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JAMES COOK
UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA

Telling Lies to Little Girls:

THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF MOTHERING GIRLS

Thesis submitted by

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in October 2013

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Political Science & Women's Studies

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Declarations

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Statement on the contribution of others

The thesis has been made possible through the support of an Australian Postgraduate Award.

Principal Supervisor: Dr Nonie Harris

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Declaration of ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the JCU Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval Number H3840.

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Abstract

In this thesis I present feminist qualitative research that explored what it is like for women bringing up girls aged between nine and thirteen years. Young girls are the focus of intense scrutiny as a fierce debate continues unabated over the way their sexuality is embodied under the terms and conditions of the contemporary political economy. Practices and representations from the sex industry – pornography, in particular – are understood as becoming increasingly mainstream, but there is little agreement as to what this means in the everyday lives of girls and the women who mother them. Women who are mothering daughters in the harsh light of a male gaze, filtered through a commodified pornographic aesthetic, face particular challenges in meeting the needs of girls through what Sara Ruddick called 'preservative love', 'nurturance' and 'training'.

Within the 'sexualisation' debates, there is very little literature which critically explores women's experiences of bringing up girls. If mothers are considered at all, it is usually only to point the finger of blame. Women are the target of 'parenting' advice, advice that often rests on unexamined assumptions about mothers' culpability. The research reported in this thesis brings mothers' voices in from the margins. To strategically step back and widen the deep concern that is felt for girls to include a concern for women, it is possible to consider issues of responsibility, powerlessness and relationships of dependency alongside the fashionable focus of much recent scholarly enquiry within the sexualisation debates – girls' agency. This study captures the contradictory spaces between women's and girls' experiences in the present moment, as well as the differences over time through women's reflection on their own girlhoods.

The study, conducted between 2010 and 2012, involved semi-structured in-depth interviews with twenty-four women living in regional Australia. Eighteen of the women participated in a follow-up interview after twelve months. The study considered broad questions of present and future possibilities for women and girls in their personal relationships and in the public worlds of work and politics. The interviews happened in an interesting historical moment, just prior to former Prime Minister Gillard's misogyny speech where, arguably, she opened up the possibility of naming the relentless sexism that thrives in modern Australia.

The women's stories led me to conclude that women and girls are yet to achieve equality in the private or public sphere. Women are excluded from the neoliberal subjectivity they are supposed to be engendering in their daughters. Yet, the discursively-produced, neoliberal ideal – 'the woman who can do anything!' – prevails to the extent that she is left unpoliticised, robbing

women and girls of a language to describe their oppression. This illusory subjectivity requires both the women who are excluded from it, and their daughters who are groomed for it, to draw on a range of psycho-social narratives which are intensely individualised in their explanatory powers. Women have been left with the psychological task of 'putting our mind to things' which, more frequently than not, is about seeing 'the big picture' where narratives of women's struggle and sacrifice are valorised, and anger is laughed away.

The key contribution and challenge that feminism makes is naming the ways male supremacy is disguised as being in the interests of all. I argue for an account of women's and girls' lives which puts individual material experiences within the context of the sexual political economy, an account which is able to ask 'who benefits' from the assumption of a post-feminist meritocracy when none actually exists. This research, then, seeks to contribute to a radical political project of feminist change.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The sexualised representation of girls in popular culture has attracted much public attention and scholarly critique in Australia. Concern about the 'sexualisation of girls' is part of a wider discourse about children which can be neatly summed up by the Australian Council on Children and the Media's (2010) conference title, *Growing up Fast and Furious;* the girls are fast and the boys are furious. The two key tropes are girls as sex and boys as aggression. Although concern about girls' sexuality has occurred throughout the ages, the debate, as it is currently framed, began in earnest in 2006 when Emma Rush and Andrea La Nauze published their reports, *Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of children in Australia* and *Letting Children Be Children: Stopping the sexualisation of children in Australia,* through the Australia Institute. The reports argued that girl children are increasingly represented as older women and this impacts on how girls think about themselves. The authors also pointed out that sexualised fashion and toys are marketed to girls, risking the legitimation of the sexual interest of adult men in girls. The two reports sparked widespread media interest, including an episode of the debate-styled television program *Difference of Opinion* on ABC television (McMullen, 2007) that I analysed as my political science honours project. In 2007, the American Psychological Association 'Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls' argued "sexualisation practices may function to keep girls 'in their place' as objects of sexual attraction and beauty, significantly limiting their free thinking and movement in the world" (2007, p. 22). The sustained media attention the topic has attracted, in all Global North countries, is not surprising, given headlines that talk of 'sex and girls' taps into cultural desires and anxieties that are guaranteed to sell papers.

The discourse about the sexualisation of girls has been taken up, and critiqued thoroughly, by academics and feminist activists. Early on, scholarly commentators took up one of two polarised positions, with many cultural studies academics dismissing concern as 'moral panic', and medical and psychology academics more often raising the alarm that these changing sexual mores are, in fact, harmful to girls. Either way, within both the 'sexualisation' discourse and its 'moral panic' critique, there has been an intense focus on girls. There has, however, been very little literature which critically explores women's experiences of bringing up girls. If mothers are considered at all, it is usually only to point the finger of blame. Women are the target of 'parenting' advice, advice that often rests on unexamined assumptions about mothers' culpability. My research brings mother's voices in from the margins. This study explores women's experiences of mothering girls and offers a particular perspective by sharply focusing on the responsibility women hold for their dependant daughters. It is deeply grounded in the

experience of being female under patriarchy. I have widened the deep concern that is felt for girls to take into account the experiences of women.

Whilst practices and representations from the sex industry and pornography are understood "as becoming increasingly normalised, widely dispersed and mainstream" (Gill, 2012, p. 483), there is little agreement as to what this means in the everyday lives of girls, and the women who mother them. Underlying this research, therefore there is a theoretical and pragmatic imperative to consider the relationship between sex and sexism as central to the exploration of women's lives. Theoretically, it is important to recognise the ways in which the subordination of women is achieved through male demands on female sexuality, in order to politicise injustice and create alternatives. Pragmatically, it is difficult to ignore sexism and its relationship to sex when the daily work of women in keeping their daughters safe is so central to their lives. Yet, as an examination of the public debate about the 'sexualisation of girls' shows, a recognition of the way that male demand on female sexuality achieves the subordination of women constantly slides in and out of view, depending on which piece of the puzzle we are looking at and how strongly we can hold onto the possibility for change. An intense focus on girls has resulted in girls themselves being frequently seen as the primary site of potential change; recognition of male supremacy, if there at all, becomes assumed and inevitable rather than named and challenged.

In the remainder of this chapter I discuss the inspiration for this research and introduce the study and its aims. I then discuss why this research has been important to undertake and describe the significance of my findings. The chapter concludes by outlining the structure of the thesis.

The origins of the research

Feminism is grounded in women's lives, and it teaches us, as women, to value what we know (Klein, 1983; Reinharz, 1983). My interest in looking at women's experiences of bringing up girls was sparked by my own experiences of bringing up my daughter, who, at the commencement of the research, was twelve years of age. The pre-teen years had presented mothering dilemmas that I felt unable to articulate. I did not know what had happened to us; I could barely describe it. I felt a deep sense of unease, as if she and I had been set up to fail, and that it was simply luck which would get us through. I felt angry at times, as if I were backed into a corner, forced to say "No" repeatedly to my daughter: "No, you can't wear that outfit"; "No, you can't stay away overnight"; "No, you can't buy a mobile phone"; "No, you can't shave your legs"; "No, you can't watch that on TV"; "no"; "No"; "NO". Saying "no" meant I felt resentful about the decisions I felt pressured to make, and that I also felt resented by my

daughter for making them. And yet parenting experts were telling me that 'good mums' must make such decisions (Brooks, 2008; Collett Smart, 2011); to not do so would have been simply lazy. There seemed so few opportunities to wholeheartedly say, "Yes", and embrace opportunities to nurture this precious child. During those years I often felt tired, unsupported and isolated.

Further, feminism as theory and practice had helped me make sense of my life experiences as a woman and mother up until that point. My daughter had attended undergraduate Women's Studies classes with me, as a pre-schooler pushing her toy pram and doll. She was with me when I first heard such powerful critiques of the institutions of motherhood, heterosexuality, capitalism, and male privilege – and the socialisation of girls into motherhood. Ouch! Discovering the canon of feminist scholarship enabled me to complete my Bachelor of Arts degree with honours, wielding the feminist analysis I had discovered across a range of academic disciplines and in my personal life. My inability, then, to articulate or make sense of my experiences with my daughter during her pre-teen years seemed significant.

In academic terms, I wanted to respond to the call for new research to consider the ways in which women manage disadvantage and disappointment in late modernity (Baker, 2005). This research is part of the long history of work by feminist women to ask difficult questions about power and oppression, as the passing of time continues to bring new manifestations of old patterns of male supremacy.

Research aims and overview

This qualitative study, conducted between 2010 and 2012, explored with women living in regional Australia their experiences of bringing up girls aged between nine and thirteen years. The study considered broad questions of present and future possibilities for women and girls in their personal relationships and in the public worlds of work and politics. Through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, women were asked to share experiences that they thought were important in terms of their mothering. The data have been analysed to illuminate the following four research questions:

- Under what circumstances are women mothering?
- What language do women use to describe present and future possibilities for women and girls?
- What are the implications of the mainstreaming of a pornographic aesthetic on women's mothering practices?

- What ways do women use to make sense of women's public success?

Twenty-four women were interviewed, with eighteen of these women participating in a follow-up interview twelve months later, a total of forty-two interviews. Women were recruited to the study through the distribution of a flyer and the snowballing technique. Theoretical sampling dictated that participants were selected to maximise diversity. Corrine Glesne (1999) argues that repeat interviews aid in-depth understanding, and increased rapport brings thicker data. As both sets of interviews happened at the end of the school year, it seemed natural to reflect on 'the year that was', as well as on what was on the horizon. The follow-up interview provided a valuable opportunity to bring my preliminary ideas and analysis to participants for discussion. The qualitative nature of this research facilitated an in-depth understanding of the lives of a group of women whose commonality lay in their shared role of caring for girls in a specific place and time. The interviews happened in an interesting historical moment, immediately prior to former Prime Minister Gillard's misogyny speech where, I argue, she opened up the possibility of naming the relentless sexism that thrives in modern Australia (Caro, 2013).

The analytical process occurred continuously throughout the study. From the very beginning, as a feminist researcher, I was committed to reflecting on my own and my participants' "social locations and subjectivities" (Reinharz & Chase, 2003, p. 84), including my insider status as the mother of a similarly-aged daughter. Methodologically, the application of the second wave feminist insight that 'the personal is political' has meant that I have sought to map and theorise the experiences individual women shared, through their storytelling, within their social contexts. Integral to this connecting work is the close attention I have paid to difference, that is, to women's experiences of diverse and specific classed, raced and gendered hierarchies of power. It has been these differences in women's lives that have illuminated the various strategies of resistance women use. My findings illustrate the resourcefulness of women in negotiating their individual experiences of differing oppressions. My analysis was facilitated through multiple readings of the data, thematic coding and reflective memo writing. Thus, I have sought to tell what Van Maanen (1988, p. 128) calls "a critical tale" about who "owns and operates the tools of reality production", by continually asking, 'Who benefits?'

The significance of the study

The findings of this research make a significant contribution to policy-making that seeks to respond to public concern about the 'sexualisation of girls'. In Australia the Senate Standing Committee on the Environment, Communications and the Arts has reported on the sexualisation of children in the contemporary media (Parliament of Australia Senate, 2008) and in the United

Kingdom there have been several major reports and reviews (Bailey, 2011; Buckingham, Willett, Bragg, & Russell, 2010; Papadopoulos, 2010). These enquiries and reviews have provoked a contest to name, frame and define 'the problem'; a process Nancy Fraser (1989, p. 163) describes as "the politics of needs interpretation". Fraser (1989) argues that it is possible to distinguish "better from worse interpretations" (p. 181) which ultimately is about "balancing democracy and equality" (p. 182). Fraser's argument is that needs are culturally constructed and discursively interpreted resulting in 'needs talk' becoming institutionalised as an important vocabulary in political discourse. In terms of the debate about the 'sexualisation of girls', this has played out as 'what do girls need?' For governments making decisions on advertising regulation, public health promotion, violence prevention, sex education and research funding, deciding 'what do girls need?' becomes a matter of drawing on "expert bridging discourses" which translate "politicized needs into administrative needs" (Fraser, 1989, p. 173). This research, then, can be positioned within Fraser's policy trajectory as part of the 'expert bridging' between social movements and the public domain. It provides a theoretical underpinning for critical judgements about what is a 'better or worse' interpretation of girls' needs.

Further, this research is significant because it brings together theory and practice for the purpose of political change. The theoretical approach has been to make connections, in line with radical feminist theorist Denise Thompson's argument that "it is through exposing male domination *as* domination that feminism poses its major challenge, since social domination operates most efficiently to the extent that it ensures compliance by being disguised as something else, and not domination at all" (Thompson, 2001, p. 8, emphasis in original). The critical, radical feminist approach makes the normative and moral argument that "male domination constitutes the conditions under which we live, *but that it ought not to be so*" (Thompson, 2001, p. 8, emphasis in original). The approach helps us recognise that to be born female under patriarchy is to experience oppression, but that it can be resisted and transformed: "male domination is not some kind of monolithic and homogenous system" that removes human agency, because, if this were so, there would be no point to a feminist project of change (Thompson, 2001, p. 9). The importance of this research, therefore, lies in the politics of change. A critical approach rests on the foundational assumption that change is possible: women can be recognised in opposition to the values of "[m]ale supremacy, that view of the world which insists that only men be recognized as 'human', [which] condones, permits, even at times recommends (as, for example, in pornography), harm to women" (Thompson, 2001, p. 12).

This study is also significant because it documents the materialities of the everyday lives of women and girls in the current political moment. Sociological theories, in particular theories of reflexive modernisation (Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991, 1992), tend now to emphasis individual agency as the explanatory key to people's lives rather than structural constraints and opportunities. Traditional sociological categories such as class, race and gender have been demoted to "zombie categories", "dead but still alive" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 203). The loosening of family ties and the restructuring of workforces within neoliberal political economies are understood to have particularly benefitted women: "indeed, they became exemplary subjects" (McRobbie, 2011, p. 181). However, this sociological turn from structure to agency, and the neoliberal discourse of choice in which it is situated, has been critiqued as "overstating progress and hiding oppression" (Baker, 2008, p. 1), and as creating, not just describing, the social landscape (Gillies, 2005). The turn to individual agency has seen structural categories morph into forms of subjectivity. This has led to a new paradigm of managerial language within government that has "a stated aim of redistributing possibilities as opposed to wealth" (Gillies, 2005, p. 837). For this, and other reasons, in this research, I have paid close attention to the language women use to describe and explain their lives. I have questioned the theoretical and material results of class, gender, ethnicity and so on, being understood as an individual's characteristic or attribute to be overcome or exploited, rather than as hierarchies of power.

Further, I have considered the gendered ways in which women and girls are incorporated into the political economy where their choices are understood as determining their lives. Angela McRobbie (2007) has argued that a new sexual contract is operating within the post-feminist space of a meritocracy that is assumed to exist, as if men and women have already achieved equality. Within this sexual contract, and through consumer culture, young women are invited to become "phallic girls" by appropriating the sexuality previously reserved for young men (McRobbie, 2007, p. 718). Women are required to display hyper-femininity as "a matter of choice rather than obligation" (p. 723) and, McRobbie (2007) warns, "we could read this as a feminist tragedy, the 'fall of public woman'" (p. 734). Additionally, Rosalind Gill argues a "'technology of sexiness' has replaced 'innocence' or 'virtue' as the commodity that young women are required to offer in the heterosexual marketplace" (Gill, 2007, p. 72).
Women who are mothering daughters in the harsh light of a male gaze, filtered through a commodified pornographic aesthetic, are facing new challenges in meeting the needs of girls. Mothers, Sara Ruddick (1989) argues, seek to provide 'preservative love', 'nurturance' and 'training' to their children. This thesis describes and theorises the challenges women face in doing so. The theoretical and practical work undertaken here – to consider the experiences of

young girls through the eyes of the women in their lives – recognises mothers' relationships of responsibility with their dependent children. It has been said that one of the conditions of the contemporary institution of motherhood is that "the mother has full responsibility but no power from which to mother" (O'Reilly, 2010b, p. 369). This has serious implications for women who are seeking to meet the needs of their daughters in the context of a rapidly changing technological world where girls' lives are mediated, publicly represented and permanently digitally recorded from a very young age. The combination of rapidly changing technological tools and the intensive marketing of identity-making products to girls are challenges that our foremothers could not have envisaged.

Outline of thesis chapters

This thesis consists of nine chapters. The next chapter locates this study theoretically by outlining the framework of sexual politics. An in-depth discussion of radical feminist theory is provided and a rationale is given for the adoption of a critical approach.

Chapter Three highlights key arguments in the literature about 'what girls need', including a consideration of sexual politics, the economy and childhood, and how these domains come together. The discussion pinpoints a key tension in the literature about the way sexuality is theorised as ordering the social world, and argues that the contemporary ignition point of tension – girls' agency – can be best understood as being the difference between those who seek liberation *through* or *despite* the eroticisation of inequality, and those who seek liberation *from* the eroticisation of inequality. The practical work mothers do in bringing up their daughters is largely missing in the scholarly literature, or, when noticed, is positioned as reactionary and blameworthy. The research presented in this thesis addresses that gap.

Chapter Four presents the methodology employed in this study and argues the political significance of centering women's experiences in theorising the social world. I present the rationale for qualitative research and canvas the ethical considerations of this project.

Chapters Five to Eight report the key themes that emerged from women's stories. The materiality of women's lives is presented in Chapter Five where I argue that women are excluded from the neoliberal subjectivity they are instrumentally positioned to engender in their daughters. The notion of 'juggling' is a background to the stories that all women told about finding the compulsory 'balance'. Chapter Six looks at how women reconcile their own experiences of struggle and exclusion with the social expectation that 'girls can do anything'. The chapter considers the language that women use to describe present and future possibilities

for women and girls, and argues that the notion 'girls can do anything' has moved from being a call to action – a resistance – to being understood as fact – an expectation. Chapter Seven looks at the mainstreaming of a pornographic aesthetic and women's responses to the liberal feminist positioning of girls as (potentially) 'empowered sluts', as the porno-chic subjectivity of choice for can-do girls. The chapter considers how women negotiate the 'technology of sexiness' (Gill, 2007) their daughters are groomed for under 'the new sexual contract' (McRobbie, 2007). Chapter Eight contrasts the sexual politics that are at play in the everyday lives of women with those displayed on the national political stage when Australia's first female Prime Minister was newly in office. A female Prime Minister served as the ultimate proof that 'girls can do anything'; proof which created tension in accounts that sought to explain the vitriol and sexualised verbal violence former Prime Minister Gillard experienced.

The concluding chapter of this thesis returns to the importance of a critical feminist approach in understanding the current political moment. It argues that to center women's diverse experiences is to draw broader connections with relations of ruling. Making connections across the differing experiences of today's girls and grown women is a profound challenge to the insistence on scrutinising individual girls as if they lived independently of their social worlds and to the fragmented knowledge that results. I argue this political project contributes to freeing up the language we use and re-politicises our experiences in a way which lets us imagine the rise of the 'public woman' (McRobbie, 2007).

Chapter Two: Theorising Sexual Politics

Introduction

This chapter begins by establishing the rationale for a radical feminist approach to the research. Feminism is defined and the centrality of sex is established. Feminism's relationship with a broad critical approach, and Critical Theory in particular, is traced. Drawing on the definition of what feminism is, this section argues the importance of a material basis to political claims and rejects alternative approaches to the extent they work to depoliticise injustice. The chapter then theorises motherhood, outlining historical feminist concerns with the institution of motherhood, detailing contemporary standards against which women are judged, and arguing that women respond pragmatically to the vulnerability of children. The chapter then theorises childhood and considers who benefits from breaking down theoretical distinctions, social taboos, and physical distance between children and adults with respect to sexuality. The arguments outlined in this chapter establish a framework for understanding 'what girls need', as explored in Chapter Three.

Radical feminist theory

This research has been informed by radical feminist theory. Denise Thompson defines feminism as "the struggle against male supremacy, and the struggle for a human status for women identifying with women" (2001, p. 16). This is, then, "political" feminism (McLellan, 2010, p. 22) or feminism "unmodified" (MacKinnon, 1987, p. 16), committed to uncovering, and thereby challenging, the ways male supremacy achieves its goal of dehumanisation. Defining feminism in this way enables much of what is broadly recognised as feminism to be included in the definition, including the connections with race, class, the environment and so on, but importantly it is "specific enough to allow anti-feminist arguments and assertions to be identified and excluded" (Thompson, 2001, p. 17). A specific definition rejects the notion that feminism is whatever those who identify as feminists say it is and reclaims feminism as a radical political position (Thompson, 2001). The feminist struggle against male supremacy, and for a human status for women, is grounded in the recognition that society operates through a hierarchy of power in which men dominate and women are subordinate, that this hierarchy is socially constructed and thus open to change, and that the lived experiences of people are the sites of knowledge. These three theoretical tenets guide and inform this research and are discussed next in order to establish the relevance of radical feminist theory in addressing the research question.

Male supremacy as a sexual hierarchy: sexual politics.

The recognition of male supremacy as the key problem is what makes feminist theory feminist, rather than simply critical theory.

> Male supremacy, that view of the world which insists that only men be recognized as 'human', condones, permits, even at times recommends (as, for example, in pornography) harm to women. Because women are not human within the terms and under the conditions of male supremacy, they are not allowed access to the rights and dignities of being human. Because women are not recognized as human, they can be treated with contempt. What happens to them does not matter, their needs do not have to be considered, their interests can be trivialized and denied. Because women are not human, they become nothing but objects for men's use. (Thompson, 2001, p. 12)

However, the male supremacist denial of women's humanity is contradicted by the *actual* existence of women.

> … the existence of women … continually gives the lie to the male as the standard of 'human' existence, a lie which is managed by acknowledging women only to the extent that they serve men's interests. It is not possible, after all, to deny women's existence altogether (although the instances where that happens are many and various and rarely commented upon). (Thompson, 2001, pp. 12, 13)

Radical feminist scholarship provides a direct analysis of the role sexuality plays in relations of supremacy and subordination. Kate Millett's (1970, p. 23) foundational text *Sexual Politics* broadened the definition of politics to "refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another". Radical feminist naming of the body politic has unveiled the attitudes and ideas which support women's subordination in areas such as reproduction, domestic and sexual violence, pornography and prostitution. Activism has resulted in major shifts, for example, the naming of domestic violence as a criminal, not personal, matter in the 1970s and the United Nations' acknowledgement of rape as a war crime in the 1990s. Scholarship and activism has shown the ways that sexual control has been the primary tool of oppression of women.

Feminist legal theorist Catherine MacKinnon (1982) lays down the basis for this understanding, arguing sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism. The sequence MacKinnon notes is "[s]ocially, femaleness means femininity, which means attractiveness to men, which means sexual attractiveness, which means sexual availability on male terms" (1982, p. 531). This is a

very direct statement about the social construction of, and power relationships between, sexuality, femininity, women, masculinity and men. Thompson also states "[i]t is through heterosexual desire that women are fitted, and fit themselves, into their subordinate roles in relation to men" (2001, p. 14). Heterosexuality, as the dominant social institution that organises people into sex-based categories, relies on socially constructed norms of masculinity and femininity. Masculinity, then, as the socially constructed expression of maleness, operates materially as "male dominant behaviour" and femininity as "female subordinate behaviour" (Jeffreys, 2003, p. 44). The theoretical centring of sexuality illuminates how women's subordination through the law, family, biology, or any other area is a consequence, not a foundation, of male power (MacKinnon, 1982). Questioning hetero-normative social relations, exposing them as ideologically maintained and constructed, is to consider the ways in which sex is put to political use.

The chief symbol of male supremacy, that marks men as superior and women as less than human, is the penis. The penis itself cannot be considered remarkably powerful, although this is not to discount the very real violence inflicted upon women and children's bodies. But, socially, the power of penis is as phallus, a social construction, not biological, natural or inevitable (Thompson, 2001). The symbolism and representation of the phallus is dominant within cultural discourses; within language, imagery, traditions and practices:

> Those who have penises are automatically 'human'; those who do not, are not, although that 'lack' can always be contested and frequently is. Because the penis is the central symbol of 'human' status under male supremacy, the chief pleasures and desires of those conditions centre around the penis. Because the penis means sex, the chief pleasures and desires of male supremacist conditions are those of sex. (Thompson, 2001, p. 37)

The sex industries of pornography and prostitution are based on the servicing of the penis, the stimulation of the penis to ejaculation. Women work in those industries to the extent that they sexually stimulate men. The sex industry explicitly purveys sadomasochism, the eroticisation of dominance and subordination:

> it is validated and glorified as delightful and beneficial, as innocent fun and pure enjoyment. Humiliation and degradation, violence, physical pain and mutilation, even death, the use on people of chains, whips, bonds, weapons, the torture of human bodies, are all valued as pleasure, only pleasure and nothing but pleasure. (Thompson, 2001, p. 40)

Instead of such inequality between humans being rejected as a moral evil, the practices of pornography, as it exists materially, are applauded.

The key disguise that male supremacy wears in contemporary western liberal democracies is 'choice'. The ideology of neoliberalism is operationalised through a discourse of individualised choice and choosing. Accordingly, individuals succeed or fail depending on the choices they make. Male supremacy acknowledges women to the extent that women make choices which are seen to serve men's interests. Within neoliberalism, the focus on women and girls' individual agency hides the reality of the male supremacist social context they make choices within; disadvantage and inequality are rendered invisible (Baker, 2010); women themselves become invisible to the extent that they fail to serve male interests (Thompson, 2001).

Male supremacy as ideology: making visible and challenging inequality through examining 'the social'.

The second tenet of feminist theory is that society is socially constructed, and thus open to change especially when collectively challenged. "Feminism says that male domination constitutes the conditions under which we live, but that *it ought not to be so.* At one and the same time, feminism both exposes the existence of male domination and challenges it" (Thompson, 2001, p. 8, emphasis in original). Feminism therefore provides a normative and moral position about how things should be, and it provides a process through which change is possible; to uncover the ideological nature of male domination is to disrupt it. Male supremacy does not mean men's absolute power and women's absolute powerlessness; this would preclude the possibility of change.

> Whether particular actions, desires, etc., maintain the social structure, or whether they erode it, is the responsibility of the individual agent to decide, a responsibility which remains even when evaded. Male domination is not some kind of monolithic and homogeneous system within which individuals are inserted without their knowledge and with no possibility of non-compliance. Any such assertion would be empirically false. (Thompson, 2001, p. 9)

Feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith (1999) theorises the 'the social' as a concept that enables us to examine social change: focus can be directed at how people's activities are co-ordinated, or socially constructed. She writes:

> The sociologist … chooses to direct her gaze towards the social as the ongoing concerting of people's actual activities, her only restriction is a commitment not to

reduce the social to properties of individuals or to reconstitute it as a supra-individual blob. (D. Smith, 1999, p. 7)

To illustrate: the metaphor of a music concert, ('concerting' as above), helps demonstrate what the social is. A concert produces music; individual musicians can play loudly or softly, they can be silent, or silenced. The musicians follow a score. The score has been written in the past but is read in the present. The score can, but does not have to, serve the interests of one set of musicians over another; the conductor's leadership can be visionary and inspiring or merely reproduce the past in the present. The sound of the music depends on the composition of individual musicians. When everything comes together the concert or 'social' can be harmonious, uplifting and synergistic, with each instrument fully audible. A silent moment might enable the tiniest triangle ring out true and clear. But it is also possible that the percussion instruments may dominant. Musicians forever banging their own drums, playing loudly, exercising their 'rights' in a way that blocks out the wind or string instruments. Perhaps the wind and string musicians decide to stop blowing and plucking and join in banging their flutes and violins, just because this represents an opportunity to be heard, to be included. The music, the social, can change. It is, of course, possible to play different tunes, but if one person plays a different tune and the rest continue on, there will be no harmony. Each instruments' contribution to the music is a factor both of its own activity and the combined activities of all the other instruments. Each musician can either play a dominant tune or resist it, a tune that creates space for collective harmonising or does not. The neoliberal logic of personal choice frames the wind and string instruments' predicament as a choice. Perhaps they should choose to be louder, perhaps it is their own fault they cannot be heard. If they just banged instead of blowing and plucking, they might fit in better. In fact, neoliberal logic would suggest that the weakness of the wind and string instruments indicates that they are naturally inferior.

So, the social can be understood as 'a place in time', a definable, knowable, material place (D. Smith, 1999). It is mediated through language (spoken and written) and discourse, language operating within the realm of ideas and ideologies. Locating 'the social', that is, naming and critiquing the social, is critically important to this study. Doing so expands the sphere of the political to include the ideological apparatuses of the state institutions (Althusser, 1971) and also enables scholars to critically examine what is 'political' about the personal (rejecting the political reduction of the 'personal' to individual 'lifestyle choices').

The scholar's gaze, as Smith (1999) suggests, can usefully focus on the concerting of people's actual activities, and so makes visible the ways in which power is exercised and meaning is made, individually and collectively. Thompson (2001) concurs:

>[T]o criticise the ideology of individualism does not mean that feminism can dispense altogether with the concept of the individual. That our individual selves are unique and irreplaceable, that we have rights and dignities and are entitled to respect simply because we exist, that we are able to act and make a difference, and that we can take responsibility for our actions, are all vital ingredients of a feminist politics committed to creating a human status for women. (p. 47)

Feminist scholarship, therefore, and its challenge to male supremacy, occurs at the level of the individual – in the case of this research, both through myself as scholar and through the women who participated in knowledge-making. However, it is not an independent, atomised, detached, objective or individualised project. Feminist scholarship, like the activism it informs and is grounded in, is dependent on collective processes – the connections and meaning-making that happen within the social – the methodological consciousness-raising (MacKinnon, 1989), and the will to collectively recognise all people as fully human living on a shared bio-diverse planet (Hawthorne, 2002).

A feminist standpoint: theorising the 'everyday, everynight' lives of women.

The third tenet of the feminist approach I have taken values the lived experiences of women as sites of knowledge. I have already referred to my own experiences that motivated this research, but a personal feminist standpoint is about more than motivation. Smith (1999) discusses the position of the scholar as a participant in the social:

>Participating in these relations means entering their practices as subject and agent, competent in the stylistics, the theoretical practices, the categories, the social organization carried by the speech genre … that standardize the forms of ruling across local sites of people's living. They are not mine alone but *of* the relations of ruling as we bring them into being in our own activities as individuals. (p. 11, emphasis in original)

This applied, localised meaning-making which underpins feminist research relies on the lived experiences of women and girls as sites of knowledge – given the reality of male supremacy – that can be critically examined. Feminists have long held that women are experts in their own lives, and that it is by observing and understanding the everyday lives of women that power relations can be understood. The grounded, material experience of women and girls carries its own authority (Oakley, 2000), despite postmodern challenges "denying the validity and originality of speaking from experience and insisting on a solipsistic confinement to discourse"

(D. Smith, 1999, p. 24). Methodologically, valuing and centring women's experiences entails recognition of the diversity of women's experiences under male supremacy.

Valuing experience is not the same as relativism; which is to insist that everything women and girls say must be understood in the terms in which it was understood and expressed. Rosalind Gill (2007) has argued to do so is ultimately patronising rather than respectful. The key principle of grounding knowledge in the actual, material experiences of women and girls is pragmatic because it means we can compare 'what is said' with 'what is made obvious' through reflective engagement, a sort of Emperor's New Clothes test. Valuing experience is consistent with scholarly processes that emphasise wholeness and connectedness (Hawthorne, 2002). Significantly, and as will be discussed in the methodology chapter, valuing women's experiences translates into research methodologies that treat a woman as a whole living, breathing woman, rather than as an identity to separate out into colour, gender, class status, ability and so on. Alternative theoretical approaches, such as intersectionality, although sometimes useful, risk disconnections in practice. Intersectionality separates out matrices of advantage and disadvantage to look at, for example, where gender intersects with class, but can occlude how they are constitutive of each other. Abstraction at the level of the individual woman does not enhance our broader understanding of the social political economy that critical feminist research employs to challenge male supremacy. Although intersectionality aspires to create space for diversity, its failure to locate male supremacy frequently renders it politically neutral (Hawthorne, 2004).

A critical approach

The key tenets of radical feminist theory, as described so far, are broadly consistent with a traditional critical approach in the social sciences. The term Critical Theory loosely refers to the scholarship of Jurgen Habermas, and to the earlier work of the Frankfurt School, primarily the scholarship of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse (Held, 1980). The rise of fascism and the devastating consequences of Hitler's Nazi Germany led Frankfurt School scholars to examine the Marxist failure to explain such extraordinary times (Held, 1980). The Frankfurt School itself continued a tradition of German idealist thought and sought to further the Kantian insights regarding the limitations of reason and knowledge, the Hegelian concern with spirit and the Marxist project of class revolution and the overthrow of capitalism. The work was broadly philosophical and interdisciplinary: Horkheimer stressed that "philosophers, sociologists, economists, historians and psychologists must unite in a lasting working partnership" (cited in Held, 1980, p. 33). In addition to Immanuel Kant, Georg Hegel and Karl Marx, the works of Max Weber, Georg Lukacs and Sigmund Freud informed the development

of key ideas. David Held (1980) notes that the Frankfurt School theorists, despite their many differences, aimed to build interdisciplinary robust ways to explore the relationships between nature, individuals and society, and to understand how society is reproduced and transformed. "They placed history at the centre of their approach to philosophy and society" and described how social domination is manifested through the ideological masking of such domination as being in the general interest of all, or as natural rather than social, or as harmonious rather than conflicted (Held, 1980, p. 15).

The period of intense second wave feminist theorising during the late 1960s and 1970s engaged with the work of critical theorists, thoroughly problematising the male supremacist bases of Enlightenment ideals of modernity. This work was crucially important because Critical Theory had failed to question male supremacy, writ large, or as internal to Critical Theory itself. Indicative of the widespread problem is the index to David Held's (1980) comprehensive *Introduction to Critical Thought: Horkheimer to Habermas* which does not contain the term 'feminism' and refers readers searching for 'women' to only two pages in the text. Nancy Fraser's article, *What's critical about critical theory* (1989), considers in detail the absence of gender within Habermas' theory of communicative action. Fraser concludes "this is a serious deficiency" that "necessitates that one read the work in question from the standpoint of an absence, that one extrapolates from things Habermas does say to things he does not" (1989, p. 14). Feminists developed a whole range of methodological tools to review scholarly work from the perspective of absence and invisibility. At the height of second wave feminism, women were dedicated to exhuming history and critically examining literature and language, largely supported through the newly established Women's Studies courses within academia. More recently, Women's Studies has been largely subsumed within post-critical disciplines of Gender Studies (N. Harris & J. Baker, 2008).

Radical and socialist feminists were particularly critical of the development of a technocratic and bureaucratic society, a concern shared with Critical Theory scholars. Both traditions critiqued instrumental reason, drawing on Weber's concept of means-ends rationality. Critical Theory paid particular attention to "the growth in mathematization of 'experience and knowledge': the shaping of all scientific practice according to the model of the natural sciences and the extension of (scientific) rationality to 'the conduct of life itself'" (Held, 1980, p. 65). Scientific rationality was seen as dangerous because it masks practices of domination where objectified technocratic directions are accepted as if law, with no critical awareness of the epistemological circumstances within which such directions are formulated. David Held writes that, while Weber accepted that rationalisation was inevitable and sought solutions within that

paradigm, critical theorists rejected it. The critical theorists did not problematise technological and scientific progress itself, but rather the way such progress was organised, which, they suggested, was the "irrationality of this rationalization" (Held, 1980, p. 66). Feminists, in particular, have critiqued the tyrannical nature of scientific 'progress' where men, replacing God and law, have sought mastery over women's bodies through reproductive technologies which instrumentalise and colonise human bodies (see for example http://www.finrrage.org).

Critical Theory, like radical feminism, works primarily through negation, confronting society with its own claims to 'truth'. Horkheimer described the work as "double-edged – a negation of the absolute claims of prevailing ideology and of its brash claims of reality" which "takes existing values seriously but insists that they become part of a theoretical whole that reveals their relativity" (cited in Held, 1980, p. 185). This involves locating theory within the historical process: scholars should not believe it possible to "passively reflect upon" any "objective reality" (Held, 1980, p. 191). Critical Theory's critique of liberal capitalism revealed how self-interest and social progress had collapsed into a "negative dialectic" where the masses, through their own doing, "produce a reality which enslaves them to an increasing degree and threatens them with every kind of suffering'" (Horkheimer cited in Held, 1980, p. 184). Here, the Marxist focus on labour is most significant, whereas for feminism a focus on sexuality is paramount.

At the start of the 1980s, however, new problems had arisen, David Held argues, "to bring about the present general impotency of critical thought" (1980, p. 69):

> The expansion of capitalism and technological rationality, while massively increasing coercive power has, at one and the same time, 'transformed numerous modes of external compulsion and authority into modes of self-discipline and self-control'. All men and women who seek the maintenance of their own lives have to act rationally; that is, they have to act 'according to the standards which insure the functioning of the apparatus'. This introversion of authority reinforces and sustains modes of behaviour that are adaptive, passive and acquiescent. Needless to say, the mechanisms of social control are strengthened. (p. 69)

Held's description of critical thought as 'impotent' is particularly illuminative of the masculinist foundation of the agenda. Feminists were deeply engaged in mapping the various ways in which male social control is arranged through the ideological institutions of capitalism, technology, heterosexuality, motherhood, and the like, but Held appears not to have noticed, an example of how under male supremacy women are only visible to the extent that they serve men's interests (Thompson, 2001).

Wild politics: the universality of male supremacy and the diversity of women's resistance

At the start of the 1980s, – in addition to the morphing of capitalist and technological rationality into individual subjectivities that Held identified – other factors were combining to undermine the potential for change. Both critical and feminist theory are grounded in the epistemological possibility of identifying universal values related to the common experience of being human and the liberal humanist commitment to respect individual people as equal and autonomous beings by virtue of being born. Post-modern rejections of the allegedly ahistorical discipline of epistemology challenged these philosophical assumptions (Thompson, 2001).

Fraser and Nicholson (1990), for example, argued for a post-modern feminist theory which "would replace unitary notions of woman and feminine gender identity with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one relevant strand amongst others, attending also to class, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation" (1990, pp. 34, 35). In short, post-modern feminism rejected the possibility of a unitary notion of 'woman' that could be applied cross-culturally, or trans-historically (Scheman, 2001). However, the valid concern about universalising that Fraser and Nicholson were seeking to address, 'the unitary notion of woman', risked losing sight of male supremacy when the focus shifts to differences between women. Denise Thompson has argued that, although feminism has exposed what Fraser and Nicholson have called "the contingent, partial, and historically situated character of what has passed in the mainstream for necessary, universal, and ahistorical truths" (Fraser & Nicholson, 1990, p. 26) this is not its primary aim:

> The problem with Western philosophy from a feminist standpoint is not primarily that it consists of particular and partial viewpoints masquerading as timeless truth, but that it operates in male supremacist interests while defining itself as in the interests of all ... Feminism's task in relation to the Western intellectual tradition is to evaluate whether or not, and if so to what extent, frameworks owe allegiance to male supremacist interests, meanings and values, and to challenge and oppose those frameworks in the interest of a human status for all. (Thompson, 2001, pp. 119, 120)

The debate between Iris Marion Young and Nancy Fraser (Fraser, 1995, 1997; Marion Young, 1990) over justice and the politics of difference maps the tensions that arise when the identity of the oppressed becomes the focus of scholarly gaze, instead of a place from which to focus on the practices of the most powerful. Fraser (1995) argues that different social groups have important differences in the bases of their differentiation and that to distinguish between these is to make a critically informed response. To know whether the difference that distinguishes groups should be eliminated, universalised or simply enjoyed depends upon what lies at the

heart of the group's oppression. For Fraser, the identity claims of different groups should be sorted through to "defend, only those versions of the politics of difference that coherently synergize with the politics of redistribution" (1995, p. 180). This is necessary, Fraser argues, in order to overcome the de-politicisation that she identifies in the work of Iris Marion Young, where difference can only be affirmed.

In order to decide if differences should be eliminated, universalised or enjoyed, Fraser (1995) categorises three possible approaches, represented by three different feminist theorists. Although the characterisation of theoretical approaches to difference allows for a discussion of the bigger ideas, attaching particular theorists to particular approaches is less helpful. Radical feminist theorists employ any one of the three approaches towards difference, with respect to recognising the claims of women, depending on the particular material experience of male supremacy in any given time and place.

The first approach is elimination: the "difference that members of oppressed groups evince are precisely the damages of oppression or lies that rationalize them. Difference, in other words, is an artefact of oppression ... The proper political response is to abolish it" (Fraser, 1995, p. 180). Many radical feminist theorists argue for the abolition of the categories of 'gender', 'men', 'women' and 'sex' to the extent that such categories have been constructed and used by the powerful to organise oppression (Jeffreys, 2003; Thompson, 2001; Wittig, 1992). Feminists have questioned how categories are differentiated and who benefits from such arrangements, aiming to discredit hierarchies of sex categories, just as racial hierarchies have been discredited (Jeffreys, 2003; Stoltenberg, 1989; Wittig, 1992). Race is still considered a useful tool of political analysis but its organising power is widely understood to be socially defined and embodied.

The second approach – universalising – Fraser identifies is "the view that the difference that members of oppressed groups evince are marks of their cultural superiority over their oppressors. These differences, like feminine nurturance", rather than being celebrated as differences, "should be universalized and extended to those who currently manifest inferior traits such as competiveness and instrumentalism" (1995, p. 180). With respect to those arguments which essentialise 'feminine nurturance' as biologically hardwired, radical feminists have recognised that some practices and thinking can be common to a group by association, not by biology. For example, mothering or caring for country can be construed as morally superior and as arising from a material commitment to preserve life and make connections, as opposed to promoting death and disconnection (Hawthorne, 2002; Ruddick, 1980). A standpoint becomes

feminist and critical when we politically and consciously name and challenge male supremacy and its colonisation intentions towards people and environment (Thompson, 2001). This practice wisdom, arising from embodied, critically-reflective and collective challenges to male supremacy (rather than from some kind of pre-political or 'natural' 'feminine nurturance') provides a values framework that can be specifically localised in appropriate ways.

The third possible approach to difference – affirmation – that Fraser identifies "is the view that the differences manifested by members of different groups are neither superiorities not inferiorities but simply variations. They should neither be eliminated nor universalised but rather affirmed as differences; they are valued as expressions of human diversity" (1995, p. 180). This is clearly the position that MacKinnon, Jeffreys, Wittig and Hawthorne also take with respect to the difference – that is, what the categories 'woman' or 'sex' *should* differentiate.

Fraser is rightly critical of identity politics where claims are wholesale and undifferentiated. Recognising differences allows us to make "normative judgements about the relative value of alternative norms, practices and interpretations" (1995, p. 180). Fraser uses redistribution (economic claims) and recognition (cultural claims on the basis of gender, ethnicity and so on) as heuristic devices. Radical feminism, as I have applied it to Fraser's typologies, makes normative judgements about the political usefulness (given the universal experience of living in female bodies) of women coming together as a sex class to challenge male supremacy. Radical feminist claims of universalising, abolishing or celebrating difference will vary, depending on the way in which supremacy is touted as 'natural' in any given situation. This is not to say that all women are the same; it is to say that male supremacy is consistent enough in its practices of domination to attract collective resistance.

Susan Hawthorne describes the diverse efforts that challenge male supremacy as 'wild politics'; she notes that the work of women from a range of non-dominant cultures, what she calls 'the diversity matrix' (Indigenous thinkers, writers from Africa and Asia, lesbian thinkers, thinkers whose focus has been on disability, class or race) has converged over the past two decades to pose similar questions. "A new kind of politics is growing out of this literature, and its parameters are diversity, context, interaction, locality, justice and change, namely, wild politics" (Hawthorne, 2002, p. 31). Hawthorne's work is important, because she conceptualises the universalism of male supremacy (theorised as capitalist globalisation operating through colonial processes of appropriation and commodification) as thesis, with antithesis as resistance by diversity.

The debate between Nancy Fraser and Iris Marion Young points to some of the tensions in a critical project committed to the universal possibility of change but focused on the material, embodied and socially differing experiences. A critical, radical feminist approach, or a wild political approach, values the individual agent as the site of acts of resistance or compliance, but does not depoliticise or disconnect the differences between individuals from what can be universalised about the social. The specific danger of an unexamined politics, based only on identity, is visible in the most recent developments in sexual politics, where some men have claimed the right to be women; a right they are aggressively and successfully championing through legal pathways and social movements. For feminist women who have struggled against the categories of sex and gender being used to hierarchally organise social communities through prescriptions of 'femininity' as 'female subservient behaviour', it is frustrating to see those hierarchies policed and maintained by men who, going further, even appropriate the position of the oppressed, and in doing so, declare that they are, in fact, the most oppressed women. They reason that 'cis-women'(women who are female at birth) do not have to fight for recognition of their oppression. Their demand for platforms and inclusion in women-only spaces and events has made feminist organising and political analysis of transgender/sexual claims particularly difficult. Although the number of men who make these claims is small, the social effect is significant. The medical-industrial complex supports materially changing people's bodies, and legal and government regulatory systems struggle to meet their demands. When transgender/sexual demands are conflated, under groupings of LGBTI, with the entirely opposing needs of lesbian women, whose oppression is grounded in the strict policing of femininity and the rules of heterosexuality, political analysis becomes even more complex.

Post-critical approaches

The rise of post-structural and post-modern approaches in the 1980s changed the direction of scholarship within the critical tradition. Methodologically, post-structuralism and post-modernism have both grown from, and influenced, tools of enquiry developed by feminism and Critical Theory, for example, the examination of language. Epistemologically, however, these approaches have frequently departed from feminism and Critical Theory's commitment to change, to the extent that a broadly defined critical approach has moved in directions which ultimately reproduce the status quo.

Kristen Waters details three major feminist critiques of the excesses of post-structural and post-modern theorising. Firstly, such theories are often self-contradictory; secondly, they are often incoherent; and thirdly, they are often nihilistic (Waters, 1996). All three critiques are related to the Liar's Paradox: which is to assert the truth of the claim that there is no truth. Post-modern

and post-structural thought is also problematic in that it frequently involves the intellectual shape-shifting of concepts from concrete to abstract; for example, from 'women' to 'fragmented selves'; 'reason' to 'desire', and 'substance' to 'style':

> Feminists have held for some time that notions of knowledge, reason and argumentation need to be reworked, noting that the separation of reason and emotion is artificial. Yet the feminist movement, to reclaim and reconfigure *reason* and *knowing,* becomes transformed by post-modernism, oddly enough in an indeterminist theory, into those ever-determined and determining notions – *fantasy* and *desire*, so anti-rational, so "feminine", so "womanly", in a post-modern move that lands us squarely back into the throes of ever-so-modern Freudian psychoanalytic theory. (Waters, 1996, p. 291, emphasis in original)

Waters explains that feminism has drawn "cautiously, critically and intentionally" on modern theory, including its tools of empiricism, logic, reason, and measurement, because "without reason and with only desire as a guide … incoherence will follow" (1996, p. 293). Scholarship that qualifies feminist politics and practice with the prefix 'post-modern' is therefore problematic:

> With its anti-humanism, "post-modern" feminism is unable to make an explicit commitment to an ethical vision of a human condition unfettered by hierarchies of domination. Within its rejection of "truth", it is incapable of distinguishing truth from lies, deceptions and distortions. With its "anti-moralism", libertarianism and "non-judgementalism", it is able neither to make its own values explicit, nor to oppose the male supremacist values which give meaning and reality to the oppression of women. Hence it is unable to acknowledge and condemn the evils of domination, to decide between right and wrong, or to commit itself to the cause of justice for women. (Thompson, 1996, p. 337)

Ann Oakley (2000) broadly critiques post-modern approaches, in particular those that Judith Butler (1991), Luce Irigaray (1985), Julia Kristeva (1981) and Stacey Young (1997) have variously taken; these, she argues, are ultimately depoliticising since they have led to the idea that neither women nor feminism really exist:

> Nothing is certain and nothing can be known for sure. Reality has gone the way of gender, we can know little more than our individual experiences, and pursuing truth in the old quintessential way is an exercise doomed to failure on procedural as well as

> political grounds … It is one of my premises that most people operate as though reality does exist. It is only academics who make a living arguing the opposite. (pp. 19, 20)

Finally, the peculiar timing of the rise of post-modernist theories has been noted by women who have remained firmly committed to an unmodified feminism – for example, Waters (1996) – and by those who have sought to engage, discipline and perform feminism within post-modern and post-structural analyses, for example, Fraser and Nicholson (1990). As Waters observes, "[t]he deconstruction of the 'subject' of discourse occurs at the historical moment when dominated and marginalised groups are gaining a voice and political momentum" (1996, p. 285).

Theorising motherhood: 'Maternal thinking'

In the classic text *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976), Adrienne Rich made the important theoretical distinction between the experience of motherhood as the "*potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to her children" and the "*institution,* which aims at ensuring that that potential – and all women – shall remain under male control" (p. 13, emphasis in original). Rich's distinction created the space to examine how women's relationships with children maintain or resist the institution of motherhood and male supremacy. She elaborates:

> The institution of motherhood is not identical with bearing and caring for children, any more than the institution of heterosexuality is identical with intimacy and sexual love. Both create the prescriptions and the conditions in which choices are made or blocked; they are not "reality" but they have shaped the circumstances of our lives. (Rich, 1976, p. 42)

Motherhood and heterosexuality, therefore, shape the conditions within which women act. They work in concert with, revive and renew other patriarchal institutions, such as nationalism and religion (Rich, 1976). With the benefit of Rich's distinction, the term 'motherhood' can be usefully employed to denote institutional, patriarchal motherhood, with the term 'mothering' reserved for describing the actions of women who are mothering – actions that may either resist or maintain 'motherhood'.

Sara Ruddick's important work *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (1989) theorises the link between action and thought. Drawing on a pragmatic approach, in the tradition of Wittgenstein, Winch and Habermas, Ruddick starts from the position that "all thinking … arises from and is shaped by the practices in which people engage" (1989, p. 9). For mothers, the

practices in which they engage are those they think meet the demands of their children. As Andrea O'Reilly has observed, Sara Ruddick had theorised the obvious: "'mother's think', this insight was 'life-changing and ground-breaking' for scholars of motherhood and mothers alike" (2009, p. 1). Ruddick identified three demands that children make on women by their very existence: preservation of their life, growth, and social acceptability. She went on to say that to be a mother is to commit to meeting those demands by acts of preservative love, nurturance and training. A woman's commitment to meeting her children's demands, however, is rarely straightforward:

> Maternal responses are complicated acts that social beings make to biological beings whose existence is inseparable from social interpretations. Maternal practice begins with a double vision – seeing the fact of biological vulnerability as socially significant and as demanding care. (Ruddick, 1989, p. 18)

These are relationships of responsibility and dependency, at the heart of which is vulnerability. Emma Woodley and Eleanor Milligan note that "[v]ulnerability calls for a caring response from another … vulnerability marks the limits of individualism" (2010, p. 10).

Mothers attending vulnerable children are not easily accounted for under liberalism. Barbara Katz Rothman describes motherhood as an "embodied challenge to liberal philosophy", which explains why societies based on liberalism cannot "deal well with motherhood" (1989, p. 60). 'Economic man', as the ideal liberal subject, is independent, self-interested, white and mobile – a subjectivity which excludes mothers who are embedded in relationships of care. Women's domestic labour continues to go unacknowledged and unaccounted under liberalism (Hyman, 1994; Waring, 1998). Instead of relationships of acknowledged interdependency, individuals are held solely responsible for writing their own life biographies, as if independently determining their fate (Rose, 1989, 1996). The family, as an organising unit, is said to have moved away from traditions of obligation toward spaces of negotiation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992), and yet feminist scholarship (Baker, 2010) has pointed to the enduring nature of male domination and the requirement that women choose that which is actually obliged.

Acts of mothering are further complicated because the demands on women are often contradictory. Raising socially acceptable children means meeting the expectations of "primary social groups with which a mother is identified, whether by force, kinship, or choice" (Ruddick, 1989, p. 17). The expectations may or may not be in conflict with the needs of children to be kept safe and to develop, and conflict with the needs of the woman herself. Further, within the conditions of patriarchal motherhood, mothering is done by women from a place of both power

and powerlessness. Children see "[t]his powerful presence [their mother] becomes powerless in front of their father, a teacher, welfare worker, doctor, judge, landlord – the world" (Ruddick, 1989, p. 36). A woman's own sense of power and powerlessness, and her children's reactions to that position, ensure women's experiences of mothering are vastly different to "the nearly magical omnipotence that children and some critics ascribe to mothers to shape their children's and even their nation's lives" (Ruddick, 1989, p. 109).

Ruddick's theory of 'maternal thinking' is not focussed on social or biological descriptions of what mothers *are*, rather it is concerned with what mothers *do*: the mothering practices and the thinking that arises from these practices. This focus enables critical reflection within different cultural or historical conditions.

> [From] the practicalist view, thought does not transcend its social origins. There is no truth to be apprehended from a transcendental perspective, that is, from no perspective at all. Practicalists reject a recurrent philosophic fantasy of finding a language free from the limits of any language in which to speak of the limits of all language. Limit and perspective are intrinsic to language and to thought, not a deficiency of them. (Ruddick, 1989, p. 15)

Further, Ruddick's use of critical theory applied to maternal thinking is realised through its grounding in the lives of women. Drawing on Nancy Hartsock's standpoint theory, Ruddick argues "[a]s feminists, standpoint theorists fight against the exploitation and abuse of women caretakers while valuing the particular knowledge that women acquire from their suffering of and resistance to oppression (1989, p. 133). "A standpoint is an engaged vision of the world opposed and superior to dominant ways of thinking" (Ruddick, 1989, p. 129). A standpoint becomes feminist when it is grounded in a recognition of male supremacy (Thompson, 2001). Ruddick criticises dominant masculine ways of thinking, particularly militarism, for their basis in abstract concepts – abstractions, she argues, that are enabled by, and result from, a distance from caring work. The distinctive caring work performed by women is interpreting "the physical phenomena of human and other bodies … care workers depend on a practical knowledge of the qualities of the material world, including the human bodily world, in which they deal" (Ruddick, 1989, p. 130). The thinking that arises from caring work, therefore, is fundamentally about connection as opposed to the thinking that arises from killing work which is fundamentally about disconnection. Although work is carried out by sexed bodies, the link between gender and work is not biologically determined, but rather social.

Feminist concerns with motherhood.

The Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s was a time of great social change and, for white women in particular, involved rejection of the past and the architects of the past, our mothers. Marianne Hirsch, recalls the early 1970s, in her article *Feminism at the Maternal Divide: A Diary* (1997), as a time when many women identified collectively as daughters or sisters (the sisterhood), breaking away from their mother's lives. "Our mothers become the emblems of a womanhood we need to reject, and the children in our … sister's lives do not make any of us any more sympathetic to the maternal project. It never occurs to us that our feminist bonding could include our mothers or ourselves as mothers" (Hirsch, 1997, p. 355). Robin Morgan (1978) describes the dilemma this created for feminist women who were bringing up children:

> Since the patriarchy commanded women to be mothers (the thesis), we had to rebel with our own polarity and declare motherhood a reactionary cabal (antithesis). Today a new synthesis has emerged; the concept of mother-right, affirmation of a woman's childbearing and/or childrearing when it is a woman's *choice* … It is refreshing at last to be able to come out of my mother-closet and yell to the world that I love my dear, wonderful, delicious child. (p. 8, emphasis in original)

The thesis that 'patriarchy commanded women to be mothers' saw women's role in biological reproduction identified as the original source of women's subordination (Firestone, 1970). "In these formulations, liberation for women would have come only when women were freed from having to be mothers, or released from primary responsibility for motherhood" (Nakano Glenn, 1994, p. 22). However, the synthesis that Morgan announced in 1978 was far from uncontested, and there are differing feminist recollections of the period (Porter, 2010).

Lynne Segal (1987) argues that feminist historians should recognise the attention paid to mothering, parenting and childcare, and that to paint early second-wave feminism as anti-natalist is a misrepresentation. Segal is critical of what she calls 'maternal revivalism', what Tuula Gordon (1990) describes as the "increasing emphasis on motherhood as a source of power and pleasure for women, and as the site which implicitly or explicitly contains assumptions about the inherent differences between men and women" (p. 42). For Gordon, it is a thesis "which stresses the feminine qualities of women, and motherhood as a contradictory strength which enables a critique of the shackles patriarchy imposes on reproduction" (1990, p. 79). Gordon (1990) points to the work of Adrienne Rich, Sara Ruddick and Ann Oakley as examples of such revivalism. In my view, the scholarship of Rich, Ruddick and Oakley does not simplistically stress 'the feminine qualities of women'; instead these theorists were committed

to an analysis of the social construction of 'women' and 'femininity' and their work grapples with the contradictions of women's embodied, lived experiences in a way that rejects essentialist notions of biological or cultural determinism. Segal (1987) argues, and Gordon (1990) agrees, that maternal revivalism has become a comfortable space because it grew out of "feminist disappointment that our aspirations to engage in creative and rewarding work, to struggle for social change, to build warm and supporting communal spaces and friendship networks – as well as to choose to have children – have proved so often difficult, stressful or transitory" (Segal, 1987, p. 145). Segal (1987) argues that 'maternal revivalism' is politically risky – "there is a danger of traditional sexist stereotypes of women and men being reaffirmed in this literature" (p. 145) and that "in the mothering literature, and all the work it has inspired, there is an exaggerated focus on differences between women and men" (p. 148).

The central tension in theorising motherhood is this "difference-equality knot" which Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1994, p. 22) says echoes tensions in the feminist project as a whole. "Do we want to do away with the category of woman – minimize the significance of sex differences and claim our rights on the basis of our essential sameness with men? Or do we want to claim the identity of women, valorize women's culture and organize on the basis of our commonalities as women?" (Nakano Glenn, 1994, p. 22). Her question echoes the debate outlined earlier in this chapter between Nancy Fraser and Iris Marion Young about whether differences should be abolished, universalised or celebrated.

To conceptualise the key problematic in terms of difference and equality can be an intellectual trap:

> When equality and difference are paired dichotomously, they structure an impossible choice. If one opts for equality, one is forced to accept the notion that difference is antithetical to it. If one opts for difference, one admits that equality is unattainable. (Scott cited in Rennie Forcey, 1994, p. 368)

Linda Rennie Forcey (1994, p. 368) has written that "[f]eminists need to recognize that the antithesis of difference is not equality but rather sameness; and the antithesis of equality is not difference, but rather inequality".

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, feminists who were theorising the sources of masculinised values of autonomy and separation and feminised tendencies towards relationality and affiliation were characterised as 'cultural femininsts' or 'difference feminists'(Hirsch, 1997). Feminists of that time, such as Rich, Dinnerstein, Chodorow, Flax, Benjamin, Fox Keller, Gilligan, Cixous and Irigaray, were radically revising object-relations psychoanalytic theory and

"point[ing] to an alternative to patriarchy and the logos, to a world of knowledge and experience in which subject-object dualism, separation, autonomy, and power relations might be reenvisioned" (Hirsch, 1997, p. 358). Feminist questions about the possibilities of motherhood divided scholars professionally and personally. Hirsh recalls: "[t]o my utter shock, my sisters and I find ourselves on opposite sides of what appears to be an unbridgeable divide" (1997, p. 360).

Ann Phoenix and Anne Woollett (1991a, p. 223), taking up Segal's maternal revivalism critique, argued that such scholarship "replace[s] a commitment to redressing gendered inequities with that of recognizing women's needs for intimacy, and seeing family and children as the most appropriate means to satisfy those needs". They are particularly dismissive of Ruddick's work, arguing "[i]f feminism is a politics which aims to emancipate women … Ruddick's approach cannot claim to be feminist because it does not engage with the ways in which differences between women … have a direct impact on women's lives" (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991a, p. 224). And, "Ruddick's work also fails as feminism because it does not engage with … mothers' sexuality, aggression and negative feelings around motherhood as well as their desires for an autonomous life" (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991a, p. 224). However, Ruddick, as early as 1980, had explained how her theory of maternal thinking would, in practice, look different for different women. Ruddick (1980) also argued for the usefulness of a theory of maternal practice which was not anchored in either fixed philosophical conceptions of the *body* (although in later work she returned to women's embodied subjectivity (Ruddick, 1994)) or in fixed conceptions of *identity*. She wrote:

> In setting out the idea of maternal thinking I made certain clams about what all children demand and then defined a "mother" as, essentially, someone who responds to the three main demands of preservation, growth and social acceptability. Despite the variations among children and those who care for them, these demands, I claimed, define, essentially, a kind of work.
>
> This assumption of commonality runs counter to the philosophical and feminist mood of the last decade. (Ruddick, 1989, p. 51)

The feminist 'mood' was grounded in the important work of questioning de-contextualised and de-historicised assumptions of modernity and made work such as Ruddick's an easy target. Women were struggling to find ethical personal positions from which to live, a struggle which was frequently and exhaustingly reduced to policing their own and others' individual politics of identity. Marianne Hirsh (1997), again:

> [Feminist critics] decry much feminist writing about maternity for contributing to an essentializing of women's experience – for returning women to the destiny of their anatomy. Cultural feminism seems to some to exclude from the ranks of feminism those women who eschew motherhood. Even worse, critics claim that "difference feminism" is unable to envision a meaningful life for women separate from motherhood. Discussion about maternity in which I participate at feminist conferences and seminars are inevitably interrupted by the emotional voice of those who feel excluded by a mother-inclusive feminist discourse, however nuanced – by a discourse they experience as alienating and even "violent" in its exclusionary power. More than that, they see feminist attention to the mother-daughter relations as a turn to the private: to a form of introspection and psychologizing that could never effect lasting change. These feminist critics identify motherhood with "individual" concerns, forever depoliticized. They see it as perpetuating heterosexuality and patriarchy. (pp. 361, 362)

As Hirsch says, studies of motherhood, such as Ruddick's, were, and remain, viewed as violently exclusionary of non-mothers, as essentialising, as depoliticising and as perpetuating heterosexuality and patriarchy. But, as Ruddick argues, "[t]o claim a maternal identity is not to make an empirical generalisation but to engage in a political act" (1989, p. 56). While I have gone into some detail to reproduce Ruddick's own words to answer some of the critiques that have been levelled against her, I now want to draw in similar detail on the generous work of Patrice DiQuinzio. In *Mothering without Norms? Empirical Realities and Normative Conceptions of Mothering*, DiQuinzio (2009, p. 116) seeks to make sense of critiques made of Ruddick for "proposing essential, or universal, womanly scripts". DiQuinzio takes up Gayatri Spivak's concept of 'the slippage of signifiers' to make sense of a trend (within scholarship on motherhood) to recapitulate the distinction between the natural and the social. So strong is the deeply-held view that mothering is thoroughly determined by women's bodies, that scholars, even sympathetic ones, frequently 'mischaracterise' Ruddick and others' work as essentialist. Diquinzio argues that Ruddick, like many feminists, has struggled "to reconceptualise the relationship of sex, gender, and embodiment: it is a defining feature of contemporary feminist theory" (2009, p. 118), and that it is common to read critiques that reduce the complexity elaborated in this highly nuanced work to crude distinctions between the natural and the social. DiQuinzio (2009) argues for an ethical, vigilant, and reflective engagement with these feminist intellectual struggles:

> The synthesis of the empirical, conceptual and normative work that we might like to see emerge from the interdisciplinary study of mothering may depend on whether we can

> strenuously resist the terms of dichotomizing distinctions, not only in our own work but in our reading and interpretation of others' work. (p. 118)

DiQuinzio suggests, and I agree, that Ruddick has practised a 'good enough' metaphysics:

> When Ruddick writes that she is "still drawn to the metaphysical 'fiction' of the human child" because it enables her to address her "primary concern…moral claims about the responses children deserve" (1995:xvi), she is, I think, practising a 'good enough' metaphysics. The metaphysical fictions to which she is drawn – not only the fiction of "the child", but also that of the "the mother", and "the woman of peace" – enable her to ground in recognizable realities of human experiences her moral claims about mothers, children, all people and the peaceful circumstances in which they deserve to live. These fictions or figures do not, and need not, exclude social and cultural differences in human experiences; rather they are tools for … critical reflection and human liberation. (2009, p. 119)

To be politically clear about the differences between men and women, and the differences between women, and the way difference is meaningfully used to socially organise hierarchies of power is fundamental to a scholarship committed to human status for all people.

The 'yummy mummy': a genealogy of psychological discourses.

In this section I draw on the history and theories outlined so far to consider more recent expectations of women. I argue for a critical psychology that can account for the ways in which women act as mothers within the context of a social where the regulatory powers of the motherhood, heterosexuality and pornography are mediated through new technologies.

The long history of oppression of mothers, as represented in psychological discourses on motherhood, has been critiqued from within (Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989), and from outside (Ribbens, 1994; Walters, 1992), the discipline of psychology. Many of the everyday words describing mothering relationships are derived from psychological frameworks. Words such as 'bonding', 'separation', and so on, "are not innocent, they have a history, and most importantly, are gendered" (Walters, 1992, p. 10). Psychology has paid little attention to women's own experiences (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991b) and, as Jane Ribbens (1994) points out, can thereby alienate women through value-laden psychological typologies that are often distant from women's own understandings. Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey critique the assumed objectivity of psychology from a class perspective, stating that "[s]cience claims to tell the truth about natural mothering but it is founded upon a set of fantasies and fears of what is to be found

in the working class" (1989, p. 29). Additionally, David Ingleby (1986) critiques psychology for its central notion of the 'the individual' split off from its social world. The individual, as the backbone of western liberal societies, is only a partial concept for the many communities of people whose members do not fit neo-classical economic or cultural definitions of individualism. Psychology, as various critiques illuminate, treats those considered insufficiently individualised as deviant and abject. The genealogy of psychological discourse of motherhood has been well documented (Davis, 1996; H. Marshall, 1991; Newson & Newson, 1974; O'Reilly, 2010b; Richardson, 1993; Rose, 1989), often by means of reviewing mothering advice manuals. In this section I contribute to this discussion by considering more recent expectations of women, and argue for a critical psychology which can account for the ways in which women act as mothers within the context of the social.

Andrea O'Reilly identifies eight 'rules' of contemporary motherhood. The first six are:

1. Children can only be properly cared for by the biological mother
2. This mothering must be provided 24/7
3. The mother must always put children's needs before her own
4. Mothers must turn to the experts for instruction
5. The mother must be fully satisfied, fulfilled, completed and composed in motherhood
6. Mothers must lavish excessive amounts of time, energy and money upon the rearing of their children. (2010b, p. 20)

These rules are operationalised at the level of the individual mother via subjectively experienced psychic narratives. However, women's individual expectations also fit within the context of broader socio-political discourses about women's place in the family and their role within the political economy. Rules seven and eight identify the socio-political context, specifically privatised powerlessness:

7. The mother has full responsibility but no power from which to mother
8. Motherwork, specifically childrearing, is regarded a personal, private undertaking with no political import. (O'Reilly, 2010b, p. 20)

Arguably, there is another 'rule' – mothers must be 'yummy'. The 'Yummy Mummy' has been described as a "brand-new, secular figure in popular culture" (Douglas, 2010, p. 128). She is upbeat, positive, sexually unchanged by childbirth or lactation and desirable. She is a

commercially-produced identity, outgoing and confident – 'girl power' all grown up. The cover of *Time* magazine in May 2012 (see Figure 2.1) created an international online storm for its portrayal of a woman breastfeeding her three-year-old son ("Confronting cover: Time shows breastfeeding 3-year-old," 2012).

Figure 2.1 Cover of *Time*

The woman on the cover of the issue, Jamie Lynne Grumet who blogs at IAmNottheBabysitter.com posted images of herself breastfeeding at the *Playboy* mansion, and her blog was tagged as a MILF – Mother I'd Like To Fuck (Wilson, 2012). The image and related commentary is illustrative of the sexualisation of motherhood (and breastfeeding) through the male gaze; it also illustrates the regulatory powers of the institutions of motherhood, heterosexuality and pornography, all of which is mediated in technologically new ways via the internet.

The intensified responsibility women have for children is a site of struggle in the 21st century, as the series of *Motherhood vs. Feminism* blogs, hosted by the New York Times, clearly demonstrates (Druckerman, 2012b; Urban, 2012; Williams, 2012). At stake is the philosophy of attachment parenting, a trend grounded in the ideas of John Bowlby, and articulated in the work of paediatrician William Sears and his co-author wife, Martha Sears (2001), in over thirty parenting books. The New York Times blogs and associated Twitter responses were triggered by the work of Elizabeth Badinter (2012) who described attachment parenting as "voluntary servitude", echoing Pamela Druckerman's (2012a, 2012b) "martyr mothering". The blogs presented a variety of responses, ranging from 'good riddance to feminism' (Williams, 2012) to claiming attachment parenting as the third-wave feminist answer to involving men in achieving a work/life balance; a solution to the 'double shift' dilemma unresolved in second wave

feminism (Urban, 2012). Attachment parenting clearly has different political motivations and results, depending on where women are situated in raced socio-economic hierarchies. For some, it is a rejection of materialism in favour of an emphasis on parental attention (Williams, 2012). The classed nature of attachment parenting is evident: rejecting materialism is only possible when there is an excess to reject. In addition, to practise attachment parenting, there needs to be a parent, (read, mother), available to attach to, which is difficult for mothers working one or more jobs. The common practices of attachment parenting, such as co-sleeping, prolonged breastfeeding and baby wearing, are practices appropriated by the middle class from less advantaged women, who of necessity continue working whilst caring for young children. Middle class women who choose to practise attachment parenting frequently describe their motivations in terms of the 'best interests of the child', rather than as a survival strategy.

Over the past three decades, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, turning children into successful neoliberal subjects has made women responsible in new ways for their children's capacity to negotiate their social worlds. Sharon Hays (1996) coined the term 'intensive mothering' to describe the intensification of expectations women faced during the 1990s. Again, expert parenting advice directly contradicts the practices of mothers from working-class backgrounds, conveniently putting the blame for social ills on 'the bad mother'. Governments whose actions do not adequately deal with social disadvantage can sanction women, individualise poverty and discriminate against them through mechanisms such as punitive welfare regimes related to school truancy and the like (Gillies, 2005). Governments have adopted a discourse which positions the 'socially excluded' as failing in self-governance, "unable or unwilling to appropriately capitalize on their lives"; and government policies may require parents to attend 'professional' classes to 'support' them to fulfil their responsibilities (Gillies, 2005, p. 837).

The history of expectations of motherhood over the past century (see Marshall, 1991; Newson & Newson, 1976; Pheonix & Woollett, 1991c; Porter, 2010, Richardson, 1993; Tizard, 1991; Walters, 1992) is useful when we consider the origins of contemporary ideals of the good mother:

> The good mother is required to be loving and caring, to have 'never-ending' supplies of patience, to willingly and regularly spend time with her children, and in this time provide her children with the right sort of attention, stimulation and guidance. She is required to remain calm and relaxed at all times, to be a good listener and communicator, and to be understanding and sensitive to children's needs. Amongst the tasks she must competently perform are the disciplining of her children, teaching of appropriate behaviour, and everyday basic care tasks of feeding and keeping children

clean. In order to manage all this she must be responsible, consistent, fair, able to handle (control?) her children in any situation, never lose her temper – and it would help also if she was energetic, creative and had a sense of humour. (Brown, Lumley, Small, & Astbury, 1994, p. 141)

The above characteristics of 'a good mother' were described by women who participated in Australian research conducted in the mid-1990s (Brown et al., 1994). The genesis of this extensive list of attributes can be traced back over the past century to socio-political ideals that have defined the institution of motherhood and the fictional 'good mother', ideals which have become increasingly seen as actual psychological processes (Ribbens, 1994; Rose, 1989). "The beliefs, norms and techniques" of psychology do not explain or mystify, but rather profoundly shape "the kinds of people we are able to be" (Rose, 1997, p. 226) Acts of caring have increasingly been professionalised, and more recently sexualised, to become projects of the psychic self, and the demands on mothers have become so contradictory they are impossible to meet.

Theorising childhood and sexuality: where are the children?

The beginning years of the 21st century have seen such dramatic reconsiderations of the child and childhood that Daniela Caselli (2010) describes them as the "conditions of a cultural paradigm shift" (p. 243), similar in nature, but not yet as advanced, as the paradigm shift of the 1960s and 70s for women. The conceptualisation of childhood and the conceptualisation of sexuality that are implicated in this paradigm shift are complex. Thorne (1987) argues that, although feminists challenged traditional modernist divisions, such as the public and private, these challenges have not been as developed for children. Instead, adult interests and perspectives, assumed within feminist theory, have resulted in three images of children: "as threats to adult society, as victims of adults, and as learners of adult culture" (Thorne, 1987, p. 89). This is problematic because "neither portrayal allows much room for understanding children's consciousness and actions within their sometimes difficult circumstances" (Thorne, 1987, p. 91). Thorne critiques socialisation frameworks as being "deeply teleological, referring children's present lives to their presumed adult futures. They also assume an ontology, a division between the supposedly completed nature of the adult and the incomplete child" (1987, p. 93). Thorne's concerns have been widely taken up, and Caselli (2010), mapping the reconsiderations of the child, suggests:

The child has been re-theorized against its classic Piagetian stages of psychological development (Burman, 2007) and as a historically fluctuating concept (Aries, 196); it has taken the shape of the adult's desire (Kincaid, 1992, 1998; Greer, 2003; Bruhm and

Hurley, 2004); appeared as a questionable self-evident materiality 'linked with a primary state of language' (Rose, 1984, p 9; Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2004); as a bridge in articulations of national identity (Kiberd, 1996; Castaneda, 2003; Balagopalan, 2008; Burman, 2008); as central to technologies of visuality (Cartright, 2008; Lebeau, 2008); as figuring queer (Moon, 1987; Bruhm and Hurley 2004; Stockton, 2009); and as problematically standing for futurity (Edelman, 2004). (p. 243)

Feminist theorising about children has been slow to develop, "given the need to challenge and transcend the malestream theory and practice which equated women's interests with those of children … The infantilization of women has long been close to the feminization of childhood, as a state of dependency" (Burman & Stacey, 2010, p. 228). Moreover, Burman and Stacey argue that "women's potential maternal status has been used to warrant the surveillance and regulation of their sexuality", which has meant feminists have focussed more on challenging "women's positions in relation to children, rather than on feminist approaches to children and childhood per se" (2010, p. 229). The risk, for women, and feminists, of a focus on children has not been unfounded. Rights-based liberal frameworks work to set women and children in competition with each other; for example, the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) received overwhelming support as opposed to the underwhelming interest in the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Burman & Stacey, 2010). Burman and Stacey propose that the UNCRC promoted social science interest in 'childhood studies', in which "the mantra of the child as 'competent social actor' (see, for example, A. James & A. Prout, 1990) was formulated to counter the deficit and dependency models informed largely by developmental psychology" (2010, p. 230). Jane Jenson's (2004) examination of the literature of child-rights identifies a neoliberal shift, primarily driven by expert discourse from the fields of population health and human development, but also from the fields of education and child development. Burman and Stacey (2010) position childhood studies literature within a global political economy driven by northern European colonial developmental discourse, and although "methodologically innovative", also somewhat "theoretically ambiguous"; which frequently results in a "gender-free and anti-feminist paradigm" (p. 230). So whilst positioning children as 'competent social actors' is an important challenge to the rational subjectivity reserved for men as neoliberal subjects, a 'children's rights regime' can put at risk meaningful theoretical engagement in the complex relationships of dependency between women and children.

Two recent special journal editions outline various developing theories. In both Feminist Theory's edition *'The child and childhood'* (2010) and Australian Feminist Studies' edition *'The Child'* (2008), there has been evident concern to understand how the lives of real children

are related to notions of the figurative 'child' and 'childhood', with close attention to the nature of children's sexuality. Barbara Baird (2008) coined the term 'child politics' to refer to "instances of politics of all kinds which pivot, in part or in total, on the discursive figure of 'the child'" (p. 291), and the term 'child fundamentalism' to characterise "the ways in which 'the child' is so often invoked as a discursive category with which one cannot disagree" (p. 291), and "that mobilises the figure of 'the child' in such ways that constitute this figure as a fixed and absolute category" (p. 293). Baird argues that the figurative child is 'pure and innocent' and depends on at least two binary distinctions; firstly between adult and child, and secondly, between sexual and asexual states of being; the first being dependent on the second. Baird challenges fundamentalism by refusing to view "the child as a nostalgic object from a perfect past and as a symbol for a utopian future" (2008, p. 296).

> Refusing child fundamentalism means allowing all that it disallows: the historical and political contingency of childhood and its variability; its gendered, classed and racialised nature; childhood desires and actions; and childhood excesses. (B. Baird, 2008, p. 296)

Challenges to fixed figurative notions of asexual childhood raises, in my view, legitimate questions. However, breaking down the binaries between 'adults and children' and 'sexual and asexual', even if only in theory, is not in itself an apolitical act, and it is equally important to question the purpose to which such 'unfixed figurations' are put. Considering how 'unfixing these binaries' differently benefits adult men in comparison to adult women, I argue that it serves *men's* interest to ascribe 'competence' to children as social actors and to dissolve developmental or teleological distinctions between actual children and adults in order to legitimate men's sexual interest in children. Women do not benefit sexually, or otherwise, from breaking down sexual barriers between adults and children. As they are held, and hold themselves, responsible for protecting children, it is in their interests to maintain these distinctions. I argue that positioning children as 'competent social actors' also displaces attention from men's acts to those of children, thus enabling, in a theoretical and material sense, a further disavowal of their responsibility towards children.

Naming the victim: regimes for the regulation of sexuality.

Sex radicals, drawing on libertarian and queer theories, have been critical of feminist activism, particularly when feminist women have insisted on an analysis of power and used legal frameworks to protect children (Jeffreys, 2011). A radio discussion in 1979 in France between gay male theorists and intellectuals, Michel Foucault, Guy Hocquenghem and Jean Danet, on the move to abolish the age of consent (later published in *Sexual Morality and the Law*

(Foucault, 1988*)* was a key moment in the development of a discourse which positions feminist concern as 'moral panic' (Bray, 2011). In the 1979 discussion, Foucault re-articulated his position that power had shifted from sovereign force to governance. His examination of a half-century of laws relating to child prostitution and pornography, from the period 1830 to 1880, led him to very different conclusions to those of Sheila Jeffreys (1985) who examined early feminist activism against child sexual abuse during the following half century – the period between the 1880s and the 1930s. In short, Foucault (1988) argued that child prostitution and pornography laws had produced medical and legislative powers that govern "the relations between child and adult sexuality", constructing a new type of criminality which he considered to be "extremely questionable" (p. 277). In addition, Hocquenghem said:

> the crime feeds totally upon itself in a manhunt, by the identification, the isolation of the category of individuals regarded as pedophiles. It culminates in that sort of call for a lynching sent out nowadays by the gutter press. (cited in Bray, 2011, p. 137)

By contrast, feminists who were writing at the same time as Foucault, Hocquenghem and Danet during the early 1980s sought to complicate the accepted history of earlier periods by showing:

> exactly what late-nineteenth-century feminists were thinking. Some of their ideas could be seen as approximating to traditional morality, whilst others constituted radical transformations of thinking about sex, questioning all of men's prerogatives within marriage and without, questioning the biological imperative and the double standard, and the authority of fathers. (Jeffreys, 1985, p. xiii)

Like Foucault, Jeffreys decried the technical power of medical professionals, but she saw it as harming women and girls, rather than the paedophiles who are the victims at the centre of the gay male theorists' concerns. Discussing the lull in feminist indignation about sexual abuse of children that occurred between the 1930s until the late 1970s, and general public disinterest in sexual abuse, particularly intrafamilial sexual abuse, during this time, Jeffreys (1985) writes:

> The change in attitudes to sexual abuse … resulted from a change in the dominant sexual ideology as much as from the decline of feminism … The scientific mystification of sexuality and sexual aggression towards women which issued from the work of the male sexologists, psychologists and psychoanalysts placed the initiative firmly in the hands of the professionals. It became less easy for women to approach the problem of sexual abuse simply from their own experience and feminist theory. The development of the 'medical model' had two significant implications. Women's anger against men was deflated when responsibility was taken away from the male offender and attributed

to his 'disease'. 'Sick' offenders could be seen as exceptions whose behaviours had little relevance to men in general. The issue of sexual abuse was removed from the context of crimes against women. (p. 85)

During the 1980s, however, there was a newly re-invigorated public interest in child sexual abuse, one in which feminists "had to demolish the 'wisdom' of the scientific establishment and rely again on their own experience and judgement in re-establishing a campaign against the sexual abuse of girls" (Jeffreys, 1985, p. 85). The feminist campaign was, and continues to be, criticised by those gay male theorists who were apparently not concerned with sexual violence against women and children. Instead, their concern was that the law and psychiatry had created a "new regime for the supervision of sexuality" (Foucault, 1988, p. 281) that pathologised and criminalised men and sought to regulate sexual interaction between adults and children. It was these discourses, Foucault argued, that created "a universal danger, and this represents a considerable change. I would say the real danger lies there" (Foucault, 1988, p. 291). Rather than being concerned about the power imbalance between adult men and children, Foucault argued that "[t]o suppose that a child is incapable of explaining what happened and incapable of giving his consent are two abuses that are intolerable, quite unacceptable" (1988, p. 284). Foucault has been criticised for not theorising sexual violence, and Abigail Bray has called his disavowal of sexual violence against children "a form of political cruelty" (2008, p. 137).

It is worth examining the intellectual tradition of 'political cruelty', in particular, the way it shifts focus from men's power to children's agency. Daniel Tsang, edited a pro-paedophilia collection of papers at the time that the North American May Boy Love Association was founded in 1979, and he puts it this way:

> The primary issue, it should be made clear, is not the right of men to have sex with boys. Were that the entire focus, proponents of the man/boy love would not gain many supporters. Rather the real issue is the liberation of young people, so that they are empowered to make their own decisions regarding all aspects of their lives, including their sexuality. (cited in Jeffreys, 2011, pp. 187,188)

Jeffreys questions this rhetoric, pointing out that to allow children sexual self-expression "is scarcely contentious", and it is unlikely to be the main aim of paedophiles who would otherwise show more enthusiasm for children expressing themselves with other children: "[t]here would be no need to assert that adult males would or should be the necessary beneficiary of children's burgeoning sexuality" (2011, p. 189).

> … the paedophiles gave out that they were selflessly striving for the sexual liberation of children. Children were deprived of most important rights, they argued, under the authoritarian rule of the family and the parents sanctified by the state. The most onerous aspect of such a regime was the sexual repression of children which had begun with the invention of childhood as a category in the nineteenth century. (Jeffreys, 2011, p. 187)

While feminists take the agency of children into account, they consider it in the context of relative powerlessness in relation to adults, and demand an end to male sexual exploitation. More recently, feminist activism and mothers' actions against child sexual abuse, and its recording within pornography, have been marginalised as 'moral panic'. 'Tolerance' as the ruling virtue under neoliberalism (Bray, 2011) has worked to depoliticise the use of girl children in corporate-endorsed sexual practices, instead the normalising of a male gaze is tendered as evidence of the empowerment of girls and this is explore more fully in the next chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that a critical approach, capable of judging better from worse, is an essential element of the struggle for a full humanity for everyone. Radical feminism is a theoretically appropriate lens through which to address the research aims of this study, because it uniquely centres sex and sexism in considerations of the construction and maintenance of male supremacy, and, by necessity, insists on analysing the way that power is exercised within, and who benefits from, particular sexual practices. Such a radical politics is committed to a full human status for all, at the expense of no one, and on the basis of this moral claim to humanity rejects domination of one person by another (Dworkin, 1987; Hawthorne, 2002; Jeffreys, 1997; MacKinnon, 1987; Thompson, 2001).

I have also canvassed feminist theories of mothering, drawing in particular on the work of Sara Ruddick, who, taking a pragmatic approach theorises that mothers' act to meet the demands of their children to be protected, to be nourished, and to be socially acceptable. The caring work women do in bringing up their children is about connection and responding to vulnerability. Feminist struggles over how to understand difference lie at the heart of its ability to collectively resist male supremacy. Susan Hawthorne's 'wild politics' theorises diversity as the antidote to the universalism of male supremacy. Different, localised responses can be collectively theorised if the focus of one's gaze remains outwardly fixed on male supremacy, as opposed to turning inwardly to differences between women. Remembering that "the antithesis of difference is not equality but rather sameness; and the antithesis of equality is not difference, but rather

inequality" holds open the possibility for diversity and equality to be achieved (Rennie Forcey, 1994, p. 368).

Theoretical struggles over difference and equality are also evident in approaches to children. The question of how to treat differences between children and adults is central. Radical feminists have insisted on responding to the vulnerability of children, and have questioned the motives of those men who stand to benefit from sexual access to children when the theoretical binaries and material taboos that separate adults and children are broken down.

In the next chapter, I outline arguments in the scholarly literature about 'what girls need', and identify a key tension between those who seek liberation *through*, or *despite* the eroticisation of inequality that is evident within pornography, and those who seek liberation *from* such eroticisation of inequality. I do this via a consideration of the political economy of the sex industry, considering the implication for women and their daughters of the normalisation of a industrialised pornographic aesthetic within mainstream contemporary culture.

Chapter Three: What do girls need? A review of the literature

Introduction

In this literature review I examine the debate about young girls and the way their sexuality is embodied under the terms and conditions of the contemporary political economy. Necessarily, this includes a consideration of sexual politics, the economy and childhood, and how these domains come together. In particular, I consider the political economy of the sex industry and ask who benefits from the mainstreaming of a pornographic aesthetic, and who benefits from its extension from women to girls (Fraser, 1989; D. Smith, 1999; Thompson, 2001).

I outline some key moments within the recent history of concern about girls, paying close attention to the processes that politicise concern, and create a public demand for action to which governments are pressured to respond. I also consider how powerful counter discourses of denial work to reprivatise concern for girls, as a matter for mothers to individually manage. The key tension in the literature stems from the various ways in which sexuality is theorised as ordering the social world. Scholars and activists who seek liberation *through*, or *despite*, the eroticisation of inequality, as expressed within pornography, are at odds with those who seek liberation *from* the eroticisation of inequality. This review traces the historical genesis of these differing approaches and considers the contemporary point of tension – girls' agency.

A sexual-political framework (MacKinnon, 1982; Thompson, 2001) and asking the central question of who benefits not only sheds light on questions about the identity-making practices of young girls, but also illustrates how possibilities within the public worlds of work and politics for women and girls, now and in the future, are structured by inequality. It is, too, an inequality which is increasingly conceptualised in individualised terms.

Public debate: a struggle over needs

Some key moments in the public debate about the sexualisation of girls find context in Nancy Fraser's (1989) explanation of the 'struggle over needs', that is, how issues raised by social movements become politicised as needs within the public domain. Oppositional discourses arise when needs are politicised from below and subordinated groups take on new social identities. Reprivatisation discourses, seeking to contain demands for action, respond to the oppositional discourses by articulating the previously-taken-for-granted entrenched needs interpretations, often incorporating some of the rhetoric of the oppositional discourses (for example post-feminist discourse where aspects of feminism are assumed). "Because reprivatisation discourses respond to competing, oppositional interpretations, they are internally dialogized, incorporating

references to the alternatives they resist, even while rejecting them" (Fraser, 1989, p. 172). Reprivatisation discourses oppose state provision for runaway needs and seek to depoliticise the issue. The struggle is over what can be considered 'political', and Fraser identifies two key institutions which seek to depoliticise social discourses: the male-headed, nuclear family, and the capitalist economic institutions, especially workplaces, private enterprise and corporations. Reprivatisation discourses are designed to police the boundaries, separating 'the domestic' and the 'economic' from the 'political'.

When needs are sufficiently politicised, a second axis of struggle emerges – the interpreted content of contested needs. The struggle is between organised interests, like industry, and oppositional social movements. Fraser argues that struggles for the hegemonic interpretation of a need usually indicate the future involvement of the state, which in turn creates a third axis of struggle. The third axis is a struggle between political demands and public policy solutions. State intervention occurs at the intersection of politics and bureaucratic administration, and relies on 'expert bridging discourses' to develop public policy intervention for runaway needs. Expert discourses:

> include qualitative and especially quantitative social science discourses generated in
> universities and "think tanks"; legal discourses generated in judicial institutions and
> their satellite schools, journals, and professional associations; administrative discourses
> circulated in various agencies of the social state; and therapeutic discourses circulated in
> public and private medical and social service agencies. As the term suggests, expert
> discourses tend to be restricted to specialized publics. (Fraser, 1989, p. 173)

Expert discourses operate as bridges between social movements and the state. Because of their bridging role, the rhetoric of expert discourses tends to be administrative, "translating politicized needs into administrative needs" (Fraser, 1989, p. 173). In Australia, concern about the sexualisation of girls has moved back and forth, from a diffused malaise to a recognised need that has been sufficiently politicised as to be on the public policy agenda. In Fraser's needs trajectory as outlined above, the struggle over what girls need has been politicised, tending, however, to slip on and off the political agenda as publicity waxes and wanes. There is also evidence of the second axis of the struggle, the struggle over *interpretation* of what the need actually is, and what would address it. The struggle for hegemonic needs interpretation is intense as governments seek to anticipate what public policy intervention they should pursue. In addition, key players in the Australian debate both influence and are influenced by the struggles over needs interpretation in other Western countries, particularly the United Kingdom and the

United States. Australian academics have shown significant critical interest in several major reports and public policy responses introduced in Britain.

'Sexualisation' as a portmanteau word.

A large part of the struggle over needs has centred on what 'sexualisation' means, and putative definitions have been the focus of much scholarly work. 'Sexualisation' has been thoroughly problematised as being "too general" and "difficult to operationalize" (Gill, 2011, p. 65), "vague and obscure" (Clarissa Smith & Attwood, 2011, p. 329), and potentially mis/read as anti-sex (Jeffreys, 2011). In the popular press, however, the term serves as shorthand for the belief that children have become a new market and product for a particular version of commodified sexuality. Robbie Duschinsky's work usefully explores the term 'sexualisation' as a portmanteau word – "the portmanteau word … denies that single words must have, on any given occasion, single meanings" (Attridge cited in Duschinsky, 2013, para. 6). Instead, the term 'sexualisation' can be theoretically useful because it allows access into the material world it arose from, as opposed to a word which represents something singularly definable. Duschinsky (2013) further describes the term as a "feminist discursive strategy" (para. 8) and "a theory of contradiction" (para. 13) which can "quicken the energy and legitimacy contained in the identification of gender inequity" (para. 18).

A timeline 2006 – 2012: mapping the struggle over needs

In Australia, the issue of the sexualisation of girls erupted onto the public agenda in late 2006. The Australia Institute published two reports by Andrea La Nauze and Emma Rush, *Corporate Paedophilia: sexualisation of children in Australia* (2006a) and *Letting Children be Children: stopping the sexualisation of children in Australia* (2006b), both of which generated intense interest in the popular press. The reports provided a content analysis of advertising and magazines marketed to children, problematised children's representations as sexualised – "dressed in clothing and posed in ways designed to draw attention to adult sexual features that the children do not yet possess" – and pointed to the way that sexualised fashions marketed to girls risked legitimising the sexual interest of adult men (Rush & La Nauze, 2006a, p. vii). The child posed in the December/January 2011 edition of French *Vogue* provides a good example of the issues identified (see Figure 3.1). The corporate sector reacted quickly and forcefully to the Rush and LaNauze reports, indicating the stakes were high. The department store David Jones, who were criticised in *Corporate Paedophilia* for using sexualised images of children in advertising, commenced defamation legal proceedings which they subsequently dropped in May 2008 ("David Jones Ltd v The Australia Institute Ltd ", 2006).

Figure 3.1 Child in *Cadeaux Vogue*

Figure 3.2 Jennifer Aniston in *Allure*

The Rush and LaNauze reports defined the problem in terms of 'premature sexualisation'. The use of the term 'premature' implied that sexualisation is appropriate when it is not premature. However, in the introduction to *Corporate Paedophilia*, "certain" and "stereotypical" are used to qualify the form of sexuality identified as problematically "capturing and moulding" children's "slowly developing sexuality" (Rush & La Nauze, 2006a, p. 1). The use of the qualifying words, 'certain' and 'stereotypical', is grounded in a distinction between sexuality per se and sexual objectification derived from a pornographic aesthetic that is highly visible within popular culture. Such a distinction allows for 'sexualisation' to be considered oppressive at any age, for a child or grown woman (Jeffreys, 1997). However, the report's 'premature sexualisation' was a harm minimisation approach where representations of adult women were left unaddressed in order to argue strongly for the regulation of representations of children. Robbie Duschinsky theorises such a choice of language and terms of argument, *the sexualisation of girls*, as a feminist discursive strategy designed to circumvent the neoliberal discourse of choice: "[the] frame of 'sexualisation' provided legitimacy for feminist discourses on the role of sexism in society at large … It is hard, perhaps impossible, to say 'well that's her choice' when someone identifies the effects of patriarchy on individual decision-making when the person in question is a minor" (Duschinsky, 2013, para. 11). The Australia Institute reports attracted widespread media attention, and concerns about women being eroticised through taking on the signifiers of childhood were also raised; Jennifer Aniston posing with a teddy bear in the February 2011 edition of *Allure* magazine is indicative (see Figure 3.2).

Media interest was further fuelled by the release in early 2007 of the *Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls*. The report defined the sexualisation of children in contrast to healthy sexuality. Sexualisation was said to occur when:

- a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics;

- A person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy;

- A person is sexually objectified – that is, made into a thing for others' sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or

- Sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person. (American Psychological Association, 2007, p. 2)

Eileen Zurbriggen, chair of the task force, argued that three of the most important consequences are depression, low self-esteem and eating disorders (Francis, 2007). The report mainly drew on research in adolescent populations, but speculated that similar results could be expected in younger children.

These reports and related media coverage made 2007 to 2009 a pivotal time in the struggle to have the problem politicised as a legitimate need that required state intervention. Fraser theorises that an issue becomes politicised, in the discursive sense, when it is contested across different arenas and among different groups of people; that is, "it is possible to identify a plurality of distinct discourse publics and to theorize the relations among them" (1989, p. 167). 'Discourse publics' can be identified by their ideology, class, gender, profession, mobilising issue and so on, and they can also be distinguished in terms of their relative power. In Australia, small grassroots movements that were naming and problematising concerns about girls and sexualisation, such as Kids Free to be Kids established in 2007 and Collective Shout established in 2009, drew on expert medical and psychological discourses, both to make sense of the experiences of their members, and to attract publicity. The membership of these grassroots movements is clearly gendered. Women are overwhelmingly the organisers and activists, and identify to varying degrees as feminist.

Fraser (1989) proposes that large and authoritative discourse publics are able to set the terms of debate; they are leading hegemonic blocs, "concatenations of different publics that together construct the "common sense" of the day":

> They can politicize an issue simply by entertaining contestation about it … Smaller, counterhegemonic publics, by contrast, generally lack the power to politicize issues in this way. When they succeed in fermenting widespread contestation over what

previously was not "political", it is usually by far slower and more laborious means. In general, it is the relative power of various publics that determines the outcome of struggles over the boundaries of the political. (p. 167)

The discourse public that worked against the politicisation of the girls and sexualisation issue came from academics whose support for the sex industries is well documented (for example McKee, Lumby, & Albury, 2008). The key mechanism they used was to dismiss concern as 'moral panic' (Bray, 2008), seeking to re-privatise the issue as an individual, personal problem best addressed by parents (read, mothers) teaching girls critical media literacy skills.

During 2007, grassroots movements' struggle to politicise their concerns, based on expert reports, was played out on national television in two special episodes of debate-style programs which offered insights into the discourse publics, their relative power, and the rhetoric they employed. In April 2007, SBS broadcast the *Insight* program 'Bratz, Bras and Tweens' (Francis, 2007). Duncan Fine, a writer for the children's show, *High 5,* appeared on the program, and he referenced his book *Why TV is Good for Kids* (2006), co-authored with Professor Catharine Lumby, a high-profile media commentator and liberal feminist academic. Fine suggested, "there is a lot of paranoia coming from parents … being fed by psychologists and other people like that". When asked if marketing to children was 'harmless', he replied, "Absolutely" (Francis, 2007, p. 6). Fine described children as "very savvy" and described the use of the term 'corporate paedophilia' in Rush and La Nauze's reports as "disgraceful" (Francis, 2007, p. 6). He insisted:

It's impossible for a child to turn an adult on – it's impossible – and there's nothing wrong with David Jones. There is nothing wrong with the people who manufactured those dresses, there's nothing wrong with the photographer or the marketers. If you think that's a sexual image, then you have the problem. (Francis, 2007, p. 11)

Fine had the last word on the *Insight* program, and said:

It's an absolute moral panic and the worst thing about it is it diverts our attention from – I assume we are all concerned about child sexual assault, that's the sharp end of this debate, and we know these images have nothing to do with child sexual assault – they are just advertising images. We've got capitalism in Australia. Unless you want to overturn it, our children are growing up in a world of images and marketing. We must educate them. We can't ban it. (Francis, 2007, p.15)

Fine seemed determined to deflect attention from institutional corporate interests, whose actions he depoliticised as inevitable. Concern about the how images of children were read in culturally

intelligible ways was framed as 'moral panic', and those who expressed concern had/were the problem. In this narrative construction, the legitimate need requiring intervention was child sexual abuse, and this need was subsequently positioned as unrelated to cultural representations of children. The ABC's *Difference of Opinion* 'Sex Sells' was then broadcast in September 2007 (McMullen, 2007). Here the terms of Fine's argument were replicated by panellists Catharine Lumby and Alan McKee. Like Fine, they argued that concern about sexualisation of children in popular culture was 'seeing phantoms' and took attention away from the real issue, child sexual abuse. Lumby and McKee's ties with the sex industries, while not mentioned on the program, may explain their interest in depoliticising and reprivatizing concern. At the time, Lumby was also serving as a board member on the industry self-regulation body, the Advertising Standards Bureau (ASB), and Lumby and McKee (2008) were about to release their pro-pornography work, *The Porn Report,* co-authored with Kath Albury (see Pringle, 2011b).

In effect, during 2007, the ABC and SBS programs framed the debate about the sexualisation of children as a debate between those who deny it is a legitimate problem, and those who argue that it is part of a serious social problem. Fine, Lumby and McKee enjoyed a high public profile. As Angela McRobbie has commented, pressure groups defending against 'moral panics' can provide "highly professional soundbites that allow the media to be seen to do their duty by providing balance in reporting" (McRobbie & Thornton, 2000, p. 88).

The concerns of groups such as Kids Free to Be Kids and Collective Shout resonate with parental concerns reported in longitudinal research published by the Australian Childhood Foundation in 2005. Eighty-five percent of parents believe their children are growing up too fast, and 90% of parents think companies overly target children as consumers (Tucci, Mitchell, & Goddard, 2005, p. 12). A further 86% of parents are significantly concerned to protect children from potential sexual abuse by adults (Tucci et al., 2005, p. 15). Corresponding research, exploring children's perceptions, mirrored parental concern: 76% of children thought "kids are growing up faster than they used to" (Tucci, Mitchell, & Goddard, 2006, p. 8); 86% of the children felt that companies target them to purchase things they didn't need; and about three quarters felt there should be less advertising aimed at them (Tucci, Mitchell, & Goddard, 2007, p. 13). The concern that children constitute new consumer markets and are at risk of sexual abuse is complicated by the emergence of new technologies, which dissolve spatial boundaries that parents have previously relied on to ensure children's safety. The Australian Childhood Foundation research documented the extent of anxiety that exists, as parents struggle to adjust to technological changes, in particular the power of digital technologies and the broader consumer culture to normalise the sex industry and commodify sexuality.

The other key contribution of the Australian Childhood Foundation has been in its 'Transformers' program (Staiger, 2005; Staiger, Kambouropoulos, Evertsz, Mitchell, & Tucci, 2005). By 2007 the program had worked with over 500 children, almost exclusively boys aged between six and eleven years, who were engaging in 'problem sexual activity' with other children. Half the children had been abused. However, of note were the 20% of participants who had not experienced abuse but who found sexual imagery confusing, and this was a factor in their behaviour (Francis, 2007). In particular, the Foundation viewed the commodification of sexual imagery as normalising an exchange economy. That the 'Transformers' program largely deals with boys says something about the different ways that boys and girls are positioned in the sexual political economy. Boys have a precarious relationship to masculinity, and they are routinely feminised through exclusion, including as victims of abuse, on the way to becoming men. While boys in the program exercised power to subjugate others, such problematic behaviour is not considered as problematic when it is the behaviour of adult men who routinely exercise their power and sexual rights through, for example, buying and selling women's bodies in prostitution.

The Australia Institute reports recommended changes to Australia's system of media and advertising self-regulation, and activist organisations such as Kids Free to be Kids supported that recommendation. Evidently under pressure, the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) announced a change to its *Code for Advertising and Marketing Communication to Children* in April 2008. Sexual imagery in advertising to children, or using children in advertising in sexual ways, was prohibited. Industry's pre-emptive change was likely designed to ease the pressure governments were facing from grassroots organisations.

The following month, in May 2008, the debate in Australia deepened when an image of a naked thirteen-year-old girl from Bill Henson's photographic art exhibition was confiscated by police, on grounds that it might constitute child pornography. As Abigail Bray's (2009a) analysis of resulting media reporting describes, the sophisticated, tolerant, self reportedly socially progressive, neoliberal middle-classes found public reactions of disgust at the imagery regrettable, vulgar, and embarrassingly unsophisticated. The masses, apparently, just did not 'get it', and their responses were cast as hysterical overreaction. Bray warned: "the very phrase 'sexualisation of childhood' risks minimising a radical shift in the sexual politics of girlhood: what still remains largely unspeakable is the possibility that this historically recent change is about mainstreaming the old self-serving masculinist fantasy that girls are 'up for it' Lolitas" (2009a, p. 113).

Advice books for parents were also published during this period (for example Brooks, 2008; Hamilton, 2008). Karen Brooks' *Consuming Innocence: Popular culture and our children* (2008) usefully documents in accessible language a wide range of concerns about representations of children. The solutions Brooks proposes, however, act to re-privatise and depoliticise the concerns to be problems for families to deal with. Brooks admonished neoliberal parents to exercise their consumer power ('just don't buy it') and engage with their savvy kids to teach them right from wrong. Women are positioned (but not named) as solely responsible for addressing the problems, and at least somewhat responsible for creating them, through their consumer choices. There is no structural analysis of power, class and ethnicity are not considered, and gender is treated as an individual characteristic rather than a social structure. The responsibility of governments and corporations to consider children's interests is unexamined.

In 2009 the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communication and the Arts undertook an Inquiry into the Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media Environment. The Inquiry received 160 submissions and made thirteen recommendations to government about the problem of 'premature' and 'inappropriate' sexualisation, including a recommendation that the issue be revisited after eighteen months. The report noted the issue was a community responsibility that demanded action by society. The recommendations included a request for research into the consequences of the problem, increased dedicated children's programming on television, more monitoring and reporting of compliance to codes of conduct, increased streamlining of complaints processes for advertising and television content, as well as sexual health and relationships education in schools. In the same year, high profile public commentator, Melinda Tankard Reist (2009) edited the book *Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls*. The contributors expanded upon the arguments that had been first made by Tankard Reist and Louise Newman in the 2007 *Difference of Opinion* television episode referred to earlier:

> A new movement is taking shape against objectification and sexualisation, one that goes beyond the usual polarities of left and right and religious and other differences. A diverse collection of organisations and individuals are coming together to agitate for the dignity and worth of girls and women, using everything from culture-jamming grassroots activism to more formal lobbying and advocacy. (Tankard Reist, 2009, pp. 33, 34)

Public mobilisation in Australia is evident in the work of Collective Shout which was established by Tankard Reist and others in 2009 as "a grassroots campaigning movement against the objectification of women and sexualisation of girls in media, advertising and popular culture" (Collective Shout, 2013). The group has been particularly successful in exerting consumer pressure on corporations through social media. The Senate, however, has not revisited the issue as recommended, although demands for such an inquiry continue, including by the Australian Medical Association in April 2012.

During 2010 and 2011 in the United Kingdom there were several major reports commissioned by Government. Dr Linda Papadopoulos' (2010) review for the Home Secretary, *The sexualisation of young people*, argued "[s]exualisation is the imposition of adult sexuality on to children and young people before they are capable of dealing with it, mentally, emotionally or physically" (p. 25), and followed in general the definition put forward by the American Psychological Association. The report framed the issues in terms of violence against women, made links between the processes of 'hyper-sexualisation' of girls, and 'hyper-masculinisation' of boys, and named the harms of pornography for everyone. The report made 36 recommendations about education, the media, business and retailers, and recommended further research. The British Parliament then appointed Mr Reg Bailey, chief executive of the Mothers' Union (!), to undertake his review *Letting children be children: Report of an independent review of the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood* (2011). In the context of the backlash against the Papadopoulos report, Bailey's key position was to reprivatise the issues; he argues the role of government is to encourage business to listen and respond to parents' voices, and to regulate themselves: "[i]t may be that there will be those who argue that greater regulation and legislation is needed to deal with the issues raised. In my view, that would further disempower parents from taking the responsibility for their children upon themselves" (2011, p. 3). Bailey (2011) is ultimately sympathetic to corporations, reasoning that responding to parents is difficult to do when parents, as a group, do not present unified demands: "[w]e also recognise that children's clothes, products and services are bought mainly by parents, and that what some parents find appropriate, others find distasteful or even offensive" (p. 42) … "[w]e, therefore, have some sympathy with manufacturers and retailers of such clothing items as they are often in a difficult situation" (p. 45).

The style adopted throughout the report is 'the middle of the road voice of reason':

> The Review has encountered two very different approaches towards helping children deal with the pressures to grow up too quickly. The first approach seems to suggest that we can try to keep children wholly innocent and unknowing until they are adults. The

world is a nasty place and children should be unsullied by it until they are mature enough to deal with it. This is a view that finds its expression in outrage, for example, that childrenswear departments stock clothes for young children that appear to be merely scaled-down versions of clothes with an adult sexuality, such as padded bras. It depends on an underlying assumption that children can be easily led astray, so that even glimpses of the adult world will hurry them into adulthood. Worse still, this approach argues, what children wear or do or say could make them vulnerable to predators or paedophiles.

The second approach is that we should accept the world for what it is and simply give children the tools to understand it and navigate their way through it better. Unlike the first approach, this is coupled with an assumption that children are not passive receivers of these messages or simple imitators of adults; rather they willingly interact with the commercial and sexualised world and consume what it has to offer. This is a view that says to do anything more than raise the ability of children to understand the commercial and sexual world around them, and especially their view of it through the various media, is to create a moral panic. The argument suggests that we would infantilise adults if we make the world more benign for children, so we should 'adultify' children.

This Review concludes that neither approach, although each is understandable, can be effective on its own. (Bailey, 2011, p. 10)

Although the debate can be characterised as between those who express concern and those who see it as moral panic, Bailey has strategically produced the cartoon-like characterisation above in order to claim the 'middle ground' for a conservative agenda in which feminist concerns about sexism can be incorporated and dismissed. As Fraser says, reprivatisation discourses use "references to the alternatives they resist, even while rejecting them" (Fraser, 1989, p. 172); in Bailey's report, feminist concerns about sexism "slide in and out of focus" (Barker & Duschinsky, 2012, p. 208). The Children's Minister Sarah Teather 2011) responded to the review in June 2011, saying:

This Government is committed to rolling back unnecessary regulation, but we will regulate where necessary, and in particular to protect children. By placing the responsibility for action on businesses themselves and, if necessary, their regulators, we believe that businesses will have the best opportunity and incentive to adopt policies and practices as proposed by Mr Bailey in ways which are efficient and indeed could provide new opportunities through connecting strongly with parents and children. (p. 1)

We recall Fraser's identification of two key institutions – the male-headed family and corporations – whose reprivatisation discourses are designed to keep separate the domestic and economic from the political in the discourses used to temper the concerns of social movements. Industry self-regulation, the government's preferred solution, is framed as an efficient opportunity for corporations to be responsive to parents. Government regulation is framed as taking power from parents, rather than corporations. Corporations are excused from making changes because parents do not provide a unified voice. Corporations are positioned as the victims of competing claims. The general direction of the Report is public policy solutions that reprivatise responsibility to individual parents (women are not named): "[p]arents need businesses and others to work with them and not against them. However, parents also need to accept the challenge to them and recognise that for children to be children, parents need to be parents" (Bailey, 2011, p. 3). Industry self-regulation is, arguably, a failed strategy; corporations are required by law to maximise profits, not citizen's rights, and experience in struggles with the food and tobacco industries clearly demonstrate the inherent conflict of interests (Hawthorne, 2002; Moodie & Taylor, 2012).

Some activist groups also engage in the debate on similar terms, through discourses of empowerment that position girls themselves as responsible. The United States based SPARK Movement was established in response to the APA Taskforce report, in October 2010:

> We center girls' experiences and elevate girls' voice because we know that "protecting them" from sexualisation doesn't work – we need to help girls develop their own strengths and speak out against the forces that harm them (SPARK Movement, 2013, para. 1).

SPARK Movement draws on the distinction the APA made between *healthy sexuality* and *sexualisation*. Although the organisation has professional and adult organisers, it claims legitimacy as a 'girl-fuelled activist movement', advised by a team of young women described as 'girls' aged between 13 and 21 years. Although the organisation exists to problematise the status quo, it rejects the possibility of protecting girls, and seeks liberal reform, often couched in terms of empowerment rather than radical change.

Taboos and children: the problem with 'phantom paedophiles'

The sidelining of concern as 'moral panic' has been achieved through marginalising those who express concern as *repressed*, and characterising those at the centre of concern – young girls – as *savvy*. Within academic cultural analyses, repression continues to be framed as the central

problem. Frequently, contemporary critiques of sexual politics are dismissed as simply reproducing earlier Victorian narratives of repression (Jeffreys, 2011).

> The concept of 'inhibition' was a powerful weapon in the armoury of the 1960's sexual revolutionaries … Through the concept of the 'inhibition' we can see that the possibility for choice was removed. If a woman did not like a sexual activity, whatever the basis of her objection, whether personal, political or aesthetic, she was considered to have had some problem in childhood which constructed for her an inhibition … To be accused by a man of having inhibitions was a serious matter, the implication being that the woman was old-fashioned, narrow-minded and somehow psychologically damaged. (Jeffreys, 2011, pp. 94, 95)

Danielle Egan and Gail Hawkes (2008), for example, are critical of *Corporate Paedophilia* (2006a) because concerns about "the emergence of premature sexual expression and the potential for sexual precocity" were also central to the work of Elizabeth Blackwell back in 1884 (Egan & Hawkes, 2008, p. 310). They argue that "[o]wing to its reliance upon nineteenth – and early twentieth-century moralistic frameworks, the current narrative on sexualisation unwittingly reproduces patriarchal assumptions of women and girls" (Egan & Hawkes, 2008, p. 319). However, The Moral Reform Union, of which Elizabeth Blackwell was a member, primarily sought to "transform the sexual behaviour of men"; they organised against the Contagious Diseases Act; prostitution, rape in marriage, the age of consent and intrafamilial child sexual abuse (Jeffreys, 1985, p. 20). I agree with Egan and Hawkes that there is some continuity between the work of these women in the late 1800s and women today but, instead of dismissing such similarities as "moralistic", we might more usefully consider the continuity in men's entitlement to the bodies of women and children. Egan and Hawkes view moralistic frameworks as most politically problematic when governments exercise sovereign power and legislate on matters relating to sex. That view shifts the focus of critical thought and oppositional politics to the oppressive nature of government regulation, rather than men's right to access women's and children's bodies.

The logic of the moral panic argument is that if adults were not 'repressed' and projecting their repression onto children's 'agency', then concerns would be not be levelled at the culture industries' production of images (for example, in advertising or pornography) but rather at individual children's engagement with those images. Any problems thereby become those of individuals, and solutions become individualised and privatised; namely, mothers need to educate children in critical media literacy, in order that their engagement maximises their individual sexual pleasure. The primacy of pleasure is derived from Foucault, who, in *History of*

Sexuality (1978), suggested that "[t]he rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality [as a disciplinary regime] ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasure" (p. 157). Egan and Hawkes (2008) say:

> Reframing the debate with these conceptual shifts in mind would change our research questions, and possibly our outcomes and solutions. For example, censorship and strict governmental control might be replaced by an expanded and age-comprehensive sex-positive sex education curriculum that includes critical media literacy as a central part of its pedagogical aims and goals. (p. 319)

'Sex-positive' is a euphemistic descriptor within academia for those theorists who support pornography. Sex education which is positive (or, at a minimum, neutral) about the eroticisation of inequality in pornography, could, they suggest, equip each individual girl to navigate the sexual political landscape. In this formulation, maximising sexual pleasure is allegedly revolutionary, even if, for girls, there is an obligation to do so.

The hegemonic critical approach that positions feminists, not pornographers or paedophiles, as responsible for putting children at risk has been built on discussions of children's capacity to know and act. The logic draws heavily on libertarian arguments that inhibition and repression are key political problems. According to this view, adults who raise concern for children are projecting their repressed sexual desire onto children (by looking at the world through the eyes of a paedophile) and are failing to recognise children as subjects capable of desire. The social construction of taboos and 'innocent children' are problematic, the argument goes, primarily because they make children more desirable to paedophiles, at the same time failing to account for children's agency.

Joanne Faulkner (2010b), one of those who make this argument, cautions that there is a potential problem when children's visibility and value are located in a display of sexual availability. She writes:

> If a magazine or advertisement produces an image of a young girl that conforms to conventions usually associated with sexual womanhood, then the acceptance of this image alters social interpretations of what it means to be a child. Whether or not the girl in the picture experiences pangs of desire for her hypothetical onlooker, she is positioned as potentially sexually receptive. And this may be cause for concern if assumptions are then drawn about children's interest in sexual experience with adults. (p. 107)

And yet, reference to this gaze is considered "dangerous": Catharine Lumby suggests "[w]e are reaching a juncture where we are starting to see children through the eyes of a paedophile at times … If we start running society because of paedophiles and in relation to what paedophiles think, I think we are going down a very dangerous path" (Cleary, 2008).

Danielle Egan and Gail Hawkes's *Theorizing the Sexual Child in Modernity* (2010) and Joanne Faulkner's *The Importance of Being Innocent* (2010a) both propose the concept that ideas about innocence in childhood served to produce a stabilised social order, where concerns about other problems can be positioned onto the child; "as a 'vector for the preoccupations' of society regarding 'order and disorder'" (Egan & Hawkes, 2010, p. 151). For Faulkner this is caused "by the fact that 'we' have *repressed* our unacceptable sexual desire for the idealised image of childhood, and *projected* it on to the figure of the paedophile" (Duschinsky, 2011, p. 541, emphasis in original).

> The paedophile represents the ordinary viewer's excess desire, distorted and persecuting. By directing attention to the paedophile, we can ignore our own investments in, and uses of, childhood innocence. (Faulkner, 2010a, p. 141)

Robbie Duschinsky's critical reading points out that both texts are able to make this structuralist psychoanalytical argument because the authors have analysed society "as a single, undifferentiated 'we'" (2011, p. 241). I argue that Faulkner's "ordinary viewer" in the quote above is actually male; women do not generally have unacceptable sexual desires towards children that they repress and feel uncomfortable about; instead, women have reason to protect children from men's sexual practices which are not repressed but expressed (Jeffreys, 2011). Women have historically, and now, used the state's social and political institutions, such as taboos and the law, to ensure the bodily autonomy of children and to limit men's legal and social power to access children for their own sexual practices.

Egan and Hawkes (2010), and Faulkner (2010a, 2010b), believe that universal demands for children's protection are ultimately untenable since, they argue, it denies sexual agency in children. Their argument is that rhetorical appeal to childhood innocence works in contemporary political life to depoliticise structural inequalities around class, race and age. The key point they make is that innocence is discursively constructed by reference to failure, abnormality and non-innocence:

> Purity campaigners constructed a category against which their definition of enlightened innocence could be juxtaposed and defined. As a result, the sexuality of the child was

made intelligible in a divided manner – as present in some and absent in most … Sexual
innocence was assured because its lack was found in another. (Egan & Hawkes, 2010,
p. 45)

Valarie Walkerdine (1997) writes that the central tropes that organise children's relationship to
sexuality in popular culture and, more broadly, 'the innocent' and 'the precocious', are
"profoundly classed and ethnically specific" (p. 3), figuring around "[t]he protection of the
innocent child of the bourgeoisie and the upward mobility of the working class girl" (p. 169).
Egan and Hawkes and Faulkner are able to clearly see the ways in which discourses of
innocence have been drawn upon by men to heighten the thrill of transgressing boundaries, and
pathologise working-class people as Walkerine, Skeggs and others have so clearly
demonstrated. They are less able to see, however, the ways in which discourses of innocence
have also been strategically used by women, including women from the stigmatised groups they
identify, to protect and nurture children. When their first axis of analysis, *that such discourses
are primarily about a stable social order*, is collapsed into their second axis of analysis, *that
such discourses hide social inequality*, they are left unable or unwilling to attend to how the
concept of 'innocent child' has been strategically employed by mothers to moderate men's
sexual interest in children. Instead, a key outcome, and motivator, of their concern for the
failures of the 'innocence discourse' is their argument that children's sexual agency is denied.
Robbie Duschinsky (2011) notes:

> Personally I find troubling the language of sexual agency for children that Egan and
> Hawkes, in particular, sometimes approach in their prescriptive discussions (eg 2010,
> 144, 153). Faulkner offers a more qualified account, particularly of questions of consent
> in everyday life, but the general movement is the same. Both texts argue that innocence
> discourse does not allow for children's agency … (p. 239)

Egan and Hawkes (2010), and Faulkner 2010a, 2010b), cannot find room for children's sexual
agency within a strategic discourse of innocence that women employ to protect children.
Instead, the discourse itself, and, by implication, those who draw upon it, are blamed for making
children a "'fetish' whose heightened value also renders them desirable in a multitude of ways
that we cannot always control" (Faulkner, 2010b, p. 107). Again, Faulkner's 'we' is
undifferentiated and does not account for the different rights men claim and responsibilities
women shoulder, in relation to the sexuality of children. Faulkner (2010b) is particularly critical
of Rush and LeNauze (2006a, 2006b) arguing that:

> 'responsible' lamentations about the sexualisation of children and the loss of childhood
> innocence contribute to (rather than avert) a fetishisation of innocence that both

prepares the ground for childhood to become the ultimate commodity, and ignores the concrete circumstances, desires and capacities of children. (p. 106)

Lacan's psychoanalytical 'anamorphosis' – the process by which the subject conceals from themselves their own disavowed desire – is deployed by Faulkner to criticise Rush and La Nauze:

Rush and La Nauze protest too much regarding their own part in the sexualisation of children. What they anamorphically reveal, however, is the relation between an idealised vision of innocence attributed to children and the hidden means by which children have become the forbidden (and thus most prized) fruit of adult sexuality. (Faulkner, 2010b, p. 108)

Faulkner blames the construction of the taboo, which she attributes to feminists and women, for making children "the most prized fruit of adult sexuality". Again, in Faulkner's account, 'adults' are actually men, and women, (in this case, Rush and La Nauze), are the 'moral warriors' blamed for creating the 'much prized fruit':

The sexualised-innocent child only comes into focus once we adopt the ulterior perspective of the pedophile, a perverse and excessive perspective that, once seen, can never be expunged. The monstrous allure of the pedophile's gaze is that he can be held responsible for all desire for children, so that the rest of us may then engage in an apparently unpolluted relation to children. (Faulkner, 2010b, p. 115)

In short, Faulkner argues that it is highly problematic when 'moral warriors' adopt a 'pedophile's gaze' (through an unconscious manifestation of their own disavowed desire), and that gaze figuratively produces an 'innocent child' which can be 'fetished'. Valerie Walkerdine (1997) disrupts the argument that the gaze at girls is 'perverse and excessive'; she points out this is not about a 'few perverts', but rather a 'highly contradictory gaze at little girls':

Blame is laid at the door of abuse and therefore of pathological and bad men who enter and sully the terrain of childhood innocence and of course, conversely, with the little Lolitas who lead men on. But, popular images of little girls as alluring and seductive, at once innocent and highly erotic, are contained in the most respectable and mundane of locations ... This is not about a few perverts, but about the complex construction of the highly contradictory gaze at little girls. (p. 171)

It follows that a focus on the culture industries' production of little girls as sexually available is highly appropriate, and yet, Faulkner (2010b) is critical of Rush and La Nauze for drawing attention to images within popular culture and the media because, by doing so, they "miss an opportunity to promote better communication between parents and children" (p. 115). Faulkner (2010b) continues:

> Children may be at risk when they blindly mimic sexy behaviours without understanding how adults interpret them. Yet if we talk to our children before puberty about sexual desire, and discuss with them concretely what might constitute unwelcome attention – as well as healthy or wanted bodily attention – they are in a far better position to avoid harm than the child who is sheltered from all exposure to 'sexualising' material … Perhaps a more substantial threat to children's autonomy and growth than the nebulous, sexually controlling stranger is the controlling parent. Yet the most telling symptom within the 'sexualisation' papers – and one that echoes community anxieties – is the ever-present phantom of the pedophile as the ultimate reference point for public morality regarding children. As I have attempted to show in this essay, in the child molester the moral warrior sees their own distorted reflection. (pp. 115, 116)

In Faulkner's account, parents are to blame for being 'controlling'. Parents, (read, mothers), simply need to communicate *better* and *recognise* their own *disavowed desire* that has been anamorphically concealed. Faulkner, here, also loses sight of the gaze that is focussed on children by accounting for the idea of a paedophile as being 'phantom' or not real, and actually being a 'distorted reflection' of the 'moral warrior', (read, woman), or 'controlling parent', (read, mother). She advises that we "need to adjust our focus beyond advertising, girls' magazines and music videos", and "[r]ather, we need to examine the proximity between ideals of childhood and what is deemed sexually desireable" (Faulkner, 2010b, p. 116). I agree with Faulkner on this last point, but I propose that this should occur through a critique of popular culture, not through mother-blaming. I suggest, instead, that feminist scholars need to examine the proximity between actual children's right to bodily autonomy and actual men's sexual desires; then we need to examine the media for the way in which it normalises a gaze at girls and legitimises men's interest. Egan and Hawkes, Faulkner, and others who privilege sexual agency in children and who argue that discourses of innocence are politically unviable do not take into account the way in which discourses of sexual agency can work to occludes men's historical and contemporary use of children for their own sexual purposes. Faulkner has argued that 'innocent' children who are asexual are figurative, and that actual children have 'desires and capacities', a statement which is hardly controversial. When women describe their children as 'innocent' they are not inferring a lack of sexuality in children, but rather the rights of

children to be free of men's sexual appetites. I suggest that scholars need to extend their critique to consider the binary and illusory nature of both discourses (innocence and sexual agency), and how they challenge or collude with the material representations of sexism.

The new sexual contract: girls as porn's pawns

Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* (1988) argues that men's power-sharing arrangements in classic contract theory, are underwritten by a sexual contract where men's power over women is organised through at least three institutions; marriage, prostitution and surrogate motherhood. Pateman's work has been criticised for 'unitarizing' and 'absolutizing' the master/subject model (Fraser, 1993, p. 180). Fraser (1993) believes that contract and commodification are not best understood as "command and subjection in disguise" (p. 180), because although the master / subject model has powerful symbolic resonance, women's subordination has become more impersonal and fluid. Joanne Wright (2004) contends that Pateman's contribution is an analysis of the symbolic association of women with the private, and "is designed to capture the theoretical and ideological essence of … modern liberal society" (p. 107). Wright contextualises Pateman's work as an 'origin' story that seeks to make sense of the historical development of patriarchy, but, in doing so, is not sufficiently precise in its historical analysis of Hobbes. Wright (2004) offers a corrective, warning that the search for origins, in both Hobbes and Pateman, can involve "the creation of narratives that embody our present political concerns, narratives that can do more to limit our understandings of political problems and solutions than to aid them" (p. 121).

Angela McRobbie (2007) proposes a new sexual contract, which sets out the terms and conditions under which girls and young women participate in post-feminist, neoliberal political economies. In this new sexual contract, young women are invited through consumer culture to become 'phallic girls' by appropriating the sexuality previously reserved for young men. Phallic girls are superficially bold, confident, aggressive and transgressive, although McRobbie (2007) warns "this is a licensed and temporary form of phallicism" (p. 732). This new sexual contract works to relocate women back into gender hierarchies through a hyper-femininity which, for example, reframes "spindly stilettos and 'pencil skirts'…as a matter of choice rather than obligation" (McRobbie, 2007, p. 723).

> These reconfigurations of normative femininity restabilise sexual identities which might otherwise be disrupted as a result of these new occupational positions, educational achievements and control of fertility available to young women … but the means by which such a role in economic life are being made available substitute notional ideas of consumer culture so that these might be extended into social as well as political fields.

The new sexual contract for young women inscribes such features within its over-arching terms, and we could read this as a feminist tragedy, the 'fall of public woman' (McRobbie, 2007, p. 734).

McRobbie's new sexual contract evokes a theoretical description of women 'choosing' an obliged 'phallicism', and perhaps addresses the problem Fraser (1993) had with Pateman (1988) by identifying the 'impersonal and fluid' nature of women's subordination. Through a discourse of choice, political gains are reprivatised as projects of the hyper-feminine consumer self. In essence, the new sexual contract can help us to understand a current manifestation of a problem that Wright (2004) also identified as a primary concern with Hobbes' work – how it is that his egalitarian origin story, in which all hierarchies are levelled, is so easily set aside as he re-establishes hierarchal order within society in new ways. In the new sexual contract, it is possible to theorise the problem we face today – that is, how hierarchal order is re-established, when we have an assumed post-feminist meritocracy, (a meritocracy that can be thought about as mirroring Hobbes 'egalitarianism', as described by Wright).

Young women in western neoliberal democracies are seen to embody the values of the assumed meritocracy: they are 'can do', 'do-it-yourself' girls, the real winners of modernisation (Baker, 2005). Feminist concerns about the disadvantages that girls face are now considered passé. Feminism itself is commonly referred to in the past tense, in both scholarly work and popular culture; and re-written as already taken into account and no longer very relevant (McRobbie, 2007). Women and girls' pathways to public citizenship through work and education are shaped, under a new sexual contract, through consumer culture where women are *free to choose* personal empowerment, sexual pleasure, and anything else they desire, including identity, as a product. The new sexual contract requires that 'phallic girls' confidently, aggressively, boldly demonstrate hyper-femininity. Rosalind Gill (2007) describes how a 'technology of sexiness' has become newly normative:

> For young women today in post-feminist cultures, the display of a certain kind of sexual knowledge, sexual practice and sexual agency has become normative – indeed a 'technology of sexiness' has replaced 'innocence' or 'virtue' as a commodity that young women are required to offer in the heterosexual marketplace…. Of course all this has to be managed with great skill and care by young women, as these new discourses are overlaid onto tenacious existing notions of 'good girls' and 'bad girls'. Sexual reputation is still policed punitively and at great cost to some girls whose behaviour is reframed within more negative discourses of female sexuality. (p. 72)

The SlutWalk phenomenon of 2011 illustrates precisely the terms of this new sexual contract. These marches, which are said to have occurred in over 200 cities worldwide (Crane, 2012), have been largely made up of privileged, young, white women, who boldly, confidently, aggressively and transgressively demand their right to choose to be 'phallic girls'. Figures 3.3 – 3.8 are photographs taken from various marches, and serve to illustrate the dominant aesthetic and spectacle qualities. One of the organisers of the original SlutWalk in Toronto, Canada, said "I would label myself a 'slut' before a 'feminist'", noting with some irony that she avoided the label of feminist because it had a bad reputation (Sifbarnett, 2011, para. 7). SlutWalk is a necessary protest for these young women who come up against the nature of the 'licensed and temporary form of phallicism' they have been granted through a porno-consumer culture. The protests were triggered by a police officer advising students, that, if they wanted to be safe, they should not dress like 'sluts'. Clearly, the sexual double standard is a tenacious legacy that still overtly and unfairly polices women's lives.

Figure 3.3 SlutWalk Toronto Advertisement

Figure 3.4 SlutWalk Boston

Figure 3.5 SlutWalk London 1

Figure 3.6 SlutWalk Seattle

Figure 3.7 SlutWalk Men

Figure 3.8 SlutWalk London 2

Gill's observation that young women have to practise a technology of sexiness with great skill and care is pertinent. Whilst many young, white and privileged women have been able to appropriate, consume, and embody the prescribed sexuality celebrated by the sex industry, and even to display outrage via SlutWalk in the face of old-fashioned sanctions, women of colour or poor women or women who have been bought and sold in the sex industries do not share the freedom to *choose* 'slut' as an optional identity (Black Women's Blueprint, 2011, September 23; Blogando, 2011; Crunk Feminist Collective, 2011; "Link round up: Feminist critiques of SlutWalk," 2011; Mott, 2011). These women have always, already, been positioned as 'sluts' through enduring classist, racist and sexist sexual double-standards, and a subject position as a 'slut' was not a matter of choice, neither to be celebrated or reclaimed. The terms and conditions of the new sexual contract are clearly different for different women.

Andrea O'Reilly is a feminist scholar whose life's work has been dedicated to leading a field of research into motherhood. She has written a passionate defence of SlutWalk and young, third wave feminist women, including her two daughters who were instrumental in organising the original march against the shaming and blaming of women. Reflecting that the 'slut' branding occurs in a "specific social *and* linguistic context" (p. 248, emphasis in original), O'Reilly (2012) argues "it was precisely the use of the world 'slut' that made the first SlutWalk the huge success that it was. Had a more benign term … been used … I doubt the event would have caught the media's attention in the way that it did, attracted the numbers that it did, or led to a global movement …" (p. 249). Kathy Miriam, a radical feminist, agrees with O'Reilly that it is important to pay attention to the specific social and linguistic context in which SlutWalk flourished. Miriam describes the historical moment in which SlutWalk so successfully exploded in the Global North as being intensely neoliberal, the moment when in which feminism has come to mean "whatever empowers the individual woman who chooses the identity" (2012, p. 262).

SlutWalk has been hailed as a practice of female self-determination. The problem ignored is that how a woman or girl dresses and/or sexually self-presents is more of an *obligation* than a choice – or it is a choice that is obliged. As so many feminists have argued, from early in girls' lives, femininity consists in learning to fulfil the obligation to signal sexual availability to the male. Yet in a situation defined by women's sexual exploitation, sexual self-presentation is a double-bind since, whatever choice of presentation is made by a woman, she will be punished – or sometimes both rewarded and punished. Women are both exhorted to self-present as sexy and yet are punished as sluts: failure to self-present as sexy is punished as prudish or as lacking worth within a system that bases women's value – and indeed very visibility – on competency in displaying sexual availability (aka "sexiness") without falling into the "slut" category (Miriam, 2012, p. 263).

Miriam writes that "the issue is not the absence or presence of agency, but the *power* to determine the 'rules' of the game. Two teams are playing but only one invents the rules; the other is allowed to maneuver within these rules. Such maneuvering may be female agency but it is not female freedom" (Miriam, 2012, p. 264). Miriam's qualification of agency echoes Sarah Hoagland's concept of 'moral agency under oppression', which Denise Thompson says "avoids both the determinism of a system of domination to which the individual is subjected and within which she is a passive victim of circumstances beyond her control, and the notion of a free will available to all without constraint" (2001, p. 47). Rather than moral agency as a form of control (of self, others or situations) it is about "the ability to choose in limited situations, to pursue one possibility rather than another" (Hoagland cited in Thompson, 2001, p. 48).

… the individual is she who makes a decision between accepting responsibility and refusing it, who acts when she can make a difference and refrains from acting, or withdraws, when she can't, and avoids de-moralization by struggling constantly against succumbing to the meanings and values of domination and holding fast to the values of a genuinely human status for all. (Thompson, 2001, p. 48)

SlutWalk requires that women are free to enjoy the game that is male domination; it protests the rape-rules but forgoes the radical demand that a different game be played where everyone enjoys a fully human status. O'Reilly (2012) claims that SlutWalk is also about taking a stand against "the anti-sex views conveyed in some US/Canadian Second Wave feminist writing" (p. 248) and the "anti-sex view and values of our dominant culture" (p. 249).

> What distinguished this march from so many I have attended over the last thirty years
> was the joy and camaraderie of the day. Our gender and sexuality were a place of power
> and strength, not of weakness and shame. (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 250)

Feminists are not divided between anti-sex and pro-sex stances; they are divided between anti-pornography and pro-pornography positions. The conflation of sex with pornography as if they were the same thing is problematic. Pornography, as will be explored in more detail shortly, is the eroticisation of inequality; radical feminism stands for the possibility of sexual practices that do otherwise. Gail Dines (2010) writes that the current generation of young people are, in effect, part of a large scale social experiment. The mainstreaming of pornography has led to, arguably, increasing acceptance of eroticised inequality and industrialisation of sexual mores. SlutWalk, Miriam writes, has slapped a smiley-face onto exploitation, and feminists who want to transform the dominant social order need to confront a "... neoliberally adjusted patriarchy. It is a patriarchy that has brought forth a 'structurally readjusted' feminism. The personal, which was hitherto by definition political, has now been reprivatized as the domain of individual choices comprising one's consumer-modeled identity" (Miriam, 2012, p.265). SlutWalk, in late modernity, offers a structurally adjusted feminism that "functions like a product placement ad for capitalist patriarchy itself" (Miriam, 2012, p. 266).

The support that the SPARK Movement gives to SlutWalk brings into question where girls might best fit in the new sexual contract. Sexuality educator and academic researcher, Renee Randazzo (2013), describes her personal journey since 2010 to find space within the activism of the 'anti-sexualisation movement' for girls to have 'authentic' or 'healthy sexuality'. Randazzo, writing for SPARK, celebrates SlutWalk as a feminist tool of resistance and an opportunity to express personal sexual power. Men, in this analysis, are not named as the beneficiaries of a sexist double standard, where women are expected to find power within the pornographic construction of 'slut', but rather as either the poster boys of an educated, enlightened politics or the victims of ignorance:

> There were lots of men at the Slutwalk. In fact, as I shouted at the top of my lungs "Hey
> Hey, Ho Ho, Misogyny has got to go!" while marching down the streets of Boston in a
> crowd of 2000, one of my greatest joys came from noticing just how many of the
> marchers were men. Yes!!! Thank you, men! …There were men on the sidewalks
> looking at us too. But guess what? From what I observed they were nearly all
> respectful, and often even supportive with nods and pumped fists. And if they looked,
> their glances to exposed cleavage brought them to messages written across women's

chests: "Not an invitation" or "I am NOT asking for it." What creativity, turning the male gaze into an opportunity to educate! (Randazzo, 2011, para. 5-6)

Randazzo's enthusiasm and gratitude for men's participation in SlutWalk, and her optimism that the male gaze can be subverted (educated) when refocussed on slogans painted on the exposed breasts of protestors, is qualified by her (light-hearted) dismissal of one event on the day:

> While kneeling in the green grass with my sign that read "My body is a temple, not a target" a man asked if he could take my picture. I said yes, happy to represent my message. After he clicked he said, "I just raped you with my camera." Ewww! Clearly this man was there for the spectacle and not the message. I'm going to give him the benefit of the doubt and assume he is illiterate to have said such garbage in response to the sign I was holding. (Randazzo, 2011, para. 9)

Randazzo's decision to give 'the benefit of the doubt' to a man who reminded her of the rape-rules of male supremacy is the natural consequence of the politics of neoliberal individualism.

A particular construction of individual autonomy underwrites SPARK Movement's rejection of "protection" and focus on "empowering girls" to speak against the "forces that harm them" as the primary tool of activism (SPARK Movement, 2013). In *Democracy in the Kitchen,* Valarie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey (1989) describe the ways in which the autonomous, empowered child is framed as "potentially waiting to take its place in a democracy" (p. 25). It is mothers who are primarily charged with turning out socially acceptable children (Ruddick, 2009). Middle class mothers discipline their children by "creating an illusion of choice where the child thinks that it is an agent of its own free will", via, for example, engaging in discussions with the child about why they may or may not do something, but "[t]he choice is an illusion; an elaborate charade" (Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989, p. 25).

Walkerdine and Lucey write that, ultimately, "[w]e believe that this fiction, the illusion of autonomy, is central to the travesty of the word 'freedom' embodied in a political system that has to have everyone imaging they are free the better to regulate them" (1989, p.29). Their insight that, within neoliberalism, autonomy is an illusion, which is most successfully performed by the most privileged seems particularly applicable to the SlutWalk movement. The endorsement that the SPARK Movement, an organisation protesting the 'sexualisation of girls', gives SlutWalk as creatively, " turning the male gaze into an opportunity to educate!" (Randazzo, 2011, para.6), seems particularly misplaced. As Bay-Cheng notes in her research with young women, thinking about empowerment only in terms of the individual is highly

problematic: "it was not a lack of agency – sexual or otherwise – that was their downfall: it was that their agency was not enough to trump their lack of leverage with male (often older) partners, their depleted social and familial networks … and the inaccessibility of resources …" (Bay-Cheng, 2011, p. 4).

This chapter has so far outlined the struggles that have taken place in defining 'what girls need'. Concern for girls has been politicised and emerged on the public policy agenda. The success of such politicisation can be partly attributed to the activism of feminists and mothers who have drawn attention to corporate practices that represent girl children as the legitimate focus of male sexual attention. Such activism, however, has attracted the sanction of some who propose the activism itself is the problem, rather than that being protested. The agency of girls is the central pin from which all positions hang. In the next section I argue for incorporating an analysis of the political economy of the sex industry as providing essential context to such debates. I then outline the recent mainstreaming of a pornographic aesthetic and evaluate the history and possibility of political freedom being achieved through experiences of pleasure.

The political economy of pornography and prostitution

On a socio-theoretical level, the material processes of the political economy provide an important focus of analysis, theoretically distinct from considerations of culture. Insisting on making visible the corporate interests in pornography and prostitution does not preclude a consideration of individuals and the various meanings they attach to their sexual practices. Nancy Fraser (1997, p. 223) argues that it is important to account for both "the historical fact of capitalist economic / cultural differentiation and also for the underlying reality of their thorough interpenetration". This is not to distinguish between two institutional domains, economic and cultural, but to distinguish between two analytical perspectives. Considering how the sex industry has grown, in terms of capitalisation, informs analytical discussions about how industry-promoted sexual practices have become mainstream: "beginning where capitalism has placed us, in a social formation that differentiates specialized economic arenas and institutions from other arenas and institutions, including some that are designated as cultural, and from the larger background … called 'society'" (Fraser, 1997, p. 129). Fraser proposes that culture and political economy have become decoupled in 'post-socialist' ideology. I note a reluctance by many to consider the political economy within discussions of pornography, it is sometimes viewed only in terms of cultural properties, even to the extent of insisting that there is no identifiable industry.

Whilst it is difficult to quantify exactly the market capitalisation of the sex industry worldwide, there is no doubt that it can be considered 'big business as usual'. Sociologist Gail Dines (2010) has drawn on the trade publications to comprehensively map the expansion of the industry as it adapts delivery of content through various technological innovations. Stephen Yagielowicz, senior editor at XBiz.com describes the business model:

> The corporatization of porn isn't something that will happen or is happening, it is something that has happened – and if you're unaware of that fact then there truly is no longer a seat at the table for you. It's Las Vegas all over again: the independent owners, renegade mobsters and visionary entrepreneurs pushed aside by mega-corporations that saw a better way of doing things and brought the discipline needed to attain a whole new level of success to the remaining players. (cited in Dines, 2010, p. 51)

Andrew Edmond, CEO of Flying Crocodile, a $20 million dollar pornography internet business, points out "a lot of people [outside adult entertainment] get distracted from the business model by [the sex]. It is just as sophisticated and multilayered as any other market place. We operate just like any Fortune 500 company" (cited in Dines, 2012, p. 516). Dines also notes corporations present home grown 'user-generated' pornography as part of their product range.

Prostitution is primarily run by legal corporate entities, organised crime, and third-party individuals who profit from supplying women to men. The International Labour Organisation and the World Health Organisation both support the legalisation of prostitution for the benefits it brings to the economies of nation states and disease control: to do so, they rely on defining women's participation in terms of the neoliberal rhetoric of choice and agency "she is not a victim, but a subject", and "a women's job which should be recognised" (Ekis Ekman cited in Stuart, 2010, para. 16). Under neoliberalism, to be a victim has become the outcome of a personal attribute or character trait, rather than someone who has suffered an injustice. "The fear of the 'victim' in the prostitution debate … is something which mirrors neoliberalism's general victim hate – since all talk of the vulnerable person immediately reveals an unjust society. Through making the victim taboo one can legitimise class inequalities and gender discrimination, for if there is no victim there is no perpetrator" (Stuart, 2010, para. 4).

In Australia, prostitution is treated differently in different states. Victoria in 1984, the ACT in 1992 and Queensland in 1999 have legalised brothel prostitution. In New South Wales, prostitution has been decriminalised, but it is not regulated by legislation. While regulation by legislation has been promoted as improving safety, the efficacy and underlying morality is disputed by women in the industry:

> To those who would say legalisation would make prostitution safer: I think the same thing any former prostitute I've ever spoken to thinks, which is that you may as well legalise rape and battery to try to make them safer. You cannot legislate away the dehumanising, degrading trauma of prostitution, and if you try to, you are accepting a separate class of women should exist who have no access to the human rights everyone else takes for granted. ("The harsh realities of 'being raped for a living'," 2012, para. 15)

In states where prostitution is legal, or not-illegal, government revenue is collected through company and personal tax on the supply of women's bodies to market. Mary Sullivan's (2007) study of Victoria's legislation showed the black market grew exponentially when the normalising of the practice resulted in an increase in men's demand. John Stuart Mill described these exact dynamics 150 years ago, in his evidence to the Royal Commission of 1870 on the Administration and Operation of the Contagious Diseases Act 1866 and 1869, when he critiqued the "encouragement" that results from State patronage (Pringle, 2012, p. 8). In contrast, in Sweden, Norway and Iceland the 'Nordic Model' of legislation has decriminalised people working in prostitution, but criminalised the buyers, and has resulted in a corresponding reduction in the size of the industry (Ekberg, 2004; Raymond, 2010). The Nordic model accepts the premise that women usually have less personal power than the men who buy them, and universally have less power as a sex class.

A demographic analysis of the women and girls working in the sex industries of pornography and prostitution provides important insight into the ways in which ageism, racism, classism and experiences of violence intersect with sex class status. The overwhelming majority of women who work in prostitution, and/or who are filmed for pornography, enter the industry as adolescents (Farley & Lynne, 2004), and the most commonly asked question by men calling brothels is, "What age is the youngest girl you have?" (Free Irish Woman, 2012, para.3). There is a significant overrepresentation of women who have experienced sexual abuse as children (Farley & Lynne, 2004). A 2009 study undertaken in Queensland found that 83% of women working in the illegal sector had experienced child sexual abuse and just under half of women working in the legal sector had (Seib, Fischer, & Najman, 2009). Indigenous women dislocated from their communities are also overrepresented (Aboriginal Women's Action Network, 2009; Farley & Lynne, 2004), and women internationally trafficked into prostitution invariably come from relatively poorer originating countries. The "Lolita Effect" promoted in pornography enables men to feel entitled to view girl children as fair game, and has seen the expansion of a significant tourism industry where western men travel to global south countries as sex tourists (Tankard Reist & Bray, 2011).

Online blogs and forums have enabled women who are, or have been, in prostitution and pornography to organise in new ways; for example, the Genderberg.com website operates public and private forums, and survivorsconnect.wordpress.com is a co-operatively run blog established in 2012 that hosts the work of Christine Stark, Rebecca Mott and others. The work of these women is compelling; especially their accounts of the conflicts of interest within activist organisations and governments which seek to legitimise the industry they criticise. Most pro-sex industry activist groups and 'unions' have irreconcilable conflicts of interest since they also represent and promote the interests of pimps and managers (Bindel, 2013). It is important to ask how women are organised differently and hierarchally in the sex industry. Why are young women, poor women, Aboriginal women and women who have experienced sexual abuse so overrepresented, and why are their experiences of victimisation and trauma so silenced in pro-industry activist organisations that purport to represent them? Christine Stark (2004) notes that:

> under sex radicalism, the pornography and prostitution industry disappears along with a class-based political analysis of sexism, racism, hetero-sexism, and classism – leaving a few select, privileged women to write about how they can 'choose' to oppress and be oppressed. (p. 290)

In recognition of this dynamic, the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres (CASAC) has called for public policy to be based "on the most common experiences and the unromantic version of prostitution" (cited in Lakeman, Lee, & Jay, 2004, p. 222). CASAC notes that the most destitute and violated are always invoked as the reason for legalisation with the most uncommon and privileged invoked as proof of agency (Lakeman et al., 2004).

Pornography and prostitution are fundamentally based on disconnection (Hawthorne, 2002). Men who buy women for sex purchase the right to disconnection, and the money they pay absolves them of responsibility. The men who consume pornography commonly do not see themselves as implicated in its production. Questioning the conditions under which women provide sexual services problematises concepts of choice and agency. However, not surprisingly, the proposed responses are often about more regulations for 'fair trade', rather than fundamental questions about men's right to buy and sell women at all. Dee Clarke (2004) notes the hypocrisy of men who take pride in their progressive, leftist values:

> His highly developed critique of monetism, the WTO, NAFTA, GATT, IMF, WB, IEB OECD, biotechnology, HMOs, sweatshops, etc., stops just short of publicly vilifying the sex-sweatshop trade in women and kids. Sex is above the line, inside the pale, a

groovy thing – after all, the right-wing bad guys …say it's bad, therefore it must be good. (p. 192)

Those who support pornography and would deny the State a role in the regulation of pornography are often the same who press the State to legalise and regulate prostitution; however contradictory, these positions are internally consistent to the extent that they ensure men's legally mandated, unconditional sexual access to women's bodies on demand. The radical left side of politics has disguised its misogyny as a fight for individual freedom. I return to the history of this political contradiction shortly, under the heading 'Revolutionary pleasure power', but first I want to present a differentiated cultural analysis of pornography and examine its "thorough interpenetration" with the economy (Fraser, 1997, p. 128).

The rise of pornography as a cultural script in contemporary society

The representations and practices of the sex industry and pornography, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, are widely considered to "becoming increasingly influential and porous, permeating 'mainstream' contemporary culture" (Gill, 2012, p. 483). The corporatisation of the sex industry has been matched by changing social mores where a pornographic aesthetic has become part and parcel of consumer culture. To call something pornographic today is to attribute it a hip sensibility; photos of restaurant meals are tagged on social media as 'food porn' and interesting bookshelves as 'book porn'.

Figure 3.9 Clinique Makeup Advertisement   Figure 3.10 *Cosmopolitan* Image

Mainstream advertising incorporates imagery from pornography. For example, products such as skincare and magazines (see Figures 3.9 & 3.10) are promoted, using the motif of the cum or money shot, where the man ejaculates on the woman's face, "represent[ing] a ritual kind of defilement" (Schauer, 2005, p. 55), and a staple act in almost all hetero-pornography. This marks a change from the time when Mielke claimed to call something pornographic was "to condemn it" (1995, p. 5). Although Miekle, writing in 1995, was making a broader strategic claim that pornography was an 'outlaw discourse' – part of his quest to discount feminist visions of equality as utopian and unrealistic – it is hard to imagine such a statement being made

today. Instead, the banal saturation of a pornographic aesthetic into mainstream culture is striking. Brian McNair (2002, p. 1) suggests that sex in the media can be celebrated as a "barometer and a catalyst" of democracy under capitalism and, in fact, "striptease culture" makes capitalism and society more inclusive and stable. This perspective, characterised by Rosalind Gill (2012, p. 485) as the "'democratizing sex' position", argues that "the spread of 'porno chic' … should in fact be seen as a sign of cultural maturity, openness and sexual liberation", and that pornography should be read in a reparative, "rather than in a 'paranoid' (Sedgewick, 2003) manner (see also McKee, Albury, & Lumby, 2008)".

Jeff Hearne (2006), however, argues that sexual citizenship or sexual democratisation interact with pornography in much more contradictory ways than McNair, and those who celebrate the 'democratisation of desire', would suggest. Hearne notes a social and analytical contradiction within social research when scholars focus either on the material or the representational, leading policy in contradictory directions. Technologies, particularly television and the internet, are central enablers of mass cultural imagery and the internet is credited as democratising cultural production. However, technologies do not just carry or represent sexual inequality, they can constitute it. "With sexuality and sexualised violence, there is, for some, little separation of sexual information, sexual advertising, production of sexual material, and sexual experience" Hearne, 2006, p. 12). Therefore, it is important to reconnect the representational and the material: material bodies are spatially, politically, economically located, they are not rendered equal or free simply by the abstraction of virtuality. Although the internet may theoretically be a neutral medium, "in the current patriarchal socio-political conditions it is not"; and therefore an "explicitly gendered analysis" is required (Hearne, 2006, p. 9). This analysis recognises the thorough interpenetration of the economic and cultural domains (Fraser, 1997). Sexual citizenship is not guaranteed when sex is "recorded, written about, photographed, videoed, televised, placed on the web (with various access rights), and retrieved … with or without the participant's permission or knowledge" (Hearne, 2006, p. 12).

The use of 'cultural scripts' is a helpful way to explore how what was once unthinkable, has become unremarkable. Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Fraser (1992), in *Moving Beyond Cause and Effect*, propose that cultural scripts constitute, and are constituted by, the subjects in them. Cultural scripts are what enable the imagination to imagine. Pornography as a cultural script is interpreted or mediated individually, individuals are empowered subjects who 'act' rather than 'behave' and these actions constitute or have power. The cultural script of pornography has continued to push the boundaries of what is imaginable. Dorothy Smith theorises that relations of ruling generate and hold power within texts. Although she was not

writing about pornography in particular, her description of the hegemonic way that broad cultural scripts are transmitted and enacted at multiple local sites can be usefully applied to pornography:

> Text-mediated relations are the forms in which power is generated and held in contemporary societies. Printed or electronic texts have the generally neglected property of indefinite replicability. Replicability of identical forms of meaning that can be activated in multiple local settings is fundamental to ruling relations … It is the materiality of the text itself that connects the local setting at the moment of reading into the non-local relations that it bears. (D. Smith, 1999, p. 79)

An account of how pornography as a cultural script/text enacts relations of ruling in its production and reproduction – when read/enacted locally – is important, because apologists frequently deny the significance of the expansion of the pornographic cultural script – by disconnecting reality and fantasy and by making distinctions between the material and representational. For example, although Arthur Mielke (1995, p. 88) presents evidence that pornography is "for men, their revenge on women", he disconnects the imagined from real harm, deciding that masturbating to pornography is a victimless activity. Similarly, Sara Diamond (1985) argues for a disconnection in her essay, *Image and Reality*:

> I am not saying, as the pornography industry often does, that pornography is a healthy release for violent men, but I do think there is a wide gulf between fantasy, no matter how grotesque, and the reality. (p. 48)

Such disconnections not only minimise the experiences of women in pornography production, in which 'the grotesque' is enacted and recorded, but also minimise the significance of the possibilities pornography has made imaginable which, increasingly are extreme domination. The 2011 release of the trilogy of so-called 'mommy porn', E.L James' *50 Shades of Grey* (2011), repackaged romance as the eroticisation of male domination and female subordination. The book had sold more than 40 million copies to July 2012 (Siegel, 2012), with book rights sold in 37 countries (Bosman, 2012), and has become the fastest selling paperback of all time (Bentley, 2012). In Australia, more than 2.4 million copies were sold in 17 weeks, that is, one in ten Australians have bought one of the trilogy (Adler, 2012). In *Fifty Shades* Darker (E. L. James, 2012a) and *Fifty Shades Freed* (E. L. James, 2012b), the plot moves away from sadomasochism to romance, as the characters become engaged and then live happily ever after. As pro-sex industry commentators celebrate the growth of the eroticisation of humiliation in mainstream consumer markets, critique is routinely dismissed as prudish.

In 1983 Myrna Kostash noted that almost 90% of what was being sold was not available in 1970; "In 13 years much of what we used to call pornography became normal" (Kostash, 1985, p. 34; see also Mielke, 1995). Even in the early 1990s, the lure of pornography was described by a research informant as the "fantasy of the blow job" (cited in Mielke, 1995, p.85); this account seems quaint in comparison to the male sexual desires that are being routinely satisfied in mainstream pornography in the first decades of the century. Both scholarly literature and popular writing discuss the desensitising effect that pornography consumers experience, and the way that this leads to more extreme pornographic representations to induce sexual responses (Dines, 2010; Ridington, 1989; Russell, 1993; Tankard Reist & Bray, 2011; Whisnant, 2004). The industry is always "upping the ante" (Whisnant, 2004, p. 17). Rebecca Whisnant (2004) notes:

> … the direction of the industry is toward 'gonzo', or pure and plotless succession of sex acts, with an emphasis on more 'extreme activities'… mainstream pornography increasingly merges sex with violence and degradation, from spitting and choking to 'assbusting' and 'gangbanging'. (p.18)

Feminist arguments against pornography have been increasingly silenced within public discourse. In mid-1980s there was a strong feminist voice against pornography both from those who supported censorship legislation as an effective strategy and those who, for a variety of reasons, did not support legislation. The women who contributed to the edited volume, *Women against Censorship* (Burstyn, 1985), made connections between women's representations in popular culture and women's representations in pornography; they argued for the radical regime change of patriarchy instead of legal reform through legislation and censorship. Carol Smart (1989), in *Feminism and the Power of the Law,* warned that the law cannot be transformative, and that seeking political change through legal channels only strengthens the hegemony of law. Her radical argument was for women to set up alternative discourse/mechanisms outside of law to effect change, because work within may be "detrimental" to woman (Smart cited in Lacombe, 1994, p. 144). Elsewhere Smart suggests that the law is more valuable for its symbolism than in its implementation, because it enables "wider debate because new positions become available and stereotyped positions could be avoided" (cited in Itzin, 1992, p. 427). Ann Scales (1994) observed that feminists needed to trust themselves to decide when using the law was helpful, and when not, as a matter of strategic discernment. Of significance is that censorship is not just enacted through formal paths, but also through informal mechanisms of discrediting and ignoring (McLellan, 2010). By the 1990s, feminists writing against pornography found themselves censored when they could not get their arguments published (Russell, 1993), whilst feminists who wrote against censorship could; Varda Burstyn, for

example, was published in *Playboy* (Ridington, 1989). It is also of significance that pro-pornography artist, feminist and civil libertarian writers are often funded, sometimes fully, by the pornography industry (Itzin, 1992).

Revolutionary pleasure power: fucking to freedom

To position censorship and the eroticisation of inequality as opposites is to make a straw-problem. Debate is thereby diverted from an examination of libertarian traditions which serve to reinforce men's entitlement, and fails to consider the demand women make for equality and full human rights. The central belief of this intellectual tradition is that sexual transgression of social mores is the key to unlock political injustice. Feminist theorists Sheila Jeffreys (2003, 2011) and Abigail Bray (2011) have traced its history, considering the work of those philosophers and sexologists who "idealize the liberatory force of pornography by equating the pleasures of sexual transgression with the expansion of democratic freedom" (Bray, 2011, p. 136). Jeffreys and Bray voice concern for the way that such ideas have been used to excuse the use of children by men for sexual practices, with Bray pointing out that concern for children has been discursively and practically sidelined as 'moral panic' (2008, 2009b).

The genesis of the sex-as-freedom claim can be traced back to (at least) the Marquis de Sade whose sadistic practices informed his political work during the French Revolution and have been forever encapsulated in the term 'sadism'. The sexual revolution of the 1960s and early 1970s was based on sexual 'liberation', with the most oppositional practices – for example, sado-masochism and paedophilia – deemed the most revolutionary of all. When Keith Hose, a former chairperson of Paedophile Information Exchange, was interviewed in the radical left journal, The Leveller, in 1978 he said: "[i]n Britain before capitalism one gets the impression that things were more free for paedophiles" (Hose cited in Jeffreys, 2011, p. 186). He argued paedophilia was only considered a problem because it "threatens some of the basic institutions of capitalism, such as the nuclear family" (Hose cited in Jeffreys, 2011, p. 186). It is of note that paedophile activists sought to link their rights of access to children with socialism during the late 1970s and early 1980s, "even if these links seemed completely obscure" (Jeffreys, 2011, p. 186).

During the late 1970s and early 1980s 'counter-culturalists' and 'progressives' took up the ideas of psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich and Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse, the sexual revolution's "prophets" (Jeffreys, 2011). Although Marcuse and Reich had quite different ideas, both agreed 'repression' was a central political problem for humanity, and could be politically solved through sexual liberation. Reich "saw the orgasm as the measure of

health" and adopted a (masculine) hydraulic model, based on Freud. He warned that sexual energy needed to be released through "orgasm with full discharge", unless there were to be physically dire consequences (Jeffreys, 2011, p. 100). Sexual freedom was politically significant because:

> The connection between sexual repression and authoritarian social order was simple and direct: the child who experienced the suppression of his natural sexuality was permanently maimed in his character development; he inevitably became submissive, apprehensive of all authority, and completely incapable of rebellion … repression existed … in order to create the character structure necessary for the preservation of an authoritarian social regime. (Robinson cited in Jeffreys, 2011, p. 101)

Marcuse, Jeffreys argues, reinterpreted "the bleak and apparently sexually conservative message of Freud that civilisation depended on the repression of the destructive force of sexuality" (2011, p. 103). Marcuse understood that capitalism required some level of sexual repression or everyone would be lying around in post-orgasmic bliss, without motivation to go to work. He said:

> The unsublimated, unrationalized release of sexual relations would mean the most emphatic release of pleasure as such and the total devaluation of work for work's sake. The tension between the innate value of work and the freedom of pleasure could not be tolerated by the individual: the hopelessness and injustice of working conditions would strikingly penetrate the consciousness of individuals and render impossible their peaceable regimentation in the social system of the bourgeois world. (Marcuse cited in Jeffreys, 2011, p. 103)

The centrality of pleasure in Marcuse's account is the background to contemporary Foucauldian positions which consistently privilege sexual pleasure as the key goal, result and process of the 'struggle for existence':

> The sex instincts are *life* instincts … Ananke [scarcity] is experienced as a barrier against the satisfaction of the life instincts, which seek pleasure, not security. And the 'struggle for existence' is originally a struggle for pleasure: culture begins with the collective implementation of this aim. (Marcuse, 1955, pp. 113, 114)

In the influential essay, *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*, Gayle Rubin (1984) drew on Foucault to identify sexual minorities, such as paedophiles and sadomasochists, as oppressed groups. Rubin was an early advocate of the term, so-called,

'intergenerational sex' and advocated a queer theory of pleasure, distinct from a feminist theory of power. However, a sex radical critique of repression, with its pleasure privileging methodology, does not satisfy a radical feminist political analysis (Jeffreys, 2011). It fails on two counts. Firstly, male sexual aggression is not natural or biological, and, secondly, it does not lack full self-expression (Jeffreys, 2011). Instead, male sexual aggression is, as Jeffreys has theorised, "socially constructed to maintain male power. In such a context the concept of repression is meaningless" (Jeffreys, 2011, p. 103). However, the hegemonic nature of libertarian ideas is visible in the preemptive phrase, "I am not a prude", that frequently qualifies the expression of concern for girls, a concern, that, expressed by radical feminists, mothers and activists, is routinely dismissed as being 'repressed' itself. Privileging pleasure as the core struggle of humanity, and the belief that repression of sexual desire, starting in childhood, leads to a compliant citizenship, are old but tenacious themes, now incorporated into the politics of third-wave liberal feminism and the sex industry.

Using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house

Whilst some academics who support pornography and prostitution find explicit domination and subordination problematic, they are optimistic that feminist tools can subvert and transform humiliation into liberation. Amy Allen (2001) writes in *Pornography and Power* that:

> It is the conceptual and normative resources that are generated in the feminist movement that enable individual women to reinterpret pornographic texts and/or films as subversive of patriarchy and thus make it possible for them to transform the experience of performing in or consuming pornography from a humiliating experience to a liberating one. (p. 527)

In Allen's schema, it is feminist tools which serve women, one by one, to individually reinterpret experiences of humiliation into experiences of liberation. In this quest, both feminism and male supremacy have been completely privatised and individualised. Denise Thompson writes: "the purpose of ideology is to purvey the interests of the dominators as the interests of all" (2001, p. 36). The ideology of individualism, in the service of male supremacy, and in contrast with a feminist politics, sees "'humanity' as a set of isolated selves, floating freely in a space which is 'social' only to the extent that there are many selves" (Thompson, 2001, p. 43).

> If domination is desired, it cannot be challenged and opposed. If it constitutes the very roots of personal identity, it cannot be seen as systematic. If it operates by means of feelings and emotions, it belongs in the realm of private satisfaction, not public politics.

If domination is fragmented and dispersed among individuals, it cannot provide the basis for common interests among the oppressed…. If relations of domination and subordination are interpreted as nothing but properties of individuals, they cannot be seen as relations of ruling at all. They become simply a matter of preferences and choice engaged in by discrete individuals who have no responsibilities beyond their own immediate pleasures and satisfactions. In this libertarian discourse, politics vanishes. If only individuals exist, political critique can only be seen as personal insult or annihilation of the self, and disagreement becomes assertion of the self against threatening and hostile others. 'Freedom' is reduced to the absence of constraint, either on the part of the self or of others. The damage done to self and others by relations of ruling is either not addressed, or is purveyed as a positive good emanating from within desiring individuals. (Thompson, 2001, pp. 33-44)

Similarly to Allen, Terrie Schauer (2005) draws on Judith Butler's concept of "insurrectionary speech" to conclude that pornography can subvert its own agenda and potentially serve women (p. 59). Schauer describes soft-core pornography as consistent with representations of women in advertising and other genres, and as creating " a link between performative displays of femininity and displays associated with (1) social inferiority and (2) childhood" (Schauer, 2005, p. 51). But for Schauer (2005), pornography is a cultural work in progress and, "as a viable alternative to censorship", she suggests "it makes more sense to investigate the possibility of pornography as a form that can be inhabited and used by women to their own advantage" (p. 61). Schauer here positions censorship as the straw-person alternative to pornography, in order to suggest pornography could serve women. In this, Schauer echoes the position of Ann Snitow who also critiques the anti-pornography standpoint:

Instead of enlarging the definition of sexual pleasure to include a formerly invisible female subjectivity anti-pornography thinking perpetuates an all too familiar intellectual legacy, one that defines male arousal as intrinsically threatening to female autonomy. (Snitow, 1985, p. 114)

In Snitow's formulation, the solution to the problem of women's ritual humiliation and degradation, in practices of sexual domination and submission, is to 'widen the definition of sexual pleasure' to acknowledge women's agency in the practices. But, as the analysis of Denise Thompson makes clear, there is nothing intrinsic about male arousal; it only becomes a threat to female autonomy when socio-political arguments disguise domination within individualised experiences of sexual pleasure. The question is: who benefits from the pleasure women may or may not experience when being sexually humiliated?

A key problem for feminists has been the denial of female sexual subjectivity throughout history. Women have sought to creatively acknowledge and make space for women's experiences of sexual desire and pleasure within many genres of cultural production; such as poetry, song, artworks and the like. Feminists have explored politically, personally and creatively what the eroticisation of equality would look like, in all its diversity. This work bears no resemblance to the predictable sadomasochist practices which eroticise inequality. To define women's work in this area as 'feminist porn' is particularly problematic. Pornography, as it is understood within mainstream consumer culture, is about eroticising inequality, and, in fact, much of what is called 'feminist porn' follows the standard script of individualised pleasure-seeking that leaves male supremacy unchallenged.

The outsider / outlaw status that the pornography industry continues to claim for itself, in part through the new extremes of humiliation it pushes in its quest to expand profits and markets, is a central part of its marketing spin. In 2004, Jennifer Wicke stated: "At this moment it is more crucial to support the potential for transgression and critique still inherent in pornography as an outlaw discourse, than obsessionally to pursue the hidden inner secret of the pornographic as violent or objectifying" (p. 187). But, given the mainstreaming of the industry, it seems that, if the 'moment' ever existed, it has long since passed. The violent or objectifying nature of pornography is hardly an 'inner secret', but is empirically evidenced by the industry itself. Rather than being an outlaw discourse, pornography has become a mainstream cultural script that makes profits for the sex industry from the consumption of women. This chapter now turns to child sexual politics to consider how the privileging of pleasure as a political tool is used within queer theory to secure men's rights to children's bodies.

Power and pleasure: making sense of child sexual politics

Critically examining the way that power works within sexual interactions has been an important feminist project, but it is an examination that some theorists dismiss as irrelevant to the politics of pleasure. Queer theorist Steven Angelides, in his article *Feminism, Child Sexual Abuse, and the Erasure of Child Sexuality* (2004)*,* is highly critical of radical feminist analysis, commenting that "it is far from obvious what, if anything, 'equality', 'knowledge' and 'consent' have to do with our desire for sex or with the pleasure of sex" (p. 171). Although Angelides (2004) suggests that few would "dispute that patriarchal social structures, male sexuality, and power relations between the sexes and between adults and children have been subjected to much-needed critical scrutiny" (p. 142), his main point is "it may be that a theory of power is in fact not the place to look for tools with which to address questions raised by child sexuality and

intergenerational sex" (p. 153). The queer project to disrupt "a linear and sequential model of age stratification premised on distinct chronological, spatial, and temporal states of biological and psychological development" (Angelides, 2004, p. 163) is primarily achieved by individualising children's experiences of sexual pleasure, and by selectively drawing on psychological processes to affirm those particular experiences which fit a pleasure agenda. Angelides (2004) practises a form of social determinism, derived from his application of Foucauldian notions of power:

> As I have made clear, from a post-Foucauldian, nonjuridical conceptualization of power that assumes that where there is a relationship between two people – and not a state of bondage or pure force – power is exercised, not simply possessed. I am not claiming that there is a biologically inevitable power differential between the sexes or between adults and children. I am claiming that in the field of power relations, no two people are situated in a dynamic of equivalence. We are all positioned differentially within social and discursive networks of power. (p. 152)

His contention that individual people *act* and, in doing so, exercise agency is straightforward; so is the claim that we are all individually situated within social and discursive networks of power. There are, however, material differences in the embodied experiences of children and adults that cannot be decided away through discussion. This is not to say that children are less human than adults, although they are often dehumanised in similar ways to other oppressed groups of people by acts of male supremacy. Angelides does not, in the above, account for common shared experiences within networks of power; for example, men as a class hold more economic and political power than women as a class, a truth that is evident through objectively measurable data. There is nothing inevitable about the inequality that depends on socially constructed hierarchies organised by means of the categories of race, class and gender; change is possible. But, in Angelides' application of post-Foucauldian conceptions of power, inequality is inevitable: "[a]s long as we think that a society of egalitarian power relations is possible, not only do we misunderstand power and sexuality, but we are led to formulate simplistic, unhelpful political analyses and ethical agendas" (2004, p. 152). Angelides suggests that "there appears to be a tension between the ontological register (what is) and the ethical register (what ought to be)" (2004, p. 151). The critical feminist project questions the inevitability of 'what is', and makes normative and moral claims about 'what ought to be', but this 'tension' is productive. In Angelides' terms it is, however, considered simplistic and unhelpful, and ultimately inconvenient for a politics of pleasure. Angelides (2004) says he "cannot agree" with Margaret Jackson's radical feminist argument that "we must challenge the assertion that the association between sex and power is inevitable or desirable … and that dominance and submission are

inherent in sexual activity and essential to pleasure" (p. 151). Angelides cannot agree because he equates the argument for the desirability and possibility of equality within power relationships as being the same as arguing that relationships exist outside power. But, he has set up a straw woman: radical feminists do not argue that anyone or anything exists 'outside' of social context or power relations.

In the queer project, as Angelides presents it, inequality between individual people is inevitable; therefore, considering "power, consent or ethics" is "simplistic" and "unhelpful". To understand children's acts of agency in 'intergenerational sex' requires us, he would argue, to prioritise pleasure and desire instead. The individualised project is enacted through classic liberal ideals of education. Instead of a consideration of how power, consent and ethics work hierarchically against classes of people to reproduce inequality – individuals must educated and enlightened to embody pleasure, rather than protected from those more powerful. "Sexual enlightenment then, the *raison d'etre* of the sexual revolutionaries, could lead to the disappearance of child sexual abuse. The enlightened child would not feel abused" (Jeffreys, 2011, p. 96).

Freezing children's experiences of pleasure and power in a convenient moment in time.

The queer project rejects the critical possibility of a different or better future, and, in particular, rejects the way that the figure of the child is used to represent any such future:

> Instead we choose not to choose the child ... that the child as figure of futurity must die; that we have seen the future and it's every bit as lethal as the past; and thus what is queerest about us, queerest within us, and queerest despite us, is our willingness to insist intransitively: to insist that the future stops here. (Edelman, 1998, pp. 29, 30)

This, when applied to children in real life, prohibits predicting possible outcomes and refuses retrospective analysis. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley make the point in *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (2004) "that we cannot and must not try to predict in advance what psychological, emotional, and political stories will arise from childhood sexual engagement" (p. xxx). Their concern about the "scandals and panics about children, and the authors who create them" leads them to argue for a 'recasting' of 'conclusions' (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, p. xxxiv). Bruhm and Hurley (2004) want to tell, (author, perhaps), "a different story … about kids, sex, power, and fantasy" (p. xxvii) and to "speak with queerness about the vexed realm of trauma" in order to allow "the possibility to narrate a pedophilia that will have been benign" (p. xxix). This is theoretically achieved by a denial of a future: "we cannot and must not try to predict in advance" (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, p. xxx) and when children become adults we must 'recast' their 'conclusions' about trauma to something more benign. "[Gone] is ... the queer child whose

queerness disappears as childhood disappears, this child *likes* the experience that is meant to terrify him, or at least likes it more that the adult narrator who remembers it" (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, p. xxix, emphasis in original). Problematically for the internal consistency of queer theory, telling 'different' stories about paedophilia requires queer theory to name as absolute, and freeze, experiences of children, in childhood.

The basic queer complaint is that children are not taken seriously as participants in 'intergenerational sex'. Angelides, for example, argues that we have to validate children's expressions of power, at the same time as he dismisses the possibility of their being able to recognise their own trauma. Although feminists have been right to "rigorously critique … the adult offender [who] was often portrayed as a harmless victim of child seductiveness" up until the 1960s (Angelides, 2004, p. 145), they have been wrong to offer therapeutic interventions to children on the understanding that abuse was not their fault because that; "impose[s] a meaning that often directly contradicts the child's own perception" (p. 159). He asserts that "[f]ar from protecting and empowering children, the feminist evasion and erasure of child sexuality have disempowered children and may have made abused children more vulnerable to psychological trauma" (Angelides, 2004, p. 158). So, because children frequently feel guilty and responsible for sexual abuse, particularly if they experienced pleasurable physiological sensations – and feminist research has recorded the extreme distress and confusion survivors have reported about feeling pleasure whilst being abused – it is, Angelides argues, inappropriate to help children understand the abuse was not their fault, because "attempting to do so … only reinforces in children the idea that they lack power and control in encounters with adults" (2004, p. 159). The fact that children do actually lack power and control in encounters with adults is irrelevant because the children themselves do not recognise it.

The rejection of a feminist analysis of power, consent and ethics, to make sense of sexual experiences leaves queer theory with the problem of explaining trauma. In a not unfamiliar twist, trauma is attributed to feminist explanations rather than to the acts of men; it is not so much what happens to children but what we 'think' about what happens that is important:

> Rather than view the child's perception of the sexual encounter as constituted through the complex interaction between reality and fantasy, as Freud did, therapists working within the child sexual abuse discourse try to alter the children's perception of reality in the hope that a change in fantasized memory reconstruction will follow. This approach is akin to brainwashing. It relies on a linear understanding of causation, at the centre of which are the omnipotent, all-controlling adult and the powerless, passive child. It also

assumes, erroneously in my view, that reality and fantasy can be definitively disentangled. (Angelides, 2004, p. 160)

Adults and children who make sense of their childhood abuse by coming to understand that, as children, they exercised limited power in relation to their abusers are seen here as subject to a "change in fantasized memory reconstruction", and those who help adults/children make sense of their experiences as "brainwashing". The argument is that it is impossible to make a distinction between something happening, and our thoughts or fantasies about what happened; the two are 'entangled'. Angelides (2004) draws on Freud to make his point:

> It is fantasy that works over the original scene of seduction and provides it, retroactively, with its neurotic force. So it is not enough to identify an act of sexual assault or seduction as the pathological cause, because it is the retroactive reinterpretation of this event in the context of later events that yields the clue to neurotic symptomatology. (p. 157)

This is not unfamiliar territory, sex radicals and paedophiles have long argued that it is not sexual abuse of children that is traumatic and damaging to children, it is society's negative reaction that gives the abuse traumatic meanings. Early sex radicals such as Inge and Stan Hegelers (1963) in *An ABZ of Love* argued:

> In very rare cases there is a question of actual attempts at intercourse with the child. In such cases it is obvious that there may be a question of physical harm, i.e. of the child's body suffering damage.

> The mental harm produced by these sexual acts towards children depends to a certain extent on the sexual upbringing the child has had and the enlightenment the child has been given. (cited in Jeffreys, 2011, p. 96)

A discourse of child sexuality, as queer theory has it, acknowledges children's capacity to act and to know sexually, but yet, in the psychological process described by Angelides (2004), while it is possible for them to know pleasure, it is not possible for them to recognise sexual trauma at the time, only retrospectively:

> As I have demonstrated, psychological trauma is a dynamic process. It cannot be a single sexual act (e.g., an act of sexual seduction), which alone would tell us nothing about the psychical processes that assign meaning to that act and thereafter give rise to a neurotic symptom. This event can happen only in association with later acts and their

retranscriptions, which give the original assault its meaning and sexual definition for the child. (p. 157)

The proper focus of critical judgement, then, is not on what happened, but on how we understand what happened. And the 'correct' way to understand some sexual abuse, according to Angelides' discourse of child sexuality, is to understand that a (non-politicised) sexual act has been interpreted through a feminist analysis of power, producing trauma. "[T]he attempt to replace a child's 'reality' with an adult's effects more than a misrecognition of psychological dynamics. It also ensures, at best, the trivialisation or evasion of child sexuality and, at worst, its complete erasure" (Angelides, 2004, p. 160). Without a critical feminist analysis of power, the sexual act becomes one of agency and volition, an 'interaction', not between equals, (because equality of power is impossible within post-structural discourse where people are situated differently), but ethically, because children's feelings of responsibility and power are taken seriously, as are their experiences of pleasure. Warren Middleton, who produced publications for the Paedophilia Information Exchange, puts it this way:

> Why does the Establishment condemn with such vigour any attempt to examine the issues dispassionately, not only of childhood self-expression and its cross-generational manifestation, but of the other, more general yet equally important issue of the rights and freedoms of youth? Why does society put down children, and try to crucify any adult who dares to meet them on their own terms? (cited in Jeffreys, 2011, p. 188)

Middleton fails to recognise that women routinely meet children on their own terms in the daily practices of nurturing children as fully human beings. Women are not 'crucified' for this work, but are criticised for ensuring their children's bodily autonomy.

Queer theory argues for the disruption of sexual norms that are based on "linear and sequential models of age stratification" (Angelides, 2004, p. 163). The key problem is that *the sexual* is normatively male, and 'troubling' distinctions between children and adults serve male interests. Angelides (2004) is particularly critical of feminist accounts which describe children who are acting sexually with themselves or with other children as engaging in 'sex play' or 'sex experimentation'; he suggests "[t]he feminist use of power has functioned to evade, silence, erase, and repress a signifier of child sexuality" (p. 154). In short, he argues that, describing children's sexuality in the terms that children themselves use is 'trivialising'. Problematically, for him, the word 'play' works to differentiate childhood sexual practices from the sexual experiences that men might describe. By contrast, Sandra Young describes her experience as a

child, in Andrea Dworkin's (1991) documentary on pornography; she was playing with her brother Ray when her father raped her:

> Ray had a bathroom in his room, and we were in there taking a bath together, we didn't know we were doing anything wrong, we were just kids, and we started playing around with each other, I mean, we were exploring and stuff, my father comes in, sees what's going on and says, "Ok if you guys are gonna do that, you're gonna learn how to do that right", and then he proceeds to rape me in front of my brother and then he turns around and he looks at Ray and he says, "See, that's all women are for" and walks out of the room. (Kelly, 1991)

Young goes on: "I figured 'ok, this is how men showed love', you know." In Angelides' schema, that Young believed that being used sexually by her father was love, and 'all women are for', is what matters most, because she had decided that for herself, and therefore exercised power in making a decision. Young, after years in prostitution, adopted a radical feminist analysis of power and understood the basis of her earlier childhood reasoning as a survival strategy. Presumably, for Angelides, this would serve as an example of Dworkin's "brainwashing".

Freezing men's interests as normative.

Radical feminists would not dispute the view that "we must provide children with discursive spaces and subject positions that enable them to negotiate their own emerging sexualities and to empower them to act on their own behalf" (Angelides, 2004, p. 161). A radical feminist approach to such a project, would, however, take a critical stance, acknowledge the vulnerability of children, and insist that we acknowledge that male supremacy employs the liberal language of empowerment and queer language of pleasure to reproduce inequality. Queer theorists see themselves as dismantling foundational categories, but they actually reify subversive or queer readings as foundational themselves (Lesnik-Oberstein (2010). Karin Lesnik-Oberstein's (2010) close reading of Bruhm and Hurley's *Curiouser* (2004) and Lee Edelman's *No Future* (2004) finds their theorising consistently relies on the separating out of real-historical-children from the figure of the child. By means of this separation they can legitimately condemn the abuse of real children, and others who are seen to fail to condemn such abuse (for queer theory, this is consistently the Church, rather than men), and can "conceive of children as desiring creatures who, although tough to access in theory, exist and make stories beyond the simple ones adults see in them" (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, p. xxxiv). Following Sheila Jeffreys (2011), I would argue that conceptualising children as complex, sexual, desiring beings is not so difficult to theorise, or recognise in practice. It is theoretically

difficult for queer theory to do so because, despite a stated commitment to demarcate "not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative" (Halperin, 1995, p. 62), their positionality is consistently deployed in ways which ultimately fix, rather than oppose, the normative interests of men as paramount.

Further, queer theory defines itself by rejecting futurity (the possibility of the future) and the figurative child who stands for a hopeful future. The theory is driven not so much by a desire to fully recognise and understand the present moment, but rather by a rejection of a future, for queer or any other theory, that could be different to the past. Queer theorist, Lee Edelman (1998) says rather poetically:

> The future itself is kid stuff … If the fate of the queer is to figure the fate that cuts the thread of futurity, if the jouissance, the excess enjoyment, by which we are defined would destroy the other, fetishistic, identity-confirming jouisance through which the social order congeals around the rituals of its own reproduction, then the only oppositional status to which our queerness can properly lead us depends on our taking seriously the death drive as which we figure and insisting, against the cult of the child and the political culture it supports, that we are not, to quote Guy Hocquenghem, "the signifier of what might become a new form of 'social organization'" (138) that we do not intend a new politics, a better society, a brighter future, since all of these fantasies reproduce the past, through displacement, in the form of a future by construing futurity itself as merely a form of reproduction. (p. 29)

The universalising, individual-orientated straightjacket in Edelman's conclusion – "the *only* oppositional status to which our queerness can *properly* lead us" (1998, p. 29, emphasis added) – goes unnoticed by the author. Lesnik-Oberstein (2010) writes that the terms in which Edelman's makes such argument as hypocritical. Edelman's work, she says:

> constitutes a repetition of the mastery of non-mastery … these repeated anticipations and qualifications in the text themselves constitute a futurity as narrative, and a narrative of futurity, in which the promise of no promise is compulsively continually undercut in and as future for the future. (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2010, p. 313)

Lesnik-Oberstein (2010) challenges Bruhm and Hurley, and Edelman, to question "precisely why" discussions such as theirs "rely on the child necessarily being that which needs to be either retrieved from, or released to, experiences of sexual relations with adults in the service of queer theory" (p. 319). Nancy Fraser (1989), in her critique of Michel Foucault, captures the essence of the problem: queer theorists, such as Edelman, for whom resistance to regimes of

sexuality can only occur in "in the name of bodies and pleasure", she says: "I can form no concrete picture of what [such] resistance … would be like. Or to the extent that I can, it is one that, by the most ironic of coincidences, resembles the hedonistic utilitarianism of the very architect of panopticism himself, Jeremy Bentham" (p. 63).

In the next section I turn to feminist responses to the material presented so far. In particular I consider the theoretical understanding of emotions and argue that it is important to allow and harness anger, as a rational response that defies the emotional distancing that neoliberal subjectivity demands.

Feminist thinking: where do emotions belong?

A 'new feminist materialism', which rejects frameworks which place language at the centre of understanding culture, presents a problematic way forward. Burman and Stacey (2010) have mapped this turn in thinking away from theoretical models derived from structuralism, post-structuralism and psychoanalysis. The work of Stacy Alaimo and Susan Heckman (2008), Karen Barad (2007), Rosi Braidotti (2006), Elizabeth Grosz (2008) and others is described as a distancing "from theories of signs, metaphors and analogies, positing instead a more direct encounter with the world" (Burman & Stacey, 2010, p. 233).

> If notions of mediation or representations have been deemed outmoded by these feminists, what has come to replace them is an attention to affect as that force or generativity that cannot be reduced to structuralist classifications or even the deconstructive moves of theorists of performativity. Located within materiality, rather than held apart from it by a mediated and mediating culture, this feminist vision turns our attention to affect in search of new potentialities both theoretical and political. In the emergence of this so-called affect theory, signification and representations are typically displaced in favour of immediacy and intensity. (Burman & Stacey, 2010, p. 233)

The interest in affects is occurring at a particular point in time in the history of feminist theory making. Danielle Caselli (2010) says feminist theory has become procedurally self-critical as it focuses on "past methodological rigidities identified as the attachment to epistemology over ontology, the centrality of estrangement over affective identification, and the alleged dogma of constructivism" (p.244). This has coincided with an engagement with areas of thought that have been considered out of bounds, "such as science (in particular neuroscience) and affect" (Caselli, 2010, p. 244).

> Affects can be described as extra-discursive and extra-textual. Affects are moments of *intensity*, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter … affects are not to do with knowledge or meaning; indeed, they occur on a different, *asignifying* register.
>
> (O'Sullivan, emphasis in original, cited in Caselli, 2010, p. 244)

The attraction of affect is its promise to "creatively … go beyond what theory – boringly – has been able to examine so far, and brings with this the allure of immediacy" (Caselli, 2010, p. 244); Caselli asks why childhood has been "so closely linked to theories aimed at using affect as a new methodological tool" (p. 245). Embracing affect can be a stepping back from the exhausting struggle over meaning; "the healing qualities of childhood emerge (but remain unnoticed) at a point in time when theory wants to heal itself from the dangers of Marxist estrangement and psychoanalytical fragmentation" (Caselli, 2010, p. 245). The key problem is the depoliticisation which posits affect as outside the possibilities of analysis. Caselli (2010) rejects the idea that affect theory is post-human, that is, that it is not going back to "pre-Freudian or pre-theoretical humanism", where humanism put man at the centre of his history, able to choose and control (p. 248). Instead, she says, "[t]he need to find a space beyond the symbolic ultimately re-establishes humanism as a project of wholeness and normativity. The child is both the methodological tool that enables this move and the site of pre-symbolic immediacy" (Caselli, 2010, p. 248). However, "the fantasy of the child's body as the site of unmediated affect" (Burman and Stacey, 2010 p. 237) is politically untenable and risky; feminists need to be able to theorise how embodied experiences are interpreted under male supremacy – it is not safe to say they are beyond meaning and knowledge.

It is possible that affect is simply rehearsing some of the theoretical roundabouts that feminists have encountered with 'experience', when experience is claimed "to be beyond critical analysis" (Caselli, 2010, p. 251), felt but not questioned. To countenance emotion and to reject the emotional distancing that neoliberal rationality insists upon and celebrates is, however, very important. When Abigail Bray (2008) describes Michel Foucault's "disavowal of sexual violence against children" as a "form of political cruelty" (p. 137), she is strategically re-introducing, through her use of the term, the 'disavowed' role of emotion in discussions of child sexual abuse. Whilst many feminists have criticised Foucault for his blindness to the gendered politics of sexuality, Bray is doing more than being critical of what is missing. She is naming his silence as 'cruelty' and situating it in a traditional of philosophical liberalism that values unaffected cruelty, along with contempt and stoic indifference, as important aspects of self-mastery and survival-of-the-fittest, as truth in Enlightenment thought. Bray (2011) says that emotion has been expunged from critical accounts – and that 'hysteria' is the "favored pathologizing term of the moral panic critics" (p.153). She argues convincingly for a

repoliticising of these 'outlawed emotions'. Describing arguments in which 'moral panic' and 'hysteria' are mobilised in order to discount anger and other emotions, Bray (2011) says:

> far from being oppositional, such arguments inform a hegemonic critical paradigm and are central to critiques of child pornography censorship legislation that fail to challenge the unregulated commodification of child sexual abuse within late capitalism. (p. 138)

Feminist activism against child sexual abuse, which reached a high point in the 1980s, has failed to engage adequately with the impacts of the expanding, technologically-supported, profit-driven documentation of that abuse, in child pornography. This eroticisation of gross inequality has not been widely theorised, nor have the limited interventions made by the legal and political systems been successful when they have occurred. Whilst feminist services have been dealing with sexual violence at the day-to-day coalface of therapeutic work with women and children, much scholarly work has been engaged in an opposing project that is critical of the censorship of child pornography rather than of child pornography itself. Bray theorises that this lack of feminist attention is, in part, due to it being difficult to question the 'anti-moral panic' discourses. She says:

> In brief, civil libertarians, sexual radicals, and cultural feminists claim that child pornography censorship legislation is a symptom of the intolerant panic politics of late modernity, one of the more powerful technologies of surveillance and control that have emerged from a dispersed child sexual abuse moral panic, and as such a reactionary response to an exaggerated threat. Within this context, child pornography censorship legislation – not child pornography – has become the proper object of oppositional thought. If child pornography is a taboo topic within feminist theory, it is largely due to the triumph of this critical paradigm over the past thirty years. (Bray, 2011, p. 134)

Bray examines Robert Danay's (2005) article, *The Danger of Fighting Monsters: Addressing the Hidden Harms of Child Pornography Law*, to make her case. In his article, Danay employs a Foucauldian critique in his discussion of the following court transcript:

> A crying toddler is shown gagging on a man's sperm. A little girl is showed being mounted by a German Shepherd. Children are shown masturbating each other. Children are shown in bondage. An adult male is seen forcing his penis into a child's mouth, and then ejaculating in her mouth. The toddler is heard crying "No, No." Another picture shows the rape of a handcuffed and hooded child. Perhaps the most poignant scene and one that will stay in my mind forever, is the image of an adult male ejaculating into the vagina of a child. The child has a soother in her mouth. (cited in Danay, 2005, p. 163)

Reading this court transcript is upsetting and distressing, but these emotions have no place in the hegemony of contemporary critical discourse. Instead, Bray writes, Danay considers the transcript "a perverse symptom of the child sexual abuse moral panic discourse that now governs 'us' with a pedophilic gaze … cautioning against the "hysteria" … of child pornography censorship" (2011, p. 153).

Gail Dines' (2010) *Pornland* and Melinda Tankard Reist and Abigail Bray's (2011) edited collection *Big Porn Inc* detail the specific ways in which children's eroticisation is commercially produced for profit. Girl children are frequently called terms of endearment, for example 'sweetie', as opposed to the names women are called, such as 'bitch', 'ho', and 'cumdumpster'. The key trope is that, underneath girls' innocence, is a wild sexuality waiting to be unlocked by men, frequently 'daddy'. It is the girls' inexperience that is sexually arousing. Caroline Taylor (2011, p. 196) has mapped the connections between legal representations of children in the court system and the representations of girl children in pornography – and how intrafamilial sexual abuse is marketed as 'incest', fuelling "a staple diet of pornography users, readers and pornographer makers". Radical feminists have critiqued how the Lolita genre of pornography transgresses taboos between children and adults deliberately, "in order to maximize profits" (Bray, 2011, p. 145). Men use pornography that features child victims to teach other children what is expected and to normalise the abuse (Norma, 2011). Evidence of such abuse is endlessly circulated on the internet. Discussing the case of victim Masha Allen, Helen Pringle (2011a) notes "circulation of the pictures prolongs her abuse to infinity, as each person who downloads her pictures participates in her abuse" (p. 209).

Yet, the situations detailed by Dines, Taylor, Norma and Pringle risk being marginalised as hysterical. Bray, instead values a feminist emotional affect. This is not conceptualised at the level of the somatic, outside of language and theory, but rather is theorised for the political implications of its absence: Who benefits from silencing women's anger?

Conclusion

The six years between 1996 and 2012 have seen a prolonged struggle played out across the media, the academy, grassroots organisations and government that is grounded in concerns about girls and sexuality. The discursive landscape of claims and counterclaims for politicisation and re-privatisation of concern has been complex, as issues have been collapsed and made to serve multiple purposes.

There are theoretical schisms in conceptualising children – as savvy agents, or as vulnerable beings – when analysis is individualised. When we can insist on positioning children as individuals *within* a social context, a nuanced picture emerges. Relations of ruling, such as those enacted through the eroticisation of inequality, are predictable in the harm they do. Grown women and girl children suffer similarly from their dehumanisation through the sex industry and its normative values. Identifying the consistent context and experience of being female under patriarchal conditions is a radical position. But whilst the context and relations of ruling are the same for women and girls, their material experiences are distinct. Women seek to protect girls, and their actions respond to the inherent vulnerability in children.

When concern for girls is expressed in ways which challenge the normative hegemony of the sex industry, it is routinely dismissed. In a massive reversal, women are blamed for creating girls' vulnerability, framed as 'protesting too much' and mocked for being unaware of their own 'disavowed desire'. Women are admonished to accept the inevitability of a capitalist imperative – their daughter's participation in the political economy is being re-privatised to that of choosing consumers. They are told to educate their daughters, so that they can find sexual pleasure in experiences of humiliation.

Reading this landscape through a feminist lens, and acknowledging the ways in which male supremacy operates through demands on female sexuality, we can take a step back from the intense scrutinisation of girls, and ask who benefits from concern for girls and how feminists' concern for girls exposes and therefore challenges how men exercise power and control at the expense of women and girls. We may also point out how concern for girls that is not theoretically anchored in the concept of male supremacy can act to shore up male power and control.

In this study, I have set out to explore women's experiences of bringing up their daughters. It is important to attend to the narratives of women in order to understand the circumstances in which women mother. It is important to consider what language women use to describe present and future possibilities for women and girls, and it is important to look at the implications for women's mothering practices of the mainstreaming of a pornographic aesthetic in which inequality is eroticised. I outline the methods I used to do this in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Introduction

> Feminist scholarship is an exacting terrain that is built on the premise of challenging hierarchical modes of creating and distributing knowledge. Feminists employ a variety of strategies for creating knowledge about women and their social worlds, which often lies hidden from mainstream society. A feminist approach to knowledge building recognises the central importance of examining women's experience. It often takes a critical stance toward traditional knowledge-building claims that argue for 'universal truths'. Research conducted within a feminist framework is attentive to issues of difference, the questioning of social power, resistance to scientific oppression, and a commitment to political activism and social injustice. (Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, 2004, p. 3)

In this chapter I revisit the underlying philosophical values that were outlined Chapter Two in order to articulate a rationale for the qualitative methods I have used to conduct this research. Feminist theory has informed every aspect of this study, from my personal motivation, to the data identified as useful, to the way the literature has been considered, to the analysis and its trustworthiness. Feminism is both theory and practice – praxis – and unpacking the interconnections, as Catherine MacKinnon (1996) does below, demonstrates how feminism produces different, and arguably superior, results to mainstream scientific endeavours:

> The movement for the liberation of women … is first practice, then theory.… Feminism was a practice long before it was a theory. On its real level, the Women's Movement – where women move against their determinants as women – remains more practice than theory.... We know things with our lives, and live that knowledge, beyond anything any theory has yet theorized. Women's practice of confrontation with the realities of male dominance outruns any existing theory of the possibility of consciousness or resistance. To write the theory of this practice is not to work through logical puzzles or entertaining conundra, not to fantasize utopias, not to moralize or tell people what to do. It is not to exercise authority; it does not lead practice. Its task is to engage life through developing mechanisms that identify and criticize rather than reproduce social practices of subordination and to make tools of women's consciousness and resistance that further a practical struggle to end inequality. This kind of theory requires humility and it requires participation. (p. 46)

In MacKinnon's terms, listening to women becomes a radical political act. Women's experiences are frequently ignored (Thompson, 2001), and women's voices as mothers, in particular, are absent from matters that profoundly affect them (Brown et al., 1994). To listen to women is to value pragmatism over abstraction. "There is a 'loud silence' when one searches for the meanings of women in the language" (Spender, 1980, p. 54).

The remainder of this chapter is divided into two sections. The first section, 'The feminist researcher', explores the research process from the perspective of the researcher and considers questions of subjectivity, ethics and the rationale for the method chosen, to 'listen to' women. The second section, 'The research project', presents detail of, and my reflections on, the study, the sample, data collection and analysis.

The feminist researcher

The question of how to practise humility and participate in life-engaging ways in the practical struggle for equality has been a central feature of this research endeavour (MacKinnon, 1996). Where do I fit? What is my job? As I discussed in Chapter One, a key motivation for this research was the deep unease I experienced as a mother of a pre-teenaged daughter. I wanted to make sense of my own experiences by learning from other women and to make sense of other women's experiences by reflecting on my own. 'The personal is political' means that what happens in our own lives matters. The dialogical process of consciousness-raising takes a critical approach to experiences, comparing and contrasting, not to test for their truth or validity, but rather because through such an approach we glimpse the social context and relations of ruling which, once named, we can challenge.

Valuing subjectivity is what Renate Klein calls "conscious subjectivity", which replaces the "'value –free objectivity' of traditional research" and is "not to be confused with uncritical acceptance of a person's statements" (1983, p. 94, emphasis in original). Clearly, as a mother, I am an insider to the research project, a "situated knower", where the researcher is a "participant of the social she is discovering" (D. Smith, 1999, p. 6). Conscious subjectivity means being aware of where I am located in the social, and of how my location is the same or different to the women who share their stories with me.

My own story shapes who I am and how I see the world. I grew up in a religious, patriarchal household where my mother was resourceful and, replicating the ways of her own mother, 'made the best of things'. My job was to be good and help her. My childhood was a working-class life where the quest for economic security ranked above education. During my last year at

high school, the teachers handed out university entrance forms, but did not say who should fill in the forms. I wondered how those students who completed the forms knew that they were supposed to do so. Perhaps they had been told beforehand.

The geo-political history of Australia, and in particular regional Queensland, is grounded in the colonisation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and my white childhood was immersed in the background racism of the 1970s and 80s. The patterns of inequality saw me get a school-holiday café job, but meant that Aboriginal girls my age were never given the same opportunity – at least, not on the front counter with the customers. Even the church had a separate congregation for anyone who wasn't white enough.

I completed school and worked in service and administration roles for a decade, travelling as a backpacker throughout Europe and South East Asia for much of that time. Two words would describe me at that age: determined and independent. I met my future husband, a carpenter, on those travels.

I was twenty-seven years old when I had my first child, a daughter. I was ecstatic to become a mother. My son followed twenty-two months later, for only one reason – it was now or never. I was not the Earth Mother I imagined I would be, and the transition to motherhood had been fraught. I was also twenty-seven years old when I enrolled at university, pregnant and worried that others would be wondering why *I* was there. I worried about wasting government money by taking up a seat in lectures. I could not see why I should be educated, but I was excited to be learning, even if my family could not really understand: "Oh well, if it keeps you happy", they said.

I was thrilled by the things I was learning, and angry too – why didn't anyone tell me about such things before? It seemed accidental that I was even in university, and I was overwhelmed by the thought that life might have just as easily gone another way, and the opportunity to attend could have passed me, and others like me, by. Slowly, I began to find the theories which made sense of my experience, the circumstances of my life. The 'accident' of my education was, in fact, part of a social system in which inequality is routinely reproduced. The patterns were suddenly everywhere.

By virtue of excelling at university, with increased financial security, good health and hard work, and my insider status in various dominant cultural institutions (such as being heterosexual in a long term partnership (Lewin, 1994)), my own children's lives as young teenagers are a

world away from mine. The university where I have studied and now teach has many first-in-family students, and I see a younger me reflected in their anxious first-day faces. The experience of being an outsider has short-circuited my tolerance for those elitist strands of academia that ignore the materiality of people's lives.

This research journey has been an ongoing reflection on the differing insights that the position of insider, or outsider, allows. Susan Hawthorne coined the term 'dominant cultural stupidities' to describe the difficulty that people who are insiders to dominant groups have in seeing the knowledge of outsiders or marginalised people. "This syndrome is widespread among people who belong to several dominant cultures: white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual, rich and mobile are some of the groups most prone to the syndrome. It comes about as a result of not having to think about the consequences of one's actions" (Hawthorne, 2002, p. 47). Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1994), Patricia Hill Collins (1994) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) write eloquently about the possibilities that open up when marginalised voices are centered. Feminist scholarship is led by challenges from the margins, and black, lesbian, disabled and poor women continue to offer radical new understandings (Hawthorne, 2002).

Research for women: issues of power and difference.

Valuing subjectivity and paying attention to the way that oppression is organised hierarchically across difference is important, because it helps us to identify relations of ruling. Less useful are methodologies which separate out and decontextualise difference. For example, a call for papers for the Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association (2011) conference advised presenters they could disaggregate privilege in the following ways:

> specific types of privilege (male privilege, white privilege, heterosexual privilege, middle/ upper class privilege, Christian privilege, U.S. American privilege, citizenship privilege, able-bodied privilege, cisgender privilege, etc.), the intersection of two or more types of privilege, or about the dynamics of privilege in general. (p. 4)

This 'intersectionality', Susan Hawthorne (2004) points out, includes so much that it risks obscuring some of what is included. When peoples' experiences are so disconnected and dissected, they are no longer whole people. Himani Bannerji describes it like this:

> In this method of operating, the abstraction is created when the different social moments which constitute the 'concrete' being of any social organization and existence are pulled apart, and each part assumed to have a substantive, self regulating structure. This becomes apparent when we see gender, race and class each considered a separate

issue – as ground for separate oppressions. The social whole – albeit fraught with contradictions – is then constructed by an aggregative exercise. According to this, I, as a South Asian woman, then have a double oppression to deal with, first on the count of gender, and second on the count of race. I am thus segmented into different social moments, made a victim of discrete determinations. So it is with the moment of gender, when it is seen as a piece by itself, rupturing its constitutive relationship with race and class. Needless to say, race and class could also be meted the same treatment. What this does is to empty gender relations of their general social context, content and dynamism. This, along with the primacy that gender gains (since the primary social determinant is perceived as patriarchy), subsumes all other social relations, indeed renders them often invisible. (cited in D. Smith, 1999, p. 42)

In this thesis, I have considered differences amongst women in terms of individual women's everyday experiences – so the woman herself is not the subject of my deconstruction, but rather her experiences within the social. The intersection, rather than happening on the body of a woman, can be understood to happen instead between her and our social world. Closely scrutinising women, involving an intellectual dissection of them (often mirroring biological dissections; as in a woman who is disabled, woman who has brown skin, and so on), either of the participants or myself, does not seem justifiable. How the scholar understands and treats difference can determine whether the research is *on* women or research *for* women. Renate Klein says: "I define research for women as research that tries to take women's needs, interests and experiences into account and aims at being instrumental in improving women's lives in one way or another" (Klein, 1983, p. 90). Dorothy Smith makes the same point in her essay *A Sociology for Women* (1979). Smith (1999) claims it is possible to create knowledge through an examination of the material world where and when women actually live it:

Different sites, different experiences, provide different perspectives and propose different strategies of exploration; they enhance and expand our capacity to grasp the nature of the beast. This does not mean an endless relativism of perspective, a multiplicity of 'truths,' for we are addressing relations, practices, powers, and forces which are actual, have consequences, need exploration, can be discovered, are there. But we are addressing that complex from the sites and standpoints it has constructed. (p. 44)

So, in this study, I have attempted to hold on to each woman as a whole person, and to be mindful of the way power works in all of our lives through systems of oppression and privilege. This reflexivity has been broadly replicated throughout all aspects of the research process:

reflexivity refers to "… the tendency to reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process" (Fonow & Cook, 1991, p. 2). The researcher herself differs from her research participants, by virtue of the task at hand. She has the power to listen or ignore and to consider or dismiss. Strategies to transform dynamics within the researcher – participant relationship which reproduce inequality in knowledge production have been important to this study. I described the research to my participants as being about what they thought was important to them as mothers, and participants were encouraged to direct my attention to those topics, as well as to qualify or amend their contributions (Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, 2004). The researcher also differs to her participants due to her real, and perceived, position of authority as 'an expert'. Despite the fact that I saw myself as learning from my participants, our interactions occurred in the context where the *idea* of research itself carries assumptions about 'getting things right'. Participants like to give answers that please and monitoring my own responses to women, in order to free them from this obligation to please, was important.

Qualitative research: the semi-structured, in-depth interview.

Feminist research can be either quantitative, qualitative or a mix of both, and methods of data collection and analysis depend primarily on the research question. At its heart, feminist research names, and therefore challenges, male supremacist relations of ruling. The everyday lives of women, their day-to-day experiences, are rich grounds for researchers who set out to identify, describe and challenge inequality. As situated knowers, women's experiences and actions can tell us something about the way that power works to enable or constrain women.

Qualitative research aims to discover the process of meaning-making that people employ to make sense of the world around them. Victor Minichiello, Rosalie Aroni, Eric Timewell and Loris Alexander (1995) suggest that "[i]f meaningful human interaction depends on language, then the words people use and the interpretations they make are of central interest to the researcher" (p. 73). Semi-structured in-depth interviews present a direct method of engaging in the details of women's day-to-day lives and, as here, their mothering experiences. Minichiello et al (1995) argue that in-depth interviews are particularly appropriate for exploratory research which aims to develop theory rather than test theory. Valarie Janesick (1998) describes interviews simply as "a meeting between two persons to exchange information and ideas through questions and responses, resulting in communication and joint construction of meaning about a particular topic" (p. 30). This definition suggests that it could be the task of the interviewer and respondent to reach a joint agreement, but this is not the approach I took. I approached the interviews primarily as a listener and learner. Corrine Glesne (1999) believes

that a non-directive approach is important; the purpose of the interview is to hear what respondents mean and feel, and not to discover whether the interviewer shares those meanings and feelings. This is not to say that the interview process itself, questions asked and responses provided, cannot elicit shared understandings; in any interview the researcher and participant share meanings to be intelligible to each other.

For this research, semi-structured, in-depth interviews presented an opportunity to access women's understandings and stories. The public debate about the 'sexualisation of girls' has been frequently informed by statistical data on media consumption, body image and so on. The interviews conducted in this research enhance our ability to make sense of statistics. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews enable women's narratives, their stories, to be told. It then becomes possible to examine these discursive sites and consider the ways that women are positioned and position themselves. Carol Gilligan's "Listening Guide" sets out ways to listen to narrative so as to focus on different aspects: the plot and the listener's response; the voice of "I" – (statements made in the first person); counterpoint or contrapuntal voice, and finally a summary stage where different ways of listening are brought together (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003). Speaking, listening and layers of meaning-making are thus uniquely available to the qualitative researcher.

The research project

This research project, undertaken in a large regional city in Queensland, was conceived of, and conducted, during an interesting time in Australian social and political history. The project began in 2010, with data collection/analysis during 2010 and 2011. The research topic was informed by the early public debate that flared during 2006 and 2007 about the sexualisation of girls in popular culture. My daughter was in her pre-teen years and, as outlined already, I felt a deep sense of unease about our experiences at this time. In my review of the feminist and academic writing on the topic, I failed to find scholarly work that described or made sense of my experience at a sociological or political level. This study, then, was motivated in part by the silent void in academia that my experiences spoke into; they echoed back to me, amplified but distorted. Around the edges of the void, the literature spoke from siloed disciplines: psychology, medicine, media studies, cultural studies, sociology, art and politics. At the bottom of the void was a bedrock of feminist theory, radical in nature. Above were the critical shifting sands of time and place, calling for interdisciplinary, contextualised, situated and nuanced understandings of the way power works in the everyday lives of women bringing up girls. My research topic emerged as a response to that call.

Coinciding with the simmering debate about the sexualisation of girls was the gender politics on the national stage, across all levels of government, with the swearing in of Australia's first female Prime Minister in mid-2010. Female political leaders, particularly the Prime Minister, have stood both as shining examples of the possibilities for women and girls as well as a terrible warning of what happens to women who claim the wrong kind of public space (Caro, 2013; Crooks, 2012; Summers, 2013).

Ethical considerations.

Shulamit Reinharz (1983) suggests researchers need to provide an ethnographic or ethological description of the conditions in which they gathered and analysed data to ensure transparency and accountability, and to enable others to judge the validity and rigour of their study. This study received Ethics Approval: H3840 from James Cook University (Appendix A). The project was approved on the basis that findings would contribute to theoretical understandings and provide useful empirical input into public policy discussions. The research would also personally benefit women through the opportunity to discuss issues that were highly relevant to them. The project was rated as category 1 (not having the potential to cause participant distress). Formal University Ethics requirements were a useful base from which to put into practice broad principles derived from the Nuremburg Code, and enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as articulated in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans.

In particular, ethics approval was granted for the information sheet (Appendix B) and informed consent forms (Appendix C & D) provided to women who expressed interest in participating. The information sheet advised that the aim of study was to find out what it is like bringing up girls, and indicated that interviews would explore the influences of the media, friends and school in the hope that information gathered would be useful to women helping girls to reach their full potential. The informed consent forms advised that participation was confidential and that participants could withdraw at any point. I used these documents during the recruitment stage and again during the interviews. Doing the 'paperwork' at the commencement of the interviews reminded participants of the purpose of the study and their rights; it also acted as an icebreaker before we settled down to our discussion. Although all participants gave their informed consent and knew, for example, that they had a right not to answer any question, I also knew that the dynamics of the interview process could potentially make it difficult for them to exercise those rights. During interviews, therefore, I tried to probe in ways which left the control with the woman sharing her story; at times, in the ebb and flow of the interview, if I sensed hesitation or reluctance, I would say something to remind women that I was happy to

hear whatever they wished to share – which worked to remind them that they did not have to share everything. This strategy seemed to work well, and women would sometimes choose to revisit parts of their interview in the closing moments, to deepen or clarify ideas they had shared earlier.

Recruitment of participants: a theoretical sample.

In this study, twenty-four women participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews, with eighteen women participating in a second interview twelve months later, a total of forty-two interviews. The study was advertised through flyers (see Appendix E) placed in twenty-two locations, including shopping centres, libraries, police youth clubs, after-school care facilities, dance schools, women's services and women's gyms. The study was also advertised in five primary school newsletters, and was the subject of a small article in the local newspaper. These locations were chosen as likely affording access to women with daughters aged nine to thirteen years and to women from different backgrounds (Mies, 1983).

The flyer included six images of girls, and one image of a girl and her mother, in various poses; smiling, looking upset, on the phone, swimming and so on. The pictures depicted three white girls, and four girls and one woman of colour from Aboriginal, African and Asian heritages. One school requested flyers to insert in their newsletter, rather than a written notice; as in their experience, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women would be more likely to respond to the visual affirmation of their lives that the flyer conveyed. The flyer asked, "Are you a woman bringing up a girl aged between 9 – 13 years?" I did not use the word 'mother' so as not to exclude women who were not the biological mothers of the girls they were bringing up, especially significant in Indigenous and migrant communities where mothering work may be communally shared, without adhering to the strict nuclear family arrangements that are the norm elsewhere (Hill Collins, 1994; Stack & Burton, 1994). This proved an important consideration as one of the Aboriginal woman who participated was not a biological mother but was an Auntie to six children, and another Aboriginal woman who was mothering in an extended family network, including granddaughters in the target age range. A white Australian grandmother also participated in the study. She was the sole custodial caregiver of her granddaughter, and provided care in the absence of any family support. The flyer also attracted the participation of a migrant woman whose daughter was younger than nine years old, but who responded on the basis of the work she did bringing up her nieces in a very close extended family network. One woman, who has pre-teen sons, but who works with girls in the target age range acted as a pilot interview, and data from that interview has been included in the study.

Across the bottom of the flyer were the words "popular culture, self-esteem, friendships, shopping, leadership, family, body image, boys, media, dreams, hopes, technology, aspirations". These words, combined with the images of girls engaged in various activities, indicated to women the study was interested in their broad experiences.

In all, eighteen women made contact after seeing the flyers in public places, and ten of those women went on to participate. Six women made contact after having the flyer passed on to them by others. In these cases the study was recommended by women I knew professionally and personally, which prompted the contact. All these women went on to participate. Two of the women in the study were my friends. A further four women who participated I had met previously through school and work connections.

Once women had made contact, I emailed or posted information about the study and arranged an interview. Interviews did not always go ahead as planned. One woman, who did not eventually participate, made three arrangements; all of which fell through. The woman had three daughters aged between nine and thirteen years who were currently out of her care in the child protection system; she was very keen to talk about her experiences of mothering in these circumstances. The complexity of this woman's life meant, that despite her willingness, other demands precluded her participation. Shulamit Reinharz and Susan Close in *Interviewing Women* (2003), recommend that the researcher be persistent and flexible when arranging interviews to facilitate the participation of marginalised women. Persistence and flexibility were essential in arranging interviews with the four Aboriginal women in my study. To arrange just one of these interviews took more than twenty emails, calls and texts. At all stages, I tried to make it possible for the woman to freely opt out, since I did not want to be *too* persistent. However, the woman continued to express interest in participating, and I continued to be as flexible as possible. The Aboriginal women in my study, (as many Aboriginal women in general) are highly active in their communities and the demands on their time are immense.

Ultimately, the women who participated constituted a fairly diverse sample. Women came from both working and middle-class backgrounds. I employ the terms working-class and middle-class for pragmatic reasons, because, although such classifications are unhelpful if reified, objectified, and viewed as independent realms, the terms do point to differences in access to economic/material, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990). When characteristics such as education, occupation, family background, social networks, income and locality are taken into account, we can make an "analysis of the real effects of class as a set of systemized social relationships with powerful material consequences" (Gillies, 2005, p. 842).

Eighteen of the twenty-four (75%) women were studying, or had studied, at tertiary level. However, only six of those women had enjoyed straightforward pathways into education. The majority of the tertiary qualifications (80%) were in the caring vocations, and were achieved after women had their children. Many women reported social mobility in their lives, welcoming the change from their own impoverished childhoods to more financially secure situations now. Just over a third of the women in my sample said that their financial vulnerability put pressure on their day to day lives. Six of the women (25%) were raising children without men in their lives. Six of the women (25%) were Aboriginal or bringing up Aboriginal children. Two women were bringing up their granddaughters, and three were bringing up girls with significant disabilities. Four women spoke English as a second language. All the women in the sample were heterosexual. I did not formally collect demographic data from the women, but rather collated details from their interviews and, in some cases, have estimated ages from the information they gave. I have described women's employment via the following categories; caring industries: teachers, social workers, nurses and allied health; professional: human resources, management, science; non-traditional industries: mining, building; service industries: administration, retail, food. Women who were born overseas I categorised as 'migrant'. The twenty-four women in this study ranged in age from thirty to seventy years; with an average age of forty-one years, and they were mothering children ranging in age from one to nineteen years, including twenty-nine girls in the target age group of between nine to thirteen years.

Towards the end of the recruitment period, I stopped arranging interviews with women who were white, married, tertiary-educated and heterosexual, since this demographic was well represented in the sample, and theoretical saturation had occurred (Minichiello et al., 1995). At the same time, I let it be known that I would interview as many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who wished to participate, and that I would also continue to interview women who were marginalised through social exclusion in any way, such as by disability, single parenting, sexual orientation, and so on. This theoretical sampling was designed to maximise sample diversity (Hill Collins, 1994; Minichiello et al., 1995; Nakano Glenn, 1994).

One Aboriginal woman who phoned in response to a flyer questioned me at length about the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. She eventually participated on the basis that she felt it was politically necessary to do so. She felt it was her duty to talk with me and ensure Aboriginal voices were heard, a stance that Theresa Petray (2010) describes as a common motivator of Indigenous women's political activism. The woman also promoted the study within her own networks and, although I did receive a further inquiry which I think was highly likely to have been the result of her advocacy, the contact did not proceed to interview: A

woman was evasive when I asked her where she had heard about the study. I realised later that this may not have been an appropriate question to ask an Aboriginal woman because she may have concerns about the confidentiality and privacy of her participation, given the close networking and referral system that operates in the Indigenous community. Early in the call, she said she would like to participate, but she then abruptly ended the call when I asked when she would like to meet. Although I did email her to thank her for contacting me and to supply more information, she did not respond. As a researcher, I relied on the advocacy and referral of Aboriginal women, but I needed to ensure confidentiality; for the woman noted above, participation may have become untenable due to the insensitive nature of asking where she had heard about the study. Ann Phoenix, in *Practising Feminist Research: The intersection of gender and 'race' in the research process* (1994) argues that uncertain or uncomfortable situations such as this need to be explored rather than ignored. Reinharz and Chase (2003) write that, "what feminist researchers share, regardless of their status as insider or outsider in relation to interviewees, is a commitment to reflecting on the complexities of their own and participants' social locations and subjectivities" (p. 84).

Table 4.1 introduces the participants using pseudonyms, and provides a basic breakdown of demographic detail.

Table 4.1 Introducing the participants

Michelle (40) 1 interview	married, white Australian, employed part-time caring industry, tertiary qualified, mothering Aiden (11) & Morrie (7).
Mahira (40) 1 interview	married, migrant Australian, English as second language, employed part-time caring industry, tertiary qualified, mothering Soraya (7), Ibraham (12) and Adi (9)
Sally (30) 2 interviews	single, white Australian, employed full-time caring industry, tertiary qualified, mothering Amber (12) and Tim (9) and Felix (4)
Kim (40) 2 interviews	married, white Australian, employed full-time professional industry, mothering Madeline (12) and Adeina (9)
Aileen (40) 1 interview	married, white Australian, studying caring industry, mothering Nathan (17), Harriet (14), Nicki (10), Charlie (7)
Jules (40) 1 interview	married, Aboriginal Australian, employed full-time caring industry, tertiary qualified, mothering Samual (19), Jarod (15) and Koraya (12)
Donna (40) 1 interview	single, Aboriginal Australian, employed part-time caring industry, studying, Aunt to: Rhianna (14) & others
Fiona (40) 2 interviews	married, white Australian, employed part-time professional industry, tertiary qualified, mothering Elle (10) and Sam (8)
Keryn (40) 2 interviews	married, white Australian, employed part-time service industry, mothering Mia (13), Saskia (8) and Max (3)
Regan (41) 1 interview	married, white Australian, employed full-time non-traditional industry, tertiary qualified, mothering Madeline (13)
Sharon (35) 2 interviews	engaged, white Australian, stay at home mother, mothering Mikaela (9), Charleigh (7), Indiana (7), Jorja (3) and Leelee (1)
Debbie (40) 2 interviews	single, white Australian, employed full-time service industry, mothering Scarlett (17) and Chloe (11)
Joy (70) 2 interviews	single, white Australian, stay at home grandmother, mothering Rebecca (17) and Lani (13)
Martina (39) 2 interviews	single, Aboriginal Australian, employed part-time caring industry, studying, mothering Terrance (17), Angelique (15) and Missy (12)
Sarah (45) 2 interviews	married, white Australian, employed full-time professional industry, mothering Patrick (17), Lucy (16) and Nina (11)
Lillian (45) 2 interviews	single, migrant Australian, English as second language, employed part-time caring industry, tertiary qualified, mothering Matthew (22), Nicola (19) and Amy (12)
Jan (44) 2 interviews	single, white Australian, working part-time caring industry, tertiary qualified, mothering Issac (13), Yolanda (11), Bianca (9) and Helen (7)
Carmen (42) 2 interviews	married, white Australian, working full-time caring industry, tertiary qualified, mothering Andi (10), Mitchell (8), Marcus (5) and Anna (2)
Linda (45) 2 interviews	married, white Australian, working full-time professional industry, tertiary qualified, mothering Chelsea (9)
Monica (50) 2 interviews	married, white Australian, working full-time professional industry, tertiary qualified, mothering Sarah (10) and Poppy (10)
Regina (40) 2 interviews	married, migrant Australian, English as a second language, employed part-time caring industry, tertiary qualified, mothering Davina (17) and Lydia (13)
Tanya (40) 2 interviews	married, white Australian, employed part-time in caring industry, mothering Issy (15), Tamara (13), Martin, (9) and Jeremy (6)
Helena (60) 2 interviews	married, Aboriginal Australian, employed part-time caring industry, grandmother, aunt to children in target age group.
Jennifer (39) 2 interviews	Married, white Australian, English as a second language, employed part-time service industry, mothering Catie (10), Max (8), Liam (7)

The interviews.

In recognising women's busy lives and the generosity their participation represented, I held interviews at times and places that were most convenient to the participants (Reinharz & Chase, 2003), including at women's homes, my home, women's workplaces, cafes and my office at the university. Interviews happened mostly during the day, although two interviews were at night, and two after school hours. I provided sandwiches and coffee, a gesture the women appreciated.

My approach to the interview process was non-directive. I positioned myself as a learner (Glesne, 1999). At the start of each interview I said that I wanted to hear what it was like for women bringing up their girls, and I described how women's accounts were missing from the literature (Brown et al., 1994). This positioning was important; the interview was not a 'test' but rather an exploration. As Silverman (1985) says, interview data "display cultural realities which are neither biased nor accurate but real" (p. 176). However, even when I introduced the study this way, participants sometimes sought reassurance. Through my responses I was able to build rapport and re-assure women there really were no wrong answers. Regan, a highly-educated, well-resourced woman, could perhaps afford to risk being judged in order to seek reassurance:

Ryl: So did you have any questions before we start?

Regan: No, I'll just wait here and see what you are going to ask me. I mean I'm intrigued to know what you are going to ask me.

Ryl: Oh, I'm a bit ditsy now, let me get going, ok, here it is [the question schedule]

Regan: As long as you don't judge me on my answers because if it's about how crap a mother I am [laughing]

Ryl: No, there is no right answer

Regan: No, they don't come with manuals, do they. It would be really handy if they came with little kinds of guide books

Ryl: And I guess, it's just the research is about your experience of being a mother, it's not about

Regan: [interrupts] if you're doing it right or wrong

Women's need for reassurance, both overt and implicit, was unsurprising given that mother-blaming is so prevalent in society. Consistent with an exploratory approach to learning is the recursive model of questioning. Minichiello et el (1995) describe recursive questioning as allowing the researcher to:

> follow a more conversational model, and, by doing this, to treat people and situations as unique … Recursive questioning relies on the process of conversational interaction itself, that is, the relationship between a current remark and the next one … the interviewer needs to decide to what extent prior interaction in an interview session should be allowed to determine what is asked next. (p. 81)

The forty-two interviews varied in the degree to which they were recursive. The very first interview was completely unstructured. The participant just started talking, covering all the areas I had imagined we might discuss, and my planned questions became probes. Other interviews were more structured, in that women expected me to ask clear and direct questions. I developed an ability to judge which style was most likely to encourage a particular woman to talk; to 'make words fly' (Glesne, 1999). I was mindful of my own and the participant's emotional state: "good interviewing, like good romance, engages with precisely the tension between self-confidence and emotional dependence. To ask questions, and to listen to the answers, requires a simultaneous sense of one's own sense of self as an interviewer independent of the interviewee and an openness to, a dependence on, what the interviewee has to say because without this the relationship is impossible. Good interviews … feel like communion" (Ezzy, 2010, p. 164).

I began each interview by stating that, although I had questions prepared, every interview was different and the woman herself could guide it. After a couple of 'settling in' questions, I would return to this point, asking an open-ended question about what the woman considered to be important things to talk about. Her answer to this question then directed both what else we talked about and the order in which I covered other topics. The interview flowed naturally, enabling me "to treat people and situations as unique" (Minichiello et al., 1995, p. 10). I found that women spontaneously raised many of the areas I had planned to explore, which reflects that these areas were highly relevant to the women who chose to participate in the study. For example, an early question in the first interview asked women to tell me about the last birthday party their daughter had been to, this was designed to give insight into the 'everyday-everynight' lives of participants. Women's responses to this question covered a vast array of issues including ideas about leadership, discussions about the appropriateness of clothing, expectations on girls to fit in and so on. Topics that were prevalent in the media at the time of

interviews were also frequently weaved into discussions by women, for example, references to Julia Gillard as Prime Minister, women in frontline military service, the safety of girls, and the portrayal of tween girls in popular culture were raised to illustrate various points. I have included the list of interview questions I prepared at Appendix F and G.

I took care not to interrupt, (not always successfully), and to employ the same words that interviewees used, to the extent that it felt natural to do so (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). I concluded interviews by asking if there was anything that we had discussed which felt 'unfinished', or anything else the woman would like to add. Frequently this led to revisiting an area discussed earlier, or was an opportunity for women, having developed rapport, to bring up sensitive areas. I also asked if there were any other questions that they thought I should ask other interviewees; by this means I was able to extend the scope of the research questions beyond my original parameters.

When women talked about their daughters' lives, they frequently, contrasted their daughters' experiences with their own experiences as young girls. "A person's narrative may reflect where he or she is in the meaning-making process at the time the narrative is produced, or a narrative may actually show a progression to new understanding as the person talks through events and weaves together different interpretations" (Skinner, Bailey, Correa, & Rodigues, 1999, p. 483). Telling stories is a useful way to explore and locate issues of identity, in terms of how women understand themselves. Friga Haug (1987), theorising the role that memories play in how women make sense of their complex lives, has argued stories are "the material out of which we have made ourselves" (p. 48). Memories of specific situations have "rough edges" that show up contradictions, contrasts, ambiguities and inconsistencies (Willig, 2008, p. 135). They are useful tools for the researcher to critically analyse how individuals fit within a society, and can be more useful than autobiographical accounts which tend to be rehearsed, coherent and stereotyped (Willig, 2008). How accurate memories are is not important. Memory is an active process where personal experiences are constantly worked and reworked, and any 'fixing' of a memory is only temporary (Kehily, 1995). To draw on memories to make sense of the present and to inform our understandings of the future is central to the historicising methodology of critical thought.

I began the second interview by noticing that a year had gone past, and wondering what had been happening for the woman and her daughter since we had last met. Women returned to some of the themes of the first interview, having had the opportunity to think about things, but they also raised new issues. Minichiello et al (1995, p. 170) writes that the advantage of

longitudinal research is that it allows for the "recognition and examination of patterns", either change or patterns of continuity over time, "the values informants attach to events, behaviours and attitudes". Glesne (1999) suggests that spending extended periods of time with a few respondents aids in-depth understanding, and the rapport brings thicker, richer and more layered data. As both sets of interviews happened towards the end of the school year, it seemed natural to talk about the year that was, and what was next on the horizon. The second interview also enabled me to offer some analysis of the first round of interviews and seek women's comments (Reinharz, 1992).

At each interview, I asked the women if they would like a copy of the transcript for their own records, and ten women accepted. None of the women who had shared particularly difficult experiences wished to receive a copy, perhaps out of a desire to not revisit those experiences. I invited women to add, delete or clarify anything they liked, as a strategy to empower participants to own their stories (Mishler, 1986). Although a few women expressed concern that their spoken, colloquial language could be read as unprofessional or uneducated, there were no requests for any changes especially after I assured the women that all of the interviews contained such language. A couple of women did add to their accounts, and this initial member-checking contributed to the rigour of the data collection. The transcripts I sent to women were typescripts, without name changes. I ensured confidentiality by changing names and, in some cases, other details – for example, ages or number of children – to avoid identification of particular women. Occasionally, I also interchanged details between women's stories so that I could report the essence of a story without risking a breach of confidentiality.

The relationship I tried to develop with my respondents was primarily one of trust, so that women could tell their "real stories" and not feel compelled to tell "expected stories" (Mies, 1983, p. 123). I aimed to develop rapport and to make it safe for women to participate in the interview. For example, early on in the research process, I had an interview scheduled with an Aboriginal woman. As I pulled up in her street, I remembered that my car sported an old sticker with a map of Australia in Aboriginal colours (red, black and yellow) and the slogan "No room for racism". I hoped the sticker would go some way to reassure the interviewee of where I stood, and that it would begin to answer the questions that Christopher Dunbar, Dalia Rodriguez and Laurence Parker (2003) say people of colour often pose to interviewers:

> Years of misrepresentation and misinterpretation have legitimated scepticism and distrust. The question most asked of interviewers by interviewees of colour is "Who are you?" The second most frequently asked question is "Why should I talk to you?" (p. 143)

Then, when I realised that this same sticker might inhibit another participant, I removed it en-route to her home. My own experience as a white woman, living in a regional Queensland town, is that sadly there is '*room for racism*'. I had considered how I should respond to racist comments and had ultimately decided that, in the context of an interview, it would be disrespectful, inappropriate and ineffective to challenge any racist views that women expressed, since I was interested in understanding how the woman understood her world. I was aware that deviating from my position as 'listening to learn' could result in a version of what Carol Beere describes as 'faking', which is "[t]o give socially desirable responses rather than honest attributes" (cited in Klein, 1983, p. 95). Although women did not make openly racist comments, they sometimes made patronising comments. Women also expressed homophobic views and classist views, for example, disparaging poor women's lack of taste. In these cases, I took care to remain neutral and did not make either affirmative or negative responses.

A final consideration for myself as interviewer was the degree of self-disclosure that I felt was appropriate. Reinharz (1983) states that, to gain trust, it is important for researchers to provide "clear opportunities to be interviewed, scrutinized and questioned by the subjects even after they have agreed to collaborate" (p. 177). In the case of the 'No room for racism' sticker, the kind of self-disclosure this sticker represented seemed differently appropriate in different situations. The same dynamic was apparent in relation to the disclosure of my own status as a mother. In most interviews, I did not identify myself as a mother in the introduction, although I suspect most interviewees would have assumed that I was. When a woman asked me, I answered directly that I was a mum with a daughter in the age group of research interest. Generally, if women were going to ask, they did so at the end of the interview. Sometimes, if women knew, or had asked early, they then asked me about my experiences with my own daughter, in terms of 'Does your daughter do that too?' In those cases, I answered honestly, but in a way that was affirmative of what I sensed was behind the mother's question. Very occasionally, I was asked if or how I managed some parenting task. I tended to offer responses which demonstrated the difficulty of knowing just what to do. More commonly, women wanted to know how other women had answered the same question, indicative, I suggest, of the isolation women often feel in this work. In some cases, I gave a brief outline of the variety of responses and, in a couple of cases, I delayed responding to these queries until the interview had finished. Typical was Carmen's comment:

> I want to know what everyone else talks about with you, what experiences they
> are having with their daughters. (Carmen)

Participant motivations and benefits.

A foremost question in my mind was 'who benefits' from this research. Glesne (1999) suggests that most research is designed for the greater good, but she advocates for research that also benefits participants, which is most likely to be action, feminist and critical research. Women described various motivations for and benefits from their participation in the study. Two of the more privileged women expressed a sense of duty and community service. A stay-at-home mother from a working-class background said that, with four daughters, she felt she was very well qualified to participate, and so, when her daughter excitedly brought home the notice from school and said, "Mum, mum this is you", she agreed and phoned immediately. A number of women said that it was their deep concern about bringing up their daughters that motivated them; they felt that such a study about young girls was important, and they wanted to make sure that their concerns were heard.

I felt indebted to the women who participated. Without their generous sharing, the research simply could not happen. When I conveyed this sentiment to women they responded positively about the benefits they had gained. At the end of Keryn's interview, she compared the experience to being a guest on a popular Australian talk show:

> Ryl: I really appreciate you talking to me and telling me these stories. Thank
>   you very much.
>
> Keryn: You're more than welcome. It's good. I feel like I'm on Andrew Denton.
>   [laughing]

Women felt strongly about being heard. Nelle Morton observed the power of "a depth hearing that takes place before the speaking – a hearing that is far more than acute listening. A hearing engaged in by the whole body that evokes speech – a new speech – a new creation. The woman had been heard to her own speech" (Morton cited in Daly, 1979, p. 412). Reinharz and Chase (2003) write that in societies where girls are treated as pretty objects to be seen and not heard, the interview process can be an extraordinarily powerful experience. "For women there have been thousands of years of silencing. The speech-act itself is a rebellion against stifling social norms which call for women's silence" (Aisenberg 1994, p. 99, cited in Reinharz & Chase, 2003, p. 77). Betty McLellan (2010) in her book, *Unspeakable: A feminist ethic of speech,* outlines the way in which women's speech is continually made second to men's. The experience, then, of being deeply listened to is something special. Michelle was surprised by her own emotions when she began to talk about her child, and after we had finished she observed:

> You'll probably get some amazing information through all of this … It will be
> really enriching … Well, you're bringing out some stuff that I didn't think we'd
> talk up. It's good. (Michelle)

I noticed the many both subtle and explicit ways that women sought reassurance that they were not talking 'too much'. Dale Spender's (1980) comments came to mind: "[t]he talkativeness of women has been gauged in comparison not with men but with silence. Women have not been judged on the grounds of whether they talk more than men, but of whether they talk more than silent women. When silence is the desired state for women … then any talk in which a woman engages can be too much" (p. 42). Fiona described the process as indulgent, and noted that the space to reflect on her own life was not only 'nice', but politically important:

> Fiona: You can come and ask me more – I'll clarify, I'll expand, I'm happy to
> expand, especially if there's another coffee. Oh, this is so, this is so,
> indulgent. I love sitting here and talking about myself.
>
> Ryl: It's a nice thing to do.
>
> Fiona: So, you know, it's not like it's actually a painful thing to have to do, and
> just saying it's 'nice', I mean, even if there's no rights and wrongs
> anyway, but just to say why you're doing things, and realise 'Oh yeah, I
> am consciously doing that', whereas you don't, you haven't, necessarily
> consciously thought about it.

Reinharz and Chase (2003) say that "[r]esearchers who interview women should thus understand the possibly radical impact of the interview on the woman herself. She may discover her thoughts, learn who she is and "find her voice"" (p. 77). Deeply listening to women, without interruptions, can result in women experiencing an 'epiphany'. Aisenberg explains that "the silence of women, whether self-imposed as a strategy of resistance or societally imposed as a tool of subordination, is a classic clinical symptom of depressive illness" (cited in Reinharz & Chase, 2003, p. 102). Keeping in mind that women's participation may benefit them precisely because they lack other opportunities to be heard, it is clear that the interviews in this study did enable some women to come to realisations about themselves. At the start of her second interview, Fiona described how she felt "less concerned and more confident" than she had a year earlier and, whilst worrying that this might 'bias' my research, she put it down to the impact of the first interview:

> I hate to tell you for your scientific survey, but there may actually be some, umm,
> what do you call it? The observation effect, how you change the experiment,

> which has been interesting, how one simple one or two hour interview can
> actually – and talking about things – can help actually allay some of your
> concerns and fears, which is quite interesting. (Fiona)

Fiona's experience of the interview process illustrates the power of the feminist understanding that women's experiences are not isolated, stand-alone events, but that the personal is political and that when women can articulate and share their fears and concerns, even in the space of an interview, this can be an empowering and an intensely political event. Many of the women in this study also felt that they were, through me, connecting with other women. Carmen's comment was typical:

> Thank you, thanks for letting me share my story with you. No one else really
> wants to hear in so much detail. It's good to, like, get it out there and, you know,
> I'm sharing indirectly with a whole lot of other mums the same issues. (Carmen)

Further reflections.

As noted earlier in this chapter, feminist scholars have theorised the intersubjectivity between researcher and respondent. In her early work Shulamit Reinharz (1983) wrote about finding new ways to engage women. She wrote that: "… experiential analysis is to adopt a non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian, non-manipulative, humble relation to the 'subject' … Vaughter describes the relation as one of 'equality, sharing and trust'" (p. 181). Since then, questions about equality and sharing have been extensively addressed in the feminist research literature. Ann Oakley, writing in 1988, reflected that she was rightly taken to task about some of her earlier ideas, published in the oft-quoted "Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms" (1981), where class differences had been minimised and sisterhood had been assumed. Although women interviewing other women was often a break from positivist models of "impersonal data-collector and … subservient data provider" (Oakley, 2000, p. 14), close attention to power differences between researcher and participants was clearly very important.

Two interviews, in this study, illustrated the dynamics of class. The first was when I was interviewing a woman, in her very up-market apartment, who made it clear I was just another item on her 'to do' list for that day. I felt my confidence slipping, the insecurity of a working-class girl who fears no amount of spit and polish, academic success or proper pronunciation will help her 'pass'. I did not manage to silence that girl inside me. However, when I reviewed the transcript, I was relieved to see that she did not speak directly to the participant. On reflection, I realised the interview was not about 'me', but my loss of confidence would, necessarily, have impacted on my ability to 'listen deeply' (Ezzy, 2010). In contrast, an interview that I conducted

in the unpretentious home of a working-class woman was a very different affair. I felt at home. As her partner lay on the floor watching the very loud television, with enormous piles of clothes half-folded around him; I smiled to myself and resisted the urge to tell him off. On a serious note, though, our educational 'distance' was very apparent to me, and I believe that *my* comfort was not necessarily the same as the woman's, who had in front of her 'a researcher from the university'. However, I felt I knew the rules, and, during the interview we shared holding the baby and so on. I remember thinking during the interview 'She is saying nothing new.' It was not until I was transcribing that I realised just how valuable that interview had been. She had stated the obvious, but in a very powerful way, documenting the reality of her day-to-day life.

A third interview illustrated the power dynamics that can come into play when a participant feels that an area of discussion is off-topic. In this case, the woman's eldest daughter was profoundly intellectually and physically disabled, and I was deeply moved as the woman described the pain, suffering and just plain exhaustion her daughter and family live with, but also the joy and love they are proud to celebrate. I had asked questions about her youngest daughter, but I was worried it would seem tactless and inappropriate to ask some of the same questions about her eldest daughter. This came up towards the end of the interview when I was checking if we had left anything unfinished.

> Ryl: I just wanted to check if we started on anything earlier and it was a bit unfinished, or there was something else to say about it? We've covered a bit of ground.

> Tanya: Yeah, it's just interesting how the, umm, even in this interview, it's, it highlights how, umm, the questions about Issy have been less, you know, less. Some of the questions asked have been about Tamara, rather than Issy, whereas Issy is still there as a youth, and as a parent you still feel, you know, "Well what about Issy and boys, and what about Issy and her school, and how she feels, and her social relationships". Yeah, but that's sort of, gets left off the agenda a bit.

We then revisited some earlier questions, and Tanya described her daily work of continually educating people to include people with disability. I acknowledged her work, and asked her to say something more about how she had experienced the interview. She said it would have been more appropriate for me to have asked questions about her eldest daughter because, even if there had been no possible answer, without the question being asked, Issy became invisible: it was this that was painful. I really appreciated Tanya's honesty and felt that, although the interview had not met her needs in terms of acknowledging her eldest daughter, I had created

enough space for her to say so. When, I reflected on what I could have done differently, I realised that asking open-ended questions and making space where the woman could have chosen to discuss her eldest daughter had not been enough. It had been my practice, after every question or area had been exhausted, to say 'thank you' before moving to the next. In this interview, I could have specifically said, 'Thank you for telling me about Issy, this is very important for me to hear', – thereby acknowledging that what I was hearing was different and was special.

The three interview examples above illustrate the complex inter-subjectivity between interviewer and interviewee. Power differentials operated in each context in different ways, and my reflections on the way power had been exercised informed my subsequent analyses of the women's stories. As Maria Mies (1983) has cautioned, research needs to be sensitive to the psychological mechanisms of dominance; this informs the research with a "view from below" and an "ethical political position" which is designed to meet the needs of the oppressed (p. 123).

Making sense of the data: trustworthiness and rigour.

In conducting this research project, I have used various tools and administrative processes. From the first day, I have kept a reflective journal called, 'It's Out'. I simply recorded everything that I did not want to forget – supervision notes, things to check, random ideas, and worries and concerns (Reinharz, 1983). I also kept an EndNote library with research notes and citation details of the literature I had read. I used NVIVO to store, code and retrieve data, and, within NVIVO, I used the memo function to record details about my coding and analysis; I did not use the automatic coding, query or model functions. These systems formed the administrative backbone of my research.

The literature that I reviewed spoke to the stories that women told, so the method I employed with literature was to read, test against my data, reflect, and read again. It was a circular process that brought the literature into a dialogue with itself and with my data; to circle around each other. The data analysis, grounded in women's experiences, sat in conversation with the literature, testing, disagreeing, developing. The method helped me avoid what Reinharz (1983) calls the pitfalls of 'self-fulfilling prophecy' where the literature – consumed, digested and absorbed before data analysis – threatens regurgitation in self-referential ways. Accordingly, the findings chapters of this thesis are consistent with the analysis, that is, the literature has been incorporated throughout the telling of the story (Glesne, 1999).

All interviews were fully transcribed and de-identified. The analysis of the data happened in several stages. Immediately after each interview, I started a memo for each woman, reflecting on the interview, my feelings, and my memory of the material we had talked about. During transcription, I added to the memo, noting new thoughts that occurred during this second immersion, listening to the woman's voice and her intonation, and recalling the moment. I challenged or expanded upon earlier reflections and mourned and documented any missed opportunities to clarify or probe.

In the first reading of the transcript I summarised the key issues, which also became codes. I then re-read each interview, manually creating codes for content, as well as conceptual codes about how ideas has been discussed or framed. I also created memos for each code, and well as for ways the codes might work together, as themes. After I had coded all transcripts in this first run, I re-read all interviews and checked against all codes, to see if data in earlier interviews also fitted into codes that had emerged later. Reinharz (1983) has compared the cognitive process of analysis with data collection: it is "reflective rather than active, solitary rather than interactional" (p. 182). Reinharz (1983) goes so far as to say:

> There are no rules for data analysis except one – that the analysis should draw heavily on the language of the persons studied, i.e. that it is grounded. The language of the researcher, which holds the analysis together, must be evocative and communicative, not jargon. (p. 183)

The language of this researcher was not, at this stage, either evocative or communicative. It was, instead, confused and full of doubt. There were many more questions than answers, all of which I documented in my journal 'It's Out'. Glesne (1999) believes that this process is more useful than suppressing feelings as it allows us to re-examine assumptions.

During the coding stage of the analysis, I kept in mind Klein's 'conscious subjectivity' (Klein, 1983). "Feminist methodology should allow for such intersubjectivity: this will permit the researcher constantly to compare her work with her own experiences as a woman and a scientist" (Klein, 1983, p. 95). Maria Mies (1983) writes that women scholars who have to ignore and repress their own experiences of sexist oppression in order to meet the "so-called 'rational standards' of a highly competitive, male dominated' academic world" are driven into a "schizophrenic situation" (p. 121). Mary Parlee agrees: "One hallmark of the feminist research in any field seems to be the investigator's continual testing of the plausibility of the work against her own experiences (cited in Reinharz, 1983, p. 167). I was guided by the tenets of

radical feminist theory, particularly the question of 'Who benefits?' This question ensured that the exercise of power was central to the study.

As the data analysis proceeded and themes emerged, it was also important to pay attention to what didn't fit. Strauss and Corbin suggest such 'negative cases' "denote not necessarily an error in our thinking but a possible variation. When a negative instance of actions/interactions appears, it becomes very important to trace the line of conditions leading to it" (1990, p. 187). Related to this is the question of women's own stories being internally inconsistent. Minichiello et al (1995) states that "[i]nterview statements should not be treated as accurate or distorted versions of reality" (p. 176). Inconsistencies are not a problem in terms of data content, but they are important in data analysis. Women's statements may, consciously or subconsciously, reflect social expectations of what it is acceptable for mothers to say. Renate Klein (1983) comments on Carol Beere's 'faking' and the need for feminist scholars to take possible 'faking' into account. "It may well be that faking is necessary for the psychological survival of many women because, without faking, reality would seem unbearable" (p. 91). Understanding the need to fake and opening ourselves up to "intuition, emotions and feelings" in ourselves and our subjects, Klein (1983) argues, will allow us to practise a type of scholarship that "encompasses the complexity of reality better than the usual fragmented approach to knowledge" (p. 95). Finally, my analysis took up Dale Spender's (1983) suggestion that scholarly work is 'temporary and inadequate'; that it is the looking for errors and flaws that refines the work. "Mistakes get revealed and become something to seek, to take on, not something to be dreaded and denied" (Spender, 1983, p. 28). Spender proposes that having a vested interest in the limitations of the thesis is important. My analysis has continued throughout the writing process, as I have articulated my ideas, to tell, what Van Maanen (1988) calls, a "critical tale" (p. 128).

Conclusion

This chapter has set out the research methods I used to explore women's experiences of bringing up girls. I have given a detailed ethnographic description of the conditions under which the data was identified, collected and analysed. I had a prolonged engagement with the field, accumulated multiple layers of data analysis, examined contradictions and negative cases, and reflected on my own subjectivity. The process of re-interviewing women meant also that I was able to do member-checking and provide rich, thick descriptions to enable the reader to experience the context; all tools which Glesne explains ensure the validity, rigour and trustworthiness of the work (Glesne, 1999).

I have given a rationale for why listening to women's stories is a political act, and I have described some of the motivations of and benefits for those who participated in the study:

> [F]or centuries women have been challenging men, and men have used punitive measures against them; for centuries women have been claiming that the world and men look very different from the perspective of women. Far from being an unusual claim, it is a common assertion of women of the past and a familiar issue in contemporary feminism that women's meanings and values have been excluded from what have been put forward as society's meanings and values. (Spender, 1982, p. 8)

In conclusion, it is important to consider how much this study can actually tell us and how generalisable the findings are. The aim has not been to provide a definitive finding which could be universalised to all women, in all times, in all places. Instead, the study is a detailed analysis of women's experiences told in their own voices, at a particular point in time, in a particular location. These specific and localised descriptions point to the different ways that women negotiate a social which *can be* described in generalisable terms. The social and cultural world, in which women do their mothering work, has been set out previously in Chapter Three. The current dominance of a pornographic aesthetic, and the hegemony of a neoliberal discourse of choice and agency constitute relations of rulings that are "actual, have consequences, need exploration, can be discovered, are there" (D. Smith, 1999, p. 44). The women's experiences reported next in Chapters Five to Eight speak to the nature of this social and to the ways in which women negotiate the social in their tasks of protecting, nurturing and enabling their children to flourish (Ruddick, 1989).

Chapter Five: The context of women's lives

Introduction

> There are other reasons, besides those which we have now given, that help to explain why women remain behind men, even in the pursuits which are open to both. For one thing, very few women have time for them. This may seem a paradox; it is an undoubted social fact. The time and thoughts of every woman have to satisfy great previous demands on them for things practical. There is, first, the superintendence of the family and the domestic expenditure, which occupies at least one woman in every family … The superintendence of a household, even when not in other respects laborious, is extremely onerous to the thoughts; it requires incessant vigilance, an eye which no detail escapes, and presents questions for consideration and solution, foreseen and unforeseen, at every hour of the day, from which the person responsible for them can hardly ever shake herself free (Mill, 1869, para. 23).

Almost 150 years have passed since John Stuart Mill wrote *The Subjection of Women*, but there has been little change to the circumstances described above. 'Juggling' is a powerful metaphor for what women have always done. Imagine the juggler: standing feet apart, always looking up, only two hands. She must keep throwing her child, her paid work, her housework upwards. One, up, up, up, watching, ready to catch again, whilst she holds the second, briefly, before passing to the other hand, briefly, then up, up, up; one hand catching, one hand throwing, eyes up watching, getting ready to catch, concentrate, concentrate – who is this juggler when she's not doing this?

In this study, when exploring with women their experiences of bringing up their daughters there was an underlying narrative, the bedrock of their stories. It was the narrative of juggling competing demands, demands uniquely experienced by women. The demands of motherhood compete with unspoken expectations that women provide household reproductive labour, and with the demands that women be ideal neoliberal subjects – an impossible subjectivity which their vexed engagement with paid work heightens.

In analysing the juggling act that women in my study described so vividly, I am not aiming to scrutinise individual women but rather explore the ways in which they make sense of complex social phenomena. As noted above, I am attempting to tell what Van Maanen (1988) calls "a critical tale", where "fieldwork studies are often … strategically situated to shed light on larger social, political, symbolic, or economic issues" (p. 127). The central problem for authors of

critical tales, and a problem for political sociology more broadly, is the nexus between structural and interactional traditions (Giddens, 1979; Van Maanen, 1988). Examining the narratives of women enables us to consider how they construct their lives and resist domination, in the context of various socio-economic realities, entrenched gender relations, and differing cultural ontologies of mothering (Ruddick, 1989; D. Smith, 1999). Van Maanen (1988) writes that, unlike other ethnographic work where what is presented appears to "be merely the unintended consequence of interacting people sharing natural problems, so that reality belongs to no one in particular, the authors of critical tales make it clear just who they think owns and operates the tools of reality production" (p. 128).

In this chapter I describe the broad context of the participants' lives as mothers, in order to set the scene for Chapters Six, Seven and Eight where I present the findings in further detail, and analyse the issues foregrounded in women's narratives, namely, the aspirations of girls, the impacts of pornography, and the public life of women.

Employment and relationship demographics

In the previous chapter on methodology, I provided demographic detail pointing to the diverse backgrounds of the twenty-four women who participated in my research, and noted, in particular, that six of the women were Aboriginal or bringing up Aboriginal children, three women were bringing up girls with significant disabilities, four women spoke English as a second language, and all the women identified as heterosexual. In this chapter I provide additional key demographic data which are useful, firstly, as a means of comparison with women in in the wider Australian population and, secondly, as context to the narratives women told about juggling their responsibilities in paid work and caring for children.

The women in this study were aged between 30 and 70 years. The median age was 40 years; and nineteen of the twenty-four women were aged between 39 and 45 years. Most women were therefore aged between 27 and 31 years when they had their daughters (between 1998 and 2002). This accords with the national median age for women giving birth at 29.5 years in 1998 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005). Table 5.1 shows the number of children born to the women in my study, the Australian fertility rate in 2005 was 2.15 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and 1.75 children for all women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005). In my sample, 56.5% of all women had three or more children, which fits with the 1996 Australian rates, where 60% of Indigenous women and 41% of all women had three or more children (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005).

Table 5.1 Participant Family Size

Size of family:	No of women:
No children (participated as aunt)	1
One child	2
Two children	8
Three children	6
Four children	6
Five children	1
Total women	24
Total (biological) children	65
Total girls aged 9 -13 years	27

The demographics of the women in my sample closely reflect those of the wider Australian population in patterns of employment across female dominated occupations, with the caring sectors of health and education heavily represented (see Table 5.2). Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012b) data show that women comprised 78% of workers in the health care and social assistance industry over the period 2011 – 2012; and forty-one percent of the women in my study worked in this area (two social workers, four nurses, four allied health workers). Women comprise 76% of workers employed as clerical and administrative workers in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b); but only 5% of the women in my study worked in this area (three in administration and two in administration-from-home). Female workers are also overrepresented in the education and training industry, compromising 70% of those employed (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b); in this study, 13% of women were employed as teachers.

Table 5.2 Participant Occupation

Occupation	No	Occupation	No
Stay – at – home	2	Management	2
Administration	3	Scientist	2
Administration from home	2	Social Worker	2
Nurse	4	Teacher	3
Allied Health	4		

The women in my study had slightly above average representation in the labour market; 92% of women were in paid work, while the national average for women aged between 35 years and 50 years was closer to 80% in 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012d). In general, women who have children under 15 years have steadily increased their participation in the labour market in Australia – from 50% in 1988 to 56% in 1998 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999a). By 2003, 71% of women were working by the time their youngest child was aged between 12 – 14 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006a).

The work hours of the women in my study were relatively evenly spread across full and part-time work (50% and 42%), reflecting the proportional differences between full-time and part-time work for women aged between 35 – 44 years in the wider Australian population in 2004 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006b). Table 5.3 cross-tabulates work with marital status, and shows that three-quarters of the women in my study were in a married or de-facto relationship, mirroring the national data on women of comparable ages (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009a). Five women were bringing up children on their own, and one woman participated in the study on the basis of her cultural obligations, as an Aboriginal woman, to her sister's six children. Of the five women who were raising children alone, four worked full-time in paid employment. One woman was retirement age, widowed and raising her granddaughter and, although she did not participate in the paid workforce she was heavily involved as a volunteer in community settings. Of the eighteen women who were in relationships, eight worked full-time and nine worked part-time in paid employment; one was a stay-at-home mother. So whilst 100% of women of working-age who were bringing up children alone were engaged full-time in the paid workforce, only 45% of partnered women were. In contrast to national patterns where single mothers participate in the paid workforce at a lower rate than partnered women, although their participation is growing at a faster rate (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

Table 5.3 Distribution across work hour commitments/marital status

Marital Status	Full-Time employment	Part-Time employment	Stay-at-home	Total
Single	4	1 (aunt)	1	6 (25%)
Married/De-facto	8	9	1	18 (75%)
Total	12 (50%)	10 (42%)	2 (8%)	24 (100%)

In Australia in 2009, 40% of women aged between 25 – 64 years had a tertiary qualification (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011), and in 2011 women made up 57% of students enrolled in a bachelors degree (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012c). In my study, eighteen of the twenty-four women (75%) had completed or studied towards a qualification, or were currently studying at a tertiary level, and 80% of all tertiary qualifications were in the caring professions. Six of the women who had studied at a tertiary level enjoyed straightforward pathways into education, that is, 25% of the whole sample. The majority of women had non-linear pathways into higher education, and commenced studying after they had their children.

The demographic data show that the women in my study broadly reflect the Australian population with regards to children, marital relationships and workforce participation. More women in my study entered tertiary education than the national average, although their areas of study reflect broader gender patterns in the caring professions.

"It's kind of a juggle": looking back, looking forward

'Juggling' emerged as the bedrock narrative in all the women's lives. Juggling requires great skill and it is exhausting; and this was reflected in the women's descriptions. Reflecting on the past, Aileen noted that expectations have increased over time:

> Even though women maybe didn't want to stay at home and look after the kids, their roles were very clear cut, so you knew what you had to do. You knew what was expected of you, whereas now I think so much more is expected of women in general. We are expected to have a career, we're expected to excel [in] our career, we're expected to still be fantastic mothers, great wives, great cooks – you know, a lot more is expected of us, and we can't turn the clock back, and we do want these opportunities but I think – yeah, that comes with a lot more stress and anxiety and having to decide what to do, and having to live up to that, to these added expectations and opportunities. Still better than going backwards. (Aileen)

Aileen spells out the price of progress. The burdens of stress and anxiety, of having to decide what to do (Beck, 1992), have replaced the burden of clear-cut certainty our foremothers experienced (Friedan, 1963). Past expectations that women be 'fantastic mothers, great wives, great cooks', roles that are deeply entrenched in a sexual division of labour, have persisted even as welcome career opportunities have opened up, bringing a whole new level of complexity to women's lives.

> One of the things that feminism didn't tell us was how hard we'd have to work.
> Because to stay well dressed, keep fit – I mean, I never read anything – I can
> hardly even read the local paper, which you need the IQ of a wombat to read …
> work hard, have a social life, entertain, have a tidy house – which I've never had,
> it looks like a bomb's hit it all the time – I've just given up on that now. But to
> aspire to all these things of the 1950's housewife, plus the career, plus this and
> you're just one woman … I already get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and go to
> bed at 11 o'clock at night ... There's just no more time. (Linda)

Social change, in part attributed to feminist gains, has brought more work opportunities for women and almost universal expectations that women develop a narrative about, if not actually attain, a career. Having a career announces that the woman has successfully negotiated the public world of work; she has constructed an identity for herself as a paid-up member of the recognised and rewarded citizenship, a status previously reserved for middle-class men but now obligatory for all.

The expectation that women do all they did before as '1950's housewives', plus negotiate successful careers, has been well documented by feminists. For example, in Arlie Hochschild's important work naming the 'second' or 'double shift' as the price women have paid for entry into the formal labour market (Hochschild & Machung, 1989), while earlier feminist research demonstrated that women have long carried the major burden of housework and childcare (Boulton, 1983; Oakley, 1974; Sharpe, 1984). This is clearly the case for many middle-class women, but women from non-dominant backgrounds, working-class and racialised women "were not expected or allowed to be full-time mothers; nor did the circumstance allow them even to harbor the illusion of a protected private haven" (Nakano Glenn, 1994, p.6). Instead, many women have always had to juggle both: "women had to move back and forth constantly between 'public' and 'private' labor, since economic provision for the family was an expected part of mothering. In turn, responsibility for mothering often had to be shared with other family members or other women in the community" (Nakano Glenn, 1994, p. 6). Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1994) believes it is important to shift such women's experiences from the margins to the centre of feminist analysis in order to emphasise the social base of mothering and attend to the varieties of women's experiences. Although all the women in my study spoke of juggling, they also resisted dominant patriarchal views of what it means to be a woman, or mother, in different ways; and these differences are presented in this chapter.

When the women reflected on their foremothers and the work they did, both in domestic labour and – for working-class women – in paid employment, they made comparisons with the past in

order to make sense of today and to speculate about what might happen in the future as well. Carmen, for example, compared her circumstances to those of women in other parts of the world:

> We're meant to have all these labour saving devices. I just go, "Oh my God, I've got a dishwasher, and a washing machine, and a car and, friggin' hell, my time is so tight, all the time". How the hell did women have 13 kids and hand wash clothes, and, you know, do all that? I just look back at those women in the past and am amazed at how they did it, I just think they did it so much harder but … they may have not had all those other distractions that we take as normal. So maybe we all work the same, I don't know. I think we're lucky. I also think women in third world countries that die when they're forty 'cause they are exhausted and have poor health. You know, I think it mustn't be that bad for us, my life must be pretty good currently. (Carmen)

Jennifer saw the juggle women face as historical and ongoing, so she is teaching her daughter to manage stress. Jennifer's mother immigrated to Australia as a young woman, with no English, and she had always undertaken paid work. Children of migrant families commonly participate in paid work, as well as carrying responsibility for work at home (Segura, 1994):

> I think it will always be the same. It's always been the same, hasn't it? The generation before, with my mother, she juggled work and kids and home life, and we all had to help at home to make life easy for everybody, and so that mum didn't feel like she was a slave … And I think to some degree [my daughter does] juggle anyway. Like, she's got music, she's got school work and sport, so she's juggling that, and then she's also juggling stuff at home. So we can't just say, 'Oh well, you know, you've got to concentrate on those things, therefore mum will do everything for you". That doesn't work. It's like, no, you've also got to learn how to fit in the time to do what you got to do here. Sometimes she might cook one meal in a week, she'll definitely do dishes, she'll put out garbage, she'll walk the dogs, feed the dogs, you know … And I mean she does get stressed by it sometimes, 'cause I think, you know, it's a learned behaviour. So we've learned to juggle over the years ourselves, so our job is to teach her how. (Jennifer)

Feeling stressed is common. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' (2009b) *Work, Life and Family Balance* reported in 2007 that in 87% of families, where both parents were employed (either full or part-time), "one or both parents always or often felt rushed or pressed for time" (p. 6). In these families, the causes were differently located: two-thirds of women (67%) cited

balancing work and family as the cause, whereas only half of the men (49%) felt rushed or pressed for this reason. Sole parents, who felt always or often rushed, cited balancing work and family responsibilities as the reason 73% of the time. The same report noted that sole parent families, who are predominantly headed by women, were much less likely to have flexibility in their work conditions (for example, the ability to change start or finish times or work extra hours in exchange for time off) than couple families where one or both parents were able to negotiate these crucial arrangements.

Interestingly, in the 2007 report, men were more likely to have access to formal provisions, such as paid carers leave, than women, "reflecting the fact that fathers were more likely than mothers to be working full-time and less likely to be casuals" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009b, p. 3). Eighty-eight percent of couples where both parents worked (full or part-time) knew they had access to paid carers leave, whereas only 42% of lone parent families knew they had that provision (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009b). Although more men than women had access to carers leave, they were less likely than women to actually provide care; in a typical week, 16% of women and 12% of men changed work arrangements to provide care and, when care was provided, only 45% of men actually took time off work, whereas 58% of women did so (when they did not take time off, they negotiated working from home or starting late or early) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009b, p. 3).

Juggling, which was a bedrock of, or background to, the women's stories invokes notions of dependence, independence and interdependence; relationships which are fundamentally gendered in the way they operate in our material lives. The Australian Bureau of Statistics collects data in the form of time use surveys and the census, and produces reports which detail some of the different ways in which men and women organise their lives. However, juggling, as a primary fact in women's lives is not a distinct priority "area of social concern" for Australia: the broad areas of social concern are: population, family and community, health, education and training, work, economic resources, housing, crime and justice, culture and leisure, and other areas – including environment, religion, and transport and communication (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012e, p. vii). It is largely up to feminist researchers to make sense of the data in light of the cross-over connections women have to negotiate across most areas of concern.

The next section considers women's relationships with men, and men's dependence on women to provide household and caring labour in order that they are free to act as 'independent' subject/citizens. I also consider how women make sense of these circumstances.

Relationships with men

> Some mothers are blessed with very helpful husbands. (Jennifer)

> I have a fairly useless husband. He's probably as useless as the next one. (Linda)

> I say to them, "Don't, don't, don't, end up like this'. (Keryn)

> There is a hell of lot of duty in marriage and quite a bit of boredom. (Fiona)

> I'm always the wicked witch, and he's always the fun guy. (Keryn)

> My husband is very good and cooks dinner every night. (Sarah)

Men in Australia do much less housework than women, no matter what paid work they each do. Even when men and women both work full-time, time use surveys in 1997 showed that men spend an hour less a day preparing food and cleaning up, half an hour less on laundry, and 36 minutes less on general housework (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999b). Additionally, on an average day, only 27% of men did general housework, such as cleaning, dusting and tidying, whilst 72% of women did (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999b).

Men also do much less child care than women, even when men and women both work full-time: on an average day in 1997, women spent just over six hours caring for children, whereas men spent two hours and twenty-four minutes – a statistic that didn't change between 1992 and 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999a, 2012a). Men's participation in caring work for children did not increase as their partner's participation in employment increased (for example, doing more hours, going full-time): "where the father was working full-time, the mother spent progressively less time with their children as her hours of employment increased. However, for fathers in such families, the time spent with their children bore little relationship to the mother's hours of work. In fact, men spent slightly less time with their children, on average, when women worked full-time than when they worked part-time" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999a). Although time use surveys are useful in documenting such differences between men and women, we need to look carefully at men's reported involvement. Mary Boulton's (1983) qualitative research with mothers from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in the United Kingdom questioned the methods of assessment used, and concluded that any increase in men's involvement in domestic matters could mean little more than an increase in their enjoyment and interest in their children. Boulton questioned the validity of research and reports based on the underlying assumption that children were the responsibility of the mother.

In Australia, government reports such as *Unpaid Work: How couples share domestic work* interpret data in ways which do not challenge the fundamental divisions of labour, for example: "… men were more likely than their partners to be employed, or if both were employed, to work longer hours … as a result, women often had more time for domestic work than men" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999b), a reading which prioritises paid over unpaid work and does not envision alternatives. The same data could be read; 'women do much more domestic work than men and as a result have less time available for paid employment.'

In my study, of the eighteen women who were in relationships, only four women volunteered that they were relationships in which their partner shared both in parenting and housework. Six women described relationships in which their partners were involved in parenting their children, but not in housework. Four women described relationships in which their partners had very limited involvement with the children; because they were absorbed in their careers and were largely absent from the home or disinterested; some of these women compared themselves to single mothers. The remaining two women described relationships in which their partners were not involved in housework and were negatively involved in parenting the children, primarily through undermining the mother. One of these relationships involved significant degrees of hostility towards the mother's children from a previous relationship; and the man exerted control over the woman, and the relationship broke up during the course of the research.

All the women who were single had problematic relationships with their ex-partners with respect to parenting, not surprising given that three of the four single women had separated due to violence in their relationships. Two of the women in the study had survived their partner's attempt to murder them.

"No stereotype, sort of, in our family".

Two of the women in my study, Carmen and Sarah, worked full-time in professional careers. Carmen's partner was a full-time, stay-at-home father, whilst Sarah's partner worked flexible hours, mostly from home. The women said that their partners were involved in the day-to-day cooking and cleaning and described their relationship variously as 'non-traditional', 'matriarchal' and 'non-stereotypical':

> I'm kind of the matriarch of the family in that I work, my husband stays home
> and looks after the kids. So there is no stereotype, sort of, in our family. (Carmen)

Carmen's husband is a full-time, stay-at-home father primarily because, after moving from interstate, she was best able to secure full-time professional work. Carmen did not necessarily

see her family arrangements as a matter of choice, more a circumstance she found herself in:

> I found this, and probably a lot of my friends would recognise that – you know, it's about having choice, and umm, not feeling that you have to go to work to prove yourself. You might have to go to work 'cause you have to earn an income … I've got friends who do work, and I've got friends that are career-minded, and I've got friends who see their life is at home, 'cause they've been lucky enough to have husbands who can support them though. I sort of think that, umm, that's actually a privilege nowadays for a lot of people to be able to stay home with their kids ... I don't think that's a bad thing, either way. It's hard staying at home working too. It's just as hard – actually it's sometimes easier to go to work. (Carmen).

As Carmen says, the decision for a woman to go to work is often not a 'choice' but an economic necessity. Financial freedom comes from heterosexual privilege, being "lucky enough to have a husband who can support them". Choice is not "feeling you have to go to work to prove yourself", noting that looking after children at home is not always the easier option. Carmen's observations tally with the political discourse of the conservative Howard liberal government who put in place economic reforms that financially disadvantaged working mothers (Summers, 2003). Former Prime Minister John Howard argued young women had "moved on", and were "more confident"; they didn't need to measure their independence and freedom by participation in the full-time workforce (cited in Akerman & Wright, 2006, para. 8,9). Howard traded on the assumption that equality had already been achieved: "We are in the post-feminist stage of the debate," and "I find that for the under-30s woman the feminist battle has been won" (cited in Haussegger, 2003, para. 10). Instead, we were to celebrate increases in the fertility rate, indicating that women had progressed past a feminist need to demonstrate public realm success: "It's positive; that's good. I think some of our policies have helped somewhat," and "We're not trying to tell people how to organise their lives; we're trying to give them help to facilitate their choices" (Howard cited in Akerman & Wright, 2006, para. 7,12). Although Howard was not the first person to announce the end of the feminist project, his words illustrate how his government framed economic policy, 'facilitating choices', where women's absence from the public realm was progress.

Whilst Carmen's family arrangement could be viewed as non-traditional, they cannot be said to have resulted from free choice. If both she and her partner had had access to equivalent work opportunities they would have theoretically been able to negotiate equivalent opportunities to care for the children and home. But, as the time-use surveys show, even when men and women

are participating equally in paid work, there is not equal engagement in child care and housework. Equality in the home is, in practice, extremely rare and always individually negotiated, often against the grain and on a case-by-case basis.

Sarah, like Carmen, described her partner as being actively involved in parenting and housework, an arrangement that meant he could work mainly from home. She described in some detail how they have always sought, and managed, to 'be there for the kids' and have avoided using day-care or other support. Sarah returned to full-time work when her youngest child was three years old, after having taken twelve years out of the paid workforce to stay at home with her two older children:

> I was fortunate that I was able to do that. I enjoyed my time at home. I had a ball, had a great time. And then coming back to work, it's seven years – when I say seven years, it's, "Wow, 'where did that go?" But then I'm still trying to do absolutely everything at home that I did do when I was stay at home. I take on too much sometimes. My husband is very good and cooks dinner every night. He's got his own business, and he's working from home the majority of the time, so that he's there for the kids …

> I guess our household is a bit different to a lot of households. My husband, he gets home at 10.30 in the morning, 'cause he does early shift ... he picks up the kids from school and he makes dinner. And, you know, it wouldn't be unusual that I'll be out mowing the lawn. You know, there isn't that definition, that traditional jobs for girls, and jobs for boys. Yeah, we share everything across the board, so, yeah, it doesn't appear to be something, an issue. Or, yeah there isn't a line I suppose in our house, as there may be in others, I don't think. (Sarah)

It is clear that Sarah continues to be heavily involved in doing housework; even though she claims that she and her partner "share everything across the board"; which in practice means she is "still trying to do absolutely everything at home that I did do when I was stay-at-home". Women and men 'swapping roles' is increasingly played out in the popular media (Fletcher, 2011; Lupton, 2012). In 2012, Channel Nine broadcast the Australian drama, *House Husbands* which followed the lives of four dads. It was watched by 1.37 million people on its first night (Byrnes, 2012). But if men and women really swapped roles, then men who worked part-time whilst their partners worked full-time would be doing the vast majority of the housework and the childcare (as is the pattern when reversed), and there is no evidence to substantiate this. The women in my study frequently pointed to their competency in manual and outside physical tasks as evidence of women's progress towards equality between the sexes. However, the frequent

references to mowing lawns and changing light bulbs were in sharp contrast to the infrequent references to men's involvement in traditionally female tasks.

"You can't do both and stay sane and survive".

Some women who worked part-time felt strongly that it is impossible to be 'a good mum' and work full-time. It was impossible, at least in their own lives, although they were careful not to be seen as criticising other women's choices. The concern to not criticise others might indicate their awareness of, and desire to distance themselves from, what Barbara Pocock (2003) calls 'the mother wars', the endless debates about what is best for children. These part-time working mothers felt that their children suffered, (or would suffer), if they worked more hours, because of the stress involved, and that they had a responsibility to make the right decision in the best interests of the children. Contemporary patriarchal motherhood requires that only biological mothers can properly care for children, that this care must be provided twenty-four hours a day; that children always come first, and experts always know best, that children need excessive amounts of time, energy and money, and that mothers must be satisfied, composed, completed and fulfilled by mothering (O'Reilly, 2010b). In this section, I draw primarily on the testimony of Fiona and Jennifer as examples of the experiences of stress women are under to be a 'good mother' and to highlight some of the ways women in more privileged heterosexual relationships seek to make sense of their circumstances.

While Jennifer had worked full-time in her allied health career after the births of her three children, she had not been able to sustain it. She expressed an enormous sense of relief that she had been able to 'change everything' and achieve some 'balance' in her life:

> They need your time. You can't, I personally feel, you can't work full-time and
> raise children. You can't. You can't do a good job of it, because they need your
> time, they need you around them and they need you to talk them. And, if you're
> full-time, you don't have any time to talk to them. You're too busy doing the
> mechanics of getting dinner ready, doing homework, and them sending them off
> to bed, and then doing it again the next day ...

> It's hard to raise a family when you're working full-time. It is, and I respect the
> fact that people don't have the choice, and I see these stressed out mothers at
> school. I really feel for them … my heart bleeds for them because they try so
> hard, and I can get their, I just get it, I get their stress levels, I really do … It's
> horrible … I was there, I was that woman. That's why I quit. And I changed
> everything. I decided it was all too hard. I decided my kids were – I was biting

their heads off, I was just vicious, nagging. I probably am a bit naggy – still I'm a lot calmer. You don't get so snappish and I think you, umm, you do handle it better. But when you're stressed – not good, not good for the family … I get tired and I know my limits. And I know some super-duper women out there that can do more, 'cause they don't get so tired. I get tired and I start to fall apart. I'll start to get really cranky, and I get sick – and I can't get sick, you know what I mean? So I know my limit … 'cause I've had to do it all on my own. My parents are in Darwin, and so are my husband's, so it's very difficult with no family, very difficult. (Jennifer)

Jennifer's narrative vividly paints the picture of a woman who was unable to cope with all that was expected of her. An inflexible 9 to 5 job position, the lack of support from her partner, or other family, meant that doing a 'good job' of mothering, over and above the daily mechanics of getting them all through their day, was out of the question. Jennifer's stress was related to not having time to be 'a good mother'. The mythical creature whom Australian women have described as: "loving and caring … [with] 'never-ending' supplies of patience ... calm and relaxed at all times … a good listener and communicator … understanding and sensitive to children's needs … she must be responsible, consistent, fair … never lose her temper – and it would help if she was energetic, creative and had a sense of humour" (Brown et al., 1994, p. 141) . This is not only ideal but the standard against which individual mothers are judged. If failing to be a 'good mother' is stressful for both woman and the children, feeling stressed is to fail. Jennifer now takes on casual work in her area of expertise, as well as the administrative work for her husband's business from home. In fact, although she considers herself part-time, she is actually working full-time, but just not in standard business hours.

I work all the time. I work at night when they are asleep. It's not that I'm actually physically going to a job that's 9 to 5 – thank God for that – because I think that's what makes it hard ... I mean, some mothers are blessed with very helpful husbands, and I'm not saying that my husband isn't helpful, but he's not here, so he's constantly – he works 10 to 12 hour days. So that's the difficulty. So it all falls back on the mum, so the mum's got to do it all. So if the kid's sick, you're it. So you can't get sick, so you think twice about the types of sports you do … You can't be irresponsible … You have to always be there for them because your hubby's always working. And I would think, also, those mothers that have husbands that are at the mines, or army or whatever, that go away a lot, I reckon they would find it difficult bringing up kids too. A lot of the time you feel that you're like a single mum ... it's all very dependent on family dynamics, as well as

> your work, 'cause I reckon if you can get that balance it's not going to be too
> hard. (Jennifer)

Jennifer believes that the availability of family support and the degree to which work is flexible are key factors in making it easier to 'get that balance'. The fact that all the women spoke of the difficulty of 'juggling' points to the enduring difficulty of securing family support; it was often easier to negotiate changes to work conditions. Working part-time was frequently seen as the better solution whereby women could convincingly perform 'the good mother' role, rather than any fundamental challenge to the gendered division of labour in the home.

Fiona, in part-time work as a scientist, also said that family support is important, although she herself receives no such support from her family or partner. Fiona questioned whether, in fact, such support would anyway lead to an entirely satisfactory solution:

> I think family support is important. I don't know if there is a satisfactory answer
> entirely 'cause I don't think that you can do both. I don't think you can be at your
> best in your workplace and at your best for your kids. I don't think you can do
> both ... I think you do, as a person, if you choose your workplace over your
> children, there are some opportunities and experiences that you do miss out on. I
> mean, that may not be bad for society, or yourself, or your child, but you've made
> a choice and life is different. You can't actually immerse yourself in both, I
> believe. Yeah, so I don't know – I think for everyone it's still gonna be that
> decision you have to make yourself.

> When my sister and brother-in-law broke up, it really made me think quite hard
> about the role of women and motherhood, and where girls – well, women – sit in
> society. And I'm probably really quite old fashioned in many ways that somehow
> I think that maybe women won't always be able to be the CEO and the Prime
> Minster, even though we've got a female Prime Minister at the moment and
> everything, because there is some – I think, biologically women are the nurturers,
> and I think you can't do both and stay sane and survive, like be a CEO and a
> good mum. (Fiona)

Ann Oakley (1980) has written that having children means women look differently at their identity and that "in becoming a mother a woman takes her place among all women, conscious in a new way of the divisions between men and women, more sharply aware both of the ties of human kinship and the special solidarity of sisterhood. Motherhood is a handicap but also a strength; a trial and an error; an achievement and a prize" (p. 308). Fiona draws on her training

in the biological sciences to make sense of where women 'sit in society'. Although she felt that women's nurturing was biologically rooted, she did not rule out that women were also biologically capable of leadership or a public life; indeed, her own professional success prior to having children was proof of that. For Fiona, women are faced with a choice between putting work first and putting children first: it is a workload issue where 'staying sane and surviving' means being individually responsible for making the right choice in the best interests of the child.

Some of the women in the study had managed successful full-time careers whilst also mothering, and attributed their capacity to do this, and to still meet the needs of their children to an acceptably high standard, to their supportive partners. However, women who faced violence had to, by necessity, prioritise their own and their children's survival, and working part-time became the only feasible option. Martina had enjoyed support from her ex-partner before his behaviour became violent; at the time of the interviews, he was serving prison time for his extreme violence against her, to which the children had been exposed:

> So from that, I guess, my life as a single mum has been coming through the trauma, learning that survival is more important than anything, so it actually gave me a different perspective about my work and that, because up until then I'd been very career-minded, and I could be because I had what I thought was a supportive partner and that sort of thing. But that was the point where I had to make some decision about, actually, my kids are the most important thing, and so change my direction a little bit. I went off, I had some very good people around me, I went off and did some study which allowed me some more time to be at home with the kids…

> And they say the further you get away from the incident, the more healing you have. Well, that's fine, except that the further I get away from the incident, the closer I get to his release – and what does that mean for me and my family and my safety? You know, so that's kind of what the [future] brings. (Martina)

For Martina, to work through trauma for herself and her children, she had to work part-time for a period before once again returning to full participation in public life, both through paid work and extensive community engagement, as a single mother. Her concerns about the future, however, meant that the violence experienced was ongoing. 'Staying sane and surviving' in all these women's narratives meant that they had no choice about continuing full-time work in their careers.

"An attitudinal thing": the compulsory nature of finding balance.

The women who worked part-time frequently expressed feelings of deep appreciation that they were financially able to choose flexible and part-time work. They were, however, not free to choose full-time work – frequently, their responsibilities at home precluded that choice. Fiona and Jennifer had to put professional careers on hold, potentially for twenty years, and they struggled with the consequent loss of social recognition. Fiona spoke in-depth about the joys and pleasures of mothering, and described how she felt the experience had 'rounded her' at a personal level. These positives, however, were won at a high cost:

> The role is still not, you know – I constantly struggle. If you go to work, you get paid. Just getting paid, just being there and getting paid is reinforcement that you're a valued member of society, whereas despite the fact that I know in my heart that being a mum is a really, really, really important thing, you just somehow don't get the feedback. And there's that constant conflict that I do – you know, for my self-esteem – want to go out and work and get paid and be part of something. Umm, and it's taken me, you know, the full ten years to come to terms with that. But, so, you know, it's still not an easy road, I've still got to keep telling myself that, you know, what I'm doing is valuable. But, yeah it's certainly, it's better and, you know, I think intellectually – I certainly understand that staying home and being a home mum and looking after kids is a really good thing to do, but sometimes you just want that, those rewards of being out there and being important and that sort of thing, yeah. (Fiona)

It is a struggle to find fulfilment and recognition in mothering work, because it is difficult to reconcile being "at your best at your workplace" and "at your best for your kids". Adopting the right attitude, knowing intellectually that mothering is really important, helps but doesn't resolve the tension. Fiona continues:

> I think the hardest thing for me is – I still beat myself up over it you know – I topped my class and all the rest of it, and here I am working eight hours a week doing casual and, you know – "Have I let myself down? Have I let society down or whatever?" And I tell myself, "Well, no I haven't". As I said, educate a woman you've educated a generation, and I've got a little less anxious over that … Even though I'm not using my full education I think using it to train my children, to raise my children, use it to help out at school, use it to do various other things. I think still having that education is good for society in maybe a smaller sphere of influence … I suppose I'm a bit further away from when I was

> working so I've come to terms with it a little bit … So it's more an attitudinal
> thing and an acceptance thing than actually things really changing. (Fiona)

Fiona had worked hard to reconcile her mixed feelings by developing an accepting attitude rather than 'things really changing', which would involve a fundamental challenge to the gendered division of labour. Feminists have critiqued the ideal neoliberal citizen who is able to author their own biographies, is free to take opportunities and controls what happens to them (Beck, 1992), because it does not fully account for the experiences of women (Baker, 2010; Hawthorne, 2002). Women, within the discourse of patriarchal motherhood, are themselves not actual ideal neoliberal citizens, but rather are positioned instrumentally to raise and mother such citizens. This puts women in a double-bind, to raise children to be ideal neoliberal citizens; that is, the authors of their own lives, apparently free to take up all opportunities, in control, requires significant sacrifices from those who raise them:

> I've got two children and I've sort of juggled work and taking leave and that sort
> of thing. You know, you struggle to get that balance and everyone's happy. I
> struggle with that. I think, "Oh, I just want to be a full-time mum, doing it
> properly", and then I think, "Oh no, maybe that would be boring" … I think when
> you're raising children you're trying to meet everyone's needs, not just your own,
> so you can make, it's easy to make decisions as an individual moves forward but
> when you've got to bring your whole family forward, for me that's a very slow
> process, and that's very frustrating for me. But I can understand the bigger
> picture, but I get frustrated and feel like I'm stagnating. I feel bored, I don't
> know, I just feel that we're ambling along and there's no direction, but there's
> direction for the children, but not for me. (Michelle)

Michelle understands "the bigger picture" and she sees herself doing important work in raising her children. Throughout her interviews she consistently spoke of the value of nurturing and of compassionate human relationships. She worked hard to provide a nurturing environment for her children, but felt desperately un-nurtured herself socially, feeling her values were unsupported and her labour was exploited:

> And maybe, you know, society wants us to move faster, and there's just that
> conflict. So I feel like I don't fit in, 'cause I wanna move slowly, but I feel like
> everyone around me is wanting to go at different odds – or that, like, if I was
> living in a different community that reflected my values, I would feel more
> content … I don't have that. I feel I don't have my niche where I can move at a
> comfortable pace but have that bigger community group that is with me. You

> know, I feel like I'm on my own, achieving what I believe in, and I have to really focus to stay there and so it's difficult because I feel isolated. (Michelle)

In contrast to Fiona and Michelle, Sharon has had limited educational opportunities, but has also known the same struggle to maintain a sense of self when bringing up her four daughters and one step-daughter:

> When our grandparents were parents to our parents, it was ok for the mother to stay home and, you know, even though the dad did struggle to get money and everything. But everything was just – and some families have to have both parents working now … I couldn't afford to send my kids to daycare and go and work, cause I'd be working for the daycare. What's the point? So I just stay home and I get looked down upon because I'm not doing something. I'm sitting on my bum at home, that's how people see it, that I'm sitting on my bum at home and just having cups of teas and coffees, and watching TV – that's how I get treated as a mother. (Sharon)

Sharon's decision to be a full-time, stay-at-home mother is dictated by her lack of ability to earn sufficient income to cover childcare costs, or to match the income her partner currently provides. Sharon said she feels looked down on, and in other parts of the interview she talked about how she endeavours to prove she is a good mother by not smoking or drinking, in effect, trying to negotiate classist stereotypes about lazy women who have too many children to too many fathers. Val Gillies' (2005, 2007) research has looked at how working-class mothers have been increasingly scrutinised, as class has been socially reconstructed from a structural category to a form of subjectivity, largely due to the ascendency of 'reflexive modernity' theories. In my research, all women were excluded from the very subjectivity they are expected to raise their children into, but this exclusion is expressed in class-specific ways. So whilst middle-class women, like Fiona, demonstrate their credentials as 'good mothers' by staying home to nurture their appropriately individualised children, working-class mothers are pathologised as lazy when they stay home with their children.

Although Fiona, Michelle and Sharon came from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds, and had their own particular experiences of exclusion from the public world of work, all three women struggled to maintain their belief in the value of mothering. They have tried hard to find and keep the 'right attitude', despite being considered 'failures' in a neoliberal society where individuals are believed to be free to choose their own success within an assumed meritocracy.

"Not everyone can be at the top".

The ideal neoliberal subject is independent, mobile, and makes choices which serve the best interests of the self. In contrast, the women in this study called on notions of the 'good of society', 'selflessness' and 'sacrifice' – all concepts that are incompatible with neoliberalism. They understand caring work as a sacrifice that women, in particular, made for the overall good of society. Fiona described the decision-making process that women use in relation to caring work and careers as a qualified 'choice', because "not everyone can be at the top"; she testifies to the incompatibility of neoliberal subjectivity and relationships of interdependence:

> So I think, umm, yeah, I think now we've moved into this equality for women, but I think we need to also be very supportive of those who choose not pursue to the top of their field, for whatever reason. 'Cause I don't think everyone can be at the top, and I think society works better for having, you know – I don't think it can be all about yourself, and so sometimes women, particularly, end up making sacrifices to raise a family or be carers or whatever.

> I think politically that needs to be recognised and appreciated, and socially that needs to be recognised and appreciated, and [there should be] the opportunities to get back in the workforce and whatever when the child rearing time is past.
> (Fiona)

Fiona worked hard in her own life to resolve some of the tensions she felt about being primarily responsible for child rearing, and the consequent neglect of her professional skills and career. She worked hard to value her own education in terms of contributing broadly to the good of society from the smaller sphere of influence in her family. She also believed it is important for society to support 'those who choose' not to pursue careers. The neoliberal language of choice frames individual women's decisions as choices, rather than sacrifice as an obligation because "not everyone can be at the top". The tension between sacrifice and wider or personal opportunities was evident in Fiona's discussion of whether it was fair that her son attend an expensive private high school and her daughter a free public high school. In what follows here, we see Fiona questioning her own motivation and decision making:

> Fiona: I'm really at a quandary ... I'm trying to decide, is it just the different personalities, or is it because she's a female and he's a male, and can I justify that to myself?, Which is really interesting, and am I actually expecting less from her because she's a female, because [of] my perhaps, perhaps slightly old fashioned views of where females are going to end

> up in society in the future. Haven't solved that one yet. You'll have to
> interview me next year 'cause I will have to have made the decision then.

Ryl: So you're questioning, thinking for yourself, questioning yourself what's
        your motivation around that, the decision-making?

Fiona: Yeah, and whether I have actually, inadvertently or on purpose, have the
        expectation that Elle will perhaps achieve less highly in her adult life.

That 'society works better' when women make 'sacrifices' and that it can't be 'all about yourself' also has currency in Jennifer's account:

> I think you've given up part of yourself, too, in raising your kids because, you
> know, I love my career … I'd love to do research, I'd love to work there more,
> but I'm not going to because that would be stupid, really, 'cause that would mean
> I'd never see my kids, and they'd have a grumpy mother 'cause – you know,
> when are these jobs going to get done? It's not worth it. So I figure, ok, I'm not
> going to die tomorrow, so I reckon I could do it once they are at uni, and I'll be a
> lot older, but so be it. If that's what it takes, I'll wait til then. But for the moment,
> there's no point trying … so you're having to give up a fair bit of yourself, so you
> can't be too selfish, I think (sigh). It's hard … You have to be selfless to some
> degree – I mean, we are selfish in some ways too, but you have to be, 'cause just
> for the benefit of the whole family, keeping the unit together … 'cause if you're
> too selfish it doesn't work, it doesn't work, I think. Anyway, it's another career
> choice. I think by choosing to have children you're choosing to have another
> career as well. So we have several careers, you know, we've got our professional
> career, we've got our family careers, so there's a career. (Jennifer)

> I just feel like parenting isn't valued. It really isn't valued. Going to work and
> having a career is just so much higher on the agenda than parenting. (Michelle)

In the above testimony, Jennifer seeks to value mothering as a 'career', a common strategy many women in this study employed to advocate for its increased status. Michelle describes the isolation she feels because everyone is so busy working and there is no time to link up regularly with other mothers now that the children are older. She draws on the rhetoric in the business world about networking and continuous improvement to professionalise mothering as a career:

> You don't get to those deeper conversation which I really enjoyed when the kids
> were little. We had playgroup, and it was just such a beautiful time. I really miss

that, 'cause we don't do that anymore and you just learn so much. And you need it when your kids are getting older, you need it through the whole process, and that's something that's really lacking. You know, I would like to start a mother's group at school but, because everyone has different work schedules, it just never works. And maybe Fridays should be, mothers just don't work on Fridays, Australia wide, wouldn't that be great? ... That's their day to meet other mothers, catch up on stuff. It's liberating in a different way. I think we need to liberate women to feel good about being a mother, you know – like, it's ok to be a mum and that it is like a career, that you've gotta do it well, and to keep tapping in and networking with other mothers. (Michelle)

There are several issues at play for women who assign value to mothering by framing it as a 'career'. Women are seeking status for activity which they value deeply, and they are also seeking community support for that activity. Mothers of babies and younger children have more opportunity to develop communities of support through playgroups, but, as children get older, these functional communities are harder to maintain, and women become isolated from each other. Viewing motherhood as a career, or as work, and children as the product of such labour, is a relatively new strategy.

The old definitions saw motherhood as a status. Women were mothers. Mothering was not something women *did*, it was something women *were ...* Motherhood was in fact a master status, and everything women did was seen in terms of our motherhood, or our potential for motherhood. Motherhood and its demands, babies and children and their demands defined women. We had to be what they needed. (Katz Rothman, 1989, p. 23)

Defining women only in relation to others has been hugely problematic for women, and has been a major focus of feminist attention. It is, however, a practice which particularly becomes problematic when the values of autonomy and independence are hyper-visible and hyper-valued, as they are in neoliberal societies.

The difficulty in reconciling the image of people as "atomised parts" with our very real desire for community, for interconnectedness between people, remains one of the ongoing problems for liberal society … As individuals, separation and compartmentalization form a central theme in the lives we lead. We 'change hats', 'shift gears' as we moved from one mechanical social order to another…And against this, we have motherhood, the physical embodiments of connectedness. We have in every pregnant woman the living proof that individuals do not enter the world as autonomous, atomistic, isolated beings, but begin socially, being connected … Motherhood is the

embodied challenge to liberal philosophy, and that, I fear, is why a society founded on
and committed to liberal philosophical principles cannot deal well with motherhood.
(Katz Rothman, 1989, p. 60)

Barbara Katz Rothman (1989) warns against reducing "the intimate, joyous, terrifying, life-
affirming experience that is motherhood" to 'work', and, in line with Sara Ruddick, argues
instead for a recreated motherhood where values of nurturing, caring and interdependences are
shared broadly by all in society (p. 23). The women in my study deeply desired that their
relationships of dependence with their children be valued, but there is an uneasy fit between
valuing such relationships and the subjectivity required of ideal neoliberal citizens.

To summarise so far, the women in my study described varied relationships with men. I found
that women in relationships in which men were actively involved in housework and parenting
were seen as non-stereotypical. In the majority of relationships, not only did the women
complete the lion's share of the housework, they also provided most of the caring work.
Although the family as an organising unit is said to have moved away from traditions of
obligation towards spaces of negotiation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992), this
was not evident in the lives of women in my study. Instead, there appeared to be an increased
obligation on women to choose that which is actually obliged, in ways in which overstated
progress overstated and obscured the difficult nature of the choices women have to make
(Baker, 2010). Neoliberalism has been critiqued by feminists for failing to account for women's
domestic labour (Hyman, 1994; Waring, 1998). Dorothy Smith has written that feminism
highlights the contours and boundaries of the political economy by illuminating absence and
gaps – domestic labour, biological reproduction and sexuality, women's roles in trade unions
and so on. The discourse of political economy operates within capitalist, patriarchal relations of
ruling, and "the topics of feminism inscribe the contours of the 'main business' by marking
what is excluded" (D. Smith, 1999, p. 37).

Ontologies of mothering

I know in my heart that being a mum is a really, really important thing. (Fiona)

I've had to do it all on my own. (Jennifer)

It takes a village to raise a child. (Sally)

In our culture, having babies is like knowledge. (Helena)

While the women in my study held a variety of views about mothering, they all told their stories within the social context of patriarchal, neoliberal notions of what it means to be a good mother. Stories of 'sacrifice', and seeking recognition for the value of mothering, were particularly evident in the narratives of those women who are in relationships where they do most of the parenting, all of the housework and work part-time. Often too, these women were living some distance from other family support.

Less common in this study were beliefs informed by the values of communal mothering. Such beliefs run counter to patriarchal notions of 'the good mother', and tell of relationships of interdependence. A migrant Islamic woman and all the Aboriginal women in my study told stories of communal mothering, as did a single mother whose feminist analysis helped her make sense of the violent relationship she had left, and also informed her nurturing relationships with a strong network of family and friends.

"That child belongs to everybody": stories of resistance.

I interviewed four Aboriginal women in my study. Two women, Martina and Donna, were mothering their own biological children. The other two women participated in the study on the basis of their cultural responsibility as Aboriginal women to mother the children in their family and community: Helena, an elder, grandmother, mother, sister and aunt and Jules, a daughter, sister and aunt. For Aboriginal women, motherhood is affirmed by their community as a valued status and sign of maturity. The work of mothering is shared broadly, although experienced differently by different women, depending on their circumstances. The working out of communal and individual responsibilities, as described by the Aboriginal women in my study, has been called 'kin-work' (Stack & Burton, 1994). "Kin-time represents the temporal scripts of families. It is the shared understanding among family norms concerning the timing of transitions such as marriage, childbearing, and grandparenthood. It includes temporal guides for the assumption to family leadership roles and caregiving responsibilities" (Stack & Burton, 1994, p. 36). Helena teaches the cultural value of motherhood to girls as part of the kin-work she is responsible for at this time in her life:

> On a cultural aspect, we need our girls because in our family, in our culture,
> having babies is like knowledge. Interesting enough, initiations, if a woman, a
> girl has a baby they've basically been initiated. (Helena)

And culturally, mothering work is shared, with older women having the most authority in decision making about children.

The mothers of these girls work and so they spend a lot of time with me. I'm very involved with the children, so therefore I'm involved with their upbringing and this is a cultural thing … the grandmother plays a very important role in the raising of the children, even in my sister's, who've got grandchildren, umm, we may have discussions of how things should happen for these girls and, at the end of the day, it will come back to me as big mum, big grandma. So there are grandchildren and daughters, not my daughter, but grandchildren out there that I'm very heavily involved in their upbringing … I'm there for them … that's why I said to you earlier, children are my passion. (Helena)

Donna was involved in the lives of her nieces and nephews, and describes mothering protocols in this way:

It's a group responsibility, I think. You have a child, yeah, you had the child physically, but that child belongs to everybody else sort of thing, you know what I mean? So everyone has equal say, if you like, depending on your status and the hierarchy of the family. If you're obviously of a mature age, then you have more say … and then it divvies out underneath, but I think it is a responsibility of the whole family group and also for those who are more closer to that child than the others, I think … so you have a little bit more say, so if you're fortunate enough to have grandparents still alive, well, what they say goes and everyone else, even the parents, gotta fall in line behind that. (Donna)

All the Aboriginal women in my study talked about their responsibilities and relationships in their community. Donna discussed the qualities she saw in her niece Emily who was fourteen and compassionately provided support to her friends:

Donna: They tend to look for that in her sometimes, not all the time, but when they need chastising …when they've done something silly she'll tend to come in as the big sister, big mumma, over them, and say to them. "Look, you know" … she'll in a gentle way, she'll say, "Look, you know that was silly what you did, hey, so what would have happened if this had happened?" You know. So she tends to do that. And I like that quality in her.

Ryl: She's the big sister too.

Donna: She is the eldest of the whole six, and she's actually, well, Murri way is the eldest child takes over mothering duties, you know – once they get a

certain age, they're able to. Which is what she's done already. She's like
a mother to her baby sister who's five months old. And the baby sister
looks for her too.

Helena and Donna's accounts of 'other-mothering' point to the communal responsibilities and support structures that are in place for bringing up Aboriginal children. Children may have many mothers. "Other mothering denotes the continuity and contemporary practices of shared, communal, or assumed mothering responsibilities that are empowering and inclusive of social transformation" (Reyes, 2012, para. 1). "'Motherwork' goes beyond ensuing the survival of one's own biological children or those of one's family. This type of motherwork recognises that individual survival, empowerment, and identity require group survival, empowerment, and identity" (Hill Collins, 1994, p. 47).

When Patricia Hill Collins (1994) uses the term 'motherwork', she draws on her experiences as an African American feminist to:

> soften the existing dichotomies in feminist theorizing about motherhood that posit rigid distinctions between private and public, family and work, the individual and the collective, identity as individual autonomy and identity growing from the collective self-determination of one's group. Racial ethnic women's mothering and work experiences occur at the boundaries demarking these dualities. (p. 48)

For many women, their labour in supporting their family is not seen as benefitting men in particular but rather the whole family (Nakano Glenn, 1985); "[t]he locus of conflict lies outside the household, as women and their families engage in collective efforts to create and maintain family life in the face of forces that undermine family integrity" (Hill Collins, 1994, p. 47). As noted above, the juggle to meet competing demands between motherhood and neoliberal subjectivity is bought into focus by women's vexed engagement with paid work. But although this site brings this tension into focus, it can also obscure the underlying dichotomies of private and public, family and work, the collective and individual, and so on. Centring Aboriginal women's experiences, as Hill Collins suggests, softens these theoretical dichotomies and feminists can critically examine the way such dichotomies structure the very language women use to understand their own circumstances.

This is not to romanticise or homogenise Aboriginal women's experiences of mothering as though there were some utopia where the traps of neoliberal patriarchal society don't exist. Rather, Aboriginal practises of communal mothering are necessary for survival, in the face of

racism, sexism and other disadvantages disproportionately experienced by women. Mothering occurs in the context of speaking and naming oppression:

> Some of this work that I do, advocating for women's rights and all of that sort of stuff – umm, you know, I [spoke at an international forum], and we were talking about the statistics of Aboriginal women – you know 33% times more likely to end up in hospital because of injuries sustained through violence, and I kind of go, "That's not a statistic over there, I'm the statistics". So you can't separate yourself from those things either. (Martina)

Family support is not always reliable, and for Martina, an Aboriginal woman and a single parent, practical support from others in her community who were often facing their own difficult circumstances, was often absent or unreliable. It was frustrating:

> I have called in favours and every single time something has happened that's really let me down … Overall, I'm proud of the fact that I've raised these kids, I've got them through … but, yeah, there are certainly challenges and the frustration of not having another parent or someone else that can step in and take the load. (Martina)

Hill Collins details the way in which motherwork is fashioned and experienced by racialised women through themes of survival, power and identity. She describes how "mothers make varying choices in negotiating the complicated relationships of preparing children to fit into, yet resist, systems of racial domination" (Hill Collins, 1994, p. 58). Hill Collins cites historian Elsa Barkley Brown's account of her own mother who demonstrated the "need to teach me to live my life one way and, at the same time, to provide me all the tools I would need to live it quite differently" (cited in Hill Collins, 1994, p. 59).

Narratives of resistance to patriarchal motherhood and the oppression experienced by Aboriginal women were shared by other women, such as Sally, who worked professionally in a feminist organisation dedicated to anti-oppression work. Sally describes her own experiences of communal mothering:

> I'm a single mother. If I was doing it completely on my own I would be swamped. I don't know how other women do it. I have a network of other women that I tap into. They could be family, they could be friends, you know. I'm friends with a woman I went to high school with, and our kids are friends, and I'm their godmother, I'm one of the kid's godmother, and they are like family. And I've

> got good women who I work with, who I socialise with, who also support me in my parenting. You know that saying it takes a whole village to raise a child, and I couldn't do it without them. (Sally)

Patriarchal motherhood requires individual women to be solely responsible for their children. Sharing mothering empowers women to act in the lives all children, not just their own biological children, and supports women to collectively meet their own and their children's needs. The communal ethos, far from being celebrated in wider society, is instead routinely denigrated, and Aboriginal mothers and single mothers are frequently seen as failing to independently manage.

"When it comes down to it, you're on your own with a child": opting out.

For non-Indigenous women, discussions about motherhood also included narratives about opting-out. The Aboriginal family arrangements described by Helena and Donna allow women to be mothers without having to carry the entire, (or, sometimes, any) responsibility for the caring work of their children. Mainstream, nuclear family arrangements, by contrast, leave women, like Kim, on their own. In a slow and halting way, Kim searched for just the right words to express her thoughts:

> I suppose – the evolution of your own awareness of parenting is an interesting thing in itself, because, as I said, I didn't plan to be a parent initially. I think, truth told, that's probably the case for a lot of people … I touched upon these days I had with Adeina where I just, I quite sincerely would, I'd contemplate, "How do I opt out of this in a way that is socially responsible?" We don't have adoption anymore. There must be so many cases where people have found themselves with children and just are not coping, and it's – what are the avenues really? I mean, foster homes, that's an extreme position. I think, when it comes down to it, you're on your own with a child. (Kim)

Debbie, who has been on her own for many years, shares custody of her children with her ex-husband. She wonders if some of her difficulties are because she is on her own:

> I've never been a housewifey kind of person, I've never placed huge emphasis on the house must be spotless or anything like that. I kind of don't even know where I sit with being a mother. Like myself, I haven't defined who I am, except to have – except to treat my daughters as good human beings and do the best I can do, because that's really what I'm doing, the best I can do …

I don't know. I mean, the whole thing about your kids really do give you a hard time … I think it can be very heart-breaking. For me, last year brought about a big change for me inside, that I'm done really. This has been really hard. And the joy of it, which I've always experienced, a lot of joy bringing up the kids, the joy of it went away … I've never been a motherly mum, but I've always loved being a mum. That's not there. And that's a bummer 'cause that's what gets you through the hard bits. And I don't know whether it's because I don't have a partner, I don't know … something has shifted in me. It's, you know – I'll always be there for them, I would never walk away from them. I have, in fact – I've probably said too many times, "This is too hard", you know. And once Chloe said to me something about, "So you keep saying you don't want to be here", and I thought, "Geeze I do". And I didn't mean to – it was just when it got too hard and I had to, you know – and I said, "Well I promise I won't say that again", and I never have. But umm, definitely there was that feeling of, "Oh get me out of here". (Debbie)

Keryn also described, in an animated and light-hearted way, her awareness of finding herself as the mother of three children, and thinking about what that actually meant in terms of how she spent her days.

I don't think I should have children. I never wanted them. I don't like children very much and I have three. It's all good. It's all good. (Keryn)

In Keryn's second interview, twelve months later, she described how she warned her daughters, Mia and Saskia, about not pretending to like things in order to please men.

I do tell them about – which is probably not even a good thing – I say to them, "Don't, don't, don't, end up like this", Not that it's a bad thing to end up like – that sounds horrible and I don't say it that way – "But there are other people that do things differently, you know"…

Mia [says], "I'm only having one child cause this is ridiculous", "Well you don't have to do this … you find a man that's happy to cook you dinner every night or set some rules, you know". I speak a lot to Mia particularly about bending yourself to be more likeable to somebody. Like, she's had her first little boyfriend in the last year, so that's been very interesting and I'm lucky that she talks to me about things. But I remind her not – to be you. If he doesn't like that, then he doesn't like that. You start off pretending to be happy doing whatever. Let's face

it, that's what we all do … You know, like, "Oh yes, I'm happy to have three children and do nothing but run around after them, and cook you dinner and wash everybody's clothes" … I do remind her constantly, "Don't be what you're not". (Keryn)

At the very end of the interview, Keryn was still light-hearted, but she was also very serious when she said:

Keryn: I wouldn't do this again, have children. Next life I will just, umm, travel, drink fine wines,

Ryl: Read books!

Keryn: Read boookkkks [laughing]. Oh, have love affairs around the world. I don't mean that really. It's a struggle though sometimes, and then I'm told it will all end and you'll be bereft.

Ryl: The empty nest problem.

Keryn: This is what I'm told, 'Just cherish it all, Keryn. It'll be gone too soon". It can't be gone soon enough [laughing].

Whenever women spoke of opting out of mothering, there was always an underlying promise that they would not actually do it: "It's all good"; "I would never walk away from them". Opting out was also always tempered by counter-narratives of joys and pleasures. Given that the women in my study already had children, there was not any real choice to opt-out; it was more a case of wait-it-out. One woman, Linda, spoke of how she had limited her family to one child as a coping mechanism:

And I made a conscious decision that I couldn't have a second child because … I knew I would have a nervous breakdown because I could not stretch that far … There is no more time and I have a fairly useless husband. He's probably as useless as the next one. (Linda)

In this study, women exercised limited control over their lives in two key areas, caring for children and working, and they frequently have to choose that which is actually obliged.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the broad context of women's lives as mothers. I have proposed that juggling was the underlying narrative in the lives of all of the women in my study. Women

sought to 'balance' the competing demands of housework and caring work against neoliberal expectations that they either attain, or at least articulate, a coherent narrative about a career.

Much feminist scholarship has critiqued the way that the political practices and social discourses of capitalism and liberalism, and the theories that explain them, fail to take into account the material reality of women's lives. The ideal neoliberal subject is the 'economic man' – independent, self-interested, white and mobile – a subjectivity which excludes mothers embedded in relationships of dependence and interdependency. Under neoliberalism, individuals are held responsible for writing their own biographies – independently determining their own fate (Rose, 1989, 1996). The women in my study felt they had to balance the competing demands in their lives by maintaining the 'right attitude' to (patriarchal) motherhood. There was an expectation they 'see the big picture', a form of sacrifice on behalf of all society, rather than fundamentally challenge the gendered divisions of labour. All the women expressed love, pride and joy in their children, but their experiences of the institution of motherhood and the acts of mothering their children were much more ambiguous. They were effectively excluded from the very neoliberal subjectivity they are expected to engender in their daughters, and in class specific ways.

Ontologies of communal mothering described by Aboriginal women and women with politicised feminist views, gave mothering status and recognition, as well as a values base where responsibilities were broadly shared in wider communities. The Aboriginal women in my study spoke proudly of the mothering work they did with their grandchildren, nieces and nephews and other children in their wider families, even though they also spoke of being let down when they needed support from these sometimes unreliable networks. Young girls growing up in Indigenous families learn that mothering work is highly valued, they will be expected to share in caring work of children, and they can expect support in return. Additionally, although Aboriginal women have the support of family networks in caring work, they also face poverty and violence at far greater levels than other women, and, as a result, much communal child rearing work is, of necessity, focussed on matters of survival. The women who pursued strategies of resistance by attributing status to mothering in terms of it being a career, were committed to waiting for the caring work to be over, rather than opting-out of responsibilities. Given their own experiences of exclusion, as theorised above, the next chapter considers the aspirations women hold for their daughters.

Chapter Six: Girls can do anything! Aspirations and assumptions

Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined the juggle that women perform to manage their responsibilities to provide household labour and caring work as ideal neoliberal citizens/workers; a juggle predicated on the social expectation that they 'find balance' in their lives. This chapter explores a significant theme that emerged from the data at the nexus between the women's experiences, as described so far, and their daughters' aspirations, and I consider how women understand their own struggles in terms of what it means for their daughters. Further, women's stories about girlhood, their own and their daughters' frequently featured what possibilities were open for girls. A key trope was that 'girls can do anything'. Accordingly, this chapter also outlines how 'girls can do anything' has been culturally produced, and changed over time, and how women's access to politicised languages of resistance impact on the adoption of the idea.

Employment and future employment demographics

In the previous chapter I presented employment demographics of the twenty-four women in the study. In this section I discuss the aspirational careers the girls reported to their mothers – see Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1 Distribution of aspirational careers named by girls, aged 9 – 13 years.

Occupation	No	Occupation	No	Occupation	No
Teacher	7	Fashion Designer	4	Veterinarian	8
Psychologist	4	Model	2	Architect/Designer	1
Nutritionist	1	Cosmetician	2	Florist	1
Marine Biologist	1	Hairdresser	2	Writer	1
Doctor	1	Singer	1	Astronaut	1

Twenty-seven girls had discussed in general conversation with their mothers between one and three choices of career, which were spread over fifteen categories, to a total of 37 nominations. Although fifty-four per cent (54%) of the women in my study worked in the two dominant sectors of education and training, and health care and social assistance, only 38% of their daughters chose occupations in these sectors as their aspirational careers.

The key generational difference was that whilst women worked as nurses and in allied health, girls nominated working in animal health as veterinarians instead (33%). Veterinarian medicine is a field that has become rapidly feminised over the past two decades, "experiencing one of the

most substantial gender shifts of any profession" (R. Taylor, 2009), women now comprise 73% of students enrolled in veterinary science at the University closest to the study site (Webster, 2012). An Australian study has shown that one of the four main reasons women enter the field is the image of veterinarians in popular culture (Lofstedt, 2003). An image of a female veterinarian is often used in advertising and education to illustrate the variety of socially important things modern girls can do. There is some suggestion that men's decreased entry into veterinary science has been motivated by the declining status and static wages attributed to women's increased participation (Slater & Slater, 2000; CA Smith, 2002).

Overall, and perhaps not surprisingly, the vast majority of careers the girls nominated tended to be heavily located within traditionally, or newly, feminised occupational categories. Very few women reported their daughters talking about becoming a mother in the future, an interesting silence given that motherhood is a statistically likely event for at least three quarters of the girls. In 1996, 89% of all women had children, a rate that is estimated to decline to 76% of women who are currently younger than 49 years, if fertility rates for 2000 remain constant into the future (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005). Despite the statistical likelihood that 24% of younger women will never have children, the desire of young couples aged between 18 – 24 years to have children remains strong, with 87% of couples in 1996 stating they expected to do so (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009a, p. 8).

Thirty years of "girls can do anything"

The slogan 'girls can do anything' emerged worldwide during the 1980s, and has proved to be both seductive and profitable within advanced western liberal democracies. The state government in Queensland, through the Office for Women, has distributed stickers and promotional materials since at least 1981 (A. Jones, 2012) – see Figures 6.1 and 6.2.

Figure 6.1 Queensland Government Sticker 'Women can do anything'

Figure 6.2 Queensland Government Sticker 'Girls can do anything'

In 2012, the 'girls can do anything' message was complemented by 'everything is possible!' as Queensland's official International Women's Day slogan (see Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3 Queensland Government Sticker 'everything is possible!'

Figure 6.4 McDonalds / Barbie promotion

Corporations have also traded on the concept of empowered and powerful girls who have the world at their feet. Mattel's Barbies were first branded with the 'We girls can do anything' slogan in 1984 (Lord, 1994). In 2012 the ever popular Barbie joined fast food chain McDonalds to maximise global opportunities to sell empowerment for girls, to girls, through consumer

products – see Figure 6.4. The first International Girls Day was proclaimed in 2010 by the American-based, non-profit organisation, The Confidence Coalition (2010), to occur annually on November 14. International Girls Day is designed to celebrate the "spirit of girls":

> With the slogan, "She Can Do Anything," International Girls Day encourages girls to embrace their unique talents, dream big and realize their potential.

The Confidence Coalition (2010) suggests possible activities to celebrate the day, including a 'two for one' Day Spa gift certificate for manicures or pedicures that a mother can give her daughter (The Confidence Coalition, 2010). Confidence, celebration, talents and potential are key tropes of the 'girl power' discourse, and corporations view the individualised self-improvement relationship between girls and their appearance as a lucrative market. Corporations' 'girl power' marketing does not simply reflect social changes, but cynically produces them; Fortune Magazine's marketing advice in 1997 was clear that, "if you want to sell to the girl-power crowd you have to pretend that they're running things, that they're in charge" (Munk, 1997, p.135).

Sinikka Aapola, Marnina Gonick and Anita Harris (2005) have written that "[g]irl power positions young women as feisty, ambitious, motivated and independent" (p. 26). Joanne Baker (2005) goes further, suggesting that girl power is a new social positioning for young women, where notions of :

> passivity, voicelessness and vulnerability are replaced with dynamism and taking charge. It represents an earlier femininity that has been superseded. Rather than being denigrated, femininity is celebrated and so girl power is a concept that can only describe the advantages of being female, not the disadvantages. (p. 32)

Because the 'girl power' discourse can only set out the advantages of being a female, disadvantages have to be accounted for by a complementary discourse, one which Anita Harris (2004) has named 'girls-in-crisis'. The girls-in-crisis discourse accounts for failure in terms of individual pathology, often a result of a girl's bad choices. The discourses are mediated by class, race and other hierarchies. For example, when girls make 'bad' choices, middle-class girls-in-crisis might enter counselling whereas working-class girls are more likely to enter criminal justice systems. Both the 'girl power' and 'girls in crisis' discourses are operationalised in the neoliberal political economy at the subjective level of the individual, the mechanics of individual choice and choosing render structural factors invisible. Girls are understood to choose well or poorly, and it is their choices which explain their everyday lives (Baker, 2010).

The view of girls as newly powerful has been theoretically underwritten by the thesis of reflexive modernisation, where personal agency has replaced structural analysis to explain the circumstances of peoples' lives (Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, 2002; Giddens, 1991, 1992). Sociological concepts, such as class, are now 'zombie categories', 'dead and still alive' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 202). Most of all, however, it has been the sociological preoccupation with individual agency, Val Gillies (2005) argues, that has reconstructed structural categories, such as class, into forms of subjectivity:

> Theories of the reflexive, late modern agent have permeated the social landscape they purport to describe, generating a new language to explain personal experience and social relationships. More specifically, their influence has been substantial in shaping current governing politics, with a stated aim of redistributing possibilities as opposed to wealth. (p.837)

Gillies' argument is that academic privileging of 'agency', as the key theoretical explanation of how the social world works, has not only has been employed to describe or explain, but has also substantially re-shaped government policies – with an observable move from redistributing wealth to redistributing opportunities. Joanne Baker (2008) has shown how the privileging of 'agency', in the neoliberal social paradigm, has also shaped individual subjectivities – individual girls primarily account for their lives in terms of 'what opportunities they choose'. Gillies and Baker are proposing that these sociological theories have created, rather than simply described, the connections that people make between their own lives and the broader society.

Changing times: from "You're never gonna do shit" to "What can you set your mind to?"

The majority of the women in my study were born in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At that time, second-wave feminist demands for equality and women's liberation had widespread currency. The catch-cry 'the personal is political' had politicised a generation of women who no longer saw their personal circumstances of social, economic and sexual subordination in isolation but rather as part of wider social patterns of male supremacy. From 1996, in Australia, married women were newly allowed to remain working in the Commonwealth Public Service, and in 1972 equal pay for equal work legislation was passed (Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, 2011). Historical changes such as these preceded the decade leading of the new catch-cry – 'girls can do anything' – which gained currency in the early 1980s, when most of the women in my study were the same age that their daughters are now – that is, between nine and thirteen years. The 'girls can do anything' message was meant to challenge tenacious and deeply held views that denied girls' capacity to achieve public success, both in education and the workforce.

However, even though governments, corporations and educational institutions were putting out the 'girls can do anything message' in the early 1980s, it was not seen to apply to every girl. The majority of the women in my study who had tertiary education qualifications began their study after they had their children, and Martina and Aileen were typical of those women in that their educational journey was far from straightforward. Martina entered the workforce straight after school, had children relatively young, and entered tertiary education in her thirties. Likewise, Aileen was completing her degree in health care after her youngest child had turned eight years old:

> I suppose my background is a little bit more traditional. My mum stayed at home. I stayed at home myself, largely, until the kids had all gone to primary school, so that is similar. But when I was in school, you know, it was just accepted that boys did one thing and girls did another …
>
> I didn't have a lot of opportunities. When I was in high school my – and, I mean, that was in the eighties so it's not even that long ago really – but my careers advisor said to me, and I still remember, "Oh well, you're a girl, so don't worry about college or uni. You're gonna get married and have kids so just leave school and get a job". And looking back now, it's just disgusting, even in the eighties. But you know, that was fine for me. And my mum and dad, I suppose, were that generation where you did – you left home, you got a job, and you contributed. So I did. …
>
> You know, college wasn't an option to me. You know, we were pretty poor anyway, so financially it wasn't an option. But there was no-one giving me a kick saying, "If that's what you wanna do, you can do it, if you want to do it you can". Nobody was telling me that, and I suppose some kids wouldn't need that, some kids would just think to themselves, "Well I will do it anyway", but I wasn't one of those kids, you know. I just went along with the flow and it just wasn't an option. (Aileen)

Aileen's working-class background meant that she was expected to financially contribute to the household, and even the careers counsellor at her school advised her not to invest in her education because her future lay in marriage and motherhood. Although Aileen reflected on the discriminatory treatment she had received, and the obstacles such as poverty which had constrained her options, she also felt some individual responsibility, that she just was not "one of those kids" who would have thought, "Well, I will do it anyway".

Martina, an Aboriginal woman, also completed high school in the 1980s and had similar experiences, although the discrimination she experienced included racism as well as classism and sexism. In contrast to Aileen, Martina recalled a turning point at school which enabled her to take an oppositional stance to discriminatory social expectations.

> I suppose at school I was, I was an average student. I didn't try and excel at anything. I also think I grew up in a time when there was very low expectations of what you would become as an Indigenous kid. So, for me, the bar wasn't set too high. So that was ok, which is really interesting later on in life [because] the bar is set really high for me now … but in year eight it was just cruising along … also too I think twenty years ago, you know, I had teachers who said "You won't ever become anything," you know, "You can dream as much as you want but you're just a little black kid" … when you go through school and your teacher's saying, "You're never gonna do shit", you kind of go, "Ok then". But it's only until you get to a point in yourself when you go, "Well, that's going to motivate me to show you". And actually I can probably pinpoint the teacher, or the subject – it was legal studies. I did legal studies, and that's when I started to do all my projects around black deaths in custody and all those kinds of things, and put myself into this framework, and I got As and that was my turning point. See, I can use this as a motivator rather than a de-motivator … but I suppose for the kids now, you know, I would think that that is a rarity, that teachers are sending those kinds of messages. It's more about, "What can you do? What can you set your mind to?" (Martina)

The women's access, or lack of, to critical political discourses to enable them to make sense of the discrimination they faced as girls, impacted both on their ability to navigate the past discriminatory expectations, as well as on the way they mothered their daughters. Their daughters, as Martina's said, no longer experience overt discrimination; instead, they are encouraged to think about what they could set their minds to. Turning the message around from the negative "You're never going to do shit", to positive "What can you set your mind to?" is clearly progress. However, both messages are those of normative neoliberal individualism, and the negative message provoked a clearer rebellion at the subjective level of the individual, given access to a critical discourse, to make sense of structural social constraints. The new message of "What can you set your mind to?" underwritten by 'you can do anything', assumes a meritocracy and leaves little room for rebellion. It is a message which the individual can only

embrace. The women in my study frequently referred to 'girls can do anything' as meaning that girls just needed to 'set their mind to it'. Jennifer's and Sharon's were typical comments:

> They can do anything if they put their mind to it – why not. (Jennifer)?

> Yeah, so try anything career-wise. You can do this, you can do that. I don't see that as a negative thing, so it's more of a positive thing. You can do that if you put your mind to it. (Sharon)

This discursive 'redistribution of possibilities' (Gillies, 2005) shifts responsibility for inequality from institutions themselves, as powerful brokers, to individual girls. The redistribution of expectations, rather than the redistribution of wealth or other material power, also obscures the identification of those who continue to hold a disproportionate amount of power – namely, men.

"Befuddled girls"

The catch-cry that 'girls can do anything they set their minds to' leaves girls with a lot to think about. In an assumed meritocracy, girls carry sole responsibility for their success; they must "set their minds" to success in order to make the right choices. However, in their everyday lives women continue to face limitations and constraints in the public realm of paid work. Although it is now more than four decades since it was legislated, the substantive practice of equal pay for work of equal value is still an elusive goal. For many years, the Australian arbitration system based the 'family wage' on the belief that workers had to support a wife and family; married women were not expected to work, and most women were expected to marry. In that system, women were paid a proportion of men's wages. Forty years later inequality materially remains. In 2011, men graduating with a bachelor's degree enjoyed a starting salary 4% higher than their female counterparts, a gap that widens at postgraduate Masters by coursework level to an 18% difference (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012c, pp. 4, 5). There is also a deeply entrenched and persistent inequality between the sexes in leadership positions. Although women's representation on company boards listed on Australia's Stock Exchange (ASX 200) increased significantly between 2010 and 2012, boards still only have 15.2% female membership, and 52 of the ASX 200 boards do not have any women at all (Australian Institute of Company Directors, 2012). Women fare better on Government Boards, and in 2012 held 38.4% of appointments (Australian Government, 2012). These inequalities in positions of power and in economic status serve to demonstrate the illusory nature of any assumed meritocracy.

Two women in the study, Linda and Monica, were the beneficiaries of very progressive, feminist, all-girl school educations in the late 1970s. Their middle-class life paths were very

different to those of Aileen and Martina described above. Both women completed vocational training or tertiary education after school, and worked in professional capacities, mostly full-time, up to and including when they had their daughters as older mums in their late thirties/early forties. Their education was feminist and progressive in that they were exposed to an oppositional 'girls can do anything' at a time when that was not widely accepted:

> I think it's a good message, and the school I went to had that message … and when I was sold that message, you *couldn't* do anything. There were a whole bunch of things you couldn't do. You couldn't be an active member of the defence force, you couldn't be a mining engineer. (Linda)

If the message made sense to middle-class girls in the late-1970s and early-1980s, when girls' capacity to achieve success was still explicitly denied, today it creates confusion. Girls of all classes have been bought up with the idea that 'girls can do anything' is a fact within the contemporary social discourse of celebratory girl power:

> Maybe it's a bit different now, although, yeah, girls can do anything more so now than, say, when we were told that. But, the reality is, in a work environment, and that may change, there are constraints about the way you still move through your work environment. And there are still constraints about the way the male version of the rules of the social game work … and there are limitations put on themselves by girls to, you know, fit in with what other people require.

> I know when I was working and supervising a lot of young girls in their twenties, they were a bit startled about the way men in their forties and fifties treated them, because they hadn't really come across that 'cause … they'd come straight from university where they'd been given that message, and then they found they were sort of talked down to and treated differently, so they found that quite confronting that it was different. Because they just took that message on board and then, when things, obstacles, got put into their way and they ran into road blocks, they were befuddled by that. (Linda)

It is no longer possible, within the dominant discourse of girl power, to name structural constraints. As a result, despite recognition of "the male version of the rules", it is women, particularly young women, who are seen as putting limitations on themselves by trying to fit in with what others require. Jennifer Baumgarder and Amy Richards (2000) in their book, *Manifesta: Young women, feminism and the future,* describe how the "girls can do anything boys can" mantra "protected us from the early decay to which our mothers' generation was

vulnerable, and this political fluoride prepared us to expect equality" (p. 83). They continue: "Unfortunately, our expectation exceeded reality and did not always indicate how gender fairness could be achieved" (Baumgarder & Richards, 2000, p. 83). Linda's words about "befuddled girls" speak to this gap between reality and expectation, and highlights how collective solutions are obscured. As a result, girls require individualised interventions:

> The alternative is you don't have that message and so you automatically lower your expectations of what you can and can't do. So I think you're probably better off to have that message, but then you need to be mentored through the times when it doesn't work. (Linda)

The 'girls can do anything' message is framed as an expectation. That expectation sits in a broader social discourse that assumes a neoliberal, post-feminist meritocracy. Therefore, when individual girls fail to meet expectations, it is they who are seen to be defective and in need of mentoring. Corporate and political interventions to fix gender inequity in leadership and opportunity in the workforce are frequently directed, often unsuccessfully, at improving the chances of individual women (Ibarra, 2010). Leonie Still (2006) notes that there are "few dominant issues that collectively galvanise women in management today. Twenty years ago, the issues were clear cut … The momentum for change and progress in career advancement has slowed" (p. 188). The legislation and policy programs that drove women's equity claims in the 1980s in Australia, including the Sex Discrimination Act in 1984 and the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act in 1986, were wound back in the late 1990s: women were positioned as 'mainstreamed' rather than 'disadvantaged' under the conservative federal government of former Prime Minister John Howard (Summers, 2003). Still (2006) notes that younger women in the 1990s,

> … who had benefited from past initiatives, began to express the view that equity had now been achieved and they faced a "level playing field" in career opportunities. Attention thus swung away from equity concerns to a concentration on "work and family" policies to allow these women and men, to attain "balance" in their personal and professional lives. (p. 180, 181)

A meritocracy was widely assumed, and there were "a few exceptional women" who had succeeded to serve as proof (Still, 2006, p. 181). The generational shift from an aspiration to an expectation created confusion for individual 'befuddled' girls. Rather than a politicised collective anger, women and girls are expected to undertake self-improvement projects to become ideal neoliberal subjects, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, is anyway widely unavailable, not least because they carry the majority of social responsibility for caring work.

Changing times again: from "What can you set your mind to?" to post-feminist silence.

Monica pointed out the limitations of mentoring, or role modelling, as a solution to the disadvantages girls face. Monica, as Linda, described her own "very progressive, very feminist education … that was probably ahead of most places at the time". Her experience made her concerned about the conservative education her daughters, who attend a private school, are now receiving. She felt that girls are no longer given the message that 'girls can do anything', rather there is a silence in the post-feminist practices of the school which, she said, are "fairly misogynistic". Feminists have critiqued theories of reflexive modernisation because they appear to make feminist claims redundant, for example, by assuming they are already achieved (McRobbie, 2004). It is a powerfully discriminatory assumption about a meritocracy which does not exist, an assumption that makes mothers responsible and rules out critical discourses.

> I find it, you know, particularly recently, I was feeling fairly challenged by the fact that, you know, where the girls are going to school, it's all males, you know, males are the leaders … I find that really strange given that it's almost 30 years since I went to school where the message that we got very powerfully was that women can do anything that men can do, except for perhaps the odd physical task. But other than that, particularly intellectually, there was nothing that men could do that women couldn't do.

> I have a feeling that we are going backwards in promoting girl's rights, and self-belief. I mean, that for me is a personal cause for concern. You know, I think you can do positive role modelling and that sort of stuff, but I find it very disappointing. But if there was a really good strong non-dominational, all-girls school, then I would certainly probably, you know, I would pick that. But it's not the boys in the class, it's just that structure … When I went to school, it really was at the forefront of the conversation. And the conversation was aimed, was really pitched at, "You've got to set your sights high", you know. (Monica)

The responsibility for women, particularly mothers, to be a 'role-model' for girls exemplifies how the assumed meritocracy assigns responsibility to individuals. Structural constraints disappear. Monica's own experience of an empowered feminist education leads her both to identify misogynistic practices and to make comparisons. The assumed progress from the old message – "You're not gonna do shit" to the modern – "What can you set your mind to?" to the postmodern silence – " ", is called into question by Monica's access to an earlier politicised feminist understanding, which frames today's silence as "going backwards".

Where there is post-modern silence about 'girls can do anything' in a school setting, there is no pressing need to prove it. It is a 'truth' that is assumed, a truth that risks being called into question by its very articulation. Three of the women in my study, Sarah, Carmen and Kim, thought it was no longer necessary or desirable to say 'girls can do anything', either as aspiration, or expectation/fact. These middle-class professional women resisted the 'girls can do anything' message because it named boys and girls as different, and this was something they consciously chose not to emphasis, even rejected:

> I don't know if I would say to Nina, "Girls can do anything". I think it would just be "You can do anything". I don't think, I don't feel, I need to push the difference between these are girls skills or these are boys skills. (Sarah)

> I'm kind of the matriarch of the family in that I work, my husband stays home and looks after the kids. So there is no stereotype, sort of, in our family … I don't tell [my daughter] that she's going to be anything – which could be a problem, I just say "You could be anything you want", sort of thing … I hope that, both my husband and I hope that, the kids will just chose whatever they wanna do … and not be influenced by us. That's just a given in our house, I think. (Carmen)

Both Sarah and Carmen framed possibilities for their daughters in terms of what the girls themselves would choose, and pointed to their family circumstances as differing from traditional family norms. They linked their belief that their daughters 'can do anything' to their husbands' participation in caring work discussed earlier, as evidence that it was possible. Sarah and Carmen's own experiences, working full-time in professional careers, were not evidence that 'girls can do anything'. Instead, their work experiences showed how individual talent or biologically gendered characteristics shaped children's possibilities.

> But I think it's also important, you know – I said "You can do anything" but I also think it's important too that kids learn that there are some things that they are not good at, and they shouldn't do – you know, having that honest conversation.

> I guess, I see people come in and they have this amazing perception of themselves. It's, wow, I don't think that's going to happen …

> Lucy, she tried singing, I said "Nah, it's not gonna happen, unfortunately you got my genes, and you can't sing so you need to stop now". A bit more gentle than that, yeah, just … there are conditions that apply, like, "You want to sail around the world? Yeah you can do that, but have you got money? Do you know how to sail?" Yeah, all that sort of stuff, so being practical about it. (Sarah)

Being practical and having honest conversations with her children and employees was one way that Sarah navigated the assumed neoliberal, post-feminist meritocracy. By being pragmatic, she collapsed barriers originating at an individual level, such as an aptitude for singing, with external barriers, such as a lack of resources. She thus could deploy an internally consistent narrative, and erase gender as a factor in potential success.

Carmen reflected on her own experience of following her mother and grandmother into working in the health sector. She wondered whether children 'naturally' gravitate towards gendered activities, despite her conscious efforts to practise gender neutral parenting:

> It's interesting though that she just, all our kids, we've raised them in a kind of neutral way. You know, we don't, umm, say "You're a girl – you can only do that", and "You're a boy – you can only do that". We've let them play and do whatever interests them, either way. But they have, I think, kids just naturally gravitate to sometimes female things and boys gravitate to boys' things, I guess because their peers influence them, I don't know. She's a girly girl, not too much of a girly girl, but quite a girl – you know, she likes the clothes. I guess I wouldn't call her a tomboy but, I don't know, she'll probably end up doing something that's quite typically female. I don't know, but there is no reason that she would need to do that. In our house she can do whatever she wants. Like, if she wanted to be a mechanic, we would say, "Yeah, go for it". But she might probably end up being a health professional, and I was, like my mother and like my grandmother. It's just, it seems to be quite a female profession, health professionals. (Carmen)

Carmen recognises outside influences on her daughter at the same time as she stresses individual choice, stating, "There is no reason that she would need to do that. In our house she can do whatever she wants".

When Sarah and Carmen engage in post-feminist assumptions that girls can do anything, they draw on their own experiences of sharing the caring work with their husbands, proof that it is possible. Indeed, this does open up the possibility of engaging in the public world of work and career, outside the restrictions that sole responsibility for caring work imposes. While Sarah and Carmen do not draw on their own experiences as successful professional women as evidence that it is possible for girls to do anything, they do draw on their workplace experiences to redefine the restrictions their daughters may experience in the public world, in terms of individual choice or natural disposition.

Kim, also a professional, middle-class woman, questions how she makes meaning of the world when faced with the views of younger women and girls. She found that the young women in her male-dominated workplace were unable to identify barriers or a sense of struggle:

> When I see those [girls can do anything] stickers … I question how relevant that still is, to have to be so publically affirmative of what should be just taken for granted. And I think what changed my outlook a little was when I did this study … about women in male-dominated workplaces – and I found there was a really big distinction between the older women and the younger women … The younger women were, "What barriers? Don't know what you're talking about", couldn't relate to any sense of struggle, and the older women were in a completely different place of their journey. … I didn't expect to find that sort of shift, because if you look at the statistics there has been no change … there might be more people going into mining or other engineering fields, but that's across the board, and the percentages in growth of professionals in those fields is tiny, tiny, tiny. (Kim)

Sarah's, Carmen's and Kim's daughters all achieve highly at school, "at the very top of the class", reflecting their mothers' successes in their own careers. Val Gillies has pointed out that middle-class children are encouraged to stand out and their parents strategically label them as 'bright', and thus deserving of opportunities, whereas working-class children are encouraged to 'fit in'. For Sarah, Carmen and Kim, the economic, social, emotional and cultural capitals they can draw on to foster their daughters' academic successes, and the sense of possibility these girls have for themselves, appears to overshadow the importance of gender:

> I suppose for me, looking at it from a societal point of view, I am more now concerned about the barriers after gender. Like the barriers to do with race, the barriers to do with income levels, the barriers to do with lack of access to education probably concern me more these days … A transformative thing I did … some interviewing for a scholarships program, and to sit down with young people who had literally come here on a boat, or arrived with nothing, or whose parents don't speak any English and probably never will, and see how much they achieve and how motivated they are, really opens your eyes to just how much opportunity your average working-class Australian family has, regardless of gender. You know, it's just phenomenal. So I'd like to think that, as a society we've largely sorted the male – female divide. I know that we haven't, if you look at any of the statistics. (Kim)

Even though Kim was well aware of the entrenched patterns of workforce disadvantage that women face, she also "would like to think" that gender inequality has been resolved, and that it is other barriers, from which her white, privileged and educated daughters are protected, that matter. Her point about the barriers people immigrating to Australia face is valid but demonstrates how the perception of social progress towards a meritocracy, even when acknowledged as promised rather than substantive for women, depoliticises gender as a useful analytical construct.

Where are the boys?

In this study, Sarah and Carmen were unique in working full-time and sharing the house and caring work with their largely stay-at-home husbands. Yet, popular culture is increasingly portraying arrangements such as these, as if the cultural landscape of caring work has changed (Byrnes, 2012; Fletcher, 2011). Whilst both Sarah and Carmen drew on their family arrangements as evidence that 'girls can do anything', the majority of women in the study, in contrast, spoke about the possibilities for girls in entirely different ways. Aileen, for example, said that girls can do whatever they want, but the option to do "lots of other things" is framed in opposition to "getting married and settling down with children":

> just trying to show them that whatever opportunities the boys have got, girls have
> got as well. They don't have to get married, settle down and have kids. They can
> if they want to, but there is lots of other things they can do. They can do whatever
> they want basically. (Aileen)

For Aileen's sons, and boys generally, the prospect of marriage and children does not preclude other opportunities in the same way that it does for her daughters. Whilst girls have been getting the message that they too, just like the boys, can do anything, there has been no change in the messages to boys. For girls growing up in hetero-normative, mainstream, nuclear families, there is an expectation that they simply add to their traditional caring roles and do much more than has been expected before. There has not been a corresponding message that boys need to do their fair share of the caring work. Becoming more involved in caring work has been positioned as a matter of lifestyle 'choice' for fathers, not necessity. This is a reversal of the way that public success for girls is positioned as a 'choice' and no longer necessary in a post-feminist meritocracy.

It is clear that the 'girls can do anything' discourse is underwritten by male norms. When the women in my study discussed possibilities for girls, they frequently drew on examples of women's participation in traditionally male roles as evidence that 'anything is possible!'

> I don't think I was ever told, no I can't do that because I'm a girl. And I think
> because where I grew up, I was expected to help do everything around, 'cause we
> had property, so I learned to chop wood. (Jan)

> Women can change light bulbs, do the lawn mowing, you can do anything, if
> you're taught. If your father teaches, you know, how to change mower blades,
> you're gonna be able to change mower blades. (Regina)

In these discussions there was often a sub-theme that women should not get out of doing their fair share of the manual work. But there are limits. At the time of the interviews, there was public debate about women serving in the front-line of the military. It was in consideration of front-line military service that Regina hesitated, struggling to explain why 'girls can do anything' might not apply to industrialised killing:

> There would be some women out there that I believe are as strong as a male,
> mentally, physically, and, yes, probably could undergo a lot of training [to do
> front line work] … the majority of males can do that, but the majority of women,
> I don't know … I think males have more of an instinct. If you look at killers,
> most killers are male, than female … Look at the way with boys when they are
> naughty and play up, they usually bash things. So, yeah, I think, like, when little
> boys get angry they kick things, they smash things, they hit their brothers. Girls
> usually 'arghhhhh', and it's genetics. It's genetics, you know, if you look back at
> genetics. I don't know, I don't know. That's just one that sort of gets me.
> (Regina)

Regina favoured biological explanations, instincts and genetics to explain male aggression, and to explain, too, why the majority of women do not have the same capacity as the majority of men to participate in war on the front-line. Patriarchal masculinity is discursively shored up at this critical point around violence, aggression and death, in contrast to the way masculinity is seen as threatened when women participate in public life and take on leadership positions. The fact that in 2012 more serving United States soldiers committed suicide than were killed in action (Pilkington, 2013) speaks powerfully to the traumatic psychological disconnection that is required in military service (Barry, 2010). Further, that more women are murdered each year by their intimate partners (National Organization for Women, 2013) than men are killed in combat speaks to the human cost of a masculinity that rests on assumptions that men's violence is somehow biologically inevitable.

Jan and Tanya, who strongly identified as practising Christians, raised as a particular concern the threat that women's and girl's participation in public life creates for masculinity. Tanya expressed concern about threats to masculinity because of her struggle to reconcile her own experiences of being a leader with her beliefs about the correct role for men. Her concerns took in her daughter who has been highly successful at school in contrast to her son who was an average school achiever.

> Tanya: I think it would mean more for my son to have little stickers saying "Boys can do anything". It's my son Jeremy that I worry about, trying to kind of plant ideas in his mind to go for leadership, to play sport at school. He doesn't even think about it … I suppose the things that I thought about most since our last conversation is that I'm more worried about my boys than my girls. And I think over the years there's all been this big positive thrust for the women, but I see more worries for the boys and their sexuality. The big thrust, that's the wrong word, the big gay agenda. [laughing]. Pardon the pun. It's more of a struggle. There seems to be a lot of support for girls out there.

> Ryl: So that thing about boys growing up and thinking about what kind of men they want to be and masculinity and ideas around sexuality?

> Tanya: And what I was going to say before, I suppose I do hold to a belief that my mum used to say, that when men are in good leadership, the men and the women follow. And you know, not all men feel that they can follow a woman, and it might be a gender bias, I don't know.

Tanya felt that boys' and men's roles as leaders been challenged by women's leadership, and she was concerned that homosexual agendas threatened hetero-normative masculinity. Jan, likewise, was also concerned to shore up her son's masculine identity, and worked hard to accommodate his gentle and sensitive nature by assuring him that men's work was superior. She validated his interest in cooking and sewing, at the same time she minimise her daughter's efforts in those areas.

> I said [to him] "Well, you know, the world's best couturiers are men, the world's best chefs are men". So I think because he's had a taste of this in Home Economics … Yolanda has actually had a few attempts at sewing things when she's seen me sewing. She'll, you know, pull out some scrap fabric, and she's made this pathetic little heart-shaped cushion. (Jan)

The dominant cultural 'girl power' discourse has been accompanied by a discourse of concern about boys educational achievements, and, more broadly, a 'crisis of masculinity'. Lindgard and Douglas (1999) describe this discourse as a backlash response to the success of promoting opportunities for girls. The concern about men-in-crisis became a focus of national debate during the 2004 federal election campaign between opposition leader at the time, Mark Latham, and the then Prime Minister, John Howard. 'Men-in-crisis' displaced earlier iconic depictions of men as 'Aussie battlers' (Bode, 2006). There were hundreds of newspaper articles dedicated to 'boys-in-crisis' by the mid-2000s (Bode, 2006) and, although the debate has cooled since then, there is continuing concern about the emasculation of men and boys. In addition, men's rights activists in Australia have worked hard to gain publicity for their claims that misandry is just as much a social problem as misogyny. They have used concerns about men's health as a platform, to claim, in particular, equal status for men as victims of women's violence. This concern for boys is underwritten by the popular assumption that girls have 'arrived' in an already achieved meritocracy, one in which there is no longer any need to affirm girls.

The dilemmas of mothering 'can-do but don't' girls

This chapter has so far explored women's responses to the perceived changes in the social positioning of girls from traditionally disadvantaged to newly empowered, enacted through the discourse of girl power and signified in particular by the 'girls can do anything' slogan. The ability of women and girls to navigate their own positions within the discourse, as shining examples of can-do girls or as abject failures, depends on various hierarchies of power – race, class, ability and so on. The discourse has been hegemonic to the extent that there have been very few challenges to its ideology.

Social positioning.

The women in my study wanted to help their daughters navigate educational and future career decision-making in particular ways, depending on their locations within hierarchies of power. Access to economic, social, cultural and emotional capitals (Bourdieu, 1990) are dependent on intersecting hierarchies of race, class and gender (Skeggs, 1997). The women who had more economic and cultural resources, particularly educational experiences, were strategic and focussed in directing and supporting their children through decision-making processes. Mahira, for example, recounted a conversation she had with her daughter, Soraya.

> She wants to be an astronaut, but I don't know how that's going to work
> [laughing]. But she loves the stars … but that can change, and I said to her,
> "Mummy's really worried because this is so dangerous" but she goes, "Oh

Mummy, but I want to". I say, "Mummy wants you to be a doctor" and she goes, "Oh I want to be a doctor, and an astronaut" [laughing]. (Mahira)

Likewise, Kim described her daughters' intense interest in finding out more about various careers, and noted that the girls, aged nine and twelve, frequently asked questions about remuneration and qualifications. Kim was well qualified to answer these, but had felt were premature. Contacting me after the interview, Kim had decided this was not the case:

Hey Ryl, I've been thinking about you and your study … After our meeting, I was racing around somewhere … and I had a rare moment of clarity and awareness, directly triggered by the discussion we had … Anyhow, the thing that really struck me was a clear sense that I want to do all I can to ensure that whatever work my girls grow into, that it is something that of itself is fulfilling and worthwhile for them. I have tended to play down their queries about career choices as a far off distant matter. I realised that this could be trivialising what will be a very significant structure in their lives over the long term, so I am going to more seriously engage in their interests and help them work out what type of things make them happy. I feel I want to be more involved in their career choices than I had anticipated I would be. I want to move from support from a distance to sharing all I can about what I have learned about the impact of work satisfaction levels on other aspects of your life. Thanks a lot for the discussion. (Kim)

Strategic support for children has been theorised by Gillies (2005) who, drawing on the scholarly work of Allatt (1993) and Bates (2002), found in her own research that "[c]lear relationships were also evident between the resources held by particular parents and the childrearing practices they pursued. Parents with access to middle-class resources (such as money, high status social contacts and legitimated cultural knowledge) drew on these capitals to consolidate their power and advantage, and invested heavily in their children's education as a method of transferring this privilege" (p. 842). The "active manipulation" of resources which ensures advantage ensures middle-class children have their 'individuality' nurtured (Gillies, 2005, p. 842). Kim's efforts to engage in her children's interests and help them work out what makes them happy thus works within a social system where success is "founded on a notion of deserving individuality" and embedded in a "social and economic context which enables, supports and legitimizes their individuality" (Gillies, 2005, pp. 843, 844).

In contrast, women who had less economic, cultural, social and emotional capital to draw upon, and whose own work and career aspirations as girls and young women has been unsupported, were much less directive and more likely to follow, rather than direct, their daughters' journey.

Jan, a single mother, recalled her own journey, as she worked through what was possible for her to do to support her daughters:

> I had two older sisters so everything that happened to them, I was aware of. So I formulated a lot of my opinions on what I saw happening to them. I saw them quit school at grade 10 and get these pathetic jobs and were never happy and that determined me not to do that. And I think that probably I've got to say to myself, I can't make the girls go and do a higher education. I've got to allow them to be who they want to be. So I'm thinking maybe they don't want to go to university, I've got to wait and see what happens through high school as to where their strengths are, you know. (Jan)

This contrasts to more resourced parents who immerse their children in developmental experiences, and are able to command teacher support or private tutoring for both extension and remedial learning, with both positioned as 'special needs'. Although Jan employs a discourse of individualisation – "I've got to allow them to be who they want to be" – she does so without the resources of middle-class individualisation. Ultimately, she will "wait and see" what happens to her children through school, rather than directing and controlling the experience. Likewise, Aileen encourages her daughter to keep her options open as a key strategy to minimise the risk involved in being responsible for your own life biography:

> I've tried to explain to her that, you know, these subjects like the maths, and your science and your English are really important because that means, if you change your mind, you've got more options … Whether, how hard she'll work at it, I don't know. At the moment, she doesn't put much effort at all into her school work, it's all into her friends. (Aileen)

Despite the pressure on Aileen to ensure her daughter's success – she herself has modelled the importance of education through commencing tertiary education – she feels her ability to guide her daughter is limited. Parents from working-class backgrounds are positioned as "holding less than high expectations of their children's academic attainment", and therefore "failing to generate the aspirational values needed to facilitate self development" (Gillies, 2005 p. 845). But as Gillies (2005) points out, "[t]his interpretation gives little consideration to the everyday material and social context shaping the lives of these families" (pp. 845, 846). Debbie, who had shared custody of her two daughters, reflected on the difficulty she had in providing enrichment activities for her children to the same level that some of their friends who had more resources were able to do. Debbie didn't have the time, energy, money or the connections to immerse her

children in the extra-curricular activities she saw happening in other families. She questioned both what impact this had on her children and how she was seen as a mother.

> I look at, you know, some other families, some other friends who've I got. I do wonder about families that really have in place this whole, you know – your future thing, where they've got lots of connections and things like that. And the differences between families who have lots of connections and where their kids end up and the differences between – like, my family when I was young had no connections whatsoever, and so my path in life went that way … I see families who are giving their kids – like, they are going to dance, to this, they've got like five things on the go, each of the kids. The families are doing these amazing things, getting them there. I wasn't one of those people willing to do that. I wouldn't have coped. (Debbie)

In patriarchal motherhood, women are held, and hold themselves, responsible for shaping their children's lives, often at great personal cost.

"Bursting bubbles".

Responding to girls' aspirations, in situations where they are unlikely to succeed, presents particular dilemmas for women. Debbie reflected on her experiences of "not bursting Scarlett's bubble", but of her elder daughter, in upper high-school having to face "life the way it really is":

> It's just that, I suppose – I think we're trying to – I think kids in general – we are trying to set them up to get into the world, and we're saying, "You can do all these things" and everything like that but really someone's got to be there and say, "It's alright if you didn't make that", you know. Like, I'm not bursting Scarlett's bubble but … at the end of it, she's just gonna have to face life the way it really is … I hope that we're not trying to protect them too much from that, because they're going to have to be there anyway ... girls … are facing up to that, … they are trying, whereas maybe in the past, "Look, just go off and do an office job, then you'll be alright, then you'll get married". Well, there's none of that stuff – except for a couple, there is still a couple of girls that I think, I know, who are thinking that way – but mostly they are just going off and doing whatever they want to do, some of it's not great …

> It's very hard though when your daughter says she wants to be a vet or a dentist or something … and someone says to you, "She's not going to get into that, you know, because she's not getting the marks, she's not trying, she's going to fail".

> And you think, God, how am I going to tell her that? … Really difficult, difficult
> thing, definitely not a straight-forward process. (Debbie)

It is a really "difficult, difficult thing" to not burst your daughter's bubble, but to be there for her when she has to face reality. Debbie, however, also notes that many girls stop trying or wanting to 'do anything' during early adolescence. In her job Debbie helps schools prepare for career days:

> Umm, you know it's funny. Look I think girls think they can do anything anyway
> these days. I don't. But there is still a lot of gender bias in terms of, like, girls
> themselves, you know. When we do career days which we organise, schools ask
> us for more girl things, and it's not just [the school that] channels that, it's the
> girls themselves. (Debbie)

Like the befuddled young women held responsible for putting pressure on themselves for trying to fit into norms in the workplace, here much younger schoolgirls are channelling their own interests into 'girl' directions. Debbie continues:

> But the observation by my ex-husband – he's just been to [primary school] camp
> … is that there is a lot of boys that don't try very much and they are not engaged.
> And there a lot of girls who are really quite bossy and forthright. Now I don't
> know what ends up happening to those girls, 'cause I think puberty and
> everything starts to play with them. I think there is this transition between the girl
> who actually thinks she can do anything and have a say, to the girl that comes
> through puberty. I think that a lot happens in that time, and I still think there is a
> gender bias. So I think we believe that girls can do anything [but] I think there is
> a lot of things around that that play with that … It doesn't take much to take a girl
> in puberty – I don't know what else to say, in that time space – to be disengaged
> from wanting that. I think everything is set up to disengage them and they
> certainly buy into it, just the time of their lives. (Debbie)

Debbie sees a transition that happens to girls when they go through puberty. Younger primary school girls who are "quite bossy and forthright" start to disengage and they "buy into" the barriers that are set up to disengage them.

Disability.

The difficulty of reconciling the 'girl power' discourse with everyday life comes into sharp relief when we put centre stage the experiences of women who are mothering girls with

disabilities. Women bringing up high achieving girls could see their daughters continuing their school success in their working careers, but for mothers of girls with disabilities there are no guarantees.

How well women could access to resources for their daughters impacted greatly on how they could position their girls as worthy. Middle-class women are able to draw on the economic, social, cultural and emotional capital, in a "discourse of entitlement", to secure considerable support for their daughters with disabilities, in clear contrast to working-class women (Gillies, 2005, p. 842). Linda, a professional middle-class woman, has invested considerable personal resources into her daughter Chelsea's diagnosis and support:

> She is profoundly dyslexic, so she will never be academic. So that's been
> something I've had to get my head around … But she's been in speech therapy
> for a year, occupational therapy for two years so she's – and art therapy and
> kinesiology and all sorts of other things … I've put her in to a lot of other
> activities, so her dance card is fairly full after school … And dyslexia and
> intelligence are unrelated. Not that I think she's that smart, but she has been
> tested and there is nothing wrong with her IQ. (Linda)

Linda had also been able to negotiate extra support from the school teachers, including the promise of specialised equipment:

> The iPad hasn't emerged, and, yes, I have expressed my frustration at the promise
> of an iPad. I didn't ask for an iPad but, once it was promised, I want it. (Linda)

The ability of middle-class parents to secure diagnoses through private health care providers means they can use these as bargaining chips when they're making demands on behalf of their (worthy) child for extra resources, so that they can fully realise their potentials (Gillies, 2005). In Gillies' (2005) British study, "[b]right was not a word used by any of the working-class parents when discussing their children. Instead, the attributes most likely to be proudly described were children's abilities to stay out of trouble, get on with others, and work hard" (p. 845). Fitting in, rather than standing out, is crucial to the security of working-class children, and parents invest emotional resources in ensuring children's survival in hostile school systems (Skeggs, 1997). Sharon's two eldest daughters both have learning disabilities. Sharon, as the working-class mothers in Gillies' study, highly values her daughter Charleigh's ability to get along with others:

> She has auditory processing problems which means she is slow at learning, can't
> spell at lot. But you know, very, very loved by a lot of people. She has lots of
> friends … she goes with the flow, she doesn't try and take charge of anything.
> (Sharon)

Sharon walks a very fine line with the teachers at her school. She accepts their authoritarian
practices of behaviour management, not only because she wants her children to fit in, but also
because her endorsement is a bargaining chip in the effort to be seen as a good cooperative
parent.

> [The teachers are] pretty good. I mean, every term they have a parent teacher
> interview. They're pretty good, they explain the good sides and the bad sides to
> what Mikaela has done. But she's been good most of the time this term, her
> talking and pushiness a little bit is the only thing. They are pretty good. I tell
> them – see I believe that kids need to have a bit of discipline and rules and stuff,
> like, I mean if there is too many kids like Mikaela doing what she does, like I
> mean – "Do what you have to do, Teachers", sort of thing, "Because you're going
> to have no control and don't let them walk over you". (Sharon)

To challenge teachers for extra resources, as Linda did for the iPad, would be a risky strategy
for Sharon. Sharon values good behaviour, and believes that her daughters' ability to fit in is the
key to them staying out of trouble in the future:

> Oh, my goodness, as long as they don't end up in jail when they are older, that's
> my concern. I only try and tell the girls, "Don't do this, don't do that". I call it
> tough love, and some people probably think I'm nasty, but like, I mean, you've
> got to have boundaries and rules. If you don't, like … you've got to tell them
> when to stop. If you let girls like Mikaela go, they'll ruin their future. (Sharon)

This contrasts sharply with the future that Linda sees as possible for children like her daughter:

> You know, I meet other dyslexic children and I meet their parents, and they say,
> "Oh, it's come from their father, and he's got a building business and he's got six
> employees, we've got five houses and a holiday house in Brisbane". It's a
> journey through school where life rises and falls on reading and writing. But,
> after that, it doesn't matter a toss. (Linda)

Linda's experience as a middle-class woman is also in stark contrast to Joy whose need for
support, and the difficulty in securing it, saw her spend many years navigating a highly

bureaucratised system trying to assist her granddaughter Lani. Joy's claim that Lani's needs were unique, and should be accommodated at school, went unheard because the experts claimed that Lani's problem behaviours simply needed modifying:

Joy: There was this continual trying to get help for her because it was obvious there was something more wrong with Lani than a few tantrums. She was obviously intellectually impaired in some way. But to find someone to actually say that she was – And she had to have a piece of paper that actually said it. And they are only allowed to do the testing every two years. So when she was in Grade 3 we had her done through the [psychological service], but [the school] just poo-poo'd it … They found that small motor skills weren't functioning and a whole lot of things, but that wasn't acceptable to anybody. So then we went through Child Mental Health. They decided that all that was wrong [was] I needed parenting skills. Hello? Haven't I been down this track before? So I had to go out to Child Mental Health – the Doctor decided that that would be a good idea. So there with six parents that had children with various problems, so I had to tear out there and be there by 9 o'clock. I forget how many days a week we had to go. We had to make all these charts, we had to do all this stuff over six weeks. And you had to have this homework all done. You had to have tried this procedure or that procedure, this reward system and that reward system.

Ryl: As if it were something that you could change?

Joy: And the thing was that Lani was the only child like she was. And she had this obsessive food bit obsession, which is similar to Prada Willis syndrome, which is where they gorge food and their brain doesn't tell them that they've had enough to eat … and the schools treated it like she was being defiant and naughty, instead of being obsessive behaviour that she could not help.

Joy felt humiliated in her attempts to receive specialist recognition and support for the disabilities her granddaughter experienced. Instead of receiving practical assistance, Joy was pathologised as a 'bad parent' and sent to parenting classes. Lani was also routinely humiliated at school, despite Joy's pleas for understanding:

Joy: And at school … she was systematically going through all the lunch boxes selecting what was left over that she'd like. She ate all this stuff … a new behaviour manager, or guidance officer or something came, cause they were doing all these different things to punish her. And what really annoyed me … you know what that teacher did? The whole class was to decide on her punishment.

Ryl: Oh, no!

Joy: Yeah, so one child, she had to sharpen all of this child's colouring pencils. And the other child, she had to clean out their tidy tray. And then she [was] also [to do] something at home. So they decided, these children decided, what she needed to do for me. And I said, "Look, what Lani needs more than anything is for someone to organise her at lunch time so she does not have the spare time to get into these things, 'cause nobody sees her, she roams around by herself and nobody sees her". But I was just – she was so humiliated, can you imagine? For these children to decide. Because they decided she was being very defiant and naughty … When I got up that afternoon, all the kids were rushing up and saying, "Guess what? Lani stole so and so's lunch", I said, "Look, when you are perfect, you can come and tell me what Lani's done". So this was the sort of thing [that happened] until she finally got to [the special school]. You've got no idea what a difference this has made.

Joy's prolonged and exhausting negotiation with education and social services to gain understanding and compassion for her granddaughter fell on deaf ears over many years, until she was finally able to get Lani's diagnosis recognised by the Education Department. Disability brings into stark relief the limitations of the 'girl power' discourse and the way that disadvantage works along class lines.

"So girls can do anything, just don't wanna set them up for a fall".

As described in the previous chapter, there was a background narrative in all the women's stories about juggling the competing demands of motherhood and neoliberal subjectivity, especially at the nexus of paid work. Although all the women spoke the juggling that shaped and defined their lives, it was notably absent in the stories they told about their daughters' future lives. In fact, the status of their daughters as potential mothers was a key silence in the data, apart from Aboriginal women who positioned the mothering role positively. Fiona was an

exception, both in terms of the silence and the positive positioning; not only did she speak in-depth about the struggle she faced in her own life, she foresaw the same struggle for her daughter. She wanted to "ease that conflict for Elle", in ways which illustrate the illusory nature of full neoliberal subjectivity for women and girls.

> My whole life, despite being blessed in many ways, I have to admit, I, you know, struggle with self-esteem, I s'pose, and self-image, self-esteem. And, I don't know, I just feel that some of that is to do with being a woman, and some of the problems that I have maybe wouldn't – a man wouldn't have those problems. (Fiona)

The struggles that Fiona faced as a woman and a mother were intense, to the extent that, prior to having children, she did not want to have a daughter:

> Certainly, before, I often felt that I was the inferior one so to have two sons who might grow up like Joseph seemed to be a real aspiration whereas to have a daughter who would grow up like me didn't seem to be – you know, I didn't really want that.

> But I think, in the ten years since I've had the children, I've grown a lot myself, and probably, thinking back on it, I've probably got a lot more comfortable with myself and where women fit into society in a way. And, yeah, I think I've probably very much grown to quite identify myself as a mother, and most of the time I'm quite proud of being a mother as a role and an identity, So and I think, you know, come to accept that as a role for, you know, girls and eventually women, in a way to be something to be quite proud of, even though, you know, you're not being boss or a top executive of a company, or bringing in huge wages. (Fiona)

Fiona found a sense of pride and satisfaction for herself becoming a mother, although her sense of self, of coming to "accept the role", had been hard won, and she struggled with the lack of recognition.

> I think I've learnt that women do have a real role in bringing up, including educating, the citizens of the future, shaping them, being involved, maybe a bit behind the scenes, involved at school and stuff. So shaping the way the kids think, exposing them to things, and making them into the sort of people that you'd hope to grow up to be. (Fiona)

This is a description of middle-class mothering, where the woman works behind the scenes to shape the ideal neoliberal citizen. It is an unforgiving position where women are excluded from the subjectivity they are held responsible for creating. Fiona, drawing on her own struggles with her identity as a woman and as a mother, wished to make things easier for her daughter, and the way she sought to do this was to try to bring the reality of compromise and rhetoric of 'girls can do anything' closer together:

> So mmm – and that's just me, and, like I said, I might be pretty old fashioned about that, but I've had a think about it. So girls can do anything, just, it's hard to know – don't wanna build them up for a fall, like, for disappointment or conflict as an adult, when you find you can't do anything. (Fiona)

In the above comment, Fiona warns of the risks of building girls "up for a fall" when they try to match the neoliberal obligation that 'girls can do anything' with managing the multiple expectations of motherhood and careers. Fiona, as similarly privileged women, was very strategic and direct about maximising her daughter's pathways through education, but she was circumspect about any aspirations her daughter might have because of the multiple expectations for women to be good mothers and good career women. She sought to soften the conflict she predicted her daughter would experience:

> Ok, so I certainly want to, obviously, let her have her dreams for the moment … I don't wanna, obviously, say, "You can't do that". That would be, that would be going backwards and so … but I do feel that I've, you know, I've very much struggled with that issue myself … I had to find my way through that very much
>
> … So, in some ways, I would like to ease that conflict for Elle. So I don't know … my mum was one of the very … first people in women's equality and probably when she went through uni it was a time when … there were a lot less women in university … so I think she instilled in me, you know, "Go for it girl" kind of thing …
>
> Whereas I would – while I'd very much encourage Elle to do that, I'd also like to somehow make it easier to recognise the values of, you know, being a mum and being a woman that's part of continuation of culture and society too. So help her to recognise that maybe being at the pinnacle of your career isn't the only thing … it would be nice to soften the conflict a little and, umm, just to ease it for her. So I suppose the way I do that – I mean, as much as I do it consciously – sometimes I do draw attention to myself as a mother and what I'm doing … so

rather than just quietly doing things behind the scenes and having it just magically appear there for her, I point out that, you know, somebody does it and if they do that … they are not able to do something else.

And I, also, it's such an effort trying to get them to do housework. But I do try and get them to have some small tasks … Looking back on my upbringing I think that mum probably very much sheltered me from that ... I want to make that more overt to Elle … Once again it's easier to get her to do it than Sam. I struggle to get Sam to do his housework … the fact that he will role model himself off Joseph makes it harder to get him to do his fair share and, you know, Elle always complains. (Fiona)

Fiona wanted her daughter to be aware of the caring work within the family, and to have Elle and Sam contribute, not for any real help they could provide, but to train them. In common with other privileged women, what the children are expected to do or not do depends on what is seen as being in the best interests of the child. So Fiona saw helping with housework as developmentally important, although largely in psychological terms, rather than as physically mastering set tasks. It was not seen as important in terms of freeing Fiona, in her role as mother, from the sole responsibility for caring work. In fact, it was perhaps more about demonstrating to Elle what the role involved, a psycho-social narrative of how caring work is both worthwhile and important, so that Elle might avoid some of the feelings of frustration and worthlessness that Fiona herself had experienced. Fiona did attempt to extend her caring expectations to her son Sam, but that was difficult because Sam modelled himself on his father.

The tensions Fiona describes – trying to value herself, and to empower her daughter to negotiate status for caring work in future heterosexual relationships – was a decade long struggle:

I think it's that fine balancing act. I think girls have to have the expectation that they are going to be treated fairly, equally, that they are going to have an equal say. I mean 'equal' even though they may not have equal pay and equal work roles. It needs to not be assumed, it needs to be openly discussed, and so I think they've got to be bought up with that.

So I think, going back to the 'girls can do anything', you know, it's that balance. You need to have that self-esteem, self-belief that you're worthwhile … that you're entitled to be consulted – not even entitled to be consulted, you're entitled to make the decisions between yourselves. And you need that sort of self-belief and that belief in women to be able to do that in a relationship.

> And, by the same token, you also need to, if you do, for whatever reason, decide
> to take that secondary role, you need to then not beat yourself up because you've
> done that and, yeah, so it's a real balancing thing. (Fiona)

Fiona well describes the balancing act that mothers face in bringing up their girls to believe in themselves, especially in their power to negotiate equal status for their caring roles within heterosexual relationships. Fiona also demonstrates how caring is (normatively) of secondary value, even though she has worked so hard to reframe that for herself.

Conclusion

As described in the previous chapter, the women in this study have struggled to juggle and balance competing priorities, which has resulted in feelings of loss and inadequacy. Patriarchal motherhood requires that women perform intensive mothering, even if there is no way to ever successfully meet its inherently unachievable expectations (O'Reilly, 2010a). Women, in the discourse of patriarchal motherhood, are excluded from being actual ideal neoliberal citizens themselves, but are rather positioned instrumentally to raise and mother such citizens. This results in a schizophrenic situation. The women's stories demonstrate their double-bind: women are responsible for producing children who are ideal neoliberal citizens – that is, the authors of their own lives, free to take opportunities and in control – but at the cost of enormous sacrifice from those who raise them. Motherhood is experienced as ambiguous and frequently stressful, with expectations that mothers will raise successful girls. To do this, the mothers in my study often sacrificed their own aspirations. They variously described 'the big picture' and 'the greater good', but were frequently frustrated and bored, endlessly providing direction and support to their children, in ways which precluded their own self-fulfilment. While Michelle spoke at length of the joy and love she feels for her children and how she longs to "liberate women to feel good about being a mother", it is also true that mothers are forever facilitating the lives of others, often without reward or recognition.

This chapter has considered what aspirations women have for their daughters, given their own experiences of exclusion. The women in my study try to hold onto emancipatory ideals for their daughters in complex ways. The catch-cry that 'girls can do anything' emerged as a key trope in women's stories, invoking expectations of success and competence in the public realm. Doing well at school was a precursor of future career success. Motherhood was positioned as a positive role by Aboriginal women, but it was mostly absent from other women's discussions of girls' futures and possibilities of success – a significant silence given that most girls will become mothers in the future. Will anything have changed for our daughters collectively when they

become mothers? Or will they similarly face expectations of sacrifice and experiences of exclusion?

'Girls can do anything' is now read as a simple, taken-for-granted fact, in contrast to an earlier time, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the slogan first became popular during the women's own girlhoods. The women remembered it as a call to action, a challenge to the deeply held views that put limits put on girls' capacity to achieve success. That meaning has now been superseded by a hegemonic interpretation in which the statement is read as fact, as expectation. The new reading occurs in a social context where a meritocracy is assumed, as if equality between men and women has already been achieved (McRobbie, 2011). All that remains, in this hegemonic reading, is for girls to 'set their minds to it'. Success boils down to the psychology of individual decision-making because other structural factors which might explain our lives have been minimised (Baker, 2010).

Women's understandings of 'girls can do anything' as it applied particularly to their own daughters, were complex, and depended on where women were located in hierarchies of power and privilege. Some women, like their daughters, considered it a taken-for-granted fact, and as a result described it as an irrelevant or outdated message. Well-resourced women hesitated to voice the idea that girls can do anything, because doing so called it into question and risked highlighting hierarchal differences between boys and girls. A few women, especially those whose daughters faced barriers to success arising from prejudices against disability, or experiences of racism, saw value in the message. It was a relevant reminder, given their broader politicised struggle for its realisation. The majority of women sat somewhere between: although agreeing in principle that girls could do anything, they tried to make sense of why girls would not actually achieve. Bringing up girls who believe 'they can do anything' within an assumed neoliberal meritocracy calls into play particular mothering dilemmas.

The key problem is that the 'girls can do anything' discourse is grounded in individualism and obscures the social context in a way that early feminist slogans, such as 'the personal is political', did not. "Above all, the ideology of individualism must disguise the actual relations of ruling, and it does that by locating all agency within the domain of an atomised individual radically independent of others, and existing prior to any form of social interaction" (Thompson, 2001, p. 46). The 'girls can do anything' message is positively framed, and the responsibility of ensuring girls' success falls on mothers. They are expected to role model and help 'befuddled girls' through interventions, such as mentoring programs. Liberal feminist strategies focussed on empowering individual girls disguise rather than politicise relations of ruling. Without a

radical feminist analysis, and a critical approach, women struggle to make sense of their own and their daughters' situations. Some women in my study were able to draw on radical analyses from their own earlier educational experiences in feminist schools or racial politics. These analyses provided glimpses into the political injustices of today, but were not collectively articulated or understood. Without a radical analysis to unsettle the deeply gendered experiences of girls both now and in the future, people settle for conservative and individualised solutions. Fiona, identifying the failure of liberal feminist ideals, spoke of her desire to "ease that conflict" and worried about "building girls up for a fall". It is significant that Fiona, as a highly educated and well-resourced woman, thought it was better to prepare her daughter for disappointment rather than challenge the status quo.

In the next chapter, I turn to the stories women told about the mainstreaming of a pornographic aesthetic and what this has meant in their everyday lives as they seek to meet their daughters' needs for 'preservative love', 'nurturance' and 'training' (Ruddick, 1989)

Chapter Seven: Mothering dilemmas in the age of pornography

Introduction

In this chapter I turn to the stories women told about the ways the male gaze positions their daughters. The gaze not only raises primary concerns about girls' safety, but it also works to discipline the notion that girls can do anything. Just as 'girls can do anything' is hegemonic under liberalism, the stories that women told highlight the ways in which girls are made to know their place as sexually serving the interests of men. The mainstreaming of a pornographic aesthetic in popular culture presents new dilemmas for women who are trying to keep girls safe, to help them to succeed as neoliberal can-do girls, and to allow them the space to flourish as sexual beings on their own terms.

Scholarly research is only now beginning to look at the complex ways in which girls position themselves as agentic in relation to the contradictory demands of contemporary sexual politics (Jackson, Vares, & Gill, 2012; Renold & Ringrose, 2011). In this process there has been little said about women's experiences. My research values mother's experiences as particularly crucial site to explore the contradictions between the newer 'we are all sluts' sexual subjectivities on offer to women and girls under neoliberalism, and the powerful, older and enduring sexual political discourse which has long required women to choose between being a "dammed whore" or 'God's police" (Summers, 1975). Women's work in helping their daughters negotiate their identities, and women's own struggles in these contradictory spaces make clear the enduring nature of male supremacy.

This chapter, therefore, builds on previous chapters where I have outlined the gendered experiences of women who carry the majority of responsibility for the production of ideal neoliberal citizens. I pointed to the contradictions for women, as this socio-politically unrecognised and unrewarded caring work effectively excludes them from the very subjectivity they are supposed to be engendering in their daughters. 'Girls can do anything', once an aspiration, is now an expectation. Women's access to politicised languages, and their positions within socio-political hierarchies, emerged as shaping the ways that women embrace and resist ideological neoliberal discourse.

The new sexual contract: girls in postfeminist, neoliberal political economies

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, young girls are the focus of intense scrutiny in a fierce debate over the way their sexuality is embodied under the terms and conditions of the

contemporary political economy. Practices and imagery emanating from the sex industry and pornography are understood "as becoming increasingly normalised, widely dispersed and mainstream" (Gill, 2012, p. 483), but there is little agreement as to what this means in the everyday lives of girls and the women who mother them. Angela McRobbie (2007) has proposed there is a new sexual contract operating in the post-feminist space of an assumed meritocracy, as if men and women have already achieved equality. In this sexual contract, consumer culture invites young women to become "phallic girls", appropriating the sexuality previously reserved for young men. Phallic girls are superficially bold, confident, aggressive and transgressive (McRobbie, 2007). The contract requires women to display hyper-femininity as "a matter of choice rather than obligation" (McRobbie, 2007, p. 723). McRobbie (2007) warns "we could read this as a feminist tragedy, 'the fall of 'public woman''" (pp. 723, 734). Additionally, as Rosalind Gill (2007) says, a "'technology of sexiness' has replaced 'innocence' or 'virtue' as the commodity that young women are required to offer in the heterosexual marketplace" (p. 72). Women who are mothering daughters in the harsh light of a male gaze, filtered through a commodified pornographic aesthetic, face particular challenges in meeting the needs of girls through, what Sara Ruddick (1989) called, acts of 'preservative love', 'nurturance' and 'training'.

The women in this study spoke in detail about their daughters' various talents and abilities, their admiration for their daughters' strength and pluck, and their sense of often exciting possibilities for their daughters' future – and they acted to nurture this. "The work of fostering growth provokes or requires a welcoming response to change … [it] is the most exigent intellectual demand on those who foster growth" (Ruddick, 1989, p. 89). During the interview process, many women engaged in a recursive process of active reflection, rather than simply 'telling it how it is'. They questioned themselves, refined and changed what they said, as they reflected, re-evaluated and responded to the issues we discussed. Aileen's account is an example of what Ruddick (1989) called 'maternal thinking':

> Girls are sexualised right from when they are dressed in pink, I s'pose, and their roles are really, right from toddlers, their roles are kind of laid out for them, you know. I think girls are a lot more savvy but I think, I sometimes think, that you see teenage girls now … who very much behave like boys. You know, like young boys, they'll go out and sleep around and do exactly what traditionally boys do, which I think is good in a way. Obviously, it is not good in some ways. It's good in a way that girls think they can do that now, but I sometimes think they are kind of biting their nose off to spite their face. They are doing that because they think that that's what they should do now, because they need to be equal, that's what

they should be doing, whereas I don't think, personally, I don't think they should be doing that. They should be finding their own way of what's right for them and what they want to do. (Aileen)

Aileen identifies the 'girls can do anything, girl power' rhetoric as underpinning the liberal notion of equality. Girls have apparently been granted the freedom to act sexually in a way that has been traditionally reserved for men and boys. This so-called freedom is discursively supported by an ideology of choice and choosing, but Aileen points to a harmful lack of options for girls in their sexual world. The radical goal of girls finding their own way of what is right for them, and what they want to do has, in practice, been reduced to a liberal notion of equality with boys.

The mothers in my study described bringing up girls in a technologically driven, rapidly changing world of instant communication and representation. Women also described the ways in which a porno-chic aesthetic had become normalised in popular culture. The post-feminist assumption of a meritocracy, when considered with these factors in mind, offers little support to women in terms of a language of political resistance they could share with their daughters. Aileen described her daughter Harriet as being "in that little mind set where she has to follow that little path and has to do, not only what her friends do, but what the boys want them to do". The cruelty and brutality of the sexual-political landscape, which demands that girls find pride, individuality, joy and freedom within the porno-defined sexual subjectivity of 'slut' leaves women and girls frightened, angry, annoyed, sad and frustrated.

> Aileen: She has told me some horrible situations that her friends have got into and had sex when they didn't want to. Terrible, makes me angry, makes me very angry, when boys, older boys have manipulated younger girls. It's awful, I can't believe that that kind of thing goes on. But this is a girls' school and it's going on in a catholic girls school and, you know, so, it's frightening and I think the best thing we can do is bring the girls up to be strong, independent and be aware of these things. Be aware of their own rights, and the right to say no, and they don't have to do these things just because they're doing it in the videos, and they are doing it in the magazines, or boys are telling them that that is what they should be doing.

> Ryl: Oh, it's tough hey.

> Aileen: It's awful. When she told me one particular thing, she told me, I just
> cried, 'cause it involved some of her friends, and I just cried out of anger
> and frustration and pity for these poor girls, you know. It's sad they still
> feel that they should have to do these things … She felt very annoyed,
> she felt angry for these poor girls, she felt sorry for them, she felt glad
> that she wasn't in that, got herself out of that situation. But she felt angry
> at the boys – men really, not boys – they were men. Yeah. Not very nice.

Aileen highlighted the gendered power context in which girls felt they had to 'choose' to do what boys told them to do, or what they saw in videos and magazines. This does not simply translate to a denial of girls' agency. Women who point out the exploitation of girls are frequently accused of denying girls' agency, but Aileen, as with other women in my study, believes that the personal empowerment of girls is an important part of achieving the radical goal of "girls finding their own way of what is right for them".

"Do I look sexy?" a technology of sexiness in girls' worlds

Sara Ruddick (1989) wrote that "[i]n "normal" times, the only task of a nurturing mother may be to provide a safe setting where a child can be herself" (p. 84). But the descriptions that women gave of their daughters' social and cultural worlds frequently referenced the male gaze, thus demanding that women not only nurture the possibility of girls to find what is right for themselves, but also act to ensure the safety of their daughters:

> OK, what is going on with society generally that we have lowered that age level
> so much? This is an enormous topic. I mean, what is this whole craze for
> Brazilian waxing? Some of the women I talk to will say "Kim, that has to be an
> obsession with pubescent, prepubescent bodies, that people would do that" …
> that's really disturbing … the magazines and pop music and videos. And the
> lyrics in a lot of those songs are just really inappropriate, and the idea that the
> whole world is [having] sex with people as young as they can, is a difficult thing
> to engage your children in within a constructive conversation. So you kind of find
> yourself saying – well, you kind of need to explain, sexual stimulation and
> satisfaction feels good, and that's a completely different thing to how you engage
> in it, and how you protect yourself from being targeted. (Kim)

Kim's description of the social milieu in which she is bringing up her daughters echoes the stories of other women who are also aware of changing social mores where girls, at increasingly younger ages, are negotiating their identities with reference to a normative 'technology of

sexiness'. If a "'technology of sexiness' has replaced 'innocence' or 'virtue' as the commodity that young women are required to offer in the heterosexual marketplace" (Gill, 2007, p. 72) can this be true for pre-teen girls too? And, if so, how do pre-teen girls and their mothers manage this? In the above transcript Kim typifies the mothers in my research who expressed concern about the male gaze which fetishizes girls at increasingly younger ages as sexually available, and pressures adult women to perform sexually as 'children'. That girls were 'getting older, younger' was a common observation:

> All I see that's different is the age maybe, the introduction of sexual activity at twelve and thirteen, I see that. But then, if my mother looked at it, she would say we were introduced younger than her at seventeen or eighteen. So I just see that as being knocked down a few years, but I think that was knocked a few years in our generation. (Linda)

> We're encouraging girls to grow up faster in a sexual way, way faster than they should. They're sexually active at eleven years old now. (Soraya)

> My niece…she's very petite and very fair and always wants to dress up as the girly girl, which makes her the popular girl at school, you know what I mean? … I know we shouldn't be doing it, but here is how society impacts us, you know. We're already going, "She's gonna be the ditzy blond, she's gonna be the girl that always gets the boys", because that's how she behaves, you know, she's got blond hair, she's got petite body and, when you think about the kind of stereotype and the images we see all the time about the popular girls, that's exactly how they're portrayed … my niece has always been, for the last couple of years, been all worried about boys. She's had two or three boyfriends, and I go, "You're twelve years old", you know, "What's going on?" (Martina)

> When I was twelve, umm, when I was twelve and in grade seven, the world seemed simpler and less complex than it does now … I can't remember ever thinking what boys thought of me, or "Do I look sexy in this?", or whatever, you know. Whereas, I know my daughter and her age, her friends in her grade, and in her age group, they talk about being sexy, "Do I look sexy?" (Sally)

> She's more mature. I will give them that much, not mature but, you know, wanting to be an adult quicker. Not so much being a kid. I mean, she still goes and does kid things but she's worried about her image. When I was nine, I wasn't worried about image. (Sharon)

Three of the women in the study had daughters who were finishing high school, aged around seventeen years, just as their younger daughters were just completing primary school, aged around twelve years. These women reported the changes they saw in the peer groups of each daughter. Regina's comment was typical:

> What I've seen from my oldest daughter, [who is] seventeen, the things that they were doing at thirteen were not the things that the children these days are doing at thirteen. So even Davina comments on that, how more sexualised they are, the clothing that they are wearing, the friends that they keep, what they want to do, all of that sort of stuff. (Regina)

When mothers discussed the pressures on their daughters to look sexy, that is, to display a technology of sexiness, they made reference to music, fashion and media portrayals of girls. Gail Dines makes the point that, as cultural beings, it is only to be expected that girls look for the "values, norms, and images of what it means to be male or female" within popular culture; "…today, there's only one image: the hypersexualized image of gender" (cited in Emanuele, 2012, para. 10). Dines invokes Gramsci's notion of hegemony to examine the political economy of a 'hypersexualization of culture', and argues the fashion, media and music industries are:

> working together to create an image of women, sexuality, masculinity and hypersexuality that holds a very coherent narrative: men are by nature sexually predatory – that's the message. Women are increasingly conforming to that image of what men are being shaped to enjoy. Women are being told that if they want to be worth something, they have to compare themselves to the Paris Hiltons, Brittany Spears, Beyonces and Rhiannas of the world. You know, you're 13, or 14 years old, trying to construct your gender identity, and as a cultural being what do you do? ... Along with hypersexualization, there comes a very important wardrobe you have to wear. Now we're back in the fashion industry. You have to have a body that's well toned, tall, and usually white. It helps to be white in this culture, and in the porn business as well. (cited in Emanuele, 2012, paras. 9-11)

There was widespread agreement amongst the women in my study about the kind of cultural landscape in which they were bringing up their daughters. Their daughters, nieces and other young girls in their lives fitted the cultural stereotypes, as promoted by the music, fashion and media industries, to lesser or greater degrees. As Martina said about her niece, body shape and skin colour were important to 'success', to fulfil the cultural stereotype of what it means to be a 'hot' girl.

Popular culture illuminates the way in which the male gaze shapes possibilities for girls. Tween celebrity, Miley Cyrus, who played Hannah Montana, was aged fifteen years when photographed by Annie Leibovitz in fashion magazine *Vanity Fair* (Handy, 2008) with tousled hair and naked, apart from a sheet (see Figure 7.1). She progressed to pole-dancing at the Teen Choice Awards when she was sixteen years (Kahn, 2009) (see Figure 7.2). Cyrus's image has increasingly taken on the visual aesthetics of the sex industry, a well-worn path "[t]hat's how Britney took off. She was the good girl gone bad, and it looks to be working for Miley as well" (Ian Drew cited in Kahn, 2009, para. 5).
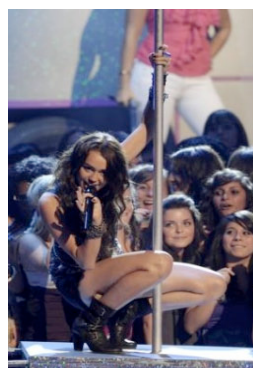

Figure 7.1 Miley Cyrus *Vanity Fair*

Figure 7.2 Miley Cyrus Teen Choice Awards

For Regan, whose daughter Madeline was "really into" Hannah Montana, the celebrity narrative of 'good girl, gone bad' was "not so cool":

> When Hannah Montana was Hannah Montana it was ok. Now she's Miley Cyrus it's not so cool … I don't like the fact that they are marketed like that ... looking provocative and posing … I don't think that's necessary, I really don't … I don't know if I've got really strong [opinions]. I don't like it and I don't agree with it, but it's there and it's what's out there at the moment, so you just kind of have to adjust. You can't closet your child up and take them away from it. It's what they are in the middle of. (Regan)

Whilst Regan is unsure whether her opinions would be considered 'strong' or not, she is able to name corporate intent, and is pragmatic about her ability to shape her daughter's world. When Regan discussed the celebrities her daughter aspired to emulate, she questioned the scope of young women's agency and what might make sense of their motivations:

> … but again is that because they want to do it? Or is that because society makes them do it? I don't know. Or they feel as though they can gain something from doing it. (Regan)

Regan highlights the way in which women have to adjust to socio-cultural norms which are positioning pre-teen girls as practitioners of a porno-defined sexuality. She notes the decisions the fashion, music and media industries make to produce child 'celebrities', and also acknowledges the agency of girls. She asks whether they are quick to learn "if they project themselves in a certain manner, they can get something they want". Arguably, the young women who are produced as celebrities, and the girls who identify with them, very quickly learn that "women's value – and indeed very visibility" is based on "competency in displaying sexual availability" (Miriam, 2012, p. 263).

> Mikaela likes Miley Cyrus and that, and Lady Ga Ga but she won't go to the point of dressing like that … but she still wears her short shorts and that. And I said, "Things like that happen when you're an adult, you can dress like that for your husband when you're an adult. That doesn't happen when you're a little girl, it's not allowed" … it does influence children, like girls, 'cause they think, "Oh I've got to look like Miley Cyrus and I've got to dress like this to be accepted in today's society". But they don't, that's the thing, and I tell Mikaela, and Mikaela is not bothered. (Sharon)

The fashion and music industry trope of 'good girl unleashed' is formulaic in the pseudo child pornography genre: "the pleasure is in watching the … Madonna … revealing the whore that lies beneath the (illusionary) innocence" (Dines, 2010, p. 147). The porno-chic aesthetic has also been taken up as a key motif in the recent SlutWalks, the public face of third-wave liberal feminism, loved by the mainstream media for the spectacle it provides (Miriam, 2012). The SlutWalk protest is against the 'rape rules' that operate in society. It incorporates the disillusionment of those young women who have come up against the "licensed and temporary form of phallicism" (McRobbie, 2007, p. 732) they have been granted through porno-consumer culture, into that culture itself.

"Others are looking and seeing something different": keeping girls safe

Women frequently pointed to images and clothes as indicators of changing social expectations towards pre-teen girls. Jackson, Vares and Gill (2012) write that "fashion articulates a post-feminist ideology through notions of empowerment via sexuality and consumption, and engages a post-feminist aesthetic of the 'sexy', desirable young woman" (p. 1). Martina described the impact fashion expectations had on her daughter:

> I do also get quite frustrated when I see young girls dressing like older women,
> You know, like the whole – and maybe it's a North Queensland thing again too –

but certainly very low cut tops and very high shorts and that whole body
exposure thing, umm, works in two ways I think. One is about, you know, saying
that you're just a sexual object and you're trying to attract attention, but the other
thing is that, when people don't feel confident in their body like that, which is
probably my daughter, that that creates a bit of an isolation, or a bit of situation
where they feel like they are less than [their] friends. (Martina)

Martina's daughter felt isolated because she could not display a normative 'technology of
sexiness'. Ethnographic work with 71 pre-teen girls in New Zealand "identified clothing as a
key signification of sexual meanings around which girls negotiated identities with and against
contemporary postfeminist meanings of femininity" (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 8). They found that
girls negotiated their social worlds by drawing on understandings of themselves as both savvy
and innocent; "we found 'agency' embedded in regulatory discourse, 'influenced' selves
rubbing up against 'savvy' ones, 'sexy' identities being both refused and carefully negotiated"
(Jackson et al., 2012, p. 15). The girls' rejected 'sexy' identities and drew heavily on notions of
age (in)appropriateness of body-revealing fashion:

> Much of the girls' negotiated positioning around clothing practices may be understood
> in relation to keeping within the boundaries of 'appropriate sexuality' for their age:
> restriction of 'showy' clothing to special occasions; refusals of 'sexy' clothing as age-
> inappropriate and sexually laden; careful negotiation of body exposing clothes (e.g. the
> leggings under short skirts, the under-top). (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 16)

Jackson et al.'s article did not report on the roles mothers played in girls' ideas about clothing. It
seems a key factor and the women in my study reported having frequent discussions with their
daughters about the 'appropriateness' of clothing choices. Women linked their daughters'
choices of clothing to issues of self-esteem and image, and tried to respond to their daughter's
need to 'fit in':

> The subject comes up when we go shopping for clothes. And we will often
> discuss what's age appropriate. That's the thing that Mummy says all the time,
> "That's not age appropriate", And she'll go, "No, it isn't, is it Mummy" and she's
> very much thinking along the same lines as me. But at the same time if I pull out
> something too square, she'll go, "Mum that's so old fashioned, I'll look like an
> old woman", and I'll say, "Yeah you're right"… so I have to give a bit … but yet
> try to make sure that she doesn't dress in a way that is promiscuous. So she has a
> good understanding of that, I reckon. (Jennifer)

> She's picking her own clothes and I am going to have to accept that she's wanting … to dress a bit older … I resisted for a while, and she said, "Oh, I want some more grown up clothes, Mummy," and it clicked. I finally saw what she's talking about. The clothes in Target are still little-girl clothes and she sees herself as wanting to be a teenager, and she's sort of small, petite, she's just starting to develop, so she doesn't yet fit into the extra small clothes that you might get at some of the other shops … they are like little mini versions of the older girls clothes. (Carmen)

All the women in my study expressed concern about the fashions marketed to young girls, and they negotiated this with their daughters in different ways, for example, rules about colours, where clothes could be worn, and so on. Mothers regulated clothing in a variety of explicit and covert ways:

> Yeah, she's wearing bras with padding in it … "Oh, my goodness, you're not wearing that to the pool" … They are made to look like they've got something, but it's all money-making for them. They don't care what it does for the girl that wears them, as long as they've got their money. (Sharon)

> My girls are never allowed to wear black. And that was the whole thing with black, slaggy, tiny, little dresses which I found so offensive. Tiny, little, size 2, slinky black, and I couldn't explain to people what I don't want you to buy my daughter for her birthday, so it just became a no black rule. (Keryn)

So whilst women understood that clothing choices signalled their daughters' wishes to be 'grown up', they negotiated those choices in a variety of ways and when they drew lines in the sand about public and private clothing choices, they enforced those boundaries in different ways. Some mothers were very explicit: "You will attract unwanted attention wearing that". Other women gave different reasons to their daughters. One woman, whose primary concern was to ensure her twelve-year-old daughter did not look overly sexual in public, told her daughter, who has a solid, larger body shape, that she was too 'big' to wear really short shorts. The reason for not wearing the shorts sat well with social pressures to be thin and small, and so she could minimise the risk she felt her daughter faced, at the same time as not having to spell out her real concerns.

Jackson et al. view the clothing modifications that girls make to manage 'appropriateness' as a creative way to manage expectations, and as evidence that girls can find pathways through contradictions. However, they caution: "what kind of agency is it that rattles around the chains

that bind it?" while acknowledging that "discourses that repress may also enable" (Jackson et al., 2012, pp. 17, 16). The discourses they see as repressive are those which mark sexuality as 'inappropriate' for pre-teen girls. The authors note:

> Both avoiding and modifying 'sexy' clothing not only manages the spectre of the classed 'slut'; it also manages the social constructions of girls' sexuality as dangerous or risky (Fine,1988; Tomlman, 2002; Vance, 1992). The operation of discourses of danger works to remind girls of their vulnerability to a predatory and sexually insatiable male; girls are responsible for protecting themselves from victimisation through, at least in part, not dressing provocatively (Vance, 1992). It is these elisions of dress and 'asking for' sex that the recent 'Slutwalks' around different points of the globe have sought to dismantle (see http://www.sparksummit.com/) (Jackson et al., 2012, p. 16).

Whilst a discourse of danger reminds girls of their vulnerability, a discourse of childhood sexual agency and an individualised conception of personal power fails to take into account the ways in which a porno-chic derived 'technology of sexiness' has become mandatory in the late modern political economy. To seek and celebrate sexual subjectivity only within the discourse of sexual agency – the savvy 'slut', as marketed by the SlutWalk movement and third wave liberal feminism – is to ignore the compulsory nature of the new sexual contract. The mothers in my study noted that girls themselves were 'not asking for it' with their clothing choices, but they pointed out that, regardless of girls' intentions, clothing is read is socially intelligible ways:

> Like, as they get older, they start to get girly and people, men, take advantage of that, and so do young boys, and that's frightens me … I've got to tell her, "You're not going out looking like that" … it's like "Mikaela!" I've got to explain things that aren't very nice to her and then she goes, "Oh!", and then will go and change … And it's hard. (Sharon)

Helena and Jules, Aboriginal women, made reference to their cultural values to explain how one person's actions impact on others. They set 'rules' about clothes, as does Regina, whose Aboriginal family respect family-made decisions:

> I don't like seeing my daughters wearing things where older men are looking at them, that's not right … and I think it doesn't do any justice to the young person to sexualise themselves, and have themselves appear a lot older than what they are. And so for me, personally, with my girls, like, I try to always bring that message home, that, "Remember, you know, what you're wearing doesn't just impact on yourself but it impacts on everybody else around you. Because those

other people feel that they have to look at you wearing that. So do you want to be in that position?" And bring it back to them because they are intelligent. They are immature and they are naive, and they think the world is just beautiful and lovely and rosy and happy, but they know from my work and my husband's work that it's not … we'll all stand there as a family and say, "It's not appropriate. You're thirteen". (Regina)

I'd say things, like, "Do you think that's appropriate to wear to one of our family dinners where, you know, it's going to be all the older aunties and uncles or your grandfather?" … I just can't say, "Don't wear that", so I say, "Do you think it's appropriate?" … "Do you think they might be a bit embarrassed or shame that you making them embarrassed?" So they may be allowed to wear that to a disco … sometimes they don't get a choice … I don't want the kids to be put down by not being trendy, you know, because that just causes other problems … it's a cultural thing, and I think we're fortunate that we can do that easily. (Helena)

I try and teach her, you know, "Be proud of the way you look … you don't have to be like everybody else", but in the same token in saying that when she wants to wear, like, the little shorts … it was bit like "Well, no, she shouldn't be wearing it, but she's twelve, just let her go" ... So there is that conflict in me … about … what I grew up with and what I'm trying to teach her but see we were taught … if you wore a low cut shirt and your boobs were showing, then you're just asking for trouble, because if you don't want guys to look, they are going to look anyway … whereas now, you see the teenagers, and they've got boob and arse hanging out everywhere, and you think, you know, if you're not looking for trouble, that's fine, but you're going to draw attention anyway … Yeah, it's ok to let your boobs hang out everywhere…and if boys look, well, too bad … Because it is fashionable … their innocence is carrying them along, but then others are looking at them, and they're seeing something different…At the same time you are trying to protect them. (Jules)

The women in my study tried to empower their daughters to feel good about their bodies and their clothes, a necessary task given the vast majority of girls do not fit the stereotypical ideal, and peer pressure to fit in with dominant fashion ideals of 'hot' and 'sexy' is strong. Mothers tried to make space for their daughters to be 'different to everyone else', and sought to protect their daughters from the harsh judgement of others, including teaching them about how clothing is 'read'.

Jackson et al. (2012, p. 17) write: "[I]t is important to address what we see as the problematic: the lack of explicitly feminist or politicised registers in discursive resources available to girls that would enable them to critique postfeminist sexualities without being trapped into using repressive, classed, regulatory discourses (e.g. the 'slut' or the 'good girl'), if even momentarily". The women in my study wanted their daughters to distinguish between who they were as people, and how other people might view them. Educating girls about the male gaze was a key protection strategy; it was simply too risky to pretend that the sexual double-standard does not exist.

"Not a few perverts": the male gaze

The problematic nature of children's visibility and value being located in the display of sexual availability has been recognised, even by scholars who ultimately reject concern as 'moral panic'. Joanne Faulkner (2010b), for example, writes:

> If a magazine or advertisement produces an image of a young girl that conforms to conventions usually associated with sexual womanhood, then the acceptance of this image alters social interpretations of what it means to be a child. Whether or not the girl in the picture experiences pangs of desire for her hypothetical onlooker, she is positioned as potentially sexually receptive. And this may be cause for concern if assumptions are then drawn about children's interest in sexual experience with adults (p. 107).

And yet, to identify the male gaze risks being accused of seeing the world through the eyes of a paedophile: Catharine Lumby says "[w]e are reaching a juncture where we are starting to see children through the eyes of a paedophile at times … If we start running society because of paedophiles and in relation to what paedophiles think, I think we are going down a very dangerous path" (Cleary, 2008). Faulkner (2010b), in a similar vein, qualifies her concern, concluding:

> Perhaps a more substantial threat to children's autonomy and growth than the nebulous, sexually controlling stranger is the controlling parent. Yet the most telling symptom within the 'sexualisation' papers – and one that echoes community anxieties – is the ever-present phantom of the pedophile as the ultimate reference point for public morality regarding children. As I have attempted to show in this essay, in the child molester the moral warrior sees their own distorted reflection (p. 116).

Faulkner's argument is based on two claims. Firstly, we are free to choose whether to see the world through the eyes of a paedophile. Secondly, although there is abundant evidence that sexual abuse exists in real life, acting on that knowledge is 'going down a very dangerous path' and 'controlling parents' (read, mothers) who do so are potentially 'a more substantial threat' to children's autonomy and growth. Faulkner's gender-neutral claim that 'moral warriors' are only seeing their own distorted reflection in child molesters fails to recognise the work that women do to protect girls from predatory men.

What emerged very strongly from my data is that the male gaze is not some optional lens that girls and women can choose to look through, rather, its very power lies in the way in which girls and women are made to see their social positions as sexually serving men. Valerie Walkerdine (1997), for example, writes about its extraordinary ordinariness: "[t]his is not about a few perverts, but about the complex construction of the highly contradictory gaze at little girls" (p. 171). A particularly poignant example of the power of the male gaze, and girls' sexual subjectivities is evident in the testimony of Sally. Sally recounted an incident where her daughter Amber, who was twelve years old, was playing with another girl about the same age in the playground at McDonalds. A younger girl, about three years of age was eating an icecream. The older girl said to Amber:

> "Oh, you know what she wants? She needs a cock, she needs a cock to lick and
> suck". (Sally)

In this encounter, the older girls positioned the child eating the ice-cream through the male gaze, substituting the child's enjoyment of an ice-cream for fellatio. It is of note that this occurred when there were no men actually present. Sally's daughter Amber had previously attended sex education classes in the broader cultural context in which the servicing of the penis is dominant.

> [Amber] went through Life Education recently, so she learnt all about penises,
> erections, ejaculations … and then you've got those ads on the radio for erectile
> problems and, umm, once she knew what it was, she said, 'I don't want to hear
> about penises and, you know, men's erections", and so she would turn off. She
> would change the radio station when those ads came on. (Sally)

However, if changing radio stations gives temporary relief, there is no way to really opt out. Girls internalise the male gaze, even without the presence of actual men, it reinforces the values of male supremacy, reminding all that under the terms and conditions of the new sexual contract the primary value of women and girls is their sexual availability to men. The privileged place men, and the male pornographic gaze, inhabit in popular culture positions girls as always

available, and up for the sexual services they can provide. The advertisements for erectile dysfunction Sally referred to were from the Advanced Medical Institute (AMI) who, in addition to blanket radio advertising, had prominent billboards advertising "Longer Lasting Sex". In December 2010 the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) began legal proceedings against AMI for breaching the Trade Practices Act. The 'breach' was that the company failed men by inappropriately diagnosing erectile problems (Ham, 2010). It is perhaps too much to expect that the ACCC would start legal proceedings against AMI for the way the company failed girls, by promoting the fallacy that an erect penis is a prerequisite for being a man.

The women in my study also described how some men had shown direct interest of men in their young daughters:

> Men, young men, have just recently started looking at my thirteen-year-old daughter, and I think, "Are you right?" That bothers me. And she's gorgeous. You would look at her, she's a tiny little thing with boobies, and she struts around, but when you mix that, which is just human nature, with clothing that's totally inappropriate for little people, and make-up, and all the business that goes on – and it's a bit out of control. (Keryn)

> It's a really difficult thing. So, I mean, by the age of, what was I? Probably fourteen I suppose. I wasn't sexually active but I was being targeted, and 'groomed' I think is the word, by someone who took, did start a sexual relationship with me as soon as I was legal age. And it went on for a long time before that, and it went on for a long time afterwards. So I guess one thing you can say, Ryl, it's much more public than it has been before. But I think it's also much more difficult to protect your children. (Kim)

> I am really conscious of protecting her from men. I'm just really suspicious of all men [laughing]. I just knew when I was growing up, when I was a teenager or a young girl like Andi, I came across a few grown up men predators, paedophiles, and, really, my mum was very innocent and not aware. (Carmen)

> I do talk to her about what's appropriate and what's not appropriate for men and boys and stuff, not in a very explicit way, but trying to make her aware that's not appropriate for men to do those things ... I don't want to break their innocence or them, but I also want to protect them. (Carmen)

To keep their daughters safe, some women drew on their own childhood experiences of being 'made to know' that they were of sexual interest to men. As discussed earlier in the literature review, there has been some scholarly critique of the notion of 'childhood innocence', as a denial of children's agency (Egan & Hawkes, 2010; Faulkner, 2010a, 2010b; Robinson, 2008). However, some of the women in my study also used the term 'innocent' to describe adults in their lives who had been unable to protect them. The women understood innocence as being unaware of male desire, rather than being asexual.

"I would have gouged his eyes out": women's anger and male bonding

Women told many stories of the male gaze focussed on girl children. Sharon had just had photos taken of her youngest daughter, Leelee, aged one, at the local shops, and the photographer had posed her with a pearl necklace. Sharon's partner Wayne had one of the photographs on his keychain, when a workmate said to him:

"You've got her into the beads already, have you?"

Here, the male gaze positioned this baby girl as sexually servicing her father, and directly referenced pornography – 'anal beads' or 'a pearl necklace' when men ejaculate around a woman's or child's neck. Sharon continued:

Ohhh, I said, "If I had been there I would have gouged his eyes out. I would have attacked him. I would have sworn at him and called him a paedophile". I probably would have even rung the cops. I don't know. But I was ropeable when he told me that [angrily] … He said, "Maybe I shouldn't tell you things" … When I see that photo … I think a man thought that about my child … it makes me sick to the gut. (Sharon)

A male entitlement to view children as sexual objects can bond men together through a shared 'joke'. Although Wayne was upset about the comment and took the keychain off, Sharon was unsure if he challenged his workmate. Wayne's first reaction to Sharon's anger was, "Maybe I shouldn't tell you things". When Sharon now looks at the baby photos of her daughter, she is constantly reminded of and upset by the comment.

While I was recruiting participants for this study, one of the flyers was defaced (see Figure 7.3). Someone had altered the research question to, 'What is it like *dating* a girl aged between 9 – 13 years?'
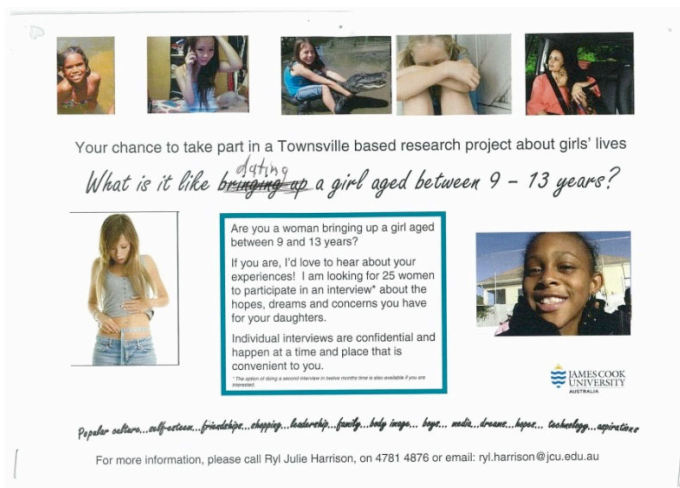
Figure 7.3 Defaced Flyer

In the second round of interviews, I asked women how they understood that act. They said that the defacement of the flyer was part of a social system in which men are able to pursue 'dating' relationships with young girls; and the legal system offers little deterrent:

> Oh lovely, lovely. Paedophilia ... Isn't that lovely? Because they are sexualising children. Nine to thirteen-year-old girls are no longer children, they are sexual objects. They are sexualising them to the point that it's funny. "What's it like dating a girl between nine and thirteen years?', You know … they are sexual objects. Recently I read in the newspaper about a grown man, roughly my age, in his thirties who actively sought out a sexual relationship with a fourteen-year-old girl. And he went through court, pleaded guilty, and hardly got any punishment at all. At all, because the fourteen-year-old girl, it said that she was infatuated with him. Well, I'm sorry, he knew that she was fourteen-years-old. He should have stopped that, but he didn't, he actively pursued it, because you're fair game. You know, you're meant to be a sexual being. You're a child, you know. I think it's unfortunately, it's happening for younger and younger and younger girls. (Sally)

Caroline Taylor's (2004) research into the Australian legal system described how children have ready-made legal identities awaiting them in court which work to preserve men's substantive, if not formal, sexual access: "courtroom prejudices have existed for centuries and have become stronger rather than weaker" (p. 290). She wrote that claims of ""neutrality" and "impartiality" cannot be sustained given the legal preference for narrative over fact" (p. 291). Male judges continue to excuse men's use of girls: in August 2013 a US judged sentenced a 49-year-old high school teacher to one month's prison for the rape of a fourteen-year-old student (who

subsequently suicided) because she was "older than her chronological age" and had "control over the situation" (Emily, 2013).

Research participants thought the person who had defaced the flyer was trying to be funny, but they did not find it funny themselves:

> There is just this general disrespect as well for girls. They are really powerless and people just don't even think about the derogatory nature of something like that. It's just funny, ha, ha, ha [serious voice]. (Sally)

> It's disturbing, to have that word 'dating' in there, when you know, it's clear that they are underage. So that's disturbing, that's the message I get from that. Or someone was trying to be funny, and it's not funny, it's stupid. (Jennifer)

> Funny, ha, ha [serious voice]. Some idiot. I dunno. (Keryn)

> Well, I just think it's disappointing that they have that attitude to nine to twelve-year-olds. But I have to say it doesn't surprise me. It's that objectifying of women. It just extends right through, and I think, umm, that kind of view is more prevalent than people care to think about. And I suppose I've spent, you know, ten of my thirty working years working in an all-male environment, so I'd say, "So what, that's what I'd expect". Isn't necessarily what I like. But you know, you had to toughen up, otherwise you'd be deeply offended on a minute-by-minute basis. (Linda)

What was common in women's accounts of men's assumed entitlement was that, for men, viewing children as sexual objects could be humorous. Any disquiet the woman felt can be dismissed as the woman taking it too seriously. Whilst the women were affronted by the defaced flyer, provisos such as Linda's, that you have to 'toughen up' was telling. In order to keep the peace, women turn their disgust inwards. Mary Daly (1979) wrote:

> "She lacks a sense of humor" – applied by men to every threatening woman – is one basic "electrode" embedded just deeply enough into the fearful foreground of women's psyches to be able to conduct female energy against the self while remaining disguised. The comment is urbane, insidious. It is boring and predictable if seen through, devastating if believed. The problem is that the victim who "sees through" this dirty trick on one level may "believe" the judgment literally on more vulnerable levels. (p. 19)

Mary Daly (1979), drawing on Simone De Beauvoir, suggests that one solution to the oppression is to refuse "to allow the fact of struggle between the sexes to be camouflaged, that is, by denying the false "harmony of mankind" (p. 56) .

Kim thought that changing social mores make men's interest in children overt and public. She thought that the person who defaced the flyer did not just privately *think* "What is it like dating…", the grafitti was a public announcement, for an audience; 'to make other's know'. For the women in my study, it 'made them know' that someone was wondering what it would be like to be in a 'dating', presumably hetero-sexual relationship, with girls the same age as their daughters. For men and boys, it was a public demonstration of the male gaze, a 'joke' between men.

> But that's really, I mean – whoever did that did it with someone else watching, or for the benefit of an audience. You don't kind of sneak up, write it and walk away, do you? So it's kind of saying, "This is the question I'm really interested in". Interesting. (Kim)

Sally had earlier observed that men feel entitled to treat children as sexual objects at younger and younger ages, and that the legal system appeared to put responsibility on to the children. Such apparent legal justifications of men's entitlement mirror views prevalent in child pornography sites, that is, the responsibility shifts to the less powerful person, via the foregrounding of her agency. Frequently, Gail Dines (2010) points out, 'agency' is a necessary illusion for users, who don't see themselves as rapists:

> Much of the illegal child pornography [retired FBI Special Agent Kenneth Lanning] has investigated indeed shows the child looking somewhat like a willing accomplice, appearing as if she is eagerly consenting to the experience. Of course this is a lie but one that, Lanning argues, many perpetrators – and indeed sometimes lawyers, social workers, and police – believe, since they view the image as the truth rather than as a carefully constructed representation of reality that is produced with specific goals in mind. In their research on men convicted of downloading child pornography, researchers Ethel Quayle and Max Taylor found that these men looked for "superficial clues which allowed the viewer to believe that the children in the pictures were consenting and enjoyed being photographed". (Dines, 2010, p. 151)

Some women found the reality of men's sexual interest in children overwhelming. Fiona's children attended a local primary school where the Principal had recently been convicted on child pornography charges. She chose not to engage with the defaced flyer, and she said that

once she was sure her children had not been hurt at school, she had chosen not to think further about that situation either:

> Ohhh, ok, ohh, ahhhh, or, ok, ummm, yeah. It's a bit sick and sad isn't it? … I don't know what to say about it cause there is a whole, there is a whole lot of stuff out there in society that I choose not to concern myself about, because I hope that I don't ever have to come up against it. And I've got plenty of things to worry about myself. So, you know, pornography and all that, supposedly what's on the internet and out there, what our school principal got up to, our old school principal got up to, umm … I don't really feel the need to know what he actually did, and I think I'm satisfied that none of our children were hurt in any way. So I sort of consciously don't really want to think about that sort of thing because, like I said, if you worry about everything there is to be worried about, you'll get anxiety and depression and probably curl up in a corner and die ...
>
> It's not going to make me a better person or a wiser person to think about some things. I'm just going to avoid them. Sure, someone's gotta make policy about it and know about it, but it's not my sphere, and I don't think I need to know. So whoever wrote that, I hope that if they are talking to Elle they keep that sort of thought to themselves. Or maybe that she doesn't come and end up talking to that person, and particularly not in an unsupervised situation. (Fiona)

Although Fiona did not want to dwell on male interest in girls her daughter's age, she immediately considered the ways in which her daughter might be kept safe. Without collective access to a critical language of radical dissent, women invest their energies in keeping their individual daughters safe.

"It's everywhere, it's absolutely everywhere"

The mainstreaming of a pornographic aesthetic creates new dilemmas for women and their daughters. Women described how normalised a commodified pornographic aesthetic was in their day-to-day lives. For some women, it was an 'out of control' industry which ran counter to their desires for sexual freedom and openness:

> But it's everywhere, it's absolutely everywhere. It's frightening really. It's become a lot more normal, it's not just under the shelf anymore. It's just become a lot more normal, the whole sex industry, you know, it's just become normalised … I think the sexual industry, I think, is just out of control. (Aileen)

In September 2011, immediately prior to the second round of interviews for this research, the budget jewellery chain, Diva, released a new *Playboy* range. *Playboy* is a brand which is 60-years-old, the first magazine published in 1953 (Dines, 2010). Although the contemporary sex industry was built on the back of three key pornographic magazines – *Playboy*, *Penthouse* and *Hustler* – the advent of the internet has meant that distribution of these print publications is shrinking. *Playboy Enterprises*, while losing money in its traditional publication (net quarter losses of $13.7 million in 2009), has successfully turned its 'brand' into a key asset through the production of licensed products (Dines, 2010, p. 21). *Playboy*'s Editorial Director, Chris Napolitano, said in 2007: "[t]he whole licensed products business now generates in excess of $800 million in global retails sales in more than 150 countries" (cited in Dines, 2010, p. 22). Gail Dines (2010) notes that the *Playboy* brand has been careful to retain a 'soft core' image, and so it "has penetrated the mainstream like no other pornographic product" (p. 21). Reflecting on the historical relationship between the corporations which publish *Playboy*, *Penthouse* and *Hustler*, Dines (2010) details:

> The more Flynt and Guccione pushed the envelope, the more acceptable *Playboy* looked, and the more *Playboy* penetrated the mainstream, the more latitude *Hustler* and *Penthouse* were given to move hard-core. This symbiotic relationship meant that by the time the Internet was introduced into homes, the culture had been well groomed to accept pornography as a part of everyday life rather than an industry that produces a system of images that debases and dehumanizes women and men. (p. 23)

It was in this context that Diva decided to market *Playboy* jewellery. Pre-teen girls are a key demographic target of Diva's cheap and cheerful 'best friends forever' (bff) merchandise and marketing. Girls are encouraged to 'bff' Diva on Facebook, and have status updates (product marketing) delivered directly to their newsfeed (see Figure 7.4):

Figure 7.4 Diva BFF us on Facebook

The press release that announced Diva's *Playboy* range of jewellery said in part: "The perfect amount of jewels and just the right amount of sexiness *Playboy* for Diva will have every girl

feeling glamorous and red carpet ready". Similar messages flowed through social media, for example, via Twitter, (see Figure 7.5):

Figure 7.5 Diva Twitter Screen Shot

The range itself included Playmate of the Month necklaces – 'Miss January'', "Miss February" and so on – and *Playboy* Bunny Bowtie necklaces (see Figures 7.6 & 7.7):
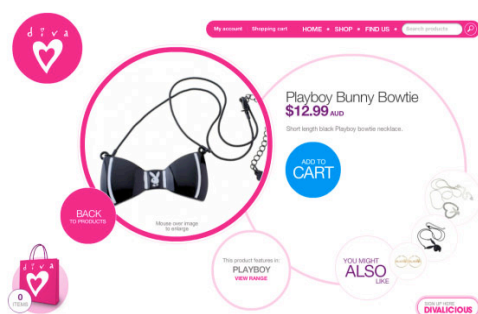

Figure 7.6 Diva Playboy Bunny Bowtie   Figure 7.7 Diva Playboy Name Necklace

Products were available online and in-store; and in-store product placement in some stores displayed *Playboy* on the same rack as items in the 'Young Divas' or 'Little Divas' range.

The release of the *Playboy* product range sparked a significant consumer backlash, organised in part through a Change.org petition sponsored by Collective Shout. The petition attracted over 6,000 signatures by October 2011 and 9,015 signatures to September 2012. The blogsite *Corporate Failings* documents, in part, the deepening consumer backlash that followed when Diva deleted online complaints (Corporate Failings, 2011). It was not until March 2012 that Diva announced it had removed *Playboy* from its range (Collective Shout, 2012). However, as at September 2012, *Playboy* branded jewellery was still available for purchase on its website.

> It's everywhere, and I know Saskia loves Diva, and they have that whole bff
> range. Every time she's got five dollars, she wants to go in there and buy
> something, and it would be attractive to her – a set of legs and a pair of high heel
> shoes with a diamond on the bum. Like, 'How cute". "No, that's Playboy". But
> to, what I don't like is how mainstream it has become, how totally acceptable.

> Like, "That's Playboy". "Oh, I know". "Well you don't really know obviously,
> but I know what goes on at the Playboy Mansion and I don't have a problem with
> what people do" ... Then I think, ok, you're too young, that's just ridiculous,
> that's out of control. (Keryn)

Keryn points to the difficult conversations women feel they have to have with their daughters about the way billion-dollar corporate advertising promotions are directed at children, such as *Playboys*' 'every girl feeling glamorous and red carpet ready', and how that is at odds with women's knowledge of "what goes on at the Playboy Mansion". The women in my study were well able to say how they, as adults, interpreted the *Playboy* logo:

> They (Diva) have particular sections that are set up for very young girls. Very
> young. You could take your three-year-old and get jewellery for her. And I think
> that this selling sexuality to very young girls; that to be sexy, you have to be a
> Playboy bunny. What is a Playboy bunny? A Playboy bunny is a woman who is
> sexually available to men, to be oogled, to be patted on the bum, to have your
> little tail pinched, to be revealed. And I think that's what they are selling, and I
> just, I really detest it. I have for a very long time, any labelling of that Playboy
> bunny, I really hate it. (Sally)

During the interviews, women frequently pointed out that young girls themselves do not always see the sexual connotations, and this leaves women conflicted about what to do. Women frequently asked themselves whether they were "making a big deal" or being "old fashioned":

> They love those jewellery shops. But then, am I making, is it just me making a
> deal about it? Do they – they probably don't see the sexual connotations there, do
> they? They just see it's jewellery. (Carmen)

> It really does concern me, and again am I just being old fashioned or not? … the
> sort of, sex toy, sex slave kind of image … but it's the sort of thing, just on that
> hazy area between what I consider acceptable and what I consider not acceptable.
> So there is always that creep towards, you know, you've always got to, where
> exactly do you put your boundaries? And it's really hard with stuff like that,
> that's kind of on the boundary. It's hard to say exactly where you stop and what's
> acceptable. (Fiona)

Fiona saw the 'whole Playboy thing' as antithetical to her own hopes for equality for women, but she was unsure of where to draw the line, and, importantly, how her own views fitted with wider social mores. The mothers in my study constantly asked themselves whether their

responses were fair and appropriate. They questioned whether they were "old fashioned", whether their daughters' interpretations of the imagery in popular culture signified, in fact, a major change in the way the image was understood, or whether the girls were, instead, simply naïve. They were unsure what other mothers thought:

> "Oh, Playboy, she's a goer". I don't even know if that's true. I don't know. It's so, I can't understand how the world has become so desensitised to violence and pornography and sexual images, and it's all just so normal these days … boys of their own generation may look at that completely differently to the boys of my generation, my mother's generation … Has it become so normalised that those boys don't even think about it? They don't think, "Oh my God, look at her tiny shorts, she's easy"… Mia is right into [television program] … I've stopped her watching it cause it finally hit me in my own life. How come that everyone that dies is a woman? How come everyone's gotta get raped and stabbed and have their breasts cut off? … And my child in next to nothing that's perfectly acceptable in their own world, but it has a twist and it's hard to make her see that, "Mia those shorts". "What?" "You 'mose well just wear a pair of knickers, love". "Nooo, they're shorts". And I know, everyone's wearing them, I see everyone wearing them, they are everywhere. What do I do about that? Can't even buy a pair of shorts that are bigger than that. (Keryn)

> You start to accept it as what it is there, which is a picture of a bunny, rather than making the link to, you know, naked girls walking around, I s'pose. But I probably wouldn't be pleased with her to have anything like that. (Debbie)

> I think there is a disconnect for young girls about this pretty jewellery and what it represents … marketing sells this stuff, I don't know, under false pretence … there is no way on God's green earth my daughters would have a Playboy bedspread, that sends so many messages intentionally or unintentionally about what you're up for, you know. (Martina)

The difficulty is further illustrated in Helena's account where she weaves together various approaches to supporting girls; for example, allowing girls the space to reinterpret the imagery as something more positive, against the risks of denying girls the knowledge of 'the real world'.

> To me, it's exploitation of children ... you associate that with that Penthouse, almost prostitution Playboy style … it's about the symbol so … only 'cause we're all into football, I'd say, "Yeah the Rabbitos, go the Rabbits". See, I'd try

to look at a different meaning for that. I'd be saying "No, that's not *Playboy*,
that's Rabbitos" … "If anyone says, 'Why are you wearing it?' say 'Because it's
the Easter bunny'". But I wouldn't, I don't know, I would question my grannies
wearing that. And I'm pretty sure, I have a way of saying things, "Well you
shouldn't wear that". But that's me. "Because boys might look at that and see that
as being an invite". And the minute I say that they say "Grandma!" and I say,
"Grandma is telling you the truth" … I believe it is protecting them with
knowledge. We always say knowledge is power, so it's telling them about the
real world. Don't make it look like it's all wonderful out there. (Helena)

We need to consider the marketing of pornography branded jewellery to girls that, in effect,
even when unacknowledged, brands the girl-child with the pornographic stamp of 'available and
up for it' with reference to the actual pornography that her peers and adults are consuming.

"It's really, really difficult": pornography and sex education

Two of the women in my research discussed the impact their teenage son's pornography use had
on them and their other children. And another woman, Keryn, pointed out that it is not an
uncommon experience:

Every woman I know that is bringing up boys have issues with porn on their
computers. Not at a young age, they are all sort of teenagers, 15, 14, 15, 16 or
whatever, every single one of them, porn. I don't know what sort of porn they are
watching I don't know. It's distressing. I feel like my grandmother or something
going, "Tut, tut", at the world gone mad. What's sacred? What's left? How is it
ok to have a whole industry working around how to legally look like you're have
a relationship with a very young girl? Ok, well, there is a market there, and it's
getting tighter and tighter there with this, with this whole real child porn. (Keryn)

It is clear that many parents are not aware of the porn that their children are viewing. A friend
told of finding the word 'vagina', spelt incorrectly, on a post-it note next to their home
computer. She looked into the search history of the computer and, seeing the names of the
websites, decided not to click through, but her son, then aged eleven, clearly had. Tanya told me
in her second interview that she had had a similar experience:

There was something that came up with my son, who is ten, when he was
watching *Touched by an Angel*. I thought "Oh I'll sit down and watch it". And
there was a bit about pornography and he was suddenly in tears. And I think he'd
just goggled up sex before, and then this show kind of – when I said, "Now if

anything like that happened to you, let me know, you wouldn't be in trouble",

and that gave him the freedom to say, so that was a chance to talk about it … I

asked him and it was, I think it was, umm, I don't think he saw any pornography.

It was probably just a few pages of maybe nude bodies together. I don't – I didn't

get the idea that it was real shocking stuff, but I don't know for sure. (Tanya)

Although all the women in my research described feeling very comfortable talking with their daughters about puberty and physical changes, but conversations about decision-making about sexual practices presented more difficulties. Lillian thought that she was more equipped than most parents to have those sorts of discussions with Amy aged twelve years, given her professional experience teaching sex education at high school level. Even for Lillian, however, the mainstreaming of pornography presented issues. Educators are struggling to keep up. Lillian described the rapidly changing nature of questions that the students raise in her classroom:

I even think back to when I first started in schools – what I'm hearing now is very

different. One of the examples is, I looked up double penetration, just 'cause I

thought, you know stuff but it's definitions … but I thought, I'll click on one of

these, I think it was called Hot Teen Dreams or something like that. It was the

first one that came up. I nearly died. It was just pages and pages and pages of

pictures of people having sex in every orifice of the body, and males/ females,

females / females, you name it, whatever. And I thought, if that is what kids are

opening up. and parents knew. I'd be horrified if that's what my kids were

spending hours looking at and I'm sure there are some kids doing that … they are

asking me these questions. They are finding it from somewhere. It's not in your

everyday book, so they are finding it out from somewhere … And the kids are

fascinated by bestiality. They don't necessarily call it that, but they, you know,

that's the sort of stuff that they come up with. (Lillian)

Research conducted in 2011 by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society reported that most teachers are ill-equipped to teach sex education (Bravas, 2011). Part of the difficulty is the mainstreaming of pornography. Although the report appears reluctant to specify pornography, their research data broadly considers media, information technology and gender roles and stereotyping in sex education (Mitchell et al., 2011). Children are accessing pornography in the school playground on smart phones and other connected devices, and educators and commentators are pointing out it is the 'new' sex education (Freedman, 2012; Ryan, 2012; Sinnerton & Gough, 2012). Maree Crabbe and David Corlett have developed resources for teachers to deal with the reality that "pornography is now our most prominent sex educator", and schools "face a significant challenge because of the mainstreaming of hard-corn

pornography" (Crabbe cited in Ryan, 2012, para. 7). David Corlett argues that "[y]oung people must have the skills to reject a sexuality that eroticises degradation and violence as it undermines their ability to have healthy and fulfilling intimate relationships" (Corlett cited in Ryan, 2012, para. 28). Eroticised male aggression is common in pornography, acts such as choking, gagging and manhandling, and this is of concern when it is a primary source of sex education for children. Young people may be very aware of 'sophisticated' sexual techniques inspired by pornography and the media more broadly, but, they have a striking lack of knowledge about basic reproduction and contraception (Grzywacz, 2011).

As stated earlier, conversations with their daughters about puberty were standard and largely straightforward for the mothers in my study. Conversations with their daughters about sexual decision-making, however, were not. Research has demonstrated that sexuality education in Australia mirrors that in the United States and the United Kingdom, and is mainly limited to basic biological detail, with some advice on how to look after yourself. Advice on contraception, and if offered at all, is mainly by mothers to daughters (Carmody, 2009). Part of the difficulty is the increasingly younger age at which such conversations about sexual decision-making are becoming necessary. After describing the broad sense of disquiet around social and cultural practices which eroticise children, Kim said (noted above):

> So you kind of find yourself saying – well, you kind of need to explain, sexual stimulation and satisfaction feels good, and that's a completely different thing to how you engage in it, and how you protect yourself from being targeted. (Kim)

Pleasure, within sexual politics, is contested territory. Dealing with pleasure is at the crux of debates about sex education policy. Michelle Fine's (1988) foundational work on 'the missing discourse of desire' in sex education is widely cited. Michelle Woolley (2011) suggests that pleasure and desire are, at times, constructed as intimately personal, and inappropriate for classroom discussion. Given the public face of pornography and the public discussions that occur when teachers discuss it in a classroom setting, there is clearly a need for critical discourses about pleasure and desire. Yet many sexuality educators do not wish to discuss the politics of pleasure, in particular, the ways in which eroticised inequality, such as that promoted in pornography, is marketed as sexually pleasurable. Michelle Fine, revisiting her 1988 essay with Sara McClelland "Sexuality Education and Desire: Still Missing After all These Years" (2006), does not mention pornography in 42 pages. In Fine's original paper in 1988, she mentioned pornography only to acknowledge women's agency in their sexual practices, drawing on the work of Benjamin, Rubin and Weeks, all libertarians who separate out discussions of pleasure from discussions of power.

In the Australian context, Daniel Marshall (2011) has written that health-based teaching of sex and sexualities in schools has resulted in a 'missing discourse of history'. Marshall (2011) has compared contemporary health-based approaches to the explicitly political activist interventions of the 1970s and early 80s, and concluded that

> contemporary sex and sexuality education routinely erases its own history of political struggle, misses opportunities to develop young people's political knowledge, comprehension and skills, and promotes an individualized and pathologized notion of sexual experience. (p. 13)

He argues that we need to look at implementing interdisciplinary sex and sexuality education which includes non-heterosexual histories. Although Marshall's aim is to circumvent homophobia, it could equally apply to feminist critiques of eroticised inequality – that is, pornography – order to politicise sexual practices, above and beyond individual pleasure or pain.

To achieve this is difficult when key public intellectuals, such as Professor Alan McKee, who lead research into public health policy and practice and consult to various state governments about 'Positive Sexual Health', refuse to consider anything less than a celebration of pornography. McKee is very critical of discourses of concern about children, and argues these discourses make it difficult for parents to talk openly with their children:

> It is appalling the level of public discussion around child sexuality. All of the rhetoric about the sexualisation of children is damaging because it makes it very difficult for parents to talk openly about issues of sexuality with their children. (McKee cited in Harrington, 2012, para. 15)

Even educators who are concerned about the levels of sexual violence are reluctant to criticise pornography. Moira Carmody's book, *Sex & Ethics: Young people and ethical sex* (2009), draws on the experiences of young people, and describes well the problematic nature of the sexual-political landscape. But she rejects radical feminist analysis, because:

> I now see that as a deeply pessimistic view which held out little hope for change, apart from a complete restructuring of society. While some aspects of this restructuring are evidenced in increased gender equality for women in the public sphere, it is the private sphere of intimate relations that proves so resistant to change. (Carmody, 2009, p. 5)

Her main point is that feminist interventions have not worked, and sexual violence has not gone away. In some places, however, Carmody (2009) misrepresents radical feminist analysis. She says, "[Foucault's] notion of power as mobile and productive and in a constant state of negotiation contrasts with grand narratives, such as radical feminism, in which power is always structurally defined by patriarchy"; and "[i]n radical feminist discourse, which retains a strong influence in violence prevention work, male sexuality is conceptualised as uncontrollable and women are required to manage it to avoid sexual exploitation. So men are consumed by sexual desire, while women's desires disappears or is determined in reaction to male desire" (pp. 86, 88). Surely it is not radical feminism, but male supremacy, that constructs men's violence as uncontrollable and men's desire for violence as natural. Radical feminism points to the ideological nature of such ideas, and calls for the complete restructuring of society.

My research shows that while mothers talk about the way pornography is marketed to their children, negotiating the implications of this with their children is difficult. When the state legalises the sex industry, it is increasingly unlikely that the state would support critical discussions of sexual politics and the role of pleasure and the exercise of power, for example through the education system's sex education programs. The state's role as pimp, collecting tax revenue from women who are bought and sold in prostitution, effectively restrains its capacity to critique that which it supports.

> Largely I think I'm hitting my head against a brick wall. I tell them one thing but everything else tells them the other and who are they going to listen to? Their mother or everybody else, you know? It's really difficult, it's really, really difficult. (Aileen)

The various apparatuses of the state –the education system, public health programs, the legal system and so on – form a cohesive narrative to ensure that men's sexual access to women and children is not fundamentally threatened. Liberal feminism colludes in this by refusing to challenge men's rights, instead focussing on 'empowering' individual girls and women. A radical feminist analysis insists that girls have a right to be safe and to flourish; the former being the precursor of the later.

Conclusion

Sara Ruddick's theory of maternal thinking proposes that 'mothers think', and that their thinking arises from seeking to meet the demands of their children. Children make three main demands of mothers: to be protected by acts of preservative love, to flourish through nurturance, and to be trained to successfully meet society's expectations. A key finding in my research is

that women are negotiating social fault lines in trying to meet these demands. In short, they are trying to hold on to emancipatory hopes for their daughters, along the lines of 'girls can do anything', at the same time as they are trying to mitigate a hostile social context in which a pornographic aesthetic has become mainstream, demanding conformity.

Girls' success depends on their ability to meet social expectations. Whilst young women have been granted new freedoms to participate in economic, social and public life, their place in the social world is governed by a new sexual contract informed by a "technology of sexiness" (Gill, 2007) and "hyper-femininity" (McRobbie, 2007). The women in my study saw the hegemonic positioning of girls as 'empowered sluts' as the porno-chic subjectivity of choice, promoted through the sex, music, fashion and media industries, and apologists in liberal feminism. The porno-chic subjectivity is marketed as a big 'fuck you' to conservative traditions that have long denied women's sexual agency. However, the dilemma for women in my study is that training girls to successfully meet the social expectations of the new sexual contract is at odds with sort of nurturing that would enable girls to flourish in their own right. Women's primary concern, a pre-requisite to success and flourishing, is protecting girls' lives; keeping them safe from harm.

This chapter has accounted for the ways in which the male gaze positions girl children as serving men's sexual interest. It is not an optional 'paedophilic' view chosen by 'moral warriors'. Instead, women and girls are made to see themselves through this gaze, endlessly reminded and encouraged to celebrate their status as highly desired servicers of the penis. Liberal feminism has failed to provide a politicised language of dissent to enable girls and their mothers to collectively resist eroticised inequality. Instead, liberal feminism's focus on pleasure and agency holds young woman solely responsible for their success or failure; they are personally responsible for fashioning and endlessly improving a successful feminine self. Such hetero-hyper-sexualised technologies of the self, in the neoliberal political economy, work through a discourse of choice. They perpetuate the illusion that a meritocracy exists, as if equality between men and women were something already achieved. The radical feminist critique of eroticised inequality is dismissed as 'judgemental'. Tolerance, the ruling value under neoliberalism (Bray, 2008), dictates that women hold their tongues and do not speak out collectively against those practices which primarily serve men's interests. The anger of the women in my study at this state of affairs is highly atomised. They did not know what other women do, or think. They were unsure how they compared. A persistent theme of this research was this aspect of mothering work is undertaken in isolation and without community support.

The message that 'girls can do anything', is underpinned by the focus on the individual, and enacted through a discourse of 'choice' and 'choosing'. Girls' choices however are increasingly restricted, not least through the commodified, monocultural, pornographic aesthetic, which girls are required to choose – and which serves to put them in their place. In the next chapter, I bring together the themes presented so far to examine the ways that women in this study understood women's public success.

Chapter Eight: Making sense of public success: the sexual politics of failure

Introduction

This chapter reports on how the women in my study made sense of women's public success, capturing their reactions to Australia's first female Prime Minister and exploring the potential implications for girls of this milestone event. Australia's first female Prime Minister was sworn into office in June 2010 when Julia Gillard won the overwhelming support of her caucus colleagues to replace sitting Prime Minister Kevin Rudd as leader of the Labor Party. A federal election was then called for August 2010 and, after an unprecedented and protracted period of negotiation with the Independents, Gillard won out over the Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott, to successfully form a minority government.

My first round of interviews occurred between October 2010 and February 2011, and presented a unique opportunity to explore with women the significance of Australia being led for the first time by a woman Prime Minister, just a few months into her term. My second round of interviews occurred twelve months later, between October 2011 and February 2012. This timing was also significant, because the interviews happened in the lead up to the Queensland state election campaign (which Labor Premier Anna Bligh subsequently lost in a landslide defeat to the conservative Liberal National Party). During the first week of the state election campaign, in February 2012, deposed former Prime Minister Rudd announced what was to be his first challenge to the Gillard leadership. Although Gillard again won the overwhelming support of her colleagues and remained Prime Minister, Rudd embarked on a destabilisation campaign and was ultimately re-elected as leader in June 2013 (Walsh, 2013).

The sexual politics at play in the everyday lives of women, described so far in this thesis, were writ large across the national political stage during the data collection phase of this study, from 2010 to 2012. The first and second round of interviews took place prior to Ms Gillard's misogyny speech in October 2012, that is, they occurred at a time when unrestrained misogyny was on display but went unremarked upon in the mainstream media – conservative commentators would say 'the gender card' had yet to be played. This chapter explores women's reactions to the political climate at the time of the interviews as a vehicle for understanding how women make sense of women's public success. Have we seen the fall of the public woman? (McRobbie, 2007), Have women come so far to fail?

The key themes in the findings chapters presented so far have built and expanded on each other. Chapter Five explored the materiality of women's lives, and the schizoid situation where

women are excluded from the subjectivity they are instrumentally positioned to engender in their daughters – that is, the ideal neoliberal citizen consumer. Chapter Six considered that ways in which girls have been robbed of an explicitly politicised language, by which they could name oppression. 'Girls can do anything' is no longer a challenge to barriers, but an expectation of individual girls who can 'set their minds to it'. Chapter Seven then explored how a mainstream pornographic aesthetic positions girl children as sexually serving the interests of men, and the difficulty this presents for women who wish to nurture their daughters and enable them to flourish but who are, by necessity, charged with protecting girls. In this chapter, I bring together these three areas to analyse the broader sexual politics enacted on the national political stage between mid-2010 and late-2012.

A woman Prime Minister: "so what? why not?"

When first-wave feminists in Australia sought the right to vote in the late 1800s and early 1900s, they saw women's political participation as the key to tackling issues which remain today, such as violence, poverty and working conditions. In 1902, Australia was the first country in the world to give white women the right to vote *and* stand for national parliament; Indigenous peoples had to wait until 1965 (Office for Women, 2005). Although white women won the right to stand for parliament in 1902, they were not actually represented until 1943, and as of August 2013, no Indigenous women have ever been elected to the federal parliament. It was only in the 1980s that (white) women's representation in federal parliaments reached an average of 15%, a proportion that grew slowly to 19% during the 1990s, and to 29% during the 2000s (Parliamentary Library, 2011). Women's presence in Australian parliaments reached a plateau in 2005 and has been in decline since (Sawer, 2012). Given this slow, and now declining rate of change, it seemed useful to ask the women in my study if the swearing in of Australia's first woman Prime Minister in 2010 was considered a significant milestone. Many, but not all, of the women in the study described discussing the milestone with their daughters. Debbie and Sarah's responses were typical:

> [My daughters] just go, "So she's there, I don't want to do that, but I could if I
> wanted to", not recognising what it would have taken to do it … Julia Gillard
> being Prime Minister didn't seem to have any remarkable effect, but then I'm not
> a very – I wouldn't say that I would be saying to them, "What do you think about
> that?" It was just, I'm not sure that there was a conversation about it … I think
> we all took it on the chin and said, "Of course", and I don't know if we celebrated
> it enough because I think we thought it was a normal thing to happen. (Debbie)

She just took it in her stride. I guess when you're 11 years old, it's not such a big deal, "Yeah, so what? Hasn't there been one there before?" [laughing]. (Sarah)

She didn't care. No, see, we're not a household that talks politics a lot actually. (Jennifer)

Women reported that, in general, their daughters were nonchalant about a new female Prime Minister, thinking, "So what, why not?". Such responses are not surprising given their daughters have inherited a thirty-year legacy of 'girls can do anything'; the message which morphed during the 1990s into a full-blown, consumer-driven 'girl power' culture. As previously described, when the slogan 'girls can do anything' was first coined, it was a positional notion which acknowledged barriers and encouraged girls to oppose disadvantage and discrimination. Since then, however, 'girls can do anything' has increasingly been understood as fact. Girls are positioned as always, already empowered players in an ostensible meritocracy (A. Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2004). A female Prime Minister was proof of that, and taken for granted.

We probably wouldn't have talked about it much. I'm not probably really into politics. I'm probably one that just says, "Oh well, whoever's there, just hope for the best". So you know, I don't sort of get that involved. So I probably wouldn't have encouraged any conversation as such … don't remember hearing anything negative from her and I don't really know what she thinks about politics. I know she talks about it from time to time – what they might have talked about at school. (Lillian)

They just had general conversations with me, but I don't think that they really registered about how important it was at that point in time … potentially I don't think they see some of the issues or barriers that women face … so, yeah, I think they probably are in that point where they just go, "Well, why wouldn't that happen?" (Martina)

I think we talked about it together, because I was so excited, and so were her aunties, and so was her grandmother. And the significance of it was certainly not lost on her. She was surprised that it was a big deal. I think she was surprised that it hadn't happened before. (Sally)

When she became Prime Minister, we did say to the girls, "See what ladies can do, see what women can do if they put their mind to it? Here is just another example". But it didn't have a real big overreacting. (Helena)

The girls' "So what, why not?" response speaks powerfully to the connection between the assumed post-feminist meritocracy and the political reality.

"What if she has bad PMT and sinks the economy": meritocratic assumptions

During 2012, two examples in the public domain illustrated the power of the discourse of meritocracy. The first was when Julie Collins (2012), Minister for the Status of Women, advised the government's commitment to increase the representation of women in leadership positions was on target to achieve 40% of government board positions by 2015. That achievement contrasted with the corporate sector where only 13.8% of ASX200 company directors were women (Collins, 2012). Former Labor federal Minister Barry Cohen responded to a question about quotas in April 2012 by denouncing the "annual whinge" of the "sisterhood" that he said followed every International Women's Day. Cohen described the representation of women in politics as historically "appalling" but rejected the notion that women face systemic barriers: after all, "[t]hose who peddle this line don't know what they are talking about. I was in parliament for more than 20 years and not once did I hear anyone suggest stopping women's entry into parliament" (2012, para. 9). Ingenuously, Cohen (2012) suggested that he would not care if every member of parliament was a woman, "provided they arrive there democratically" (para. 22). If Cohen really believed it possible for men to be completely unrepresented, he has not wasted time planning for it. Instead, he suggested a choice between two possibilities: "[i]t's great to have vastly increased numbers of women in national parliaments but not nearly as good as treating them as human beings" (Cohen, 2012, para. 28). In an actual meritocracy, surely it would be possible to have both.

The second example was the backlash that followed academic Carole Ford's newspaper articles addressing women's political representation prior to and post the 2012 Queensland election campaign (Ford, 2012b, 2012c). Ford reported on the election's negative impact on women's representation, resulting in the newly elected conservative government cutting women's representation from 49% under Labor to 18% under the LNP. Even racehorses had their rights defended by an Assistant Minister for Racing, while the position of Minister for Women was abolished (Ford, 2012c). Subsequently, Max Tomlinson, a media advisor for Liberal Senator Ian MacDonald and previously the editor of the *Townsville Bulletin* from 1998 to 2003 (Caldwell, 2012), trained his sights on Carole Ford. Tomlinson had also won pre-selection in Thuringowa for the LNP in 2010 (Caldwell, 2012). Tomlinson emailed Ford, saying he "generally ignore[d] the bleatings of sourpusses like you" but felt "moved" to say "Get a life" (cited in Crook, 2012):

> … Like most women, you probably don't possess the necessary drive, determination
> and decisiveness that men innately possess. It's not a personal criticism; it's a fact of

biology … Blokes dominate most areas of human endeavour because Nature equipped them with something called testosterone. That was part of Nature's grand design to enable men to be stronger, more fearless and more determined than their sisters. Sorry, Carole, fact not fiction. Women occupy a special but different place in the world to that of men … Women who can't cut it in – what did you call it? the boys' club – can easily cover their inadequacies by claiming bias, sexism, misogyny, chauvinism etc. etc. ad infinitum. It's so tiring to read such twaddle. Face reality, my dear. Smell the coffee … I repeat: GET A LIFE … (cited in Crook, 2012).

Tomlinson's position received conditional support from men's rights activist, Townsville-based medico, Greg Canning, who enjoyed significant media coverage for his repeated claims that men suffer from sexist feminists (Canning, 2012a, 2012b). Canning deploys men's health as a policy platform in his quest to establish the anti-misandry-based 'International Men's Day' (International Men's Day, 2012). The points of contention have a long history. One hundred years earlier, in 1912, Clementine Churchill (married to Winston Churchill) responded to similar arguments raised by Sir Almroth Wright, in a letter to the editor of *The Times*:

Dear Sir, After reading Sir Almroth Wright's able and weighty exposition of women as he knows them the question seems no longer to be 'Should women have votes?' but 'Ought women not to be abolished altogether?'…We learn from him that in their youth they are unbalanced, that from time to time they suffer from unreasonableness and hypersensitiveness, and that their presence is distracting and irritating to men in their daily lives and pursuits. If they take up a profession, the indelicacy of their minds makes them undesirable partners for their male colleagues. Later on in life they are subject to grave and long-continued mental disorders, and, if not quite insane, many of them have to be shut up … And may we not look to Sir Almroth Wright to crown his many achievements by delivering mankind from the parasitic, demented, and immoral species which has infested the world for so long? Yours obediently, C.S.C. ("One of the Doomed"). (Churchill cited in Soames, 2003; Usher, 2012)

Although it is tempting to dismiss the views of Tomlinson and his supporters as anachronistic, to do so minimises the significant power they have to promote their own views, and to suppress the views of women, given their privileged positions in public life. Following the publication of his email to Ford, Tomlinson resigned his role as media advisor. At the time newly elected LNP state member for Townsville, John Hathaway, echoed federal Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, saying, "They're not views that I share … I think we're well and truly beyond this in the current climate and it's all merit-based" (cited in Skene, 2012). Hathaway was left unable to explain the

reduction of women representatives from 49 to 18% under the conservative government which saw him win office. This difficulty arises when biologically-determined views continue to powerfully shape the experiences of women in public life, but are dismissed through the premature announcement of a 'merit-based system'.

The women in my study came up against examples of deeply entrenched attitudes against women on a daily basis. Women had to straddle parallel universes, their daughter's belief in 'girls can do anything' and beliefs about biological determinism. Kim described an incident that occurred immediately after Prime Minister Gillard was able to form government in 2010:

> I'll tell you something curious. When I came to work on the day after the result was announced finally … I went into our little corner store as it was, and to overhear the shopkeeper, who I had a lot of regard for and I've known for some years as a customer, and one of his customers talking about Julia Gillard in the kind of derogatory, reserved-for-women language. So one of them was saying, "I've got nothing against women, as you know, and equal rights and all of that, but what if she just has a bad PMT day and sinks the economy" … and I was on the verge, because it's a small space, of joining in, in a jocular fashion because I thought they were joking. And then the other person said, "Yeah, I know what you mean mate, it's bullshit". And they were serious and these men were in their fifties and I could not believe what I had heard, "Well I'll catch ya tomorrow then". "Yeah, seeya mate". They really considered the country was likely to go to pot because of the hormones in the Prime Minister's body [incredulous laughing]. And that day when I came to work – I was working with a young woman I didn't know very well who would be in her mid-twenties – and for her it was not even on the radar that the Prime Minister elect was a female. Like, it was just such a non-issue because in her mind there was no issue of gender. (Kim)

Kim was prepared to join in a joke, making fun of women's hormones because, in a post-feminist discourse that assumes feminist concerns, for example, about biological determinism, have been dealt with and a meritocracy exists, 'women's hormones' would be a laughing matter. However, we know that men often disguise discriminatory statements as jokes, in order to position those who object as humourless (Daly, 1979; McLellan, 2010; Spender, 1980). In this case, the men in the store were not even pretending to joke; they were seriously concerned about the Prime Minister's menstrual cycle and its potential effect on the Australian economy. Biological determinist reasoning, deeply entrenched in stereotypes about women leaders, are cycled through a populist view of merit to explain why women do not, should not, cannot, or

will not be successful political leaders. The argument that we are effectively in "the post-feminist period", as made by former Prime Minister John Howard (Akerman, 2006), or that politics occurs within a meritocracy, fails to account for the sexist regulation of women who do become political leaders.

Professor Charles Arnade (2006), in his review of Julia Baird's (2004) *Media Tarts: How the Australian Press frames female politicians,* questions such sexist treatment, asking "[do] Australian women encounter greater opposition and ridicule when standing for politics?" (p.2). He speculates that "[m]aybe this is because Australians tend to be more outspoken and sometimes this translates into more insensitivity and even rudeness. It might also be a more male oriented society" (p. 2). Labor Party heavyweight Bill Ludwig has observed:

> The blokes here just don't like women, especially women in charge …'The federal election is a long way off, it's different circumstances, but I don't think the blokes like Julia, either. The men of Queensland are just very negative towards women" (cited in Marriner, 2012).

Nonetheless, the logic of merit continues to dominate explanations of women's success or lack thereof. During a three year study, Professor of Leadership Studies, Beverly Alimo-Metcalf (2011) found that merit went unrewarded. When women produced superior outcomes it was attributed to luck, or to exerting extra effort, whereas men's success was attributed to personal capability. For men, failure was attributed to bad luck, but for women it was attributed to their lack of ability. "A major problem for women is that they simply don't look like the notion of a leader, because leaders look like men" (Alimo-Metcalf, 2011, para. 10).

"Those bloody jackets": policing the boundaries of 'woman'

Julia Gillard, as Prime Minister, and previous as deputy Prime Minister, provided leadership to the nation during some remarkable times in history. Australia's economy had remained strong during the global financial crisis, avoiding the painful austerity measures implemented in other countries (International Monetary Fund, 2012). The Prime Minister successfully formed Australia's first minority government and, with the support of the Independents and Greens, realised significant reforms in mining taxation, the environment and disability support. And yet, when the data for this study was collected, the criticism of the Prime Minister's governance between 2010 and 2012 was overwhelmingly vicious and negative. Commentators identified three key problem areas: firstly, the process by which the Prime Minister rose to power; secondly, the way that she negotiated policy agreements within a minority government, and thirdly, an intensely hostile media (Dunlop, 2012; Kernot, 2012; Mahlab, 2012; Scutt, 2012a,

2012b; Summers, 2012a). A common theme in media coverage was that Prime Minister Gillard had 'back-stabbed' Rudd, and that her success was a women's sneaky manipulation, rather than due political process. The women in my study referred to the accession of the Prime Minister in terms such as the following:

> At the beginning there was all the media thing – the only way to get to the top was to put the knife in everyone's back and climb on. (Jan)

> I really believe she started off on the wrong foot to begin with. The media – I really believe she didn't have a chance because of the way she got in. From the word go, she was undermined, and I must say I lost faith in her, umm, from the word go, because of what happened. But that's because I voted for Rudd and he was more of a humble sort of a person, if you know what I mean, whereas she was right out there, and that turned me straight off … Well, the sad thing with Julia Gillard is she has been treated bad as a woman. But I believe she set herself up … they keep rubbing it in now … they are still throwing it back on her, not letting people forget what she did, and that's the unfortunate thing,. If she was a man they would not be doing that, you know? So I think she's, because she's come in the way she has, the media won't … let it go, and they keep thinking women are inferior. (Helena)

Helena felt that the media saw women as inferior, constantly 'rubbing in' the process by which Prime Minister Gillard came to power. Law academic Jocelynne Scutt's (2012a) has reviewed the history of leaders coming to power and the resulting media coverage: she shows that Australia's first twenty-six male Prime Ministers were elected by caucus or party room; twenty-one changes of Prime Minster occurred outside of an election; and seven never won an election. The legitimacy of all these Prime Ministers, after having won the support of their colleagues, was not questioned by the media. In contrast, Australia's twenty-seventh Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, in contrast, faced endless questioning about her right to lead the government, despite winning the overwhelming support of caucus in June 2010 and February 2012. Scutt (2012a) put the widespread media destabilisation in its historical context:

> Relentless concentration upon the Prime Minister's accession to power and her retaining the post in the February ballot defies past coverage of Prime Ministers – all men, challengers always male (p. 3).

Anne Summers interviewed an unnamed Labor frontbencher in 2012 who put it this way: "[c]hange is never pretty. There is always blood on the floor, but having a woman do it – that

offends the natural order of things … there is the idea that women should not seize power" (cited in Summers, 2012a, para. 9). Scutt described the online treatment of the Prime Minister as "savagery"; and in turn, Scutt received online comments which are indicative of the general mood of this time:

> Come off the grass Jocelyn. It's the nasty, vindictive, spiteful, viscous, lying, untrustworthy, conniving, hateful personality we don't like. We don't actually give a dam what body you wrap around it. Being totally incompetent doesn't help. What ever body you put it in, when what's in side makes Keating look soft a cuddly, you've lost most of us. (Hasbeen, 2012)

Despite Hasbeen's view, what emerged very strongly from my study was that 'the body' of the leader was, in fact, key to understanding women's treatment in political life. What was common across all the public criticism the Prime Minister attracted was an objections to her personally, along with a frequent disavowal that her gender was relevant. The women in my study expressed disappointment and frustration that media attention focussed so intensely on superficial matters, such as appearance, rather than on important policy issues:

> [*The Australian*] said something … about ill-fitting suits and I'm just like is that the most important thing that you can say? … I mean who cares if her suit fits? … Can she lead the country? Can she achieve consensus? … I don't think they'd do that for a man, so that really disappointed me … it saddened me. (Fiona)

> That is one of the other barriers that women face in terms of a political or public career. You've got to have really thick skin, and you know, none of us like to have ourselves critiqued, and that's what happens. It's not the job you do, it's a personal critique. (Martina)

> This week that, when we've just passed what is the most significant laws to come from Parliament for ages, the papers were full of photos of her kissing her colleagues, and they were the headlines. And I thought that was weird, and it actually makes me very angry … it's disappointing that it hasn't abated, and I think it says a lot about how unequal we are, and it probably flies in the face of my comments earlier that the battles have largely been won. Well, they haven't. If you can't be a Prime Minister and just be dealt with on the basis of the work you do, it's pretty amazing. (Kim)

The intense focus on the Prime Minister's appearance was fuelled by Germaine Greer's comments on Tony Jones' *Q & A* television show in 2012:

> What I want her to do is get rid of those bloody jackets. It's not even fashion, they don't fit. Every time she turns around, you've got that strange horizontal crease, which means they are cut too narrow in the hips. You've got a big arse, Julia. Just get on with it. (McEvoy, 2012)

The throwaway comment attracted laughter and applause from the audience and panellists. In the days that followed federal Opposition Leader Tony Abbott joined in the national joke at a community forum when he responded to a woman's suggestion that he "get some of those jackets off her" with "I know, I know, I know, Germaine Greer was right on that subject" (Lane, 2012). Abbott was subsequently asked by Carl Stefanovic on the *Today* show if he was sorry about his remark:

> Abbott: Well, look, it was an off the cuff remark, responding to a member of the public. I shouldn't have said it and I regret it Carl.
>
> Stefanovic: Are you sorry for it?
>
> Abbott: Well, I've just said I regret it, Carl, and I guess, umm, it was inappropriate banter.
>
> Stefanovic: You don't believe it though?
>
> Abbott: Well, look, I'm a bloke and I have learnt a long time ago, Carl, that you should never comment on these sort of subjects. And what I discovered the other day was that I shouldn't really comment on other peoples' comments either. (Newton, 2012)

The Leader of the Opposition called on his status as a *bloke,* to argue that men are the victims of a double-silencing by women, and the silencing of men rather than the policing of women became the central narrative. Rather than actually being silenced, Abbott effectively communicated his refusal to condemn the policing of women. His regret was about the sanctioning he received for having joined in.

Many women in political leadership are aware of the gendered discrimination they face. However, as Anne Summers (2012a) notes, it is a difficult conversation to have. Kristina

Keneally, former Premier of New South Wales, told Summers (2012a): "I can't ever consider that I experienced some kind of disadvantage because I am a woman. I won't lend support to such a thesis". And yet, in a profile piece in the *Weekend Australian Magazine,* Keneally explained how, even after leaving public office, a change in her hairstyle garnered media headlines, something as Premier she could have ill-afforded: "Can you imagine what would have happened if I changed my look when I was premier? ... Look what happens when Julia gets a haircut" (cited in Salusinszky, 2012).

The relentless negative media focus on Gillard's appearance made Debbie question what could explain it:

> I don't think she's been treated very well. I think for the person, for the calibre of her speech and all of that, I think, you know, she's been given a pretty hard time, about every single issue. And I look back and I think, well, John Howard did some ghastly things and just didn't answer for it, whereas they keep making her answer to it. I feel she's been treated quite harshly and, you know, I guess she's not a, well, she is beautiful in her own right, but she's not a groomed woman, and I just do wonder what the difference would have been if she'd been slim, and articulate … whereas that never, ever happened to any male … I really think, the bummer is, that by Julia not playing up to femininity at all has actually left no mark on our young people who are not political animals. So you would have to be politically minded to notice Julia. (Debbie)

Debbie tried to reconcile the treatment Julia Gillard received with the very different experiences of male political leaders who had benefited from attention to their appearances, or who had remained unaccountable for "ghastly things". Debbie questioned whether it would have made a difference if the Prime Minister had been 'slim' or had played up to her 'femininity'. The women in my study contrasted the favourable media treatment Governor-General Quentin Bryce received and concluded that the symbolic power of Governor-General made Bryce less of a target, compared to the real power vested in the position of Prime Minister.

"Go for it! What a bitch": sexually violent language

The women in my study, regardless of personal political beliefs, said that the unfair treatment of Julia Gillard at the hands of the media, much of it violent, happened because she was a woman. Typical of these comments were Sally's, referring to media coverage of the 'Convoy of No Confidence' rally in Canberra, where the Opposition Leader Tony Abbott chose to address the crowd in front of violent and sexist protest signs (see Figure 8.1):

Well, I was absolutely dismayed, absolutely dismayed one day when I was looking at the national news and there was a man holding up a placard ... "Burn the witch" … and I thought, That is just disgusting … because you disagree with her politics, because you disagree with her opinion … This was a man holding a venomous placard attacking her as a woman on national news at a very large rally, and I thought, There are all these people standing around and nobody is saying to him, "Take that down, put that away, that's not ok". Everybody is just accepting that that's ok, "Go for it! what a bitch". And I think, you know, she's had a lot of things said about what she wears, and her hair, and her boyfriend, and her marital status and all sorts of things – that I truly believe that it's because she's a woman, not because she's unintelligent, or ineffective as a leader, or anything like that. (Sally)

Figure 8.1 Tony Abbott Speaking at Carbon Tax Rally

Anne Summers (2012a) later noted there was a "near hysterical reaction from politicians and much of the media" to Senator Bob Brown's observation that "quite a bit of the criticism is sexist and unfair and unrelenting" (para. 14). Political and public commentators employed negative, gendered stereotypes about the Prime Minister, and the commentary itself was often sexist and violent. Even a cursory examination of comments attached to digital media provides overwhelming evidence of the entitlement many men, and some women, felt they had to criticise in sexist and violent terms any woman who dared to speak out. A phenomenon that is increasingly being documented (Elliott, 2011).

Perhaps it is not surprising that women in leadership positions, such as Prime Minister, attract particular vitriol. In the lead up to February 2012, when the first week of the Queensland State election campaign was disrupted by the federal Labor leadership challenge, both the Prime Minister and the Queensland Premier were facing constant criticism – not only for being 'failures' (a condition that could spread between different levels of government, see Figure 8.2) but also for being liars. Some journalists and members of the public were calling the Prime Minister, not by her title or name, but by the insult 'Juliar', made popular by radio shock jock Alan Jones (Kwek, 2011). Premier Anna Bligh's name was popularised as 'Bliar'. Women, it appeared, could not be trusted. Male politicians might make 'non-core promises' but women personified them.

 Figure 8.2 Election Advertisement

The sex of the Prime Minister framed the commentary. Cartoonist Larry Pickering saw fit to draw the Prime Minister naked with a strap-on dildo (Quinn 2012). During the Queensland election campaign, in March 2012, ten Wicked campervans were painted with a cartoon figure of a naked Premier Anna Bligh lying on her back, legs up and spread. Painted on was the slogan "tick the right box", and in the position of her vagina was a 'No 1' box, and over her anus was a 'No 2' box. The vans were never rented, but they had their effect because the images were

printed in the mainstream media (Gough, 2012) and were easily found online. Shortly after, in Cairns, North Queensland, during the local elections, candidate Max O'Halloran ran flyers with the slogan "Get more balls into Council" (Manning, 2012). When questioned by local newspaper the *Cairns Post*, O'Halloran said it was aimed at improving junior sport, and "It also means we need a bit more guts in the council … and a sense of humour" (Strudwick, 2012). Women, by this account, were not only anatomically incorrect for leadership, but also failed to have enough courage, and failed to laugh enough, presumably at themselves.

These are not isolated events. Rather, the sexualised objectification of female leaders is widespread. Journalist Julian Tomlinson (2012), following his father Max Tomlinson in a journalistic career, ended his opinion piece about blokeyness in the *Townsville Bulletin* with the question, "Surely it's ok to be a man?" But it was Tomlinson's introduction which illustrated his view that men have the right to put women in their place through sexism. He began, "There's a disaster afflicting men around the country, and it's not leaked photos of a Julia Gillard lingerie shoot" (Tomlinson, 2012). For Tomlinson, being a man had to begin with mocking the Prime Minister by means of a national male bonding exercise in sexual objectification. The newspaper refused to publish an objection which directed readers' attention to a campaign organised by Women Everywhere Advocating Violence Elimination (WEAVE) to protest such rhetoric. WEAVE had run a campaign from May 2012 to coordinate an open letter (signed by over 59 organisations and 150 individuals) connecting community tolerance of violent discourse against the Prime Minister and tolerance of violence against women in general:

> Influential commentators and leaders have suggested placing her in a bag and drowning her at sea (Alan Jones June 2011, July 2011), kicking her to death (Grahame Morris Feb 2012) and having a "target on her head" (Tony Abbott March 2011), "burn the witch" placards (Carbon Tax Rally March 2011) and the persistent use of the language "liar" and "bitch" … Violence against women is not a trivial matter..[it] cost[s] the Australian economy approximately $13.6 billion per year. (2012)

Although WEAVE's open letter was widely announced in a press release in May 2012, media failed to pick it up, except for opinion pieces by the women involved (Ford, 2012a; McLellan, 2012). Dissent was effectively silenced and sexist commentary, such as that of Julian Tomlinson, continued unchallenged in the mainstream media. Anne Summers (2012b) argued that political lobbyists' concerted campaign against the Prime Minister went unreported by a silent mainstream media, but fed public discourse, and flourished within social media, where it became the norm to sexually vilify the Prime Minister.

"Deliberately barren": avoiding the "tough things in life"

It was precisely her female body that generated the sort of critical attacks on the Prime Minister to which male politicians had never been subjected. In addition to her appearance, these attacks centred on motherhood. A woman who does not mother is not acting out her proper role, an affront to deeply entrenched views of what is considered to be the natural order. For men, parental status is rarely an issue. Senator Bill Heffernan's infamous comment, "I mean anyone who chooses to remain deliberately barren … they've got no idea what life's about" (see Sawer, 2008) has been echoed many times since. Yet, as Anne Summers (2012a) points out, senior female parliamentarians who do have children are also treated as if they have no idea what life is about. Nicola Roxon, the Attorney-General, described how "the media is more interested in me as someone with a young child than anything to do with policy. My male colleagues who have young children don't get asked these questions", another cabinet minister said, "You literally cannot win. You are criticised if you dedicate yourself to your career and don't have children. Or if you do have them, you're told you are neglecting your family. Or, when you spend time with them, that you are not doing your job properly" (cited in Summers, 2012a, para. 19, 20). Women political leaders are socially positioned through their bodies' reproductive capacities.

Although all women in my study were in favour of a woman as Prime Minister, there were a range of opinions about Julia Gillard in particular. The women with religious beliefs were generally opposed to the Prime Minister:

> So, Julia Gillard, I would never want my children to aspire to be like her, never,
> ever … I don't think Julia is a good role model for women because she, like,
> she's – I don't think she has embraced all that womanhood has to offer. You
> know, she's never married, she's not had children, and so I just, yeah, I don't, I
> think she's kind of avoided the big women's issues in life. And it's very easy to
> go and do your politics and do all that when you've avoided the tough, the really
> tough, things in life, you know. (Tanya)

In this account, the Prime Minister's childlessness, which allowed her to focus on a political career in the same way that men do, regardless of their parental status, is evidence that she had avoided women's issues.

> Look, I think it's an absolutely frustrating situation. We have some of the most
> senior people in the country are women. But, in saying that, that doesn't
> necessarily mean because they are women they are going to advocate strongly for

the position of women, or be a feminist. And I think that's one of the challenges
for Julia, because she's not a mother, and the media will kill her whether she does
or she doesn't do particular things …

So I don't know, I mean, she's in a really critical position to make some
difference about that [the status of women generally]. But the other challenge is
she's not safe, and so it would potentially, at this point in time, be career suicide
to come out and make some strong statements about women. But, in saying that,
if she did that, I think a lot of women would actually get behind her more, cause
at the moment there is a disconnect. And I don't think she needs to be a mother to
able to do her job, umm, but again, the parental status of the men is never
questioned because there is an assumption that the women are at home looking
after the kids … so to me it's not about that. (Martina)

Martina saw the Prime Minister in a catch-22 situation: it would be 'suicide' to make strong
statements about women but in not doing so, she risked disconnection from her women
supporters. In these circumstances there is no way to succeed. Women are damned if they do,
and damned if they don't. The politics of failure here are clearly gendered.

Unfolding the future: lessons for girls

The women in my study considered what impact a woman Prime Minister could have on the
future leadership options for women and girls. Three women identified strongly as practising
Christians, and although these women were supportive of women being leaders, they expressed
dislike, or even extreme dislike for the Prime Minister. The particular examples they gave were
instances when the Prime Minister was seen as acting out of role of the stereotypical woman.
For Joy, the Prime Minister's strong assertive handling of questions from the press gallery was
seen as 'condescending'. Although Joy took care to point out that her dislike of the Prime
Minister was not "because she's a woman"; she did believe that women would pay a price for
the Prime Minister's personal style. The Prime Minister had not "done women any favours",
and Joy believed a woman was unlikely to be elected again: they "would have done the woman
thing":

Well, I'm not a fan. There is a lot of her attitudes I don't like. And I find her very
condescending in the way she speaks … and I just find her very false, and I don't
like her at all, and that's not because she's a woman, I just don't like her, I don't
like her attitude … And the way she has her press conference, she stands up there
and says, "John, now when you're finished, then I'll have Bob, and then I'll have

> so and so – no, no, no, over here". Like she's in a classroom, and ordering all
> these people around. I don't think she's done women any favours really, and you
> hear more talk about not liking her, and actually it's the women who don't like
> her ... I don't think [another woman will be elected in future]. I think they would
> have done the woman thing. I don't think they'll be choosing another woman.
> (Joy)

Likewise Jan, who was highly critical of the Prime Minister's "moral compass" (in particular, disliking her de-facto relationship), was unsure if another woman would have the chance to be Prime Minister in Australia:

> I don't know, 'cause the media is so against her in a lot of ways. I think she
> hasn't done herself any favours. I remember, you know, like, at the beginning
> there was all the media thing – the only way to get to the top was to put the knife
> in everyone's back and climb on up … is she going to be the only woman Prime
> Minister we have? Are the public going to do that again with her track record?
> (Jan)

Keryn, as the women who professed religious beliefs, did not believe that Julia Gillard was "a good politician". But she was strident in her rejection of the rhetoric linking political failures to women generally.

> I hate how, if she's a bad politician, she's a bad politician, it's not about if she's a
> woman. No one is saying she's a good politician, let's face it … I don't like this
> whole, "See, a woman – you've done it, you've got a woman in there and she's
> useless". There's a lot of that going on, and I'm aware of that, but I don't know
> that my kids are – I certainly don't talk to them about it … And I certainly don't
> go, "Stupid bloody woman" … it's very unequal, as always. You'd never say
> about a man, "Well, what a shithouse job he did – if he was a woman, it would be
> better". (Keryn)

If a female Prime Minister has been proof that 'girls can do anything', her treatment in public discourse, and specifically at the hands of a powerfully misogynist media, has served as a warning. A woman with leadership aspirations faces amplified and concentrated sexism which, in the context of an assumed meritocracy, is re-privatised as a personal characteristic. Women reflected on what lessons their daughters might potentially learn:

I don't think a lot of girls would even bother trying to even go that far because of what they see get done to her. 'Cause even Mikaela has come home and said things like, "Oh well, it's not going well, Julia's not doing a good job". (Sharon)

You can be smart, but you have to be pretty, and acceptable and not too opinionated, and … people can attack you as a woman, and that's ok. So not only can they attack your opinions or your judgements or your work or anything else, they attack you personally because you're a woman, and that's ok, so you've got to be perfect. And that's why my daughter ended up with depression because society was trying to make her perfect, and she felt the pressure to be perfect, and she put it on herself to be perfect and to fit in, to not be the other. (Sally)

So as a female … if we want to be accepted in this world, we've got to be better than a man. Doesn't matter that we can have babies, and we can carry loads and do a lot more stuff than men. They don't weigh that up, you know … they are ever quick to down us. We have to be better, we have to be stronger … I just think it's just a big stereotype thing that they are doing on her. How can they possibly compare her with [other] women … you need to compare what she's doing with what men are doing. But also realise it's stereotyping, it's discrimination … because I work out things by measuring and comparing, and I do that because when you're an Aboriginal and Islander person … you're always getting compared to, or stereotyped. (Helena)

Mary Crooks of the Victorian Women's Trust warned: "[i]f Julia Gillard, as an eminently capable person and leader, is not able to continue serving as the first woman prime minister, it will set us back decades" (cited in Summers, 2012a). The Trust produced *A Switch in Time* (Crooks, 2012), addressing the "debasing and relentless attacks on our country's first female prime minister", necessary, Crooks said because "[e]very time someone makes an attack on her authority to lead (as distinct from her policies), they are sending a subliminal message to every woman and girl that they are not welcome to sit at the table of real political power" (cited in Summers, 2012a). Journalist Nikki Gemmell (2012) reported women's observations in her March opinion piece:

What they see: a woman getting things done. In a man's world. Quietly, differently, effectively. Amid the great roar of vitriol, and not flinching. They think it's extraordinary. Because usually as women, we flinch. It's just too hard. We bleat our vulnerability. Gabble too much about our personal lives and the toll it's taking, make excuses, give up, bow out. She doesn't play the victim, just keeps going ... (para. 2)

Gemmell's column, focussed on the difficulty women had in publically expressing support for the Prime Minister. She described a school gate scene where one mother's declaration of "I adore Julia" was risky: "they looked at each other, amazed; it was like stumbling across some secret society of disparate females expressing deeply unfashionable, unspoken sentiments" (Gemmell, 2012, para. 1). One mother said, "She's such a strong role model for our daughters", and another said, "We're all scared of saying we love her – in front of the men, especially. It's like saying you're a feminist" (cited in Gemmell, 2012, para. 1). The future for women is going to be difficult if women feel they can't support one another in case they are branded feminist. However, Gemmell (2012) was optimistic that the jarring disconnect between what some women were thinking and what the media were saying about the Prime Minister could create change for girls: "It's a fascinating story of one particular Australian woman and the affronted psyche of a nation, and it's still unfolding" (para.4).

Conclusion

Of course, now, the story has further unfolded and continues to unfold. Julia Gillard lost the leadership in June 2013 and resigned from federal parliament at the election, in September 2013. The data in this chapter was collected in a period when the sexism in Australian media was unrelenting, but had not been publically named. As the sexist treatment of the Prime Minister continued, the Destroy the Joint movement was formed when women converged, then organised online through Twitter and Facebook, to protest conservative shock jock Alan Jones' pronouncement (August 2012) that, "Women are destroying the joint". To July 2013, over 33,000 people had 'liked' the Destroy the Joint Facebook page, and were receiving feminist analysis of daily events directly in their newsfeed. The Prime Minister's speech on misogyny in October 2012 was a major intervention in the public debate about sexism, was positively reported worldwide, and went viral on the internet. The mainstream media in Australia had negatively reported the speech, criticising it as an ill-advised example of "playing the gender card". Jessica McLean and Sophia Maalsen's (2013) have proposed that the Destroy the Joint movement and the misogyny speech marked a feminist revitalisation in Australia, and that cyberspace demonstrates exciting possibilities for activism and change.

The need for change is clear. Less than two weeks before Julia Gillard stepped down as Prime Minister, the media reported that a Liberal party fundraiser had featured a dish on the menu called "Julia Gillard Kentucky Fried Quail – Small Breasts, Huge Thighs & A Big Red Box" (Jabour, 2013). Such treatment of women political leaders should be of concern to all who support the leadership aspirations of girls. The undermining of the Prime Minister in such explicitly gendered and sexual terms occurred in an assumed meritocracy where 'girls can do

anything', thereby masking structural barriers and effectively individualising 'failure'. The playing field is far from level, as the women in my study said, to succeed women and girls must be "perfect" and "better than men".

What emerged strongly from the stories women told me was that the rise of Australia's first female Prime Minister was the ultimate proof that 'girls can do anything' – in fact, young girls' first reaction was "So what, why not?". However, the discourse of meritocracy made it difficult to explain the vicious treatment meted out to Julia Gillard. Australia's first female Prime Minister was treated very differently to our first twenty-seven male Prime Ministers, and her leadership was undermined in particularly sexual ways. Criticism of the Prime Minister was personalised and individualised, and her hair, her clothes, her voice, her manner and her childlessness dominated public discourse. The shock jocks, the conservative media, the Leader of the Opposition, and even some key members of her own party, translated personal characteristics into the hostile campaign to denounce the Prime Minister as inept and a liar, deserving of the (sexual) violence and vitriol she was threatened with. The findings in this chapter speak to the struggles women face in making sense of women's leadership. The debate has moved forward from that moment in time, and some of the issues have since been named – the gender card played – but it remains to be seen how far we have moved.

In Julia Gillard's resignation speech she suggested that she had made it easier for the next woman who came after her. Perhaps she is correct. It is hard to imagine anyone facing a harder task than she did. It remains to be seen if Australia has learned any lessons. A key finding of my research is that Australian women have been brutally reminded of the terms and conditions of their participation in public life. Julia Gillard might have proved that 'girls can do anything,' but her treatment has also proved that keeping women in their place through the eroticisation of inequality is not just a private matter, but a public 'right'. Julia Gillard's resignation from political life has sent a powerful message to girls and perhaps sowed doubts about the avowed post-feminist meritocracy.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion "What do girls need?"

Research aim and questions

In this thesis I have presented feminist qualitative research that has explored the experiences of women bringing up girls aged between nine and thirteen years. Young girls have been the focus of intense scrutiny in the debate about their embodied sexuality under the terms and conditions of the contemporary political economy. The mainstreaming of a pornographic aesthetic has presented new challenges to mothers who are attempting to respond to the needs of girls, through acts of, what Sara Ruddick (1989) has termed, 'preservative love', 'nurturance' and 'training.' To date, mothers' experiences have largely been missing from scholarly accounts of 'the sexualisation of girls'. Mothers have often been included only to the extent they are blamed. This research, therefore, set out to address that gap.

Centring women's experiences was a strategic decision. It meant that I could examine issues of responsibility, powerlessness and relationships of dependency, along with the currently more fashionable focus of most scholarly work – girls' agency. I could capture the contradictory spaces between women's and girls' experiences, and make connections between the various experiences of being female under patriarchy, as well as highlight the differences between women and girls. Exploring the materiality of women's lives helps make sense of competing claims about 'what girls need' and helps inform the public policy agenda.

The research, broadly questioned present and future possibilities for women and girls in their personal relationships and in the public worlds of work and politics. Through semi-structured in-depth interviews, women were asked to share experiences they thought relevant, and in doing so illuminated the following four research questions:

- Under what circumstances are women mothering?
- What language do women use to describe the present and future possibilities for women and girls?
- What are the implications of the mainstreaming of a pornographic aesthetic on women's mothering practices?
- What ways do women use to make sense of women's public success?

Theorising sexual politics: a critical approach

Theoretically, I have argued that the sexual politics of motherhood and girlhood are best understood as a debate turning on the moral question of whether women are human, and, by virtue of being human, equal to men. I have explored the key tension around the way sexuality is theorised as ordering the social world. I have argued that the eroticisation of inequality, celebrated in the dehumanising practices of pornography and prostitution, is fundamental to the maintenance of male supremacy: to seek liberation *through* or *despite* such inequality is unethical, and simply, does not work. It does not work because it is a project of individualism, and the task of liberation becomes the psychological responsibility of each woman; a lifestyle choice rather than a politics. A sexual politics which insists on connecting people to the broader political economy brings into focus the seductive but futile nature of resistance when liberation is limited to projects of the self. In this thesis, I have drawn, in particular, on the writings of Sara Ruddick, Denise Thompson, Dorothy Smith and Nancy Fraser, and their rigorous theorising of motherhood, radical feminism and the social and the political economy have enabled this research.

Listening to women: a radical political act

Listening to women enables them to speak. When the twenty-four women who shared their stories for this research described the intricacies of their day-to-day lives they clearly believed that *maternal thinking* – that is, reflecting on the acts of mothering (Ruddick, 1989) – matters. In this research, women reflected on their stories in in-depth interviews, and I reflected on their stories in analysis of their accounts. It has been a research methodology which has politicised the personal (Reinharz, 1992). The stories the women told illustrate that their primary role, acknowledging the vulnerability of their daughters, is to keep girls safe; to protect them. Theirs is a deeply pragmatic response to a hostile social context in which the male gaze is filtered through a pornographic aesthetic of eroticised inequality. The imperative that women raise 'socially acceptable children' brings its own dilemmas. Is it best that girls fit in with, or stand out from, social norms which threaten to dehumanise them? That women also strive to create the conditions in which their daughters can flourish has been equally evident in this research, particularly in those moments when women described acts of resistance or creative alternatives. I have paid attention to women, and centered the diversity of their experiences, in order to draw broader connections despite the relation of ruling of male supremacy that are fundamentally premised on disconnection. This research, then, by drawing connections between women's diverse experiences and connections across the differing experiences of girls and grown women, challenges the fragmented knowledge that results from scrutinising individual girls as if they lived independently of their social worlds.

A review of the findings

Women are bringing up girls in post-feminist, neoliberal times in which we are told 'girls can do anything!' The belief that women and girls can do anything inevitably collides with the realities of juggling family and work. Women are effectively excluded from the neoliberal subjectivity they are expected to engender in their daughters. Female participation in the public worlds of work and politics is regulated not only by the institutions of family and work, but also by the new sexual contract which asserts that women's worth lies in servicing men's sexual interests. This leaves women in a difficult position. What are we to tell girls? What is it even *possible* to tell girls?

This research has set out to answer four research questions. The first question asked, Under what conditions are women mothering? 'Juggling' emerged as the underlying narrative in all the stories the women told. Women are still responsible for the vast majority of housework and caring work and it is virtually impossible to reconcile these responsibilities with the injunction to be an ideal neoliberal subject. The women in my study sought to make sense of their exhausting struggle to fashion successful selves by asserting the value of their mothering work, in terms of it being a 'career', and argue for the social benefits of caring work. Such assertions were tempered, however, by women's understandings that they would never be 'good enough' to meet the impossibly contradictory standards of a 'good mother'. The radical demand for recognition of the value of caring work is overshadowed by accounts which, of necessity, are anchored in narratives of sacrifice or 'seeing the big picture'. Finding 'balance' has become compulsory for women, and juggling rules out challenge to the gendered divisions of labour. Ontologies of mothering which drew on communal mothering offered transformative alternatives for Indigenous women, but the women who practised these forms of mothering also had to often respond to significant levels of structural disadvantage due to racism and sexism. Under these circumstances, mothering at individual and community level becomes a matter of survival. Further, women who organise their lives communally are judged harshly by normative standards of patriarchal motherhood that frame such arrangements as failing to 'manage'.

The second research question asked, What language do women use to describe present and future possibilities for women and girls? The question explored further the material conditions under which women are mothering. The juggle to balance work and family results in the exclusion of women from the subjectivity they are instrumentally positioned to engender in their daughters. How do women reconcile their own experiences with the social expectation that 'girls can do anything'?

I have explored this contradictory terrain by considering the generational change in meaning attached to the 'girls can do anything' slogan. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the slogan first became popular, it was a call to action, a challenge to deeply-held views that limited girls' opportunities. Today, that meaning has been superseded by a new interpretation which reads the statement as fact; an expectation. The new reading takes place in a social context which assumes a meritocracy, as if equality between men and women has already been achieved. In this hegemonic reading, all that remains to be a success is for girls to decide; they simply need to 'set their minds to it'. In this research the 'girls can do anything' theme cropped up in varying ways depending on where girls were located in hierarchies of power and privilege. For the well-resourced women in my study, it was a message that could not be spoken, as articulation works to call it into question. The experiences of women mothering girls with disabilities show up the illusory nature of a supposed meritocracy. Well-resourced women who can highlight their daughters' 'specialness' are able to command resources and imagine (set their minds to) rosier future possibilities than the less-resourced women who are mothering girls with disabilities. Fitting in, rather than standing out, is a key strategy less-resourced women employ to secure their daughters' futures.

As a foreground message, 'girls can do anything', was a positive for the women in my study. In the background, however, there was silence about their daughters as potential mothers, except for Aboriginal women who saw this positively. Fiona was an exception, speaking both of her desire to "ease that conflict" and warning of "building girls up for a fall". It was noteworthy that Fiona, a highly-educated and well-resourced woman, tentatively advocated for disillusioning her daughter of the possibility of 'doing anything' rather than challenging the status quo which made it impossible. Liberal feminism has failed to politicise the relations of ruling that structure women's personal and professional lives; no amount of empowering girls can address deep structural issues that are occluded, and therefore reproduced by, an assumed meritocracy which does not actually exist. Although individual women in my study had glimpses of the political injustices facing girls today, these glimpses were not collectively articulated or understood. The lack of a radical language of dissent, meant Fiona felt it might be better to stay with more conservative options in order to "ease the conflict" she predicted for her daughter, as she could see no alternatives to the disappointment she herself had experienced.

The third research question asked, What have been the implications of the mainstreaming of a pornographic aesthetic on women's mothering practices? Women were clearly aware of the hegemonic positioning of girls as 'empowered sluts', the porno-chic subjectivity of choice promoted to young girls through music, fashion, movies and popular culture. The sex industry,

and its allies in liberal feminism promote porno-chic as a big 'fuck you' to traditions and institutions which have dictated that women should not, could not, be sexual agents. To celebrate sexual subjectivity only within a discourse of sexual agency, as a savvy 'slut', is to ignore that the new sexual contract has made it compulsory. The 'girls can do anything' girl-power rhetoric, which underpins the liberal rhetoric of equality, fails to challenge the centrality of the phallus in sexual politics. The logic of individualised agency shifts responsibility from men to girls. Differences in power become irrelevant when libertarian ideals of pleasure trump power. In this belief system, girls must be empowered to find pleasure in their subordination. The mothers in my study resisted that logic. They knew their daughters were vulnerable, and they wanted to protect them. They struggled to negotiate the social fault lines between 'how things are' and 'what should be'; they simultaneously tried to hold on to emancipatory ideals as well as keep their daughters safe. The strategies they used differed, depending on their locations within hierarchies of power, but they consistently negotiated with their daughters, especially about dress and representation, seeking to help them navigate men's grooming gaze.

The male gaze which positions girl children as serving men's sexual interest is not an optional 'paedophilic' point of view, taken up by paranoid 'moral warriors'. Rather, women and girls are encouraged to invent themselves through this gaze, endlessly reminded to celebrate their status as highly desired servicers of the penis. Mothers have to have difficult conversations with their daughters where judgements about what is right and what is wrong are not easy decisions when there is very little language of resistance. The radical critique of the eroticisation of inequality is deemed as 'judgemental'; tolerance is celebrated as a ruling virtue in neoliberalism (Bray, 2008). Women hold their tongues and do not speak out collectively against practices which primarily serve men's interests. The work women do in negotiating the pornographic aesthetic is highly atomised. The women in my study, largely, did not know what other women did or thought about these matters. They did not know how they compared. A persistent theme in this research was that mothering work in this area happens in the absence of community support: "I tell them one thing, but the whole world tells them something else. I feel like I'm hitting my head up against the wall".

The final research question asked, What ways women use to make sense of women's public success? I believe that this research has made a significant contribution to the political debate about Australia's first female Prime Minister. Have we, as McRobbie (2007) warned, seen the fall of public woman? Have women come so far to fail? From 2010 to 2012, during the data collection stage of this study, the sexual politics at play in the everyday lives of women were writ large across the national political stage. The interviews took place prior to Julia Gillard's

now famous misogyny speech in October 2012, that is, they occurred at a time when misogyny was on display but had not been named – as conservative commentators would say 'the gender card' had not yet been played. The findings of this research illustrate how the rise to power of Australia's first female Prime Minister seemed the ultimate proof that 'girls can do anything'; as some girls said "So what, why not?" However, a discourse of meritocracy could not account for the treatment that Julia Gillard was accorded. Australia's first female Prime Minister was treated very differently to her male predecessors. The criticism was personal and individualised. It was her hair, her clothes, her voice, her manner, her childlessness that dominated public discourse. Her personal characteristics were fodder for the hostile campaign waged by shock jocks, the conservative media, the Leader of the Opposition, and members of her own party, which characterised the Prime Minister as inept and a liar, personally deserving the (sexual) violence and vitriol.

It remains to be seen how Australia's will reconcile the experiences of the first female Prime Minister into the future. In her resignation speech, Julia Gillard reflected on gender issues during her time in office: "it doesn't explain everything, it doesn't explain nothing, it explains some things. And it is for the nation to think in a sophisticated way about those shades of grey" (ABC News, 2013). A key finding of this research is that women feel they have been brutally reminded of the terms and conditions of their participation in public life. Julia Gillard might have proven that 'girls can do anything', but her treatment also proves that keeping women in their place through the eroticisation of inequality is not just a private matter, but is a public 'right'.

Significance of the research and future directions

This research is a significant 'expert bridging' discourse between social movement and public policy, and can inform the process of deciding 'better from worse' interpretations of girls' needs (Fraser, 1989). The inability to determine better from worse is to reinforce the status quo, yet this is the hallmark of research that fails to ask who really benefits from proposed courses of action.

The research has elicited significant descriptions of the everyday material lives of women, and the stories that the women shared give glimpses of what Mary Daly (2003) calls 'the background'. The spiral of women's stories criss-crossed enabling connections and providing jumping off points to delve deeper into the background of our social worlds. The key methodological question in this thesis has been, 'Who benefits?' A different question would have elicited a different answer. This account is partial, but, I argue, significant because asking

'Who benefits?' illuminates that which is taken for granted. It is essential to debunk the myth of meritocracy and to rip the bandaid of 'girls can do anything' off social injustices. In this study, I have theorised women's lives and I have told a critical tale. The study contributes to opening up the language we use to describe the world and to re-politicising our experiences. If we keep telling lies to little girls, they will keep blaming themselves for their failures. This research has been a feminist political project of change.

It is an on-going project and much remains to be done. It would be interesting to ask girls themselves the research questions in this thesis. Further then, too, the women who participated in this study between 2010 and 2012 could not have imagined the dramatic events that were to unfold in Australia's political life – from the misogyny speech in October 2012 to the fall of the first female Prime Minister in June 2013. The Destroy the Joint movement (Caro, 2013), the chronicling of media treatment of Julia Gillard (Walsh, 2013), and of political misogyny (Summers, 2013) has begun to record the immediate past. It will be important to go back to women and to girls to check whether work such as this has re-politicised our understandings of women's place in society. This is a task both for activists and for scholars, and feminist research methodologies offer transformative ways forward.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have argued for the importance of a critical radical feminist approach to making sense of our lived experiences. Scholars, activists and others have been so focussed on acknowledging girls' long-denied agency that they have failed to see enduring structural and social discrimination written out of our language. Instead, we have been exhorted to the psychological task of 'putting our mind' to being a success, which, more frequently than not, has meant 'seeing the big picture'. The 'big picture' often turns out to be where women's struggles are disappeared, mocked or subjected; struggle and sacrifice are valorised and anger is laughed away. Liberal feminism has failed to politicise the key issue of the eroticisation of inequality, and has offered therapies of the self rather than political change as the solution to any inconvenient problems. Radical feminism rejects the status quo in which women are dehumanised and denied the opportunity to flourish. Radical feminists insist on naming the political economy and the ideological state apparatus that collude to maintain male supremacy and mask it as natural and inevitable. Radical feminists reject the penis as the sole mark of humanity and are committed to denouncing that lie. It is time to stop telling lies to little girls!

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval

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Appendix B: Participant information sheet

JAMES COOK
UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA

INFORMATION SHEET

Study: "Bringing up Girls"

You are invited to take part in a research project about what it is like bringing up girls aged between 9 – 13 years old. Young girls are subjected to multiple influences; from the media, friends, school, and of course very importantly from their mothers and significant women carers. This research will explore these areas and it is hoped that the information gathered will be useful in helping women support girls to reach their full potential.

The study is being conducted by myself, Ms Ryl Harrison and will contribute to the research project for my PhD in Political Science and Women's Studies at James Cook University.

If you agree to be involved in the study, you will be invited to be interviewed twice, once in 2010 and once in 2011. Each interview, with your consent, will be audio-taped, and should only take approximately 1 – 1.5 hours of your time. The interview will be conducted at James Cook University or a place that is convenient to you. You can participate in one or both of the interviews. It is up to you.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and you can stop taking part in the study at any time without explanation or prejudice. You may also withdraw any unprocessed data from the study.

If you know other women in Townsville who are bringing up girls aged between 9 and 13 years and who might be interested in this study, please feel free to pass on this information sheet to them so they may contact me to take part in the study.

Your responses and contact details will be strictly confidential. The data from the study will be used in my thesis and in research publications. You will not be identified in any way in these publications.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact myself, Ryl Harrison, or my Supervisor, Dr Nonie Harris on the contact details below.

Thank you.

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Appendix C: Informed consent form: first interview

INFORMED CONSENT FORM Interview 1

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	**Ryl Harrison**
PROJECT TITLE:	**Bringing up Girls**
SCHOOL	**School of Arts and Social Sciences**

I understand the aim of this research study is to explore women's experiences of bringing up girls aged between 9 – 13 years. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written information sheet to keep.

I understand that my participation may involve two interviews that will be held twelve months apart. I understand that I can participate in both or only the first interview. I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the information sheet.

I acknowledge that:

- taking part in this study is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part in it at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;

- that any information I give will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval;

(Please tick to indicate consent)

		Yes		No
I consent to be interviewed		Yes		No
I consent for the interview to be audio taped		Yes		No
I consent to be contacted in 12 months time to assess my interest in participating in a second interview		Yes		No

Name: *(printed)*	
Signature:	**Date:**

Appendix D: Informed consent form: second interview

JAMES COOK
UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA

INFORMED CONSENT FORM Interview 2

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	Ryl Harrison
PROJECT TITLE:	Bringing up Girls
SCHOOL	School of Arts and Social Sciences

I understand the aim of this research study is to explore women's experiences of bringing up girls aged between 9 – 13 years. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written information sheet to keep.

I understand that my participation will involve an interview and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the information sheet.

I acknowledge that:

- taking part in this study is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part in it at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;

- that any information I give will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval;

(Please tick to indicate consent)

I consent to be interviewed		Yes		No
I consent for the interview to be audio taped		Yes		No

Name: *(printed)*	
Signature:	Date:

Appendix E: Participant recruitment flyer

Your chance to take part in a Townsville based research project about girls' lives

What is it like bringing up a girl aged between 9 – 13 years?

Are you a woman bringing up a girl aged between 9 and 13 years?

If you are, I'd love to hear about your experiences! I am looking for 25 women to participate in an interview* about the hopes, dreams and concerns you have for your daughters.

Individual interviews are confidential and happen at a time and place that is convenient to you.

* The option of doing a second interview in twelve months time is also available if you are interested.
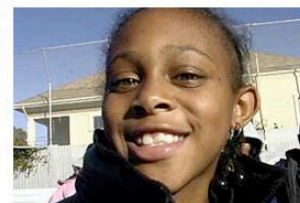
JAMES COOK
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Popular culture...self-esteem...friendships...shopping...leadership...family...body image... boys... media...dreams...hopes... technology...aspirations

For more information, please call Ryl Julie Harrison, on 4781 4876 or email: ryl.harrison@jcu.edu.au

Appendix F: Interview schedule: first interview

[Introduce study / paperwork]

- Can we start off by you telling me a little bit about yourself?

- Can you tell me a little bit about your daughter?

- Since I've started doing this research about women's experiences with bringing up girls and I've told people that's what I'm looking at, I've lost count of the number of times people who don't have girls have said to me 'oh I'm glad I don't have a girl'. I just wondered if anyone had ever said that to you, or what you would make of a comment like that?

- So because this is quite new research the important issues mums are dealing with are still emerging from the interviews; and it's different for every mum as well. I do have some questions prepared but our discussion today will be really guided by what you see are the important issues for (yourself) mums and (your daughter) girls?

    - [questions below in whatever order / as probes to earlier responses]

- Can you tell me about or describe the day that you daughter last attended a birthday party, either her own or someone else's?

- I know that girls sometimes talk about what they want to be when they grow up. A couple of years ago I went to a grade seven graduation day at school where they had made a powerpoint presentation for each of the kids as they went up on the parade and nine out of ten girls said they wanted to be fashion designers when they grew up. I just wondered if your daughter talks about what she wants to do?

- When Julia Gillard became Australia's first woman prime minister, I was wondering whether your daughter talked about that as being significant at all?

- There has been some debate in the papers and on TV that girls are being sexualised in popular culture for example, in magazines, in advertising and music videos. Some experts are saying this is just a moral panic or a storm in a tea cup and others are saying that is something that they are really worried about in terms of the health and wellbeing of girls. I wondered what your thoughts on that debate are? [if raised earlier – could you say a little more about how you see that].

- Parenting experts seem to be talking about children being what they are calling 'media literate': it seems to be a bit of a new buzz word. [have you heard of this term / what do you think about this idea of 'media literacy' / would you describe your children as 'media literate'?]

- When you think about when you were your daughter's age, how does it compare to your daughter's life?

- Is there anything else you'd like to say?

- Are there questions I haven't asked you that you think would be important for me to ask other women?

- Would you be happy to pass on information about this study to other mums?

Appendix G: Interview schedule: second interview

- It's a year since we last talked, what's been happening since we last met for yourself and your daughter?

    - [questions below in whatever order / as probes to question above]

- I've bought some things along to show you, I have this 'Girls Can do Anything' sticker. I wondered what your thoughts are about giving girls this message?

- I noticed in my first round of interviews that many women talked about mothering, obviously, but in terms of juggling motherhood with work, and the demands on time, feeling pressure etc, but that mostly women didn't talk about motherhood as being something their own daughters would have to try to juggle and balance, and it struck me as interesting. I wondered did we just assume that potentially juggling motherhood is just part of our daughter's futures or did we think something would be different?

- Since we last spoke, I went back to pick up the flyers advertising this study and this one which had been displayed in a place where children don't go, had been defaced. The words 'what is it like bringing up a girl' had been changed to 'what is it like dating a girl aged between nine and thirteen'. I thought this said something interesting about what my study is looking at. So I wanted to bring this back to women in this second round of interviews and ask you about your response to that?

- A friend told me this story about her neighbour, and a conversation she had with her 11 year old son and 12 year old daughter about sex when they were driving along in the car. The mum said the kids had all the biological details about the birds and the bees straight, knew where babies came from and so on, but they had not put two and two together to realise that people had sex for any reason apart from reproduction. I wondered what your own experiences or thoughts on this were?

- What I heard in my first lot of interviews was that women felt mostly comfortable telling their daughters about puberty and reproduction, and this was often a change from how their own mums were with them even, but the relationship aspects of sexuality seem more difficult to talk about; and I wondered if you had further thoughts on this?

- I have a question here about the mainstreaming of pornography, a couple of weeks ago Diva, the jewellery shop, released their Playboy range of stuff, their advertising line is "this is the perfect amount of jewels and the right amount of sexiness, Playboy for Diva will have every girl feeling glamourous and red carpet ready", and they've got Miss January and Miss February necklaces and so on [show advertising], so I just wondered what your response was to this kind of marketing to girls?

- Last year we talked about Julia Gillard becoming prime minister, she's been in that job for a year now, I'm interested in any further thoughts you've had on our last discussion, and how this past year has been, [how she has been portrayed in the media as a woman leader / impact on girls]

- Is there anything else that we started to talk about and didn't quite finish? Or anything you'd like to say more about?

Appendix H: Publication / Prize related to this research

Prize

(2012) Australian Political Studies Association – Women and Politics Essay Prize winner, 'Women in Political Leadership: coming so far to fail?'

Book chapter

Harrison, R. (forthcoming 2013). Telling Lies to Little Girls, Motherhood, Girlhood and Identity in M. Porter, L Raith & J Jones (Eds.), *Mothers at the Margins*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.