

The Fertile Subject: A Psycho-Social Exploration of Professional  
Femininities

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The thesis is submitted by the Cardiff University of Wales in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted for any degree.

Signed.....

Dated.....

STATEMENT 1

This dissertation is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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STATEMENT 2

This dissertation is the result of my own independent investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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## SUMMARY

This thesis is about the knowledge, power and discursive production of contemporary western femininities. It is concerned with the politically sedimented power-knowledge relations and socio-historical, discursive, material and embodied processes by which particular versions of femininity are brought into being. The thesis investigates the modes by which femininity is currently constituted and experienced through discursive and material practices that exalt femininity as fluid/flexible in a historical context where subjects are also 'supposed to be sustained by a stable centre, an ego capable of resilience' (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 241). Through a psycho-social analysis of twelve biographical accounts of professional women aged 32-45, the research utilises an interdisciplinary approach to explore the discourses and narratives through which this deep irony is lived for women in the present, examining the place of subjectification and subjectivity. These practices are examined in relation to their constitutive and regulatory power through which women's emotions-desires; fantasies and fears of loss and risk are made intelligible 'as personal failures when all there is available to understand these is an individual psychological discourse' (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 243). The research builds on feminist psycho-social, post-structural and governmentality studies tracking the complex and dynamic interrelations 'across variable daily actions, fantasies and narrations', (Driver, 2005, p. 23) where the social, cultural and psychological are strongly entwined with each other. It is the lived experiences of women in their negotiation of this complex process of ongoing transformation that the research explores, asking how are women's subjectivities produced through the social spaces that have opened up for them in specific historical conditions and cultural and social locations.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **Tomorrow's New Women Today**

This thesis is about what it means and feels like to be a 'new woman' in the Western world today. Almost three decades on from the radical social, cultural and political changes first implemented by neo liberal governments throughout many western nations in the late 1970's and early 1980's, this thesis seeks to understand the psycho-social implications of how we as re-made 'new women' experience our lives in the much promised 'female future', (Hughes and Kerfoot, 2002). The thesis is written at a time when women's large-scale employment within the professions in the west has become relatively unremarkable and when being female is positioned as advantageous within a new and radically transformed economy. It is a time when being feminine means having the 'right stuff' necessary for carrying the project of international globalisation and progressivism forward and long into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The opportunity of entering the professional labour market in large numbers from the mid 1980's onwards, has offered women the chance to participate as never before in the most profound social, economic and political re-structure in 50 years. In an era of reduced welfare provision, downsizing and the off shore relocation of traditional male working class industry and occupations, it is a predominately female labouring body that now props up an individualised, contractual and service industrialised global economy in the West, (Fincher and Saunders, 2001).

As a white working class woman born in Australia at the beginning of the 1970's, I, along with other 'generation X' women, found myself at the forefront of this shift. Like many other women of my generation who made the transition to womanhood during the upheaval of the 1980's, I felt compelled to depart from my mother's life script, 'seize the day' and re-make myself as a 'new woman' in the 'new knowledge economy'. It is the lived experiences of women in their negotiation of this complex process of ongoing transformation that this thesis seeks to explore, asking how are women's subjectivities produced in and through the social spaces that have opened up for them in specific historical conditions and cultural and social locations?

The feminine subject is well disposed to 'reinvention' and as argued by Walkerdine et al (2001) and Blackman (1999), makes the 'transition from motherhood and housewife in a long term monogamous marriage to a working woman whilst also being 'invited to constantly remake [herself] as the (changing) object of male desire', (Walkerdine et al, 2001 p. 9). As such, women have long been accustomed to the idea that the unitary humanist subject is a fiction, in the Foucauldian sense, in that self-invention has always been a necessary element of femininity. It is precisely through this feminine disposition, the 'right stuff', that women have been mobilised and have come to play such a central role in providing a flexible work force in the new economy. Indeed, a decade ago the introduction to the British think-tank Demos's publication '*Tomorrow's Women*', stated that:

"As male jobs disappear, women's importance in society is set to rise, as is their confidence. Forty percent of women believe that women are naturally superior to men. Women will soon make up a majority of the workforce and Britain is becoming increasingly shaped by feminine values. Values such as empathy, care, community and environmentalism, are now central to British society. Work has become more important for women and nearly all groups of women have become relatively less committed to the family over the last ten years," (Wilkinson et al., 1997, p. 8).

A decade on then it is 'tomorrow's' woman who is positioned here as embodying the new worker, a woman who is re-made/born 'as the modern neo liberal subject; a subject of self invention and transformation who is capable of surviving within the new social, economic and political system', (Walkerdine et al, 2001, p. 3).

### **The Malleable Resilient Woman**

Being capable of weathering the new and inherently insecure flexible labour market however, requires a robust subject who is the producer of 'one's own labour situation', (Beck, 1992, p. 93). As Ulrich Beck argues, the new insecurities of temporary and under-employment faced by today's workers must be individually managed, resulting in an elevated sense of subjective risk, (Beck, 1992). This requires a modern subject who must be responsible for their own 'social biography' and as elaborated by Giddens, such subjects must understand themselves as individual autonomous agents and creators of their present, future and ongoing reflexive 'life project', (Giddens, 1991). As such, regardless of any inflexible and extraneous restraints faced in an increasingly privatised, down sized and contractual work place, 'each individual must render his or her life meaningful, as if it were the outcome of individual choices made in the furtherance of a biographical project of self-realisation'. These compositional social, economic and political changes, as Rose argues, 'do not crush subjectivity', rather they form 'new forms of regulation' of which produce subjects who are 'capable of bearing the serious burdens of liberty', (Rose, 1999, p. viii).

However, this re-invention requires a specific ‘psychological subject of modernity’ a subject who is ‘made and not born’. Such a liberal subject is made ‘through the psi sciences, that create the appropriate subject’ within a form of ‘liberal government that depends upon subjects who are free and rational agents of democracy, re-created in the context of globalism and economic rationalism’, (Walkerdine et al 2001, p. 2). Thus femininity is currently constituted and mobilised through discursive and material practices that at once exalt femininity for its characteristic malleability, inside an historical epoch that is reliant on subjects who are ‘also supposed to be sustained by a stable centre, an ego capable of resilience’, (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 241). This thesis seeks to explore and understand how this ‘deep irony’ is managed and lived by a group of twelve professional Australian women aged between 32-45, by examining the ‘place of subjectification, (the production of ‘the subject’ in discursive practices) and subjectivity (the lived experience of being a subject)’, (Walkerdine et al, 2001, p. 176).

Importantly, as the final sentence of the Demos statement proclaims, from the late 1980’s onwards, tomorrow’s women are positioned as less *committed* to the family. As Demos assumes, this is because ‘work has become more important for women’. Indeed, Anthony Giddens has proclaimed that women’s increasing presence within the labour market provides apparent confirmation that, ‘modern women have real choices between a life centred on family work and/or paid work’. Giddens proposes that such ‘real choices’ demonstrate that ‘we can no longer learn from history’ as ‘individualisation has been the main driving force for change in late modern society’, (Giddens in Hakim, 2000:vii). What does it mean then; that the self-invention exacted of women in their transformation to workers in the new economy is co-terminus with

them being positioned as less committed to a life 'centred' on the family? In a labour market where the aesthetics of femininity are to be universally adopted and performed by male and female workers alike, (Adkins, 2001), how do women at once embrace such characteristics-self-invention and transformation-while departing from the femininities that constituted the generations of women before them? What does it mean to be positioned as less committed to a life centred on the family for 'tomorrow's' generation of re-made women today?

### **Emotional Research**

To explore the complexity and enormity of these transformational changes and to understand women's experiences of them, has meant that I have had to acknowledge and understand the important role that emotion plays in the lives of women today. Indeed my own emotional departure from my working class mother's life script could not be pushed aside, nor could my own complex location as social researcher and 'child free' professional woman be ignored. This has meant that my epistemological framework and post-structuralist sociological background and training has been called into question. Specifically, my previous understanding of Rose's (1999) account of Foucault's 'care of the self' as accounting for the 'fiction' of the autonomous liberal subject, previously rendered any reference to the experience of an unconscious or 'interiority' as potentially counter-productive. However, as Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) so cogently argue, while this experience of an unconscious or interiority is 'one of the significant psychological fictions of the twentieth century' in the Foucauldian sense, this fiction non-the-less functions as truth. Further, I

nonetheless argue that this fiction operates in ways that are central to the complex social, cultural and psychological dynamics of womanhood today as:

“[w]e are created as modern subjects with an interiority and it is through that interiority that we live our emotions. [The] aim here, then, is to recognise the powerful place of those emotions in producing the very practices and subjects we are talking about. Such emotionality is completely absent from the hyper-rationality of Foucault and his ‘Other’,” (Walkerdine et al, 2001, p. 176).

Indeed, what I could not ignore when speaking to women about their experiences in relation to their work, family and their fertility prior to conducting any research, was that ‘women experience and speak of self as feeling’, (Kim, 2006, p. 239). When speaking to women about often very personal aspects of their lives informally before I conducted any research, I *felt* compelled to engage with them and contribute to the ‘shared knowledges’ that this type of talk produces, (Gray, 1995, p. 161). Also my own working class subjectivity combined with a history of learning differences and educational failure, has understandably fostered a personal sense of suspicion for those who ‘gaze’ on ‘others’ ‘from an incredulous distance’, (Walkerdine et al, 2001 p. 13). Thus taking up an exclusive position of social scientist was something that I felt uncomfortable doing and, which I was well aware, could be spotted a mile off, (Walkerdine et al, 2001).

### **Research Questions & Outline**

Inspired by the type of talk produced in these informal conversations with women, I conducted four unstructured pilot interviews with women in Sydney, Australia in 2003, where I began my PhD studies at the University of Western Sydney. The subsequent narrative accounts produced within the pilot study informed the

construction of the following over-arching research question: how do current social conditions provide opportunities to construct particular versions of femininity that resonate with contemporary understandings of work, family and fertility? Taking this question as my main point of departure, the following subsidiary questions aim to explore specific annexed themes within the research and circumscribe the scope of the research:

- 1) How do discourses concerning fertility, work and family shape the lived experiences of women today?
- 2) How is femininity constructed and regulated through discursive and material practices in relation to fertility, family and work in the present?

In order to address these questions, I adopted a qualitative methodological approach that involved conducting twelve unstructured in-depth interviews with women aged between 32-45 in Sydney Australia in 2003. An analytical and theoretical approach that combines critical psychology, post foundational studies, discourse analysis, narrative analysis and governmentality studies was then utilised to examine the multiple and complex processes through which femininity is produced in the analysis of participants' narrative accounts. The research seeks to build on Walkerdine's (2006) concept of 'relationality' in which the 'affective, embodied, engagements, relations that make up our world' are fore-grounded in an attempt to understand how the 'varied ways that we can feel, but we can not necessarily talk about the ways we are connected', is illuminated through 'the space that is relational' (2006, p.191). Therefore, the thesis critically examines the *relational* modes and practices by which femininity is produced, through an engagement with historical, material, embodied and discursive processes (Henriques et al, 1984). How 'the ordinary circumstances of

life are seen, felt, known and understood' by women, are examined through an analysis of participants narrative accounts conducted with women selected as most likely to be *positioned* as encountering specific issues with work, family and fertility, (Kim, 2006, p. 238).

It was not my aim to produce data that was in some way free from the contamination of my presence as a researcher *and* woman within the interview process or delimit the inter-subjective dialogue that occurred therein. Rather, I considered my own subjectivity as a resource. Thus, I did not view my subjectivity as an obstacle to be extracted from the interview process in order to achieve a moment of pure objectivity in which the 'behaviour' of the women I spoke with could be recorded as it *naturally* or *really* occurred. The researched and the researcher are viewed to mutually constitute the 'data' within this framework, in a relational and dynamic process that seeks to 'de-centre and disperse the knowing one', (Spillers, 2003, p. 427).

The selection of participants was not based on a criterion of 'representation' as utilised in some social research sampling techniques, but rather women were recruited in relation to their age cohort and their identification with the category of 'professional'. This was done with the express purpose of increasing the likelihood of accessing women who have, and continue to, negotiate the type of complex transformations detailed above. Specifically, interviewing established professional women who fell within this age bracket facilitated the opportunity to explore the ways in which women negotiate particular discourses, such as the 'biological clock'/fertility related discourses and subject positions such the 'superwoman', 'stay at home mum' and 'childless professional'. However, whilst professional women may be well placed



to provide narrative accounts of what it means to be a 'new woman' today, professional subjectivities are interwoven with differences of race, ethnicity, sexuality and class. Such differences both challenge the universal category of 'woman' and open up the local specificity of place and space in the production of subjectivity. My aim here is to build on feminist psycho-social work that does not seek to obscure the complex and dynamic interrelations of 'race, class, gender and sexual power [as] abstracted from the living embodiments' of women, (Driver, 2005, p. 22). Rather, I attempt to track 'across variable daily actions, fantasies and narrations', (Driver, 2005, p. 23), where 'the social, cultural and psychological are so strongly entwined with each other that a disciplinary teasing apart does violence to the actual mechanism', (Walkerdine et al, 2001, p.15). It is the fantasies, desires and emotionality, the psychological project of the transformations discussed above and the femininities produced through this, that this work seeks to explore through the indices of the psycho-social.

## **Thesis Outline**

In chapter two I outline how the critical psychology approach I take in this study sets out to explore how these political, social, cultural and economic changes are strongly and complexly entwined with the psychological production of feminine subjects and subjectivity today. I outline the political, social and economic changes that have occurred from the 1980's onwards in Australia, where this study took place, and discuss the implications of these changes for the women in the study. I include excerpts taken from an interview with one participant and discuss how her precarious position within Australia's 'new economy', raises the issue of how women's fears and

defences against being positioned as single mother 'welfare cheat/scrounging' 'other', regulates femininity in new ways today.

In chapter three I discuss the ways in which an ongoing debate in the social sciences concerning women's increased participation within Western labour markets, remains caught within a binary that reconstitutes a social versus individual dualism. Within this debate I discuss how women are positioned as either rational individual agents who are able to effect choice in relation to their work, family and fertility, or are conversely positioned as constrained by cultural norms and socialisation practices. I discuss the implication of how women's increasing participation in the labour market is fore-grounded within this debate and constituted as a primary site in which to investigate, measure and understand the lives of women. In outlining this debate I show how social scientists locate patterns of segregation within the labour market and constitute these as primary indicators in which women can be categorised into discrete subject types in accordance with differences in employment participation. Within this chapter I discuss how this categorisation operates to compartmentalise and reduce the complexity of women's lived experiences and explore the implications of this through the analysis of two participant narrative accounts. Within this chapter I argue for the need to take into account women's fears and desires as important in understanding how neo liberal discourses of rational individualism operate in conjunction with the psychological categorisation of femininity and how this impacts on the lives of women today.

In chapter four I present a selection of different media representations of femininity that are treated as symptomatic texts wherein a new set of discursive practices are

identified. Specifically, I examine how an increasing trend to portray and speak about the lives of women as beset with problems in relation to work, family and fertility within popular media, operate to classify femininity in particular ways today that are relationally connected to the categorisation of the feminine types outlined in chapter three.

In chapters five, six and seven I establish common themes present within the broad corpus of narrative statements of the twelve interviewees. I explore these narrative accounts in relation to how the desire to be a whole feminine subject, (the ego capable of resilience), sits in contradiction with a feminine subject who must constantly reinvent herself, (Walkerdine, 2003). Thus within these three chapters I explore how the deep irony I referred to above, is lived for women in the present and how this is spoken, made intelligible, and lived contextually through a set of material practices.

Within chapter five I focus on binary associations in talk and the way specific historical conceptual dualisms, (such as mind/body, rational/irrational and male/female) have been reconfigured and reconstituted, operating to pose specific problems for the participants in this study, which are discernible in the patterns and flows, breaks and (dis)continuities of the production of participants narratives, (Walkerdine et al, 2001). Within this chapter I show how the participants in this study engage specific practices of self regulation in order to reconcile these dualisms through self transformation, (Walkerdine et al, 2001).

Within chapter six I explore how the women in this study struggled to position themselves as ambitious professionals. Here I examine how participants' narratives

flow and break as they struggle to construct a coherent story in relation to their career trajectory in context to their personal and emotional happiness. This becomes particularly evident at the very point in which their individual 'stimulation' or 'social interaction' is broached in conjunction with motherhood. Here I discuss how women consistently speak of their personal happiness as being located in terms of their professional identities. I discuss how it would seem that women are only able to make the love of their professional working lives intelligible in terms of a sense of loss, specifically in terms of the loss of mental stimulation.

Within chapter seven I examine how the women in this study defend against the possibility of being positioned in/as 'other' undesirable feminine subject positions. I also show how participants attempt not to 'other' those very women who are seen to take up these undesirable positions. Thus within this chapter I discuss how the women in this study construct fantasies through which they are able to take up the position of an 'other' woman and by doing so create a space in which an 'other' self can be made intelligible. I discuss how by fore-grounding the incidences in which emotion, talk, silences, connections and interactions take place, we may understand how this is played out/lived today.

In chapter eight I conclude the thesis with a discussion of my research findings. I outline how through a relational approach in which connection is fore-grounded we are able understand the ways in which women recognise together what it means to be constituted as 'other' within the 'gaze'. I highlight the importance of appreciating and understanding that even when attempting to escape 'othering', women try to share their position, often through the spectre of the other. I discuss how I believe women

do this so as not to occlude the other of their fantasy but rather to include this other into themselves in an attempt to understand this 'other' woman. Lastly, I outline what implications the study has in relation to theory, for practise and for policy and discuss what further questions remain in relation to my findings and where I think future research is required.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Method & Australian Background**

“Psychology has helped to constitute the very form of modern individuality. Psychology is productive: it does not simply bias or distort or incarcerate helpless individuals in oppressive institutions. It regulates, classifies and administers; it produces those regulative devices which form us as objects of child development, schooling, welfare agencies, medicine, multicultural education, personnel practices and so forth. Furthermore, psychology's implication in our modern form of individuality means that it constitutes subjectivities as well as objects.” (Henriques et al., 1984, p. 1)

#### **Introduction**

In the following chapter I outline how the critical psychological approach I take in this study sets out to explore how specific political, social, cultural and economic changes are strongly and complexly entwined with the psychological production of femininity and subjectivity today. I outline how and why I came to conduct this study<sup>1</sup>, including my reasons and rationale for adopting a critical psychological approach that attempts not to produce a ‘disciplinary teasing apart’ of this complexity and why this is important in understanding how femininity is lived today, (Walkerdine et al, 2001, p. 15). I discuss the political, social and economic changes that have occurred in Australia from the 1980’s onwards, where this study took place, and discuss the implications of these changes for the women in the study. I include excerpts taken from an interview with Sandra, a 36 year old participant and sole parent, and discuss how her precarious position within Australia’s ‘new economy’

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<sup>1</sup> This study initially commenced in 2002 in Sydney Australia where I began my PhD at the University of Western Sydney. All interviews with participants were conducted in Sydney 2003.

raises issue concerning the ways in which women's fears and defences against being positioned as single mother 'welfare cheat/scrounging' 'other' in this instance, regulates femininity in new ways today.

### **Critical Psychology & Post Structuralism**

At the beginning of this study I set out to design a robust methodological framework so as to appreciate the complex constitution of femininity and contribute to critical research that seeks to understand the lived experiences of women today. This has meant that I have adopted an inter-disciplinary approach that crosses the boundaries between sociology and psychology. In so doing I have been inspired by the work of post structural theorists and in particular critical psychologists such as Henriques et al (1998) and Walkerdine et al (2001). Post structuralism and critical psychology offer the researcher a lens to understand the complex indices and connections of how subjects are constructed and how subjectivity is lived. Appreciating how the social, cultural and historical are interwoven with emotionality (desire, fear) is necessary if we are to move beyond understandings of psychology as a mere myth and examine how this fiction functions as truth. This is vital if we are to understand how the transformation that women have undergone over the last three decades has been achieved, (Walkerdine, 2006).

Critical psychology is a growing and diverse field finding its roots in critical theory, German critical psychology, Latin-American liberation theology and psychology, feminism, postmodernism and post-structuralism.<sup>2</sup> There is no one definitive version of critical psychology, however Parker's statement that critical psychology is 'a

movement that challenges psychology to work towards emancipation and social justice, and that opposes the uses of psychology to perpetuate oppression and injustice' is often cited as a potentially unifying mandate, (Parker, 1990). The publication of 'Changing the subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity' in 1984 however, is most often linked with the radical shift toward a critical understanding of psychology. '*Changing the subject*' was written at time when critical theorists began to distance themselves from Marxism and move toward a post structural critique of metaphysics and humanism. Taking their theoretical impetus from post-structuralism, Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine (1984); set about critically evaluating the implications of psychology's insistence on the split between the individual and society.

The post-Saussurean linguistic theories of Derrida, Foucault and Barthes and Lacan's theory of a decentred subjectivity, thus offered critical theorists a critique of existing understandings of power, language, knowledge, subjectivity and identity. 'Modernity entered history as a progressive force promising to liberate humankind from ignorance and irrationality', (Rosenau, 1992, p. 5), post-structuralists however, both challenged and rejected this assumption. Importantly, post structural thinkers provided a critical analysis of the way power is embedded in the processes of formulating knowledge and thus theory, challenging the very project of a grand theory of human liberation, (Teo, 1998). As Morawski details (1990):

"Perhaps the chief feature is a general disclaiming of the search for enduring, absolute, or universal truths; these dubitable truths include the existence of a stable, autonomous knower, the possibilities of objective, disinterested knowledge, the existence of logic, rationality, or reason that is independent of a social system endorsing these mental processes, and the

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For a general historical overview of the disciplinary subdivisions of Critical psychology, See D. Fox and I. Prilleltensky (Eds.), 1997, 'Critical psychology: An introduction' Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.



feasibility of referential language to describe reality”, (Morawski, 1990 in Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 2001, p. 148).

In effect, post structuralism marks a ‘perpetual detour on the way to a truth that has lost any status or finality’, (Sarup, 1988, p. 3). Central to the critical psychology of Henriques et al, as Morawski illuminates in the above quote, is the post-structural premise that there is no ‘knowing subject’ independent of discourse, power, knowledge, or unitary individual as within Cartesian conceptualisations of the subject. Here subjectivity is not thought to ‘pre-exist the forms of its social recognitions’ and ‘is a heterogeneous and shifting’ assemblage of historical, socio-cultural discursive constructions, (Rose, 1989, p. 222). Foucault’s understanding of the ‘self’ therefore, does not exist outside of ‘the social expectations targeted upon it, the social duties accorded it, the norms according to which it is judged, the pleasures and pains that entice and coerce it, the forms of self-inspection inculcated in it, the language according to which it is spoken about and about which it learns to account for itself in thought and speech’, (Rose, 1989, p. 222).

### **Subjects, Subjectivity & Power**

Judith Butler outlines subjection as the making of a subject, wherein the code of regulation in which a subject is produced is a type of unilateral power that acts as a force of domination on the individual *and* also shapes and forms the subject. Here subjection does not merely imply the domination of a subject nor purely its production, but rather a type of constraint in production. Here constraint circumscribes; i.e. the production of the subject cannot take place without this restriction *through* which production takes place (Butler, 1995). Butler thus expands on Foucault’s analysis demonstrating how two modes of power are enjoined in the

formation of subjects. This extension of Foucault's analysis of power provides us with a useful framework to further understand how an analysis of subjectivity may be enjoined with a critique of liberal governance, (Butler, 1995).

Power in the context of governance operates in the first instance as disciplinary and according to Foucault has regulatory modes by which normative codes of behaviour aim to 'order' and delimit the possibility of heterogeneity. In the second instance however, power operates on the individual's 'conduct' forming an internal regime, the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault, 1982, pp. 220–221). Power thus takes a more pernicious form in modernity according to Foucault, becoming embedded within specific practices whereby the 'self' acts upon the 'self' (Foucault, 1982, pp. 220–221). This marks a historical shift from domination in the context of disciplinarian norms of conduct, as power is enacted by the self on the self and embedded in the practices in which the self comes to recognise the self. In this respect, a theory of the 'micro physics of power' has particular relevance for the analysis of biographical narrative accounts' as it is appreciative of the very delicate and complex effects of modernity in the formation of subjects and subjectivity. In particular Foucault's theory of power allows us to unpack the self regulation techniques enacted through the 'conduct of conduct', whereby 'technologies of selfhood' form the processes through which we 'are governed and govern ourselves as human beings of a particular sort', (Rose, 1996, p. 144).

### **Discourse & Discourse Analysis**

The term 'discourse' is used throughout this thesis in preference to 'language', 'because it refers beyond language to sets of organised meanings', to 'emphasis the

organised way in which meanings cohere around an assumed central proposition, which gives them their value and significance', (Hollway, 1989, in Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 16). As a methodological approach, there is great diversity as to what constitutes the 'object' of discourse analysis and indeed the exact form that discourse analysis should take.<sup>3</sup> Discourse analysis is thus utilised in a variety of inter-disciplinary studies whereby the functional aspects of language and the social construction of reality inform this 'non-definitive method', (Macleod, 2002). According to Wetherell et al (2001, p. 196), 'discourse analysis is probably best described as the study of talk and texts' and 'is a set of methods and theories for investigating language in use and language in social contexts'. Wetherell suggests that discourse analysts seek to 'identify patterns of language and related practices and to show how these constitute aspects of society and the people within it', (2001, p. 196). The foundational underpinnings of discourse analysis rest on the idea that social actors construct a variety of 'versions of reality', (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), calling on available discourses circulating within the social. 'Realities' are produced in and through discourse; and experience and meaning are co-constructed through inter-subjective material and discursive processes that cannot be isolated in order to be studied from the 'outside', (Burman, 1997). Discourses thus function to *form* the actions, objects, experience and knowledge of which they speak.

This qualitative turn to discourse within the social sciences, (Mather, 2000, p. 86) represents an epistemological shift away from positivist objective empiricism, as research is viewed as already political in its intention rather than a 'neutral' transparent methodological technique, (Burman, 1997). Within this study my

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<sup>3</sup> See Potter et al (1990), Burman and Parker (1993), Wetherell et al (2001) and Potter (2003), for further discussion on the approaches to Discourse Analysis.

interpretation of discourse analysis can be considered as taking a 'macro' analytical approach inspired by Foucault's analysis of power, whereby 'discourse analysis is about discourses as objects', (Parker, 1990, p. 196). Here Parker's account of discourse analysis, in which statements are seen as regulated through broad socio-cultural knowledge formations and contexts, is considered useful in an analysis that seeks to understand how power and discourse are formed 'in the same breath', (Parker, 1990, p. 199). This branch of discourse analysis seeks to understand the historical dimensions and emergence of discourses and their regulatory effects in place with how discourses operate within and through power-knowledge formations across spatial and temporal boundaries. Again, discourses are viewed as dependent upon historical, social and cultural processes for their 'condition of emergence' and are produced and perpetuated through complex 'micro-physics of power' relations, (Foucault, 1997).

Discourse analysis thus provides us with a grid of analysis through which we are able to understand how a series of participants statements are interwoven and connected to specific technologies, practices, institutions, expertise, (i.e. knowledge-formations) and are thus politically embedded and relational in nature. Statements should thus be situated within broader discursive formations and linked with the 'system that governs their division, the degree to which they depend on each other, the way in which they interlock or exclude one another, the transformation that they undergo, and the play of their location, arrangement and replacement', (Foucault, 1972, p. 34). This 'macro' approach to discourse analysis allows us to understand the ways in which 'truth' is a discursive construct and how subjectivity is produced and regulated through and within specific power-knowledge formations.

## **Narrative Method**

This study began in Australia in 2002 where I began my Doctoral studies part-time under the supervision of Professor Valerie Walkerdine at the University of Western Sydney. During the early months of 2003 Professor Walkerdine informed me that she had decided to take a position at Cardiff University and offered me the opportunity to complete my thesis as a student there. Before moving to the UK, I conducted unstructured interviews with twelve women in Sydney Australia. The transcribed interview data produced from these interviews forms the corpus of statements on which I base my qualitative discourse narrative analysis in this thesis.

The data produced from the twelve interviews I conducted is incredibly rich and thus the process of understanding and analysing what was going on in these interviews has proved just as complex as the narratives themselves. Narrative analysis finds its theoretical roots within the work of post foundational theoreticians such as Ricoeur, Barthes and Bakhtin etc. Kohler-Riessman describes the ‘purpose’ of narrative analysis as seeing ‘how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives’, (1993, p. 2). Biographical narratives provide a platform by which an analysis that attempts to understand how subjectification is both ‘to produce subjectivity’ and ‘to make subject’ can be undertaken so as to investigate the condition of being a subject, (Henriques, et. al., 1984). According to Hollway and Jefferson, (2000) narrative analysis allows researchers to examine how people may position themselves according to many differing discourses in circulation by focusing on how the subject

constructs their own narrative in context with such discourses. Narratives have an historical importance as 'there does not exist, and never has existed, a people without narratives', (Barthes cited in Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 32). Narrative can be seen as 'the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful' as 'it organises human experience into temporally meaningful episodes', (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.1, cited in Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 32), with 'self identity' made intelligible through 'narratives of the self', (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 32). Narrative analysis thus allows us to understand and unpack the ways in which subjectivity is constituted in a dynamic discursive field of multiple and contradictory discourses, (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

The position I take within this study is one in which I treat participants' narrative statements as instances of discourse whilst paying careful attention to the 'patterns of fantasy and defence, hope and longing-in other words what people longed to be and what they guarded against being', embedded within each narrative account (Walkerdine et al, 2001, p 16). This methodological approach utilises a discourse analysis designed to unpack the techniques for what can and cannot be stated rather than apply an underlying rule that seeks to establish the communicative or linguistic functions of talk. Indeed I wish to move away from a position that assumes the existence of an independent reality, and come from the position of a plurality of truths. This type of discourse analysis concerns itself with the 'techniques, the structures, the forms of know-how by which people are able to produce and recognise an utterance', (Foucault, 1977, p. 78). As such, I do not take a strictly empirical approach that focuses on the enunciation meaning as found in critical linguistics or social semiotics etc. I am thus interested in the position of the statements in a close

reading of the interview transcripts and do not hope to reveal a truth or uncover a form of false consciousness.

My aim is to focus on the chronology/temporal aspects within the subjects' narratives and map out how each participant tells her story and constructs her specific reality during each interview, emphasising the location of events, places and utilisation of anecdote and metaphor to do so, (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). My intention here is to allow each woman's narrative to set a wider overall structure and thus provide a grid of analysis that includes a sense of relations, significant events, times and places to emerge giving a sense of what sort of story is being told here. For this reason I include substantial sections of participant's narrative accounts in my discussion and analysis, so as to show the connective points within and between women's accounts. Here I find including a selection of narrative chunks as I present my analysis, affords me the opportunity of fore-grounding connection as well as locating contradiction. Here I wish to ascertain what kinds of speaking positions the participants' broader narratives give rise to, what orientations emerge, the significance of silences and what discourses women call upon at specific intervals in relation to their narratives as a whole, (Walkerdine, et. al., 2001). The purpose of this level of analysis is to refer to the modes of subjective practice and the complex forms in which subjectivity is managed, shaped and lived. Such an analysis assists in the critique of how and by what ways we are to become ethical subjects at this current historical juncture. I focus here on the ruptures, contradictions, counter discourses and statements of resistance in the production of the continuity of talk within each narrative and attempt to map the cracks and crevasses within and between subject positions. By locating these specific gaps, breaks and discontinuities I show how specific patterns, similarities and

differences within each subject's narrative emerge as they work to create confluence and clarity in their stories and presentation as coherent selves within the interview process. Expanding on Walkerdine's use of the concept of fantasy (2001), I explore how women's fantasies of transformation are mediated by continued work and struggle with the 'self', (Walkerdine, et. al. 2001).

While sociologists such as Rose critique critical psychology as being focused on locating subjectification in a 'universe of meaning or an inter-actional context of narratives', (Rose, 1999) governmentality studies do not deal with problems of experience and emotionality and embed subjectification in history whilst perhaps missing the delicate interplay in which subjects' complex emotions-desires, fears, defences-investments and resistance are arranged within a story and a biography<sup>4</sup>, (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Thus I am interested in understanding how power is productive and what we know as truth is produced, resisted and regulated, whilst recognising 'the powerful place of emotions in producing the very practices and subjects we are talking about, (Walkerdine et al, 2001, p. 176). In light of the fact that for many participants the issues broached in the interviews were often emotional, the positions that women take up within their narratives allows us to link their emotional experiences with the effects of political power and knowledge formations.

Discussing the 'advantage of the idea that current at any one time are competing, potentially contradictory discourses', Hollway's analysis of gendered subjectivities allows us to 'pose the question how is it that people take up positions in one discourse

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<sup>4</sup> Rose can be considered to critique Discourse Analysis as a lens of analysis here, in particular the approach to Discourse Analysis taken by Discursive Psychologists. However Governmentality studies is now often combined with Discourse Analysis within inter-disciplinary social science research, such



rather than another?' (1998, p. 237). Here Hollway suggests that Foucault does not 'account for how people are constituted as a result of certain truths being current rather than others', (1998, p. 237). Hollway thus argues that narrative analysis is a valuable methodological tool for examining the ways in which subjectivity is constituted within dynamic discursive fields of multiple and contradictory discourses. Discussing the 'investment' that people may have 'in taking up certain positions in discourses' Hollway suggests that:

"By claiming that people have investments in taking up certain positions in discourses, and consequently in relation to each other, I mean that there will be some satisfaction or pay-off or reward for that person. The satisfaction may well be in contradiction with resultant feelings. It is not necessarily conscious or rational. But there is a reason", (Hollway1998, p. 238).

As a methodological tool combined with discourse analysis, narrative analysis helps us to locate and map connective themes within individual biographies *and* between a corpus of biographical accounts. In this context, what is not spoken; those gaps and spaces can be utilised as vantage points from which the researcher can locate how and where themes intersect. Importantly Hollway highlights that 'investments' may not be rational or indeed conscious. In doing so she challenges the notion that the individual subject is an autonomous agent who freely makes the conscious rational choice to take up specific positions.

Discussing the 'incompatibility' that exists between the 'two positions' of bourgeois subject and 'the fecund female body', Walkerdine et al. find in '*Growing up Girl*' that such 'incompatibility must be lived by the girl herself as a psychic struggle from which she never escapes', (2001, p. 187). Thus girls 'inscription as bourgeois subjects

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as Power's 'The Unfreedom of Being Other: Canadian Lone Mother's Experiences of Poverty and 'Life on the Cheque', (2005).

counter-poses fecundity in a way that simply does not allow the possibility of pregnancy', (2001, p. 187). Walkerdine et al thus found that success for middle class young women is contingent upon their individual ability to manage their bodies and not bear children early in life. Here understanding that the practice of 'investing' in a particular subject position may not necessarily be conscious or rational, allows us to appreciate how the 'struggle' that Walkerdine et al refer to, may be lived emotionally. As we shall see in the following chapters, this 'incompatibility' means that women must defend against being situated as having chosen their current 'life style' in comparison with other 'life styles' apparently on offer.

### **Interviews and Data Gathering**

The selection of participants was not based on a criteria of 'representation' as utilised in some social research sampling techniques. As discussed above, discourse analysis concerns the study of discourses as objects. I am thus seeking to establish what current discourses there are in circulation in order to establish how these are taken up by professional women within a specific age range. Here, rather than establishing how many women take up specific discourses, I am interested in the way specific women call on discourses to construct their biographies. Thus conducting in-depth interviews with twelve participants, rather than collecting data from a larger number of women, is a methodological approach that provides me with a sufficient amount of data to perform a discourse and narrative analysis, (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). The women who participated in this study were recruited in relation to their age cohort and their self-identification with the category of 'professional'. Participants were canvassed through an online and hard copy information sheet setting out the

categories of gender, age 32-45, and 'professional', (see appendices A & B). It was deemed necessary to recruit women within this age range and occupation category in order to access participants most likely to be positioned as experiencing a broad range of situational factors in relation to their fertility, work and family and thus identify with different stipulated subject positions, i.e. 'childless professionals', 'stay at home mother' or 'superwomen' etc. The interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and I wrote extensive field notes immediately after each interview detailing my thoughts, feeling and impressions of each interaction.

Women within this age range are also likely to be at a crucial point in establishing themselves within a career and may have to navigate their way through many obstacles and constraints regarding their individual 'choice' in context with their family, fertility and work. For this reason it was deemed necessary to recruit women who identified as being 'professional' as such women can be viewed as being positioned at the 'coal face' concerning temporal, fertility and work constraints. Importantly, women falling into this age bracket grew up in a period before the political changes outlined in chapter one came into being, and as such, these profound shifts came about during the participants' transition to womanhood. In this respect the opportunity to enter the professions granted to these women were distinct from that of their mothers' generation, whereas women of a younger age cohort may not have experienced/felt this shift as keenly. In conjunction with this, the participants in this study fall within the age ranges whereby their biological fertility limit, i.e. biological clock, is fore-grounded whilst advancements in career in relation to promotion and seniority may also be paramount.

The project received ethical approval in accordance with the University of Western Sydney's research ethics and guidelines procedures. During the first phase of calling for participants, I contacted 'The Business Women's Association of Australia' who were interested in promoting the project. I was granted access to the Association's web site and posted an online copy of the project information sheet and call for participants sheet to be circulated on their members list Australia wide (see appendix A and B). However, unfortunately only one woman volunteered from this recruitment drive and as she lived many hundreds of kilometres away I was unable to interview her. As such, accessing professional women within the private sector proved difficult and was only achieved through a snow-balling method. As a result, all of the women from the private sector who volunteered to be interviewed were affiliated with each other, as is often the case in studies that utilise snow-balling to access participants. In order to access a more diverse range of participants I contacted a large inner Sydney University with an ethnically diverse staff profile who granted me access to call for participants. I then circulated online copies of the information sheet and call for participants sheet on the Universities staff web mailing list.

Of the twelve participants eight women are from the public sector and of mixed professional occupations, four women are from the private sector; three of whom are journalists and one is a public relations manager. Four women within the study are mothers, two of which are sole parents and are single, with another two women married and living with the biological fathers of their children. Four of the women in the study are married with no children with three of these women actively seeking to become pregnant through assisted methods such as IVF, alternative therapies or technologies. Three of the women in the study are single without children and one

woman is recently partnered without children. Three of the women identified as coming from middle class backgrounds and nine identified as working class. All the women in the study are white and identified as being heterosexual. It is important to note that as I had decided to complete all interviews before moving to the UK, I was restricted in the amount of time I was able to recruit participants. Perhaps as a result of this, the twelve participants are largely homogenous in respect to differences in race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The participants were thus chosen as a result of their heterogeneity across occupational, parental, partner and class background. All the women in the study were unknown to me and each participant's name has been changed to protect their identity.

An unstructured interview technique was adopted throughout the project and interviews were held in various locations, such as participants' homes, work locations and public spaces, as requested by each participant. Each interview was sound recorded on a mini disk recorder and the data was transcribed by the University of Western Sydney's transcription service. As discussed within chapter one, when speaking to women about personal aspects of their lives informally before this study took place, the type of 'shared knowledges' that women draw upon in everyday conversation influenced the methodological approach I adopted, (Gray, 1995, p. 161). Inspired by these informal conversations, I decided to utilise an unstructured interview method in which 'I', could be both researcher and 'myself', within the research setting, (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). As such, although an interview is being 'conducted' with a 'participant' who is made aware in advance of the topic area of the research, the questions that are posed by the researcher are open ended and general and formulated to elicit a biographical account from participants. I thus began

each interview by asking each woman her employment history, i.e. how she had come to occupy her current position. Depending on the direction that each discussion took, I sometimes asked participants direct questions, particularly in relation to future aspirations, for example in relation to parenthood or partner status etc. In this respect the interviewer asks a broad over-arching general question and then interjects as the story unfolds. Thus when the researcher does not wish to elicit highly structured biographical accounts from participants, (in order to find answers to a set of prepared questions for example), the category 'researcher' can evolve over time as people unfold themselves as the interview proceeds. The implications of utilising an unstructured interview method within the study will be further discussed throughout chapters 5, 6 and 7. (Walkerdine et al, 2001).

I did not adopt this interview methodology and technique so as to produce data that is in some way free from the contamination of my presence or 'inter-subjective' dialogue occurring between the myself and participant. As such, the interviews were conducted where the researcher's subjectivity is considered to be a resource and is not viewed as an obstacle that must be extracted from the interview process in order to achieve a moment of pure objectivity. Rather, the researched and the researcher are viewed to mutually constitute the 'data' within this framework in a relational and dynamic process. This form of interview technique was deemed the most appropriate when asking women to share their most private and often painful experiences.

Discussing the problematic of representation in 'Sexing the self' and borrowing from *Spivak*, Elspeth Probyn details the dilemma that the critical researcher as 'proxy' may find themselves in when 'increasingly attacked by the public, men and women alike'. Raising the question of 'who speaks for whom, and why', Probyn articulates how the

‘project of representing women has been a condition of possibility for feminism’, and, ‘continues to be the ground upon and from which many feminists and feminisms speak’, (1993, p. 7). However, by creating discursive spaces from which certain women are sanctioned to speak, feminism may unwittingly foreground certain experiences and therefore occlude others. From this standpoint, Probyn asks how as feminist researchers we are able to ask ‘who is she?’ without performing an act of essentialism?’ (1993, p. 17). Probyn asks for an imagining of the self where ‘the image of the self put into discourse cannot be reduced to ‘me’; nor can it be extrapolated to found an ontological category of women’. This ‘working image’ of the self, according to Probyn, allows us to shift the ‘truth of selves’ and further may ‘allow for a moment of empathy between us’, (1993, p. 171). Discussed further within chapter seven, an unstructured interview technique is also a valuable method for allowing non-discursive ‘moments of empathy’ to occur between the researcher and participant.

### **Coding and Analysis**

Organising the rich quantity of data gathered in the interview process entailed the selection and coding of specific samples taken from the collection of statements as a whole. Such a task enabled me to locate instances of narration where techniques of self-governance, practices of subjectification and modes of subjectivity could be illuminated and undergo critical scrutiny. One way of arranging the data is to code statements in accordance to where they appear within the narrative, denoting how such statements may function themselves. Such an approach is inspired by Foucault and treats the empirical analysis of a ‘statement’ as that which acts to both delimit and

facilitate what is knowable. As such, 'statements' are held as not merely representative of a given state, but as functional and connected to knowledge systems operating within societal technologies and historical boundaries that comprise techniques for the production of human subjects, (Foucault, 1972). Statements can thus be viewed as defining a position from which a given subject speaks and acts, and from which a wider spectrum of specific social technologies and expertise, i.e. psychology, link such statements to broader systems of knowledge and discursive formations.

My analysis therefore included a discourse analysis that established common themes present within the broad corpus of interview statements, linking these selected thematised statements to discursive formations circulating in the social. Here I locate the socio-historical conditions that make such statements possible in context with systems of knowledge. For this purpose, I highlighted how binary associations and the way specific historical conceptual dualisms, (such as mind/body, rational/irrational and male/female) have been reconfigured and reconstituted, operating to pose new problems. Statements are not taken to reflect unitary positions, practices or knowledges however, rather they are viewed as a part of a complex of multiple and contradictory fields that arise and emerge from specific historically contingent problematisations that interweave and circulate in hybridised formations. Statements furnish subjects with articulatory repertoires from which to form coherent narratives that provide meaning and sense of/to lived experience, bridging knowledge systems and subjects of which are mutually constituted and produced. It is this process that links statements to forms of regulation, technologies of subjectification



and systems of power, according to strategies and objectives and for specific purposes, (Foucault, 1972).

### **Professionalism and Class in Australia**

It is important to outline that professionalism may be conceptualised differently in Australia than other countries, in so much that to identify one's self as professional may not be as heavily associated with a middle class identity as it might be the UK or other countries. This may account for the relatively high proportion of working class women who came forward to participate in the study and identified themselves as professional. Also, this may account for why these working class women felt able to speak candidly in respect to making difficult departures/crossing boundaries from their mothers' generation of primarily home maker/house wife backgrounds. Australia's indigenous and colonial past, identification with the Irish and the undercurrent of rebellion that has always contained elements of romanticism in relation to the resistance of English upper class rule, is often associated with an aggressive Australian attitude to 'make something of yourself'. Indeed 'doing better' than one's parents in the form of upward mobility may not necessarily carry with it the associated pain and loss in respect to shifts in class location, as might occur in the UK for instance. However, although class may not be a powerful organising principle in Australian society, as the gap between rich and poor has steadily increased, poverty has now become increasingly associated with an underclass of welfare recipients, (as will be discussed below in reference to the 'undeserving' poor etc). Thus although many white Australians have an idealised concept of Australian culture as being founded on working class principles, where Australia continues to be considered a

‘working man’s paradise’ and the ‘lucky country’, as will be discussed below, in the last two decades a cultural shift has occurred, (Curthoys, 1997).

The public admiration of the cultural archetype of the aggressive ‘little Aussie battler’ and entrepreneur, is symptomatic of the Australian attitude toward upward mobility in respect to financial success and gain in opposition to class mobility. Here a cultural disrespect for the English upper classes means that middle class Australians must guard against being positioned as snobs. This can be witnessed in the ‘tall poppy syndrome’ and the ‘who do you think you are’ cultural schema embedded within Australian public discourse, wherein British snobbery must be guarded against. However, this homogeneity does not account for gender mobility, i.e. what it is to move out into the very masculine, aggressive and competitive culture of Australian public life. In this respect it may be women who identify as middle class who feel silenced, through not being able to speak of any difficult feelings or experiences for fear of letting slip any sense of personal failure in an aggressive masculine culture that does not tolerate failure lightly. This may account for the relatively low rate of women with a middle class background who volunteered to participate in a study calling for women who identified themselves as professional, (Curthoys, 1997).

### **Australian Background**

As I am not aiming to perform a cross cultural analysis between Australia and the UK, it is necessary to outline the political, cultural and social aspects that are specific to Australia and Australian life. However, as an English speaking country geographically isolated from the Commonwealth, of which it democratically remains

a member, it is also very important to point out that with a relatively small population Australian culture and society is heavily influenced and continues to be greatly shaped by the UK and America.

The Australian social, political and economic infrastructure has been considerably transformed since the Hawke and Keating Labour Government began dismantling welfare institutions throughout the early 1980's. Although this shift was in line with radical reforms underway in the United Kingdom, United States, New Zealand and Canada, (Wiseman, 1998, Capling, Considine and Crozier, 1998) it was particularly striking that a hugely popular Labour Government and Prime Minister with a strong Trade Union history, initiated such reforms. 'Since the 1980's the benefits of globalisation and associated micro-economic reforms have dominated the public agenda and continue to generate debate', (Barns and Preston, 2002, p. 1). The deregulation of Australia's labour markets, in conjunction with an increased focus on competition has resulted in an 'increasing wage and income inequality, the growth in relative poverty, the increased use of flexible employment contracts (part-time, temporary, casual and self-employment) and persistently high levels of unemployment', (Barns and Preston, 2002, p. 1, Mitchell, 1997). Within a labour market characterised by irregular wages and employment insecurity, access to government social security income support has been increasingly subject to new forms of restrictions, contractual agreements and surveillance control measures, (Fincher and Saunders, 2001).

Reforms to industrial relations and labour market deregulation alongside welfare reform have since been deeply embedded within the Australian socio-economic

infrastructure by the current Liberal Coalition Government. The neo-classical economic approach taken by the current administration, became characterised by welfare reform designed to ‘create individual incentives’ in line with keeping a ‘disciplined approach to fiscal policy’, designed to purge Australia of the ‘moral hazard’ of welfare recipients within a ‘culture of welfare dependency’, (Abbott, 1999). The Social Security Legislation (Work for the Dole) Act, introduced in 1997 by the Liberal Coalition Government, was implemented with the proviso that ‘[although] we can’t stop people from needing the dole, we can make it impossible to be idle for long at taxpayers expense’, (Abbott, 1999).<sup>5</sup> This Act was built on the foundations of the previous Labour Governments ‘mutual obligation’ scheme and revamped wherein the ‘neo-liberal rhetoric of self-sufficiency and self-reliance’, (Barns and Preston, 2002, p. 7), became a means of shifting ‘the culture of welfare to the culture of work, [marking] a move away from the politics of entitlement into the politics of responsibility’, (Abbott, 1999). Those welfare recipients who were ‘deserving’ thus became obligated to provide the tax paying community with something in return for their support, (Rodgers and Wilson, 2002). Recipients of social security payments under this legislation were thus subject to ‘rigid penalty-based incentives and severe compliance mechanisms’, (Barns and Preston, 2002, p. 8).

Throughout the late 1990’s the neo-conservatives of the Coalition Government set about targeting those groups who were to become most associated with the ‘moral hazard’ of welfare dependency through a regime of stringent welfare policy reforms. Specifically, women sole parents became targeted as ‘long term unemployed’, whilst

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<sup>5</sup> Tony Abbott was the then Federal Minister for Employment Services in the Liberal Government.

married women caring for children full time in the home were 'rewarded' through low temporary rate tax break incentives. Mutual obligation requires that sole parents receiving social security payments re-enter the workforce or engage in mandatory training schemes when their children reach the age of thirteen, which has since been reduced to the age of six, (Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services, 2006). As such, within the last decade women's participation and employment within the Australian labour market has increased by 3.5 percent, (in contrast with a fall in male rates by 2.6 %), (ABS, 2006). This increase is concentrated in the growth of women's part-time employment, whereby women now make up 72 percent of all part time employees in Australia, constituting 44 percent of all female employment, (ABS 2006). As examined by Australian feminists critiquing the Mutual Obligation scheme, (see Pascall, 1997, Pocock 1998), 'participation in the labour market for many women is only financially viable if remuneration is that of the full-time wage and yet it is full-time employment that is the most difficult for women to secure' in the current labour market, (Barns and Preston, 2002, p. 14). As argued by Barns and Preston, 'economics may override the social and emotional benefits derived from employment' for mothers, producing a society whereby the 'working poor' in wealthy Western economies are predominately made up of women in insecure part-time contractual employment, (ibid, p. 14).

## **Sandra**

I want to now provide an example of how the methodological and theoretical approaches outlined about are put into action to produce the type of analysis I have referred to as fore-grounding relationality. I feature an analysis of interview

transcripts taken from an interview I conducted with ‘Sandra’ to illustrate how I utilise my approach in relation to the changes that have taken place within Australia as outlined above. I aim to locate the places in Sandra’s narrative where she calls on specific discourses to construct her biography in order to show how neo liberal discourses of welfare ‘dependency’ impact upon her life. An example of how Sandra defends herself against being positioned as ‘other’, is thus included here to foreground the ways in which she is able to take up a classed position to manage the pressure of being positioned as a single mother.

Sandra is a white middle class 36 year old sole parent of four children. Throughout the interview I had with Sandra she struggled to position herself as a middle class self regulating neo liberal citizen *and* a disaffected sole parent barely able to make ends meet. Sandra works three days per week as a project officer in a large public institution and describes her situation as one in which she is required to negotiate a complex morass of childcare fees, benefit assistance and earnings thus:

*Sandra: “I have had to really weigh that up and go well if I sit down and do the sums and what I end up working for um in terms of what I have lost in benefits, it is very, very depressing, plus my childcare costs have skyrocketed because it is over the subsidy limit here. Um, whereas when I was living in the country the gap fee was much smaller. Now I am paying \$300 a fortnight in childcare and that is with a maximum sole parent subsidy. So I can’t afford to earn much more anyway because then I would start chipping away at my childcare subsidy”.*

Sandra goes on to explain how she feels caught in a “*real poverty trap*” in which she was kept ‘*virtually as poor as what I was on the pension, on just the full benefit*’. Sandra went on to describe her move to the city in order gain employment as one in which she found: “*policy wise with this most recent federal government, that sole parents end up in the same box as single income earners with families with two parents, which is usually a male who can do overtime as opposed to a woman struggling to supplement a benefit with a part-time income*”. Being placed within the ‘same box’ as two parent single income earner households for Sandra, is also deeply disparaging as “*he has got a wife at home and he doesn’t have to worry about his kids because they are with their parent, so they are not in institutional care*”. As Sandra states, “*I don’t have child care and I can’t do overtime, I want to see my children*”.

As the Coalition Government have stepped up their program of surveillance, it is the recipient of an irregular income-the casual, part-time or ‘cash in hand’-employee working irregular hours, who is constituted as the most likely ‘welfare cheat’, (Sydney Morning Herald 2001). As discussed above, it is women who make up three quarters of all part-time and casual employees in Australia. How do women such as Sandra then cope with the stress of constant surveillance and threats of investigation inside a political, social and economic situation fraught with income insecurity and poor working conditions, in conjunction with the demands of motherhood? Importantly, how do women cope with being stigmatised as a ‘moral hazard’ and ‘cheat’, on top of all this? And in era where women are thus demonised, what are the implications for all women regardless of their circumstances?

To be further explored in chapter seven, Sandra has to work incredibly hard to guard and defend herself against being positioned as a welfare dependant ‘scrounging single mother’, (Walkerdine et al, 2001). Growing up in a middle class family with “*a lot of career pressure*”, whilst acknowledging the “*strong pressure on women to not parent*”, Sandra repeatedly stressed that “*it just feels good, it is good, it feels you are still doing something other than parenting*” when referring to her ongoing higher education studies. Throughout the interview Sandra, an extremely politically savvy woman, was pained to acknowledge that she did “*certainly admire women who devote themselves to motherhood*”, but felt “*you don’t want to feel that you have wasted the years at uni that you have done*”.

Here a discourse of the single mother welfare cheat/scrounger, being ‘sufficiently pervasive to constitute a discursive formation’, creates a ‘climate of moral regulation’, wherein women such as Sandra are pressured, in this case from her middle class parents, (Sandra:) “*to not be a full time mother without income earning capacity, without progressing educationally*”, (Walkerdine et. al, 2001, p. 180). As discussed by Walkerdine et al, for middle class girls ‘failure [is] simply not an option: whatever else happened, they were compelled to succeed educationally’, (2001, p. 180). Sandra’s experience, to be further discussed in chapter seven, highlights how through constant educational attainment she is able to continue the process of becoming a ‘proto-professional’ subject, by proving that she is self-regulating’, (ibid p. 180). Importantly, and to be taken up within chapter seven, she is able to ward off ‘deep fears of failure’ as a middle class woman living in a post colonial society in which single motherhood is deeply inscribed with fears of ‘otherness’-of the indigenous Australian ‘other’ and the undeserving poor ‘other’, (Bhabha, 1984). In unpacking the



complex way in which Sandra constructs her account, we are able to see how she works to situate herself as both acknowledging ‘other’ women, who devote themselves to motherhood, whilst distancing herself from them. Thus we are able to understand how Sandra *must* position herself so as to defend against being positioned within any undesirable subject positions.

As a further example of this, in discussing her ongoing studies, Sandra reiterated that: *“at first the baby slept and you are home anyway, so it just got, you are feeling useful and like you are not stagnating, because you are not missing out on the pub because you can’t go anyway, and it is better than you know just watching TV and doing the dishes every night”*. Later in the interview however, Sandra says: *“I listen to 702 (talk back radio station), and bake, that’s my idea of adult company”*. Here Sandra indicates that her ongoing studies, although making her feel she is not ‘stagnating’ by doing something ‘useful’, do not provide her with ‘adult company’. This she obtains through listening to, and participating in, talk back radio (see chapter seven). What I want to draw attention to here is the way she frames the statement, ‘that’s my idea of adult company’. Sandra indicates here that adult company is no longer something that she engages in directly, but rather it has become an ‘idea’, an idea of what adult company is.

## **Conclusion**

In the chapters that follow, I discuss how the fear of being an isolated house-wife and mother, looms large in the fears and fantasies of all the women I interviewed regardless of their parental or partner status. This terrible fear, resulting from a lack of adult company and mental stimulation, ‘criss-cross[ed] corporeal, economic and

symbolic boundaries', (Driver, 2005, p. 22) and served to constitute a dominant common theme linking all the women's accounts. Importantly, this fear is interwoven with painful departures *and* links with the generation of women and mothers gone before. The transformation from the once normative position of housewife to the now 'life style' category of 'stay at home mother', (further elaborated in chapter three), carries with it the fear of loss of financial autonomy and anxiety over a loss of individuality, imagined as a type subjective death. Such fear must be defended against, and as will be shown throughout the thesis, is done so through a variety of self management techniques.

Femininity is constituted through politically sedimented discourses that position women as being able to effect 'real choices' in relation to their fertility, family and work in a post-industrial new 'knowledge economy'. Women are positioned as rational actors within this new 'knowledge economy', who possess the ideal *feminine* psychological attributes necessary for making autonomous and individualised 'life style' choices in relation to their fertility, family and work, (Giddens in Hakim, 2000:vii). In the next chapter I discuss how new constructions of feminine categories within sociological discourse, attempt to locate feminine identity as central to a market 'self'. I discuss how such categorisation operates to problematically constitute and solidify specific categories of femininity, (and as will be shown in chapter 4), construct 'other' femininities that must be defended against as. I discuss these feminine classifications in relation to the discursive and material practices that constitute femininity as personifying *the* ideal flexible worker and neo liberal self inventive subject.

Discourses that purport to provide evidence that women's labour market participation is confirmation that, 'modern women have real choices between a life centred on family work and/or paid work', as 'individualisation has been the main driving force for change in late modern society', (Giddens in Hakim, 2000:vii), will be examined as also 'describing women as personality types', in context 'with the idea that the neo liberal subject is a psychological subject with a set of life choices', (Walkerdine et al, 2001, p. 5). The categorisation of women into types according to whether they are 'committed to careers in the labour market', give 'priority to the marriage career', or are 'adaptives' in accordance with a 'threefold typology of women's work preferences', (Hakim, 2003, p. 6), will be discussed as further solidifying the feminine typologies outlined above, i.e. 'stay at home mother' etc. Importantly, this complex constitution of femininity will be discussed as rendering academic research and analysis difficult, as Gill illuminates, whereby constraint may be re-positioned and re-contextualised as something women are not subjected by, but as a set of available *choices* to be freely chosen from by 'active, confident, assertive female subjects', (Gill, 2005, p. 104). Thus the modes of production through which femininity is constituted as embodying the new professional 'modern neo liberal subject; a subject of self invention and transformation' will be explored in relation the humanist individuality ascribed to femininity as one 'capable of *surviving* within the new social, economic and political system', (emphasis mine), (Walkerdine et al, 2001, p. 3).

## **Chapter Three**

### **Femininity, Choice and Constraint**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I discuss the ways in which an ongoing debate in the social sciences concerning women's increased participation within Western labour markets remains caught within a binary that reconstitutes a social versus individual dualism. Within this debate women are positioned as either rational individual agents who are able to effect choice in relation to their work, family and fertility, or are conversely positioned as constrained by cultural norms and socialisation practices. I discuss the implication of how women's participation in the labour market is fore-grounded within this debate and constituted as a primary site in which to investigate, measure and understand the lives of women. In outlining this debate I aim to show how social scientists' utilise labour market indicators to categorise women into discrete types.

Within this chapter I discuss how this categorisation operates to compartmentalise and reduce the complexity of women's lived experiences and explore the implications of this through the narrative accounts of Kelly and Karen. I discuss how Kelly must work to guard against being positioned 'from the outside' as having made a rational choice not to have children and thus avoid being positioned within the category of a 'work centred' 'childless professional/singleton'. Here I argue for the need to take into account women's fears in relation to how women experience being positioned

through neo liberal discourses of individualism and choice. I discuss the modes by which these practices are enjoined to produce the discursive categorisation of femininity and how this impacts on the lives of women today.

## Choice

As discussed in chapter one, women's increasing participation within the labour market, and the 'end of the era of the masculine 'organisation man', has resulted in 'a tendency to see the new economy as positive for women's prospects', (Wajcman and Martin, 2002, p. 986). As mentioned in chapter one, Giddens posits that women's increased employment confirms that, 'modern women have real choices between a life centred on family work and/or paid work', (Giddens in Hakim, 2000:vii). The idea that women can exercise 'real choices' in relation to work, fertility and family, as argued by Giddens in Catherine Hakim's book *Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Hakim, 2000), is further elaborated by Hakim as she suggests:

"Some sociologists now accept that agency is becoming more important than the social structure as a determinant of behaviour. People do not only gain the freedom to choose their own biography, values and lifestyle, they are *forced* to make their own decisions because there are no universal certainties and norms about the good life, as in early modern industrial societies", (Hakim, 2003, p. 341).

Hakim's argument that women have the 'freedom to choose their own biography' has been a central tenet in her 'preference theory' and ongoing study of women's career 'preferences' in relation to continuing patterns of employment segregation within the labour market. In her article 'Five Feminist Myths about Women's Employment', (1995), Hakim accused feminists of 'dictating' a manifesto by which 'feminist orthodoxy has replaced dispassionate social scientific assessment of the evidence', and claimed that 'no amount of solid evidence can dispel the myth of rising female

employment and expectations of consequential social change', (1995, p. 448). Hakim went on to charge the 'feminist orthodoxy' and 'theories explaining the sexual division of labour, cross-national variations and long-term trends in employment' as needing to 'take fuller account both of continuing sex differentials in work orientations and behaviour and increasing polarisation within the female workforce', (1995, p. 449).

Hakim's findings that an 'increasing polarisation within the female workforce' is evident, was not disputed in the debate that followed the publication of her article. However, Hakim's assertion that women may be categorised into 'two fairly equal sectors' of the 'adult female population' in accordance with their 'individual preferences' and 'work orientations' has proved far more divisive. Hakim positions these 'two sectors' of women according to the polarity in women's employment, i.e. 'the first group of women (who) are committed to careers in the labour market' and to the other group of women who 'give priority to the marriage career (and) do not invest in what economists term human capital', (Hakim, 1995, p. 450). She goes on to suggest that 'the two groups will always exist, will always differ and will have increasingly polarised experiences in the 1990's and beyond', (ibid, p. 450). In a later 1998 article, after much criticism, Hakim revamped her theory to include 'a threefold typology of women's work preferences, work plans and employment profiles', to include 'the large and complex nature of a middle group', which she described 'under the more positive label of 'adaptives'', (Hakim, 1998, p. 32).

The continuity in the sexual division of labour, according to Hakim, results from employers having 'organised around it by creating a substantially separate,

segregated, part time workforce accommodated to married women's qualitatively different work orientations and behaviour', (1995, p. 450)

“Occupational segregation has been reconstituted in the late twentieth century to provide separate occupations and jobs for women following the marriage career, which allows only non-committed contingent work and non-career jobs which are always subordinate to non-market activities. Such a change makes sense of the sharp changes over the century in the characteristics of female dominated occupations. It also makes sense of the contemporary features of female dominated occupations, with the highest incidence of part time work, lowest incidence of un-social hours, the lowest levels of trade union membership and the ability to tolerate high turnover levels. Thus the social function of occupational segregation has changed fundamentally over the last century, independently of any changes in the level of occupational segregation”, (ibid, p. 450).

In the prolonged academic debate that was to follow, Ginn et al suggested that the problematic ‘at issue here is whether it is the nature of part time jobs or the characteristics of their occupants which accounts for differences between full and part timers behaviour’, (Ginn et al, 1996, p. 170). Ginn et al went on to suggest that ‘the implication is that it is women part timers’ low expectations which are responsible for the poor quality of their jobs’ and that the ‘key issue is whether women prefer part time jobs or jobs with short hours’, (Ginn et al, 1996, p. 170). However, they concluded that ‘Hakim tends to place unwarranted emphasis on women’s attitudes and orientation to work, blaming the victim’, (ibid, p. 171). Crompton and Harris, in keeping with Ginn et al’s claim, reacted to the article by stating ‘that one-sidedly voluntaristic explanations of women’s (and men’s) economic behaviour, in which ‘orientations to work’ and corresponding choice of economic activity as regarded as the major explanatory variables in respect of women’s (and men’s) economic behaviour, are inadequate and misleading’, (1998, p. 131). Crompton and Harris went on to claim that ‘whilst women do indeed make choices, some women go into employment and family life without the conscious exercise of choice’, (ibid, p. 131).

They concluded that ‘occupational segregation by sex cannot be explained as being a consequence of women’s choices alone’, and that ‘sociological explanations relating to women’s employment patterns cannot rest upon a simplistic reduction to the argument that they are due to the fact that there are different ‘types’ of women’, (ibid, p. 131). Importantly, Crompton and Harris accuse Hakim’s ‘Preference Theory’ of failing to convince due to it ‘ultimately resting upon a psycho-biological classification of female ‘types’ whose origins remain obscure’, whilst also stating that, ‘preferences may shape choices, but they do not, contrary to Hakim’s assertions, determine them’, (ibid, 131). Crompton and Harris went on to assert that ‘it is likely that some degree of occupational segregation, reflecting cultural and psychological notions of masculinity and femininity as well as the organisation of work and family life would persist even if all gendered constraints on labour force participation were removed’, (1998, p. 132).

### **The ‘Feminisation’ of the Work Place**

With the de-industrialisation of Westernised nations and the reduction of traditional forms of male employment the ‘growth of the service sector, involving an increase in the kinds of jobs (such as servicing and caring jobs) traditionally performed by women and an expansion in the number of jobs involving terms and conditions often associated with women’s work (including low paid, insecurity and deskilling), as well as changes in household and family forms [are all aspects associated with] the ‘feminisation’ of the labour force’, (Adkins, 2002, p. 59). Adkins cogently argues that such an apparent feminisation of the economic sphere does not, however, subsequently imply that traditional masculine and feminine binaries are necessarily



eroding. Rather, Adkins suggests that such binaries are 'being arranged in new ways', and indeed she posits that instead of the feminisation of workers 'the ideal worker of post-industrialised service work is one who can claim to possess a flexible or mobile relation to gender performance and hence to have taken up a reflexive stance toward gender', (2002, p. 58). However, Adkins also points out that such a mobile gendered performance may be 'denied' to many workers 'through a naturalization of the performance of particular aesthetics styles which disallows reflexivity in relation to gender', (2002, p. 58). As Adkins demonstrates 'many workers' are denied mobility in relation to the performance of their gender, such as women with children. As the performance of parenthood (motherhood as opposed to fatherhood) is almost exclusively aestheticised as female, it is the worker mother who is disallowed reflexivity in relation to her gender on account of her biology.

Discussing the recent consensus within the social sciences that the 'movement of (certain) women into the labour market (and in particular into high status jobs) is related to the process of feminization', Adkins illuminates how such processes have become understood 'to be linked to the detraditionalization of gender in the domains of work and economy', (2002, p. 64). A so called 'domestication of the public sphere', has thus been theorised as occurring as the 'idea that work is culturally feminizing may be understood to be connected to the much broader view that there has been a recent feminization of contemporary culture', (2002, p. 62). The fact that a proliferation of women entering into the professions is perceived to be 'domesticating the public sphere', highlights the degree to which a private/public polarization continues to dominate thinking within the current neo liberal socio-cultural climate. Australian politicians have been particularly reluctant in drafting federal legislative

provisions concerning a uniform mandate for paid maternity leave. The zeal with which Catherine Hakim's ideas were embraced by Australian politicians and policy makers alike throughout the 1990's, suggests that this reluctance is a manifestation of the current Government's neo liberal philosophical approach concerning working mothers. Hakim's central tenet that women fall into the categories of being either 'centred' on the public or private sphere is particularly amenable to neo liberal politics precisely because it reifies and reconstitutes public versus private spheres and implicates the woman as individuals can choose between the two.

### **Challenging Dualisms**

Asserting that such exchanges were 'largely futile', and that 'both sides sought to rely on rather crude measures of women's attitudes as unproblematic signifiers of what women really want', Probert sought to problematise what she determined to be the 'focusing on women rather than gender, or the relationship between men and women around these issues', (Probert, 2002 p. 8). However, Probert leaves unexplored Hakim's reliance on psychological concepts such as work 'orientation' or 'preference', as operating to furnish her with the necessary epistemological framework to locate the object of her analysis outside of society, i.e. relationships between men and women, and within the psychology of the individual subject. And as Irene Bruegal suggests, Hakim's thesis falls into a trap 'made by sociologists of neo-classical economics', as her argument reads 'preferences into outcomes without considering how circumstances frame preferences', (Bruegel, 1996, p. 177). Building on Bruegal's critique, Hakim's 'preference theory' could be seen as an attempt to form a 'bridge across the conceptual divide between the individual and society',

whilst both constituting ‘the polarity of these terms and at the same time locking them together’, (Henriques et al, 1998, p. 71). Importantly, such concepts provide a conceptual tool amenable to ‘quantification and other statistical techniques’, (Henriques et al, 1998, p. 71). As such, Hakim is able to posit that structures need only change and have only changed to accommodate the differences that already exist within the ‘orientation’ or ‘preference’ of individual women. She is able to back such claims with statistical evidence, utilising long established social scientific methods and produce factual documentation that is highly amenable to policy outcome focused scholarship. Thus Hakim asserts that structures need only respond to the individual’s ability to *choose* in line with their preference or orientation, (Henriques et al, 1998).

‘This dualism and the concomitant individualism which is central to it allows even radical analyses to be pressed into the service of existing social relations, thereby reinforcing and perpetuating them’, (Henriques et al, 1998 p. 60). The ‘reductive effect of the individual / social couple’ in this instance results in a position ‘whereby society is assumed to be basically unproblematic’, (Henriques et al, 1998 p. 60). However, the counter arguments as posed by Crompton, Harris and Ginn et al, that ‘preference theory’ positions women as rational individuals somehow free and outside of socio-cultural effects and constraint, nonetheless attempt to position women inside specific ideological socio-cultural constraints in the same instance. For example, Crompton and Harris assert that their research findings ‘suggest that the heterogeneity of women’s approaches to employment and family life are not a reflection of innate characteristics, (as it would seem to be implied in Hakim’s reliance on psycho-biological explanations), but are deeply rooted in early patterns of socialisation’, (Crompton and Harris, 1998, p. 146). Crompton and Harris imply here that it is a

process of the learning of roles and the taking on of stereotypes that a pre-given psychological subject is made social or socialised, (Walkerdine, 1999).

By calling on psychological concepts such as orientation, preference and behaviour, Hakim utilises experimental practices 'of a specific kind, these in turn disallow, by the concepts through which they are fashioned, other ways of understanding the phenomena', (Henriques et al, 1998 p. 60). However, Crompton and Harris's assertion that 'longitudinal data is the best source from which to derive evidence of the nature of future employment/career orientations as well as their stability', also in turn refutes, through concepts in which such methodology is constructed, other claims to knowledge, (Crompton and Harris 1998, p. 144). 'Such a position within the discipline of sociology depends on wider features of knowledges, power and practices, not only from the dualism within which the theory remains trapped, but also from the rejection of approaches which did not approximate to dominant knowledges and practices and therefore to common sense', (Henriques et al, 1998, p. 61). Thus this 'perpetual mutually propelling antagonism' of the individual / society dualism, both within theoretical and political terms, operates 'to leave power relations unchanged' by appealing to notions of common sense and the practices of valid scientific enquiry, (Henriques et al, 1998, p. 61).

Furthermore, Hakim's thesis of preference and orientation differences 'lends plausibility to those theories which do base themselves on difference, but explain it in ways which have more pernicious, and determinist, implications', (Henriques et al, 1998, p. 70). The biological and psychological discourses Hakim calls upon to ensure the validity of her claims to truth, 'emerge and develop as part of the practices which

administer individuals, securing their regulation and disciplining. These practices form a social technology, techniques for the mass measurement of individuals', (ibid, p. 61). It is such a theory that categorises women into a 'threefold typology'. 'The epistemologization of the issue of truth lends itself to the point of view that appeals to common sense as a criterion of rationality and reasonableness. It works for the strategies that enable the dominant claims about the real and existing power relations to appear rational and objective, it forces opposing views to establish their rationality and intelligibility according to norms that already favour that which they oppose', (ibid, 65). Hakim attempts to demarcate between true and false knowledge, both within the discipline and within a wider domain of knowledge, which is demarcated as unscientific. Importantly, the scholars who replied to, and attempted to critique, Hakim's thesis, did not problematise the 'administrative strategies and requirements (that) conditioned the emergence' of Hakim's thesis. Nor were they able to illuminate the effects that such a thesis has in context to other knowledges or how 'this whole network constructs the social domain with all its contradictions and differences as well as its regularities', (ibid, p. 70). By staying within the confines of the sociological discipline, such scholars were thus only able to juxtaposition Hakim's individualism with developmental humanism, (Henriques et al, 1998).

Although claiming that such dichotomist approaches ultimately 'collapse into the general charges that choice is always constrained and that preference theory is tautological', (Duncan, p. 59, 2005), little attention has been given to the increasing utilisation of 'preference theory' and the salience of 'life style' choice indicators within academic research, policy and political analysis, (see for example Walter, 2004, Kreuzmann, Hsu, Vella & Jones, 2003, Doorewaard, Hendrickx & Verschuren,

2007). Importantly, the implications of such an epistemological framework, (that 'agency is becoming more important than the social structure as a determinant of [women's] behaviour') sits in contrast with empirical research findings within sociology of work and organisational studies that reveal:

"Maintaining a balance between work and home while avoiding the traditional criticism that women with families are not suited to senior managerial positions [is] not easy. The enormous gulf between the two led many women to adopt strategies of subterfuge to meet the twin demands made upon them. At the same time they were silenced on the issue of work/home commitments", (Simpson, 1998, p. S48).

Likewise, Kelan (2006) has found that discourses of 'individualisation' in combination with the positioning of women as 'new ideal' workers within managerial texts, make 'it difficult to voice inequality of women vis-à-vis men in the new economy', and thus further silences women's experiences within the labour market and beyond, (Kelan, 2006, p. 1). In their analysis of female managers narratives, Wajcman and Martin, (2002), also found evidence that 'choice' means quite different things in the private world for men and women', this is 'because the available private identities remain so deeply gendered that women face a negotiation of employment and domestic responsibilities which is different from that of men', and that 'constructing and resolving these issues in terms of market-like choice is much more problematic', (Wajcman and Martin, 2002, p. 999).

### **Neo Liberal Governance**

As Nicolas Rose describes it, we are living in an era of neo-liberalism, a 'form of liberal government that depends upon subjects who are free and rational agents of democracy, recreated in the context of globalism and economic rationalism', (Rose, 1999, p. 65). Rose argues that neo-liberal forms of governance are reliant on a subject

who is able to bear ‘the serious burden of liberty’, (Rose, *ibid*). Neo liberalism was revised as a neo-classical economic theory in opposition to considered collectivist ideologies such as nationalism, socialism, and fascism by economists Frederick Hayek and Milton Friedman in the late 1940’s. However, as Tickell and Peck illuminate, it was not until the late 1970’s and early 1980’s with the election of Thatcher and Reagan that the ‘neo-liberal project would take on a programmatic quality as the fledgling ideology was melded with significant state power’, (Tickell and Peck, 2003, p. 14). As discussed in chapter two, the Australian Labour Government similarly to the UK, USA, Canada and New Zealand made radical changes to Government policy during the early 1980’s effectively dismantling the welfare state and ushering in a neo liberal programme of governance.

In keeping with the ideological premise of the enlightenment liberal *laissez faire* ethos, the Labour government set in motion a relentless deregulation, privatisation and down sizing of government so as to allow the apparent natural market forces to operate unfettered. Importantly, Tickell and Peck highlight how neo-liberal discourses tell a deceptively simple story about the logical, historical and philosophical superiority of markets and of individualised and privatised economic relations. As such, with the succession of the Australian Liberal party throughout the mid 1990’s and beyond, we have witnessed ‘the effective normalisation of neo liberal modes of regulation, which increasingly came to constitute the taken for granted context of economic policy decisions’, (Tickell and Peck, 2003, p. 14). It is this new and concentrated form of liberalism that marks ‘a shift (that) demands subjects who are capable of understanding themselves as autonomous agents, producers of their present and their future, inventors of the people they are or may become’, (Walkerdine et al, 2001, p. 2).

As noted by Duncan, 'in this way preference theory neatly operationalises the individualisation view of late modern society for women's choice between employment behaviour', as 'each uses the other for support', (Duncan, p. 59. 2005). In this way neo liberal individualism operates to extract and silence issues of class, race, sexual orientation and gender from the social.

As such, regardless of any inflexible and extraneous restraints and limitations faced in an increasingly privatised, down sized and service industrialised work place, 'each individual must render his or her life meaningful, as if it were the outcome of individual choices made in the furtherance of a biographical project of self-realisation' (Rose, 1992, p.12). These compositional changes, both economic and political, as Rose argues, 'do not crush subjectivity', rather they form 'new forms of regulation' of which produce subjects of whom are 'capable of bearing the burdens of liberty', (Rose, 1999, p. viii, as cited by Walkerdine, 2003, p. 240). It is within our current epoch then, that women have come to play a central role in providing a flexible work force for an apparently flexible market place, as the Demos publication highlights in chapter one. It is 'tomorrow's' woman who is called forth to embody the new professional and who is re-made/born 'as the modern neo liberal subject; a subject of self invention and transformation who is capable of *surviving* within the new social, economic and political system', (emphasis mine), (Walkerdine et al, 2001, p. 3).

Within this 'new' economy discourse of 'choice', there has also been 'a tendency to describe women as personality types', in context 'with the idea that the neo liberal subject is a psychological subject with a set of life choices', (Walkerdine et al, 2001,



p. 5). The categorisation of women into types according to whether they are 'committed to careers in the labour market', give 'priority to the marriage career', or are 'adaptives' (Hakim, 2003, p. 6), is further witnessed in the social categorisation of women as: 'childless professionals', 'stay at home mothers' and 'working mothers/super women'. Such typologies have all become recently solidified within common/popular parlance. Importantly, these new stereotypes exemplify how the complex constitution of femininity renders academic research and analysis difficult, as Gill illuminates, whereby constraint may be re-positioned and re-contextualised as something women are not subjected by, but as a set of available *choices* to be freely chosen from by 'active, confident, assertive female subjects', (Gill, 2005, p. 104). Thus in a climate of post-feminism and female empowerment/girl power 'tomorrow's' confident individual woman is 'executed and popularised by the media', wherein 'such constructions begin to be seen as objective reality, eventually becoming regimes of truth, (Foucault, 1980 & Hall 1992, in Walkerdine, 2001). This regime of truth operates to make invisible the new ways in which femininity is regulated, re-positioning such regulation as 'life style' choice in relation to work, family and fertility, in turn operating to further silence and 'other' women's experiences.

Walkerdine further elaborates by putting such changes 'together with the place of psychology' that she argues is required to support an 'autonomous and self invented subject'. It is thus the subject, as responsible for their individual self regulation that neo-liberal governments are able to regulate, through a set of complex discourses that operate to position these subjects as 'constantly changing successful entrepreneurs' of the self. Walkerdine argues that:

"Psychology has a central role in providing both the discourses through which the psychologised self is understood and the clinical

discourses and practices which put that subject together again after the inevitable failure. Equally important are the discourses through which that success and failure is understood and therefore the techniques of self-regulation and management which both inscribe the subject and allow him or her to attempt to refashion themselves as a successful subject: the subject of neo-liberal choice.” (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 241).

Gill observes that this remaking has become ‘internalised to form a new disciplinary regime’, and represents a shift where a ‘self policing’ internal gaze operates to furnish women with ‘the promise of power’ and the ‘status of active subject-hood’, (Gill, 2005, p.104). It is precisely this feminine subject who is positioned as able to effect choice in regards to her fertility, work and family. Further, as Hughes and Kerfoot succinctly argue, ‘discourses that attest to women having ‘made it’ are prevalent in contemporary western society. For some commentators, this is clear testimony that we have reached a truly post-feminist era. These discourses cite evidence of widening opportunities, choices and potential in women’s lives’. However as Hughes and Kerfoot suggest ‘present countervailing research evidence problematises the notion of ‘the future as female’ and underscores the continuing role and salience of processes of gender differentiation’, (Hughes and Kerfoot, 2002, p. 474).

Wajcman and Martin argue that ‘gender remains either neglected or inadequately addressed’ in the theoretical and methodological approaches of researchers who seek to understand ‘how employees understand themselves and their work’, which becomes ‘especially clear when one analyses their underlying assumptions about the relation between experiences and identities in paid work and family life’, (Wajcman and Martin, 2002, p. 986). However, as discussed above, despite this neglect within research, or perhaps because of it, women continue to be rhetorically lauded as embodying the ideal neo liberal new self-invented worker. Thus contradictions

women face regarding work, fertility and family, as those discussed above by Simpson, Wajcman and Martin etc, may become managed through 'survival' strategies and practices whereby women attempt to reinvent themselves in order to 'accommodate the conflicting demands made upon them' as workers and carers, (Simpson, 1998. S46). Importantly, women have no discursive repertoires to 'openly voice their concerns', and are 'constrained in their resistance', aware of the 'danger of being stereotyped as the 'whinging woman''. (Simpson, *ibid*). 'Survival strategies' therefore form part of the complex 'internalised disciplinary regime' and 'forms of regulation' that produce the 'ideal' feminine subject of whom is 'capable of bearing the burdens of liberty', (Rose, 1999, p. 65).

## **Kelly**

How then do women experience and make sense of their lives in relation to these individualistic discourses of choice? In the following extracts from an interview I conducted with Kelly, we can see that she is all too aware that the contingent life circumstances she finds herself in may be positioned from 'the outside' as a deliberate life-style choice. As we see, Kelly, a white thirty five-year-old, working class single professional, works hard to defend against being positioned in this manner through attempts to transform her-self.

*Kelly: "A sort of pivotal thing was when I was thirty, and um, I just thought shit I've done nothing with my career, like I'm a fucking secretary and I've got a masters degree, like there's something really wrong, like my self confidence is getting in the way of achievement - there was an ad on um a web site, this women who was working*

*there was doing life coaching. You go and sit down to an interview with them and you just sort of mention things like, she'll say just mention things that are in your life whether it be your cat - your dog - your dress - you like to see movies - where you work, just mention all these things right - and then you carry across the ones where you think you need to invest more effort in those areas. So, so the problem areas keep getting carried across until at the end you, you're left with three basic goals of what, of what you want to do. So you pick three goals and at the end of it, it's like the three goals, and I'm like of course this is what I want, but you'd never have been able to articulate it like before hand, and my three goals were - to be a journalist, um - to be happy which ended up just being too broad a goal and um to lose weight' (laughs). 'And as um, as it turned out I think three goals was too much because I ended up achieving the one which was to become a journalist and the other two just fell by the way side'".*

Kelly begins her narration of a pivotal moment in her life by bench marking her age 'when I was thirty' and explaining that by this age she had 'done nothing with my career', thus Kelly sets up a rational understanding of why she feels her self confidence may be 'getting in the way of achievement'. In discussing why she feels 'like there's something really wrong' and that her 'self confidence is getting in the way of achievement', she utilises the services of a life coach. Kelly thus sets a logical premise for the reason why she is seeking the services of a life coach. In discussing different aspects and things present in her life, Kelly learns the technique of carrying 'across the problem areas' until she is left with 'three basic life goals'. Kelly is thus able to articulate the self, her self, through discursive practices that, as she exclaims, 'before hand' she would 'never have been able to articulate'.

Now furnished with a discursive repertoire through which she is able to articulate her self as possessing capabilities of individual self regulation, Kelly utilises such a repertoire to express specific techniques of self governance such as ‘carrying across problem areas’ and establishing ‘three basic goals’. As Kelly constructs this biographical narrative, moments of contradiction arise as she works to articulate her self in neo liberal parlance as an autonomous rational self-regulating subject. When Kelly exclaims that her second goal, ‘to be happy’ ‘ended up just being too broad a goal’, she is quick to reiterate that this was as a result of ‘three goals being too much’ because, ‘the other two just fell by the way side’. There is a break in Kelly’s narrative at this point as she struggles to frame her narrative within neo liberal language and present her self to me as a person with a rational coherent biography. Discussing her second goal ‘to be happy’ further on in the interview, Kelly expresses that such a goal includes having children and continuing her career:

*Kelly: “I mean I don’t think, I mean I know heaps of women, not sort of personally but I know of heaps of women, and they’re not, who do both who have careers and children, a lot of um hard core feminists who do both you know, so I don’t think that you know, that the decision to not have children up until the point where you start to think shit if I don’t do it now I’m never going to- I don’t think it’s so much like the children versus career but it’s more like my personal fulfilment hasn’t been achieved yet, so whether that might be career or whatever, so you’re not actually saying well I’m not going to have children because of my career, but it could be a lot of other circumstances”*

Merryn: "*Circumstances*"?

Kelly: "*That impact on it, you know maybe the guy's not the right guy you know, or maybe you know your health isn't the best or I don't know, and so - and so - it looks like by the time your thirty five or whatever, you've had a few abortions and you know you're in a career and people think from the outside that she's made a conscious choice not to have children, but I don't think its necessarily like that, like you still might want to have children but it's just, it just hasn't worked out*".

Kelly frames her desire to have children within a psychological developmental discourse of personal fulfilment and achievement, whilst adding that such personal achievement is subject to contingent circumstances. As will be further discussed in chapter four, the transformation from girlhood to womanhood is achieved through the normative category of motherhood and marks the developmental psychological and socio-cultural right of passage to feminine self-fulfilment. Importantly, Kelly narrates her experience as a woman who is positioned 'from the outside' as having made a 'conscious choice not to have children'. Kelly works to defend against this and when positioned as an autonomous rational agent free to make choices in relation to her fertility, Kelly works to articulate her self as a woman who has *not* made a conscious life style choice to forego motherhood because of her career. Rather Kelly defends against this position by stating 'so you're not actually saying well I'm not going to have children because of my career, but it could be a lot of other circumstances'. Kelly is thus keen to defend herself against being categorised as a childless professional and importantly with any subsequent apparent associated subjective choice in relation to her fertility. This defence is then extended to guard against being

positioned as a 'singleton', as Kelly tries to position herself as an autonomous individual capable of taking steps to work towards achieving her goal of obtaining a life partner whilst at the same time making sense of her 'circumstances':

*Kelly: "It's one of those goals I guess that you can't really work towards, you know what I mean, like some goals you go okay I want to change my career I know the steps I have to take towards that, but sort of getting a partner, I mean the only thing I can think of is like making myself more physically attractive (laughs), you know what I mean, but that's pretty much it, you know, there's not really, you can't really change, or, or you know like for a while I went through a stage of like ah you know going out a lot by myself and stuff in the effort to, you know because I'm not meeting people and all my friends are like coupled off and didn't want to go out and stuff and so I sort of started going out and in the end it was really humiliating so, yeah like so I thought oh well I don't want to do this so I thought I might as well just stay at home, so it's one of those goals you just can't really take steps to achieve".*

Kelly is faced with the contradiction of both desiring to take up the position of autonomous rational individual, able to take the necessary steps in order to actualise her goals, and her contingent circumstances that make such a goal 'one of those you just can't really take steps to achieve'. Her only recourse to understand the emotional pain and humiliation she undergoes in attempting to achieve fulfilment and happiness is through a discourse of personal failure. Somehow she has been unable to carry her life goals across and make them material reality. Here we see that Kelly turns to the body as a possible site of transformation in an effort to re-make her-self into the 'other' desired and fulfilled self she wishes she could be. However, it is through

psychological work on the self that the body is rendered as a site of transformation. This attempt to self regulate is evidenced in the work that Kelly must do as she attempts to construct a coherent narrative that at once fits with her circumstantial contingent life experience and her position as autonomous subject. Here we can see how Kelly struggles to re-make herself and be open and available to re-invention. Kelly's narrative clearly demonstrates that it is this very condition of constant becoming that carries both the promise of freedom and inevitability of failure. Each position is completely entangled with the crossing over narratives of transformation as the collective of splits' searches for a 'true' stable centre and whole, only to be actualised through psychological practises of self regulation. It is this never ceasing journey that requires a reflexive fluid subject who weighs and measures each option, and who is always searching for another space in which work on the self can be carried out.

In this last extract, Kelly goes on to discuss her fears in *relation* to another woman who, although having achieved the professional and material goals Kelly works toward, is subject to being positioned from 'the outside' as having 'no one':

Kelly. *"In ten years time I would like to have a family. You know what I mean? Like I have seen, where I used to live, I lived in a flat in (...) This woman upstairs was a sub-editor and she was in her late 30s and I was about 30 and I considered her a fair bit older than me at that stage and she had a beautiful apartment, like she was paying off her apartment. She drove a new car and you know she worked for The (...) and that sort of thing. She was obviously getting paid quite well. But I felt really sorry for her. I felt like you poor thing, like you have got no one"*.

Merryn: *"Okay. No partner. No children?"*



Kelly: *“Yeah. Yeah. And kind of thought oh I am never going to turn out like that. That is not going to be me. But it is getting closer”*

Merryn: *“Yeah, what are you now”?*

Kelly: *“Thirty five. Yeah. So it is like it is becoming me, you know. And it is not necessarily, I mean she might have been really happy, it is just a judgement that you make from the outside”*

Kelly is aware that this ‘other’ woman she fears she may become, who may indeed be happy, still remains subject to being judged from the outside as anything but. Kelly locates having ‘no one’ in this instance as the source of the women’s potential and imagined unhappiness of which material and professional success cannot guard against or indeed replace. Here we can see how the ‘circumstances’ that Kelly finds herself in, her age, relationship and parental status, mean that she must defend against being positioned, or becoming, this ‘other’ unhappy unfulfilled woman at all cost. It is the desire to have a child combined with the fear of being categorised and judged by others as having *chosen* the life style of the so called childless professional ‘work centred’ woman, that pushes Kelly to engage the service of a life coach, venture out at night alone and diet.

## **Karen**

However the fear of being seen to have chosen not to have children, in relation to how ‘other’ women are positioned, looms large for heterosexual married women also, as this extract taken from Karen, a white 38 year-old professional married women with no children<sup>1</sup>, demonstrates:

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of the interview Karen and her partner were receiving treatment at an IVF clinic and had been given no medical diagnosis, or “reason”, as to why she was unable to fall pregnant.

Karen: *“Well I know (husband) has got an Auntie who never had kids and um, you know, never, I mean, we talk about it between ourselves and say, because they are really nice people and stuff, what a - and you say I wonder if they did anything, whether they might have been too you know, early or you know for IVF has only been around for, I mean they are in their mid 50’s. So it may have been you know by the time that sort of technology came to Australia and the sort of idea that they may have been too old. Yeah, but I think that it is still like in society, people will still say to you, oh do you have kids, because you are married or because you are a certain age, and um, you sort of think oh no we don’t have kids. Oh, some people sort of say oh would you like to and you sort of think, you know, yeah. Most people would but I guess you sort of, I guess it is, it is not particularly asked, I don’t get it a lot, but you do sort of, there is an expectation that if you are a certain age in a relationship ... even if you’re not married, you know, there is an expectation and you’ve probably got the pressure on you. It is just because that’s the way, like you know, and even like we do it, I just said to my husband and I, we think it, oh the poor things they don’t have kids.”*

Merry: *“You do”?*

Karen: *“We don’t have kids. They are probably thinking the same thing about us.”*

Karen, like Kelly, is reflexive and empathetic concerning how others of a ‘certain age’, both married and not married may be positioned as objects of pity and curiosity if they do not have children. Importantly, although Karen says that she is not often asked outright if she would like children, it is the unspoken expectation of being a certain age that she feels places her under pressure of being positioned as a ‘poor thing’. Thus Karen understands that she, as with her husband’s Auntie, may be positioned as a ‘poor thing’ by others who may speculate as to whether she took steps to become pregnant or made the choice to be, or remain, childless. Both Karen and

Kelly live with the fear of being positioned as unhappy 'poor' childless professional women and must face overt and or covert pity and speculation as to whether they made individual choices in relation to their fertility, family and work.

The theories outlined earlier within this chapter are unable to grasp the complex interplay of practices that operate to position Kelly, Karen and the other women participants in this study as 'constantly changing successful entrepreneurs' or describe the 'techniques of self-regulation and management which both inscribe the subject and allow him or her to attempt to refashion themselves as a successful subject', (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 241). In order to grasp how the 'micro physics' of power-knowledge formations work in this context, and how women's experiences are silenced in this complex way, it is necessary to understand how these new knowledge formations produce specific discourses, within sets of social practices that both regulate and produce subjects, (Foucault, 1977, Walkerdine, 1999). Also how women are positioned within this nexus *and* how they experience this themselves in their lives in relation to their work, fertility and family is vital if we are to understand how women develop and practice coping mechanisms to reconcile the contradictions they face in today's labour market *and* the processes by which women's embodied and emotional experiences are marginalised or silenced.

### **Preference Theory**

Hakim's preference theory demonstrates the peculiar difficulties that Gill speaks of, in which a profound shift has occurred by which constraint may be re-positioned and re-contextualised as something women are not subjected by, but as a set of available

choices. Hakim's thesis is plagued by a set of complex contradictions that at once position women as neo liberal choice driven individual inventors of their own fortunes *and* fecund bodies who are furnished with only three 'life-style' options in life. The only reconciliation that Hakim is able to theorise in order to gain some sort of purchase between this divide, is to position fertility as an individual choice. Thus she is open to criticism as reductionist. However, Hakim's detractors locate their own reconciliation within the theoretical confines of developmental psychology, through a modernist epistemology reliant on an innate human essential subject that awaits emancipation and release from the shackles of ideology in order to realise their true essential free self. Importantly, Hakim's thesis demonstrates the pervasive salience of the 'tomorrow's woman' discourse as constituting 'woman' as fundamentally positioned in relation to her engagement to and with the labour market, a privileging of a market rationalisation discourse and a centralising of a market identity. This can be further witnessed in what Driver speaks about in the centralising of the maternal in psycho-analytic inspired studies and sociological studies that come to see the maternal bond as central to women's identity. It could be argued that Hakim tries to disrupt this centrality but rather is only able to shift this to another locus of control offered within a market identity.

Hakim's centralising of a market identity adopted in 'preference theory' takes its inspiration from neo classical economics and in particular 'game theory', (Hauman, 2000). 'Game theory' takes its ideological premise from the neo conservative theory expanded from the Chicago school and relies on an epistemological framework in which all human behaviour and interaction is theorised as motivated by a system/game of rewards and outcomes. Here human behaviour is understood as the rational self

interested outcomes of individual agents whose actions can be predicted in accordance with a set of desired preferences, that in turn are predicated on the understanding that, faced with a series of options, people will act in accordance with their individual self interests, (Curtis, 2006). In the BBC documentary entitled *Century of the Self*, (BBC 2006), Adam Curtis discussed the ways in which game theory enjoins Freudian psychoanalysis and mathematics to produce a humanist account of behaviour. Here Curtis argues that the American government of the 1920's turned to psychoanalysis to develop an account for the opposition between irrationality and rationality, by which primitive irrational behaviour could be governed and indeed harnessed for the greater good and the production of market wealth. The American Government's project of producing rational citizens for a rational government sought to engage the services of Freud's nephew, Edward Bernays, to develop new and revolutionary techniques of mass marketing. Thus Bernays set about devising a new approach to mass marketing in which the unconscious desires of Americans were to be become associated with practises of consumption and identity and a politics of life style. 'This produced a possibility of a government which linked capitalism with democracy and produced a quietened population, apparently sated by consumer goods and wealth', (Walkerline, 2007, p. 13). Indeed the first advertising campaign Bernays launched was aimed at encouraging young women to take up smoking; in this he associated cigarette smoking with freedom and freedom with the power to possess the phallus. Here the emphasis was placed on the market as offering an identity imbued with autonomy, freedom and power not before imagined by women. However, such power was linked with practices of consumption and an ethos of choice, freedom and life-style that offered the promise of power within a market context only. Here the opposition between rational and irrational 'is deeply caught up in the politics of government, with an

address both to the power of the irrational in the production and sustaining of mass consumption, while at the same time drawing on discourses and practices of rationality to produce a population whose irrational was not out of control or devoted to antisocial and anti government activities', (Walkerdine, 2007, p. 13). 'This opposition between passive ideology and active resistance can therefore be understood to be a completely specious one in the sense that both strategies have been and are demanded within liberal democracies based on consumer capitalism', (Walkerdine, 2007, p. 13). Hakim's preference theory builds on the understanding that preferences can be measured, just as consumption practises can be measured, through the assumption that people have natural biological self interested drives and will make choices made on which best serves these drives.

We can see by Kelly's and Karen's narratives however, that women are all too aware that the 'circumstances' that they may find themselves in may very well be positioned 'from the outside' as 'life style choices'. Here we are able to understand why it is that Kelly attempts to take the steps she does to cope with her fears by rectifying how others may position her as making a choice *not* to have children based on her 'life style' choice as a 'work centred' woman. By taking into account Kelly's and Karen's fear about being positioned through this discourse of choice, we are able to see how such discursive and material regulatory practices call upon the feminine subject to work on the self as a work in progress. It is by understanding how Kelly works to make sense of these contradictory subject positions within her narrative account, between the lived experiences of embodied fecund woman, professional and autonomous neo liberal choice making citizen, that we are able to avoid society/individual dichotomy pitfalls. In particular we can see how the developmental

approach taken by Crompton etc, does not account for this complexity or how the categorisation of femininity impacts on the lived experiences of women today.

## **Conclusion**

Establishing a theoretical and methodological framework that attempts to address the above points, requires an approach that is able to appreciate the discursive and material practices through which specific subjectivities are produced within particular localities. Broad theories, such as economically based or developmental approaches as outlined earlier, do not broach subjectivity nor the ways in which the human subject is produced through practices that make up the social. Nor, as highlighted earlier, do general theoretical approaches provide a critical framework from which to question the taken for granted truths of the existence of a pre-given psychological subject who becomes social/ is socialised, (Henriques et al 1998). Rather in order to grasp how the 'micro physics' of power knowledge formations work in this context, we need to understand how such formations produce specific discourses, by which being a subject is made meaningful, through sets of social practices that both regulate and produce subjects, (Foucault, 1977, Walkerdine, 1999). Importantly, as Walkerdine outlines:

“The subject is produced through the discursive relations of the practices themselves and is not co-terminus with the actual embodied and lived experience of being a subject. To understand the relation between subjectification (the condition of being a subject) and subjectivity (the lived experience of being a subject), it is necessary to examine what subject positions are created within specific practices and how actual subjects are both created in and live those diverse positions”, (Walkerdine, 1999, p. 4).

Here Walkerdine highlights how an approach which both takes into account the complex workings of cultural and social practices and the ways in which such

practices construct what being a subject means, within those very practices, is called for. Hence grasping the ways in which these practices work is synonymous with understanding how subjects are constituted within them. Therefore, to establish the ways in which femininity is discursively and materially produced through social and cultural practices, we need to also examine 'how that relation is formed inside the discourses which constitute the technologies of the social', (Foucault in Walkerdine, 1999, p. 5). It is through a process of locating practices and retracing the system of dependencies of these discourses, that we may attempt to reconstitute the present from its traces in the past and thus provide a Foucauldian analysis of the history of the present. By taking into account Kelly's fears and desires in this instance, we are able to understand the relationality of how a neo liberal discourse of rational individualism operates in conjunction with the psychological categorisation of femininity in accordance with a discourse of freedom, life style and choice.

In the following chapter I further explore the cultural construction of feminine categories through an analysis of various media representations. Building on my analysis of Kelly's narrative account within this chapter, I establish how desire and fantasy are contained within each category, with each category interweaving with the other and containing elements of loss and risk. Again I fore-ground the relational aspects of what are positioned as discrete feminine types and how women work to guard against being categorised thus.



## Chapter Four

### Classified Feminine

#### Introduction

In this chapter, a selection of different media representations of femininity will be introduced and treated as symptomatic texts wherein a new set of discursive practices circulating within the social can be identified. Such texts are featured within the thesis so as to appreciate the complexity and multiplicity of discourses that women call upon and thus serve as a secondary textual resource and backdrop to help further locate specific practices in the analysis of research participants' narrative accounts within chapters 5, 6 and 7. Here I build on the analysis of the categorisation of femininity in chapter three and examine how an increasing trend to portray and speak about the lives of women as beset with problems in relation to work, family and fertility within popular media, operates to classify femininity in particular ways today.

The inclusion of an analysis of 'gendered representations of women located at various mediated sites of popular culture' within the thesis, came about as a result of reoccurring themes arising within informal conversations I've had with many women in recent years, (Shugart, et al, 2001, p. 194). As such, with many women I have spoken with, media representations of femininity make up an integral 'shared topical resource' (Gillespie, 1995, p. 56) and 'cultural reservoir' to *draw* on, and in my experience, 'women's conversations are so often saturated', (Kim, 2006, p. 227). The following samples do not

present an exhaustive dossier of media representations of femininity, but rather have been carefully selected as exemplary texts that cover a spectrum of discourse, illustrative of the practices through which femininity is increasingly classified and of the subject positions that women are invited to take up.

As mentioned in chapter two, as an English speaking country with a relatively low population, Australian culture is saturated with UK and American media. Also, the Australian media industry produces a relatively small amount of popular media that are Australian specific, i.e. television programmes, print media and advertising etc. For this reason I have included media representations from the UK and America within my analysis, as not only was it necessary to broaden the research scope but it is also pertinent to establish the wide variety of non Australian influences that the women in the study would be exposed to and thus draw on.

### **Working Mothers & Stay at Home Mums**

Studying representations of professional women within the Dutch tabloid press, Van Zoonen (2000), found that the portrayal of politicians varied markedly in relation to how male and female Ministers were positioned in context with their familial relations. Heterosexual monogamous marriage and fatherhood for the male politicians, Van Zoonen concluded, was positioned as a normative source of support, whereas marriage and motherhood was portrayed as a source of conflict for women pursuing a political career. Similar media studies concerning the representation of female politicians, (highly visible professional women), even within countries with strong traditions of women in public

office, draw similar conclusions wherein family is positioned as site of conflict for women, (see Koski 1994, and Borjesson 1995). Media representations of the traditional 'nuclear family' as a site of conflict for professional heterosexual women, as witnessed in BBC Three's reality TV programme 'Who Rules The Roost?', have increased in visibility recently across a vast variety of media, particularly within the genre's of docu-drama/reality TV, 'chick-lit' print media and news and 'info-tainment' broadcasting. Regardless of this diversity however, a specific and repetitive theme can be identified where women are pitted at the centre of a particular struggle.

'Who Rules The Roost' first appeared on BBC 3 in 2005 and according to the advertisement, is part of BBC 3's 'Parenting Season'. Other programmes included in this season are 'The Week The Women Went', 'He's Having a Baby' and the hugely popular, 'Wife Swap'. After a series of eight one hour long programmes of 'Who Rules The Roost', the first series was re-run with 'half hour updates to see whether making radical child-rearing changes have brought more happiness into the families' homes' ([www.bbc.com.uk](http://www.bbc.com.uk)). This reality TV series attempts to showcase the everyday lived experiences of busy white middle class heterosexual dual earner parent households, intent on exposing and reconciling the perceived difficulties such families may encounter in context with their child care responsibilities, work and relationship bonds. But, as the title suggests, the programme's entertainment hook hinges on a power struggle played out between the parents. In particular, the degree to which the women's careers can be successfully managed and negotiated with childcare, housework and wifely responsibilities is dramatised as being the crucial site of contestation within each family.

For example, the show's BBC web site blurb outlines the plight of the Manklow family thus:

“Karen and Marc are busy working parents with very different ideas on how to manage their four children. IT analyst Karen juggles her full-time job as well as getting all four kids washed, dressed and fed every morning and evening whilst also taking care of the house work in between’. Karen says; “Everybody wants me at once but there’s only one of me to go round!”, ([www.bbc.com.uk](http://www.bbc.com.uk), 2005).

The depiction of women as tired overworked ‘working mums’ is now widely recognised, with the spectre of this new and increasingly solidified archetype becoming particularly visible throughout Westernised cultures, (Choi et al, 2005). The exhausted working mother as an everyday normal and *recognisable* subject is thus able to be targeted, appealed to and hailed as a potential client and consumer, (a theme I return to later). ‘Who Rules The Roost?’ however, also illustrates how working mothers are positioned as viewers and consumers of entertainment, (someone who enjoys empathising with the women on the show for example), and crucially how the working mother is also constructed as an *object* and source of cultural curiosity. In Who Rules The Roost, the everyday experiences of working mothers are packaged as ‘reality’ entertainment, with Karen’s dilemma that ‘everybody wants me at once but there’s only one of me to go round!’ operating to establish the site of the drama. Indeed this quote was the only section of talk to be selected for the promotion web site and television commercial for this episode. The quote is highlighted in order to establish the human interest angle of Karen’s story by situating a busy middle class professional working mother at the epicentre of an antagonistic plot, the dilemma of which Karen expresses as an embodied experience, i.e. the ‘me’ of whom there is only ‘one of’ to ‘go round!’.

Depictions of professional working mothers within women's popular literature, often referred to as 'chic-lit', have also recently witnessed an explosive increase in the last decade, with many wildly successful best sellers cornering a sizeable share of the print media market, (Ferriss, 2006). Allison Pearson's 2002 fictional novel *'I Don't Know How She Does It: A Comedy about Failure, a Tragedy about Success'*, is one among many international best sellers that tell the story of the everyday struggles in the lived experiences of professional working mothers. Another very successful writer within the genre is Ayelet Walderman with the *'Mommy Track Mysteries'* fiction series. Titles in the series include, *'The Big Nap, A Play Date with Death, The Cradle Robbers'* and *'Murder Plays House'*. The promotional paragraph on the back of the book jacket for the latter novel reads:

"Juliet Applebaum, public defender turned stay-at-home-mom and private investigator, is pregnant with her third child. The family apartment is suddenly too small, so she is looking for an affordable house. Her friend, Kat, a reluctant real-estate agent, offers to show her some homes, and the one that she really loves comes complete with a dead body in the guesthouse. Since her detective agency has no business, she decides to find the killer, hoping that it will give her a better chance to buy the house. As always, Walderman uses humour to portray the Los Angeles scene while making some serious points about what is really important in life", (Walderman, 2004).

An interview in the *'Oakland Tribune'*, with the *'Mommy-Track Mysteries'* author, 'mother of three and wife of Pulitzer Prize winner Michael Chabon', informs us that the 36 year old 'didn't really expect to become a writer'. Like her fictitious character, Walderman was a 'graduate of Harvard Law School' and working as a 'high-powered federal public defender in Los Angeles when she had her first child'. Apparently,

Walderman 'fully expected to go back to work right away after the baby was born, but found to her surprise that she was doing a poor job as a mother and a lawyer'. "Almost every professional woman I know has this dilemma" Walderman is quoted as saying, "Nobody manages the work/time thing well", (*The Oakland Tribune*, July 5<sup>th</sup> 2001).

Pearson and Walderman, two of the few critically acclaimed writers within the 'chick-lit' fiction genre, each create stories in which their female protagonists are faced with a strikingly similar set of problematic circumstances. Both leading characters are successful, white, middle class, heterosexual, married career women with two or more young children, who are 'victim(s) of time famine' and who 'count seconds like other women count calories' (Pearson, 2003, rear book jacket). Just as Walderman's Juliet, once 'public defender' is '*turned* stay-at-home-mom', so too is Pearson's character 'Kate Reddy', who is turned from successful stocks and bonds investor to 'stay at home mother', albeit in the culminating chapter of the book (emphasis mine). Both female characters, for haphazard and contingent reasons, find themselves embroiled in engaging intrigues as stay at home mothers, whereby their professional skills are called upon to either solve mysteries, or in the case of Pearson's character, to help out struggling businesses under female management (a small doll house manufacturer!). Thus, although both characters leave their respective professions and are 'turned' from working mothers to 'stay at home mothers' they are able to continue being actively engaged within the public sphere as professionals.

Pearson and Walderman achieve some form of reconciliation for the struggles their characters encounter by creating novel situations in which both characters can engage in stimulating work, aside from mothering and caring. Although each character stumbles upon situations in which their professional expertise are required to rectify an injustice, the fictitious private domestic sphere, in which both characters are 'turned', does not inhibit them from performing these expertise and engaging in work. Importantly, both protagonists are portrayed as not actively desiring, seeking or *needing* to work, but rather happen upon situations in which they are called upon to engage their skills for philanthropic reasons. These two popular modern day heroines therefore, overcome the problems they encounter in their everyday lives in relation to their work and family, by inhabiting a fictitious fantasy space where they are able to be successful mothers, wives *and* professional feminine subjects. In short, each protagonist is able to 'have it all' through a series of random events whereby home and work, private and public are brought/thrown together and co-exist (feminine fantasies of working-from-home and philanthropic vocational rationales will be further discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7).

Stories about the everyday lives and experiences of professional working mothers are also increasingly deemed to be of high reader interest in the daily newspapers, noticeably within glossy magazines such as '*The Observer Magazine*'. A myriad of columns, features and news items written by an almost exclusive female body of journalists concerning motherhood and work, are now common place. Popular columnist Barbara Ellen for example, recently entitled her 'Up Front' column, 'There are Smug Mums, and there are Mug Mums, no prizes for guessing who's permanently skint and tired'. Ellen

writes of her own struggles here, and as with Karen's dilemmas in the 'Who Rules The Roost' and the fictional characters mentioned above, a comparison is played out and offered as light entertainment, between professional working mothers and stay at home mothers. These two feminine types sit in constant comparison with each other conjoined through discourses that situate each as discreet mirror images of the other. As the above novels attest, the desire to occupy a space in between these two positions is very often fodder of popular feminine fantasy. However, the sentence chosen to be lifted and colour highlighted in large print within Ellen's article reads, 'in my no kids fantasy I'm flying first class, sipping cocktails and turning so often to ask the couple behind to shut their screaming brat up', (*The Observer Magazine* 12/6/05). This 'no kids fantasy', is one in which Ellen is able to dissolve the space between 'smug mums' and 'mug mums', made achievable through the spectre of another feminine typology, the childless professional, (i.e. sipping cocktails and flying first class). Ellen's fantasy of a life free of being 'permanently tired and skint' is one in which the work-from-home fantasy is not called upon. Here Ellen invokes the fantasy of who she would or could be-a childless and professional woman-positioned as desirable by contrast. She is the other woman who is positioned as able/entitled to demand a space free of screaming brats, lest her cocktail sipping *first class* existence be disturbed. This opulence and serenity is situated as experienced by childless professional Ellen and imagined as enacted within an indulgent personal space where Ellen is afforded freedoms otherwise denied to her. However, this 'first class' fantasy contains an element of selfishness and negation where Ellen, as this other type of woman, is positioned here as one who would turn so often and ask the *couple* behind to shut their screaming brat up. The fantasy therefore contains four inter-



related characteristics attributed to an identity that Ellen positions as desirable in this shared fantasy: childlessness, autonomy, wealth and a lack of empathy (traditionally recognised as masculine). All of which Ellen equates with specific freedoms.

Motherhood is not only positioned as potentially exhausting and financially undesirable for working professional woman, but is also located as a site of potential emotional struggle and ambivalence, (Hollway and Featherstone, 1997). In the same edition of *'The Observer'* columnist Cristina Odone's popular 'Diary' section, is entitled 'Parenthood has become sealed in a smug, Disneyesque sentimentality'. The column is accompanied with a photograph of a woman breast feeding, with the underlying caption reading, 'Your baby at the breast may not inspire warm, gooey love' (*'The Observer'* 12/6/05). Both of these very popular journalists write of their individual personal experiences as professional working mothers, offering a-day-in-the-life snap shots of their ordinary trials and tribulations, delivered through a series of humorous vignettes. Here Odone lays out what has become an increasing complaint, warning and admission concerning the contradiction between constructions of motherhood, (*sealed* in a smug Disneyesque sentimentality) and the lived experiences of many, more often than not, professional educated middle class white heterosexual mothers (Faludi, 1992). The baby at the breast here does not signify the 'good mother' archetype; rather the image, in its relation with the caption, operates to situate motherhood as a site of potential emotional ambivalence.

Women's newspaper diary columns have more recently provided a point of origin from which a very successful proportion of novels and screen plays concerning femininity,

work, family and fertility, such as 'Bridget Jones's Diary', 'Sex and The City' and 'I Don't Know How She Does It', first gained popularity. The phenomenal rise in popularity of women's autobiographical writings however, is representative of a very specific genre through which women's experiences of motherhood, work and family life are spoken. As this sample of newspaper clippings show, articles pertaining to women's experiences in relation to fertility, work and family, and comparisons between working mothers, stay at home mothers and childless professionals, often make general 'news':

'Superwoman dies from overwork'

'SEX or sleep? In conjugal bedrooms around the country, women are facing the choice and realising it's a no-brainer.' *The Weekend Australian* 12/05/01

'The Baby War'

'Some people see them as super-mums, but many childless women secretly call them a pain. Is motherhood compatible with work?' *The Australian* 21/11/01

'Motherhood: the biggest career choice'

'Mothers who choose to stay at home are not paid by the Government to stay at home.'  
*Sydney Morning Herald* 24/6/98

'Social engineering aside, mum is not a dirty word'

'Stay-at-home mothers see their decision as putting the family first.' *The Australian*  
25/8/98

## **Singletons & Childless Professionals**

On February the 27<sup>th</sup> 2005 *The Independent* Newspaper featured a body shot of a woman with an accompanying headline reading ‘They’re the Alpha females: clever, confident, well off, so what’s their problem?’, in the top corner on the front page. A smaller headline placed aside the photograph read, ‘men are scared of a strong woman’, (*The Independent* 27/2/05). The full article, located within the ‘Home’ section of the paper, ran with a caption placed in bold next to the woman’s head reading, ‘Bibi Lynch, 38 is a successful journalist and TV presenter who describes herself as a “card-carrying Alpha female”’. The smaller sub heading placed under the main one read, ‘The higher their IQ, the less chance they have of finding a partner, *that’s the problem*, and guess what? The rule doesn’t apply to men’ (emphasis mine). Two female head shots are featured underneath this sub heading with accompanying quotes from each woman reading, ‘Men don’t want to marry Alpha females: it means they may not get looked after’ and ‘I feel fortunate that my career has had no effect on my fabulous relationship’, (*The Independent* 27/2/05).

Flicking through an edition of the glossy inside ‘Observer Magazine’, some months later, I happened upon a small advertisement for [www.ivorytowers.net](http://www.ivorytowers.net) online match making agency. The ad features a cartoon image of a young woman dressed in business attire with a thought caption above her head reading: ‘got my masters, bought a flat, ran the marathon and own enough Italian designer shoes for an Italian centipede. Damn! I knew I’d forget something!’ The advertisement’s caption then asks: ‘Have you been too busy to

find a partner? 'The intelligent matchmaking site Ivory Towers will do it for you'. By making 'a new way of doing an old thing' possible, even for the girl who by her own admission already has everything else, Ivory Towers offers to provide that final accessory to complete every working women's wardrobe, a man, (*The Observer* 5/6/05).

The above newspaper article and advertisement describe professional women as experiencing a similar problem, but conceptualise and locate this problem in two separate but inter-related ways. Professional women in these examples are constructed through a set of interwoven discourses in accordance with how this problem, the *lack* of a heterosexual male partner, is contextualised. As the 'Alpha female' article cautions, being 'clever, confident' and 'well off' publicly and professionally, does not signify private and personal success for women. Within this article, 'the problem' is located within the capabilities of professional women to undertake traditional caring duties and look 'after' men, which is further substantiated through Lisa Jardine's admission that she feels '*fortunate* that (her) career has had no effect on (her) fabulous relationship', (emphasis mine). Importantly, motherhood is not broached here, rather the problem is located in the 'effect' that a *professional* career has upon a woman's ability to execute feminine caring duties within the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). Importantly, the article suggests that such effects diminish women's sexual allure and attractiveness to potential male partners, as 'men are scared of a strong woman' with a high I.Q. Thus professional women are positioned as encountering difficulties attracting male partners as a result of their cleverness, confidence and financial security, which in turn jeopardises their chances of taking up the normative feminine positions of wife, partner and carer. This sits in contrast

with Ellen's fantasy of childlessness, autonomy and wealth as desirable, but both comparative constructions of the childless professional and or singleton, contain loss. For all her success, this other woman *feels* fortunate, that her cleverness and financial autonomy has not been at a detriment to her ability to hold down a heterosexual relationship. Indeed Ellen's absence of a male partner in her first class fantasy can be seen as conspicuous in this respect, as is her inclusion of the 'couple' seated behind with their screaming brat. Although the 'Alpha Female' article is blatant in its message of failure and fear, Ellen's article situates this other woman as tacitly undesirable also, for in her no kids first class autonomous life, she lacks *feminine* empathy for the mother behind her *and* she is alone.

As will be discussed further below, the Alpha females are aged within their thirties and forties, whereas the cartoon image of the woman in the Ivory Towers ad appears to be in her twenties. Importantly, professional single women who have passed their fertility use-by date, or are at risk of doing so, are constructed within the Alpha females article as caught in a trap where no amount of cleverness, confidence or personal wealth can compensate for their loss of love and family.

The 'Alpha females' article thus positions heterosexual monogamy as a site of conflict for professional women, as does the Ivory Towers advertisement. However, the Ivory Towers ad does not locate the problem as resulting from an inherent inability to attract a male partner, rather the problem is positioned as a lack of time to focus on procuring male attraction. Interestingly, the difficulties of combining the personal and the

professional are framed as problems of 'temporality' rather than context or subjectivity (Odi, 2003). The product that the company seeks to market therefore is time, something that professional women are constructed as having a lack of in context with this problem. This is not the case within Ellen's article for example, where professional women without children are portrayed as having the luxury of time to themselves. Ivory Towers attempt to hail the single, childless professional woman who suffers from a lack of available time to pursue, or be readily available to, a male partner and subsequently to a potential father. Indeed 'time famine', regardless of parental or relationship status, is continually posited as a barrier that seriously impedes heterosexual *professional* women's abilities to effect 'real choices' in their lives:

'Oops, I forgot to have the baby'

'They did not realise they were, in essence, choosing not to have families. After all, their male peers did both. Why weren't they, too, able to have it all?' *Chicago Sun Times*  
19/5/02

'My childless career'

'Work or family? Anne Manne looks behind the creeping non-choice faced by the rising number of high-achieving women who miss out on motherhood.' *Sydney Morning Herald*  
01/6/02

'Wanting a baby is easy, finding the time to schedule it is hard'

*Sydney Morning Herald* 20/6/02

‘Women charging up the corporate ladder run into baby ceiling’

‘There’s a new wrinkle in office politics these days. Call it the Ticking Clock Factor.

Can women really have it all?’ *Chicago Sun Times* 19/5/02

Featured within the same edition of the ‘The Observer’ as the advertisement for Ivory Towers, located within the newspaper’s ‘Focus Motherhood’ section, is an article entitled ‘Now I know my fertility time limit. All I need is the right father’. This lengthy article is accompanied with a large picture of a woman (the writer of the article) holding a baby with the caption underneath reading, ‘Lorna Martin with nephew Lewis. “Babies were always something I thought I wanted”’. The sub heading reads ‘The Observer’s Lorna Martin is the first journalist to take a controversial British test to estimate when women are likely to reach menopause. After conquering her nerves, she reveals why it was the right thing to do’ (*The Observer* 5/6/05). Another article concerned with women’s fertility appeared on the front page of the ‘The Sunday Times’ August the 21<sup>st</sup> 2005, with a colour photograph of a woman situated alongside a caption reading ‘I bought a perfect baby’. A smaller caption beneath this read ‘Why singleton Lori Gottlieb went to the sperm bank’. Unlike the articles above however, this article was not relegated to the ‘Home’, ‘Focus Motherhood’ or glossy magazine sections of the paper, but was afforded front page status of the ‘News Review’ section, with the same photograph and a caption alongside reading ‘I bought my baby at the sperm bank’. The sub heading reading, ‘Lori Gottlieb didn’t want to start a family with her boyfriend so she did what an *increasing* number of single women are doing: logging on to find the perfect genetic father’, (emphasis mine). A highlighted sentence from this page read, ‘Ordering the father of my

child on a web site was especially difficult for me, because I'm not a good online shopper', (*The Sunday Times* August 21, 2005).

In the 'Sydney Morning Herald' on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2005, well known journalist Adele Horin made front page news with her report on the findings of a federally funded government study concerning Australia's 'low fertility rate', the headline read, 'Why we can't have kids for love or money'. A cartoon accompanied the article depicting a woman with a caption reading 'I want a secure relationship', and man with a caption reading, 'I want a secure job', and a child (male) with the caption reading, 'I want secure parents'. The sub heading for the article read 'what the study found', and included a list of findings with brief overviews, e.g. 'Work: women in full time work were less likely to have children than part-time or jobless women'. The article continued on page eight of the paper with the heading 'Bringing up baby: why our fertility rate is falling' (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 28/1/05).

The first two articles here feature the personal narrative accounts of two professional female journalists, (as with Odone and Ellen's articles), who detail their fertility experiences in context with new fertility scientific and technological advances in the West. Each woman's situation is framed through two separate but inter-connected problems interwoven through the hegemonic 'biological clock' discourse, wherein professional women are situated at risk of missing their opportunity to procreate by ignoring their fertility time limit. Again, as within the Ivory Towers advertisement, in the first article professional and most often single women are hailed as consumers of a



service, in this case a medical procedure/product that apparently provides women with a fertility dead-line estimate. However, the following article, whilst also encompassing the biological clock discourse, constructs professional women as struggling to obtain a potential father for their biological offspring *regardless* of their relationship status, (to be further discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7). Thus, professional heterosexual women are positioned as struggling to attract fathers to procreate even when partnered. Once again, professional women are positioned as potential consumers of a product, sperm. Thus the heterosexual relationship, as the second article attests, may not necessarily offer women a secure and unproblematic route to motherhood and thus a way to beat the clock. Rather, as will be further discussed within chapter 6 and 7, heterosexual coupledom is constructed as a site of potential loss for professional women, regardless of relationship and parental status. The market is thus positioned as offering a viable solution to the risk of potentially 'missing out on motherhood', if for example, Ivory Towers is unable to provide an agreeable/viable mate. The singleton *or* partnered professional woman need only to have her fertility time limit calculated therefore, so she may shop online within her time budget for the father of her choosing. Professionalism is tacitly positioned as disrupting the male gaze here, wherein the professional woman risks being passed up as a potential mother, regardless of her relationship status. Market autonomy, although offering a way to beat the clock, does not offer the professional woman an unproblematic solution to her work, fertility and family struggles.

In the article by Horin featuring Australia's low fertility rate above, heterosexual coupledom is also located as a problematic site of insecurity for women: 'I want a secure

relationship'. It is women's desire for a secure heterosexual relationship that is positioned as a reproductive deterrent here. Low fertility rate and pro-natal discourses are often inscribed with misogynist, racist, homophobic, classed discourses and conservative political epistemologies, wherein primarily white middle class, heterosexual educated women are constructed as self motivated individuals who deny the state its rightful sovereignty over the province of the fecund body (Ireland, 2003; Lawler, 1996; Shilling, 1997). Importantly, the spectre of the lone mother in relation to discourses pertaining to high divorce rates, feminine impoverishment and child health and development, lurk around the edges of this insecurity, where both mother and child are situated at risk: 'I want secure parents', (Silva, 2004; Phoenix, 1996). The traditional nuclear family is thus positioned as a site of potential material and psychological insecurity for women, whose low fertility rate is situated as management of such risk. The above newspaper headlines concerning stay at home motherhood, are evidence of the defensive stance which women who are classified as gambling on such risks frequently take up. Importantly, the market is positioned as the prime site of insecurity for men within the report, 'I want a secure job', and the management of this insecurity is located as a potential reproductive deterrent. Hence the headline 'why we can't have children for *love* nor *money*'. Therefore, women and children are situated within this discourse as at material and psychological risk, wherein a low fertility rate is positioned as symptomatic of modern risk management practices. Feminine financial autonomy and childlessness is constructed here as desirable relative to the spectre of the downwardly mobile impoverished lone mother. Thus childless professional and or single childless women, are not languishing in first class here nor signing up to dating agencies, rather they are presumably engaging in

the rational calculation of risk-hedging their bets and saving for their pensions. In contrast working and stay at home mothers are risking their children's health and development and their own material and psychological well being and security by placing all their eggs in an increasingly fragile basket.

### **She Who Just Gets On With It**

The final media representation of femininity featured within this chapter is the above mentioned Anadin Extra advertisement for painkillers, televised within the UK. The advertisement opens with an image of a thirty-something white woman getting out of her car in a busy shopping centre car park. As the scene runs, a voice over begins with an English woman asking the viewer sedately in a middle class accent, "are you always on the go?" As the woman leaves the car park and enters the shopping centre, the viewer becomes aware that she is juggling two miniature people in one hand as she walks into the shopping centre. "You need to be, people depend on you", soothes the voice over. As the woman approaches a fruit and vegetable stand she picks up two more little people, an elderly woman and a teenage girl holding a soccer ball. The woman walks off now juggling the four little people with both hands. On closer inspection, the two people initially juggled in the opening scene are a thirty something white male holding a newspaper and a thirty something white woman in a business suit with brief case in hand (appearing to be one and the same woman, i.e. the protagonist now juggles a miniature professional version of herself). The woman moves down an escalator whilst comfortably juggling her four little people with both hands, who bounce up and down in synchronised

rhythm as relaxed and slightly hypnotic background music accompanies the scene. As the woman walks out into an open square, a pained expression appears on her face and she gently places the little people down on a brick flowerbed. Each miniature person then goes about their business oblivious to the woman's discomfort, i.e. the man reads his paper, the girl plays with her ball, the professional version of the woman talks on her mobile phone whilst looking at her wrist watch and the elderly woman knits. "When you get something like a muscle ache or even a headache you just take Anadin and carry on", the voice over calmly states. The woman then opens her shoulder bag removes a packet of Anadin tablets and swallows a pill from her conveniently stashed supply. Her face immediately brightens as she picks up her little brood and continues on her way juggling comfortably. At this point, another woman comes into view who also juggles four little people with both hands and a man in a suit simultaneously crosses the scene juggling two people, whom we cannot see, in one hand whilst carrying a briefcase in the other. The voice over then serenely announces, "triple action Anadin extra for people who just get on with it" (Creative Agency Public Ltd, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2005).

In the opening scene of the Anadin Extra ad, a woman is depicted to be routinely going about her daily grocery shopping. Directly addressing the viewer in the first person, a voice then asks us, 'are *you* always on the go?' This question is immediately confirmed through the statement, "you *need* to be, *people depend* on you". The advertisers attempt to hail the working mother through a discourse of *recognition*, invoking familiar stereotypes of familial and professional responsibilities. In attempting to hail the 'superwoman', the advertisers reify taken for granted truths ascribed to this feminine

subject. She suffers from ill health because she is responsible for her family and her career. In so doing, they construct her need as relational to other peoples' dependencies, a presumably natural and essential obligation of the working mother. The juggling is symbolic of the embodied and psychological performance of doing/managing this obligation, the 'go' that professional working mothers are 'always on'. The advertisers thus constitute the feminine body as an object of risk that *needs* managing. Femininity then is constituted here through a discourse of relationality, wherein self-governance is positioned in relation to *other* people's needs. It is through the individual's regulation of her body that the needs of others are safely secured. Successful self-management therefore, is performed for the desires of others; managing their dependency is her duty. In this respect, it is not the subject's individual pain, suffering or ill-health that constitutes her body as a site of risk, rather the risk is located in the body's ability to accommodate and endure the needs of others. The professional working mother's body is constituted therefore as a risk to others (the failure to organise, co-ordinate and accommodate her familial obligations). The painkiller product is thus pitched as a viable tool of risk management, reifying the feminine body as the essential object through which social and cultural cohesion is safeguarded.

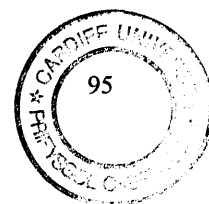
Continuing to engage the viewer in the first person, the voice-over posits that "when you get something like a muscle ache or even a headache you just take Anadin and carry on". Carrying on is made possible if one *just* takes Anadin. 'Anadin Extra' therefore is 'for people who just get on with it'. Working mothers are not constructed here, however, as people who *just* get on with it, they are people who *need* to get on with it in a context

where social, familial and professional responsibilities of working women are entirely naturalised. Catch-cries such as 'just get on with it' have become a familiar trope of Western consumer culture since the mid nineteen eighties, wherein an ethos of consumption is enjoined with a life-style aesthetic and a politics of freedom, autonomy and individualism, (Rose 1999). From Nike's 'just do it', to slogans such as 'get a life' etc, Western marketing/advertising discourses constitute the subject as a rational, autonomous individual who is free to choose their identity unproblematically amongst a multiplicity on offer, (Walkerdine, 2001). However hailing a feminine subject who perseveres to manage the desires of others through the management of self, also constitutes a living contradiction between freedom and constraint. The advertisers, who clearly recognise the pain of living this contradiction, position their product as offering relief against the risk of individual and relational breakdown, so that working mothers are 'free' to continue living this contradiction. The metaphor of the juggling/multi-tasking feminine subject locates and constitutes a rational core of 'self', a solid unitary subject, to whom they can appeal as the subject of their marketing campaign. As such, Anadin is a product that aims to appeal to an everyday generic woman who, with forethought, planning and good sense, will always be - *must* always be - at the ready should the risk of bodily breakdown disturb the precarious balance of her relational obligations to others. It is this feminine rational, resilient and solid self that is positioned behind or in control of these other selves and who is a conduit for the smooth operational functioning of her self, family and work. Anadin is positioned as the product for the take charge woman who does indeed get on with it and is never caught, *can never be caught*, under-performing or ill prepared at work, home or in fact anywhere at all.

The conceptualisation of this struggle as being specifically feminine becomes clear within the advertisement when the man enters the scene toward the end. As he carries his briefcase in one hand, we are made aware that he does not juggle a professional worker version of himself, for he *is* the professional worker self (signalled by his business attire and briefcase). Thus the family, as within the low fertility report article above, is constituted as the domain of feminine concern. The responsibilities of mother, wife, daughter and professional are signified through the little others, as components to be juggled, arranged and organised by another self, the multi-tasking 'super woman'. It is this presumably rational, resilient and solid conception of the feminine self that is positioned behind or in control of these other selves and who is, after all, a conduit for the smooth operational functioning of self, family and work.

## **Conclusion**

The media representations of femininity I have discussed within this chapter do not merely mirror real already existing women, but also construct and position women through discursive practices wherein femininity is made intelligible in new ways. As these examples demonstrate, an increasing trend to portray and speak about the lives of women as beset with problems in relation to work, family and fertility within popular media, operates to classify femininity into discreet typological identities. However, as these examples show, the subject positions of the working mother, the stay at home mother, the childless professional and singleton are always situated within a complex *relational* network, each being contextualised as containing aspects of loss in relation to



the other. The working mother superwoman is positioned as desiring a life free of the emotional, physical and financial demands of motherhood and the insecurities of heterosexual coupledness. This position entails suffering the loss of psychological well-being-time, peace, quiet, sleep, space, sex-and autonomy, individual wealth and the lifestyle seemingly afforded to the childless professional. She is positioned as at potential future risk of material, (breakdown or down-ward mobility) and psychological harm due to her financial and nurturing responsibilities as primary carer, within a potentially precarious and unstable heterosexual family unit, (Skeggs, 2004). The position of stay at home mother is no less relationally constituted through loss. As with the fictional novels first introduced, she is often constructed as having to 'opt out' of public life and is 'turned' away from the individual autonomy that an independent position within the market is constructed as affording her. Thus she too is vulnerable to the insecurities that her dependent position as wife and mother potentially expose her to. The stay at home mother, as will be further discussed in chapter 6, is also positioned as lacking public, and specifically intellectual, stimulation, (as alluded to in the fiction novels), that other women are afforded, and hence is also considered at potential psychological risk, as are her children. Indeed recent discourses concerning post-natal depression often argue that isolation is a prime contributing factor in women's ability to perform the normative 'good mother' role, (Bennet, 2006). This is in contrast to discourses that exalt the stay at home mother for her unselfish dedication to her children and family, as featured in the defensive newspaper headlines above. This also sits in comparative relation with discourses condemning the inferior levels of care provided to the 'latch key kids' of working mothers who are unable to schedule 'quality time' for their children and subject



them to potential psychological and bodily harm through exposure to out-sourced care (Lawler, 1996).

The childless professional and singleton, although positioned as less at risk from the material losses potentially suffered by the above feminine types, is no less constituted through her desire and loss - of family, motherhood, femininity, sexual attractiveness, time, psychological well being, love - and is often recognised as failing to realise her *true* essential potential as a woman. As I will discuss later in chapters 5, 6 and 7, the childless professional and singleton category, is often situated as desirable only within the context of a discourse of transformation, particularly as called upon by young middle class professional women. These typologies are constructed as temporal transitory identities, taken up by 'normal' 'healthy' young women as they pass through to self actualisation, achieved through the normative identities of mother and wife, (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine, 2003). As such, they are often positioned as embodying girlhood-immaturity, frivolousness, gaiety, self indulgence- as within the Ivory Towers ad, Ellen's no kids fantasy, Sex and the City and Ally MacBeal etc, (Gill, 2003). However, as the two newspaper articles attest, this late girlhood is shadowed by a discourse of impending limits of biological reproduction in which the womb is symbolically rendered into a 'ticking time bomb', to become the object of the medical gaze, wherein developments in medical technologies contradictorily promise hope or forecast doom (Foucault, 1977). The childless professional/singleton therefore, is constructed as desirable within the context of a market identity in which she is both free to consume and free of the psychological and material responsibilities and struggles in relation to those attributed to

working and stay at home mothers. The defence of this position can be witnessed in the ‘I don’t need a man’ catch-cries of more recent post-feminist empowerment discourses, for example within the song lyrics of ‘Destiny’s Child’ and within the classed based assaults on the ‘pram faces’ of stay at home mothers, or the scrutiny of the ‘yummy mummy’ post natal body (McRobbie, 2006). However, the saliency of the lonely dried up spinster/maiden aunt archetype remains, reconstituted through this typology, and as will be further explored within chapters 5, 6 and 7, looms large within the desires, fears and fantasies of women today.

In chapters five, six and seven I establish common themes present within the broad corpus of narrative statements of the twelve interviewees. I explore these narrative accounts in relation to how the desire to be a whole feminine subject, (the ego capable of resilience) sits in contradiction with a feminine subject who must constantly re-invent herself (Walkerdine, 2003). Thus within these three chapters I explore how the deep irony I referred to above, is lived for women in the present and how this is spoken, made intelligible, and lived contextually through a set of material practices.

## Chapter Five

### Transforming the Self

“[I]t is not possible to treat the problem of alterity without taking account of the founding model of all alterity that is the subject of the other gender. The masculine subject and the feminine subject cannot be substituted for each other for a variety of reasons: their position with regard to an originary *you* is very different, their being-in-the-world is specific, their corporeal and cosmic experience of being is different, their relational economy is other, their mode of entering into and existing within language is specific”, (Irigaray, 2004, p. 71)

#### Introduction

Within the next three chapters I establish common themes present within the broad corpus of narrative statements of the twelve interviewees. What I am interested in exploring and unpacking within these narrative accounts is how the *desire* to be a ‘whole’ feminine subject, (the individual ego capable of resilience referred to in chapter one), sits in contradiction with a feminine subject who must constantly reinvent herself, (Walkerdine, 2003). Within the following three chapters therefore, I show how this deep irony is lived for women in the present by focusing on the modes of intelligibility, patterns of talk and the discourses the women call upon to construct their biographical accounts. I also explore the context in which they situate themselves within the narratives and the material, emotional and embodied practices and techniques of self-management they engage in, (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

## Compartmentalisation

Discourse analysis requires that an analyst locate broader themes within participants narratives in order to understand what discourses constitute the positions available for subjects to take up, (Kohler-Riessman, 1993). However, in our search to gain a purchase on the ways in which subjectivity is constituted and lived, the methodological enterprise of separating a narrative into discursive themes, may lose some of the contradiction, emotional experience and complexity evident within the interviews we conduct and take part in. Indeed the Anadin marketers attempt to capitalise on this in their construction of a feminine subject who *must* painfully and problematically separate and compartmentalise her life into do-able spheres. Here, for example, we can see the ways in which women are positioned as struggling to manage this complexity. However, whilst the advertisers portray women as managing their lives through separation and compartmentalisation, they also highlight connection-between mind and body- and the exhaustion and pain that is brought about through being always on the go *both* physically and mentally. Further, the advertisement highlights how the separation act itself, the compartmentalisation of life into do-able spheres, brings with it exhaustion and embodied suffering. The now hegemonic metaphor of a juggling woman working to bring harmony and balance in her life therefore constitutes a new discursive practice through which we are able to see how binary associations are being re-constituted rather than resolved, or dissolved.

This feminine compartmentalisation performance, has deeply contextualised relations both with the self and others, rendering the painful enterprise of doing femininity an

individualised moral morass and endless muddle of old and new. Making *sense*, therefore, of participants' narratives has required me to listen to the *(non)sense* of this performance, the impossibility of 'just getting on with *it*', i.e. femininity. Without tuning my ear to this din, I too may have missed the important and often painful emotional experiences of lives fraught with contradiction. With this in mind, throughout the following chapter I aim to explore the modes by which femininity is constituted through a dualistic juxtapositioning of biology and psychology, through body and mind. I focus on the way specific historically contingent dualisms, (such as mind/body, rational/irrational and male/female) have been reconfigured and reconstituted and operate to pose new problems in the present. My aim throughout this chapter is to show how women engage specific practices in order to reconcile these dualisms through self transformation, the practice of which can be made discernible in the patterns and flows, breaks and (dis)continuities in the production of narratives. In highlighting such binaries I hope not to reproduce them, but rather to both unpack their historically contingent and systematic nature and appreciate the ways in which they interrelate, (Walkerdine et al, 2001).

By emphasising 'relations over subjects, the solidity of subject boundaries begins to fragment' the importance of understanding this fragmentation, allows us to focus on the complexity of what happens in ways that show us connection rather than separation into discrete persons acting upon objects, (Walkerdine, 2007). This challenges a Cartesian view that it is the separate action of human actors behaving rationally in the world, which gives the world meaning, and instead opens up the possibility of understanding the complex connectednesses of the social world in ways that have been hidden by our

Cartesian insistence on subjects and objects, (Walkerdine, 2007). As Walkerdine argues, going beyond Cartesianism means that we move between a set of distinctions between psychological and social, between what's inside and what's outside, between macro economics and micro interaction and explore relationalities themselves, (Walkerdine, 2007; Henriques et al, 1984).

I would now like to recall the interview I conducted with Kelly whom I introduced in chapter three. In her attempt to achieve her desired goal to be 'happy', Kelly turned to her body as a viable site of transformation in order to be the desired subject she would like to be. Kelly's fear of being positioned 'from the outside' as having made the choice not to have children and thus be categorised as a 'childless professional', was rationalised through a developmental psychological discourse in which she felt she had not achieved her full potential and reached 'self fulfilment'. In the following, Kylie and Tina also call on developmental psychological discourses whereby they are offered the promise of self transformation through work on the self.

### **Kylie**

*Kylie: "But I know that I have to do it in a way without sacrificing myself along the way, all the things that are important to me along the way. So I have to find a way to fall pregnant and without turning half of myself off I think. Yeah. That's it in a nutshell".*

Kylie is a 36 white, working class, senior public administrator and has been married for twelve years. She and her husband have no children and Kylie has been recently diagnosed with a hormonal imbalance:

Kylie: *“The hormonal problem I have is where your pituitary gland is sort of saying oh my God you are pumping out so many eggs, therefore I’ll sort of stick you full of testosterone and androgen. So I have actually been masculinising my own body internally which is why I can’t have kids so far”*.

Kylie’s condition led to an ectopic pregnancy of which resulted in a *“life threatening experience”*. As a result, Kylie received what she described as a *“wake up call”*, *“because before that I always felt that my body was quite impervious. It was always like something I could always rely on, no matter what. It would go like a machine”*. Kylie presents her body as an object that she was previously not required to manage; a machine that she could rely upon in any circumstance. Kylie goes on to explain that, *“so I think after that the ectopic part of me started to get slightly apathetic, easier to assume you are never going to have something than to hope for it and push for it”*. Kylie thus presents her body as now having the addition of a new ‘ectopic part’, a part that feels apathy and is reluctant to ‘hope’ and ‘push’. After seeing a *“leading fertility expert using acupuncture”*, Kylie finds that:

Kylie: *“Every time she managed to find something to start to fix me, I would fight it back, somehow, some way a drama would come up or I don’t know, I would have the flu,*

*something kept pushing it every time. And the whole idea being there was to help me to conceive. Um, so I knew I still had to do some groundwork, what the hell was going on”.*

Kylie narrates her situation as one in which she feels for some reason that she is throwing a mental spanner in the works, preventing her body from being healthy and thus fertile.

*Kylie: “And it was sort of like you know when mum, when I realised that I was still an arrested developer with my mum, I could appreciate that unless I am ready to be a woman I can’t possibly be a mother and also because I saw my mother as having done such a lousy job when I was a kid. And the pain of what a child could bear if the mother and father don’t get it right. I did not want to impact that on a child”.*

The ‘groundwork’ that Kylie feels she is required to do, and the resultant spanner in the works, is attributed to the childhood related condition of arrested development. Unless Kylie is able to ‘appreciate’ and be ‘ready to be a woman’, she ‘can’t possibly be a mother’. Kylie’s ectopic pregnancy, her near death experience and her body’s apparent resistance to accept the healing powers of alternative therapies are not attributed to her physiological hormonal condition. Rather, it is Kylie’s individual life history, in particular her mother’s ‘lousy job’ and the resultant ‘pain’ of having parents who did not ‘get it right’, that Kylie locates as the space and source from where to begin her ‘groundwork’.



What are we to make of this account? Kylie at once presents herself as a person whom has been diagnosed with a biological medical condition which prevents her from easily and safely becoming pregnant. On the other hand she presents herself as a person not yet ready to be 'a woman' and who suffers from 'arrested development' that prevents her from becoming pregnant. In trying to understand and make sense of why she does not respond to the treatment she is receiving for infertility, Kylie offers up an explanation that is psychological rather than biological. In so doing, Kylie is furnished with a psychological discourse of arrested development that, if she does the 'groundwork', she may be able to thus make sense of 'what the hell is going on'.

Kylie begins this narrative by separating her 'ectopic part' off from herself, it is this ectopic part that feels a sense of apathy. She thus separates and demarcates her biological body as 'other' from her psychological self. It is this other biological self, that formerly required no management and in which she relied on to act as a machine, that has become a problematic object. But when faced with a breakdown in the machinery, Kylie must make psychological adjustments in order to fix the problem. However, this separation and splintering off, is narrated as one in which some aspect of Kylie's childhood prevents her from realising a deeper aspect of herself, her womanhood. Kylie thus searches for a rational causal understanding to her problem of infertility that requires her to dislocate and then compartmentalise herself off from her body and locate her childhood as the source of her true problem, resulting in her inability to pass into womanhood.

Kylie initially relates a frightening near death event in which she becomes aware that her body is no longer 'impervious' to functioning unproblematically. However, within a short stretch of narrative, Kylie has rendered such an event as being the result of her inability to be 'ready' to be a woman, a condition of being raised by a mother who did a 'lousy job' as parenting. For Kylie, the technique of separating her mind from her body, operates to provide her with a possible remedy in which she will then be afforded the rational psychological utility to remedy this bodily dysfunction. Kylie constructs this rationale by performing both a separation-of mind and body-and a process of pathologisation-of body through mind. It is through psychological transformation work on the self, that Kylie believes her body can be re-made and thus 'ready' to become a woman. Importantly, it is through work on the psychological self in relation to the mother that the original problem may be tracked down, circumscribed and made sense of.

### **Mind and Body**

The relationship of mind and body has a long history within philosophy and subsequently psychology. Descartes seminal *Meditations de prima philosophia* (1641) informed new scientific expertise concerned with the mind/body relationship of which became increasingly intensified after the mid to late 1800's. As the discipline of psychiatry and then psychology specified and converged, a growing concern with cerebral functioning and functional neurosis heralded a great deal of interest in the new expertise. A variety of mind/body views were espoused in response to a growing body of thought on how the brain processes influence the mind. At the forefront of such enquiry was Henry

Maudsley, whose text *Body and Mind*, published in 1870, championed the position of the functional dependence of mind on body on brain. Mind, according to Maudsley, was a product of bodily and brain processes; a healthy mind depended on a healthy brain in a healthy body. Thus according to Maudsley's thesis, disorders of the body and brain were to be reflected in disorders of the mind. Maudsley rested his theory on two specific distinctions that continue to inform current perspectives; firstly that physiology and pathology of mind are two branches of the one science. Secondly, that mind is a function of the nervous system, i.e. nervous disorder underlies mental disorder. Maudsley argued that 'mental disorders are neither more nor less than nervous diseases in which mental symptoms predominate', and emphasised hereditary constitutional factors, such as the 'insane temperament', in predisposing a disorder, whilst analysing particular effects of various internal organs; 'organic sympathies' on the specific characteristics of different forms of insanity. For Maudsley the body was an organic whole and healthy mental processes were dependent upon the proper functioning of that totality. Maudsley was at the forefront of what is now known as the psychosomatic perspective, where emphasis is placed upon the relevance of pathological phenomena for an understanding of a 'normal' mind and the relevance of normal phenomena for an understanding of pathology. Thus as the Suffragette movement began to make ground throughout the Western world throughout the late 1800's, Maudsley posited in his thesis '*in Sex in Mind and Education*', in 1884, that women's unfitness to be educated lay on scientific grounds as:

"This is matter of physiology, not a matter of sentiment; it is not a mere question of larger or smaller muscles, but one of energy and power of endurance of the nerve force which drives the intellectual and muscular machinery; not a question of two bodies and minds that are in equal physical

condition, but one of body and mind capable of sustained and regular hard labour and of another body and mind which for one quarter of each month, during the best years of life, is more or less sick and unfit for hard work”, (Maudsley, 1884)

Here women’s education was seen as posing a detriment to women’s health, specifically their reproductive health. Maudsley’s thesis is premised, as are other disciplines emerging from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, on the conceptual development of the Cartesian legacy. This ontological division between mind and body, with the privileging of the former, lay relatively uncontested and unproblematised until the final quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when the body acquired greater significance within sociology, as influenced by postmodernists and feminists alike, (Csordas (1994). The body became viewed as being central to the maintenance and establishment of social life, as new technologies and new forms of bodily manipulations placed the body at the centre of public debate. However, the Cartesian legacy in which nature as taken to be an object that can be represented within a rational project, continues to inform developmental discourses positing that we are able to know in advance what we will encounter with certainty. However, as Merleau-Ponty observes, it ‘was not the scientific discoveries which provoked the change in the idea of nature, rather it was the change in the idea of nature which made these discoveries possible’, (Ponty, 1995, p. 25; Csordas 1994).

This shift in scientific attitude allowed for an understanding of nature as being everywhere and always homogeneous, (Ponty, 1995, p. 25). Importantly, the idea that ‘man’ is a rational scientist able to conduct objective investigation and experimentation upon a passive natural world supports the liberal enlightenment ethos and European

masculine values of reason and detachment. Importantly, the feminine has been excluded from this universal construct of rational masculinity, as 'man's attitude of mastery over nature requires the absolute voice of a generic subject', (Irigaray, 2004, p. 219). As such 'man's failure to recognise the subjectivity of the body produces policies and technologies that do not take into account the corporeal integrity of the subject', (ibid). Here 'sensation corresponds to a more passively lived experience and leads to a partitioning of intersubjectivity between two poles: a pole of the subject and a pole of the object. Sensation, sensations are divided according to a dichotomous logic', such as 'active/passive, masculine/feminine, along with other dichotomies which exile the body from its organisation in a whole and from its incarnation through words, words which then remain both listening and fecund', (Irigaray, 2004, p. 18). This tradition 'reduces the feminine to a passive object which must experience sensation' with 'this elementary economy of sensation [being] already too abstract for the life of the flesh, for its harmony [and] for intersubjectivity', (ibid, p. 18).

Thus 'we lack a culture which is both subjective and intersubjective', where 'the reciprocity in touching-being touched, itself a matter of perceiving or of speaking' remains in the shadows and back-ground of experience. Within 'communal relationships, the objective of words, their linguistic and phonetic economy, as well as their syntactic production, there should be a care about preserving a reciprocal touching in the act of communication. If a discourse or a collective organisation prevents us from remaining in or returning to intersubjectivity, it is worth questioning'. Here we are able to see the intersubjective 'communal relationship' and preserve the 'reciprocal touching in the act of communication', (Irigaray, 2004, p. 18).

As Csordas (1994) has argued ‘the body has no existence of its own in an indigenous worldview and no name to distinguish it’. In this respect Csordas argues that the implications of objectifying bodies through colonial discourses and practices are what produce the figure of the colonial subject as an object. It is this practice which instantiates dualisms, be it mind/body, subject/object, psychic/social (Walkerdine, 2007), that Walkerdine argues that:

“It is this splitting that is part and parcel of the splittings made possible by the incorporation of the Cartesian project into practices of domination – scientific, colonial, capitalist, for example. This splitting assumes that there are two parts, not simply a replacement of something by something else. Something has been split off and that split off part is hidden, occluded. In Csordas’ example of colonisation, what is split off is the ways of being that existed before colonisation. How do those remain? As pain, memory, ritual, hidden, subverted, suppressed?” (Walkerdine, p. 2007).

In taking a relational approach however, we can begin to ‘bring to light the occluded practices through which the social and psychic’ are produced and ‘if meanings are made by producing specific affective relations within practices, it is through the practices of those relations that the cultural and subjective endlessly flow through each other’, *ibid*, 2007).

Here we can understand that the only recourse available to Kylie in order to rectify her othered ‘natural’ feminine body is to indeed pathologise her mind, as not ‘ready’ for this natural state. A psychological discourse of the pathological arrested developed mind, unable to mature and pass through to its natural state of motherhood, provides Kylie with the discursive tools through which she is able to overcome her body. This healthy mind,

cured of the pathology of arrested development, (a result of dysfunctional mothering), will thus render Kylie's body as ready for the hetero-normative category of motherhood. Here we can see how the developmental discourse referred to in chapter four, operates to locate self actualisation and fulfilment as within transformation of girlhood to womanhood, through the rite of passage into motherhood. As discussed further below, this transformation requires a subject who must first perform a diagnosis whereby the mother infant bond is pathologised; only then can reconciliation take place through work on the self. Here we can see the relational specificities of a developmental discourse that demands separation, of mind from body, in order to create unification and with it the promise of a stable normal harmonious identity.

### **The Relational Interview Space**

Before I begin my analysis of Tina's narrative, it is important to note that as with Kylie, Tina was raised by a single mother. In all of the interviews I conducted to varying degrees and in varying ways, I felt myself positioned as a woman by the participants. With both Tina and Kylie, I felt positioned as a working class woman who had been raised in the later years of childhood by an impoverished single mother and recipient of welfare benefits. As mentioned in chapter two and four, the children of sole parents are often positioned as 'at risk' of potential psychological harm and financial and emotional deprivation. Throughout our meeting both women spoke candidly of their relationships with their mothers as they struggled to make sense of their contradictory and complex feelings concerning their relationships. As discussed by Gray, (1995) and Kim (2006),

‘shared knowledges’ form part of a ‘cultural reservoir on which the researcher and her respondents can draw’, (Kim, 2006, p. 227). Indeed ‘how what we take to be knowledge comes to be produced’, (Skeggs, 1995, p. 1) within the interview process, requires us as researchers to appreciate the co-constitutive relational field of the research setting and is ‘bound up with effects’, (Probyn, 1993, p. 71 in Kim, 2006, p. 227). Here I wish to highlight that ‘what kind of person the researcher is’, (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 78) in combination with the research itself; i.e. *who* the researcher is ‘has profound effects on the encounter with the participants of study’, (Bell, 1993 in Kim, 2006, p. 229). As Kim argues, *who* is able to be there, or ‘which bodies come to matter-and why?’ (Butler, 1994, p. xii, in Kim *ibid*, p. 232), has profound implication on the ‘extent of research on lived experience’, (Kim, *ibid*, p. 233). ‘The fact that one ‘could be there’ is a necessary condition for ‘being there’ (Probyn, 1993, p. 71), and it must be recognised that research for getting and staying ‘there’ requires a certain type of body’, (Kim, *ibid*, p. 232).

Why did these women tell a stranger their personal and painful stories? I believe that the research respondents in the study did not always ‘have the language to begin to talk about the emotionally charged moments in which [they *felt*] their lives with clarity’, whereby such emotionality often ‘only [defied] description’, (Bell, 1993, p. 29 in Kim, 2006, p. 240). Here I believe it was important that the interview process facilitate a degree of spontaneity where women could be afforded the ‘opportunity to explain themselves and their painful feelings in available language codes’, whilst providing a setting in which the ‘extraordinary expressive intensity and [the] deep emotional energy in what women do



not always say', is acknowledged, (Kim, 2006, p. 237). To some degree, I believe my position as a working class woman and PhD student operated to co-opt my role as an educated researcher, as did my personal mannerisms, rural Australian accent and history of learning differences. As discussed in chapter one, I *felt* that my own idiosyncrasies could be 'spotted a mile off', (Walkerdine et al, 2001). This reflexivity facilitated a type of intersubjective interview environment, whereby the women I spoke *with felt* 'far from being simple instruments in the hands of the researcher, [sometimes taking] over the interview themselves' at various 'emotionally charged moments', (Kim, 2006, p. 237). Here an open-ended interview technique with 'silent pauses at times for thinking and reflecting, enabled women to articulate their affective subjectivity, needs, desires and wishes', whilst also allowing for those non-discursive inter-subjective moments to occur and be recognised *intersubjectively*, (Kim *ibid*, p. 237). The significance of these non-discursive communications will be further discussed within chapter seven.

## **Tina**

On the bright morning of our meeting, Tina, a white working class 33 year old environmental journalist with no children, ushered me nervously into the living room of her trendy one bedroom apartment in inner city Sydney. Discussing Tina's mother as offering her a possible role model in her career aspirations early in the interview, (in the context of Tina's mother's political activism), Tina interjected my positive affirmation that: Merryn: "*you don't often hear oh I was inspired by my mother's political activism you know*", with an important transformation event she experienced recently:

Tina: *“Well actually over the past few weeks, what’s really opened up for me is allowing myself to be even more inspired by her. You know, I gave up making her very ... about a whole lot of things, recently, on Mothers Day I gave it up actually and that was actually holding it against her, I hadn’t even like let myself see it really before, but I was really like blaming her for my financial situation, you know, that she hadn’t been a good financial role model. You know, like I was blaming everything else on her, like the education institution for not teaching good finances at school and banks for you know, the debt trap and all of this stuff. And mum was right up there, but I couldn’t actually face it until something happened you know very minor like she asked to borrow money and I was so conflicted and finally it was like oh you know the alien on my face was kind of exposed, and it was like yuck, okay I’ve got to deal with that. And once I’d cleaned that up with mum, I’ve actually let her contribute to me even more”.*

Tina’s process of transformation is one in which ‘the alien’ on her face was exposed after, what she deems to be, the minor event of her mother asking to borrow money. Up and until this moment Tina had presumably been oblivious that her relationship with her mother required ‘cleaning up’. Interestingly, it is her financial situation and her mother’s inability to provide her with a ‘good financial role model’ that Tina locates as a source of conflict. Likewise, Kylie too experienced conflict as a daughter of a mother who required financial support:

Kylie: *“And I went to mum, you know I could do this, (trainee-ship) and give you \$380 a week or I could go and do accountancy. (speaking in the third person) for God’s sake Kylie do accountancy”*.

Importantly, Kylie was not living with her mother at this time but viewed this event as a major transformation in her life as: *“my Mum had changed, started to change. And I thought hmmm, this is weird. So we started to have this dialogue and it was enough to make me think well I wanted something different. But it really made me think well maybe I can have something different than the pain and the sort of lifestyle I was in”*.

Kylie earlier explained that her mother had recently sent her a letter stating that *“she’d been doing group therapy and she said something like um, if you want to be a garbage bin for mankind, don’t expect me to wrap it up for you or something like that”*. It had been this letter that acted as a catalyst for her mother’s, and subsequently her own, transformation.

Similarly, Tina had just completed a series of lengthy self development courses that she attributed as providing her with a new ability to: *“give up all the stories about it, like what she’s not that I can appreciate her”*.

Learning to ‘give up’ and ‘have something different’, has meant that Kylie and Tina feel that they have undergone a process of transformation through the relationships they have with their mothers. Both women speak of their mothers, within painful terms, as reliant upon them for financial support. However, both women struggle to find a way in which they can appreciate their mothers as having a valuable and meaningful influence within

their lives, albeit of a non financial nature, whilst dealing with their material and financial concerns, independence and autonomy.

Tina: *“Yeah, and I thought, well, how about that! And that was about the same time as I was having some resentment around my mother’s retirement plan, what has she done, she has barely had a job in her life, and you know, she is all her idea of, oh ... .. one thing that she has done, she’s got this big dream, when I win the lottery we are all going to live together, I am going to get this mansion and stuff like that. And it is like do you think I really want to live with you. I love you, but” ...*

Merryn: *“Even if you do win the lottery”*

Tina: *“Yeah and it is like and so I’ve had all these stories like, oh shit you know, I’ve had this real block ... making money as well, like this guilt, like if I have money I’ve got to give some to her and I’ll be supporting her, but I’ve kind of given that up and just accepted it and think yes that is my responsibility. That is part of my responsibility that is just the way it is, its the sign of the times, as well and it is also about accepting her for who she is and who she isn’t. She’s given me some great stuff. She’s done the best of her ability for who she is and” -*

Merryn: *“Her generation?”*

Tina: *“And her generation, absolutely. And so I am inclined in a ... to give her some independence which is what I would like at her age”.*

Tina’s struggle to make sense of both her anger, in being financially responsible for her ageing mother, whilst acknowledging the ‘great stuff’ her mother has ‘given’ her, came at

a crucial point in the interview when I had asked if she had any future aspirations concerning motherhood. I felt at the time that my prompting gave rise to a defensive subject position, (Hollway 1999) in which Tina launched into a narrative account of her mother's lotto fantasy. I sensed, through unspoken non discursive communication-bodily gestures, tone of voice and eye contact-that Tina was attempting to express her simultaneous guilt and anger for the responsibility for her mother's financial security, whilst accounting for the contradictory feelings of shame and pride that it is she who is 'inclined', not forced, to provide her mother with 'some independence', as indeed this is what Tina would desire 'at her age'.

Both of these women tell stories of pain, anger and shame regarding their relationships with their mothers. Kylie suffers from arrested development as a consequence of 'lousy' mothering and both women face a future of responsibility concerning the emotional and economic care of their mothers. Both women strive to furnish themselves with possibilities however, in which their relationship with their mothers can be transformed. In so doing, Tina and Kylie call upon psychological discourses of self development in order to transformation these emotions and their material situation, for it is through transformation of the self that both women are offered the promise of change. As we shall see, it is ability to remain in a state of continual becoming that each woman is able to re-make herself and thus become the desired subject she hopes to one day be.

## Groundwork

Both Tina and Kylie locate the dysfunctional relationship they feel exists with their mothers as a potential site of transformation. As previously discussed, Kylie was attempting to make her body ready for its passage into adult womanhood, through the 'groundwork' she feels will free her of the arrested development that impedes this transformation. Tina too, in the following narrative, lays down a management strategy through which the self development techniques she has adopted can be utilised to bring in to material reality a fantasy 'homey' 'space' which in future she desires to occupy.

*Tina: "And I've also done some courses, like some self development type courses since September last year, pretty much non stop to now. And that finished in like less than two weeks, the last one that I've been doing. And I've got so much out of that and now my career path is something quite different. I would still love to do you know this environment idea. I am in a space now really just deciding sort of by next year what I want to do there. If I want to go back, I think I'll go back part time and maybe work towards that but what is actually you know, come up for me is something completely different. And that is starting my own business doing, um, designing interiors, I love to make sort of cushions and curtains and just homey stuff and that for me is almost like occupational therapy".*

Unlike Kylie, Tina does not have a long term partner and does not position her body as the stumbling block that prohibits her from establishing a family. Rather, Tina yearns and

fantasises about a 'space' in which she is able to smoothly entwine financial security, including her mother's secure financial future, with a therapeutic occupation making soft furnishings and 'homey stuff'. Tina repeatedly returned to this space within the interview, to the extent that I experienced my role as interviewer/researcher as unpleasant on numerous occasions, as I felt as if I was working to devise techniques to lure her out of what appeared to be a safe, cosy realm in which she wished to linger. Upon reading our interview transcripts many times, it became apparent that Tina would invoke this fantasy space whenever I mentioned motherhood. After attempting to move on from conversations concerning her career, I asked Tina where she sees herself being in ten years in context to any family aspirations she may have:

Tina: "*Um, family of some description. Um, making things*".

Merryn: "*Yeah*".

Tina: "*Somewhere with a big balcony, lots of wood, overlooking trees and water and being able to sit down and make stuff, and write as I want to but without pressure*".

Merryn: "*Sounds lovely*".

Tina: "*Yeah, that's what I'm living into*".

The term 'living into' was frequently used to describe the techniques Tina was putting into place to facilitate the necessary changes within her life that would eventually place her within this desired space. Techniques such as receiving her first driving lesson etc. Although not specified by Tina directly, I assumed that this term was one she had acquired during her self development courses, as it only formed part of a future transformation and change lexicon. Also, it seems to be in keeping with the parlance of other participants, such as Kelly, who also engaged with self development culture.

Importantly, Tina's 'family of some description' does not include a fantasy projection of a partner or children, rather her future family is a place where Tina is free to make things and write without pressure in the surrounds of the lush rainforests of Tasmania. A far cry from her rented expensive inner city flat. This fantasy is reminiscent of the work-from fantasies as discussed in the fiction books detailed in chapter four, whereby woman are able to reconcile the contradictory positions of worker, mother and partner, and in this instance daughter, through a fictitious space in which they are able to bridge the private and the public.

This extremely detailed fantasy space also encompasses a business enterprise that Tina envisages will consist of: *"lots of gorgeous things and accessories and all that sort of stuff, like selling stuff on consignment, having it open so that my friends can sell stuff on consignment through there"*. However when placing her mother within this fantasy space later in the interview, Tina's joyful mood was replaced with a more resentful tone. Tina was only able to speak of her fantasy space within the same context as her mother in terms of her inability to discuss her future career aspirations openly with her mother:

Tina: *"I had this collapse crap that I had coming and that was mainly because before I couldn't discuss money with her without all this other shit coming up and I certainly couldn't say hey, you know what, I'm going to be really wealthy you know. And I am committed to owning my own home and my own business and you know, you can put your stuff in my shop and that sort of stuff"*.



## **Transformers**

Kylie and Tina's narratives of transformation involve a complex dynamic weave of oscillating emotional experiences in which both women seek change and reconciliation with their mothers through a process of psychological transformation. It is clear that without this transformation having occurred however, both women would not have realised that it was in fact their dysfunctional relationship with their mothers that needed 'cleaning up' or 'giving up'. Indeed without the psychological catalyst of either group therapy or self-development courses, it would appear that this transformation event and subsequent changed relationship with their mothers, may never have occurred. Rather, it is in the process of therapy and self-development that Kylie, Tina and their mothers discover that a psychological transformation was required, with subsequent techniques being appropriately adopted in order for a cleaning and giving up to occur. Within this process the women learn that they can gain access to a previously unconscious, unseen and unacknowledged aspect of their psyche, through which they may be able to both locate and unlock aspects of their inner selves. The women are offered self-diagnostic techniques which they are able to utilise as real tools so that they may go forth, as autonomous individual agents, and effect change within their lives and the lives of those around them, including changes to their bodies and material existence. A new and powerful discursive realm is thus made available to them, of which they understandably experience as an empowering and transformatory mode of intelligibility.

As Driver argues, (2005), the ‘grip on psycho-symbolic primacy of the maternal’ operates to occlude the ‘heterogeneity through which [women] articulate themselves’, (p. 21). As with Kristeva, Driver calls for the fixation on a ‘powerful mother as the locus of idealising and denigrating projections’, to be broken down so as we can ‘attend to the contingency and diversity of embodied histories’, (Driver, 2005, p. 13). ‘While motherhood is one among many possible relations within an order of sacrifice, western societies have designated the maternal body as a primary site of repudiation and idealization’, (Driver, 2005, p.13). Building on Spillers ‘psycho-analytics of desire’, Driver further elaborates that ‘mothering entails a necessary yet uncertain passage between the body and the social, self and other’, that must be taken into account if we are to appreciate ‘women’s different and conflictual social experiences’ and how these ‘are positioned in relation to the dominant Oedipal narratives’, (ibid, p. 16). Indeed Driver calls feminist analysts to recombine ‘languages of desire and mothering from *multiple* fields of representation and critical analysis’ and seek to ‘decipher desire in narratives and images embedded within the daily communicative struggles that broach boundaries between conscious and unconscious, social and personal, textual and corporeal *relations*’, (emphasis mine, Driver, 2005, p. 17).

Shifting attention on to ‘multiple relational spaces’ means that we can begin to appreciate that ‘while experience becomes a valued site of knowledge, it is lived and spoken through complex mediations and acts of remembering’, (Driver, 2005, p. 19). By doing so we can see how the stable subject of humanism and psychoanalysis breaks down whereby desire

‘does not commence in the psychoanalytic at all, but is firmly rooted in habits and levels of communication, reading and interpretation’, (Spillers, 2003, p. 389).

‘What emerges is a strategy for reading experiences of desiring subjectivity unpredictably interwoven throughout daily social events and stories. Spillers’ attentiveness to the contours of desire embedded in overlapping aspects of professional/popular, public/private, work/family discourses, realigns psychoanalytic practice. She argues for an analytics of desire that is activated and dispersed across social fields, traversing boundaries proscribing words, bodies and pleasures’, (Driver, 2005, p. 20).

Here we can see how ‘the psychic centrality of maternity’ operates to occlude the ‘various historical contexts of regulation and struggle’ contained within Kylie and Tina’s narratives of transformation, (Driver, 2005, p. 20). Both women foreground the mother-child dyad relation as constituting the original relation prohibiting them from becoming the subjects they desire to be and thus the site that offers them the promise of transformation. However as we have seen, each women’s relation to her mother is also interwoven with her position within a market economy that increasingly requires the individual to be responsible for the care of elderly and retired relatives. Both Tina and Kylie can be seen to break with their mother’s generation here by taking up a position of financial independence and autonomy within the market. Both women struggle to work through the painful contradictions of having experienced financial insecurity as daughters of single mothers, whilst attempting hold on to their financial autonomy and security and pass from girlhood to womanhood. This very difficult set of contradictory positions is succinctly narrated by Kylie as she searches “*to do it in a way without sacrificing myself*

*along the way, all the things that are important to me along the way*". As we have seen for Kylie finding a way to 'fall pregnant' means that she must *not* turn 'half of' herself 'off', indeed 'sacrifice' that half and the important things 'along the way' in the transformation to motherhood. As was discussed in chapter four, managing the financial and psychological risks associated with the dependant position of mother, present women with a set of deeply contradictory discourses and painful emotions to navigate. However, as we see with Kylie and Kelly the powerful developmental discourse of the unfulfilled woman who has yet to achieve her full potential, underscores these fears as each woman continues to attempt to re-make herself so as to take up the hetero-normative position of mother.

Although Tina would only venture that she would like a 'family of some sort' when asked directly about wanting children in the future, her elaborate 'homey' fantasy is one in which the potential of having a child could be combined with a work from home career. This work from home fantasy is one in which Tina is free from the pressures of her current job and one in which she is able to financially provide and care for her mother and friends. What is important to note here is the anger that Tina expresses in regards to her mother's lotto fantasy in relation to the rational steps Tina is taking to make her own fantasy a reality, i.e. like going to self development classes and having driving lessons etc. Here we can clearly see how Tina struggles to cope with her mother's position as a welfare recipient within a socio-cultural climate that denigrates such dependency. This shift marks an important break for a generation of women who have been raised within a society that increasingly views the ageing 'baby boom' population, a large proportion of

whom are women, as a financial drain on society (Curthoys, 1997). As we can see, this places tremendous pressure on women such as Kylie and Tina for the financial responsibility and emotional support of their mothers in a privatised economy where divisions in the standards of health care and services are rapidly increasing. It is within this social context that Tina's "homey" fantasy unfolds allowing us to see and 'rethink experience and social relations as networked and complex' (Walkerdine, 2006). By 'displacing subjectivity from centre stage in order to think about how what we think as subjectivities are an effect complex relations themselves', we are able to understand why it is that Tina calls upon this fantasy of an 'other' self so often within the interview in order to reconcile the painful and complex contradictory relations she encounters in her life (Walkerdine, 2006).

## **Conclusion**

Kylie and Tina construct narratives of self discovery and transformation in which they have come to understand that the material and embodied constraints in their lives can be considered as new opportunities for change. Each women narrates a story in which she has learned to look inside her self in order to shift aspects of previously unseen blocks and barriers to a previously unseen and unknown future. Indeed, both women are aware that until they were exposed to this new way of seeing themselves, they had not envisaged such a future. However, this new way of seeing into themselves, of understanding themselves, involves the process of applying a painful set self diagnostic techniques, of exposing aliens on faces and lousy upbringings. Although such techniques

offer the promise of a shiny transformation at the end of the rainbow, they must first undergo a thorough scrutiny of the motherchild relationship. This is further evidenced within both women's accounts by the almost complete absence of any mention of their fathers. It is 'mother' who sits as gate keeper to another, successfully realised, adult woman and it is as a direct result of mothers' ineptness that such a gate/barrier exists at all. Importantly, the transformation process that both women speak of acts to both delimit, by circumscribing and locating a problem, and enable, through a discourse of change. Thus it is through a process of psycholocial discovery that both women understand themselves as othered from a possible self, and importantly, a self that is free of their current embodied and material constraints. Change, through psychological transformation, is thus synonymous with freedom. Both women thus narrate their lives and their experiences as in a state of continual becoming, a situation in which they must work on the self to achieve an ongoing transformation of which will both realise and reconcile their problems, delivering them remade whole adult women. Kylie's body will thus become fertile and Tina will reconcile her professional self with her home-maker self and both will manage the financial and emotional care of their mothers.

In the following chapter I further explore how, like Tina and Kylie, women struggle to call upon discourses in which they can apply specific techniques of the self management in order to 'become' the complete whole and 'other' feminine self they desire to be. In so doing the generic woman discussed in chapter four in the Anadin advertisement, can be seen to continue to think in advance, plan and adapt. Within the next chapters however, painful contradictions and an exhausting feminine performance, shadow the freedoms

that this never ceasing state of 'becoming' promises. Just getting on with it, just got near impossible.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Ambitious Selves**

“The problem of women’s ambition and aggression must reflect and impact on the changing historical prospects for women. Bodies and minds are lived in and constituted in history”, (Harris, 1997, p. 302).

#### **Introduction**

Within this chapter I highlight how the women in this study have ‘no way to own’ their professional ambition ‘except as [potential] loss’ (Harris, 1997, p. 298). Here I aim to explore the ways women cope with feelings of happiness and self-fulfilment as professionals in context with practises of self-management in relation to motherhood. As within the previous chapter, ‘being ambitious’ seems ‘to smudge and jumble together psychologically’ with family, motherhood and coupledness (ibid). The chapter also explores how the idealisation of feminine ‘peacefulness, her maternal empathy’, continue to be a ‘powerful normative pressure’ both psychologically ‘and in the larger culture’, (Harris, 1997, p. 298).

#### **Kate**

I’d like to introduce Kate’s story by linking it with Kylie’s and Tina’s stories in connection to her relationship with her mother. Kate is a white, working class 37 year old senior public administrator. Kate and her husband of 10 years have been trying to have children and had recently finished receiving fertility treatment at an IVF clinic.



Kate first mentioned her mother toward the middle of the interview when she and I had been discussing stimulation as a possible reason for women returning to work.

*Kate: "I think, you know, compared to say my mother's generation, when she left school at you know, 15 or whatever it was. She got a job and she worked until she got married um, and like I guess the thing is that when she was staying at home with kids, every other mother in the street, except for maybe one who was, usually it was for people's whose mum was a nurse or something or a teacher, they were the only people whose mums that went to work. There was one lady in our street who worked at a school, so she was the admin. person come reception or whatever. And they were the only people that worked. So there was always like, you know, 20 other kids in the street, there was always five other people and if my mum had wanted some stimulation to talk about something or to go shopping with, or to do whatever she did, you know, there was plenty of stimulation for her in that way. Okay, she may have - and I guess she may not have had any aspirations to do anything, but you know, as soon as she got the opportunity to extend, you know, when I was about 15, she went back to work, because she could see that there was really no point hanging around the house all day because by then everybody, a lot of the other mothers had gone to work, or you know, there'd been a shift in their environment, you know, people had moved in and out. So the same sort of day-time stimulation, like I know with my mum she's the sort of person, she prefers to have company. So she was just desperate to get out to work. And she loved it, she worked you know, when she was working until she retired".*

Kate's long vignette about her 'stay at home' mum is housed within a narrative of generational change and the changing landscape of Australian suburbia and culture. Kate highlights that at the time of her childhood, her mother was surrounded by stay-at-home mothers she could access if she needed 'to talk about something or to go shopping with, or to do whatever she did'. However when Kate was 'about fifteen', during the late seventies or very early eighties, "*she went back to work, because she could see that there was really no point hanging around the house all day because by then everybody, a lot of the other mothers had gone to work, or you know, there'd been a shift in their environment, you know, people had moved in and out*". Faced with this shift, Kate relates how her mother, who "*prefers company*", "*was just desperate to get out to work*".

Kate frames the story of her mother's life in the changing historical and generational shift of the late 1970's to early 1980's, when Kate was a teenager. Here Kate speaks of a time when stay at home mothering was the norm. Indeed, she lists the occupations that stood out as the exceptions from this norm that 'every other mother in the street did' as a nurse or teacher, both very traditional caring feminine occupations. 'Mum' indeed meant staying at home and the community and society that Kate grew up in, working class Canberra, reflected this. However, this long description of her mother's situation and in particular Kate's closing remarks of how 'desperate' her mother was to 'get out' to work, acted both as an introduction and conclusion to a protracted conversation in which Kate spoke about what stay at home mothering means to her, (Curthoys, 1997).

## Coasting

As mentioned earlier, Kate and her husband of 10 years have been trying to have children. Kate left school in Canberra at the beginning at the age of seventeen and began her interview discussing how:

Kate: *“I mean in Canberra at the time I left school it was either you join the public service or you um did something else like a trade or something, like hairdressing or something. And a very few people might have gone on to university. It is not like today, like 20 years ago most people didn’t go to university. It is much different today. And so I started in the public service.”*

For the first half hour of our conversation, Kate reiterated a position in which she *“just joined the public service, I didn’t have any great career aspirations, just you know, have a job”*. Thus Kate told me that she started, what was to become a very successful career, as one in which she *“sort of didn’t really think about it too much”* and *“just sort of pottered from job to job”*. When moving interstate upon receiving *“another opportunity for a promotion”*, Kate states that she *“just got moved into HR”* and *“would never have even thought about going”*. Kate thus constructs a narrative in which she has been blown in the wind from situation to situation from where she is told, *“here you go, you are doing that now”*. From the outset then, Kate’s narrative in context with her life as a professional ‘work centred’ woman, is one of opportunity and fate. However, within a short conversation span, Kate began to contradict this discourse of disinterest and lack of ambition as she described the recent career move she had made to her current employment:

Kate: *"I probably stayed there for about 5 years, maybe a bit longer. Yeah five years and I thought oh well it is time I did something different. There was no movement in HR. I didn't really like the sorts of structures that were here in this HR before the restructure and there just didn't seem to be any. It was clear to me that there was going to be no movement. And I thought oh I'll look somewhere else and then I moved out into the faculties and um, yeah I've had a couple of promotions since then and here I am."*

Upon sensing this change and possible contradiction with her earlier assertions that she had rolled, without motivation, into her current very senior position, I became aware that she swung back to her former laid back stance with her closing 'here I am' statement, (which was said in a very 'there you go' flippant tone). Slightly confused, I thus went on to clarify her statement:

Merryn: *"Here you are.....have you still got more ambition to sort of go say another ten years?"*

Kate: *"Probably not. Probably not. Um because the jobs that I see immediately before me in the university sector are very demanding. I mean I am pretty lazy ... I like to be challenged in my workplace and I like to contribute and I like to learn more and participate, but I also like to you know, come in at 9 o'clock if I feel like it and you know, leave at 4 if I need to. You know, I mean like I take work home and I work on the weekends you know, as is needed and a lot of the jobs in the university do need, just to keep up, but basically I you know, I can see, the jobs immediately in front of me from where I stand now are not particularly attractive in that way."*

Kate again seems to reinstate her position as a person who is not overly ambitious and is in fact 'lazy', however toward the end of this rather long narrative piece she changes tact, telling me that:

Kate: *“And I guess you know like I’m in a position in my life, my husband and I we don’t have any kids. We would like to have kids and we have been trying for a long time. But um, we both realise that, you know, we own our house, we don’t have to, like we often wonder at the end day when he has brought his work home and I’ve brought my work home and at 9 o’clock at night you are still doing work and we think what are we doing these things for. We don’t need to.”*

At this point Kate again takes up the position of having arrived by chance into a profession and is by her own admission a lazy un-ambitious woman. However this position is soon contradicted in her very next sentence in which she positions herself as only having *“a few more years left here and I might look for something else and but I don’t, I mean I am quite happy in this job, so I don’t just want to – if I wasn’t happy I’d probably be thinking oh yeah it’s a bit more attractive, but another couple of years I will look for something that I want to do, because I will have finished doing a Masters of Commerce this year”*.

Merryn: *“So you study as well?”*

Kate: *“Yep. So.”*

Merryn: *“So you have kept studying sort of?”*

Kate: *“Yeah after I did that architectural drafting I did actually an associate diploma of applied science. In environmental science as well, I did that at (...), so um, yeah but I’ve never really stopped work and studied, I’ve always done it as part time so.”*

At this point in the interview I was rather perplexed, Kate had clearly reiterated her haphazard career trajectory, or lack there of, and had only just explained how she and her partner had sat at night wondering as to why they remain working till 9pm. Not only had I just been informed of the Masters in Commerce but I was then told of an

Associate Diploma of Applied Science and Architectural Drafting qualifications as well! It was not until I re-read this contradiction in the narrative that I realised that Kate, after making great pains to position herself as a woman who does not possess career aspirations, was compelled to close *any* narrative concerning her career with a disclaimer in which she could distance herself from expressing overt ambition: “*I see them as being hard work and I think hmm, you know, do I want hard work. There’s got to be more to it*”.

### **Working from home**

At first glance, one would assume that Kate’s position is one of ambiguity in relation to her profession. However, Kate both positions herself as having no particular career trajectory and at the same time speaks of her aspiration to make use of her many qualifications. What becomes clear in the construction of Kate’s narrative is a deep contradiction between subject positions rather than professional ambiguity. Indeed, when she discussed her wish to be in a job that offered further upward mobility, I enquired about her earlier comments on wishing to start a family so as to clarify what she had meant by her ‘there’s got to be more to it’ remark. This prompted a discussion about working from home full time:

Merryn: “*So you would be looking though to find something more part time if you*” -

KATE: “*Yeah probably I suppose*”.

MERRYN: “*Would you eventually go back to work?*”

KATE: “*Um, well I don’t know. I dream about resigning everyday. I wish I could - because I like being at home and um, you know, I have friends who don’t like being at home but I actually do like being at home and they’ve got kids and they stay at home because they like - They are financially in a position where they can stay at home,*

*okay it is a bit tough from time to time, but they enjoy that and that's what they want to do. And I have other friends who um, who have had kids and they just think they've got to get back to work because they don't enjoy the staying at home parts".*

Merryn: *"Yeah, need some stimulation".*

KATE: *"Yeah, they need the social interaction you know, all those sorts of things from work as well, I mean it's you know, I often think about people who work from home, how isolating that would be. You know, if you want to have a cup of coffee who do you talk to? Like the dog or something".*

Here Kate moves from telling me she likes staying at home and dreams of resigning every day, to a position where she wonders if women at home are in fact so isolated that a cup of coffee with their dog is their only means of company. When asked directly about having a child of her own therefore, Kate is unable to take up a position of stay at home motherhood, as in her 'dreams', because of the vivid and bleak fear that this dream may turn into a nightmare. Here Kate grew increasingly restless as she wrestled to resolve this deep contradiction and there was a great deal of empathetic eye exchanges and head nodding. During the following exchange, I reached over and touched her on the forearm to demonstrate my feminine solidarity in recognition and appreciation of her courageous effort to make such an impossible and painful contradiction intelligible.

Kate: *"I often think that that would, I don't think I would like to work from home, but I think probably I guess because I've worked for so long and because I'm used to that sort of, that work place interaction I would probably miss it, although I really do believe sometimes I think oh wouldn't it be lovely to stay at home, you know, so but I really think that, I mean it is nice, I guess it is like when you have a three day weekend, you think oh wouldn't it be great to have a three day every weekend, a three*

*day weekend every weekend. But once you had that you'd think oh wouldn't it be great to have a four day weekend. So it is like, you know what I mean? Because you don't have it you sort of think you would really like it, but I guess the reality is I'm you know, after 2 or 3 weeks I might think oh, so you know" ...*

Merryn: *"Yeah well you can't know until you are there".*

KATE: *"Yeah, yeah, I mean would it be enough to stimulate you. Would you have enough - I mean I'm sure you would find enough to keep yourself occupied, I mean especially if you had children. And I think that even if I didn't have kids I would find things to do at home because I love gardening, you know, and I like to do craft bits done on things and you know, and I would like to go and have lunch with girlfriends and you know, I would find absolutely no problem you know, filling my time, but um, and you know with kids I don't think you even have time to scratch yourself really".*

Kate's narrative contains, as with Tina's work from home fantasy, the construction of a serene and inherently feminine home space where taking up crafts and gardening along with the company of one's girlfriends occupies ones day. This sits in sharp contradiction with the extreme spectre of the isolated housewife having coffee with her dog. Here we can see how women constantly position themselves through fantasy in relation to what it might be like to be 'other' women, just as in Ellen's 'no kid's fantasy' within the article featured in chapter four. What becomes very clear is that Kate is neither able to position herself as possessing career aspirations nor to aspiring to be a full time stay at home mother. By narrating her life history to me as one of lazy opportunism, Kate then contradicted this with her career achievements and her continued qualification attainments. However Kate worked incredibly hard throughout the interview to leave space and room for another most important



possibility, motherhood. As such, Kate is unable to position herself as a woman who made conscious rational career *choices*, nor as a person who *chose* to take steps in further education in order to further her professional aspirations. Rather, Kate paints a haphazard random career history in which she may 'opt out' at any moment should her other calling eventuate. A contradiction occurs however, when the subject of stimulation is broached as Kate constructs a fantasy of what her life might be like if she were a stay at home mother. Thus a discourse of pathology is inscribed within the feminine subject position of stay at home mother as highlighted in chapter four. 'For many women, construction and arrangements of gender and the normal play of aggression make for a combustible and conflicted scene. Adult women, particularly if their identifications move along traditional or conventional lines, often live out complex conflicts around achievement', (Harris, 1997, p. 300). The fear of ill health as a result of isolation, therefore makes this a risky position to take up. Combined with the financial risks associated with the dependant position of stay at mother, the 'choice' to stay at home full time is fraught with real and terrible danger. 'Shaping these choices are the whole conscious and unconscious set of object ties in which the women's subjectivity is anchored', (Harris, 1997, p. 300). Kate, Kylie and Tina have all witnessed how their mothers have had to endure loneliness as stay at home mothers. Coming from a comfortable Australian working class background<sup>1</sup>, Kate's mother's desperation to return to work further illuminates that a financial position within the market cannot alone account for women's eagerness to return to work.

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<sup>1</sup> The Australian working class enjoyed very high rates of pay and living conditions from the 1950's till the late 1980's when the minimum award rate became relatively low in relation to the inflation rate. Kate's father was a highly skilled tradesman who would have been paid the equivalent of a medium paid English middle class professional salary, relative to today's standards. Also, as Canberra is a small city, the cost of living; such as housing, food and health care, would have been far cheaper than Sydney or Melbourne etc, (Curthoys, 1997).

Kate makes a separation between being physically occupied, with crafts and gardening for example, and mental stimulation, conversation and work, throughout her account. This separation has become increasingly solidified in the cultural representation of stay at home mothers as bored ‘desperate housewives’, (as witnessed in the female characters of the drama television series ‘Desperate Housewives’). The terrible fear of being starved of stimulation is also evident in ‘The Mummy Track Mysteries’, and ‘I don’t know how she does it’ novels, whereby stay at home motherhood is *humorously* depicted as potentially bad for women’s mental health. Although Kate states that there indeed must be more to *it*, aside/outside from her work, she is unable to clarify just what that *it* is. Motherhood and child caring are not spoken of in terms of offering a rewarding stimulating career within these accounts. Although Kate envisages that mothering may provide her with physical stimulation and activity, motherhood is positioned as placing one at psychological risk. Indeed as Kylie made clear, women *must* find a way of ‘doing’ motherhood without ‘sacrificing’ stimulation; the psychological ‘half’ of themselves. Here women’s ‘choice’ to work full or part time does not mark a change in women’s ‘commitment’ to motherhood, as proposed in the DEMOS publication discussed in chapter one. Rather the lessons of past generations of mothers, the increased scope and cultural insertion of psychological discourse and a punitive welfare regime, inform the apparent ‘life-style choices’ and ‘commitments’ of women today.

The public/private-home/work binary has been reconstituted in such a way that women must work constantly to reconcile the two. Here we can see how women are never fully able to comfortably belong in either category of stay at home mum or working mother and yet struggle to position themselves, and to be positioned by

others, as being open to belong in both. Throughout this interview I received a strong sense that Kate, who was softly spoken and extremely accommodating, was loath to have me come away with the opinion that she was an ambitious 'work centred' woman. This fear operates to keep Kate, a professional woman, from both being positioned and aligned to/with either a 'work centred' or 'home centred' 'orientation'. Thus Kate remained in a position where she could criss-cross between the two binary boundaries according to context, whilst never taking up either or reconciling her 'self' with the two.

If women 'gain the freedom to choose their own biography, values and lifestyle' and 'are *forced* to make their own decisions', what are the biographies chosen by Kate and the other women in this study? (Hakim, 2003, p. 341) Clearly the women who took part in this study were unable to construct the type of rational, individual and coherent biographies that Hakim implies they are forced to do. Indeed Kate's narrative demonstrates there are no circumscribed unitary biographies to choose from, rather subjectivity is experienced as a contradictory nebulous and loose assemblage of interweaving subject positions that are never taken up or lived as unitary fixed realities, (Henriques et al 1984). What is important to consider here however, is how the construction of a 'subject of choice', (Walkerdine, 2001) operates to position women as having freely chosen a 'life-style'; a biography and have thus chosen to live their lives according to the norms and 'values' associated with a particular mode of existence. Fantasising about what it might be like to live a particular style of life is one way of trying it on for size-trying before buying-and allows women a safe space to experience what another subjectivity they may fear and or desire to take up might be like. Thus fantasising is a powerful technique imbued with meaning that women

utilise in order to play with identity formation and thus resist being 'forced' to make a choice *between* unitary subject positions.

## **Clare**

So far we have explored the narrative accounts of professional women without children and can now appreciate how their fantasies of motherhood contain deep fears of being isolated and/or at risk of financial deprivation. Clare is mother to two young girls and a senior full time exterior relations manager in a public organisation. She has been married for ten years, is forty years old, white and identifies as 'middle class'. Clare's narrative was interwoven with stories in which she outlined her personal priorities; in relation to sexual relationships, work, children, home, extended relationships and life. Clare appeared to be a woman who carefully weighed up each situation and option before settling on the best available course of action. In short, I came away from this interview with a feeling that hers was a long but resounding, 'know your limits' story.

## **Priorities**

Clare: *"You know, it wasn't the job, and it had policies for if you had, I think I read something about if you need to bring your child to work because there is no where else for that child to go as long as it is okay with your supervisor, you can do it. Bearing in mind I have no family in the area, it is down to me"*.

Clare found herself returning from the UK with her English husband shortly before the birth of her eldest daughter, some four years before this interview. Up until this

point Clare had worked in London within the private sector as a public relations manager for a large international company, finding herself in a position where:

Clare: *“I purposely decided that when I had my baby that it was really going to be impossible for me to continue. It was just too difficult”*.

Upon returning back to Sydney, Clare took up part time work with her current employer, describing this situation as anything but ideal:

Clare: *“So that was great, I had my baby in child care here at (.....) and I worked here at (.....) and it was two days a week essentially but she was in child care and it was very good. But then of course, I’d had my first baby, I was mid thirties and you know, did I want to have another one and my career was going absolutely no where, not that I ever wanted it to go anywhere, but with the restructure I was really, I have just never had such a non-job, do you know what I mean. It was a very, very difficult time and I really didn’t know if I was going to be kept on at the end of it, or you know, there was no purpose”*.

Although Clare initially states that the situation with her new public employer is great, particularly referring to the child-care facilities that this employer provides, her narrative moves from one of security, in being allowed to bring her child to work a few hours per week, to one in which she is offered very little career security or opportunity. Importantly, Clare too narrates herself as a woman who never ‘wanted her career to go anywhere’, while in the same breath describing what a ‘very, very’ difficult time this was as ‘there was no purpose’. This new found security within the public sector, quickly and brutally evaporates as Clare reiterates:

Clare: *“As far as reorganising, business development was very low on the list of priorities and years have gone past without me really knowing what the shape of the future meant”*.

What struck me when reading Clare's interview transcript many times, was the vastly different impression I came away with and wrote of in my field notes in comparison with the story that Clare tells in this narrative. Here was a woman I perceived as 'having it all' and seemed to be 'living the dream'-two kids, a wonderful husband and a fulfilling career. However, when analysing the transcript it became glaringly obvious that indeed Clare did not feel she 'had it all' and had indeed been through many years where she had been deeply unhappy with her situation:

Clare: *"Yeah. Um, but what, I was very conscious at this point that I wanted, I knew (...) was a fantastic employer, had really given me the things that I needed as a mother, not as a professional"*.

Although Clare had previously stated that she had not wanted her career to go anywhere, here she clearly describes her 'very very difficult' situation as that in which her needs as a professional were not being met. Indeed after describing a time when she had continued to apply for senior full time jobs after the birth of her second child, Clare continued to reiterate that in fact she 'didn't really know if (she) wanted it or whatever'. Upon landing the current demanding full time job she had, Clare proceeded to provide a list of provisos as to why this job was important and differed from the previous position she held in the private sector before the birth of her two children:

Clare: *It is much more market focused and that may not be in terms of dollars or profits but it is in terms of image and being a positive ... and creating good relationships and being accountable and transparent. They are the sort of focus areas of what I do and you know particularly in the (... ..), I mean I really love the opportunity to do that. In my last role that I had I was selling (... ..). I worked for the world's largest (... ..) equipment manufacturer. We sold (... ..) equipment and it*

*suits me much, much more trying to improve the lot of the (.....) and its constituents. I would much rather be doing that, you know, making more money for somebody.*

What is clearly evident within this narrative is the absence of any mention of the child-care facilities, or ‘family friendly’ policies in her comparison between private and public employers. It is Clare’s fulfilment *as a professional*, particularly on ethical grounds, that Clare identifies as the source of her happiness, and in which she continues to reiterate again in the following extracts:

*Clare: I love coming to work, I absolutely love coming to work and love doing lots of things but I really feel that I am responsible for those girls and I want to be with them as much as possible and you know look after them and I would be worried if they were in places that I didn’t trust and the rest of it.*

Clare clarifies again that she: *‘love(s) coming to work, particularly because I don’t know many people in the area this is my social life. I really enjoy coming to work.*

And further in the interview: *But if I didn’t come to work, look I could read all those books and I could do the garden and you know, to me it doesn’t, I don’t define myself by the job that I do, it is more about how happy I am.*

Here Clare continues to pronounce her love for her job. However this love must be atoned for and is done so through a discourse of philanthropy. As mentioned in chapter four, as a mother Clare, like the fictional women in the novels, must house her emotions and her ambition within a philanthropic rationale accounting for the reason why she feels this way about her work. Here, positioning herself as loving ‘the opportunity’ to work full-time in the public sector and not having to ‘just make more money for someone’ helps to guard her from being potentially positioned as a selfish mother. However, the philanthropic position she takes sits in contradiction with her

account of not defining herself by her job. This is further evidenced by her earlier admission of the dismal time when she had ‘no purpose’ and was in a ‘non-job’ where ‘business re-organising’ (her job), was ‘low on the priority list’ and her ‘professional needs’ were not being met.

### **The Home Space**

I want to foreground the differences and similarities between Clare’s construction of stay at home motherhood and those of the other women in this study. To begin with, the term ‘look’ is used within an Australian cultural context to denote the speakers gravity and a sense of finality, in a similar way that one may say ‘at the end of the day’ etc. Therefore when Clare leaned forward and said ‘look, I could read all those books and I could do the garden’, she clearly communicates how universal she feels these activities are, in that anyone can do them. Here stay at home mothering is faceless, lifeless and above all de-individualised. Unlike Tina, the home is not a fantasy space, but one of real responsibility. As a professional mother, Clare did not seem to have a ‘work from home’ fantasy, for example as constructed within the fiction novels etc. Indeed Clare made it resoundingly clear that she had significant professional needs; one being that work provided her with a ‘social life’ and thus her reason for why she ‘really enjoys coming to work’. We can again see here how having adult interaction and stimulation underscores women’s ‘love’ of working. Losing one of the ‘things that are most important’ (in Kylie’s words) to Clare-her job-can not be replaced by crafts, reading or gardening. Thus Clare did not associate the home space as a site of reconciliation between the private and the public nor express any desire to take up the position of stay at home mother.



## Jenny

This was also the case with other mothers who participated in the study. Jenny, a sole parent of two from a working class background, worked three days per week as a research officer in a public institution and listed her 'reason' for working as:

Jenny: *"The reason I will only work three days is mainly because of how it builds up at home, by the end of my three days, I work Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Thursday night we have got soccer training as well, ... it is pay day and the fridge is getting empty and you want to go and do your shopping, you know, the kids want to get videos the next night. So yeah, you just end up on catch up with all the washing. It is mainly the washing. Because you know it starts getting dark early by the time you get home. It is dewy and damp again. I don't believe in hanging washing out in the dark I think that is oppressive. Yeah. It's a um an indicator, life is you know not as relaxed as it should be. Doing the washing in the dark. It's just one of my personal indicators. I used to have a neighbour, there was only her and husband, the others had left home. They both worked full time and she would be there hanging out the washing in the dark and I would think why? You know, ..."*

Merryn: *"Overloaded you reckon"?*

Jenny: *"Just why? You shouldn't have to. It is cold. Wet washing on your fingers in the dark, it is horrible. It is just oppressed. Well I am sure she had her reasons but yeah. So I try and keep a check on yeah how organised I am".*

Merryn: *"Mmm. In case it gets over?" ...*

Jenny: *"Well things like that, whether I am spending more time telling the kids to shut up and go away because I have got housework to do. Housework is not more important than talking to your kids. There is no reason why it should be. It is easy everyone knows how to do it".*

We can see again, as with Kelly's comparison with the 'lonely' 'sad' childless professional who lived above her, Jenny defends against being positioned as the other 'oppressed' woman living next door who hangs her washing out at night. What the childless women fearfully fantasised as potentially occurring, i.e. a loss of individuality as a result of a lack of stimulus, must be managed by mothers. This undesirable transformation is constructed as regressive, whereby motherhood carries with it an almost zombie like threat. Here again we can see how a discourse of the drudgeries of motherhood contains the deep fear of a loss of individuality (Irigaray, 2004). Jenny lays out a plan to manage and fend off this transformation, keeping 'a check on how organised' she is, so as not to become oppressed like the woman next door, an older woman of the previous generation. Jenny's understanding of this other woman's oppression, is made intelligible through a very vivid embodied narrative and fantasy of what it would *feel* like to have the wet washing on her fingers at night- 'horrible'. What becomes apparent here is that Jenny has spent some time imagining this and as Kim suggests, women speak of self as feeling, (Kim, 2006, Irigaray, 2006).

Again the spectre of the isolated housewife is evoked here whose work is never done or recognised. As with Clare, Jenny sees this as not 'important' work as 'everyone knows how to do it' and to over identify with it is to risk oppression, and 'things not [being] as relaxed as they should be at home'. The home is clearly not a site of reconciliation for Jenny. For Jenny, the self provides reconciliation but only through rational regulation and management techniques. By constructing a set of personal indicators, Jenny is able to be suitably organised so she can guard and counter the effects of oppression. Hanging out the washing at night and spending little time with

the children is thus managed and a loss of autonomy and individuality is guarded against. This is why Jenny works three days per week, so she can keep check on how 'organised she can be' and thus fend off feeling or being positioned as oppressed. Importantly, Jenny is reflexive concerning the position of the 'other' woman next door when she suggests that she must have 'had her reasons'. Here we can see that Jenny does not want to effectively objectify this woman herself but rather she must find a way of coping with the fear that one day she may find herself in this very position.

### **Feminism and Motherhood**

Feminists such as Shulamith Firestone, Mary O'Brien, Simone De Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich, Andrea Dworkin, Robyn Rowland and Ann Oakley etc, have attempted to understand the ways in which gendered forms of oppression are historically rooted in conceptualisations of reproduction and motherhood. Firestone reworked Engels's concept of historical materialism so that a class distinction between men and women, the dialectic of sex, would be considered as the origin of all social division. Reproduction and not production, according to Firestone, was theorised as the original driving force behind historical events, (Firestone, 1970, p. 12). Firestone surmised that women's emancipation would then lie in a biological revolution and envisioned that the opportunity for such revolution could be made possible through advancements in reproductive technology. As such, Firestone believed that reproductive technologies would provide the conditions of emergence necessary for the emancipation of women. Thus Firestone hoped that a biological revolution, made possible by reproductive technology, would result in no woman

having to, 'bear children in pain and travail', (Firestone, 1970, p. 242). However, as men have created and control reproductive technologies, Mary O'Brien, (1981) posits that women could face new and more insidious forms of oppression as a result of a further loss of control over their one unique power and source of traditional historical and cultural value. It is this one sphere of traditional power, women's unique ability to reproduce, that Rich foresaw men wanting to possess and control. Accordingly, feminists such as Rich, Dworkin, Rowland and Greer, have become concerned that the rapid growth in reproductive technology could lead to a decline in the rights and status of women world-wide.

In calling for a reassessment of motherhood, Anne Oakley's analysis of motherhood as a socio-cultural construct in turn problematises the 'truth' of a biologically innate maternal instinct. Further, Oakley's dismissal of the existence of an instinct to mother as biologically innate supports Firestone's assertion that such an epistemology is an apparatus of patriarchal ideology. Importantly, Oakley makes the point that essential conceptualisations of motherhood place women in an impossible position, for if women do not experience/feel this normative 'mother instinct' they are demonised as unnatural and unwomanly (Oakley, 1974). Rich (1976) thus argued for a feminist understanding of motherhood that moves beyond a patriarchal epistemology whilst accounting for the ways in which such an epistemology constructs women's experiences of motherhood. Accordingly, Rich called upon women not to dismiss motherhood in the name of emancipation, but rather to reclaim motherhood and liberate it from patriarchal regulation and institutionalisation. However, Chodorow illuminates how these feminist epistemologies rely on the essential understanding that women are rational agents who are able to freely take up subject positions in the first

instance. Chodorow argues that once an individual is mature enough to effect any significant choices in their lives they have already undergone a slow and insidious socialisation process and have thus become engendered. As such, 'mothering has little to do with conscious choice and much to do with an unconscious desire to mother. So deep is this desire that most women find the question, *why* do you want to mother, puzzling if not unanswerable', (Chodorow in Tong, 1989, p. 154). Chodorow thus posits that women do not simply learn how to mother, nor is motherhood simply imposed upon them, rather a woman must 'on some unconscious or conscious level' consider herself as maternal if she is to mother with any degree of 'adequacy', (Chodorow, 1978, p. 32).

I want to draw attention here to the ways in which some of the western feminist understandings of oppression and motherhood outlined above, have been culturally appropriated and inscribed within discourses concerning motherhood. The techniques that Jenny employs to manage the possibility of being oppressed as a mother protect her from the fear that she will somehow lose her individuality. To be a mother then is associated with a loss of individuality and, importantly, autonomy. This construction of the autonomous liberal subject operates to situate motherhood as something women either embrace or give in to, as can be witnessed in the 'surrender to motherhood' discourse. As within the novels discussed in chapter four, women who are 'turned' to motherhood guard against a loss of autonomy and individuality by continuing to engage in market activity. Importantly, practices associated with the normative role of mothering, i.e. housework and childcare, are constituted as specific oppressive physical activities that must be monitored and regulated. Jenny thus adopts a management strategy that offers her a way of tempering her position as a mother with

a professional identity so she can retain her position as an autonomous liberal individual. Here we can also understand Clare's investment in a professional subjectivity that provides her with a mode of making her autonomy intelligible. Indeed, we can also understand why the childless women in this study invest in a professional market identity in order to safeguard against the potential loss of autonomy and individuality that motherhood may bring. It is through fantasies of isolation that the women in this study make their fear of such a loss intelligible. Here we are able to appreciate how imagining what it would be like having coffee with a dog or what the feel of wet washing is like in the dark, is a way of coping with the fear of being 'other'-other than the liberal individual autonomous subject. For Jenny, devising 'personal indicators' is the only means by which she is able to fend off losing her autonomy and thus avoid becoming the 'other' woman next door.

### **Wife-work**

Jenny spoke of the relationship with her former partner, and the father of her children, as having broken down as a result of his inability to co-parent and share in the household responsibilities:

Jenny: *"So when we got to [...], we got a really nice house out on the river and I started applying for work and got this job um and he was meant to be doing the full time fathering and you know they don't, they just play with the kid between 10 and 3 and the rest of the time the kid watches Sesame Street and has their breakfast and you know they don't do the washing and you get home and the place is just a car wreck. Yeah. I even used to get up with [child] still every morning and at a quarter to eight take him in and sit him on his father's stomach and say get up now, I have got to go to*

*work and I had already given him his breakfast and done all that, you know, so, yeah”.*

Merryn: *“Done a great deal of the work”.*

Jenny: *“Yeah. I mean there are probably dads out there who do it but most women you talk to find the sexual division of labour probably one of the core frustrations in their relationships especially after you have kids.”*

When confirming that this was one of the ‘core’ reasons why she had left her partner, Jenny commented that:

Jenny: *“Well you realise that the property and independence is the pay off, [for divorce]you know, for not having to cook for him and wash his underpants and get the shits and build up resentment and you know, I am happy to cook and clean for my kids, I grew them, I put them on this earth I chose to have them, I will clean up until the day they leave home, you know, it doesn’t worry me. But to clean after a fully able adult. It gets in my craw. Why? Why should I? You know?”.*

We can now begin to understand why Jenny may be reflexive and defensive concerning the possible ‘reasons’ as to why the woman next door hangs her washing out at night. Although she has no longer cares for her children in the home, the woman next door works full time and has a husband who presumably is not often sighted hanging out the washing. In the following narrative Jenny voices her anger at being positioned as a ‘replacement’ for her former partner’s ‘mother’.

Jenny: *“It is not your responsibility to pick up where Mum left off either in doing the work for them or in teaching them to do it or to take responsibility for it”.*

Merryn: *“Which is another work, it is another type of work”.*

Jenny: *“It is more the effort of doing it and it starts an argument and they are more worried about proving their side of the argument than just getting off their arse and*

*changing a toilet roll. Why, wouldn't put your energy into rhetoric, you know, we have all got brains"*

Jenny makes a direct break with a previous generation of women in her narrative, such as the woman next door, who are positioned as taking 'responsibility' for the smooth operation of the family and private sphere. It is the 'effort' in teaching men to take responsibility for the smooth operation of family life that is identified as producing conflict and anger. Here, as within the article in which married mothers were portrayed as 'wanting a secure relationship' discussed in chapter four, we can see that the normative heterosexual family unit is a site of potential risk and struggle for mothers. Contained within this struggle is the fear of feeling and being oppressed. The discourse of the overworked 'super woman' therefore carries within it a deep anger for having to 'take care' of men. Here, as with the woman in the Anadin advertisement, she who 'just gets on with it'-superwoman Jenny talks about how she found the struggle to contain everybody else's needs unbearable. 'Taking care of men', portrayed as being difficult for single professional women in chapter four, is just as difficult for professional mothers. As shall be further discussed within chapter seven, approaching men, let alone negotiating with them, concerning children is very difficult for women regardless of their parental or relationship status.

Clare also talked about how she worked to 'negotiate' parenting responsibilities with her husband and the emotional 'wife work' that this entailed, (Maushart, 2001).

Clare: *"He does the hair, the lunch boxes"*

Merryn: *"Isn't that lovely."*



Clare: *“If you saw them you wouldn’t think so. It can be a bit wild. But that is one of the things that you have to learn as a woman, to let him do it. And to just not pick on ... it is very hard and a lot of women find it very difficult that I can do that. But I mean [husband] has even cut my baby’s hair without me being there. You know he has just decided that she needed a hair cut. That is a mother’s job to do all that. Yeah. And like other women have found that really, oh my God he cut [child’s] hair and you weren’t even there”*

Clare, whilst reflexively empathising with ‘other’ women who find ‘learning’ how to ‘just let him do it’ difficult, ‘as a woman’ however she has had to learn not ‘to pick on’ her husband’. In the following discussion, Clare tells of more things that she has had to learn to negotiate, that ‘other’ women may find difficult to do:

Clare: *“Yes but this has been built up over the years of both sharing the load. And his standards are obviously very different from a woman’s standards, the way the girls’ hair is done, the clothes they wear. The fact that I pick Lucy up from school, who is five, the other day and she had Maisie’s, who is two, socks on. Oh well they went on. And she had stretched them, trying to pull them up. There were all sort of ... you know, those things and Steve would not even notice that. He wouldn’t even. So they are the sort of things that you just have to let go and just not be finicky about, not pick on”*.

Clare works not to ‘pick’ at her husband, although she is aware that she risks being positioned by other women as perhaps being an inattentive mother. Here I am reminded of a scene in the book ‘I don’t know how she does it’ when the heroine stays awake into the wee hours of the morning making the mince pies she bought for her daughter’s Christmas school dinner, appear home made (Pearson, 2002). Unlike the character in the book, it is the parenting ‘standards’ of her husband that place Clare at

potential risk of being positioned as a poor mother. Clare must learn, 'as a woman' working full-time within a demanding profession, to 'let go' and manage this risk. The public element of the example Clare calls on to construct her narrative, suggests that Clare also fears that her daughter may be positioned in relation to what will be perceived to be, her 'mothering' standards. Here I am referring to a discourse in which working mothers are positioned as placing their child at psychological risk, for example by exposing their children to bullying because they were sent to school with ill fitting clothes. The tremendous fear of damaging the psychological development of one's child and damaging the primary maternal bond, produces feelings of terrible guilt and anxiety for professional mothers, (Maushart, 2001). It is Clare the mother who bears this brunt and not her husband, as all the anxieties are contained within motherhood and felt in isolation by the mother. We can see the link here with the article in chapter three concerning Australia's national fertility rate, where a child is depicted as 'wanting secure parents' and working motherhood associated with psychological as well as financial risk.

As Maushart argues in her (2001) book 'Wifework':

"How it happens that a wife ends up being the only grown-up in a family with one too many children is a mystery-especially among couples who know for absolute certain that it's not going to happen to them. Perhaps most mysterious of all though is why we pretend otherwise. Why we insist upon projecting an image of harmony, equality and symmetry when the reality is so clearly fraught with conflict, injustice and disproportion", (Maushart, 2001, p. 124)

Here Maushart foregrounds how the 'mental work-the remembering, planning and scheduling-is the most arduous of all parenting tasks' and is managed almost exclusively by women in heterosexual family units, (2001, p. 125). Indeed studies on changing patterns of parenting and the division of domestic labour suggest there has

been very little growth in fathers' 'progress relative to mothers in the 'management' of child care, which involves being generally responsible for planning and scheduling child care and a child's daily activities', (Demo et al, 2000). Here 'discussions about the balance of parenting within marriage are minefields bristling with shallowly buried hurts and resentments. Husbands feel their contributions as parents are undervalued; they feel attacked or controlled', (Maushart, 2001, p. 126). Here we can understand why Clare must 'let go' and not 'pick' at her husband, as we can also see how the anger Jenny voices is as a result of feeling 'betrayed and abandoned as a parent by [her partner] and stripped of [her] options as a person', (Maushart, 2001, p. 126).

I would like here to refer back to Kelly's comment featured in chapter three, that only 'hard core feminists' can 'do both' motherhood and full time professional work, as demonstrating the 'effort' and work that working mothers are constructed as having to endure. Kelly makes clear that the stamina required of working mothers demands that one take up a 'hard core' feminist position in order to manage and contain all these risks and struggles. It was at a point in Kelly's narrative when she was talking about *not* having made 'the *decision to not* have children' that she added that she knew of 'hard core feminists' who 'do both'. Although Kelly does not detail what she means by 'hard core feminists', she mentions these 'other' women at this point in her narrative to indicate that some women *can* 'do both'. These hard core feminists are thus held up as examples of women who are strong enough to do both. Again we can see how the normative heterosexual construct of 'family' and of motherhood is located as a site of struggle and contradiction for women, that only a hard core feminist is able manage. Importantly, we can also see how professionalism is

positioned as incompatible with motherhood and that it takes the stamina and persistence of a hard core feminist to take up the position of professional 'working mother'.

Within these accounts we can see how a humanist understanding of subjectivity as unitary operates to produce defended subject positions. Women are thus compelled to call upon counter discourses to guard themselves from being positioned as a 'subject of choice' (Walkerdine et al, 2001). Importantly, where women of previous generations may have called upon feminist discourses to claim the right to choose to pursue a professional career, as the proportion of professional women has grown, stereotypical understandings of who and what a professional woman is/are have become solidified and deeply embedded within social discourse. As we have seen, the women without children in this study work very hard to avoid being positioned as having *chosen* not to have children in order to pursue their careers, i.e. so as not to be positioned as a stereotypical ambitious career driven 'childless professional'. In this respect, *one* of the reasons that the 'I'm not a feminist but' generation of women are compelled to distance themselves from being *positioned* or identifying as feminists, is to defend against being situated as having *chosen* a particular unitary 'life style'-identity, i.e. of 'feminist'. As such, women attempt to position themselves as agreeing with the project of feminism whilst guarding against being seen to take up the subject position of feminist.

## Conclusion

Clare and Kate's interviews appeared at first to be very different. These two women seemed to me to be in very different situations and to be dissimilar in personality and outlook. Kate on the one hand appeared not to want to give me the impression that she was in any way opinionated. Clare on the other hand seemed to have it all sown up and gave me the strong impression that she had very definite goals and opinions on most topics. However the striking similarities between both women become evident in the way their narratives flow and break at similar points where they struggle to narrate their ambition as professional women. As both of these accounts made clear we must 'open up the fantasies, the meaning structures and psychic consequences of [women's] needs and strivings' if we are to appreciate the complexity of women's lives, (Harris, 1997, p. 304). Both women were unable to construct a rational coherent story in relation to their career trajectory in context to their personal and emotional happiness, particularly at the very point in which their individual 'stimulation' or 'social interaction', is broached in conjunction with their position as mothers. This supports Harris's (1997) understanding of the way 'this not some special pathology, but that normal femininity is masked and performed in these ways and that the dilemma for women is how to support the ambivalence inherent in ambitious strivings', (Harris, 1997, 302).

Thus Clare must justify her love of her work, which she clearly states over again, with her 'responsibilities' as a caring mother and the recognition she receives in being a successful professional woman. She does this by first downgrading her ambition, directly in contradiction to her admissions of unhappiness at being placed in a go

nowhere job where she feels her worth is receiving low priority and where she receives little security. However, she attempts to bridge this later by justifying her new full time high profile career move, by framing this move as one in which she is fighting the good fight and not merely working for a large multi-national co-operation etc. However, she again contradicts this with her reiteration that she in fact is not defined by her work, but rather it is the social interaction and the stimulation that she needs. This is the 'professional need' she speaks of earlier.

'Even as she exercises ambition or striving, a woman pays a psychic and often actual price which reflects the fear that to be ambitious is to be not female, not normal', (Harris, 1997, p. 207). Kate also seems unable to find any comfortable position when speaking of her professional ambition within the interview. Although Kate does not have children, she seems to oscillate between positioning herself as a professional woman who has drive and talent and a woman who is completely ambivalent as to whether her career lasts another day. 'There is often an intense oscillation of self states', 'in the intricacies and subtlety of women's experience of their' ambition, (Harris, 1997, p. 297). Importantly, both women consistently speak of their personal happiness as being located in terms of their professional personal interactions and fear the loss that they would suffer if such interactions were taken from them. It would seem that both women are only able make the love of their professional working lives intelligible in terms of this sense of loss, specifically in terms of the loss of mental stimulation. Upon reading what I experience as quite stifled accounts of professional femininity, I was shot with sporadic rages in which I found myself shouting at the transcript 'ambition is okay'! But clearly, for both of these women, ambition is experienced as fraught with great emotional loss and impossible to claim as one's

own for its own sake. Professional ambition, talent and drive must be downgraded and reduced to haphazard contingency and dumb luck. Clare is simply unable to speak of the tremendous professional perseverance she obviously has, without sign posting the way with those subtle 'whatevers' that re-confirm that she still contains those feminine attributes that signify that she is a mother whose 'responsibilities' are to her children. When the thrill she obviously receives from her professional career spills over in her continuous use of the term 'love' to describe it, she quickly distances herself through the technique of placing such a strong emotion within the safer confines of a loss of personal happiness. The thrill and love themselves cannot be directly spoken of in sheer terms of *being* a professional alone, rather they *must* be weighed and measured in light of the gap they would leave if they were not there. It is this fear of loss that Kate also constantly measures, indeed the two seem inseparable, and it is only when each woman is caught off guard *emotionally*, that each attempts to rationalise their position as ambitious career driven professional women through other discourses. These discourses, the 'lazy/lucky/default' the 'lack of stimulation' or 'times have changed', are called upon by both women as they attempt to regulate their femininity by diminishing a lust that threatens to take them out of the private realm and into the stimulating public sphere for the experience of professional life alone. This love, indeed, *appeared* to me to *feel* the same as that of which Tina attempted to narrate to me through her fantasy about living in her Tasmanian work from home spaces and the same that Kylie envisaged in her struggle to become a full time professional mum. Not one of the women in this study were able to sit in my company and share the love and pleasure they experienced as professional feminine subjects, without attempting to rationalise and regulate such emotions in context to their fecundity. Indeed what these women do express is the fear that their love of work and

the stimulation that they derive from it comes at a price. In the next chapter I link how this fear of missing out on love, a family, having space, not having to work and try so hard and the fear of being alone are all contained within women's narratives as they try to express the complexities of living an impossibility of contradictions.



## **Chapter Seven**

### **Other Women**

“Will a woman not continue to love what she fears or feels she cannot be?”

(Harris, 1997, p. 301)

#### **Introduction**

In chapters 5 and 6 we have seen how the women in this study are able to call upon psychological discourses through which they are able to put into place regulatory practices in order to conduct continual work on the self so as to reconcile contradictory subject positions between mother, partner and professional as well as autonomous neo liberal choice making citizen. Within this next chapter, I want to explore how an individualised construct of a ‘subject of choice’ sits in contradiction with women’s lived experiences in context with their relationships with men. I will then discuss the importance of specific non-discursive inter-subject moments, experienced between myself and two of the participants, and discuss how specific practices of ‘othering’ have implications for an understanding of femininity that is relational.

#### **The Existence of ‘Woman’**

Post foundational feminists such as Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, by dismissing conventional understandings of reality and truth, disrupt phallogocentrism within their writings. Inspired by Lacan and Derrida, Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva seek to

deconstruct the 'internal contradictions in seemingly perfect coherent systems of thought, ordinary notions of authorship, identity and selfhood', (Sturrock in Tong 1989, p. 217). These feminists thus directly challenge the notion of a unitary feminine subject as the 'notion of truth is challenged by reference to the idea that language and reality are variable and shifting', (Tong, 1989, p. 219). Importantly, within this framework 'woman as such does not exist', (Kristeva, 1974, p.16).

"The belief that 'one is a woman' is almost as absurd and obscurantist as the belief that 'one is a man'. I say 'almost' because there are still many goals which women can achieve: freedom of abortion and contraception, day care centres for children, equality on the job, etc. Therefore, we must use 'we are women' as an advertisement or slogan for our demands. On a deeper level, however, a woman cannot 'be'; it is something which does not even belong in the order of being."

(Kristeva in Tong, 1989, p. 230).

As Tong illuminates in 'Feminist Thought', 'woman is a viable concept politically, but not philosophically', (1989, p. 230). Thus, feminist post foundational analysis has created a theoretical space from whence we as researchers are able to question the notion that femininity is fixed and unchangeable. Accordingly, feminist discourse analysis does not require the researcher to provide any evidence that a given subjective experience is 'real', or in turn of greater validity, so as to establish a *fact*. Rather, analysis is undertaken in order to establish how, for example, feminine subjectivity is made intelligible in relation to a given discursive field.

As outlined in chapter four, the feminine subject positions of 'stay at home mother' and 'childless professional' for example, although often presented as in confrontation with one another, are not lived as unitary subjectivities. Rather femininity is a

dynamic compilation of multiple subjectivities. Indeed the women in this study do not position themselves in opposition with *other* women, including myself, but rather relate to the ways 'other' may be positioned. Indeed I found that in each interview I conducted, at some point, I was positioned as a 'childless professional' by each women. However, I did not feel 'othered' by the women in the study, for example by the mothers who took part; rather I felt that this practise was an attempt to relate to my position through an inter-subjective moment of empathy. Indeed, in posing the question 'who is she' and simultaneously 'who am I', one immediately challenges the apparent objective and neutral stance of the researcher as scientist and opens the way for such phenomena to occur. Thus, as researchers, if we are not seeking to validate or privilege specific knowledge formations, utilising a relational approach opens up spaces from whence we ourselves are able to experience inter-subjective moments during the course of our studies. As such, it is quite plausible that as women and researchers we can and do relate to each other and that narrative analysis may very well provide an analytical site from which to 'allow a movement of empathy between us', (Probyn, 1993: 171).

### **Deanne & Tracey**

Deanne is a 36 year old recently partnered working class woman with no children. Deanne like Clare and Kate, distanced herself from being positioned as an ambitious professional throughout her interview:

Deanne: *"Yeah apart from that, I'm not like terribly ambitious anyway when it comes to my job. In fact, my ambition is to be doing stuff, more and more about you know, like home nurturing relationships you know."*

Here as with Tina, Deanne's ambition is to spend more time at home. However Deanne's wishes to spend more time 'nurturing relationships' rather than creating a small crafts business, although both construct the home as a traditionally feminine space in which to engage in traditionally feminine pursuits. Deanne shortly began to describe the relationship she shared with her current boyfriend, who was quietly situated in the adjacent room in their small apartment whilst the interview took place. Here Deanne speaks about a conversation that was prompted by my visit, whereby her involvement in the research sparked an interchange with her boyfriend before my arrival in which the subject of children was broached:

Deanne: *"Well we used to go out with each other and we broke up about two years ago and it is only really in the last couple of weeks that we've like ... Um and it is certainly the sort of thing that we can discuss freely, it is just that it only really came up you know this morning - when I said oh this is what I am doing today. [Taking speaking position of boyfriend] Oh really, just imagine us having kids. I said yeah. So you know, but we really didn't have time to talk about it, but yeah it was funny actually."*

Deanne then went on to explain that: *"You would never presume that somebody wanted kids or didn't yeah. ... But actually discussing it, we haven't quite advanced at the same level. So on the one hand, so it is a big, I think it can be a real unsaid gulf. At times, because it is a big thing, and there can be no expectation one way or the other, or assumption."*

I want to place Deanne's narrative alongside Tracey's before I provide any analysis of her account, to foreground how each women's biography contains specific relational

elements. Tracey is 33 years old, single with no children and identified as hailing from a working class background. Here Tracey outlines her own experiences concerning heterosexual relationships and those of her heterosexual male friends experiences:

*Oh well if he runs he is not ready. In my view men get married just when they feel like it. They reach a certain point between 25 and 35, oh some never get there, but they are sick of fucking around and they want a woman to come home to, they think it might be time to have a few kids, and the next girl friend they have they propose to. It not that she has got any other characteristic that the last five didn't have, it is just the point in his life. I have seen that over and over I have seen that and particularly when it is the bloke who I have known as a friend, you know, when I see it from his perspective. You see him at this point where they go no I want to meet the woman I am going to marry now, you know, and off they go lookin' and when they are ready they are ready.*

In the first excerpt we can see how Deanne struggles to deal with the fact that she feels that she and her boyfriend have not 'advanced to the same level' when it comes to 'discussing' the subject of children. Here Deanne illuminates how one can no longer presume that people want children today and how this has produced a 'real' and 'big' 'unsaid gulf' within relationships. Importantly, although Deanne had previously had a relationship with her current partner for two years, it was not until the morning of my visit that any mention of children had ever been broached before. Interestingly, she briefly takes up the speaking position of her boyfriend, so as to provide me with an account of his reaction in which it appears that he had never before 'imagined' them

as 'having kids'. Although Deanne states that she felt this conversation was 'funny', it soon becomes apparent that it is in fact a 'big thing'.

When we place Deanne's account in context with Tracey's however, we can see that perhaps this unsaid gulf exists as a result of women feeling unable to initiate dialogue with men and not vice versa. Tracey creates a narrative based on her personal 'friendships' with men, rather than her personal experiences with male partners, to situate men as taking a privileged position as a 'subject of choice', i.e. it is men here who *get* to choose a partner and at what point. She thus firmly states if 'he runs he is not ready', as only he can choose when he is ready. Here, as with within Deanne's account, we see that men are positioned as deciding when they are ready and thus cannot be approached or pushed, and in Deanne's example, to even discuss the subject of children. In each of these narratives we can see how little 'real' choices women are positioned to have and effect in their lives in relation with their relationships with men. Here we can again see how the heterosexual dyad is positioned as a site of struggle for women, particularly in relationship to motherhood, (Irigaray, 2004). As discussed in chapter four, being in a relationship in Deanne's case (as within the newspaper article concerning partnered women who 'shop online for sperm') does not mean that a women will be 'chosen' as potential mothers. What we can see within these accounts are the ways in which women's voices are silenced and any power to effect 'choice' in relation to their fertility and family is co-opted through this silencing (Pateman, 1988).

Again we can see contradiction and connection between the way women are positioned within the media, (as within the article concerning the Alpha females'

difficulties in attracting male partners), as being rational agents who choose a career over 'taking care of men' and the lived experiences of women. What is important to note here is the threat posed to women who do not remain docile and silent and indeed voice their needs. In Deanne and Tracey's accounts we can see that initiating dialogue or approaching men is positioned as futile and places women at potential risk of losing, or never being 'chosen', as a partner. How painful it is then for women to be positioned as having 'chosen' the life style of the singleton professional, when in actuality they feel as though it is they that have not been 'chosen'. 'Taking care' of men here clearly means that women are not to approach, push or 'pick', as Clare would say, and are to remain silent waiting to be chosen or spoken to. Here women's visibility and consumer power within the market is completely co-opted as they are rendered completely powerless outside of this context. This impossible position is made further evident by Kelly's account in chapter three, when she turned to her body as a possible means of effecting some changes in relation to her partner status and thus realise her goal to be 'happy'.

### **Kelly & Anne**

I return to Kelly's interview as she discusses me who she felt comfortable discussing her desire to have children with:

Kelly: *"I don't, like my female friends at work, like one of them ... one of them is pregnant, I do. Because she was sort of coming from the same space as me, she was in my situation at my age and then she met the guy she is now married to and it also worked out for her and she ended up getting pregnant just in time. You know, it was fine and so, you know, she kind of makes me feel better about where I am, you know what I mean, so I do open up to her and um a few other female friends, yeah, and like*

*[male friend] knows, but it's a fine line between discussing it and sounding desperate, you know what I mean, if you kind of harp on about having kids all the time, you start looking like you are a desperate kind of wench. You know sad bitch that just wants to be pregnant. And once the word gets out no single men are really going to want to go near you, because they'll go oh that's the one that wants to have a baby. So you've got to keep it up -so you've got to keep it under your hat to a certain extent even though, just for those reasons and also just because the more you kind of talk about it, the more focused you get on it which isn't really helping."*

Kelly speaks of yet another reason why women must try to contain and manage expressing any desire to have children. Here the spectre of the 'desperate wench'-childless singleton-is associated with psychological ill health. Any desire for children must be completely masked in this account. It is the psychological effects of the fear of being undesirable as a mother or partner therefore, that requires managing if one is not to risk putting off men. Within this narrative then, one must manage the self in order not to give off the whiff of being desperate to have children or else risk potential partners running off if they get wind of this unspeakable desire. To demonstrate how important this is to Kelly, she reiterated that:

*Kelly: "No, so you've got to sort of keep a lid on it. But it is a fine line between. It is one of those goals I guess that you can't really work towards, you know what I mean? And what else is there, you know, lately I've just been thinking well what if this doesn't happen? How else do you fulfil yourself for the rest of your life? What other avenues are there and it is really hard to think of things. I mean the only thing that I can sort of think of is maybe writing that novel or you know, that kind of thing, so it is like you've created something of your own."*



Here again we can see how there 'having to be something more to life', as mentioned by Kate, is associated with finding 'fulfilment' through the normative category of mother. Interestingly, Kelly struggles to imagine what her life would be like as a childless woman 'if [motherhood] doesn't happen' or what avenues she could pursue to fill this void. Here we can see how Clare's account differs markedly from the childless women in the study, as it is the loss of her job that she positions as a threat to her self-fulfilment. What becomes clear when unpacking these women's narratives is the impossibility of taking any feminine subject position without risking loss. Here we can see how Clare, a mother of two, could be considered to have a 'work centred orientation', whereas Kelly a childless singleton could be considered to have a 'child centred orientation'.

Thus what these biographical narratives clearly show, is the way women's complex lived subjectivities sit in contradiction with the construction of the unitary 'subject of choice' of humanist discourse. Indeed as the following interview excerpt taken from an interview with Anne shows, 'adaptive' women who may appear to have it all, find it just as difficult to position themselves as the architect of their own fortunes. Anne is a 39 year old middle class married woman and mother of two children. Anne talked a great deal about her husband and marriage throughout the interview and commented that she had initially not wanted to get married:

*"But I was at the time, I think I was just a couple of days off my 28<sup>th</sup> birthday when we got married and I was so disappointed in myself that I was getting married at 28. You know I thought I would never get married for a start because I was a modern woman and I didn't believe in the shackles of marrying somebody. And the ring, there was no*

*way I wanted a wedding ring. Absolutely no way did I want some sign of a man ownership on my hand, no way did I want it but [husband] really wanted it. And so in the end I relented and said "Yeah I will have one if you have one", okay we decided on that. So these were the sort of issues that were really important to me and stupid things like wearing a bloody wedding ring. And I was really sort of underneath sort of embarrassed that I was getting married, that I felt far too young to be getting married and that you know I wasn't really turning out the way that I had this picture of myself.*

Merryn: *"What was that picture?"*

Anne: *"Well I don't know I think I saw myself as this. Even at that point in my life I was completely lost in a way. I spent five years basically travelling around the world doing nothing and [husband] represented the end of that. Like I had run out of money I was sick to death of it and I wanted to settle down and get on with my, not sort of settle down in terms of you know getting married and having kids that sort of thing, but I just wanted to do something different."*

There is a break in Anne's narrative that occurs when she attempts to explain to me what 'picture' she had of herself before she was married-how she had previously seen herself. Here Anne must break with this narrative in order to establish that her husband 'put an end' to who-ever she previously saw herself as being. This is tempered by her comment that she had indeed been 'lost' and doing 'nothing' before he had come along. Although Anne constructs a fairy tale rescue to act as a counter narrative to her narrative of resisting marriage, she still feels the need to state how she eventually 'relented' as a result of needing a change of life style. Thus Anne speaks of her reluctance to be married but how, despite embarrassment, she 'relented', rather than chose to be married, because she 'just wanted to do something different'. In

many respects, Anne's narrative reflects the type of contradictions found in Kate's. Kate's restlessness in relation to her ambition as a professional, mirrors Anne's reluctance to position herself as choosing to become a wife. Here Anne also creates a haphazard blown in the wind trajectory wherein her husband, as with Kate's employers, made the decisions for her. Again what these accounts demonstrate is the difficulty women experience at having to position themselves as a 'subject of choice', (Walkerdine et al, 2001).

In the following excerpts, Anne discusses how she came to be a mother:

Anne: *"Yeah a lot. And I really um I suppose, I kept waiting for those maternal feelings to happen and they never ever did and I wondered whether I would or I wouldn't, wasn't bothered if I didn't. I could see that I would have a very nice life if I didn't have kids, you know, there were a lot of other things but I suppose that because of the type of person that I am I do like change and I think, you know, I was very happy and satisfied with the work that I was doing, studying, you know, and everything was going well, and well I thought okay what next. And I suppose I was 32-33, which is that time and I thought okay, let's see about having a baby and so we decided that we would I think try and we sort of decided you know if it wasn't going to happen, you know, that wouldn't be the end of the world whatever, but I certainly never took it for granted that I could have a baby, you know, because you are just surrounded by people who can't. Yeah that's right. Really I didn't tell anybody that we were trying when we decided, you know, and low and behold fell pregnant and suddenly... Didn't tell anybody I was pregnant until after, you have these tests to show abnormalities or other in the baby and we decided, [husband] I think particularly, that um that we would terminate if there was any problem."*

What becomes apparent within this account, as with Clare, is the way Anne as a married mother of two, foregrounds that self-fulfilment, happiness and satisfaction are to be achieved through work. Indeed Anne lists the reason as to why she became a mother, despite her 'maternal feelings' 'never' arriving, as being a result of liking change. Again she listed her husband as the one who made the decisions, for example as to whether or not she would terminate a problematic pregnancy. So again we can see that women are unable to position themselves as having chosen their 'life-style'. Anne is also reflexive when she mentions how she kept her pregnancy a secret in case there were problems and never 'took for granted' that she would become a mother as she had been 'surrounded' by people who were unable. The fear of being unfulfilled-missing out on 'having it all'-is associated with a loss of work to professional mothers' and associated as a loss of motherhood to professional childless women. Thus making any 'real choices' between the two becomes an impossibility, of which women manage through a complex variety of techniques. Finding it impossible to effect choice in relation to their circumstances, but knowing that they will be positioned as having chosen an apparent 'life style', means that women must then create a defensive strategy in which to counter being positioned as the 'subject of choice'.

### **Sandra & Mary**

We take up again with Sandra after she has mentioned her 'idea' of adult company is listening to talk back radio in chapter two. It's important to understand the location of where this comment appeared within her narrative, however, before we pick up and

carry on from this story. Sandra somewhat abruptly changed the track of a brief conversation we were having about two female Australian journalists who had recently referred to childless professional older women as ‘those types of women’.

Sandra: *“I tell you what I think is the big irony now, that a large percentage of women go back into the workforce and I know it’s mainly part-time that’s the majority, but parenting now is so much more hands on and perfectionist.”*

Sandra described this ‘hands on’ ‘perfectionism’ as *“stressing you right out”*, which followed through with a rapid run down of her hectic weekly schedule and the fact that *“you have got remember these things and it’s full on”*. I could barely manage a quick “yeah” before Sandra followed through with:

*“And I mean I grew up like that too, I had to do a musical instrument, a sport, but I think in the last two generations, anyway, um yeah parenting has become heaps more hands on and there is this massive, massive publishing industry and huge pressures on parents to um you know have the best birthday party and birthday party every year. We never had birthday parties every year”.*

There appeared to be a break in Sandra’s narrative here. Firstly we learn that as a busy part time working sole parent, she is under immense pressure to be the perfect hands on mother, within a socio-cultural epoch that idealises middle class childhood. A painful and ‘big irony’ indeed. However, having learned that Sandra ‘grew up like that too’, she breaks this link with her own childhood with the introduction of a shift she perceives having occurred within the ‘last two generations’. This shift is one in which the increasing cultural significance of ‘hands on parenting’ is experienced through the pressure to provide one’s children with ‘the best’ birthday party ‘every year’. The discussion then turned to how this idealised image of childhood, places

*“more pressure on her (mothers) to be perfect when she isn’t”*. Here we can see the obvious parallels with Odone’s article cited in chapter three, whereby ‘childhood has become sealed in a smug Disneyesque sentimentality’. From here Sandra told me how she practised a more traditional parenting style, in which she was able to tell her children *“here’s your food, I am busy. You are just listening to talk back radio or something. I listen to 702 and bake. That’s my idea of adult company”*.

There are many interweaving narratives here. Sandra’s critique of the modern middle class childhood ideal is reliant on the counter idealised construction of childhood, pre-existing the Hawke Labour government of the 1980’s. However, by her own account she herself had the very childhood she critiques as placing an undue burden on mothers to be perfect. Sandra can be seen to work hard to account for the tremendous pressures she faces as a lone parent in providing her children with a ‘normal’ childhood, which places her under immense financial and emotional stress. Whilst working through the fact that although she herself grew up with such middle class trappings, as a single mum in the current epoch, she cannot provide her kids with the same. She does this by introducing the changed nature of the childhood birthday party to signify that although she is unable to provide her children with same middle class upbringing that she received, this may not be a bad thing. Through a discourse critiquing childhood consumption and identity, Sandra is thus able to defend against being positioned as a failed middle class woman and single mother who may be positioned as unable to provide her children with the experience of what now passes, as a ‘normal’ childhood. In so doing she is able to further ward off the potential and future position that she risks exposing her children to psychological damage, (through not having the ‘best’ birthday party every year). Through a discourse in which

childhood is not sentimentalised and motherhood not idealised, she is also able to *transform* the normative ‘good mother’ archetype-‘I listen to 702 and bake’. Here she rounds up her at points quite rapid account, with an image of herself baking, tending but not pandering to her children and engaging with popular political concerns through left wing debate on talk back radio.

From here Sandra then excitedly informed me that whilst listening to 702 recently, much to her delight:

*“They started talking about this birthday thing and the perfect parents and how you have to out birthday party the next person and have clowns and everything. I was like making a cake for my son and it was just for a family dinner, it wasn’t for a big party, it is not his year for a big party. And um so I rang up and I said to the producer that I wanted to make my point that if you are a real middle class Australian you don’t blame the working class or get jealous of the rich people, you take responsibility for your own position in life because that is what you are raised to do. You are raised to get an education, get a job, take responsibility for going to work, coming home and putting food on the table and that is what you are taught, you know”*

Before I could nod, she explained that she had been kept on the radio, as “I could see he (presenter) liked me”, and that *“I said well I don’t think of people on the dole as bludgers, I have been on benefits myself, you know, you are just, you are either waiting for an opportunity or you are learning how to maximise your opportunities”*.

It is crucial here to note that neither of the two biological fathers of Sandra’s four children, all under twelve, provide her with any form of income assistance nor have regular contact with their children. As such, she is *“very much on my own”*. We must

note here that although Sandra was in fact baking a cake for her son's birthday, she is very quick to defend that this was in fact not for 'a big party' as it was not 'his year for a party'... In this very powerful account, Sandra 'makes her point' by first distancing herself from the working class. As she sets out to establish her real middle status, she does so by first asserting that this realness requires that middle class individuals do not blame the working classes, however she does not expand on what she is *not* blaming the working classes of/for. Within her 'real middle class' manifesto, one should also not be jealous of the rich. Rather, a real middle class person takes full responsibility for their person-hood. Here we can see the powerful trope of the "*disaffected middle Australia aspiration voters*", which this particular segment of the talk back radio show was entitled. Through a discourse of individual middle class responsibility, Sandra is able to situate herself outside of the working class and rich, and firmly cement her place as middle class. From this position she is then able to speak, to make her point, that she does not think of people on unemployment benefits as bludgers. Importantly, it from inside this middle class position that she is *able* and entitled to speak of her own experience of having been on benefits, in which she was merely *waiting* to maximise opportunity.

Here we see just how hard Sandra has to work to take her place as an ethical middle class single mother. This process involved knitting together many discourses through which Sandra constructed a self that both retained her middle class status whilst transforming her sole parenthood status, achieved by taking up the position of responsible individual neo liberal subject. After this account Sandra became quiet and appeared to have said all that she wanted to say, indeed that I felt she had come to the interview to say. She had made her point. Although the interview ended within ten



minutes of this account finishing, there was a palpable change in the air between us. Earlier on within the interview, I had disclosed that I was a child of a family of four and raised in part by a single working class mother. This was shared after Sandra detailed the pressure she felt from her parents to 'not waste' her University education, as detailed in chapter two. After this interchange Sandra became quite despondent, edgy and vague. Here, in assuming that Sandra may be struggling through some very private and painful emotions, I offered my own experiences of what it was like to depart from my own mother's life script. Although Sandra did not comment on my personal experiences, she picked up on my account of mothers' experiences of single motherhood and interjected with her own feelings of being tired and overworked, although I had not ventured that my mother had been tired or overworked. However, after her above account I struggled to compose my emotion, my body and my facial expression as I reeled, from what felt like at the time, to be a slap in my working class face. And yet as I left her office with very warm and generous goodbyes equally exchanged, my feelings began to change and although I wrote many notes, the following captures my emotions at the time: "I was dumb founded in the way she associated the working classes with blame and yet quite touched at her defence of 'us'".

Sandra's story is one in which she is placed in a very precarious, stressful and contradictory position as a middle class working lone parent of four young children. Sandra must work to produce an account of herself as a responsible ethical subject in a social, economic and cultural climate that heavily penalises single mothers and demonises them as the scourge of society. She defends being 'othered' here by calling on this very same discourse, situating herself as a responsible, individual and

autonomous neo liberal citizen. However, Sandra really struggles not to engage in a process of ‘othering’ other women herself. She struggled with this throughout the interview by attempting to place a disclaimer in front or at the end of all her statements concerning ‘other’ women’s positions. For example in chapter two she spoke of her admiration for women who devote their themselves to mothering inside a culture that devalues such devotion. Upon listening to our interview many times, Sandra, in defending herself against the fear of being ‘othered’ as welfare scrounge/bad mother/failed middle class daughter and woman, must deploy a strategy of defence and counter defence. Here, as in the media samples in chapter three, we can see that femininity is managed through a complex process by which in order to defend oneself against categorisation, one must *not* engage in categorising and ‘othering’ other women! Women’s desire not to be ‘othered’ is thus folded, as one must guard against categorisation and ‘othering’, whilst not being seen to put this other category and those that are placed within it, down. Women must manage their fear of being categorised as ‘other’ through a complex psychological rationalisation of their fears, in which they must be seen to not show their desire not to be categorised at all.

### **Food for thought**

I would now like to discuss an interview I had with Mary, a white heterosexual thirty five year old professional administrator, who agreed to meet with me in her small inner city studio flat in a popular restaurant district of inner Sydney. We commenced our interview in somewhat comical fashion upon finding that each of us had brought along a large packet of chocolate biscuits, of the particularly luxurious variety. Upon

both of us producing our respective packets, there was quite a bit of tittering as the packets were handed back and forth with cries of “no you take one, no you take one”, followed shortly by both of us eagerly pronouncing, “oh go on then I’ll have one if you’re having one” etc. As both of us proceeded to gobble down a biscuit, a back and forth banter ensued, that although I did not record it, I jotted down in my field notes as including, ‘admissions of desire expressed in snorts, giggles and knowing eye glances followed by delighted laughter’. I did remember however that a sort of mock defiance and then reprimand ensued this, and I wrote down that she had said: “You’ve got to have a chocy biscuit now and then for fucks sake!”, to which I replied: “Stuff it”. However, after we had finished eating the biscuits she offered to remove them from the table, by holding them aloft and stating: “mind you, maybe we had best place them out of reach”, to which I responded, “far far too distracting” after this we exchanged mutual sly glances and chuckles. This interchange stuck in my mind and in the following weeks seemed to me to be of increasing significance as I grappled with what had occurred in this small moment between us. It became more apparent that I ‘felt’ that Mary and I had, by both bringing, offering and sharing our chocolate biscuits, navigated our way through some very difficult feminine terrain. I felt that both Mary and I had taken up feminine positions through an intersubjective process in which together we understood what it was to be positioned as ‘other’. Here, through an extremely nuanced material ritual, we were non-discursively inter-subjectively positioning ourselves in relation to our bodies. Humour played a vital role in this interchange and acted as a moment of non-discursive ‘chick’ bonding and inter-subjective play. Here Mary and I were both establishing what ‘type’ of woman the other was, i.e. the type who has a chocolate biscuit now and then and who does so with an ironic snub to those who might frown upon such consumption.

A complexity of interweaving feminine subject positions seemed to me to be made manifest in this material practise, of which the consuming of specific foods has become inscribed with particular political performances of femininity. Importantly, the tension existent between contradiction and possible conflict between individual subjects is broken down through this material and inherently social practice, illustrating the ways in which extra discursive practises form integral emotional connections that often frame experience in small and easily overlooked ways. This intimate funny moment served to establish such an emotional connection between Mary and me from the outset and facilitated a mood conducive to producing a very informal 'girls' talk' throughout the interview, (Walkerdine et al, 2001).

### **Our Others**

As 'other' by being born woman, (Irigaray, 1995) we can see how the introduction of the new feminine categories-single mum, superwoman and childless professional/singleton-construct feminine subject positions that women must defend against and create a defence of. As discussed above, Mary and I had a moment that perhaps can be best described as extra discursive, whereby we didn't defend against or 'other' other women but shared our experiences of being 'othered'. (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Perhaps this requires a non-discursive embodied moment in which the subtle practices of the body and emotion were allowed to by pass this complex process of defence. I believe this happened between us before the interview when we laughed at both having brought chocolate biscuits to the meeting. This action prompted a moment of 'us', between two women who, under a normative gaze may

be positioned as unregulated 'non thin' women. In laughing together we acknowledged our anxieties about being positioned this way, feeling the struggles we both had gone through by inter-subjectively attempting to find a way to make our resistance intelligible together. Importantly, this was achieved without calling on the spectre of the 'other' thin woman, in making these feelings intelligible through discourse. Through the act of eating and consuming the biscuits together, we shifted the gaze, not through a conscious rational effort to move beyond it, but rather through a shared experience and mutual recognition of what it is to be positioned through it. By experiencing this together, in an impromptu moment of shared embodied pleasure, there was an extra discursive moment that occurred outside of the rational enterprise of language (Walkerdine, 2001). This important moment could not have been, and indeed did not want to be, spoken of. This moment *felt* to be more than enjoyment, pleasure or even fun, and was more akin to a feeling of *connection*, (Irigaray, 1995).

The desire expressed by women throughout this study to be 'whole' unitary subjects is bound up with the desire to become the individual subject of liberal enlightenment. Desiring to be the rational individual is synonymous with the desire to be outside of a pervasive gaze and also to be able to assume a position of power to gaze back. This privileged position of rational male autonomy is offered only to women through a position within the market. However, women are trapped within this new-found position within the market. As fecund bodies, women must split themselves off from this new market self and so are caught in a never ending cycle of work to reconcile the resultant contradictions of this split. This cycle constitutes the only route offered women to escape being positioned as irrational 'other' to man's rational subject, as Irigaray outlines. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, psy discourses are the only

tool through which women have to render themselves free of this contradiction. Indeed as a field of expertise, psychology operates to furnish women with a language by which they are able to understand themselves through, and according to, a scientific gaze. Thus women are promised a transformation in which they are able to remake themselves into the unitary and 'normal' subjects that no longer falls within this gaze, (Foucault, 1977).

However as Irigaray states, 'woman' is constituted as what man is not and if 'woman's' subjectivity is created through the gaze as other, then her being is constructed through and within the gaze, i.e. femininity is what masculinity has constituted it to be (Irigaray, 1995). This offer of individuality, autonomy and liberal market citizenship and subjectivity, is one that men have offered women, i.e. a woman's place remains constituted by male power. Here women are 'given', 'bequeathed' a place within the market *as* 'other'. As such, this position is a gift to 'woman' from 'man' and the qualities ascribed to femininity—malleability and fluidity—are only valued and adopted in the market context. Thus they are only valued within this confine and are thus only to be adopted, in the masculine sense, by working class men who have had to transform themselves into 'new' service workers in a 'feminised' labour market. These qualities are to remain 'other' and have become valued now as a means by which workers are to be exploited—within an insecure labour market—so as to harness a female body of workers in the race to establish richer and more powerful nation states. This is not to say that today's 'new' women are suffering from false consciousness. This would suggest that there is something outside of 'this'—some other knowledge, being, subjectivity—that can be imparted to women, something outside or beyond the rational enlightened

autonomous individual that women can, through some means, take up. As such I do not wish to suggest that women are wrong to believe that their new position as autonomous individual market citizens has not produced a subjectivity that, before their visibility in the market, was unimaginable. Rather it is to say that such power is conditional and is sanctioned only within the market context. Hence the rebuking of childless professional and single women, who are seen to step outside of this realm and assume autonomous individual power beyond this limit, (Irigaray, 1995).

### **The Power of The Market**

The citizen, the rational European enlightened white heterosexual individual thus remains male, with his autonomous privilege now tantalisingly offered to women through a market identity, particularly through the power of financial autonomy and the freedom to consume. This position has only very recently been offered to women, but remains an offer only. It was indeed Freud's nephew who first appealed to women as individual autonomous individuals, those early debutante 'flappers', to pitch cigarettes to by positioning women outside of men's controlling gaze. Here we can see that by associating individuality and autonomy with the power of consumption; the market becomes located as the site in which women are promised the opportunity to resist being positioned as 'other'. Is it any wonder that the women of this generation seized their cigarettes, with their offer of power, of shaping and producing, of being visible within the market and above all their promise of full subject-hood?, (Walkerdine, 2006).

Within this thesis I am not suggesting that women revolt by refusing to engage with the market in any form. Rather I turn to a position where we can begin to understand how this is lived and individualism resisted by examining the implications of this new market feminine self in the *relational* aspects in which it is lived with 'others'. I am also not proposing that men do not experience fear about falling under the 'gaze' and as being positioned as 'other'. Indeed masculinity could be understood as just as deeply 'othered'. Rather, the ontology of woman however, the very being born a woman, is to already be 'other'. Therefore, the individual subjectivity offered to women through their new position as market citizens introduces another position in which to be 'other', the individual market 'other'. This operates synergistically with the 'other' of 'woman', in so much as it does not provide a way of by-passing or overcoming the category of 'woman' as 'other', but begets more categories in which to 'other' women. For example the 'super-woman' feminine subject position contains all of these 'others', including an individual market citizen identity. This category is the only position in which women can contain all her 'others'. The 'super-woman' thus offers women a possible, with much work on the self, subjectivity that could resist/fall outside of the gaze of being 'othered', i.e. the 'super-woman' can resist being positioned as a childless professional and/or stay home mother. However, as was shown, constant risk analysis and management required of superwomen, within a medical gaze, threatens this containment. Thus even when all the psychological checks and balances are controlled for, super-women can never rest. Indeed the defence against this medical gaze requires incredible work whereby women are positioned as pathologically overworked, unable to cope and at 'potential' risking of ill health, or potentially risking their children's health, their relationship, or potential relationship and their financial health. In short although a woman may take up a



position in which she is perceived to be containing, managing and 'having it all', she still falls under the 'gaze' as at potential 'risk' of failing to contain and manage 'it all', (Irigaray, 1995; Walkerdine, 2006).

## **Conclusion**

As I have outlined above, women who may be positioned as successfully managing to resist the gaze, remain securely within it! She may have it all, but for how long and at what cost.... This is perhaps the most pernicious of all discourses, calling upon women to control for the *future* risk of personal failure that may strike down any woman at any time. The resilience required of today's woman indeed earns her the right to be considered as super human. The only way a woman can manage this risk is through self-regulation, internalising the gaze and this 'other' potentially risky self. This potential failed 'other' is only fended off through constant monitoring of the self. Thus today's new woman is indeed always at the ready armed with the appropriate discourses, rationalising all emotions, channelling all efforts, interactions, relationships, lest she fail.

By foregrounding the incidences in which emotion, talk, silences, connections and interactions between women take place, we can understand how this is played out in the lives of women. Importantly we can establish the modes by which women attempt to resist this, not necessarily in the form of a conscious awareness, but spaces where maybe there exist subjectivities, femininities that are done in ways where the gaze is somehow shifted or lifted. By focusing on relationality, I do believe that we can locate where such happenings take place, whereby there *are* connections to be fore-grounded

through which an understanding of the ways in which women recognise together what it means to be constituted as other within the gaze, constitutes a moment of 'us'. This thesis has highlighted the importance of appreciating and understanding that even when attempting to escape 'othering', women try and share their position, often through the spectre of the other. For example, in her 'no kid's fantasy' article, Ellen is attempting to share her pain and does this by sharing her experience of her position with like minded women, i.e. she hails super mums in this respect to 'relate' and recognise her position. And although she does this by othering childless women, she also exposes her self through her fantasy childless other, i.e. in this respects she slips in and out of both positions through this fantasy. I believe women do this so as not to occlude the other of their fantasy but rather to include this other into themselves, in an attempt to understand this 'othered' women in context to being positioned as 'other' themselves, (Walkerdine et al, 2001, Irigaray, 2004, Henriques et al 1997).

In the next chapter I provide an overview of this thesis and discuss my conclusive findings, further suggestion for research, praxis and policy.

## Chapter Eight

### Conclusion

#### Introduction

This thesis explored the complex relational modes through which femininity is currently constituted and experienced by 'new women' in a radically changed social, economic, political and cultural landscape. The thesis sought to show how a set of discursive and material practices operate to construct femininity as fluid/flexible in the historical context where subjects are 'supposed to be sustained by a stable centre' and 'an ego capable of resilience' (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 241). The thesis explored the discourses and narratives through which this 'deep irony' is lived for women in the present through a discourse analysis of the biographical narrative accounts of twelve women in combination with an analysis of secondary media texts. These practices were examined in relation to their constitutive and regulatory power through which women's *emotions*-desires, fantasies and fears-of lack and loss are made intelligible 'as personal failures when all there is available to understand these is an individual psychological discourse' (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 243).

Throughout the thesis, the ways in which the feminine body is inscribed was discussed as constitutive of a new form of classification. It was argued that this classification operates to individualise and psychologise contradictory lived experiences of women in context with the production of a neo liberal subject position

‘ascribed to femininity’, where women are ‘understood as the central carriers of the new middle-class individuality’. The thesis set out to argue that femininity is constituted through such practices that rely on their condition of emergence ‘upon the long-established incitement to women to become producers of themselves as objects of the gaze’ (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 242). Thus the thesis demonstrated how femininity is constructed and experienced through the neo liberal ideal of self-invention and endless flexibility when the rational unity of subjects and the embodied fertility of women are contradictory experiences.

The thesis was therefore about the knowledge, power and discursive production of contemporary western femininities. It was concerned with the socio-historical shifts that have occurred in power-knowledge formations of work, family and fertility and their productive capacities. It was concerned with the politically sedimented power-knowledge relations and socio-historical, discursive, material and embodied processes by which particular versions of femininity are brought into being. It highlighted a relational field of intelligibility where contemporary understandings and experiences of femininity, fertility, work and family merge and are reified. It explored how the typology of feminine subject positions, such as the ‘super-woman’, ‘stay at home mum’ and ‘childless professional’ etc, are symptomatic of socio-cultural practices that construct contradictory and opposing versions of the ‘true’ everyday experiences of women today. It challenged the expertise of the social sciences as co-producing this ‘truth’ through the reconstitution of perpetually ‘mutually propelling antagonism’ that remain locked within an historically contingent dualistic (individual versus social) epistemology (Henriques et al, 1998). A reductionist theoretical turn was problematised as operating to position women’s lived experiences in context with

'choice'. In highlighting the historically specific and contingent conditions by which current conceptualisations of 'choice' are made possible, the thesis aimed to go beyond this dichotomy toward a 'new economy of power relations', that consists of 'analysing power through the antagonism of strategies', (Foucault, 1977). The thesis also sought to disrupt power-knowledge relations that situate and locate choice as either the product of an individualised innate psycho-biological determinates, or conversely a set of developmental ideological constraints, that serve to 'leave power relations unchanged' by appealing to notions of common sense and the practices of valid scientific enquiry, (Henriques et al, 1998).

The thesis aimed to demonstrate how, when faced with a specific set of discourses which operate to discursively position women as if they can affect unlimited choice in relation to their fertility, family and work, women research participants illuminated deep contradictions between their lived experience and such discourses. It became clear within the women's narrative accounts that such contradictions are managed through techniques of self-governance. Such discursive regulatory practices call upon feminine subjects to work on the self as a work in progress to reconcile contradictory subject positions between the lived experiences of motherhood and coupledness *and* the discursive subject position of women as autonomous subjects of neo liberal 'choice'.

## **Overview**

In chapter two I outlined how the critical psychology approach I utilised in this study offers the researcher a lens through which to explore how specific political, social,

cultural and economic changes are strongly and complexly entwined with the psychological production of feminine subjects and subjectivity today. I outlined how these changes have occurred within Australia from the 1980's onwards and discussed the implications of these changes for the women in the study. I included excerpts taken from an interview with Sandra and discussed how her precarious position within Australia's 'new economy' raises the issue of how women's fears and defences against being positioned as single mother welfare cheat/scrounging 'other' regulates femininity in new ways today. I explored how Sandra is able to ward off 'deep fear[s] of failure' as a middle class woman living in a post colonial society in which single motherhood is deeply inscribed with fears of 'Otherness', (Bhabha, 1984). In unpacking the complex nature in which Sandra constructs her account, I was able to show how she works to situate herself as both acknowledging 'other' women, (in this instance 'other' women positioned as devoting themselves to motherhood) whilst distancing herself from them. Through the analysis of Sandra's narrative account I was thus able to demonstrate how women *must* position themselves so as to defend against multiple undesirable subject positions.

In chapter three I discussed the ways in which an ongoing debate in the social sciences concerning women's increased participation within Western labour markets, remains caught within a binary that reconstitutes a social versus individual dualism. Within this debate I discussed how women are positioned as either rational individual agents who are able to effect choice in relation to their work, family and fertility, or are conversely positioned as constrained by cultural norms and socialisation practices. I discussed the implications of this debate as constituting employment as a primary

site in which to investigate, measure and understand the lives of women and as an indicator in which women can be categorised into discrete types.

I thus explored how this categorisation operates to compartmentalise and reduce the complexity of women's lived experiences and examined the implications of this through the narrative accounts of Kelly and Karen. I argued for the need to take into account women's fears and desires as important in understanding the relationality of how neo liberal discourses of rational individualism operate in conjunction with the psychological categorisation of femininity and how this impacts on the lives of women today. Here I examined the ways in which women experience and make sense of their lives in relation to individualistic discourses of choice, by taking up a position of individual autonomy, whilst at the same time trying to make sense of their lived 'circumstances'. Contradictions arising from this were examined through an account provided by Kelly, who made sense of the emotional pain and humiliation she endured as she attempted to achieve 'self' fulfilment and happiness, through a discourse of personal failure. Here we were able to appreciate how Kelly sought to reconcile contradictions in her life through psychological work on the self in which the body is rendered as a site and object of transformation. Kelly's narrative account clearly demonstrated how femininity is lived as a never ceasing journey that requires a reflexive fluid subject who weighs and measures their every option, and who is always searching for another space in which work on the self can be carried out.

Importantly, I examined how sociological and economic theories are unable to grasp the complex interplay of practices that operate to position women as 'constantly changing successful entrepreneurs' or describe the 'techniques of self-regulation and

management which both inscribe the subject and allow him or her to attempt to refashion themselves as a successful subject', (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 241). I argued for a relational approach in which to understand how the subject must work to make sense of contradictory subject positions. I proposed that by focusing on the relationality of these contradictions, (fore-grounding the emotional dimensions of subject formation-fears and defences) between the lived experiences of women as embodied fecund selves, professional and autonomous neo liberal choice making citizens, we are able to avoid epistemological society/individual dichotomy pitfalls, that effectively carve up reality. I demonstrated throughout this chapter that general theoretical approaches do not provide a critical framework from which to question the taken for granted truths of the existence of a pre-given psychological subject who becomes social/ is socialised (Henriques et al 1998). I argued that by taking into account women's emotions we are able to understand the relationality of how neo liberal discourses of individualism operate in conjunction with historical conceptualisations of freedom, life style and choice in the production of femininity and the 'subject of choice'.

In chapter four I presented a selection of different media representations of femininity that were treated as symptomatic texts wherein a new set of discursive practices were identified. I discussed how an increasing trend to portray and speak about the lives of women as beset with problems in relation to work, family and fertility within popular media, operate to classify femininity in particular ways today. Here I demonstrated how cultural constructions of femininity sit in alignment with the psychological typologies outlined in the previous chapter, i.e. I foregrounded the connection between work and home 'centred' and 'adaptive' women with 'childless professional', 'stay at



home mothers' and 'superwomen'. Building on my analysis of Kelly's narrative account within chapter three, I established how desire and fantasy are contained within each category, with each category interweaving with the other and containing elements of loss and risk. Again I foregrounded the relational aspects of what are positioned as discrete feminine typologies in relation to 'choice' and 'life-style'. The selection of media representations of femininity presented within this chapter highlighted the broad spectrum of talk as illustrative of the discursive practices through which femininity is culturally classified and showcased the multiplicity and complexity of subject positions that women are invited to take up. However, as the selection of media examples clearly demonstrated, the subject positions of working mother, stay at home mother, childless professional and singleton, are always situated in a complex connected and *relational* network with one another, through each being contextualised as containing aspects of loss and risk in relation to the other.

Within the next three chapters I set about establishing common themes present within the broad corpus of narrative statements of the twelve interviewees. I explored how women today desire to be whole unitary subjects who are individually capable and resilient within a society fraught with risk, requires that they constantly re-make and transform the 'self', (Walkerdine, 2003). Within these three chapters I sought to explore and understand how this was spoken, made intelligible, and lived contextually through a set of material practices. I explored the modes by which femininity is discursively constituted through a dualistic juxtaposing of biology and psychology-through body and mind but rather than focusing on their separation, I highlighted the techniques by which women reconciled these splits in search for a whole. Here I focused on binary associations in talk as evidence of a reconfiguration and

reconstitution of Cartesian dualisms that now present women with new set of problems to be negotiated, (Walkerdine et al, 2001).

## **Findings and Discussion**

Within chapter five I focused on how Kylie and Tina's stories of 'self' discovery and transformation had required each women to embark on her own psychic journey in which to learn new discursive resources to render the material and embodied constraints in her life into new opportunities for change. Kylie and Tina told of how they had recently uncovered previously unseen blocks and barriers within their unconscious and in seeing these new aspects of the 'self' each woman was able to make intelligible a previously unimagined future. Both women offered a reflexive account of how this new way seeing the self gave rise to a new way to imagine a changed and transformed future self. These new discursive practices through which women learn to understand themselves therefore constitute a field of intelligibility through which the desire to be an 'other' self is made possible. In this instance, understanding the self involves a process of applying a set of self diagnostic techniques, which make possible the promise of transformation through the mother-child bond. This was made further evident within both women's accounts by the absence of any mention of their fathers. The mother imago was situated as gate keeper through which another whole adult woman was to be realised, (Driver, 2006). However, it was as a direct result of 'mothers'' failures that such a gate and barrier existed at all. Here the discourse of developmental psychology acted to *delimit*, by circumscribing, locating and pathologising (in childhood and with mother) and *enable*, through a discourse of self transformation. The diagnosis is simultaneously the cure.

However, as was evident throughout Kylie and Tina's accounts, their relationships with their mothers did not exist in a vacuum outside of socio-political and cultural practices. Rather each woman spoke of her individual responsibility for the emotional and financial care of her mother. Here we were able to map the painful breaks that this generation of women have had to make with the majority of their mothers. The new found financial independence that a position within the market has afforded these two women has required each to cross a painful emotional and material boundary. For Kylie and Tina, autonomy and personal success could only be achieved by breaking with their mother's life script. Witnessing how both women struggled to work through these very painful contradictions, as the daughter of single welfare dependent mother myself, was very difficult. What we are able to see in both accounts are the incredible challenges that women face as they try their best to value, respect and acknowledge their mothers' achievements, contribution and subjectivity. The guilt, anger and pain that this produces is made manageable through fantasies of self transformation where reconciliation is *imagined*, in Tina's case, within a space where boundaries are melded and healed.

When we concentrate on the thematic connections *within* both women's narratives and also *between* them, what becomes clear are the techniques by which women manage a professional identity that carries with it both a painful separation from the past and a painful *connection* with it. The fiction texts in chapter four also provide us with further examples of the pervasive power of the 'work from home' fantasy. Here we see how the heroines, in Kylie's terms, successfully do 'it in a way without sacrificing [themselves] along the way and all the things that are important to [them]

along the way'. By a wonder of fictional luck, the characters no longer need to manage the financial and psychological risks associated with the dependent position of mother by retaining their position within the market. This understandably comforting fantasy overwhelmingly demonstrates the longing that women have to be *able* to take up an autonomous bourgeoisie professional subject position, *without* the deep contradictory painful emotions and sacrifices ascribed to it, i.e. motherhood, health and happiness. There is very little scope to measure Tina and Kylie's 'life style' 'choices' within their biographies and every evidence to suggest that we do indeed need to lean from history!

Within chapter six the coping mechanisms through which women manage contradiction were foregrounded again in the analysis of Kate and Clare's strikingly similar struggle to speak of their ambition as professional women. Neither woman was able to construct a coherent story whereby she was able to fully situate herself as an ambitious career professional who experiences personal happiness and self fulfilment through a market identity. This was made apparent at specific junctions in each woman's narrative where the issue of individual 'stimulation' and 'social interaction' was broached in conjunction with motherhood. The fear of a loss of stimulation also masked a fear of the loss of this personal happiness and self fulfilment as associated with the market. Here, as within the media example of Ellen's 'no kids' fantasy, we can also see how psychological and material isolation are associated with motherhood and the risks of 'sacrificing' an individual liberal identity.

However, what this chapter clearly showed was the impossibility of embracing an individual market identity as well, whereby both women diminished their ambition

through a set of counter narratives in which the ‘love’ of being a professional was curtailed and contrasted with the desire for, and responsibility of, motherhood. As with journalist Ellen, participants Jenny, Tina and Kate narrated their experience of this impossibility through fantasy. However, Kate’s fantasy, unlike Tina’s, was not about reconciling contradiction; rather like Ellen, Kate fantasised about who she would be if she took up the position of ‘stay at home mother’, as did Ellen as the ‘childless professional’. Kate’s haunting image of ‘having coffee with the dog’ presented us with a poignant metaphor in which to understand how the loss of autonomy within the public market signifies the loss of individual subjectivity and freedom. As Jenny makes clear, this must be guarded against by sole parents who are positioned as at real psychological risk as a result of sacrificing this public individual self. However, through Clare’s story we can see how feelings of responsibility and guilt are associated with taking up the position of a partnered professional mother working full time. Thus the loss of a market identity is tempered by the loss of being positioned as the unselfish good mother who *chooses* to sacrifice this identity.

In chapter seven we explore how Sandra defends against being ‘othered’ as a lone parent by situating herself as a responsible, individual and autonomous neo liberal citizen. What I wanted to highlight throughout Sandra’s account is the way in which she struggles not to engage in a process of ‘othering’ other women herself. As such, Sandra deployed a strategy of defence and counter defence so as navigate her way through the complex process whereby defending one-‘self’ against categorisation means one should *not* engage in categorising ‘other’ women. Here I discussed how women’s desire not to be ‘othered’ is folded through their fear of being categorised as ‘other’ themselves. Here women are locked in a complex set of contradictions

whereby they cannot show their fear of being categorised within any unitary feminine subject position i.e. as within Sandra's statement of 'admiration' for stay at home mothers whilst distancing herself from the category itself.

In the last section of the thesis I explored how the research interview could be considered as producing a relational connection between myself, Mary and Sandra. Particularly in the interchange between Mary and myself, this folding of the 'other' into the self acted as a moment of non-discursive 'chick' bonding and inter-subjective play, where we both established what 'type' of woman the other was. The tension existent between divisive discrete subject positions could be seen to break down, illustrating the ways in which non discursive practises form emotional connections that often frame experience in small and easily overlooked ways. These moments served to establish emotional inter-related connections. By including these aspects of the research, I wanted to show how the introduction of new feminine categories constitute feminine subject positions that women must defend against and create a defence of. Including these non discursive happenings meant that I could highlight the moments where women are able to inter-subjectively slip the fear of being 'othered' by *sharing* our experiences of being 'othered'. This eventuality facilitated a moment and space created through sharing where fear and anxiety were mutually acknowledged. Here we perhaps shifted the 'gaze' of the 'other', not perhaps through conscious or rational effort but through our shared experience of acknowledging what it is to be constituted through it. Language may have proved unable to contain this feeling, or make it intelligible, as the moment of connection here was felt rather than spoken.

The desire expressed by women throughout this study to become whole unitary subjects was synonymous with the desire to become the individual liberal 'subject of choice'. Desiring to be this rational individual carries with it the desire to be able to assume a position of power within the market. Such a privileged position has only been available traditionally to primarily white, western middle class heterosexual men. Thus the opportunity for women to take up this position has been *granted* to them through a discourse of market opportunism whereby neo liberal discourses of choice and freedom promise individual citizenship within the so called objective eyes of the market. However I would like to conclude that a market identity possess problems for a fecund self whose ability to take up a market identity is compromised, and as this thesis has shown, the implications of such a compromise in the lives and experiences of women today are profound. This thesis has shown that the professional women who took part in this study become entangled in a never-ending cycle of work on the self to reconcile and manage this contradiction. Thus this thesis found that neo liberal governments rely heavily on a psychological self who works tirelessly to reconcile this never-ending contradiction.

The market is and remains constituted through male power with women being afforded a place within this public realm as man's 'other'. As such, the qualities ascribed to femininity-transformation, fluidity-are valued only within a market identity as productive. These qualities are not to be taken up by bourgeois men, as evidenced in the Anadin business man who does not juggle a re-made professional version of himself, and are valued for their exploitable qualities in the context of global competition and progressivism. Here I do not wish to suggest that women are hapless victims of a state ideological apparatus, but rather want to illuminate the way

power through market visibility is gender specific, conditional and is sanctioned only within that context, hence the condemnation of childless professional single women, who are seen to step outside of this realm and assume autonomous individual power beyond its contextual boundary. I certainly do not want to romanticise or idealise an identity outside of the market however, rather I wish to foreground the *relations* between all these apparent discrete selves and ‘others’. I wish to focus on how the individual subjectivity offered to women through their new position as market citizens introduces another ‘other’, the individual ‘other’. And although the ‘super-woman’ category contains all feminine ‘others’, even if women do manage to contain and ‘have it all’, they risk falling under the gaze as ‘at risk’ of *potentially failing* to contain and manage ‘it all’. She may have it all, but for how long and at what cost....

### **Implications and Future Applications of Research**

Appreciating relational connection helps us to see the ways in which women share and recognise what it means to be constituted as ‘other’. Thus a relational approach offers us a window through which to understand the relational character of possible feminine spaces and acts of resistance. This thesis highlights that need for future critical research to appreciate the ways in which women slip in between subject positions as they manage complex contradictory subjectivities and how this is often lived through the painful crossing of boundaries.

Kate *‘But I know that I have to do it in a way without sacrificing myself along the way, all the things that are important to me along the way. So I have to find a way to fall pregnant without turning half of myself off I think. Yeah that’s it in a nutshell’.*



The above comment is perhaps the most honest and open statement that any woman has ever said to me. When I first read this statement I was immediately struck by a parallel with Virginia Woolf's story of the 'Angel in the House', (Woolf, 1931, p. 89), where Kate, like Woolf, illuminates a very feminine conundrum. Rather than turn on the maternal presence of the Angel, grab her by the throat and kill her however, Kate presents a far more complex situation where she must find a way to *live* with her. There is an embodied brutality to this language of sacrifice, turning off and killing, a language that is both emotional and detached, embodied and disembodied. Such statements allow us to see and trace fractures and collisions where violent metaphor makes intelligible the non-discursive emotional and material work that is required to make sense of being female, fertile, professional *and* 'you'. What is so striking about Kylie's statement is that unlike Woolf's there is no finality; rather Kylie positions herself bravely at the centre of an ongoing storm. In managing her way through this storm of contradiction she compartmentalises her self; changing and shifting shape through constant transformation as she goes. And through all of this, Kylie tries to find a unified whole within this impossible complex of splinters, to have and contain in 'a nutshell'.

What this thesis has shown is how from the early 1980's onwards femininity needs to be understood as constructed in new ways, through discourses of liberal individualism that carry the promise of autonomy and freedom. This historical shift has forever transformed what it means to be a feminine subject in the western world. The once fantasised female future is touted as having brought about the death of feminism in the present. Within this discourse, the dreams of a great movement and struggle are now over as women apparently storm the market and take control of their destinies.

Throughout the early and mid nineties many feminist scholars, commentators and critics began to tentatively voice their dissent in relation to contradictions between the lived experiences of women and the neo liberal female future rhetoric, (see Walkerdine et al 2001, Skeggs, 1996, Gill, 2006, and Hey, 2002 etc). This thesis seeks to contribute to critical scholarship that attempts to question and disrupt epistemologies that suggest femininity can be categorised into discreet unitary rational identities. Therefore this research has implications for studies in which an agency versus structure debate serves to both occlude connection, by foregrounding separation, (circumscribing discrete feminine identities), whilst producing division through the mapping and foregrounding of separation.

As witnessed within women's accounts throughout this study, femininity is lived as fraught with continuous struggle, but rather than seek reconciliation through social change, (i.e. by calling on government to make child care free or increase sole parent pensions etc) many women now seek change through self transformation. The findings of this research suggest that further work needs to focus on the ways in which the struggle to gain full citizenship rights, as workers, partners and parents, is co-opted through social science epistemology, as discussed in chapter three, in which rampant individualism has rendered any subsequent struggle as taking place with and through the 'self'. This study demonstrates how future research needs to account for these new modes in the production of femininities and importantly how the neo liberal project and dream of the female future, is inscribed within the day to day lived experiences of women as they attempt to 'have it all'. Here we can see how seemingly small and insignificant actions such as making cushions, losing weight, doing the shopping, listening to the radio, hanging out the washing, having a cup of coffee and

eating a chocolate biscuit are imbued with new, profound and political meaning. If the relational elements in the production of femininity are back-grounded, researchers run the risk of further silencing and diminishing the difficulties that women face today.

The findings of this study suggest that further research needs to be conducted to keep up with the rapid historical socio-cultural and economic changes outlined throughout, and their implications for the production of femininity today. Specifically, the modes through which the production of a malleable psychological self is positioned in contradiction with a stable ego centred self, need to be further examined as productive of new practices of self-management and regulation. Questions need to be asked as to how women overcome contradiction in their lives through techniques of self-governance if we are to understand the complexity and multiplicity of subject formation today.

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## **APPENDIX A: COPY OF PROJECT INFORMATION & CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS SHEET**

### **You are invited to participate in the research project: FERTILITY DISCOURSES AND FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY: NARRATIVES OF THE PROFESSIONAL WOMAN**

Please read the following Project Information Sheet and if you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact the researcher via the contact details provided.

#### **What Is The Research About?**

As more and more women enter the professions, public discussion and controversy concerning issues such as maternity leave, fertility and birth rate trends etc has proliferated. Increasingly, professional women in their thirties and forties experience tremendous trepidation whilst attempting to navigate their way through an often competing and conflicting array of social controversies and discourses. Exemplars of such discourses can be found in the *stay at home mum*, *childless professional*, *superwomen* and *biological clock* discourse etc.

The project aims to explore how professional women experience such public discussions in their everyday lives in the hope of better understanding how women's subjectivity/identities are formed. The project will involve the selection and interviewing of twenty professional female participants between the ages of 32-45 years, so as to expressly target women who are most exposed to particular discourses, such as the *biological clock* discourse etc.

#### **Who Is Doing The Research?**

The research is being conducted through The Centre for Critical Psychology at the University of Western Sydney (Bankstown), by Merryn Smith chief researcher who is currently a PhD candidate at the Centre and Valerie Walkerdine PhD supervisor who is Foundation Professor of Critical Psychology at the Centre.

#### **How Will I Be Involved?**

When you are clear about the nature of the research, have indicated your willingness to participate and signed a consent form, you will be asked to give one interview with the chief researcher. This interview will last for at least one hour and may continue for a longer time if you feel that there is more that you would like to share. The interview will be held at a place and time agreed upon by you and the interviewer at either a BPW facility or on a UWS campus. The interview will be taped and a written copy made of it.

## **APPENDIX A: COPY OF PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET (cont)**

### **What Sort Of Questions Will I Be Asked?**

The research is based on a narrative method rather than on a set of specific questions. This means that you will not be asked to answer a list of questions, but simply asked to talk about topics related to your everyday life. The interview will take the form of a conversation in which you will be asked to narrate your experiences. Topics of conversation might include: professional and family life current situation and future aspirations, thoughts, ideas and feelings concerning issues such as motherhood, marriage and age. You will not be expected to talk about anything that you would prefer not to discuss.

### **What Will Happen With The Information?**

All information gathered by the researcher will be dealt with in ways that protect the identity of the interview participants. All tapes and written copies of interviews will be securely stored and only be accessible to the researcher. Any information or material produced by the researcher will be available to the participants on request. The findings drawn from this research may be published in a form that does not identify participants in any way.

### **What If I Have More Questions Or Problems?**

Should you have any further questions, you can contact Merryn at 02 8399 3292, or at: [merrynbsmith@yahoo.com.au](mailto:merrynbsmith@yahoo.com.au). If you have any personal concerns, anxieties or problems as a result of issues that may arise in relation to your participation in the research you may contact:

UWS Clinical Psychology Unit (Wednesday only), 02) 9772 6712  
Lifeline 131114

FPA Healthline 1300 65 8886

IVF NSW 02) 9387 5887

Family Counselling and Medical Centre 02) 9690 2532

Abortion Counselling 02) 9602 6543

Please feel free to speak confidentially with Merryn for a more comprehensive list of relevant NSW contacts concerning fertility related counselling services for individuals, couples and families.

### **What If I Change My Mind?**

You may change your mind about participation in the research at any time. You do not need to give a reason, and no further approaches will be made to you by the research team. None of the information gathered at the time of your withdrawal will be included in the research or kept on file.

Note: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Offices (tel: 02 4570 1136). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

