THE PARENT AS GENDERED LITERATE SUBJECT: AN ANALYSIS OF PARENTS' TALK ABOUT THEIR OWN AND THEIR CHILDREN'S LITERACY

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Summary

This thesis reports on a poststructural discourse analysis of parents' accounts of their own and their children's literacy. It aims to challenge popular and academic accounts of home literacy practices which omit reference to gender, labour and conflict. The 'home' has often been examined as the context of children's literacy development. Here the question is not: What is the child's context? but: What is the parent's?

The informant group consists of fifty-five urban South Australian parents, mothers and fathers. While mixed in socioeconomic status, ethnicity and language background, the group can generally be described as middle-class. The informant group was recruited through the researcher's social network and through contact with an inner-suburban primary school. Interviews were conducted in informants' homes and were between 60 and 90 minutes in duration.

Poststructural discourse theory provides the framework for placing parents' accounts in their sociosemantic context. Parents are understood as accessing socially available discourses through their past and current participation in social practices and through their readings of texts. These discourses have effects on parenting and literate practice by constructing particular subject positions and forms of relation.

In order to position parents' accounts within their discursive context, a survey of discourses and practices is undertaken. The survey of discourses focuses on three discursive fields within which parents are constituted as subjects: parenting, childhood and literacy. In each of these fields, key discourses, categories and positions are identified. This survey demonstrates that gender is a key element in the construction of social subjects in each of these discursive fields.

The survey of parenting practice reviews selected studies from a range of academic fields in order to build up a picture of parents' literate and pedagogic practice. The following areas are reviewed: parent-child talk, parents' participation in children's play, parents' pedagogies, effects of child gender, and parents' personal practice of literacy. The survey finds that gender, class and adult-child relations are important factors in constituting patterns of difference in practice. On the basis of this survey

certain predictions are made about the informant group.

Three aspects of parents' accounts are subjected to critical discourse analysis. These are: parents' memories of acquiring and using literacy in childhood; parents' descriptions of children's literacy and learning; and parents' descriptions of parents' literate work with their children in home and educational sites. In each of these areas, key discourses, discursive practices and subject positions are identified.

The study find that modes of literacy are associated with gendered subject positions in all the areas investigated. Parents' memories indicate that as children they were offered and took up forms of gendered literate subjectivity through their participation in the relations of schooling and family life. The discourses which parents employ to describe and interpret their children are also involved in the intersection of literacy and gender. Alignments between the binary discourse of gender difference, the developmental discourse and the child-centred discourse results in the naturalisation of girls' literacy learning and the problematisation of boys', particularly in the early years.

I declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: 

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CHAPTER ONE

THEORISING THE PARENT

AS GENDERED LITERATE SUBJECT

1.1 Preface

A warm golden glow illuminates the domestic scene. A woman, busy cutting vegetables for the evening meal, has turned her head to look at her daughter, seated at the bench of a clean and well-equipped kitchen. We can't see the child's face; she is turned to her mother. The brightest object in the entire scene is the white page of the book the child has open. Her hand is raised in the act of writing and her head is cocked toward the adult woman as if posing a question. The mother's eyebrows are raised in an attitude of interested listening. She is smiling.

The whole scene is bounded by the white margins of a double magazine page and a heading at the top asks: 'Does the homework spill over into your kitchen?' A column of writing at the side of the page answers the question and continues the 'dialogue':

> It would be a surprise if it didn't.
> Surprising too, if your kitchen didn't echo to
> the sound of musical instruments,
> the whirr of the sewing machine
> and the boisterous laughter of family card games.
> Because after all, your kitchen
> is much more than just a place
> to prepare food. It's the hub
> of your home.
>
> (The Australian Women's Weekly 1994 May p. 166-7)

This text, an advertisement for laminate found in a popular Australian women's magazine, encapsulates some of the discursive themes explored in this thesis. More than this, it is an example of what drove the project. The seductive image of a safe domestic feminine domain within which particular literate practices are carried out by children - for instance the doing of homework - under the supervision of a caring, competent (female) parent is, of course, not found only in advertising texts. Indeed, were it not for the pervasiveness of notions about women's responsibility for children's development (including crucially their development into literate, educated citizens), this image would not have the power to sell laminate or any other product. Socially available representations of parenting, childhood and literacy, like this one, provide positions for

parents, both men and women. Due to the entrenched nature of the gendered division of parenting labour in contemporary Western societies and the dominance of binary oppositional models of gender identity, such representations are inherently gendered.

Few parents can be totally immune to images which represent literate labour as women's labour or compliance within adult-child relations as a feminine trait. Images like the laminate ad are part of the context within which families undertake their literate activities. Yet parents' views on children's literacy and their role in its development are sought far less than their purchasing power and cooperation. Still more rarely are parents' understandings placed within the socio-semantic context of available models and practices of literacy, parenting, childhood and gender.

Within this thesis a group of South Australian parents, mothers and fathers, talk about their literate labour, their literate histories and their children's growth into literacy. As researcher I read the transcripts of interviews as records of parents' interpretive frames and ask: what meanings are parents constructing for their own and their children's literacy? In order to locate these accounts within their sociosemantic context I survey the overlapping discursive fields of parenting, childhood and literacy, identifying discourses which can be traced through parents' accounts. I demonstrate that the gendered nature of knowledge production and practice in these fields means that the interpretive frames parents use are inherently gendered frames.

1.2 Parents and Literacy: a hot topic

In choosing parenting as a focus for a piece of literacy research, I am entering into an area of social debate involving diverse and competing interests. There are many stakeholders involved in the outcome of discussions around the role and influence of parents in relation to children's learning, from governments and institutions to families and individuals. After around forty years of educational research on parent and home factors, there is now much accumulated evidence to support the view that parental influence, or family background (the two are often conflated), is significantly correlated

with children's educational performance (Blatchford et al 1985; Rowe 1990; Toomey & Allen 1991). This has led educators and policy makers to advocate, in one form or another, that social institutions 'set up and control the circumstances in which children are reared' (Wolfendale 1983 p.151) in order to produce children as literate citizens and thus avoid the social costs of illiteracy.

Not a year goes by in Australia without a fresh suggestion for utilising parents as agents in improving their and/or other children's learning (Bergstrom & Burden 1981; Cairney & Munsie 1991; Dodge & Phinney 1991; Fruchter, Galleta & White 1993; Macdonald 1984; Mayfield & Ollila 1992; Pearce 1990). Literacy, that is to say schooled literacy (Cook-Gumperz 1987), has featured in many of these plans. Researchers from a range of discipline areas have been actively involved in this process: identifying the need for such programmes, designing, monitoring and evaluating them. Such research has provided valuable information about the way some parents and children participate in some forms of literate activity. However, it is an initial claim of this thesis, that such debate, policy-making and research has been dependent on, and necessarily reflected, socially available understandings of what constitutes 'parent' and 'children's literacy development'. It is an important first step therefore to consider what have been the dominant understandings shaping literacy research on parents, before outlining how I intend to construct the subject 'parent' in the context of this thesis.

1.2.1 The meaning of 'parent'

In current documentation of literacy research on parents, 'parent' is used as a generic term, intended to cover the range of adult persons holding primary responsibility for children's care (Redding 1991). This is in contrast to research conducted from the 50s to the 70s in which the reference was generally to 'mothers'. This shift can be understood in relation to two social initiatives: a move to combat sexist language in government documentation; and official recognition that, in a pluralistic society such as Australia, alternative family formations mean that a range of adults, including grandparents, are involved in children's care.

However, the gender neutrality of this language has not been associated with any significant change in the target group of literacy research and educational programmes. On the whole, research and policy in the area of literacy has continued to reflect the conventional view that mothers do, and should, have the primary responsibility for children's literacy development, particularly in the early years. Gender neutral language has served to mask gender differentiated practices in the area of parental participation, policy and programmes (David 1993).

This is seen in the slippage from 'parent' to 'mother' that can be found in educational documents (eg Rich 1985). It is also seen in the type of parental activities that are frequently associated with involvement in children's literacy, activities such as routine housework tasks (eg Dodge & Phinney 1991; Dzama 1983) that are usually carried out by the adult responsible for 'home duties'. The association between mother's work and literacy work, is reflected in the media example which opened this chapter, is also explicitly made in certain educational writings. In an early childhood educational journal Pulvertaft (1985) warns that 'the bedtime story as an established part of family routine is disappearing faster than home-made gravy' and enjoins the 'parent' to forget about ironing trackpants and concentrate on story-reading. In this way, the gendered division of labour is taken for granted and extended to the arena of literate labour. As A. Luke notes, in relation to child language research:

> The sexual division of this particular aspect of textual work .. too often is (silently) represented as a product of biology, innate relationality, 'caring' and so forth. (1994b p. 368)

Rather than making the gendered division of literate labour the subject of analysis, mainstream literacy research has tended to take it as a basic given.

1.2.2 The meaning of 'children's literacy'

As well as reflecting conventional understandings of what constitutes a 'parent', debate around parents and literacy has also been shaped by understandings of what constitutes 'children's literacy development'. Literacy research into home factors can be categorised as either child-centred or community centred. An example of a body of child-centred studies is the work on child language acquisition, sometimes referred to as 'natural language studies'. Community-centred research includes ethnographies undertaken to investigate the language practices of particular cultural and ethnic sub-groups (Heath Moll 1990, 1992; Moll et al 1992).

Theories of children's literacy development have often focussed on the early years in an effort to analyse and explain the process by which language and specific forms of literacy are acquired. This focus has resulted in the home, and parenting, becoming an object of particular interest to researchers investigating child language. Two features have characterised studies into children's home language acquisition. Firstly they are necessarily child-centred; the parent is studied only in interaction with a child. Secondly, being observational studies, they concentrate on behaviour. What the parent *does* (their literate and child-rearing activities) is analysed rather than what the parent *thinks* about their literate and child-rearing activities. Although research in the area of social psychology has investigated links between parents' perceptions and their actions (Bacon & Ashmore 1985, 1986; Bird & Berman 1985; Dix & Grusec 1985; Goodnow 1988; L. McGillicuddy-DeLisi 1982), there has been little if any cross-over of this theorising into the field of literacy research.

Studies which focus on the child as a unit, or the child-adult couple have been critiqued for lacking a theorisation of 'the social' (Riley 1983). The dominance of humanist individualism which has been noted in relation to social science research (Henriques et al 1984) can also be seen in child-centred research on children's literacy, including home based studies. In many accounts of children's language acquisition, the child takes centre stage as agent, while other factors become backdrop or 'context'. In this

framework, the parent can either be seen as part of a child-adult unit, in which two individuals interact with each other, therefore coming under the 'individual' theoretical frame, or as part of the assumed backdrop to the child's development - parent as 'context'. Mother-child language studies are an example of the former emphasis (Newson 1977; Pawlby 1977; Snow 1983; Tizard & Hughes 1987). Despite frequently stressing the importance of social interaction to the child's language development, the focus on the mother-child dyad as the primary context for language interaction mitigates against a consideration of broader social factors.

The latter approach, to treat the parent as part of the assumed context of children's development is a fair representation of the position of fathers in much educational research. Father's income is often taken as one of the standard measures of a family's socio-economic status in research investigating 'home environment' as a factor in children's educational progress, typically measured in terms of reading scores (eg de Jong 1993; Grolnick & Ryan 1989; Johnson & Martin 1985). However fathers' presence other than as an income source is often absent from such studies.

This tendency to treat the parent as either one half of an adult-child unit, or as an unexamined part of the child's social environment creates difficulties for understanding 'the social' in relation to the parent. The primacy of the child in child-adult interaction studies means that in so far as 'context' is considered, it is the child's context, not the parent's. The question arises: What is the parent's context? And how does this affect their actions, feelings and understandings in relation to their literate labour? In this study, this question will be addressed through a consideration of both the discursive and the material contexts within which parents are located.

The absence of gender as a category of analysis in relation to parents has been noted (David 1993; Loveridge 1990). This absence has generally extended into the framework for understanding 'the child' and it's literacy in relation to 'the parent'. 'Child', like 'parent' is used as a generic term intended to cover all possible variations of class, ethnicity and gender. This neutrality of reference has been facilitated by two strands in contemporary

education, including literacy education. One is a 'progressive' pedagogy, particularly influential in primary schooling, emphasising the child as an individual and associated with such educational strategies as individualised programming and the encouragement of individual forms of expression, including literate expression (P. Gilbert 1989). The other is the movement for gender equity of participation which has been interpreted in many quarters to mean 'treating all students the same'; thus encouraging the adoption of gender neutral language as a sign of fairness (Clark 1989).

Although classroom based education research has been addressing gender issues intensively over the last ten years (Clarricoates 1987; Danby 1994; Davies 1989b; P. Gilbert 1987, 1989; Kenworthy 1994; Lee 1980; Martino 1994; Riddell 1992; Skeggs 1991; Sultana 1990; Swann & Graddol 1988; Thomas 1990; Thorne 1992; Walkerdine 1987), research on parental and home factors continues, on the whole, to be framed as if child gender is not a relevant factor. Although classroom based studies have reported gender-differentiated modes of participation in school literacies, there has been little, if any, attempt to investigate whether these patterns are also present in the home environment. Adult-child 'interactions' have been viewed from the perspective of age relations but not gender relations.

It has been noted that home language studies have focused on parental practice in relation to the child, rather than on the parent's understandings or feelings. This focus on behaviour when combined with an absence of gender as an analytic category, prevents many questions from being asked. For example, how might a mother's or father's understanding of a child's gender affect expectations for the child's participation in various literacies?

1.2.3 Parents and Literacy: an alternative view

Whilst acknowledging the contributions made by past educational research into parental and home factors, in undertaking this research I have attempted to address some of the absences implicit in dominant approaches to the subject. Like many other studies, this

thesis addresses the issue of children's literacy. Unlike most studies, this thesis makes parents the central focus in an attempt to discover what emerges when the question becomes, not: what is the child's context? but: what is the parent's?

In this study, fathers' and mothers' participation in children's literacy is understood to involve not just behaviours, but perceptions, interpretations and emotions. If this is accepted, then factors which influence parents' understandings become relevant to the research problem. A research framework needs to provide a theorisation of the process by which parents come to apply meanings to 'literacy', 'gender', 'child', 'mother', 'father'.

This study starts with the assumption that gender is significant. However, due to the absence of gender as an analytic category in educational research on parents, the specific ways in which gender is relevant in family literacy; the particular ways in which discursive practices undertaken in home and other sites may, or may not be gendered; the modes of interaction between gender and other factors in shaping parents' and children's literate identities - these and other questions have remained unasked. To begin to address these issues it is necessary to have a framework which provides a theorisation of gender which operates at the levels of language, thought and practice.

The framework I employ here utilises concepts and insights drawn from three domains: post-structuralism, feminism and critical studies in literacy. Post-structuralism provides a theorisation of discourse which allows the parent to be located within a network of competing discourse each offering definitions of 'literacy', 'the child' and other key terms; definitions involving subject positions and associated discursive practices. Feminist post-structuralism enables the interrogation of ways in which discourses of gender offer gendered subject positions to mothers, fathers, sons and daughters. Feminist materialism allows parents' literate activities with children to be understood as a form of labour, thus making possible an analysis of the material conditions within which this labour is carried out. Literacy studies characterised by a socially critical viewpoint offer a range of strategies for understanding how language practices are implicated in political and social agendas operating at macro and micro levels of society. The intersection of

these theoretical domains makes it possible for me to theorise the parent as gendered, literate subject.

1.3 Who says? An introduction to the writer

Before setting out to develop in some detail the theoretical framework within which I will read 'the parent', I will attempt to locate myself, as researcher, in relation to my subject. Any attempt to provide a 'standpoint' in textual form, including the one I am about to make, is necessarily subject to multiple readings. Fixing a standpoint involves, at least partly, the construction of a writing persona that in some way 'matches' or complements the constructed research subject. Rather than claiming that this standpoint piece can transparently represent 'me' as subject, I offer it as a means of addressing the question: what are the discursive and material contexts within which this researcher has selected this particular research subject?

The self I am presenting here is one which coheres around the intersection of three arenas within which I have been operating over the last twenty years. These are: academia, teaching and parenting. It could be said that embarking on this research has offered me the chance, unique so far in my life, to bring these domains together and thus create the particular 'me' that speaks here. My academic background was initially in the area of English literature where I pursued an interest in textuality and gained access to a range of reading and writing strategies.

The theories underpinning these strategies were generally implicit. Reviewing the teaching of literary criticism in tertiary English Departments, Crowley notes:

> [It] is carried on, for the most part, as though it were innocent of theory, as though it were a knack that anyone could pick up by practising it. (1989 p. 26)

The naturalisation in English teaching of a particular type of reading, 'close reading', which involves a comprehensive attending to what is 'in' the text, privileges a certain

type of reader, one who possesses the cultural capital necessary to construct plausible readings. As a middle-class student from a 'literate' home, that is one which valued the 'canon', I had the capital and was able to pick up 'the knack' of close reading. However, the willingness of faculty staff to entertain any reading that could be support by detailed reference to the text, meant that multiple readings and interpretations were constantly being aired. I gained from this experience a certain comfort with shifting meanings which, reinforced by the social context of postmodernity, has become habitual (though like everyone else I 'draw the line at some things'. A deconstructive reading of this text could trace where I have drawn it).

I began a teaching career in the early 80s at a time when economic rationalism was beginning to make its presence felt through an emphasis on 'observable outcomes'. My subject position as teacher was always a contradictory one; as I now understand the situation, my teacher's body was constantly being utilised in the service of competing discourses. Liberal humanism dictated I facilitate the students' personal growth; critical pedagogy insisted I empower the disadvantaged; feminism encouraged me to combat sexism and economic rationalism required me to make the students 'job-ready'. My academic background told me that all I needed to do was teach English students how to understand texts and this, indeed, is where I initially focussed my energies.

As an English teacher I soon became aware that girls and boys displayed different modes of participation in school literacies. Whereas to many, this was a natural and taken-for-granted state of things, to me it came as somewhat of a surprise. My education between the ages of 11 and 16 had been undertaken at an all-girls' school. Any oppositions that existed in terms of orientation to curriculum areas, or behaviour, were oppositions between groups of girls; the 'brainy' types and the 'typing stream'; the 'goody-goodies' and the rebels. The oppositions between boys and girls' modes of classroom and literate behaviour were accounted for by some of my colleagues in terms of their 'natural' propensities. I found it difficult to accept the agreed status quo voiced in statements such as 'boys just don't like reading' or 'girls are naturally neat'. Not only the diversity of my school-girl peers but the example of my father, a keen reader who

had taught me to read, caused me to question whether these gender differentiated patterns were inevitable or natural.

I was sure boys just needed to be won over and set out to do it, thus falling into the common trap of giving even more attention to a group of students already claiming a disproportionate amount (Sadker & Sadker 1986; Shakeshaft 1986; Spender 1986). However, several experiences of success with supposedly hardened anti-English boys, reinforced a conviction that it was possible for boys to take other than the conventional oppositional stance with regard to certain literacies. If my teaching practice could modify this oppositional stance in some cases, then teaching practice became also implicated in the maintenance of this stance. I began to see gendered literate practice as related to classroom contexts and relations. And if it was so for boys, then why not for girls also?

In English lessons I was concerned to see girls spending what seemed to me an inordinate amount of time on 'peripheral' activities such as decorating the margins of each page or using five different colours of biro in a piece of writing. One of the central planks in feminist pedagogy at that time was facilitating access to the valued curriculum. The girls' decorative literate practice seemed counter to the acquisition of the academic genres which would lead to higher educational pathways. Unlike my modest success with some of the boys, I was never able to convince the girls to change this particular practice. Typically, while the boys were offered a chance to gain something, the girlswere asked to give up something of value to them. Like many feminist educators frustrated in attempts to change gendered attitudes and behaviours, I sometimes wondered why they had become so entrenched. Although at one level I could see that classroom practices were themselves involved, still the notion of locating an origin for these unhelpful patterns was seductive. Those of my colleagues who did not subscribe to a biologically determinist theory of gender difference often advanced 'social conditioning' as a causal factor. In discussions about social conditioning, a number of agents frequently appeared including the media, peers and family background.

My eventual decision to select 'the family' as a site for research on gendered literate

practice needs to be seen in the context of theories of social conditioning. The selection of parents rather than one of the other supposed agents of conditioning, also involves widely available theories of literacy acquisition which present the pre-school years as a crucial period for the development of modes of literate behaviour. But while it could be said that I began framing this research with the view that 'it all comes from home', this perspective changed to incorporate the question: what goes into the home? I began by seeing the home as the child's context for developing gendered literate behaviour but realised that I needed also to contextualise 'the home' itself by considering broader social formations. In so doing I have also attempted to construct a context for myself and my practice as a parent.

While I do not, with the exception of this 'standpoint' piece, speak directly as a parent in the thesis text, it is true that, had I not experienced living as a mother, both the construction of the thesis topic and the research methodology would have taken a different form (the implications of this for methodology are explored in chapter two). Although I was aware of the constraints affecting teacher's practice, and the contradictions caused by competing agendas, until I became identifiable as a mother I had not personally experienced the conflicting ways in which women are positioned as parents. Teachers share with mothers the burden of producing children as properly 'socialised' citizens. As a teacher, I had been happy to leave this burden at the classroom door at the end of every school day. As a mother I discovered how pervasively social expectations can permeate into every aspect of a life I had formerly supposed 'private'. A similar experience is reported by wife-and-husband sociologists, the Newsons (1968). It led them to instigate a comprehensive interview project partly in order to place themselves as parents within what they found to be a broad and diverse range of parental attitudes and practice. In my case, this experience makes up part of the network of factors leading to the construction of the topic in terms of 'parent as subject'. The experience of subjectification made this approach particularly salient.

As a parent, prior to taking on this project, I had been thinking about ways to use literacy as a site of resistance to the gendered socialisation I anticipated my daughter being

subjected to. This parental project does not have a place in the thesis; however it made me constantly aware of factors influencing the literate choices I was making as a parent and is another strand in the construction of this research subject. Because feminism takes up a position of resistance in relation to traditional ideologies of motherhood, to position oneself as a feminist and a mother means the living out of contradiction (Davies & Welch 1986). Because of this experience I have found the theorisation I am about to offer, which incorporates the concept of multiple subjectivity, makes sense to me on a personal level.

1.4 Theorising the subject

The choice of 'subject' as a theoretical category places this study within the domain of poststructuralism, a somewhat loose and diverse theoretical field incorporating a range of concerns, but characterised by a view of language as constitutive rather than representative of social reality (Brodkey 1992; Crowley 1989; Fairclough 1989, 1992a; Foucault 1990; Lather 1991; Parker 1992; Smith 1990; Threadgold 1986; Weedon 1987). A 'subject' in post-structural theory can be understood as a position, defined in language, which, though occupiable by specific individuals under specific circumstances, is not identified with a particular individual:

> A subject ... is a location constructed within the expressive sphere which finds its voice through the cluster of attributes and responsibilities assigned to it ... (Parker 1992 p. 9)

Subject is not a synonym for person, a humanist term which implies a unitary stable identity. Subject rather implies a recognition of the role of language, the expressive sphere, in constructing versions of social identity and making possible the identification of individuals with these identities.

Descriptions of post-structuralism vary but, in general post-structural theorising addresses three main concerns (Agger 1991; Parker 1992; Rabinow 1991; Sheridan 1980; Weedon 1987; Yeatman 1991a):

1) The identification and description of particular systems of meaning which are available to describe, and which are understood as constitutive of social reality;

2) The investigation of the effects of these meaning systems in a broad range of social phenomena eg kinds of government, the structure of institutions, methods of organising individuals into social groups;

3) An analysis of the relation between these meaning systems and the ways in which persons form understandings about themselves and social reality, and act upon these understandings.

It is the potential of post-structural theory to integrate concepts of structure, society and subjectivity that makes it relevant to this thesis, concerned as it is with tracing the effects of social forces through the voices of individual parents.

The concept of discourse is crucial to post-structural accounts of the relation between individuals and socially available meaning systems (Agger 1991; Baker 1995; Davies 1993a; a 1989, 1992; Gee 1990; Loveridge 1990: Luke 1995; Luke & Luke 1992; Parker 1992; Smith 1990: Walkerdine 1988; Weedon 1987). Discourse can be understood to have both a general and a specific meaning. The term 'discourse' is used in post-structural theory to refer in a general way to the continual process of constituting social reality through language and practice. This use of discourse originates with Foucault whose socio-historical analyses have demonstrated that not only particular classes of persons (eg the delinquent, the homosexual), but taken-for-granted modes of experiencing social reality, have been made possible through the speaking of them into existence (Foucault 1990; Rabinow 1991, Sheridan 1980). It is in this sense that theorists refer to discourse as an agent able to act in the world. Gee (1990), for instance, states:

> [I]t is not individuals who speak and act, but rather ... historically and socially defined Discourses speak to each other through individuals. (p. 145)

'Discourse' is also used to refer to specific meaning systems which are identified both by their characteristic structural features and by their characteristic effects. Structural features might include relations between key terms (eg 'mother' and 'baby') while effects might involve particular institutional practices (eg the practice of infant health checks). Effects can also be traced at the level of individual subjectivity (eg in the terms mothers commonly use to describe themselves in relation to their baby) (Urwin 1984).

Specific discourses can be understood as assemblies of meaning which cohere around a particular subject or set of relations, and which are expressed by and constructed through language and practice. Researchers looking for specific discourses are looking for patterns, an issue which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two. Discourses identified through analysis have been associated with institutions (the church, the family), areas of social categorisation (gender, race, class) and domains of knowledge construction (medicine, psychology). Those discursive fields with particular relevance to this thesis will be discussed in the following chapter.

Historical analyses undertaken within a poststructural framework form an important background to this thesis by demonstrating that forms of knowledge are historically variable and contingent upon a range of factors (Donzelot 1979; Foucault 1990; Riley 1983, Rose 1990). These factors include forms of government, political agendas, material conditions, forms of communication and kinds of social relations. For instance the knowledge that 'children need their mothers' was produced in the context of social developments emerging out of the industrial revolution such as the geographical relocation of families from rural to urban habitations and the absorption of men into industry both of which reduced the child-rearing availability of adults other than mothers. The authorisation of this view of child-rearing was further made possible by the development of particular scientific modes of enquiry which provided developed theorisations eg 'maternal attachment theory' (Riley 1983). A range of social projects has

been justified with reference to this knowledge, for example the project of accomplishing the return of women to the domestic sphere after World War II. However, under particular social and political circumstances it has also been possible to mobilise other, conflicting knowledges about children's 'needs', for instance in order to provide women workers to replace male fighters during the same war.

Whether a particular view of the world holds sway at a given time and location depends, then, on a number of factors: its degree of alignment with governmental and institutional agendas, the social capital held by subscribers and the rate and nature of social change. Those discourses which are strongly aligned with powerful social institutions, which privilege groups in possession of social capital in its many forms and which are associated with relatively stable social phenomena can be termed dominant (Gee 1990). In the discursive field of parenting, for instance, the maternalist discourse can be considered dominant because it is articulated with and supported by a range of social institutions including contemporary education and health systems. Feminists argue the maternal discourse privileges male power-holders by providing a rationale for their exclusion from a devalued domain (Polatnick 1975). The gendered division of child-rearing can be considered a relatively stable, in the sense of socially entrenched, phenomenon, which contributes to the dominance of maternalism within the discursive field of parenting. Dominant discourses can be expected to exert a powerful influence on individuals, particularly those who are constituted as subjects by the discourse. Any woman who has given birth to a child is positioned as 'mother', whether or not she chooses to subscribe to or resist the dominant maternalist discourse.

Researching the parent as subject therefore involves a consideration of discursive contexts within which 'parent' is framed under particular historical, social and political conditions. In framing this thesis as a post-structural account I have found Loveridge's (1990) articulation of a framework for research on parents a useful encapsulation.

> I suggest that an analysis which examines the play of discourses surrounding becoming a 'mother' or 'father' or 'parents' in the context of the *lived experiences* of particular individuals offers an insightful means

> of understanding how these experiential relations are constituted. (Loveridge 1990 p. 18)

In this study, parents' lived experience becomes available to us through their accounts. Parents' accounts are here understood as representations of their experience. In producing these representations, parents necessarily draw upon the available resources of discourse. The categories they employ make their experiences intelligible within the terms of the discourses on which they are drawing. By the same token, these categories exclude alternative interpretations of experience. So constructing an account, as each parent has done, is itself a discursive practice. That is, it is a practice organised by and made possible through discourses (Davies & Harre 1990).

At the same time, the practices which parents describe in their accounts can be understood as discursive practices. For instance, these parents often described the experience of reading a story to a child (see chapter seven). Story reading involves both adult reader and child listener taking up positions in relation to each other and in relation to the text. The social relations enacted through the practice of story reading are enabled through historically specific childrearing and pedagogic discourses. These discourses have constituted 'story reading' as one of the characteristic practices of the subject 'parent' and 'story listening' as one of the characteristic practices of the subject 'child'. Parents' accounts are thus here understood as representations of discursive practices constructed, through discourse, by social subjects.

Because social subjects are inevitably gendered subjects, the effects of gender, both discursive and material, must be accounted for in analysing these representations. This requires a theorisation of the parent as gendered subject.

1.5 Theorising gender

In naming gender as an essential element in a framework for examining the parent as subject, I locate myself within the broad field of feminist theory. Because all of the many branches of feminism are centrally concerned with the subject 'woman', an important task of feminist theory has been to interrogate the ways in which the category 'woman' has been and continues to be constructed (De Lauretis 1987; Fox 1977; Plumwood 1993; Nicholson 1994a). At the same time, feminism, as a politically active movement, continues to highlight the material conditions within which actual women conduct their lives (Bryson 1985; James 1991; Stanley & Wise 1993). Feminist theory thus provides models for examining gender both as a meaning system and as a lived experience.

Harding (1986) has provided a conceptualisation of gender which provides a useful framework for analysis. It incorporates three integrally related aspects: gender symbolism, gender structure and gender identity. Gender symbolism refers to representations of gender, the ways in which 'male' and 'female', 'masculine' and 'feminine' are defined. In Scott's (1988) terms, 'gender is the knowledge that establishes meanings for bodily differences.' Gender structure refers to the organisation of social practice in relation to gender. This is a similar concept to De Lauretis' sex/gender system, defined as 'a set of social relations obtaining throughout social existence' (1987 p. 9). Gender identity refers to the personal experience of gender, the level of gender subjectivity. All these aspects are crucial to understanding the ways in which gender impacts on social subjects.

These three elements should not be seen as fixed concepts but as aspects of continually occurring interrelated social processes. At the level of gender symbolism meanings are assigned to 'various perceived dichotomies' (Harding 1986 p. 17). These gender dualisms are then used as a justification for the organisation of social activity in particular ways (Connell 1987; Harding 1986; P. Smith 1985). The gendered division of domestic labour is a prime example of a social structure underpinned by assumptions of essential difference. Both gender representation and gender structure continually impact on

individuals contributing to the construction of individual gender identity. Thus the construction of gender occurs in an interrelating way at all levels, the symbolic, the social and the individual. This process is summarised by De Lauretis as follows:

> The sex-gender system, in short, is both a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc.) to individuals within the society. If gender representations are social positions which carry differential meanings, then for someone to be represented and to represent oneself as male or female implies the assumption of the whole of those meaning effects. ... The construction of gender is both the product and the process of its representation. (1987 p. 5)

There are some potentially useful correspondences between this theorisation of gender and discourse theory. Discourse theory is also concerned with the construction of meanings, the organisation of social practice and the production of subjectivity. Just as discourse and practice are seen as mutually constitutive forces (Fairclough 1989, Weedon 1987) so gender symbolism and the gendered social practice continually act upon each other. In De Lauretis' formulation, to represent oneself as gendered means to 'assume the meaning effects' of the sex/gender system. This is consistent with a post-structural theorisation of subjectivity. The individual becomes a (gendered) subject by constructing self according to the terms of socially available (gendered) discourses and practices. The alignments between these two frameworks will become clearer as I discuss each of the three aspects of gender.

1.5.1 Gender as a meaning system

male - female normal - ill

Understanding gender as symbolism begins from a recognition that defining objects by comparing them to perceived opposites is a dominant and enduring feature of Western meaning systems (Leach 1989). This, the binary system of classification operates such that each term in a category pair is defined through exclusion of the qualities associated with its opposite (Agger 1991; Dallery 1989; B. Davies 1989a, 1993a; Plumwood 1993; Wiltshire 1989). Reason, for instance is defined in opposition to, and in exclusion from, emotion. The public is understood as that which is not private.

Femininity and masculinity are categories which, like the other dualisms, are constituted as mutually exclusive yet mutually interdependent. That male and female, masculinity and femininity, are opposites is a defining foundation of the dominant discourse of gender difference (Plumwood 1993; Wiltshire 1989). Masculinity is defined by reference to qualities which are understood as not-feminine and vice versa. In this way, definitions of gender draw on more general categories of opposition, which are available in the culture.

It is possible to produce a list of these gendered binaries which provides a summary of the features of the dominant discourse of gender difference. The following list is a compilation of some of the most frequently occurring terms found in analyses of gendered meanings (Agger 1991; Bleich 1988; B. Davies 1989a; Plumwood 1993, P. Smith 1985; Thomas 1990, Walkerdine 1988; Wiltshire, 1989):

masculine	feminine
reason	emotion
active	passive
mind	body
culture	nature
public	private
outside	inside
separation	attachment
individual	social

Within the dominant discourse of gender difference, then, masculinity is understood as aligned with an array of qualities all related in some way to autonomy, to the foregrounding of the person in relation to his setting (Keller 1983). Femininity, necessarily in contrast, aligns with the natural, the subjective and the familial. The precise terms in which this opposition is defined is variable depending on the cultural and historical context within which gender is at issue (Ortner 1990). However, the definition of gender according to two sets of oppositionally related categories appears to cross cultural, historical and geographic boundaries. P. Smith notes that, regardless

of cultural context:

> the convergent gender-characteristic attributes are highly correlated ... so that anatomy, personal appearance, personality, sexual and much non-sexual behaviour form a tight cluster. ... In short, the gender formulae are relatively cohesive, cross-situationally prominent and reciprocal ... (1985 pp. 23-4)

A debate within feminist theory concerns the degree to which the masculine side of the binary system can be said to be 'always privileged' (P. Smith 1985). One argument states that the binary system is itself a masculinist imposition on representation, preventing subjects from defining themselves in other than gendered terms (Dallery 1989; Weedon 1987). However, another point of view maintains that it is the feminine that should be privileged and used as a model for human conduct generally (Firestone 1970). This argument maintains the concept of essential gender difference while reversing the order of privilege. Postmodern feminism argues that the many ways in which the categories 'woman' 'and 'man' can be defined mitigate against total hegemony of any particular version of difference (Butler 1994). Part of the feminist deconstructive project is to look for the contradictions and slippages in representations of gender, in order to produce space for alternative, non-binary discourses of gender (Bannet 1993).

The notion of 'dominant discourse' can be helpful here (Gee 1990). A dominant discourse is one that is strongly supported by powerful social institutions, which privileges groups in possession of social capital in its many forms and which is associated with relatively stable social phenomena. This definition of a dominant discourse is consistent with the operation of gender symbolism. In this thesis I will be using the term 'dominant discourse of gender difference' to refer to the system of representing gender in terms of oppositionally related category sets. This term is intended to capture the privileged position of this discourse within social institutions and its power in providing socially endorsed subject positions for individuals to take up. At the same time the reference to dominant discourse acknowledges that there are 'other' discourses of gender which may operate in specific socio-cultural settings. These 'other'

discourses of gender are often socially marginalised and the social subjects produced by them constructed as pathological within the majority discourse (Foucault 1990). The dominant discourse of gender difference is thus hegemonic but not totalising in its power.

1.5 2 Gender as social practice

Understanding gender as social practice means taking into account the ways in which gender has been and continues to be an organising principle in social institutions, social sites and social relations (Connell 1987; De Lauretis 1987; D. Smith 1990).This occurs at every level from the macro-social to the micro-social, from the state to the family. The pervasiveness of gender at every level of social practice is due to the centrality of production/reproduction in determining forms of social organisation (Arnot 1984; Connell 1987; Ferguson 1989). Human reproduction has been called a 'nodal practice' which links fields of social practice to 'the reproductive division of people into male and female' (Connell 1987 p.140).

Social practices organised in terms of gender are predicated on the notion of gender difference and support and maintain such difference. A prime example of this is the gendered division of domestic and parenting labour which is justified by reference to both innate and conditioned differences between women and men (Riley 1983; Seidler 1988; Thurer 1994). This point will be further explored when I discuss the discursive field of parenting in chapter three. Another example is the gender segregation of the market-place for children's products such as toys, clothes and leisure activities (Rheingold & Cook 1975; C. Luke 1994). This is a particularly relevant aspect of social practice when considering parents with young children.

The ongoing work of maintaining gender difference has been described in terms of the gender 'regimes' which operate in institutions such as the school and workplace (Connell 1987; Frank 1991). These regimes can be understood as institutionally located discourses of gender which construct different masculine and feminine subject positions

and in so doing effect the terms in which social relations are carried out. Gender 'boundaries' may be constructed through the activities of social subjects in specific sites such that individuals are constrained to present the appropriately gendered social persona or face censure (Thorne 1992). For the social subject, knowing the forms of gender subject position deemed appropriate in particular social contexts and being able to behave as a particular kind of gendered subject, is an important social asset. For this reason gender has been considered a form of 'cultural capital' capable of conferring social advantages (McCall 1992). Producing oneself as appropriately gendered thus involves not only understanding the dominant discourse of gender difference but which version of masculinity or femininity is privileged in particular social contexts.

The relation between gender as discourse and gender as social practice is theorised by Smith (1990) in her exploration of femininity. Femininity, for Smith, is social practice performed in relation to discourses of femininity. These discourses are made available to social subjects through the representational practices of society, in other words through the complete range of texts and products through which the subject 'femininity' is constituted. Modes of femininity, and by extension other modes of gendered practice, can thus be understood as:

> the social relations of a 'symbolic' terrain and the material practices which bring it into being and sustain it. (1990 p. 163)

These material practices include all the forms of work done by social subjects in order to produce themselves as gendered in particular ways. Behaviour, speech, dress, posture - all can be considered forms of discursive work contributing to the production of gendered subjects. In Smith's terms, these feminine practices 'index' the discourses of gender which continually provide representations of gendered subjects through a range of texts.

A similar approach focuses on the importance of narrative in providing sets of instructions for living as a particular kind of gendered subject (B. Davies 1989; Davies & Banks 1992; Davies & Harre 1990). It is often through standard story genres (such as

the romance novel or the sports telecast) that gendered subject positions are made available. Characters in narratives provide the detail through which readers learn what it means to appear and act as a particular kind of gendered subject (Gilbert 1991; Smith 1991). This includes forms of social script through which gendered relations can be enacted.

1.5.3 Gender as identity

An analysis of gender at the level of the individual must therefore take into account the individual's relationship to discourse and social practice. Within an overall post-structural framework, the process of acquiring and maintaining gender identity has been theorised in several ways. Although gender has been the focus for much work on subjectivity (due to the influence of feminist theorists) these theorisations have broader relevance, providing models for understanding subjectivity in general.

At an individual level, gender is experienced not as a set of categories but as a mode of being. To be gendered and to feel gendered is an embodied experience, incorporating physical sensations, habitual postures, desires and revulsions. Such dispositions are acquired in the process of taking part in the social practices of gender:

> ... through the organization and regulation of the time, space, and movements of our daily lives, our bodies are trained, shaped, and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity, femininity. (Bordo 1989 p. 14)

Analyses of masculinity, for instance, highlight the role played by the physical practice of organised sport in producing particular forms of embodied masculine subjects (Connell 1987; Frank 1991). The practice of sport indexes dominant discourses of masculinity which provide categories which define the masculine sporting subject eg strong, tough, brave, aggressive. These masculine discourses thus become embodied in the actual bodies of individual men through their participation in sport.

Living as a gendered subject also involves making a personal investment in chosen mode(s) of femininity or masculinity (Hollway 1984; Walkerdine 1994; Weedon 1987). This investment in gender is one aspect of the individual's general investment in a stable, continuous and non-contradictory sense of self. This process of investment becomes visible when individuals narrate their lives. Children, for instance, commonly employ standardised storylines to describe their experiences and in so doing take up the gendered positions available in these storylines:

> preferred storylines and the cumulative experience of being positioned within those storylines in consistent ways enables them to tell stories that give the sense of a consistent and continuous person (Davies & Banks 1992 p. 23)

Because of this investment, individuals can be expected to resist being positioned in ways that are inconsistent with their understanding of masculinity or femininity (Weedon 1987).

1.6 Theorising literacy

In developing a theorisation of literacy relevant to the study of parent as subject, I have I drawn on two overlapping areas of research. The first, critical studies in literacy is concerned with the relation between forms of literate practice and socio-political agendas. The second field, feminist research in literacy has examined gender differentiated patterns of participation in literacy, offering insights into the production of gendered literate subjectivity.

The term 'literacy' is often used in public discussions as if its meaning was singular and undisputable. Critical researchers in literacy, drawing on post-structural and neomarxist perspectives have challenged dominant definitions and assumptions about literacy, offering instead the notion of multiple literacies contesting social and political space, some institutionally supported - others marginalised (Freebody 1992; A. Luke 1994a, Luke & Luke 1992; B. Green 1991; Wickert 1992). 'School literacy' is understood as a

specific set of literate knowledges and skills deemed necessary to participate in contemporary official institutionalised discourse (Cook-Gumperz 1987). As studies of specific communities have demonstrated, school literacy is by no means the only form of literate practice available to people (Heath 1982, 1983; Moll 1990, 1992; Moll et al 1992). However, it is the dominant form in contemporary affluent societies such as Australia due to the widely assumed (but occasionally challenged) causal link between school literacy and socio-economic power. A starting point for reading the parent as literate subject is the assumption that, in urbanised societies, to be a literate subject is to be a schooled subject. Every parent in this study is, in some sense, a product of the literate practices of Australian schooling in the 60s and 70s. And every parent has an interest in the production of their children as schooled literate citizens.

In the early years this involves for each child something that is generally referred to unproblematically as 'learning to read and write'; in other words, the attempted acquisition of the means to participate in socially determined literate practices. As critical studies have demonstrated, this involves much more than the simple transmission of skills from expert to novice. It involves being socialised into a set of relations: relations to text, to authority, to self and to others (Baker & Davies 1992; A. Luke 1988; McHoul 1991). As Gilbert points out:

> part of learning how to read, is learning about the various reading positions that texts construct through which they become intelligible, coherent, plausible. (1990 p. 102)

Through text, and particularly through the dominant narrative genre, social markers of difference such as age, gender, class and ethnicity become categories which are made recognisable and transferrable.

Not only the text itself, but the social context within which such texts are read, contributes to the positioning of the child subject. The discursive practices through which children acquire literacy are social practices (Cook-Gumperz 1987). In the early years, a key relation is that between adult and child; teacher and learner; expert and novice.

This is a relation of power in which the adult's position of authority is further reinforced by the relations depicted in the text (Baker & Davies 1992; Baker & Freebody 1989). Although this view has been developed through reference to early schooling, the home site is also an arena where literate practices are conducted within adult-child relations, often with specific reference to school literacy, for instance when a parent teaches a child the alphabet in preparation for participation in school. As Heath (1983) has demonstrated, the rules of conduct within these relations determine which modes of literate participation are made possible and seen as appropriate. Cultural protocols operating within communities also have an impact on literate relations within home sites.

The process of acquiring literacy, through engagement with texts and participation in discursive practices, involves becoming subjected to particular assemblies of meaning or 'ways of theorising about the world' (A. Luke 1988). School literacy is a means of gaining access to social knowledge (Cook-Gumperz 1987), a complex of attitudes, understandings and potentialities which at any particular point in time and cultural location, is deemed desirable and necessary. As such it can be considered a form of capital, which with other forms of capital (such as economic) contributes to an individual's social power (A. Luke 1996). The current social position of the parents in this study can thus be seen, at least in part, as an outcome of their accumulation of literate capital through their participation in home, school and workplace discursive practices. At the same time, their parental practice can be viewed in the light of its role in maximising their children's social capital (Lareau 1989) through the acquisition of forms of literate competence deemed valuable. Critical studies have, however, highlighted the generally implicit nature of both the knowledge conveyed *through*, and the knowledge of how to participate *in* school literacy practices (Baker & Freebody 1993; Hammersley 1990). The acquisition of literate subjectivity thus often entails the taking on of unexamined and taken-for-granted forms of knowledge and practice.

1.6.1 Literacy and the production of gendered subjectivity

If literate practices are a means by which individuals come to acquire social knowledge and become positioned within social relations, then they are a crucial factor in the production and maintenance of gender, both at the level of discourse and individual subjectivity. Through feminist and post-structural analysis the processes through which literacy and gender intersect have begun to be made visible. Three areas in particular have been highlighted: texts, writing practices and the framing of literacy within broad domains of knowledge. Feminist post-structural analysis has demonstrated that the subject positions constructed through a range of children's texts reflect dominant representations of gendered identity and that, further, the discursive context within which these texts are read reinforces these representations (Baker & Davies 1992; B. Davies 1987, 1993a; Gilbert 1990; Gilbert & Rowe 1989; White 1990). The practice of writing is seen, through this frame, as a process of selecting from available text models in order to construct a meaningful account. Since the most commonly available text models reflect dominant discourses of gender, the writer is constrained either to reproduce these dominant gender positions or produce an incoherent or contradictory text (Gilbert & Rowe 1989). The experience of acquiring literacy is thus understood to be integrally related with the development of gendered subjectivity.

Other studies have examined the positioning of various literacies within broad domains of knowledge (Lee 1992; A. Luke 1994b; Martino 1994; Thomas 1990). Using a deconstructive approach to the analysis of oppositional categories through which areas of knowledge are defined, these studies consider the ways in which particular literacies are constructed as feminised or masculinised. Categories, such as fiction/fact, reading/writing and Arts/Sciences have been found to align with the traditional gender categories of feminine/masculine. The contemporary school curriculum and its associated literacies is structured around such oppositions (J. Miller 1993; Weiner 1994). The experience of being positioned within this polarised field of knowledge is one shared by the parents in this study and is a factor in their construction as gendered literate subjects.

1.7 Bringing the strands together: some linking concepts

In constructing my research subject in this multi-layered way - as parent, as gendered and as literate - I attempt to represent the complexity within which daily practices around family literacy are lived out. Dealing with complexity means considering relations both within and between discursive fields, in this case the domains of parenting, literacy and gender. These relations exist at the level of meaning, at the level of social practice and at the level of individual subjectivity. At the level of meaning, relations exist within and between discourses, for instance between discourses of gender and discourses of parenting. At the level of practice, discourses operating in particular social contexts make possible modes of interaction between social subjects. Finally, there is also the factor of self or individual subjectivity. The notion of subjectivity incorporates the cognitive, emotional and physical 'dispositions' (McCall 1992) of persons. These dispositions are continually being produced, maintained and modified through 'the semiotic interaction of self and outer world' (De Lauretis 1987 p. 18).

In writing these relations I will be employing as linking concepts the metaphors of 'discursive field' and 'discursive networks'. The concept of 'discursive field' provides a spatial metaphor for the domains of meaning and practice within which subjects are defined and positions made possible. Weedon (1987) describes discursive fields as:

> competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes. They offer the individual a range of modes of subjectivity. (p. 35)

Discursive fields are not fixed structures of knowledge: their boundaries are necessarily shifting as meanings continue to be produced. 'Gender', 'literacy' and 'parenting' can all be considered discursive fields in the sense that they are all domains within which a number of different discourses offer alternative ways of describing particular subjects.

Foucault refers to a 'multiple and mobile field of force relations' within which discourses are 'tactical elements or blocks' (1990 p. 101-2). Within discursive fields, discourses are

mobilised as part of a continual contest over power. Power is always power over something or someone; 'force relations' are those relations produced when certain social subjects are allocated particular kinds of control over others. Discourse is instrumental in producing this power through producing knowledge. An example of particular relevance to this study is the way that knowledge of 'the child' was produced within medical and psychological discourses which employed instruments of measurement and observation. Norms produced through these strategies were then available to position individual children and thus regulate them and their carers (Rose 1990).

'Network' is here used as a metaphor for the way in which the complex interweaving of strands of knowledge and practice create relations at many levels. This image is particularly useful in explaining how discourses and practices come to be 'relayed' (Parker 1992) between sites and texts. D. Smith's (1990) theorisation of the process by which individuals in diverse sites construct similar positions within discourses of femininity is an example of a network model:

> the concept of a discourse of femininity, as developed here, envisages a web or cats-cradle of texts, stringing together and coordinating the multiple local and particular sites of the everyday/everynight worlds of women and men with the market processes of the fashion, cosmetic, garment and publishing industries. (p. 167)

In this study, parents are understood as being located within a discursive network consisting of multiple intersecting discursive fields, in particular the fields contesting meanings of gender, literacy and parenting.

However, to state that there are multiple discourses within any field of meaning is not to suggest that any discourse is a fixed entity, any more than a field can be. Discourses are not discrete: in constructing any system of meaning it is necessary to use the raw material of language (in the expanded sense), a medium all discourses share. We can expect therefore to see the 'same' words being employed in different discourses but given different nuances of meaning due to their relation with other terms in the

assemblage. Walkerdine (1988) employs the term 'relations of signification' to describe this situation:

> there are multiple significations, connecting, weaving in and out of different discursive practices. (p. 207)

These relations of signification are what prevent any discourse from achieving full hegemony over competing systems of meaning (Brodkey 1992; Crowley 1989). A further implication of these relations of signification is that, taking up a position in relation to one discourse necessarily involves taking up a position in relation to another (Gee et al 1992).

Because of the existence of multiple discourses within any discursive field, a range of subject positions is available to individuals. The notion of multiple subjectivity (B. Davies 1993b; Davies & Harre 1991; Kenway et al 1994) is crucial to a post-structuralist analysis operating, as in this thesis, at the level of individual experience and life history. It enables tensions and contradictions in parents' accounts of their experience to be understood as arising from their positioning within competing discourses:

> the discourse and practices through which we are constituted are also often in tension, one with another, providing the human subject with multiple layers of contradictory meanings which are inscribed in their bodies and in their conscious and unconscious minds. (Davies 1993b p. 11)

Lived experience thus can be understood as involving a continual process of positioning, whether this is done in a reflective way or not.

1.8 The organisation of the thesis

In this chapter I state the thesis agenda and outline the theoretical framework within which parents' accounts will be interpreted. In chapter two, I locate the project within the methodology of discourse analysis and describe the strategies used to gather and analyse the parents' accounts. I explain that this approach to discourse analysis involves

two strands: 1) identifying discourses and practices within the overlapping discursive fields of parenting, childhood and literacy; and 2) tracing discourses and practices through the corpus of data.

In chapter three, I undertake the first part of this analytic task. Through a survey of the literature in a range of fields (education, psychology, history, sociology), I map some of the key discourses used to define parents' literate work and children's literacy learning. In chapter four I then review research on parental practice, reading this as discursive practice, that is, practice associated with particular ways of understanding the meanings of, and relations between, subjects such as 'mother', 'father', 'child' and 'literacy'.

Chapters five through seven present my analysis of the parents' accounts. Chapter five examines parents' literate histories for the gendered literate positions made available to them, particularly focussing on parents' attitude to reading. Positions are categorised according to whether they conform to an 'expected' or an 'unexpected' gender-literacy alignment. While the expected positions - femininity as pro-reading and masculinity as anti-reading - are subscribed to by many parents, the analysis demonstrates that other positions are possible. Multiple versions of masculinity associated with different educational pathways and sociocultural contexts, offer a range of modes of engagement with literacy, including that of 'keen reader'. The analysis reveals a subordinated feminine position of resistance to forms of literacy.

Chapter six presents an analysis of parents' descriptions of their children. Through their accounts I trace four discursive strands: gender difference, individualism, child-centredness and developmentalism. By comparing parents' descriptions of male and female children I show that discourses of 'the child' which are ostensibly gender neutral are being used to support gender differentiated patterns of meaning production. Through examining alignments between discourses I show how a picture is built up within which boys' and girls' modes of participation in literacy and learning are understood as different and 'the problem of boys literacy' is produced.

Chapter seven focuses on parents' description of their practice. Here I analyse the material effects of discourses of parenting, childhood and literacy focussing on such aspects as the division of labour, the negotiation of relations, positioning within specific sites and usage of time. Parents' literate work within the home is discussed with a particular focus on bed-time story reading practices and explicitly pedagogic work with young children. I also analyse parents' accounts of their activities in relation to early childhood educational sites such as the kindergarten.

Chapter eight concludes the thesis with a discussion of the ways in which gender, literacy and parenting intersect to produce parents as gendered literate subjects. The thesis findings are contextualised in relation to current debates in the fields of literacy and education.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCHING THROUGH PARENTS' ACCOUNTS: CONDUCTING A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

> We must try, in every case, to mobilize all the techniques that are relevant and practically useable, given the definition of the object and the practical conditions of data collection. (Bourdieu 1992 p. 227)

2.1 Introduction

I have set out to investigate parents' understandings of literacy and the relationship between these understandings and the socio-political contexts within which they are formed. The theoretical framework uses the concept of the subject position to conceptualise this relationship. Subject positions are positions constituted and made possible by and through discourses. Discourses are representational systems within which particular subjects of knowledge are defined. When individual subjects, such as parents, engage in any act of interpretation, such as a description of their children's learning, they are, by virtue of employing a shared language, mobilising discourses. Language is thus an important mediating link between discourses and individual subjectivities.

This theoretical framework has several implications for methodology. It requires firstly, a methodology suitable for the analysis of language which incorporates analysis at the level of domains of knowledge construction. Secondly, it requires an approach capable of dealing both with the level of individual subjectivity and of the broader discursive framework within which subjectivities are formed and articulated. Both of these requirements can be seen as a form of double perspective: the language/discourse perspective and the individual/social perspective.

The need for a 'double' perspective has been an issue of debate amongst researchers interested in incorporating post-structural theory into social and linguistic analysis (A. Luke 1995; Kamler et al 1994; Poynton 1993). Studies in education have tended to focus either on large-scale social movements and policies or on close studies of practice in particular sites (A. Luke 1995). Close studies have tended to employ analytic models from the domain of structural linguistics, as evidenced by the tradition of work on classroom interaction (Flanders 1970; Mehan 1979; Sinclair & Brazil 1982; Sinclair & Coulthard 1975). Analyses which employ a structural linguistic framework have traditionally taken a politically neutral stance, claiming simply to chart language use as it occurs. In effect this has meant a maintenance of status quo versions of social reality

since analysts' own investment in the findings of their analysis are not acknowledged (Lee 1993). However, studies which attempt to build up a picture of the socio-political context have tended to lack a detailed examination of language use (A. Luke 1995; Poynton 1993; Threadgold 1986). The methodological challenge is:

> to see how broader formations of discourse are manifest in the everyday, quotidian aspects of text in use. (A. Luke 1995, p. 8)

Some researchers on parenting, particularly those operating within social cognition theory (the study of the formation of beliefs within social contexts) have expressed a similar viewpoint. Miller (1988) comments that the common method of statistical analysis of parents' beliefs has a fragmenting effect making it difficult to theorise how parents' various understandings are related to each other. Analysis should rather assume a 'fuller network of beliefs'. This network of beliefs is what I am referring to as the discursive framework.

Discourse analysis provides the necessary 'double perspective' through a focus on language as the mediating factor linking individual subjectivities and social meaning systems. It is discourse analysis which defines the over-arching theoretical and methodological framework for this thesis project. Within this overarching framework, the interview is used as the major data-gathering tool, thus locating the study within the tradition of qualitative research in general and the interview study in particular.

2.1.1 An approach to discourse analysis

Discourse analysis has been called a 'uniquely heterogenous' approach to the study of texts and interactions (Tannen 1992). Within linguistics, discourse analysis refers to the study of extended text units, particularly of speech, and is associated with an array of techniques of structural analysis (Burton 1981; Goodwin 1981; Hatch 1992; McLoughlin 1984; Sinclair & Coulthard 1975; Stubbs 1983; Tannen 1992). This body of work has provided many categories useful for describing the interaction patterns typical to a range of social situations. Communication, in this model, is both a rule-governed and a

dynamic state of affairs in which participants negotiate their relationships and modes of interaction.

Within post-structural theory, discourse analysis refers to the identification and critique of systems of meaning and representation through the study of texts and practice. The difference between these two perspectives can be seen in the way 'context' is understood. In sociolinguistic discourse analysis, context generally refers to the immediate situation which governs the interactive roles participants are able to take. In post-structural discourse analysis 'context' is generally avoided since it suggests a separation between the individual and the social system which supports the fiction of individual autonomy (Henriques et al 1984). This form of discourse analysis is concerned with the identification of meaning systems which are constitutive of practice and subjectivity. Poststructural discourse analysis has often entailed the analysis of textual material with the aim of identifying discourses and the subject positions made available by them.

Recently, these two strands of discourse analysis have been combined into an analytic framework able to deal with multiple levels of meaning within texts and interactions. Fairclough's (1989, 1992a, 1992b) approach to critical discourse analysis provides a model for this multi-levelled analysis. The object to be analysed (the 'discoursal instance') is understood to have three dimensions, each with an associated analytic task (Fairclough 1992a). The dimensions and their tasks are set out thus:

Dimension of the discoursal instance	Analytic task
the text	description - structural analysis and framing
the interaction which produced the text	interpretation - within context of language conventions
the wider social action in which the interaction is embedded	explanation - within social context

Table 1 Discourse dimensions and analytic tasks (based on Fairclough 1992a)

Analysis at each stage is fundamentally an analysis of language and, because any aspect of language can operate on more than one level, analysis of one dimension informs analysis of the others. At the level of text, attention is paid to the linguistic features which establish its coherence: for example syntax, repetition, and the use of genres such as narrative. At the level of interaction, attention is paid to the immediate circumstances which cause the text to be produced in a particular way. This includes interactive routines and protocols, expected behaviour from participants in particular roles and ways of signalling that one is performing a particular role.

These first two dimensions correspond to the linguistic and sociolinguistic approaches to discourse analysis. The third, the investigation at the level of broader social context, incorporates notions of discourse closer to poststructural theorising. This is made clearer in Fairclough's discussion of the functions of language in establishing the broader social context within which texts and interactions are produced. Language at this level provides the means for representing and constituting social reality. Analysis must thus focus on how language, 'signifying the world and our experience' (1992 p.8), constitutes social identities and social relations. In the language of poststructural theory, this entails an

analysis of the ways in which discourses produce subject positions (B. Davies 1993b; Davies & Harre 1991; Weedon 1987).

In a multi-layered discourse analysis, then, an interpretation of data is built up by attending to each of the three dimensions outlined. The degree to which this can successfully be achieved depends on the analytic techniques available to the researcher. No single method is capable of demonstrating the degree of complexity required; a range of tools is necessary.

I will be describing my approach to analysis in detail in a later section of this chapter. Briefly, I establish a semantic context for the interview transcripts through a review of a range of texts through which the subject positions 'parenting', 'childhood' and 'literacy' are constructed. In this way I identify discourses and categories within the research literature which inform the analysis of thematic patterns in the interview corpus. These two analyses together result in a description of the ways in which parents employ socially available discourses to position themselves and their children in relation to literacy and learning.

I undertake analysis at the level of text through close readings of excerpts from the transcript data, using a range of methods. These methods are described in a later section of this chapter. Analysis at the level of social interaction is accomplished in two ways. It is an element in the interpretation of specific excerpts, when it can be seen to have effects on the production of meaning in relation to the key subjects. The effects of the immediate social context on the relationship between participants is also discussed in relation to the data gathering process. The social location of the researcher is a crucial factor here and it is to this location that I now turn.

2.1.2 Location of the researcher

My location has had implications for the development both of a general orientation to the research problem and the specific researching techniques used. 'Location' here has

multiple meanings. It refers to my 'beat' - the places where I live, socialise and work. It refers to my status as a citizen of an affluent Western country and my membership of particular age, gender, language, class and ethnic sub-groups within this society. It refers to my temporal situation, as a person who has experienced the last thirty or so years of history as such a citizen. It refers to my positioning within dominant and other discourses. All of these aspects of location can be understood as resources I have brought to the task of gathering, producing and interpreting data.

At the time of commencing this research project one of my daughters was four years old and the other was a baby of eight months. I had spent the previous year on accouchement leave from my teaching job and had spent much of my social time in the company of other mothers with small children. My eldest child was then at kindergarten and so I was frequently on site chatting to parents and being involved in activities.

My situation provided me with two crucial resources: social networks and access to discursive practices. As I will explain in relation to recruiting, social networks provided me with prospective interviewees, people with whom I already had some contact and who knew me as a parent first. This enabled me to avoid protracted periods of negotiating access and to concentrate my time and energies on talking to parents.

My 'situated knowledge' (Harraway 1988) as a middle-class at-home mother also gave me access to some of the interpretive frames which my informants (particularly the mothers) were using to understand their children's growth and learning. I was targeted by the same commercial and media interests, consulted the same textual authorities and sought to present myself and my child as intelligible subjects in the same social forums. In relation to the research subject, I have thus been like Smith's (1987) feminist sociologist:

> Like Jonah, she is inside the whale. ... Her own seeing arises in a context structured by the same system of social relations structuring the everyday worlds of those whose experience provides the problematic of her inquiry. (p. 142)

This system of social relations which enables me to be and see in certain ways includes the Australian education system through which I and most of the participating parents have passed as children. As a product of a particular period of schooling, I share with adults of similar age the experience of subjectification through the educational discourses and practices operating in the 1960s and 1970s. This also has been an interpretive resource.

My orientation to methodology has also been influenced by the skills and resources I have developed in previous professional and personal projects. Prior experience of interviewing both as a journalist and as a counsellor was a consideration in choosing interviewing as a method of data gathering. My studies in English literature inclined me to choose samples of extended text as a focus for analysis rather, say, case notes or checklists. My keyboard proficiency made the transcription of large amounts of recorded data feasible.

My method of conducting this project thus reflects the way I have constructed the research problem and the discursive and other resources I have brought to bear on investigating this problem.

2.2 Conduct of the research project: Collecting parents' accounts

In this section I describe the process of collecting accounts from finding informants to conducting interviews. The informant group is characterised in terms of social location. Finally I consider how the relationship between myself and the informants affected the research process

2.2.1 Recruiting

The selection of parents to interview, like the research methodology generally, was influenced by the two key considerations of the construction of the research problem and the location of the researcher. My decision to investigate the effects of gender on parents' literate practice had implications for recruiting. I sought out families in which both a male and a female care-giver were willing to participate in order to investigate the

effects of both masculine and feminine discourses of parenting and literacy. In practice, this generally meant two-parent families since non-resident fathers are difficult to recruit. However, I did manage to include one non-custodial father and a resident step-father. I also included sole supporting mothers who wished to be involved; there were three.

As I wanted to ensure a gender balance in the sample of children in the participating families. I sought out families with two or more children to maximise my chances of covering different forms of gender comparison within families i.e. single and mixed-sex sibling groups. However, since this is not a statistical study, exact numerical balance was not sought.

The age of the children in the family was a further factor. I decided to interview parents both of preschool children and of primary school aged children. Deciding to seek out parents of preschool children was important for a number of reasons. This is a time when parents (particularly mothers who take on the primary childrearing responsibility) have the greatest opportunity both to observe their children's growth and to participate directly in their activities. For this reason it is also a time when parents are most likely to be exposed to discourses of childrearing which construct children's literacy learning as parents' work. I was interested to hear how mothers and fathers positioned themselves in relation to these discourses. In addition, the early childhood years are also considered to be a crucial time for the establishment of children's gender identity (Martin et al 1990) and parents take the major responsibility for ensuring the appropriate identifications are made through choices of clothing, leisure activities, etc. (Rheingold 1975; Thomas 1990). The early years are thus a crucial period for investigating the effects of gendered discourses on parents' understandings of their children.

Parents of primary school aged children were also sought because, after the junior primary years most children's print literacy has developed to the point that they have achieved a degree of independence in reading and writing. At this time, parents are in a position to review their child's progress and to identify any trends in orientation to particular genres or literacy-related activities.

Five methods of recruiting informants were used: 1) direct approach to long-standing acquaintances; 2) direct approach to parents in the community; 3) following up recommendations; 4) letter approach to parents of a local primary school class and 5) letter approach to parents of a non-local junior primary school class. Of these methods the first four were successful. The fifth, which was the only approach not to use local knowledge or social networks, did not result in any takers.

Recruiting parents with whom I had a prior friendship conferred a number of benefits. It allowed me to achieve a degree of rapport in the interview situation which is considered conducive to the generation of qualitative data (Measor 1988). Since I scheduled these interviews first, it allowed me to refresh my interviewing skills, and make the inevitable mistakes, in a situation where any problems in the research relationships could be relatively easily repaired. This group was also active in providing me with contacts to approach.

This initial group consisted of four women (Amanda, Roz, Anne and Mary) who had been my friends since our first children were born some four years previously. A further advantage was that I was on friendly terms with their partners. Fathers can be difficult to involve in research projects (Brantlinger et al 1996; McKee & O'Brien 1983; Taylor 1983). My success in recruiting men is partly due to the use of such a network.

This core group was very effective in providing further contacts who met the research criteria. Before I had time to conduct the first interview, I received a phone call from a woman not known to me saying 'Hi. Mary told me you wanted to interview parents.' Roz, for instance put me on to Craig, who she knew through school, and to Joanne and Melissa, from her volley-ball team. This recruiting method is known within sociology as 'snowball sampling' (Weiss 1994) and was also found effective by Wearing (1984) in her study of ideologies of motherhood.

Direct approaches to parents at the local kindergarten my daughter attended also yielded some participants. These were people who knew me as a 'fellow parent' and were prepared to do me a favour. Some of these parents also referred me to others.

My social network was most successful in locating parents whose children were in the preschool or junior primary age range. In snowball sampling there are inevitably some commonalties in the sample reflecting the composition of the core group, which in this case were all women with young children. As my network lacked families with older children, I decided to use a different method of recruitment but still one that took advantage of local community membership. I approached the primary school which shared a site with the kindergarten and which my eldest child would soon be attending. I gained permission to contact parents of children in a particular mid-level class whose teacher had an interest in literacy research.

In order to facilitate rapport with this group of parents, who were not part of my social network, I gained permission to spend time in their children's class. In this way, I became familiar not only with the child but with the literacy-related activities undertaken at school and was in a better position to follow parents' accounts. I spent a period of three terms team-teaching in the class on a part-time basis. As a goodwill-building exercise I took on the task of training the school choir which was much appreciated by some of the parents. Towards the end of the second term, I sent home a letter asking parents whether they would be willing to participate in an interview. Seventeen out of twenty-six families agreed to be involved. Out of this group, three parents chose the option of responding in writing to questions. Two out of these three parents were of non-English-speaking background.

2.2.2 Description of the sample

The overall sample of 55 parents is divided into two sub-groups on the basis of age of children and method of recruitment. Tables summarising the composition of these two groups can be found in Appendix B. From this point, specific sub-groups will be named

in the text when the analysis or commentary refers to that group only. Otherwise all comment refers to the total sample.

2.2.2.1 Group One parents

Group One was recruited using my social network as described previously. The snowballing method is one where the eventual composition of the sample is partly dependent on the resources of the network. The resulting sample inevitably has certain commonalities. In this case all the families had an oldest child in preschool or junior primary. The parents tended to be in their thirties and living in middle-class neighbourhoods. As women were the main recruiters, it is not surprising that the common factors were more noticeable among mothers than fathers. In particular, most women were, or had recently been, in the position of full-time at-home carer for one or more young children. Many were trained teachers and had established their relationship in the context of work.

The fathers in this sample were a more diverse group, at least in terms of their fields of employment. Six were in technical or trade occupations, four were in jobs traditionally termed professional, there were two police officers and the remainder were in a mixture of occupations. One father (Craig) had primary responsibility for childcare and housework while his partner combined part-time work with study.

It has been noted (Backett 1982; Shelton 1992; Wearing 1984) that the years when families care for preschool children are those when the gendered division of labour is most marked. This was certainly the case for Group One parents. At the start of the project, only two of the 18 mothers were in the paid workforce on a full-time basis. 10 mothers were involved in parenting full-time and 7 divided their time between the paid workforce and domestic labour.

2.2.2.2 Group Two parents

The second group, of twenty-three adults, consists of parents of children in a particular year 5/6 composite class at the start of the project. This group were mainly residents of a cluster of inner Adelaide suburbs in close proximity to the primary school, 'Rowan Glen Primary'. This group was older, on the whole, than Group One. There were a larger number of parents in their forties and many families had at least one child in high school. The area around Rowan Glen, like many inner Adelaide suburbs, is a mixture of European origin families who migrated to Australia in the 50s and 60s, short-stay renters many facing various kinds of disadvantage, upwardly mobile young professionals, affluent families and recent immigrants from a range of countries. The school community of Rowan Glen reflects this mix. Of the sub-group of Greek background families with children in the class, none chose to be involved in the project. Perhaps if the information sent home had been available in translation some of these parents would have participated.

Group 2 also differs from Group 1 in terms of mothers' occupations. Most Group 2 mothers (9) were in the paid work-force on a full-time basis, most in professional occupations. Only two mothers classified themselves as full-time home workers at the start of the project. This group also included four women who were single custodial parents, following a separation from their children's father. One father (Fritz) shared custody of two children with his ex-partner.

2.2.2.3 The overall group

Taken together, the parent group for this project can be characterised in terms of certain commonalities. However, there is also a degree of diversity that is not always apparent from demographic summaries.

Socio-economically the group is middle-class. Most are established in houses that they own or are buying and many are engaged in renovating the 1920s bungalows or 1980s villa which are so common in the inner urban areas of this city. These families do not

however represent the socio-economic elite. Most of the children attended state, rather than private, schools (at least during their primary education). None of the sample was drawn from the wealthier Eastern suburbs.

Many of the fathers, regardless of field of work, were self-employed or had part-ownership of a business. Most traded skills and services rather than products. Mothers tended to be, or have been, employed by the government in health, education or other fields of public service.

In terms of educational background, most of these parents attained the standard of Leaving (Year 11) or better before moving on to employment, trade training or tertiary education. Many have since completed further education or training, often to further a career path. Harry, for instance, had completed several certificates in his trade; Megan was in the process of studying Primary teaching; Jill was working on a Masters degree in her professional area.

In terms of ethnicity, the majority of the parents were born in Australia and of Anglo extraction (see appendix C). Nine of the parents were born outside of Australia and five of these were migrants from the UK. Fourteen of the parents were of ethnic backgrounds other than Anglo. Most of these were the children of European parents (including Greek, Italian, Polish, Macedonian, Latvian and German). English was the second language in many of these families of origin.

The parents in this sample had taken a diversity of routes to reach their current middle-class status. Many were in very different careers and/or locations from their parents. For many, particularly the children of migrants, this was partly due to having achieved a higher level of education than their parents. Amanda's parents, for instance, were Macedonian gardeners and had received basic schooling in their country of origin. She credits them with encouraging her to study hard and pursue a career in teaching.

Twelve of the group had grown up in rural areas of Australia. Both Fred and Matthew, for instance, had left farms to join the police force. Some were 'late starters' in their present careers. Kathleen, having failed to graduate from high school and having married young, had returned to study as a single mother and had recently taken her first teaching job. Christopher's opportunity to complete higher education came about as a returned serviceman. Penny had quit school early to work as a hairdresser and, having since completed an Arts degree as a mature age student, had a new career as a writer.

Not all changes had been in the direction of upward mobility. Craig had suffered a prolonged period of unemployment. Barbara, whose father was a professional, had left school and married early, had since separated and was now working behind a bar in order to support her two children. Roz, a trained teacher, had resigned to take up home duties and was working as a kitchen hand to supplement the family's income.

In summary this sample can be described as predominantly middle-class adults of Anglo extraction aged in their 30s and 40s. They are generally settled home owners resident in Adelaide's Western and Southern inner and middle urban suburbs. Their backgrounds are characterised by mobility, both geographic and social. They have experienced first hand, through their family histories, the changes that education can bring about. Now they are watching their own children's journey through the Australian school system, but in many cases, in very different circumstances from their own.

2.3 Conducting Interviews

Interviews took place in the informants' homes, usually in the evening after the children (theirs and mine) had gone to bed. Most people chose the living room as a suitable space. Interviews were recorded either on a cassette recorder or dictaphone. The recorded section of the interview lasted from 30 minutes to 90 minutes, depending on whether one person or two were being interviewed. Most informants were interviewed only once; however following the first stage of analysis a number of follow-up interviews were conducted with

selected families. These were families in which the youngest child had been a baby or young toddler at the time of the first interview.

2.3.1 Approach to questioning

Prior to running the interviews three main areas for eliciting data were determined. In order to investigate the effects of parents' literate histories on their current understandings, one line of questioning concerned parents' memories of their own acquisition of literacy both at home and at school. Another line concerned parents' accounts of their children's literacy development. This was intended to provide information on two aspects. Firstly, parents' understandings of their own role in relation to their child's literacy indicates their positioning within the parent-child relations and this, further, may indicate their positioning within discourses which construct such relations. Secondly, parents' interpretations of their child's literacy related behaviour (and indeed their interpretation of certain behaviours *as* literacy related) may index discourses which provide constructions of children's language acquisition and learning. The final line of questioning required parents to predict their children's progress in literacy and schooling. In predicting we call upon theoretical frames to construct hypotheses about the relation between current and future states ('if this, then this'). Therefore parents' predictions provide insights into the theories informing their understanding of the relation between children's literacy and a range of possible associated factors such as individual personality, environment, gender, and the structure of schooling.

I intended to cover these areas within a largely unstructured interview format which I anticipated would be somewhat conversational in interaction style, particularly since the first round of interviews was planned to involve parents known to me. This approach to questioning however became modified before the first interview took place, due to an unexpected response. I received an offer of participation from a friend-of-a-friend, someone I had never met. Laura was not comfortable with the idea of an unstructured interview and told me I 'ought to have some questions'.

The unstructured interview has been critiqued for perpetuating a power imbalance between researcher and researched all the more difficult to challenge when relations between them

are friendly (Glucksmann, 1994; Scott, 1985). On the other hand, as has been noted, the structured question schedule has been criticised for imposing the researcher's views on the informants. Aware that any decision was imperfect, I decided to produce a set of questions whilst taking any opportunities offered within the interview situation to explore areas in depth and introduce new material.

Also as an attempt to equalise the power relationship within the interview I invariably gave the question sheet to the parent(s) at the outset and invited them to address the questions in any order they wished (see appendix A). At the top of the sheet was the statement: *This list of questions is a guide only. Please feel free to mention whatever comes to mind.* Most parents did indeed go beyond the set questions. Some however kept strictly to the schedule. Fred, for instance, conducted what amounted to a self-interview, keeping the question sheet in his hand and both asking and answering the questions.

All Group 1 interviews were conducted using the interview schedule as a guide for parents' responses. Before conducting the second round of interviews I made a decision to change the approach to questioning based on what was emerging from the analysis of the first group of transcripts. When looking at parents' memory material I noticed that extended narratives offered a rich resource for exploring issues of subjectivity and discourse. However, there were many examples of 'fragments of narrative' which appeared to have been truncated or curtailed due to some informants' interpretations of the interview situation as one where they were required to 'stick to the questions'. There were also times where I had ignored informants' signals that they had a story to tell. For instance, a number of informants had offered as a lead that their parents' lives were 'hard'. By deflecting attention back to the respondent's experience, I may have prevented possible extended comparisons between their parents' experiences and their own.

The format for the group 2 interviews can be described as a 'guided monologue' (Hammer & Wildavsky 1989 p. 77). Parents in this group were informed of the three main topic areas in the letter requesting their participation in the project. At the outset of each interview I restated these areas and invited each informant to address the topics in any order and in

any way they wished. I explained that I would not interrupt unless there was something I didn't understand or they ran out of things to say. Most informants requested some 'thinking time' before beginning to speak. Many went on to speak fluently until they felt they had covered all three areas to their satisfaction. Some asked for further prompts before, or during their accounts. Many of these informants adopted a 'life history' approach to structuring their accounts. Typically beginning with their earliest memories of literacy at home or school, they went on to describe their post-school experiences leading up to the commencement of parenthood. Their children's literacy was often placed within the overall history of the family. In this way informants explicitly made links which, in analysing the first transcripts, I had been attempting to make on the basis of a more fragmented data set. Luke was one example. His life history account began with his schooling and moved chronologically through his various jobs, his marriage, his mature age tertiary studies, resulting new career direction and parental experiences. Luke's narrative was told with a minimum of prompting.

Overall, despite the differences, both approaches to questioning resulted in a detailed, rich and complex collections of opinions, impressions, memories, observations, questions, and theories around literacy, parenting and gender.

2.3.2 The researcher-researched relation

Establishing a relationship of trust with informants is generally considered essential to a successful in-depth interview, particularly when the topics to be covered are sensitive. It has been reported that, when informants trust the researcher, they are willing to allow exploration of sensitive areas of their experiences (Finch 1984; Measor 1988). In the case of this project, a number of factors contributed to establishing a degree of rapport between informants and myself. Where a prior relationship existed (as with many of the Group 1 parents), there were established interaction patterns which carried through into the interview situation. When I had been referred to a parent, there was usually a reference to our mutual friend in the introductory phase of the interview. Typically the question was: 'How do you know Anne?'

Often, I was asked about my study and would quite frequently find that one of the parents had a personal interest in further education; either they were presently studying, had studied in the past, or were thinking about studying. Jill, for instance, was pursuing a Masters degree in her profession and was clearly sympathetic to my situation. Her partner, Evan, an academic, asked a number of questions about the research process in a manner that suggested he was familiar with the role of 'supervisor'.

In many cases, some common ground was established on the basis of shared parental status. Questions were often asked about the composition of my family, in particular the age and gender of children and whether they had started preschool or school. On a few occasions (generally when money for childcare was scarce and the interview as conducted during the day) my youngest child, then a baby, was actually present. Though not an intended outcome this tangible evidence must have reinforced my status as mother. It certainly did create a rapport with the women I interviewed (this situation did not occur with the fathers, who were interviewed at night). Here Natasha, a recent immigrant from Russia, steps out of the 'researchee' role to offer me some reassurance:

> **Sue**: Mm ... for instance here ah when children are learning to read, they take home, every night a reader [**Natasha**: Hm mm] to read to their mother or their father. [**Natasha**: Hm mm] Does that happen in Russia?
>
> **Natasha**: Yeah.
>
> **Imogen**: I want a bottle.
>
> **Sue**: A bottle? ... Here.
>
> **Natasha**: Ah it is normal. (laughs)
>
> **Sue**: (to Imogen) You've got a little dolly ... isn't that nice? (To Natasha) But how does er Lina feel about school in Australia?

It has been stated that a degree of self-disclosure on the part of interviewers can assist in creating an atmosphere of mutuality that is helpful to the research process (Measor 1988). Although I went into the interview process believing in the effectiveness of self-disclosure, my experiences were mixed. As the following examples show, my initiatives sometimes received minimal or no response:

Example 1

Neville: Yeah, no he can count to twenty, he learned to count to twenty to start with.

Janet: Yeah.

Sue: How old was he when he did that?

Janet: Oh about ...

Neville: I don't know, six months or more ago.

Janet: Yeah before he was four, just before he was four I reckon.

Sue: Yeah. Beatrice has only just started putting number fifteen in, she left that one out for ages.

Janet: Yeah yeah.

Neville: Yeah he, he's sort of, we taught him the alphabet too a little while ago.

Example 2

Gilles: He's got so many other things from swimming to gymnastics to ... Fathers and Sons but just a whole range of activities, and writing and reading has just dropped back a bit on his priority scale.

Sue: Hm mm. So he's pretty active?

Gilles: Yes he is. He's an Olympic gymnast.

Sue & Louise: laugh.

Sue: Beatrice is starting gym this Saturday.

Louise: Mmm. But with Andrew he's ... with the second child I think you tend to make comparisons, you obviously make comparisons with the first one and Andrew is far behind, far behind Alexander but still quite normal in his knowledge of the letters and so on.

Whilst responding to my initiations with a degree of affirmation consistent with politeness, in both cases the interviewees kept to the prior topic of their children. Understandably, they took roles consistent with the participant structure (Philips 1972) of the interview, rather than the conversation. According to this structure, my role was to ask questions and theirs to answer. They had the question sheet and so were justified in ignoring any leads from me that did not advance the already stated agenda.

At other times, self-disclosure did prompt a collaborative interaction more typical of the chat between friends as in this excerpt from an interview with Lynette, a fellow kindy mother:

Lynette: I think that Mark tends to read and pick out the most important points, he skims over things. Whereas **I** tend to read word for word and try and absorb what I'm reading. [SUE: Mm] So for example with notices and things that come home from school that I leave on the cupboard in that spot -

Sue: Oh the reason why I'm laughing is because -

Lynette: Happens to you?

Sue: Yes, yeah /all the time.
/Lynette: Yes that's right. I say to Mark - er the latest newsletter blah blah blah, and he'll say 'I must have missed that' and half an hour before I would have said 'Oh did you see the information that was sent home?' [Sue: Mm] [...] So yes his reading is different to my reading. (laughs)

Sue: Mm, so you can read the same thing.

Lynette: Yes.

Sue: But you're saying you will read it all.

Lynette: Yeah.

Sue: Everything equal /weighting sort of thing.
/Lynette: Yes, yeah. Where I think he tends to - although if he was given something to read as a test, he would most probably read it differently. **[Sue**: Right.] Because he knows, he'd know that he would have to answer on it.

Sue: Mm. So it depends what the purpose is really for, kind of.

Lynette: Yeah. He doesn't er miss things because he's not a very good reader, he misses things by choice.

Sue: Mm, Michael's the same.

Lynette: Is he? I guess a lot of people are, yeah because I, I [**Sue**: Yeah.] imagine at work he needs to read a lot during the day so ... he's got to get through it all somehow. Yeah.

Sue: It depends what it is /too.
/Lynette: Yes.

Sue: He will, he, if it's a bill or if it's anything to do with business, he will not, he won't miss /out any detail.
/Lynette: No neither will Mark, he actually handles all the bills so I, I, if he asked me to read it a lot of it wouldn't stand out I guess.

[Lynette relates a story of her friend's similar experience]

Sue: Yeah, that's right and Beatrice can be waiting to say something to Michael

and there he is reading the mail you know. [**Lynette**: Yes] And I'll say 'Um Beatrice wants to tell you something, can't you do this later on?'

Lynette: Mm yes it's er - although Mark doesn't tend to do that, he'll just flip through it, once again he'll just flip through it or quickly gets changed as quick as he can. (laughs) While the kids are waiting. 'Yes oh right.'

Sue: Well OK.

Lynette: Comes with the gender I think.

Compared to the previous examples, where self-disclosure had no effect on topic development in the interview, here my introduction of common experience supports an extended elaboration on the theme of gender difference in the handling of home literacy tasks. The frequency of overlapping talk (lines 4-5, 10-11, 17-19) is consistent with informal talk between parties of equal status (Cazden 1988). The frequent affirmations from both partners suggest a high level of mutuality. Lynette's sense of control is seen when she draws a conclusion on the basis of both our experiences: 'Comes with the gender I think'. This kind of summarising framing move is often taken by the interviewer, as I do on line 12. Lynette's acceptance of my self-disclosing in effect produces fluidity in participant roles.

I found that self-disclosure, then, has no single predictable effect on the relations between the researcher and the researched. Its effects are dependent on the participants' understandings of the nature of the event and the participant roles which are possible and appropriate.

Regardless of prior relationships or degree of commonality, I sought to address the power imbalance that is inherent in the research relation (Glucksmann 1994, Kelly et al 1994) by negotiating aspects of procedure with informants. As previously stated, the strategy for handling the question schedule was one area for consultation. Another was whether parents preferred to be interviewed as a couple, or separately. I did not attempt to standardise my approach and this resulted in quite a variety of interview situations. Laura and Michael for instance chose to sit next to each other on the other side of a table from me. The interview thus felt quite formal. Laura, as it happens was responsible for suggesting I have set questions, so it appears she wished to establish some control over the situation. Janet and Neville were interviewed separately; however Janet kept an ear out for Neville's responses

and frequently interjected from the kitchen. Fred and Ros, who I was used to seeing socially as a family, opted to be interviewed separately; the kitchen door was kept shut and each went off to do something else while their partner's interview was in progress. This was so different from their usual conduct, that it appeared that they were taking measures specifically to prevent each partner from overhearing the other's interview.

On occasion, an informant sought to balance the social exchange by asking a favour of me, either directly or indirectly. When this happened, my status as teacher or literacy 'expert' was often invoked. I was asked, for instance, to listen to a long account of a teenage son's difficulties at school and to comment on the school's response. On occasions such as this, my response would be very similar to one I would make had I actually been consulted as an educator by a friend (as sometimes happens). Occasionally the favour would be asked in my capacity as polite visitor or defacto 'family friend'; to admire renovations, say 'Goodnight' to children or accommodate a cat on my lap.

This is not to suggest that relations within the interview were necessarily uncomplicated or harmonious. As with conventional polite conversation between strangers, people I interviewed generally did not make evaluative comments about me or my work. However I had reason to suspect that my double status - as mother *and* researcher - caused some tensions and ambiguities, particularly for women. I was used to mothers that I met around the community responding to the news that I was doing a Ph.D with the exclamation 'I don't know *how* you do it!' Whether this implied a question about my material resources, my ability to cope, or the likely effects on my family, I was never too sure. In any case such a response implies a degree of discomfort with the notion of combining motherhood with 'other' pursuits and may have counteracted my efforts to establish common ground with some of the informants.

In relation to the fathers, there were difficulties of access and communication in some cases. My initial contacts were generally with, or through, the mother of the family. When confirming the interview I always asked whether her partner had been informed and was happy to participate; however I could never be sure of the level of consultation. On some

occasions I am certain it was minimal. Neville, for instance, was working late the evening I came over and was not impressed to come home and find me sitting in his living room with a tape-recorder. He took the sheet, read out each question and answered it with 'nah' or 'don't know', the whole procedure taking about a minute. I apologised for disturbing his late dinner and expressed my appreciation for his patience. We then recommenced the interview and Neville was much more expansive.

The subject matter of the interviews also, I suspect, caused difficulties for some fathers. Being asked for observations of their children's literate activities was difficult for those men who worked a late hours as they often did not get home until, or after, their children's bed-time. One man expressed his embarrassment explicitly; others seemed to adopt a defensive attitude. In one case, I sensed a similar discomfort from a mother. As the interview went on I discovered that she had worked full-time since her child (now eleven) was 12 months old. Much of the literate work often associated with parenting had been delegated to the child's grandmother.

Some parents found talking about their experiences acquiring literacy rather difficult and even painful. This was particularly the case for those who had been identified as 'failures' at school. Some of the most detailed accounts however came from this group. Tracey and Luke were two parents who gave life histories focussing on their struggles with literacy. When I saw Luke a year after the interview he told me that reading his transcript had been very 'confronting' as he did not usually reflect on this aspect of his life. In several cases, the response to questions about the past was a determined 'I can't remember'. It was impossible to say whether, or to what extent, failures of memory express resistance to the line of questioning.

Gathering material from 'known' informants, while beneficial, also raised a number of issues for the research. It created a difference in the interpretive resources available for analysing parents' accounts. It also created ethical tensions on the occasions where friends would informally ask about the research. Although nobody specifically asked what a shared acquaintance had said in the context of the interview, on occasion guesses would be offered

or assumptions made such as: 'X would have told you what happened at the kindy'. This was done, not in a probing way, but in the sense of establishing shared knowledge which would be available for discussion. This particular group, though old friends, were geographically dispersed and so tended to relay information through the network.

The difficulty for me was remembering what information had been divulged within the interview (and so was confidential) and what had been offered in an open friendship context (and so was considered the property of the network). Strange as it felt, it was necessary at times to say: 'I can't really talk about that because it's in the research.' As time went on, the current topic changed and this blurring became increasingly less of an issue.

My experience does not support any formula for the 'successful' researcher-researcher relation. Whilst being an 'insider' in some respects can be useful, any effects cannot be predicted or taken for granted. As Mitchell points out (1991), the researcher is always an insider in some respects and an outsider in others. I can say that the parents who spoke to me were generous in offering me their memories, stories, observations, opinions and interpretations. The interviews did yield a large amount of the sort of data that is called 'rich' and presented a challenge for interpretation and analysis.

2.4 Conduct of the research project: Analysis

2.4.1 Introduction

Analysis has involved a number of overlapping and inter-related phases, each aimed at contributing to a theoretically coherent interpretation of the parents' accounts. The following description of the analytic procedure necessarily segments what were often simultaneous and dialectic processes into a number of phases of analysis. The first phase can be seen as a form of preparation for conducting a discourse analysis. In this phase, each interview is worked into a new form, the print transcript, and then the group of transcripts is worked into a mega text, the corpus, which is categorised in various ways.

The second phase, which I have termed the first strand of discourse analysis, consists of identifying systems of meaning and practice within the overlapping discursive fields of parenting, childhood and literacy. The focus for this work is not the transcripts but a group of texts drawn from academic, educational and popular literature. Each of these texts produces meanings for the subjects - mother, father, child, literacy, learning - and constructs relations between them. This phase of analysis produces a semantic context for the corpus.

The third phase consists of working on the corpus to identify patterns which can be interpreted as evidence of discourses in operation. This involves the use of a number of tools of analysis. Also in this phase, my emerging interpretations of corpus data are checked against other readings, including those of the parents themselves.

2.4.2 Preparatory work on the corpus

2.4.2.1 Transcription of data

Transcription is considered as an aspect of analysis because it inevitably involves decisions of selection and presentation which will influence both the analytic process and the reading of this text. If transcription formats are understood to range along a continuum on the basis of how much of the experience which produced the data is represented, then my approach occupies the middle ground. Detailed recording of nonverbal communication has not been attempted; neither has vocal quality (eg pitch, pace). These omissions were made in the interests of time and convenience but were also related to the context of the interview. Had I been observing practice, for instance, it would have been more important to record action and gesture.

The following textual features have been included: repetitions, false starts, pauses (with two standard pause lengths), simultaneous speech and back-channel utterances. Back-channels have been somewhat standardised: 'uhuh' and 'mmm' represent what are actually a variety of 'go-on' noises. These 'peripheral' features can be significant in indicating a range

of meaning-production processes, such as contradiction, suppression, multiple positioning, negotiation, acknowledgment and hedging.

Tape quality was variable from clear to poor. At times many listens were necessary before I settled on a particular word or phrase. In cases where confirmation could not be made, the indicator [unclear] is used. It is, of course, possible that some of the transcriptions still contain errors. My analysis being multi-layered, significance is established at the level of the whole text and corpus through multiple intersecting references. Therefore it is unlikely that minor changes would yield a significantly different overall result.

2.4.2.2 Sorting

This phase of analysis was aimed at coming to terms with what was a large and complex mass of transcript material and follows established procedures for qualitative research analysis (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Mishler, 1986; Tesch, 1990; Weiss, 1994; Winter, 1989). Although accounts of a preliminary step to discourse analysis are not often found, Fairclough states that the selection of samples for detailed discourse analysis should be 'on the basis of a preliminary survey of the corpus' (1992b p. 230). Kamler and colleagues (1994), operating from a post-structural theoretical perspective, incorporate a stage of coding and sorting into their analysis of gender and power relations in a primary school classroom.

The initial stage involved working at the level of the individual transcript. Each transcript was given a 'familiarity reading' in order to get a sense of it as a complete text. Though not in a systematic sense, this is nevertheless an analysis of 'cohesion' (Hatch 1992) in the sense that any section of an interview text is seen in relation to the whole. These readings formed a foundation for later close analysis of excerpts, since the interview as a whole provides the textual context for any specific part.

For the first stage of sorting, the two bodies of data (Group One interviews and Group Two interviews) were worked on separately. Owing to the more extended process of negotiation with group 2 parents, I had transcribed the first group of interviews by the time I was ready to start the second. So, as the Group 2 interviews were in progress, group 1 data was sorted and analysed.

2.4.2.2.1 Sorting Group 1 data

Initial sorting categories for Group 1 conformed closely to the question schedule (see appendix A), and material relevant to each category was excerpted to form a category file (Weiss 1994). These files then formed the basis for further analytic work. I selected three files for further analysis: parents' memories, parents' views on children's learning and parents' expectations for children's future. Before further sorting each of these files was subjected to a familiarity reading in the same way as the transcripts had been. Themes noticed in this reading became potential categories for further sorting. When gender differences in parents' responses appeared to be present, gender categories were used for sorting.

Because gendered patterns were clear on a first reading of the Memories file, sorting was into gender categories according to the following codes: FMS (fathers' memories of school), MMS (mothers' memories of school), FMM (fathers' memories of their mothers), FMF (fathers' memories of their fathers), MMM (mothers' memories of their mothers), MMF (mothers' memories of their mothers). This resulted in six excerpt files which were then read for themes. Frequently recurring points were noted as strong themes and minority positions were also recorded. On the basis of this analysis I reported the following findings:

- Fathers more negative towards school in general
- Fathers more negative towards reading
- Fathers more likely to report problems with handwriting
- Fathers more negative towards Subject English

- Mothers more positive about primary school in particular

- Mothers more likely to report enjoying handwriting and presentation tasks

The file I titled 'Parents' views of children's learning' was very large and contained a diverse array of material. This was the area where parents' responses were least easily predicted due to differences in children's ages and genders and parents' approaches to childrearing. It was also the part of the interview where parents were most likely to forget the constraints of the question sheet and become expansive. Due to both the quantity of material and its diverse nature I did not apply pre-established categories to the sorting process but rather decided on a thorough 'dredging' content analysis.

To accomplish this, I used a cumulative coding system, similar to that described by Tesch (1990). Starting at the beginning of the excerpt file, any unit of data that can be considered a point is labelled. As further sections are read, the codes multiply as new material is processed. At the same time grouping of units occurs as similar material is encountered. Once all the material has been worked through, the coding system is refined to delete redundancies.

As I recorded points, I also recorded whether the point was made by a mother or father and in relation to a daughter or son. Thus for each subcategory I was able to note any patterns of differences in responses. I noticed parent gender differences in relation to the following subcategories: parent role, theories of learning, prerequisites for school literacy, and literacy opposites. Child gender differences were noted in the categories: parent role, theories of learning, prerequisites for literacy and motivating factors.

The existence of gender differentiated patterns in parents' descriptions of their children's learning prompted me to undertake a gender sort of all group 1 material. This sort included material which had not been in the 'Children's Learning' content analysis because it was mentioned in relation to parents' memories, for instance when a parent compared themselves to their child. Four excerpt files were produced: MG (mothers on girls), MB (mothers on boys), FG (fathers on girls) and FB (fathers on boys). The length of the files told a story even before any further analysis; the combined M (mother) files

were substantially longer than the combined F (father) files and the MB (mothers on boys) file was the longest of all.

Categories for sorting the 'Parents' Expectations' file reflected four areas of contrast noted in reading the file. These were: child gender; parent gender; curriculum area (literacy related/not literacy related) and; nature of expectations (positive/negative). Example of resulting codes were: FPEG (fathers' positive expectation in relation to a daughter) and MNEB (mothers' negative expectation in relation to a son). After comparing the contents of these sub-files, I noted the following patterns:

- substantially more positive expectation statements overall than negative statements
- mothers more likely to make negative expectation statements
- fathers of daughters less likely to express expectations (positive or negative) than fathers of sons

The next stage of analysis of Group 1 material involved greater attention to lexical and syntactic features and so will be dealt with under the heading of discourse analysis.

2.4.2.2.2 Sorting of group 2 material

In the group 2 interviews parents were given guidelines rather than questions. The resulting transcripts contained relatively more extended monologues structured partly according to the speaker's personal criteria. The first step was to separate parents' memory material from their descriptions of their children's literacy and schooling. Due to the less predictable nature of parents' responses, I decided on a thorough point-by-point content analysis of all material in the large children's literacy file rather than using pre-set categories as I had done for the first stage of the group 1 sorted.

There were 41 categories listed and these were grouped according to common issues resulting in the following headings: descriptions of child, parental roles, curriculum and

teaching, child's reading, expectations, learning problems, theories of learning, and gender comparisons. As with the content analysis of the group 1 excerpt file, 'Parents' Views on Children's Learning', points were additionally coded in terms of parent gender (M/F) and gender of child referred to (G/B).

Comparing fathers with mothers files I noted the following comparisons:

- Mothers were more likely than fathers to make statements in relation to curriculum and teaching.
- Fathers were more likely than mothers to offer theories of learning
- The combined M files were overall twice as long as the combined F files.

Checking the last finding further I noted that this large discrepancy was due in part to the substantial MLP (mothers on learning problems) file in which a small number of mothers were over-represented. I excerpted this group and the discrepancy was reduced. However mothers still had substantially more to say about their children's learning than fathers.

From the 'Descriptions of Child' file, I excerpted all material which specifically related to literacy and/or schooling. I coded this material according to child gender (BG) and evaluative status (school positive/school negative). This, in effect was a sort according to how compatible with schooling the child's perceived qualities were. In interpreting parents' evaluations of their children, I coded as negative any statement in which the described qualities of the child were seen as incompatible with schooling and/or literacy, even if they were valued by the parent. Strength of the evaluation was gauged by the number of school positive descriptors employed. On the basis of this analysis I noted the following:

Girls more likely than boys to be described as strongly school positive
Boys much more likely than girls to have no school positive descriptors (4 boys, 0 girls)
Girls and boys equally likely to have some school negative descriptors
Boys more likely to be described as strongly school negative.

For the next stage of analysis I focussed on the 'Parental Role' data. This material was sub-divided into Descriptions of Practice ('What I do' statements) and Role Conceptions ('what one should do and why' statements). Material in the Role Conceptions file was analysed using a form of discourse analysis (see section 2.5).

A content analysis of the Descriptions of Practice file revealed 41 specific forms of reported participation in children's literacy and schooling. These were then grouped under three headings: Reading, Writing and School Involvement and a gender comparison was made. Mothers reported greater involvement in all areas but the most striking difference was in school participation where no fathers were represented.

I then applied a measure of degree of reported participation according to the number of specific roles mentioned. Those parents who reported carrying out four or more roles were classified as Highly Participatory in comparison with the rest of the group. This group included 6 mothers and 2 fathers.

Turning to the 'Curriculum and Teaching' file I noted a strong evaluative component in parents' responses. Statements were thus coded according to the nature of the evaluation given: positive or negative. Statements were also classified according to whether they related specifically to a child's experience or were general statements of belief about education and schooling. Once again a gender comparison was made. Further analysis on this material, and on the file 'Theories of Learning' was more in the nature of a discourse analysis and will be dealt with in a later section.

2.4.2.2.3 Combining the two groups

While I had originally been intending to deal with all the transcripts as one data set, this did not turn out to be a very achievable plan for three reasons: 1) the time-lag between gathering and analysing data; 2) the differences in approach to questioning and: 3) the different compositions of the two samples. A major discrepancy related to the differences in school stage of the focus children. While Group 1 parents were making predictions

about their children's progress in school, Group 2 parents were relating their children's educational histories.

However, one area of the data did lend itself readily to combination: parents' memories. The two relevant excerpt files were combined into one which was then sorted and this formed the basis for selection of examples for detailed discourse analysis (see chapter five). Adding the Group 2 parents to the set proved valuable since, being an older group, some of their experiences were not reported by the Group1 parents. For instance, two fathers in this group had entered further education as returned servicemen following their involvement in the Vietnam war.

Another category which translated across data sets was Parental Practice. Due to the differences in children's age and stage I maintained the Group 1 and 2 files as separate sets but, on the basis of similarities in patterns emerging from the sorting process, I dealt with the discourse analysis under similar headings.

In other areas, although the analysis had been undertaken separately, there were parallels in findings. I brought together the reports of analysis of Group 1 'Parents' Views on Children's Learning' and Group 2 'Parents' Theories of Learning' and noted some similar gender patterns. Here the Group 2 findings were treated as supplementary to the more detailed discourse analysis of Group 1 material. Examples for close reading were also drawn from both data sets according to the discourses and positions in question.

The form this preparatory work has taken reflects several key aims of the analytic process. One aim was to include as fully as possible the range of positions within the parent group as a whole and within the account of any individual parent. It is for this reason that a comprehensive content analysis was undertaken. Another aim was to enable an informed selection of excerpts for close textual analysis and to ground this analysis in an understanding of the overall context from which the excerpt was taken. Any excerpt chosen for close reading was thus previously encountered several times in

different contexts: within the specific interview transcript, within one or more excerpt files and in fragmented form as segments of a content analysis. One was to enable the tracing of discourses through parents' accounts; this requires an initial stage of identifying themes or patterns preceding discourse analysis. A further aim was to enable the tracing of discourses through parents' accounts; this requires an initial stage of identifying themes or patterns preceding discourse analysis. The process of working from these patterns to their labelling as discourses will be described in the following section.

2.5 Conducting discourse analysis

2.5.1 Introduction

The question of when one 'begins' discourse analysis in a project such as this is not a straightforward one. I have represented the stage of coding and sorting as a form of preparation for conducting discourse analysis. However as soon as one identifies patterns in text, one is potentially in the position to name these patterns as discourses. Luke (1995) following Foucault (1982) defines discourse as:

> ... recurrent statements and wording across texts (Foucault 1982). These together mark out identifiable systems of meaning and fields of knowledge and belief. (A. Luke 1995 p. 12)

In practice, the identification of patterns and their naming as discourse are processes that shade into each other. Identifying a pattern requires the use of a frame to view the data. Each frame determines what is considered part of the pattern and what is excluded (Machlachlan 1994). As Gee points out (1990), we cannot stand outside discourse; we can only use the terms of one discourse to comment upon another. So in the act of coding, it can be argued, I am already conducting a discourse analysis.

However, in the interests of clarity I am using 'discourse analysis' to refer to that stage of research when I name particular patterns in the corpus *as* discourses, rather than referring to them by thematic titles. So the 'don't push' theme in the corpus becomes a trace of 'the

child-centred discourse'. This shift can be seen, in Fairclough's (1992a) terms, as a move between dimensions of the discoursal instance, a move from text to semantic context and from description to explanation.

This type of analysis is inherently intertextual. Patterns of discourse are built up by moving between texts within the corpus; between the corpus and other texts within which the key subjects are defined; and between both of these sources and the lived experience of the researcher. Baker (1995) describes a similar approach to analysis in which the subject ' teacher' is traced through both texts about teachers and the talk of actual teachers. Within each text she examines how the category 'teacher' is defined in relation to other categories such as 'child', 'parent'. The institutional texts provide a range of official versions of 'teacher' which Baker is able to find recurring in the accounts of actual teachers alongside and interwoven with descriptions of their experiences as teachers.

In the section that follows, I describe how I have undertaken this intertextual process and arrived at a grounded interpretation of the corpus. Three intersecting levels of discourse analysis are described. In the first, which I have termed the level of semantic context, a semantic map is produced of major discourses within three discursive fields. In the second, the level of the corpus, patterns within the transcript material are named as discourses and analysis focuses on the positions and practices made available within these discourses. The third level I have termed the level of the text, because analysis focuses on specific excerpts from the transcript data. Here various close reading strategies are used to investigate the construction of meanings within the accounts of individuals.

Another way to think of these three levels of analysis is in terms of the different ways in which 'parent' is located. In the first, 'parent' is located in terms of historically specific socially sanctioned definitions and practices relayed across institutional sites. In the second, 'parent' is located in relation to a particular group of parents within which a range of positions in relation to discourses are represented. In the third 'parent' is located in terms of the ways in which a specific individual frames her or his past and present as a literate subject. An aspect of the analysis at this level is a consideration of the social context within

which the text is produced ie the interview and the influence this may have on the linguistic and semantic choices exercised by participants.

2.5.2 Identification and tracing of discourses: analysis at the level of the semantic context

Concurrently with sorting through the corpus, I also worked on the accumulated research literature. This phase of a thesis project is usually termed the literature review. In the case of this project, the task of reviewing literature has the methodological function of providing a semantic context for the analysis of the corpus. The literature forms a semantic background for the corpus in two ways: 1) by providing discourse categories which can be traced through parents' accounts and 2) by providing researchers' accounts of parental practice which can also be analysed from the perspective of discourse. Therefore analysis of this material takes two forms: 1) mapping of the dominant categories and discourses in the fields of parenting, childhood and literacy and; 2) reading research reports of parental practice from the perspective of these categories and discourses.

My approach to mapping discourses has drawn from the deconstructive analysis of primary text material found in the historical studies of a number of social researchers operating within a poststructural theoretical perspective (Burman, 1994; Donzelot, 1979; Parker, 1992; Riley, 1983; N. Rose, 1990; Tyler, 1993; Walkerdine 1988). Another important source has been feminist and critical analyses of gender as a domain of meaning production (Bordo, 1989; Buchbinder, 1994; Connell, 1987; B. Davies 1989a, 1993; D. Evans 1993; Flax 1990; Hollway 1984; Plumwood 1993; D. Smith 1990; Walkerdine 1994). Through the work of poststructural, socially critical and feminist researchers much work in identifying and describing dominant discourses in the fields of gender, parenting, childhood and literacy has been done.

In constructing this semantic context, I am interested not only in listing discourses as separate entities but in the relations between them. This is particularly crucial to

understanding the ways in which the dominant gender binary system works to gender meaning in apparently neutral fields. I have used the concept of an interlocking binary system of meaning production (Plumwood 1993) to find relations of meaning production across the relevant discursive fields. Categories index each other - 'feminine' maps onto 'maternal' which maps onto 'sensitive' etc. - and each category indexes its binary 'other'. By demonstrating how this process of meaning production operates in the overlapping discursive fields of parenting, childhood and literacy, I lay the groundwork for tracing discursive alignments and oppositions in the accounts of the parents.

My analysis of research reports of parental practice tests the notion that discourses can be traced through practice. This analysis involves reading the research texts for the positions which parents are represented as adopting and comparing the positions taken up by different subjects. Because much of the research reports gender differentiated parenting patterns, it provides a challenge to gender-neutral accounts of parents' literate work. When the text is written from an ostensibly gender neutral perspective, analysis involves resistant reading ie reading in a way unintended by the writer. An example is my interpretation of Taylor's (1983) family literacy study (see chapter four). Here I show that the researcher adopts a child-centred discourse to describe parents' literate work in a way that downgrades the mother's practice and naturalises the link between masculinity and power.

2.5.3 Identification and tracing of discourses: analysis at the level of the corpus

Moving from content analysis to discourse analysis requires a change in 'mental set', a different orientation to both the informants and to their statements. I began to think of difference not in terms of differences between persons but differences in discourses employed and positions within those discourses. At some level this involved a kind of loss - a loss of the 'whole person' - which, since I knew many of the informants quite well and had a continuing relationship with them, was a peculiar and fragmenting sensation.

In describing my approach to analysis at the level of the corpus I outline three strategies. Firstly, patterns of recurrence in parents' statements are identified as positions. Secondly, such patterns are indexed to patterns found in other discourses sources. Thirdly, parents' accounts are analysed as accounts of discursive practice.

2.5.3.1 Identifying positions

Typically at this stage, I assembled groups of statements for analysis of recurring patterns. While I had begun by coding statements descriptively according to the surface topic, I now began to think of statements as representing positions within discourses. The strong themes which emerged from the first stage of analysis, those that had recurred across a majority of transcripts, I now considered as dominant positions. Analysis of a data set typically began with the strongest positions (which were often positions supportive of the dominant binary discourse of gender). For example the initial analysis of parents' memory material had revealed gender differentiated patterns of attitudes to literacy. 'Reading' was selected as a topic for further exploration of these gendered patterns. The strongest positions evident in relation to reading and gender were a masculine position based on resistance to reading and a feminine position of enthusiasm for it. Accounts that conformed most closely to each of these two dominant positions were selected for close reading. This analysis identified some of the binary categories within which individuals were positioned such that they were aligned with one set of categories and opposed to the 'other'.

Having excerpted the accounts of parents who took dominant positions I returned to the data set to look for other positions, focussing first on the men who had not taken positions of strong resistance to reading. Analysis of this excerpt file revealed several forms of a position that can be described as a conditional liking for reading. Through detailed analysis of representative excerpts, I was able to describe how reading can be constructed in ways that are compatible with discourses of masculinity.

There was a further aspect of the data to explore before I could claim to having thoroughly investigated the range of gendered literate positions present in parents' memory material. As Poynton points out:

> In order to begin to delineate discourses ... one needs to take into account what is not, what is absent within a particular discursive site, what the missing categories are with respect to which the categories present enter into oppositional relations. (1993 p. 9)

Returning to the data I checked the transcripts of the women not represented in the 'reading-positive' group looking for negative statements about reading. In comparison to the male 'reading-negative' group, I was unable to find an example of a woman clearly expressing a dislike of reading. Two explanations were possible: no women disliked reading or; women who disliked reading were suppressing this information in the interview situation. To check, I decided to contact one of the mothers who had said nothing at all about her own reading practice in the interview and ask her, straight out, how she felt about reading. Since this was likely to be a rather confronting question, I chose Roz, a longstanding friend. Roz acknowledged hating reading (see chapter five) and this confirmed my suspicion that the interview situation itself was producing the conditions for the suppression of this position.

2.5.3.2 Intertextual analysis: the case of 'child-centred discourse'

Naming a particular pattern in the corpus as a discourse has often involved intertextual work across a range of sources. The example of the 'child-centred discourse ' is a case in point. The term 'child-centred discourse' was taken from studies which have charted the emergence and maintenance of a strand of theory and practice in relation to the child (Rooke & Schnell 1992; Walkerdine 1983, 1984). This discourse is characterised by a particular definition of learning, and an associated pedagogy which is dependent on a model of adult-child relations in which the adult takes on a facilitative role.

While the label was provided by academic sources, the interpretation of the corpus data was grounded in an analysis of recurring patterns of meaning and practice. For instance, in relation to parents' views on children's learning, I identified, through a key word search

of Group 1 data, a theme I initially labelled 'don't push'. Further analysis of excerpts in which this pattern was present revealed commonalities with the 'official' view of the child-centred discourse encountered in the academic literature. I also noticed similarities between the child-centred statements of this sample and accounts from parents in other research studies (Backett 1982; Cohen 1981; Taylor 1983). Thus 'my' parents were located in relation to a wider social grouping of Western middle-class parents who form the target group for promotion of child-centred practices.

A further discourse source was provided by a group of surveys of parenting literature (Clarke-Stewart 1978a; Dean et al 1994; De Frain 1977; Loveridge 1991; C. Luke 1994; Urwin 1984: Woollet & Phoenix 1996). In these reviews a range of parenting discourses were encountered that had echoes in the corpus data: for instance, discourses of maternal responsibility, developmentalism and child-centredness.

However, even before encountering parenting discourses through either academic studies or the corpus data, I was aware of strands of social meaning and practice in which positions are constructed for parents. My awareness came about as a result of my status as a practitioner in the twin fields of parenting and education. While I did not label it as such, the child-centred discourse was, and is, present in my life as an urging to consider the interests and performance of children as the central focus of my facilitative work. As a mother, for instance, I had been (and continue to be) encouraged to believe that my children 's learning can occur in a spontaneous and 'natural' way.

To experience something as a problem makes one particularly sensitive to signs that indicate its presence. I had already noticed that appeals to children's spontaneity were generally associated with a product or service which had to be purchased or a task which had to be performed (by me). I experienced (and continue to experience) my positioning within this discourse as a problem and this has made me sensitive to aspects of the interview texts which were open to reading within the discourse. Reading this data, I was particularly sensitive to indications in mothers' accounts that they were backgrounding their own labour whilst focussing on their children's actions. This noticing

was assisted by my social location, the theme emerged through the content analysis and its eventual labelling as 'child-centered discourse' occurred through engagement with the literature.

2.5.3.3 Analysis of discursive practice

Foucauldian discourse theory encourages the analyst to view accounts not only as linguistic constructs but as historical documents in the sense that they provide information about practice in particular local sites. Discourse, from a Foucauldian perspective has effects, both enabling and constraining. It is productive in all the dimensions of human activity - spatial, physical, cognitive, social. I have thus asked of accounts: what forms of practice - bodily, social, spatial - are being enabled or prevented in the reported situation? What effects are particular discourses producing in this particular local site?

Three analytic categories have been particularly useful here: 'event', 'site' and 'relations'. Parents' accounts include many reports of events they have observed or participated in. As well as reading these accounts for the discourses used to frame them as representations, I have also used them as a resource for finding out about 'literacy events' (Heath 1983; which have occurred in homes and early childhood sites. Once again, this has been a multi-layered process involving a range of analytic techniques.

In the sorting phase, I had excerpted from Group 1 data all descriptions of 'literacy events' in home sites. My definition of literacy event is broader then Heath's (1982) since I include activities not directly related to reading and writing such as cutting, pasting and drawing. My rationale for doing so is that the context of the interview, which the parents understood to be focussed on 'literacy' created a field in which reported events would have already been self-selected for their relevance to the topic. Another reason is that within the developmental discourse of childhood (see chapter three), such activities are often classified as a preparatory stage to literacy acquisition (Dodge & Phinney 1991; Healy 1994).

Concurrent readings in the discursive field of childrearing and pedagogy had shown me that, within the child-centred discourse, a particular narrative of adult-child relations is commonly produced. In this narrative, the main character is the child and the central drama is the child's active engagement with its environment. The facilitating adult (generally the mother or teacher) plays a supporting role and the outcome towards which the story is directed is a new plateau of understanding for the child (Bruner 1977; Dodge & Phinney 1991; Forman & Hill 1984; Forman & Kuschner 1977; Schaffer 1977).

In analysing the 'Literacy event' excerpt file, I was interested in how the story was told and particularly in the question of attributed agency. Who was reported to be the actor (main character) in these events? When the file was coded from this perspective, three categories emerged: 1) parent initiated joint activities; 2) child-initiated joint activities; and 3) child-initiated solo activities. Following this a further breakdown was made in terms of parent and child gender. To interpret the gender differentiated pattern, I referred to the research literature on child centred pedagogy (Clark 1989; Walkerdine 1983, 1985, 1988) which suggests that there are significant intersections between this discourse and discourses of masculinity with their emphasis on agency, activity and autonomy.

'Site' was the subject of another round of analysis of Group 1 material. Here I focussed on the relation of parents to a particular early childhood site, the kindergarten. The starting point for this exploration was my awareness, from both the interview material and from my own participation in this site, of a group of highly participatory mothers. These women appeared to have established a regular presence inside their child's classroom and spoke knowledgeably about routines and teaching methods. I decided to try and give each parent a 'typical location' in relation to the kindergarten site, once again using both the interviews and information gained from outside the interview context. Fred, for instance, did not mention his classroom involvement in the interview. His wife, Roz, told me about it at one of our regular get-togethers.

The resulting categorisation (see chapter seven) of parents into 'insiders', 'fringe dwellers' and 'outsiders' allowed me to re-analyse the accounts from the point of view of the differing

relations, knowledges and practice made possible through these different locations. The differential gender balance in each of these three groups allowed me to investigate the impact of gender on positioning within these relations, knowledges and practices. As well, the discovery of two men in the 'insider group' allowed me to challenge essentialist accounts of gender difference in relation to parenting and literacy.

2.5.4 Identifying and tracing discourses: analysis at the level of the text.

Analysis at this level has entailed the selection of excerpts from the corpus, followed by a close reading of each excerpt, paying attention to a range of textual features. Selection of each text has been informed by knowledge of the patterns of discourse emerging through analysis of the corpus. In investigating the ways in which individuals construct gendered and literate identities within the broader domain of competing discourses, close reading has been an important strategy. It has provided a means of placing individual accounts within the matrix I have constructed of intersecting discursive fields of gender, parenting, literacy and childhood. My approach to close reading is best described as critical discourse analysis (Birch 1989; Fairclough 1992a; A. Luke 1995). Critical discourse analysts employ detailed analyses of sample texts as a means of attending to the specific linguistic processes through which subjects are defined and placed in relation to each other (A. Luke 1995 p. 15).

Critical discourse analysis is an approach driven by critical questions that are posed of the text or corpus (Birch 1989; Fairclough 1992a). My questions have related to the kinds of subject positions present within the text, how these are created and maintained and how different kinds of subjects are placed in relation to each other. Sample texts in this study have been selected either for their capacity to 'answer' critical questions emerging from analysis of the corpus, or because they are atypical and thus raise critical questions. Because earlier rounds of analysis had revealed many gender differentiated patterns, my questions often focussed on the production of forms of gender identity within the texts. An example of sample texts chosen to 'answer' critical questions is the group of texts in which men spoke explicitly about their dislike of reading. Here a pattern noted in the corpus raised

the question 'How do men who resist reading constitute both reading, and themselves as reading subjects?' This question then informed analysis of the sample texts. An example of an 'atypical' text was that of Anne (see section7.2.1) who, unlike most mothers, stated she had not read to her children from an early age. This raised the question: is this individual's stance informed by similar discourses of parenting and literacy, or alternative discourses?

Because critical discourse analysis is driven by critical questions, rather than by a study of language per se, it has been relatively eclectic in its use of analytic tools. Methods have been drawn from a range of analytic traditions, among them structural linguistics, systemic functional linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, narrative analysis and deconstruction. In reaching a grounded interpretation of each text I have aimed to use as many resources as will assist me to answer the guiding questions. Thus the analytic process involves several 'passes' through a single text while attending to different aspects of its construction. In this process the different analytic methods combine to form a multi-layered reading in which no single interpretive technology is dominant (Hatch 1992). My selection of analytic for textual analysis combines elements of deconstructive analysis, literary criticism and structural linguistics.

Deconstructive analysis is based on the premise that any definition of some nameable thing is at the same time a definition of what it is not (Crowley 1989; Landry & Maclean 1993; Lather 1991, Norris 1991). Every category has its shadow 'other' on which it is dependent for its identity and this pair, the named and the unnamed, form a dualism. In feminist deconstructive analysis, dualisms in text are examined for their relation to the dominant gender binary, feminine/masculine. The work of a number of feminist researchers has provided models for deconstructing texts to uncover gendered themes (Faye 1993; Keller 1983; Steedman 1988; Plumwood 1993; Walkerdine 1986, 1988).

The steps in a deconstructive analysis of text are: the identification of key terms in the speaker's production of meaning; locating these terms within a system of binaries; and highlighting contradictions and tensions as signs that 'other' suppressed positions may be

present (Crowley 1991; Lather 1991; Norris 1991). An example of a deconstructive reading is my interpretation of Prue's comparison of her daughter and son (see section 7.4.2.1.) Here I note that the category 'real interest' is implicitly opposed to the subordinated category of 'other interest' in such a way that each child is assigned to their appropriate gender group.

Literary criticism is present in my analysis as a form of reading which treats the particular text it as if it were a piece of narrative fiction. Narrative analysis attends to the way an account is constructed as a story (A. Luke 1988, Mishler 1986; Polkinghorn 1988). This approach from literary criticism is similar to that taken by post-structural theorists who uses the concept of 'storyline' to analyse positionality (B. Davies 1993a; Davies & Banks 1992; Davies & Harre 1991). Relevant questions are: Who are the main and supporting characters? What roles are they given to play? What is the sequence of events? What events are treated as problems and how are these resolved?

A narrative orientation to analysis was particularly applicable to parents' extended life histories. An example is my interpretation of Kathleen's account (see section 5.5.2). Here I note how Kathleen constructs a relational narrative in which her acquisition of literacy is explained through relationships with significant others.

A central idea of literary criticism and one often exploited by authors, is that text items may operate on both a literal and a metaphoric level. Discourse analysts are also interested in the uses of metaphor particularly as they can invest particular subjects with ideologically loaded qualities (Fairclough 1989). An understanding of the ways in which language operates symbolically has informed my analysis of parents' accounts. For instance, I note in chapter five that Richard makes repeated reference to his father's 'big, big bookcase' which I read as a symbol of possession of a particular kind of literate power. Detecting underlying metaphors involves noticing the patterns of semantic associations within texts. This type of analysis has been useful when working on collections of similar statements drawn from across the corpus. For instance, I note the associations between children and vehicles in a group of texts and read this in terms of the construction of 'child' within the developmental discourse as one who is 'on a developmental journey' (see chapter seven).

In analysing text, I am attending to linguistic structures. This does not mean employing a single structural model to a group of texts in the interests of discovering how structures are produced. Rather, structure is understood in Halliday's terms as 'a mechanism whereby the speaker realizes or makes manifest the choices he (sic) has made' (in Kress 1976 p. 4). A range of models is available for categorising texts according to their structural features (Halliday in Kress 1976; Brown & Yule 1983; Hatch 1992; Fairclough 1989, 1992a, 1992b; Janks 1995; Luke 1995; Nunan 1993). These models focus on various levels of textual structure: the word, the clause, the sentence, the exchange, the passage.

I have attended to a range of structural features in the interests of discovering how subject positions are produced in a particular text. Among these features are: theme (the order of components in a clause); modality (the qualification of statements through markers such as 'might'); the negotiation of turn-taking in conversations and; coherence (the linking of themes through extended passages of text). Structural analysis necessarily takes pattern as its starting point. In this case, the nature of the pattern has influenced the choice of analytic tool and terminology. For example, having gathered a group of statements from men identified as 'resistant to reading' in a previous round of analysis, I noted a common register feature - their blunt and unequivocal tone. My reaction prompted a search for the structural features these statements had in common. In this case, one common feature was the structure of theme. Of course, this process can be explained in reverse ie that the common structure of theme informed my initial grouping of the texts. However in this case, structural analysis has followed a broader qualitative and discursive analysis, rather than being the prime interpretive technology.

When critical questions have focused on the relationship between speakers, such as when couples were interviewed jointly, a sociolinguistic approach was woven into the analysis (Burton 1981; McLoughlin 1984; Stubbs 1983; Tannen 1989, 1990). Analytic questions have focused on interactional aspects of discourse such as how participants constructed roles for each other; how they managed issues of authority; and how they aligned with or contested each other's statements. For instance, Marco and Alicia contested each other's

right to define the terms within which their own and the other's position will be defined (see chapter five). Textual indicators that contestation is occurring include interrupting, reframing and nonverbal gesture.

In summary, my analysis has been principally guided by critical questions. Using available interpretive strategies drawn from a range of models of linguistic analysis, I have undertaken a multi-layered reading of selected excerpts. This close textual analysis has been a crucial strategy in investigating the ways in which individuals construct gendered and literate identities both within the social context of the interview, and within the broader domain of social meaning systems.

2.5.5 Airing interpretations of data

2.5.5.1 Involvement of informants

Following established qualitative research procedure, I sought to establish some degree of faithfulness in my interpretations of data by consulting informants at various stages throughout the research process. The degree to which involvement occurred was up to the individual and so varied considerably. A further factor was the time I had available to facilitate such involvement. I am reasonably sure that some of the parents would have liked to play an even greater part in the research process had they been given the opportunity.

All informants were sent a copy of the interview transcript together with an two attachments: 1) an information sheet about interview transcription (see appendix D) and 2) a letter outlining actions they might wish to take. The information sheet explained that I was using a 'full transcription' method ie one that included false-starts, repetitions, pauses etc. This was compared to an edited interview such as they might be familiar with from reading newspapers or watching television. In the letter, parents were informed that if they were not happy with any part of the interview, they could either ask for it to be deleted from the transcript or supply a written statement to supplement the transcript. Nobody took this action however.

That is not to suggest that everyone was happy with their interview. As previously mentioned, one parent, Luke, told me about a year later that he had found reading his transcript very confronting since it had dealt with an aspect of his past that he did not normally reflect on. As Finch (1984) points out, the standard ethical protocols do not protect the researched from all the consequences of being investigated and, as this example shows, men may be just as vulnerable to the emotional effects of the researcher's sensitive probing as female subjects.

In another difficult incident, Sharon asked for a copy of the interview tape and, when I contacted her to ask for it back she told me she had wiped it. She went on to make several convincing points about the impossibility of any research subject really knowing how material was going to be used. It occurred to me that Sharon may have felt safer had I been conducting a statistical analysis of a standardised survey schedule. Her critique is echoed by a number of critical researchers who question how far it is ever possible to be truly ethical even in the supposedly non-exploitative case of a feminist researcher conducting qualitative 'voice oriented' research (Finch, 1984; Glucksmann 1994; Scott 1985).

As the initial stages of analysis ran concurrently with interviewing, I took the opportunity to check emerging interpretations of the corpus with informants, a practice recommended by some researchers in the qualitative tradition (Measor 1988; Taylor 1983; H. Wilson 1983). This inquiry would often take the form of a statement as to what 'some parents' had been saying about a certain topic together with an offer to comment. Informal contacts with the parents also provided opportunities to discuss the research, often at their instigation.

More formal methods were also used in order to provide information about the research process. I sent out a series of three newsletters to all participants, each one giving a brief and clear summary of the latest phase of analysis and inviting comment. After the first two, no comments were forthcoming so I decided that an open question required the respondent to do too much framing work. For the final newsletter I attached a four-question survey on aspects of the data I was currently attempting to interpret. I received six responses and some challenged my suggested interpretations prompting a rethink. For example, one

question concerned some parents' practice of testing their children's learning. The gender balance in the examples collected suggested that fathers were more likely to report testing than mothers. My question was 'Are fathers more likely to test their children?' Four of the six respondents disagreed, giving accounts that suggested that maternal testing did occur. One explicitly commented on the gap between practice and reported practice and this became incorporated into my analysis of the effects of the maternal discourse on women's literate work (see chapter seven).

2.5.5.2 Other readers

An important part of the analytic process has been exposing both the data, and my interpretations of it, to a community of readers. This I have done throughout the research process, both formally and informally. Those who have made comment include academics, school teachers, adult educators, research students, friends and family. I have presented material from the project through the medium of workshops, seminars, journal articles and conference papers and have received valuable feedback (Nichols 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1994d, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1995d, 1996a, 1996b, 1997a, 1997b).

This process of communication has had a number of outcomes. Questions have been asked and issues for investigation generated. Readers have drawn my attention to the operation of factors complicating my analysis. For instance, when I have presented an analysis from the perspective of gender relations, others have read the data for class, age or cultural relations.

Some readers have reminded me of the need to consider other explanations, to look for other voices in the data. When my readings have been greeted with resistance it has sometimes been because they were too tight and failed to acknowledge the possibility of other positions. This response has promoted me on occasion to re-examine the set of categories I have been using. My partner has been a key commentator, reflecting on my interpretations from the standpoint of his own experience of literacy. It was partly his response to trends emerging from the analysis of masculine literate positions that led me

to consider the issue of single vs mixed sex schooling in producing variations on the gender/literacy interface.

Generally the response has been one of recognition and affirmation. But it would be naive to see this as evidence of the 'rightness' of my interpretations. Many of these readers were women educators in the field of literacy; many also mothers. Their response of recognition can be understood as arising from their positioning within the same discourses that position me and produce my reading position.

2.6 Summary

My approach to researching the parent as gendered literate subject can best be described as critical discourse analysis. This involves analysis at three interrelated levels: the text, the corpus and the semantic context. This is an intertextual process in which patterns of recurrence are traced within texts, across texts within the corpus, across texts which form the sematic context, and between all three levels. Analysis of specific texts has been guided by questions of positioning and has utilised a range of tools chosen for their ability to bring to light patterns of meaning production.

Within this methodology, I am present both as a situated subject and as an analyst. My social and semantic location has implications for the researcher-researched relation (and thus the data gathering process) and for the meanings which I am able to construct from the data. The analysis of the sociosemantic context provides a means of checking my constructed interpretation against the discursive categories generated by other analyses of texts and practices.

In the chapter which follows, I present an analysis of the research literature in which I discuss the ways in which the key subjects 'parent', child' and 'literacy' have been constructed. This analysis provides the sociosemantic context for the parents accounts which are presented in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

A SURVEY OF DISCOURSES AND DISCURSIVE PRACTICES IN THE FIELDS OF LITERACY, CHILDHOOD AND PARENTING

> I suggest that an analysis which examines the play of discourses surrounding becoming a 'mother' or 'father' or 'parents' in the context of the *lived experiences* of particular individuals offers an insightful means of understanding how these experiential relations are constituted. A part of such an analysis would be an examination of the way in which research in this area has not merely documented experiences but been productive of discourses which may shape the experiences of becoming a mother, father or parent. (Loveridge 1990 p. 18)

3.1 Introduction

In chapter one, I introduced the concept of the discursive field as a spatial metaphor for domains of knowledge production within which meanings are contested (Weedon 1987). The production of knowledge is characterised by the generation of categories and definitions in order that aspects of the known world can be named and placed in relation to each other (Machlachlan 1994; P. Smith 1985). One of the ways in which discourses can be identified is through the categories and definitions which they employ to delineate particular subjects (Parker 1992). As Loveridge states, understanding how 'parent' is currently produced as subject - and specifically to this investigation, as gendered literate subject - requires a mapping of the discourses which are currently available to produce knowledge about 'the parent'. This is particularly true of those discourses which can be termed 'dominant' due to their pervasiveness and level of support within social institutions.

I begin by exploring a common characteristic of the production of knowledge within discursive fields; the process of constructing binary categories or dualisms. I then consider some of the meanings which have been generated historically and in recent times in relation to the subjects literacy, childhood and parenting. I employ three categories of discursive field in order to build up a picture of the complexities of subject production for parents. Within each field - literacy, childhood and parenting - I review work that has been done in delineating some of the key discourses which construct gendered literate positions for parents and their children. Through a consideration of the patterns of meaning, or discourses, in these fields, I map the terrain within which the parent can be understood as gendered literate subject.

In surveying the discursive fields of literacy, childhood and parenting, I trace the binaries which operate to construct meanings in these fields. I also consider how, through their association with the dominant discourse of gender difference, binary discourses operate to gender knowledge and practice, even when gender is not explicitly referred to. In the next section, I outline some dominant views of literacy and consider how discourses of

gender are implicated in the production of particular forms of literate subjectivity.

3.2 Discourses in the field of parenting

There are two broad aspects of the construction of parenting that are relevant to this study. One is the way that the definition of 'family' as an entity, a location and a set of relations contributes to the construction of parenting as a practice. The other is the way that motherhood and fatherhood are constructed as different subject positions within a discourse of separate roles and its associated practices.

To understand the way 'family' has been defined in modern post-industrial times, it is necessary to take into account changes in patterns of child-rearing, domestic labour and enterprise which occurred through the 19th century and resulted in what we now regard as 'traditional' modes of living (Davidoff & Hall 1992; Donzelot 1979; Thurer 1994). Beginning in the 19th century, the domestic site became increasingly physically separated from the site of enterprise with the women and children located in the home and the father journeying to and fro (Davidoff & Hall 1992). The 'family' came to be understood as the nucleus of parent-child relations occupying the home, and 'home' as the site of domestic and child-rearing work undertaken by parents (as distinct from servants or extended family).

As the father began to leave the home site in order to pursue paid labour, fatherhood came to be associated with bread-winning rather than with direct or frequent contact with children. A reflection of this geographical and discursive change is in the composition of advice texts written to parents (Davidoff & Hall 1992). When men, in their roles as workers in home-based family enterprises, had been considered to be an important direct influence on their children, they had been the target of advice on how to fulfil this role. From the 1830s on, advice was increasingly directed at middle-class mothers who, with the gradual decrease in the use of servants, were becoming increasingly involved with day-to-day domestic and child-care labour (Richards 1987). Broadly speaking, there was a shift from a focus on men as in-house authorities on familial matters and prime

decision-makers (the traditional patriarchal model) to a focus on the mother as key parent, responsible for the children's socialisation. With the shift away from the direct monitoring of wives and children within the family, there was an increase in less direct forms of regulation through the state. This has been termed the shift from husband patriarchy to public patriarchy (Ferguson 1989).

What we have come to regard as the traditional view of parenting, in which mothers' and fathers' roles are separate and different is thus the product of historically specific and variable conditions. The 'traditional discourse of parenting', while a useful category, is actually a set of discourses in which various meanings of the difference between mothers and fathers are promoted. In some versions, mother and father are seen as two opposite and mutually exclusive subject positions, with their characteristics aligned with other binaries. An example of this is the object-relations model in which the mother is associated with presence, connectedness and relation; whilst the father is associated with absence, distance and autonomy (Solsken 1992). This is variously seen as natural and a good thing, or the unhealthy outcome of an unbalanced gendered division of labour. Such versions of difference have been referred to as 'maximalist' (Baber & Allen 1992).

The maximalist view of gendered parental difference both justifies and is supported by the gendered division of domestic labour which characterises family arrangements that society has come to regard as traditional. The version of masculinity which is most closely associated with this arrangement is the 'breadwinner' model which has maintained its dominance despite changes in patterns of women's participation in the paid workforce (Collins 1985; Dickie 1987; Thurer 1994). The pervasiveness of this view of parental roles is attested to by studies of parents' attitudes (Collins 1985; Wearing 1984; White 1994). Collins, for instance found that the least participant fathers 'brought the culture of the public domain to bear on the division of domestic labour in such a way that it justified their exclusion.' (1985 p. 79).

Whilst the breadwinner discourse supports men's exclusion from the domestic realm, a maternal nurturance discourse is employed to support women's place within it and her exclusion from the public realm particularly when the care of young children is involved. Studies show that care of preschool children by their mother continues to be considered the ideal option by parents (Collins 1985; Dickie 1987) even when the mother is committed to a career (Fogarty et al 1971). When Wearing (1984) asked women to define the 'good mother', the most common response was that the good mother puts her children first.

The other end of the spectrum, the 'minimalist' position on parenting, is that which asserts that there is no fundamental difference between mothers and fathers (Baber & Allen 1992). Rather there is just the job of parenting which can be done equally well, and with no significantly different outcome, by men or women. Although this gender neutral view of parenting is often thought to be a recent outcome of social changes including feminism and the entry of women into the workforce. Lewis (1986), suggests that it is a recurring discursive strand which emerges as a form of resistance to more rigid definitions of gendered parental roles.

Some researchers have referred to the current version of the minimalist position as the 'shared parenting' model (Backett 1982; Cohen 1981; O'Brien 1982). Shared parenting is sometimes advanced as a means for modifying gender differences in children, when these are understood to be the result of social conditioning (Lamb et al 1983). Recently, this view has been advanced in relation to children's literacy development. The argument runs that if fathers were to take over some of the literate work currently undertaken by the mother (such as reading to children), literacy would no longer be regarded as 'women's business' by boys (Martin 1991; Solsken 1992). As this argument demonstrates, the family continues to be seen as primarily responsible for children's socialisation regardless of whether maximalist or minimalist versions of parental gender difference are operating.

The minimalist position however, despite its recurring popularity and utility, cannot be regarded as dominant since there is considerable evidence that the mother continues to be regarded as having prime responsibility for child-rearing and domestic tasks. The 'parent' as subject in medical, educational, legal and political discourses continues to be, to all intents and purposes, the mother (David 1993; Jaffe 1983; Woollett & Phoenix 1996). Due to her assigned responsibility for the socialisation of children, the mother's role is inevitably influenced by those discourses which, as we have seen, construct the child as a subject. Within the child-centred discourse, she is the facilitating adult who occupies the background to the central drama of the child's cognitive activity (Riley 1983; Walkerdine 1986, 1988; Walkerdine & Lucey 1989; Thurer 1994). Within the developmental discourse she is assigned the responsibility of monitoring the child's development and producing it as normal (Tyler 1993; Walkerdine 1986; Urwin 1984). Studies of parenting manuals and women's magazines demonstrate the extent to which mothers have access to discourses of childhood and the practices which these discourses make possible and necessary (Clarke-Stewart 1978a; Dean et al 1994; De Frain 1977; Urwin 1984).

While the consequences for women of being subject to child-rearing and pedagogic discourses have been the subject of discussion, what is seldom considered is the effect of these discourses on men in their position as fathers. In the absence of such accounts it is interesting to speculate on the subject positions made available for men within pedagogic and child-rearing discourses. An examination of psychological research on the relation between home factors and children's learning suggests that the traditional discourse of gendered parenting in which the father is primarily a breadwinner is clearly evident. Whilst fathers' views are rarely solicited through interviews, their incomes are almost always referred to through the standard measure of socio-economic status (Hess et al 1984; Johnson & Martin 1985; Rowe 1990; Sameroff & Feil 1985).

One might speculate that, in so far as parents subscribe to the shared parenting discourse, fathers and mothers will take similar positions in relation to discourses of child-rearing. Ruddick (1989) for instance asserts that, while fatherhood is traditionally

associated with patriarchal authority, fathers can adopt 'maternal thinking' which she describes in child-centred terms stating: 'mothers construe their children as contructive agents of their world' (p. 92). However, in as much as traditional discourses of masculinity emphasise autonomy (Keller 1983), there is the potential for a conflict between the adult position of facilitator and the masculine gender position of autonomous male. The issue of authority is also implicated. The reason/nature opposition was particularly powerful in constructing 'father' as authority figure within a hierarchy extending from church and state to private patriarchy (Seidler 1988). This version of fatherhood is still active in constructing masculinity. Yet father as authority figure is potentially at odds with father as sensitive facilitator, alert to the 'child's reality'. Such conflicts might have repercussions for men's involvement in their children's learning and literacy related activities. This has been recognised by some educators who are particularly concerned that the version of masculinity often referred to as 'macho' might be preventing men from increasing their parental involvement (B. Martin 1991; Rich 1985). Rich (1985) suggests:

> A media campaign can be started showing fathers working with children. These .... messages can appear on TV during football games ... this enhances the image of the "macho" man as caregiver to children, not just family provider. (p. 37)

Rich's suggestion is an implicit acknowledgement of the multiple discourses of masculinity which are available to men and their effects on parental practice.

An aspect of the discursive positioning of women as mothers that is seldom considered in educational research is the discourse and practice of housework. Yet the very term 'housewife' constructs woman as one who is responsible not just for a family but for a domestic environment. In the magazine excerpt which prefaced this study, the spotless kitchen is a necessary backdrop to the figures of facilitative mother and studious child. Being simultaneously positioned as both a housewife and a sensitive child-centred mother requires women to undertake a double work of production - the production of an orderly house and the production of a well-developed child (Walkerdine & Lucey 1989).

These competing demands are a central aspect of women's experience of motherhood (Baber & Allen 1992; Davies & Welch 1986; Wearing 1984).

The discursive field of parenting, then, is characterised first of all by the bracketing out of 'family' from other forms of social relation and social site. 'Family' is constituted as a site for the socialisation of children by parents, monitored by the social institutions of 'public patriarchy' (Ferguson 1989). Secondly, this discursive field is dominated at times by 'maximalist' accounts of parental role differences. This 'separate roles' discourse is linked to the dominant discourse of gender differences such that the qualities associated with the 'feminine' side of binary category pairs are associated with 'traditional' motherhood and the qualities associated with the 'masculine' side are associated with 'traditional' fatherhood.

This maximalist discourse of parental gender difference is, however, recurrently contested by a 'shared parenting' discourse in which parental gender differences are minimised. The discursive filed of parenting is therefore characterised by tensions between the different definitions of parental roles and gender relations. For mothers, discourses of 'the child' have been particularly influential in defining the maternal role, as I discuss further in a later section of this chapter. Individual subjects, mothers and fathers, are faced with the task of representing themselves as parents through these available discourses. Contradictions between competing positions arising from discourses and practices of childrearing, domestic labour and breadwinning are thus likely to be a continuing feature of parental life.

In the following section, I look at a discursive field with particular relevance to the construction of the contemporary parenting role - the discursive field of literacy.

3.3 Discourses in the field of literacy

There is a range of competing views on literacy; views on what is included in literacy, how one acquires it, how one accounts for differences in its use. Each of these

competing views of literacy can be understood as a discourse which produces subject positions for those who are defined within its terms, defines social relations between participants, and provides practices for them to engage in. The degree of dominance of any discourse of literacy depends on how thoroughly it is taken up by, and incorporated into, social institutions such as schooling and government.

In the 20th century, mass education has been one of the key means for promoting particular literate practices and discourses. Whenever technologies of literacy are taken up by social institutions there is an accompanying work of meaning production as the uses and values of these technologies are defined and promoted. A key aim of ideologies of literacy in the 20th century has been establishing the link between education, literacy and 'equality of opportunity as a basic value from which other advantages come' (Cook-Gumperz 1987 p. 34). In this view, literacy is understood as a basic or core skill and value and linked to every other realm of endeavour. Its lack becomes an unthinkable handicap and the 'literate' becomes the norm against which 'others' are measured and found wanting. This equation of literacy with social and economic advancement, which Graff (1994) has called the 'modernization paradigm', is one of the most powerful and enduring strands in discourses of literacy and one which is familiar to every parent in Australia today.

The meaning of literacy within the terms of this discourse relates to those aspects of literate competence which are transmitted by schools (Cook-Gumperz 1987). Schools have a crucial role in providing the 'evidence' through monitorial and assessing procedures that the transmission process is occurring. Street and Street (1991) have coined the term 'the pedagogization of literacy' to describe the process whereby the practice of acquiring schooled literacy has become the model for, and eventually supplanted, other forms of literate practice. Within the terms of the pedagogic discourse of literacy, the focus is on the processes of acquisition, monitoring and assessment rather than on the uses and functions of literacy. So pervasive has this discourse become that it is relayed through the texts of society and available from multiple sources.

The modernisation and pedagogic discourses of literacy, though dominant, are contested by alternative perspectives. The exclusive association of literacy with schooling and with social advancement has been challenged by researchers who have investigated literate cultures both prior to the emergence of mass education (Street & Street 1991) and in communities where access to schooling is still a comparatively recent phenomenon (Delpit 1990; Moll 1990; Moll et al 1992; Street 1994). In some of these communities literacy, in the sense of 'book learning', is understood not as a basic competence required by every person but a specialist competence held by some. As a specialist skill, literacy is able to be traded within the social network, just as are other forms of skill and knowledge. However, these other understandings of literacy occupy positions of marginality in relation to institutionalised discourses. This discursive gap between community and school understandings and practice of literacy has been implicated in the 'failure' of minority students (Heath 1983).

While the 'illiterate' is a stigmatised and pathologised subject position in modern societies (Brodkey 1992; Wickert 1992), the subject position of 'the literate' is one that is unmarked and unproblematic. Once one has acquired the literacy skills necessary in order to demonstrate schooled literate competence, one's position with respect to literacy is, it seems, no longer a matter for comment. Considering the ways in which the failure to acquire these skills is described and explained provides an interesting insight into the unacknowledged discursive work that continually supports the unmarked category. Parental efforts to support their children's literacy can be understood as efforts to prevent their children being placed in the pathologised position of the illiterate and socially dysfunctional. Sleeter's (1986) analysis of the construction of the category 'learning disabled' illustrates this process. Middle-class parents whose children were experiencing difficulties with reading resisted their categorisation as 'slow learners' or 'culturally deprived'. Forming an alliance with health professionals, they exerted pressure for the acceptance of a new category, 'specific learning disability'. This enabled the reading difficulty to be understood as a restricted problem locatable within individual mental processing and treatable through medical intervention.

Within the general discursive framework which I have referred to as the 'pedagogic discourse of literacy', there is a range of competing views of how literacy acquisition and learning should be understood and delivered. One model which has been particularly influential in the area of reading pedagogy has been drawn from cognitive psychology and will be referred to as the 'cognitive discourse of literacy'. The focus on cognition locates literate activity within the individual mental apparatus and frames it as a form of information processing. (McHoul 1991; A. Luke 1994a).

The act of reading is understood as a form of interaction between the individual and the text. The social context within which literate activity takes place is backgrounded in this process and with it the effects of culture, relations and social structures. The literate subject within the cognitive discourse is neutral with respect to gender, race, ethnicity and class. This understanding of literacy has had particular effects on schooling practices. Because schools are required to assess individuals' ability to perform the internally located act of reading and understanding, the monitoring and assessment of reading has become the subject of considerable discursive elaboration. An array of tests, indicators, checklists and observation schedules has been generated in order to place each individual precisely within a performance grid. A further assembly of structured programmes and supports has been generated in order to re-position those who do not 'measure up'. Like pedagogical discourses in general, the cognitive discourse of literacy circulates through social texts and is available to parents depending on their degree of access to these texts. As we will see in relation to discourses of the 'child', these texts and practices form part of a discursive regime which simultaneously operates to regulate children and those responsible for their development.

None of the discourses of literacy referred to so far has addressed the issue of gender. Literacy is understood either as a schooled, a communal or an individual practice. However, there are ways of framing literacy which highlight the ways in which beliefs and practices are inflected by gender. I will consider these in the following section.

3.3.1 Gendered discourses of literacy

In this section I consider the ways in which literacy is framed as gendered in relation to three key binaries, each of which operates to structure forms of literate knowledge and practice. The first, the Arts/Science binary is strongly associated with the dividing of the curriculum into domains of knowledge within educational institutions (G. Weiner 1994). The second, the private/public binary, is associated with the allocating of particular genres, texts and relations either to the realm of personal practice or to the realm of public practice. The third, the passive/active binary, distinguishes between literate and other forms of practice, and between particular forms of literate practice, on the basis of whether they can be understood as a form of 'doing'. The categories within these three binaries overlap and 'hail' each other through systems of meaning association. All of these binaries are indexed in various ways to the dominant gender binary, femininity/masculinity, with the result that various forms of literate knowledge and practice take on gendered meanings. Because they are located in familiar and taken-for-granted category pairs (such as Arts/Science) gendered discourses and practices of literacy may operate in subtle and hard-to-acknowledge ways.

3.3.1. 1 Literacy and the Arts/Science divide

In as much as literacy is framed as a schooled practice, the ways in which it can be understood are inevitably constrained by the structuring of domains of knowledge and practice within education systems, structurings which pre-date the introduction of mass schooling and which are firmly entrenched. Integrally related to the gendering of particular literacies is the division of the curriculum in terms of two broad subject groupings, the Arts (or Humanities) and the Maths/Sciences. These classifications are widely used in the secondary and tertiary curriculum and in primary school they find their counterpart in the Language Arts and Maths, or the old 'Reading/Writing and Arithmetic'. Literacy, understood as the practice of engaging with written texts, is associated with the Arts side of the knowledge divide. It is the ways in which these two domains are framed, not only as separate but as opposite, which is relevant to a consideration of the

gendering of literacy.

Thomas' (1990) study of tertiary students' perceptions of subject areas reveals the key definitions though which this opposition is expressed. Thomas selects Physics and English as her focus subjects as representative of the general science/arts divide. Since English is the archetypical textual subject, how it is defined can reveal much about the ways in which literacy, understood as textuality, is positioned in relation to other forms of practice. Thomas found that both English and Physics students defined their subject area in terms of difference from the other. Physics students, who were more likely to be male, drew on terms associated with discourses of masculinity to define their subject, in particular emphasising its 'hard' quality in comparison to the 'softness' of arts subjects (see also Keller 1983; J. White 1987). This hardness was associated by them with the assumed nature of knowledge in the sciences - that is, its status as a body of facts or laws which are universal and generalisable. 'Hard' also has a double meaning of 'difficult' implying an association of scientific modes of knowing with the cognitive effort presumed necessary to grasp 'abstract' concepts. This is consistent with a study of secondary students' perceptions of subject/gender relations (Archer & Macrae 1991). For girls, the difference between perceived 'masculine' and 'feminine' subjects was commonly expressed in terms of a difficult/easy categorisation, where the masculine subjects were perceived as those which were most difficult.

English students in Thomas' study, who were predominantly female, concurred in the categorisation of their subject area as 'subjective'; however, they saw this as a strength and related the subjective nature of subject English to its greater 'relevance' to the lived experience of people. This framing of English relates to its dominant form of practice: the reading of, and commentary upon, texts which are primarily works of narrative fiction, works 'about people'. This practice is not confined to tertiary courses; it begins with the bedtime story and is maintained through the Arts band of the primary and secondary curriculum. The association with narrative is crucial to the framing of subject English and schooled literacy in general as a feminised domain (A. Luke 1994a; Martino 1994). In Archer & Macrae's study (1991) the category 'about people' was associated by boys

with 'feminine' subjects and contrasted with an 'about things/masculine' category. If this categorisation is extended to forms of literate practice, narrative fiction which is centrally 'about people' is inevitably associated with femininity; and subject English, which is centrally about narrative fiction, is positioned as a feminine subject.

These studies demonstrate that through the separation of domains of literate knowledge and practice along curriculum lines and the association of particular curriculum areas with presumed gender-related aptitudes, gender identity becomes linked with modes of participation in literacy. An individualistic 'right-to-choose' ethos can mask this gendering process by maintaining that subject selection and achievement is a matter of individual preference and ability, rather than a process of alignment with, or resistance to, forms of gendered literate subjectivity (Riddell 1992).

3.3.1.2 Literacy and the public/private divide

Another way in which literacy takes on gendered meanings is through the division of particular forms of literate practice in terms of where and why these practices are presumed to take place. Literacies are more likely to be framed as feminine when the 'where' is understood as the private domestic realm and/or when the 'why' is associated with emotional expressivity. Fictional narrative fulfils both these criteria which further underlines its association with the feminine. Some literacies are deemed feminine because of their association with women's domestic work, for instance the practice of reading 'women's' magazines. Other forms of literate practice take on masculine connotations because of their association with the pursuit of 'practical' objectives. Mac an Ghail (1994) notes that male students clearly distinguished their mode of participation in school literacies from girls' by reference to concrete goals. One male English student explained his interest in this way:

> Girls like feminine writers and all the emotional stuff they get in their magazines. It's completely different for a bloke. He's into like how to become more like an expert ... (p. 61)

This student's stance depends on identifying the realm of the emotions as other to the

'real world' in which practical concrete work is done. Through an association of femininity and the private affective realm, particular literacies are defined as both feminine and 'impractical' under the terms of masculine instrumental discourses.

Similar statements to the above quote were made by boys in Martino's (1994) study. Amongst the arguments used by those who rejected subject English and its associated literacies was the perceived lack of relevance and usefulness to the world beyond school. The Physics students in Thomas' (1990) study made similar criticisms of tertiary humanities subjects, including English, saying for instance that they 'don't lead anywhere' and that they represent 'education for education's sake' (p. 67). Here a school/'real world' divide is operating with implications for the division of literate practices. Literacies are categorised according to whether they are associated with educational goals (in the limited sense of participation in an educational institution) or with instrumental goals in the broader public sphere. Thus the feminisation of literacies also occurs through their association with narrow educational goals perceived as irrelevant to the world of adult work.

Because masculine domains of knowledge and practice are seen as accomplishing goals in the public sphere, they are more likely to be seen as productive. Closely associated to the framing of literacies as productive or unproductive is the categorisation of modes of literate practice as 'active' or 'passive'.

3.3.1.3 Literacy and the active/passive divide

Another means of dividing literate knowledges and practices which has implications for gender centres on their classification as forms of activity. A key issue here is whether a particular knowledge/practice can be considered as a work of production. Classifying practice according to whether it is productive or not is implicated in the division of textual practice (which is often seen as an umbrella for 'literacy') from material practice, such that only material practices are seen as productive, as forms of 'activity'. Analysing the gendered framing of schooled literacies, Lee (1992) notes that for some male students:

> The generally negative relations between masculinity and writing ... meant that 'writing' was feminised in opposition with masculine 'doing'.

Solsken (1992) suggests that a crucial issue is whether a particular literate practice is seen to result in a material product. She explains the preference of the primary school boys she studied for writing rather than reading in the classroom with reference to both the private/public and the active/passive divide. Reading, due to its link with family rituals such as the bedtime story, was associated with the private realm whereas writing was associated with the social world of peers at school. Solsken suggests that a further factor operating was the way in which reading is framed as a form of textual consumption:

> Reading still involves following the lead of the author rather than taking the lead oneself, and it results in a less tangible product. (1992 p.153)

Reading, according to this view, not only does not produce anything, it requires a form of mental submission, a willingness to follow another's lead. The nature of fictional narrative must surely be a factor here, since its central characteristic is the plot which operates to withhold information from the reader, only revealing its meaning gradually. This relation of power between writer/producer and reader/consumer may be a further factor in the gendering of forms of literate practice. Even though 'The Arts' is seen as a feminine sphere, the work of artistic production is still often understood to be the work of men (Hudson 1972 cited in K. Thomas 1990). Thomas comments:

> ... the practise of discovering knowledge, of creating, ... of making the worlds we live in, is seen as conducted entirely by men: masculine men or feminine men - but not women. (1990 p. 34)

Particular orientations to literacy, then, can be understood as masculine if they are framed as 'active', even those that are more generally considered feminine. Male tertiary English students characterised themselves as non-conformists in order to distinguish themselves from their female peers (K. Thomas 1990). This non-conformity was performed by dominating tutorial sessions with outspoken commentary. In this way, participation in subject English was made compatible with a masculine discourse of autonomy and active agency.

The masculine/active - feminine/passive divide is further linked to understandings of literacy through the association of literate practice with forms of physical constraint. Reading necessarily entails a degree of bodily stillness so that the readers' eyes can be properly oriented to the printed text. Writing, particularly as it is practised in schools, required the writer to occupy a space whose limits are defined by desk and chair. Constraints extend to the voice; places and times specifically allocated to reading generally require quietness of participants. Certain versions of masculinity, however, make available forms of subjectivity and practice which are at odds with these requirements; masculinities constructed around physical movement and command of space.

A consistent theme in research on masculinity and schooling is the importance of sport and physical activity in creating subject positions for boys. Sport is generally positioned in opposition to literacy, understood as reading/writing (Connell 1989; Frank 1991; Martino 1994) except in those elite schools and streams where the subject position of 'all-rounder' (both academically and physically competent) is available. The implications of this opposition for boys' participation in school literacy are clear. However, the implications for those girls who may be physically active and thus 'other' to the feminine discourse and practices of literacy is rarely commented on. Raising questions about these 'others' is important to considering the ways in which both parents and children may resist, challenge or be positioned outside dominant discourses of gender and literacy.

3.3.2 Implications of discourses of literacy for parental practice

If the literate subject is a schooled subject, then one of the key tasks of parents in contemporary society is to produce the educable child. The educable child is one who is able to make a smooth transition between the discursive practices of the family and community of origin and those of the classroom (Baker & Freebody 1993; Heath 1983). Several educators, particularly in the field of early childhood education, have suggested that schools should become more like homes in terms of the conditions for learning

operating in these sites (Cambourne 1988; Holdaway 1979; Kemp 1990). However, it is clear from much of the debate about schooling outcomes that it is parents who are held responsible for producing their children in such a way that there are no problematic gaps between the child's behaviour and the school's requirements.

One parenting manual, for instance, gives the following advice: 'Just try to encourage your child to explore and learn in your home environment the way we help children at school' (Dodge & Phinney 1991 p.14-15). In this instance, the school requires 'independent, enthusiastic, curious learner[s]'; therefore the parent's literate work is constructed by the school as the work of producing self-regulated literate subjects. Other authorities enjoin parents to teach the skills of text decoding so that their children can enter the school system already 'literate' (Doman 1965: Macdonald 1984), holding out the promise that their children will be allocated to favourable positions within the institutional performance grid of school.

Parents' literate work is thus likely to be geared to the requirements of the education system (D. Smith 1987). This system provides the means of evaluating their children's progress according to defined standards of comparison. So while parents may be expected to undertake pedagogic work with their children, they are not expected to set the terms within which this work will be assessed. This situation is likely to create pressures for parents, particularly if the terms under which their children are assessed are not clearly communicated. Mothers are likely to feel this pressure more than fathers since it is they who, according to the dominant gendered division of labour, are more likely to be allocated direct responsibility for children's care.

Although society expects parents to make children school-ready, the education system is geared to compensate for their perceived shortcomings through a range of interventions. These include remediation programmes such as Reading Recovery (Furniss 1993b), clinical assessments for forms of learning disability (Harris 1990); and programmes to instruct parents in children's learning and/or development (Cairney & Munsie 1991; Docecki et al 1983; Fuerst & Fuerst 1992; Kagan 1995; Raven 1982).

Some of these interventions may position the parent as one who lacks knowledge and skills in children's literacy and learning. For instance, mothers were selected for a home visit programme on the basis of their willingness to learn child-centred practices (Raven 1982). In order to adopt these new practices, the mothers had to learn to see their current parenting methods as wrong. Maintaining a position of power, when one's child has been deemed a problem (or a potential problem) can be difficult for parents. Thus the stakes for parents in producing successful, literate and educable children are high.

The gender dimensions of parents' work in producing literate children are rarely referred to. What the research on gender and literacy makes clear is that, in learning a particular orientation to literacy, children are often learning an orientation to gender and vice versa. Parents have the potential, in their choices of text and reading practice, to align their children with the appropriate form of gendered literate subjectivity. Studies of parents' views about their children's gender orientation suggest that they prefer their children to display the 'appropriate' behaviour for their sex (Antill 1986; Rheingold & Cook 1975; D. Martin 1985; Weitzman et al 1985). So it seems likely that, if literate practices and products are gender differentiated, parents will take this into account when selecting for their children.

As products of a system which divides the curriculum on binary gendered lines, parents themselves are likely to have developed gendered orientations to knowledge in general and literacy in particular. Parents' histories may well have some impact on their understanding of the forms of literate practice that are deemed appropriate for their sons and daughters.

I now turn to a consideration of the discourses which construct the subject 'child' and which have a profound influence on the framing of both parenting and literacy.

3.4 Discourses in the field of childhood

Considering childhood as a discursive field entails an initial step of acknowledging the social and historical constructedness of the category of 'child'. Aries (1962) is credited with pioneering this perspective in his detailed investigation of how the category 'child' has been constructed in western societies through the centuries. Constructing 'the child,' according to Aries and other social historians, has been a crucial element in achieving a range of social projects, each aimed in some way at regulating and controlling modern mass populations (Donzelot 1979; Foucault 1980, 1990; Rose 1990; Rooke & Schnell 1992; Tyler 1993). In these projects, many official bodies of knowledge, or disciplines, have been generated and mobilised. The disciplines of medicine, psychology and pedagogy have been particularly active in constructing the child as subject through the generation of knowledge about children and associated practices of intervention.

The emergence of the modern child subject has also been associated with changes in the material conditions in which family life is lived. Kessen (1979) outlines three key social developments which have been associated with the modern construction of childhood: 1) the separation of the domain of the home from the domain of work, 2) the separation of masculine from feminine and 3) the separation of child from adult, associated with an idealisation of childhood. The gendered division of domestic labour has thus been a crucial factor in producing the discursive separation of all that is related to the child from all that is related to the adult - the domain of the public and the productive. The identification of the home as primarily a place to raise children (rather than as part of the family enterprise) and the physical location of women and children in this setting has accomplished a discursive alignment of childhood, maternity and the domestic. Kessen's three themes reflect the intersection of discourses of childhood with discourses of gender and parenting.

For the purposes of this study, the most relevant of the socially available discourses of childhood are those which have the greatest bearing on parental understandings of their children's literacy learning. Research into the construction of parenting and education

suggests two discursive formations have been particularly influential. The first emerges from the psychological/medical discipline of child development and will be referred to as 'the developmental discourse'. The second has been associated with cognitive psychology and a 'progressive' strand of education and child rearing this century and will be referred to as 'the child centered discourse'.

3.4.1 The developmental discourse

The developmental discourse of childhood takes as its basic assumption the notion of the progression of the child through a series of stages in a range of domains eg cognitive, social, physical. Its emergence has been traced by a number of researchers (Harris 1990; Riley, 1983; Rose 1990; Tyler 1993; Walkerdine 1984) who describe the ways in which the developmental discourse has generated practices in a range of sites, such as the nursery, clinic, kindergarten and home. These practices include measurement of the child on a large range of parameters, comparison of individual children with norms for age, and allocation of individual children to groups based on their developmental status.

Efforts to produce a universal map of children's language development form part of the discursive backdrop to this study, since such research has been particularly influential in describing and promoting particular parenting practices. 'Natural language' studies from the 1950s on have produced a body of knowledge on the development of language competence in the infant and young child, particularly the child's use of available social resources to actively construct understandings about language functions. Of particular interest is the way in which this model of language development constructs two key subjects positioned in relation to each other; the active meaning making child and the facilitating adult (Dyson 1994; Riley 1983; Rose 1990; Walkerdine 1984, 1988; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989).

Riley traces how the intersubjective model of language development grew out of earlier maternal attachment research, retaining a fundamental assumption of the primacy of the mother-child bond (1983, p.20). Although ostensibly a reaction against mechanistic

behaviourist theories of socialisation, this new approach preserved the language of stimulus-response which was used in analyses of 'natural' mother-child interactions. In a demonstration of the pervasive infusion of scientific discourse into everyday parenting practice, Urwin (1984) found the term 'stimulate' commonly used by mothers to described their role in their child's development.

Language acquisition studies set out to identify maternal practices which had the desired effect on children's development (Bruner 1977; de Blauw et al 1979; Newport 1976 in Painter 1985; Paulby 1977; Phinney & Feshbach 1980; Wells et al 1979) and early intervention programmes were established to promote these practices (Chazan 1982; Clarke-Stewart 1983; Dokecki et al 1983; Olmsted & Rubin 1983; Raven 1982; Wolfendale 1983). In the process a new language was developed ('scaffolding', 'cues', 'sensitivity') and a subject position for the mother associated with particular capacities, especially the capacity for 'sensitivity':

> Then sensitivity became linguistic. Normal mothers not only responded to their babies' emotional needs, they engaged in 'fine-tuning' their meanings, they 'scaffolded' their responses, they expanded their children's utterances and made sense of their gestures. ... It is they who would ensure their children's mental health and would prepare them for educational success both by teaching them and developing their language. (Walkerdine & Lucey 1989, p. 62)

Child language acquisition theories thus produced a form of linguistic work for mothers which could be evaluated in relation to a range of child language indicators eg vocabulary, syntax, reading age.

The developmental discourse became manifest in the geography and teaching practices of the kindergarten (Tyler 1993). Chairs, for instance, were graded so that children's size could be measured unobtrusively. The case-record was used as a technology for differentiating and managing types of children. Children were also observed at play through a one-way screen. These strategies enabled 'problem' children to be identified, for example those that spent 'too much' time in solitary play and thus risked jeopardising their social development.

Tyler's (1993) analysis highlights the discursive alignment of teacher and mother through their shared role in recognising and meeting the child's developmental needs. This 'correct' relation between mother/teacher and child is symbolised by the one-way observation screen which its designer Arnold Gessel described as combining 'intimacy of observation with detachment' (1943 p. 370 cited in Tyler 1993 p. 48). The mother/teacher monitors the child to ensure its development in all domains according to the standards determined by child development authorities.

'Problems' in any of the domains when detected can be referred to professionals (eg paediatricians, educational psychologists) or textual authorities (eg parenting manuals). The developmental approach to childrearing is particularly compatible with professional intervention: 'One of the attractions of this developmental explanation ... is that it is a very rich source of ideas for remedial strategies.' (Harris 1990 p. 92) That parents, and in particular mothers, do refer to developmental models of childhood is indicated by the contents of popular women's magazines. Historically, there has been a shift from a pre-World War Two preoccupation with child health to a focus on social and cognitive development (Dean et al 1994). One survey found that nearly all readers of parenting books and magazines nominated 'learning about child development' as their main reason for consulting these texts (Clarke-Stewart 1978a). The diffusion of this material through the class strata is indicated by that fact that, whilst buyers of parenting texts tended to be middle-class, a significant group of library borrowers were working-class mothers (Clarke-Stewart 1978a).

As well as promoting normative views of childhood and children's care, the discourse of child development has also been influential in supporting notions of 'natural' gender difference which are used to explain girl's and boys' differential achievement in school literacies (M. Clark 1989; Goldstein 1987; Riddell 1992).The following teacher quote from Riddell's (1992) study of a secondary school shows how the developmental discourse is used to constitute different kinds of feminine and masculine student subjects.

> It's also stages of development. You will find so often that a girl will work industriously and produce pages of writing that looks most impressive and when they get higher up the school you look at it and it isn't so impressive, and the boys come on and the ideas are there. (Miss Maple, deputy head, teaching mathematics) (p. 69)

In this quote we clearly see the associations being built up between a mode of development (early), specific literacies (the production of pages of writing) and specific modes of participation in the classroom (working industriously) to produce a feminine literate subject. By implication boys do not engage in these specific literacies and modes of participation. The masculine subject is not defined in terms of literate activity but in terms of cognitive capacity. The association of cognitive capacity (or 'potential') with masculinity has been noted by other researchers (Bird 1994; M. Clark 1989; Walkerdine 1988). In a study of primary school students and teachers, Bird (1994) found the idea of developmental delay intersected with a masculine discourse of latent strength (potential) which she terms 'Eurocool'. Boys displayed 'coolness' through the absence of any visible effort, including effort directed at school literacies.

In summary, the developmental discourse has produced a number of effects relating to gender. It constitutes males and females as different in terms of their rates of development. The notion that development is continually unfolding means that any competence not yet realised can be considered a 'potential'; therefore boys as 'slower' developers are more likely to be attributed with potential. The developmental discourse is also implicated in child-adult gender relations through its allocating to women (as mothers and teachers) the prime responsibility for normalising children's development. Since boys are more likely to be seen as developmentally delayed, the female adult/male child relation is endowed with particular significance. Closely related to developmentalism is the discourse of 'child-centredness'.

3.4.2 Child-centeredness

What I am calling, following Walkerdine (1983, 1984, 1988), the child-centred discourse, relates to a strand of educational theory and practice in which the child, rather than the

adult teacher or parent, is placed at the centre of the learning process. This strand has been one of the available discourses in the field of education and parenting throughout the development of the modern education system, but its level of dominance has shifted depending on its attractiveness to social and political powers at various times. In the post-war period, a child-centred perspective has been associated with developments in cognitive psychology, in language acquisition theory and in teaching methodology, particularly in the primary school and in subject English.

Several researchers have analysed the terms and effects of this discursive formation. Walkerdine (1988) has traced developments in cognitive psychology through which has emerged the construction of the child as 'active learner'. Her analysis of child-centred texts and practices shows how this construction is based on a number of oppositional categories. In particular the work/play opposition is shown to be central in the model of learning produced through this discourse:

> Work, then forms a relation with rote-learning and rule-following ... a mode of learning which is opposite and antithetical to the 'joy of discovery'. ... it leads to resistance. Children regulated in this way do not become self-regulating. ... [Play] constitutes a category which frees 'the child' to be something distinct, playful, not an adult, outside the field of productive labour, innocent, natural. (1988, p 207)

The emphasis on engaging with the environment means that physical movement, manipulation of objects and play are read as indicators of cognitive processes (Walkerdine 1988). Within the terms of this discourse 'independent learning' is valorised and opposed to teacher-directed activity ('rote learning', rule following'). A number of researchers have drawn attention to the way in which this discourse intersects with the gendered binary active/passive to construct the male child as 'active learner' (Clark 1989; Walkerdine, 1983; 1984;1988). An implication of this for girls is that literacies and literate practices traditionally considered feminine (reading, quiet sustained writing), are associated with passivity and rule-following and opposed to independent cognitive activity (Gilbert, 1989)

Clark (1989, 1992) suggests that it is the relative dominance of traditional or progressive

pedagogies in classrooms which will determine whether girls or boys will be viewed as 'the ideal pupil':

> At first glance it would appear that the model pupil is female. ... In other schools where neatness, order and obedience had partially given way to more enquiry oriented child-centeredness the ideal model pupil was more blurred - more contradictory. At a practical day-to-day level the ideal pupil tended to be female ... yet ironically it is the male pupils who were seen as a challenge and therefore as more interesting. (Clark 1992 p. 244-5)

The child-centred discourse has been much more influential in shaping the primary curriculum for several reasons. Primary teachers are predominantly female and their role has often been constructed in alignment with the mother's (D. Jones 1990; Bleich 1988; Biklen 1987). This facilitates the relay of notions such as 'sensitivity' between home and school sites. The secondary school, on the other hand, is controlled to a greater extent by the values of the academy (Bleich 1988). Authority is vested in the masculine, which indexes associated categories; objectivity, scientificity and generalisability. This authority is played out through the relation between teacher and class in which the teacher undertakes to transmit content to the students.

A version of the child-centred discourse does appear in the secondary school, however, most noticeably in the framing of the English curriculum. This strand of pedagogy emphasises 'self-expression' as a key goal of learning and constructs the student as active meaning maker (P. Gilbert 1989). The teacher's role is here to assist students to find their 'personal voice' rather than to transmit predetermined items of knowledge.

As long as the child-centred pedagogy has occupied a position of influence it has been positioned in opposition to other more 'conservative' pedagogies. These two perspectives are often pitted against each other in debates that are played out through the media. Parents, as consumers of media images, are confronted with an apparent choice between two mutually exclusive approaches to children's education, a choice which has implications for their own pedagogic work.

Parent gender and child gender are likely to have a bearing on the pedagogic discourse that is brought into play in home literacy practices. This suggestion is supported by Lee's (1992) analysis of gender relations within two opposing pedagogic discourses, the child-centred and the transmission discourse. Each discourse is seen to establish particular gendered subject positions such that the ideal 'teacher' is the gendered 'other' to the ideal student. In relation to the child-centred discourse, Lee supports other researchers (Clark 1989; Walkerdine 1986) in noting that the definition of teaching as supportive facilitation aligns the ideal teacher to the feminine. At the same time, the definition of learning as active, self-regulated discovery constructs the ideal student as masculine. Within the traditional transmission, the definition of teaching as authoritative instruction of content is aligned to the patriarchal model of masculine authority. The student is constructed as passive recipient of this content, a position aligned with traditional femininity.

Lee's model holds promise for theorising parent-child gender relations within pedagogic discourse. By substituting 'parent' for 'teacher' and 'child' for 'student, this model can be adapted for interpreting parent-child relations:

Pedagogy	**Relations**
progressive 'child-centred' pedagogies	feminine / masculine teacher / student parent / child
transmission pedagogies	masculine/ feminine teacher / student parent / child

Table 2 : Gender relations within pedagogic discourses (adapted from Lee 1992 p.249)

Thus, when the child-centred discourse is brought into play in a home context, the ideal teaching subject is more likely to be the mother, unless the father is willing to take up the facilitating non-authoritarian subject position of teacher. (Some writers suggest that this

is exactly what fathers should do - see Ruddick 1989.) Note that in both discourses, the overt power is held by the masculine subject. Within the child-centred discourse, control is ostensibly in the hands of the self-regulating child.

3.5 Conclusion

I have considered some of the major discursive strands in each of three overlapping discursive fields in order to build up a picture of the complexities of subject production for parents in current Western societies. In the field of parenting, I described the way that modern historical constructions of 'the family' have contributed to the definition of parenting as a practice conducted within certain relations and at a specific kind of site, the 'home'. I considered how motherhood and fatherhood are constructed as different forms of subjectivity within a discourse of separate roles, termed the 'traditional discourse of parenting', underpinned the dominant discourse of gender difference. I also considered an alternative position on parental roles, in which differences are minimised, associated with a 'shared parenting' model of the division of domestic labour.

With reference to the discursive subject 'child', I considered how this has come to be historically constituted in relation to the separation of childhood and adulthood, home and workplace. I also described two discursive strands which have been particularly influential in constructing forms of literate and pedagogic practice in modern Western societies: child centeredness and developmentalism.

In the field of literacy, I have pointed out that the dominant discourse operating in modern Western societies is one that associates literate competence with schooling; and both literacy and schooling with social status. This framework can help to explain the pressures placed on parents to ensure their children's acquisition of schooled literacy and the struggles faced by those whose communities have alternative understandings of literate and social competence. Within this field I also described a specific discourse which has been influential in constructing understandings of the process of literacy acquisition: the cognitive discourse of literacy.

Following this, I considered the ways in which notions of gender and literacy intersect to produce forms of gendered literate subjectivity. Three key dualisms were used as frames for considering how literacy becomes gendered. The first, the Arts/Science binary relates to the dividing of the curriculum into domains of knowledge within educational institutions. The second, the private/public binary, distinguishes between particular genres, texts and relations on the basis of whether they 'belong' either to the realm of personal practice or to the realm of public practice. The third, the passive/active binary, uses the notion of 'doing' to distinguish between literate and other forms of practice, and between particular forms of literate practice. In the following section I consider how these gendered literate categories may be implicated in enabling particular forms of parental practice in home and other sites.

This survey of parenting discourses is necessarily incomplete. The field of discourse analysis is relatively new and the work of delineation of discourses is ongoing. However it does suggest that the complexity of the relations between different discourses, and the subject positions which they construct, should lead us to expect tensions, conflicts and contradictions in parents' accounts of their literate work and in academic accounts of this work. In the following chapter, I review research literature in the field of parenting, with a particular emphasis on children's literacy, language and learning. This body of work offers valuable insights into the nature of parental practices and the ways in which these practices have been understood. In reviewing parents' practice through the research literature, I will consider some of the possible effects of constructions of 'the child' on what parents can believe, say and do in relation to their children's literacy and learning.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARENTAL PRACTICE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED LITERATE SUBJECTS: INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH

4.1 Introduction

In chapter three, I surveyed some of the discourses constructing the subjects 'parent', 'literacy' and 'child'. I considered some of the implications of these discourses for parents' literate work in terms of the practice made possible by them. In order to trace the effects of discourses it is necessary to extend the study into the lived experiences of individuals and groups, the realm of practice. Here 'discourse' and 'practice' are not to be considered forms of binary but as mutually constitutive processes (Gee 1990; Fairclough 1989; Foucault in Rabinow 1991). The term 'discursive practice' (Davies & Harre 1991), practice organised in relation to discourse, expresses this relation.

As a preliminary step to presenting my own analysis of parents' accounts I here explore the issue of parents' discursive practice through a selective survey of studies of parenting. This chapter is organised around a number of topics drawn from the research literature, each of which relates in some way to aspects of parental practice which potentially have significance for children's literacy development. Such practices are referred to here as 'parental literate practices', a broad term incorporating all aspects of parents' work *as parents* which impacts on children's literacy. Clearly, practices which are directly related to preparation for and participation in schooling - such as reading instruction and homework assistance - can be understood as contributing to children's acquisition of schooled literacy. However, theories of children's cognitive, social and linguistic development have contributed to an almost endless broadening of the range of parental behaviours and attitudes which are considered relevant to their children's educational outcomes. Notions of 'modelling', for instance (Toomey & Allen 1991) have focussed attention on parents' personal literate practice as providing an example for children to follow. Language acquisition theory (Britton 1972; Schaffer 1977; Vygotsky 1978) has emphasised the significance of conversational interactions with carers for developing competence in the native language, usually referred to, not coincidentally, as the 'mother tongue' (Painter 1985). Psychological accounts of children's cognitive development have stressed the importance of active play, thus focussing attention on the adults' facilitative role in providing resources and acting as a non-directive play

partner (Ebbeck & Ebbeck 1974; Forman & Hill 1984; Healy 1994).

Because of the multiple significance of parents' practice within theories of learning, accounts of such practice may be drawn from a wide range of studies, crossing disciplines and theoretical perspectives. In this section of the review, I draw upon studies which may be read for the insights they provide into the complex intersection of gender, literacy and parenting in the construction of meanings and practices. This sometimes involves reading in a manner unintended by the authors, whose main focus may be something else - often child development. It also involves considering the way that research itself is implicated in constructing gendered literate positions for parents. The topics considered are: parent-child talk; child's play as parental practice; parents' pedagogic practice in home and school sites; and parents' personal practices of literacy. I deal with each of these in turn.

4.2 Parent-child talk

How parents speak with, and to, their children has been a topic of great interest to researchers in the area of language and literacy acquisition. Very few children fail to achieve a basic competence in speech before school age which has led many to suggest that the process of learning to talk can provide insights into the optimum conditions for learning other forms of literate practice (Cambourne 1988; Holdaway 1979; Mercer 1994; Wiener 1988). This explanation of children's early language development, and the crucial role of significant caring adults in it, is generally offered within a gender neutral framework. However, as feminist theorists in the field of gender and language have pointed out, language is not a gender-neutral medium (Hill 1986; Spender 1980). As referent - as provider of names and categories with which to interpret the world - language is active in constructing gendered discourses. And as sociolinguists remind us, language use takes place within, and is a means of maintaining, social relations (Stubbs 1983). This includes gender relations (Swann & Graddol 1994; Tannen 1990). For this reason, gender as a form of discourse and social relation, must be a factor in parent-child interactions. This view has not formed part of the mainstream of

child language studies; however it is supported by some which have specifically focussed on gender.

Research on parent-child interactions in infancy supports the belief that gender differences in parental linguistic behaviour with children emerge very early. These differences appear in the frequency of interactions; one group of fathers when caring for infants, talked to them much less frequently than their partners (Greenbaum & Landau 1982). The quality of parent-to-infant talk appears also to be gender-related. Belsky and colleagues (1984) found differences in the areas of positive affect, stimulation and responsiveness. When caring for infants, mothers use more verbal endearments than fathers. Mothers were also more likely to draw the child's attention to objects or activities in its environment. These findings were repeated with a different sample in a later study (Belsky & Volling 1987) suggesting a degree of consistency about this pattern of gender difference.

The observation based study of Gleason and Greif (1983) focused on the linguistic interaction patterns of mother-child and father-child pairs in a range of situations. Both similarities and differences were noted. Fathers and mothers were alike in simplifying their speech style when addressing children; the mean length of utterance was nearly identical (see also Phillips & Parke 1982). In terms of content, both mother-child and father-child conversations focussed on actions and states in the immediate present context. It appears that mothers and fathers have similar understandings about the nature of the child and its development. In some respects, the age relation is more salient than the gender relation. This is consistent with the finding that fathers and mothers have a high rate of agreement about concepts of child development (22 out of 26 concepts) (McGillicuddy-DeLisi 1982). This also suggests the power of the developmental discourse of childhood to construct relations of difference between parents and children.

There were however some gender differences noted in parent-child linguistic interaction (Gleason & Greif 1983). Fathers produced a much higher percentage of imperatives

when talking to children than did mothers. They were also more likely to interrupt children and used more threats. The researchers comment:

> [Fathers' speech] is distinguished from mothers' speech to children along the lines that are connected with the father's traditional role, both as authority figure and one who is not called upon to be completely sensitive to the needs and intentions of the child. (p. 144)

In the language of discourse theory, it can be said that fathers appear to be positioning themselves within a discourse of paternal authority which is set in opposition to the child-centred discourse. Fathers are not 'called upon' to be sensitive; in Althusser's terms (Barrett 1985), they are not 'hailed' by the sensitivity discourse to the same degree as mothers. There are further indications in Gleason and Greif's (1983) study that fathers are less driven by a child-centred agenda: they were more likely to use subtle forms of implied directives which required the child to work out what was wanted and also to use advanced and unfamiliar vocabulary, despite an overall simplified style.

The significance of the child-centred discourse to adult-child linguistic interactions is further supported by a comparative study of male and female child care workers (Gleason & Greif 1983). The findings suggest that under certain circumstances, this discourse overrides the discourse of paternal authority leading to changes in men's speech to children. Male day care workers displayed many of the linguistic interaction patterns of mothers and female day care workers, in contrast to fathers. They produced far fewer imperatives than fathers, and significantly fewer even than mothers. This suggests that child-centred discourse constructed at and through particular sites (such as a child care centre) positions any 'caring adult', whether male or female in a particular relation to the child subject and makes particular discursive practices possible. Other discursive practices are excluded, in this case the authoritarian pattern of linguistic behaviour which in other sites is considered appropriate for men.

These parental gender differences appear to be further modulated by the gender of the child. Fathers addressed sons differently from daughters, being more likely to use playfully insulting nicknames (Gleason & Greif 1983). Fathers of newborn sons have

been observed to adopt a 'matey' style and also address more utterances to the child than fathers of daughters (Woollett et al 1982). The impression gained from these findings is that father-son relationships appear to be constructed in terms of a 'playmate' model, to a greater extent than father-daughter relationships. This is further supported by research on adult-child play interactions as will be seen in the following section.

Adult-child linguistic interaction patterns, therefore, reflect the ways in which difference is constructed. Differences in age and gender between the participants results in particular patterns being adopted. An example is the shorter mean length of utterance used by adult care-givers to young children. These patterns can be understood in terms of the discourses operational at particular sites and the speaking positions these discourses make possible. In the next section I consider the patterns of difference found when adult-child interactions are framed as 'play'.

4.3 Child's play as parental practice

Research studies on parental styles of playing with children are relevant for several reasons. Firstly they are a manifestation of theories of children's learning which stress the importance of active interaction with the environment for children's cognitive development. 'Play' in many of these studies is to be read as the means by which a child in active interaction with its environment engages in developmentally necessary cognitive activity. Secondly, a number of studies have compared the play styles of mothers and fathers within families and have found a pattern of difference. Thirdly, studies of play often include on the observation schedule activities which are literacy-related such as story-reading, drawing, 'educational games' and others.

Several studies have characterised fathers' preferred play with children as 'physical' or 'rough and tumble' (Clarke-Stewart 1978b; Ehrensaft 1986; Lewis 1986). Since literacy-related activities are generally undertaken in relatively settled physical postures, fathers' preference for physical play may make their participation in them less likely. Clarke-Stewart (1978b) compared fathers' physical play with mothers' interactions which she

characterises as more verbal and 'obviously educational' in nature. What is 'obviously educational' about this play? Although Clarke-Stewart does not define her terms, I would suggest that it is the similarity of mother-child play interactions to the pedagogic practices associated with 'schooled literacy' that enable them to be termed 'educational'. This similarity was noted by Heath (1982) who found that both middle-class mothers and primary school teachers employed a form of 'known answer' questioning designed to elicit displays of knowledge from children.

It appears that parents themselves attach different meanings to mothers' and fathers' play and that these meanings are consistent with different relations to pedagogic and parenting discourses. Mother-child play is associated with women's perceived responsibility for children's literacy and learning while father-child play is associated with bonding and entertainment. Comparing their play styles to their partners, a group of middle-class mothers 'perceived themselves as more "intellectual", more "sedentary", and more "quiet"' (Ehrensaft 1986 p. 150). All these descriptors can be read in terms of an attempt to construct a home learning environment which is parallel to the traditional classroom where the ability to sit still and be quiet is considered an advantage.

A father expressed these different functions when he said: 'She always tries to educate him with her play, whereas I'm just a bit boisterous with him, you know' (Lewis 1986 p.122). In view of the different meanings attached to fathers' and mothers' play, it is not surprising that mothers' play is reportedly more sustained and focussed on the child, whereas fathers' play is intermittent and interleaved with other activities such as watching television and reading the newspaper (Belsky & Volling 1987). If women understand their play sessions to be pedagogic and developmental in nature they will want to check whether the child's response indicates that learning is taking place. This degree of monitoring is difficult to achieve if the mother's attention is divided. Fathers' simultaneous performance of child's play and personal leisure (TV viewing, reading) suggests that they view their role differently; as child-minding or 'keeping company'.

Lewis' (1986) findings on parental play are interesting since they suggest that fathers' performance of physical play may be a choice to position themselves within a masculine discourse of fatherhood. When fathers were asked to describe their activities with children, they produced similar lists to their partners. However, when a researcher was observing their interactions, they were much more likely to engage in physical play than any other kind. In a situation where they may have felt their fatherliness was being evaluated, they acted according to the popular stereotype of the home-coming father. Lewis also found that mothers, but not fathers, saw the father-child play sessions as 'special' and different to their own play with the child. It appears that mothers were taking a defining role in relation to their partner's interactions with children. By designating father play as 'special' they are drawing on a discourse of parenting which constructs motherhood as 'the norm', the taken-for-granted presence, in contrast to the heralded and commented-on role of fathers.

Fathers' predisposition to boisterous interactions seems intensified when they are with sons. According to Russell and Russell (1987), sons were more likely than daughters to be engaged in 'rough and tumble' play and ball games and to be taken to sports events. Interestingly the authors report that mothers also interacted with their sons in a similar fashion. Mothers who support 'traditional' notions of gender difference are particularly likely to engage their sons in active play (Brooks-Gunn 1985). Versions of masculine discourse which emphasise physicality appear to be a powerful influence on parents' views of what is an appropriate activity for their sons.

Popular accounts of the need for male role models (West 1995) may be a factor in parents encouraging both father-son masculine play sessions and the sons' attendance at male sports events. Fathers say they feel particularly motivated by and responsible for their sons and see this bond as qualitatively different from the father-daughter relation (Lewis 1986). Men reportedly increased involvement with their sons over the ages three to nine years, whilst decreasing involvement with their daughters over the same period (Radin & Goldsmith 1983).

Parents can also influence their children's activities through the provision of resources in the form of toys, equipment and reading materials. Rheingold and Cook's (1975) report continues to be one of the few to investigate the relationship between gender and parents' provision of such resources. The researchers found that parents and other caring adults provided young boys with significantly more toys than girls and also a greater range of toys. Toy provision was also consistent with gender stereotypes in the expected direction (eg cars for boys, dolls for girls). Later studies suggest that this pattern continues. Weisner and Wilson-Mitchell (1990) investigated the attitude of professed 'anti-sexist' mothers to their children's activities and report that even the most 'sex-egalitarian' mothers discouraged their male children from playing with dolls (p. 1931). Mothers thus continued to act to ensure their sons' subscription to masculine gender identity. As we see, this can result in mothers' direct intervention to prevent their male children's practice of play activities associated with femininity.

In studies such as these we see the complex interaction between discourses of gender, childhood and parenting as manifested in the social relations and discursive practices of play in the family. Crucial to this study is the question: what forms of literate practice do parents associate with masculinity and femininity and how do they act to encourage or discourage their children's participation in them? In the following section, I consider how the interaction between discourses of gender, childhood and parenting manifests in activities more directly associated with children's literacy and schooling.

4.4 Parents' pedagogic practice in home and school sites

4.4.1 The gendered division of literate labour

In the previous sections, we have seen some evidence of gendered patterns of parenting in the areas of interaction with children, both linguistic and non-linguistic. In this section, I will focus more closely on aspects of parental practice directly related to literacy such as reading to and with children, assistance with homework and participation in children's education at home and other sites. In so doing, I will draw on two bodies of

research: 1) comparative studies of mothers' and fathers' activities in the home; and 2) ethnographic studies of family and community literate practice. While the picture is far from complete, these studies suggest that gendered patterns of parenting are significantly implicated in the practice of literacy in home and educational sites. They also suggest that socio-economic status is a crucial factor in affecting parents' access to those discourses of child-rearing and pedagogy which are associated with the institution of schooling.

Since parental involvement in children's literacy and schooling necessarily entails the commitment of time in home or educational sites, it is not surprising that the literate labour of parents appears to be divided along similar lines to the division of child-rearing generally. The job of preparing children for school entry and of undertaking the routine administrative support for children's schooling is generally the province of the parent designated the prime carer, in most cases the mother.

The early stage of family life is characterised by the most marked division of labour (Shelton 1992). The tendency of women to stay at home during the early years of children's lives removes a potential source of income from the family, often necessitating a greater commitment to paid labour on the part of the father. Cohen's (1981) study of a suburban community gives a detailed picture of the gendered division of literate and educational labour in middle-class Western families. In this newly established suburban housing estate, fathers were often absent for much of their children's waking weekday lives and so were not involved in the daily literacy related activities of their children.

Mothers in this community saw facilitating their children's development and learning as very important and participated in a number of practices aimed at fulfilling this role. They took their children to play groups, gave them opportunities to engage in educational and developmentally appropriate play and monitored their progress at school. In order to inform themselves of current knowledge in the field of children's learning and development, mothers consulted literature. The more highly educated women took on the task of reading and disseminating this information. An issue of particular interest to

these mothers was 'reading readiness', and mothers in the network appealed to each other for assistance in determining whether a particular preschool child had reached the crucial stage.

Once children have reached school age, the disparity between mothers' and fathers' access to the child is reduced somewhat, and the shape of pedagogic labour is now set directly by the school. Conceivably, the disparity in fathers' and mothers' participation in literate labour could be reduced. Studies are rare, due to the dominance of pre-school accounts of literacy development. However, it appears that mothers' responsibility continues in the school years (Brantlinger et al 1996). Both mothers (Solsken 1992) and fathers (Collins 1985) have been reported to identify the mother as the parent with responsibility for managing children's daily education-related needs. This includes such tasks as monitoring bag-packing, note-reading and writing, and enrollment in extra-curricular activities. Mothers were more likely to deliver their children to and from kindergarten (A. Russell 1991). A time-use study found that more mothers (43%) than fathers (14%) took the major share of homework assistance (Horna & Lupri 1987). Lareau (1991) summarises the division of labour thus:

> The routine activities of schooling overwhelmingly fell to mothers. Fathers expressed a belief that they should be involved but generally pleaded off ... often citing the demands of their careers. (p. 208)

While these studies do suggest that the gendered division of parents' pedagogic and literate labour is firmly established one should be careful about generalising about parental roles and their effects on the basis of these findings. Cause-effect relations between parental behaviour and children's learning are notoriously hard to establish. In a study linking parental involvement in education, children's 'internal resources' and learning outcomes, fathers predictably were assessed as less involved than mothers (Grolnick, Ryan & Deci 1991). They were even found to decrease their level of involvement as children got older. However paternal involvement, no matter how limited, was more highly correlated with children's perceptions of competence and autonomy

than maternal involvement. And children's perceptions of competence and autonomy were strongly linked to outcomes in reading and maths. The researchers conclude:

> ... children's feelings that their fathers are concerned with and involved with them is more critical than more objective ratings would suggest. (Grolnick et al 1991 p. 515)

This suggests that there are aspects of parental practice that are hard to detect or measure. There are many possible ways other than material practices through which parents may make available particular subject positions to their children. What parents do or don't say may be just as significant a part of their literate work as what they do or don't do.

4.4.2 Social class and the division of literate labour

Another factor modifying degrees and forms of parental participation in literate and pedagogic work is socio-economic status. Both Lareau (1991, 1992) and Evans (1988) have undertaken comparative studies of working-class and middle-class school communities and note that middle-class parents were more likely to be present at the school site than working-class parents. Middle-class mothers were much more likely to spend time in their children's classrooms than working-class mothers or fathers in general. Middle-class fathers were more often present at parent-teacher interviews than working-class fathers and reportedly appeared more comfortable in interacting with their child's teacher (Lareau 1989). In interacting with the teacher, they position themselves both as parent and as 'co-professional', a position not available to working-class men.

The composition of management groups such as school councils indicates which parents within a particular community represent the dominant group. Evans (1988), has compared the gender balance of parent representatives on school councils in two class differentiated areas. He noted that, in the working-class council, fathers outnumbered mothers whereas in the middle-class school the reverse was the case. There are several possible reasons for this. Perhaps middle-class women are able to mobilise their

knowledge of pedagogic and childrearing discourses to create a discursive field of influence. This is certainly suggested by the different agendas operating in the two schools. In the middle-class school, mothers were in a position to introduce items which reflected their interests. Evans notes that whenever 'feminine' issues like nutrition were raised, a discourse of maternal nurturance was brought into play, making possible a strategic alliance between middle-class mothers and teachers. This group used regulatory notions such as 'good diet' drawn from child-rearing and health discourses to marginalise and pathologise working-class mothers, who however formed their own lobby group to resist this positioning.

On the other hand, perhaps this difference represents the relatively greater influence of 'shared parenting' discourses and practices in middle-class homes (see next section). Women's attendance at council meetings necessitates the male partner taking on the responsibility for childcare. Men's greater participation in childcare and domestic work is associated with both increased socioeconomic status and maternal levels of education (Ehrensaft 1986; Radin & Goldsmith 1983; Russell & Radin 1983).

Delegation does not, however, mean a total handover of decision making power to women in middle-class communities. In the middle-class school council, the key power holders (senior staff and president) were men, and this was the group that held sway when large items of expenditure were considered. Women were powerless to prevent the money they had raised being spent on a new ride-on mower. So the overall council agenda in both schools reflected the dominance of masculine discourses of public power over feminine pedagogic and maternal discourses.

Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' can be used to theorise middle-class mothers' active role in their children's education (Brantlinger et al 1996; Cohen 1981; Lareau 1989). According to this account, middle-class families use the mothers' access to time, resources and knowledge as a means of maximising their children's success in school and thus their potential financial and social status, while the fathers' income supplies the financial resources necessary to 'employ' the mother and provide her with the material

necessary to do her job. While working-class parents may understand the link between education and social power (Snow et al 1991), it is middle-class mothers who possess the cultural capital necessary to participate on equal terms with their child's teachers.

In support of this theory, Lareau (1989) reports that middle-class mothers were more likely to have a physical presence in their children's classrooms. The most highly participatory mothers were also those most critical of the teacher (Lareau 1989, Biklen 1993b). Pressure from mothers was most acutely felt when the teacher in question was from a working-class background (Biklen 1993b), suggesting the teacher's awareness of the class-related power imbalance operating. An aspect to mothers' power in this situation is their access to, and mobilisation of, discourses which construct the teacher's role. It has been reported, for instance, that middle-class mothers:

> ... wielded impressive educational vocabularies. Some mothers commonly used phrases like "instruction time" and "large muscle activities" in their discussions of teachers' strengths and weaknesses. (Biklen 1993b p.162)

The dominance and pervasiveness of middle-class discourses of parenting and pedagogy can be seen in studies which chart the effects of class and cultural mobility. The childrearing practices of immigrant women have been found to change in the direction of dominant Western child-centred models within a few years of settlement. For instance, following immigration to Germany, Turkish mothers 'showed a rapid change in early child rearing practices that tended toward the normative practices of German mothers' (Younnis 1994 referring to Nauck 1988). The same study found that fathers were less likely to change their views on child rearing, suggesting that women, rather than men, were the targets of this discursive diffusion.

In Cohen's (1981) UK study, mothers' interest in up-to-date educational theory was associated with their movement from their working-class families of origin to the newly middle-class housing estate. That the women associated forms of pedagogy with social mobility is indicated by their actions to ensure their children received a 'good' education. They successfully lobbied to have a school opened where the 'estate children' could be

educated separately from the working-class children of the surrounding area and monitored the school to ensure the teacher's pedagogy was consistent with 'modern' methods. These women's access to pedagogic discourse enabled them to take an assertive position in relation to their children's teachers. A similar pattern has been noted in a US study in which middle-class parents gained access to pedagogic discourses through reading texts on children's learning and used this information to pressure their children's school to adopt particular practices (Street & Street 1991).

Little information is given in Cohen's study about the pedagogic practice of the working-class families of origin, consistent with the scant attention that has been given to the actual educational practices of working-class families (as distinct from practices prescribed by authorities). However there are signs that the shift in class location is associated with a shift from a community-oriented discourse of family life to a child-centred discourse. This is illustrated in the changing practice of celebrating 'estate children's birthdays. Extended family and friend gatherings in which children were left to play while the adults caught up on news gradually made way for child-only affairs, with children's games supervised by the mother. This suggests an increasing diffusion of child-centred discourses and practices into family life.

The power of middle-class parenting and pedagogic discourses to construct ideal subjects to which all should aspire is vividly illustrated in a study of playgroups in working-class areas (Finch 1983). Playgroups historically were established in the UK by and for middle-class women as a response to the lack of places in pre-schools. Finch notes that in the working-class area she studied, mothers' mode of participation in playgroups operated as a test of how closely they were oriented to middle-class values of 'respectability'. A key indicator of success was demonstrating an understanding that the playgroup was a child-centred site. A playgroup leader comments:

> We got a new group of ladies with their children and we found that these were congregating in a circle and smoking and drinking tea and weren't interested in helping the kiddies ... (Finch 1983 p. 107)

Here child-centredness is a crucial indicator of respectability and a prerequisite for acceptance by the local power group. It functions as code for gender, class and status location.

Middle-class mothers' access to pedagogic discourse is a major theme of a study by Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) who re-analyse the data from a comparative study of working-class and middle-class mothers interactions with children in the home (Tizard & Hughes 1984). In keeping with the prescriptions for parental practice offered within child-centred discourses of psychology and education, middle-class mothers maintained a playful quality to their interactions with children whilst inconspicuously incorporating learning in basic literacy and numeracy into activities. They managed to perform both pedagogic and domestic duties simultaneously by making the same activities serve both agendas eg by having the child count ingredients for a meal whilst singing a counting song. Working-class mothers, on the other hand, clearly distinguished between 'work time' and 'play time'. Their resistance to their children's claims on their work time lead to overt struggles of the sort which are defined negatively in much child-rearing literature. The authors note, however, that the working-class mothers' domestic labour is at least visible, in the sense of being subject to discursive struggle. The literate labour of middle-class mothers is required to be made invisible in their terms of child-centred discourse which foregrounds the child's 'free' and 'independent' participation. The production of the middle-class child as literate subject can thus be seen as accomplished through a multiple suppression of reference: to the mother's domestic labour, her pedagogic work and her authority.

Comparative studies can be used to support the popular notion that working-class parents are not 'involved' in their children's education. However, an alternative reading is that, due to differences in access to both pedagogic discourses and social status, working-class parents are positioned differently in home-school relations. Because they are less likely to be present at school sites, less likely to employ official pedagogic discourses in discussions with teachers, and less likely to position themselves as 'co-professionals' with teachers their literate work may be invisible. This is particularly the

case for working-class men who, as well as being outside pedagogic discourse are also outside the maternal discourses within which child development is often framed. Lareau (1991) cites the case of a working-class man who had taught his daughter to read by taping words around the house but did not feel comfortable about 'owning up' to this in the interview saying 'We did work with her when she was quite young, only because we didn't know better.'

These studies suggest that, in order to understand the relationship between parents' socio-economic status and their participation in pedagogic practices it is necessary to consider their positioning within discourses of childrearing, pedagogy and schooling. This is consistent with Fairclough's (1989) statement:

> [C]lass relations and positions are not directly expressed and reproduced in most practice. The connection between class relations and discourses is a mediated one, mediated precisely by the various discourse types of the social institutions in a society. (p. 40)

Parents' class and gender status has effects not only on their access to such discourses but on how others are able to position them as inside or outside particular discourses and their associated practices. In the next section I describe how a particular discourse of parents' gender roles associated with middle-class values has effects on men's positioning within pedagogic and literate practices in the home site.

4.4.3 Effects of gender and class on fathers' positioning in pedagogic practices

Class and gender factors appear to be implicated in differences in men's participation in literacy in home sites although it should be noted that data are rare. A theme emerging from a number of studies is a middle-class emphasis on the sharing of parental responsibility which extends to participation in children's education. Lareau (1991) notes that in middle-class families, compared to working-class families, there was a greater degree of overlap between mothers' and fathers' responsibilities which was particularly evident when decisions were being made about children's education. In the community which Cohen (1981) studied, beliefs about the necessity of fathers' direct

involvement in children's learning and care distinguished the newly middle-class 'estate families' from their working-class families of origin. This is consistent with O'Brien's (1982) study of fathers' role perceptions in which she found that middle-class men were more likely than working-class men to feel that they 'ought' to be more involved with their children with one father quoted as saying: 'I feel guilty because I know I should be playing with him or reading to him' (p. 221). It is interesting that this father singles out two activities which are associated within child-rearing and pedagogic discourses, with children's literate and cognitive development.

When changes to the division of child-rearing labour occur, as in 'shared caregiving' families, fathers reportedly increase their involvement in activities which are often associated with children's literacy and schooling: story reading, assistance with homework and play (Russell 1983a). Fathers in these families defined their role in terms consistent with the child-centred discourse eg: 'To encourage her, to help her develop as an individual'. (p. 53). They also used pedagogic and developmental terminology to described this role eg 'Developing their skills and coordination ... naming things, developing their vocabulary and sense of awareness.' (p. 53) . It appears here that, in common with the male childcare workers in another study (Gleason & Greif 1983), shared-care fathers have access to discourses of childhood more usually available to mothers. Another study of shared-care families supports this interpretation (Ehrensaft 1986). Fathers who chose to share childrearing responsibilities equally with their partners often had jobs which involved them with children in a professional capacity. These fathers also employed developmental and child-centred terminology to describe their role as parent.

The middle-class belief in the desirability of shared roles is potentially in conflict with 'traditional' practices of dividing childrearing labour. Backett (1982) names this tension as one of the key issues for middle-class couples. Parents attempt to resolve the dilemma of maintaining father involvement when work demands limit his availability by investing certain activities with meaning as key indicators of participant fatherhood. In effect this creates symbolic participation. Significantly for this study, the bed-time story

is one such activity, well able to fulfill its symbolic function since it is both performable for most fathers and defined by pedagogic and child-rearing discourses as particularly beneficial to children's literacy development (Cochran-Smith 1984; McMackin 1993; Pulvertaft 1985; Teale 1984). Cohen (1981) reports:

> One child told me that "nearly always" it was her father who told her a bedtime story as he was so much better than her mother. Since her father was away from home much of the time, I queried the statement with the mother, who told me that whenever she read to this child she would always make a point of telling her that she was only doing so as her father was unable to , and that he was really much better than she at reading stories. (p. 276)

Although there have been several studies of parent-child reading interactions (Kemp 1990; Silvern, 1985; Spreadbury, 1992, 1995), there is very little information available which addresses the question of mothers' and fathers' possibly different relations to this practice. Gleason and Greif (1983) have observed both mothers and fathers reading to their children in home settings and do note some patterns of difference. Mother-child sessions were more interactive; mothers asked more questions and monitored the child's understanding of the text. Fathers, on the other hand appeared to concentrate on the performance of the story-reading task; they were less likely to check that the child was following the plot. One possible explanation for this is that mothers see story reading within a pedagogic framework as an opportunity to develop their children's comprehension of text while fathers have a different understanding of its purpose, perhaps as a means of offering companionship to the child. Gleason and Greif do not conclude that fathers are uninterested in children's learning however. They point to fathers' behaviour in other activities such as car construction play in which they are more likely than mothers to quiz children about the correct technical names of care parts. It appears that mothers and fathers, due to their different relations both to gendered discourses and to the division of parental labour, may have different criteria for interpreting interactions with children as pedagogic.

4.4.4 Child gender and parents' literate and pedagogic practice

We have seen that gender of the child is a factor in modifying parental interactions with children. Weitzman and colleagues (1985), in a rare comparative study, suggest that this is also true of parent-child reading practices. The researchers observed mothers reading a story to their children and found that mothers chose different stories for boys, specifically those with more numbers and action verbs. Thus mothers' book selection practice can be read as reflecting two of the key binaries gendering literacy which I referred to in chapter three. The choice of number books suggests a Maths/masculinity association while the preference for action verbs may reflect a desire to position boys on the 'active' side of the active/passive binary.

Whilst talking about the text mothers asked more questions of boys, particularly those aimed at having the child describe what was happening. They also engaged in more explicit teaching behaviours with boys than with girls. If a conclusion can be drawn from the greater overall level of mother intervention with boys, it is perhaps that girls' literate performance and understanding is being taken for granted. 'Nontraditional' mothers (meaning those who subscribed to an anti-sexist discourse) displayed the same gender differentiated behaviours as 'traditional' mothers. In this study it appears that subscription to an anti-sexist model of parenting had little direct impact on mothers' interactions with their male children. These findings suggest a complex interplay between gender and a range of aspects of the literate experience: the content of texts; the relationship between adult and child; and the mother's pedagogy.

In an in-depth study of family literacy, Solsken (1992) found that adult and child gender relations both in the home and school site are implicated in the maintenance of modes of literate production and consumption. Solsken found evidence that boys were experiencing tensions around their participation in literacy, particularly in the area of reading, which manifested as resistance to mothers, sisters and teachers. She employs object-relations theory, a branch of psychoanalytic theory which is concerned with tracing causes of difference in males' and females' developmental pathways, to theorise

this situation. Object-relations theory states that due to the socially constructed gendered division of child-rearing labour, the masculine gender model (the father) is seen in terms of detachment and autonomy. In order to develop this autonomous masculine identity, boys must disassociate themselves from their mothers and, by extension, their mothers' literate subjectivity. The mother-child reading session thus takes on a different kind of significance according to the child's positioning within gender relations.

An interesting aspect of the study is the comparison of literate relations in the home and school. According to Solsken, school offers boys the opportunity to take part in a masculine literate culture around writing which, for many of them, is not present in the home. This creates a difference between peer-sponsored and adult [mother]-sponsored literacies and literate subjectivities which Solsken claims is particularly marked for boys. She notes:

> [R]eading, more than writing, was the behaviour that connected them to their mothers and defined literacy as female. ... [C]lassroom dynamics around writing highlighted peer interaction in which the boys made a visible claim on writing competence. (1992 p. 166)

There are several interrelated dualisms that appear to be operating here to frame particular kinds of literate practice: writing/reading, public/private, school/home, adult/child, production/reproduction, male/female. Home literate practice and family relations thus cannot be divorced from broader social discourses also operating in other sites such as the workplace and the school.

Child/adult gender relations are also present in Taylor's (1983) study of family literacy. These are not commented on by the author, whose interest is more in detailing differences in individual life-histories and family style. It is possible, however, to offer a reading of this study which brings gender and age relations into focus, which I do here by making reference to a specific situation described in the book. The account deals with a boy's response to his parents' invitation to participate in specific literacies. Taylor begins the account by describing a mother's unsuccessful attempts to encourage her son to keep a journal over the summer holiday. One day, the father returns from a

business trip to Washington with a book on American presidents. In this book is a page of presidents' signatures. The child who previously had not wanted to keep a journal is very enthusiastic about tracing over the presidents' signatures. Taylor frames this as a positive literacy experience for the boy since it connects to a genuine interest and is not imposed by an adult:

> Keeping a journal because a mother wishes her child to maintain momentum could not compare with learning script to be able to sign one's name like the presidents of the United States. (1983 p. 77)

An alternative reading might note a clustering of meanings around masculinity and power; the father's work status linked with public political power (the visit to the capital) and the son able to gain access to a position within this discourse through the act of tracing the signatures. The signatures arrayed in historical order signify a masculine tradition of public power associated with public forms of literate participation. The father's act is framed as a welcome invitation to join this discourse. Journal writing can here be read as a private literate practice associated with the domestic sphere. The domestic sphere and its associated literacies is subordinated both within family relations and within Taylor's account which, by failing to comment on the gender-power relations, implicitly naturalises them.

Child gender also seems to be a factor in parents' predictions of performance in particular curriculum areas. Although this is an under-researched area the studies that have been done support the notion that gendered discourses of knowledge have a significant impact on the way parents' position their children. The work of Jacobs and Eccles (Jacobs 1991; Jacobs & Eccles 1985) in the field of parents' attitudes to mathematics is interesting when considered in the light of oppositional discourses which construct Maths/Sciences and Arts/Humanities as mutually exclusive areas of knowledge and competence (Keller 1983; K. Thomas 1990).

Jacobs (1991) found that mothers' assessment of their children's ability and future progress in maths significantly favoured boys over girls. Fathers, interestingly were not

found to discriminate in a similar way. The authors relate this to gender differences in parents' self-evaluations. Women were far more likely to see themselves as not good at maths and appeared to believe their daughters would follow suit. In an earlier study (Jacobs & Eccles 1985) found that mothers and fathers responded differently to a newspaper article which presented a biological explanation for girls' 'inferiority' at Maths. Mothers of daughters expressed an even firmer belief in girls' relative inferiority after reading the article. However fathers of girls gave more positive evaluations of their daughters' ability after reading the article than before. The authors suggest that fathers were motivated by a desire to defend their child from perceived slights which over-rode their views on gender differences in maths.

Bird and Berman (1985) found that both mothers and fathers distinguished between boys and girls when predicting their performance in literacy-related tasks. Both mothers and fathers believed that boys would achieve better results than girls, even though there were no gender differences in actual child performance. This runs counter to suggestions that parents have low expectations for boys' literacy ability. However, the tasks were very specific and decontextualised and were perhaps understood by the parents as a test of intelligence. In that light their optimistic predictions of their sons' performance would be in line with other findings that boys' educational achievement tends to be ascribed to natural ability (Clark 1989; Walkerdine 1983; Riddell 1992).

That parents' beliefs about gender has effects on their educational expectations is further supported by Baker and Entwhistle (1987). Their findings present a complex picture in which child gender, mothers' expectations, children's self-expectations and socio-economic status are all factors. Specifically, mothers were more likely to perceive sons, rather than daughters, as having high all-round ability (which can be seen as a perceived intelligence measure) and also specific ability in Maths. Surprisingly, perhaps, mothers also expected boys to do well in beginning reading acquisition, perhaps because this was also seen as a measure of general intelligence. However, their general reading ability ratings favoured daughters. The researchers conclude:

> We show that "mother of son" or "mother of daughter" jointly constructs with the child a role as student which is linked to gender roles and therefore linked to the dynamics of the social structure. (Baker & Entwhistle 1987 p. 691)

While this formulation offers a promising start in theorising the complex relations between discourses of gender, family practices and the social institution of education, it raises unanswered questions about the position of fathers within these relations. What positions are made available within gendered and educational discourses for 'father of son' and 'father of daughter'? Does the child jointly construct a 'role as student' with the male parent? If not, what roles are being jointly constructed through this relation?

4.5 Parents' personal practices of literacy

While there has been considerable interest in parents' (particularly mothers') pedagogic practices within the home site, information about other types of literacy practised by adults in the home is limited. This is somewhat surprising in view of the emphasis placed on parents' responsibility to provide a positive role model to their children, particularly in relation to reading. Although studies are scarce, those that have been done do suggest that adults' modes of participation in a range of 'domestic' literacies reflect gender divisions found in other sites such as the school and workplace. This is consistent with social understandings about the respective roles of males and females which underpin literate practices across social institutions and relations.

It appears that, at least to some extent, gendered patterns of literate activity in general, and reading in particular, carry through from adolescence into adult life. The fact/fiction binary is reflected in adult reading patterns with the male preference for non-fiction reflected in their book purchasing habits. Men buy more biography (Dorsch in Williams 1995) and specialist books and magazines, related to hobbies or work (Hole 1990; Williams 1995). The romance genre is targeted at a female readership (Christian-Smith 1988; Gilbert 1990) while it has been noted that women comprise 75% of borrowers at public libraries which have traditionally focussed on narrative fiction stocks (Hole 1990).

Reading behaviours involve more than the selection of material. They are integrally related to the purposes of reading, the settings in which reading is done, and the relations constructed both through the reading practice and the text. Adults' reading behaviours will, then, relate to their roles as parents and workers and their location in home and other sites, inevitably involving notions of gender. The interweaving of parenting, community, gender and literate roles is illustrated in Heath's (1983) study of family and community literate practices. In a conservative Christian community, parents instructed their preschool children in letter and number recognition. Young mothers in particular were very vocal about the benefits of reading, consistent with their location within maternal discourses of responsibility for children's literacy. However, the community's values emphasised productive work and prohibited idleness. Women's personal reading activities were thus restricted to cutting out from magazines 'useful' items such as recipes and knitting patterns which were filed away to read later, presumably when all the domestic work had been done. This rarely eventuated. Thus the community's 'Christian work ethic' discourse, which was associated with the notion of separate spheres for men and women, made it difficult for mothers to match their pro-reading rhetoric with action. However some of the women did read privately and their choice was often the romance genre illustrating the power of the discourse of femininity promoted through the pages of love stories.

An adult reading within the home signals 'leisure'. This may explain why Shelton's (1992) study found that, contrary to patterns noted in childhood, men actually undertook more reading at home than did women. The most frequent readers were unemployed men while employed women did the least home-based reading, a finding which is directly related to the amount of available leisure time. Reading, with television viewing, was one of the activities undertaken by fathers whilst simultaneously fulfilling child-cared responsibilities (Belsky & Volling 1987). Mothers, in the same circumstances were more likely to do housework. This pattern is not surprising given that the expectation that mothers' personal reading should take back seat to children's demands is also expressed by academics. Characterising the difference between mothers' and fathers'

parenting styles, Ehrensaft uses a scenario which the reader is meant to accept as typical:

> Imagine being at home with an article at your side that you are dying to read. Then imagine that you are "on duty" with your four-year-old child, who is playing energetically at your feet with a new toy. What would you do? If you were one of the fathers, you would have found a way ... to do both. ... If you were one of the mothers, the magazine article would have fallen by the wayside. (1986 p.97)

Whilst this account may be descriptive of what happens in some households it also functions to naturalise the division of gendered literate labour in the family. Imagine the reader of this passage is a mother who in a similar circumstances kept reading the magazine. By failing to include this option for mothers, Ehrensaft naturalises a gendered divide in parents' literate work in which masculine literacies are those undertaken in the service of self while feminine literacies are those undertaken in the service of others.

Perhaps the archetypal image of intersecting gendered parental and literate practices is the image of father reading the newspaper at the breakfast table. Like the image of the mother in her kitchen, it occurs in advertising, in films, in adult and children's fiction. Newspaper reading has became understood as a masculine practice due to its association with the working man, arming himself to meet the 'outside world' each day through his knowledge of events. Glimpses of this practice can be found in Taylor's (1983) family literacy study. One glimpse is a woman 'jokingly' reporting that her husband's daily newspaper reading habit had almost ended their marriage' (p. 26) because it made family communication in the busy morning period so difficult. Another glimpse is a father (not the same one) describing his newspaper reading habit:

> [I] try to kill it totally ... I think I can do it right down to the editorials, the reviews, the whole shmeer ... But it I hit an article which has a lot of numerical information in it, or graphs, histories .. And you know you're trying to remember all this ... then it slows you down. (1983 p.27)

The overtly aggressive terms used locate newspaper reading within an individualist competitive professional discourse. It is thus a powerful signifier of public-world

masculinity which signals 'breadwinner' status and separates the reading father discursively from the subjects wife/children.

The gendered division of domestic labour is also reflected in men's and women's approach to home-based activities which involve writing. Mothers use written notes and lists as a means of organising and coordinating the activities of the family, particularly the children (Heath 1983; Taylor 1983). They also use letters to maintain contact with those at a distance (Barton & Padmore 1991) and encourage these protocols with their children (Heath 1983). When men write in the home, it is in their role as official head of the household. They pay bills, sign documents and fill in the income tax form (Barton & Padmore 1991; Heath 1983; Rockhill 1987). The importance of the paid work/domestic work divide in the organisation of literate labour is illustrated by several examples from the adult literacy study conducted by Barton and Padmore (1991). The breadwinning partner handled the bills in all cases, even when this was the wife or one of a gay couple. They comment that bill paying is seen as 'a crucial part of negotiating with the outside world' (p. 67). Another factor operating may be a division of tasks along literacy/numeracy lines. When asked in one study who was responsible for 'maths-related tasks' in the home, twice as many women as men answered that their partner was (Parsons et al 1982).

There are circumstances in which the division of literate labour is not so marked. Heath notes that in the upper-middle class community where there was a predominance of professionals and dual-income families, both men and women were engaged in letter writing. In these families, a mother in the paid workforce was just as likely to bring home work-related writing tasks as a father. Here we see not just a 'shared parenting' practice but a 'shared breadwinning' practice affecting the conduct of literate practice in the home. In poorer communities, a crucial literate role division is that between the schooled person and the unschooled person, regardless of gender. Those adults with 'book-learning', regardless of gender, make their skills available to others (Barton & Padmore 1991; Heath 1983). These findings alert the researcher to the importance of class and culture, as well as gender, in mediating adults' practices of literacy in home sites.

4.6 Conclusion

The accumulated evidence presented here suggests a number of key intersecting factors in the production of literate practice within the family. Gender, class and adult-child relations are key factors, although others, such as ethnicity and religious affiliation are undoubtedly also important. Gender, class and adult-child relations are all present as forms of social relation which are lived out in family interactions and in the interactions between the family and social institutions such as schools.

In terms of gender, the research supports the view that the gendered division of labour within mainstream Western families results in significant differences in the experience of parenting for mothers and fathers. These differences extend to their management of literate and pedagogic work. Types of literate work associated with the public domain (eg bill paying) are more likely to be allocated to the male partner whereas pedagogic work with children is typically the mother's domain.

Beyond actions, gender differences appear to extend to parents' understandings of the *meanings* of their actions. There is some evidence that the interpretive frames used by parents are gendered frames. In the area of play, for instance, men not only display a different interactive style to women, but father-child play appears to be allocated different meanings to mother-child play. In other words, it is positioned within a different discourse of parenting. If mothers' play is seen as pedagogic it will be understood as having greater salience for the child's literacy and learning than father's play.

There are indications, however, that in some contexts mothers and fathers take a similar approach, for instance in simplifying their speech to children (Gleason & Greif 1983). This suggests that the dominant discourse operating to construct linguistic interactions between parents and young children is one that defines 'adult' in contrast to 'child'; a discourse primarily of age relations rather than gender relations. Father-mother alignments could also result from deliberate attempts to operate according to a 'shared

parenting' discourse in which differences in parental role are minimised (Backett 1982; Ehrensaft 1986).

The research also supports the view that parents' interactions with, and interpretations of, their children are influenced by the child's sex. This extends to practices and understandings specifically associated with literacy and learning. In material terms, parents supply different kinds of resources to boys and girls thus facilitating the acquisition of different kinds of cultural capital. In discursive terms, parents appear to be offering daughters and sons different positions within discourse of masculinity and femininity, through their interactions with, and expectations of, them. Both fathers and mothers, for instance, ensure sons participate in sport (Russell & Russell 1987), thus maintaining the discursive and practical alignment of the masculine with the physical.

Parents can be seen as actively involved in the process of constructing gendered educational pathways for their children. Parents' class location influences both their pedagogic practices and the degree to which these are legitimated. Middle-class parents not only have greater presence and decision making power in relation to schooling but they are more likely to find alignments between their own educational theories and those of their children's teachers (Lareau 1989). Mothers' class location effects the degree to which they are present at the school site. Fathers' socioeconomic status appears to influence the degree to which they are willing to delegate educational decision-making to their partners. In working-class communities, school management bodies are male-dominated whereas women form a power group in middle-class schools (Evans 1987).

Women, in their roles as mothers, are both the targets of, and the means for promoting, middle-class pedagogic and child-rearing discourses. In the examples of working-class playgroups (Finch 1983) and a newly middle-class housing estate (Cohen 1981), we see women in the communities taking on the role of educating and regulating their peers. Forms of adult-child relation associated with working-class communities of origin (such as communal birthday parties) are marginalised by being labelled as 'other' to the valued middle-class child-centred discourse.

On the basis of the survey of discourses and practices presented in these two chapters, it is possible to make some predictions about the parent group which is the focus of this project. As the sample is predominantly middle-class, we can expect to see the following: subscription to (or at least knowledge of) child-centred and developmental discourses of childhood; a belief in shared parenting and the importance of men's involvement as fathers; and a degree of presence at educational sites, particularly in the case of mothers.

In view of the dominance of both the discourse of oppositional gender difference and the gendered division of labour, we can expect mothers and fathers to do different kinds of parenting and literate work, and to express different understandings of the nature of this work. However, due to the current importance of the shared parenting model, we can expect some tensions in parents' accounts between representations of difference and similarity in their roles.

We have seen that contemporary discourses of childhood often present as universal, gender neutral accounts of 'the child'. At the same time, the dominant discourse of gender maintains that there are two different classes of children (and people). In yet a further discursive twist, the contemporary liberal feminist discourse emphasises equality between the sexes. Parents are thus allocated a complex task in relation to their children's general and gender-related development: to produce them as 'normal' for their age and stage; to produce them as appropriately gendered, boys or girls; and to treat opposite sex children fairly and equally, downplaying gender difference.

These conflicting discourses can be found in both academic and popular accounts of parenting work. We should therefore expect to see some evidence of discursive conflict in parents' accounts of their children. What form these conflicts take is a question that can only be addressed through an analysis of these accounts.

In the three chapters that follow, I present an analysis of the accounts of a group of Australian parents focussing respectively on: their own experiences of acquiring literacy,

with particular reference to reading; their observations of their children's orientation to literacy and learning; and their descriptions of their literate and pedagogic work in the home and in educational sites.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PRACTICE OF READING AND THE PRODUCTION OF GENDERED LITERATE SUBJECTIVITY

5.1 Introduction: reading as discursive practice

In the following chapter I offer an analysis of parents' responses to questions about their childhood experiences of acquiring and using literacy in school and family contexts. My particular focus in analysing these accounts is on associations between domains of literate knowledge/practice and gendered subject positions. Through the analysis I identify a range of masculine and feminine subject positions associated with particular attitudes to literacy and with modes of literate consumption and production.

I have argued that literate practices are a means by which individuals acquire social knowledge and learn how to participate in social relations (see chapter one). For this reason, they are integrally implicated in the production and maintenance of gender relations and gendered forms of subjectivity (Baker & Davies 1992; B. Davies 1993a; Gilbert 1990; Lee 1992; Martino 1994). The process through which literate practices construct gendered subject positions occurs at several levels; at the level of text, at the level of the context within which texts are encountered, used and interpreted; and at the level of the organisation of knowledge into domains.

Each of these levels are present in parents' accounts of their past experiences. Parents often recalled and expressed preferences for specific texts, text genres or authors. They described the classroom contexts within which they learned to read and write in particular ways. They very often aligned themselves with, or opposed themselves to, broad domains of knowledge encountered through the polarised curriculum of their schools. The gendered nature of these responses was one of the clearest and earliest trends emerging from the data analysis.

As the general subject of literacy is so broad, and the data set of parents' memory material so complex and diverse, I have selected as a focus for this analysis the subject of 'reading'. Reading featured strongly in all the parents' memories of schooling and was a subject around which gendered groupings tended to cohere. The learning of, and use of, reading was an important aspect of the school curriculum experienced by these

parents as children. In the primary school emphasis was on the acquisition and performance of print decoding. In the secondary school, reading was strongly associated with subject English and by association with the study of fictional narrative texts.

Reading is a discursive practice. The 'discursive' part of this definition reminds us that reading is a major means by which individuals encounter socially available discourses and the subject positions which these discourses constitute. The 'practice' part of this definition reminds us that when an individual reads - maintains an engagement with a print text - she or he does so in a particular site, for a particular purpose and for a specific length of time. An analysis of reading as a discursive practice involves thinking about:

> how people organize their activities in relation to texts, and the skills and practices involved and with how relations mediated by texts and textually determined practices operate and are operated ... (Smith 1990, p. 163)

Both as a practice and as a mode of producing and consuming discourse, reading is inevitably a gendered activity. Texts, particularly the narrative texts through which young readers have traditionally been taught the skills of schooled literacy, carry the storylines through which masculinity and femininity are made socially available (Davies 1989). The versions of femininity and masculinity carried in these texts have generally conformed to the dominant discourse of oppositional gender difference (Baker & Freebody 1989; P. Gilbert 1991; A. Luke 1988).

Reading can also be understood as part of the ensemble of teaching strategies used to discipline the school child (McHoul 1991). Discipline is used here in the Foucaultian sense of a monitored routinisation of practice conducted in such a way that practice becomes embodied in, and ideally self-maintained by, the individual (Foucault 1977 in Sheridan 1980; Parker 1988). Learning to read in the classroom has traditionally involved learning the physical posture and verbal silence deemed necessary for correct orientation to the text. It involves learning to ignore the physical presence of peers whilst being alert to the teacher's voice and ready to break off engagement with the text whenever required. Thus it involves being positioned within adult-child power relations

in the classroom which, as has been amply demonstrated, are also gendered relations (Baker & Davies 1992; Kamler et al 1994; Walkerdine 1987; Walkerdine & Lucey 1989).

In analysing parents' memories of reading I ask: what versions of femininity and masculinity are being offered to subjects through their past participation in the literate practices of schooling and family life? Conversely, what forms of literate practice are made possible through individuals' subscription to particular versions of masculinity and femininity? Equally significant are the questions: which literate options are restricted or closed off by particular forms of gender orientation? and: which modes of literate practice are marginalised or pathologised?

5.1.1 Organisation of the chapter

I begin this investigation of gendered literate subjectivity with a discussion of the polarisation between masculine and feminine positions on reading, as they are presented in parents' accounts. Following this I analyse men's statements to consider the ways in which reading is constructed as 'other' to masculinity. I trace two binary themes through these accounts (active/passive and fact/fiction) and undertake a close reading of one man's narrative to demonstrate how these and other binaries are interwoven and mutually supporting. Continuing my investigation of men's experience of reading, I then turn to the accounts of men who characterised themselves as leisure readers to consider the ways in which reading might be constructed as compatible with masculinity.

The following section focuses on women's accounts of reading, beginning with the statements of women who characterised themselves as keen readers. In this section, I consider how the desire for reading is produced in girls. I also discuss the relation between the subject positions 'good reader' and 'good student' and their effects on women's experience of reading and schooling. I then identify a marginalised position of the female 'resistant reader' and describe some of the effects of occupying this position on women both as schoolgirls and mothers.

In the final section I consider how parents' literate histories impact on their present day perceptions of their children's literacy and schooling. I argue that the gendered literate positions taken up in the past are a resource used by parents to understand their children's orientation to literacy and schooling.

I have chosen to deal with men's accounts before women's, in the context of this chapter, because it was in the statements of the men who identified themselves as resistant to reading that the binaries within which reading is constructed as 'feminine' were most obvious. It is perhaps the case that binary constructions are more likely to be employed when the aim is to demonstrate one's difference from something, or show how something is 'other' to self. A task for some of these men, within the context of the interview was to signal: 'I'm not that (a reader)'. Therefore an oppositional relation between self and reading was prominent in their statements. A similar form of construction was evident in some women's positioning in relation to 'Maths', however since this was not the stated subject of the interview, extended explorations were not available.

The chosen sequence of this chapter inevitably results in women's accounts being read in the light of men's. However it is not my intention in this way to privilege men's accounts over women's. For those readers who would like to reverse the textual sequence, I invite you, after reading the following section, to turn to section 5.5 and read the women's accounts first.

5.2 Polarised positions on reading

I begin my exploration of parents' positions on reading by juxtaposing two kinds of statements taken from the transcripts. These statements have been chosen to illustrate the pattern of gendered opposition which emerged in some of the parents' accounts. The two kinds of statements represent two broad positions on reading, firstly, a firm preference for reading as a personal pursuit and secondly, a rejection of reading.

It will soon be apparent that, as I have presented it, this is a gendered pattern. It has justifiably been argued that researchers are implicated in the construction and maintenance of gender difference through their methodological choices (Warren 1988). I began my investigation into parents' positions on reading by focussing on the clearest and most explicit statements of personal positioning in the interview transcripts. This seemed the best way to begin the process of mapping the range of positions represented in the corpus. In this group of parents with definite positions, the pattern of gender difference was clearly evident.

I now turn to a selection of reading statements from this committed group. Attending to these statements provides a means of identifying some of ways in which reading positions are defined and aligned with gender positions. This analysis provides an introduction to some themes and raises some questions which will be explored in greater detail through close reading of more extended sections of transcript:

> I hated reading. And I still don't really enjoy reading, unless it's, unless it's something that I'm really interested in. (Doug)
>
> Love it. I loved it, really loved it. (Kathleen)
>
> I never liked English, used to hate it really. (Steven)
>
> I can remember, always, always read. Um, always had a book around somewhere, and always had great pride in my collection. (Prue)
>
> We were always out playing sport, we didn't have time to sit down and go and read. (Wayne)
>
> They've never not seen me read. (Gwenda)
>
> I'm not one for picking up books. (Neil)
>
> Every spare minute I had my head stuffed in these books. (Sandra)

Immediately striking is the use of strong modals such as 'always' and 'never' to define positions on reading (Prue, Wayne, Gwenda, Steven). This is particularly evident in Prue's statement where 'always' is used four times. Such terms constitute either reading or not-reading as a fixed constant and exclude any alternative position. If one has 'always' been a reader, the experience of being a not-reader is not available or

comprehensible. In Wayne's case the constant position is not that of reader but of sportsman and it is made clear that, for him, these two positions exclude each other:

References to 'hate' and 'love' (Doug, Kathleen, Steven) are similarly unequivocal. These emotional verbs signal that reading is here associated with forms of subjectivity that are strongly felt. According to Hollway's (1984) theorisation of emotional investment in gendered subjectivity, oppositional forms of gendered subjectivity are produced dialectically. Applied to these reading positions, this would mean that male hatred for reading and female desire for it, are mutually constitutive and reinforcing. This is a possibility to be explored in further analysis of parents' accounts.

An additional factor in the reading statements is the reference to spatial and temporal dimensions of reading practice. This suggests that gendered reading positions are produced as part of a general process of choosing ways of using time and being in space. The opposition between reading and sport in Wayne's account, for instance, is understood by him as a consequence of such choices: *because* he was 'always out playing sport', he 'didn't have time to sit down and go and read.' The 'go and read' makes it clear that reading was undertaken in a different space to sport and indicates the conscious effort required to make unhabitual choices. That reading *is* a experienced as a space is indicated by Sandra's vivid description of her reading position, her head 'stuffed *in* these books.' Comparing Sandra's and Wayne's statements, the oppositional elements are clear: inside vs outside, sport vs reading, collective activity vs solitude. These binaries will be further investigated in later sections of this chapter. But what is equally striking here is the sense of energy and purpose in both Sandra's and Wayne's statements. Both understand their choices as forms of action, in Sandra's case challenging the construction of reading as a passive pursuit.

In summary, this brief exploration suggests that 'reading' is a subject around which gendered oppositions cohere. Those individuals who take extreme positions of enthusiasm for, or rejection of, reading appear to be aligning themselves in gendered ways. This is consistent with the construction of literacy as a discursive field in which the

binaries used to produce difference in fields of knowledge and practice align with the dominant discourse of gender difference (see chapter three). These statements also suggest that gendered positions on reading are produced within the context of overall 'lifestyle' choices and may be maintained as fixed constants from childhood into adult life. They also suggest that such positions involve an emotional investment in forms of subjectivity.

This is not to suggest that the pattern of oppositional gender difference I have noted here is the whole picture. Instead it provides a reference point for an exploration of the broad range of positions which were present, not only across the corpus, but within individual parents' accounts. In the next section I look more closely at the accounts of men in order to determine what alternative versions of masculinity are associated with different forms of literate knowledge and practice, particularly in relation to reading. I begin by considering how reading is defined by the group of men who identified themselves as resistant to reading, before to turning ways in which reading might be experienced as compatible with masculinity.

5.3 Men as reading subjects: resistant readers

In this section I present an analysis of the accounts of a group of men who defined themselves in a relation of opposition to reading. Firstly, I introduce some of the key themes in their accounts by examining the reading position statements of some of these men. I then discuss two of these themes in detail. The first is a pattern of reference to time as a factor in determining modes of participation in literacy. The second is the use of a fact/fiction binary to position the self in relation to different kinds of reading material.

5.3.1 Defining self as 'not a reader'

A negative association between men and reading emerged at an early stage of analysis due to the unequivocal manner in which some men expressed their dislike of or disinclination for reading. Following are some representative statements from the group

of men I have classified as resistant to reading. Some of them will be familiar from the previous section. By analysing them as a group, I begin to explore some of the ways in which a negative association between reading and the masculine self can be made.

> I hated reading. And I still don't really enjoy reading, unless it's, unless it's something that I'm really interested in. (Doug)
>
> I hate novels. I cannot pick up a novel and read it. (Stanley)
>
> I never liked English, used to hate it really. (Steven)
>
> I wasn't really into reading but I used to like Maths. (Fred)
>
> We were always out playing sport, we didn't have time to sit down and go and read. (Wayne)
>
> I dropped English at Matric because I never really liked reading. (Rodney)
>
> I couldn't really see the relevance of English to learning. (Neville)
>
> I'm not one for picking up books. I'm not a novel reader or anything. (Neil)

What these statements have in common is their status as identity markers. Self is thematised (placed in the object position within the clause) within all these utterances and is generally in direct syntactic relation to the subject of the clause. This results in short clear statements - 'I hated reading', 'I hate novels', 'I dropped English' - in which identity is expressed in terms of the relation between self and reading (or subject English). In Wayne's case the statement is one of group affiliation since he uses 'we' and the group appears, from the references to sport, to be a masculine peer group. Wayne's statement is a reminder that choices regarding orientation to particular literacies may also be choices regarding group membership, choices which have material effects on the literate practices of individuals.

In these statements we see evidence of some of the binary organisations of meaning and practice through which men position themselves as 'other' to reading. A comparison between reading and an assumed opposite is explicitly made by both Wayne and Fred. In Wayne's case, the opposition is one of spatial location (outside/inside) and also of bodily practice (moving around versus sitting down). His is thus very much an embodied

subject position. In Fred's case, the opposition is expressed in terms of the organisation of knowledge in the school curriculum (reading/Maths). In Neville's, subject English is defined in a relation of opposition to 'learning'. For all these men, reading or subject English is defined negatively, not as a valued activity.

Many of these statements were made in the context of recalling school experiences. It is in the context of the school curriculum that many of these men learned to categorise themselves as non-readers. Fred, for instance, associates not-liking reading with liking Maths. Rodney 'dropped English' because he did not like reading while Neville 'couldn't really see the relevance of English to learning'. The polarised curriculum in which knowledge and practice is organised along binary lines (numeracy/literacy, Sciences/Arts) has enabled these men to position themselves in opposition to reading/subject English (Lee 1992; K. Thomas 1992; Weiner 1994).

Neville's favourite subject was Geography. It was in comparison to the organisation of knowledge in this subject that he criticised English for its 'irrelevance to learning'. What Neville meant by 'learning' as he went on to make clear, was the absorption and reproduction of factual information. He compared the two subjects thus:

> I hated [English]. Whereas something like Geography that you know you learn the facts and then that was it! You know? But I couldn't really handle English.

Underlying his view is an organisation of knowledge according to an objectivity/subjectivity dualism which, in the context of schooling accord the status of real knowledge and thus true learning only to 'facts'. So Neville's view of himself as a non-reader (and resistant English student) was reinforced by his orientation to 'objective' areas of the school curriculum.

While this group of statements has some commonalities, however, it does not signify homogeneity. I have been using 'reading' as an umbrella term but in this group of statements a number of meanings and contexts for reading are present. While all express aspects of a negative relation between self and reading, the statements suggest

a range of ways of negatively defining reading associated with different contexts and practices. Reading, as well as being a general term, is specifically associated with subject English (Steven, Rodney & Neville) and with fictional narrative (Stanley & Neil). It is also defined in a relation of opposition to Maths (Fred) and sport (Wayne).

The English classroom is clearly one important site for the production of reading positions. Here resistance to reading is at the same time resistance to pedagogic practices. However statements which refer to the practice of 'picking up books' (Neil, Stanley), suggest a different context. The wording here implies a place where books are available and one is free to pick them up or not, as the case may be. This sounds like the home site. Here choices are made about the use of leisure time and the decision not to read implies a judgement that other leisure activities are more rewarding. These two contexts, school and home, are both associated with resistance to reading but have different implications for the position of 'not-reader'.

Difference is also present in the degree to which men describe their position as fixed. While strong modals such as 'always' and 'never' (Steven, Wayne, Rodney) express a certain fixity in the subject positions adopted, the possibility of movement is present in even these seemingly unequivocal statements. Doug softens his stance considerably in the space of one sentence from complete rejection ('I hated reading') to a milder statement of qualification dislike ('and I still don't really enjoy reading') to the statement of a significant exception ('unless it's something that I'm really interested in'). The presence of the qualifier 'really' (Steven, Fred, Rodney, Neville) might be read as making a space for a shift away from a totally resistant position. These qualifications raise a number of questions about men's taken-for-granted opposition to reading. Were there times and spaces in these men's pasts when some interest in reading was experienced? Were these experiences classified as 'not real'? Have experiences of 'the other' been marginalised by the very discourses through which certain knowledges and practices are constructed as 'real'? The analysis of parents' construction of their children as gendered literate subject pursues these issues further (see chapter seven).

Each of the following two sections focuses on a theme from the accounts of the male 'not-readers'. Firstly, I examine the ways in which reading is understood as a practice which uses time. Then I consider how reading's association with fictional narrative is used to justify resistance to it.

5.3.2 A waste of time

Time - leisure time, work time, time of life - was a recurring topic in the accounts of men who were categorised as 'resistant' to reading. Whether or not to read was presented as a choice made in the context of decisions about time use; decisions about what to do with one's time, how long for, where, and who with. These choices reflect values about what is considered pleasurable and/or productive and what is considered compatible with gender orientation. The following selection of quotes are representative of the ways in which reading was presented as a form of time use. The quotes include one by a woman, Debbie, who was referring to her father-in-law as a reader:

> We were always out playing sport, we didn't have time to sit down and go and read. (Wayne)
>
> I don't really like to waste my time with [novels]. Yeah, I'm a factual type person. (Doug)
>
> I read that book when I was in hospital, what was that book I read? (Rodney)
>
> Rodney's father's only just retired and um all of a sudden he's reading books and he's joined a library, I guess because he's got time on his hands. (Debbie)
>
> When we go on holidays, occasionally I'll take a book 'cause I guess that's when I have time to do nothing. I'll just read. (Steven)

For Wayne, to spend time in reading involved taking time away from sport. Thus not-reading is presented as an effect of decisions about the use of leisure time; it was not a matter of disliking reading but of having no time to spend on it. The terms in which reading and sport are set alongside each other in Wayne's statement are consistent with an active/passive dualism where activity is defined in physical terms. Sport here is the dominant category (named first) and sets the terms within which reading can be

understood: sport is outside, reading inside; sport involves movement, reading involves 'sitting down'. Sport is defined through non-specific temporal and geographic locations: 'always' rather than at some specific time; 'outside' rather than in some specific place. Thus sport is the given, the fact of life. To 'go and read' involves an effort of making time which entails removal from the peer group and its space and thus physical, social and discursive re-positioning.

Doug defines reading (specifically the reading of novels) as a 'waste of time'. As with Wayne, time refers to leisure time, time that is 'free' to spend as one chooses. The significance of the leisure time context was made clear when Doug described his reaction to his son's decision to read during one of his (Doug's) preferred pastimes, a fishing trip. He expressed surprise at this preference:

> He just picked it up [the book] and started reading and that you know, which is something I wouldn't have done when I was a kid over the shack. I'd sort of be outside you know doing more activity things instead of reading, unless I was specifically interested in finding out about something, or, or one particular thing.

The 'shack' mentioned here is particularly significant as a site for choices of time use due to its status as a masculine leisure site. It is here that father, son and male friends and relatives gather. Within this masculine setting, reading is set in opposition to the real business of the weekend, fishing and other outdoor pursuits, pursuits that Doug calls 'activity things'. By implication, reading is not an 'activity thing'; it is not accorded the status of action.

However the implication that reading is passive is offset by the agentic language Doug uses to describe his son's orientation to books: 'He just picked it up and started reading.' So Doug's statement contains the possibility of reading being considered as a form of action and thus as masculine. His attribution to his son of initiative in the reading practice is consistent with a discourse of autonomy which is a theme in parents' accounts of their male children (see chapter seven). There is a tension between two views of reading,

both compatible with masculinity. Reading is both seen as 'other' to action and as a form of action in itself.

In the comments of Steven, Rodney and Debbie (above) reading is defined as an activity which men undertake when other forms of pursuit are precluded. Rodney, who by his own account does not like reading, considers it an option when immobilised by illness and without other ways of using his time. Debbie, reflecting on her retired father-in-law's newly acquired habit of reading, explains it in terms of time ('he's got time on his hands'), time that would previously have been spent in paid work. In Steven's case a holiday combines both an increase in leisure time and a distance from his common routine that enables him to consider reading an appropriate way to fill time. While acknowledging its suitability in this context, Steven explicitly defines reading as a way of 'doing nothing' thus denying it the status of a 'real' activity. In 'normal' circumstances it appears reading would have no claim on his time. In all of these cases, reading is presented as 'other' to habitual activities such as work and leisure.

The relegation of reading to specific, limited and in some senses, unusual times reflects the comparatively low value that is placed on it and, by implication, the much higher value placed on paid work, and 'masculine' leisure activities. Underlying this judgement are binary constructions of meaning and practice in which key oppositions are active/passive and productive/un(re)productive. Reading is not an 'activity thing' (Doug) but rather a way of 'doing nothing' (Steven). 'Nothing' by definition needs no time. So the very definition of reading as a non-activity precludes time being spent on it.

However, this leaves open the possibility of reading being defined in active and productive terms. An active construction of reading might be more compatible with certain versions of masculinity. This is suggested by an anecdote of Steven's which shows his mother's attempts to bring about a change in his literate practice. In the following excerpt he describes a scheme instituted by his mother to encourage him and his brothers to read books:

> STEVEN: For every book we read, we used to score so many points. Every now - every now and then if we'd accumulated enough points we could buy ourselves something. [...] 'Cause that was at an age, probably about ... um fourteen or fifteen I suppose, it was at an age where I was starting to get into music and cassettes were something I wanted. So that was the idea, a persuasion item. [...] I did read quite a bit there for a while. And I guess, thinking back that scheme probably did -
>
> Sue: What sort of stuff did you choose?
>
> Steven: Oh I used to like Alastair Maclean, yeah a bit of adventure.
>
> Sue: So you could sit down and read quite an advanced book if you had the right incentive?
>
> Steven: Oh yeah, if I had the time. I guess for twelve months when I was in about third year I had a real spurt but I guess other things came up and I lost interest. Um that was that.

The point system in effect makes reading an activity which is materially productive. The child Steven does the work of reading and earns money to spend on products. This scheme, while no doubt intended to accord value to reading further emphasises the importance of productive labour. Note that the texts Steven chooses also enable reading to be framed as active. He selects novels with action as their theme ('a bit of adventure') and describes the act of reading as conducted in an energetic manner ('with a real spurt'). Thus reading is made compatible with discourses of masculinity emphasising productivity (reading as breadwinning) and active agency.

My question to Steven indicates my failure to understand that his decision not to read reflects his value system rather than his innate capabilities. It reflects my own positioning as teacher within pedagogic discourses and practices in which 'failures' to read are seen as cognitive processing problems.

So it appears that whether reading is seen as a 'waste of time' by some men depends on whether it can be constructed in terms that are compatible with values associated with masculinity. If reading is seen as 'other' to the active and the productive, time spent on it is time wasted. It is a way of 'doing nothing'. However, by the same token reading is seen as appropriate for times when men are not required to be active or productive (holidays, illness, retirement). Reading can also be considered a worthwhile use of time

if it is framed as an action, either by making it materially productive (as in Steven's scheme) or through the selection of texts in which male characters take active roles.

5.3.3 Not a novel reader: the rejection of fictional narrative

So far I have discussed men's comments on reading in general, but men who spoke negatively about reading sometimes specified a particular text type - narrative fiction, often referred to as 'novels'. In this section, I explore the meaning of fiction reading to this group of men in three ways: by identifying relations of difference in their statements about fiction reading; by analysing a conversation in which husband and wife discuss their reading positions and by considering the remembered context of school classrooms in producing men as 'failed fiction readers'.

The following statements were drawn from men who identified themselves as 'non-readers'. For some, this amounts to rejecting, not reading *per se*, but a specific reading practice, the reading of novels.

> I'm not one for picking up books. I'm not a novel reader or anything. (Neil)
>
> I haven't done much reading, you know like as, as in novels and books and things like that. (Doug)
>
> I hate novels. I cannot pick up a novel and read it. (Stanley)
>
> I don't like reading much, you know. I read all day at work. [...] I'm just not like Alicia, I don't like reading novels. (Marco)
>
> I like reading information. I don't like reading fiction. (Neville)

In these statements, the relation between self and this reading practice is explicitly and unequivocally presented: 'I don't like/hate (reading) novels/books/fiction'. The statements can be read for the relations of difference within which 'novel reading' is constituted as 'other'.

One relation of difference concerns the status of the knowledge that is drawn from different sources. Novels, as 'fiction', are compared by Neville to 'information.' The knowledge available from novels is thus not considered to have the status of information; for information, he implies, one looks to other sources.

The second relation concerns the physical form that texts take. Novels are books as Neil and Doug make clear, and books are extended prose texts. The reading practice rejected here involves an orientation to extended prose. Books are long and take time to read. As I argued in the previous section, time usage is a critical factor in decisions regarding literate practice. The text types that the 'non-reading' men *did* mention reading by choice included magazines such as National Geographic (Marco) and fishing magazines (Doug) and car manuals (Stanley). In as much as reading is seen as an orientation to books, the reading of magazines does not represent a challenge to the 'non-reader' subject position.

A third relation of difference concerns forms of subjectivity, the difference between 'reading' and 'liking reading'. This difference is explicitly stated by Marco and implied by statements of 'not liking' reading rather than 'not reading'. There seems to be a recognition here that novel reading can be, and is for some, a source of pleasure. Marco gives his partner as an example of one who does 'like reading novels' at the same time underlining his difference both from her and from her mode of literate subjectivity 'I'm just not like Alicia'. The experience of pleasure from reading fiction, for these men, is categorically ruled out.

In the following section I further examine the relations of difference within which reading is constructed with reference to a conversation between one of the 'resistant readers' and his partner.

5.3.4 Opposite positions on reading: Marco and Alicia

The positioning of narrative fiction within relations of difference was most clearly developed in an exchange between Marco and his partner Alicia. Marco explicitly rejected narrative fiction while Alicia was a keen leisure reader of novels. In the exchange that follows, they negotiate the meanings of 'fact' and 'fiction and in doing so set up a relation of opposition between themselves:

> **Marco**: I don't like reading much, you know, I read all day at work. I'm doing a course there, I've got these books there to do an assignment. Which I have to get done. And I've got four weeks to do it. ...
>
> **Marco** pulls a face. **Alicia** laughs.
>
> **Marco**: But ah ... I, I'm just not like Alicia, I don't like reading novels or - I like to read things like um, er Geography, you know like National Geographic, you know like
>
> **Sue**: [...] Can you think of any reason why that should be?
>
> **Marco**: Why? For me it's because I read so much through the day. And um and perhaps I was not as stimulated from a young age to read like Sam may be, you know? And that's probably how I think each person turns out to like reading anyway or find it you know comfortable [unclear] I can read you know, see I got those there. I like reading um some technical stuff sometimes you know, whatever comes up other than my normal day-to-day ...
>
> **Alicia**: It's basically nonfiction.
>
> **Marco**: Mm.
>
> **Alicia**: It's factual type stuff, technical.
>
> **Marco**: Yeah. As we call exact sciences anyway.

Marco begins by making a comparison between himself and Alicia based on reading practices and attitudes, incorporating two key oppositions: fact/fiction and work/home. Work reading is factual and undertaken not for entertainment but for advancement. It is done whether one likes it or not (' have to get [it] done'). Novel reading, by implied comparison, is located in the home and is not motivated by practical necessity.

Alicia's introduces the 'correct' (literary) term for the kind of reading Marco has been

discussing. By introducing 'nonfiction' as a key term she implicitly brings its opposite, fiction, into play and underlines the oppositional relationship between herself and her partner. Marco's noncommittal response prompts Alicia to expand on her definition of 'nonfiction' and in so doing she incorporates Marco's term, 'technical', thus aligning nonfiction with the particular domain of knowledge he is expert in. Marco's next contribution further narrows the field to that of the 'exact sciences'. His use of 'exact' suggests an opposition between objectivity and subjectivity. The 'we' suggests an authority for the use of this term in the discourse of a particular group of which he is a member and his partner, by implication, is not. The conversation continues

> **Alicia**: I think ... I think men have got into this time-slot where they, they don't have time and if they do have five minutes to spare to do something it has to be factual because they have to be fact-finding. And they're continually fact-finding. Because they need to fact-find. It's just like work spilling over into home.
>
> [**Marco** raises his eyebrows]
>
> **Alicia**: It *is* Marco. You're always, you're only interested, your interests only lie in, in factual type things. Literature [**Marco**: Unclear.] Yeah, yeah I think so. You're highly, you're a very technical type of person, [**Marco**: Mm] you've got to know how things work and that's why shows like Beyond Two Thousand and The Investigators and things like that -
>
> **Marco**: Would attract me [**Alicia**: Yes!] more than watching the Murder She Wrote [**Alicia**: yeah] or something like that.

Alicia here explicitly defines the domain of fact as a masculine domain. She sets out the terms in which Marco's behaviour will be interpreted as being typical of men in general. Marco's preference for documentaries on television is taken as evidence for an interest in facts. Alicia coins the phrase 'fact finding' for this perceived masculine activity. In elaborating her definition of fact finding, Alicia associates it with 'technical' knowledge, expanding the definition of technical to the knowledge of 'how things work', thus stressing its practical applied nature.

It is interesting to compare the verb phrase 'fact finding' with the verb 'reading'. In 'fact finding' the activity (finding) makes no sense without its object (facts). It is, thus, constructed as a goal-directed activity with information as the goal. 'Reading' in contrast

is taken as a sufficient term without an explicitly stated object. This suggests that reading is considered an activity undertaken for its own sake.

Alicia presents this orientation to facts as a form of desire, even an obsession. This is seen in her use of strong modals: '... you've *got* to know ...', '... they *have* to be fact-finding ... they *need* to fact find ...'. At the same time, she distances herself from this perceived masculine mode of subjectivity. Her use of the third person ('they') implies '*we* [women] don't need facts'.

Marco's eloquent eyebrows suggest resistance. Since he has already stressed his interest in factual information, he can hardly be objecting to Alison's restatement of that position. His silent protest is more likely a reaction to the 'work spilling into home' comment. Once again the work/home divide underlines their respective positions. It's interesting to speculate whether the reverse comment can easily be made. Can Alicia 'spill over' her home-related 'stuff' into Marco's work domain?

This exchange highlights some of the ways in which fact and fiction are set in opposition to each other and simultaneously in alignment with the gender binary masculine/feminine. It is the fact/masculinity alignment which is the major focus of both partner's discursive work. Fiction is present only as an implied other to fact. Facts, as an objective form of knowledge, are associated by both partners with scientific thinking, the 'exact sciences'. Fiction, by implication, is a subjective and imprecise form of knowledge. An orientation to facts is seen by them as an active, goal-based mode of consumption (fact *finding*). Fiction reading, by implication is not (does not need to be) productive.

Marco and Alicia's conversation has brought us into the present and demonstrates that the constitution of gendered literate subject positions is a continual process of negotiation. In the following section, however, I return to the remembered past and specifically to the English classrooms of these men's youths. I argue that the pedagogic practices of subject English may reinforce masculine resistance to fictional narrative.

5.3.5 Narrative fiction and subject English pedagogy

To further explore the meanings of fictional narrative to the men that rejected it, it is useful to consider the contexts within which a relation to fictional narrative was first experienced as problematic by them. According to many reports a key context was the high school English classroom. In this study, men were more likely than women to report difficulties or tensions around the pedagogic requirements of subject English. These difficulties were of two kinds.

Firstly as students they were required to read complete, and sometimes lengthy, texts - often novels. For some this was a difficult requirement since they had not developed the habit of reading sustained prose texts in their leisure time. Rodney, for instance, reported that he rarely read more than the first twenty pages of any novel. Neville's partner revealed that he, also, managed to complete high school without fulfilling the novel reading requirement of subject English:

> Well tell Sue. Neville only read one novel in his whole school years. Neville never reads. (Janet)

Doug spoke of relying on friend's reports of the novels studied in subject English, since he did not read them. That the schooled subject position of rejecting subject English is associated with the adult subject position of 'non-reader is suggested by Janet's movement from the past to present tense.

The second problematic requirement was that students produce interpretations of novel texts in written and/or spoken form and submit these interpretations to the evaluation of the teacher. Accounts of pedagogic practice in subject English (Patterson 1993) indicate that the interpretations likely to be privileged are those at the level of characters' internal motivations. This practice was referred to by one parent (a woman in this case) as the 'Why did Pigsy *feel* this way?' approach, a reference to the frequently set text 'Lord of the Flies' by William Golding.

This requirement advantaged those students familiar with the conventions of the character novel and the indirect modes by which authors signal characters' internal states, that is, those students who had established a habit of reading novels. Boys are less likely than girls to choose reading as a leisure pursuit (Rowe 1990) and when they do read, prefer science fiction, comics and nonfiction to character novels (White 1990). When required to write narratives at school, boys focus on action rather than characterisation (McAuliffe 1993/4). These findings suggest that boys are less likely to have developed the genre knowledge necessary to arrive at acceptable interpretations of character novels.

Rodney spoke at length about the problems associated with studying English at high school. A major issue for him was completing homework tasks:

> You'd have to, for English you'd have to read a chapter say in a, in a week and you'd have to do a, a report or whatever, write out a two page summary of what happened in that chapter [SUE: Yeah] and what you think it's leading to and all this, you know. And I, I really couldn't get into that. I mean I, I, you can bet your bottom dollar the first thing I'd do for homework, Maths, and slowly go through the pile, you know, English would be last, of course. (Rodney)

The student Rodney is expected to make predictions about future events in the novel based on his reading of the story so far: 'what you think it's leading to'. This task requires the reader to attend to textual cues indicating characters' tendencies and their relation to the context of action. These cues may not be obvious to those readers unfamiliar with the textual conventions of novel writing. Perhaps this is why Rodney
is not able to 'get into' the interpretive task and places his English homework at the bottom of the pile.

Rodney's statement places English in opposition to Maths. They form the two extremes of preference in the homework pile - bottom and top. This contrast is further developed by Rodney in the following statement::

> All the way through school I was always quite good and I enjoyed Maths. Hated English and er but I enjoyed Maths [...] I really didn't do much homework for the first couple of years of high school because I suppose you'd get through without doing much, sort of. You still could, especially in Maths because it was logical [...]

His description of Maths as 'logical' evokes the objective/subjective binary recalling Marco's reference to facts and the 'exact sciences'. Read in the light of subject English pedagogy, the 'logical' nature of Maths problems forms a stark contrast to the problems of predicting characters' actions in a fiction text.

Once again, the element of time is present. Due to the predictable nature of Maths tasks, the student Rodney was able to complete them quickly, thus limiting his homework time: 'you'd get through without doing much'. For a boy who would 'rather be outside doing something rather than sitting inside doing homework', the relatively greater time required to analyse literature was felt as an imposition. This framing of 'doing homework' in opposition to 'doing something' recalls the opposition of reading and doing discussed previously. It suggests an association between reading and schoolwork due to their characterisation as both sedentary and compulsory in comparison to the free physical activity of sport and outdoor play.

Neville also spoke of experiencing difficulties with the textual work of senior English. In this case, he offered his own interpretation of the text but found it was not accepted:

> **Neville**: They'd ask you things like how did you interpret this? And you'd sort of think: well I interpret it this way and you'd get a big cross, no that's wrong.
>
> **Sue**: (laughs) Oh what a pain.
>
> **Neville**: Yeah and I thought, I'm sure lit, literature is you know, people get their own thing out of it. But at school there's a right answer as to what such-and-such was thinking and such-and-such did that. There was a right answer and a wrong answer and I could never get the right answer, [**Sue**: Yeah yeah] well I could never get the answer they wanted, put it that way.

The student Neville is here in a bind created by a gap between the apparent requirements of the teacher's pedagogy and the actual requirements. The question: how

did you interpret this? locates the act of interpretation within the individual and implies that all readings have equal status: 'people get their own thing out of it'. At the same time, such a question leaves the teacher's interpretive framework unspoken (Patterson 1993). Failing to realise that a particular interpretive framework is actually required, Neville maintains his own reading and is positioned as unsuccessful.

The student Doug devises a method for producing acceptable interpretations which avoids the problem of grappling directly with the text:

> But then you'd have to find out, you know, you'd talk to a few people and you'd say "What was the book about?" And they'd tell you. And you'd just sort of put one and one together, and, and you'd just sort of go off writing about any garbage, you know? [Sue: laughs] And the teacher would sort of come back, give me 'A'. Oh, that's all right! (laughs)

By drawing on the interpretive resources of other students, and the teacher's instructions, Doug is able to construct an account that conforms to the teacher's interpretive framework. Doug's interpretive work is focussed on the teacher's requirements rather than on the text. His method avoids possible clashes between his personal reading and the accepted one. The resulting 'A' is experienced as a joke against the teacher; a reward for 'any garbage'.

Men's rejection of narrative fiction, then, is associated with its status as a nonfactual, subjective form of knowledge. It is also associated with a reluctance to allocate periods of time to engaging with extended prose texts. A rejection of fictional narrative is sometimes associated by men with a dislike of subject English. The absence of a personal novel reading routine is in conflict with the requirements of secondary English. The resulting lack of experience with novel form may be a reason for some of these men's difficulties with the subject.

5.4 Men as reading subjects: keen readers

The positioning of reading in opposition to masculinity is, as we have seen, associated with particular versions of masculinity and particular definitions of reading. However, the polarisation in relation to men and reading breaks down when considering 1) genres and practices which have become constructed as masculine due to their location within certain discourses and 2) private reading practices.

5.4.1 The construction of reading as masculine

In the group of fathers, there was a sub-group who could be classified as 'keen readers'. This sub-group included Hans, Gilles, Jack, Evan, Keith, Richard, Chris and Yannis. All these men spoke enthusiastically about reading as a leisure activity. None mentioned disliking Subject English in high school. In common with the keen women readers, none reported experiencing difficulty with acquiring the skills of print decoding. The question can be raised: why categorise keen readers by gender at all?

It is true that there are some points of similarity between the accounts of all keen readers, male and female. However, it is also true that boys who are proficient at, and like reading, are required to take positions in relation to available models of masculinity which are operating in particular sites. As we have seen, these models can set up conflicts between forms of literacy deemed feminine and forms of masculine identity and group alliance. In analysing the accounts of this group of men, I was interested in how they positioned themselves and were positioned in relation to prevailing versions of masculinity. Were they positioned as marginalised in relation to dominant discourses of masculinity or were there alternative valued masculine positions available to them?

The majority of this group did not report any conflicts between their literate practice as students and their gender identity and group membership. They did not report being teased for being a 'bookworm' or 'swat'. Their preference for reading did not seem to prompt the kind of homophobic reaction reported by Martino (1994). Overall, their stories

do not suggest membership of marginalised or alienated male groups such as the 'Three Friends' in Walker's (1988) study. A possible exception was Keith, whose story will be taken up in a later section.

This suggests, therefore, that alternative valued forms of masculinity, in which reading was considered appropriate, were available to some of these men. School pathways have been associated with the production of different forms of masculinity (Connell 1989; Mac an Ghail 1994; McLean 1995). A crucial distinction appears to be that between the 'academic' and 'nonacademic' streams. When I checked the profiles of this group of keen male readers I found that most of them had taken the academic route through schooling and had taken up professional occupations on completing school. They had also generally come from professional families.

Gilles, whose father was an academic, went into Law. Evan's mother was a teacher and he followed school with a career in academia. Jack went to a prestigious private school and went into teaching. For Hans, coming from a professional family, an early aptitude in languages made possible his insertion into a school pathway directed at a range of professional niches:

> I mean in ...in England in the mid sixties if you came out with a good degree in foreign languages, in modern languages it used to be called, you were in line for a number of career prospects in diplomacy, in er ... in overseas marketing, in er ... in teaching ... in a variety of things. There were realistic prospects for you.

His study of languages rather than Maths/Science or an other strand was justified by the 'realistic prospect' of entering into a high-status occupation. In Hans' case, this was a career in diplomacy.

Yannis did not come from a professional family or attend a private school. The son of Greek migrants, he reports being encouraged to do well in all his subjects and particularly enjoying subject English. Like the others, though, he took a professional pathway becoming an architect.

In all these cases there is a pattern of reporting enjoying and doing well in language-rich subjects in secondary school. Yannis and Richard named English as their favourite high school subject, while Gilles and Evan singled out History. While Jack particularly liked Physical Education he described himself as an all-rounder, doing equally well in all subjects.

Four men from this group attended all-male private secondary schools. As well as implying an upper-middle class location, the single-sex nature of these schools may have had effects on the range of gender positions made available to students. The absence of girls to occupy the position of 'other' in relation to literacy, may create a space for reading to be constructed as masculine in contrast with other forms of masculinity. This interpretation is supported by a comment from Rodney, one of the men who took up a position in opposition to reading:

> I certainly didn't pick up books like Jenny or other people would be seeing, you know, not just females but I mean males read books as well.

As Rodney also went to an all-boys private school it is reasonable to interpret his reference to the 'other people' as a reference to other boys in his school.

It has been claimed that the existence of male reading role models in boys' families will encourage them to take up reading as an 'appropriate' masculine activity (Martin 1991). While this was not a dominant trend in these accounts, both Richard and Gilles made particular mention of their fathers reading, both to their children and for their own purposes. Richard's account illustrates the role of a masculine family tradition of leisure reading which makes available the subject 'reader' to the young Richard:

> And er I, my father, used to have a big, big bookcase at home with books and everything but ah we never used to read 'em, we used to read comics or whatever, the first couple of years. It was only in probably early primary school we started to read um ... oh novels like Treasure Island ... we had them, those sorts of classic type things. Black Beauty and all that. But all the books were written in large print. I don't even now if it was the full text of the book or not.
>
> **Sue**: Oh yeah some of them would've been abridged.

> **Richard**: Yeah, otherwise you wouldn't've read it. But my father - I just mostly remember reading all the comics and things like that. Another thing, books were expensive then I think too.

Richard draws a distinction between his childhood reading and his father's books in a way that invests the father's reading with status. The father's bookcase can be read as a symbol of his ownership of a particular kind of literacy. The size of the bookshelf and the expense of the books attest to the power of this knowledge. Comics are the stuff of childhood, to be discarded for the next step on the path to full ownership of literacy. Even the classic children's novels which followed are recognised as transitional: written in large print and shortened.

Later in the interview, Richard made another reference to his father's bookshelf, this time placing his father, his uncle and himself within a masculine tradition of reading, associated with a professional pathway:

> Like I said, my father had bookshelves everywhere, I had uncles and one was a doctor and had a whole room full of books. Must have had some sort of background.

In response to a question about his parents' reading habits, Richard continued:

> Mine both read all the time. Mum reads um ... you know the Women's Day and Women's Weekly and she also reads novels and things like that. Father reads more serious type books, mm autobiographies and things like that.

The prominent reference to magazines explicitly named as 'Women's' to frame his mother's reading, sets up the comparison as a gendered opposition. The description of his father's reading as 'serious' implies its opposite, 'trivial', thus attributing lesser status to 'women's reading'. The adjective 'serious' applied to the autobiographical reading of his father suggests that it is the kind of book that takes as its subject 'important' public figures and events. The gendered opposition employed here recalls the public/private divide already remarked in relation to Marco and Alicia.

Interestingly, whilst associating his father's reading with a certain type of masculine power, Richard described his own current reading practice differently:

> I still, I still read a lot of magazines. But I don't read novels any more, I used to. Before children, but ... (laughs) The time to sit down and read something, that would take me probably two weeks to read. I just couldn't sit down and read normal in, you know, one or two days or something. Ah I just like reading something I can absorb straight away.

This was very similar to statements some women made about how their leisure reading practice had been curtailed along with their leisure time, with the arrival of children. The division of labour within Richard's present family was less polarised than that within his family of origin. For instance, Richard took responsibility for dropping his daughter at school, taking her to the library and listening to her read. In his assumption of some domestic responsibilities, Richard's lived experiences have taken on some of the qualities of his mother's.

The production of reading as masculine, therefore, is associated for this group of men with a range of factors: taking the academic route through schooling (which is itself associated with class membership); attendance at an all-male school; membership of a family-based tradition of masculine reading; and the construction of particular modes of reading as 'adult' and 'serious' in contrast to both class and gender opposites. However this pattern was not present in all cases of men who were keen readers. In the following section I discuss one whose adoption of reading as a preferred literate practice was associated with a different educational and family context.

5.4.2 Reading as a personal practice

None of the factors mentioned by the above group of male 'keen readers' were present in Keith's case. His parents were not leisure readers and he did not recall being read to as a child. Neither did he take the academic track through school. Indeed, he reported disliking school in general and leaving as soon as he was able to enter a trade. Despite

this, Keith spoke of reading with enthusiasm and named English as a preferred high school subject:

> It was probably one of the few subjects that I did enjoy. English. That's about all I can think of. I, I didn't enjoy school at all, I didn't like it. You know, as soon as I was old enough to leave, I did. But that was one of the subjects that I did enjoy doing. Along with History, Geography, that type of thing.
>
> **Sue**: Right. Um so what was it about those subjects?
>
> **Keith**: Oh just the, you know just the stories, poems, writing things, I used to enjoy essays, that type of thing. It just seemed more ... pleasant, more ... more enjoyable than -
>
> **Edith**: More relevant than a lot of other things too.
>
> **Keith**: Yeah not - I don't know whether I thought of it like that, I just, I used to enjoy doing it. Whereas Maths to me, and Science ... I couldn't see the sense in them. It was just disjointed and didn't seem to flow or anything like that. Whereas English to me, I mean like reading, it was a great pleasure and - that's about all I can say in that regard.

Once again we see an opposition between reading/subject English and Maths/Science but in this statement the common gendered association is inverted. The qualities of Maths/Science which Keith remarks, its fragmentation and abstraction of knowledge, are very similar to those highlighted in feminist critiques of positivism (Harding 1986). In contrast, the definition of reading as 'flowing' gives it a continuous and relational quality. Keith's reference to 'pleasure' suggests a mode of literate subjectivity similar to that experienced by the keen women readers (see section 5.5).

Keith, also like some of the keen women readers, does not associate his reading skill with success or enjoyment in school. For some of the women readers this related to conflicts between the pedagogic practices of the primary classroom and the personal practice of reading (see section 5.5.4). However, there is an additional factor operating for Keith which relates to his positioning within school gender relations. His memories make it clear that for a boy, being perceived as competent in particular forms of literate practice potentially places him outside dominant discourses of masculinity. In Keith's case, it was not reading (which as a private practice was not open to surveillance) but the public performance of handwriting that signalled to the class his atypical position and

lead to censure. Keith's account below follows my comment to him that several parents had spoken of girls' neatness in primary school:

> **Keith**: I used to be ... a very neat writer. It's funny you should say that. And I deliberately changed my writing style ... because I didn't want to be seen as being too good a writer.
>
> **Sue**: Really?
>
> **Keith**: Yeah we used to use the old ... ink wells when we wrote, with the nibs. I could rea - I could write very neatly. And because I could, and I was always getting praised by the teachers, I went the other way. Because it was ... wasn't the done thing.
>
> **Edith**: For boys to /write like that.
>
> **/Sue**: Were you getting teased about it?
>
> **Keith**: I can't remember but I must have been. I, I can remember thinking 'Well, this is no good.' And so I started, by the time I got to high school, my writing had turned into a, a scrawl that you couldn't read.

Although Keith makes no reference to gender in his account, his partner Edith recognises the conflict between feminine writing practices and dominant notions of masculinity when she speaks of the perceived inappropriateness 'for boys' of neat handwriting. In deliberately altering his handwriting style, Keith removes the traces of his early facility and produces himself as an appropriately messy masculine literate subject. At the same time, he maintains his leisure reading practice which, because more private, is not subject to the same scrutiny.

This completes my analysis of men's memories of reading. I now turn to the accounts of women to consider the questions: what literate positions were made available to these women as children? Were these literate positions also gendered positions? What did it mean to be a girl and a reader or not-a-reader in the remembered contexts of schooling and family life?

5.5 Women as reading subjects: keen readers

In this section I focus women's memories of childhood and schooling and consider how the desire for reading is produced as a normative subject position for girls. Out of the thirty-one women interviewed, I categorised fifteen as keen readers on the basis of their explicit and unequivocal statements of preference for reading as a leisure activity. In analysing their accounts, I first consider some of the common threads in a selection of statements before offering a detailed reading of one of the narratives. I then discuss the ways in which the subject positions 'good reader' and 'good student' intersect and the consequences for female students of being a keen reader.

The following statements are broadly representative of the keen women readers' attitudes towards. These statements are characterised by the construction of reading as a source of pleasure, as a form of orientation to the text and as a constant in life:

> I can remember, always, always read. Um, always had a book around somewhere, and always had great pride in my collection.[...] I still read extensively, across a great range of reading material.[...] There's always a book lying around somewhere. And I've often got my head in it. (Prue)
>
> I have been a bookworm since I could read. And I can't remember when I first learnt to read. By the time I was in Year four, I'd read every book in school. (Megan)
>
> Love it. I loved it, really loved it. (Kathleen)
>
> I've always been a great reader. You know we've always had lots of books. (Barbara)
>
> I always enjoyed reading and writing. [...] I can certainly remember reading a lot and having a lot of books to read and finding it very pleasurable. (Fiona)
>
> I've always got my nose stuck in a book. I'm one of those people that reads the back of the cornflakes packet over breakfast. (Gwenda)
>
> Oh I like to read everything. (laughs) I like classic books. I like um ... book about present or book about um something in past. Or book about futures. (Natasha)
>
> Every spare minute I had my head stuffed in these books. (Sandra)

A number of themes can be traced through this assembly of statements. Pleasure in and through reading is either explicitly or implicitly present in many of them. Fiona characterises her experience of reading as one that provides enjoyment and pleasure. For Prue, there is the 'pride' of ownership involved in building up a personal library. Kathleen's emphatic statement constitutes reading as the object of her 'love' and her self as one who desires reading. The mode of literate subjectivity available to the 'keen' reader involves emotional investments and emotional rewards.

Another theme relates to the way in which reading is described as a form of orientation to the text. Prue says: 'I've often got my head in it'; Gwenda's nose is 'stuck in a book' while Sandra's head is 'stuffed in these books.' Although strongly physical in reference, these statements do not function as literal descriptions of the physical practice of reading. Reading actually entails holding the book at a distance from the head sufficient for the eyes to be able to focus on the print. These references indicate, however, that these women experience their absorption in reading as a sense of being physically 'in' the book, of having the book surround them and exclude the 'outside'.

Note that it is the 'head' that is 'in' the book, rather than, say, the 'eyes' being 'on' the book. This lexical choice constitutes reading as a cognitive process rather than an act of visual decoding. The physical referent 'head' (rather than a cognitive noun such as 'mind') functions to represent reading as an action, as does the choice of a concrete object, the book, rather than an abstract noun like 'reading'. The representation of reading as an action and the reader as an actor challenges masculine framings of reading as a form of passive pursuit, as a way of 'doing nothing'.

5.5.1 'Always' a reader

A further common thread linking these statements is the use of the word 'always' to characterise both the activity of reading and the individual's identity as a reader. When I searched the 'reading' file for references to 'always' I also found it used to characterise

the orientation of other female readers such as mothers and daughters. Collecting the references to 'always' together yielded the following selection:

References to self

I can remember, always, always read. Um, always had a book around somewhere, and always had great pride in my collection. [...] There's always a book lying around somewhere. And I've often got my head in it. (Prue)

I've always been a great reader. You know we've always had lots of books. (Barbara)

I always enjoyed reading and writing. [...] I can certainly remember reading a lot and having a lot of books to read and finding it very pleasurable. (Fiona)

I've always got my nose stuck in a book. I'm one of those people that reads the back of the cornflakes packet over breakfast. (Gwenda)

References to others

My mum's always been a big reader and I guess, similar to our set up. Like Prue's always been a huge avid reader, non stop. (Geoff)

Well she's always got books on the go. (Edith, referring to her mother-in-law)

Sally will always read. She has to have her reading time before she goes to bed. (Prue referring to her daughter)

She has always sat there a long time and looked at books. (Roz referring to her daughter)

Well she has always loved books, always loved books, *loved.* (Melissa referring to her daughter)

Clearly, 'always' does not have a singular meaning. It is sometimes a reference to reading as a regular and taken-for-granted habit, such as the child Kelly's 'reading time'. At other times, it is the sustained nature of reading sessions that is emphasised; Roz' daughter is described as looking at books 'for a long time'. 'Always' can also refer to the consistency of the reader's subjective response to reading; Fiona has 'always enjoyed' reading while Melissa's daughter has 'always loved' books. 'Always' also refers to the ever-present nature of books in the reader's environment; Barbara 'always had lots of books', Prue 'always had a book around somewhere' while Fiona had 'lots of books to read'. The use of the past tense here is a signal that the 'always-ness' of books is a feature of the remembered word of childhood for these women.

While there are several frames for interpreting 'always', what is common in these statements is the construction of self (or female other) as one who has 'always been' a reader. As with the references to 'head stuck in a book', these statements cannot be taken as literal representations of reading, since it is not possible to 'always read' or 'always have read'. In addition to referring to material aspects of reading, 'always' operates in two ways. As an intensifier to the statement 'I read' it underlines the identification of self with reading. 'I read' could refer to any mode of engagement with print but 'I always read' expresses a commitment to reading as a mark of identity. Additionally, 'always' operates to rule out alternatives and thus functions as a kind of hidden binary. A more modulated term such as 'often' or 'usually' leaves a space for the entry of other 'not-reading' forms of subjectivity. 'Always' excludes such possibilities. 'Always' elides over times and spaces in which one is not a reader and produces a unitary and consistent self-as-reader. I am reminded of Weedon's observation that:

> The exclusiveness of the assumption of a particular form of subjectivity, which rules out its alternative [...] gives the articulation of subjectivity in language the temporary appearance of fixity. (1987 p.105)

Reading as pleasurable, reading as embodied practice and reading as 'always' present; these themes, interwoven in the accounts of the keen women readers, constitute a relation between the self and reading characterised by active commitment. To be this kind of reading subject means being willing to give one's entire attention, mentally and physically, to a text. The kind of text implied by this reading practice is one that creates a world which the reader is able to fully enter, in other words a work of sustained narrative fiction. It is perhaps this kind of intensely committed reading subject that some men are resisting taking up when they identify reading as a 'waste of time'.

The brief statements referred to so far do not provide much information as to the process through which these women came to adopt this gendered literate subject position. However, through their narratives of acquiring literacy, some of the women reflected on the influences that contributed to their adoption of particular literate practices and

attitudes. In the following section I read one of these narratives for what it suggests about the process of producing the girl subject as 'always a reader'.

5.5.2 Kathleen's story: the production of a keen reader

We have already briefly encountered Kathleen as the woman who said of reading: 'Love it. I loved it, really loved it' (section 5.5). Note that the shift in tense signals the continuity between past and present forms of literate subjectivity. In the narrative presented here, Kathleen reflects on her childhood experiences of literacy. I argue that both school and family contexts are crucial in enabling the child Kathleen to be positioned as a 'good reader' and thus a 'successful' literate subject.

This is how Kathleen recounted her childhood memories:

> I went to Pine Hills West Primary School, my parents lived, we lived in Pine Hills um and ... Mum ... er we had Dick & Dora books you know the ones? And I was so proud, I came home and um had this book and I couldn't remember "there" and "this", I remember I getting "there" and "this" mixed up all the time and Mum showing me the difference between the letters. And then I had could read the whole thing, I can remember that really clearly and I was only just started, I'd only just started school. And my brother couldn't read very well ... um ... he was er ... he was more ... he was, he took, yeah he was a bit slower at, at learning and he was a bit older than me, about 18 months older. And so they were always proud of what I could do. And I, and I just remember that I was always you know like, always felt a bit um ... sorry for Grant 'cause he couldn't read as well as I could but he's, I mean he's really good at Maths and [unclear] I couldn't do what he does either [...] But, at the same, at, when he was young, I thought Mum and Dad put a lot of emphasis on what I could, read and write and I used to write stories and I always you know wanted to be a teacher and wanted to be a writer and (laughing) all this sort of stuff and, and I was yeah just really into that side of things and whereas Maths was really weak and Science and things like that I'm not, except for Biology I couldn't handle it.
>
> Sue: Yeah. So were you keen on reading when you were a kid?
>
> Kathleen: Love it. I loved it, really loved it. I have read all the 'Anne of Green Gables' books and the, all 'The Famous Five' books and um any, anything at all, I always got books for my birthdays and ah I loved ... yeah fairy stories and the Child Craft, you know the Child Craft encyclopaedias? I read all of those.

The comparison between Kathleen and her brother is a major theme in this narrative. In relation to reading, Kathleen is portrayed as advanced for her age: she had 'only just started school' when she performed decoding. Her brother, on the other hand, is portrayed as delayed for his age: at '18 months older' he could not read fluently. In the area of Maths, the reverse is the case: Grant was 'really good' whereas Kathleen was 'really weak'. Their relative relation to fields of knowledge is clearly understood to be both oppositional and mutually exclusive: 'I couldn't do what he does either' [and he couldn't do what I do]. Note the present tense here. Positions formed as schooled subjects continue to define the relations between these siblings and continue to locate Kathleen in relation to these fields of knowledge.

As Kathleen's account is rather long and detailed, I have set it out again below, this time dividing it into topic segments and, within these segments, into meaning units. The narrative section (which concludes at 'I couldn't handle it') is in three parts. In the first section, Kathleen presents an account of her acquisition of reading. In the second, she develops the comparison with her brother. In the final section, she returns to the subject of herself, elaborating on her literate identity and extending the now implied comparison with her brother. For this analysis, I have deleted Kathleen's answer to my question since that did not form part of the narrative.

I went to Para Hills West Primary School,
my parents lived, we lived in Para Hills um
and ... Mum ... er
we had Dick & Dora books you know the ones?
And I was so proud,
I came home and um had this book
and I couldn't remember "there" and "this",
I remember I getting "there" and "this" mixed up all the time
and Mum showing me the difference between the letters.
And then I had, could read the whole thing,
I can remember that really clearly
and I was only just started, I'd only just started school.

And my brother couldn't read very well
... um ... he was er ... he was more ... he was, he took, yeah he was
a bit slower at, at learning
and he was a bit older than me, about 18 months older.
And so they were always proud of what I could do.
And I, and I just remember that I was always you know like,
always felt a bit um ... sorry for Brad
'cause he couldn't read as well as I could
but he's, I mean he's really good at Maths
and [unclear] I couldn't do what he does either [...]
But, at the same, at, when he was young,
I thought Mum and Dad put a lot of emphasis on what I could,
read and write

and I used to write stories
and I always you know wanted to be a teacher
and wanted to be a writer
and (laughing) all this sort of stuff and,
and I was yeah just really into that side of things
and whereas Maths was really weak and Science and things like that
I'm not, except for Biology I couldn't handle it.

In this narrative, Kathleen continually sets up links and associations through connectives ('and', 'and so', ''cause', 'but'), through extended comparisons and through key words (eg 'proud'). This constructs her literate identity as relational; that is Kathleen's acquisition of the position of 'good reader' is presented in the context of relations between herself and others. This is further underlined by the sequence of events as Kathleen chooses to relate them. In the text her performance of decoding ('and then I had, could read the whole thing') is preceded by information about her school, her parents, the text, her difficulties with decoding, and her mother's assistance. Here she is produced as a good reader through her mother's skill, her parent's pride and her brother's inadequacy.

Kathleen's narrative can be characterised as a narrative of participation as distinct from a narrative of autonomy. This categorisation stems from Rose's (1990) analysis of men's and women's accounts of acquiring literacy. Rose noted that women typically wrote of pleasing others with their literacy skills while men wrote in terms of personal goals achieved. Kathleen's narrative can also be read as reflecting gender-related modes of text construction (McAuliffe 1993). She composes her literate history as the sort of relational narrative which girls are reported to prefer.

The statement 'I was so proud', however, reflects a sense of agency in relation to reading. In the first section this pride is a personal response to the specific act of decoding. However its echo in the second section: 'And so they were always proud of what I could do' links the parents' pride in Kathleen's skills to her older brother's deficit. Here the significance of 'what I could do' is produced as a by-product of 'what he couldn't do'. Her parents' approval is not simply earned by Kathleen's effort but dependent on a comparison with her less skilled brother. The agency of Kathleen's parents in setting up this comparison and positioning as literate subject is further underlined when she concludes section 2: 'I thought Mum and Dad put a lot of emphasis on what I could [do], read and write.' There is a tension here around agency in relation to reading. While Kathleen experiences pride in her performance of reading she is also aware of her parents' role in constituting her as 'good reader' through a comparison with her brother.

That Kathleen continues to feel discomfort at the comparison with her brother is suggested by the long chain of false starts where she attempts to come up with an acceptable way of comparing her brother to herself: '... um ... he was er ... he was more ... he was, he took, yeah he was a bit slower at, at learning.' Her pleasure in being a good reader is accompanied by the pain of contributing to her brother's positioning as 'slow'.

In the third part of Kathleen's narrative, a chain of 'ands' produce a cluster of associations linking reading, writing and teaching. Reading and writing are identified as

two aspects of a single practice. 'Writing stories' following on, suggests that it is narrative which is the link. Writing and reading are to be understood as the production and consumption of narrative. Writing is further identified with teaching as Kathleen positions her childhood self as one who wants to be a teacher and a writer. Another feature of Kathleen's account that has echoes with some of the other women is her desire, as a young girl, to become a teacher. No man interviewed recalled wanting to be a teacher as a child, although several of them (eg Jack, Chris, Luke) did go on to take up teaching as a profession. Her laughter speaks of the unreality of 'being a writer' for the adult Kathleen. As White has pointed out (1987), girls' success in writing does not generally lead to their taking up of the socially recognised position of writer in the 'real world'.

From Kathleen's account we can conclude that her production as 'good reader' involves her positioning within family relations, textual practices, and curriculum structures. While the ability to decode text may be crucial, the production and maintenance of the position 'good reader' involves much more than the practice of decoding text. In Kathleen's family of origin being a good reader is a gendered subject position within family gender relations, in particular the brother-sister relation. Being a good reader is a way of being a good daughter. In the primary school context, being a good reader is a way of being a good student. Thus gendered literate subject positions are inextricably related to both familial subject positions and schooled subject positions.

In order to further investigate the contribution of schooling practices and relations to the production of the 'good girl reader' position, I turn once again to the accounts of the group of keen women readers.

5.5.3 Good reader as good student

When I looked at parents' accounts of their primary schooling, a number of trends emerged. First, those who were unambiguously positive about their experience of primary school were much more likely to be women. Second, all those who spoke positively about their early years, both male and female, did so in terms of indicators of

success made visible through forms of teaching and assessment. Third, many of these public, measurable indicators were associated with forms of schooled literacy.

Kathleen's account starts, appropriately, with the experience of reading 'the reader', a 'Dick and Jane' type beginning reader text widely used in Australian schools in the 1960s and 70s, when this group of parents were children (Baker & Freebody 1989; A. Luke 1988). Her account illustrates the links between being a good reader and being a good student within the terms of the primary school's reading pedagogy. 'Reading the reader' - a public performance of text decoding performed routinely each school day - was one of the key means by which students' literate competence was monitored and evaluated. As a public performance, it provided each child with information about their own literate status relative to their peers. Failures in fluency relegated the individual to the ranks of 'problem readers', not only in the eyes of the teacher, but in the eyes of the class. Students who could read fluently, without slips, mispronunciations or hesitations had their status as 'good student' confirmed on a daily basis.

In the accounts of women who described themselves as good readers, we see the intersection of the categories 'good reader' and 'good student'. 'Good writer' is also a relevant category (Brodkey 1992). The good student position was achieved through smooth insertion into the pedagogic discourse and practices of the primary school classroom (Freebody 1995; Kamler et al 1994). The women frequently either referred to the ease with which they accomplished the task of decoding or described themselves as having 'no problems'. To those who displayed the indicators of literate competence signalling 'good student' - fluency in reading, accuracy in spelling and neatness in handwriting - came rewards. Some rewards were public and tangible: being ranked near the top of the class, taking home the 'honour book', receiving the book prize at the end of year assembly, being selected for class captain. Following are two accounts on the theme of 'rewards' for literate competence:

> I never recall having any great difficulty with anything at school, reading or anything. ... I didn't have great trouble with spelling. Um, I always had relatively glowing reports. (Sandra)

> I can vividly remember getting flash cards flashed at me day in and day out at school. And them um having readers, 'Dick and Dora' and the animals that went with it. Um and then progressing very well and very quickly. Always when we had reading tests ten out of ten. (Gwenda)

Sandra's summary of her primary school performance demonstrates the close identification between school success and literate success. Her chain of association links 'anything at school', 'reading' and 'spelling'. In Gwenda's account we see the associations between forms of pedagogy (flashcards and readers) and the visible signs of 'progress' which positioned her as 'good student'.

That the highly visible 'good student' position was often occupied by girls in primary school was mentioned by some of the fathers:

> I remember sitting in school and, and tracing out the letters that we copied in the b - , we had to copy what was on the board. I remember all the comments that the girls were neater than the boys. [...] The girls were always [unclear] their writing was always held up and ah and the er the top people in the class were almost invariably female, all the top three. Um as for reasons, I really don't know. (Gilles)

> I can remember in primary school (laughs) I hated this girl because she got 'A's for everything and that used to depress me, it always seemed to be a girl that was top of the English class um but the reason for it, no, I don't know. [...] Oh it was always a girl. You know we used to get marks out of ten. There was only one boy that was ever in the nine or ten bracket ... (Rodney)

Gilles' account illustrates how the public literacy assessment practices of the primary classroom contributed to the division of the class along gender lines. Displays of handwriting enabled the category 'neat girls' to be formed, a category which excluded boys. We have seen, in Keith's account, what could happen to boys whose handwriting was neat.

Three forms of visible positioning are mentioned in Rodney's statement: letter grades, numerical grade and ranking in the class. All reinforce the positioning of girls as good students, even though a minority of children in the class actually occupy the top ranks. The affective terms used here ('hated', 'depressed') recall those used by men to describe their rejection of certain forms of literacy (see section 5.2). The boy Rodney

experiences this rejection as a form of gender relation within the class pitting him against the high-achieving girl.

It has been suggested that primary school pedagogies privilege forms of literate competence traditionally associated with femininity such as neatness and rule following (Hurstville Boys' High School 1995; Van Derhorst quoted in Bushweller 1994). The good schoolgirl' subject position has been described as combining 'good performance ... with docility and helpfulness' (Walkerdine 1985 p. 231). In the primary school a key element of 'good performance' is the ability to read and write competently.

The parents' accounts suggest that, in the primary schools of these parents' childhood, the 'good schoolgirl' subject position was certainly present and reinforced. Many of the women who classified themselves as keen readers experienced rewards for their performances of schooled literacy in the primary system. This suggests a link between the subject positions 'good reader' and 'good student'. As we shall see in the following section, however, the picture for girls' literacy was not entirely rosy. At times the subject positions 'good reader' and 'good student' were in tension.

5.5.4 'Drifting away': good reader and disengaged student

Some women despite describing themselves as keen and good readers reported disliking their primary school experience. This was an unexpected trend given the widely assumed link between literate competence and school success. That a good reader could find the primary school an uncongenial environment challenges the assumption that the ability to read well makes for a smooth insertion into schooled literate practices. That a school girl who is also a keen reader could dislike primary school suggests that the good schoolgirl position was not necessarily experienced as rewarding. In this section, I examine the accounts of two women who spoke in negative terms about their primary schooling despite categorising themselves as keen readers.

Theresa and Jill both established a leisure reading habit early in life. Visiting the library, getting books as presents, reading in bed were familiar routines. However, they both described a gap between personal reading practices and school reading practices:

> But reading at school, was really a drag because that was in the days when you had to read the reader. And you had the reader for a year and you stayed with them. The chapter that you were on or the page you were on - I used to take the reader home on the first day of school and read it right through like any book, and then just had to stay with it. So that part of it was really very boring. [...] I just had this feeling of being off with the fairies somewhere else, drifting away. (Theresa)

> I used to read quite a lot um and sort of did all the um little [unclear] all that sort of thing much earlier than even our kids I suppose. [Sue: Mm] But I don't know whether we actually ever read in school, I'm sure we did. Um certainly not silent reading, certainly not where you go into the library. [...] Um ... um actually I'm wrong, I think what we did was we all had to read out loud. Yes it was sort of you do it if you're being naughty or otherwise people would have to take two or three sentences at a time. Yeah. ... It wasn't really seen -. No. It wasn't really seen as anything of value. (Jill)

In both these accounts two kinds of conflicting reading practice are alluded to: personal reading and pedagogic reading. Personal reading entails choice of text. Selecting books from the library was frequently mentioned by those classified as keen readers, both male and female. It is a silent reading practice which isolates the reader and the text from surrounding activity and so produces privacy. It is a sustained practice, through which a book is read 'right through' over a period determined by the reader. Necessary conditions for this practice are time and a degree of solitude which can only be achieved when private reading is seen as an appropriate practice for children to be engaged in. Personal reading, for Theresa and Jill, was the norm, the practice against which other forms of reading were measured.

Pedagogic reading included reading 'the reader' and other set texts in the context of the classroom. Typically, this involved a 'round-robin' practice in which students took turns to read aloud. Where personal reading was undertaken voluntarily, pedagogic reading was compulsory. Where personal reading involved free selection of text from available resources (such as the library), in pedagogic reading text selection occurred at an institutional level. Where personal reading could be sustained as long as leisure time

lasted, pedagogic reading involved a fragmented, rather than sustained engagement with the text. The reading aloud protocol required each student not only to decode a small section of text when called upon by the teacher but to sit silently while each student in turn performed the decoding task. Here reading was framed as a public performative practice, not as a personal interpretive practice.

For Jill, reflecting on her experiences, these two reading practices were so unalike that she initially only classified one as reading. For her, the school did not value reading at all. Jill recalled making elementary mistakes such as failing to form the letter 'J' properly and being kept back to write pages of J's. Her vehemence was clear as she stated in the interview that she had 'hated' primary school. The result of this conflict for Theresa was disengagement from the pedagogic practice: she was 'off with the fairies somewhere else.'

From these two narratives it can be seen that being 'good readers' did not necessarily advantage girls at primary school, particularly when the pedagogy of reading emphasised public and collective, rather than private and individual practice. In these accounts, we see a private reading subject with a degree of autonomy at odds with the docile public reading subject of the classroom. Which mode of literacy is privileged in the classroom, and therefore which student subject is constructed as ideal, is dependent on the pedagogic practices in use. This challenges accounts which represent the primary classroom as a feminised environment within which girls forms of orientation to schooling are privileged (Hurstville Boys High School 1995; NSW Dept. of Ed. 1994; Sizer 1984 in Shakeshaft 1986).

What happens, though, to the girls who don't read or can't read? In the next section this question is addressed with reference to the memories of some female 'resistant' readers.

5.6 Silenced femininities: women's resistance to reading

In this section I identify a marginalised position of the female 'resistant reader' and describe some of the effects of occupying this position on women both as schoolgirls and as mothers.

Earlier in this chapter, I surveyed the range of literate positions occupied by the fathers in the group. I described men as taking up or being offered the position of 'keen reader', resisting this position or identifying themselves as particular kinds of readers eg readers of factual information, holiday readers, etc. In surveying women's statements on reading, I searched for a similar range of subject positions. The position of 'keen reader' was clearly evident and has been discussed in an earlier section of the chapter. Some of the women also expressed more qualified attitudes to reading based on specific preferences or contexts for reading. The position of self-identified female resistant reader was, however, one I was initially unable to find represented in the corpus. That is to say that no woman explicitly said that she did not like reading. This was despite women apparently being given the same opportunities as men within the interview situation to raise issues relating to their schooling and literacy preferences. This absence of negative opinion on women's part was in stark contrast to the group of men who were vocal about their dislike.

On the face of it, this absence could be taken as evidence that females do have more positive experiences and attitudes towards literacy. However, having taken a position of scepticism towards essentialist accounts of gender difference, I did not feel justified in reaching this conclusion without further investigation. I returned to the accounts of the women who did not speak either positively or negatively of reading as a personal pursuit to look more closely at their comments on reading, literacy and schooling in general. I also sought a follow-up interview with one of these women in order to specifically address the subject of reading. In the discussion that follows, I focus on the accounts of three women whose experiences suggest that to take up a position as 'other' to the competent literate schoolgirl exposes the individual to acts of suppression, both external

and internal. I argue that this suppression is manifest in the interviews in an absence of clear negative reference to reading.

5.6.1 'I absolutely loath it': Ros

Ros, when initially interviewed did not mention her own reading practices, either as a child or adult. She volunteered no opinion on reading as a personal pursuit although she did speak enthusiastically about her daughter's enjoyment of books. Ros also made no mention of reading to her children; rather she spoke in terms of her children 'looking at books'. However, while Ros did not recall memories related to reading she did speak enthusiastically about writing. One of her earliest memories of school was of pretending to be a teacher writing on a blackboard which she had at home. This early desire to be a teacher was realised in adult life when Ros chose teaching as an occupation. Her specialisation was in a practical area of the high school curriculum.

I selected Ros for a second interview because of the absence of references to reading in the first interview. Also, as a longstanding friend, I hoped that she would allow me to open up a subject that may have been deliberately avoided for reasons that I did not yet know. The follow-up interview with Ros was aimed at establishing her attitude to reading and, if possible, exploring the factors influencing this (as yet unknown) position.

When asked directly, Ros made a statement on reading that was striking in its clarity and vehemence:

> **Sue**: I'm interested in your attitude to reading Ros.
>
> **Ros**: Oh God! (laughs)
>
> **Sue**: (laughs) Oh God?
>
> ...
>
> **Ros**: I hate reading. I absolutely loath it.

Note that Ros did not answer the implied question straight away. Her first response was an exclamation that may indicate some strong reaction such as shock, confusion, or anger. She followed my prompt with a pause that could indicate a reluctance to answer

or a mental review of her options. These responses suggest that the topic of reading was a difficult one for Ros to address.

Her statement, when it did come, was clear and unequivocal. It is, like the statements of some of the men, a polar opposite to the statements of the keen women readers. Ros' hatred and loathing of reading are in sharp contrast to the love and desire for reading expressed by, for instance, Kathleen (see section 5.2). Its emotional tone is similar to Henry's 'I hate novels. I cannot pick up a book and read it.'

Ros' statement raises further questions. Why does she loath reading? In other words, why did she take up and maintain an oppositional position in relation to reading? And further, why did Ros not mention her attitude to reading in the initial interview? In order to address these questions, I return to the follow-up interview transcript. The passage below followed immediately on Ros' initial statement about hating reading:

> **Sue**: What do you mean, you hate reading?
>
> **Ros**: I can't concentrate unless it's dead quiet, that's my problem with reading.
>
> **Sue**: Mmm?
>
> **Ros**: I must have been taught a lot of silent reading or something. When it came to year 11 and 12 I couldn't study at all unless I was in a quiet room. ... ... How long ago was it that you interviewed me before?
>
> **Sue**: It was two years. A whole two years.
>
> **Ros**: Was Rachel in school then?
>
> [conversation about child]
>
> **Sue**: That's great. ... You know you said you hated reading? Why do you hate it so much?
>
> **Ros**: I was one of the kids that liked creating stories, not reading about them. I really enjoyed making up my own stories. ... ...
>
> **Sue**: You know I've noticed something from the interviews. [...] No woman actually said they hated reading.
>
> **Ros**: I do!

Sue: But Ros, you didn't say that during the first interview. It started me wondering whether there's some reason why women don't like saying negative things about reading. Do they think it's irresponsible or will give bad messages or something?

Ros: Do you know what happened to me in year eleven?

Sue: No.

Ros: My English teacher turned around and said to me - I didn't like reading poetry - she said to me that she would only pass me in English if I promised to do - if I went to a career that wasn't a professional career. She said she would fail me for English if I intended to do any professional career, like teaching. She would only pass me if I were to do something manual. Not secretarial obviously but, oh I don't know what she had in mind. Do you know what I got for yr 11 English? An A. I was the only one in the class. She had given me a hard time all year.

[...]

Sue: What convinced your teacher to give you a mark like that?

Ros: Well, the reason I got it was - remember Wilfred Owen? - and you had to write a lot of things about him and the war. I had an excellent imagination, I wrote really good imaginative stories. I was one of those students that did no work all year and managed to sit down during the Swot Vac, cram one whole year's work in two weeks. I'm good at parrot remembering.

There are many potential factors in the production of the subject position 'resistant reader' suggested by Ros' account. It is not my intention here to make a 'diagnosis' of her 'problem' but rather to point to some aspects of her past and continuing positioning as a literate subject.

Firstly, there is cluster of associations in which reading is linked with quietness, concentration and study. Ros offers as an explanation for her dislike of reading that she 'can't concentrate unless it's dead quiet'. The emphasis on concentration is consistent with a cognitive discourse of reading (see chapter three) in which the reading act is located in the mind of the reader and reading failure is presented as an individual cognitive problem. Ros defines this inability to concentrate as her 'problem' with reading, thus identifying herself as one with a 'problem' and accepting ownership of this problem.

Ros' next statement describes the practical circumstances in which an inability to concentrate becomes identified as a problem: 'When it came to year 11 and year 12 I couldn't study at all unless I was in a quiet room.' It is in the context of the senior secondary curriculum, which during the 70s when Ros was a student, was driven by the end-goal of state-wide examinations, that Ros experiences herself as a 'problem reader'. However there is a contradiction here not noticed by Ros. At another point in the transcript she reports that as a student she was able to 'cram one whole year's work in two weeks', a description inconsistent with her characterisation of herself as one who 'can't concentrate'.

Another theme in Ros' account is a comparison between reading and writing: 'I was one of the kids that liked creating stories, not reading about them.' Here the difference is between text production (creating stories) and text consumption (reading about them). The implication is that the positions of creator and consumer are mutually exclusive: one can either generate stories or receive the stories generated by others. Ros' identification of self as creator is further emphasised in her statement: 'I had an excellent imagination, I wrote really good imaginative stories.' Writing, rather than reading, is understood as an imaginative act, an act which draws on one's inherent capacities. This pattern of identification with writing and resistance to reading has been associated with male students (Lee 1992; Solsken 1992). Solsken (1992) who observed this pattern in the primary school setting, notes:

> Reading ... involves following the lead of the author rather than taking the lead oneself, and it results in a less tangible product. When the cultural definition of male identity emphasizes social dominance and achievement in work, boys may find writing more 'masculine' ...' (153)

Ros' account demonstrates that this position is not exclusively masculine. The subject position of producer/not consumer can be taken by females also. Perhaps the factors that made concentration on print difficult for Ros, preventing her positioning as 'reader', at the same time facilitated her positioning as 'writer'.

While there may well be parallels between Ros' literate positioning and those of some males, there are aspects of this positioning that relate to her status as a school *girl*. Ros' 'story about 'what happened to me in year 11' has no clear parallels in the accounts of the men in this group. While conflicts with teachers were quite often reported by both women and men, the incident Ros relates is particularly relevant to a consideration of the implications of resistance for female students.

In order to consider the possible meanings of Ros' story about year 11, I first note the conversational context within which she chose to relate her story about the English teacher. In the preceding turn I performed two conversational acts. Firstly I challenged Ros with her earlier silence about disliking reading and secondly, I posed the general question as to why women may be reluctant to state such an attitude. Ros followed my question with a question of her own: 'Do you know what happened to me in year 11?' While not answering my question or challenge directly, she seemed to be offering this specific story as a way of addressing the issue of silence. So in what way is Ros' story salient to the silencing of women's resistance to reading? Let's turn again to the relevant section of Ros' account:

> **Ros**: Do you know what happened to me in year eleven?
>
> **Sue**: No.
>
> **Ros**: My English teacher turned around and said to me - I didn't like reading poetry - she said to me that she would only pass me in English if I promised to do - if I went to a career that wasn't a professional career. She said she would fail me for English if I intended to do any professional career, like teaching. She would only pass me if I were to do something manual. Not secretarial obviously but, oh I don't know what she had in mind. Do you know what I got for yr 11 English? An A. I was the only one in the class. She had given me a hard time all year.
>
> [...]
>
> **Sue**: What convinced your teacher to give you a mark like that?
>
> **Ros**: Well, the reason I got it was - remember Wilfred Owen? - and you had to write a lot of things about him and the war. I had an excellent imagination, I wrote really good imaginative stories. I was one of those students that did no work all year and managed to sit down during the Swot Vac, cram one whole years work in two weeks. I'm good at parrot remembering.

What 'happened to' Ros in year 11, according to her account, was that her English teacher set an extraordinary condition on according her a passing grade. This condition was that Ros agree not to pursue a 'professional career'. Significantly, the specific example of a professional career mentioned is teaching. Teaching was at that time the career considered most appropriate to competent school girls (Clark 1990) and it was Ros' ambition. In attempting to close off this option, Ros' teacher apparently sought to preclude her from one of the major professional options for girls and at the same time places her outside the model of feminine competence that teaching represents (Biklen 1987).

In reflecting on the career direction her teacher may have considered appropriate, Ros comments ' Not secretarial obviously'. Secretarial work was the second major career option to girls at the time (nursing was the third), many schools having a Business Studies stream at senior level which represented the major vocational option for those girls not entering a profession. However Ros understands her teacher's comment to rule out this option as well as teaching. So in effect, the teachers' stance rules out all accepted feminine options for Ros.

We have no access to the teacher's motives or any way of judging the accuracy of Ros' account. What is important is how this event contributed to Ros' perceived marginalisation within the context of a secondary English classroom. One reason for Ros' problematic position may have been her reported dislike of poetry. The comment 'I didn't like poetry' is interpolated into the account in such a way as to suggest a context for Ros' conflict with her teacher. Of all the genres studied and produced in school, poetry is arguably the form most closely associated with feminine literate subjectivity. Ros' dislike of poetry can be interpreted as a refusal to take up a feminine reading position.

Her voicing of this dislike places her outside another subject position, that of compliant 'good girl' (Fox 1977; Kamler et al 1994) which, as we have seen in the accounts of the 'keen women readers', is interwoven with the position 'good reader. An additional factor

in Ros' apparently problematic position as student is suggested by the description she gives of her preferred work pattern: 'I was one of those students who did no work all year.' The schoolgirl Ros' decision to 'do no work all year' may also have placed her at odds with teachers' expectations for compliance.

To read thisaccount as a story of silenced resistance is to consider the continuing effects of positioning a school girl, and the woman she became, outside the dominant feminine literate subject position. As experienced by Ros, the English teacher's statement constitutes her as a negative - a not-teacher, not-secretary - as an absence in relation to recognised feminine subject positions. Ros offers the story in response to my question as to 'why women don't like saying negative things about reading'. Her story in effect shows her understanding of the serious consequences of 'saying negative things about reading' ('I didn't like poetry') for women.

But Ros' story is not just one of suppression. After all, the teacher did in fact award her an A without, apparently, having drawn from Ros any promises about future career choices. Ros, far from being denied the position of teacher, did in fact go on to teacher training. Another way of reading this story, is as an account of a work of production rather than a work of suppression. According to this reading, the teacher's threatened denial of the subject position 'teacher' produces the literate performance which enables Ros, after all, to be positioned within the feminine subject position of 'good student' (of English).

While this interpretation may seem speculative, the account of another woman, Tracey, suggests that girls who fall outside the dominant feminine subject positions of 'good reader/student' may indeed be subject to powerful sanctions.

5.6.2 'She's the dunce of the class': Tracey

Tracey's report of her experience of literacy 'failure' in primary school is constructed around accounts of her relationship with two teachers, Mrs. Compton and Mrs Alling.

When read side by side what emerges from these two narrative sections is a parallel pattern of teachers' productive work aimed at effecting a transformation in the subject Tracey from 'problem girl' to 'good school girl'. Each narrative is constructed around two contrasting incidents. In the first, Tracey describes Mrs. Compton's reaction to her performances in decoding print.

Mrs. Compton narrative:

> I can remember having Mrs Compton as a teacher and we used to um ... it was very traumatic ... um, I found it really difficult to read ... um, I think I used to be able to speak out all right, but I found it really difficult with tables. Um but the reading was very, very difficult for me. And I can remember being put in a corner, like she's the dunce of the class.
> I can remember that.
>
> And then ... and then one other instance. This woman, Mrs Compton, who used to have bunned plaits around her ears, like this, praised me really highly, because I actually could read the Dick and Dora Fluff thing? I don't know whether I memorised it, or whatever, and I remember getting um, her getting there each side of me and hugging me. (laugh) Next to her big huge bosom or something like that. But um ... that's the only nasty thing I can think about school.

In the second, Tracey describes a change in her relations with Mrs. Alling:

Mrs. Alling narrative:

> There used to be this teacher at the school, Mrs Alling, I remember her name. And before I got into her class, she was so awful to me in the yard, I mean, it was always my fault, I was always...'cos I little bit of a tomboy and a sort of bit of a rebel ... but not ... I was really dreading getting into her class. [But] she was such a beautiful teacher to me and she was ... she was English actually and um..she knew how to write like ... er, calligraphy?
>
> **Sue**: Copper plate?
>
> **Tracey**: Ahh! She used to write so beautifully on the blackboard and I just use to ... I fell in love with her. I thought she was the most beautiful person ever. And she sort of um .. .just so changed me. She just gave me so much time. So I really got into writing. Even though my spelling was atrocious and my reading atrocious, but um, I got into writing.

In both narratives, the child Tracey appears as a problem within the institutional context

of schooling. Her problematic status Is associated with, on the one hand, her apparent inability to perform decoding and, on the other, her 'rebellious' behaviour. The use of the term 'tomboy' indicates that the child Tracey is assigned to a gendered category in relation to the dominant category of 'good school girl'. The 'good school girl' subject is categorised both by literate competence and compliant behaviour (Kamler et al 1994; Walkerdine 1985; Walkerdine & Lucey 1989). Tracey's failure to read adequately and her physically active demeanour place her outside this privileged position.

In both narratives, the teacher is a central character, mentioned first and by name. When the reported actions of each teacher are analysed a recurring pattern emerges. Each undertakes a double work of production: firstly, censuring Tracey's 'inappropriate' behaviour and secondly, attempting to reinforce conventionally feminine qualities and practices. Mrs. Compton firstly isolates the child Tracey both physically (into the corner) and semantically (by labelling her 'the dunce of the class'). Thus Tracey is assigned to the publicly pathologised subject position, problem child. However, when Tracey is able to produce a literate performance capable of being interpreted as decoding, she is 'rewarded' by a hug. Tracey, describes herself at the moment of 'achievement' as being surrounded and engulfed by her the teacher's 'big huge bosom'. This intensely maternal symbolism underlines the gender and power relations between teacher and student. In 'reading' Tracey becomes not only the good student but the good child.

In the case of Mrs. Alling, attempts to censure Tracey come in the form of unspecified 'awful' treatment in the schoolyard. Here it is not literacy that is the focus of regulation but more general behaviour. Note however, that it is literate practice that becomes the focus of Mrs. Alling's more positive productive work on the problem subject Tracey. By teaching the child calligraphy, she makes possible her placement into a feminine discourse in which neatness and carefulness are key features.

Tracey's 'Ah!' and her use of romantic language to describe her feelings for Mrs. Alling are a striking counterpoint to the disgust with which she describes Mrs. Compton. Both reactions indicate the importance of desire in this story of gendered literate production.

Taking up the 'right' position within a dominant discourse of femininity is a source of great pleasure. Mrs. Compton appears to feel this pleasure when the child Tracey performs the reading practice. Tracey feel it when she practices calligraphic handwriting and so aligns herself with the 'beautiful' feminine subject, Mrs. Alling. The counterpart to this pleasure is the pain and trauma of being marginalised and isolated, labelled as 'tomboy' and 'dunce'.

While Tracey and Ros gave accounts of the suppression they experienced as a consequence of their failure to take up appropriate forms of schoolgirl subjectivity (and associated forms of literate practice), Lynette's experience of suppression was very much a present day issue. Her early memories of schooling were not happy ones. She recalled feeling 'slow' and being compared unfavourably to brighter children. But while Lynette did volunteer these memories in the context of the interview, she suppressed reference to them when talking to her children, as her answer to my question indicates:

> **Sue**: So is there anything that you can remember liking about primary school?
>
> **Lynette**: (laughs) Emma's asked me the same question, what did I like best about school. (laughs)
>
> **Sue**: (laughs) What do you tell her?
>
> **Lynette**: Um, well I don't tell her the truth, that's for sure.

Lynette's statement suggests that the consequences of taking a negative position in relation to education or literacy are not confined to the school context. Being a mother constitutes such negativity as inappropriate and makes 'the truth' something that can't easily be spoken.

Despite these negative experiences, in the context of the initial interview all three women refrained from making negative comments about reading. Even Tracey, who clearly had a terrible time with acquiring schooled literacy, did not say that she disliked reading. She said rather that she liked it but found it difficult. It is possible that the interview itself produced the conditions for the suppression of negative reference to reading. My framing

the interview as 'about children's literacy' may have brought into play a discourse of maternal responsibility within which women's statements are measured for their potential effect on their children's development.

5.7 Conclusion: Gendered reading positions:

In the introduction to this chapter I stated that literate practices are integrally implicated in the production and maintenance of gender relations and gendered forms of subjectivity. In relation to parents' accounts of reading I posed two questions. What versions of femininity and masculinity are being offered to subjects through their past participation in the literate practices of schooling and family life? What forms of literate practice are made possible through individuals' subscription to particular versions of masculinity and femininity? These questions draw attention to the mutually constitutive nature of the relationship between gender and literate practice.

I began my analysis by looking at the gendered oppositions within the statements on reading made by a group of women and men. I noted how these statements employ a range of binaries within which reading is aligned with femininity and opposed to masculinity. These binaries link reading positions with broader domains of knowledge and practice. The discursive opposition between reading and masculinity, for instance, is supported by the association between masculinity and other discourses (see chapter three). Masculinity is associated with domains of knowledge defined as objective, rational or factual. Masculinity is also aligned with the productive, public sphere. Both these alignments support an opposition between masculinity and reading. By the same token, reading is aligned with femininity through its association with subjectivity and the private sphere. Parents' use of these binaries to position themselves is consistent with investigations of literacy and gender conducted by other researchers (Lee 1992; Alloway & Gilbert 1997; Martino 1994; K. Thomas 1992).

These binary constructions of reading and gender have powerful effects on social subjects. This is seen most clearly in two cases, Kathleen's account of literacy

acquisition and the dialogue between Marco and Alicia. Kathleen's story is an example of the production of feminine literate subjectivity through constant comparison with an opposite masculine subject (her brother). In Alicia and Marco's joint construction of opposition, the feminine literate position reaffirms its masculine opposite (and vice versa).

But while these binary oppositions have powerful effects they do not tell the whole story. It is also necessary to take into account the lived experiences of social subjects. This includes their social and institutional location and their participation in private as well as public practices. Whether particular literate practices are seen as compatible with masculinity, for instance, is influenced by the male literate subject's location in educational pathways associated with class and career. When a clear link can be established between forms of literacy, academic pathways and future employment, then literate practice and masculinity can be aligned. This explanation accounts for the fact that the keen male readers in this group did not, on the whole, report marginalisation or alienation from masculine peer cultures as a result of their literate practice. When such links are absent, literate practice may lack the support afforded by an alignment with dominant discourses of masculinity.

Orientations to literacy can be maintained as a form of personal, rather than gendered, practice. This is only the case, however, if personal practices can be maintained as private practices outside of the social context in which gender alignments are performed. This is seen in the case of the child Keith who altered his handwriting to conform to the public version of masculinity operating in his school while experiencing the pleasure of a 'feminine' reading practice in private. While Keith conformed to public masculinity in the school context, Theresa and Jill resisted the public performance of the 'good school girl' position. In their case reading was seen as a private practice associated with individual subjectivity rather than as a public display of feminine competence.

Certainly the stories of these adults suggest that, in the institutional context of the schools they attended in the 1960s and 1970s, the expected gender positions were both

available and taken up. That is to say, some girls did take up the position of 'school girl' which entailed certain kinds of literate competence and some boys did take up the position of 'school boy' which entailed other kinds of competence (eg physical, mathematical or sporting) and excluded many of the kinds of literate competence associated with schoolgirl femininity. Gender divisions in the classroom were produced and reinforced through the rewarding of displays of literate competence.

This pattern of gender opposition has received much attention in recent times and has been taken as evidence that boys 'don't like' or 'aren't good at' reading while girls 'do' and 'are'.The analysis presented here offers a different perspective to popular representations of female and male literate subjects. The resistant woman reader is an absent subject in both educational debates and in media texts, unless it is in the context of illiteracy. The notion that a literate woman could simply dislike reading appears to be unthinkable: on the contrary, reading is often portrayed in media texts aimed at women as an indulgence, a form of reward for domestic labour. The figure of the keen male reader is also rarely seen either in popular representations of boys and men or in literature on education and culture. (I exempt here the figure of father-reading-the-newspaper which is associated with masculine discourses of public world participation) I would speculate that it is the association of this group with social and educational privilege that makes it paradoxically invisible in educational debate. Power holders are not generally known for problematising their own positions. At the present time it is rather the 'problem' of boys' attitude to literacy and schooling that is receiving considerable attention (Bushweller 1994; Foster 1994; Hurstville Boys High School 1995; Martino 1994; McLean 1995; The Gender Equity Network 1996; West 1995). Interestingly the subject position of keen male reader/student is being constructed as an object of desire at the same time as its reality status is being denied.

However In this chapter I have shown that forms of gendered literate subjectivity categorised as unexpected in the context of current debate are not unusual although they may difficult to recognise. Through my analysis of the 'resistant' women readers I have argued that their lack of visibility is due in part to suppression. Those schoolgirls

who either cannot, or do not wish to, participate in forms of classroom literate practice experience a double difference. They are outside the position of schooled literate subject and also that of feminine subject. The stories of Ros and Tracey show the work that goes in to the attempted production of both girls as feminine literate subjects and the suppression both face when this work is unsuccessful.

Whatever their positions in relation to reading and gender, the accounts of all these parents highlight the extent to which such positions are experienced as *embodied*. Choices about engaging in reading are decisions with implications for time use and physical location. These choices reflect values about what is considered pleasurable and/or productive and what is considered compatible with gender orientation. The experience of reading is illustrative of a more general process in which:

> girls and boys learn to form a particular relationship to their bodies which is culturally constructed and which in turn affects their desire to be active and their choice of activities. (Wright 1989 p. 2)

Reading is a physical as well as a cognitive act which involves sustained periods of holding a physical object - the book, magazine or newspaper - and holding the body in orientation to this object. Reading thus involves the reader in forming, in Wright's terms, a particular relationship to her body. It is partly through this physical relation that readers come to desire reading. Those who do not acquire this embodied orientation to the text do not speak in the same way of 'loving' or desiring reading. For the keen women readers in the group, reading is an embodied practice characterised by intense focus and great pleasure. Their representation of reading as both physical and a process of active commitment challenges masculine framings of reading as passive.

It is sometimes argued that, because boys are active, they find it difficult to settle to sedentary pursuits like reading and table work. Indeed this point of view was expressed by several parents (see chapter seven). On the evidence of these accounts, some men do consider reading incompatible with an active lifestyle. However we cannot conclude from this that participation in sport trains the body in ways that exclude the acquisition of the physical disposition required for reading. The experience of some of the keen readers in this group challenges that assumption. Prue, for instance, who said she

'always, always read' had also been a keen sailor, hardly a sedentary pursuit.

It seems, therefore, that the body is capable of acquiring multiple dispositions both 'active' and 'passive'. Whether individuals acquire both 'active' and 'passive' forms of subjectivity appears to be influenced more by the degree to which dominant discourses of gender are operating rather than any inherent qualities of the activities themselves. In relation to reading, boys may be less likely to acquire the physical disposition of reader if the dominant discourse of masculinity operating in that context constructs the masculine embodied subject as one who most be moving rather than still, outside rather than inside.

This completes the section of the analysis which focuses on parents' literate histories. In the remainder of the thesis, this group of parents will be seen within the context of their current family group. They will be read primarily as parents, rather than as remembered children and school students and the focus will be on current understandings of children's literacy and learning. However, the forms of gendered literate subjectivity which adults bring to their lives as parents are a resource for the challenging task of interpreting their children's experience. As products of the institutions of schooling and the family, parents have been inscribed through pedagogic and curricular practices and have learned to understand themselves as particular kinds of subjects. They have learned to associate particular forms of literate competence with versions of masculinity and femininity. These associations help to create the frames through which parents interpret their children's engagement with various literacies.

CHAPTER SIX

GENDER AND DISCOURSES OF CHILDHOOD: PARENTS' BELIEFS ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING

6.1 Introduction

> [D]iscourses construct ways of knowing children as much as they enable or prevent ways to know them. They provide lenses to which people subscribe, or are encouraged to subscribe, which suggest meanings for the words children use, for gestures and behaviours they enact, and for the activities in which they engage. (Biklen 1994p.18)

As the previous chapter illustrates, through their histories, parents experience forms of gendered literate subjectivity which are integral to their constructions of self. These understandings of self are a resource which parents use in the task of understanding their children as gendered and literate. In this chapter I will be considering another form of resource available to parents: the discourses within which the child is constituted as subject.

This chapter is organised around four interpretive frames used by parents in describing their children. The first, the child as 'individual' enables parents to position their children as different to others and to interpret the child's behaviour as expressive of its innate characteristics. The second, the child as 'boy' or 'girl' reflects the dominant oppositional discourse of gender difference which is employed by parents to align their child with an appropriately gendered subject position even whilst maintaining a belief in the child's individuality. This discourses is both explicitly and implicitly present in parents' accounts. The third frame, the child as 'active learner', employs categories and definitions which echo progressive child-centred pedagogy. It is used by parents to position their child as agent in its own learning. The fourth, the child as 'developing', finds its justification in discourses and practices of child development originating in the domains of psychology, education and health. It enables parents to measure their child against developmental norms for age and stage. In conclusion, I consider the ways in which the discourses used by parents to interpret their children intersect to produce different kinds of gendered literate subjects.

The place of gender in parents' constructions of their children as learners is considered in two respects: 1) as a dominant discourse 2) as a hidden presence within apparently

neutral discourses of learning. The apparently neutral discourses which parents generally employed to position their children, are based on binary categories which index the dominant oppositional discourse of gender difference (see chapter three). Through the analysis I show how these discourses are indeed used in ways that define and support difference.

In analysing parents' use of discursive resources, I will be focussing on the ways in which they describe their children. I understand the task of describing a child (or any object) as an act of framing (Machlachlan 1994). Forming a description of a person to present to a third party (in this case the interviewer) involves the selection of a frame of reference which the speaker can be reasonably certain that the listener will be familiar with (Tannen 1989). This frame provides the category terms that can be used in description. Often multiple frames will be in play. Description is, then, an act of interpretation in which the speaker calls from the available repertoire of interpretive frames those which seem appropriate to the situation.

Parents' descriptions of their children presented here should be understood in terms of the discursive context of the interaction which gave rise to them. The interview was framed as being about the child. Thus the discourses which came into play were those that construct 'child' as subject. Further, my known identities - as teacher, mother, and researcher - were factors in informants' framing of their descriptions. Parents' descriptions at one level illustrate their perceptions of the 'correct' or official way to describe a child.

On another level, however, parents' descriptions are grounded in frequent and regular observations of, and interactions with, their children and are an attempt to represent the real (Backett 1982). These two ways of understanding parents' accounts co-exist in the analysis. Parents' descriptions arise from and are based on lived experience. At the same time, they are discursive constructions which make certain actions of the child intelligible and others, which are incompatible with the current frame of reference, invisible.

When selecting data for analysis I have taken a broad definition of literacy and learning so that a wide range of behaviours, attitudes, predispositions, settings and practices may be considered within its scope. In the interviews, parents volunteered a great diversity of information about their children in addition to that which was obviously literacy related, including sleeping and eating habits, relationships with family members, typical and atypical behaviours, and in some cases, medical histories. The focus on framing enables me to include much of this diverse material in the analysis. The question: how is the child here framed? is applied to descriptions in their totality, not just to those parts of descriptions focussing specifically on literacy.

In the section that follows, I turn to the first of the four interpretive frames employed by parents in describing their children: the child as 'individual'

6.2 The child as individual

That children are all individuals is an accepted tenet of contemporary pedagogic and childrearing discourses (Hardyment 1995; Kessen 1979; N. Rose 1990). As a reminder of the prevalence of this notion I begin my investigation into the individualist discourse with a selection of examples from parental advice texts. The Bounty Baby Book, which in Australia is distributed free to every mother of a newborn baby reminds parents that '[e]ach baby is an individual and must be treated as such' (Farrer 1991). Popular media paediatrician Dr. Christopher Green writes: 'It's a fact that children vary greatly in their God-given temperament' (1994 p. 234). Parents are also reminded of their children's individuality when they consult advertising material for children's goods and services. 'Parent Briefings', a series of hint sheets, similarly states: 'The problem with babies is that no two are alike.'

In these texts, children's individuality is presented as innate ('God-given') and an undisputable fact. The role of the parent is thus to accept and deal with the given fact of each child's unique temperament. Parents (principally mothers to whom these texts

are targeted) 'must' in fact treat their children as individuals from infancy. This injunction implies deleterious consequences if the individuality of each child is not catered to. Children's individuality becomes parents' 'problem'. The 'problem', for parents, lies in their double responsibility both to nurture their child's individuality and to ensure that it does not reach an extreme level that would jeopardise the child's successful integration into society (Backett 1982).

In this study, parents frequently made reference to the concept of individual difference either as a general principle or in the terms in which they compared their child to others. Individualism, as a general principle was expressed in comments such as the following:

> I think everybody's different so it's nice to think that there's a different ah ways of teaching. (Lynette)
>
> But they're all different. (Sharon)
>
> I mean all kids are different. (Barbara)

Note that these parents do not include themselves (ie the category adults) as subjects in this discourse. 'Difference' is here defined as an attribute of childhood as in the media texts previously referred to. Individualism is presented as a universal, a property of 'all' children.

Parents' descriptions of their own children were consistent with the general theme of individualism. They were much more likely to describe their children in relations of difference from others than similarity to them. This pattern is seen when descriptions of individual children are categorised as statements of 'difference' (ie 'he's completely unlike so-and-so') or statements of likeness (ie 'she's just the same as her sister'). Group 1 parents made a total of 234 'difference' statements made overall compared to 64 'like' statements. These linguistic patterns suggest the active part parents played in producing their children as individual subjects within the discursive context of the interview.

The theme of individuality was also seen in parents' reference to 'personality' as a category in describing their children:

> It was just her personality, her, she just had this real ... she, she wouldn't, if she could've, she wouldn't've slept. She hated sleeping. (Alicia)
>
> Although looking at Edward, children are all different anyway, so it's very hard, I think it's very hard to predict whether it's because of being the second child or whether it's because of their personality. (Lynette)
>
> Nathan gets into a bit of a format too you know, he's a bit of a format person.(Doug)
>
> He likes mixing, he mixes well, you know, his personality. That's the way I've found, he learns very, he communicates with other children as well and tries to make friendship anyway (Marco)

'Personality' can refer to innate character traits which distinguish an individual children from others. By referring to personality, children's behaviour can be interpreted as the outward sign of their innate characters. Thus 'personality' can be an explanation for aspects of a child's behaviour that are otherwise hard to explain (such as a 'hating sleep'). Alicia, for instance, reads her daughter's resistance to night-time settling routines as indicative of the child's 'personality'. Doug observes the regularity in some of his son's behaviour ('Nathan gets into a bit of a format') and ascribes him with a personality type on that basis ('he's a bit of a format person'). Marco discovers his son's personality from watching him in social situations with other children: 'That's the way I've found'. In Lynette's statement, there is a tension between two ways of characterising her children: as 'personalities' (and thus as different in individual and unpredictable ways) or as members of sibling categories (and thus as different in ways that relate to their position within the sibling order).

Parents often supplied detailed accounts of individual children's attributes, usually without prompting. The following statements are typical of this naming process:

> She's just an absolute delight, Julia, really a bit fiery sometimes but it's always exciting being around her. She's lovely and dear and warm and generous and a lovely child to have around. So I think she just carries on the way she is. (Theresa)
>
> He's very much an individual (Laura)
>
> Kimberley is very high strung. Very high strung.(Stanley)

> Georgia's very arty, very [gestures] dramatic and hysterical and that's why she likes ballet and does well at it because she's found a niche that she can express herself (Alicia)
>
> He's very easily led, he's a follower. He'll follow the lead of other people. (Debbie)
>
> He's very um ... determined. Once he sets his mind on something, he'll do it. (Debbie)

These statements follow a syntactic pattern: child /is /attribute. These statements define the child in terms of its attributes: fiery, arty, high strung, determined. Individuality itself is, in one case, accorded the status of an attribute (He's very much an individual'). In this case, the child is individualised by his individuality. Other children, it is implied, are not 'so much' individuals.

The statements are unequivocal, in tone. This effect is produced through the use of intensifiers ('*very much* an individual'); repetition ('he's a follower. He'll follow'); the accumulation of attributes ('lovely and dear and warm and generous') and gestures (Alicia's 'dramatic' flourish). These statements have an authoritative and conclusive quality. They are meant to be taken as representations of the real.

In the context of the transcripts, children's individuality often marked the limits of parents' influence. As Dr. Christopher Green, a believer in 'God-given temperament' cautions 'There is little we can do to change the basic material we have been given to work with. (1984 p. 20). Alicia, for instance, brings the notion of individuality into play to in the context of explaining the child's resistance to bed-time routines. Similarly, Stanley's attribution of a 'high strung' personality to his daughter occurs in the context of describing the child's resistance to parental direction. Children's perceived innate qualities were at times presented as limiting, particularly when the descriptive category related to intelligence or talent. As one father resignedly said: 'I s'pose its gotta be in the kid for a start, otherwise, you know, if they're not er ... that way in mind or inclined I, I don't think you got, you got no hope trying to push 'em into it (Wayne).'

Parents' references to children's individuality, then, were not always positive. But even

when it is seen as posing a problem for parents, the status of their child as an individual person with unique characteristics and preferences forms a foundation to parents' descriptions. In this, parents are a similar group of people to school teachers. The belief that all children are individuals is one of the 'basic operating principles' of teaching (Riddell 1992; see also Clark 1989). However while this focus enables teachers to see children's individual characteristics, it makes invisible the effects of social relations and contexts (Clark 1989; Riddell 1992). In other words, the belief that children's characteristics are innate takes attention away from the influences working to produce them as particular kinds of subjects. This is likely to apply to parents as well as teachers.

In the next section, I turn to another discursive frame used by parents to position children. The categorisation of a child as 'boy' or girl' may seem at odds with the belief that children are all individuals, since this categorisation can only be made on the basis of the division of human characteristics into two gender-related groups. However I will argue that parents generally keep both discursive frames in play, assigning their children with gender-appropriate characteristics and interests whilst maintaining that these are the expression of the child's innate personality.

6.3 The child as boy or girl

The notion that girls and boys are different in essential ways is, despite the influence of liberal feminist discourses of gender equality, one of the most pervasive and enduring themes in contemporary life. This belief finds material form in a wide range of dividing practices in which children are treated differently on the basis of their biological sex. These dividing practices have been thoroughly documented in the context of educational sites: preschool sites (Brown & France 1985; Ebbeck 1985; France 1986; G. Thomas 1986); primary schools (Clarricoates 1980, 1987; T. Evans 1988; Thorne 1992); and secondary schools (Riddell 1992; Robinson 1992; Sadker & Sadker 1986). Parental practices also have been found to discriminate between sons and daughters in the area of language use, toy provision and play (see chapter four).

Discourses of gender equality have had effects, however, most notably in a range of educational practices which promote children's (particularly girls until recently) participation in non-traditional activities (Clelland 1986; Education Dept. of SA 1975; NSW GACETT 1994; Sultana 1990). The extent to which the such discourses have influenced parental choices has been little studied but there is some evidence that they have had greater impact on the upbringing of daughters than sons (Weisner & Wilson-Mitchell 1990; Weitzman et al 1985). It also appears that this liberal discourse has contradictory effects; its rhetoric of 'fairness' is just as available to those who oppose anti-sexist programmes as those who promote them.

In this section I address the question: to what extent do parents employ dominant discourses of gender difference in defining their children? I am particularly interested in the ways in which children's literate practices and perceived modes of literate subjectivity are used by parents to position their children in gendered ways.

In analysing parents' descriptions of their children in this way, I am, I suspect reading them in a manner differently to how they were intended. Just as parents' narratives were presented as accounts of the individual self, rather than the self-as-gendered, parents' descriptions of their children were presented as descriptions of their children as individuals not as members of a gender category group. This absence of reference to gender as an explicit category runs counter to evidence of parents' gender differentiated practices with their children (see chapter four). It is consistent, however, with aspirations towards equal treatment of girls and boys which can be understood in relation to liberal anti-sexism discourses which have gained ground in Western societies in recent times.

It is hard to know whether, or to what extent, parents deliberately avoided defining their children explicitly in terms of their gender. My experience of participating in conversations with other parents outside the research project suggests that explicit gender comparisons are quite routine in informal contexts. It is not at all unusual to hear a particular child's behaviour explained by: 'he's a boy' or 'she's a girl'.

I am beginning this exploration with a passage in which the parents (particularly the father) *were* explicit about using gender categories to describe their children and in which these gender categories were overtly related to the children's perceived modes of literate subjectivity. From there I move to a consideration of the descriptions of children which were presented from an individualist perspective but which, nonetheless employed terms consistent with discourse of gender difference.

6.3.1 'There's a real difference': gender opposition as an explicit categorising practice

This section of the chapter centres on an analysis of one couple's extended comparison of their two children, a girl and a boy. Through this analysis I explore how forms of literate subjectivity are attributed to the children in ways that align them with gendered subject positions and constitute relations of opposition between male and female.

At the time of the interview, Melissa and Neil's daughter was five years old and in her first year of formal schooling. Their son was three. The passage of talk in which the comparison occurred begins with Melissa's response to my observation that some parents in the study had reported that the younger of two siblings had benefited from the example of the older. Melissa said this was not the case with her children and elaborated. The first section of the following passage is given below:

> **Melissa**: Clara's more ... advanced probably isn't the right word but - and neither is intelligent. How do I say it without ... ? Um Andrew is virtually just sort of copying for the sake of copying you know, like, whereas Clara ... was genuinely learning at about his age which Andy's just sort of plodding along.
>
> **Neil**: Andy's a boy. (laughs)
>
> **Melissa**: Yeah. There's a real difference, there's a real difference, it's not not a real ... interest. If Clara picks up a book well then he'll want one but if she didn't have a book he wouldn't probably do it of choice.

In developing the comparison, Melissa initially searches for the right category term. In effect she 'tries on' a number of interpretive frames with which to explain the perceived difference between the siblings. Developmental discourse is tried ('Clara's more advanced'). Theories of innate ability are hailed ('intelligent'). Melissa's unfinished question ('How do I say it without ... ?') can be read in a number of ways. 'How do I say it without implying one child is better than the other?' might be one possibility. 'How do I say it without making a sexist comment?' might be another.

Melissa's comparison is not initially on explicitly gendered lines but if she is hesitant about employing gendered comparisons, Neil is not. The brevity and syntactic simplicity of his statement ('Andy's a boy') are in striking contrast to Melissa's more extended and syntactically complex exploration of difference. This linguistic directness and the accompanying laugh communicates an underlying message 'It's all so simple'. That the male child, rather than the pair, or the girl, is thematised suggests that Neil's interest is in distinguishing *masculinity* as different.

Despite her earlier hesitation, once Neil has explicitly endorsed the discourse of oppositional gender difference, Melissa is quick to agree. Her repeated statement ('there's a real difference') has the flavour of debate. The reiteration of 'real' suggests an underlying argument that gender differences do 'really' exist and at the same time allocates the status 'unreal' to some alternative argument. The opposite 'unreal' argument must be one that maintains that gender differences do not 'really' exist. So Melissa appears here to be resisting a liberal feminist version of the anti-sexist discourse, one which stresses equality and similarity between the sexes (Arnot 1984, Elshtain 1981; Diamond 1991; Sultana 1990).

In the movement from 'real difference' to 'real interest' we see a linking of gender difference with the child's orientation to literacy. The activity of reading is seem to reflect real interest on the part of the girl but mere copying if carried out by the boy. 'Real interest' is implicitly set in opposition to 'copying' and thus imitation is seen as somehow

inauthentic, not an indicator of the child's true nature. In this case what is deemed to be 'real interest' and what is imitation is determined by gender.

Melissa had defined her son's interest in negative terms ('it's not a real interest'). My next question picked up the notion of interest in an attempt to discover whether there was a positive counterpart to this negative categorisation.

> **Sue**: You say he's a boy. So does that mean he's interested in other things?
>
> **Melissa**: Yes.
>
> **Neil**: More so than, more playing than Clara was ever er interested in playing.
>
> **Sue**: You mean active - ?
>
> **Melissa**: Outdoor activities.
>
> **Neil**: Active, outside, plays with the bat and ball, just running amok.
>
> **Melissa**: Cars, building, construction. He has more patience than Clara so he'll sit down and play with his lego, play with things that she wouldn't do, whereas reading a story or drawing to Clara was more relaxing. Whereas to Andrew he would prefer to be doing things.
>
> **Neil**: Not so much relaxing it's just the fact that that's what she liked to do.
>
> **Melissa**: Yeah well. Yeah yeah.
>
> **Neil**: That's just her, well that's the way she is, she likes to sit down and read whereas Andrew likes to get out, outside. That's why I say a boy, that's to differentiate between boys and girls.
>
> **Melissa**: I probably think Mat's going to be a little bit busier in his um physical (laughing) activities [**Neil**: Destruction] than Clara was.
>
> **Sue**: Destruction? (laughs)
>
> **Neil**: (laughs)
>
> **Melissa**: Yes he's a very very big boy, he's a very busy boy.

In a jointly produced list, Neil and Melissa define their son in terms of what he does and where: 'Active, outside, plays with the bat and ball, just running amok (Neil); cars, building, construction (Melissa)'. This cluster of associations between play, sport, the

outdoors and physical activity constitute the child's masculinity in contrast to his sister. Neil makes the comparison explicit: 'she likes to sit down and read whereas Andrew likes to get out, outside'. For Neil, the key binaries are inside/outside and sitting/moving around. There are echoes here with the statements of orientation made be the adult males categorised as 'resistant readers' (see chapter five).

Reading is here a crucial factor in producing difference since that is the activity which marks the subject as sitter rather than mover, as inside rather than outside, as 'girl' rather than 'boy'. Neil clearly states these are gendered traits, rather than matters of individual difference and takes an active role in maintaining this difference: 'That's why I say a boy, that's to differentiate between boys and girls.'

While Melissa had categorised her son in terms of outdoor pursuits, unlike Neil she also describes his indoor activities. Here it is not the outdoor/indoor binary that constructs the difference, but a distinction between different kinds of indoor play, cars and construction on the one hand, and reading and drawing on the other. Again, Melissa defines her son's interests in terms of opposition to her daughter's: 'things she wouldn't do'. This recalls her earlier comment: 'If Clara picks up a book well then he'll want one but if she didn't have a book he wouldn't probably do it of choice.' Melissa positions her daughter and son oppositionally just as Kathleen's parents positioned her and her brother (see chapter five). For both Melissa and Neil, orientation to (or away from) reading is a key factor in distinguishing essential differences between their opposite sex children. Reading is defined as *the* primary feminine activity.

However, Melissa's description of Andy's indoor play uses terms that partially disrupt the gender opposition. Her 'he'll sit down and play with his lego' is very similar to the terms in which Neil describes their daughter as *different* to their son: 'she likes to sit down and read whereas Andrew likes to get out, outside'. There appears to be some contestation going on here around definitions of their son as a masculine subject. Melissa incorporates 'patience' into her description which is strikingly at odds with Neil's humorous references to 'running amok' and 'destruction'.

This conflict also involves differently positioning the male child relative to adult authority. Neil's 'destruction' suggests a child subject who is disruptive of adult authority, whose physicality is unconstrained. Melissa's preferred term 'busy' is also a reference to physicality (as suggested by her association of 'busy' and 'big'). However this suggests a child subject whose activity is imitative, rather than disruptive, of adult behaviour.

In comparison with her brother, Clara is presented as a much less problematic subject. In the following passage the comparison between them is further developed by Melissa. Again orientation to literacy used as a means of defining difference:

> **Melissa**: He's also, um Clara was a um a quieter child which I think in a way lends itself to reading and writing, that that sort of personality. Andrew is a lot um busier and ... you know er more of a participant with other people. Clara tended to be a bit of a loner and I think he'll, you know, reading and writing'll be a bit of a pain at times to Andy. But I mean I think he'll, he'll be, be there but I think Clara will will, if we could compare levels at ages I think she'll probably be, be you know. But then her social skills will be not as good as Andy's. They're, they're you know different personalities. I think with reading and writing Andrew will consider just a bit of a, you know, 'I've gotta do it but you know let's get out and play and mix with everybody' and do all of that, whereas Clara will be quite happy to sit in a room with a few people quietly and read and write.

Literacy ('reading and writing') is a here a key reference point around which dualisms of pain/pleasure, active/passive, public/private and outdoors/indoors are clustered. In order to bring out these themes more clearly, I have reordered the clauses to bring all the references to each child together. Clara is described as follows:

> Clara was a um a quieter child
>
> which I think in a way lends itself to reading and writing,
>
> that that sort of personality.
>
> Clara tended to be a bit of a loner
>
> but I think Clara will will, if we could compare levels at ages I think she'll probably be, be you know.
>
> But then her social skills will be not as good as Andy's.

Clara will be quite happy to sit in a room

with a few people

quietly

and read and write.

Here there are two lines of definition being employed. Clara is, on the one hand, being characterised in terms of her (absence of) social skills and, on the other hand, in terms of her capacity for literacy (reading and writing). This is done in such a way that Clara's orientation *to* literacy is seen as an effect of her orientation *away from* social situations. Emphasis is also placed on the term 'quiet' in describing Clara both as a social and a literate subject. The assumption here is that quietness is a prerequisite for participation in certain forms of literacy: 'lends itself to reading and writing.' Melissa attributes this orientation not to gender identity, as Neil does, but to 'personality'. However, the terms in which she makes the comparison draw upon gendered binaries, particularly the dualism public/private. Clara's position as literate subject is within the private realm: 'in a room with a few people'. Turning to Andy, it is clear that he, on the other hand, is constituted as a public subject:

He's also, Andrew is a lot um busier and ...

you know er more of a participant with other people.

And I think he'll, you know, reading and writing'll be a bit of a pain at times to Andy.

But I mean I think he'll, he'll be, be there.

I think with reading and writing Andrew will consider just a bit of a, you know, 'I've gotta do it

but you know let's get out

and play

and mix with everybody

and do all of that

In a reversal of positions compared to his sister, Andy is described as oriented *to* people and *away from* literacy. His position as one who is, or desires to be, 'out' in the public

world makes participation in literacy problematic; it will be 'a pain' for him. This is in striking contrast to the description of Clara, 'happy' to be inside reading and writing. This opposition of desire and repulsion is reminiscent of the polarised positions in some of the parents' attitudes to reading. It suggests that an important factor in the construction of literate subjects is the acquisition of the appropriate desires. Although Clara has been reading (in the sense of decoding) for a relatively short time and Andy has not yet begun to read, they are already seen by Melissa as having developed forms of literate subjectivity that are consistent with their gender orientation.

Regardless of differences in their choices of descriptive terms and the degree to which gender orientation is an overt category, both Melissa and Neil position their two children in a relation of opposition to each other. In so doing they align each child with its 'expected' gender orientation. The passage suggests that children's perceived orientation to literate practices in the home may be pivotal in providing parents with a 'litmus test' of their children's 'real' (gender appropriate) preferences. It also suggests that positioning of children in relation to literacy, schooling and gender is a process of continuing negotiation and contestation. It is precisely because there are a *range* of versions of masculinity, for instance, that Melissa is able to challenge Neil's description of their son whilst still maintaining the opposition between son and daughter.

As I have previously noted, Neil and Melissa were, within this sample, unusual in their explicit reference to gender difference when describing their children. It would be, perhaps, easy to dismiss them as 'conservative', 'rigid' or 'unenlightened'. I could, for instance, refer to Neil's working-class background and Melissa's lack of tertiary education and explain their stance in terms of their lack of access to alternative discourses of gender. In the following section, however, I examine the descriptions of their children offered by parents who did not, apparently, subscribe to 'sexist' notions of gender difference. Rather, they subscribed to a discourse of individuality within which the terms of description are framed as 'personality traits' or 'choices'. Nevertheless, the terms in which these descriptions were offered, I argue, constitute relations of opposition between girls and boys.

6.3.2 The gendered individual: parents' comparisons of their opposite sex children

In this section, I discuss the categories parents used in comparing a child with its opposite sex sibling. In making these comparisons, parents generally did not (as Melissa and Neil did) make explicit reference to gender as a reference point. We have seen that many parents subscribed to a discourse of individuality which constitutes the child as a unique individual rather than as a member of a group (gender, race or class). However, analysis reveals the extent to which gender difference is used by parents as a reference point for categorisation, even when not explicitly acknowledged by them.

I have pointed out that parents when comparing children to others were much more likely to use terms of difference than of similarity (see section 7.2) . This trend was particularly marked when the children being compared were of different sex. In Group 1, I counted 68 instances of a parent describing a child in terms of a comparison with an opposite sex sibling, peer or group. There were 60 instances of reported girl/boy difference and 8 instances of reported similarity. This suggests that, even though parents may claim to be describing individual differences, rather than gender group difference, they find it much easier to interpret their child's personality in terms that are compatible with the 'appropriate' gender orientation, than the reverse.

As well as describing boys and girls in terms of difference, parents also discriminated between male and female children by individualising boys more than girls. By this I mean that boys were more likely to be described in terms of their difference from others (including other boys) than girls. Girls were also much more likely than boys to be described in terms of similarity to or likeness with others. Findings from a count of all comparative statements in the Group 1 Observations of Children file are given below:

Comparitive statements	Boys	Girls
Difference statements	131	103
Like statements	21	42

Table 3: Gender balance in parents' comparative statements about their young children

The gendered pattern here suggests an intersection between notions of individuality and of masculinity, such that boys are more likely then girls to be defined in terms of difference to others. By the same token, femininity appears to be aligned with notions of connection with others, expressed in terms of likeness to them. In support of this interpretation, parents were much more likely to use terms of likeness when comparing sisters than when comparing brothers. In Group 1, brothers were described as like each other on only two occasions. Sisters were described as similar on sixteen occasions. So it can be said that the discourse of individualism not only intersects with gendered discourses but is itself inherently gendered. This reading is consistent with the opposition of 'individual' (aligned with masculinity) and 'social' (aligned with femininity) in Wiltshire's (1989) list of gendered dualisms.

In order to understand more about the ways in which gender difference was constructed by parents I undertook a close analysis of sustained comparisons of opposite sex siblings because, as Kamler and colleagues note:

> The ways in which gender is constructed become visible when we trace the wordings associated with various participants in a text. (1994 p.132)

Out of 33 families in the study, 17 included children of both sexes and out of these 17 families, there were 8 in which a sustained comparison of two opposite sex children was carried out within the interview. The decision to engage in such a comparison generally originated with one or both parents, rather than being prompted by my questioning. In some cases this comparison occupied the largest sustained turn in the interview, suggesting that the descriptions had been well worked up in many previous discussions.

Here I noted the particular categories which were employed by parents in comparing their sons and daughters. The following table summarises the key elements of difference between opposite sex children as described in each of the ten interviews.

No.	Parents' names	Descriptors for girl	Descriptors for boy
1.	Franca &Matthew	sedentary shy advanced determined	physical sociable (popular) slow developer easily distracted
2.	Debbie & Rodney	quick developer interested in drawing not 'really' interested in sport	slow developer interested in sport not 'really' interested in drawing
3.	Alicia & Marco	shy slow developer indoors person creative	sociable quick developer outdoors person practical
4.	Melissa & Nick	shy indoors person quiet creative	sociable outdoors person loud destructive
6.	Lynette & Richard	shy average developer	confident slow developer
7.	Edith & Keith	dependent	independent
8.	Prue & Geoff	interested in reading not good at Maths interested in fiction imitative not physically active ('couch potato)	not interested in reading a 'numeracy person' interested in facts imaginative physically active

Table 4: Parents' descriptors for opposite sex siblings

As the table shows, female/male sibling pairs are often described in oppositional terms, although the terms of opposition vary. Where one child is described as an 'indoors person', its sibling will be described as an 'outdoors person'. The 'shy' child is offset by its 'confident' counterpart. Where one is described as a 'quick developer', the other will be described as 'slow'.

Not only are sisters and brothers being defined as opposites, but the terms in which this is done are consistent with socially available discourses of femininity and masculinity. There is, for instance, a repetition of the term 'shy' and associated terms ('quiet',

'dependent') to describe girls in comparison with their brothers. The counterpart to these terms for boys are 'popular', 'sociable' and 'confident'. Here it is the masculine term that is privileged: girls are defined in terms of their lack of a masculine quality (confidence). This binary (shy/confident) positions girls and boys differently within social relations. To be 'confident' and 'independent' is to take the initiative in social relations whereas 'shyness' suggests a reluctance to make social contacts. We have seen in the example of Melissa and Neil that an orientation away from social relations is associated with an orientation to certain forms of literate practice (especially reading).

A recurring theme in the comparisons of boys with their sisters is physicality, variously expressed as a trait ('physical', 'active') or as an interest in sport. There is a corresponding absence of such terms in descriptions of girls. This is consistent with socially available discourses of masculinity that emphasise the masculine body, its actions and its capacities (Connell 1987; Frank 1991). The corresponding terms for girls are 'sedentary' , 'interested in drawing' and 'likes making things'. This suggests a number of ways in which girls can be defined as 'other' to masculine physicality; through a feminine physical orientation (ie sitting down) or through interests (drawing/making things).

So the production of relations of gendered opposition between male and female siblings occurs through the attribution both of oppositional personality traits (eg shy/confident) and of orientation to activities (interested in drawing/interested in sport). In the next section I pursue the theme of gendered interests through an analysis of parents' descriptions of their children's orientation to activities.

6.3.3 The gendering of interests

Parents very often made reference to their children's interests. They talked about the activities their children did or did not like to do and they made predictions about pursuits their children would or would not be interested in. Often the reference to interests was

made in the general context of describing the child's personality or characteristics. This can be seen in statements like Alicia's which was previously encountered in section 7.2:

> Georgia's very arty, very [gestures] dramatic and hysterical and that's why she likes ballet and does well at it because she's found a niche that she can express herself (Alicia)

Here the child's interest in ballet is seen as expressive of her innate personality (arty/dramatic/hysterical).

We have seen that, when a couple employs the dominant discourse of gender difference to position a child, the child is generally attributed with interests and innate characteristics that align it with the expected gender orientation (see section 7.3.3). Most parents did not, however, make direct reference to gender difference when describing their children's interests. In this section I present the results of an analysis of parents' statements of their children's interests. I argue that, despite the lack of explicit reference, gender orientation is a significant factor in parents' interpretation of their children's behaviour as indicating 'interest'.

Group 1 parents' descriptions of their children's preferences were categorised according to gender of child and direction of perceived preference (interested/not interested). Because literacy is a key area for the construction of gender orientation, I also noted whether the 'interests' associated with particular children were or were not literacy-related, in the sense of including a component of reading, writing or school-related book-work.

Overall the list of boys' interests was considerably longer than the list of girls' interests (33 items compared to 17). This is consistent with a pattern of individualising boys. It suggests that boys are attributed with a diverse range of preferences while girls are assumed to share common interests on the basis of their gender group membership.

Most of the interests attributed to girls were directly related to literacy. These included looking at books, listening to stories, learning to read, writing, drawing and schoolwork.

The only items on the girls' interest list not related to literacy were playing with makeup and watching television. Although literacy-related interests also appeared on the boys' list, they were also much more likely than girls to be attributed with 'other' interests. These ranged from the general such as 'being outside' to the specific such as 'making a goal'.

Boys were also more likely than girls to be described as 'not interested' in literacy-related activities. All eleven items on the boys' 'not interested' list were literacy-related eg 'letters', 'the alphabet' and 'learning to do bookwork'. These parents apparently found it difficult to imagine that their sons could prefer reading, writing or drawing to other activities. Although literacy-related activities also appeared on the girls 'not interested' list, so did other activities such as 'camping', 'sport', 'playing' and 'Maths and Science'.

These findings could be read as providing evidence in support of the notion of gender differences. According to this interpretation boys and girls simply *are* interested in different things. However, as Melissa' and Neil's account highlighted, 'interest' cannot be read as a straightforward representation but as a term with constitutive power. The notion of 'real interest' can be used to exclude from consideration those of the child's activities which do not conform to the 'appropriate' gender orientation. The discourse of individuality acts in a powerful way to mask this process of interpretation, since children's behaviour is seen as arising from their individual natures. The passage of talk analysed in the following section further illustrates this point.

6.3.3.1 Debbie and Rodney compare Sean and Maggie

The section of transcript I examine here is interesting for two reasons. Firstly it shows parents employing the distinction between 'real' and 'inauthentic' interests to position their children in gendered ways. Secondly it illustrates the different interpretations of a male child's behaviour offered by a mother and a father.

Like Melissa and Neil, this couple developed a detailed comparison between their two children, in this case an older boy and a younger girl. Neither Debbie nor Rodney, however, made any explicit reference to gender difference as a reason for the perceived differences between the siblings. The passage begins as Debbie describes the boy Sean's orientation to activities at kindergarten.

> **Debbie**: He's very easily led, he's a follower. He'll follow the lead of other people. If it's up to him he just won't do it. So that's where Maggie comes into it because Maggie um she's normally the one who asks to draw and then she'll start to draw, he'll sit down and draw. But um until Maggie has asked to draw he wouldn't want it.

The focus of the comparison is drawing which many parents mentioned in association with preschool children's literacy development (see section 7.5.1). Here the younger sister, Maggie is attributed with agency in relation to the drawing practice while Sean's drawing is represented as a response to her initiation. Debbie reports that Maggie is 'normally' the one to ask to draw. This suggests that Sean does at least occasionally ask to draw but constructs such behaviour from Sean as not 'normal'.

Debbie also advances a more general categorisation of Sean, as a 'follower' on the basis of his apparent imitation of other children at kindergarten. She goes on to expand on this description:

> **Sue**: So do you think it's seeing other kids doing things at kindy?
>
> **Debbie**: Oh definitely. It's the other kids, it's the influence of the other kids, he's always sat and just watched other kids. Just sit and watch for hours, he's very patient in that respect. Um yeah, but as far as leading into something, he wouldn't do it, yet if somebody asked him to do it he would, he just doesn't take the initiative.

It is apparent here that observing her son at kindergarten has had a significant effect on how Debbie is able to frame his behaviour. At the time of the interview, Sean had been at kindergarten for two terms and prior to that he had been at home on a full-time basis. His opportunities to observe other children in a formal setting have thus been of comparatively recent duration. Rather than linking the child's behaviour to the social context of the kindergarten, Debbie sees this behaviour as indicating an enduring aspect

of his personality: 'he's always sat and just watched ... he's very patient.' This, once again, illustrates the pervasiveness of the assumption that children's behaviour can be explained with reference to innate characteristics.

In the talk that follows Rodney, however, contests Debbie's claim that Sean does not take the initiative:

> **Rodney**: He does with sport, he'll say, he'll come up and say 'I want to play cricket' not 'Do you want to?', 'I want to play cricket', 'I want to play football' or ... he's direct in that sense but he won't come in and say 'Oh I want to read a book' or 'I'm going to play with this' or 'I'm going to do that', he'll just sort of potter around ...

Rodney's characterisation of his son as agentic arises from a different context and relation. Rather than observing him in an educational setting, Rodney bases his assessment of the child's nature on a pattern of father-son interactions in home leisure time. The child's agency is 'proved' in this account through reference to the syntax of his utterances. Here Rodney compares two possible ways of framing a request to demonstrate that his son chooses the more assertive. This is taken as indicating authentic motivation. Sean's non-sports activities are described as 'just pottering around' ie as insignificant non-activities because the child has not clearly signaled an interest in the terms in which this will be understood ie in the terms ' I want to ...'.

My follow-up question is designed to test whether Maggie is attributed with agency in relation to the sports practice in the same way as her brother.

> **Sue**: Are you noticing that with Maggie as well?
>
> **Debbie**: She's not bad but she's not as interested and perhaps not quite as ... as good as Sean but she'll certainly go out there and have a go but, but she's not as coordinated as Sean.

Not only is the female child attributed with less motivation but also with a lesser degree of skill for which her younger age is not counted as a contributing factor. However, it is clear from this account that Maggie *does* participate in physical play. My next question maintained the focus on perceived motivation.

Sue: Does she take the initiative on that? Does she come to you and say 'I want to go outside and play with a ball'?

Debbie: No but she'll follow Sean when he ...

Rodney: She follows Sean. He'll always say 'I want to play cricket' and if he wants to play, she wants to play it, um if I want to play football, she wants to play. Both have a set of small golf sticks and Seany went out and dug himself a hole in the yard to hit the goofball towards, you know, and Maggie would go out and play with him the same but she's more easily distracted from playing, like if you're playing cricket all of a sudden she'll just go and sit on the swing for a while, it's it's almost a battle to get Sean to stop like for tea or for whatever whereas with Maggie it's quite easy to say 'Well look, we're going in for tea now' and she's happy with that so um I, I think that she's coordinated enough, it's just that I think she loses interest quickly, a lot quicker than say Sean does.

The possibility that the female child might be initiating an interest in sport is clearly discounted. Her relation to the sporting practice is clearly stated by Rodney: 'She follows Sean'. Rodney advances a comparison of the two children's use of their golf sets to cement the point. The brother is described as acting independently in a manner appropriate with the practice: 'Seany went out and dug himself a hole in the backyard to hit the ball towards.' His sister however, is represented as an imitator: 'Maggie would go out and play with him the same'. Unlike Debbie, Rodney does not see the difference as one of ability: 'I think she's coordinated enough.' He also acknowledges interest on his daughter's behalf but perceives this as less enduring and reliable than his son's interest: 'I think she loses interest quickly, a lot quicker than say Sean does.'

In this account, there are indications that each child is making some attempt to signal an interest in 'the other' activity; however these attempts are framed as imitative rather than authentic initiations arising from genuine interest. Thus Sean is constituted as 'really' the sporting type while Maggie is 'really' not into sport. Maggie is genuinely interested in drawing while Sean is just copying. Sean and Maggie's perceived preferences, through being defined as 'real interests', are aligned with the 'appropriate' gender orientation without this gendering being explicit or acknowledged.

6.3.4 The child as 'boy' or 'girl': summary

This analysis supports the conclusion that, whether parents make explicit reference to the dominant discourse of gender difference, they position their children in ways that are consistent with, and maintain, this discourse. Literate practices are key to this process. For parents, the child who is aligned to the appropriate gender category is the child who is oriented to (or away from) the appropriate form of literate practice. This is particularly the case with girls and reading/drawing.

Parents are doing more than simply describing their children's activities (and thus reporting natural gender differences). They are discriminating between these activities by describing some as 'real interests' and others as 'copying.' 'Real interests' turn out to be those consistent with gender stereotypes.

The findings presented in this section are consistent with studies of teachers' attitudes to their male and female students. A belief in the individuality of each child is strongly held by primary school teachers (Clark 1989). Despite this, their descriptions of individual children often conform to gender stereotype (Browne & France 1985; Clark 1989; Riddell 1992; Rodd 1986; G. Thomas 1986). It is the teachers' belief in individuality which makes it difficult for them to see the categorising process at work:

> Appeals to naturally occurring or socially produced individual differences which happen to conform to the dominant ideas about appropriate femininity or masculinity obscure, from the teacher's point of view, the centrality of gender .. (Clark 1989 p. 249)

A similar process is at work in parents' descriptions of their children. Each child's perceived 'real interest' aligns them with traditional gender categories but the notion of interest as individual prevents this gendering from being explicit .

In both extended examples of comparison presented in this section, there was a degree of contestation over alternative ways of positioning the male child. Neil's 'destructive' and 'Melissa's 'busy' offer different ways of positioning their son within an implied adult-controlled environment. In the second example tension focuses on the issue of agency. While Debbie describes Sean as a 'follower', (that is one who responds to the initiations

of others), Rodney describes Sean as an initiator within the specific practice of sport. This theme of the problematic male child is also consistent with studies of teachers' perceptions (Clark 1989; Clarricoates 1980; Riddell 1992; Rodd 1986). We will find it recurring in other discourses used by parents to describe their children.

I now turn to another of the frames employed by parents to describe their children. In the section that follows, I discuss the implications of framing the child as 'active learner' for the child's positioning within literate practices and age/gender relations.

6.4 The child as active learner

The image of the child as self-directed, exploratory learner is a strong theme in parents' accounts. When read in relation to the discursive field of childhood, this theme can be read as reflecting a strand of knowledge and practice which has been labeled the child-centred discourse (see chapter three). This discourse, which has been closely associated with progressive moves in the field of early childhood education from the 60s, theorises the child's learning process as essentially one of active exploration and discovery (Burgess & Carter 1996; Marshall 1990; Walkerdine 1984). It is strongly promoted through parenting manuals and magazines and forms the justification for a wide range of products and services designed to stimulate the child's active play (C. Luke 1994). As such, it is a taken-for-granted part of the discursive landscape for parents of young children.

The following are characteristic statements from parents in this study taking up the 'children as active learners' position:

> He's certainly **interested** in things, he's got that sort of scientific outlook, he **loves to find out**, you know **touch** things and **explore** things which is, is healthy and he's certainly **not afraid** of the technology, **learned how to use** the video and TV and (laughs) **no fear** of that. (Adrian)

> I think she probably will do alright because she **has an eagerness to want to** learn to read and write and an **enthusiasm** there. She

> can **see** these books and she **really wants to know** what's in those books. (Ros)
>
> I think she'll **choose** what she **wants** to do and she'll **know** what she **wants** to do. She's always known. (Keith)
>
> I'm just assuming that he has got a good memory. And so if he's got that it will be how he just **chooses** to use it. (Anne)

Discursively, this strand is characterised by thematising the child, the use of sensory verbs to describe the child's actions on the environment and the recurrence of key words that relate to motivation ('interest', 'eagerness', enthusiasm', 'want') and choice ('chooses', 'prefers'). In these statements, the child is positioned as agent, acting on the world. The basic linguistic structure underlying this perspective can be formulated as: child / verb / thing in the world. Examples are: he/loves to touch/ books; she/can see/ these books.

The child-centred theme in parents' accounts can be identified, not only by what is represented, but by what is left out. There is no reference to other people either as agents or as subjects for the child's interest. The only other entities in this world are the things that the child apprehends and acts upon. In order to produce an account of their child as self-directed, the parent is required to suppress reference to other forms of agency in the child's world. This creates tensions, not only in representation, but in practice. In order to explore these issues further, I have selected the account of Laura.

6.4.1 Negotiating child and adult agency: the example of Laura

Laura was avowedly child-centred in her approach to parenting and described her role as 'being there for the kids'. She extended this emphasis into her attitude to schooling. At the time of the interview Laura and her partner Michael had just been through the process of selecting a kindergarten for their eldest child. Laura had read up on Montessori and had searched for a kindergarten with a similar approach. The private school which they had chosen for the child's primary education made attendance at their preschool a prerequisite, however. Laura was unhappy at what she considered the too-strict approach of this preschool.

Both Laura and her partner Michael came from working-class backgrounds and had set a parenting agenda of being different to their own parents, who they characterised as 'hardworking' but with insufficient time to spend with their children. From their accounts it is clear that adopting child-centred practices is considered a key strategy in making the difference. This is similar to the pattern of upward mobility noticed by Cohen (1981) in which newly middle-class families distinguish themselves from their working-class families of origin by adopting child-centred parenting practices.

That Laura subscribes to a child-centered approach is indicated by the terms in which she describes her eldest child. Her choice of verbs and adjectives constitute him as cognitively active, self-regulated and initiatory:

> he's incredible, he's learning really complicated words
> he always questions
> Gavin is a motivated child
> he's got a mind of his own
> he's very inquisitive

The role of the adult in the terms of child-centred discourse is one of facilitator rather than director. However facilitation still entails some form of parental action and so the adult must manage this in such a way that the child takes the lead. In the following excerpt we see Laura negotiating a teaching/learning relation with her child in such a way that the child's apparent autonomy is kept intact.

> **Laura**: With writing, you know, I thought when he started to show an interest, I thought well OK, we'll start to teach him... and , um I think we sort of went in, well, it didn't work ...
>
> **Sue**: So have you been drawing his attention to the letters in the words at all or do you think that'll just gradually come?
>
> **Laura**: He does it. He points out letter in the words. [...] I find that I have to try not to push him. You know? Um .:. I have to wait 'till he's ready. I usually wait for him to ask questions rather than me trying to push information on to him. I find I have to sort of try to stop myself from making him do too much, um, because then he loses interest very quickly. He has to be ready.

Here it is evident that a crucial issue for Laura is the timing of her facilitative moves. To conform with a child-centered pedagogy, these must be preceded by an initiating move of the child's. In this account Laura is at pains to make clear her attempts to follow her child's initiation by acting only when 'he's ready'. This requires her to determine when, in fact, her son is 'ready' to learn. One indicator mentioned here is the asking of questions: 'I usually wait for him to ask questions'. However the difficulty in determining readiness and effectively timing facilitative moves is shown by Laura's awareness that her efforts don't always 'work'.

Within the terms of the child-centred pedagogy, any failure in the adult-child learning relationship is attributed to the adult taking the 'wrong' (ie a directive) role (Phinney & Feshbach 1980). Playing the supportive role requires Laura to monitor her own attitudes, detecting tendencies to become 'too directive' and acting against these instincts before they can manifest themselves in 'pushy' behaviour. Laura 'stops herself' from 'making him do things' (ie she avoids the role of directive teacher) because she fears an ensuing loss of interest on the part of her child. According to the child-centred discourse, the child's 'interest' in its environment is taken to be crucial to learning; therefore, any loss of 'interest' means a crucial learning opportunity missed. Although Laura does on the one hand refer to herself as a teacher ('we'll start to teach him'), the tension between direct teaching and facilitation means that she also resists the role. When a question offers her the position of directive teacher (have you been drawing his attention to the letters?'), Laura clearly distances herself and foregrounds her child ('He does it').

Facilitating her child's learning also requires Laura to have access to resources, both personal and material, and the knowledge of how to use these resources so as to make best use of the learning opportunities that arise. She employs a 'book on signs', for instance, as a teaching tool:

> I've got a book on signs and it sort of explains how signs give information and all the rest so that, I think that is why he started to take notice of signs.

This practice involves presenting the child with information in textual form and then looking for indicators that learning has occurred in the child's subsequent behaviour. Laura interprets the child's orientation to signs ('taking notice') as proof that her intervention has been effective.

The tension between directive and facilitative positions for Laura is linked with a tension between dependent and autonomous positions for her child. The position of directive adult implies a compliant child while that of facilitative adult implies an initiating child. Both forms of adult-child relation are present in the following excerpt, where Laura describes her son in the context of an early childhood setting:

> With playgroup, I'm there to spend the time individually with them. With kindy the teacher's got ... there's one or two teacher with fourteen or so children. So.. in a way I'm glad that David is a motivated child, well he'll just go and do things on his own but, um ... at other times he, he might be having an off day, he'll just come home with a bit of scribble on a piece of paper, just something to fill in the time sort of thing. And you can tell he hasn't had the time spent with him.

While the child is described as innately active and self-directed ('a motivated child'), his production as successful learner is at the same time dependent on having 'the time' (that is, teacher/mother time) 'spent on him'. Texts (in this case drawings) produced by the child are read by Laura for signs of adult facilitation. Producing the child as active learner, then, requires both the attribution of agency (motivation) to the child and the backgrounded work of an adult focussing on the individual child and producing motivation.

It is evident from this account that a lot of work, both semantic and material, goes into the production of the child as agent in accordance with the child-centred discourse. In Laura's case this work includes educating herself about child-centred theories and practices, making herself available to respond to her child's initiations, monitoring her child for signs that learning is occurring, monitoring herself to ensure that any tendencies to directive behaviour are controlled, and monitoring her child's teachers for the time they spend in facilitating her son's learning.

From this specific example of an adult-child relation constituted through the child-centred discourse I turn to a consideration of patterns of agency in adult-child relations in the corpus as a whole. Through an analysis of such patterns I argue that the child-centred discourse positions males and females differently within adult-child relations with particular effects on the framing of teaching/learning events in the home.

6.4.2 The child-centred discourse and gender relations

In this section I present the results of two analyses which demonstrate that parent use of the child-centred discourse to describe their children's activities is influenced by the gender of the child. Following this, I analyse a comparison between siblings in which the terms of the child-centred discourse are used to constitute relations of opposition.

It has been noted that the definition of the ideal child in the terms of the child-centred discourse aligns with the masculine side of the binary meaning system:

> Process models of learning construct the ideal pupil as self-directed, self-motivated and self-regulated, creative and active - all the qualities which are stereotypically associated with male children. (Clark 1989 p. 245)

This requirement places a restriction on any adult behaviour in relation to the child which can be labeled 'directive'. We have seen in Laura's account the difficulty of negotiating this restriction. If Clark's assertion about child-centred discourse is correct then we would expect the prohibition on directive behaviour to be more salient to adult/boy interactions than to adult/girl interactions.

The first analysis focuses on parents' use of a cluster of terms relating to parental directiveness. Examples of terms in this cluster are 'pushing', 'forcing', 'imposing', 'making an issue of it'. 14 out of 32 parents in group 1 (parents of young children) made negative reference to pushing children in relation to literacy learning. The prohibition against pushing is a key element in the child-centred pedagogy and this result suggests the extent to which this has been incorporated into parents' theorisations of learning. Out of these 14 parents, 10 were mothers, supporting claims that child-centredness has

been specifically targeted at women in their roles as mothers and early childhood teachers (Walkerdine 1986). Of the 10 mothers who made comments against 'pushing', 8 were specifically referring to sons and 2 to daughters. This does suggest that adult directiveness is seen to be less appropriate when the child in question is a boy than when the child is a girl.

An analysis of parental reports of learning events provided further evidence for the construction of boys as self-regulated. Learning events were coded according to who was reported as initiating the interaction. There were three categories: Parent Initiated, Child Initiated and Child Independent. The first two categories entailed parent-child interaction while the third included child-only episodes. For the present purposes, the salient point is the numbers of boys and girls who were represented under each of these headings. In the Parent Initiated category there were equal numbers of girls and boys (9 girls, 9 boys). In the Child Independent category there was a small difference in favour of boys (9 boys, 6 girls). The Child Initiated category was the most significant in terms of its association with Child-centred discourse which promotes adult-child interactions in which the child is allowed to take the lead. In this category, there was a significant child gender difference. Ten boys and only three girls were described as initiating learning episodes with their parents.

These findings could be read as evidence for innate child gender differences. By this account boys would be seen as simply more active than girls and thus would not wait for parents to initiate interactions. However, if parents' accounts are see as interpretive, that is as involving a process of selecting particular readings of their child's behaviour, then it appears that boys' behaviour is more likely to be interpreted and described as self-motivated.

I now turn from one aspect of the progressive construction of 'child', self-regulation, to another, creativity. The example given below suggests that, just as the autonomous child is constituted in ways more compatible with masculinity than femininity, so too is the creative child.

6.4.2.1 Intersections between constructions of masculinity and creativity

In child-centred or process models of learning the ideal learner is not only autonomous but creative. If the ideal child subject constituted by this discourse is male as Clark (1989) claims then it should follow that, when this discourse is operating boys are more likely to be attributed with creativity than girls. The idea of creativity carries with it a subordinated opposite, which can variously be described as imitation, rule-following, rote-learning (L. Davies 1984; Walkerdine 1983, 1988). Studies suggest that in classroom sites it is girls who are more likely to be described in these terms, as compliant 'triers' rather than original thinkers (Clark 1989, Riddell 1992, Walkerdine & Lucey 1989).

Here I present one mother's comparison of her two opposite sex children as an example of the way in which the idea of creativity can be used as a reference point to constitute difference. Prue compares her eldest daughter, Sally and the child's younger brother, Zac, both primary school students. I have included an extended section of transcript in order to bring out two features: 1) the framing of the male child's creativity in opposition to his sister's laboriousness 2) an imitative activity (hand-writing) framed in opposition to a generative activity (narrative writing).

> Her writing's always been really neat and in fact at one stage we had to tell her to stop taking so much care in neatness because she was doing Maths as neatly as she was doing everything else and not doing it as quickly. So she was getting left behind. And er, but her writing always. She started, I think she got her pen licence in grade 3 um when most people did it fairly early in grade 3 and from that stage she was link lettering. And she linked letters beautifully. And last year we bought her, got into calligraphy. And she starts, writes calligraphy quite easily. Because of her link lettering she finds the flow on fairly easy.
>
> Um her story writing still lacks, to me, some of the imagination considering, given the books she reads. She reads avidly. Her story writing doesn't seem to have the imagination that Zac puts into a story. She still needs a lot of basis and of prompting, not prompting because she doesn't get it because she doesn't ask it. But you read them and you still think, you could have used that little bit more than you did.

> Sally as I said writes neatly and beautifully, Zac doesn't hold his pen correctly. And it wobbles around and it looks like he writes, he is just not controlled, in fact Jemima, our youngest one writes much more neatly than Zac does. Zac's, it's not important to him, it's not a priority to his way of learning at all. He has much more imagination [...] he's the one with the imagination, he's the one with stories are really quite out of this world. How he ever thinks of them! He thinks of them simply where as she's still I suspect she still labours over them. So they are different in a lot of ways.

The difference between the two children is presented as more than a matter of personality: it is a matter of different 'ways of learning'. Zac's way of learning is characterised by spontaneous and effortless cognitive activity. Sally's approach is not described as a way of learning at all but a way of *working*, as indicated by the reference to 'labour'. Through child-centred discourse's definition of real learning as playful, work, the opposite of play, is seen as the wrong way to learn (Walkerdine 1988). In the above account, Zac's way of learning is presented as superior to his sister's in the specific domain of narrative writing. Sally is placed outside the child-centred discourse of creativity via her inscription with the feminine attributes of neatness and care. At the same time, Zac is placed outside this feminine discourse due to his perceived clumsiness. Zac's positioning, is, however, represented as a matter of choice ('priority'), consistent with the attribution of agency to the child within child-centred discourse. Sally is not attributed with agency in the same way.

Literacy related activities provide key reference points for the positioning of the two children relative to each other. The production of the two children as gendered in particular ways and literate in particular ways is accomplished through the complex interweaving of discourses of gender and learning. Participation in narrative reading and hand-writing is seen as Kelly's way of being literate whereas participation in nonfiction reading (dealt with in a different section of the interview) and narrative reading is seen as Zac's way of being literate. In relation to the crucial area of narrative text, Sally is positioned as consumer whereas her brother is positioned as producer. This would seem to run counter to the argument that girls are more proficient in prose writing overall and narrative in particular (Poynton 1985). What it suggests is that the certain types of

literacies can be constructed as masculine depending on the discursive and practical context.

This was also seen in relation to men's reading in the previous chapter. What links the leisure reading of a man like Richard (chapter five) and the narrative writing of a boy like Josh is the construction of both activities as matters of individual choice or priority. Josh and Richard are both attributed with agency in relation to these literacies thus maintaining their positions within a masculine discourse of autonomy.

6.4.3 The child as active learner: summary

The representation of the child as an active independent individual taking the initiative in its own learning is an important theme in parents' accounts. This frame allows parents to see their child as author of its own achievements.

The analysis presented here supports the view that, despite its apparent neutrality the child-centred discourse is inherently gendered (Clark 1989; Walkerdine 1983). Generally speaking, parents find its terms more appropriate for describing boys' orientation to activities than girls'. When we consider the context for these statements it is clear that the positioning of children within adult-child relations is a crucial factor in the interpretation of their orientation to activities. Boys are seen as agentic *in relation to* an adult carer.

This aspect of age relations is critical to children's perceived orientation to literacy. Under the terms of the child-centred discourse, literacy learning (particularly in the preschool years) must be relevant and responsive to the child's own agenda. This means that, it the child's agenda does not appear to include literacy learning, the caring adult should not make a teaching move. I have stated that boys are less likely than girls to be perceived as 'interested' in literacy-related activities (section 7.3.3). In this section we have seen that they are more likely than girls to be seen as independent active learners. When the child-centred discourse is operating, these two factors together mitigate

against any 'intrusive' parental teaching of boys.

However, parents are charged with the responsibility of producing children who are not only independent but educable, that is able to enter into pedagogic relations with adults. The attribution of agency to children (and particularly boys) under the child-centred discourse thus has the potential to cause problems in the negotiation of literate practice in the home. This aspect will be further pursued in chapter seven.

The issue of child agency is differently addressed within the terms of the next focal strand: the developmental discourse. In the following section, I will discuss how, in parents' accounts, the individual child is at the same time the developing child, whose achievements are subject to monitoring, measurement and intervention.

6.5 The child as developing

Parents in this sample often explained the current state of their child's learning, literacy or behaviour in terms of the child's age or stage. In this they are representative of a dominant Western attitude to childhood as itself a stage different from adulthood (Aries 1962; Kessen 1979). Parents reportedly characterise the state of childhood as one of change in contrast to the perceived stability of adulthood (Backett 1982). It is as if childhood is a journey while adulthood is the destination. This sense of journey was present in the transcripts as a recurrent transport metaphor that manifests in the use of such terms as 'speed', 'rate', 'direction', 'track' and 'getting there':

> I just would like her to be happy at school at this stage, it's a **long way to go**. (Melissa)
>
> Socially he's still got **a little way to go** I guess. (Adrian)
>
> I think I'd say: He'll **get there**! I'm sure he will. And if he doesn't I'll be ready, to help him get there I mean. (Anne)
>
> In fact that'd be interesting to see how **quickly** she's **advancing**. (Janet)
>
> This year he's **accelerated** quite rapidly. (Matthew)

> Like Terry says, it is sort having faith that the kids will **get there**. (Luke)

These children are seen as advancing towards some form of destination. The flexibility of this metaphor is seen in the way that the destination is left unspecified whilst at the same time children can be categorised by how close they are to it. The journey metaphor is able to encompass various rates of progress and degrees of agency for the child from the independent traveler to the one whose is helped to 'get there'. In this way, the overall developmental frame is able to encompass both directive and non-directive adult-child relations. The journey metaphor thus has considerable utility for the parent.

While the notion of journey is productively vague, the notion of destination poses a challenge to parents. In order for a parent to know that their child has 'got there' they need to decide which are the relevant indicators for normal progress at any particular stage of the journey. The school system is structured to located individual children in relation to an institutional performance grid (McHoul 1991; Tyler 1993). It provides developmental indicators in the form of year levels, grades, streams, leveled texts, etc. These institutionally authorised indicators facilitate parents' comparison of their children with 'the norm'.

In the preschool period however, and particularly when children are at home full-time, parents are less likely to have access to institutional assessments of their children. They are thus faced with the task of deciding which of their child's many behaviours are developmentally significant. In the following section I describe some of the indicators of development most commonly referred to by parents of preschool children.

6.5.1 Assessing development in the preschool years

In positioning their preschool children within a developmental timetable, parents of preschool children chose as developmental indicators those aspects of their children that were observable, that changed over time, and that were displayed by other children

(particularly a sibling). Some of the developmental sites and their associated indicators referred to by parents of preschool children are listed in the following table::

developmental sites	**developmental indicators**
speech	clarity, complexity, fluency
memory	recall of names, sequences, events
drawing	accuracy of representations, complexity, number of colours used
orientation to books	sitting still, asking questions, recounting story
physical coordination	balance, ball skills, use of objects

Table 5: Developmental sites and indicators referred to by parents

The importance of speech to parental evaluations of early development is illustrated in the following excerpts.

> Rachel at age two was forming sentences a lot earlier and, um, could understand when you asked her to do something a lot easier than Kylie. (Ros)
>
> He's speaking very clearly. Where Georgia did not do that, Georgia had basic words and, and she didn't say much at all. And ah, yeah, so it was , it's a very big difference which I would have thought would be the other way around, the girls speaking clearer and the boys taking a lot longer. (Alicia)
>
> So, so as far as he, as stories go, he can't er say as much as what Maddy did at his age, he's about six months behind her. (Lynette)
>
> James' speech was - he started talking later and it hasn't been too [unclear] I've just had chat to the kindy teacher and she said don't worry he's fine. And she said she'd do a, you know, um speech assessment for him, and she came out and she said he's fine for his age. (Anne)

In all of these accounts relative norms are constructed through comparison such that the child who has been 'faster' provides the standard against which the other is measured. In the case of Alicia the sibling comparison occurred retrospectively, her observations

of their youngest child providing a baseline for judging the older one's earlier development as delayed. Here the slower child is compared, not only to her brother but to her gender group. Alicia subscribes to the notion that girls are developmentally faster than boys which, as we will see later, is a strand in parents' accounts. Her daughter is thus not only described as behind in comparison to a sibling but as atypical in relation to her gender group.

Parents sometimes quantified the difference in terms of comparative ages at which particular developmental milestones had been reached. Lynette, for instance states that her younger child is 'about six months behind' his elder sibling in terms of his response to stories. She takes the child's comparatively brief response ('he can't say as much') as an indication of relatively slower development. In Anne's case, her perception that a younger child is developing more slowly than his older siblings, leads her to consult the child's teacher who employs measurement practices associated with official versions of the developmental discourse. Discovering that her child measures up to the norm for speech development causes Anne to modify her earlier assessment of the child as behind. It is the institutionally sanctioned assessment rather than the mother's perception that is validated.

Although each of these accounts focus on speech development, there are differences here in both the aspects of speech considered developmentally significant and the communicative practices which provide the context for children's speech. While Alicia focuses on clarity, Ros uses sentence structure and comprehension as key indicators. There are two different relations implied in these two accounts. For Alicia, the question seems to be: can I understand the child? For Ros, an equally important question seems to be: can the child understand me? She refers to an instructional practice as a forum for assessing the child's comprehension: 'could understand when you asked her to do something'. Here, the child's failure to do what she is asked is taken as an indication of delayed cognitive development. In the case of Lynette, the story reading practice provides a means of assessing children's speech. The child who is less vocal during

story-reading sessions is positioned as developmentally behind in comparison to his sister.

Another activity used as an indicator of children's early development is drawing. Children's drawings were visible in many of the houses I visited, often displayed attached to the fridge with magnets. When children attend preschool and childcare, they frequently bring home examples of artwork making this a useful indicator to those parents who lack opportunities to observe their children directly. Walking into an early childhood setting, parents can see their child's drawing within the context of the entire group, an arrangement which facilitates direct comparisons. Lynette and Mary both described their child's stage of development in terms of its achievement in drawing:

> He's much, much more behind than what Maddy was at this stage, er she was actually drawing pictures. Whereas Edward really could only do scribbles. Ah he's actually positioning the scribble on the page at appropriate places, you know for a house or a tree or something. [Sue: Oh right] so he's got, you know, quite a good idea but certainly not up to the same standard. (Lynette)

> Catherine has but it's taken her, I suppose it took her a while to pick up just shapes and drawing faces and things whereas Simone, all of a sudden, when she was about three, she just drew this face. It was as if she just, it was as if she knew what to do, and letters and things. And Catherine has only just started to do those things and she's four and a half now. (Mary)

In both cases, the younger child's drawing activity is understood in terms of the developmental goal to which it is heading and the 'faster' sibling provides the standard against which the other's development is judged slower. Thus Edward's scribbles are seen as a step towards full representations and are assessed for the closeness of their approximations. Catherine's drawing activities are seen as attempts to 'pick up' the knack of proper drawing. Through participating in drawing activities, under their mother's gaze these children are learning that 'real drawing' means drawing a tree, house or face in accordance with a formalised model. The child's ability to make a comprehensible representation of some thing (house, tree, face) is considered an indicator of general cognitive development. Mary's link 'and letters and things' suggests an additional

association between drawing and writing. The significance of Mary's comment 'she's four and a half now' lies in the close onset of school entry. This suggests a concern that the child might not be able to produce visible signs of developmental progress within an educational setting.

The strategies parents use to position their children can be considered a sort of 'folk' developmentalism, an everyday means of measuring children and assuring themselves that they are indeed normal. This is in contrast to the highly developed battery of testing practices which are available to child health and education professionals. Some parents, however, due to training, reading or employment have access to a official versions of developmental theory. In the following section, I analyse the account of one mother who can be considered as a member of this informed group.

6.5.2 Official developmental discourse: the case of Amanda

Amanda, as a trained Special Education teacher, was experienced at working with children who had been assessed by a range of professionals. Amanda was one of the core group of four established acquaintances (see chapter two) and, in conversation with friends, had often expressed her belief in the importance of early intervention. She had encouraged me to take my eldest child along to kindergym, saying that it was an excellent programme for the development of children's coordination. At the time of the interview, Amanda was concerned that her eldest child, Nathan, was not up to a normal level specifically in the area of physical coordination:

> I have had concerns about Nathan's development because he, he has had a few problems, he's hypertonic so his **coordination** isn't, has never been very good, he was sort of slow to sit up and slow to crawl and ... slow to walk, he walked at fifteen months and er I guess most people can walk a bit sooner but it's not just the walking, he ... he just wasn't very **coordinated**, he sort of couldn't get up to a sit properly and um he wasn't confident in jumping or you know standing on one leg, just basic skills that kids practice um just in their normal play because Nathan wasn't very steady on his feet, he wouldn't practice them and so it just turned out that um he **physically** seemed to be behind the other children um ... so **physically** he's probably not up to scratch to

> what a four year old, other four year olds are. Um ... and ah his **speech** is probably a little bit immature though it is improving. Um ... but other skills such as his um ... **mental development** I guess, um seem pretty well on cue I feel for a four year old. [...]

Here Amanda draws on her understanding of official developmental discourse, to situate her son on a developmental continuum without resorting to the sibling comparisons used by most parents (although later, she does this also - see section 7.5.3). Amanda explicitly flags 'development' as the theme for her description and proceeds to undertake an assessment of her child that, in some respects, would not be out of place in an institutional report.

A feature of developmental discourse as it occurs in professional arenas is that it constructs separate domains for the child's development eg cognitive, gross motor, fine motor, social, etc (Burman 1994). Each domain is associated with its own set of developmental milestones and tasks, its own set of measurement practices and its own set of professional personnel given the status of experts (N. Rose 1990). One indication that parents are aware of this official discourse is in their use of category terms for the separate domains of development. Here (as indicated by the highlighted markers) Amanda provides an assessment of her son in each of three domains of development: physical coordination, speech and mental development.

The most elaborated section of Amanda's evaluation (above) refers to the area where her son is 'behind' - physical coordination. Here she describes a normative developmental sequence constructed around key milestones: sitting, crawling, walking, jumping, balancing. The absence of any milestone at the appropriate time is taken as an indication of a developmental problem. At the time of the interview, the child was about to enter formal schooling, and the problem of coordination was particularly salient:

> And ah he can't hold a pencil properly which does worry me because I know reception teachers have told me: 'Ooh teach your child to hold a pencil properly right from the start because once they get into bad habits ...' I don't know, I think he might not be ready to hold a pencil properly.

Here Amanda is being positioned as one who is responsible for producing in her child one of the key indicators of normal development (holding a pencil properly). There is a tension here between two notions of development with different implications for adult intervention. One view holds that the child will naturally progress at their own rate from one developmental stage to another. The other holds that deviations from developmental norms must be addressed - the child must be 'brought up' to the appropriate level.

'Readiness' is a key concept in the 'natural development' discourse and one which has particular meanings within literacy as Amanda is aware:

> He's right into matching things and yeah he's sort of at that willingness to learn stage that they'd probably regard as pre-reading.

By constructing 'willingness' as a stage preceding mastery, the developmental discourse takes on a child-centred turn. Here the adult role can be both facilitative and directive: initially waiting for signs of readiness and then intervening with instruction. In principle this allows parents to fulfil two seemingly incompatible tasks: leaving their child alone to develop 'naturally' and intervening to ensure developmental milestones are achieved. In practice it is a difficult balancing act. Amanda's statement demonstrates that official discourses of development position parents (particularly mothers) as responsible for producing their child as 'normal' in specific and monitorable ways. At the same time, such discourses may be mobilised by those parents who have access to them in order to produce knowledge about their children.

Amanda's categories are generalised and universalised in the way that parents' commonsense or 'folk' discourses are not. Thus rather than positioning her child relative to one other child, she is able to say that he is 'on cue for a four year old'. Official and 'folk' versions of developmentalism are alike, however, in their function of fixing children's position relative to a developmental continuum. Whether through sibling comparison or institutionally sanctioned age norms, it is assumed that there is a 'normal' reference point to which 'advanced' and 'delayed' are relative categories. Thus the child Nathan is assessed as normal ('on cue') in the area of mental development, but delayed

('behind') in the areas of physical coordination and speech.

In the following section I suggest that 'advanced' and 'delayed' are not neutral terms but are applied differently according to whether the child being described is male or female. In other words, I argue that, like the child-centred and individualist discourses, the developmental discourse is mobilised in ways that support the dominant discourse of gender difference.

6.5.3 Developmentalism, sibling order and gender difference

In the section that follows, I examine Group 1 parents' use of developmental categories in describing their children. I find that the use of such terms is associated with two strands of understanding about children's development and learning. The first is the notion that girls' developmental advantage will lead to their early interest and proficiency in key developmental tasks, many of which are directly associated with literacy. The second is the belief that older children develop faster and learn more easily due to the greater amount of adult time spent on them. Keeping these two different theories of difference in operation offers parents some flexibility in interpreting and explaining their child's behaviour.

The notion that girls are quicker developers than boys has the status of fact both in scientific and popular domains; it is both a piece of conventional wisdom supported by parents' and teachers' anecdotes and a finding based on numerous comparative studies in a the field of developmental psychology. From the stand-point of post-structural theory, however, the early developmental superiority of girls, whether 'proved' by informal observation or by experimental research, must be regarded as a construction. Researchers operating within a post-structural framework have subjected a number of such 'facts' about gender difference to re-examination. For instance, the assumption that girls are inferior in the realm of mathematics, which is the corollary to their assumed superiority in literacy and also supported by research, has been extensively critiqued (Walkerdine 1989).

The belief about developmental gender difference was, however, seldom explicitly referred to by parents. Exceptions are Alicia and Debbie who both made specific mention of 'speech' as an area where girls could be expected to progress faster than boys. Alicia was surprised when this wasn't the case with her own children. Debbie commented:

> The theory that I've had so many people tell me about is that girls are so much faster, at toilet training and talking and walking and everything. Maggie was more advanced with her talking and she'd go off with her books and look at them by herself. (laughs) Seany wouldn't do that. (Debbie)

The above excerpt also illustrates how easily the movement is made from knowing about a theory to finding evidence in support of it.

Parents' reference to developmental gender difference was more usually embedded in descriptions of their own children which were offered as descriptions of individual rather than gender difference. Patterns of difference were seen when parents' use of the developmental terms 'advanced' and 'delayed' (and their equivalents) were analysed. An analysis of all Group 1 sibling comparisons found that these terms were associated with both sibling order and gender.

In relation to sibling order, my analysis found elder children were more likely than younger children to be designated advanced while younger children were more likely than older children to be termed delayed. A possible reason for the perceived advantage of the older child is the greater amount of parental, particularly maternal, contact and direct teaching it receives. This pattern of intense focus on the first child with reduced time available for subsequent children was mentioned by a number of parents:

> With Lauren because she's the eldest one I had more time with her. I spent a lot more time with her with printing, writing, playing games, all that sort of stuff. And she's picked up a lot more - well Elizabeth's picked up a fair bit but mainly she's had to learn on her own, ah, 'cause I haven't had much time to spend with her. (Mary)

> I haven't spent as much time doing sort of ... um preliminary book, you know books about matching and the diff - what are those

> books helping children to learn to recognise letters and copy letters? - and some of those things that perhaps I did with Oliver. I just haven't done that as much with Dylan. (Louise)
>
> Our first child, wonderful, make sure we do everything right you know, wash the carrot when he drops it on the ground and make sure everything dah dah and then later on just don't worry too much about those things. I think with her reading it was the same thing, I mean David and Sarah had more attention than Lou did. (Christopher)

In the above accounts, it is sibling order, rather than gender, which determines both the resources available to the child, and how its behaviour will be read. In Mary's account, for instance, the eldest child's learning occurs within a teaching relationship with the mother. It is thus interpreted as learning through transmission. In the absence of this teaching relationship, the younger child's learning is understood as a self-regulated process.

In addition to the sibling order pattern, there was a gendered pattern in parents' comparisons of siblings along developmental lines. Girls were more likely than boys to be designated advanced (11 girls, 3 boys) while boys were more likely than girls to be termed delayed (10 boys, 5 girls). Although numbers in each of the four sibling/gender pair configurations (GG, GB, BB, BG) were too small for statistical significance the patterns of definition were interesting. Of the five older boy/younger girl pairs, four younger girls were described as more advanced than their older brothers. In the fifth case, both children were described as advanced. Of the four older girl/ younger boy pairs, no boy was described as advanced in relation to his older sister.

These comparisons suggests that parents are indeed disposed to believe that girls have a developmental advantage. Even when boys are older, which according to the sibling order model, should give them the advantage, their younger sisters are more likely to be termed advanced.

It is perhaps surprising that there was not more explicit reference to notions of girls' developmental advantage in the interviews. Perhaps the reason is that this notion runs counter to notions of gender similarity and equality which are also socially available. The

tension between these two positions is reflected in some parents' accounts. In the following excerpt, Amanda canvasses a number of explanations for her daughter's perceived advantage but she is clearly uncomfortable about 'owning up' to a belief in innate gender difference. This example is particularly relevant as it focuses on literacy related skills as indicators of developmental progress:

> Milly was quicker to talk. And she's more assertive. She wants to do more but that's probably because she's got Nathan as an example, she can see him doing things. She's more interested in drawing and cutting and pasting than Nathan was but perhaps it's being a second child. *And because she's a girl*, I'm sure it makes a lot of difference. *Perhaps I shouldn't say that.* But the reason why I'm saying it is that I've spoken to people I know and they say they can see a huge difference with their own children. Some of the eldest are girls and they're really into the writing, drawing, making things. Whereas their second children, the boys aren't interested, even thought they've got the example. They want to be outside climbing trees. When Nathan was at kindy, he never brought stuff home because he didn't want to make anything. But Milly has to do everything, she's really disappointed if she doesn't get to the making table. But perhaps that's because we didn't encourage it so much with Nathan, I don't know. *I still think girls are different.*

There is a complex interplay here between a theory of innate gender difference, in which boy/girl is the key term of comparison and a theory of learning by example, in which older/younger is the key term. Note how theories of innate gender difference are both subscribed to and partially retracted (see my italics). In Amanda's account a crucial place is given to certain developmental tasks which are associated with literacy (cutting, pasting, drawing) in allocating to the child positions both in relation to a developmental sequence and in relation to a gender group. Milly can be read as more advanced partly because she shows more interest and proficiency in these key tasks. However the possibility that this interest is due to her location within the sibling order, affording her the opportunity to copy an older child, is also kept in play ('she can see him doing things'). This imitation theory of learning appears to be gender neutral; any second child would develop faster than a first.

To complicate the picture further, in Amanda's account the discourse of gender difference also occupies a strong position, partly negating the imitation theory. It is

precisely younger boys' failure to learn from their older sisters that Amanda cites as support for her belief in innate gender differences ('the boys aren't interested even though they've got the example'). Amanda also keeps in play the possibility that her son's lack of interest in key developmental tasks is conditioned by parental expectations: 'perhaps it's because we didn't encourage it so much with Nathan.' The unanswered question is: why was Nathan not encouraged to sit at 'the making table'? Amanda's belief that it is socially unacceptable to distinguish between children on the basis of gender may make this a difficult question for her to answer.

6.5.4 The child as developing: summary

The notion of that children pass through a series of developmental stages provides an important reference point for parents in their attempts to interpret a particular child's behaviour. In positioning their children on a developmental continuum, parents may make use of common-sense indicators gleaned from their everyday observations. Sibling comparison is a popular strategy for positioning children with the older or 'more advanced' child providing the standard by which the other is assessed. Some parents also have access to more formal measures of developmental assessment and use the officially sanctioned terminology of domain-specific indicators.

Developmental and gendered discourses intersect in two main ways. One, is via a gendered discourse of parenting which assigns to women the major responsibility of monitoring and normalising their child's development. From the evidence presented so far, it is clear that in the preschool years mothers' observations of their children's activities are a key family resource in positioning the child within a developmental matrix. It is mothers who generally take the lead in deciding when it is necessary to consult an expert, as Anne does in relation to her son's speech. The other is via the notion that girls as a group are developmentally ahead of boys as a group, thus constructing boys' early development as problematic (Goldstein 1987). The relationship between these two gendered discourses constructs the relationship between women and young boys as crucially important to the latter's success.

Developmentalism is one of a number of strands of childrearing and pedagogic discourse which construct boys' learning as problematic and focuses attention of the female adult (mother/teacher)-male child relation. We have seen that this was also a pattern in child-centred accounts of children's literacy and learning. In the following section I consider how the theme of children's 'problems' is developed across the range of parental accounts.

6.6 Children as gendered literate subjects

In the four discourses of the child that I have traced through parents' accounts, the child is variously described as an individual with innate qualities; as a girl or boy with the gender-associated characteristics; as an active initiator of its own learning; and as at a particular stage of the developmental journey. When parents describe their children there is often more than one frame operating. So the child may be both an individual and a typical boy, both a self-regulated learner and one whose learning is determined by its current developmental stage.

We have seen that, while explicit references to gender as a category are relatively rare in the data, parents employ ostensibly gender-neutral discourses in ways that support the dominant discourse of gender difference. Discourses of 'the child' turn out to produce different kinds of child subject, depending on gender. Because gender difference is a recurring binary across all discourses of the child, we can expect some recurring patterns of difference in parents' references to boys and girls. In this section I focus on one of these recurring themes, that of the male child as a problematic literate subject and its counterpart, the girl as an unproblematic literate subject.

6.6.1 The gendered construction of children's literacy/learning 'problems'

In this section I discuss a theme that occurred across all the discursive frames, that of the male child as problematic. It is important when considering the meaning of 'problem' to take into account the discursive context of the interview texts. The understood focus

of the interviews was literacy and in this social context literacy, particularly in relation to children, is generally understood to mean schooled literacy (see chapter three). Parents' understandings and evaluations of their children's literacy/learning are always formed in the context of the institutional requirements of schooling. It is teachers and schools that provide the definitive judgement of children's knowledge, skills and abilities, judgements which are made available to parents in the form of written reports, exam scores and comments made in parent-teacher interviews. Further than this, schooling (and school literacy) needs to be seen in the context of social expectations that individuals become educated, employable citizens.

In the Group 1 families the eldest child had just made, or was just about to make, the transition into formal schooling. For these parents, their child's acquisition of schooled literacy was a matter of great interest. Parents of new or prospective students also made frequent references to the behavioural expectations of classroom participation eg that children were required to sit down, to listen to adults and to follow routines. Analysis of Group 1 parents' expectations of their children's school and literacy performance showed two clear trends. Firstly, statements about boys were much more likely to be qualified with reference to possible problems that could arise than statements about girls. Secondly, mothers were much more likely than fathers to voice specific concerns about their children. Taken together, these two trends suggest, once again that discourses and practices of literacy and gender constitute the mother-son relation as particularly significant.

6.6.1.1 'He's got a mind of his own': parents' concerns about boys' transition to school

In this section I discuss a pattern of gender differentiation in parents' description of their children as school students or potential school students. I argue that parents of boys are more likely than parents of girls to see the child-school relation as problematic. In each of the focal examples in this chapter we can note similarities in the way that boys relation to schooling is described. Employing a discourse of masculinity, Neil humorously predicts his son will be 'destructive'. Debbie, who maintains an individualist perspective,

expects that her son will not really be 'interested' in literacy related activities. Laura, who takes a child-centred view, worries that the teachers will not give her son enough attention. Amanda, using a developmental frame, is concerned that her son is 'behind'. Regardless of the interpretive frame employed, the assumption is that the boy in question will be in some way at odds with the expectations of primary schooling.

This pattern is manifested in two ways in parents' accounts. Firstly, through explicit references to actual or potential mismatches between the child and his teachers and secondly, through attributing to the child attitudes or characteristics that are seen to be in some way incompatible with the environment of schooling.

Success in the early years of schooling was more likely to be seen as contingent on the 'right' teaching if the child was a boy. Only one parent of a pre-school girl made a statement of this kind compared to six parents of pre-school boys. Two examples of statements of this kind follow:

> **Example 1**
> If he gets a teacher that's going to inspire him or bring him out, I think he could go above average but if he gets someone that he's going to clash with for whatever reason or he's not encouraged along, I think he might coast along in any way um ... (Anne)
>
> **Example 2**
>
> **Dion**: I'm more concerned with who is his teacher, and the relationship between him and the teacher. [...]
>
> **Sue**: Well ideally what sort of class I mean what sort of relationship with the teacher do you think would create the best environment for Hugh?
>
> **Dion**: Someone who appreciates his particular character I suppose, allows him to be creative and imagination and tries to lead him from that.

The teacher is charged with the responsibility to 'inspire', 'bring out', 'encourage' and 'appreciate' the child. Here the teacher is positioned as one whose focus is the individual male child and whose work is in producing the circumstances whereby what is *in* the child can come *out*. The child's individual selfhood is the prime concern; there is no expectation here that the essential nature of the child will change as a result of the

pedagogic interaction. Rather it is up to the teacher to avoid 'clashing' with the autonomous individual, to begin with the child's character and 'lead him from that'.

Parents' allocation to teachers of responsibility for boys' literacy progress is consistent with research showing that male students tend to attribute educational failure to external factors (particularly teaching) whereas girls blame themselves (Licht & Dweck 1987). The reverse is the case for educational success. The attribution to boys of potential is a critical factor in making this difference. Research also shows that teachers tend to attribute boys with intellectual potential even in the absence of evidence. Girls are seen as 'triers' rather than 'naturally' intelligent (Clark 1989; Riddell 1992; Walkerdine & Lucey 1989).

In the light of these findings the two statements above can be interpreted as references to the assumption of masculine potential (Bird 1994). Before their sons have even begun school, Anne and John are effectively preparing the ground for any future 'under-achievement' being laid at the foot of the children's teachers.

Some parents of preschool boys were also concerned about their sons' response to the constraints of schooling. They recognized that their child would have to conform, to a degree, to the behavioral and academic standards of the classroom, to 'fit in' to what John referred to as 'the system'. Laura was one mother who was worried about her son's place within the institutional context of school:

> **Sue**: Well, um, if you, um, could get out the, the crystal ball on David and see him progressing through school, particularly with the literacy side of things, how do you think he's going to go?
>
> **Laura**: ... Um, that's very hard ... um, he's so ... he's got a mind of his own ... and I reckon if he decides that he doesn't want to do something, well he probably won't. ... (sighs)

Laura's concerns are related to her subscription to child-centred discourses of learning where the child is seen as agentic. As I have reported in an earlier section of this chapter, boys are more likely than girls to be credited with agency in adult-child

pedagogic activities. Here, two desired forms of child subjectivity are brought into tension: the autonomous individual, a subject which is consistent with dominant discourses of masculinity; and the docile schooled student, a subject which is consistent with discourses of pedagogic discipline (Kamler et al 1994). Laura's sigh seems to express both the difficulty of bringing these two forms of subjectivity together and her assumed responsibility for the attempt.

Cassie (Dion's partner) was specifically worried about the effects of acquiring schooled literacy on her son Hugh.

> I don't know how easily he'll make the next step into sort of actually coming to terms with sort of all of written language. ... I think he'll find it very hard to ... cope with a world where there is a right way and a wrong way I mean and if you want somebody else to be able to read that then you have to do it in a certain way.

Taking up the position of writer in Cassie's view means committing oneself to the system. Literacy is here an aspect of the social order. Acquisition of the alphanumeric code entails entering 'a world where there is a right way and a wrong way'. Her son is positioned as one who will resist being constrained by this literate and social order. His entry into literate citizenship is anticipated by Cassie to be a difficult passage: 'He'll find it very hard to ... cope.'

One might assume that entry into the literate and social order would be a difficult passage for all children. However the parents who express such concerns generally do so in relation to sons. This suggests that there is something about the construction of masculinity that makes the masculine child subject stand out from his institutional context. If masculinity in childhood is associated with individuality and autonomy, then it can be said that the boy subject is constituted as masculine through his difference from 'the system'.

The evidence presented here cannot be considered conclusive. There were parents of sons who expressed no particular concerns about their acquisition of literacy or transition to schooling (many of these were fathers - see section 7.6.1.3). However the accounts

presented here raise several questions. Are boys really more resistant to schooled literacy or is their behaviour being interpreted as resistant due to gendered expectations? Note that here parents are describing boys who are at the very beginning of their school careers and how have had, as yet, little opportunity to resist or otherwise the literate practices of the classroom. Might parents who wish to see their sons as masculine have a vested interest in seeing signs of resistance to conformity? When 'the system' entails the literate practices through which social order is produced, might resistance to literacy be considered a sign of masculinity?

And what about girls? What are parents' concerns about their acquisition of literacy or transition into schooling? In the following section parents' expectations for their young daughters are discussed.

6.6.1.2 Girls as unproblematic literate subjects

Very few parents of young children volunteered any similar concerns about the progress of their preschool daughters. When parents did express concerns about girls' literacy it was generally in the context of same-sex sibling comparisons where the 'faster' girl provided the standard for the 'slower' one. In these cases, the developmental discourse was employed to produce difference. However, this was not understood as a gendered difference. Craig expressed concerns that his younger daughter was less advanced than her sister at the same age. However, he categorised boys as a group as less mature than girls.

When we review the ways girls are positioned within each of the discursive frames employed by parents, several reasons for their unproblematic status emerge. Within the terms of the dominant discourse of gender difference, girls are constituted as quiet, passive, and indoors-oriented. This description bears a strong resemblance to the mode of literate subjectivity most often associated with reading, and particularly with the leisure reading of narrative fiction.

Within the terms of the individualist discourse, children are attributed with innate preferences and interests. However, the interests attributed to children take clearly gendered forms. In the case of girls, their 'individual' orientation is perceived as being towards literacy-related activities, particularly reading and drawing. There is thus not the necessity, in parents' minds of motivating their daughters to like these activities.

While the child-centred discourse is ostensibly universal and gender-neutral, the child subject in the terms of this discourse is actually constituted in gendered terms. Parents' descriptions demonstrate that the initiative that is assumed to be a feature of children's learning is, in practice, more likely to be attributed to boys than girls. This agency is however, experienced as problematic by the adult who is charged with the responsibility of facilitating the child's learning. In the terms of this discourse, were the adult to impose their will, the child' learning would be compromised. Conversely, if children are not attributed with agency, problems of intervention are less likely to arise. Because girls are less likely to be seen as autonomous learners, their learning is not seen as so dependent on the adult's skillful facilitation, so easily compromised by 'the wrong' kind of intervention.

Within the developmental discourse, girls are explicitly attributed with an early advantage while boys, in comparison, are seen as 'behind'. The years in which girls are assumed to have this advantage coincide with the period in which children are expected to acquire the foundations of reading and writing (schooled literacy). Here is an additional reason for parents to expect that the process of literacy acquisition will be smoother for girls than boys.

Perhaps I would have discovered more about parents' perceptions of girls' educational problems had the interview been more wide ranging and less focussed on literacy. Research suggests that in the field of Maths, parents' expectations are the inverse of what is presented here (Jacobs 1991; Jacobs & Eccles 1985). This is consistent with the binary construction of fields of knowledge in which literacy and Maths are positioned in oppositional relation (see chapter three). Although attitudes to Maths are not dealt with

here, statements made by mothers about themselves and by parents about their daughters did follow the expected trend. That is, when Maths (or Science) was mentioned it was generally in some form of negative association

Girls' relation to literacy does, however, appear to be constituted as relatively unproblematic. Their positioning within the dominant discourse of gender difference supports this status since it constitutes (particularly the young) female subject as naturally sedentary, quiet and language-oriented. At the same time ostensible gender neutral discourses operating in the filed of childhood contribute to girls' status as unproblematic. In the case of the developmental discourse girls are defined as developmentally advanced. In the case of the child-centred discourse it is the association of active agency with masculinity together with the taboo on adult directiveness that constructs the male subject as problematic. Here, it is not so much that girls are constituted as unproblematic but that the feminine child subject is relatively ignored within the terms of the discourse.

In this discussion of children's 'problems' I have focussed on child gender as the factor that makes a difference. In the final section I describe another pattern of difference which emerged from the transcripts.

6.6.1.3 'No problems': fathers expectations of their children

In this section I discuss a theme which recurred in men's statements about their preschool children's possible future progress at school and was rarely uttered by mothers. Fathers were much more likely than mothers to state that their child would not have any 'problem(s)' with schooling in general. Mothers' expectations for their children's future progress, whilst being generally positive in tone, were more qualified than fathers'. Rather than referring in non-specific terms to a (currently non-existent) 'problem', mothers were more likely to specify the kinds of obstacles to learning their children might face. We have seen examples of these qualifications throughout this chapter.

The following statements are representative of the 'no problems' theme in fathers' statements of expectation:

> It looks like he'll be interested in Maths. That's a common occurrence in boys, that's what the teacher old us. **Definitely not anticipating that he'll have any learning problems.** I think he'll be above average. (Kevin)
>
> I really don't - I suppose all parents would say this - but **I just don't see that he'd have any problems** like that, that he'd be behind, you know, the next kid basically. [...] But **I mean there's nothing to indicate there will be any problems** so ... (Rodney)
>
> Yannis said **he didn't think there would be any problem** with her.(Researcher's notes)
>
> There's absolutely no doubt that Alexander is going to be an excellent reader. There's just no doubt about it. Because he is, he enjoys acquiring knowledge. And ... Yeah. **The problems that he's got now**, being careless with his writing, problems with his letters **will be just run over and steamrolled** with the thirst to, to find out. Just right out of the water. (Gilles)
>
> 'How do you think your child will handle reading and writing in the future?' **Oh, well I don't think Matt'll have any problems**. Eliza seems to be quite keen. (Neville)
>
> Oh I think she'll pick it up. Um, because I got her to copy ... I got her to copy some letters the other day and she, she picked it up. I got her to do letter 'B' and on the first attempt she wrote it backwards,
> did a mirror image of it and then she tried again and she got it. **So I don't think ... I think she'll pick it up.** (Fred)
>
> **I've got no reason to think that he'll have any problems**. I know that some of his talking's a bit erratic but it's usually when he's excitable that he mumbles a bit. Still, he's only young I s'pose [unclear.] No **I got no reason to suspect that he'll have a problem.** [...] I guess the hardest bit is to know if he is getting behind. [...] But so often you hear of teachers who don't really tell the truth. They take the easy way out and say 'Oh yeah, he's fine.' (Steven)
>
> I think it's incredibly, the question's rather hard to answer. Because um I don't know what Catherine is like until she starts school. (Alastair)

The recurring pattern here is one which takes the form: 'I /don't think /the child /will have /a problem'. There are several implications here for fathers' understanding of their children's learning. Firstly, the crucial issue seems to be whether their child does or does

not 'have a problem'. The use of the possessive verb suggests that problems are understood as located within individual children.

Secondly 'problem' is a general term; the nature or type of problem is left unspecified. This vagueness is related to the location of problems (or rather not-problems) in the future. Since no problem has yet arisen, the category is open. This raises the question: how will a situation be defined as a problem? There are indications that fathers depend on schools to provide this definition. Alastair, for instance, found the question about his daughter's future progress in literacy 'hard to answer' since she had not yet started school (his partner, however had no such qualms).

Fathers' categorising of a child as one with or without problems seems to relate to a pragmatic context in which related decisions are made: worry/don't worry; act/don't act. The category 'problem/no problem' is a general binary which appears across a range of pedagogic and other discourses. But the absence of discursive elaboration in this context makes it difficult to locate the term within any official or institutional discourse.

Examined from the perspective of discourse theory, these statements suggest that fathers may lack access to (or practice in using) pedagogic discourses with which to describe and define their children's literacy learning. Among the parents of mid-primary children, mothers were more likely than fathers to make statements about specific aspects of curriculum and teaching. As I discuss in the following chapter, this discursive difference is related to the gendered division of pedagogic and school-supportive work in families.

Overall, while fathers could find 'no reason' to expect problems for their children, mothers volunteered a range of reasons for potential difficulties. A possible reason for mothers' ability to specify problems is their access to pedagogic and childrearing discourses, in which the 'normal child' however defined is constituted through its difference from the 'problem child' (Law 1994; McCallum 1993; Sleeter 1986).

6.6.2 Conclusion: Parents' constructions of children as gendered literate subjects

In this chapter I have analysed parents' descriptions of their children in terms of the discourses employed by them to interpret and describe their children's literacy and learning related activities. Four discursive frames have been traced through the transcripts: children may be defined in terms of discourses of individualism, gender difference, child-centredness and developmentalism. Each of these discourses provides category terms which assign characteristics to the child.

While parents' descriptions are grounded in observations of their children's behaviour, they cannot necessarily be considered as straightforward representations of the real. The process of description is a process of selection from available categories so that any description is at the same time an act of positioning the subject in relation to the discourses from which the categories are taken. The child performs a behaviour, such as picking up a crayon and drawing on a piece of paper. The observing parent has then to decide how this act will be interpreted and represented.

This chapter has demonstrated that the terms parents choose very often hail the dominant discourse of gender difference although this is often neither explicit nor acknowledged. The point at which a category term is chosen to represent the child's behaviour is the point at which the child is constituted in gendered ways. An example is the choice is 'real interest' or 'copying' to describe a child's orientation to particular activities.

What, then, is it possible to conclude from this analysis? The discourses that are operating in parents' understandings of children's literacy and learning do not conspire to produce homogenous kinds of 'typical girls' and 'typical boys'. There are conflicts, tensions and continuous negotiations produced by the intersection of different discourses. However, there are also some notable alignments and it is those which may have a powerful effect in producing certain ideal kinds of gendered literate girls and gendered literate boys.

The broad association of literacy with femininity or with particular personality types which are associated with femininity; the notion of girls being developmentally advanced in key literacy-related areas such as speech; the absence of a taboo on directing girls early learning; all of these elements have the potential to form a tight cluster constituting girls' literacy learning as natural and unproblematic. In contrast, the opposition between masculinity and literacy, or particular literacies; the expectation of developmental delay; the problematising of direct teaching in boys early learning; the attribution of agency to boys in deciding (or not deciding) when they are ready to learn; these elements form another tight cluster constituting boys' literacy learning as problematic.

Compared to girls, boys are problematic subjects in relation to literacy. This problematic status is reinforced by the intersection of multiple dominant pedagogic and childrearing discourses. The binary discourse of gender difference constitutes masculinity in ways that position literacy/learning as 'other' to the male child, particularly in the early years when learning literacy requires the acquisition of habits of bodily discipline and compliance. The individualist discourse, while making gender invisible as an explicit category, is used to support boys' perceived preference for active/outdoor/practical pursuits. The child-centred discourse makes boys' 'interests/wishes/initiatives the determinant for adult interventions, particularly in the early years. The developmental discourse constitutes the male child as 'delayed' and, paradoxically, in need of adult intervention.

We have seen how a number of dominant discourses, both explicitly gendered and apparently neutral, are employed by parents in order to describe, position and produce their children in particular ways. To state the process in this way is to grant parents agency in selecting from available discourse the ones which best suit their purposes. Another way of stating the situation, would be to say that discourses employ parents in the construction of children as subjects, thus denying parents either awareness of or power in the process of construction. Each of these formulations, whilst pointing to an aspect of the complex process of negotiation between parents, children and discourses is incomplete however, as is my account of this process. For a more complete picture

the child's role as agent, both in its own construction and in negotiating practices with parents, must be taken into account.

This completes the section of the thesis which deals mainly with parents' representations of their children. The preceding chapter had dealt mainly with parents' representations of themselves as literate subjects. In the following chapter, these two subjects are brought together through an analysis of parents' representations of literate practices in home and school sites.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PARENTS' ACCOUNTS OF THEIR LITERATE WORK

7.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter discussed parents' descriptions of their children, this chapter deals with parents' descriptions of what they do with, to and for their children, in relation to literacy and learning. These accounts are to be understood, not only as windows on family literacy practice, but as representations which attach particular meanings to the practices described. As accounts of practice, parents' descriptions offer some insight into the social relations through which literate practices are performed. Reading parents' accounts in this way I ask: What are key practices in the family's organisation of parents' literate work and which discourses are operating to define these practices? How are the sites within which this work is carried out organised? How are subjects (mothers, fathers, children, teachers) physically and discursively positioned within these forms of organisation?

I use the term 'literate work' to refer to any literate activity that can be understood as a form of contribution to children's development, from direct teaching to personal practices (such as leisure reading) which can be considered a form of modelling. In describing parents' activities in this way (as 'work'), I am using language very different from that of many of the parents. Few of them described their actions to encourage their children's literacy and learning as 'work'. Many of them, particularly mothers, saw these actions as a 'natural' part of the parent-child relationship. The implied distinction between 'work' and 'nature' indexes other associated binaries: productive/nonproductive, public/private, masculine/feminine. The term 'work' rather than 'activity' reminds us that parents' acts are forms of productive labour.

Understanding parents' activities as productive labour entails recognising the place of the family within the Western capitalist socioeconomic system. Current concepts of 'capital' influenced by Bourdieu (Lareau 1989; A. Luke 1996) go beyond the financial status of the family to include its role in providing forms of cultural competence which children need in order to achieve social power. This includes crucially those literacy-related skills and knowledges which are valued within social institutions. Parents' literate

work within home and educational sites can be seen as a means of providing their children with cultural capital.

7.1.1 Two sites

This chapter is organised around two categories of site for parents' literate and pedagogic work. These two categories are the home and the educational institution. While 'the home' can be taken in general to refer to the family dwelling, this category encompasses a range of sites in which the primary relation is that between parent and child and in which activities are organised around the domestic and administrative running of the household. So, for instance, some of the literacy events described by parents took place in their cars, for instance the pointing out of road signs, or when visiting friends. For the purpose of this discussion, these are included in the category of home. Nor should 'the home' in the sense of the family dwelling be thought of as one singular site but as a cluster of specific locations within which particular practices are carried out. So, for instance, literacy events described by parents might take place in their beds, at the kitchen table, in the 'family room'.

The category 'educational institutions' more obviously refers to a range of sites in this case organised around the primary activity of grouping children together for the purpose of learning. In this study, two kinds of institutional site are considered. The first, which I have referred to as 'Early educational sites' includes such locations as the kindergarten, playgroup and kindergym class. The second is the 'classroom site' characteristic of mainstream Australian primary schooling. It is here that children encounter schooled literacy within a formal government-regulated curriculum.

These two sites are linked in many ways both materially and discursively. The organisation of time is an example of a practical linkage (Leichter 1979). The 'school day' provides a reference point for the mobilisation of children and parents (Grieshaber 1994; D. Smith 1987). At the same time, the 'home day' with its routine of mealtimes and bedtime restricts the hours in which schools can operate. An example of discursive

linkage is the way in which the subject positions 'mother' and teacher' are aligned within child-centred pedagogic discourses (Walkerdine 1986). Child-centred discourse operates within both sites to produce the associated subject positions of facilitating adult and initiating child. Discursive links of this kinds do not require actual contact between home and school. They are continually constituted and renewed in multiple socially available texts which represent 'home' and 'school'.

Social texts continually reinforce the notion that home and school are causally related. This is certainly the case in the academic domain where a large and growing corpus of research work examines the effects of links (or their absence) between the two institutions (Bogenschneider & Steinberg 1994; Carlson 1991; Chazan 1982; de Jong 1993; Dornbusch et al 1987; Grolnick & Ryan 1989; Hess et al 1984; Parr et al 1993; Rowe 1990; Snow et al 1991; Stevenson & Baker 1987). The assumption of a causal link is reinforced by commercial interests selling products and services to parents on the basis that these will set their children up for school success. It is reinforced by media articles and programmes which draw correlations between home environments and children's academic and social performance (Jones 1994; Page 1994). The child's documented school performance is thus taken as a means of evaluating parents' childrearing, pedagogic and breadwinning labour (D. Smith 1987). Parents' accounts of their literate work must be seen within the context of this assumed link between home and school. Their strong interest in their child's school success is likely to have effects not only on the literate work they do but on how they represent this work.

7.1.2 Predictions

Before presenting the findings of this study in relation to literate practice, I briefly review the research evidence which is surveyed in greater detail in chapter three. On the available research evidence it is clear that the gendered division of parenting labour extends to parents' literate and pedagogic work. Women take primary responsibility for this work. Beyond this there is some evidence that men and women attach different meanings to this work. Mothers' play with children was, for instance, is more likely to be

understood as pedagogic than fathers' play.

However, in some contexts mothers and fathers took similar approaches or expressed similar views. Both, for instance, have been found to simplify their speech to children (Gleason & Greif 1983). The developmental view of childhood, which focuses on the child's age or stage, also appears to be subscribed to by parents regardless of gender (Backett 1982). From this it appears that in certain contexts, the subject position 'parent' may be more salient than the gendered subject positions 'mother' and 'father'. That is to say the dominant discourse may be one of age rather than gender. Parental solidarity is also facilitated when couples subscribe to a 'shared parenting' discourse (Backett 1982, Ehrensaft 1986).

Parents' accounts of their literate work can therefore be expected to reflect both gender differences and parental similarities of approach. Due to the multiple discourses within which parents' activities are constituted as pedagogic or literate we can expect some tensions between different ways of representing this work. On both the research evidence, and the findings of the previous two chapters, we can expect that the gender of the child will be a significant factor in the way parents choose to represent this work.

The chapter deals firstly with parents' accounts of home-based literate practices. Two kinds of practice are discussed, story-reading and teaching/learning events. Parents' activities in relation to educational sites are then described and analysed.

7.2 The home as a site for parents' literate work: reading to children

> Neville reads to Timothy every time, every night, for at least half an hour and, and it's not, not only for a calming sort of effect, but somehow to help him to read or just to have, you know, a really nice interest in books, which is good. Yeah, so we've done that since day one and if they ever ask to be read to during the day, we'll stop and do that immediately so mmm they, they really enjoy books. (Janet)
>
> She had a, um to read to her like was a, a mega struggle like, to get her to sleep every night I used to literally have to hold her down in the bed, read to her, sing her songs, then hold her down until

she went to sleep. and that was up 'til three, 'til I fell pregnant with Anthony and I couldn't do it any more. (Alicia)

In contemporary times, reading to children has occupied a prominent place in accounts of parents' roles in their children's literacy development (Cochran-Smith 1984; McMackin 1993; Pulvertaft 1985; Spreadbury 1992; Wiener 1988). Reading to children has been attributed with a wide range of educational effects including fostering intellectual development (Toomey & Allen 1991), contributing to the development of children's reading and writing skills (Rowe 1990), encouraging positive attitudes to books (Teale 1984) and training the child in school-type protocols (Heath 1982). It is not the aim of this project to test whether these claims are true but to regard them as the 'official view' and thus part of the discursive field in which parents position themselves and are positioned. Parents' awareness of the assumed place of home reading in children's development is reflected by Janet's statement above. Her belief that story reading will 'help him to read' connects her parenting practice to an educational discourse which offers a particular view of children's literacy development.

But Alicia's statement is a powerful reminder that story-reading takes place in a domain of family relations in which the issue of children's literacy development is only one of a range of competing concerns. It is an account which would look very strange and perhaps shocking in a child development manual for parents, where parent-child interactions are viewed as 'learning events', and factors such as fatigue and struggle do not appear (Woollett & Phoenix 1996).

The general picture that emerges from a survey of the transcripts is of homes where reading to children (particularly in the preschool years) is a routine part of family life and where this is a task shared between mothers and fathers, to a greater or lesser degree. Although both men and women spoke of their participation in this practice, there were patterns of difference in their accounts. Women were more likely than men to emphasise the importance of the child's early exposure to books. They were also much more likely than men to take a supervisory role in relation to this practice. This supervisory role operated in many ways: through the provision of texts, through delegation of work,

through undertaking the role of commentator on their partner's practice. Another difference was temporal: men were more likely to undertake their reading sessions as part of a bedtime settling routine than at any other time. They were also more likely to report using various strategies to shorten the time spent on story reading. A further pattern related to child gender. Parents seemed to invest father-son reading sessions with a special significance. I deal with each of these trends in turn.

7.2.1 Starting early: mothers' reading to very young children

A large group of mothers in the combined sample (16) specifically volunteered the information that they had read, or believed in reading to, children from the youngest possible age. Some said that they had 'always' read to their children; others nominated a specific age. Representative statements include:

> I read to him every night which I tried to do anyway right from you know right from the word zero (Kathleen)
>
> We've read to him from a very early age, virtually right from birth he's been exposed to books, the written, and the written word from a really early age (Amanda)
>
> There are a lot of books around, lots of books in our house, there are books ... surrounding him. ... The bedtime ritual of a story probably started, well even before he could talk. (Cassie)
>
> Jeanette said that when Alexandra had been a baby of less than 12 months, if she was asked to ' pick up the book with the cat in it', she would. (Researcher's notes)
>
> Well she has always loved books, always loved books, *loved*. Like we did pictures with her from the year of one, you know like just um 'cow' 'sheep' all the simple books. (Melissa)

While the differences between these statements are as interesting as the similarities, all of them nominate infancy as the appropriate time to begin reading to children. Several of these mothers are at pains to point out that they began the reading practice from the earliest possible time: 'right from the word zero', 'right from birth'. This association of reading with infant care suggests that these women understand their literate work to be an integral part of their mothering work. Although fathers spoke about reading to their

children, it was mothers who stressed the early age at which the practice had commenced. Perhaps fathers felt less need to present themselves in the context of the interview as conscientious parent-educators. The mothers' emphasis on the earliest possible beginning to reading can be interpreted as conveying to me, the 'literacy expert': 'I haven't missed any opportunity to educate my child.'

Teachers were well represented in this group (Kathleen, Amanda, Cassie) suggesting the effects of pedagogic discourses accessed through training. However, on the evidence of this sample, the early reading practice appears to be widespread, at least in middle-class homes. Although few mothers referred to the sources of their early reading practice, one possibility is that women are learning about this practice from the same sources from which they are learning about infant care and child rearing.

One mother who made explicit mention of a source of advice on early reading was Lynette. Her account gives an insight into the way this advice may be incorporated into women's infant care practices:

> I remember being in the prenatal classes and things, talking about that you can read to you know very young children.
>
> But I remember um once when she was only a few weeks old I had these little Beatrix Potter books and I thought I'd, I, I just didn't know what to do with her, it was - Richard had gone to work and it was still fairly early in the morning so I sat in bed with her and tried to read her these Beatrix Potter books. (laughs)
>
> But I now look back on it and think, you know, had there been some bright pictures or something like that it would have been a bit more interesting. But these tiny little books with tiny little pictures. Yeah but um I had the right idea. (Lynette)

Lynette's use of the second person ('you can read') positions herself as the subject of this advice. The implied voice of 'you can read' is the instructor, the expert on infant care. Lynette narrates her reading practice as an attempt to follow this advice ('I ... tried to read').

The reported circumstances under which this attempt was made suggest a context for

women's adoption of the practice of reading to very young children. Lynette lists the following factors:

> she was only a few weeks old
> I had these little Beatrix Potter books
> I just didn't know what to do with her
> Richard had gone to work
> and it was still fairly early in the morning

The only factor here that directly relates to reading as a literate practice is the texts. Either Lynette herself or another interested person has supplied books so story reading is prepared for as an expected part of child rearing. The other factors relate to Lynette's situation as a new mother. She is alone with a very young child, her partner has left and the day stretches ahead of her. She does not know 'what to do with' her new baby. It is in these circumstances that the expert advice is mobilised: 'so I sat in bed with her and tried to read'.

Lynette follows her account with a retrospective comment: 'But now I look back on it and I think'. In her commentary, Lynette does not mention contextual factors such as the absence of her partner and the long days to be filled somehow. Instead but focuses on choice of text ('these tiny little books with tiny little pictures'). Here she uses the terms of child-centred discourse to evaluate herself as a facilitator of her child's literacy. She positions herself as one who simply needed to know more about what 'interests' young children ('bright pictures') and affirms the value of the early reading practice ('I had the right idea'). In so doing she affirms the expert advice with which the account began, using its terms to judge her own performance.

Anne, unlike the mothers mentioned so far, resisted the pressure to incorporate literate work into her infant care routine.

> I'm trying to think ... when we started reading to him, we never did it when he was really little, you know, a baby. I know people say you should read right from the word 'go' to babies but I don't think we ever did that very much. [...] He probably would have had one

> or two stories read but not as frequently because I know what Alastair gets now, I don't read to him much 'cause I just, just - (laughing) I don't. I should I know but I don't. (laughs) (Anne)

Anne's account of reading to children is framed an account of her departure from recommended practice. Her statement about reading is in the negative: 'we never did it when he was really little'. The injunction to begin reading early is referred to: 'people say you should read'. Like Lynette, Anne refers to herself as the subject of this advice but the source is unspecified; 'people say' suggests multiple sources. Later she switches to the first person thus (also like Lynette) adopting the expert perspective to evaluate her own performance: 'I should ... but I don't'.

Anne places herself in subject position as knower of this advice: 'I know people say', ' I should I know'. Perhaps by stressing her knowledge she avoids being positioned as ignorant within the context of the interview. Anne evidently feels a necessity to justify her departure from accepted practice but at the same time she resists positioning herself as accountable. This tension is contained in a statement which, though framed as an explanation does not explain: 'I don't read to him much because I just , just (laughing) ... I don't'.

One justification Anne could have offered (but didn't) is the difficulty of incorporating this literate work into her childrearing and domestic labour. Anne at the time of interviewing had three children under five years old. Perhaps her laugh indicates the impracticality of reading to infants given these domestic demands. But, like Lynette, she adopts the terms of pedagogic discourses of childrearing to describe her practice. These discourses evaluate mothers as facilitators of their children's development, including their literacy development, and do not make reference to the social and material context for this work.

Returning to the statements of the 'early reading mothers', I note that 'books' are a crucial feature in these accounts. Although this may seem an obvious point to make, the way in which mothers describe the relation between themselves as reader, the child, and the text tells us something about their theories of learning. Cassie, for instance, was identified through discourse analysis (see chapter six) as being strongly 'child-centred'

in her orientation to children's learning. She describes the early reading practice as follows:

> There are a lot of books around, lots of books in our house, there are books ... surrounding him. ... The bedtime ritual of a story probably started, well even before he could talk. (Cassie)

Cassie begins by describing an environment within which 'books' are a key object and then places her child within it. Here the crucial relation is a direct one between the child and the book. Adults are not directly referred to. For Cassie one reads to very young children in order to bring about this contact between child and book. This is a framing consistent with a Piagetian model of child development (Forman & Hill 1984; Forman & Kuschner 1977) in which the child is understood as learning through interaction with objects in the environment. Amanda's reference to 'exposure' suggests a similar model:

> We've read to him from a very early age, virtually right from birth he's been exposed to books, the written, and the written word from a really early age (Amanda)

Once again, the early reading practice is framed as a means of bringing about direct contact between the child and the book.

In parents' accounts books also appear as a means of facilitating and testing young children's recognition of objects, or rather representations of objects. Many early picture books are designed to enable a practice in which the adult shows the picture, names the object and encourages the child to repeat the word. Heath's (1982) community literacy study found this naming practice common in white working-class homes, suggesting that it is a widely understood way for parents to engage young children with books. Melissa seems to be referring to this kind of text:

> Like we did pictures with her from the year of one, you know like just um 'cow' 'sheep' all the simple books. (Melissa)

Jeanette set her infant daughter the test of identifying a book by its pictorial content:

> Jeanette said that when Alexandra had been a baby of less than 12 months, if she was asked to 'pick up the book with the cat in it', she would. (Researcher's notes)

In these two examples, the mother appears in a more overtly directive role and the child is accorded lesser agency within the reading practice. It is perhaps significant that both women are referring to daughters whereas the examples above, which are more child-centred in tone, refer to sons. This would certainly be consistent with the gender differentiated patterns in attribution of agency reported in chapter six. However, it should be stressed that the numbers here are very small.

In summary, a sub-groups of mothers, but no fathers, laid particular stress on the early age at which their child had been offered its first story-reading experience. Early reading appears to be widely understood as an aspect of infant care, promoted through prenatal classes, and known about even by those women who choose not to practice it. The practice of mothers reading to infants reinforces an association between mothering work and literate work and in doing so supports the gendered division of parental and literate labour (see chapter four). Mothers employ two kinds of explanation for their early reading practice. They either index a child-centred model of development in which direct contact between the child and book is seen as crucial or employ a transmission model in which object recognition is taught to the child through the medium of books.

7.2.2 Bed-time story reading and the micro-politics of family life

Story reading is parenting work which occupies a particular place and time within family life. The practice of having a regular story-reading session in the pre-bedtime period was followed by the majority of parents of young children in this study. The early evening period, referred to as 'arsenic hour' by Anne, is a time of heavy demands on families. The evening meal is prepared and eaten, children are tired and fractious, parents who have been 'out at work' come home and attempt to 'catch up' with each other, older children have homework to do and younger children are 'settled down' for the night. Observing negotiations around literate work in the evening period, Freiburg and Freebody (1995) noted that:

> it was the micro-politics of domestic labour that determined more directly the length and complexity of home literacy events, and their penetrability by other agenda and chores, rather than factors such as the number of books in the home or some more general "motivational" aspect of the family. (p. 366-7)

Bed-time story-reading thus needs to be seen in relation to its micro-political function as well as its pedagogic function. The high rate of adherence to this practice suggests its ability to fulfil more than one of the competing demands on parents at this time of day.

7.2.2.1 Men reading, women supervising

Parents' availability for reading to their children is limited to the hours in which they are present at home. In families where there were young children, most mothers were at home on a full or part-time basis. This gave them scope to incorporate story-reading into their daily routine at times which suited them. The same applied to Craig, the male homeworker. For most men in this study, however, availability was limited to after 5.30 on week-nights and during weekends, though shift-workers had a greater range of home hours.

One of the important functions of the bed-time story for these families was its ability to bring fathers together with their children on a regular basis. The importance of story-reading as part of men's literate work (for this group of parents) is reflected by the high rate of fathers who reported their participation. Of the parents of young children only two fathers did not mention involvement in story-reading; two mothers also. It appears from this study that reading to children is one area where the rhetoric of shared parenting and 'new fatherhood' has found expression in practice.

While fathers reported reading to their children, the reasons for their participation were more likely to be explicitly stated by their partners. In the interviews mothers frequently

advocated father story reading in terms of its benefit to the children (particularly sons as seen below). Alicia, for instance, said:

> I think it's really important for Marco to read to the kids, not just be a female role, that only Mum reads to them. (Alicia)

Alicia's stated agenda in encouraging these occasions is framed, not in terms of literacy or pedagogy but in terms of liberal anti-sexist discourse. This discourse is often used to support claims that gender differentiated behaviours (sex roles) are learned and that to change gender differentiated behaviours, one should change the role models. Marco's literate work with their children is thus presented by Alicia in terms of its function as an antic-sexist role model to the children. That the children are to be the recipients of this message is underlined by Alicia's use of the third person ('that only Mum reads to them'). This suggests Alicia has considered how her participation will be read by the children. Her dominance of a particular literate or domestic task will signal that this is a 'female role'. Thus in *not* taking sole responsibility for story reading, Alicia is nevertheless taking responsibility for producing her children as particular kinds of gendered subjects.

Barbara reports prompting her partner's participation:

> He actually used to read to Ben, but not, like he would never just have picked up a book and said 'I'll read you a story'. [Sue: Mm] It would have been 'How about you read a story?'

In Barbara's statement, two different kinds of relation to the reading practice are contrasted. The father may be reader but he is not positioned as initiator of reading. The position of initiator is indicated by taking action (picking up a book) and announcing the intention to read. The voice of 'I'll read you a story' is explicitly not the father's voice: 'he would never have ... said [it]'. It is, by implication, Barbara's who initiates story reading. Her partner's position is, on the other hand, one of responder to her initiation: 'How about you read a story?'.

While Barbara reports prompting specific story-reading sessions, Luke credits his partner with initiating the story-reading practice in general:

> So as far as our family goes, obviously it's Theresa's influence I guess mainly about reading to the kids and a lot of the stuff I read to the kids, was the first time I'd heard it.

His 'obviously' refers back to his life history which preceded this comment. Parental story-reading was not practised in his family of origin and Luke grew up considering himself a poor reader. His partner, Theresa, came from a family that valued reading.

Delegating this task may also have practical benefits for mothers, allowing them to undertake evening domestic duties without the additional responsibility of childcare. Fathers' time with the children may also be mothers' time by themselves. This appeared to be the case in Adrian's family:

> I guess because Amanda has Nathan through the day she tends to do a lot of activities then and at night time when she needs a break I, I get them through tea and then do the reading that I'm going to do to them then.

Here Adrian strongly thematises his partner Amanda and explains his participation in story reading in terms of her needs. The adult-child relation is here described differently to the bonding accounts. Adrian is in the role of delegated domestic director ('I get them through tea') and reading is something that is done 'to' children not with them.

The act of mothers delegating story reading to fathers was seen most clearly in the situation of Ros and Fred. At their children's school, mothers are encouraged to come in to the class and read stories aloud to children. As the reported conversation between Ros and her child's teacher shows, there is a social expectation that mothering involves particular kinds of literate work, of which story reading is one. Ros and Fred, however, divide the literate labour differently:

> **Ros**: I actually told Rebecca's teacher that I hate to read. 'I can't stand reading, I'll get my husband to do it'

Sue: (laughs) What did she say?

Ros: They give me a really odd look when I say that. They say 'Who does the reading at home?'

Sue: What do you say to that? Fred does it?

Ros: I say 'My husband, it's his job.'

Here Ros allocates to herself the task of defining the division of literate labour in her family. In this she is like many of the mothers in the sample though few express themselves with such directness. What is unusual is that Ros explicitly rejects the position of story reader which the teacher expects her to assume by virtue of her status as mother. Her literate history (see chapter five), which positioned her outside a feminine discourse of reading perhaps makes it possible for her to take such a resistant stance.

Rosemary was another mother who explicitly stated that she encouraged her partner to read to their children. The following passage of talk in which Stanley's reading was discussed reveals some of the negotiations and tensions around literate relations in the family. A central issue was Stanley's degree of proficiency with spoken and written English. For Stanley, but not for Rosemary, English was a second language and he had maintained a preference for his mother tongue well into adult life. The excerpt that follows is condensed from a much longer conversation revolving around Stanley's language 'problem':

Rosemary: I always read stories to the kids anyway and I like Daddy to read stories to them (laughs).

Sue: And do you like to read stories to them Stanley?

Stanley: No I don't. [**Rosemary**: laughs]

Rosemary: There was one poem that I like him to read to the kids. The poem actually read 'Cross patch, draw the latch, sit by the fire and spin' and he used to read 'Cross patch, draw the latch, sat by the fire and spun.' ... (laughs) And I used to sit there and wait for it every time! (laughs)

Sue: Well!
Stanley: laughs

Rosemary: He's not, he doesn't read the word, [STANLEY: And that's what I'm scared of.] he sees the first couple of letters, it's sort of like he missed the vowel in the middle he just saw the, you know, the whole thing without actually reading it. Kimberley does that sometimes but not very often. (laughs)

[...]

Stanley: I'm scared of reading out loud so they pick up my bad pronunciation and like the wrong sort of, I give 'em the wrong messages how to pick up words. It's very, I'm very very scared of that. [...]

Rosemary: But I like him to read to the kids. Because ...

Stanley: It helps me too.

Rosemary: Yeah, because it helps him.

At the outset, Rosemary states: 'I always read stories to the kids anyway and I like Daddy to read stories to them'. Her own practice is stated first implying its status as a model or standard for her partner. Note the reference to 'always', a recurring theme in women's accounts of their reading (see chapter five). Rosemary's status as a reading subject is fixed and taken-for-granted: she is 'always' reading to the children. Stanley is, by comparison the other or problematic literate subject.

Let's look at Rosemary's statement 'I like Daddy to read'. The use of the term Daddy rather than her partner's name hails him as father. 'Daddy' is also a term that children use to their fathers and so its use implicitly brings in the assumed child's perspective: 'Read me a story Daddy'. 'Daddy' is a reminder that story reading is done as part of a father-child relationship.

The syntax of this utterance however makes 'Daddy's reading' the object of Rosemary's preference. The 'and' sets up a semantic link between this statement of Rosemary's preference and her position as the one who 'always' reads to the children. It is in her position as the model of reading that Rosemary is able to exercise agency in relation to Stanley's reading. My question: 'And do you like to read stories to them Stanley?' poses a challenge to Rosemary's position by opening a space for Stanley to voice his resistance to the practice. His 'No I don't' makes visible within the interview text the

power relations involved in his participation in reading.

In this family, father's story reading is not a private affair but a literate performance monitored by his partner. In the example of 'Cross Patch' Rosemary listens to Stanley's reading of the text and compares it with the 'correct' version noting the discrepancy. Thus she does not simply observe Stanley's reading performance but analyses it, comparing it to the decoding efforts of their child. In doing so, Rosemary takes up the position of authority on reading. Stanley, on the other hand, is positioned with the child as reading novice. Indeed, he is invested with less ability than the child who can be expected to improve. In the context of the interview, Rosemary's selection of this example demonstrates his imprecision in decoding and aligns her with me as joint masters to Stanley's novice.

It is Stanley, however, who volunteers that reading to his children has contributed to his improved English proficiency: 'It helps me too'. So his participation cannot be seen as completely imposed by Rosemary. Rather it appears to be the subject of negotiation as Stanley's fears about being a 'bad example' are balanced against the benefits to him, his children and his partner.

These examples indicate that in this group fathers' participation in bed-time story reading is encouraged, facilitated and supervised by mothers. Women's apparent reasons for encouraging this practice are multiple. Alicia wants to bring about a change in the gendered division of literate labour in order to demonstrate to her children that reading is not just women's work. Amanda wants a break from her child-rearing and pedagogic work. Ros hates reading.

Just as women have many reasons for advocating father reading, men had diverse responses to the task. Some appeared to be highly committed to reading to their children; others saw it as a somewhat onerous duty. In the following section I examine the accounts of a group of men who were not completely whole-hearted about story reading.

7.2.2.2 Getting it over with: fathers' attempts to limit their participation

That some men were less than whole-hearted about story-reading is indicated by the number of them who 'owned up' to using various strategies for limiting the task, including choosing short books, missing pages and summarising the story. Fathers were much more likely to make these admissions than mothers.

This is not to suggest that women do not use these strategies. Indeed it could be argued that mothers who delegate the task of bed-time story reading to their partners are using a very effective tactic to limit their participation. Ros, for instance, had succeeded in avoiding story reading completely. No other mother, however, voiced an explicit dislike of story reading or spoke in terms of getting out of the task.

In the statements that follow, a group of fathers describe the ways in which they reduce the length of story-reading sessions:

> I've noticed, this'd make me laugh at times to myself, Chloe would pick a big one with all these words and she didn't know, she just thought it was going to take a long time (laughs). I'd probably read the top line and the middle line and the bottom line and so I'd just fill in make-up words and she's happy just looking at the pictures. As long as we've spent a little bit of time on that page looking at the pictures she's fine. Then just flick the page. (Neil)

> Sometimes he says um - 'cause often you know I make it up, I don't really read all the words, it takes too long - and often he'll point to a word and say 'What's that word Daddy?' [...] Sometimes, often he knows a lot of the stories off by heart and if you sort of make it up as you go he says 'No that's not right, you read the words' (laughs). (Steven)

> When they were young you tried to flick through it pretty quick but now he'll realise if you're skipping a page, like if you just sort of turn the page and there's pictures and words on it, he knows there's words to be read and he won't let you just skip over because he can identify the words there and he says: 'Well what's that say?' You know, you got to read that and er he lets you turn them over. (Rodney)

A recurrent pattern in these accounts is the reference to time. Neil interprets his daughter's choice of a long book as an attempt to extend the length of the story reading session: 'she just thought it was going to take a long time'. His reading practice represents a compromise between the child's demand for time and his own wish to complete the session as quickly a possible. Steven states: 'I don't really read all the words, it takes too long'. So what is considered to take too much time, in all these accounts, is the process of 'reading the words'

In each instance, reducing the story reading session involves doing some form of work on the text. Rodney tries turning the pages without reading any words, a strategy that involves minimal textual work. Steven appears to be using the text as a reference point to 'make up' a story that has fewer words than the original. Neil's method is quite strategic. He selects the beginning, middle and end sentence from each page of an extended prose texts ('a big one with all these words') and joins these excerpts with his own composed text ('make-up words'). This method appears aimed at maintaining the narrative structure and many of the lexical features of the original text. In order to join the excerpts, Neil is having to do a significant amount of textual work.

Another theme in the three accounts is a form of struggle between father and child to define the reading practice. Steven reports that, when his son is familiar with a text, he insists on the author's version ('you read the words'). It also appears that once a child acquires the knowledge that the story is carried in the print rather than the pictures, it is in a position to insist on hearing an accurate reading. As Rodney's account suggests this results in a shift in both the practice and the adult-child relation with the child assuming greater control of the practice: 'You know you've got to read that and he lets you turn them over.' Neil also went on to describe a struggle over the reading practice.

> **Neil**: And then I remember when I used to pick a book up and, no Chloe would pick it up, and it was a thick one, I'd skip, I'd also sometimes - she got smart 'cause I'd flick three or four pages at one hit. And then she wouldn't pick it up.
>
> **Melissa**: What a dreadful parent, God! No wonder she wanted me to read.

In this case, the father tries omitting large sections of text and as a result his reading is too far from the authoritative version for the child to accept. Melissa's shocked response indicates her view that being a good parent means taking the 'right' approach to story reading. It is unclear what shocks her the most; Neil's tampering with the text or his instrumental attitude. Melissa now reinterprets Chloe's requests for her to read as reflecting a dissatisfaction with Neil's reading.

These accounts suggest that the child is being exposed to two kinds of readings. Since these are home-based reading sessions, and fathers are admittedly tampering with the text, the authoritative reading, the one with all 'the words', is most likely coming from sessions with his mother. This suggests that mothers and fathers may have different attitudes to the authority of texts. The reading practice described by these fathers is unlike the practices recommended by educational and childrearing authorities (McMackin 1993; Ollila & Mayfield 1993; Silvern 1985; Spreadbury 1992; Teale 1984). Perhaps that is why Melissa calls it the act of a 'dreadful parent'. A reading which involves 'making up' bits and talking about pictures is nevertheless a literate practice. Whatever fathers' motivations for using this method, they are effectively engaged in an act of composing text.

In the next section, I continue with the theme of fathers reading and mothers supervising but from a different angle. I consider the possibility that story reading may be framed as an opportunity for masculine bonding between fathers and sons.

7.2.2.3 A bonding practice: fathers reading to sons

Fathers reading to sons appeared to have a special significance for some parents in this study. When fathers spoke about reading they were more likely to refer specifically to sons than daughters. Also, where in families where there were two opposite sex children, some parents organised story reading as same-sex parent-child sessions, fathers reading to sons and mothers reading to daughters. Opposite sex siblings are

less likely to share a bedroom than same-sex siblings; therefore it is understandable that parents may want to divide up the night-time 'settling' work, each taking on one child. When this occurs, however it seems that fathers choose, or are allocated, sons to read to.

In the case of Janet and Neville, 'father reading' was constituted as different from 'mother reading' both in the organisation of practice and in the meanings attached to this work. Janet and Neville have two children, Lucy and Timothy, who at the time of the interview were 3 and 4 years old respectively. At 'settling time', Neville reported that he read to Timothy while Janet read to Lucy. The significance of father-son reading sessions was explicitly commented on by Janet:

> **Janet**: It's a nice quiet time for you and him to get alone anyway 'cause he doesn't get to see you much during the day. [Neville: Yeah] In fact he considers it a special time.

Story reading is here presented as a form of compensation for the father's absence during the day. It is only the male child, however, who is considered to be disadvantaged by this absence. It is her son's perceived need for a 'special time' with his father that, for Janet, invests these sessions with significance. It is not only the presence of the father, however, that is important in Janet's description, but the absence of the mother, that is her own absence. Son and father are to 'get alone' through the medium of story telling.

Neville did not explicitly invest reading to his son with special significance. However, it is interesting that, when asked, he was unable to recall reading stories to his daughter. This prompted Janet's interruption, asserting that he did, in fact, read to Lucy:

> **Sue**: And do you read to Lucy as well?
>
> **Neville**: No.
>
> **Janet**: Yes you do.
>
> **Neville**: Occasionally.

Janet: Yes you do.

Neville: Occasionally. Sometimes I read to both of them [JANET: Yeah] just like sit up in here and read to them both. It's Janet that puts Lucy down and reads her a story but I [JANET: You do read to Lucy in the afternoon] do read to her but not as often.

Neville distinguishes between two kinds of reading practices which he is involved in. There is a settling practice which is nightly, involves his son only and takes place in the private space of the child's bedroom and there is also a different kind of story reading which involves both children, is occasional and takes place in the more public family room ('up in here'). However it is the father-son practices that he mentions first and he does not recall the other until prompted by Janet.

A gender-divided story-reading practice was also followed in the household of Marco and Alicia. Marco regularly settled the youngest child, a boy, while Alicia read to their daughter. In this case, both father and mother explicitly stated the importance of father-son reading sessions. As we saw previously Alicia directly stated her anti-sexist agenda in encouraging her partner to read to the children. This statement is repeated below with Marco's comment:

Alicia: I think it's really important for Marco to read to the kids, not just be a female role, that only Mum reads to them.

Sue: Mm. And do you think this too?

Marco: I think so too because it's part of my bond, my contact with the child my son anyway, he's going to absorb things, you know, from me as well, not just say 'Oh let's go and fix the car, come and help me water the garden or do something. Let's do something different, let's read a book.'

While Alicia refers to the children collectively, Marco refers specifically to his son and explicitly evokes father-son bonding as the key reason for his participation. Reading is deliberately brought under the category of things men and boys do together, while at the same time Marco acknowledges its 'difference' from the 'usual' masculine pursuits. Marco's description makes it possible to reread Alicia's gender-neutral statement as a reference to the male sex-role model.

That Marco receives a unique pleasure in reading to his boy is clear from his description of the bed-time story sessions:

> We read whatever he wants and if he hasn't got an option I go and pick one up. And I sit on the floor and he puts his head on my shoulder 'cause my shoulder sits right on the edge of his bed, so he puts his head here, you know, I'm reading on the floor sitting down reading to him.

There is a strong sense of intimacy in this account through the repeated references to the physical closeness of the father and child. Richard was another father who stressed this aspect of story reading:

> It's probably one of the er, oh I won't say the few times, it's a time when they're actually sitting close to you. So they don't get cuddles as much any more. Sitting down to read, Thomas seems to enjoy it, just the company of being with you. (Richard)

Richard appears to be describing sessions in which he reads to both children ('they') but it is the son that he refers to by name. Adrian regularly reads to and settles both his son and daughter at night. However, like Marco and Richard, he singled his son out for a particular mention:

> I, yeah and I guess spend a bit of time with them too, particularly Nathan. He almost won't go to bed without a story so either you make one up or you read one.

Once again, the importance of working fathers spending time with their children (and particularly their sons) is being stressed. However, Adrian also acknowledges that story-reading has a care-taking function; it is a means of getting the child to go to bed.

In general, the participation of these men in story-reading can be understood in terms of the discourse of shared parenting which has produced the subject position of 'participant father'. At the same time, it appears that an alternative discourse of fathering, which positions the father as male role model and emphasises the salience of the father-son relation (Biddulph 1994; West 1995) is also operating such that story reading is seen as an opportunity for masculine bonding.

7.3 Parents reading to children: summary

Reading to children, on parents' reports, was a routine activity in families where there were preschool age children. In several cases, this practice had been instigated from the child's earliest years. This group of parents saw many benefits in story-reading, from fostering the child's development to facilitating intimacy. Story reading appears to be promoted to parents through multiple channels - institutional (eg hospital ante-natal classes), commercial, and informal. The taken-for-grantedness of the advantages of story reading is such that it is part of common knowledge. As Anne states, 'people say you should read.' So it can be said that story reading has become part of the normative construction of parent, at least in middle-class urban Australian communities, and that this group of parents are actively aligning themselves with this normative position.

Of course, 'parent' cannot be used as a neutral term. This analysis shows that, while there is a degree of common ground, fathers and mothers are positioned differently in relation to the reading practice. These differences can be understood as reflective of broader differences in the construction and practice of motherhood and fatherhood. Some differences were to be expected on the basis of other studies of the division of domestic and literate labour. Solsken (1992) for instance found that only one father in her study read to his children. However, the pattern of women doing all the reading in the home was not found here. This group of parents manages their literate labour somewhat differently whilst still maintaining women's overall responsibility for childrearing and domestic work. This is achieved through the delegation of story reading (particularly in the evening hours) to fathers.

This means that fathers are participating in discursive practices that have been the taken-for-granted province of mothers. While many mothers still read to their children in addition to their partners, some are taking more of a supervisory than a hands-on role. Ros is the clearest example of this.

There are indications that this shift is changing the discursive practice of story reading. The incorporation of different kinds of subjects into a literate practice must be expected to transform it in some way. As we have seen (chapter five) males and females are positioned differently in relation to literacy and domains of knowledge through their childhood participation in schooling and family life. Men and women are thus likely to bring different literate histories to their practice of story reading. This may explain why some men find story reading at times an onerous duty and use various strategies to shorten sessions. These strategies actually change the nature of the practice by changing the text that is transmitted to the child.

In the next section, I continue this exploration into parents' home-based literate work, shifting the focus to practices which parents identify as pedagogic.

7.4 The home as a site for parents' literate work: parents' reports of home literacy events

7.4.1 Introduction

While story-reading fulfilled multiple functions, many of them not explicitly associated with learning, parents did identify some of the activities they engaged in with their children as teaching/learning events. Because parents did understand these activities as educational, their descriptions necessarily employ versions of pedagogic discourses. My analysis of parents' descriptions of these events has sought to address issues of discourse by asking: what discourses are associated with these practices? What subject positions are made available through these discourses? What conflicts are operating between different practices, discourses and subject positions?

This analysis is informed by the work of researchers on teaching (Burgess & Carter 1996) and parenting (McGillicuddy-De Lisi 1982; Segal 1985) who have found two main clusters of meaning around the adult's role in teaching and learning. These have been termed the 'transmission' and the 'progressive' strand (Lee 1992). The 'transmission'

strand is the traditional teacher-directed practice, where a skill or body of knowledge is transmitted to the learner, whose task is to absorb this information. As their life histories illustrated, most parents in this sample were subjects of this practice as primary school students. The 'progressive' strand is associated with the child-centred discourse and frames learning as a self-directed exploration facilitated by a responsive adult. I have already presented evidence that the child-centred discourse us one of the key discourses employed by parents to interpret their child's behaviour and preferences (see chapter six). In this section I discuss the ways in which parents employ these two discursive frames in order to construct accounts of home literacy events.

7.4.2 Transmission and child-centred discourses as frames for parents' accounts

In this section I have selected for analysis two groups of statements, the first characterised by a transmission view of learning and the second characterised by a child-centred view. Indicators that parents were employing transmission discourse to construct teaching/learning events were the used of key verbs in association with the adult subject ('teach', 'learn', 'show', 'remember') and the use of 'how to' ('I showed him how to write his name', 'she remembered how to draw a face').

The group of statements presented below shows parents taking the directive role of instructor in relation to their children. The sections referring to the parent are highlighted.:

> If ever I'm trying to write a letter **I try to say** 'Well you know you'll find it easier to do an 'S' if you start at the - and do it in one movement.' (Cassie)
>
> He did this scribble and he said 'Is that my name?' And I **said** 'No that's not your name.' And **I wrote** his name. (Alicia)
>
> I mean when she was three or four, because I'm an ... ... electrician, **I'd say** 'Chloe, right', you know just ... **explain** things and I was amazed that when she started talking she'd say 'the light', 'the power-point' or something. (Neil)

> **I said** 'Counting to a hundred's no harder than counting to ten'. You know you have one to ten and then you have ten to twenty, thirty, you know it's ten lots of ten. (Neville)
>
> She'd remember things, you know, and if **I kept repeating** them, like in the bath or something **I'd say** the alphabet or **say** the numbers. [...] I think you have to really sit down and keep **repeating** things. (Mary)
>
> She can actually write a letter, **I've been telling her** which one to write. So she knows more letters of the alphabet ... without me showing her what it is, **I ask her to write it** and she can write that now. (Lynette)
>
> I used to **get him to do** some writing. For five to ten minutes he would sit down and attempt to write. (Matthew)
>
> I **got her to copy** some letters the other day and she, she picked it up. I **got her to do** letter 'B' and on the first attempt she wrote it backwards, did a mirror image of it and then she tried again and she got it. (Fred)

These statements are characterised by the presentation of the parent as initiator, actor and director. Verb patterns indicate two major roles for the parent. Firstly the parent is represented as source and transmitter of information as indicated by the use of the verb 'say' and its equivalents. Neville, for instance, describes himself as explaining the decimal system and, in effect, reproduces the text of his 'lesson' within the interview. Mary's major pedagogic strategy is to repeatedly vocalise the information she wants her child to learn.

Secondly, the parent is represented as director, as agent whose role is to 'get the child to do' some task. The kinds of tasks mentioned give some indication of the circumstances which legitimate parental directiveness. Often the task is a writing task where the child is required to correctly reproduce letters or words. The authority of the parent here arises from the authority of the linguistic code. Alicia tells her son that his attempt at name writing is not successful and has him copy the correct version. Fred does not accept his daughter's mirror image of the letter 'B' as an indication that she knows the letter. He waits for her to 'try again' and 'get it'.

While the parent is here presented as initiator and director, there is however difference in the degree of power attributed to the parent within the teaching/learning relationship.

This is clear when we examine the selection of verb to denote the directive action of the parent. Fred and Matthew both 'get' the child 'to do' an action. This is the strongest form of directive here as it implies that the parent's direction is carried out. Lynette 'tells' the child which letter to write. This is still strong but contains the possibility of the action not being carried out. She later softens the verb further: 'I ask her to write it'. Cassie's statement ('I try to say') is an even milder form of directive and her 'lesson' is presented more in the nature of a hint. So even when parents adopt a position consistent with the transmission pedagogy there is variation in the degree to which they accept the role of director.

The following group of statements provide a contrast. Here parents construct the teacher/learner relationship in a manner more consistent with child-centred pedagogy:

> **She wanted me to** hold her hand to write a capital 'R' **'cause she has a** name tag done at kindergarten with a capital 'R'. (Ros)
>
> The other night **she got me to**, she put her hand on my hand and with a pen I **had to** draw different letters of the alphabet and different numbers. And then **she'd say, I'd do one and she'd**: 'Right do another one. Right, do another one.' (Fred)
>
> **I usually wait for him** to ask questions **rather than me trying to** push information on to him. (Laura)
>
> **He really loves trying to** analyse things. If he can't understand why something happens, **he'll say** 'Lets think about why that happened. You go first Mum and then I'll go.' (Cassie)
>
> Um **we've played** matching games and **he's got a** dinosaur domino game that I think you're (laughing) familiar with. And um **he likes** that. And **he likes, we collect** the junkmail catalogues and **he likes** to cut out pictures and **we make up** stories about things (Amanda)
>
> **We gave him** alphabet jigsaws and things like that. **He learnt** to do that very quickly, what letter came after and things like that just by matching it with, **he knew** there was a 'v' for 'van' and that was next to it. (Adrian)

In these statements, agency is attributed to the child, or is presented as shared between child and adult. Children are positioned as initiators of others' action ('she got me to write'), as well as actors. They are owners of materials ('he's got a game'), speakers

('he'll say') and knowers ('he knew'). Adults appear in the role of responders to children's' initiations ('I usually wait for him'), partners in joint action ('we've played') and providers of resources to be used independently by the child ('we gave him jigsaw puzzles').

Descriptions in which the child featured as agent were sometimes supported with explicit statements of belief in child-centred and developmental theories of learning. Parents occasionally made a direct comparison between child-centred and what I have called transmission pedagogies:

> I feel if you, if you, if we'd sat there and made her read words correctly etcetera, it wouldn't be a pleasure, it's more of a chore. [...] If she'd shown signs of wanting to learn, well we would've encouraged it but she certainly didn't want to know how to write her name or have to know or anything like that. (Melissa)
>
> We just haven't pushed him in any way. When he's interested as Jenny said, we'll certainly help but we're not pushing him to do anything. (Rodney)
>
> We just let them play with them, not sort of consciously going, you know 'This is an 'a'' or 'This is a 'B' or - just let them play with the letters and the numbers. (Sandra)
>
> I didn't actually show him how to write and one day, it was about, oh it was before his fourth birthday, he just started to write. So I encouraged him to do it, he wanted me to show him how to do it. (Janet)
>
> I certainly wouldn't force it upon him until I thought he was ready for it. But then I guess I don't, I don't really know when he's ready for it. (Steven)
>
> If we had more time ... we'd be happy to ah ... you know try and facilitate his interest in learning 'cause he does have an interest in language that could be carried over to reading and writing but ah ... I think it's important to do it when you're not being pressured into some sort of ...framework. (Dion)

These statements provide some indications of the discursive field within which children's learning events are interpreted. It is a field characterised by oppositions between work and play, freedom and constraint. For Melissa, to make her child read would be to construct reading as work, as a chore. Reading should rather be a 'pleasure'. Sandra compares two possible adult subjects, the teacher who transmits information ('This is

an a') and the parent who provides materials for the child to use in constructing its own meanings ('We just let them play with them'). Similarly Dion makes an implicit comparison between two pedagogies. One involves the imposition of a structure ('framework') upon the child whereas the other begins with the child's 'interest' and builds new learning upon it. Beginning with the child's interest is a strong theme here, also mentioned by Melissa, Rodney, Janet and Steven.

Comparing the two groups of statements (transmission and child-centred) similarities and differences are evident. One of the major differences is in how the role of speaker/director is assigned. In the 'transmission' statements, where lesson scripts appeared they were provided by the adult :'I'd say 'Chloe, right''; 'I said 'Counting to a hundred's no harder than counting to ten'. In the 'child-centred' statements, such scripts are attributed to the child: 'She'd: 'Right do another one. Right, do another one'; 'He'll say 'Lets think about why that happened. You go first Mum and then I'll go.' Thus the relations between listener and speaker are directly reversed. It could be said that the power relations are reversed also. But that conclusion begs a further question - the source of the authoritative subject position. In other words, where are children (and adults) learning the practices of pedagogic authority?

These two discursive clusters, one centred around transmission and the other on child-centredness construct different kinds of ideal child and adult subjects. The ideal child subject according to the transmission perspective is one who is receptive, able to absorb and reproduce information, willing to follow instruction and able to do so competently. Lynette reports that her daughter, after instruction, can 'actually write a letter'. Neil is please when his daughter reproduces the terms 'power-point' and 'light' which he had taught her. Alicia is not satisfied with her son's scribble; she wants to see him reproduce his name correctly by copying her. Direct instruction is legitimised on the grounds that the parent has something to teach which the parent judges the child needs to know.

The ideal child according to the child-centred perspective is one who has 'interest'. Without interest the child is presumed not to be 'ready' to learn, therefore parent

intervention is not legitimated. The task for the adult is to interpret the child's behaviour as indicative of interest or its lack. The ideal adult is thus one who is able to recognise when the child is interested in something and willing to develop the child's learning within this field of interest. The difficulty of achieving this is stated by one of the fathers, Steven: 'I don't really know when he's ready for it.'

While differences may be more obvious, similarities cohere around the content of 'lessons' whether adult-directed or child-regulated. Examination of the overall corpus reveals that in the early years, learning/teaching events typically focus on letter, word and number recognition; numerical and alphabetic series; colours and shapes; drawing of standard objects (face, dog, house); and letter and word writing (often the child's name). Children are also taught what can be called 'everyday' knowledge, for instance the names and functions of household items, their phone number and address. Neil, for instance, teaches his infant daughter the names of items associated with his work ('light', 'power point'). In some cases children were instructed in a language spoken by the parent or grandparent. Marco, for instance, had taught his daughter Portuguese words for common household items.

Recognising and writing the alphabetic and numeric code are key aims however the relations between participants is conceived. This reflects parents' understanding of the basic requirements for school success in the early years. Whatever the degree of agency that is accorded to children within these practices, the intended outcome is determined not by them, but by the social institutions which deem schooled literacy and numeracy necessary for participation.

As parents attempt to produce their child both as 'school-ready' holder of socially valued items of information and as autonomous independent learner, they are required to negotiate the conflicting demands of these two discourses. On the evidence of this study parents use a degree of flexibility to accomplish this. By separating these two sets of statements I am not suggesting that parents can be grouped according to their pedagogic 'camp'. As the names on these quotes indicate, the same parent can keep

both perspectives in play at different times, or indeed simultaneously. However, it is perhaps inevitable that tensions and contradictions arise when both pedagogies are in play at the same time. In the following section I consider two cases of conflict caused when a mother and father subscribe to different pedagogies.

7.4.3 An analysis of discursive conflicts and alignments in the conversations of two couples

In this section I present two passages of talk which illustrate the kinds of discursive and practical conflicts that arise when multiple discourses operate to frame children's learning and parents' pedagogic work. In each excerpt we see a mother and a father discussing approaches to home learning events. In analysing each excerpt I trace pedagogic and childrearing discourses through the parents' talk about their own practice. The different perspectives on what is happening offered by the mother and father enable us to see the play of discourses in action.

7.4.3.1 Neville and Janet talk about counting

This passage in which a couple describes their son's acquisition of counting offers a clear example of competing discourses being used to constitute a child's learning and his parents' role in this learning. It is perhaps significant that, in the context of the interview, this tension came to light when the topic turned to numeracy. In discussing their children's literacy related activities, Janet had taken the lead, providing a child-centred account. As we will see, when she attempted to extend this perspective into numeracy, Neville intervened to offer a different account.

As this passage of talk begins, Janet has been describing her four-year-old son's orientation to literacy in terms of 'interest', a term associated with individualist and child-centred discourses. Neville, who joined the discussion late, has been taking a back seat in the discussion so far. As interviewer, I pick up Janet's term 'interest' in introducing a new topic, that of numeracy:

Sue: Is he as interested in numbers as he is in books?

Janet: Yeah.

Neville: Yeah, the \other day he was counting ...

\Janet: Yeah he counts to a hundred.

Neville: Counts to a hundred.

Sue: Counts to a hundred?

As the topic turns to numbers, Neville becomes actively involved in the discussion. His comment is specific, focussing on a particular occasion which he witnessed; 'the other day he was counting ...'. Janet, while appearing to be agreeing with Neville, transforms his statement of the particular to her own statement of the general and offers a description, not of a single event but of the child's capacity. Both the definitive nature of her statement, and the fact that she interrupts Neville to deliver it, suggests an attempt to establish her authority within the discursive context of the interview. Janet's 'to a hundred' significantly increases the claim being made for the child's skill level and prompts my somewhat incredulous response. Perhaps Janet hears an accusation in my question, because she continues:

Janet: Yeah he chooses to. You know he'll - what was he counting? - I had a top with all these beads and things and he counted every one, he got to about eighty-eight or something. And he wanted to know when he got to ninety, what, what came after eighty-nine and you know, he takes a ...

The framing positions the child as agent: 'he chooses to', 'he counted', 'he wanted to know' and absolves Janet from in any way forcing the child to undertake numerical feats. But while Janet backgrounds her own role, the child's reported counting performance is only achieved by virtue of Janet's willingness to sit still whilst he manually counts every bead on her jumper. Both the actual practice, and Janet's framing of it in this account, are consistent with child-centred discourse.

In the interview, rather than take this account at face value, I decided to probe a little to see whether other practices, less compatible with the child-centred discourse, were in use. My next question was designed to elicit parental practices by which the child's skill may have been facilitated.

> **Sue**: So how did he pick that up? That wouldn't have /come from kindy.
>
> **/Janet**: I don't know how he picked it up.
>
> **Sue**: Do you know Neville?
>
> **Neville**: ...
>
> **Janet**: It's not like we go running around counting to a hundred. (laughs)
>
> **Neville**: I suppose we've always sort of started all that counting thing.
>
> **Janet**: I think you take a lot for granted of what you do, like if he's, if he's just counting something, we'll just sort of ... encourage it won't we, you know like with that alarm?
>
> **Neville**: [...] And I quite, I often like, give him some ... simple Maths things like, you know there's four oranges, I take one away, how many's left? There's three.

Janet's answer was given in a tone of amused incredulity. By disavowing any influence she implies that the child's achievement of the counting performance had been spontaneous and unassisted. Neville, however, directly attributes the child's performance to adult intervention. Janet's negative ('It's not like we go around counting') is echoed in reverse by Neville's positive (We've always started that counting thing'), although Neville's qualifiers ('I suppose', 'sort of') can be read as an attempt to minimise this apparent opposition. His reference to 'always' interestingly recalls the statements on early reading made by the group of mothers (see section 5.5.1) and suggests that he holds similar views about the value of early numeracy learning.

Following Neville's statement, Janet, however, continues to position the child as initiator of learning events. Their parental behaviour (she uses 'we') is framed as responsive and conditional on the child's display of interest. Despite his inclusion in Janet's construction, Neville maintains his perspective and does not appear to have any misgivings about

assigning himself a directive role. He positions himself (using 'I') as initiator of learning events which are structured as lessons, a 'visible pedagogy' (Solsken 1992). His practice, and his account of it, are both clearly located within a transmission discourse of learning.

In the interview, Neville continued by describing the strategies he had used to teach his son the decimal system. This account, which has been omitted due to is length, clearly positioned him as authority in the numeracy teaching practice. Following this, he turned to the subject of literacy, and continued to maintain his transmission persecutive retrospectively challenging Janet's earlier account.

> **Neville**: Yeah he, he's sort of, we taught him the alphabet too a little while ago.
>
> **Janet**: But he, but only through books and ... jigsaws and [**Neville**: Oh songs] things like that, not actually sitting down and ... yeah.
>
> **Neville**: Yeah.
>
> **Janet**: I suppose you are doing it, you just don't take it in, you don't realise just how much you are doing.

Here Neville clearly establishes the pedagogic relation ('we taught him') the syntax here underlining the authority of the adult (not 'he learned from us'). The 'we' brings Janet into this adult-child power relation and disrupts Janet's child-centred account of teaching/learning events. Janet, however, resists this framing and reinstalls the child as theme: 'But he ...'. Her reframe omits all reference of adult agency and instead brings in 'books' and 'jigsaws' in the role of teaching tools. This is consistent with the Piagetian strand in child development theory which emphasises the child's engagement with its environment. Neville's 'songs' is an attempt to contribute to Janet's picture but once again implies adult involvement. Janet's final comment suggests how hard it is for her to 'admit' to a directive role in pedagogic interactions: 'you', rather than 'I', distances her from the directive practice that she is at the same time acknowledging.

Janet and Neville's exchange is a clear example of conflict between two pedagogic discourses, each offering different subject positions for adult and child. Janet adopts a

child-centred perspective to describe teaching/learning events while Neville adopts a transmission model. However, this is not just a story of conflict. Both participants use the 'we' at various times to include the other in their account despite their differences. They are also both concerned, in their different ways, to ensure their child learns certain items of knowledge prior to commencing formal schooling (counting and the alphabet).

This pattern of negotiating discursive differences whilst maintaining a collective parental position is also seen in the following example, that of Louise and Gilles.

7.4.3.2 Louise and Gilles talk about reading

This excerpt has been selected because of the different ways in which the father and mother represent their participation in their children's literacy. Louise and Gilles have two children, both boys. At the time of the interview, the eldest had been at school three years and the youngest was in kindergarten. In the excerpt presented here, they compare the two siblings' responses to reading.

> **Louise**: Oliver was eighteen months and he was driving us nuts because all he wanted to do was be read stories whereas Dylan was more like ... well over two before he really ... got enthusiastic about being read to and he's still not as, he'd still just as soon play with blocks or something whereas Oliver will always be read to, loves to be read to and has for a long time.
>
> **Gilles**: That, I mean Dylan's become more ... more ...
>
> **Louise**: More interested in books.
>
> **Gilles**: Far more interested ... in books. [**Louise**: Yeah] I think that's a little bit because we've forced it upon him ... you know I, we didn't give up. It also - he's most probably mirroring his older brother ... to a large extent. Louise is right, he's, he, he chooses what he wants to do - but he's malleable.

Their different framings of their own agency relative to the children indicate each is using a different discursive framework. Louise's initial statement attributes agency to the children, and explains the differences in their literate behaviour as caused by differences in their preferences. The use of 'always' and references to duration of time represent the particular child's nature as enduring, if not actually innate. However, Louise's account

is also an account of change in one child's behaviour towards a more 'enthusiastic' response to parent-child reading interactions. How to account for this change is one of the issues the couple is negotiating in this passage.

Louise's framing of this change as 'he [...] *got* enthusiastic' maintains the child-centered discourse, while her reference to 'over two' leaves the way open for a developmental explanation which would also be consistent with the child-centered focus. Louise's suggestion of 'interested' is also consistent with her attribution of agency to the child. Like Janet she puts forward 'books' as the object of the child's interest thus emphasising the child's interaction with its environment. The emphasis on books maintains the absence of the parents as agents in the literate practices of the family.

Gilles' next contribution, a restatement and intensification of Louise's words shows his intention of maintaining a unified account. However his next words represent a significant deviation from the child-centered discourse, referring as they do to the use of 'force'. His statement ' we didn't give up' implies a sustained struggle between adult and child over the issue of reading. The 'we' includes Louise as part of a parent coalition aimed at overcoming the child's resistance and disrupts her child-centred account. The term 'malleable' applied to the child powerfully reinforces parental agency, suggesting an approach of direct, even 'hands-on', modification. Gilles' picture is one of parental power and child resistance. The absence of parents in Louise's account can now be read as an absence of parent-child conflict and struggle.

However, Gilles also attempts to maintain unity with Louise. He softens the term 'force' in advance with a diminutive ('a little bit'). He also attempts to reconcile the conflict of representation by keeping both accounts in play at once: 'he chooses what he wants to do ... but he's malleable.'

Like Neville and Janet, Louise and Gilles are engaged in the process of negotiating their different versions of their children's literacy and learning. Both couples also use various conversational strategies to reinforce a joint perspective in the face of these differences.

It is perhaps significant that in both cases, the father represents himself as taking a direct teaching role with the child whilst the mother focuses on the child's self-directed agency. In chapter six I presented the finding that mothers are more likely than fathers to describe their children as initiating literacy/learning events. These passages of talk further support the conclusion that women, in their roles as mothers, are more likely to subscribe to child-centred discourses which represent the child as agent.

These two cases also cast some light onto the childrearing and pedagogic discourses which fathers (and mothers not employing child-centred discourse) might subscribe to. Neville's approach can be located within a transmission discourse of education. Gilles, on the other hand, seems to be positioning himself as authoritarian or disciplinary figure, rather than teacher. Both clearly distinguish the positions of child and adult in terms of their relative power in interactions. Adults have the right to ask questions and expect a reply ('there's four oranges, I take one away, how many's left?') and to insist on a particular course of action ('we've forced it upon him').

Both mothers, however, do not attribute this degree of power to themselves in their pedagogic interactions with children. The following section returns the focus to Louise to consider why this may be so for her.

7.4.3.3 'I actually do lots of testing': a mother's dilemma

In the two examples dealt with so far, we have seen that when parents employ competing discourses to shape and represent their practice, tensions and conflicts can result. Much of the repair work going on in the conversations can be interpreted as attempts to maintain a united parental position in the face of these competing discourses and practices.

Conflict can also be intrapersonal as individuals attempt to negotiate their own positions within competing discourses. Such intrapersonal conflicts means that the account any individual gives of themselves at any particular time cannot be taken as the sole or

privileged account (Ellsworth 1992). In the above example, we saw that Louise, like Janet, took up a largely child-centred perspective. In this section I focus on a comment she made in a different forum which presents her practice in a different light and reveals the difficulty of negotiating competing positions.

Louise's comment was written on a feedback form sent out to participants. Parents were invited to comment on an early trend in the analysis relating to reports of testing practices. At that stage it appeared that fathers were more likely to report using testing practices with their children than mothers. An example is Neville setting maths exercises for his son: 'There's four oranges, I take one away, how many's left?' Louise wrote back:

> I actually do lots of testing because I worry that my children might not be doing well but I don't particularly like this aspect of my personality.

The 'actually' here positions this account as 'true' and implies that there are other versions of Louise's practice which do not reflect the real. Her stated reason gives a context for her adoption of directive pedagogies. Unfortunately for Louise, one of her children was not 'doing well' at school. Her adoption of directive practices which are at odds with both the child-centered and the nurturant discourses needs to be seen in the light of her child's 'failure' to 'naturally' learn the competencies necessary to perform in the educational setting. This becomes Louise's failure to produce her child appropriately and leads to her direct intervention.

Louise's statement on testing indicates that the discursive dilemma in which she is caught. In the terms of the child-centered discourse to which she subscribes, she is a non-directive facilitator of her child's learning and according to the feminine discourse of motherhood (Thurer 1994; Wearing 1984), she is positioned as the provider of emotional nurturance. But also according to gendered division of parenting labour she is the producer of her child as literate school student and citizen.

However, rather than attribute her dilemma to social expectations Louise personalises her situation. Her use of testing is presented as an undesirable aspect of her

'personality'. This further underlines the stakes for women of 'owning up' to directiveness, since the 'wrong' approach to teaching children can be taken as an indicator of a deficient character. To avoid being positioned in this way Louise, by her own implication, sometimes gives accounts of her practice that are not 'actual' ie that omit reference to her directive intervention.

7.4.4 Parents' reports of home literacy events: summary

In this section I have traced two discursive strands through parents' accounts of home learning events. Each discourse constructs subject positions for, and relations between, child and adult participants in teaching/learning events. These discourses are not discrete clusters of meaning but are constructed through relations of signification such that one indexes the other. Child-centred discourse is constructed in a relation of difference from, and opposition to, transmission discourse. This is clear from parents' references to oppositional categories such as 'work' and 'play', 'freedom' and 'structure'. This difference is most clearly seen in the attribution of agency to participants. In transmission-based accounts the agent is the adult and the responder the child and these relations are reversed in child-centred accounts.

The presence of these two pedagogies operating in the field of child-rearing and education provides a challenge to parents. In this chapter we have seen parents negotiating the conflicting demands of these two discourses whilst maintaining a sense of consistency. The conversations presented here show the process of negotiation which occurs when each partner subscribes to a different discourse and thus represents relations between themselves and the child differently. In both cases, it is the father who represents himself as taking the directive role while the mother positions herself as facilitative. This is not to suggest that the child-centred perspective is only taken by women. On the contrary the section presents some quotes by fathers taking a similar point of view. However, Louise's 'testing' dilemma suggests that women risk more by representing themselves as directive.

Regardless of perspective, however, the content of home-teaching events suggests that the overarching influence is that of institutional education. The choice of resources and games, the content of lessons - all are directed towards the child's acquisition of standard forms of knowledge and skills. Knowledge of the alphanumeric code is the key goal of reported home teaching/learning events in these families. The parent takes as indicative of this knowledge the child's ability to recognise and reproduce letters, numbers and words. While the parent may have a preference for a particular pedagogic approach, it is this goal which is most important. This is illustrated in the case of Louise. When the school assessed and documented her child as a poor performer she abandoned her preferred approach and took a directive role.

The influence of children's schooling on parents is considered further in the following section. Here I look at another aspect of parents' literate work; their participation in the sites of their child's education.

7.5 Parents' literate work in educational settings

7.5.1 Introduction

The playgroup, library, kindergarten and classroom are sites for the organization of children's learning and literacy. As such, they are sites which construct particular child and adult practices, produce particular linguistic and nonlinguistic texts and make possible particular adult-child relations. They are institutional locations which were constructed on the premise of adult women's responsibility for young children's care and, despite changes in the nature of men's participation in family life (Russell 1983a; Lamb et al 1986; McBride & McBride 1993), are still generally organized on this assumption.

In this section I focus on parents', fathers' and mothers' positions in relation to the sites of their children's early education, that is kindergartens, childcare centres, playgroups and schools. 'Position' is here understood to have both a material and a discursive aspect: that is to say, each parent occupied physical spaces within, around or away from

these settings and also occupied subject positions in relation to the discourses operating in these settings. Material positioning and discursive positioning were related in a number of ways. for instance, those parents who spent the most time inside these sites had the greatest access to the educational discourses operating there.

In the analysis that follows, I identify three positions that these parents took up in relation to their children's educational sites 1) insider, 2) on the fringe, 3) absent. 'Insiders' refers to those parents who regularly spent extended time in the particular setting, either exclusively with their own child, observing, socialising with other parents, or 'helping' the teacher in some agreed capacity. Those who were classified 'on the fringe' regularly picked up or dropped off their child and so had some, though limited, opportunities to observe, talk to the teacher and other parents. Those who were classified as absent did not go to the site except for formal interviews. Many of these parents had not observed the site in operation and drew their conclusions about it from a range of sources. The gendered division of labour is clear from the distribution of men and women in these positions. Many more mothers than fathers regularly took up 'insider' positions while more men than women were categorised as absent. 'Fringe' positions were occupied by both fathers and mothers.

The type of participation varied with the site and format. In organized 'leisure' activities for toddlers, such as playgroup and kindergym, the emphasis was on each parent facilitating their own child's participation for the duration of the activity. In preschool settings such as kindergartens, the emphasis is on facilitating the child's separation from the parent through a gradual withdrawal process. Therefore parent activity is rather loosely defined and ranges from active teaching roles to general 'being there'. In the junior primary classroom, parent participation tends to be more formalised and teacher directed, less focussed on the parents' own child and more on individual children and small groups selected by the teacher.

Participation offers parents opportunities to read the discourses of childhood, education and parenting as they are expressed in the many texts available in these settings. These

texts include written products, verbal interactions, nonverbal communications and also the environment itself and the practices which are made possible within it. Differential rates of participation lead to differential access to these texts and the discourses that constitute them.

In analysing parents' reports of their children's education sites, I look for their degree of access to these sites and, consequently, to the discourses and practices employed in them. I look for how they read the texts available in these sites and the positions they take up within practices and relations. I consider the effects of the gendered division of labour on parents' differential access to the discourses and practices of early childhood education; also the implications of this division for mothers' and fathers' understandings of their children's literacy and their own role in its development.

The following section focuses on three aspects of parents' reports of participation. I focus in turn on two kinds of sites for parents' participation: preschool settings and junior primary school settings. In the third section, fathers' reports are analysed in terms of their positioning as insider, outsider or 'fringe dweller'.

7.5.2 Parents in preschool settings

Australian kindergarten and play groups are generally run as facilitative free-choice environments, in which a range of activity areas is set up prior to the child's entrance into the setting (Tyler 1993). The range of activities is designed to be 'developmentally appropriate' and to cater for children's different interests. In this study, mother's accounts of these settings and activities are characterised in several ways:

- By their location in the physical geography of the site; thus there are 'outdoor' and 'indoor' activities; 'floor', 'table' and 'home corner' activities.
- By the aspect of child development the activity is designed to promote; thus there are 'creative', 'hand-eye' and 'social' activities.
- By the child's mode of engagement; thus independent involvement is differentiated

from adult-directed involvement.

The early childhood setting is thus experienced as a clearly differentiated space. Corner activities are not table activities. Outside activities cannot be inside activities. Table-work is not done on the floor; that is the place for the train-set and modular construction.

Those mothers who were regular participants at early childhood sites (the insiders) read their children's behaviour in terms of their location in the discursive space of the site. They spoke of their children 'at the making table', 'in the home corner' or involved in 'outside play'. They appeared to interpret children's mode of engagement with different preschool activities as providing information about their stage of development in different domains. The 'modern' kindergarten has indeed been designed to facilitate such observations and interpretations (Tyler 1993).

Alicia regularly took her younger child to playgroup and was anticipating his approaching entry into kindergarten. Her description indicates that she reads her son's choice of playgroup activities for what it can tell her about his likely mode of engagement in the preschool site.

> He's now, like he'll start pre-entry um next term, half way through next term. And he really is all of a sudden - and at play group he would do all the outside activities - and all of a sudden he's now starting to do the inside activities and not play outside as much and actually doing the construction things and sitting down and saying 'Mum can you please help me?' He's looking forward to kindy.

Alicia reads her son's behaviour as indicating a transition from one kind of activity to another and thus as developmentally significant. Her son's move to 'inside' activities is seen by her as indicating a readiness to enter into a more formal educational environment. Alicia also sees significance in the perceived change of her son's mode of participation from independent and solitary to more dependent on an adult. This is explored further in her next comment:

> And ah, and the same, same thing happened at kindygym, he was a real rebel at kindygym like at kindygym they play for so long and then they have fifteen minutes song time or ten minutes song time. I was never able to get him to sit down at song time because he just wouldn't sit still. Now he sits down and he participates. And he's quite happy to go away from me, like sit next to the teacher and participate.

The child's earlier independent behaviour is seen as problematic within an instructional setting. His move to the teacher is read as a move towards correct participation.

Alicia's concern with her child's successful transition to formal education was echoed by many mothers who similarly saw their child's participation in 'sitting', 'indoor' and 'table' activities as critical indicators:

> You see with me, he's got heaps of concentration, he'll sit there for hours and do it but once he gets in a kindy situation, he won't sit down and do anything, he just plays, not even [unclear] or a paintbrush or whatever craft activity's going on. He'd much rather be out playing so that's something he has to be encouraged to do, is to sit down and concentrate. (Janet)

Janet's initial statement ('with me he's got heaps of concentration') is a reference to a practice of engaging her child in learning activities which she described in the interview. Janet had been advised to 'sit with' her child by a child psychologist who had assessed the four-year-old and found that him deficient in the area of concentration. The child's imminent transition to formal schooling provides an indication of the context in which a four-year-old's ability to sit is deemed to be important enough for pre-emptive remedial action to be taken.

Here 'sitting' is implicitly set against 'playing'. The child is attributed with a preference for play that is presumed to exclude a preference for sitting activities: : 'He'd much rather be out playing [than inside sitting]'. 'Sitting' is associated with 'doing things'; in the home setting 'he'll *sit* there for hours and *do* it' whereas in the kindergarten setting 'he won't *sit* down and *do* anything'. This association indicates why sitting is considered so important and the lack of sitting is so problematic: without sitting there is no doing - no work being done. Sitting at a table and 'doing work' is part of the classroom habitus and

knowledge of school work routines is a powerful form of cultural capital for commencing students (Kamler et al 1994). Janet's work with her son can be seen as an attempt to reproduce the classroom habitus and produce her child as a schooled subject. His preference for play in the kindergarten setting is read by her as an indication that he has not learned to regulate himself in a manner appropriate to the schoolchild subject.

Comments like Janet's are a further reminder that the two dominant discourse in early childhood, the child-centered discourse and the developmental discourses set up tensions between children's freedom to choose what and how they will learn and the facilitating (usually female) adult's responsibility for producing normal development (Urwin 1984; Walkerdine 1986). A child who cannot 'concentrate' is liable to be labelled abnormal (eg by attributing a pathology such as Attention Deficit Disorder). But a child who does not 'choose' the crucial indicator activities for concentration (the 'indoor' activities) is not demonstrating normal development in this important domain. The adult's facilitating behaviour is thus critical for accomplishing these two conflicting demands: 'encouragement', 'guidance' and 'support' are necessary for producing the child's 'choice' of developmentally necessary activities. If exercising choice is seen as the natural learning behaviour of the child, then ' it is mothers who are held responsible for the emergence of the "natural" ' (Walkerdine 1988).

From the many references in the transcripts it appears that the child's writing of its own name is, like involvement in 'tablework', one of the crucial signs which is understood as indicating normal development in the preschool stage. Prue ensured her child was able to display this sign of literate competence on entry to kindergarten:

> By the time she got to, about, just before she started kindergarten, um, she came to me and said 'I want to learn my letters'. We had a blackboard at the time and we sat down for ages with chalk and she actually learnt to write with the letters of the alphabet on the blackboard, um and we went from there. By the time she got to kindergarten she could actually, or went to the Child Parent Centre, she could actually write her name um, quite easily and had quite a good command and they promoted that through, with kindergarten.

Prue employs the child-centred discourse to frame her description. The child is represented as initiating the letter-learning sessions and as owning the practice ('my letters'). The use of 'we' represents the learning sessions as collaborative. Nevertheless, the timing of this practice 'just before she started kindergarten' and the choice of name writing as a focus suggests the hidden agency of the mother. It is she who determines the level of skill necessary to display 'command' of the crucial name writing task. The aim is evidently for the child to write 'quite easily' ie without displaying the struggle of learning.

The child's entry into the kindergarten site where it will be scrutinised for signs that the parents' preschool literate work has been successfully accomplished can be a stressful experience for some parents, particularly mothers since they are held responsible for their child's early care. Those parents (particularly mothers) who understand the child-centered discourse to mean in practice that the child should be left up to its own devices, rather than that the adult's literacy work should be *represented* as child-centered, may 'fail' to produce their child as 'literate'.

> Um because he was a first child, you obviously make mistakes and maybe one of my biggest mistakes was that I didn't encourage him earlier to sit down and just, you know, try and write and there's a lot of kids I've noticed at kindy that can write their names and all that and have been doing so for quite a while. Because I never sit down with him, I just, I didn't think he was interested and I guess I didn't, I guess basically I just didn't think of it, that I should sit with him and do things like that with him. [...] I was quite amazed at kindy when he first started, there was kids younger than him that could write their names quite clearly and I thought (laughs) I sort of haven't been doing my homework as a parent here, I haven't supported him. (Debbie)

Debbie's reference to the child's 'interest' indicates that, prior to the child's entry into kindergarten, she had been operating according to a version of the child-centered discourse which she took to mean that she should not initiate literacy activities with him. On entering the kindergarten site, Debbie experiences her child's inability to write his name as her own failure to produce in the child this sign of literate competence. She learns to read her own practice as wrong, as a 'mistake'. In representing her own difference from the implied 'other' parents (those who had produced their child's name-

writing), Debbie positions herself, not as a teacher, but as a student, and a failed one at that. The other parents (mothers) had 'done their homework', that is, they had learned the lesson set by the teacher. The figure of the teacher, implied by the reference to 'homework' is not a specific individual but the representation of a particular educational discourse, one which Debbie had not hitherto had access to (as a parent). According to the terms of this discourse, the child's writing of its name is a key sign of literate competence, a sign which can only be produced prior to formal education through the parent's active direction.

On graduating from kindergarten to school, the child and its parents encounter new discourses and practices, in particular those associated with the acquisition of 'formal literacy'. In the next section we will consider the material and discursive positions of parents in relation to the junior primary classroom.

7.5.3 Parents in school settings: the insiders

One of the most significant differences between the preschool educational setting and the Junior Primary school is the official expectation that children will begin to acquire formal literacy, that is reading and writing. Classroom routines, student-teacher relations, activities and organisation of space are all structured to make possible the literate work of children. Another way of putting it is that the literate work of children is structured so as insert them into the pedagogic and disciplinary regime of school. The practices of 'school reading' which receive so much attention in the early years are a powerful means for constructing the child both as 'class member' and as 'child' (Freebody 1995; McHoul 1991):

> The regime of the classroom and the regime of reading are practically identical: they are regimes of "regulated freedom" (McHoul 1991 p. 209)

When parents are present in the junior primary classroom their participation tends to revolve around this literate work. Common tasks delegated to parents in this sample were listening to reading and remedial work with individual students. Parent participation

fulfills a dual function of facilitating children's literacy acquisition and facilitating their acquisition of appropriate forms of 'school child' subjectivity.

Many mothers volunteered in the interview that they 'helped' in the classroom in some way and one had attempted to offer help but felt rebuffed by the teacher. Other women I am aware from 'insider' knowledge did 'help' but chose not to mention this in the interview. One father spoke of spending regular time in his daughter's class and another man's partner revealed that she had 'volunteered' him for canteen duty, although the father himself did not mention this. Overall, however, participation as a regular 'duty' inside classrooms was much more the province of mothers than fathers. The term 'the reading mothers' used by one informant to describe the group of women who helped at school, testifies to the way in which this work is defined as both literate and maternal.

Parents who were 'insiders' within children's classrooms gave detailed accounts of many aspects of teachers' practices, generally without prompting. In these accounts we can see how the mother's participation in the class occurs via her insertion into the teacher's pedagogic practice which is itself constituted by and through the various educational discourses which are available. In the following example, Joanne describes what occurs in her regular 'helping sessions' in her son's junior primary classroom:

His teacher has flash cards

and, and um they've each got their little wallet and they've got all different little flash cards in there.

And um **we go through,** we sit down with them and w, we,

say it's 'apple' and you've got a picture of a apple,

um we say to them 'OK **we're gonna do** um the a b c letters,

er **I want you to go through, tell me** what these letters are.'

And then they'll tell me and then I'll say 'OK um',

um you say - **they'll go 'a' and then you say** 'What's the picture?'

and they'll say 'a for apple' or 'B for banana', you know 'b for banana, c for cat'

and they'd go through like that.

And then we would cover up the letter **and get the, them to** write the letter 'a'

and then some would write it in capitals **and some would** write it in the little way as well

And then we, um **Bridget just got us to** correct them,

teach them to do, you know, top to bottom and then your circle

so we would do that,

she's got that going in the school as well.

It is clear from this account that Joanne is one of a group of 'helping mothers' by her frequent reference to 'we' and that this group is under the direction of the class teacher, Bridget. The teacher appears first as the owner of the flash cards (and thus of the flash card pedagogy) and this information is followed by a description of the physical organisation of the flash cards. The method of organising the cards in which each letter is clearly differentiated from the others reflects the compartmentalised nature of the pedagogy, and both child and 'helper's experience of it. The flash card practice, as Joanne outlines it, follows a predictable and unvarying sequence of steps, organised around a stimulus-response pattern of interaction. The structure of the practice is made clear in the bold sections of the transcript. Within this practice an adult-child relation is constructed, in which the adult has power to define precisely the nature of the child's response, both verbally and physically (ie in the movements of correct letter formation).

However, Joanne's power is in relation to the child only. In relation to the teacher she occupies a similar position as the child does to herself or any other 'helping mother' as reflected by the similar stimulus response pattern of interaction: 'Bridget just got us to correct them ... so we would do that.' Here we see the parent as helper being positioned within the pedagogic practice in similar ways to the child. The authority here is in the structure of the practice to which all participants are subject.

In the following example, the teacher's method is different but the relations between teacher-helper and helper-child are similar. Through her participation as a 'reading mother', Melissa learns the terms of the discourse, and through her alignment with the teacher comes to have an investment in it:

> They, it's, the way they teach them, it's memory. It's looking at a word, not as we used to learn as 'c - a - t spells cat' but it's 'that word is cat', 'that word is blanket', 'that word is ...'. And she, you know just twigged, like most sort of children in the class, 'cause I've read ever since she started school one day a week for the whole class which has been - her first year of school was a mixture of reception and year one and now she's in a year one/ year two composite class and um she's reading to her ability. You know the, the teacher decides what ability they're at, gives them the reader and um she's reading it.

And because I'm reading at school, I, I get a fairly good overview of the the standard, if you want to say that, not that I expect Chloe to reach any high - you know, I just would like her to be happy at school at this stage, it's a long way to go, but I get a good picture of the standards of reading and she's certainly doing extremely well.

The standards of reading which Melissa refers to are constituted by the classroom reading practice which focuses on 'readers'. This body of reading material is produced specifically for the purpose of streaming children into reading ability levels and monitoring their progress through a developmental sequence. In Melissa's account, the teacher is in charge; she has the knowledge which makes it possible for her to place each child within an ability range and allocate to the child the appropriate reader. But within this pedagogy, (as within any pedagogy) the teacher is constrained through the structuring of her practice according to the terms of particular educational discourses.

In this case, underlying the reading practice is a discourse which constructs learning as a developmental sequence, a sequence which can be matched with sequenced teaching materials (readers).

In Melissa's account we can see how the family's interests are met through her helping practice. Melissa gets a 'good picture of the standards of reading' by virtue of knowing what level of reader each child in the class is currently on. Thus she is able to place her child within a performance range and within a developmental sequence, information which she relays to her partner. Melissa's mode of participation in the classroom offers her the opportunity to monitor her both her child's learning progress and, equally important, her level of emotional comfort. At the same time, her actions are compatible with the teacher's pedagogy.

The practice of involving mothers as 'reading helpers' is a popular form of compromise between two sets of interests, the teacher's and the mother's. However, teachers expect helpers to put the interests of the class ahead of their interests in their child while in the classroom (Biklen 1993b). One way to ensure this happens is to construct the helper's classroom practice in such a way that she is constrained to focus her attention on 'the other children'. Joanne's account of the flash card practice can be read as an example of such a constraining strategy. In effect to be a good helper the mother is required to behave as if she places other children's needs as equal to, or ahead of, her own. The difficulties of doing this are indicated by Joanne's account of listening to reading in her daughter's class:

> I actually stopped reading um also um with her in grade two because she was getting too distracted and um plus when I was reading with other children she kept coming out to me and I just couldn't concentrate with the other children. And actually once I have stopped going, she picked up really well with her reading and I think it was just she liked having me there but she didn't want me to be there to listen to reading, she just enjoyed my company, so.

Joanne is caught between her daughter's need for 'company' and the requirements of her helping role. Because the move into the classroom entails a position shift from

'mother' to 'teacher's helper' the child is required to shift position in relation to her mother from 'daughter' to 'class member'. Her attempts to disrupt the reading sessions can be seen as indicating resistance to this shift. Joanne's position of helper thus requires both her and her child to hold in tension two positions, each with different interests and responsibilities.

In both these accounts, which are representative of the group of 'helping mothers', we can see both alignments and tensions in the positioning of mothers and teachers. The similarity in their discursive positioning occurs via alignments between the discourses and practices of the home and the school in which women are positioned as responsible for children's early development and care (Walkerdine 1987; Biklen 1987, 1993). However, in the classroom site, the interests of parents and teachers are not identical. Parents are concerned with the achievement and emotional comfort of their own child whereas teachers are responsible for managing the performance of the entire class (Katz 1982). I have used the inclusive term 'parents' here deliberately because, while mothers have a greater presence in school sites, fathers are also concerned with their child's performance and well-being at school (Bradley 1985; Hock et al 1980; Lareau 1989). Mothers' work in school sites, like their school-supportive work at home, can be understood as work performed on behalf of the family, aimed at maximising the child's present success and future social status (Cohen 1981; Lareau 1989; D. Smith 1987). An essential part of this work is learning the pedagogic discourses and practices within which the child is positioned as schooled literate subject.

In these two sections, the focus has been on the group of women categorised as educational 'insiders'. In the following section, I turn my attention to fathers and ask: how are they positioned in relation to the sites of their children's education?

7.5.4 Fathers and education sites: participation and absence

Fathers' positions in relation to their children's educational sites, whether inside, absent or on the fringe, have a major bearing on their access to the discourses and practices

operating at these sites and thus their ability to construct their own parenting practice in relation to these discourses. This is particularly the case as men are not generally targeted by pedagogic and childrearing discourses which circulate in socially available texts, such as 'women's magazines', although this appears to be changing as the shared parenting discourse gains greater currency.

On the evidence of the interviews, men were much less likely than women to adopt an inside position and much more likely to be absent from children's educational sites. This is due both to the gendered division of labour operating in these families and the organisation of early childhood education. Most of the women had taken a period of extended leave from the workforce in order to care for young children and so were available to spend time at their child's kindergarten, should they wish to. Indeed it was kindergarten hours that prevented some of the women from returning to paid work as soon as they wanted. As kindergartens generally offer four three-hour sessions per week, even part-time employment is difficult to arrange without additional childcare.

In the following section, men's experience of these three positions will be examined through the accounts of three fathers: Neville, who was generally absent from the site; Michael who was on the fringe; and Craig, one of the few male insiders.

Neville's absence from his son's kindergarten site was in contrast to his partner Janet's position as insider. Janet frequently spent entire sessions at the kindergarten and was also the treasurer of its committee. Neville's experience of the kindergarten was limited to parent interviews. We can expect that differences in Janet and Neville's modes of participation may lead to differential access to educational discourses and practices. As discourses offer ways of framing both the child's learning and adults' participation in it, differential access may contribute to differences in the ways Neville and Janet understand children's activity in educational contexts. Following are Janet's, then Neville's answers to a question about whether they were satisfied with the kindergarten's approach to literacy:

Janet: I have seen Jo encourage those ones that want to write

> which is good and I've also seen her encourage the ones that want to write that can't write and she's sat down with them and spent time with them and I think that's really nice. They do the little - particularly if they can't write their name - she does the dots and they join up and they think its pretty special. So yep, I reckon if my child wanted to write at kindy, Jo would encourage it, so yeah I think she's got the right approach.
>
> **Neville**: Oh they just sing songs and the kids roar around, none of that reading and writing.

As we have seen, Neville's own approach to his child's learning is directive. Teaching, to him, is transmission of information and skills (see section 8.4.3.1). Because Neville does not observe the kindergarten teacher in the role of transmitter, he assumes no learning is taking place. Neville asked to comment on literacy in this site, replies in effect that there is no literacy. What he does see is a form of group activity which he does not associate with learning ('they just sing songs') and random chaotic child behaviour ('the kids roar around'). The teacher is not present in Neville's account at all: the 'invisible pedagogy' is truly invisible to him (Solsken 1993).

Janet sees the teacher responding to individual children's attempts at literate behaviour ('encourag[ing] the ones that want to write'); she sees the teacher scaffolding these attempts (dotting the letters); she sees children's responses to the teacher's actions "they think it's pretty special'). She sees, in short, the teacher's pedagogy and in so doing aligns herself with the teacher. This alignment is reinforced by her use of the teacher's first name.

Here Janet and Neville look at the educational site with different discursive lenses and as a result make different interpretations. Because learning is defined differently within different pedagogic discourses, what can be interpreted as learning is conditioned by the discourse within which the interpreter is positioned/positions themselves. However, not all discourses are equally privileged and thus not all interpretations will be seen as valid. It is Janet's interpretation that is likely to be privileged here because she shares the teacher's discursive lens. While Neville's presence in the classroom signifies participation it does not signify membership of the discourse.

The discrepancy between fathers' and mothers' accounts of their children's formal education was most marked in families where the mother was highly participant in, and the father absent from, educational sites. In some families, there was greater sharing of the routine educational duties, such as taking children to school, settling them in to the classroom, picking them up, etc. Michael, unlike most of the fathers, was available to pick up his child from kindergarten on a regular basis, due to working an early shift. He thus had greater opportunities to be present in the setting than many men.

Michael and Laura subscribed to a shared parenting model, despite maintaining a traditional division of childcare and domestic labour. This was indicated in their frequent use of 'we' statements, as in this reference to story-reading:

> **Laura**: We started very young with both of them, presenting books to them as a source of interest and something, oh something that ...
>
> **Michael**: You do together.
>
> **Laura**: Yes, you do together.
>
> **Michael**: It's not just one of us.

But Michael's desire to be an equal partner in the child-rearing process is limited both by the division of domestic labour within his family and by the way in which his participation at the educational site is represented. In the following account of an introductory visit to a kindergarten, we can see how Michael positions himself as observer in contrast to the 'mothers' who he presents as full participants:

> But I must say when we went to L. Kindergarten just to have a look and enrol Gavin for this year, until we found out the other problem, and er, there was about five mothers there, even more. And it was just, ... heavy involvement like they were making something, cooking I think, all the mothers there and the children all helping make ... I can't remember what it was.
>
> But then, they had a break and they went outside and I had a David and Luke outside and Laura was in the office and er ... kindergarten teacher's there, two teachers ... supervising the children on the .. playing and everything and they all had fruit laid out for them, it was afternoon tea. It was like, they must have all brought fruit and put it in.

> And the, well one of the kindergarten teachers came up and started to talk to me and just explained what the kids were doing and she was very very friendly and I said "Oh great, it's going to be good coming here"

Michael's description of the kindergarten scene begins by highlighting the presence of women in their roles as mothers and then goes on to define the nature of this presence as 'heavy involvement'. The scene is defined in terms of this involvement - 'all the mothers there and all the children helping'. Michael's position is outside with this two children, on the outskirts of an activity. His partner Laura, on the other hand, is 'in the office', presumably discussing the child's enrolment: she is both literally and discursively on the inside.

Michael's description occurred in the context of a comparison with another kindergarten in which parents were required to stop at the door. It is the 'heavy involvement' of the mothers at this site that makes it a preferred choice. Michael does not encounter 'heavy involvement' from fathers at either site. The mode of participation made available to him is one of monitor and observer. In this role he determines whether prospective kindergartens for his son encourage the maximum amount of participation by women in their roles as mothers.

The intention to be an active participant in his children's learning, and his reliance on adult females to do much of the routine literate work are both present in the following statement.

> **Michael**: Ah just simple things that we can do as a family like Laura can run to the library and get books for the boys or take them to playgroup. A couple of times a week she takes them. Like they're simple little things that were never done for us because ...

Going to the library and playgroup are understood as significant aspects of the work of developing children's literacy, work which Michael has indicated he wants to take an equal share in. The use of 'we' and references to 'the family' reflect Michael's desire to represent himself as a full participant; however the slippage to 'Laura' indicates his reliance on the mother to carry out the actual practices. Tension is also present in the

reference to 'simple' and 'little' which down play the mother's work, even while its significance is emphasised. These qualifiers operate to minimise the effect of Michael's absence from this work. Thus subscription to the shared parenting discourse can be maintained even though sharing of the work is not, in practice, complete. If tasks are 'simple' and 'little', by implication it does not matter who does them, thus the allocation of these tasks to the mother is not taken to constitute a deviation from 'shared parenting'.

Very few men in this study ventured beyond the fringe of their children's educational environments. However Craig was one who made the move to classroom 'insider' and so occupied a position which many of the women interviewed took for granted as their own. Interestingly, Craig had been a 'failure' at school, experiencing severe difficulty with reading and writing and describing himself as 'hopless'. As he explained it, his experience of failure provided a powerful incentive for his move into the classroom as a 'reading father'.

Another factor which enabled this participation was Craig's work status. An extended period of unemployment had afforded him the opportunity both to teach himself to read (using the newspaper as a 'reader') and to spend time at his children's kindergarten. Craig and his partner decided that the arrangement suited both of them, so Craig 'officially' took on the role of full-time homeworker. Craig's presence in the classroom was noted by the teachers who invited him to listen to reading on a regular basis:

> So they just sort of said, you know: 'Would you be interested?' and of course, I suppose I'm terrified but yes I'll do, I'll try. (laughs) I figure that kids are ... a lot worse off than I am now so (laughs) I mean I can read a lot better than they can. So they can't - I couldn't possibly embarrass myself.

Craig's admission of 'terror' was one factor that distinguished his account from those of the 'helping mothers'. His ability to overcome this fear is related to his experience of acquiring print reading as an adult by 'teaching himself' to read. By positioning himself as his own teacher, Craig is able to adopt the position of teacher in relation to the children. Unlike 'insider' mothers, such as Melissa and Joanne, Craig did not appear to utilise his classroom presence in order to learn the teacher's pedagogy. When asked

whether he had taken on this task to learn more about children's learning, Craig responded:

> Not really because every trick they pull I, I've pulled I suppose. So it wasn't an education really, it was more ... me passing on the sort of knowledge that, you know, you're not going to get away with it so. (laughs) I did when I was around because people just let me get away with it.

Craig explicitly states that his participation in the classroom is not 'an education'. He does not, therefore position himself as apprentice to the teacher's expert in the way that, for instance, Joanne does. On the contrary he positions himself as the one with knowledge to 'pass on', thus hailing the transmission discourse of learning which we have seen in also subscribed to by Neville (see section 8.4.3.1). He also presents himself as controller and disciplinarian in relation to the children ('you're not going to get away with it'). This reference to child resistance (the implied attempts to 'get away with it') also recalls Gilles account of his son's reading.

Craig hails his own literate history in justifying his approach to the listening-to-reading practice: 'every trick they pull, I've pulled'. As a 'failed' school student, Craig is able to take up a different subject position from that of the teacher. This is part of what makes his approach to listening-to-reading unlike that of many of the parents (particularly mothers) who align themselves with the teacher's pedagogy. So while as 'reading father', Craig occupies an insider position until now more usually the province of mothers, he brings a different outlook to this position, one informed by his own literate history.

The degree of participation by each of these fathers at the sites of their children's formal education was materially affected by the division of domestic and childcare labour in their families. Craig was able to become an insider partly because of his partner's participation in the paid workforce. Michael's presence on the fringe was possible due to a work schedule which left him 'free' in the afternoons. Neville was not able to 'spend time' at his son's kindergarten, even had he wished to, due to the demands of full-time employment. Of course, the same can be said for mothers. Those who work full-time

are in a similar position to most fathers with regard to participation at educational sites. Few women in this sample had, however worked full-time in their children's preschool years.

As outsiders to their children's educational sites, fathers have fewer opportunities to see pedagogies in action. This compounds the differences created through women's greater access to the childrearing and pedagogic information available in parenting texts (Clarke-Stewart, 1978a; Dean et al 1994) and through mother's networks (Cohen 1981; Wearing 1984). When men do attend kindergartens, play groups and the like, they generally see, as Michael does, women as main players. However, when such sites are organised according to the child-centre models, women's organising presence may be hard to recognise. Neville, for example, merely sees children 'roaring around'. He does not see the ways in which children's 'free' activity is facilitated by women in their roles as teachers and helpers. He does not, as his partner Janet does, notice the carefully timed interventions of the teacher who determines when individual children are 'ready' to learn. Thus, even when fathers are present, they may still be outsiders, discursively speaking. This state of affairs contributes to the maintenance of women's socially imposed expertise in the management of children's learning and schooling.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed parents' accounts of their literate work with children in home and educational sites. What often went unsaid in the interviews, perhaps because it was considered so obvious as not to warrant comment, is the primary reason behind this literate work. But to appreciate the significance of this work and the forms it takes, it is necessary to remind ourselves once again that the desired product of parents' literate and pedagogic labour is the educable and educated child, a product which is not complete without institutional certification. The measuring practices of schooling are taken to provide the documentary evidence of the success or otherwise of parents' efforts as Smith points out:

> The child's "performance" is constituted in the documentary practices of the school. This locates a key to the power of the school over child and parents. The child's documentary standing within the school shapes the child's future within the school system and eventually in the labor market. (1987 p.199-201)

It is their shared relation to the education system which produces commonalities in these parents' aspirations and the pedagogic practices through which they attempt to create optimum conditions for their children's success. In particular, parents generally demonstrated a belief in the importance of the early years as preparatory to school entry. There was a striking degree of similarity, in terms of desired outcomes, in the kinds of activities parents undertook with their preschool children. Activities, whether directly taught or indirectly facilitated, were often designed to elicit recognition of foundational symbols: number, letter, colour, shape.

However, as we have seen, there are some patterns of difference also, most notably in relation to parent gender. These differences are associated with two key factors. The first is the gendered division of domestic and childrearing labour in these families, particularly in children's preschool years. This is particularly relevant to the temporal aspects of parents' literate and pedagogic work. The division of labour determines which parent is available during school hours to occupy the position of school insider, where this is seen as necessary. This was particularly obvious in the case of Craig, whose regular participation at his daughter's school was made possible by the reversal of domestic roles. Fathers' literate and pedagogic work, because it is usually undertaken in the period between home-coming and bed-time, is less subject to choice of time and location. In many families this relatively small window of opportunity combined with the importance placed on father-child interaction invested events, for example the bed-time story, with particular significance.

For home-based mothers, the challenge is to manage the competing demands of domestic and caretaking labour on the one hand and literate/pedagogic labour on the other. The dominance of child-centred accounts of mothering makes it difficult for middle-class women to acknowledge conflicts between these two sets of demands (Walkerdine & Lucey 1989). Perhaps this is the reason for the relative absence of

references to domestic work in women's accounts. However, traces of this conflict can be found: in Lynette's attempts to combine story reading with infant care; in Anne's laughing reference to 'arsenic hour' and her dismissal of the possibility of regularly reading to the youngest of three young children; in Alicia's use of story reading as part of a nightly physical struggle to settle her child; in Louise's reference to being driven 'nuts' by a toddler's continual demands to be read to.

The second factor contributing to gender differences in parents' literate work is their differing access and subscription to the pedagogic and childrearing discourses which provide models for this work. Women are more likely than men to encounter these discourses even before they become mothers, as Lynette's experience in ante-natal classes illustrates. They are more likely to read the texts which promote particular literate and childrearing practices (Clarke-Stewart 1978a, Dean et al 1994). They are also more likely to attend the sites within which particular pedagogies are employed and child-adult interactions are demonstrated (for instance kindergyms, playgroups, kindergartens). Women are more likely to form networks of mothers in similar circumstances (Cohen 1982; Urwin 1983; Wearing 1984); indeed the core group for this sample began as such a network.

It is not surprising that, as we have seen, mothers inthis group are more likely than fathers to subscribe to the dominant developmental and child-centred discourses which are promoted through these texts, sites and practices. Where mother and father subscribe to different pedagogies conflicts arise around the issue of child agency. This is demonstrated in the similar cases of Neville/Janet and Louise/Giles. In both these cases, the mother attempts to produce the child as autonomous, independent, learner denying her own agency in the process. This pattern has also been observed by Walkerdine and Lucey: 'Mutuality ... is achieved by the mother actively suppressing her own authority' (1989 p.109). The fathers in these two families, on the other hand, do not suppress their authority in child-adult pedagogic relations and appear to be locating themselves within a transmission discourse of learning where the adult determines what is to be learned and how.

The pattern of difference between mothers and fathers can be expressed in this way: while both take on responsibility for their children's upbringing and education, it is mothers who are more likely to feel this responsibility in terms of producing their child in ways which accord with dominant discourses of childrearing and pedagogy. These discourses provide yardsticks, not only for child outcomes, but for *kinds* of maternal input. For many mothers it is not enough to ensure one's child is literate; it is necessary to ensure this literacy has been produced in ways which leave intact the child's individuality and autonomy. It is not surprising that in interviews mothers were more likely to be self-critical about their literate and pedagogic work with children than fathers. We see this when Debbie speaks of not doing her 'homework'; when Anne begins to justify her decision not to practice early reading; when Louise speaks of 'not liking' herself for her adoption of a testing practice.

These parents' accounts suggest that the shared parenting discourse is impacting on parents' management of their literate and pedagogic work in the family. This is particularly seen in men's participation in story reading and in the entry of some fathers into educational sites. What the accounts of reading demonstrate, however, is that men enter into existing practices constituted on the premise of women's responsibility for young children's care and learning, and which are still monitored by women in their roles as mothers. This is consistent with Smith's (1987) observation of parents' management of their children's education:

> Insofar as fathers are now in some places playing an increasing role in this work, their role takes over or represents a new division of a role already established for the family and vested earlier in women. (p. 201)

However, it also seems that fathers' participation may be effecting some transformations in family literate practices. In the area of story reading, some men's attempts to shorten texts in the interests of settling their children quickly is resulting in a form of reading that has a composing component. Children are thus being subjected to different versions of the same text depending on which parent is reading it. It is interesting to consider what effects this may have on children's attitude to the authority of the text.

Men's participation is also having effects on the ways in which parents' literate work can be represented with potential challenges to official accounts of this work. This was most clearly seen in the tensions between Janet's and Neville's accounts of their practice. In the standard study of 'parental' beliefs (Hess et al 1984; Johnson & Martin 1985; Sameroff & Feil 1985; Weisner & Wilson-Mitchell 1990) only Janet's version of this work would have been sought. Thus, Neville's use of directive teaching strategies would have gone unrecorded and the account of their son's learning would have been located within the child-centred discourse.

The accounts of parental practice presented in this chapter call into question idealised images of the home as a backdrop to children's 'natural learning', images that are free of material constraints and discursive conflict. Rather we see mothers, fathers and children contesting authority as they attempt to negotiate their relative positions in literate and pedagogic practices, and indeed negotiating whether these practices are primarily to do with literacy and learning or something else, such as love or power.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Introduction

In this thesis, the metaphor of discursive fields has been used to position parents within competing discourses available for framing their children's literacy and their own. By the same token, this thesis product is itself part of a discursive field within which the meaning of home literate practices is continually being contested at all levels of public life. It is in the context of such debates that I offer these conclusions.

An enduring theme in public debate has been parents' responsibility for their children's school achievement. At the time of writing, the Australian government had been considering a suggestion that family allowances be made conditional upon parents' participation in their child's literacy development (Clare & Johnston 1993). The report authors further suggest that:

> schools might come to expect from every parent a report from parents on what they are doing to assist their child's education. (Clare & Johnston 1993 p. 66)

Clare and Johnston, in common with most contemporary commentators avoid making reference to 'mothers', preferring the gender-neutral term 'parent'. In these 'enlightened' times it appears that reminders of the unbalanced division of domestic and pedagogic labour are not to be considered appropriate.

However we need look no further than women's magazines to realise that women continue to be the assumed prime agent in children's development (C. Luke 1994). The advertisement copy 'does the homework spill into your kitchen?' (see chapter one) could only be directed towards a mother. The literate family, managed and monitored by a competent and caring mother, is an object of collective desire that is discursively constituted in multiple social texts.

This thesis is informed by an alternative construction of the literate family. I have understood the subject 'parent' to be simultaneously located within the intersecting discursive fields of parenting, childhood and literacy. Within each of these fields multiple discourses provide meanings for the subjects 'mother', 'father', 'child', 'learning', 'reading' - indeed all terms within the field.

The relation between actual parents and these discursively produced subjects 'father'and 'mother' can be understood as analogous to the relationship between actual teachers and the discursive subject 'teacher'. This relationship has been described by Baker:

> When individuals talk as or account for their work as teachers, they ... are inventing or describing themselves as members of the category [teacher]. Each appearance of a [teacher] in a text is an articulation of what a teacher is, should be or could be. Part of this range of possible teachers is available to actual individuals in the course of their work and life. (1995 p. 4)

In a similar way, discourses of parenting, childhood and literacy produce a range of possible subject positions for 'parent' defined through category terms. An example is the subject position for father variously termed 'participatory father', 'shared parenting father' or 'new age father'. The position is defined through category terms such as 'nurturing', 'caring', 'interested' and 'warm' (Biddulph 1994; Ehrensaft 1986). These terms are very similar to those traditionally used to define mothering (Ruddick 1989). In contrast, the subject position father, as constituted within patriarchal discourse, is defined through the category terms 'authoritative', 'strong', 'firm' and 'breadwinner' (Seidler 1988).

These category terms define not only what the subject 'parent' ('mother', father') is but what such a subject does. In other words these possible subjects entail possible forms of participation in discursive practices. The position 'participant father', for instance, is associated with nurturing practices. This is illustrated most clearly when the persona 'new age father' appears in television commercials engaged in such activities as putting a band-aid on a child's knee, telling stories and washing his little girl's favourite dress.

Over the course of their life histories and in their present situations each of these parents has taken up a range of subject positions within discourses and practices of education, literacy, and childhood. In the thesis text I have progressed from parents' memories to their interpretations of their children, to their literate practice. It is in the nature of such sequences to suggest a past-to-present causal relationship. However, I do not claim that the past causes the present in any simple way. Indeed, as memory is constructed in the present, it would be just as just as true to say that the past as

it is known to us, is produced by the present. We represent the past through discourses available in the present. When a person narrates a 'true' event:

> the nature of the remembering [is] significantly a function of the stye of discourse which constitute[s] it. (Middleton & Edwards 1990 p. 35)

This thesis has not, therefore, aimed to tell definitive stories about people's lives but rather to trace patterns of meaning and practice through their representations of their lives. In order to trace these patterns, parents' accounts have been fragmented and the fragments scattered and reassembled many times in many different ways. The discursive patterns emerging from this process have been set alongside discursive patterns produced through analysis of other groups of texts. In this way parents' accounts have been interpreted in their sociosemantic context.

8.2 The sociosemantic context: a continuing story

The sociosemantic context for parenting is a dynamic, continually contested field. Relationships between parenting and children's literacy are regularly being defined and redefined in the public arena. This continuing debate forms a background to the review of discursive fields which follows.

In this thesis, I have established the sociosemantic context for parents' accounts by surveying socially constructed meanings within the discursive fields of parenting, childhood and literacy (chapter three). Parenting is socially defined as the practice of bringing up children conducted within a particular set of social relations (the family) and in a particular kind of social site (the home). While 'parent' is often used as a gender neutral term in official discourse, within the 'traditional' discourses of parenting, motherhood and fatherhood are constructed as different forms of practice. This discourse is closely aligned with, and mutually supportive of, the dominant discourse of gender difference. The differences between fathers and mothers tend to be defined in terms of opposition (care/control, private realm/public sphere). The categories used to define the feminine maternal subject are associated with her presumed childrearing role. Thus the 'parent' of official parenting and childrearing discourses is often code for 'mother'.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that women continue to be the target group for intervention into the circumstances of childrearing. In Australia, one such recent intervention at federal government level has been cuts to community childcare centres budgets (Gunn 1997; King 1997). This move has been associated with a return to 'traditional family values' lead by conservative political forces. While this intervention into childcare funding is generally reported in gender-neutral terms as impacting on 'families' and 'working parents', research suggests that when childcare has been made difficult, it has been women rather than men who have reduced their working hours (Fogarty et al 1971; Riley 1983; Shelton 1992). Thus the target group for this intervention is actually mothers and the effect is to reinforce the gendered division of childrearing labour within families. The discourse of separate roles remains strong, albeit disguised by gender-neutral language.

There is, however, an alternative discourse of parenting which is based on the notion of likeness rather than difference. This discourse, which I have termed the 'shared parenting' discourse, constitutes men and women as actually, or potentially, similar in their responsibility for and approach to child-rearing. It promotes men's active participation in child-rearing and is supportive of women's right to participate in the public sphere. The subject position 'mother' appears to be defined rather similarly in both traditional and shared parenting discourses. The ideal subject, the object of desire, constructed within shared parenting discourses is the participatory nurturing father.

Because parenting is defined as the practice of bringing up children, discourses which construct the subject 'child' simultaneously construct the subject position 'parent'. Two influential discourses of the child at this historical juncture are the 'developmental discourse' and the 'child-centred discourse'. Each of these discourses constitutes the subject 'child', the subject 'parent' and the two prime child-directed practices, parenting and education.

The child is a key subject within discourses of literacy and learning. Official discourses of literacy cohere around a central assumption, that literacy is the key to social status for the individual and progress for the society. While writing this conclusion I was further reminded of the pervasiveness of this assumption when the

Australian Minister for Education Dr. David Kemp was making statements, such as the following, linking low literacy levels in primary school with high rates of unemployment:

> It is now clear Australia has a serious literacy problem among its children. ... It is feeding the unemployment queue and denying children the opportunity to participate fully in society. (Kemp 1997)

The literate child is thus an ideal subject, used as an indicator of society's proper functioning. This subject, heavily invested in, requires continual productive work, both semantic and material. This productive work links the macro level of government and social institutions with the micro level of family life. One of the key tasks for the social subject 'parent' is the production of the subject 'literate child'. It is the assumed link between parenting and children's literacy which, in one sense, legitimates this thesis, this academic intrusion into the 'private lives' of families.

Gender is inextricably implicated in the construction of the social subjects within the field of parenting. This is also true for the discursive field of literacy. Literacy is located within broader domains of knowledge production which are defined in oppositional binary terms. This is reflected in the division of the curriculum within educational institutions. In the review of discursive fields (chapter 3) I particularly focussed on three key binaries: Arts/Science, private/public and passive/active. It is through their positioning within these oppositional discourses of knowledge/practice, that social subjects take on forms of gendered literate subjectivity and participate in associated modes of literate production and consumption.

8.3 The research context

This thesis is located within the broad multi-disciplinary field of studies of parenting. In surveying selected studies, I have examined evidence of parents' practices (chapter four). At the same time I have noted how research into parenting has employed available discourses of parenting and so has itself been productive of particular subject positions.

The following aspects of practice were reviewed: parent-child talk, parents' participation in children's play, parents' pedagogies, effects of child gender, and parents' personal practices of literacy. On the basis of this review, I concluded that gender, class and adult-child relations were key intersecting factors in the production of literate practices within the family. I also made certain predictions about patterns likely to emerge from the accounts of this group of parents.

I anticipated that there would be patterns of gender difference both in the allocation of parenting and literate work and in the meanings attached to this work. Specifically, mothers were expected to take the major responsibility for this work. However, I also expected to see a belief in shared parenting and in men's involvement as fathers. Because shared parenting is at odds with traditional division of childrearing labour, some tension in parents' accounts of their work was predicted.

A belief in child-centred practices of childrearing has been associated with middle-class values. Therefore I anticipated this group of middle-class parents would subscribe to, or display knowledge of, child-centred discourses of childrearing and education.

The research evidence suggests that parents wish their children to develop as appropriately gendered girls or boys. Studies show recurring patterns relating to child gender in a range of areas: the provision of play materials, modes of parent-child talk and modes of interactive play. For this reason, I expected to see patterns related to child gender. However, since very few studies related specifically to the area of literacy I made no predictions about the form these patterns might take.

I noted that liberal anti-sexism discourses had set parents a new task, that of producing gender equality between different sex children. Because this task potentially conflicts with the task of producing children as appropriately gendered, I predicted discursive conflict in parents' accounts of their children.

8.4 Findings: the parent as gendered literate subject

The analysis presented in this thesis supports the contention that gender is a critical factor in parents' understandings of childhood, literacy and parenting. Gender is present in both of the senses outlined by Flax (1990 p. 46): as a 'category that helps us to make sense out of particular social worlds'; and as 'a social relation that enters into and partially constitutes all other social relations and activities'. The accounts of this particular group of parents reveal the many ways in which gender enters into their constructs and practices. While sometimes gender is explicitly referred to, more often it is present in less obvious (and unacknowledged) ways.

In analysing the place of gender, I have focussed on three areas in particular: parents' literacy histories, their literate practices in their roles as parents, and their understandings of their own children as literate subjects.

8.4.1 Gender and parents' literacy histories

In parents' literacy histories, gendered positions emerge in their definitions of literacy as knowledge and practice. Through analysis of parents' memories of schooling I have shown some of the ways in which they became inserted into pedagogic discourses and structures. Through participation in these discourses and their associated practices, they learned to constitute themselves as particular kinds of schooled and literate subjects, subjects that were both gendered and classed.

For some of the men in this study, masculine subjectivity has been constituted in a relation of opposition to forms of literacy which are understood as 'other' to masculine qualities. Because reading, as a literate practice, is constituted as subjective it is considered other to masculine objectivity. Neville, for instance, valued his favourite subject Geography, for its emphasis on 'facts' but hated subject English. Likewise, reading's status as private and passive constitutes it as other to modes of masculinity associated with public realm participation and productive activity. Recall Steven who could only be encouraged to read as a child if he could be seen to 'earn something'.

For the women, dominant forms of feminine literate subjectivity have had both private and institutional dimensions. In its public dimension, feminine literate subjectivity appears to be associated with the 'good student' subject position which is achieved through displays of literate skills (reading aloud, writing neatly). Tracey, for instance, was able to partially redeem her 'tomboy' image through learning calligraphy from her primary teacher. In its private dimension, feminine literate subjectivity has been associated with the pleasure gained from sustained attention to a text as it unfolds, in particular the reading of fictional narrative. Yet, this form of subjectivity is not available exclusively to female subjects, as Keith's story illustrates.

Men who rejected reading and women who loved it made statements that were in some ways the direct reverse of each other. This suggests that feminine and masculine literate subjectivity are constituted in a relation of opposition. But while this opposition may reflect dominant positions, other positions were taken up which do not so clearly reflect this gendered opposition.

Some forms of masculinity were positively associated with particular literate practices and positions. Future positions within a class-differentiated work force appear to have influenced boys' attitudes to both schooling and literacy. The adoption of school-credentialed literacies can be compatible with a masculine identity for boys growing up with professional aspirations. For Hans, the Arts/Languages track in his private school was associated, not with marginalised masculinities, but with a coveted foreign office career. This is also the case if there exists, within a boy's family of origin, a living example of the professional masculine literate subject such as the 'tradition' that Richard's father represented.

Some of the women took up positions of resistance in relation to dominant forms of literate subjectivity. However, this resistance was suppressed, both within the context of the interview and within the institutional context of schooling. This suggests that some gendered literate subject positions are marginalised. The stories of Ros and Tracey suggest that girls who do not adopt privileged forms of feminine literate subjectivity are problematic subjects within the school context. Both were the subject of disciplinary work by teachers. Ros, for instance, was pressured (unsuccessfully) to drop her chosen career choice of teaching.

Similarly, Keith faced censure owing to his adoption of feminine literate practices deemed inappropriate to a masculine subject. In order to publicly align with masculine literate subjectivity, Keith worked on his handwriting, deliberately making it a messy scrawl. Through this body work, he erased this feminine aspect so successfully that untidy writing became habitual and his earlier facility was almost completely forgotten.

This analysis suggests that, in order to understand the choices individuals make about participation in literate practices, it is necessary to consider the degree to which particular gendered literate subject positions are privileged within particular contexts. This is consistent with Skegg's (1991) analysis of high school girls' negotiation of subject positions within the classroom. She notes:

> Contradictory subject positions can be taken up in discourses of femininity and masculinity. Movement between them is, however, constrained by the power located in discourse and access to positions circumscribed by class, gender and race.' (Skeggs 1991 p. 136)

As we have seen, those literate positions which run counter to the individual's 'expected' gender orientation are likely to be constrained through disciplinary work.

There is evidence that these parents' early orientations to literacy are a factor in their current attitudes and practice. This is particularly seen in their descriptions of their own children's orientation to schooling and literacy. Megan, for instance, based on her school experience, identified herself as a keen reader but 'no good' to Maths. She described her son, on the other hand, as a good Maths student but hopeless at reading. Megan, in common with most parents, made no explicit reference to gender in her descriptions of self or child. In an unacknowledged and taken-for-granted process, both mother and son are positioned through gendered binary discourses and their associated educational structures and practices in such a way that an oppositional relation is produced between them.

8.4.2 Gender and discourses of the child

I have traced four discursive strands through parents' descriptions of their children. One of these corresponds to the dominant discourse of gender difference and employs binary categories to construct relations of difference between male children and female children. Some parents were explicit in their reference to gender as a prime categorising frame. This was seen most clearly in the case of Melissa and Neil's comparison of their son and daughter. Here gender was understood as productive of children's preferences and capacities. More generally, parents did not explain their child's qualities with reference to its gender. However, an analysis of the category terms used by parents to describe male children as compared to female children indicated that the dominant discourse of gender difference *is* an underlying though unacknowledged resource used by parents in positioning their children.

The other three discursive strands were ostensibly gender neutral. The individualist discourse allowed parents to describe each child's personal qualities and to distinguish an individual child from others. This discourse also allowed the parent to see the child's actions as caused by innate characteristics. It is perhaps the strength of the individualist discourse that prevents parents from noticing that the categories they use to describe their child's special qualities at the same time assigns that child to category group membership (Clark 1989). I have noted above the way in which this works for children's gender positioning. However, this process also has other effects which are equally significant , for instance in assigning children to ability categories such as 'bright' or 'battler'.

The child-centred discourse allowed parents to represent their child as agent in its own learning. At the same time it enabled the parent to represent themselves as responsive to the child and to avoid the marginalised position of 'pushy parent'. In the child-centred discourse as it appears in child-rearing and educational texts the subject 'child' is presented as universal and gender is not explicitly referred to (eg Dodge & Phinney 1990; Elkind 1994). However, this study found that the discourse was employed in gender-skewed ways by parents. Firstly, mothers were more likely than fathers to represent children as agents. Secondly, boys were more likely than

girls to be so represented. This finding supports critical analyses of child-centredness which challenge its supposed gender-neutrality (Clark 1989; Walkerdine 1985).

This study finds that an intersection of the discourses of individualism, gender difference, literacy and child-centredness supports a prohibition on parental literacy teaching to boys. This intersection creates a logic that can be expressed in the following way. Since children are individuals, they have innate capacities and preferences. However, since children are gendered, boys have different capacities and preferences to girls. Girls are understood to be 'naturally' more predisposed to schooled literacy practices such as reading, while boys are considered to be 'not interested'. If children do not show an interest, parents should not impose practices on them. However, even when boys do engage in literacy-related activities (such as Sean's drawing) this may be interpreted as 'not a real interest'. This cluster of factors means that parental literacy teaching to young boys is heavily problematised. Louise, mother of two boys, is barely able to 'admit' that she indulges in the directive practice of testing.

The developmental discourse allowed these parents to explain their child's current behaviour in terms of its age or stage. The notion of rates of development also allowed parents to compare their child to others; children could be 'on track', 'slow' or 'advanced'. Developmental discourses were also employed in gendered ways; boys were more likely to be described as developmentally 'behind' than girls. In this respect, parents employed developmental discourse similarly to teachers as indicated by a number of studies (Clark 1989, 1990; Lee 1992; Riddell 1992). Riddell (1992), for instance notes that the developmental model of childhood was a key factor in teachers' typifications of girls as mature and boys as immature.

Since literacy and language acquisition is considered a key developmental feature of the early years, the expectation of developmental delay for boys intersects with the other discursive factors in constituting boys as problematic literate subjects. Conversely the attribution to girls of an innate capacity for literacy and a developmental advantage in early learning, together with a much lesser degree of opposition to adult directiveness, constitutes girls as unproblematic literate subjects. This interpretation is once again supported by studies of teachers' attitudes. Riddell

(1992) found that the category 'mature' used to describe school girls was associated with the categories 'neat' and 'conscientious'. Thus a developmental descriptor was linked to classroom performance indicators associated with task completion and the presentation of written work, both integrally linked to literate competence.

While this similarity between parents' and teachers' responses may not be particularly surprising it is worth speculating as to possible reasons. Both home and school are part of the broader discursive field within which the subject 'child' is produced and are thus subject to influences from powerful social institutions and forces. An important institution which impacts on both home and school is the health system which has been particularly influential in developing and promoting medical and developmental discourses of childhood (Donzelot 1979; Riley 1983; Rose 1990). The media is another force which is particularly active in producing texts of childhood and employs individualist and child-centred discourses to create markets for goods and services (C. Luke 1994).

Another possible reason is that there are essential differences between boys and girls and that both parents and teachers (and for that matter doctors and advertisers) are simply reflecting this reality in their descriptions. The developmental discourse, according to this argument, has validity because it describes real developmental differences. This argument is however rejected because it fails to take into account the constitutive power of discourse (Fairclough 1989; Gee 1990; Weedon 1987). It is developmental discourse's claim to represent the real, and its legitimation by institutional authority, that makes it such a powerful influence on those charged with the responsibility of producing 'normal' children. Clark (1990 p.11) notes that the belief that males and females 'have their own distinct developmental blueprints' is a 'core belief' for teachers, underpinning the notion of essential gender difference.

The power of discourse to produce, or at least reinforce, gender difference in children is illustrated by an example from this study. Debby and Rodney observe that both son and daughter participate in two activities, drawing and golf. This phenomena could be reported as a case of sibling similarity. In another context, it could be taken as a sign of community membership, if drawing and golf were key community activities. However, these parents choose to report this behaviour as a sign of difference,

indeed of opposition. The category 'real interest' enables them to constitute their children as opposites, and each child as aligned with its gender group. It is significant that the point of difference revolves around inside versus outside play, and sedentary versus physical activities, oppositional categories used to produce gendered forms of literate subjectivity.

8.4.3 Gender and parental practice

Parental gender is clearly a key factor in the organisation of parental practice. This is most clearly seen in the division of labour and responsibility both generally in relation to childrearing and more specifically in relation to children's literacy and schooling. Overall, this sample of parents have allocated to the mother the primary responsibility for childcare and school preparation in the early years. Generally there was an attitude of acceptance of the status quo rather than enthusiastic support of it. 'That's just the way it is I suppose' was how one father expressed his attitude to the gendered division of labour.

The significance of this division of parental practice can be seen in the few cases where it was reversed or modified. One family's parental role reversal made it possible for the father, Craig, to establish a presence inside his daughter's junior primary classroom and enter into the literate work of the school. In another case, Michael's shift-work hours freed him to pick up his son from kindergarten and thus to maintain personal contact with the teacher.

With the exception of Craig, however, all of the school insiders, who assisted with the teacher's literate work, were mothers. This group, by their actions, endorsed the socially dominant assumption about women's responsibility for young children's literate achievement. This highly visible group were in the minority. Most mothers confined their involvement to home-based school support. However, very few explicitly rejected social expectations of their primary responsibility for their children's educational progress. Only one, Ros, actively challenged pressure from teachers to undertake literate work. In assigning this work to her partner, she mounted a radical challenge to the gendered discourse of parenting but at the same time supported the institutionally entrenched assumption about parents' supportive role in relation to the school's pedagogy.

As well as taking direct responsibility for their children's literacy learning, many mothers also undertook supervision of their partner's participation. This was most clearly seen in the example of bed-time story reading. Mothers' supervisory activities included direct initiation of fathers' reading, investing father-child reading sessions with special significance and listening in to monitor the father's reading performance.

Fathers' attitude to story reading demonstrates the intersection of parents' literate histories with their present practices. Those men who, as school students, had identified themselves as non-readers were more likely to 'own up' to employing various strategies for restricting the length of story-reading sessions.

This study finds that parental gender impacts on literacy practice through gender-differentiated access and subscription to pedagogic discourses. One key point of difference in this group was whether parents used the terms of the child-centred discourse to describe their children's activities. This is seen in the degree to which children were attributed with agency in parent-child pedagogic practices. Women were more likely than men to position the child as the initiator and themselves as responder in such interactions, particularly if the child was male. Mothers were also more likely than fathers to make comments to the effect that one should not 'push' children. Walkerdine & Lucey (1989) suggest that middle-class mothering is based on a democratic model in which active conflict between parent and child is taken as a sign of disfunction. Mothers' injunctions against 'pushing' can be understood in terms of their socially imposed responsibility to produce 'free will' in children (Walkerdine 1986). However, while mothers may publicly avow child-centred practice, they may take more directive roles in practice. Certainly this seems to be indicated in the case of Louise who 'owned up' to testing her children, after representing her practice as child-centred in the initial interview. Louise, remember, wrote that she did not 'like' this aspect of her 'personality', indicating the price of guilt paid by those who 'fail' to produce self-regulated children.

Difference in the pedagogic approaches taken by parents (and teachers) can be analysed in terms of the relative allocation of power to participants (Lee 1992; Vare 1995). The role of the adult is related to the way in which knowledge is understood in each discourse. Whether knowledge is seen as transmitted content, or conversely

as actively constructed is crucial to the allocation of power to participants.

In the child-centred approach power is ostensibly granted to the child. This can be seen when parents made statements such as:'I wait for him to ask questions' and 'she got me to draw letters' (see section 8.4.2). The adult participant is expected to avoid overt displays of power in relation to the child, thus the taboo against 'pushing' which was voiced by some parents, mothers particularly. In the child-centred discourse, knowledge exists in the environment as a kind of raw material waiting to be transformed into concepts by the child's active engagement (Walkerdine 1988). Knowledge of things is not, therefore, in the possession of the facilitating adult, although knowledge of the child most definitely is.

In the transmission approach, power is held by the teacher (whether institutional or parental). This power is operationalised as the power to speak and to direct the actions of another (Mehan 1979; Sinclair & Brazil 1982). The child is expected to listen and to respond to direction. These parents' responses suggest that, in an intersection with the developmental discourse, this expectation may be modified according to the age of the child). The adult's power is related to the definition of knowledge in this discourse. When parents use the transmission discourse they define knowledge as content, a body of information which can transmitted from teacher to learner. The alphabet is an example. These parents do not, generally, expect their children to 'discover' the alphabet but explicitly teach the letters by repeating them, having the child copy them and testing the child's knowledge of them. Consistent with analyses of teachers' use of transmission discourse the adult's authority comes about as a result of their status as primary knower.

Mothers, I would argue, are more likely to use the terms of the child-centred discourse than the transmission discourse to represent their practice for two reasons. Firstly, women have been positioned by discourses of femininity which proscribe overt displays of power in relationships. Secondly, the child-centred discourse emphasises knowledge of the child as the province of the adult participant. Due to the gendered division of childrearing labour, women are more likely to see themselves as holders of this kind of knowledge.

By the same token those fathers who engage in pedagogic interactions with their children may be more likely than mothers to use the terms of the transmission discourse for two reasons. Firstly, prohibition against overt exercises of power has not traditionally applied to men in the same way. No father in this group expressed any guilt about being overly directive with his child, although some did make statements of principle against 'pushing' children. Secondly, the transmission discourse emphasises knowledge of facts rather than knowledge of children. The emphasis on facts is consonant with men's experience of the 'objective' curriculum. The lack of emphasis on child-knowledge means that, under the terms of this discourse, men are not disadvantaged by their comparative lack of sustained access to their children in the early years.

Whether or not fathers subscribe to the child-centred discourse appears to be affected by two factors: their degree of exposure to it and the degree to which they are willing to relinquish explicitly exercised power. Some fathers did employ a child-centred perspective. Some of these fathers were teachers; others explicitly referred to their partners as authorities on their children. In these cases, men were exposed to the child-centred discourse either through work-related training or through their partner's access to texts and practices.

The meanings parents attach to their literate work are thus determined by the discourses which produce the positions 'teacher' and 'learner', 'adult' and 'child'. The relation between parent gender and pedagogic discourse is one that is mediated by power because the gender of the parent affects the extent to which they adopt positions of power within pedagogic relations. This in turn brings into play the appropriate pedagogic discourse, that is one that accords power either to the adult participant or the child learner. This is most clearly illustrated in the case of Janet and Neville, who offered different accounts of how their young son had acquired the skill of counting. While Janet emphatically attributed power to the child ('he chooses to'), Neville represented himself and Janet as the agents ('we've always started that maths thing'). Neville related the event using the script of his lesson: 'There's four oranges, I take one away, how many's left? There's three.' This exchange tells us about the gendered effects of pedagogic discourses. Competing discourses, with

different accounts of gender/power relations enable Janet and Neville to give different explanations of their son's learning.

8.5 Implications

Over the last twenty years, the 'problem' of gender has occupied educational practitioners and researchers and it is concern about this 'problem' which is likely to prompt interest in the results of this study. This investigation is one of a number of studies in recent times to examine aspects of the gender/literacy connection. Most of these studies have been undertaken in a classroom context and have found consistent patterns of difference in literate production and consumption (Alloway & Gilbert 1997; Kamler 1984; Lee 1992; McCauliffe 1993/4; White 1990) , as well as in levels of achievement (Laslett 1992; Halpin 1996; White 1987). These findings of difference have prompted calls for changes in educational practice, particularly directed at boys. It has been suggested, for instance, that more male 'reading role models' are required (Hurstville Boys High School 1995), that 'Boys into Non-technological Programs' pilot schools be established (Fletcher 1995), and that boys be provided the option of single-sex classes in English (Bushweller 1994)

For those concerned about gender differences and literacy, this study does not offer any simple correlations. The polarised school curriculum, gender-differentiated classroom practices, the gendered division of parenting labour, broader social agendas, all are implicated. If we look at the experiences of this group of parents, we can see that they became (and are becoming) gendered literate subjects through a complex continuing process at simultaneous multiple levels, both institutional and personal.

The dominant discourse of gender difference exercises a powerful influence in many areas, intersecting with discourses of childhood, literacy and learning, to constitute gendered literate subjects, modes of literate production and consumption that are identifiably 'feminine' or 'masculine'. However these positions are neither essential or stable. Any consideration of the relation between gender and literacy that focuses primarily on the expected gender positions will fail to take into account modes of

gendered literate subjectivity that differ from these positions. As well, accounts that treat individuals as unitary subjects fixed within one particular kind of relation to literacy or learning will ignore potential contradictions produced by competing discourses and practices.

This is not to suggest a 'free market-place' of gendered literate subject positions, however (Connell 1987). When competing forms of literate practices are available, those that are deemed incompatible with the individual's gender orientation may carry the price of social censure. Therefore it is important to consider: the ways in which forms of literate practice are associated with gender; the kinds of semantic and material work done to produce individuals as appropriately gendered literate subjects and appropriately literate gendered subjects; and the kinds of prohibitive work done to direct individuals away from inappropriate forms of gendered literate subjectivity.

Parents should be seen as both agents and subjects in this process. As schooled and socialised subjects, these parents were produced and produced themselves as gendered and literate in particular ways. As those charged with the responsibility of socialising their own children, they are engaged in kinds of productive and prohibitive work with effects on the positioning of their children. As parents, they are the subject of productive and prohibitive work through institutions, media and networks to constitute them as appropriately gendered and literate mothers and fathers.

When educators have responded to the narratives contained within this thesis text a common response has been one of despair at parents 'stereotyping' children according to gender. Women who have been involved in action for gender equity have wondered aloud whether 'anything has changed'. Rather than condemn parents for reinforcing traditionally gendered behaviour in their children we could instead examine how gender is dealt with in discourses of parenting, literacy and learning. It is these discourses which provide interpretive frames used by parents in understanding their children as literate beings. If developmental discourses make available the notion of 'developmental delay' as a point of difference between boys and girls, it may be used by parents to compare boys and girls, attributing to children the rate of development associated with their gender group membership. Those concerned with parents' perceptions of children could ask: which definitions of 'child'

are privileged in educational contexts? What interests are involved in promoting these positions and their associated products, services and practices?

There is currently a great deal of interest in promoting the increased involvement of fathers in their children's care. This study does support claims that changes are occurring in men's involvement in parenthood. This point was explicitly made by several informants (both men and women) who said, for instance, that their fathers did not have such close involvement in their care and education. In commenting on these narratives, many have seen as 'heartening' accounts of men's participation in their children's daily care and learning. One woman, for instance, described Keith the role-reversal father as 'the hero of the piece'. However, one should be cautious about attributing disproportionate significance to these accounts of men's participation. One reason for this is the evidence in this and other studies that fathers' participation has considerable *symbolic* value for contemporary middle-class couples (Backett 1982; Cohen 1981; Russell 1983). Backett, whose study also focused on middle-class families with young children, noted that, while the belief in shared parenting was strong, parents' efforts:

> were concerned more with sustaining such beliefs about joint parenthood, rather than actually constituting practical attempts to create objectively equal arrangements. (Backett 1982 p. 162)

It is interesting that in two studies of English middle-class parents (Backett 1982; Cohen 1981) story-reading is specifically mentioned as the activity which fulfils this symbolic function most effectively. However other Australian studies have found that men's participation in story-reading is minimal (Solsken 1992; Spreadbury 1997). The suggestion has been made by interstate audience members listening to this data that 'Adelaide men' are more 'enlightened' than their Eastern state counterparts. Perhaps it is something to do with this city's Anglo heritage.

Images of the 'reading father' have a powerful appeal at present given collective wishes for a generation of nurturing men. However, men's participation may not lessen the burden on women. Indeed, there is evidence in this study that such participation means an additional role for mothers, that of supervisors and monitors

of their partners' literate and pedagogic work. Recall Rosemary listening in to, and commenting on, Stanley's pronunciation of words as he reads to their children; and Barbara saying to her partner 'How about you read to the kids?'. This suggests that some women are taking responsibility for producing, not only socialised children, but resocialised men, fathers able to fulfill their parenting functions in the 'appropriate' way. Women's access to pedagogic and childrearing discourses is a crucial factor in enabling them to take up this position. These discourses provide the terms within which parental work (their own or their partners') can be evaluated.

Literacy is a focus for so much of our collective desire for happy successful children. Literacy is therefore a focus for our collective demands of the two prime socialising institutions, the home and the school. But literacy is not a singular skill or body of knowledge. 'It' is a multitude of practices of production and consumption carried out for myriad purposes in multiple contexts. 'It' is also the meanings that are attached to these practices, meanings that constitute particular practices as 'school literacy' or 'work literacy' or places them outside the bounds of institutionally acknowledged practice. Becoming a literate subject involves participating in literate practices and in learning the meanings that are attached to these practices. It is in this way that the gendering of literacy occurs.

Rhetoric about parents' responsibilities for children's education' is generally couched in gender-neutral terms as if neither 'parent' or 'child' was attached to a gendered body. But when we ask parents to produce literate children, we are asking this of women and men, people who were once schoolgirls and schoolboys, people who were offered and took up gendered positions in literate practices. We are asking these gendered literate subjects to select from the field 'literacy' particular literate practices for their children to engage in, practices which are very likely to carry gendered associations. Should we be surprised or shocked if, in becoming literate, their children too become gendered?

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Appendix A

Appendix A: Interview question schedule: group 1

Parents' Views on Literacy

THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO SHARE YOUR VIEWS ON LITERACY

This list of questions is a guide only. Please feel free to mention whatever comes to mind. Your views as a parent are valuable.

If you would like to have a copy of the interview transcripts, I will send one to you.

I would like to interview as many parents of pre-school age and junior primary children as possible. If you know of anyone who may be willing to participate, please pass on my phone number.

QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me about your memories of learning to read and write as a child?

2. What was you favourite subject at school? Did it involve much reading and writing?

3. Did your parents play a part in helping you learn to read and write?

4. Has your child taken any steps towards learning to read and write?

5. Have you played a part in helping your child to read and write? If so, could you please talk about what you have been doing?

6. Some people say that children are pressured too much to start reading and writing early. What are your views?

7. Are you satisfied with the approach your child's school/kindy is taking to reading and writing?

8. I will ask you to make a prediction. How do you think you child will handle

reading and writing as he/she gets older? What do you think his/her strengths and weaknesses will be?

Appendix B

Appendix B

Table 6: Family details: Group 1 (parents of preschool and junior primary aged children)

No.	Names (aliases)	Mothers' Occupation	Fathers' Occupation	Mothers' work status	Children age/sex
1.1	Laura & Michael	Clerical officer	Mail sorter	Home duties	M4, M2
1.2	Roz & Fred	Teacher/kitchen hand	Police officer	Part-time	F4, F3
1.3	Mary & Alastair	Clerical	Customs Officer	Home duties	F6, F4
1.4	Anne & Steven	Teacher	Computer analyst	Home duties	M4, M2
1.5	Amanda & Adrian	Teacher	Engineer	Home duties	M4, F1
1.6	Franca & Matthew	Clerical	Police Officer	Home duties	M5, F3
1.7	Debbie & Rodney	Clerical	Business manager	Part-time	M4, F2
1.8	Cassie & Dion	Instructor/actor	Lecturer/artist	Part-time	M4, F2, F2
1.9	Janet & Neville	Teacher	Mechanic	Home duties	M4, F2
1.10	Alicia & Marco	Teacher	Engineer	Home duties	F6, M2
1.11	Jeanette & Yannis	Pharmacist	Architect	Part-time	F4
1.12	Rosemary & Stanley	Clerical officer	Mechanic	Home duties	F6, F5
1.13	Melissa & Neil	Secretary	Electrician	Home duties	F6, F5
1.14	Louise & Gilles	Public Servant	Solicitor	Full-time	M6, M4
1.15	Joanne & Wayne	Secretary	Bricklayer	Home duties	F8, M5
1.16	Lynette & Richard	Optical dispenser	Computer technician	Part-time	F5, M3
1.17	Barbara & Bob*	Bar staff	Unemployed	Part-time	M9, M5
1.18	Sandra & Craig	Clerical/student	Home Duties	Part-time	F7, F5

* Starred partner not interviewed.

Table 7: Family Details: Group 2 (parents of children in Rowan Glen Primary year 5/6 class)

No.	Names (aliases)	Mothers' Occupation	Fathers' Occupation	Mothers' work status	Children's age/sex
2.1	Edith & Keith	Nurse	Plumber	Part-time	F11, M9
2.2	Jill & Evan	Social Worker	Lecturer	Full-time	F14, M11
2.3	Theresa & Luke	Teacher	Teacher	Full-time	F15, M14, F11, F8
2.4	Hans & Gloria *	Manager	Teacher	Full-time	F16, F11
2.5	Prue & Lesley	Nurse	Technical Officer	Part-time	F11, M8, F7
2.6	Fiona & Christopher	Writer	Manager	Full-time	M16, F15, F11, F6
2.7	Tracey & Mike	Receptionist	Optometrist	Part-time	M13, M11, M11, F9
2.8	Patricia & Doug	Retail Sales	Taxi Operator	Full-time	M10, F2
2.9	Megan	Student	n/a	Full-time	M14, F12
2.10	Kathleen & Jack	Teacher	Teacher (p/t)	Full-time	M11
2.11	Gwenda	Community Worker	n/a	Part-time	M11, M11
2.12	Natasha & Boris *	Scientist	Scientist	Home duties	F11
2.13	Penny	Writer	n/a	Full-time	F14, F11

* Starred partner not interviewed. In the case of 2.4 the parents were separated and custory was shared.

Appendix C

Appendix C

Tables 8 & 9 : Parents' ethnic background and country of origin

Table 8: Group 1: Ethnic background and country of origin

No.	Names (aliases)	Mother's ethnic background	Mother's country of origin	Father's ethnic background	Father's country of origin
1.1	Laura & Michael	Italian	Australia	Anglo	Australia (rural)
1.2	Roz & Fred	Anglo/German	Australia	Anglo	Australia (rural)
1.3	Mary & Alastair	Greek	Australia	Anglo	UK
1.4	Anne & Steven	Anglo	Australia	Anglo	Australia
1.5	Amanda & Adrian	Macedonian	Australia	Anglo	Australia
1.6	Franca & Matthew	Italian	Australia	Anglo	Austraia (rural)
1.7	Debbie & Rodney	Anglo	Australia (rural)	Anglo	Australia
1.8	Cassie & Dion	Anglo	UK	Anglo	Australia
1.9	Janet & Neville	Anglo	Australia (rural)	Anglo	Australia
1.10	Alicia & Marco	Anglo	Australia	Chilean	Chile
1.11	Jeanette & Yannis	Greek	Australia	Greek	Australia
1.12	Rosemary & Stanley	Anglo	Australia	Polish	Australia
1.13	Melissa & Neil	Anglo	Australia	Anglo/ Latvian	Australia
1.14	Louise & Gilles	Anglo	Australia	Anglo	Australia
1.15	Joanne & Wayne	Anglo	Australia (rural)	Anglo	Australia (rural)
1.16	Lynette & Richard	Anglo	Australia	Anglo	Australia
1.17	Barbara & Bob*	Anglo	Australia	Anglo	Australia
1.18	Sandra & Craig	Anglo	Australia	Anglo	UK

Table 9: Group 2 parents: Ethnic background and country of origin

No.	Names (aliases)	Mother's ethnic background	Mother's country of origin	Father's ethnic background	Father's country of origin
2.1	Edith & Keith	Anglo	Australia	Anglo	Australia
2.2	Jill & Evan	Anglo	Australia (rural)	Anglo	Australia (rural)
2.3	Theresa & Luke	Anglo	Australia (rural)	Anglo	Australia (rural)
2.4	Hans & Gloria*	Anglo/Dutch	UK	Anglo	Australia
2.5	Prue & Lesley	Anglo	Australia	Anglo	UK
2.6	Fiona & Christopher	Anglo	Australia	Dutch	Netherlands
2.7	Tracey & Mike	Anglo	Australia	Anglo	Australia
2.8	Patricia & Doug	Anglo	Australia	Anglo	Australia
2.9	Megan	Anglo	Australia (rural)	n/a	n/a
2.10	Kathleen & Jack	Anglo	Australia (rural)	Anglo	Australia
2.11	Gwenda	Anglo	Australia	n/a	n/a
2.12	Natasha & Boris*	Russian	Russia	Russian	Russia
2.13	Penny	Anglo	Australia	n/a	na

* Not interviewed for this study

Appendix D

Appendix D: 'About Transcripts' Sheet sent out with transcripts of interview

ABOUT TRANSCRIPTS

An exact transcript of interview is taken when a researcher wants to look at the words a person is using to express themselves as well as the general point they are making. This can be very important when analysing the information. For instance, if several people use the same or similar words to describe their experience then this may indicate some common thread.

Exact transcripts contain all the words that were recorded in the interview, including 'ums', 'ahs' repetitions, false starts and pauses. In this way they are different from edited interviews that you will be used to seeing on television. People sometimes feel uncomfortable reading exact transcripts of their words. They may feel that the repetitions and pauses make them sound confused or uncertain.

If you feel this way, it might be helpful to know the following points:

- This complete transcript is not public property. It will be read only be myself, you and my supervisors.

- If you would like to restate any point in clearer language, you are welcome to send me a written statement.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any concerns,

Sue Nichols