live in a society that is organized around ownership, consumption and material possessions, women are still expected to make choices about employment that will not harm their children. According to these women, economic necessity requires many mothers to work; most women feel they have no choice but to work when their children are young. Many are also pursuing careers at the same time as starting a family because they desire the challenge, human interaction and status accorded paid work in New Zealand culture (Baker and Tippin, 2002). Yet the Good Mother discourse requires women to be in constant attendance to their children's needs. This conflict between the demands of the workplace and the Good Mother discourse, already discussed in Chapter Four, makes visible for the women in this study the structural contradictions that they must negotiate in order to participate in economic productivity without being positioned as bad mothers. The processes through which they achieve this involve a careful positioning of ones self, not only within the discursive process, but also in relation to other mothers.

This section will explore how, by constantly positioning and repositioning herself within contradictory discourses, each woman in this study claims her place in the discourse of the Good Mother. At the same time the visibility of these contradictions highlights the gendered organisation of labour, where male patterns of employment are treated as the norm and women struggle to find a way to reconcile their work and home responsibilities without being disadvantaged in the workforce and feeling guilty and inadequate at home. In Chapter Four I discussed the contradictions women face trying to reconcile their dual roles as self-seeking worker in the market place and self-sacrificing

mother at home. The following discussions see Sarah, Hannah, Penny and Bridget attempting to reconcile some of these contradictions in how they approach paid work and the types of working conditions they believe would best enable them to participate in the job market while still retaining primary responsibility for their children's care.

Some of the following conversations took place during an interview session when I showed the group part of a British documentary about working mothers and the effects of childcare on young children.<sup>3</sup> The BBC's *Panorama* documentary was highly critical of middle-class women who placed their preschool children in childcare facilities while working long hours. The women in this group were not against mothers working per se, but expressed concern over women, like those in the documentary, who worked long hours and prioritised earning money over spending time with their families. The following is Sarah's reaction to a mother in the *Panorama* documentary who was returning to work full time and leaving her baby in a childcare facility:

Sarah: Like she is saying like justifying it, like she's saying in terms of the baby, yet she is so upset to be leaving the baby. And maybe that's not the issue for her, there she is not saying 'I really want to get back to work because I feel like, I really feel good about being at work'. She's thinking, 'well I need all these monetary things for my baby' and yet what she and her baby need is some more time together. But then I sound really reactionary, that everybody should stay home kind of thing, but that's not what I mean. I mean if she feels like she wants to really be home with the child, I feel sad that there is this pressure on her to go out and earn all that money that she needs.

Hannah: You are so right. ... It makes me sad that people think that they have to do something that gets them on this wheel and a lot more money. ... You're just being natural.

Hannah and Sarah resist the notion that career and money should take precedence over spending time with children. They also acknowledge the pressures that women face to show that they are good mothers by providing their children with material possessions. Sarah is expressing her conflicted feelings around her feminist beliefs that women should be able to pursue a career, beliefs that contradict her philosophy of motherhood which privileges children's needs:

Sarah: Mmm, yeah but I feel like I am being judgmental as well you know? Like I, I mean I know that I am not, you know and seeing this and thinking these women should be staying at home with their children, that's what I am really thinking.

There was considerable discussion in the group about how much mother's time is enough for children, sparked by a comment from one mother in the documentary that she does not have a great deal of time with her child so she ensures that they have "quality time" together. Bridget, Hannah and Sarah were quick to dismiss this notion:

Bridget: I mean she talks about quality time, but that doesn't sound like quality time, what she was giving. I mean, sure if you're arriving home at 7 o'clock at night and you expect to get quality time with your child and you haven't seen them since when you left. But I find that, if I get home at 5 o'clock, you can just sort of sit back and relax and do your things with the kids.

Sarah: God, I can't, if we come home at five, I've only done it a couple of times through exams, I find it, it's just making dinner, getting her into pyjamas. I find that we have to be home by two or three so that we can just relax. Three at the latest. Just because, I suppose because Flora eats earlier and might go to bed earlier than your boys.

Bridget: They go to bed I think about eight o'clock. I mean I always read them a bedtime story first, and chat to them. And if we don't have time for a bath, it's always more important to me that they have time for a story and cuddles and everything. A quick flannel in the face. 'Cause I'd rather have enjoyed that time.

Jane: So when do you get quality time?

Sarah: I think quality time's a crock, eh, I think, it's time that you spend with your children. I mean it's spontaneous (that's right). And you've got the time to do that if you don't work till six o'clock at night, you know, if you come home at three. ... Stuff we do together, but like it's not like, 'okay we're having quality time now', it just kind of spontaneously happens. Like maybe I'll be going to cook dinner and she will be helping me, or she will decide to play a game with me in the kitchen, you know?

Bridget: You can always get the pots and pans out.

Sarah: Yeah. But you know, like quality time is, like we have two days at home a week as well, and it just happens and people will put pressure on it to have a certain time, you know, and the kids just come up with things at the time.

Hannah: You can't have a time slot for quality time, your child dictates how they feel.

Bridget and Sarah have different ideas about how much time in the afternoon or evening they need to spend with their children, but both of them are critical

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of the use of this documentary during the research

of a woman who does not arrive home until 6 or 7 pm such as those in the *Panorama* documentary. In fact some of the women featured in the programme booked their children into overnight childcare facilities, something Sarah likened to “booking your dog into a kennel”. They were also critical of parents attempting to compensate for long hours away from their children by employing the notion of quality time. I asked them where they thought the idea of quality time came from:

Sarah: I think it's to justify people's time away from their children. They have to say it's all right, you can do this as long as you spend some time with your kids.

Bridget: So they're concentrating on nothing else.

Hannah: I think quality time, it's garbage actually. It's been made up in some institution.

Jane: What institution do you think made it up?

Sarah: Probably the media. Probably some women's magazine talking about how to balance your days.

By rejecting the notion of quality time as an artificial fix, manufactured by the media, for people who spend long periods of time away from their children, these women position themselves against full time working mothers. For Sarah, Hannah and Bridget, the most valuable moments they have with their children are spontaneous and driven by the children's rather than the parent's needs. Such a child-centred approach to mothering requires women to be easily available to their children, ready to respond to these spontaneous moments whenever they might occur. According to these women, such moments are more likely to emerge from regular day-to-day activities than in organised time-slots. Bridget also feels that an important component of mothering is caring and cooking for her children - “It's care, it's making food for them, those show that you love him and that builds up a relationship” – something that many full time working mothers do not always have time to do, yet is integral to the discursive construction of Good Motherhood and its gendered distribution of household labour and caring.

According to Hannah, Sarah and Bridget it is acceptable to work and to use a childcare facility as long as a mother is still able to spend enough time with her

children for spontaneous child-centred activities and to perform the caring tasks in her home. They carefully position themselves in such a way that their own mothering practices are acceptable. By rejecting the notion of quality time they are able to position themselves favourably in relation to other working mothers. There is no need for them to resolve the either/or debate about the use of childcare because they have found a relatively comfortable place for themselves where they can reconcile the contradictions between working and mothering. At the same time, however, they are aware that the sort of part time employment such an approach requires does little to benefit women's careers:

Bridget: See I don't think working mothers is a problem, I think that the problem is that crèches are not on-site crèches, they are not provided by the big companies, time is not given for mothers to breastfeed, smokers can go out and have their ten minute cigarette but you can't go down and have your ten minute feed with your kid.

Sarah: No, no we have been told, okay we want to join the workforce again, be unnatural, be like the guys, don't have time to be a mother. ... They squeeze the kids out.

Bridget: If you want this job you have to work until 9pm at night.

The structural conditions of employment now enter the discussion. Sarah had recently had first hand experience of a company refusing to take a flexible approach to their employment policy. She had successfully applied for a job with a Wellington Law firm, but eventually had to turn the job down because the company was unwilling to let her take time out from her day to spend with Flora and then continue her work in the evenings. She is torn between her feminist belief that women should be able to combine work and motherhood and her personal belief, constructed out of the Good Mother discourse, that her child needs her time and attention:

Sarah: I mean I feel so reactionary but I feel like, because I feel that if women want to work, that's cool, you know, if that's what they want to do. But I feel so reactionary in that I am not only thinking poor kids, I am thinking poor woman, you know, because of all that, I know that I am torn. I mean I have just had to turn down a job in Wellington because there was no way that I was going to do that and it would have meant 8.30am to 5.30pm and it would have meant my income would have gone up but I would have been miserable. And Flora would have been miserable and that would have been horrible and we would have had a lot more money.

Sarah tried to negotiate flexible hours with the firm so she could have the time with Flora that she believed was so important, but was unable to successfully do so:

Sarah: But they just couldn't see past me not being on-site. It's just, they don't have the ability to see that flexibility can work for them, and work for us.

Hannah: And they can get the best person. You see, us women have to work like that if we are going to get through our degrees. We have to work when our children sleep.

Sarah: That's right.

Hannah: That's right, it's reality.

Bridget: I actually work harder now that I have had children and I am getting better results.

Sarah: Same. You focus, you focus.

Hannah: And they know the studies, they have seen the studies, the women achieve better, women are better workers. They know all of this.

They are employing more women but they still want to treat them like rats rather than people with families and relationships.

Despite their willingness to work flexible hours and their experience in successfully doing so during their university studies, the women feel that there are few opportunities to combine motherhood and working life in an employment environment where families and relationships are not valued:

Bridget: There is this whole as well, that if you take time off with your children, when they are young, that you will be out of touch when you got back into the workforce and you will not get a job unless you get re-trained first. And there is this huge thing, if I don't go back now, when I go back will there be a position for me?

Jane: Yeah and things like long service for people and you get...

Sarah: Well that's all based on the male standards anyway.

Jane: Quite often based on how long you have been in continuous service in a place. And promotion...

Sarah: But that's all, that's all male standards, having no recognition of women, women's patterns of employment, that's a male pattern of employment. It's rewarding a male pattern of employment not a female one.

Hannah: I still don't understand why we're not making more noise as women. We don't even get paid the same.

Bridget: It's because it's the '90s, it's the feminist revolution is over, in the '90s women are equal. ... People have actually been saying that on the radio.

Sarah: But that's not true.

Bridget: I know it's not but...

Sarah: It's just propaganda.

The group recognises that for mothers to participate in the public realm they must either accept inferior working conditions to men or take on full time continuous employment, making it very difficult to spend the time with their children that they have identified as necessary to be a good mother. They perceive the opportunities to advance their careers to be limited by their roles as mothers. They have been able to juggle their study and motherhood by studying when their children are asleep, but it seems it will be much more difficult to achieve this flexibility once they join the workforce. Women's so-called equality does not apply to mothers wanting time for their families as well as their work and Sarah clearly rejects the notion that women have reached a point of equality with men (references to part time work, disadvantages, numbers of women working part/full time etc.). Mothers are once again regulated by a culture that devalues their work in the home while expecting paid employees to accept a 'one size fits all' approach to paid employment. Such an approach disempowers women who aspire to combine a career with the discursive practices of the Good Mother:

Bridget: I keep thinking it's such a powerless position, and I think there is that sort of fear if you stick your neck out, you know, what's going to happen?

Sarah: Yeah. And I mean when I wrote this letter I could have got angry in this letter and wrote I am really disappointed that you weren't able to be flexible, I could have put all that but I didn't.

Hannah: Why not?

Sarah: I don't know. I was tentative, I wanted to leave the door open, I wanted to say I was really disappointed because I, my parental commitments, I feel unable to take on the hours offered, um, I hope that in the future, I really want to work for you, I hope that in the future ... we can reconsider the situation. I didn't go over that edge because I need that job possibly in the future.

Hannah: I understand that.

Sarah: And that's why the noise isn't being made and I should have made the noise. But when there are ten people behind me waiting to take that position...

A competitive job market makes it difficult for women to challenge the structural conditions that constrain and regulate their attempts to juggle motherhood and paid employment. It also makes direct resistance difficult as making too much "noise" might jeopardise their future job prospects. Again this is a source of considerable conflict between these women's desires to be good

mothers and their career aspirations, a conflict that appears to them to be irreconcilable in today's economic climate:

Hannah: I don't want to be equal, I don't want to live a man's life.

Sarah: I know, but I want to be paid for the same amount of work I do as a bloke.

Bridget: Oh definitely.

Sarah: I want fairness. I want equity out there. I don't want to be treated differently because I am a female doing the same job.

Hannah: I think it's sad that men have been dislocated from their children for years. I don't think it's, I think it's a complete system, it's a system that was instigated by men in control. I think that men and women and their children and relationships have suffered as a result. I just don't think it's a women's issue, but I think that women going into the workforce are the ones that have the opportunity to make the noise about it.

Bridget: And we don't?

Sarah: Yeah.

Hannah: See, but you've just got to remember that we're living in a very austere world controlled by the dollar. Very much so at this time.

Sarah: It takes too much more resources to deal with a woman with a child.

Bridget: Yeah, it's all about cutting costs. Well this is all unrealistic and unnatural.

Sarah: It's got to end one day.

The contradictions between the 'natural' world of the mother caring for her child and the 'unnatural' world of paid employment and childcare are, for these women, a source of considerable anxiety, frustration and a sense of powerlessness. They recognise the gendered inequalities of the workforce and reject the male patterns of employment that mean that men spend long hours away from their families. At the same time they feel powerless, in the face of the power of economic might, to effectively offer direct resistance to the structural conditions of employment. Because they value family relationships highly these women are likely to choose these over opportunities for financial gain or career advancement, a choice Sarah had already felt impelled to make. In 2002 Penny was the only member of the group who had not completed her university studies, but neither Bridget, Hannah or Sarah were working full time because of their commitment to their children. The fact that they positioned themselves against mothers who worked long hours to retain their discursive place as Good Mothers increases the likelihood of their remaining in the relatively low paid part time workforce while their children are young. They were, however, acutely aware of the gendered nature of this

economic 'choice'. British research, cited in the *Panorama* documentary, suggested that children whose mothers worked long hours were likely to be less emotionally secure and more likely to have problems with school work. Sarah and Bridget responded to this research, noting that there was no reference to the effects that working fathers might have on their children's development:

Sarah: (In response to the video) What matters *most* is mother's working.

Bridget: What about fathers?

Sarah: It's incredible eh? It's blaming mothers, blaming women, for things that, it's just saying women, I mean basically it's just saying no woman should work, they should be in the home, otherwise the whole of society is going to go to the pack.

The difficulty of reconciling contradictions between the discursive regimes of the Good Mother and the workplace are felt strongly by many women and yet this is seldom regarded as an issue for men. Many of the studies cited in the previous chapter describe men's feelings of guilt when they contributed less than their wives or partners to housework and childrearing, but they did not express conflict over the need to choose between paid employment and raising children. The quotes at the beginning of this section illustrate that we live in a climate of economic necessity, where raising children requires large amounts of financial as well as time and emotional resources (Hays, 1996; Nasedan, 2002) For this reason many mothers feel they have no choice but to contribute financially to their families and dual income households have become the norm in many Western countries (references). Yet Sarah identifies the blame that is still attached primarily to mothers when children are portrayed as missing out on time and attention from a parent. Bridget and Sarah believe the popular media, particularly television, reproduce these dominant discourses of motherhood or simply ignore the conflicts that arise from juggling dual roles:

Bridget: There's that whole thing of, if the mother has a job and a child then she's a bad mum, but the dad it's just taken for granted. And if he's just with it (the baby) then that's enough to show that he's a good father.

Sarah: Yeah, 'cause like women are judged. You're a good mother or a bad mother, and they're portrayed that way, that's how it's set up. Whereas the fathers aren't necessarily set up like that at all.

Bridget: I think that mothers are, whereas fathers are so perfect. There's no portrayal of fathers like that. Or fathers having to make the choice between

job and child. Or fathers having to say, 'sorry I'm late for this Board meeting, my kid puked up'.

Sarah: Like Murphy doesn't ever say something like that. You know, 'sorry, sorry'...

Bridget: 'I've got this white blotch on my shoulder' (laughter).

Sarah: It would be great if she went on TV going, 'sorry, you know, whosiwatsit just puked on me, I hope you understand' (laughter).

Sarah: They're always rich, they've always got the ability to like have a nanny, or...

Bridget: They've always got a good job.

Sarah: Yes, or else they're a bad mother, and like, have you seen *Chicago Hope*? She's a top, top surgeon and there's been this whole custody battle over her seven-year-old child. She's absolutely torn up about it. And they've given her to her, she's been with the mother for all these years, since the separation of mother and father. But because he's given up his job, they've decided it would suddenly be better for her to be with him. And she wasn't prepared to give up her job, to um, you know I think if I was in that situation I would have ditched the job and got the child. But they still portrayed it in this way that she had to choose between her career and her daughter rather than doing something in between which is what the majority of us do, is juggle.

The invisibility in the media of working mothers juggling their dual roles precludes the reality of many women's lives according to Sarah and Bridget. By presenting paid employment for mothers as a choice rather than a necessity these media images polarise women into the good/bad mother categories while excluding fathers from such regulation. Even the radical image of *Murphy Brown* as a successful career woman and single mother fails to represent 'real' women's lives by ignoring the physical reminders of motherhood such as baby vomit or even the baby itself:

Sarah: But *Murphy Brown* drives me crazy. She's had this child, which she thought was all very beautiful in the first scene the week she had him. But we never see him and we never see her interacting with him.

Bridget: You often see the babies portrayed, like babies that come about once every four episodes. And the mother goes, 'ooh' to the baby, picks it up, cuddles it and then gives it to the nurse maid, nanny and it's walked out of the room, or it's put to bed, or it's, you know...

According to these women the media portrays paid work and motherhood as either a simple choice between selfishness and true maternal nurturance or an unproblematic exercise in managing career and hired domestic help. While programmes such as *Murphy Brown* do much to resist the notion of the Good

Mother as married and financially supported by her husband, the absence of Murphy's baby or even any sign of it in many episodes, does little to portray the realities of motherhood or challenge conditions of employment that fail to account for family needs. In the face of such polarised images and media silences, the women in this study were able to negotiate how they juggled their dual roles by positioning themselves as good mothers, both in relation to the amount of time other mothers spent away from their children and by privileging spontaneous child-centred activities over regulated periods of 'quality time' defined by adults and constrained by their working commitments. At the same time, however, they felt unable to effectively resist the workplace culture that ignores family interests and limits the career possibilities of mothers such as themselves who are compelled through discursive regimes to prioritise time with their children over using childcare facilities and pursuing full time work outside the home.

In these discussions Bridget, Sarah and Hannah employed the notion of free choice to frame women's decisions about the amount of time they spend away from their children. The notion that mothers choose between careers and their children leaves mothers who are, through economic necessity, unable to avoid working long hours, ostensibly relegated to the category of bad mother. The discussions also failed to account for those single mothers who choose to remain at home with their children, forced to rely on Welfare benefits and thus stigmatised as economically unproductive and dependent. While Sarah and Hannah have both received state support for their families as single mothers, they were both pursuing university study as a means to gaining at least part time employment in the professional realm. The fact that Penny, who was present during most of these interviews, remained largely silent during discussions of work related topics, illustrates a lack of space given by the other women to her decision not to attempt to juggle career and motherhood, but instead pursue university study as a means of stimulating her thinking while remaining primarily an at-home-mother receiving a state benefit. The doctrine of individual free choice can, in such discussions, mask the structural inequalities that exist between different groups of women, privileging the

experiences of well educated middle-class Pakeha women and excluding other mothers from the discursive construction of the Good Mother.

### External Scrutiny – Medical and Welfare Regulation of Motherhood

In Pakeha New Zealand society, the family is constructed as private and separate from the state. However, particular social groups have come under increasing scrutiny and state regulation in recent decades (Baker, 1997). A story Sarah told of Flora jumping off a coffee table and breaking her leg illustrates the way some power, such as that invested in medical institutions, is directed at particular social groups such as single mothers. The medical scrutiny faced by Sarah when she arrived at the hospital with Flora was initially concerned with the possible danger she represented to her young child:

Bridget: I remember you said when you first came in they were asking questions about the coffee table and how you could have been talking on the phone and still supervising her.

Sarah: Yeah, well 'cause I went to answer the phone.

Bridget: I mean that's not supervision, you naughty solo mum (laughter).

Sarah: See I'd never even think anything like that, until I got into the doctor's and could see the looks on their faces ... they were really grilling me.

The danger that Sarah represented was quickly alleviated, however, as the doctors discovered more about her family background:

Sarah: ...the doctors were really questioning me, but as soon as I sounded white, middle-class, I was at university, you could see them click in their faces, it was so interesting.

Penny: Spooky eh, don't you love it?

Sarah: It was spooky, spooky, scary, scary and it was the emergency room and they were asking me these questions and I had my father and he had his business suit on, 'cause he was the only person I could contact at the time. So I had my white, middle-class rich father with me and I was, it came out that I was at university and there was this kind of sigh of relief.

While the young single-mother Sarah was a possible danger to her child, Sarah the middle-class university student accompanied by her wealthy suit-clad father was regarded as beyond suspicion by the medical authorities. The doctor she spoke to even went so far as to advise her that he would prescribe Flora a higher than usual dose of the painkiller *Panadol*, because unlike many

other mothers he saw, Sarah would be able to responsibly monitor the extra dosage. Sarah's identity had shifted, in a short space of time, from that of possible threat to her child, to more capable than the average mother. The women in this group, however, know that child abuse and neglect crosses class and educational barriers and resisted the notion that particular groups of mothers should be subjected to intense medical scrutiny while others are not:

Bridget: But don't you think that there are kids out there who are getting hurt and all that?

Sarah: Yeah, you can understand.

Hannah: Yeah but middle-class people also abuse children.

Sarah: That's right, that's what I mean. They switched off with that. They switched off with that, because of my class, whatever. And I could have been...

Hannah: That's right and they think the stupider you are, the more likely you are to abuse your children.

Penny: It's very, very dangerous, this whole thing.

Hannah: It is, it's incredibly dangerous.

Penny and Hannah, while agreeing that some children might be in danger of abuse, believe that it is "dangerous" to subject some social groups to external scrutiny that is not warranted, based on the erroneous notion that poor or uneducated parents pose more of a threat to their children than other, more privileged parents. Other conversations among the group revealed that such scrutiny is not always limited to institutional agents or to disadvantaged social groups, however. Sarah commented that people looked at her "differently" when she took Flora out in public with a plaster cast on her leg. Bridget told a story about her son Andrew burning his hand on an element in the kitchen and her fear that people would suspect her of inflicting this injury on him and I described how my mother had been carefully questioned when myself and my two siblings all had accidents that required medical attention during one 24 hour period during my childhood. The group agreed that the current climate of public concern over child abuse, fuelled by media discussions and enacted through government policies and practices, meant that all mothers were subject to scrutiny when their children were injured. They felt, however, that some mothers, such as single or poor mothers, were directly targeted by public institutions such as medical authorities and child welfare departments. The fear that parents might harm their children, either through abuse or

neglect, invites scrutiny and regulation while, according to these women, childhood injuries are a normal part of growing and learning:

Bridget: Andrew is, Andrew is covered in bruises.

Hannah: Stubbed toes and little scratches. 'Cause Sam goes and plays with the cat and the cat gets hacked off with it. I mean how do you teach them?

Bridget: It's the only way they learn.

Sarah: That's right. I mean Flora has never jumped off a coffee table again (laughter).

This was one of many conversations the group had about the regulatory power of institutions. Hannah, Sarah and Penny recounted numerous incidents of welfare regulation that, as single mothers, limited their financial resources and the choices they made about how to spend the money they received through state benefits. It was in the discussions about institutional power that these women clearly distinguished between the regulatory power that they encountered in other parts of their lives and the sovereign power that resides in these institutions. By sovereign power I mean that these institutions were able to exert absolute control over certain aspects of some mother's lives. For example, in 1997 when these interviews took place, single mothers in New Zealand were able to obtain vouchers for food when other expenses used up the benefit money that they would otherwise spend on groceries. However these vouchers were only redeemable at certain supermarkets and for certain products. Women were not able to choose, for example, to shop at a store that stocks organic fruit and vegetables if it was not one of the government sanctioned supermarkets. They were not allowed to buy cigarettes, alcohol or 'fizzy' drinks with the vouchers and the people running supermarket checkouts were able to refuse to sell these items to women with welfare vouchers. Similarly, medical costs covered by welfare benefits did not include purchasing homeopathic or herbal medicines, or visiting alternative therapists. If a single mother needed a major appliance such as a washing machine, she was able to borrow money against her benefit to purchase a second-hand machine, but not a new one.

There were many, many conversations about these regulations during the interviews. From Penny's need to buy a new washing machine, but her

inability to procure credit because she was a single mother; to Sarah's ongoing negotiations with her bank to get credit to buy a computer that would enable her to work and study from home; to Hannah's experiences of being unable to receive welfare assistance when her husband had voluntarily resigned from his job; to Bridget's having to support her entire family on her student allowance when her husband's immigration status was under review; these women had all experienced financial hardship at the hands of government regulations and inflexible company policies that they believed discriminated against mothers and families. As single mothers, finances were, throughout the study, a major source of stress for Penny and Sarah:

Penny: Well that's the toughest part of being a single parent of course, is the money side. It's crazy too because it is the most valuable job really, well especially when they are little. There is that energy to put into it, you are all stressed out about money...

Sarah: Yeah, and that just getting to the end of the week thing...

Hannah: Yes, yes, I remember that.

At the time of the interviews it appeared that this situation was about to deteriorate even further. Single mothers had been particularly hard hit by the 1991 benefit cuts in New Zealand (Larose, 1999). In 1997 the then National government was beginning to put forward plans for their so-called Code of Social Responsibility that they said was aimed at clarifying the relationship between the state and its citizens (Davey, 2002). This code was particularly concerned with welfare beneficiaries and contained a number of measures designed to regulate the behaviour of parents who received state support. These included distributing vouchers for food and housing, as well as financially penalising parents who did not meet their criteria for adequate parenting. In 1998 the Minister of Social Policy, Roger Sowry, officially announced the Code and distributed over one million booklets containing the details of these measures to households and box-holders throughout the country. An intense public debate ensued, with the government receiving 94,303 written responses. There was overwhelming criticism of the Code and it was dropped later that year (ibid). As Smith and Taylor (2000) argued, "(p)ractical support for families, rather than a statement of what society expects of them, is likely to be more productive. The Code side-stepped the issue of the state's responsibility to not expose children and families to

stressors such as poverty, a growing gap between rich and poor, unemployment, market rentals for public housing, increased user charges for health and education (but poorer access to these services), and a struggling child care and protection system” (6). The women in this group were extremely critical of the notion of penalising single mothers financially if they did not meet the government’s criteria for adequate parenting:

Sarah: The government is telling us several messages here. It’s telling us it doesn’t want to look after us any more and yet it’s pulling the reins in on beneficiaries and saying, ‘well this is how you shall live’. Why aren’t we stomping up and down and saying, ‘why the hell are we paying so much tax since you’re taking so much away from us? And get out of our lives please, you want us out, you don’t want to be in our lives, go away’.

Hannah: But then they’ll justify it with, ‘but that’s tax payers money, we have a right to restrict you’.

Penny: Yeah, but they get more taxpayer’s money than everyone else does. They’re hypocrites. You know, no wonder we’ve got bad parents in this country. They’re not very good leaders. They don’t set us a very good example.

Bridget: Well if you look at it this way, they’re actually on benefits themselves. Because tax payer’s money is paying their thing, so the only reason they get money is because we pay them, so why aren’t we giving them all grocery vouchers and housing allowances?

This clear rejection of the government’s contradictory non-interventionist policies in the private sector and increased intervention in the lives of beneficiaries exposes the most overt workings of regulatory power in mother’s lives. The fact that only certain mothers – those who themselves or whose partners are unemployed or unable to work, and single mothers – were to be subject to such intense scrutiny, was untenable for these women and many other New Zealanders, hence the government’s decision to abandon the Code. As a means of exposing what they believed was the inequity of measures like the Code of Social Responsibility, the group provided examples of a number of middle-class parents they knew who they believed were less adequate parents than themselves. In doing so it became clear that it was not the regulation of mothering practices per se that they were opposed to, but the singling out of sole mothers as the recipients of such scrutiny:

Sarah: It seems like such a hard thing to enforce, that instead of giving people money, giving them food vouchers to make sure they spend it at certain grocery stores on certain things and they won’t be allowed to buy cigarettes or fizzy drink or, cigarettes is the big one they seem to think. And

um, you know, where does the line stop, they won't be allowed to buy fizzy drink or chocolate biscuits either? Poor people aren't deserving of those, that's not proper parenting, you know?

Bridget: To tell you the truth, it's really frightening to me 'cause I was saying, I mean I know people who are, I don't mean chocolate biscuits or that sort of thing, but I do think there are certain people out there who are really damaging their kids.

Sarah: But they're not necessarily on benefits and that's the thing, I know people who are very rich who I baby-sit for, that have got two incomes and they feed their children shit. And they eat these lovely meals and they feed their children 2-minute noodles all the time and give them a banana and think that's healthy. And the issue for me is that the government can't control it on that level, then Social Welfare should be stepping in, in a care kind of situation.

The proposed Code of Social Responsibility evoked some intense discussion about the kinds of food that people fed their children and the need for some form of governmental control on processed foods, what Sarah called the "toxic waste" that came in pre-prepared, packaged meals. In particular, Sarah and Bridget positioned themselves as Good mothers through preparing fresh food daily and buying organically grown fruit and vegetables, in opposition to other much more financially advantaged mothers who fed their children processed foods. This was a highly contradictory positioning, considering their strongly worded rejection of government attempts to regulate what single mothers purchased in their grocery shopping. While it appeared that Sarah and Bridget were overtly critical of mothers who deviated from their standards of providing high quality food for their children, Bridget did acknowledge her privileged status in being able to do so:

Bridget: And I actually think we're very lucky because we're intelligent, educated, so we do know organic vegetables, we do know about nutrition, we do know about how to manage our money, we do know how to do basic math. There are an awful lot of mothers out there who do not know how to deal with money and all that.

Penny added that the Department of Social Welfare in New Zealand provided no budgeting advice for beneficiaries, many of whom had experienced a sudden change in circumstances, such as a marriage break-up, requiring them to seek state financial support. While Hannah and Penny were not so passionate in their criticism of other mothers feeding their children processed foods, they were critical of young women who did not know how to cook

nutritious food or knit or sew their own clothes. They positioned themselves as Good Mothers in their knowledge of traditional homemaking skills that they had been taught by their own mothers. Hannah was concerned that these crafts were no longer being handed down to future generations. She argued that the collapse of the textile industry in New Zealand and the introduction of cheap imported clothes meant that it was often cheaper to buy than to make clothes. She saw this as contributing to a dependence on government welfare and a loss of independence for many young women:

Hannah: In some ways you're a lot more independent if you have these skills. But what worries me more than anything else is that we're being so conditioned into having everything done for us that we can, no one will do anything for themselves.

The group saw this not merely as a loss of traditional feminine skills, but also as a sign of government sponsored, corporate control of people's lives. They likened the collapse of the textile industry to the government regulation of single mothers, in particular the control of how they are allowed to spend money on food and healthcare, because they believed that in all of these areas the state was actively promoting the interests of corporate finances and big business at the expense of poor New Zealanders:

Hannah: You know I really do think our society, they're trying to control us. And they're trying to keep us down. And poor.

Sarah: Because pharmaceutical companies, they get lots of money from pharmaceutical companies as well don't they.

Hannah: Well the cancer society's busy telling us we're going to be a society riddled with cancer because of bad food.

Sarah: Mind you they tell us it's good food as well, but then they don't go, the cancer society doesn't go the whole hog. They don't go to the organic extreme do they? I think they should.

Bridget: But where are they getting their money from? Drug companies. Our whole country is riddled with sponsorship. ... It's all come down to the Business Round Table rule how we do everything.

The Business Round Table is a group of conservative business leaders who have been extremely important in influencing government policy in New Zealand since the introduction of neo-liberal economic measures in the mid-1980s. The connections made by the women in this study between the collusion of government and business interests and the policing of beneficiaries, particularly single mother's, behaviour, provided the justification

for practices aimed at avoiding or averting the regulatory power of the state. The coercive nature of welfare policies invited resistance, usually in the form of finding ways to negotiate the regulations that penalized them financially. For example, Sarah was able to find a doctor who supported her application for a disability allowance for her daughter to cover the cost of the homeopathic remedies that she favoured over conventional medicines. Penny, Bridget and Sarah all found ways to earn extra money and avoid paying taxes by minding other women's children in their homes. This resistance was accompanied by a degree of anxiety over being found out, however, and successive governments in New Zealand have encouraged people to inform on beneficiaries that were known to be cheating the system, appealing to the notion that the money they gained was tax payers money and therefore benefit fraud was tantamount to stealing from law-abiding, tax paying citizens. Such appeals furthered the divisions that policies like the Code of Social Responsibility reinforced between the economically 'productive' and so-called 'dependent' social groups (Davey, 2002).

At times the state regulation of beneficiaries lives required a more direct form of resistance than avoidance or 'bending' the rules. Hannah recounted a story about a time when her family was unable to receive any state support because her husband had voluntarily resigned from his job. At the time Hannah had been receiving her share of a joint unemployment benefit, but this was immediately stopped when her husband's actions came to the notice of the Department of Social Welfare. This situation evoked overt resistance from Hannah to the particularly gendered nature of state welfare policy that penalised a woman for her partner's behaviour:

Hannah: There was a time there actually, when was it, during the 1990s, I was going to have myself declared an individual because married women are often treated quite shabbily. They sort of lump you in as your, as the Adam's rib, you know what I mean?

Penny: Yeah, absolutely (laughter).

Hannah: And um, I went to the lawyer and he said, 'oh well, there's not much we can do about it, no one's done it yet' (laughter).

Jane: Wow!

Sarah: Put that at the top of the agenda for the Law Commission. (Lots of group laughter).

Hannah: I went, 'oh I've been a married woman but I didn't like being treated like this appendage of my husband's. It was all to do with the Social Welfare Department actually, and getting the dole. You see we get separate payments of doles. We were so-called individuals, but what happened was the Matt took on a job for this rather unusual character who had a landscaping business that was for sale, and so we thought oh well, we'll look at it, so he paid him wages. Anyway, Matt and I said no, this is a bad business. He has got no good will, he's just junk. So we pulled out and the next thing this guy does is rings up Social Welfare Department and says Matt refuses to work.

Sarah: Oh no!

Hannah: Of course they just cut off the dole. No phone call, no letter...

Bridget: Oooh!

Hannah: And it was Annie's School C year, so I fumed along, very fired up and sort of said, 'well you know, in doing this you have not only made my husband suffer, but also my child who is in her School C year, she can do without this, and myself, I didn't do this'. And so they suggested that I should ring, ah, write to the MP at the time. But they gave us the money after I went and saw the manager. But it took some time and ...

Sarah: And energy.

Hannah: Yeah. But see what I mean, the system doesn't recognise us as individuals?

Bridget: No.

Hannah: And it's not fair.

This story generated discussion of other times that various members of the group had experienced what they perceived as discrimination at the hands of state policies that refused to allow women financial support if their husband's were earning. For example, women like Bridget, Hannah and myself were not able to claim student allowances because of our husbands' income, requiring us to juggle paid employment with our studies on top of our childcare responsibilities and the cost of finding alternative care for our children when we did have to work. In a society where most families require two incomes to live comfortably, such policies penalise women by forcing them to accept low paid, part-time employment (Gornick and Meyers, 2001), or in the case of the women in this study, illegal 'under the table' work in their homes.

### Conclusion

Research that has focused on women's employment has shown that women, and especially mothers, are over-represented in the lowest paid, least secure jobs (Larose, 1999; Gornick and Meyers, 2001; Walter, 2002; Baker and Tippin, 2002; Dixon, 2000) and that single mothers in particular earn

considerably less than partnered mothers, partly due to the lack of support they receive in arranging alternative childcare (Larose, 1999; Walter, 2002; Baker and Tippin, 2002). In New Zealand, the 1996 census data showed that, of those earning less than \$10,000 per annum, 62.3% were women, while of those earning above \$40,000, only 22.9% were women (Lips, 1999). A lack of qualifications and work skills was one reason cited for the discrepancy between women and men's wages, yet policies that do not allow partnered women the chance to receive training or study allowances make it extremely difficult for many mothers to upgrade their skills and qualifications.

It is simplistic, however, to claim that economic policy alone reproduces the economic disadvantages that mothers in New Zealand face. Research conducted in Britain in 1998 and 1999 entitled *Listening to Women*, found that on the whole mothers would prefer to take a job that had flexible working hours and fitted in with their childcare responsibilities, even if it was not particularly interesting or well-paid (Hakim, 2003). In the absence of financial need, only 5% of the mothers interviewed said they would work full-time, with three-quarters preferring part-time employment. Interestingly only one-quarter of the mothers interviewed thought that employers should offer special arrangements such as flexible working hours and working from home options for women with children, indicating that there is still a strong belief among women that they are primarily responsible for the care of their children and that it is up to them to find solutions to childcare problems. This was not reiterated by the women in my study, however, who were highly critical of employers who were not prepared to offer flexibility to working mothers.

The belief that mothers of young children should not work full time and that childcare responsibilities remain a matter of private concern, embedded in notions of maternal bonding and the discourse of the Good Mother, perpetuate gender inequalities in the workforce. As Gornick and Meyers (2001) write:

Many parents in the industrialized countries find themselves navigating uncertain new terrain between a society that expects women to bear the primary responsibility for caring in the home and a society that expects, and increasingly requires, all adults to be at work in the market. Mothers and fathers are struggling to craft private solutions to this problem. But

rather than resolving the question of who will care for children when everyone is on the job, these private solutions often exacerbate gender inequality, overburden the parents, and ultimately lead to poor-quality child care (3).

They point out that not only are women likely to be lower paid and have worse working conditions than men, but that other women are often employed on very low wages to care for working mothers' children. The impact of part-time employment, interrupted careers and intermittent employment that many women experience often persist long after their children have grown, contributing to lifelong economic disadvantage. For single mothers, access to well-paid jobs is even more restricted, and as Maggie Walter (2002) points out, paid employment is not a guarantee of material well being for sole mother families. Low wages, combined with the cost of childcare and the need for much higher levels of income from sole mothers than partnered mothers with earning spouses, means that working single mothers are often worse off financially than those on benefits. Walter believes that the financial benefits of having a partner "far outweigh the economic value of labour force participation" for mothers (365). She concludes that "the highly disadvantaged position of sole mother families is related fundamentally to the soleness of their parenting, rather than personal characteristics such as lower educational levels, or, indeed, labour market participation" (366).

In another study conducted with single mothers in New Zealand, Maureen Baker and David Tippin (2002) found that it was a combination of a lack of skills and resources and "strongly held moral codes about good mothering" that prevented many single mothers from finding employment (347). Like the women in this study, many of the 120 mothers they interviewed believed that their primary role was to care for their children and that employment, while necessary for economic reasons, should not take too much time away from this role. This belief, of course, conflicts with government policies that view single mothers as dependent and unproductive. The women in Baker and Tippin's study, like those in this research group, were also aware that single mothers are subject to particular scrutiny and are vulnerable to accusations of child neglect. Thus the need to position themselves as caring and attentive

mothers becomes of primary importance for this group, even when they are aware that privileging their children's needs may disadvantage them in the job market.

While all of this points to the gendered inequalities inherent in Western economic and welfare policies, studies that focus on the financial difficulties that single mothers face inadvertently reinforce the problematic nature of sole motherhood and thus privilege the nuclear family as the most suitable environment for raising children (Guerrina, 2001). While it is true that financial difficulties can dominate the lives of poor mothers, the women in this study are highly critical of mothers who privilege material well-being over caring for their children and families. They also express pity for men who have had to spend long hours away from their families in paid employment and have thus missed out on enjoying time with their children. The discourse of the Good Mother produces visible tensions for women who try to juggle study, paid work and employment and in doing so must negotiate the contradictions between mothering and market identities and practices. As the work to position themselves as Good Mothers, these women find ways to shift the discursive constructions of motherhood to allow them time away from family responsibilities, yet still express anxiety and guilt around leaving their children in childcare for more than short periods of time. It will require the active deconstruction of notions of childhood that focus on vulnerability and the primacy of the mother-child relationship for childcare to become a less contested arena in Western societies like New Zealand, and changes in both welfare policies and employment practices before mothers are able to work in paid employment without facing considerable disadvantage, both in wages and working conditions. While there are some signs that workplaces in New Zealand are becoming more flexible, there is little evidence that mothers are benefiting from these changes and yet the rising numbers of working mothers indicates that this is an issue that will continue to generate public debate over the meanings of motherhood in New Zealand society in coming years.

## Chapter Eight

### Princess Diana - Fairytales, Feminism and Media Motherhood

#### Introduction

We could identify with her struggles because we are all struggling with questions of how to live as a modern woman, how to behave as a lover, a partner, a mother, a member of a community or a disapproving family (Roseanne Kennedy, 1997; 49).

She was winning, you know, she was coming out on top and the bastards were trying to put her down (Bridget, September 1997).

The sudden death of Princess Diana in a car crash in August 1997 evoked an unprecedented outpouring of shock and grief in Britain, New Zealand and elsewhere in the Western world. During the days following her death, extraordinary scenes of public mourning were transmitted via television into the homes of millions of ordinary people. These people, many of whom had, through their avid consumption of images of Diana in women's magazines, tabloid newspapers and on television, participated eagerly in the Diana phenomenon, were now being asked to question the role of the media in her death.

Especially vehement was the condemnation in the mainstream press of the paparazzi, the journalists who, it appeared, would stop at nothing to feed an insatiable public appetite with the images they so desired. Among the mainstream media and the public at large, a sense of unease remained as questions were raised regarding the part they may have played in perpetuating the intense scrutiny that surrounded every aspect of Princess Diana's life. Questions too were asked about the role she herself had played in actively encouraging or 'manipulating' the media interest that at other times she claimed to despise.

That the corporate media were able to cash in on the public fascination with Diana is undeniable. That people had continued to consume images of her despite increasing publicity over the dubious means by which these images were obtained is equally apparent. That Diana was acutely aware of her

popularity and at times actively employed it, through the use of the media, to further her own personal interests is also obvious. What these public debates tended to obscure, however, were the more compelling factors behind the huge public interest in Diana's life. What was it that made so many people, predominantly female consumers of tabloid newspapers, television and women's magazines, so fascinated with Diana? What aspects of her life and the ways it was produced as popular culture were able to engage so many women over many years?

These were some of the questions raised by Diana's death that immediately interested me as I began to follow the intense media coverage that ensued. I was also certain that the four women I had been interviewing for over six months at the time of her death would have plenty to say about this event. I use the word event similarly to John Fiske (1994), who invokes a river metaphor to describe media events as "sites of maximum visibility and maximum turbulence" where the "discursive currents and counter currents swirling around these sites are accessible material for the analyst to work upon" (7). The rest of the time, according to Fiske, much of the ongoing discursive struggle in a culture remains beneath the surface, inaccessible to the cultural critic. This river of discourses includes powerful dominant currents as well as receding and emerging ones, involved in an ongoing struggle to "dominate the cultural flow" (ibid). According to Fiske, a media event is also political, as it,

...invites intervention and motivates people to struggle to redirect at least some of the currents flowing through it to serve their interests; it is therefore a site of popular engagement and involvement, not just a scenic view to be photographed and left behind. Its period of maximum visibility is limited, often to a few days, though the discursive struggles it occasions will typically continue for much longer (8).

The intervention and struggle Fiske alludes to can be seen in the occupation of public spaces by Diana's mourners in the days following the car accident and the popular condemnation of the lack of public demonstration of grief expressed by the British Royal Family after her death. These public interventions required action from the royal institution and resulted in the unprecedented flying of the flag at half mast at Buckingham Palace and the lengthening of the funeral route to enable more people to participate.

Implicit in Fiske's argument is that the cultural anxieties about women's changing roles and the struggles for meaning over representations of 'woman' that Diana embodied will not disappear in the same way that the thousands of floral tributes left outside the London palaces did after a few days in the sun; that these anxieties and struggles are deeply emblematic of Western culture at the start of the new millenium and will continue to surface, although perhaps never quite so dramatically and visibly as in the days after her death. Campbell (1998) claims that the mainstream media and politicians in Britain failed to engage with the issues of sexual politics that were at the heart of Diana's popularity and that will continue to spark interest in her for years to come. Indeed there have been frequent flurries of media activity around aspects of Diana's life and death since 1997, the most recent suggesting that Diana herself wrote a letter describing how a palace official was arranging for her to be killed in an assassination designed to look like a car accident. It is the dramatic and hugely visible nature of the media event that was Diana's death, as well as the ongoing interest in her since, that makes her an important figure for those interested in the study of popular cultural forms and people's engagements with such forms. In particular the interest in Diana highlights many of the same issues that have been discussed throughout this thesis; those relating to motherhood, intimate relationships, families and women's changing roles in society. As Ruth Barcan (1997) states: "Even before her death, Diana was a cultural sign of extraordinary richness to a feminist cultural studies interested in the complexities of women's engagements and identifications" (37).

### Researching Diana

Involved as I was in research with women about their lives as mothers, I was interested in how the four women I was interviewing would respond to this media event, what shape their own engagements and identifications would take. What I found was that Diana's death enabled me to explore the discursive constructions of motherhood, family and intimate relationships that the group applied to her life and compare them with the way they talked about their own experiences. It thus enabled me to re-examine my earlier contention

that interviewing women about media texts alone was not an adequate means of understanding how media consumption relates to experiences of everyday life. Occurring approximately two-thirds of the way through the research process, the interview held two days after Diana's funeral stands out as fundamentally different from any other. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the topic of conversation remained the same throughout the interview, with few deviations from direct discussions of Diana's life and death. During other interviews the discussion would cover a number of different topics, often shifting from one to another and back again regularly. Secondly, all four women expressed very similar opinions and tended to agree with each other throughout this interview, whereas in others they would have different opinions and often argue a point to assert their perspective. When I attempted to play 'devil's advocate' and introduce alternative interpretations of events during the Diana interview, I was quickly silenced as the group continued to sympathise, empathise and largely reify Diana's life as they expressed their understandings of it.

As the following discussion will show, there was considerable contrast between this interview and the group's careful positioning of self and the surveillance and regulation of others that occurred in all of the other interviews. What was particularly conspicuous about the group's discussions of Diana was their lack of criticism and their attempts to understand why Diana might have behaved in ways that would have evoked strongly worded criticism, even condemnation if a 'regular' mother that they knew or even another celebrity that they had read or heard about had acted in a similar way. Something in the combination of the emotion of Diana's death and the identifications each of these four women made with her life, enabled them to accept her putting her own needs as a woman ahead of her children in a way that was much more problematic for them during other discussions, either prior to or following this interview. At the same time the group paid tribute to Diana's ongoing resistance to the structural power of the British royal family in the context of a long history of women's subordination to men in royal marriages. As arguably the most scrutinised woman in the world, and the most public of single mothers then, Diana was a media figure that these women

identified with in multiple ways and a symbol of womanhood and motherhood that produced contradictory meanings, both embedded in and separate from their discussions of their own experiences of femininity and motherhood.

The discourses employed to construct meaning from Diana's life are evident in the myriad of Diana texts available to consumers of popular culture, including the ongoing 'tell-all' exposes written by those close to her during her life. However, to make sense of the enormity of the public response to her death, it is also important to consider the tertiary texts, the meanings in the oral and written texts produced by 'ordinary' people involved in discussions about her in the aftermath of the Paris crash; people like Hannah, Bridget, Penny and Sarah (Fiske, 1987). These meanings not only apply to Diana however, they also reflect the tensions and contradictions played out in their own everyday lives as they struggle to negotiate their identities as women and mothers. I will argue that the engagements and identifications described in the Diana interview, position her as emblematic in a struggle over meaning at a time of increasing debate over what it is to be a woman in the media saturated world of New Zealand in the late 1990s. This discussion will attempt to understand how a figure such as Diana, so deeply entrenched in traditional notions of femininity, might provide a site of resistance to masculinist power. However, in doing so, this discussion also highlights the problematic nature of attempting to make sense of everyday life through examination of how women talk about media texts by examining some of the differences between the Diana interview and how the group talked about their own lives and other mothers' lives during the remainder of the interviews. Before I begin, however, I will briefly describe my own experience of engagement and identification with Diana shortly after her death.

The death of Diana produced what Foucault has called a "temporary inversion" of power relations, as public spaces, both physically located and technologically mediated, were taken up with crowds articulating the types of emotional concerns usually relegated to the domestic sphere (Grace, 1997). Public figures such as members of the British Royal Family and politicians were required to participate in this outward show of emotion, not a usual

demand for those in public office. According to Ruth Barcan (1997) "In the case of Diana's death, the strength of public feeling forced official culture to make space for the feminine in all its potential excess and mawkishness. Discussions about feelings triumphed in public culture for a week, often in explicit opposition to the discourses and institutions of official, masculine culture" (38). The crowds in the streets of London and the ever increasing sea of floral tributes outside Kensington and Buckingham Palaces were instantly relayed to living rooms throughout New Zealand via television sets. In addition several documentary style tributes were aired here over the ensuing week, culminating in the simultaneous broadcasting of Diana's funeral on two different television channels the following Saturday night. I stayed home to videotape the funeral, but from all accounts the streets of Christchurch were pretty much deserted that evening as people gathered in front of their television sets to farewell the 'people's princess'.<sup>1</sup>

As a researcher interviewing women about motherhood, family life and the media, I experienced a sense of shock when I heard the news of Diana's death - she was not someone I expected to die - followed closely by keen anticipation - this would be great stuff for my research. I felt vaguely parasitic at this stage, but not particularly emotionally involved - I had never taken much of an interest in her life so why should I be moved by her death? I watched the wedding when I was 15, as did all the other girls in the small community I was living in, but I do not remember it making much of an impact on me at the time. I had seen news items about her various personal and marital problems over the years and quite by chance watched a little of the famous *Panorama* documentary, which I found to be absolutely riveting viewing for the fifteen minutes or so that I saw of it. She had not been someone discussed in the dozen or so interviews I had conducted with the participants in this study, although given the topic area I could have expected her name to have come up.

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<sup>1</sup> This was a term coined by English Prime Minister Tony Blair in the days after Diana's death. Although it was not used by the research participants it is useful in conveying the shift from the princess of traditional fairy tales who is viewed from a distance to a much more active princess

As I settled down in front of the VCR for the next week, eager to obtain copies of the endless stream of mediated images of the public mourning just in case I could use them later, I found myself gradually becoming more engaged with the story of this woman's extraordinary life. I found her life extraordinary in the sense that it was so different from my own or anybody I had ever met, rather than thinking that she had done anything particularly remarkable with it. I was still very much approaching my viewing from the position of distanced critic, but not quite so distanced as I had been a week earlier.

As I sat, remote in hand, watching Diana's funeral (it would be too long to fit onto one tape so I would have to decide which bits I would edit out), I watched her sons in their stiff formal suits walking behind her coffin, surrounded by crowds of silent onlookers while the camera persistently lingered on an envelope addressed to 'Mummy' written in a child's handwriting. I was genuinely moved by the thought of what these young boys might be feeling and the enormity of what they had to cope with - both the personal loss and the intensely public nature of the event. After a while I wandered into Louis' room where he lay sleeping and kissed him, hoping that he would never have to contemplate the loss of his mother while he is still young, at the same time aware that my own fear of not being there for the remainder of his childhood was a possibility I found extremely difficult to entertain.

The reason I have described this incident here is that for me this 'moment of connection' between what was happening thousands of miles away in England and my own personal fears around the intensity of feelings I have for my son helps me to feel a sense of connection with the millions of viewers around the world who were presumably experiencing similar emotional responses to what they were seeing. Talking with people I knew who had also watched the funeral confirmed that, for many, the sight of the young princes following the coffin and the 'Mummy' envelope evoked strong emotions, both for those who had children of their own and those who did not.

The fact that this was a highly orchestrated media event, that those responsible for producing the images that we watched were clearly intent on eliciting such emotions, as were those who decided to place the envelope in such a prominent position and allow the princes to take part in the funeral procession, does not alter the fact that the line between the distanced critic and the loving and fearful mother became increasingly blurred as I partook in the media event that was Diana's death. This did not mean I lost the ability to look critically at what I was viewing, but it did mean I could no longer claim to be unaffected by it, or view the participants in my research as 'other' to me as they discussed the moments of connection between their lives and Diana's.

Having said this I am aware that I participated less in the discussion of Diana's death than I had done in many of the other interviews, taking on much more clearly the role of interviewer - introducing new topics of conversation, asking questions, directing the discussion and acting as 'devil's advocate' to try to complicate the issues somewhat. This may be because, unlike previous interviews, I knew exactly what the topic of conversation would be and I had some very clear questions that I wanted answered. Earlier interviews tended to be directed much more by the participants, covering a general theme that had been raised in previous sessions, with no clear interview schedule to adhere to. What happened during this interview, instigated by my research agenda, was that the group of women told the story of Diana's life as they understood it, in a fairly chronological way. What Hannah, Sarah, Penny and Bridget described during this interview was a series of identifications with aspects of Diana's life that enabled moments of connection with a personal, often emotional, aspect of their own lives. And what they explored in the retelling of Diana's life intermingled with their own narratives, were opportunities to not only connect and empathise with her, but to address broader issues of women's relationships with their children, partners and families in relation to powerful gendered norms and expectations. The following discussion outlines these identifications, connections and discussions, and their implications for the discursive construction of the Good Mother in women's talk about media texts.

### Identifications

In her work on the fantastic family sit-coms of the 1960s, Lynn Spigel (1991) made a case for re-examining television programmes previously dismissed as escapist trash - the "lower depths" of television. Instead she examined these programmes in relation to "the historical changes that created the conditions in which they could flourish" and found them to be "a complex organisation of contradictory ideas, values, and meanings concerning the organization of social space and everyday life in suburbia" (206). For me the importance of Spigel's work lies in her reading of popular cultural forms as a means of identifying and examining larger social struggles and cultural anxieties, also called a "symptomatic" approach to the study of mass culture.<sup>2</sup> In the case of Diana this approach can be employed to examine some of the issues that surrounded media images of her life such as women's preoccupation's with romantic love, familial relationships and motherhood so often denigrated as the trivial stuff of soap operas and women's magazines. For it is this 'stuff' that enabled millions of women world-wide, including Sarah, Bridget, Hannah and Penny, to identify with and feel a deep sense of personal loss at the death of an extremely privileged, wealthy woman, born into a life that most could only fantasise about.

Each of the four women in this study identified with different aspects of Diana's life, depending on how they related it to their own. Sarah identified strongly with the 'fairy tale gone wrong' aspect of the story because as a young girl she idolised Diana the beautiful princess:

I was ten when they got married ... and I had the Lady Di haircut and I had the shirts and I stayed up for the wedding ... I did a huge project on her when I was at Intermediate (school), she has been in our milieu since we were ten.

Sarah also identified the importance to her of a fairy tale princess who was "human like us". Thus, sixteen years later, her connection with Diana's "humanness" remains despite her rejection of royalty as an institution:

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<sup>2</sup> Suzanna Danuta Walters (1995) employs this term in her discussion of the importance for American cultural critics of the film *Thelma and Louise*.

And even though I have rejected a lot of the things that I thought were cool about that context then, you still have that little place in your heart for her because you saw the humanness.

Penny saw in Diana's marriage and subsequent divorce many parallels with her own experiences, which included bouts of depression and struggling with an eating disorder:

I'm a couple of years younger (than Diana) and I remember watching the wedding and the engagement process and going through the whole thing, on a much smaller scale of course myself, not that long after she did. And having kids and going through a messy divorce myself, and what she went through mirrored, well, to a minor extent what I was going through when I married too young as well and I married a guy who was English, who was as uptight as Charles in his own way, and was as arrogant and cold and everything else. And I think for me and for a lot of women it's mirrored a lot of what we have gone through, especially our generation, you know?

Bridget identifies with Diana's approach to mothering. She also has two boys and believes she shares her sense of enjoyment of her sons with Diana:

You talk about the human element, to me her human element was that she was a mother, and it's something I can relate to ... and I am like Di very much for the soft fun-loving, grabbing them and throw them upside down, chuck them round the park, take them out, and I like having fun and I like doing things that are slightly dangerous but they are okay because they're kids and they're having fun.

Hannah, who was older than the others at the time of the wedding, wasn't particularly interested in Diana at that time, but saw her in later years as a "symbol of good":

Ultimately we saw her as a symbol of good. I think this tired world needs a symbol of good, you know? We are tired of cynicism, we're tired of evil things, we are tired of bloody wars, you know, the media is obsessed with negatives.

There were many opportunities for Western women, like these four, to identify with Diana, whose identity was reinvented by the media and herself many times - shy virgin, fairy tale princess, depressive bulimic, unhappy wife, loving mother, survivor of trauma, unofficial humanitarian ambassador to Britain - at times she occupied several of these often contradictory subject positions simultaneously. It is clear that over time women could engage with Diana in many ways and from multiple subject positions. This is clearly so for the women in this study who describe their engagement with the different

personas of Diana at different times and in different ways as their own personal experiences changed over time. As a mediated image Diana reflected the changing roles of women in society, but she also reflected the multiplicity of subject positions that women are required to manage and negotiate in their daily lives (Barcan, 1997; Campbel, 1998).

### Connections

The identifications described above enabled moments of connection with well known media images of Diana, often those each woman in the group saw as signifying the essence of a particular phase in her life or points of departure and the emergence of a new phase or identity. As in the description of my own experience of watching Diana's funeral, moments of connection refer to those moments when the mediated image provokes a powerful connection between that image and the social and emotional life of the viewer. Each phase in Diana's life produced a plethora of televisual and photographic images. Some of the most enduring images are also those which are significant to these four women - the wedding kiss, Diana alone and looking dejected in front of the Taj Mahal in India, or shifting her head away as Charles moved to kiss her, her boys running joyfully into their mother's arms - are all mediated representations that, for the women in this study and probably for many others, signify some of the moments of connection between their lives and Diana's. These women identified with different phases in Diana's life depending on their relevance to their own experiences. The fairy tale princess, the unhappy wife indulging in acts of self harm, the independent survivor who refused to remain silent about family secrets, were also all identities or subject positions held by these women at some time in their lives.

Of course access to the story of Diana's life for these women was only through mediated images. These images were already made to mean certain things, they were already framed within particular discursive constructions of femininity. This means that images of Diana were not open to any possible interpretation, but contained preferred readings which in turn shaped the discursive framework that any discussions about her were likely to employ. It is not surprising that the group spoke of fairy tales, romance and motherhood

when discussing Diana; her image was always overdetermined in these areas. What I am interested in is *how* they deployed these discourses to problematise the notion of traditional feminine identity as stable and prescribing a place for women within the private sphere, while at the same time continuing to reinforce traditional notions of femininity and motherhood as a woman's primary concerns. For while the *attraction* of Diana for these women may have been with fairytales, beauty and romance, the *connections* they made were with issues of personal struggle.

### From Fairy Tale Princess to 'People's' Princess

Lady Diana Spencer first appeared on the public scene in 1979 when the story broke that she was to marry Prince Charles. Images of a fairy tale wedding were immediately invoked. Fairy tales are an important cultural artefact in Western society. The familiar plots of traditional fairy tales are reworked in many forms in popular culture causing them to reappear in many guises. For girls in our society, the beautiful princess, hated by her evil stepmother, who wins the hand of the handsome prince is often inscribed into their understandings of gender and their place in the world from an early age. In her 1989 research with young children, Bronwyn Davies found that attempts to rewrite fairy tales from a feminist perspective proved ineffective in changing children's understandings of the common sense order of things within the traditional tale. Thus an active, assertive princess was seen as 'naughty' and a passive, ineffectual prince was still regarded by the children as the hero of the story, illustrating the ever present "power of the pre-existing structure of the traditional narrative to prevent a new form of narrative from being heard." (Davies, 1989, cited in Cosslett, 1996; 88).

With her passive role, often tied to the domestic sphere and epitomised in the coma states of *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White*, the fairy tale princess must await the arrival of the handsome prince to awaken her, offer her marriage, wealth and of course the 'happy ever after' of so many traditional fairy tales. The princess's virtue is usually tied to her beauty (constructed also as whiteness), and she is often pitted against an older, evil woman. Thus "female activity, resourcefulness, energy, anger are equated with evil; female passivity

with goodness" (Cosslett, 1996; 81). The whole story is entrenched in discourses of heterosexual romantic love and marriage as the end point in a woman's life. It is easy to see the parallels between the traditional tale and Diana's early years as a royal princess. And indeed Diana appeared to be everything the traditional notion of a princess encompassed, with her quiet, shy demeanour, her bowed head, her connection with the domestic world of small children and her English beauty. Around the world, millions of people watched and read about the preparations for the fairy tale wedding that was to take place in August 1980 in Westminster Abbey. Immediately Diana was subject to unrelenting scrutiny from the world's press. The ensuing obsession with her clothes, her body, her pregnancies and her relationships with her husband and children cemented her role as the public embodiment of the ideologically constructed and ideal female subject.

When Charles and Diana kissed on the balcony outside Buckingham Palace shortly after the marriage ceremony, it was a kiss that lasted only a moment but was "frozen into a longer and more meaningful image" by the media (Geraghty, 1998; 70). This was the moment that should have signified the beginning of the 'happy ever after' of the fairytale for children like Sarah. Instead, as she says, "we saw it all fall to pot." For Penny, who was 17 at the time of the wedding, "she was this beautiful young girl who was going to have this fairy tale wedding and fairy tale life, but most of us had question marks over what would happen because he was older, because he was cold." In real life the fairytale did not end with the marriage. In children's stories the prince is young, charming and handsome. In real life he was not. In the years that followed, stories of eating disorders, suicide attempts, conflict between Diana and the rest of the royal family, infidelities and eventually separation and divorce, surrounded the marriage of Diana and Charles.

The fact that Diana's story did not end with her marriage and the fictional 'happy ever after' allows women to question the myth of the fairytale. It also exposes the institutional power at work behind the reification of royalty in fairytales. The women in this study saw in the fairytale romance not the

perfect ending to a woman's search for love, but the subjugation of women such as Diana as "breeding stock" for future reigns:

Penny: They knew it was an arranged thing, it was what the palace wanted and I think that's what bonded a lot of people to her. Here is this young girl who is vulnerable.

Sarah: Yeah and thinking oh poor thing, she was 19, how is she going to cope?

Penny: How the heck was she supposed to cope with that?

Sarah: I mean how many princesses through the generations, through the hundreds of years of princesses and queens have been in exactly the same position as her?

Penny: I think too that we all knew that she was married to be the mother of the future king.

Sarah: She was a breeding cow.

Despite their critique of monarchic institutional power and the subjugation of royal wives, the women continued to evoke fairytale imagery in their discussion, describing Diana as a symbol of beauty and good:

Sarah: I think people like Diana because she was, like you say she was a symbol of good, but she was like the good fairy. You know how in all our fairy tales ... there is an old crone sitting by the side of the road and she asks for some water and someone's rude to her and another person's rude to her and finally someone gives it to her and she suddenly transforms into this beautiful fairy. If you are a good person your image should match, you should look like the shining angel and she did look like that. When she went into the hospitals you know, she was glowing, she was beautiful, she was the epitome of good beauty and I think that's why she captured attention. She was the good fairy.

Here Diana's goodness and beauty are conflated, as in the traditional fairytale. Unlike previous discussions where media images that conflated beauty, whiteness and wealth with 'goodness' were criticised and rejected by Sarah and the other women, here it is exactly these discursive constructions that Sarah employs to argue for Diana's 'goodness'. There was no dissension among the other women in the group when Sarah described Diana in this way and images of beauty and glamour as symbolic of humanitarian good were common throughout the discussions of Diana's life. However, unlike the fairytale princess the good fairy that Sarah describes is not passive; she has agency and transformative power. The group were quick to point out that Diana, while a symbol of good, was also very "human". It is the combination of this symbolic goodness and Diana's humanity and human flaws that seemed to really engage these women:

Hannah: People had got to like her because she was stylish and she was beautiful and she was accessible to people, she was a popular person who was very human. She made human mistakes, she wasn't perfect.

Hannah: She was a strong woman, she was strong.

Bridget: Superb.

Sarah: And yet at the same time she was insecure, she was full of self hate, and you could see that women could be both. She had convictions but she didn't like herself. She was under-confident about people and that's how, that dichotomy exists in women everywhere, and that's what people love.

Here their descriptions of Diana have moved a long way from the passive fairytale princess to a woman who still retains her beauty and goodness, but is active, contradictory and struggling to find personal happiness. The group related this image of Diana to their own experiences by discussing how they would fight for their workmates or their children but have difficulty standing up for themselves. They clearly related to the idea that Diana could be so beautiful and rich yet still feel deeply insecure on a personal level. At the same time they respected her strength, particularly her decision to leave an unhappy marriage and actively seek a new life for herself outside the monarchy, a decision that reflected Hannah, Penny and Sarah's experiences of leaving unhappy relationships and raising their children alone.

This discussion of how Diana's identity shifted from the passive fairytale princess to the active 'people's princess' illustrates how the women in my study, through the connections they made between Diana's and their own lives, deconstructed the myth of the fairytale and reconstructed a notion of a princess that retains some of the features of the traditional character, while clearly rejecting many of those that subjugated her. Along with her beauty and goodness comes agency, vulnerability and personal insecurity. A distinguishing characteristic of the new princess is her ability to wield and resist power. Crucial to Diana's power was the act of speech:

Sarah: One huge turning point for me was, I always read those things in the magazines and thought - I am a bit of a cynic - 'oh maybe he does love her', all this kind of stuff. The huge turning point for me was when Fergie and Diana both came out and confirmed so much of what the press said, and I thought, oh my god we have been so cynical and we've been saying 'don't believe the press, don't believe the press'. But they actually

confirmed so many of the reports and things that came out and so from that point I believed so much more of what was put in those magazines.

By speaking out about her unhappiness Diana enabled women to connect with her as another woman talking about personal issues such as depression, eating disorders and marital and family problems. Her life was no longer merely the subject of media speculation; speech made Diana's experiences 'true' and therefore 'real' for other women. She was able to put into discourse, through media such as women's magazines, her own truths that worked against the normalising truths produced as the effects of the institutional power of the monarchy in the mainstream media. Diana's speech enabled her to put into public discourse her truth about her experiences, allowing her resistance to the royal family to become part of the construction of public knowledge. That she was talking about many issues that women throughout the West struggle with every day – an unhappy marriage, her relationship with her body, depression, trouble with her in-laws – made her truth highly desirable in a world where such feminine issues are often devalued and the women dealing with them treated as deviating from idealised images of femininity.

Knowledge that Charles and Diana's fairytale romance was not all it seemed did not necessarily come as a surprise to the women in my study, as already noted. These women, reflecting on their own experiences as well as media reports about the royal marriage, believed it was Diana's refusal to submit to a relationship devoid of romance - a loveless union - that precipitated her rebellion:

Bridget: Camilla had already been married, Charles was in love with her, they (the royal family) thought that they had this 19 year old English girl, a person that they could manipulate and that she would know about Charles' relationship and it wouldn't bother her. But unfortunately she was in love with him and it bothered her.

Sarah: And the other thing was, they thought when she was 19, she was shy, she'd shut up, she didn't speak for years. She was that kind of closed her eyes, played with the kids, good girl.

Penny: Yeah, I was one of those.

Sarah: Until 1985 or something like that, then she started pouting her lip, and sitting a bit further away from him, she was...

Penny: She wouldn't kiss him.

Sarah: That's right, she was the silent queen, ultimate queen that they wanted. But behind the scenes she was slowly doing things that they didn't want, and then she spoke out which was just completely, they just wanted her to be this 19 year old that shut up.

Precipitated by a feeling of being unloved, the women in this study saw Diana's speaking out as a dangerous and courageous act, one that might have contributed to the accident in Paris. Diana's death and the question of who might be responsible for it was the focus of a substantial part of the interview. While the mainstream media debated the role of the paparazzi who had been pursuing her car, and the possibility of a drunk driver being behind the wheel, the women I interviewed believed that the royal family may have been behind a conspiracy to kill Diana. Such was the power of her speech, along with her desire to find a public role for herself outside of the royal family, that they believed that the car crash was unlikely to have been an accident:

Penny: From her interview onwards when she discovered she could have a role and it was accepted world-wide, it was accepted and acclaimed, I think they needed her gone.

Though unsure whether "they actually finally finished her off or not", Penny believed that "in many ways they did", referring to how difficult Diana's life had become after she began resisting royal power. Increasing Diana's potential threat to the power of the monarchy, according to Sarah, was the possibility that Diana may have been pregnant and about to marry Dodi Al Fayed, the wealthy Arab businessman she had been romantically involved with at the time of her death, and who was killed along with Diana and the driver of the car:

Sarah: And more for the English to want her to be knocked off. She was going to be having a child to an Arab and they were going to be getting married and the child was going to be born less than nine months after their wedding and she's the mother of the king ... I think that it was such a threat to them to have Islamic, Arabic people connected so closely to the royal family

Diana was about to further undermine traditional notions of family by conceiving a child out of wedlock and marrying outside of her culture and this was perceived as untenable for the royal family, a powerful symbol of conservative values. This was a royal family whose ability to represent such values had been seriously eroded in recent years through publicity about the

troubled royal marriages of both Prince Charles and Prince Andrew as well as increasing calls for the monarchy to pay taxes on their substantial assets and income. Sarah believed that in this context Diana's impending marriage and baby were enough to precipitate an assassination attempt. Clearly these women perceive Diana as a considerable threat to the monarchy. Her visibility and willingness to speak out against royalty, along with her unconventional relationship with Dodi Al Fayed, allowed them to position her as a source of powerful resistance to the institutional power of the royal family that she had married into.

Penny, Bridget and Sarah all spoke of Diana's struggle to maintain control over her life and especially over her children in the face of a relentless paparazzi force and a powerful British royal family. For Bridget, Diana lost her power when she died and could no longer have any say in the raising of her children:

Ultimately she doesn't have any control over the boys anymore, and that's what the royal family really care about, because he's going to be king, you know?

Bridget also talks about the power to take control of one's life, something she hoped Diana would have been able to do if she had lived:

She was put down in her, in what she valued and in who she was and her personality and what she wanted to do ... everything under scrutiny ... I just think I wanted her to be able to bow out of public life and to have her own private thing going on.

There were parallels between the women in this group describing their sense of regaining control over their lives when they left an unhappy relationship, and their belief that Diana was fighting for a similar sense of control in the face of much more powerful forces. While Penny, Sarah and Bridget believed that Diana's power lay in her ability to threaten conservative values and effect change through taking control of her own life and influencing her son in his position of power, Hannah on the other hand believed that Diana was more powerful now that she was dead:

Hannah: I think she's more powerful dead because now the inevitable's not going to happen, you never see like her have a child to umm.

Sarah: To Al Fyed.

Hannah: ...yeah, yeah, she's the epitome of a princess at the moment. She's not going to get wrinkly, we'll remember her as beautiful, and we will remember her as being the pure mother of two boys, most people don't know about the pregnancy thing.

So for Hannah power is equated with beauty, goodness and racial purity. If Diana was to have a child to Dodi Al Fayed and lose her youthful beauty, she would lose her power as a symbol of ideal femininity. From this perspective a woman's power is very much tied to her ability to fit the normalising discourses of the ideal woman rather than in any specific acts of resistance or claims to independence. While Hannah's understanding of Diana's power was in her symbolic representation of ideal womanhood, the other three women in the group saw in her life, rather than her death, the power to resist traditional notions of ideal womanhood and take control of her life. By speaking out publicly, Diana enabled other women to connect their own experiences with her resistance to institutional power. The discussions about Diana's resistance revolved around two main themes, both central to the discussions held through the research process and both tied to traditional notions of femininity - romantic love and motherhood.

### Romantic Love

Studies of women's engagements with romance novels and soap operas have produced accounts of the widespread appeal of romance to women from a variety of backgrounds, something that cannot be ignored by feminist academics (Modleski, 1982; Snitow, 1984; Radway, 1987; Langford, 1996). Romance, as represented in popular culture, has been described as a "primary category of the female imagination" (Snitow, 1984; 74), through which women can "negotiate and symbolically resolve the conflicts, tensions and anxieties that are involved in trying to achieve successful love relationships in real life" (Modleski, 1982; 57). Often the tensions and anxieties Modleski identifies are allayed in popular culture by individualistic accounts of the problems women encounter in their intimate relationships, where individual responsibility for change rather than collective action is emphasised (Peck, 1995). According to Wendy Langford (1996) this approach, found in the many self-help books available to women and in television talk shows, ignores the structural processes through which women's

subordination to men is perpetuated by notions of romantic love and freedom of choice. These notions mask the power relations inherent in Western family structures by constructing a power/love dichotomy which makes it difficult for those involved in romantic relationships to identify the ways in which these relationships serve the interests of a patriarchal capitalist system founded on men's domination of the public sphere and women's unpaid labour in the home (see Chapter Six for a detailed discussion of these issues).

Mary Ellen Brown (1994) argues that ideologies of romance and dependency - both emotional and economic - work to position women and girls within the idealised nuclear family. She argues that girls are put under pressure to behave in ways that ensure their good name and desirability as future marriage partners: "The politics of reputation, the need for proper (i.e. nonthreatening and nonsexual) behavior, and the discourse of domesticity (and thus financial dependence and controlled sexuality) ideologically can leave young women few options" (29). These notions of female subjectivity embedded in discourses of romantic love and family life also serve to mask the power relations at work in the reification of the western nuclear family (see Chapter Six).

By the time it became public knowledge that Diana and Charles' relationship was in trouble, the belief in marriage until 'death us do part' had been seriously eroded in Western society. Beatrix Campbell (1998) writes that "women were fascinated by Diana as the embodiment of an ideal and its impossibility" (134). While the myth of the fairytale was still played out regularly in books, films and television programmes, increased awareness of domestic violence, child abuse and failed relationships told people that the domestic sphere was often a site of conflict and unhappiness.

Again, it was the act of speech that precipitated public knowledge and personal connections with Diana's unhappiness according to Bridget:

This was the other thing about relating to her, she loved Charles, she really loved him and the marriage break up was probably, I mean like she's talked about it so this is going off what she said, was absolutely devastating to her.

At one point Hannah even implicates Charles' lack of love for Diana in her death:

Hannah: But I still believe that she died of a broken heart. Literally actually, because that's where she was injured. (General agreement from the others) She, she didn't want her marriage to break up, she was broken hearted.

Bridget: She absolutely adored him.

Sarah: Yeah.

Penny: And she said he cheated on her.

Bridget: And all that depression and self harm and running around with all sorts of people ... I mean I would probably do that.

While Charles' infidelity is seen as the cause of Diana's unhappiness, and perhaps indirectly her death, Diana's extramarital affairs, as well as her depression and suicide attempts, are seen as an understandable human response to being unloved. As already noted, part of Diana's attraction for these women was in her human ability to make mistakes and act in ways that other women would in similar circumstances. Rather than seeing her behaviour as deviating from the norms of ideal womanhood, these women make sense of it through their understandings of what it is to feel unloved and unheard. Diana spoke out about this part of her life and her attempts to cope with it, enabling women to celebrate her public resistance to the expectation that women will endure private pain in silence. Similarly, the women in my study saw Diana's role as mother to the future king as a site of resistance. I am left wondering, however, if these women would be so forgiving of regular mothers, or of themselves, in similar circumstances. With this in mind I asked the group if they thought Diana was a Good Mother and why.

### Motherhood

As I have noted in previous chapters, feminists have focused on motherhood as a site of women's subordination since the 1980s, describing the social pressures on women to make having children the central source of fulfilment in their lives while putting their own interests aside (Russo, 1986; McBride, 1984; Howe, 1989; Oakley, 1990). According to Karen Howe (1989) "these societal images ... all emphasise the centrality of motherhood in the woman's life, and imply that outside activities detract from the quality of her mothering. In doing so, they also encourage a simplistic and one-sided view of women

who are mothers." (47). Often motherhood is seen as central to a woman's identity and a key to achieving maturity as a woman (Woollett, 1991; Schofield, 1994). The requirements of Good Motherhood have been defined and redefined over time, but certain themes remain. These include the mother's most important role as social sculptor of the next generation; maternal qualities as inherent or natural; and the belief that a mother's behaviour is crucial to the healthy development of her child (Howe, 1989).

Throughout this thesis I have focused on the discursive construction of the Good Mother as self-sacrificing and nurturing, yet as I have said, women's experiences as mothers are becoming more diverse with an increase in single parent families, step-parenting and working mothers. Women are having children later in life, having fewer children and continuing to work after their children are born. At the same time dominant social images of mothers have changed little to more accurately represent changes in women's lives. The result is even more confusion and conflict as women struggle to reconcile their personal situations with idealised and polarised popular images. (Richardson, 1993; Crouch and Manderson, 1993).

Diana was often represented in the media as someone who loved children, stemming from her early days as a kindergarten teacher. She was portrayed as a 'hands on' mother compared to other women from her class position. The women in my study saw this as Diana trying to provide "normal" maternal love for children being raised in a highly abnormal environment. For Sarah the real tragedy of Diana's early death was that her sons would no longer receive her "real motherly love":

And that's the thing we really mourned the most ... was those poor little boys ... I think that the royal family and the way that those people are brought up in isolation like that with nannies and huge draughty castles is hideous, and what she did for those boys in giving them some humanness and real motherly love ... she gave those boys some access to humanity and we just saw that all fall apart, and we felt for those little boys who, she'd really given them a true mothers love, you know, and it had all been taken away and that was the thing that really, really upset me.

Hannah described Diana's feeling for her children as "natural":

I think she was actually quite naturally drawn to children as well. I think it was something in her, she's drawn to people, she's a people person, so it came to her rather naturally that she would do the very best for her sons ... she's a warm mother and gave them love which often children do miss out on. It doesn't matter their social status, she treated her boys with love and understanding.

Despite largely rejecting the notion of natural motherhood in their discussions of their own lives, these women employed it frequently to position Diana as a Good Mother. At the same time they admired her efforts to fight for her children and believed that her resolve to parent in the way she thought best was seen as something that connected other women with her as well as a symbol of resistance. In this way the natural motherhood they invoke is an active and resistant motherhood:

Bridget: There are some things that you can't fake or ham up and I think one of the things, you know the fights that she had to have her children where she wanted them.

Penny: Amazing!

Bridget: The fight to breastfeed, the fight to...

Sarah:...to have them come over here on that tour...

Bridget: ...not do the nanny thing, to have them come with her when she went away, all those kind of things and I just thought, in some ways I think she made a step for ... aristocratic women, you know? Maybe aristocratic mothers have been pushed and shoved and prodded, like you say, like breeding cows.

Sarah: Well also in another sense, her being able to do that in a classless sense, they saw her as challenging for things she felt were more appropriate for her children and on lots of levels women could take that on.

Hannah: Yeah, she challenged, she challenged the establishment.

Penny: I think she was um, a very powerful mother, in the sense that she fought for her children. She made phenomenal decisions to change mothering for herself, in that she was five when her own mother walked out for whatever reasons. Now that could have left her a cold, distant mother, but it didn't. She changed all that for her kids ... but she also fought for them. Fought for custody, fought for access, fought for different education, fought to take them with her.

Bridget: She took on the royal family.

These discussions of "true", "real" and "natural" motherly love and a mother who will fight to do the best for her children seem deeply embedded in the discourse of the Good Mother, where motherhood is inherent and requires self-sacrifice. However in the case of Diana this meant taking on the

institutional power of the monarchy. Her knowledge of what her children needed was not only inherent, but learned through her own experiences and her understandings of how previous generations of royal children had been treated. Like the women in this study she wanted things to be different for her children than they had been for herself during her childhood. The admiration expressed for Diana as a mother also reflected previous conversations in the group when Bridget in particular talked about having to fight to be at university when she was pregnant and as a mother, or when Hannah, Penny and Sarah discussed relationship problems and fighting to regain their independence when they left unhappy relationships. Diana's mothering was significant to these women because, like them, she held strong beliefs about what was right for herself and her children and was prepared to struggle to raise them the way she wanted. Such conversations privilege women's experiences over regulatory discourses, even at the same time as they are embedded in these very discourses. Again it is a reworking of the traditional discourse of the Good Mother that connects these women with Diana.

At times the discussion of Diana as a Good Mother was less embracing of traditional notions of motherhood, in particular the importance placed in previous interviews on a primarily child centred approach to mothering. While still emphasising the importance of love and warmth, Sarah's response to my question, was Diana a good mother indicated that she understands that these things are influenced by social context:

I mean what is a good mother? But on what we know of her I think she definitely showed great affection for her children and tried her hardest for her children ... I think that in her context she did the best that she could and she loved, she obviously loved her children ... and she tried really hard to give those kids normal parental love which she knew some, her husband and his family hadn't got ... so I think she tried her best and that's all you can ask of a mother aye?

Bridget emphasised the importance of both physical affection and communication as indicators of the genuine love she saw between Diana and her sons - love which made Diana a good mother:

She obviously loved children, and I mean like I said the delight on her face when she sees her kids and the way they throw themselves into her arms and all that kind of thing ... and I think that's why I feel connected to her in a certain way, just that love of her kids. And I just think when (my son)

does that to me and I mean these kids are at school, they are not just going to do it because mum tells them that you have to look excited about seeing me. I mean you can't do that kind of thing...

Penny: No, not with kids.

Bridget: But if a kid runs up and jumps into your arms and you have this full on cuddle, I mean, yeah I think she was a good mother.

Bridget: Like when she had that, you know when that affair was going to be released on the news, the way that she drove down to talk to them. She was a mother who talked with her children and discussed, and she realised that that would be hurtful for them and it was going to come out and it would upset them and maybe they'd be teased at school and, you know, she talked.

The group are far less critical of Diana when it comes to being a good mother than they are with themselves and other women. In previous chapters I have written about the constant self-regulation these women employed around responding to their children's needs, even when they were exhausted or sick. Diana, whose children attended boarding school in Scotland while she spent large amounts of money on clothes and attending social events, had domestic staff to take care of her household responsibilities. At the same time she conducted a relationship with a man other than her husband, yet despite all this was still perceived as a good mother by the women in this study because of the affection that was apparent between herself and her children. I am left wondering about the women who were criticised in other interviews for feeding their children instant noodles and coke or attempting to make up for working long hours by employing the concept of quality time with their children. What would the response from the group have been if these women had behaved in a manner similar to Diana?

It is significant in the context of this thesis that Diana was not criticised for having an affair or sending her children to school away from home, things that the traditional Good Mother would never do. Such a response from research participants might be used to highlight resistance to the Good Mother discourse, yet the previous chapters have indicated that this resistance was not applied to themselves or other women, only Diana. And yet it was the connections between their own lives and her's that these women used to understand and "forgive" Diana her flaws. In fact when I suggested that some

of Diana's behaviour – an eating disorder, suicide attempts, sending her children away to school, having an affair - might be viewed as not conducive to good mothering the women were quick to defend her actions and connect them with their own experiences:

Bridget: If I came to your house and even if I knew that you were bulimic, suicidal, or whatever, and I saw your kids jump on your knee and you give them a cuddle and they are obviously loving you and you are obviously loving them, and I mean she said a lot of times that the only reason she didn't knock herself off or go off and live on an island was because of her children. And I think I'd forgive it, I'd forgive it.

Penny: I lived that when my marriage disintegrated. We were living in this amazing facade that everything was perfect and people couldn't believe that we had separated, because we seemed an ideal couple. But behind the scenes I was so depressed I was thinking of driving off the Summit Road, and I think it was that love for my son that kept me alive and he was only two and a half at the time. And I mean I was pregnant and I had an older child as well. But I mean I could identify with Diana's anorexia and all that sort of depression stuff because under that pressure of a marriage going sour, a certain way of coping that you can do, and your kids will come through that, if that love link is kept going, regardless of what they see.

From their own experiences, these women know that idealised images of motherhood are impossible to achieve at times. Women cope the best they can with marital difficulties according to this group and it is inevitable that children will be affected by these problems. It is communication and love that are important in getting children through such times, but a woman has to attend to other issues as well. In a quote I have already used an excerpt from, Bridget articulates the pressure women feel to be an ideal Good Mother, while recognising that there are times when women need to tend to other issues in their lives:

I think, like Sarah said, you just have to be the best mother that you can, and in a terrible situation like that ... you have to look after your own emotions sometimes. Sometimes you just haven't got emotions enough. I mean it's like post-natal depression. It's like you give birth to this baby and you really want to love this baby and you want to be this great mother and all the media images tell you, you know it's going to be this beautiful mother with this glowing face that uses Ponds soap cuddling her beautiful baby, sitting down laughing together and this kid is screaming non-stop, red, colicky, spotty, throwing up, shitting everywhere (laughs), wrecking your life, changing everything that you do, and you have still got these beautiful images of what motherhood is supposed to be about and emotionally you just can't be that mother. You know I think I could relate to her because on the one hand

sometimes you can be full on, but sometimes, you know, like someone close to you dies, or you leave your husband, or you find out he's having an affair, or whatever happens and it's very hard to take control of that part of your life. And I think I would always still read to my children before they went to bed, still love them in the same way and if someone judged me on the fact that you know, I got drunk one night because I was feeling upset about something, they judged me as a mother, I would say to them, 'hang on, look at our relationship, is our relationship still intact?'

According to these women Diana was a good mother because of her love and openness towards her boys. This was not a self-sacrificial love, however. Dealing with her own personal problems and working in the public sphere are seen as just as important as loving her children, and they accept that there are times when women have very little emotional energy for children. As long as the children still feel loved and as long as she communicates with them, a mother is still being a good mother. A good mother does the best that she can within her circumstances and it was recognised that Diana was living in extreme circumstances. So what was it that enabled these women to connect their 'normal' lives with hers? I believe it was because she spoke out about her personal unhappiness in ways that they could relate to their own experiences. As with the fairytale princess, the notion of the Good Mother has been redefined by these women, while still retaining some of the essential elements of the traditional discourses.

This discussion has explored the way the women in this study used their talk about Diana's life as well as their own experiences to problematise some traditional notions of romance and motherhood. They have, in their conversations about Diana, constructed a new princess, one with agency and transformative power. However, it is as a human being, another woman struggling with self doubt and personal unhappiness, that Diana really 'spoke' to these women. It seems that Diana needed to be both – beautiful, glamorous, other-worldly *and* vulnerable, unhappy, struggling – in order to both engage the imaginations of these women and for them to make connections between their lives and hers. It was her resistance to the institutional power that surrounded her life as a princess, that enabled women to identify with her as a symbol of women's struggles in their everyday personal and private lives. As Ruth Barcan (1997) put it: "She came to signify

opposition to institutions and tradition and was thereby able, paradoxically, to function as a point of identification for 'us' ordinary people, while retaining the aura of a glamorous, unattainable figure" (40).

### Diana and Feminism – a Contested Arena

Not all feminist academics agree with this analysis however. Some have argued that Diana was a symbol of gender conservatism (Cameron, 1997); a selfish woman who painted herself as a victim while retaining all of the privileges she gained from those she claimed had victimised her (Smith, 1997); or a figure who was used by the media to divert attention from more pressing local political issues (Kennedy, 1997). Others, however, have proclaimed her a feminist icon embodying the adage the 'the personal is political', that emotion and experience are vital elements of any feminist politics (Barcan, 1997; Campbell, 1997; Kelly, 1997; McCollum, 1997; Sofoulis, 1997). In many ways Diana was all of these things. For some, of course, she was unimportant or irrelevant. While few in the Western world could escape completely the images of Diana which abounded in popular culture making her "part of the air we breathe" (Kennedy, 1997; 51), for many who did not experience moments of connection that created a conjuncture between their lives and hers, Diana was a figure of either vague curiosity or indifference. For those to whom heterosexual romance, royal scandal and the lives of the acutely privileged were not of interest, Diana may have had little relevance. However, her involvement with the homeless, AIDS patients, land mine victims and other marginalised groups means that many of these people were also able to identify with Diana.

For some feminists, Diana's life and the popular response to it appeared to reinforce several well known 'truths' that value the emotional, the personal and women's everyday experiences as vital to a feminist politics. Hilary McCollum (1997) saw Diana as an activist who, through her involvement in the land mines issue, highlighted how policy changes can effect individual lives. She argues that this is a far cry from a feminist politics which has become "bogged down in theories, developed often within academia, which have lost sight of the lives of individual women" (66). McCollum argues that feminists should

learn from Diana's popularity the importance of "human interest" in both capturing media attention and engaging people's interest. She believes that Diana was adept at "using the experiences of individuals to make a problem 'real' for those not directly affected by it" (ibid). If feminism is to engage more women, human interest, not theory, is required.

Liz Kelly (1997) takes a similar approach, seeing Diana as someone who "placed herself alongside women who dare to challenge and refuse tradition and power structures" (68), using her experiences of personal suffering to connect with others. For Kelly, Diana reminds feminists of the importance of experience and how it is deployed to engage women: "It is not our personal experiences in and of themselves which matter so much as the way in which we make sense of them and communicate about them enabling connection with other women" (ibid). Of course a media figure like Diana is open to multiple readings and identifications, as illustrated by the women I spoke to after her death. What does seem clear is that the issues of romantic love, family life, body image, depression and self harm that she spoke about, are vital concerns to many, many women who were able to identify with Diana's experiences. Also of great interest to many of these women are beautiful clothes, glamorous lifestyles and fairytale romances – the possibility, if only in fantasy, of transcending the mundane and everyday struggles that connected them with Diana in the first place. Diana embodied the fantastic and the ordinary, the transcendent and the mundane. However, through speaking out about her life, she suggested the possibility of transcendence through action – speech, resistance and claiming a role for herself outside of the institution that oppressed her – that many could aspire to. She created a space in public discourse for talk about love, sex, emotions and personal happiness, and in doing so made these things part of political life.

For postmodern feminists Diana represents the plurality and elusiveness of female subjectivity – polysemous and contradictory, she reinvented herself several times over the years. But it was through speech, through putting into discourse her resistance, that Diana enabled connections between herself and others. This resistance is certainly where the women in this study saw her

power as residing. At the same time Hannah suggested that her power also lay in her ability to symbolise ideal womanhood. Diana as a media 'text' was able to sustain both conservative and progressive readings, particularly after her death when her image became frozen in time as the young and beautiful socialite, as well as the proud survivor of personal trauma. It could be argued that Diana's life was also an example of the potential for a politics of difference that enables strategic alliances around particular local struggles. Diana's involvement in issues such as eating disorders, AIDS awareness and land mines in Africa are examples of how change can be effected by such alliances. For not only was Diana a powerful publicity vehicle for these causes, but those involved were able to appropriate her image to further their political aims. In her personal as well as her public life, Diana befriended gay men such as Elton John and people from many different nationalities. She has been described as a gay icon (Benzie, 1997) and the 'princess of others' (Nava, 1997) because of her friendships and romances with those outside the British mainstream.

### Conclusion

In the context of this thesis, Diana's death and the interview that followed it provided an opportune example of the differences between these four women's discussions of their own lives and that of a powerful media figure. Nowhere in the discussion of Diana as mother is the demanding and exhausting child-centred approach to mothering that pervades Bridget, Sarah, Penny and Hannah's descriptions of their own mothering experiences and restricts their abilities to abandon their domestic responsibilities for more than a short period of time. The regulatory processes that produce anxiety and guilt as a matter of course for these women are not applied to Diana who is forgiven what could be described as a multitude of sins against the powerful Good Mother discourse that the group work so consistently to position themselves alongside. Instead, Diana is held up as an example of resistance to male institutional power and rational, unemotional relationships. These women used the story of Diana's life, alongside their own experiences, to question idealised notions of romance and motherhood. They perceived her as transcendent and ordinary at the same time, symbolising goodness and

uncertainty, conforming to idealised standards of feminine beauty and nurturance while resisting the institutions that position women as confined to the domestic sphere.

Diana's death signified the end of a story that many people had been following for years, it brought an end to a drama that appeared to consistently resist closure, bringing with it a sense of disbelief and shock for many. Diana will remain for Bridget, Penny, Hannah and Sarah a symbol of women's resistance and the costs, both in personal happiness and safety, of publicly taking on the institutions that work to subjugate women. Perhaps her death will act as a warning to women against such resistance, although I believe that a large part of her appeal was that she represented publicly the resistance that women constantly enact in their private lives. Her death and the conversations that ensued were able to reveal the complexities of her significance to women like these four – the intermingling of myth and domesticity in an ongoing struggle to redefine women's identities in the late twentieth century.

At the same time it is not possible to understand the complexities of these women's struggles to negotiate their own identities as mothers by focusing entirely on their responses to media figures like Diana. As I have said, the self-regulation, the judgement of other mothers, the everyday stress and exhaustion of being a mother that were so prominent in so many of the discussions through this research process, are largely absent from the Diana interview, even as the personal cost of these pressures are alluded to. While Diana might remain a symbol of women's resistance to institutional power and unhappy relationships, Hannah, Penny, Sarah and Bridget remain immersed in the daily juggle of work and family, self and others, resistance and compliance within powerful regulatory discourses that define the experiences of motherhood for women throughout the West. When Foucault spoke of power, he argued that "none of its localized episodes may be inscribed in history except by the effects that it induces on the entire network in which it is caught up" (Foucault, 1977; 27). Evaluating the significance of Diana's life and death for examining changing power relations between women and men must

therefore lie in examining the larger social and cultural struggles that make up the network of social relations within which her image has been articulated and made to have meaning over time. As I have argued throughout this thesis, these struggles are complex and ongoing. The enormous public interest in Diana illustrates her importance in representing many of these struggles for Western women, but it is in the daily living, the discursive construction of new definitions of motherhood and family that real change is produced for women like Penny, Sarah, Hannah and Bridget.

## Conclusion

Motherhood is still considered inevitable and natural for many women in Western societies. I have argued in this thesis that the valorisation of the nuclear family as the most appropriate setting for the raising of children today is widely debated and increasingly contested. Single or welfare mothers continue to be held responsible for social problems blamed on the breakdown of the traditional nuclear family as the discourses of the New Right construct mothers on welfare as a drain on public resources justifying state intervention in their lives. However, the normalisation of motherhood within the nuclear family is increasingly at odds with the realities of many women's lives. Motherhood and family life has changed considerably in recent decades in New Zealand and throughout the West. The Idealised Nuclear Family with its breadwinning husband and devoted, housebound wife and mother, no longer exists for many families today. For many women the nuclear family may form one part of a fluid and shifting experience of family life that includes some time in traditional family structures, some time as a single parent and some time in reformulated families that combine children from more than one relationship, who are not all biologically related to each other. Households are often much more fluid in their membership than in the past, with children moving between homes to spend time with parents who are no longer in an intimate relationship. These changes in family formation, women's increased participation in the workforce, rising divorce rates and the visibility of non-traditional families have rendered the notion of the traditional nuclear family increasingly unstable with the result that taken-for-granted definitions of 'the family' as well as motherhood have become highly contested domains of culture (Giddens, 1999 ; Castells, 2000; Stacey, 1996). It is within this contested domain that this study of motherhood in New Zealand has been situated.

Motherhood is a unique experience for every woman. How she negotiates her identity as a mother is both individually and socially contingent on a wide range of cultural, historical and political factors (Holland et al, 1998; Stacey, 1994). While the experience of motherhood will be different for each woman, the social conditions within which it is shaped and the subject positions available to her will be regulated and constrained by powerful normalising discourses (Weedon, 1991). At the same time the daily mothering practices that make up the lived reality of mothering for women in New Zealand will in turn shape how motherhood is constructed within the culture. This thesis has traced the conversations of four Pakeha New Zealand mothers over a period of 10 months. I have located these conversations within the regulatory discourses that delineate the ideal of the Good Mother and work to prescribe motherhood within this ideal. The ideal of the Good Mother is based on constructions of femininity that emphasise self-sacrifice and nurturance, that locate a woman's primary site of interest and obligation within the domestic realm and that differentiate mothers' and fathers' roles along clearly marked gendered norms (Richardson, 1993; Villani, 1997; Thurer, 1994; Hays, 1996). For the women in this study such an idealised notion of traditional feminine roles was at times compelling while at others invited resistance and redefinition. These four women's experiences of surveillance and regulation as mothers, then, was marked by both compliance and resistance to the Good Mother discourse.

In this thesis I have adopted a Foucaultian approach to analysing the interviews with Penny, Bridget, Hannah and Sarah that requires me to problematise taken for granted notions of motherhood, families and childhood in order to "make the familiar strange". By exploring how certain discourses have come to dominate thinking about motherhood and families in Pakeha New Zealand culture, these discourses are exposed as constructed in and through modes of power that regulate women's lives. As Foucault argued, "as soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them,

transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible” (Foucault, 1988; 155). The social change that is required to alleviate the motherhood workload cannot occur, however, without an understanding of the ways in which the power that regulates motherhood is manifested in particularly gendered ways (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 1991). The discourses that construct caring for children as the primary responsibility of women have been widely debated and critiqued within Western feminism since the 1970s. Repeated calls for men to participate more equally in the care of their children have done little to alter the inequitable distribution of work within the home in Western cultures (Baxter, 1993; Bianchi et al. 2000; Dempsey, 2002; Milkie et al. 2002; Ritchie, 1999; Wolcott and Hughes, 1999). The conversations between the women in this study have highlighted how the persistence of the gendered nature of caring is contingent on powerful emotional responses to the discursive construction of the Good Mother and the production of regulatory norms that equate femininity with self-sacrifice and nurturing. Coupled with current constructions of childhood, the belief that women must first care for others before they pursue their own interests is reflected in the sometimes profound feelings of guilt and anxiety that these four women described over engaging in practices that deviate too far from these norms.

Such beliefs are reiterated in social institutions as well as personal relationships and family life. The hegemonic power of institutionalised constructions of motherhood and childhood and the perpetuation of masculinist ideologies inherent in State institutions have also been subject to considerable critique from feminist academics. Calls for changes to welfare, childcare and employment policies and practices continue to remain largely unanswered in Western culture, leaving many women juggling a double shift that is exhausting and guilt inducing. Institutional power was sometimes experienced by these women as a form of “sovereign” control over their lives, prohibiting them from access to financial resources, but more often it was the

“governmental” power that works through State institutions that monitored and regulated their behaviour as mothers. This power was experienced in medical encounters, through welfare policies, and in their experiences at university. Thus the experiences of motherhood explored in this thesis are constrained by both governmental and sovereign forms of power, producing a persistent and prevailing set of discourses that combine to form what I have called the discourse of the Good Mother.

As Bridget, Hannah, Sarah and Penny described their daily negotiations of the Good Mother discourse, they sought to position themselves as Good Mothers, but also to challenge taken for granted notions of femininity, family and motherhood. They did this in a Pakeha New Zealand culture that has been defined historically by the need to populate a new colony in harsh environmental conditions amid two world wars, a global economic depression and the emergence of the Plunket Society, one of the strictest regimes of regulating motherhood that the Western world has known (Kedgley, 1996; Mein Smith, 2002). Motherhood in New Zealand became synonymous with patriotism during the early part of the twentieth century and the Plunket Society became the mechanism through which Pakeha women were subject to intense scrutiny and ‘scientific’ management while their children were young. Thus motherhood also became synonymous with regulation and surveillance in New Zealand, setting the scene for the state and medical control of many aspects of women’s experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and raising their children (Kedgley, 1996). Here and throughout the West, the state became more and more involved in the intimate details of everyday life: “In effect, in the name of state security, governmentality was extended slowly over more and more realms of life, demanding that the everyday intimacies of living be rendered more visible and more subject to intervention” (Nadesan, 2002; 420).

The shape of this intervention and the means by which mothers are regulated have altered over time and the women in this study described surveillance and scrutiny on a number of different levels - from the State imposed regulation of their economic circumstances as single mothers; to a pervasive sense of being watched and judged against a set of ideological norms constructed in and through forms of popular culture; to the self-imposed regulation of their own mothering practices as they worked to claim their place within the shifting boundaries of the Good Mother discourse. In negotiating contested notions of the Good Mother these women also participated in the regulation of other mothers' lives. In particular they often positioned themselves against other mothers as a means of establishing their own mothering practices as more fitting to idealised notions of motherhood.

The Good Mother discourse worked to regulate these women's lives within their homes and in their relationships with their children and male partners. The discussion of the motherhood workload in Chapter Six illustrates the sheer exhaustion of juggling domestic responsibilities with paid work, study and interests outside the home for these mothers. There was an almost total lack of opportunity for any of the four women to participate in leisure activities while their children were young and any time not spent at home or with their families was taken up with work and university study. The gendered norms that require women to not only undertake the majority of cleaning and caring work in their families, but that also demands a particularly intensive approach to raising children, often left the women in this study exhausted and resentful about the lack of support they received from their male partners. Yet these same gendered norms left them with few other options in a culture where feminine identity is constructed around notions of caring, nurturing and self-sacrifice (Hays, 1996, Villani, 1997). Unable to escape these norms altogether, the women in this study looked inwards, practicing various forms of self-regulation in an attempt to find solutions to the motherhood workload. Attempting to juggle all of their responsibilities often led to decisions to limit

the amount of time they would spend in paid employment or studying. These four women all chose low-paid employment that they could combine with their domestic responsibilities, such as caring for other women's children in their homes. This was also a means of earning some extra money that was not subject to government taxes. The extra work that was required to do this meant that the motherhood workload was increased by the need to earn money in ways that did not penalise them financially and did not require them to leave their children for long periods of time.

Constructions of childhood that stem from 1950s attachment theory position women who leave their children in the care of others for more than short periods of time as inadequate mothers (Dahlberg et al, 199; Gittens, 1998; Collier et al, 1993; Nasedan, 2002). These constructions then also restricted the possibilities for Penny, Hannah, Sarah and Bridget to pursue outside interests and exacerbated their feelings of guilt and anxiety when doing so. Not only did these women feel inadequate as mothers if they left their children in childcare institutions for too long, they also perceived the quality of their interactions with their children when they were with them as crucial to the child's ongoing development and emotional well-being. The intensive forms of mothering that are implied by the Good Mother discourse and current constructions of children and childhood, meant that even a simple task such as preparing a meal could become a difficult, stress producing activity when the constant demands of small children were perceived as requiring immediate and time-consuming attention. Failure to attend to their child's every need was perceived by the group as less than adequate mothering and productive of the self-regulatory practices that would ensure that their motherhood identities continued to comply with the ideals of the Good Mother discourse. Compliance with these ideals appeared to drive the many self-regulatory practices described in the conversations I recorded between Hannah, Bridget, Sarah, Penny and myself during 1996. It was clear that we all desired a motherhood identity that positioned us favourably within the

powerful regulatory discourses that surround motherhood in Pakeha New Zealand culture. And yet as I have argued, motherhood has become increasingly fluid and changing and alternative subjectivities have been available to women for several decades now.

The idealised image of the Good Mother that was described by these women persists still in representation if not often in practice, however. The media images of the Good Mother and the Idealised Nuclear Family that were identified during the interviews was deconstructed and for the most part rejected by the group, mainly due to the lack of fit between the realities of their daily lives and the polarised representations of Mother they encountered. Largely ignoring alternative media images of motherhood, the group focused on the most conservative and prevailing renditions of the Good Mother found in television programmes, women's magazines and advertisements. The discussions that resulted in their rejection of these images displayed a critical understanding of the politics of representation and in particular of exclusion. Poor mothers, single mothers, young mothers, welfare mothers and non-white mothers were all identified as being excluded from simplistic notions of Good Motherhood in media representations, while the white, middle-class, married mother of two beautiful children reigned supreme on television screens and in the pages of women's magazines. Often the recognition of media exclusions came from the invisibility of these women's own experiences in popular culture. Although they are all white, middle-class, well educated women, they have also between them experienced being young, poor, single and welfare mothers. Rejecting monolithic images of Good Motherhood then, the group went to work negotiating their own identities as mothers through a process of repositioning, redefining and in some cases rejecting altogether dominant discourses.

In particular the group resisted the more restrictive elements of the Good Mother discourse that confine women to the domestic realm. This resistance

took a variety of forms. By continuing with paid work and tertiary study whilst pregnant and when their children were young all four women occupied public spaces that are traditionally associated with the rational, masculine realm. Pregnancy created a state of altered normality, of deviation from expected bodily norms, which exposed the socially constructed nature of such norms while at the same time requiring particular forms of regulation to manage this deviance (Longhurst, 2000). The pregnant body thus became a body 'out of place', and it was from this very 'out of placeness' that the opportunity to resist normative images of female embodiment emerged. Taking babies or young children into spaces reserved for adults also elicited criticism and a sense of being under surveillance. That all four women encountered opposition to their pregnant bodies or their childrens' presence in public spaces, accompanied by a heightened sense of surveillance during these times, indicates the persistence of the regulatory discourses that position women within the domestic sphere. These experiences highlighted the social construction of differentiated masculine and feminine spaces and the difficulties mothers face in attempting to cross the boundaries between these. In a similar way, the feelings of guilt and anxiety described by these women during the interviews testifies to the difficulties women face when attempting to resist motherhood as a monolithic identity and pursue alternative subject positions outside the private realm. While pursuing paid employment and tertiary study these women could not escape the Good Mother discourse and the regulatory practices that accompany it, but instead attempted to redirect and redefine the characteristics of the Good Mother to include subject positions such as worker or student. This was never straightforward and required not only a careful positioning of oneself within the discourse of the Good Mother and often against other working mothers, but also taking on an often phenomenal workload as they continued to take overall responsibility for childcare and housework.

Resistance also took the form of choosing to parent alone rather than continue with unhappy relationships with the fathers of their children. Rejecting the notion of the Idealised Nuclear Family, Sarah, Penny and Hannah all opted for single parenthood and with it an increased financial, physical and emotional workload. This decision was accompanied by a sense of regaining control of their lives and all three reported being considerably happier as single mothers than they had been in unhappy relationships. Opting for single parenthood is a powerful rejection of one of the central constituents of the Good Mother discourse. Leaving a marriage and choosing to mother alone can be read as a highly political and subversive act. At the same time, however, the group's conversations illustrated how their discussions of unhappy relationships were embedded in discourses of romantic love and free choice. While the politics of exclusion were examined and the nuclear family rejected as the only site of Good Mothering, the day-to-day struggles amid the motherhood workload and the relationship trouble that accompanied it, was masked by the discourses of romantic love and personal choice that dominate intimate relationships in Western culture making it difficult to understand these except in terms of bad choices and personal inadequacies. These women described their relationships as failing because they chose the wrong men. While they proudly asserted their status as Good Mothers, despite being single, relationship troubles were personalised and individualised rather than understood as produced by the gendered norms that left women exhausted both physically and emotionally because of the motherhood workload. At the same time these discourses often excused men from much domestic labour.

Resistance to the regulatory power of the State and public institutions was much more visible however, and as such invited a clearer articulation of the surveillance and regulation of mother's lives than discussions of families did. The discourse of the Good Mother regulated these women's use of childcare facilities, requiring the careful positioning of oneself in relation to other

working and studying women. The influence of childcare workers was debated and contradictory understandings of the importance of such influences were articulated. Employing others to care for her children allowed each woman in the group the opportunity to study and work, but powerful notions of mother-child attachment and the 'formative' nature of the earliest years of a child's life restricted how much time each woman felt she could spend away from her child daily. Rather than critiquing these notions of childhood and motherhood, the women in the group criticised working conditions that reflected a traditionally male pattern of employment and failed to allow the flexibility they felt that women required to combine motherhood and career. Criticism was also aimed at medical institutions that reproduced the exclusions of the Good Mother discourse by scrutinising and questioning poor women's mothering abilities when their children were sick or injured and a welfare system that penalised single mothers financially and failed to recognise women's independence from their male partners economic circumstances.

The significance of the complex negotiations that surround Bridget, Sarah, Penny and Hannah constructing their identities as mothers lies in the possibility of enhancing our critical understanding of not just the reasons for the persistence of the Good Mother discourse, but also the barriers that stand in the way of well educated women who describe themselves as feminist or at least of having an understanding of gender issues in contemporary society, making wide-ranging changes to their mothering practices. These are women who are prepared to risk financial hardship and social stigma to mother alone, yet who feel guilty and inadequate when the exhaustion of the motherhood workload leaves them unable to instantly attend to a child's smallest need. The discussions held throughout 1996 illustrate how these women learnt, through their own experiences as children, that women are responsible for the nurturing and caring in families and that this would be their role as mothers. Though Bridget, Sarah and Hannah were all committed to their university

studies as a means to a professional career, the demands of the Good Mother discourse along with an employment culture that ignores the family responsibilities occupying many women's lives, restricted how they perceived their future employment prospects. Yet by choosing single motherhood, studying and working outside the home when pregnant or when their children are young, by confronting institutional inequalities or avoiding the financial penalties enforced on welfare mothers by the State, these women worked to redefine the regulatory power of the Good Mother discourse even as they were still constrained by it.

Hannah, Bridget, Sarah, Penny and myself all described our participation in such redefinitions. As we struggled to position ourselves within powerful discursive regimes we searched to find new ways to understand motherhood and personal relationships, to understand our own lives both inside and outside the discourses of the Good Mother and the Idealised Nuclear Family. This was a struggle because families no longer represent a simple, social structure with clearly defined roles for each member. Giddens (1999) writes of the family as a "shell institution", one that still has the same name "but inside their basic character has changed". He argues that today, "when people marry, or form relationships, there is an important sense in which they don't know what they are doing, because the institutions of marriage and the family have changed so much" (2). Within these changes in family life women struggle to juggle the demands of the double shift, the exhaustion of the motherhood workload and the desire for emotionally fulfilling relationships, all under the powerful gaze of the Good Mother discourse.

In a recent interview on the *Good Morning* television programme, aired nationally during the morning and aimed at women at home, family psychologist Ruth Jillings stated that "by rejecting the traditional nuclear family model we are left with a blank page on which to plot a new course". While mothers like Penny, Hannah, Bridget and Sarah are the women actively

engaged in plotting this course, there is a clear need for a decisively more critical approach to the gendered constructions of parenting that define children's needs as unquestionable, and nurturing and caring for them the primary domain of women. It was surprising that in all these discussions of motherhood and family life there was very little mention of the actual practices of mothering. As we talked about our lives as mothers there seemed to be an unspoken consensus that children's needs were foremost and that it was our role as mothers to provide for them unquestioningly. Failure to do so required self regulation and was often accompanied by the feelings of guilt and inadequacy described above. It is here that the demands of the Good Mother discourse most powerfully invest women's lives. For while they were able to reject the Idealised Nuclear Family, the confinement of pregnant women and young mothers to the private realm and the State control of women's economic circumstances, these four women were unable to reject the intensive mothering practices necessitated by current constructions of childhood.

The rigour with which mothering practices were examined varied in intensity among the four women in this study. Sarah and Bridget tended to interrogate both their own and other mother's behaviour more closely than Hannah and Penny. This may be due in part to their being younger and having younger children than Penny and Hannah. Evidence suggests that mothering is at its most intensive and time consuming when children are very young (Hays, 1996; Villani, 1997). Bridget and Sarah were also studying at postgraduate level and therefore under considerable pressure to perform to a very high standard academically, increasing the workload they were managing. Both Penny and Hannah had watched their older children survive some traumatic events and their comments often reflected a belief that, if provided with plenty of love and care, most children were resilient and could overcome earlier emotional difficulties. Current constructions of childhood are not immutable

therefore, and may be altered over time, but are nonetheless very powerful regulators of women's early experiences of motherhood.

Constructions of childhood that generate feelings of guilt and anxiety for mothers are embedded in what Dahlberg et al (1999) have described as the notion of the "poor" child. To begin to reconceive children as "rich" and capable rather than "poor" and vulnerable requires a rethinking of motherhood, the family and the relationship between the child and society. If childcare institutions were reimagined as sites where a child's social citizenship was developed in relationship with other children and a range of adults, women might not feel so anxious about leaving their children in the care of others. This would require a rethinking of the role of the family as the primary site of a child's physical, emotional and intellectual development and instead require a shift to understanding the relationship between the child and mother (and to a lesser extent the father) as only one of many important primary bonds with other people (ibid).

Having said that, the intense 'motherlove' described by the women in this study when they spoke about their children is compelling in a culture where self-serving individualism appears to dominate the public sphere. While I would join in the seemingly endless array of calls for men's increased participation in domestic responsibilities and childcare, a more flexible employment market, inexpensive and accessible childcare facilities and welfare reforms that recognise and value single mothers' work raising their children, it is clear that the regulatory processes described by Hannah, Penny, Sarah and Bridget are deeply embedded in notions of women's capacity for caring and loving that cannot simply be cast aside. As Sharon Hays (1996) argues, in a world where individualism, competition and global economics leave little room for community or social cohesion, the family remains a site, albeit a contested one, where putting the welfare of others ahead of one's own is still possible on a daily basis. The difficulty for these

women is that it is inevitably they who sacrifice their needs for the perceived needs of their families.

All four women stated that they have no desire to take on the traditional male role and feel that many men have missed out on rich emotional experiences by spending long periods of time away from their families. The desire for such experiences remains a strong one and I believe that the solutions to the exhaustion, guilt and anxiety of the motherhood workload, produced through the powerful regulatory processes of the Good Mother discourse, lie in the ongoing resistance and redefinition of traditional notions of family as much as they do in the restructuring of welfare and employment practices. Ali (2002) writes about Foucault's emphasis on localised forms of resistance, "with a focus on the construction of power at the 'microlevel of society' within day to day interactions. Such resistance can consist of individual acts that serve to exploit the contested space in between what is taken to be 'fact' and what is 'unknown'" (236). The fact that much of what will constitute family life in the new millenium is unknown and contested, provides women with opportunities to form new meanings of motherhood and to produce alternatives to the power effects of the Good Mother discourse. At the same time new understandings of childhood and the child as a social citizen are required if the physical and emotional exhaustion produced in and through the Good Mother discourse is to be alleviated.

The role of the media in shaping women's identities as mothers remains ambiguous. This study has shown that these women's daily negotiations of identity within the regulatory processes of the Good Mother discourse are much more complex than can be understood by a text based analysis of audience engagements with mediated images. When asked to talk about motherhood as represented in the media, the group chose to focus almost exclusively on the most conservative and dominant images of mothers and families. While they took some delight in occasionally finding an oppositional

or resistant image, their talk returned again and again to the Idealised Nuclear Family and the archetypal Good Mother or the negative portrayal of non-white and/or single and/or poor mothers. The last decade has seen a number of television programmes that openly critique and question the idealised family. Situation comedies such as *Roseanne* and *Married With Children*, and cartoons like *The Simpsons* and more recently *Southpark*, have all parodied and subverted idealised images of family life. In fact television has a long history of presenting, particularly through humour, a critique of suburban domestic bliss (See for example Lynn Spigel 1991 for a discussion of subversive domestic sitcoms from the 1950s). Yet when left unprompted to talk about particular programmes these women chose not to discuss this genre, but instead focussed on the most common and overwhelming image of the Good Mother in television. While providing some pleasure for these women, moments of resistance do not appear to erase the powerful regulatory effects of the most pervasive constructions of motherhood.

The death of Princess Diana part way through the research process provided a timely example of the dissonance between these women's regulation of their own mothering practices and their constructions of Diana as a symbol of Good Motherhood. Representing the extreme of motherhood under scrutiny, Diana was forgiven some serious deviations from the Good Mother ideal and positioned as a 'natural' and loving mother, standing in stark contrast to what these women perceived as the emotionally cold and distanced British royal family. As a symbol of resistance to institutional male power Diana is a consummate example. As a means of understanding how Pakeha mothers in New Zealand experience motherhood on a daily basis, discussions of Diana are inadequate and simplistic. It is clear then that audience studies must indeed be grounded in everyday life, locating studies of media reception in the historical, political and social lives of those who participate in such research, exploring, in Janice Radway's (1988) words "the endlessly shifting,

ever-evolving kaleidoscope of daily life and the way in which the media are integrated and implicated within it" (366).

## **Epilogue**

Louis is turning eight years old this month. During his short life he has experienced family as a constantly changing phenomenon. He has lived with his married parents and experienced their marriage collapse. He has lived with both his mother and father separately when they shared custody of him and lived with his mother alone when she had sole custodial rights. He has had a number of flatmates, both male and female when sharing a home with his father. He has formed brief relationships with both men and women as the new romantic interests in his parents' lives. He has developed strong relationships with both his parents' new partners and now shares his time between two homes comprising a mother and step-father and father and step-mother. He has formed strong bonds with 'step-cousins' and 'step-grandparents' among other relatives of his step-parents. He is soon to participate in his mother's second marriage ceremony and may well see the birth of a child to his father and step-mother in the next year or two. I asked him the other day what family means to him. "All the people you love and who love you, who are part of your family" he replied. I asked him who those people were in his life and he included many members of both his biological and step-parents' families in his reply as well as his best friend from school. I asked him what he thought the most important thing about mothers was. "They love you the most" he replied. After a moment he added, "and they do what you ask and they get you stuff as long as you're not from a poor family". I was quietly contemplating how simply he had encapsulated the Good Mother discourse when, with a smile that could melt the polar caps he added, "and you're the best mum in the WHOLE WORLD!" And at that moment the stress and exhaustion of the motherhood workload seemed very insignificant indeed.

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