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An other(ed) handmaid's tale : Child care workers: seen but not heard

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An other(ed) handmaid's tale

Child Care Workers: Seen but not heard

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ABSTRACT

Child care workers seem to have been forever assigned the lowest rung on the career ladder. Their low status has been attributed to several intractable factors: the socially devalued 'caring' nature of the role; the relatively small, disparate and non-hierarchically structured workplace; intimate association with an increasingly more marginalized group – children in their early childhoods; and an assumed complicity with a pseudo-surrogacy role of mother rendering them transgressors within a pro-natalist landscape. The institution of exclusive maternal care, for children prior to school, holds fast against the inexorable call for women to paid work. This dilemma resonates strongly within 'skills starved' economies facing diminishing birth rates. Whilst undeniably denigrating views of child care work persist in a sector buffeted by competing economic and cultural imperatives for child care provision, the voice of the predominantly female (97%) child care worker herself remains mute. This research seeks to explain how the voice of the child care worker lies baffled under a layered mantle of discourses. Uncovering how she has been named and marginalised provokes emancipatory imaginings of being heard and reinscribed. A feminist autoethnographic approach is adopted to investigate and interpret the researcher's experience of working within this fraught role. A metaphor of a handmaid subject-hood, constituted by a dissident relationship to motherhood and sisterhood within an ostensibly post-patriarchal state is appropriated to frame a disruptive analysis of the child care worker's occupation in (re) productive work for broader society.

Declaration

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(i)   Incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

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11/10/07

Kathrine Alice Sarah Whitty

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> *There remains a mirror on the wall, on the hall wall. If I turn my head so that the white wings framing my face direct my vision towards it, I can see it as I go down the stairs, round, convex, a pier-glass, like the eye of a fish, and myself in it like a distorted shadow, a parody of something, some fairytale figure in a red cloak, descending towards a moment of carelessness that is the same as danger. A Sister, dipped in blood.*
>
> *The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood, 1985, p.19*

A metaphor

Imagine this now. Once upon a time in a dystopic world an underclass of reproductive handmaids serve as surrogates to an infertile ruling elite. In this world a handmaid's subordination to the elite Commanders and Wives is underscored by an oppressive silencing and abnegation of the handmaid's will, in order that she serve the broader society obediently in a role reproducing its populace. Driven by the dictates of the Commander's world that include forced conception, segregation and public parturition, the story ends beguilingly, with a twist befitting feminist authorship. The handmaiden subject of the narrative's author, Margaret Atwood, (1985p. 18) tells her story as an act of resistance. Her eventual emancipation leaves the reader to consider not only the power of story, but also the empowerment of resistance to oppression, sought through and wrought by voice in writing.

This evocative metaphor will be used as a backdrop to my research. A research story concerned with dismantling the marginalisation of the child care worker, whose voice I contend, like the handmaid's, deserves a hearing from within a baffling array of discourses

producing the current context of Australian children's services. This thesis investigates how a handmaid-like child care worker, is seen but not heard. Her being rendered voiceless provides a rationale for my research question: How is the child care worker made visible but mute and what would she say if she were given a voice?

I argue that the child care worker has been silenced in a maelstrom of conflicting discourses. These discourses construe the child care worker as a 'handmaid' in service to the institutions of a public neo-liberal economic state, and a patriarchal form of private family and market service provision. My research begins with my own contribution to the sector as a committed child care worker, resistant union delegate, hopeful pedagogue and frustrated regulator. In as much as one can 'choose' motherhood this was also a period throughout which I chose *both* to take on motherwork and not to, an ambiguity which crucially informs my interpretations of being 'other-to-mother' in a sector both construed by, and disruptive of, pro-natalism.

This first introductory chapter provides some background context to the Australian child care sector and the public's perception of its provision as predominantly influenced by conflicting market and cultural imperatives.

The second chapter reviews some of the feminist, industrial, sociological, policy and educationist literature exploring the nature of the child care workforce's status. These bodies of literature are grouped under headings articulating the handmaid's work in relationship to the discursively produced institutions of motherhood, childhood and child care respectively as: *'other to mother'*, *'as minder'* and *'as martyr'*. This trilogy of refuted subjectivities, bound together in the metaphor of a handmaid, originates from a 1990's industrial campaign slogan: *"Not mother, not minders, not martyrs"*. Donna Haraway's endorsement of "figuration as a mode of theory"

(1992, p. 86) helps perfectly to theorise the resonance of such a slogan in a metaphoric whole when she recommends the usefulness of figuration "when the more 'normal' rhetorics of systematic critical analysis seem only to repeat and sustain our entrapment in the stories of the established disorders" (p. 86). The three terms are further explored in chapter four's first handmaid's tale. This literature review identifies the gap where the child care worker's insider perspective and experience is obscured.

Chapter three outlines the unconventional methodology I employ to locate and situate the child care worker's voice, reflecting her unique experiences and knowledge. I use a feminist autoethnographic approach to elicit an insider analysis of nine tales of my own experience and interpretations of child care work.

Nine tales of the handmaid in chapters four, five and six tell an iterative story of *betrayal* (chapter four), *dismantling* (chapter five) and *re-inscription* (chapter six). Each chapter of three tales describes and attempts a disruptive analysis of a handmaid's experiential insights.

Chapter seven concludes with the consideration of the handmaid becoming reinscribed. By voicing her own story, and suggesting alternative understandings, a child care worker epistemology is hinted at. A re-appraisal of her work, its value and the special knowledge and insight it brings to broader culture, its familial forms and childhoods, suggest that a dismantled handmaid can reinscribe herself.

Background context

Today in Australia an estimated 55,000 child care workers, in 4,484[1] centre based services are working with approximately 394,600 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005, p. 15)[2] children under school age. Conflicting claims about the amount of time these people should be spending with each other in these settings persist (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005, p. 4) whilst debates about quality, access and affordability prevail in the media against a backdrop of public consternation over impending shortages of children and workers impacting our economic futures (Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), 2006). The seemingly intractable workforce problems of staffing shortages, poor status and pay, linger frustratingly as the proverbial 'elephant in the room'.

Since the 1990s in Australia "there has been a fundamental transformation in the philosophy underlying the provision of children's services" (Brennan, 1998, p.205) such that policy-makers are no longer caught up in 'old' debates about how best to fund child care for all women and all children. A discernable shift in the public's perception of child care has occurred from the earlier pursuit of philanthropic, feminist or welfare objectives, to the pursuit of business objectives involving the "commodification" (Press & Woodrow, 2005, p. 278) or "property view" (Goodfellow, 2005, p. 59) of the child. It falls to children's parents to consider themselves "free to choose" (Goodfellow, 2005, p. 58) a child care service that 'suits them', within the 'open market' of a "levelled playing field" (Brennan, 1998, p. 205).

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[1] These estimations come from the Australia Institute which cites Family and Community Services and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare figures census and administrative data for 2005/2006.

[2] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005) identifies 7% of all Australian infants (up to 1 year old), between 38% and 53% of up to 3 year olds, 38% of up to 4 year olds, and 22% of up to 5 year olds attend formal child care (including occasional and family day care). The attenuation of 3 to 5 year olds is explained by increased attendances at state funded preschool/kindergarten programs and then school, where fewer children attending before or after school care programs would be counted in this data as formal attendance.

Ready access, choice and quality through competition, are the debated imperatives of child care policy, despite research finding "the limits of parents capacity for making informed choices suggest it is unlikely that [as] consumers [they will] exert an upward pressure on the market to improve or deliver quality in ECEC [Early Childhood Education and Care]" (Press & Woodrow, 2005, p. 282). Press and Woodrow also reflect on the dubious implications of marketisation for the workforce suggesting that:

> contrary to the conventional wisdom of the market, lack of supply [places and staff] has not resulted in improved wages and conditions. In fact, quite the opposite seems to occur as issues of quality and qualification collide with issues of profitability and viability (Press & Woodrow, 2005, p. 286)

Marketization under conservative policy approaches in Australia, the U.S and the UK have clearly favoured a social welfare model over a public investment model of child care provision (Morgan, 2003 p. 245). This approach allows for the less expensive option of demand-side or consumer subsidy (parent fees) funding, which has in turn led to what Brennan calls the "'market rules… ok?'" (1998) ethos in the Australian sector. Supply-side funding of fee relief directly to parents, rather than to service staff and infrastructure, has one commentator asking if it isn't the Australian Government who is in fact the "customer" of children's services by virtue of it's payment of a "sizeable subsidy for work-related care" (Nyland, 2001, p. 82).

However children's services are perceived, "the rights and needs of children do not play a major part in current policy debates: [as] the children's services program is firmly focused on the needs of adults (parents and employers)" (Brennan, 1998, p. 205). Arguably these adults, and the government as consumers, have been distracted from the integrity of the 'product' of child care and how it came to be made in Australia, at least in part, by its adult child care workers.

Whilst much has been written on the Australian child care sector's history and evolution as a result of broader ideological and political influences (Brennan, 1998; Petrie, 1992; Scutt, 1992) the child care worker's unique ontological knowledge has rarely featured in research endeavours. Consideration of the lack of insider perspectives on this gendered[3] occupation is subsumed by the more prominent dilemmas of staffing, access and quality limitations whilst profit making for shareholder and corporate investor's interests thrive (Kirby, 2003; Maiden, 2006).

In his cross-national comparative study Moss suggests that we need to consider diverse "construction[s] of the early childhood worker....by asking who we think [she] is" (Moss, 2000, p. 9) and by considering how a culture's construction of childhood itself impacts on our representations of the adults who work with them. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence suggest that the marketization of child care has produced "a matching construction of the early childhood worker [as] technician, substitute parent, and entrepreneur" (1999, p. 67). Representations of child care workers such as those made by the Australian ABC Learning Company's most recent television advertisement selling staff as service providers of 'learning with love' may aim to convey this technical and business like approach to child care, but arguably do little to progress professional or industrial gains for staff. It is difficult to imagine teaching or defence personnel advertisements aligned similarly with an imperative to provide love in their occupations. Articulations of an alternative image of child care as a "forum in civil society where adults and children engage together in a variety of projects of social, cultural, political and economic significance including pedagogical work" (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 62) are rarely heard within descriptions of the occupation.

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[3] Research into the gendered profile of child care work across nations in the OECD have consistently produced the approximate figure of 97% of people in child care roles being women (See Klein, 1992, p. 21, COAG's National Children's Services Workforce Study, 2006)

These contrasting views of child care work, jointly subsumed within a landscape of pronatalist discourse, and divided by the former's commercial imperatives and the latter's ideological holy-grail, of child care for children as citizens, seem irreconcilable. Somewhere in between is where the real and practiced labour with, by and for children, takes place daily within a workforce time commitment that exceeds that of the school year's[4]. This disjuncture between contrasting perceptions of child care work demands reappraisal.

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[4] Workforce participation hours determine that formal child care services usually operate in excess of core business hours (for example7am to 6pm) to allow for parent travel time as well as year round attendance (for example 50 weeks). Whilst individual children's participation in child care may be on a part-time basis the workforce's occupational conditions are usually full-time and contrast markedly with those of the education workforce. School attendance schedules (set within daily three to six hours sessions and four yearly terms of approximately 10 weeks) safeguard essential non-contact time for the education workforce in order to plan, evaluate, prepare and reflect on their direct contact/teaching time with children.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

> *Obviously, it could not have been recorded during the period of time it recounts, since, if the author is telling the truth, no machine or tapes would have been available to her, not would she have had a place of concealment for them. Also, there is a certain reflective quality about the narrative that would to my mind rule out synchronicity. It has a whiff of emotion recollected, if not in tranquillity, at least post facto.*
>
> *The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood, 1985, –Historical Notes- p. 315*

To locate the voice of the child care worker this thesis will be written from a feminist perspective incorporating the autobiographical experience of the researcher in the project of researching a child care worker's voice. I have been inspired by the comprehensive work of Reinharz (1992) who suggests that the "desire to eradicate the distinction between the researcher and the researched" (1992, p.234) is indicative of feminist researchers' "innovative.. study of their personal experiences" (p. 234). She defines an "epistemology of insiderness...that violates the conventional expectation that a researcher be detached, objective, and value neutral" (p. 261). This feminist approach will therefore adopt the emergent qualitative method of autoethnography[5] along with a deconstructive analysis of my own experiences. I welcome the prospect of being suspended in the "tension" and "dual vision" of "distrust and belief" between "two worlds – the world of discipline....and the world of feminist scholarship" (Reinharz, 1992, p.243).

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[5] Autoethnography is considered to be located 'at the boundaries' of disciplinary research practice (Foster et al, 2006, p. 44) and is still to gain broad 'legitimacy" and acceptance in light of "postmodernism's doubts about the privilege of any one method for obtaining authoritative knowledge about the social world" (see for example Holt, 2006) As such it needs to be employed with considerable forethought and conviction on the part of the researcher.

A feminist perspective and cross disciplinary approach

In her essay *The possibility of feminist theory,* Marilyn Frye (1993) suggests legitimizing feminists' perceptions of the "patterns of patriarchy" (p.109) through "outlaw emotions" which "flag black holes – where privileged perceptions, opinions and practices" (p. 108) may lurk. In adopting a feminist perspective which countenances child care workers marginalisation with distrust, as well as belief in their (ir)resistible potential, this research also works across the two disciplines of women's studies and the study of child and family. This reflects my need to understand how, as a feminist child care worker, I have been discursively produced between them. Between and marginal to these disciplines, I suspect, is where the story lies, and where past misunderstandings, outlaw emotions and misnomers have obscured knowledge produced by resistant handmaids:

> Try to go back through the names they've given you……
> exposing the indeterminacy of woman…is clearly a
> destabilizing political act.
>> (Iragary cited in Zalewski, 2000, p. 70)

My location as an outsider to heterosexuality and biological motherhood must also account for the privileges of being a white, educated, able-bodied and fee-paying student of colonial heritage. Whilst hoping that child care workers may, at least partially identify with my own experience and interpretations this thesis does not claim to speak representationally. As Martin cautions:

> The search for a more perfect self, for a truer more
> authentic 'I' too often represents a refusal to account for
> the position from which we speak, to ground ourselves
> materially and historically, to acknowledge and be vigilant
> of our own limitations and our own differences…It is
> imperative that we understand and not abuse the need
> and/or the desire to speak and be heard.
>> (Martin, 1992, p.284)

Explicitly then, this thesis assumes that my experience as a child care worker authorizes me to comment on the felt and experienced meaning of marginalisation within this occupation.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography will connect my "personal self (as researcher) to the broader cultural context" by employing the technique of "evocative writing to share experience and extend understanding of a particular social issue" (Foster, McAllister, & O'Brien, 2006, p. 44). Autoethnography's intent and execution lends itself well to seeking out a marginalised voice in a sector where exploitative conditions have resulted in "staff prefer[ring] the exit voice over the trade union voice" (Lyons, 1996, p. 635). It will capture a silenced knowledge constituting an alternative form of resistant voice to that of the 'exit' or 'trade union voice'.

In response to the common criticisms of autoethnography's potential "narcissism, self-absorption, exaggeration and self-indulgence" (Foster et al., 2006, p. 48) I contend that three advantages outweigh these limitations: Firstly, the nature of this method's execution –giving voice- echoes the intent of my research to distinguish a child care worker epistemology as it has been silenced and hidden from mainstream research. Giving voice to an individual child care worker is an initial and symbolical step on the path to broader ethnographic research on this sub-culture. Secondly there is a scarcity of written material that documents the lived experiences of child care workers by the women (and men) who have worked in this capacity and who speak to illuminate rather than criticize, advise or exhort. Thirdly, I view the exemplary endeavours of child care workers as being akin to the goals of autoethnographers such as those, Carolyn Ellis aspires to: "narrative modes of scholarship that emphasize human solidarity, community, sense making, coping with and improving life conditions" (Ellis, 1997, p. 117). "Evocative storytelling, acts of

dramatic representation, revealing and making sense of life's mysteries and certainties, within a community of different people learning to co-operate and question", describes several core occupational pursuits and daily endeavours of child care workers.

Discourse analysis

Discourses have been described as "defining the nature of an institution...revealing its strategic production of knowledge, its rhetoric and its suppressions" (Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos, & Kirkby, 2003, p. 95). In attending to several dominant discourses producing the institutions of family, childhood and child care, this thesis sets out to analyse how they "operate by marking out or colonising" (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003, p. 94) child care practices. I attempt to analyse these discourses as "a way of exploring the power relations [they] mobilise, identifying the distribution of power and making it available for critique" (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003,p. 95). Foucault's critical method has been described as one that "locates power outside conscious or intentional decision [and] asks how power installs *itself* and produces real material effects" (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 15 - original italics).

Revealing the discourses that "treat and contain truths" (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 15) about child care work elucidates how the child care worker subject has been construed as someone 'other' to: a skilled autonomous and collegiate practitioner, working in a complex role, requiring the artful execution of particular knowledges and providing professional and ethical capabilities in spite of poor conditions that mitigate against success. I argue that the neo-liberal economy's privileging of certain traditional ideologies influence the disempowered subjectivity of child care workers. I want to make an 'unruly' reading of some of the 'normal' texts flowing discursively throughout the institutional site of child care service.

The data

Nine handmaid's tales encapsulate a selection of personal accounts of epiphanous insights, paradoxes made manifest, routine conflicts of understanding and perception, and motivational experiences in my time as a child care worker. Autoethnographic collation of data for this research may risk the limiting claim of "solipsism, projection [and] ethnocentrism" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 261) The integrity and verisimilitude of the handmaid's tales validates the research data and their potential as "a resource for understanding the problematic world being investigated" (Holt, 2003, p. 11) and to find an:

> emancipated voice…that has unmasked oppression-perpetuating falsifications…analysing how these structures maintain the status quo and who is benefiting from this setup, and by envisioning a society free of repression and exploitation   (Meyers, 2001, p. 740)

The data's representations of the 'subculture'[6] child care worker have been "rhizomatically"[7] (Malpas & Wake, 2006, p.245) and reflexively developed and collated throughout the process of recalling my experience and writing the thesis. Relevant artefacts (such as cartoons, speech notes, and other documentation) complement the discursive analysis of an insider's perception of the handmaid's marginalisation. The handmaid's tales incorporate departures from

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[6] In rationalizing the use of autoethnography Bennell's definitions (cited in Duckart, 2006) provide clarity of purpose. Child care workers are considered a 'subculture', 'in conflict with other cultures' (the institutions of education, nursing and motherhood for example) by which they are 'positioned as different, othered and marginalized'. The tales speak to those 'outside of the subculture', by attempting to be seen [or heard] as others may not see [or hear] them in order to 'explain the othering process' (Bennell cited in Duckart, 2006).

[7] As suggested by Malpas and Wake (2006) I use this term in 'critique of the long theoretical domination of tree-like models of thinking in which central unities subordinate real plurality and difference' reflecting the intuitive and undetermined nature of the tales and their wont to travel in associative and, unsystematic directions.

the more prevalent contemporary and public discursive appraisals of Australian children's services provision.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

The newspaper stories were like dreams to us, bad dreams dreamt by others. How awful, we would say, and they were, but they were awful with out being believable. They were too melodramatic, they had a dimension that was not the dimension of our lives. We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom. We lived in the gaps between the stories.

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood, 1985, pp. 66-67.

An insider's account of child care work necessitates a review of the voices outside of practice that help produce (and reflect) the handmaid figure through dominant and circumscribing discourses of the institutions of family (and motherhood), childhood and childcare. In producing child care work these discourses also delineate a gap where one of two insider voices (children and child care workers) is missing. The voices of children are not presented in this thesis although I hope that an integral valuing of their contribution to the handmaid's voice and knowledge claims is evident. This literature review forms the background to an analysis of the handmaid's potential to resist the dominant discursive production of the institutions of family (including motherhood), childhood and child care. Discourses that place child care workers as handmaids in the undervalued labour of caring for groups of 'other' people's children are discourses that predominate in the constitution of the concepts of Family (Motherhood), Childhood and Childcare. These discourses play an undeniably powerful role in upholding the persistent marginalisation of an occupation that endeavours to work 'in partnership' with all three.

Collier, Rosaldo and Yanagisako in asking 'Is there a Family?'(1992) suggest the hegemonic concept of "The Family as the universal human institution" (p.31) still produces and is produced by contemporary pronatalist discourse. Collier et al challenge Malinowski's claim as an influential anthropologist who studied Australian Aborigines, that "units of parents and children have to have clear boundaries in order for childrearing responsibilities to be assigned efficiently" (p. 35) contending that, as with "any functionalist argument", this one is 'flawed' (p. 34) because it prohibits us from countenancing how we uncritically:

> ideologize relations within The Family as nurturant while casting relationships outside The Family – particularly in the sphere of work and business-as just the opposite...The Family is seen as representing not only the antithesis of the market relations of capitalism; it is also sacrilized in our minds as the last stronghold against The State, as the symbolic refuge from the intrusions of a public domain that constantly threaten our sense of privacy and self determination. (Collier et al., 1992, p.43)

Ailwood also contends that "the education of young children is deeply embedded in a range of complex and contradictory 'adult' discourses and knowledges, including those of motherhood, politics, worker, citizen and economy" (2004, p. 19). In her Foucauldian analysis of the Queensland government's provision of preschool education and it's "new political rationalities, tactics, strategies and techniques for governing preschool spaces and subjectivities", Ailwood suggests that "recognising these shifts in understanding motherhood and the woman worker/citizen on neo-liberal and advanced liberal societies is important for early childhood as they are closely linked to our understanding of young children" (2004, p. 28). Ailwood shows how "preschools were established on a voluntary, sessional kindergarten model – a model that did not disrupt the valorisation of motherhood and family" (2004, p. 26). Cox (1988) likewise drew this to our

attention two decades ago when she argued conclusively that the "state enters very reluctantly into the provision of any services designed to relieve women substantially of their child-rearing responsibility" :

> These kindergartens worked on part-day programs and were deliberately made unsuitable for use by the employed mother. They were for intervention and education, aimed at the child *and* the mother at home. Not only did the centres question the legitimacy of parental values in child-rearing, mothers were only given minimal relief in terms of time, and also expected... to contribute by doing some of the domestic chores (emphasis in original)
>
> (Cox, 1988, p. 192)

Saggers and Grant research found family day care staff were "taking up a position ... akin to professional detachment" (1999, p. 82) in their work and found "deep psychological and sociological contradictions...apparent in [their] voices" (p. 81). They cite further feminist research when suggesting that "those performing motherwork have" (p. 81) "brought about profound social and economic changes that outstrip the interpretive power of representations of motherhood" (Adams cited in Saggers & Grant, 1999p. 82). Saggers and Grant conclude that "to mother other people's children in a . rapidly professionalising setting...necessitate[s].. more flexible ideologies of mothering" (p. 82).

The diagnosis by Meyers (2001, p. 735) of a particular genealogy of motherhood discourse, "matrigyno-idolatry", as an obstacle to women's autonomy, seems also to pervade the child care setting. Meyer's diagnoses is appealing in particular because of its scope for child care workers to contest, rather than reproduce, matrigyno-idolatry in their work, and claim a form of autonomy in this location where they are perceived as being 'other' to mothers on their way to becoming or substituting for proper mothers. Meyer's argues for a

better child rearing context where children construct a knowledge of mothering as future parents and where "caregivers and educators [could] modify their practices...to discern the detrimental impact of matrigynist figurations... envisage dissident figurations...and entrust their lives to those figurations that augment their fulfilment and enhance their self-esteem" (Meyers, 2001, p. 769).

In her research on "'infertility'/ 'involuntary childlessness'" and" 'non-motherhood'" Letherby also uncovers an array of 'stigmatising' motherhood and non-motherhood discourses which produce "all contemporary societies [as] pronatalist" (1999, p. 361). Letherby suggests that her own research respondent's "resistance was reflected in their ambivalent feelings surrounding motherhood" (p. 365). Instead of being taken seriously these feelings of ambivalence were regarded as an "individual shortcoming...rather than an aspect of everybody's lives" (p. 365). As the child care workforce is predominantly made up of women who either, intend or do not intend to mother, are voluntarily or perhaps involuntarily mothers, or voluntarily or involuntarily not mothers, are becoming or un-becoming mothers, or consider themselves social as well as biological mothers, ambivalence as a theme seems crucial. These permutations represent in the institution of motherhood at least a myriad of what, Letherby feels is, "a difference that has been given little attention by feminists" (p. 370). Unlike the education system's sessional preschool model which Cox and Ailwood have suggested is tailored to compliment and sustain the ideal institution of mothering, child care is positioned as either substituting poorly for, or being dichotomously opposed to, 'proper' mothering, thereby constituting its staff if Letherby's perspicuity is applied, as "other to mother" and as "stranger".

Despite its rocky genesis as a concept of rearing young children collectively the reality for potential development of the child care sector is still subsumed in a baffling profusion of feminisms'

theorizing about motherhood which, it has been suggested, is "trapped in dominant cultural assumptions and fantasies …, which in turn rest on fantasised and unexamined notions of child development" (Chodorow & Contratto, 1992, p. 209). Chodorow and Contratto's opinion that:

> feminist views of mothering...have united infantile fantasies and a culturally child-centered perspective with a myth of maternal omni-potence creating a totalistic, extreme, yet fragmented view of mothering and the mother-child relation in which both mother and child are paradoxically victim yet omnipotent   (1992, p. 210)

sheds some light on the terrain child care workers (mothers and non-mothers) necessarily must negotiate in their daily work with (mostly) mothers, who like themselves and children, are "valued rhetorically but not structurally" (Letherby, 1999, p. 361) and must juggle a shared stigmatisation.

Discourses of 'martyrdom' in the institution of Child care

Feminist analyses of the exploitative nature of child care work, which flourished during the introduction of a children's services quality assurance system (Petrie, 1992; Scutt, 1992; Wangmann, 1995) seem to have waned. A few studies directly seeking the view of Australian child care workers on the material reality and status conditions of their occupation (Lyons, 1996, 1997; Rush, 2006; Saggers & Grant, 1999) suggest a discernable gap in research on their lived experiences in these settings; their own interpretation of their occupational relationship with children and families, and their ability to navigate their subaltern status and marginalisation through its production in pronatalist discourse. Insightful feminist appraisals of resistance to this status have occurred (Petrie, 1992; Wearing, 1984) but are rarer than the more usual macroanalyses of the sector which focus on debates over child care's integrity, it's complementarity to

education and parenting imperatives, and debates about quality, affordability and access for its most powerful customer, the broader workforce.

Several writers have alluded to the deeply embedded discourses of motherhood complicating child care work (Petrie, 1992, p. 8; Saggers & Grant, 1999, p. 70; Scutt, 1992, p. 20). These writers expose possible inversions of thinking that reveal underlying pervasive 'will to truths' about the institutional constructions of childhood, motherhood and family, suggesting that the child care setting may be a powerful site of resistance to these institutions.

Petrie (1991) for instance has considered whether child care workers employed in the family day care model of provision perceive themselves as "liberated or entrapped". As business women working from home it could be argued that they have 'liberated' themselves and other women into paid work whilst retaining a home setting for both their own, and other women's, children. This contrasts paradoxically with the view of family day carers as being entrapped by exploitative work conditions for other women's gains, perpetuating a patriarchal model of child rearing, and compromising their own children's access to exclusive maternal care. Petrie asks if in fact, contrary to an institutional view of entrapment, family day care is actually an empowering "stepping-stone" to the "wider work-place" that constitutes a discernable form of "accommodation and resistance to the prevailing social order" (1991, p. 5).

Petrie (1992) further demonstrates how the child care worker's occupational profile is caught up in the idealisation of family as "self-reliant, nurturing and economically self-contained" (p.24) and "where intrusion by [child care workers] is only legitimised if the family is deviant (i.e., neglectful, abusing, poor)" (p. 24). She explains how child care in Australia developed from sanctioned forms of "benevolent or philanthropic" (p. 24) provision that "cannot and

should not be justified for families who are not inadequate nor deviant" (p. 24) and that the false "dichotomy between education and care is rooted in the fundamental dilemma concerning public versus private responsibility for child rearing" (p. 24). Petrie also explains how the child care worker struggles with a self-perpetuated image constructed through a history of conservative motherhood and educationist ideology. This is not surprising given her supposition that "'other-care' represents the failure of 'mother-care' in the eyes of traditionalists" (p. 18) and becomes particularly salient in a workforce where research shows that early childhood teachers themselves "espouse traditional ideologies about family and motherhood" (p. 19) This does not auger well for a re-imagined vision of "early childhood services [as] human services which should be carried out for males and females by males and females" (Petrie, 1992, p. 27). Petrie's idealisation echoes the imagined post-patriarchal world the feminist Mary O'Brien envisaged, just a decade earlier, where "in a rational human society men and women [would be] sharing in the roles of [production] in the morning, [childcare] in the afternoon, and critical [criticism] in the evening" (O'Brien, 1981, p. 209).

Such revisioning brings promise to a sector that seems well placed for a radical and socialist feminist appeal for communal and collective approaches to child rearing. International models such as the communal schools of Reggio Emilia in Italy which were established by Malaguzzi in the aftermath of the second world war, offer a radical re-envisaging of early childhood as a communal responsibility:

> Our image of children no longer considers them as isolated and egocentric, does not see them only engaged in action with objects, does not emphasize only the cognitive aspects, does not belittle feelings or what is not logical and does not consider with ambiguity the role of the affective domain. Instead our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and other children.
> (Malaguzzi cited in Dahlberg et al., 1999)

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Most public accounts of the children's services sector tend to focus on what have been described as it's crises and intractable dilemmas: an undervalued workforce (Doherty, Lero, Goelman, LaGrange, & Tougas, 2000, p. 59; Smith, 2002, p. 72; Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber, & Howes, 2001, p. 59), a potentially stressful environment for its participant's parents, their children and staff (Sims, Guilfoyle, & Parry, 2006, p. 10) and the dubious ethics of a stockmarket flourishing despite a sector 'in crisis' (Kirby, 2003). A Coalition of Australian Government (COAG) sub-committee report released in January 2006 as the *National Children's Services Workforce Study* reiterates the ongoing profile of a sector in "crisis" (Elliott, 2006, p. 41; Press, 2006, p. 44; Sumsion, 2005), although it does not directly refer to it as such, when it a predicts a shortfall of 7320 staff members in child care services as opposed to an oversupply of 1075 staff members in the preschool and kindergarten sector by 2013 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006, p. 29). This discrepancy no doubt reflects the significant pay, condition and status disparity between the two early childhood occupations:

> Issues related to poor conditions are more likely to be found within long day care (centre-based and home-based) rather than pre-school. Staff within preschools are likely to work shorter days and have longer holidays than staff within long day care....research pointing to long hours, expectations of unpaid work...higher numbers of children to staff, particularly for infants and toddlers...being factors that lead to staff stress and job dissatisfaction. (Press, 2006, p. 44)

Expert and policy recommendations to address a workforce in "disarray" (Elliott, 2006, p. 50) , "some degree of turmoil" and a "chronic shortage of workers" (McDonald, 2002, p. 201) usually include the rhetorically sound calls (that have yet to materialise) for; universal provision (McDonald, 2002, p. 202); more research, especially in measuring or profiling the "problem" (McDonald, 2002, p. 201); strengthening of family and community co-operation (Press, 2006, p. 53); better integration and co-ordination of relevant

government departments (Press, 2000, p.63; 2006, p. 52), and ending the care-education dichotomy (Elliott, 2006, p. 46).

In the United States Whitebook et al. suggest that the "acute problem" that is "the child care staffing crisis", "left unattended eventually becomes the *status quo"* (original italics) (Whitebook et al., 2001, p. 59) and point to more overt proof of administration and policymaker's "profound reluctance" (p. 59) to follow through with recommendations to bolster an ailing workforce with direct and publicly funded wage subsidies. Successive US State Governors (Pete Wilson and Gray Davis respectively) are quoted as saying:

> While recognizing the important role child care providers play in caring for our children I do not believe it is appropriate for the State of California to provide wage subsidies or other-wise interfere in the private child care market...this may constitute a gift of public funds.

> and

> While turnover in the child care profession may create problems for certain communities in filling vacancies in a timely manner, I am not convinced that this approach [direct staff wage subsidies] is warranted [and] am concerned..[with] establishing a costly new state responsibility that will grow rapidly over time.
> (Whitebook et al., 2001, p. 29)

In Australia too, suggestions for the direct funding of pay increases to staff, usually come with a thinly disguised caveat that reiterates an oppressive under-privileging of the child care worker's wages against the more privileged imperatives of accessibility and affordability in a capitalist market system where the government only pays for users to pay :

> We therefore repeat the recommendation made by the Child Care Workforce Think Tank in 2003: governments must 'address the costs of improving the pay and conditions of the early childhood workforce *while ensuring that the cost to families is affordable'*.....One possible strategy for addressing this issue would be to raise the minimum wages of child care workers. Price

> restrictions could then be imposed on centres that are
> eligible to receive child care benefits to *ensure child care
> remains accessible.* (Rush, 2006, p. 61 italics added)

Marilyn Waring claimed that "by this failure to acknowledge the primacy of reproduction, the male face of economics is fatally flawed" (Waring, 1988, p. 23). As women have moved into the paid economic workforce, the lowly or unpaid work of child rearing, wherever it is conducted (in family or centre based services) remains divested of any proper economic value. Waring vigorously laments rhetorical displays of this hypocrisy still relevant to both mothers and child care workers today:

> We frequently hear from politicians, theologians, and
> military leaders that the wealth of a nation is its children.
> But, apparently the creators of that wealth deserve no
> economic visibility for their work. (Waring, 1988, p. 23)

As a cartoon drawn by Peta Rowney, a new graduate to the child care sector, so aptly depicts a stereotypical assumption of the motivation of child care worker to participate in such poorly remunerated and undervalue work is still that it is a type of martyrdom: a public/private apprenticeship for the more important private/public endeavour of motherhood (see Appendix A).

Discourses of 'minding' in the institution of Childhood

In their post-modern consideration of early childhood institutions, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education* Dahlberg, Moss & Pence (1999, pp. 52 - 69) have suggested that constructions of childhood and children are indeed productive of practice, and propose that the constructions of the child care institution as a "producer of standardized and pre-determined child outcomes,....substitut[ion] for home-like care...and business competing in a market to sell products" predominate (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 68). These constructions of early childhood settings in line with economic, family and education policy resound throughout

contemporary Australian policy and research documents (Elliott, 2006, p. 4; Press, 2000, p. 20; 2006, p. 24) prioritising the requirement for children's services settings as "first[ly] for maternal employment,... second[ly]...children's development and third [ly] to intervene with economically disadvantaged ethnic minority children and socialize them to the cultural mainstream" (Scarr cited in Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 63). In suggesting that a "shift of reproduction ...away from the private domain of the household and the extended family" is occurring Dahlberg et al, ask why this can't be a shift away from the "domains of state and economy to the domain of civil society" where:

> transformed community institutions of social solidarity ...the exercise of democracy and freedom through learning, dialogue and critical thinking [takes place along with] social support for parents, both in and out of the labour market [and there is provision of] a mechanism of redistribution of resources towards children as a social group. (p. 70)

According to Dahlberg et al., "Foucault believed... local sites [such as early childhood institutions] very productive for analysing theories of power" (1999, p. 42) and argue that the problematizing of early childhood's discursively predominant theory of child development is occurring within a "new sociology of childhood" (p. 49). This new understanding recognises children "as full members of society, as both part of, but also separate from the family with their own interests" and as "rich, powerful, knowledgeable, competent and agentic beings, capable of *co-constructing..*culture [and their] own identity "(pp. 49 - 50) [original italics].

These new constructions of childhood for children in child care settings resist old constructions of children that determine their "psychological individualisation" (Mayall cited in Dahlberg et al., 1999. p. 49) as merely "a preparatory or marginal stage" (p. 49) towards adulthood. For Canella too, (1998) the construction of childhood has depended on the hierarchical privileging (as its binary opposite) of adulthood (pp. 157-184). Canella describes the negative

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constructions of children as weak, fragile, unworldly, incompetent, unintellectual, asexual, needy and innocent as "whole child narratives"(p. 160). She points to the historically determined categorization of individual developmental domains (cognitive, social, language, moral and physical for example) that contribute to the production of a child's "predisposition to logic, reason and organisation"(pp. 160 -161). In the institution of childhood these discourses produce[8] a child care curriculum from staff based on individualized outcomes for children's optimal learning confined to each of these "essential" domains as well as ensuring that any "ambiguous, indeterminate characteristics exhibited during the early years are suppressed" (p. 161).

In her paper considered foundational to Australia's "internationally recognised" (Press, 2000, p. 58) accreditation system, June Wangmann (1995, p. 74) remarks on the "critical" levels of staff turnover surmising that this may be due to "training institutions not adequately preparing graduates for the *realities* of working in child care services' (Wangmann, 1995, p. 80 - italics added). In national surveys recently undertaken in the United States and Australia (Council of Australian Government (COAG)s ' Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council, 2006, p. 93; Smith, 2002, p. 72; Whitebook et al., 2001, p. vi) child care workers, despite their satisfaction with the work per se (Lyons, 1997, p. 42), have consistently nominated the *realities* of poor pay, public regard, and working conditions as the reasons for their leaving the field.

The incongruence, as suggested by Wangmann, between the child care workers preparatory expectations, theoretical knowledge and their reality of "being there" (Reid-Boyd, 2000, p. 236)[9] in their

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[8] See for example the Australian Capital Territory's licensing regulations- *ACT Children's Services Conditions for Approvals in Principle and Licences, 2000* – Condition 5.1 (b) & (e).
[9] I am indebted to Elizabeth Reid Boyd's comprehensive thesis on the concept of 'being there' in defining the nature of motherwork with children as it is experienced by mothers who 'stay at

practical work with children is redolent of Rich's theorizing of motherhood in her seminal work *Of Woman Born* (1976). Here Rich describes the contradictory (dis)empowerment that separates the lived experience of motherhood from the ideology of motherhood as institution. Child care workers likewise seem precariously and ambivalently positioned through policy, practice and rhetorical structures as handmaids to the adult "consumers" of her occupation; parents, corporate shareholders and the Australian government, whose funding privileges the imperatives of workforce participation and early intervention for 'needy' families.

Conclusion

The child care worker's voice is muted by public discourses that construe child care institutions to compliantly uphold (or be charged with irreverently destabilizing) familial, and childhood ideologies. Within these discursive paradigms I find the child care worker to be ultimately construed as an *other-to-mother, minding, martyr* in service to the capitalist state's version of family, its children and its imperatives for men and women's participation in paid work. *If* the child care worker were enabled (under vastly improved conditions) to speak from her unique standpoint, that I contend is well placed to deconstruct these privileged and powerfully embedded discourses, *would she say anything different? If so what would it be?* Nine tales, I trust, will shed some light and bring some resistant and re-constructive insight.

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home' but for whom I also feel the term applies well as a descriptor of the nature of centre based child care, particularly for infants, in its 'cyclical, continuous, time in reproduction' (2000, p. 236)

CHAPTER 4

BETRAYAL?

Yours is a position of honour, she said...Try to think of it from their point of view. It isn't easy for them.....It's not the husbands you have to watch out for, said Aunt Lydia, it's the Wives. You should always try to imagine what they must be feeling. Of course they will resent you. It is only natural. Try to feel for them. Aunt Lydia thought she was very good at feeling for other people. Try to pity them. Forgive them, for they know not what they do. Again the tremulous smile, of a beggar, the weak-eyed blinking, the gaze upwards, through the round steel-rimmed glasses, towards the back of the classroom, as if the green-painted plaster ceiling were opening and God on a cloud of Pink Pearl face powder were coming down through the wires and sprinkler plumbing. You must realize they are defeated women. They have been unable ...

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood, 1985, p. 56

This chapter outlines how the child care worker has been named. It describes her subjectivity as being formed by an indifferent public regard and ambivalent private experience, resulting in a jointly held perception of a lowly social status. The chapter's three tales encapsulate a personal/political awakening and it's subsequent manifestation in me as a sense of betrayal to the oppressive conditions of my occupation. A betrayal underscored by a fraughtly defined relationship with the children of, ostensibly, post-patriarchal sisters who I discover are similarly marginalised as child care 'users'. This chapter examines how the handmaid's low status is bolstered by discourses of crisis and commiseration in the sector, and concludes by hinting at the subversive knowledge she has, albeit hidden under the handmaid's metaphoric mantle of marginalisation.

> *FIRST HANDMAID'S TALE: "T is for T-shirt and Terrible Trinity"*
>
> *In 1989 I worked with a group of people referred to as 'toddlers'. These people and I learned a lot in a short time together about our place in the world. Guilty by association, we couldn't help noticing that we were both construed alternately as nice but naughty, saintly but stupid. The 'toddlers' sometimes wore t-shirts with other peoples words describing holidays they had been on. I sometimes wore a t-shirt describing a wage I'd have liked to earn underscored by a catch-cry designed to bolster our wage claim in the (then) Industrial Relations Commission. My t-shirt's words were: "Not mothers, Not minders, Not martyrs!" Today I'm still trying to decipher their meaning –especially the overt denigration of motherhood.*

As an industrially active child care worker I was keen to bear a campaign slogan for improved wages and conditions that emphatically denied my occupation as that of a 'mother', a minder, or a martyr?' But I am simultaneously perturbed by how the predominantly female workforce of a putatively feminist project- child care- can reject its touchstone –motherhood- that it was so surely founded upon to support?

This first of three handmaid's tales suggest that whilst child care is now publicly visible within a masculinised market place of "entrepreneurial patriarchy" (Currie, Thiele, & Harris, 2002, p. 177), the dilemma gnawing at its core originates still within the "responsibility for parenting which devolves almost exclusively to mothers [and as] a major factor in the subordination and oppression of women" (Wearing, 1984, p. 11). The marginalisation of child care workers to whom, I argue, motherwork[10] has further-more been devolved albeit it differently in group settings, is best discerned in its material form as a pay check. Rowney's depiction of the reaction of a new recruit to the sector, who may share something of the ambition

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[10] I have deliberately appropriated the term motherwork in acknowledgement of its nature as labour with the potential for being undertaken collectively by those other than those directly related to the child. See for example Ruddick in Maternal Thinking: Towards a politics of peace, 1989.

and intent, of a lone parent with quintuplets[11] reflects the material worth and under-valuing both may feel at the end of a long day (See Appendix A).

Rothman claims 'something has to be done about child care'(1989, p. 102) and that a questionable modification of patriarchy has occurred within child care provision that extends privileges of Victorian fatherhood to "mothers as father-equivalents"(p. 92), leaving women "to own their children, just as men do" (p. 91). Rothman decries the privileging of the genetic over the nurturant tie expressed in the "ultimate meaning of patriarchy for mothers: [as] Seeds [being] precious [and] Mothers fungible" (p.97), and draws attention to the oppressive irony in the actions of mothers "substituting poorer women to do the traditional mothering work" which paradoxically when it is "performed by hired hands is called unskilled" (p. 97):

> We devalue these nurturing tasks when we contract on them. When we do them ourselves...see them as precious, as special, as treasured moments in life. That is the contradiction that allows us to value the children so highly, to value our special time with them, to speak lovingly of the child's trust, the joys of that small hand placed in ours-and hire someone to take that hand, at minimum wage. (Rothman, 1989, p. 97)

I often felt satisfied and privileged working with children and parents especially when acknowledged by them both along with the consistent support and recognition of colleagues. The lived experience was marred by unfair pay and conditions (see Appendix B). Was I stupid or saintly to expect fair remuneration?

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[11] The current regulatory minimum ratio of infants to staff in licensed services is 5:1 in all states and territories except Queensland and Western Australia where 4:1 is legislated for (Press, 2006, p38) and perhaps 'quadruplets' would be a better analogy.

Saintly but stupid

The T-shirt's derogatory catchphrase resonated strongly when it was used in the first child care worker wage claim campaign by the Miscellaneous Workers Union in 1989, leading up to a landmark test case at the Industrial Relations Commission put forward by the Australian Council of Trade Unions in 1992 (Brennan, 1998). Before the test case enshrined long awaited pay increases I was earning $7 an hour as a qualified worker in the first tale's 'toddler (8 month to 3 year olds) section' alongside a qualified nurse working with infants earning $15 an hour, and a qualified teacher with 'preschool' children earning $21 an hour. This $7 hourly rate improved to $12.48 an hour following the claim and resulted in qualified child care workers being recognised as 'level 4s' in a five tier system of staff working in contact with children (See Appendix C). Despite the test case having 'resulted in substantial [fiscal] gains for some workers burnout and high turnover of staff' were still seen to "remain [as] major problems for the child care industry" (Brennan, 1998, p. 120).

Perhaps the terrible trinity of 'm – words' (not-mother, minder and martyr) sheds light upon the handmaid's dubious position of (dis) honour. It seems, after all, eerily reminiscent of the Judeo-Christian trinity proposed by second wave feminists such as Anne Summers in "Damned Whores and God's Police" (1974) in their representation of the impossible and falsely dichotomous "good or evil" (Summers, 1974, p. 67) that she claims bind women's subjectivity in an "existential straightjacket" as "dutiful wives and bountiful mothers" (Summers, 1974, pp. 78-79).

More recently Tatman, in her "theological queer[y] ing of the sacred" (Tatman, 2007, p. 1) has given the terrible trinity of mother, whore and virgin, a positive spin suggesting that as "numinous subjectivities" they have become denigrated only by narrow religious interpretations of an immanent "mythical and mattering power" that

we should not so readily renounce. If, as Tatman suggests (2007, p. 2) these three figures are "unavoidable..[and] undeniably present within western cultural imaginary" then the metaphoric handmaid serves well as an wholistic figuration of the child care worker, emblematic and all encompassing of the impossible task conceived her role performing all three as mother, minder and martyr, whilst engaged in otherwise named, poorly paid, and seemingly less 'mattering' employment.

Guilty by association

I felt like a handmaid to unrealistic expectations, in relationship with children, that ambiguously (mis)construed me as these three 'sacred' subjectivities. The T-shirt's slogan reflected my sense of being an exploited martyr in association with similarly marginalised mothers and children who together, were 'sinfully appropriated' within a sacrilegious institution outside of the institution of motherhood proper. Child care, it seemed, was commonly viewed as undermining the sanctity of motherhood. This was a confusing position following a pre-service qualification paradigm that stressed 'partnership with parents'[12].

Journalist Sally Loane describes new graduates to the child care field as "smacking head first into the real world which doesn't value their skills, denigrates their education, pays them peanuts and delivers often poor working conditions" (Loane, 1997, p. 290) demonstrating a broad empathic appreciation of the "pink ghetto" dilemma of "underpaid and undervalued child-care workers" (Loane, 1997, pp. 287-316). Also demonstrated (but perhaps less intentionally) is Loane's concluding default to the more traditional paradigm of

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[12] See for example Stonehouse & Gonzales-Mena *Making Links: A collaborative approach to planning and practice in early childhood services,* 2001, and the National Childcare Accreditation Council's *Quality Improvement and Assurance System Handbook,* 2005 for examples of this integral aspect of the occupation.

parental guilt which is the predominant articulation and titular exploration of her book:

> It's a mystery and our shame. The fact that we do our best to keep these workers in the pink ghetto *says more than anything about how we, as a society, treat our children.* (Loane, 1997, p. 316 italics added)

Not mother, minder and martyr are discernable terms within informal discursive settings of children's services today where rhetorical descriptors of the role of child rearing have led to the production of particular images of the child care workers who, alongside children, experience contexts of privation, lack and diminished status. Iterations of child care worker's subjectivity, such as those put forward by Anne Stonehouse in her book *Not just nice ladies*, (1994, pp. 2-4): form the precursors to the image of a corporate handmaid; an aproned 'Mary Poppins'; cardigan wearing 'Spinster'; megaphone bearing 'Lobbyist', briefcase toting 'Business person' and steely multi-skilled cyborg (see Appendix D). The spectre of a saintly, martyr-like handmaid is also never too far from the published discourse of parenting gurus, such as Steve Biddulph, who glibly acknowledges that "the nursery [child care] industry depends utterly on a supply of low-paid labour: *If nursery care workers were paid what they deserve, the industry would collapse*" (Biddulph, 2006, p. 160 - original italics) he concedes inexplicably.

Futile attempts to resist, rebut, avoid and replace the common terms given to adults in the workforce (such as 'nice-lady', 'nanny', 'baby-sitter' and 'carer') with professionalised nomenclature such as the hybridized term "edu-carer" (Caldwell cited in Klein, 1992, p. 12) belie public ambivalence to the work and may explain the resistance to motherhood in the slogan. I believe the slogan sought unequivocally to draw attention to the powerful hegemonic discourses that have produced the child care worker and her resistance to being regarded as *merely* a minder, *exploited* martyr and an *(im)possible* mother substitute.

Denigrating motherhood

In her work *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich makes a clear distinction between the extrinsic powerlessness of women inside the "institution of motherhood" and the intrinsic powerfulness of women's "experience of mothering" (1976), a distinction Rolfe(2004) reminds readers that the proponents of the psychoanalytic school of healthy family development seem less inclined to make, and might explain the slogan's paradoxical denigration of motherhood. In her text designed to refresh child care workers knowledge of attachment theory in order to "promote children's psychological health" (p. 5) in their work, Rolfe reminds readers of Bowlby's original intent to conflate the mother or 'other carer' in a role undertaking the work of attachment and care within the infant/mother dyad. Rolfe quotes Bowlby as explaining that "'Although throughout this book the text refers usually to 'mother' and not the 'mother-figure', it is to be understood that in every case reference is to the person who mothers a child and to whom he becomes attached'" (cited in Rolfe, 2004, p 12).

In child care practice it behoves child care workers to achieve this fraught goal of mothering-but-not-quite-mothering whilst, simultaneously promulgating and managing attachment and detachment so as to uphold a discursive ideal of mothering by proxy. Motherwork undertaken outside of the sanctified institution can be experienced as transgressive and dissident, by child care workers and lacks, ironically, the endorsement of all feminists for whom the subordination of an oppressed substitute has been considered "morally wrong":

> we must not recreate endlessly the separate worlds of power
> and care. We must not do this in any of its guises: not as
> separate public worlds of men and of women. It is morally
> wrong to have children raised by one group for another
> group, whether it is Mrs. John Smith raising John Smith Jr, in

her husband's image, slave nurses raising their masters, or hired caregivers raising the children of dual-career couples.'

(Rothman, 1994, p. 155)

Resistance to the hegemonic form of mother-within-family does not often include the child care worker's perspective of motherwork which given a conducive workplace ethos, actively includes, supports and benefits from a myriad of emergent othered-mothering encountered in direct working relationship with marginalised groups that include single, gay, foster and alternate kinship models.

Sister(s) Betrayed

SECOND HANDMAID'S TALE:- Sister(s) betrayed!

In 1996 my knees knocked as I stood in the centre of my home city, to address a gathering lunch crowd about an injustice dear to my heart and hip-pocket. A local legislative member and upcoming labour party senator was introducing speakers at the poorly attended rally. I had often admired her dogged ability to juggle motherhood with politics and cringed nevertheless as she introduced me to the ambivalent onlookers as an 'angry child care worker'.

My voice shook as I uttered the unutterable: " I feel betrayed by the sisterhood!"

My voice was directed to the women who like me wished for free and proper child care. My voice as an exploited child care worker asked why their rhetoric of our 'saintly-hood' wasn't backed up by a pay-packet that matched theirs. I thought we agree that the care of children is hard work – I said – very hard work.

Why are our low wages subsidizing your participation in the workforce?

The act of speaking the un-speakable brought me realization: I had a voice…albeit one that divided me from my sisters. And if sisters divided are conquered, who then is benefiting?

In the second tale I ask publicly why the child care worker's low pay need subsidize her sister's participation in the paid work force. If the

work's worth is agreed to be high why then is it remunerated and valued so lowly? Child care workers wages seem to be directly compared to the paying capacity of the mother's earnings rather than it being the direct interest of fathers and the state. Mothers and child care workers in paid work are 'conquered' when they are complicit in the acceptance of a responsibility of fathers and a toleration of conditions and remuneration that militate against shared ambitions for proper child care. (See Appendix E). My understanding of this dilemma since making this speech (See Appendix F) has evolved from a sense of betrayal, to one of an appreciation of the bewildering feminist ambivalence Meyers aptly describes, as women's "indelible moral identity [to] incur or disavow various care giving obligations" (Meyers, 2001, p. 735).

Ambivalence

Petrie's (1992, pg. 27) analysis of the family day care model of child care provision as a "social system...understood as a pattern of accommodation *and resistance* to the prevailing social order" suggests that an 'undivided and unconquered' interpretation of the ambivalent social valuing of child care work is possible. Wearing's (1984) qualitative study of motherhood ideology in Sydney in the 1980's points to the evidence of an "insidious use of power" when mothers are both able *and* unable to imagine alternatives to their predicament:

> the mothers in this research have shown, they *can imagine* their lives being improved by better facilities in public places and alternative temporary child care, but everything they have ever experienced from birth onwards reinforces the view that the biological mother is the best and rightful caregiver for her children. They see this as 'natural and unchangeable' and, in many cases, value it as 'divinely ordained and beneficial'
>
> (Wearing, 1984, p. 202 - italics added)

Public assertions such as those of the federal Economic Planning and Advisory Council's (EPAC) Task Force findings on the Australian child care sector openly attest to the remuneration of its workforce being incommensurate with its labour intensive demands:

> Pay rates for child care workers are below those for even unskilled occupations such as shop assistants or car park attendants and are generally out of step with the pay rates for occupations with similar proportions of workers with education and training...Child care is labour intensive work involving a high level of stress and responsibility in day-to-day work. The work is highly personal, with long periods of face-to-face dealings with children, and is subject to strong societal and parenting demands for quality care, and for quality development outcomes.
> (EPAC cited in Lyons, 1996, p. 632)

They also echo the lament of feminists to such an absence of recognition in motherhood, where it is, in the main, acknowledged as the "powerless responsibility" ('The Matriarchists' cited in Rich, 1986, p. 52) of women:

> there is an extravagant fraudulence in the easy reconciliation made between the common attitude of contempt for women and the respect shown for mothers. It is outrageously paradoxical to deny woman all activity in public affairs, to shut her out of masculine careers, to assert her incapacity in all fields of effort, and then to entrust to her the most delicate and most serious undertaking of all: the moulding of a human being.
> (De Beauvoir, 1972, p. 538)

In last year's National Children's Services Workforce Study commissioned by the Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council as part of the National Agenda for Early Childhood, one survey participant's testimony is highlighted in a section of the report where she asks, in roughly 350 words (see Appendix G), why her son's nascent career raising carrots affords him better conditions and pay than her longer career raising children. Her question hangs in the document text unanswered and untethered to an explanatory note or

reference, but with emphasis inferred nonetheless through the use of additional question marks at the quote's end, "Our jobs are very similar aren't they ?????" (Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council, 2006, p.63). It becomes an anonymous symbolic gesture in a report where responses to key findings, are limited to "developing a staff profile, forecasting future staff shortfalls and identifying staffing opinions for staff retention" (CSMAC, 2006, pg. 24). Saintly martyrs may no longer be memorialised in public spaces (where they were burnt or hanged as inspiration to good behaviour) but they can still be found in public documents where their reification seems to silence material solutions to the handmaid's status.

Divided ....who then is conquering?

That the marginalisation of child care workers by their oppressed status is not confined to Australia suggests that conciliation across a sisterhood of mothers using child care may not be all that is required to dismantle her marginalisation.

In her examination of three historical accounts of the evolution of child care in the liberal market economies of Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, Kimberley Morgan attributes this dilemma to the broader policy and economic stances of like nations. She identifies several "striking similarities in how child care policy and politics has unfolded" (Morgan, 2003, p. 743) in these nations where a clear preference in the last twenty years for reliance on private markets rather than public investment in child care provision is evident. Morgan points to these author's (Deborah Brennan in Australia, Sally Cohen in the US and Vicky Randall in the UK) shared identification of "the importance of the institutional context for policy making, the weakness and fragmentation of the advocacy community, inconsistent involvement of feminist organizations, rhetorical support for rather than actual involvement in child care, the triumph of neo-liberalism and the 'vexed question of

motherhood'" (Morgan, 2003, p. 746). Morgan sums up by hinting that despite the three authors' success in aiming to argue that "weak public child care provision reflects both the limits of narrow interest organizations...and the power of antistatist ideologies that reject intervention in families and markets" their generalizations may have in fact ignored or avoided:

> alternative approaches... such as those that emphasize the failures of feminist organizations to promote expansive public child care, or an account of the influence of male breadwinner ideologies as a cornerstone of the liberal welfare state. Unfortunately, these three authors do not aim to provide that level of generalization about child care in liberal welfare states. What they do provide us with, however, are richly detailed accounts of the struggles of childcare advocates against a wall of obstacles.   (Morgan, 2003, p. 747)

In further work framing "generalizations" through comparisons between the Swedish, French and US's systems of child care provision, Morgan (2005) concludes lucidly that the "production" of child care in modern welfare regimes is shaped by the inextricably linked forces of social policy and labour markets. The "junk job" quality of child care is maintained by "a low-wage, low-skill workforce in a liberal market economy...that enables a private market of child care...[to] take[s] pressure off policy makers to address the controversial question of mothers' employment as families self-service in private markets" (p. 259).   Morgan has again made reference to the "controversial question" of mothers' employment before explaining how the Swedish example of a coordinated market economy approach to child care provision has led to vastly improved pay rates and conditions for child care workers. Sweden has achieved this by ensuring "a lack of private alternatives, skill requirements linked to vocational and professional education systems, higher rates of unionization that impede development of an extensive, unsubsidized market [leaving] policy makers with stark

choices about whether to promote and support mothers' employment" (Morgan, 2005, p. 256 – 257).

I have begun to see child care as a site that can unite rather than divide women across a conceptual public/private schism. It follows that public work in the private institution of home (as with family day care) and private motherwork in the public institution of child care (as with centre based care) is limiting, like the worn out paradigm of care and education. Here is an enduring false binary of the "dichotomous conceptual order" (Hopkins, 2001, p. 30) bifurcating the common needs and aspirations of mothers and child care workers for proper and affordable child care provision.

THIRD HANDMAID'S TALE: Aren't I an(other) mother, mechanic, teacher or counselor!

Once upon a time, when economic rationalism and child care didn't mix as well as they do now, I remember calculating the hourly rate to park your car in Sydney as being more than the hourly rate for a child care place in Canberra. I, like you, berated myself for my relativistic cynicism. How ridiculous to compare children to cars!

Later that year an upset father came to speak to me about why my colleagues and I couldn't 'fix' his 2 and ½ year old daughter's biting behaviour. "I'm a mechanic", he said, "and my job is to fix cars. You are a child care worker and your job is to fix children....when are you going to fix my child?"

There is another festering image of economic transaction I hold in my minds eye:

I hand over a $100 bill for a well earned hours worth of grief counseling. I wonder at how, for this hard-working practitioner, it is in effect a paltry amount given the overheads, exhaustion, mental preparation and reflection she necessarily takes on with each distressed client.... But I can't help comparing that crisp note to the small coin of $2 handed over, to me, in my job, for the difficult but rewarding hour I spent working with a distressed infant.......one in a group of five.

Comparing children to cars

If I'm not a mother, minder or martyr then am I a mechanic, a teacher, a counsellor? In my attempts to conceive of an occupational 'worth' in a market economy, I juggle images of blue and white collar occupations whilst simultaneously managing the challenge of undertaking 'other' to 'mother-care' (Petrie, 1992, p. 18) which "represents the failure of 'mother-care' in the eyes of traditionalists" (p.18). My inability to meet an anxious parent's expectations, my 'festering' need to appropriate personal notions of comparable worth (outside of cars and parking) seem futile when deemed publicly as 'too difficult' to measure:

> The Industrial Relations Commission in the *Childcare Workers Case* is a telling exemplar of the problem. The Commission recognised the importance of the work carried out by child care workers....however...did not look at the work value and skills exhibited by those working in the industry or profession. Rather, it hinged the decision on 'objective' measures- such as what formal qualifications are held by the workers. Certainly it is important to look at and grant recognition for these qualifications. However, it is equally vital to value the actual performance of work required in the field. This however, appears to be 'too difficult'. (Scutt, 1992, p. 40)

Placement of the figures in the CSMAC report highlight the majority of respondents as enjoying, and being satisfied with their work, suggesting that job satisfaction mitigates against oppressive pay and conditions and that "to demand a proper wage is to somehow bring into question [child care workers] commitment and integrity" (Wyse cited in Brennan, 1998, p. 139). This concept harks back to the measuring of child care work against the historically unpaid private work of mothering rather than fathering or a state investment and interest in its shared value and commensurate remuneration as a collective pursuit. What other betrayals beg dismantling?

CHAPTER 5

Dismantled

A thing is valued she says only if it is rare and hard to get. We want you to be valued girls. She is rich in pauses, which she savours in her mouth. Think of yourselves as pearls. We sitting in our rows, eyes down, we make her salivate morally. We are hers to define, we must suffer her adjectives. I think about pearls. Pearls are congealed oyster spit...All of us here will lick you into shape, says Aunt Lydia, with satisfied good cheer.

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood, 1985, p.124

This chapter analyses the handmaid's fourth, fifth and sixth's tales of experience working in child care. Subjugated knowledge is assumed to lie hidden under her metaphoric mantle. In attempting to dismantle and disrupt the discourses that have embodied and inscribed me as a child care worker the mantle, constituting my subjectivity as handmaid, is shed to voice a personal and professional understanding of childhood against pedagogical theory, considered integral to practice. Analysis of these tales uncovers perplexing paradoxes which constitute an 'othered' knowledge that could disrupt and dismantle the hegemonic discourses that have "trickily vanished" child care workers through "exclusion, pseudo-inclusion and alienation" (Thiele, 1992).

Despite my efforts to be a 'valued girl' by reconciling pre-service theory with the *realities* of practice, poor conditions seemed consistently to undermine any skilled practical ability to meet occupational responsibilities and requirements, which I perceived as laying, discursively, between the institutions of mothering and teaching. In the fourth tale, I am frustrated and cynical about an onlooker's gaze carrying with it an outsider's misconception of my underlying professional intent and, leaving me with a bestowed sense of failure as a pedagogue.

> **FOURTH HANDMAID'S TALE: Failed Pedagogue?**
>
> *Ariel is 11 months old and practicing her walking again. This time she's headed for the hill. There's a slide dug into it for safe use by the babies and I pause to watch her, half hoping - so that I don't have to run holding baby Josh- that she will accomplish as she did yesterday- a foot first, soft landing into pillows and grass at the base. She's a hard working adventure-seeker this girl, and we are both reveling in her efforts.*
>
> *But today Ariel has set herself a different challenge. She has turned at the top of the hill and is stepping forward to return down it the conventional way. She looks up and across at me as if to alert me of the challenge she is about to undertake, daring me to observe rather than intervene? I pause in admiring attention moving slightly towards her to indicate potential support but only if she needs. She falls. I hesitate to see how she copes. She looks at me, with what I take to be approval, and gets up to try it again. She does it again. Fall that is. Again, and again, and again. Most times getting better and faster. Sometimes doing worse than when she started.*
>
> *I look briefly past her through the fence to some passers- by casting a look of 'civil inattention', (Goffman, 1972, p. 322) at us. I wonder what they see?*
>
> *Perhaps, an ineffectual and uncaring child care worker ignoring a baby falling repeatedly in front of her? Or an unappreciative child care worker squandering an absent mother's right to relish one of many missed milestones?*
>
> *Looking back to Ariel's endeavours I contemplate the cumulative nature of physical development and the destructive myth of 'milestones'. More like emotive 'millstones'- I muse - that ignore Ariel's (and our) right to the dignity of risk and a pedagogy of 'failure'.*

Ignorant and ignoring?

This tale reveals the (im)possible task the handmaid has been set as I am construed in it as both ignorant and ignoring of infants. Envisaging the handmaid, who is 'licked into shape with good cheer' to fit the institution of childhood service, reiterates my subjectivity in three dominant ways. Firstly, as useful by default while mothers work; secondly, as a custodian of developmentally appropriate practice, and thirdly; as the cultural overseer of those children deemed needful

of intervention. This then shapes my status in the public's regard against the real experiences with children and parents in the work.

In the fourth tale I imagine the potential vilification of onlookers as I consider "the dominant construction of the early childhood institution as limited by its function as a 'producer of care' [with] standardized and predetermined child outcomes" (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 63) in the form of 'milestones'. In particular while working with infants, about whom the discourse of "maternal deprivation" is more salient now than it's earlier version of "maternal overprotection" (Chodorow & Contratto, 1992, p. 203), I feel trapped by the unrelenting prospect of a public's disapproving gaze and its mis-construal of the underlying intent of my work. My intent is to work from the inextricable, rather than mutually exclusive, links shared within a nurturant (caring) and pedagogical (educational) relationship with Ariel and her parents.

Failed pedagogues or a pedagogy of failure?

I am frustratingly aware of "what is known and what is possible within the predominating economic zeitgeist" of child care work which Rolfe, Nyland and Morda (2002, p. 94) suggest openly thwarts my efforts to encounter the intentional and communicative acts of infants. Rolfe et al. suggest that "an idealisation of the family (mother) as child rearing context, has led to a tolerance for everyday child care experiences that are less than ideal" (p. 94) . In the "developmental niche" of a child care setting, Rolfe et al., (2002, pp. 86 – 94) report child care workers perceptions of Australia's national standard for an infant: staff ratio of 5:1 as being "intrinsically antagonistic to what they had been taught to promote" (p. 90). The researchers comment on their study as "foregrounding disjunctions between caregiver beliefs and behaviours due to constraints that limit practice", and they ask the following provocative questions of Australia's current infant: staff ratio impeding a child care worker's 'performance' and a reiteration of the disparity between training expectations and reality:

to what extent can caregiver responsiveness and sensitivity withstand, and for how long, structural features like 1:5 child ratios that are the norm for regulated infant rooms?; Is there a threshold group size at which *training effects disappear* due to carer stress and fatigue?; If structural problems prevent the quality of care we teach students in the classroom *what are they learning* from their practicum experiences? (S. Rolfe et al., 2002, p. 90 - italics added)

Individualised attention as per the predominant attachment theory rhetoric is revealed to be a cultural imperative overriding reality in practice. Their research reflects the closely held conviction of child care workers that their work is only as achievable as conditions allow. Protests by child care staff as recently as 2004 in NSW (See Appendix H) to change the regulatory staff: child ratios from 5:1 to 4:1 have not been successful in most of the Australian states and territories that have aligned themselves to a national standard of 5:1[13].

In the fourth tale the handmaid's efforts to resist the onlooking public's gaze, whose valuation of her work's worth is incongruous with her own, are apparent. Regarding Ariel's and my joint endeavours as part of a pedagogical project (Ariel's risk taking) presents the intentional and worthwhile pursuit of child care work as supportive of an infant's persistence in mastering an incrementally and autonomously achieved skill. Such a project paradoxically, both contests and produces, the dominant discourse of my lowly status as an indifferent and technical minder of milestones. In reconciling this incongruence, I make a disruptive analysis. The misinterpreted transaction constitutes a more genuine sense of experienced professional agency held within my supportive relationships with parents, children and colleagues and arrived at through resistance

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[13] Licensing regulations for Queensland and Western Australia are the only two jurisdictions that set a staff child ratio minimum of 1:4 which still exceeds that recommended by Early Childhood Australia and the US based National Association for the Education of Young Children of 1:3 (Press, 2006, p. 38)

rather than acquiescence to the public's gaze. This gaze which casts me as a failed teacher and transgressive mother takes the form of a risky alternative, one of 'insider' knowledge shared with a motivated infant, both of whom accept the utility of 'failure' in personal pursuits.

Teaching motherhood or mothering teachers?

FIFTH TALE – If Bella was a boy?

Bella is 5 years old. A 'single' child with a 'single' mum. Both cruising along in her early childhood like the 'mother with babe' humpbacks I've seen on TV. Bella's personality is singular too. She prefers to visit us in the 'babies' room, interacting within relationships that seem to beguile and enchant her: A bobbing hammock and she alert us that "so and so is awake!" and "probably needs changing" and "don't we remember from yesterday how he likes to bounce a bit-as if it's a game before he gets up!", "I'll make sure he doesn't turn on his tummy". "Can I lift him out now?", "I know, don't worry, I'll be careful of his head." "I could lay him on that pillow and bring Josh to see him?" "See how he likes Josh…but would you like a book for now, Ethan?" she says in a high and modulated tone. "I will find his nappy for you, I know which is his bag…..he's getting so big isn't he!" she exclaims moving adroitly about the room. "Can I feed Rani her lunch again today?"

We don't answer all of her questions. They are rhetorical really if you listen beyond the affirming self-talk of a competent 5 year old. But her capabilities defy our expectations and I realise she is aware her presence is highly valued by all in our group. Does she see herself as somebody's big sister, mothering with attentive care? Does she sense she's is both a teacher and a student? How can I explain to her that we are elated by her disruption of a horizontally peer grouped program which can prepare you for a life of variety and differenc,e unmatched expectations, un-synchronised needs, abilities and values?

Watching you Bella, I mentally reply to the lingering rebuke of a friend learning of my prospective work with infants: "But what will you do! – line them all up and sing to them?" And I hear the exclamation of a manager for whom the role brought the surprising realisation that "babies ARE interested in each other if you are there with them - on the floor!" But am I dreaming again? Suddenly I'm ashamed and furtively worrying that at best, Bella is being alleviated of competitive peer group pressure but at worst is being exploited as child labour in an under-resourced enterprise of infant group care. What sort of role models are we to her? Will the visiting female police and wildlife officers mitigate this occupational experience? How will I explain to Bella's Mum?

What if Bella where a boy?

In this fifth tale I am perplexed by my complicity in teaching Bella the value of 'motherwork'. I ask myself if her own mother would approve given her expectations of our service to adopt an educational imperative to prepare children for school (whilst bolstering my own professional standing as a 'teacher'!). I ask myself if there is a subconscious gendered agenda at work in my preparing of girls for caring work as I was performing, thereby excluding or discouraging Bella from a more profitable occupational pursuit. How were my actions positively intervening as a feminist to include males in this important work? Testimony from the handful of excellent male child care colleagues I worked beside and insight from bell hooks remind me again to embrace contradictions for their instructive insights:

> To a grave extent women, who on the one hand critiqued
> motherhood but on the other hand also enjoyed the special
> status and privileges it gave them, especially when it came
> to parent-child bonding, were not as willing to relinquish pride
> of place in parenting to men as feminist thinkers hoped.
> Individual feminist thinkers who critiqued biological determinism
> in every other area often embraced it when it came to the issue
> of mothering. They were not able to fully embrace the notion
> that fathers are just as important as mothers, and can parent
> just as well. These contradictions, along with the predominance
> of sexist thinking, have undermined the feminist demand for
> gender equity when it comes to child care (hooks, 2000, p. 83).

I decide that Bella is there because she wants to practice a yearning to care ethically in her relationships with the infants she embraces responsibility with and helps us come to know through her unique insights. If I turn away from this learning will I see the faces of her male peers pressed up against the room's window, wanting, waiting to join her?

SIXTH HANDMAID'S TALE - Enabled

"Our wish is for Harry to learn to clap his hands" his parents said to me on our first meeting. Both Harry's '10 month old' parents and I were positively optimistic it would happen so why did I feel so anxious and afraid?

Harry's parents and I could not possibly have known then that our overestimation of his 'disability' would morph into an underestimation of his ability to psychologically enable us. Little could I have realised then how much Harry's infant body and lifespan would teach me in, and prepare us for, the following ten years. Years our service team spent honing inclusive practice and weathering the grief and loss visited upon what we considered a fairly 'regular' child care community with it's fairly 'regular' aspirations.

As a first experience of 'disability' Harry effortlessly spurred a knowledge and conviction that shifted our wariness of 'difference'. In the short three and a half years before he died Harry enlightened our minds and enabled our hearts. We learned that the act of enabling someone does not start with a name, questions, or wishes. These lead to naming, answers and expectations. It was easier to take our cues from Harry: tentatively at first and then with gusto and laughter, selectively engaging the help of specialists and becoming hopelessly bonded with his parents through the crises of resuscitation attempts and ambulance trips. Eventually succumbing to the inevitable we managed the impossible: relief for all staff to attend his funeral – but without closing the centre.

A book we made to together with children's stories to celebrate Harry's life proved cathartic, and drew unsolicited admiration from a child psychologist specialising in children's grief. She congratulated us on doing the 'right thing' by ourselves and without professional advice and support!" On a spring day in the year following Harry's death we realised his Dad had been back secretly gardening! Gladioli were springing up in the babies' well-loved plot nodding commemoratively at the bench we'd built for Harry underneath his favourite tree.

After Harry came much that I didn't think I'd signed up for: The death of two children to a rare degenerative condition; the death of another to a more common disease; and the anger and disquiet of eleven children whose autism helped staff to 'diagnose' the chaotic and unpredictable nature of our programs as unnecessary and unbecoming for all children.

A daunting difference

In this sixth tale a type of unknown knowledge is revealed. This knowledge comes from a paradoxical embracing of ignorance and difference by the handmaid rather than an application of the 'known and normal' information knowledge base she is compelled to execute as someone qualified in child development knowledge:" a regime of truth in that it regulates and governs...the correct way to understand and organise young children" (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 33)

Silin argues that when we "constitute childhood as memorabilia" of the past and 'concern ourselves with what children are not, rather than what they are, [we are] assuring that the present will always be viewed in the service of the future" (1995, p. 50). For child care workers committed to inclusive practice the challenge of working with differing abilities that warrant specialist or expert attention can be daunting. But it can also be profoundly enlightening as it problematizes 'normal development' and exposes the damage that stigmatization unjustly bestows. Inclusion as merely 'good intention' rather than experienced reality can also be problematic as the queer theorist Britzman (1998, p. 221) suggests when she casts inclusion as a "liberal hope" where "the lived effects of inclusion are a more obdurate version of sameness and a more polite version of otherness" and because often "arguments for inclusion produce the very exclusions they are meant to cure" (1998, p. 221). Sims (1999) in her argument for "valuing difference" (p.3) rather than "fixing or ignoring" (p.2) it has suggested that "it is not necessary to have a lot of *specialised* knowledge about children with special needs in order to successfully include a child" (Sims, 1994, p. 44). Perfunctorily prescribed sets of knowledge and the add-on resources required by regulatory authorities and the accreditation system seemed to add to my ignorance and fear of including Harry. Paradoxically as Harry taught me about his 'special' needs I came to understand the limitations around unspecial or 'normal development', other to his.

Diverting development

The anxiety and fear the child care worker reflects on when encountering children with 'disabilities' is buttressed by predominant "socially and culturally defined...notions pathologi[zing] children who do not achieve universal standardized developmental targets (Davis, Watson, & Cunningham-Burley, 2000, p. 205). "Advice from a medical and developmental perspective" (p. 205) is likely to have underpinned the child care worker's training unless the "multifunctional" and "ecological" foci of services and "values transmitted" (Sims & Hutchins, 1996, p. 25) are also included in her qualification and practical experiences Seeming to need to 'know less' in order to 'know more' the handmaid, her colleagues and the centre's community of children, achieve this together and in direct relationship with others, rather than through the measured application of theory. This resistance to theoretical application may disrupt the social construction of 'disability' and it's gate-keeping strategies of measured intervention to facilitate controlled inclusion of the 'other'. Children labelled 'disabled' of which Harry in this tale is only one, are alternatively known and perceived by a collegiate team of handmaids as "capable of transforming cultural and social relations...and maybe affecting the structures surrounding their lives" (Davis et al., 2000, p. 205).

CHAPTER 6

Reinscribed

Come now, he says, pressing a little with his hands. I'm interested in your opinion. You're intelligent enough, you must have an opinion. About what? I say. What we've done he says. How things have worked out… I hold myself very still…He knows what I think, all right. You can't make an omelette with out breaking eggs, is what he says. We thought we could do better.

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood, 1985, p. 222

This chapter considers a re-inscribing of the child care worker's subjectivity. Three last tales reinvisage the handmaid's work with children and their families within community institutions where children grow up through care-ful and reflective pedagogy. It brings together the knowledge I have voiced with the "new paradigm in childhood studies" (Christensen & James, 2000, p. 4) where "research with children does not take for granted an adult/child distinction" (p. 2). These three tales comprise an attempt to recast myself as non complicit with a discursive construct of myself as a handmaid in a subjugated relationship with the child in the family. I imagine a valuing and valued professional workforce where I can practice in a respectful and respected relationship with children and a civic community which redefines the pedagogical work of women and men in relationship to young children.

SEVENTH HANDMAID'S TALE – Leaving the edge for strangeness.

As I'm stepping off the platform's edge and onto the train that will take me to present a thesis proposal to some receptive colleagues, I hope nervously, wondering how I will bear up to the scrutiny of polite 'strangers'.

But there is a baby looking at me gravely, just seats away, inviting me to play in a wordless game, reminding me that everywhere there is reciprocative work to be done. Relieved by the distraction of the inevitable

pull to an encounter with an infant, and with it's nearby adult's assent, I am hooked in a 'game' of turn-taking: serious eyes and relinquishing smiles, serious-er eyes and rewarding smiles. We are strangers caught in a gaze of mutual admiration and curiosity: an accelerating pulse of conversation; propositions and gestured pronouncements, reservations and endorsements, questions, answers, separations and reunions in miniature and in large.

Is this the 'innocent' and 'vulnerable embryonic adult', who must be protected from practising encounters with strangers? After all, I detect the adult close-bys approval and maybe a faint sense of her interest and relief?

Proximity seeking and testing in the safety of a moving train.

Baby, you remind me of my niece and the day the door opened and she was there, arms shaking up and down, legs flexing and contracting in excitement as she reached out to me from my sister's hip. The excitement of the familiar and an expectation met. Your brain relishing congruity to power your hunger for the incongruous. Once a fortnight, you'd stay overnight in your aunties' bed and in the morning we'd go for swimming lessons with familiar strangers. Slippery excited body, at home in warm water, watching all the other babies. Amongst all the bubbly songs and games we were sneakily teaching you to factor in the return trip, whenever you left the safety of the edge.

Then one day you floored us: having found a girl like yourself in a picture book with a bed in a room of her own, you told your mum you wanted to sleep by yourself now. Mostly. She called me to share this heart wrenching news. We cursed Freud and revelled in your self-determination. Now you are six and I see you've been jumping off the wharf's edge cavorting and consorting with more strangers, taking familiar comfort in having effortlessly measured up the return trip.

Doing better

This tale speaks of the hegemony of developmental psychology's legacy that ensures reverence of the nuclear familiar and fear of any threat to its dissolution. Collective non-parental care in the form of child care may constitute just that threat and as a handmaid populating this institution I feel ambivalently complicit in both the upholding and erosion of its traditional family values. I believe that this paradoxical tension means that child care is in a position to both do better, and be better done by.

Familiarity with strangers

In her critique of Western thought and developmental psychology on institutions of child care and the professionalization of those who work within them, Canella (Canella, 1998, p. 158) identifies three dominant and problematic themes: "the construction of 'childhood' and consequently the 'child'... the creation of the field of Early Childhood Education, and ...the creation of a profession that formulates and supports [the field's] policy and practice":

> Using psychology and a deficit human perspective, we
> have constructed a field in which children, their teachers,
> and their families are silenced, pathologized, disrespected,
> and controlled. (Canella, 1998, p. 173)

The seventh tale reiterates the findings from Rolfe and Richard's (1993) qualitative study of Australian mothers using child care that suggests mothers can be welcoming of the involvement of others. With acknowledgement that the mother subjects of their study could be using "rationalisations and justifications...to reduce cognitive dissonance resulting from their decisions [to use child care services]" (p. 19) Rolfe and Richards, nonetheless, argue for "a more complex conceptualisation of the ways mothers negotiate with traditional ideology of mother care" (p. 10). They conclude that a mother's construction of "implicit theories are embed [ded] in wider ideologies of family life and parenthood and that there is a need to examine the ability of women and men to question and challenge traditional ideas" (p. 21).

In this seventh tale the handmaid on the train despite being away from her workplace is still contesting the construction of a child within the confluence of developmental psychology and exclusive mother-care discourses, when she acknowledges the fleeting but respectful regard the adult and infant stranger have for one another. The child's

and my, joint access of an implicit freedom to associate and make meaningful contact in public is tempered by virtue of their place in an ostensibly anonymous space of a moving train. Here perhaps the discursive reach of the institutions of motherhood and childhood are limited by the assumed brevity and inconsequent nature of the interaction. My initial seeking of the adult close-by's consent, and her obvious receptivity to any interaction, attest to these overwhelming and dominant constructions of childhood and perhaps an exception to the regimentations of being 'other to mother' with children.

Chris Woodrow surmises the problematic confounding of childhood in dominant discourses today through the prevalence of images of the child as "innocent, 'threat/monster' and 'embryonic adult" (Woodrow, 1999). Woodrow suggests that child care workers can "revisit and reinspect assumptions and truths about children and childhood that have become naturalised within the profession"(p. 11). She cites the following recent developments in Australia that "suggest competing constructions of the child struggling for dominance" (p. 7):

> mandated curriculum for the non-compulsory years, the development of comprehensive assessment regimes in preschool and the first years of school, the moral panic over paedophilia, the increasing 'market-isation' in education, as well as the powerful political claims made by the present Federal Government about the primacy of the family in raising and protecting the interests of the child.
> (Woodrow, 1999, p. 8)

In this seventh tale I am curiously resistant to these constraining discourses of childhood that produce the infant in public spaces as innocent, vulnerable and invariably reliant on another's consent to interact with 'strangers'. How is the infant, and the subject/object of her regard, a 'threat' to adult social order, requiring the control and restraint of a protective and proprietorial authority (parent/teacher)?

The idea of the child as an "embryonic adult" in a passive state "awaiting their temporal passage into the social...and adult rational

world" (Woodrow, 1999, p. 10) seems here to be usurped by many autonomous decisions such as that of my niece's to sleep independently. When children self-determine these decisions alongside acts of dependency, I remember and envisage, as with the baby on a train, all children's ongoing agency and determination in social interaction as deriving from an urge to consider an 'others' perspective accepting "separation as not equivalent to deprivation" and "autonomy as different from abandonment" (Chodorow & Contratto, 1992, p. 210) 210). In the crucible of a child care infant's section where the children and adults involved in separations and reunions, determine their pace, this seems like a secret that could be extrapolated from.

Beyond complicity

Are child care worker's performing patriarchy's project by seeking professionalisation as technicians through the application of 'official knowledge' (1998p. 168) thereby constituting it as a "conservative act" (p. 168)? Canella suggests "the professional field is grounded in a knowledge base that is...linear, rational and deterministic...is not ours and has not attended to the voices of children with whom we work" (p. 169):

> We have constructed a field whose professional actions
> are grounded in the best of intentions. However, these
> actions were based on psychologically biased knowledge
> that serves to support our patriarchal condition....I would
> propose that we construct a new form of professionalism,
> grounded in the development of a critical disposition.

I think the handmaid senses that she is both upholding and destabilizing this patriarchal 'project'. Child care centres are well placed to imagine, envisage and reinscribe themselves as civic forums that Canella suggests proffer opportunities to reconstruct themselves as ethical places where we "must learn to interrogate ..as well as construct languages that foster justice, liberation and

possibility" (1998, p. 177) and where the professional act of "teaching is an interpretive rather than legislative project" (Silin, 1995, p. 131) . That citizenry could be assumed part, or the right of, childhood is a rarely expressed idea and perhaps a dangerously disruptive discourse:

> Indeed, exclusive parental care constrains the young child's opportunities for inclusion in society, the exercise of citizenship, and of fulfilment from interaction with other children and other adults, interaction which has a vital role to play in the active child's co-construction of knowledge, identity and culture.
>
> (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 52)

Child care is a site of ongoing transitions between strangeness and familiarity and where staff manage daily separations and reunions between children, themselves and their parents. This knowledge and skill moves beyond the question of whether it should happen at all, to how parents, children and staff manage them ethically, comfortably and with an agency that once achieved becomes informative and emancipating. Learning to leave the edge and always factoring in the return trip.

EIGHTH HANDMAID'S TALE: Tattoo

This morning whilst squatting to reach and lift infants from the floor Tara was, by turns, revealing and concealing the edges of a richly hued tattoo that fanned out across her lower back.

Tara worked professionally: respectfully supportive of each infant as they got to know each other before taking up investigation and mastery of their physical surrounds; delicately weighing how much of her collegial and personal self to offer parents who seem invariably vulnerable to a private experience of separation and a public accusation of detachment. Tara matched her tempo to each of the babies' and artfully sought their consent for any experiential change initiated by her. To join in her laughing, lingering or singing through a nappy change felt like collusion in the witchcraft of her work.

Curiosity rather than appropriate supervision, led me to ask her the story behind her tattoo. She told me a boyfriend's art had inspired her skin inscription. Brainstorming with Tara in the ever fecund infant's area led

to the hatching of a plan to ask a Koori artist she knew to repaint our centre. It was time the centre's front wall was reinscribed to better reflect the Aboriginal land it stood upon.

Negotiating the price of $800 was difficult. It seemed not enough, and alot then, to offer an artist and justify to our funders. But watching it happen was easy. An ease infused with the delight of tracing molten earthy colours as they replaced the lurid primary colours used to proscribe 'child-friendly' spaces and 'eye-catching' toys.

Children, families and staff were drawn by a steady process that quietly and surely transformed our centre's entrance from a washed-out lightness to a rich and layered darkness. The muralist invited each of us to leave our sprayed handprints as we came or left through the front door. In the final rendering these, our, hands linked up the shadowy profiles of the region's 'un-exotic' animals and plants.

Less discernable and more important was the mural's secret and unspoken yearning being impossibly realised only a month later: A first Aboriginal staff member and a child from her family arrived at the centre's door to linger on the couch and consider an invitation to stay and return.

This before I'd read Tikka Wilson's Bringing Them Home Report, before I, or a nation, said sorry. This before, and while nothing, has changed for the better.

Today when I pass the centre I am still drawn to see if it remains un-graffitied. It does. And I notice, in the darkness, that I am moved still, to see my handprint amongst those of a generation of childrens' and parents' who un-indelibly held together a hope for change to the racist exclusion of Australia's first people.

In the eighth tale the handmaid is caught in a zone between acknowledging her own complicity in a "western imperialist project" (Viruru, 2006, p.1) of child care founded by, and continuing to perpetrate, a colonialist legacy of stolen generations of children, and a yearning for reconciliation.

The Aboriginality of two colleagues and Tara's local Aboriginal networks, her tattoo, and the fading mural of our centre's exterior, become emblematic of my beginning to see colonialism in its layered

oppressive guises of exclusion, silence and marginalisation. An aesthetic motivation to overlay the 'lurid' colours that signified the infantilizing and hygienification of my workplace within "neo-colonial cultures of whiteness" (McLaren interviewed by Borg, Mayo, & Sultana, 1998, p. 365) as an exclusionary setting for white children, vaguely disguises my shame and longing for alterity. Bhavani warns us that:

> What often occurs in the process of presenting feminist arguments..is that the points about racisms, exclusions and invisibility of women of colour become silenced...It is sometimes implied that inclusion of racism in feminist work can lead to fragmentation of feminist projects. My argument is that far from an analysis of racism leading to fragmentation, it is the process of not engaging with the consequences of racialized inequalities which weakens the projects of feminism   (Bhavani, 2004, p. 66)

Since this tale of wishing a path through my colonialist perspective I have come to understand how more than a superficial surface painting is needed. Lorde reminds me sadly that oppressers can continue to oppress even once their oppressive acts are self-acknowledged:

> It is the members of the oppressed, objectified groups who are expected to stretch out and bridge the gap between the actualities of our lives and the consciousness of our oppressor...it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes.   (Lorde, 1992, p. 47)

To question why we only *thought* we could do better instead of apprehending and refusing continuing racism has become this handmaid's current mindset in recognition of my complicity in the oppression of Aboriginal people. I feel both reassured and destabilized when, for instance, I have felt deeply complimented for being mistaken for a person of Aboriginal heritage, and at a conference, utterly ashamed when my upset over the testimony of stolen generation elders elicited comforting of me by other Aboriginal delegates!

As the member of a child care team which tried to cross through the surface (mural) rendering of a post colonial gesture I realise now the extent of a wall of racism residing beneath, hiding and denying. What D'Souza regards as "the government's desire to bring Aboriginal children's services closer to the mainstream" (1999, p. 29) in effect reiterates a racist refusal:

> To redress the effects of history, ameliorate the socioeconomic conditions of many A&TSI [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] families, and ensure...recognition of ATSI culture and child-rearing practices.
> (D'Souza, 1999, p. 32)

DeSouza is positive about the "values and world view of A&TSI peoples which emphasize the collective, the value of relationships, the spiritual, and the holistic nature of human existence on this planet" (p. 32). I realise that I have only begun to appreciate the extent of injustice directed at, and the potential for reconciliation through, Aboriginal resilience and strength.

NINTH TALE – Write y(our)selves you say!

My father started me with his-story.
My mother has ended me with another - hers.
It's a sad story about the death of a baby brother, my parent's only son.

Dad's story was published proudly in a magazine and we all remember how it went: His wife and daughters, walking bravely into the local marketplace to tell. Two sisters waiting for a brother, unwittingly reflecting the market-people's gaze: expectant and then so very disappointed. His final image for this story rested with the fruit-seller, a widow who took from her black skirts the photo of another, her own, lost son. You are not alone her shiny eyes said to Mum.

But my mother's is another story. And her adult daughters weren't to hear it until much later in their lives, and in writing, not from her lips. In a letter to us, read together, far away from where she wrote it, we heard for the first time how she held him closely three days after birth and death. His skin like wax, his body perfect without breath. Her pain was not a story for the market-place. Her grief took years to be writ large for the brother's sisters. You were so alone Mum.

> *How I know this now, as an erudite sister gestures us to sit on purple chairs in her office – to tell each other a familiar story. As good feminist theory goes:*
>
> *'Grief and loss, lots of grief, in looking fore and after,*
> *loving, leaving and letting children grow away'.*
>
> *How she also asks might I write about a pain that is silently-measured and measured-ly silenced? How might we will you to write 'her' story after 'his'?*

The ninth tale is both the end to the handmaid's thesis and its beginning. This earliest and latest part to my story speaks of the potential difference and inequality between two versions of the same event in my family's history. Growing up with my father's story of the loss of our brother coincided with my growth within a patriarchal culture. My awareness and development as a feminist coincided with the insight my mother's story brought me on how patriarchy pervades women's lives. My use of a feminist approach to researching the problem of the child care worker's marginal status led me to countenance patriarchal discourses that forced me to question personal and professional understandings of difference and equality in the institutions of motherhood, sisterhood and childhood. As Lorde said :

> We have built into all of us, old blueprints of expectations
> and response, old structures of oppression, and these
> must be altered at the same time as we alter the living
> conditions which are a result of those structures. For
> the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.
>
> (1992, p. 54)

CONCLUSION

I sit in my room, at the window, waiting.
In my lap is a handful of crumpled stars.

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood, 1985 p. 203

This thesis attests to a personal and professional need to make meaning of a period in my working life which often left me feeling meaningless. Time I spent working in direct contact with children was (almost) overwhelmingly a time of great enjoyment and learning alongside others. Despite the satisfaction of rewarding work and relationships I discovered the lack of social regard and support for the work debilitating, however hard I tried to meet its unrelenting requirements, or try to understand its paradoxical ambivalences and feminist conundrums.

The tales reveal my concern with child care as a feminist issue distilled early from within 15 years of contact work with very young children and parents sometimes within just weeks of their new relationships together. I experienced the marginalisation of child care work alongside colleagues in contact, union, teaching, management and more recently regulatory work and have wondered fiercely about how it intersects with the ambivalent experience and falsely reified institution of motherhood.

To begin from personal experience seemed right given a feminist framework that has underpinned my study pursuits and work in practice. The irony of arresting an insight through the privileged position of studying outside of the field, and without the experience of motherhood *per se* is not lost on me. Full-time work in children's services rarely affords the practitioner the conditions of rest, recovery and reflection required to take full account of her situation let alone

take action other than leaving for alternate work, or perhaps the personal experience of mothering. My methodology sprung from the marked desires and memories of significant moments as a child care worker that occurred nonetheless, and a recognition by me that these experiences in child care could reveal profound insights. Today I begin to appreciate how 'othering' of people, for reasons institutionalised by oppressors, actually works to oppress. As well, I have learnt how the myriad forms of resistance 'become' in response to hegemony and that here is where to look to find an ethics of 'caring for the other' in all of us.

Nine tales from the perspective of a handmaid subject reveal how I have been named, the extent of child care work's marginalisation and the suggestion of child care workers unique perspective and knowledge of children. Knowledge gleaned through respectful pedagogy by child care workers has been silenced by an outsider's view and the muffling effect of noisier discourses which cast her derisorily as other to mother, merely a *minder* to childhood and interminably as a *martyr* to an economic state's version of child care. Dismantled, these discourses which have produced patriarchal constructs of motherhood, childhood and family are, I have argued, both reproduced and resisted at the sites of collective child rearing endeavours.

Despite, and because of, my having been cloaked by a metaphoric mantle of discourses, I came to know child care from experience as a series of profound and revelatory paradoxes. Nine tales of alterity disguise enriched understanding of the lived and actual diversity of childhood, mothering and child care worker subjectivities, and the experiential insights they afford. My rhetorical tales tell of a knowledge gleaned from unwisely 'othered' differently abled, cultured, classed and gendered subjects.

Analysis of my hitherto unspoken experience leads me to conclude that child care workers are in a unique position to bolster rightful claims to a respectful and ethical pedagogy (contributed to by all parents, staff, peers and communities) and a *material* and revolutionary valuing of time spent honouring these 'childhoods' by placing them at the core of civil activity. This seems unlikely whilst motherwork is split hierarchically between a falsely reified and essentialised subjectivity of exclusive mother/child dyads or by forms of 'othered-mothering' in a subaltern status regarded as a poor public prior-to-school-substitute for the sanctity and haven of home.

Plato's idea of the state playing a role in the bringing up of children from infancy is perhaps not such a ludicrous and abhorrent idea if we can simultaneously cast off the shackles of a legacy of exclusive mothering and embrace new sociologies of childhood. These reject the exploitation of familial ideology through the neoliberal economic marketisation of childcare and materially place children at the foundation of *present* as well as future social cohesion and engagement. The ethical and responsible engagement of *all* adults (not just genetic parents) with *all* children supported by unequivocal public investment could ensure children's authentic participation in civil life from birth. The weary platitude that 'it takes a village to raise a child' serves only to reinforce a contradictory status quo when and where raising children manifests predominantly as a commodity for sale on the stockmarket next to other 'natural' and finite 'resources'.

McLaren reminds us that if our "goal as a citizen and educator and cultural theorist is to make the world less exploitative, less cruel, less inhumane than if [we] had never been born" (Borg et al., 1998, p. 358) then "the experience of the subaltern should not be essentialized but understood dialectically in relation to theory" and warns that by "exoticizing the precious singularity of the 'other' – of that unknowable alterity that escapes representation-.. [we may]

forget about the politics of collective struggle" (p. 357). My theory is simply that voice must precede action.

The handmaid's tales voice one child care worker's attempts to speak theoretically of the practical marginalisation of the occupation and its profundity of exploitative and revelatory experiences. Whether these experiences resonate with, or are collectively acknowledged, provoke further resistance or silencing, is not within my power to determine. Speaking through this research however constitutes my unabashed desire for collective struggle against the continued marginalisation of child care workers, the sector, and the children and families who dare to engage with it as a concept and reality. My hope is for child care workers to feel they have a responsibility and right to the privilege of speaking and a belief in what they have to say as mattering.

New feminisms and sociologies of childhood suggest a better place for the reproductive work of women in an era of posts; post-modernism, post-colonialism and post-patriarchy but will only prove fruitful if the insights of the marginalised group charged with enacting these revolutionary approaches are acknowledged. I would like this thesis to contribute to an energised re-storying and re-envisaging of child care services as loquacious and hope-driven sites for the people who work within them as well as the children, and communities who trust in their experiential insights, and their resistant and ethical actions.

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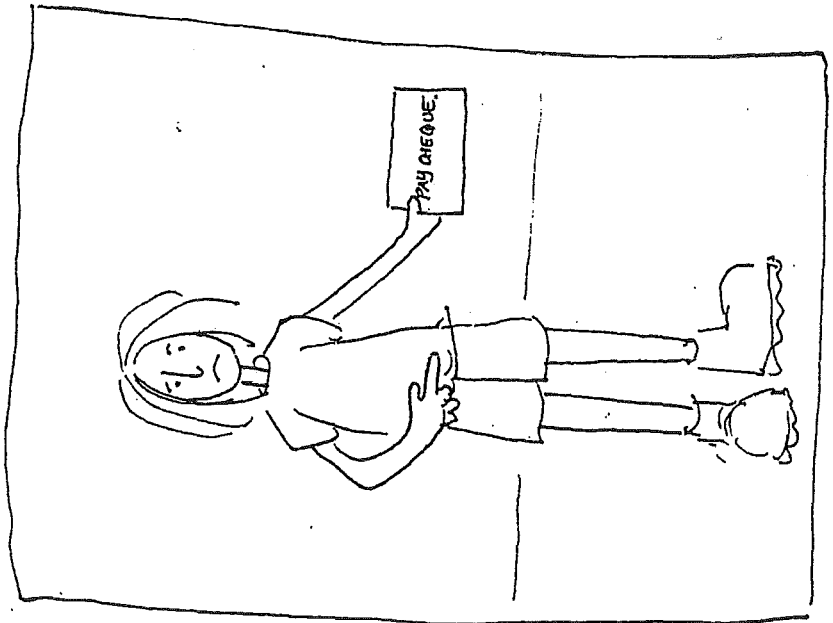
APPENDICES

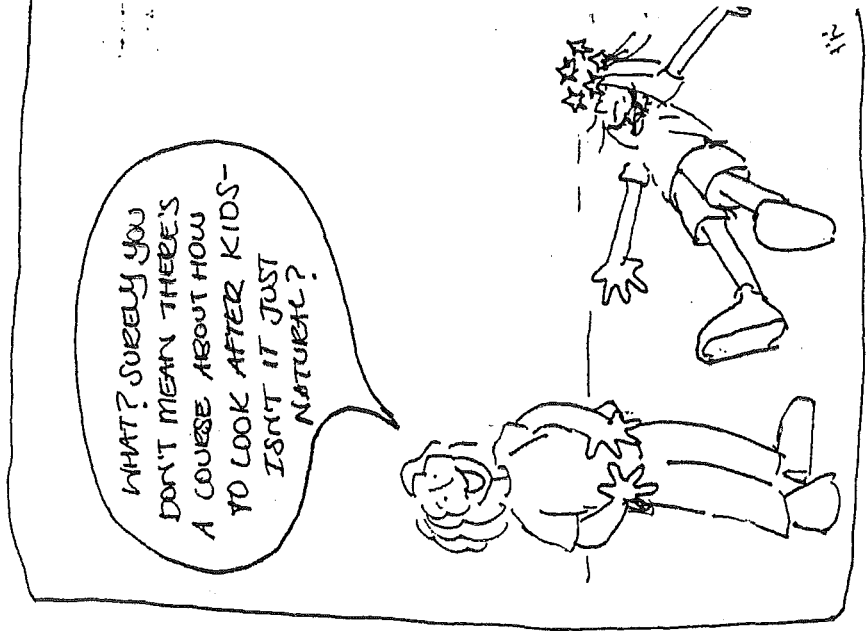# Appendix A

Cartoon by Peta Rowney, 1990, Canberra

INSULT TO INJURY: WORKING IN CHILDCARE.
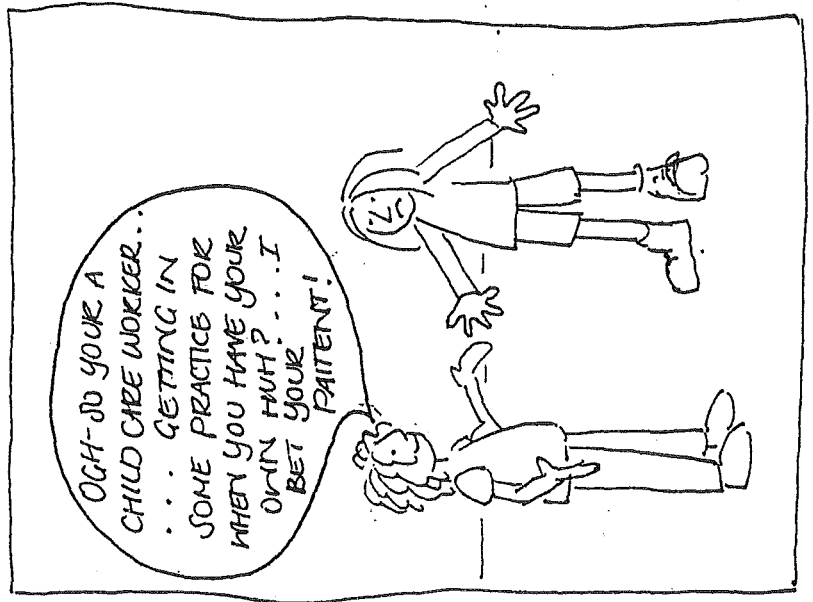
A VERBAL INSULT.

A PACKAGED INSULT.

ADDING INJURY TO INSULT!

Appendix B

Whitty, K. (1993, September 7). Ignorance of the writers [Letter to the editor].
The Financial Review p. 18.

Need to rewrite our tax laws

SIR, So the Government is again facing up to re-writing Australia's income tax legislation. Before embarking on such a Herculean task a clear understanding of the reasons why our tax legislation has fallen into such disrepute, as well as a clear vision as to what it will look like after the re-write, is required.

Since the legislation, from which the present Income Tax Assessment Act has grown, was adopted in 1936 we have seen enormous changes in the needs of Government for revenue, the competitiveness and internationalisation of Australian business, international communications and the ingenuity of business and their advisers in interpreting the law.

There is no question that these changes have required change, indeed complex change, but resultant amendments have led to a situation where the Act has become almost unintelligible, daunting in its size, lacking logic in its sequence and almost laughable in the alpha/numeric numbering used (Section 159GZZZZF is but one of a number of statutory sextuplets).

The minimalist approach in meeting these criticisms would be to re-order (and re-number) the Act in a logical way, introducing at the same time a proper and helpful system of cross referencing.

A further improvement would be if, where a defined term is used, it were emboldened (with reference to the section of the Act where the definition can be found).

In addition, there are many sections which, since the introduction of the general anti-avoidance provisions of Part IVA, are of no relevance. They could be removed without affecting the avoidance deterrent powers of the Act.

Changes of this type while, in essence, changes of style rather than substance, would nonetheless be of considerable importance and could be achieved reasonably quickly.

If fundamental change to our tax legislation is to occur, one option the Government

may consider is adopting US-like legislation, a system involving a code, generally expressed, which is backed up by an extensive system of binding rulings. The US system is certainly not simple as anyone who has had reason to confront it will tell you.

Any fundamental change will undoubtedly be accompanied by confusion and uncertainty for a number of years and it is by no means certain that what would emerge at the end of the process would be any simpler or fairer or would better meet the needs of Government and the taxpaying community. So, beware of fundamental change!

A thorough spring cleaning of our existing legislation, together with the ongoing re-writing of those areas which are acknowledged by all as lacking in clarity, would go a long way to restoring integrity to the Act.

PETER THOMAS
Partner
KPMG Peat Marwick
Sydney, NSW

Ignorance of the writers

SIR, As the co-ordinator of a child-care centre, I usually pay little attention to articles about child care in the *AFR*.

Your commentators, such as Peter Walsh and Geoff Hogbin, usually restrict themselves to discussing outlays, subsidies and profit-making. These are not areas where child-care workers generally profess skills.

Unfortunately your commentators rarely make any significant points regarding quality care and early childhood education.

Why should they?

They know little about the area and cannot see any fundamental link between the care a child receives between the ages of 0 to six years and the adult the child will become.

Mr Hogbin's latest diatribe ("Child care outlay", AFR, September 1) illustrates the

depths of his ignorance about how child-care centres work.

His statement that community-based long day-care establishments dissipate government subsidies "in excessive staffing and salaries" simply cannot be supported by the facts.

In the ACT, a child-care worker earns between $4.37 and $13.40 an hour. The latter (level 5) applies for a two-year tertiary qualified assistant director with 200 hours in-service training.

Neither could staffing levels be described as excessive.

ACT ratios are 0-18 months, one staff member per five children; 18 months to three years, one staff to six children; three to six years one staff member to 10 children.

Any commentator who describes the work conditions outlined above as in any way luxurious is either joking or has never spent time with children while earning less than a garbage collector (not that their valued work is easy).

KATHRINE WHITTY.
Narrabundah, AC

GRDC backs research

SIR, The export emphasis on Australian malting barley highlighted in Sue Mitchell's article (*AFR*, August 31) is a welcome development which has brought separate sectors of the industry together.

One point overlooked in the article is that Australian grain growers have recognised the importance of this market-oriented approach and through the Grains Research and Development Corp are contributing $2.6 million or 33 per cent of the total research budget for the project.

The importance of this approach is that all the key players in the chain from the researcher to the grower through supporting government agencies to the downstream processors, distributors and marketers of the end product are all committed to fast tracking a quality product.

Complementary initiatives are also under way in Western Australia and are being planned for northern NSW and Queensland, where similar co-operative projects are under way. The GRDC is keen to support and facilitate these initiatives which satisfy both

growers' production needs for new varieties and meet the national objectives of adding value to key components of our export industries.

DICK DAVIES
Executive Director
Grains Research and
Development Corporation
Barton, ACT

Australian content high

SIR, As the maker of the jewel cabinet referred to in Terry Ingram's article (*AFR*, September 2) I would like to correct him on some points.

1. The position in Government House is perfectly suitable, being in the older section of the residence, in the private entrance hall.

2. The Australian content of the cabinet includes (apart from the maker and sugar glider as mentioned) native orchids, bower plant, emu bush, flame peas, daisies, flannel flowers, eucalypt leaves, hibiscus, Sturt's desert pea, Moreton Bay fig, wattle and fig birds.

As well, there are 10 Australian timber, and Australian made glues, sand paper, hinges, screws lock and polish.

GEOFFREY HANNAH.
Furniture maker.
Lismore, NSW.

A complete reconciliation

SIR, The journey of tribal Aboriginal land rights has stagnated over the years. While many systems are being put in place to cause reconciliation, it does not appear that they will effectively generate complete reconciliation in the near future.

For Australia to be a complete nation, there must be complete multicultural reconciliation. The non-tribal Australian-born citizens affect complete reconciliation with new Australians through a ceremony of naturalisation.

This ceremony initiates people into the culture and gives them equality in status and rights, and has proven to be a successful vehicle in obtaining an intercultural reconciliation.

I, therefore, believe that true and complete reconciliation with tribal Aboriginals will only occur when tribal

Appendix C

Australian Liquor, Hospitality & Miscellaneous Workers Union ACT Branch, 1995, Child Care Industry (A.C.T.) Award 1985 – Rate Sheet

Australian Capital Territory Branch

Ian Gair
President

Gil Anderson
Secretary

**Australian
Liquor, Hospitality
& Miscellaneous
Workers Union**

Unit 5
40 Brisbane Avenue
Barton ACT 2600

Telephone 06. 273 1238
Facsimile 06. 273 1628

RATE SHEET

LHMU

C173RS
April 1995

CHILD CARE INDUSTRY (A.C.T.) AWARD 1985

NATIONAL WAGE CASE – 2ND SAFETY NET ADJUSTMENT

As a result of an application by the union we have been successful in securing an $8.00 per week wage rise.

Set out below are the new rates of pay effective from the first pay period commencing on or after **28 April 1995.**

Some major conditions of your employment are also summarised below. If you require more information about your award entitlements, contact the union.

NB. **Increments have now been included at Child Care worker Level 5.**

Classification	Weekly Rate	Hourly Full Time	Hourly Casual (25%)
	$	$	$
Child Care Worker Level 1			
on commencement	348.60	9.17	11.46
after 1 year in the industry	358.90	9.44	11.80
after 2 years in the industry	369.10	9.71	12.14
Child Care Worker Level 2			
on commencement	370.70	9.76	12.20
After 1 year in the industry	380.90	10.02	12.53
after 2 years in the industry	391.20	10.29	12.86
Child Care Worker Level 3			
on commencement	426.00	11.21	14.01
after 1 year in the industry	433.20	11.40	14.25
after 2 years in the industry	443.40	11.67	14.59
Child Care Worker Level 4			
on commencement	474.20	12.48	15.60
after 1 year in the industry	484.40	12.75	15.94
after 2 years in the industry	494.70	13.02	16.28
Child Care Worker Level 5			
on commencement	504.90	13.29	16.61
after 1 year in the industry	515.10	13.56	16.95
after 2 years in the industry	525.40	13.83	17.29

Appendix D

Stonehouse, A. (1994), *Not Just Nice Ladies.* Castle Hill, NSW: Pademelon Press, pp. 2-4
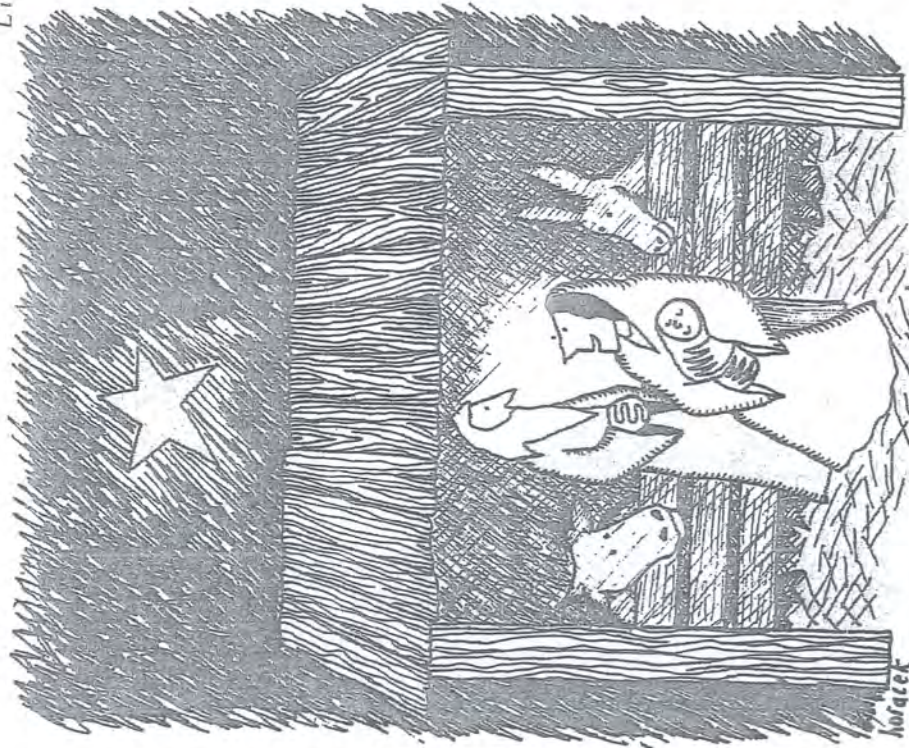
Fig 1.1

Fig 1.2

Fig 1.4

Fig 1.3

Fig 1.5

Appendix E

Horacek, J. (1992) *Life on the edge: cartoons*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, p.79.

So it's agreed then – we'll share childcare equally

Appendix F

Whitty, K. (1996, March 27). Why we're angry. *The Green Left,* p.11.

issues

View **POINT**

Katherine Whitty

Why we're angry

We are 65,000 child-care workers professionally caring for you and your 450,000 children for any of many reasons, all of them justified and none more than the others.

I am fortunate enough to work in a type of care referred to as occasional care. It's a bit of a misnomer, as there is nothing occasional about the way our service operates or the frequency with which parents use us. We provide regular and consistent care and education for the children of women in shift work who need to sleep during the day, women who may work in or from home and need precious child-free time, women whose part-time paid work will not allow them to secure a place in long day care and women who seek to care for themselves through leisure or recreational pursuits.

It is our belief that you are rightfully entitled to these services, delivered at the highest possible standard and for the lowest possible cost. And we are all aware of the difficulties you face when choosing and eventually settling your children into care. It's written on your faces when you leave and come to collect your children, the expressions of anxiety and joy when you learn of your child's daily experiences.

But how many of you would be surprised if I said we are in fact an angry mob of oppressed and exploited workers whose meagre wages are paving your way to employment glory? The brave amongst you have probably confronted us with heartfelt wishes of "you're a saint ... I could never do it, so thanks a heap and we'll be back for more of the same tomorrow." Let me tell you why we're angry.

The turnover rate of staff in this industry is double most, and it is our colleagues and your children who suffer this untold loss.

The pay requires most of us to seek a second job to make ends meet and regain a modicum of social dignity. It costs you as much to sink a couple of drinks or park a car in your average CBD for the day as it does for you to hand us the responsibility of your child's healthy development for the afternoon. The forced suppression of our wages with the low fees you pay allows you to play grown-ups in the employment marketplace while it gives your employers the excuse to baulk at our reasonable wage claims. It's not surprising then that any pay rise we have secured through the now historic Accord has been the only excuse employers have found to raise fees.

We are expected to resource and maintain environments 10 times the size and complexity of your average office space, with little or no time to prepare and organise these places of learning, or even plan alongside colleagues.

And we too work eight hour shifts filled with intensive human interaction, broken only by short and staggered breaks that make it virtually impossible for us to network and organise effectively with our colleagues, even if we had the leftover energy to do so.

So I am asking you sisters, are we not also entitled to the status that paid work brings — recognition for a labour that has been undervalued since the dim dawn of patriarchy? The oppression that women as mothers have faced for centuries is alive and kicking in this industry. And your respectful silence and heartfelt gratitude are getting us nowhere.

Put simply, child-care fees have yet to reflect the real value of our work. And whilst our economy hinges on the strength and contributions you make in your working lives, it looks as if child-care workers are going to have to strike for a balance in ours!

[This is an abridged version of a speech given to a trade union women's speak-out in Canberra on March 7 to mark International Women's Day.]

Appendix G

Council of Australian Government's Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council. (2006). *National Children's Service Workforce Study*: Melbourne, p.63.

Raising Carrots or Kids?

I am 52 years of age, a director level 7 responsible for all financial records, wages, administration, staff management etc, risk management, and compliance with all licensing and accreditation requirements etc etc.

I have managerial and general life experience plus raised 4 sons. My formal training extended over 6 years while I worked fulltime in other fields and child care.

I was responsible for all costs incurred in training and loss of income from my employment while undertaking practical placement. I was able to RPL little of my courses due to the difficulty of the process.

I continue to train and upgrade my knowledge and skills, mostly at my own expense, travelling long distances (I live in the country) and often paying for my own accommodation so that I can access training.

I do work in a supportive environment (I'm lucky!) with wonderful dedicated staff. I enjoy my job but find I'm often exhausted. I am paid for 38 hours per week plus an RDO once a month, but regularly work longer hours often even coming in on a weekend to finish off when it's quiet without interruptions. (It is often difficult to take RDOs due to the lack of available staff to cover my 2IC so that she can be non-contact).

My youngest son is 24 years old. He left school without completing Year 10 but undertook a traineeship on my insistence.

He is now a manager of a farm producing carrots, and is responsible for the day-to-day management – in some aspects similar to my position. He works long hours too and sometimes on the weekend if needed. He gets paid overtime.

He earns slightly more than me and in addition is supplied with a house, vehicle and fuel for his use – personal and private.

All training courses are undertaken during work hours and at his employer's expense - travelling in the vehicle supplied and with the fuel supplied.

His position commands respect both from his employer and the community as he provides work for many of the locals.

I am very proud of him.

Our jobs are very similar .... aren't they?????

He raises carrots while I raise children.

Current Job Satisfaction

The Australian children's service workforce overall had a high level of job satisfaction.

Of all children's services staff, 86 six per cent agreed (strongly or slightly) that they were satisfied with their job.

Appendix H

Community Child Care Cooperative (2004) Photographs taken at "The rally for ratios-Sydney"
Retrieved from http://www.ccccnsw.org.au/rattl070/editors.html March 7, 2007

May 8, 2004

WE
DESERVE
BETTER

1:4
make it
Law