Constructing Fatherhood

Discourses and Experiences

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Theorizing Fatherhood: Poststructuralist Perspectives

In recent times, the poststructuralist perspective, developing from theorists as diverse as Marx, Althusser, Lacan, Freud, Derrida and Foucault, has exerted an enormous influence upon social and cultural theory and research. One major characteristic of poststructuralism is the 'linguistic turn', or drawing attention to the constitutive role played by language in creating notions of reality. The concepts of discourse and subjectivity are central to poststructuralist theorizing, in its focus on the intertwining of textual representations and the construction and delimitation of personal identities.

This chapter reviews the theoretical underpinnings for our analysis of the meanings and experiences of fatherhood. The interlinking of discourse, subjectivity, knowledge and power are explained and their relationships to embodiment, the project of the self and gender practices explored. The discussion ends with an acknowledgement of the emotional and unconscious dimension of human experience, including what might be described as the 'extra-discursive', and how this dimension should also be considered important in understanding how men construct and conduct themselves as fathers, providing important insights on the emotional, conflictual level of meaning in intimate relations with others.

Discourse and Subjectivity

Subjectivity, which is becoming a central problematic in contemporary social and cultural theory, may be defined as the varying forms of selfhoods by which people experience and define themselves. Moving away from the notion of 'the self' as a fixed identity that has tended to dominate the positivist social sciences and health sciences, subjectivity is generally represented in poststructuralist writings as dynamic and heterogeneous within individuals' lifespans: 'Unlike humanism, which implies a conscious, knowing, unified, rational subject, poststructuralism theorizes subjectivity as a site of disunity and conflict' (Weedon, 1992: 21). Michel Foucault's writings on how notions of the human subject are historically contingent and constantly created and recreated through discourse have been extremely influential here. Foucault argued that we cannot accept the notion of selfhood as pre-existing to social and cultural processes. Rather, we need to accept that selfhood is a product of these processes. Foucault's own work was directed to identifying

the historical conditions in which particular subject positions are made possible.

Discourse is central to the production and maintenance of subjectivity. When, for example, people draw upon certain discourses in talking about or telling stories about themselves, they do so with the intention of presenting a certain persona or character (although this may not always be a conscious intention). This presentation of the self invariably involves accessing a pool of pre-established discourses that circulate in wider society and within a specific social context. Likewise, people are positioned by others in discursive interactions as particular types of individuals. The use of discourse, therefore, is constitutive of the self and of others. As such, 'human communication cannot be seen simply as a matter of information transfer from one location to another, it must be seen as ontologically *formative*, as a process by which people can, in communication with one another, literally in-form one another's being' (Shotter, 1989: 145; original emphasis).

As we observed in the previous chapter, fatherhood is a phenomenon around which there currently exist many and often competing discourses. Discourses, as ways of framing, speaking about and giving meaning to phenomena, are the sites of struggle, open to challenge from other discourses. Depending on the context, some discourses are hegemonic over others, taking charge over the definition of what is considered to be 'truth'. As Foucault has argued, '"Truth" is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it' (1984a: 74). This is particularly the case if discourses issue forth from privileged and authoritative social institutions such as the government, the mass media, the legal system, medicine and public health, religious institutions and the education system (Weedon, 1992: 110). The family, for example, is a prime site for discursive interventions from members of these authoritative institutions, who attempt to frame its meanings and regulate its members in certain ways (see Chapter 2). Even within these institutions there may be a number of competing discourses around a particular phenomenon. As a result, there is never any one, fixed way of thinking about and representing phenomena such as fatherhood. Rather, there may be said to be identifiable hierarchies of discourse, in which at some times some discourses are hegemonic, carrying most credibility and weight in defining a particular phenomenon. The hegemony of any particular discourse, however, is tenuous, continually subject to contestation and new attempts to define meaning.

Discourses and practices are inextricably intertwined and symbiotic in their effects, each shaping the other. Thus, for example, popular and medical texts which emphasize the importance of men participating in the birth of their children, highlighting the need for them to 'bond' with and feel closer to their infant and partner, are likely to be major contributors to a man's decision about whether to be present at the birth of his children. However, practices influence discourses in the same way as discourses influence practices. The more men who are present at the birth of their children, for

example, the more textual sources may point to the importance of such participation, identifying a 'norm' or a 'trend', thus perpetuating and supporting the practice.

Poststructuralism takes up many of the concerns of the earlier social constructionist position, which has argued that any type of knowledge and understanding of reality, scientific or otherwise, is inevitably constructed and understood through social and cultural processes (see Berger and Luckmann, 1966, for a classic statement on the social constructionist position in sociology). This recognition has led to the insight that those aspects of human experience that were previously considered to be fixed, natural and immutable, such as gender and the human body, are rather the historical products of shifting social forces and power relations. As such, the social constructionist perspective views both motherhood and fatherhood, rather than being 'instinctive' or 'inherent', inscribed in the genes and biology, as learnt through acculturation into a particular sociocultural and historical context. Thus far, there has been more attention paid to the social construction of motherhood and femininity than to fatherhood and masculinity. In Ann Oakley's book *Housewife* (1974), for example, she criticized the 'myths' surrounding motherhood – that children need mothers, that mothers need their children and that motherhood is both 'natural' and the greatest achievement of a woman's life – for the role these myths play in perpetuating women's disadvantaged status and dependency upon men.

Taken to its extreme, social constructionism can become overly relativist, suggesting that bodies and identities are endlessly malleable or 'written upon' through social and cultural processes. The fleshy body, the body that becomes ill and inevitably dies, becomes somewhat lost in the utopian visions that sometimes emerge from the highly relativist position. The emphasis on the social construction of gendered positions that dominates contemporary perspectives in feminist studies, for example, tends to discount biological explanations for gender differences as essentialist. Other feminists have responded by arguing that even if attributes such as caring and empathy are not identified as specifically or inherently 'feminine', the biological realities of the differences between women's and men's bodies cannot simply be ignored. The different capacities of male and female bodies, some feminists argue, necessarily shape the types of participation women and men have in relation to reproduction. For instance, women, unlike men, have uteruses, the capacity for menstruation, becoming pregnant, giving birth and breastfeeding, and this has profound implications for their life experiences. As Braidotti has argued, it is important for feminist critics to continue to stress 'the specificity of the lived, female bodily experience, the refusal to disembody sexual difference into an allegedly postmodern anti-essentialist subject, and the will to reconnect the whole debate on difference to the bodily existence and experience of women' (1989: 91).

Nonetheless, at its best, the insights offered by social constructionism into the contingent nature of knowledges and notions of reality have much to offer an analysis of phenomena such as fatherhood and motherhood. The

notion that there are certain inevitable anatomical features that distinguish men and women from each other may be retained, in concert with the recognition that the *meanings* given to these features are socially constructed and differ historically. Thus, for example, it has been shown that the bodily experiences associated with the phenomenon that has been labelled in western societies as 'menopause' are understood and dealt with differently in contemporary Japanese society. While Japanese women also experience the permanent cessation of menstruation in mid-life, they are far less likely to view this as a negative experience, or to suffer the symptoms which women in western societies often find debilitating and for which they seek medical attention (Lock, 1993). As this suggests, it is not necessarily the case that anatomical phenomena (such as the possession or otherwise of a uterus or penis) have inevitable consequences for embodiment and social experience. Rather, it may be argued that the ways in which these features of anatomy are identified, defined and invested with meaning are culturally specific, with varying consequences.

In our analysis of the interplay of discourse and lived experience, we take the approach to power that is articulated in poststructuralist theory and which depends, in particular, upon the writings of Foucault and his followers. For Foucault, power is everywhere, part of every social relation and representation. Power is not conceptualized simply as an external influence seeking coercively to repress human action (although this remains one important element of power), nor as located solely in institutions, groups or particular individuals, but rather as a system that may also be seen as productive. Power relations, that is, serve to bring things into being. From this perspective, power and discourse are interrelated and work together to constitute subjectivity and social relations. Discourses both reflect and reproduce power relations, while power produces discourses.

The poststructuralist perspective, therefore, with its recognition of the mutually constitutive aspects of power/knowledge and its insistence that subjectivity is multiple, dynamic and constructed through discourse, also moves beyond the traditional agency/structure debate. Power is located very much at the level of the everyday. The Foucauldian understanding of power relations is that central discourses invite and persuade individuals to conform to norms and expectations rather than directly coercing them, appealing to individuals' desires and wants at both the conscious and the unconscious levels. Individuals are neither passively enmeshed in power relations nor are purely free agents, for subjectivity is always produced through power relations which themselves involve resistances. Power cannot simply be removed or stripped away, allowing individuals to be 'free', for power in some form or another is a condition of subjectivity. We are always the subjects of power.

Another reason why power can never be simply oppressive of freedom is because, as explained above, subjectivity is a moving target. Because there are a number of ways of constructing subjectivity, a range of competing discourses and meanings upon which we can draw in understanding the social and material world and ourselves, spaces are produced for individuals to

oppose, reject or transform what they perceive to be constraining or reductive subject positions. Weedon has described it thus:

> The individual who has a memory and an already discursively constituted sense of identity may resist particular interpellations or produce new versions of meaning from the conflicts and contradictions between existing discourses. Knowledge of more than one discourse and the recognition that meaning is plural allows for a measure of choice on the part of the individual and even where choice is not available, resistance is still possible. (1992: 106)

This suggests that it is reductive simply to view fathers *qua* men as participating in the oppression of their female partners via their participation (or lack of participation) in the spheres of the family, work and so on. Both women and men actively participate in the reproduction of dominant discourses and practices around parenting, just as both women and men often are acutely aware of their contradictions, sometimes seeking to challenge or subvert them.

Masculinities and Fatherhood

In western and other societies, gender is a central organizing strategy of subjectivity and embodiment. Feminist writers, in particular, have drawn attention to the role played by gender in the process of shaping and directing subjectivity and embodiment for women. Building upon this work, some writers have begun to explore the nature of gender as it is implicated in men's experiences. Discussions now often take up the notion of gender as a dynamic project of the self: the gendered self is conceptualized as a series of constantly shifting practices and techniques (see, for example, Butler, 1990; Connell, 1993; Probyn, 1993). Judith Butler (1990) describes gender identities as performative, learnt through culture. She argues that gender, therefore, does not express an inner core of selfhood but rather is the effect of performative acts. The production and maintenance of gender may be considered forms of work upon the self, including both bodily practices (for example, styles of walking, hair-styles, body shape and dress), communicative practices (ways of interacting with others) and thinking practices (ways of thinking about the self and gendered others). These practices inevitably take place in the context of institutions such as the family, the workplace, the education and legal systems, the governmental apparatuses of the state and the economic context (Connell, 1993: 602).

From this perspective, masculinity is seen not as something that exists apart from the man, but as a phenomenon that is practised or performed and constituted by men. Masculinity is also regarded as highly contextual: 'Men are not simply masculine but, for example in the UK, they "do" African-Caribbean or Asian masculinity, public school masculinity, hypermasculinity, gay masculinity, or regional versions of working class machismo' (Ramazanoglu, 1992: 343). Connell (1993: 606) has similarly argued that the conventional view tends to represent masculinity as a reified property or

attribute of an individual that exists in a greater or lesser degree, failing to appreciate the many and varied concepts of masculinity that co-exist and compete even within a similar cultural context at the same historical moment. Indeed, it is now commonplace for writers to insist that rather than there being a sole notion of masculinity, the more appropriate term is 'masculinities', suggesting the diversity of understandings that co-exist.

Even in acknowledging that there are various forms of masculinities, some of which are dominant over others in different contexts, men and the women who know them may find it difficult to identify the specific masculinities they represent. The feminist writer Lynne Segal (1990: 28) recounts the story of how a group of feminists in London once met to discuss their relationships with their fathers, only to find a diverse range of experiences and fatherly 'types' that called into question attempts to pin down 'fatherhood' and 'manhood'. From a male perspective, Jefferson (1996: 339) has commented upon how many men – particularly pro-feminist or gay men – have found it difficult to 'recognize themselves, their mixed experiences, contradictory desires, and simple confusions' in the 'one-dimensional portraits of masculinity' that have circulated in much academic writing on gender.

Jeff Hearn (1996) contends that too rarely is masculinity linked to men's material practices, and that the shifting nature of notions of masculinities even within the course of one man's life tends not to be acknowledged in much writing about masculinity. He argues that notions of masculinity tend to be assumed as pre-existing, which then naturalizes and reifies the dichotomy between masculinity/femininity and the reproduction of gender. Consequently, Hearn asserts that 'it is sensible not to make too many assumptions about what masculinity might be or even whether masculinity is relevant or meaningful in a particular society' (1996: 210). Masculinities are slippery and often contradictory, even within the one individual's life experience.

This approach to masculinity contrasts with previous academic writings, which tended to position it as a 'psychological essence, an inner core of the individual' that was considered to be either inherited or acquired early in life (Connell, 1993: 599). This conceptualization generally ignored the wider social structural and historical aspects shaping gendered subjects, considering 'the social' to extend little beyond the family setting in terms of forming gender. An alternative to this portrayal of masculinity was the 'male sex role' approach that was dominant in the American social scientific literature in the 1970s and early 1980s. In this approach, masculinity was considered to be a product of socialization, formed through social norms and expectations. The concept of the 'male sex role', while adopting more of a social constructionist perspective to gender, is still limited by focusing on individual agency rather than on the power dynamics underlying gender formation (Connell, 1993: 599). Proponents of this approach have tended to suggest that taking on gender 'roles' is largely an unproblematic, indeed almost automatic, process through socialization. As Connell has contended, 'Role theory rests on a superficial analysis of human personality and motives. It gives no grip on the emotional contradictions of sexuality, or the emotional complexities of

gender in everyday life, which are revealed by fine-textured field research' (1993: 599).

The poststructuralist notion of the interrelationship between discourse and subjectivity, related contemporary redefinitions of masculinities and the current focus in the academic literature on the performative dimension of gender have implications for how the concept of 'the father' should be understood (and by corollary, femininity and 'the mother'). Thus far, however, surprisingly few academic writers have drawn upon these theoretical insights and developments to write about fatherhood. There is general agreement in the social historical and social science literature that the expectations and norms around 'good' fatherhood have changed dramatically over the course of the twentieth century. Pleck (1987), for instance, identified four 'phases' of American fatherhood typologies: first, the father as 'authoritarian moral and religious pedagogue' (eighteenth century to early nineteenth century); second, the father as 'distant breadwinner' (early nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries); third, the father as 'sex role model' (1940 to 1965); and fourth, the 'new' father, who is nurturing and interested in his young children as well as engaged in paid work (late 1960s to the present). These apparent changes in the 'cultures of fatherhood' have been accompanied by perceived changes in the 'cultures of motherhood'; from the ideal of the 'stay-at-home' mother single-mindedly devoting herself to her children that supposedly characterized the first half of the twentieth century, to the growing acceptance that women could seek paid work outside the home in combination with mothering (the 'dual career') in the late twentieth century.

The difficulty with quite rigid categorizations such as these is that there is little recognition of differences between men of different social classes, educational level, ethnicity/cultural background and so on. Fatherhood is portrayed as dynamic only in the terms in which today's fathers are considered to be different from their own fathers, a change which is viewed as accompanied by a certain amount of role or identity confusion. This approach is evident in the claim of feminist critics Knijn and Mulder that 'Fathers are not what they used to be. Fathers do not longer [sic] model themselves on the image of the sovereign patriarch, the head of the family, who orders his wife and children about, but they have not developed a new identity, either' (1987: 1).

Some academic writers, however, have challenged these assumptions. Lewis, for example, contends that 'A cursory glance at the literature on marriage indicates that the emergent image of fatherhood – the view that men are starting to become involved in family life – is as old and perhaps as prominent as the notion of patriarchy' (1986: 5). He goes on to give examples of academic writers who championed the participation of fathers in family life in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. As McKee and O'Brien (1982: 18–19) have noted, within the same society at the same historical moment a man's occupation, social position and geographical location are significant to the ways in which he approaches fathering, and even then there is much diversity in men's experiences. For instance, in Edwardian and Victorian Britain the upper-class

father may have been regarded as 'remote' and may often have been absent on business, but there is also evidence that such fathers were benevolent and affectionate towards their children and held a central authoritative position within the family (McKee and O'Brien, 1982; Tosh, 1996). (See also Griswold (1993) for a more nuanced historical account of fatherhood in the United States.)

LaRossa (1988) argues in relation to the contemporary American context that it is middle-class men who are experiencing the greatest ambivalence, guilt and confusion around fatherhood, as they ascribe more closely to the ideals of the 'new' father. Griswold (1993: 254) also suggests that the contemporary 'new' father is a very middle-class phenomenon, used by men as a marker of their sensitivity and refinement, their willingness to incorporate the ideals of liberal feminism and their distance from the stereotype of the crude, sexist working-class man. In contrast to this ideal of the 'new' father is that of the 'dangerous' father, the father who abuses and neglects his children, who has recently become a figure of moral panic. This father is frequently designated as poor, working-class or of non-European ethnicity, preserving the 'new' father image as predominantly white and middle-class (Messner, 1993).

The 'new' father archetype, therefore, tends to elide differences between men. When subcultural groups *are* singled out for attention in relation to the fatherhood debate, they are often positioned as negative counterparts to the bourgeois ideal of the 'new' father: as 'absent' fathers, 'dangerous' fathers or 'deadbeat dads'. The diversity, richness and constantly changing nature of the fatherhood experience for individual men is lost in the use of these categories. They all present somewhat confining and reductive accounts of how men may engage in fatherhood.

The social constructionist perspective has begun to emerge in recent discussions on fatherhood. For instance, one writer has explored what he calls 'the cultural images of fatherhood', or the symbolic representations, ideologies, cultural images, stereotypes, beliefs, norms and values that surround fatherhood (Marsiglio, 1993). Sometimes the phrase 'father role identity' is used to denote these phenomena in the social scientific literature on fatherhood, particularly that published in the United States. While this approach, like the related 'male sex role' concept we discussed above, is vaguely social constructionist in recognizing that fathers are 'made and not born', the 'father role identity' is typically presented as a set of quite fixed and individualistic characteristics. It is described as involving an individual's recognition of specific behaviours that he regards as conforming to 'good' or 'bad' father types or 'scripts', choosing from among these behaviours and then developing a 'father identity'. There is a reliance here upon static and specifically defined models of identity and upon rational choice as a means of constructing subjectivity. Sometimes this use of social constructionism slides into positioning 'the social' or 'the cultural' as separate from and external to the individual. There is an assumption in this writing that masculine identity is pre-existing, and is merely altered in some way as men respond to these expectations.

We would not want to suggest that there is no element of rational choice

operating in men's construction of fatherhood. Indeed, as we go on to argue below, parenting for both men and women has become conceptualized and approached as requiring much considered thought and the weighing up of alternatives. The 'father role identity' approach, however, tends not to admit of a less conscious level of experience that contributes to men's conceptualization and presentation of the self as a father. It also implies that once a 'father role identity' is 'chosen' and constructed, it is more or less discrete and fixed, except for shifts that take place over time due to responses to external 'life events'; for example, in the case of marital separation, remarriage or children reaching adulthood and leaving home. In these cases, it is argued, a certain identity changes into another one, and so on. While role theory admits that there are many identities that people enter and leave (the 'work identity', the 'husband identity', the 'father identity' and so on), it tends to suggest that these identities are separate from each other, and are juggled by the individual who takes up one identity at some times, then drops it and takes up another as the context demands.

There is little recognition in this literature that fatherhood is a continually changing ontological state, a site of competing discourses and desires that can never be fully and neatly shaped into a single 'identity', and that involves oscillation back and forth between various modes of subject positions even within the context of a single day. The concept of 'the father' is typically gendered in western societies; it denotes maleness, the possession of a penis and testes in working order, the proven ability to produce viable sperm to impregnate a woman resulting in a child. Yet, as de Kanter (1987: 6) points out, the contemporary concept of 'the father' is far more complex and less unified than this common-sense definition suggests. There are different modes of masculinity expressed between and within fathers. The concept of 'the father' or 'fatherhood' is multiple rather than unitary, changing according to the context even for the individual, as do concepts of 'the mother' or 'motherhood'.

De Kanter (1987) notes that when speaking or writing of 'the father' there is a continual move between at least three different levels of meaning: the person of the father (that is, an individual's embodied presence), the sociocultural position of the father and the more abstract symbol of the father. As she argues, the term 'father' may be used to describe the individual who provided the biological material, even if he is never known to his child (as in the case of sperm donors), to describe the person who lives in the same household as the child and is the mother's partner but is not biologically related to the child, and the man who is legally the father but does not live in the same household because of marital separation or divorce. So too, a 'father figure' may be a friend of the family or a relative such as an uncle. Indeed, fatherhood need not be linked with maleness or heterosexuality at all. For instance, among lesbian couples with children, a woman may be conceptualized as performing the 'father' role, while gay men can be fathers in any of the above senses. As this suggests, there is no a priori or necessary relationship between maleness, masculinity, heterosexuality and 'the father'.

There is nothing particularly linear or predictable therefore about the interaction between the subject position of 'father' and discourse and practice. Men will take up and adopt different discourses and practices at different times, perhaps ascribing to contradictory discourses simultaneously. The extent to which men and women may accept the dominant discourses on fatherhood is a highly complex process. That is not to say that there are *no* constraints to the extent to which dominant discourses may be avoided, rejected, or, for that matter, taken up by individuals. There continue to be material as well as ideological constraints to the autonomy of individuals. As Weedon argues, 'How we live our lives as conscious thinking subjects, and how we give meaning to the material social relations under which we live and which structure our everyday lives, depends on the range and social power of existing discourses, our access to them and the political strength of the interests which they represent' (1992: 26). Material conditions must change as well as discourses for some social transformations to take place. Similarly, as we contended above, such features as the differing anatomical capacities of women and men continue to have implications for their life choices. Changes in discursive practices may go some way towards changing the meanings associated with these capacities or perhaps reducing their potency, but they cannot erase them entirely.

Parenting and the Project of the Self

The poststructuralist concept of subjectivity recognizes that it must be worked at on a daily basis, rather than being given or becoming static from a certain point in an individual's development. Rose (1996) has taken up Foucauldian insights to argue that historically there have been different ways available to humans to produce and understand themselves as subjects of a certain type: 'The human being is not the eternal basis of human history and human culture but a historical and cultural artifact' (Rose, 1996: 22). Rose describes the discourses and practices related to subjectivity, after Foucault, as particular 'regimes of the person'. He observes that many such regimes have developed around aspects of everyday life, including parenthood and child rearing, constructing them as problems.

Several sociologists have recently written about the ways in which individuals in contemporary societies seek to establish and maintain a sense of identity and set of beliefs in a world that is experienced as rapidly changing and full of uncertainties and risks. Zygmunt Bauman (1996), for example, has described the notion of life as a pilgrimage. He argues that unlike that of the pilgrims of pre-modern times, the pilgrimage of modern individuals is accomplished without leaving home; they are inner-worldly pilgrims who embark on this journey not through choice but through necessity. This pilgrimage is, in other words, the 'unfinished project of the self', the ever-continuing endeavour of fashioning self-identity. It is ever-continuing, because 'the rules of the game keep changing in the course of playing' (Bauman, 1996: 24).

The project of the self requires reflexivity, or rationalized attention to how best to deport one's self, how to relate to others and live life wisely and well, accomplishing one's goals. It involves drawing upon and making use of available knowledges about selfhood. In contemporary western societies, such knowledges tend to include the insights offered by the 'expert' knowledges of psychology, sociology and the health sciences and, to a lesser extent, religion. In relation to the contemporary regimes around the project of the self, Gordon argues that the individual is seen to be engaging in a type of enterprise, involving continual reflection upon one's way of life and conduct with others:

> the idea of one's life as the enterprise of oneself implies that there is a sense in which one remains always continuously employed in (at least) that one enterprise, and that it is a part of the continuous business of living to make adequate provision for the preservation, reproduction and reconstruction of one's own human capital. (1991: 44)

It is not only the intangible self that is part of this regime, but also the body, given that there is an inextricable relationship in western notions of subjectivity between the body and the self. Thus practices of the self also involve bodily care and deportment – ways of decorating, grooming, disciplining, moving and presenting the body.

From this perspective, fatherhood may be understood as an entrepreneurial activity, part of the project of shaping one's life as a rational, autonomous, responsible individual seeking to maximize one's potential and achievements as a worthy person. The 'expert' or 'professional' discourses emerging from such fields as medicine, psychology and sociology, as well as those evident in popular forums, are translated into prescriptions for how men should understand and practise fatherhood. In turn, men's experiences, as they are catalogued in clinical and academic research, are transformed into the contentions of 'expert' discourses. Such bodies of knowledge serve to bring phenomena such as fatherhood into being, making them thinkable, knowable and measurable. Fathers, that is, are produced as objects of knowledge through these discourses.

We can point to common discursive patterns in the ways of representing fatherhood in popular and 'expert' texts and the decisions men may make in their practice of fatherhood. Given the sheer volume of textual representations of fathers and fatherhood in contemporary western societies (although this remains small compared to textual representations of mothers and motherhood), it is inevitable that men and women will draw on these in constructing their understandings and experiences of fathers and fatherhood. In some cases this will be a highly conscious and deliberate process, including the purchase and perusal of self-help books on childbirth and parenting, for example. In other cases it will be a less deliberate and far more diffuse process, occurring as an inevitable part of acculturation into society through formal education, participation in family life, discussions with other parents and so on. In seeking to identify the interplay of discourses that constitute fatherhood, we do not wish to imply that men are somehow forced into particular

versions of fatherhood via discourse. It is difficult, if not impossible, to identify a 'cause and effect' relationship or to isolate specific forums of discourse as the most influential upon men's own practices and experiences in relation to fatherhood, or vice versa.

In their writings on intimate life and family relationships in the context of late modern societies, Beck-Gernsheim and Beck (Beck, 1992: chapters 4 and 5; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Beck-Gernsheim, 1996) discuss the process of individualization, or the movement in post-industrial societies away from traditional social ties, systems of belief and towards relationships involving not only more flexibility but also new demands and obligations. The creed of individualization is that 'life is what you make it' (Beck-Gernsheim, 1996: 140). As part of individualization, 'Women and men are currently compulsively on the search for the right way to live' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 2). But it is not only this diminishing of general norms about how to live one's life that is part of the growing uncertainties about how family life should be conducted. It is also the discourses that suggest that people should devote time to themselves and should interrogate their relationships for their flaws.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) argue that traditional notions around gender-defined roles and expectations have, to some extent, dissolved, and have been replaced by a more androgynous approach, involving a greater need for couples to work out for themselves how their relationship will operate. In contemporary intimate relationships, men are now expected to respond to and provide emotional closeness with others. The ideal notion of marital love is that which expects both partners to develop a fulfilled and independent self, in which family and gender roles are flexible and constantly renegotiated. There is a strong emphasis on individuals seeking to communicate needs and feelings to each other and on openly confronting problems, in 'working' on the marriage (Cancian, 1987; Duncombe and Marsden, 1993; Griswold, 1993). As a result, 'love is more difficult than ever' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 52). There is more freedom and flexibility to 'choose' how one should behave in an intimate relationship, but this very flexibility brings with it added burdens and uncertainties: 'the more complex the decisions are, the more likely they are to lead to quarrels' (1995: 52).

This increased emphasis on negotiation, egalitarianism and communication in intimate relationships is evident in contemporary discourses on fatherhood. As we will show in Chapters 2 and 3, both 'expert' and more popular discourses on masculinity have tended to argue that men should take on a more 'feminine' approach in interacting with their family, including revealing their emotions to their partners and children, demonstrating their love and affection openly and participating in embodied caring activities with their young children. This is a shift from earlier notions of the role played by 'the home' for men, where it was conceptualized as a place where they could retreat from the burdens of public life and allow themselves to be cared for by their partners. Women, for their part, are expected to behave not only as 'angels of the home', bestowing love and care on their partners and children,

but also to engage as active workers in the paid workforce. They are encouraged to seek emotional companionship from their partners in return for their own emotional support. A 'developed' person now tends to be described as 'someone who combines feminine intimacy and emotional expression with masculine independence and competence' (Cancian, 1987: 8).

This intensification of discourse around intimacy and love in the marital and family context coincides with an increased concern about the vulnerability of the child, and the importance of parental actions in affecting children's moral, emotional, social, physical and cognitive development. Individuals in western societies have been constructed to experience and perceive relationships between children and their parents as highly important, emotionally charged and integral to the sense of self. It is no longer considered enough to do one's duty as a parent, to conform to moral standards. Rather, the emphasis now is upon individuality and self-development, and hierarchical relations between parents and children are no longer valued: 'Modern conceptions about good parenthood do not emphasize that parents have to teach their children societal norms and values; they should relate to their children in such a way that the individuality of the children can fully develop' (Verheyen, 1987: 37).

Part of the idea of life as malleable to individual agency is the notion that children are planning objects, requiring the investment of much care and attention as well as economic resources on the part of their parents. Parents actively seek to produce a perfect child, for the child has come to stand as the tangible outcome of parental labour and care: 'A child, once a gift of God, sometimes also an unwanted burden, increasingly becomes for parents/mothers "a difficult object for treatment"' (Beck-Gernsheim, 1996: 143–4). Nippert-Eng has referred to the contemporary dominant concept of children as that of 'sacred children', seen as 'precious entities entrusted to adults' care, deserving the very best from us' (1996: 203). She goes on to note that 'In its extreme form, "sacred-child parenting" places children (especially infants) on a pedestal of the highest magnitude. Here, a parent's life is utterly devoted to a child's needs and desires, subordinating all other goals, actions, claims, and people to the child' (1996: 204). Parenting, therefore, is an integral site of the reproduction of modes of care of the self. It has become important as a performative practice, with the outcome a child whose demeanour, appearance and achievements are strongly linked to parents' own subjectivity, their presentation of the self to others *qua* parent.

The practices of the self related to the role of the parent are not simply limited to one's own body or self, although they may include this focus (particularly during pregnancy), but primarily revolve around the care of the body and self of another: the child. Clearly, parenting is an important practice of the self for those who have infants or young children, for some people at some times coming to the fore and virtually overwhelming other practices. The project of the child begins well before birth, when individuals have to decide whether or not they even want to have a child, whether their relationship is stable enough, whether their economic resources are robust enough or

whether they feel emotionally ready for the demands of parenthood. Once the difficult decision is made to go ahead, both prospective parents are encouraged to maximize their own state of good health before attempting to conceive. This intensifies for women during pregnancy, when they are offered a battery of prenatal diagnostic tests to measure the health and normality of the foetus. Then follows a whole range of decisions that have to be made and information sought and considered (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: chapter 4). An important part of these decisions is how the father will conduct himself in his parental role. Fathers are encouraged to negotiate with their partners about how child care will be undertaken, to attend antenatal classes with their partners, to be present at the birth of the child and to consider the nature of their relationship with their child and how best to achieve this.

Emotions and the Inner World

One area which discourse theory has tended to overlook is an understanding of the inner world of the subject and the importance of emotional states, mutuality and intimate relationships between people, including those between parents and their children, as contributing to subjectivity. Feminist critics in particular have drawn attention to these absences in Foucault's work, as well as to his tendency to construct a masculinist concept of subjectivity (see, for example, the chapters collected in Ramazanoglu, 1993). Foucault and his followers have also been charged with neglecting the ways in which subjectivity is also shaped via the pre-discursive, or that part of existence that develops in earliest infancy before the subject is aware of language, and the extra-discursive, or those elements that go beyond language and visual representation, such as spatial, embodied and sensual experiences (smell, touch, taste and so on), feelings and emotional states and relations to other bodies and material objects. For instance, Cain (1993) argues that is possible to *feel* something before this feeling is translated or expressed into language or visual imagery; feelings, indeed, may remain imperfectly expressed in discourse or not expressed discursively at all. An over-emphasis on discourse, thus, may descend into 'discourse determinism', and this 'does not account for what we experience as individuality: the fact of each person's uniqueness in relation to language/discourse' (Hollway, 1989: 84).

Social research in general too often ignores the emotional dimension of human action, preferring to turn its attention to documenting and explaining patterns of 'rational' behaviour. The lack of interest in the affective dimensions of fatherhood, or what the writer of one popular book has called 'the passions of fatherhood' (Osherson, 1996), is typical of academic writing in general in the social sciences. As Game and Metcalfe have argued, linking the word 'passionate' with the words 'sociology' or 'psychology' generally is disturbing, for it challenges assumptions about what is proper for social scientists to write about: 'Modern sciences like psychology and sociology rarely talk about passions, and certainly not their own. The closest they come

is through the more anaemic concept of emotions. For most psychologists and sociologists, the idea of passion is as imprecise and pre-scientific as humoral understandings of health' (1996: 4).

So too, both psychology and sociology tend to assume the notion of the unified, rational subject, the subject who seeks out knowledge so as to make wise choices. Traditionally, therefore, sociology and psychology have tended to construct a dualism between individual and society, structure and agency. These perspectives are reflected and reproduced in popular and expert writings on fatherhood. As we show in Chapter 2, much of the social scientific literature on fatherhood argues for change, advocating that fathers take a far greater interest in, and provide practical assistance for, their children's care. The writers of this literature mainly rest upon the 'voluntarism' position, implying that as long as men's consciousness is raised, that they are made aware of their inherent potential for nurturing and the rewards that come from close physical contact with infants and children, then they will take steps to alter their lives so as to be more 'involved' fathers. While much sociological writing has drawn attention to the constraints imposed by society on men's ability to change their fathering practices, including such factors as gendered expectations around work and concepts of masculinity and femininity in relation to the care of children, most sociologists argue for change driven by 'rational' action. In their focus on rationality, neither psychologists nor sociologists appear very much interested in the emotional and embodied dimensions of fatherhood; that is, the ways in which the discourses, meanings and practices of fathering are experienced by men themselves at a visceral, sensual and affective level.

What such perspectives do not and cannot account for is the 'extra-rational' aspects of life, including the generation and experience of strong emotional states. We would argue that fatherhood is not only constituted through discursive and conscious processes, but importantly is also constructed through touch and smell and inchoate memories of infancy and early childhood, all of which form part of the realm of knowledge and experience. While many of the everyday activities in which we engage are not particularly invested with emotion, it is clearly the case that familial and other intimate relations, including parenthood, are primary sites for the expression and investment of emotions.

It is here that the psychoanalytic approach provides an alternative perspective. This perspective in general offers the insight that there is much that lies beyond conscious thought, that individuals' sense of their own coherence as an individual, their certainties about self, others and the world are only one part of subjectivity. It differs from mainstream developmental and social psychology in its focus on the emotional, the contradictory, the fragmentary and disordered subject rather than the 'rational', the conscious and the unified subject (Burman, 1994: 13). It recognizes that there is an element of the human psyche, namely the unconscious, that acts as a reservoir for repressed thoughts, phantasies, desires, libidinal drives and motivations which are always potentially rising to the surface and revealing themselves through

such outlets as dreams, slips of the tongue, jokes and what might be experienced as 'irrational' emotional reactions. These emotions, phantasies and desires themselves are socially constructed in particular historical settings: 'those processes which position us are also those which produce the desires for which we strive' (Henriques et al., 1984: 205).

The concept of the unconscious highlights the ever-present 'threat' of loss of control over the rational, ordered and reflective self. As Walkerdine and Lucey suggest,

> The psychic dimension of our work – the problems of what people remember and how they interpret situations, mixing fact and fantasy, the defences against pain, the push of wishing, hoping, desiring – are rarely discussed in social analysis. A politics of subjectivity needs this engagement if it is not to succumb to a too simplistic determinism, for it shows the complexity of how we are struggling. (1989: 44)

Although language and culture are important to the construction of subjectivity, the emotional self, the self who has a personal biography of unconscious emotionally imbued phantasies, also plays a part in the shaping and reshaping of meaning for each individual. That is not to say that each is separate from the other. Language, culture and emotional phantasy interact, each shaping the other (Chodorow, 1995a). The unconscious, therefore, may be understood as structuring and reconstructing social relations in certain ways. In turn, the unconscious is constructed through social and cultural processes. The psyche and subjectivity are developed as a product of the social and ideological field but also 'feed back' into the social world, serving to shape social, political and cultural relations.

Psychoanalytic theory is able to provide some insight into the question of why individuals may 'believe' one thing and 'do' or 'feel' another: for example, why strongly feminist women who are critical of what they see as the oppressive aspects of the institution of the traditional family may still want to engage in heterosexual relations, live with a man and bear children. Henriques et al. make use of the notion of 'investment', or 'the emotional commitment, involved in taking up positions in discourses which confer power and are supportive of our sense of continuity' (1984: 205). This notion of investment is useful, for it both recognizes that individuals possess agency in positioning themselves in certain ways, and allows for the affective underpinnings of everyday thoughts and actions. Thus, for instance, men may be conceptualized as taking up certain masculine subject positions as a way of (partially) resolving contradictions, anxieties and uncertainties as well as achieving pleasure and a sense of power (Hollway, 1984; Jefferson, 1996).

By extension, this theoretical point also raises the question of how people who have been 'socialized' into taking up certain discourses and norms of behaviour may instead flout or transform them. Because in psychoanalytic theorizing the self is understood as complex and often unpredictable in responding to unconscious desires, this approach further opens up the potential for social change. Those who have taken up psychoanalytic theory have suggested that social norms are usually 'internalized', but not without

struggle and conflict, particularly as norms themselves contradict each other (for example, the conflict between autonomy and dependence that dominates western notions of the ideal self – see further discussion of this below). This internalization, therefore, is never quite complete and closed off.

A focus on analysing discourse remains important, however, not only because of the role of discourse in contributing to the shaping of experience but also its function as the primary means by which we convey to others, however inadequately and clumsily, our feelings and emotional states. Thus the Foucauldian interest in discourse may usefully be brought together with psychoanalytic insights into the meaning and experience of motherhood and fatherhood that are often neglected in other approaches interested in the sociocultural aspects of parenting. Such a perspective is able to delve below the manifest level of meaning to explore the symbolic and emotional dimensions of the parent–child relationship, including the profound ambivalences and contradictions that characterize this relationship (and all other intimate human relationships).

Object Relations Theory, Gender and Intimate Relations

Psychoanalytic theory has provided a number of important insights into the production and shaping of subjectivity and gender. Writers adopting psychoanalytic perspectives have argued that early parent–child relations have significant implications for adult subjectivity, including individuals' relationships with and feelings about their partners and own children. Feminist writers, in particular, have employed insights derived from psychoanalytic perspectives to speculate upon the ways that gender is produced through relations with one's mother and father in early childhood. In the emphasis on unconscious phantasies and desires as they are developed in infancy, the object relations theory is able to raise some questions (and attempt to answer them, albeit partially) about the deeply-felt emotions around childhood and parenting which are often regarded as 'irrational', the investments that people have in taking up gender roles, that external theories of subjectivity are often at a loss to explain (Hollway, 1994: 541).

Early psychoanalytic theory tended to highlight the importance of the father as the primary figure responsible for introducing children into the 'real', external and moral world and shaping their gender identity. Freud, for example, viewed the domestic space, the world of the mother and the infant as a closed circle. He contended that the infant is at first unable to differentiate itself from the maternal body, the provider of pleasure. For Freud, particularly in his earlier writings, the father was of great importance, representing the outside world, its morality, the necessary link the child requires to gain autonomy from the mother and achieve differentiated selfhood and sexual identity.

Freud's major preoccupation in exploring the unconscious dimensions of the relationships between parents and their children was in relation to male

children. In what Freud called the Oedipal crisis, he described the situation by which the male child, around the age of three years, first begins to conceptualize himself as separate and different from his mother. At this time, argued Freud, the boy desires his mother, seeking to maintain his sense of psychic union with her, and views his father as an intrusion into his intimate relationship with the mother. The boy therefore sees the father as his rival and wants to usurp him, phantasizing about his death. For the father's own part, he requires that the child renounce the mother as the love object and acknowledge paternal authority, the father's right to the mother. Eventually the boy must learn that his father's authority cannot be usurped, and his forbidden desire for his mother is driven into his unconscious. As part of the process of achieving maturity as an adult, the boy must find his own (ideally female) sexual partner to replace the mother figure, but the forbidden desire for his mother may re-emerge from the unconscious from time to time.

Freudian theory has been widely criticized for its universalizing tendencies and for the stereotypical representations of gender, reflecting the sociocultural context in which Freud was writing (Europe in the late nineteenth century) and his perspective as a privileged middle-class European man. Nonetheless, Freud was the first to establish the concept of the unconscious and to attempt to draw implications for the ontology of human existence and selfhood. Later object relations theory, particularly as it was used by feminist writers, diverted emphasis from the influence of sexual desire and the Oedipus complex in constructing the unconscious, as was the focus in Freudian and Lacanian approaches, to the 'pre-Oedipal' stage, or the maternal–infant relationship. Turning away from the approach that seems to predominate in masculinist psychoanalytic theory, these theorists have adopted a position that both recognizes and celebrates the role of the mother while simultaneously acknowledging the struggles that ensue at the stage of the child's separation and individuation from her.

The work of Melanie Klein, first published in the 1920s, has been taken up as an alternative to simply focusing on boys and their fathers by exploring the unconscious dimensions of the relationship between infants of both sexes and the mother (for a collection of some of her most influential writings, see Klein, 1979). Klein and her followers have pointed out that because only women's bodies have the potential to give birth to children and lactate, it is the woman who gives birth to the infant who tends to take care of it. Therefore, in most situations, individuals' primary identification is with one person: the woman who gave birth to them. Klein focused on infants' intense ambivalent reactions to the powerful mother, including their fears of her omnipotence, which, she argued, shaped subsequent subjectivity. Like Freud, she argues that at the beginning of life, human infants are unable to differentiate themselves from the care-giver, but experience an emotional and physical oneness with this person. Infants are also helpless, utterly reliant upon this care-giver for survival, as they were in the womb.

In the first few months of life, according to Klein, the infant experiences frustration and discomfort in birth and adapting to a new environment out of

the womb. This leads to the unconscious feeling that she or he is attacked by hostile forces, which is alleviated by the sensual gratification and comfort provided by feeding and other caring actions provided by the mother figure. For the infant, therefore, the mother figure represents the whole of the external world. As part of normal development, the first object upon which infants fixated, Klein contended, was the mother's breast, which was conceptualized by the child as both 'good' at some times (when it gratified desires) and at others, 'bad' (when frustrating desires or withholding pleasure). So that the infant may preserve the loved aspects of the good mother, a splitting occurs that results in a severance of love and hate.

While these processes emerge in earliest infancy, when infants undergo the psychic processes of differentiation from the maternal body, they continue to work into adulthood in individuals' relationships with other people and with material phenomena and their dealing with ambivalent feelings. Parts of the self (sometimes the 'bad' parts, sometimes the 'good' parts) continue to be split off and projected onto important others, influencing emotional life and relations with other people and things in adult life. Klein argued that sometimes this projection can lead to severe emotional or personality problems, but it is also found in minor degrees in 'normal' people. Hollway (1989) gives the example of the vulnerability and anxiety experienced by adults in their relations with others. She argues that these emotions may be understood as culturally inevitable, developed in infants through their interactions with and positioning by their care-givers, who invest their own anxieties in the infants. As a result, for adults, 'Anxiety thus provides a continuous, more or less driven, motive for the negotiation of power relations' (Hollway, 1989: 85).

Feminist writers drawing upon the foundation work of Klein, such as Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976), Nancy Chodorow (1978, 1989) and Jessica Benjamin (1994) have employed object relations theory to argue that the role differentiation between women and men shapes the ways in which gender is reproduced. They build upon the recognition common to most psychoanalytic approaches that children construct their autonomous self identity by going through the process of separating from their mothers. The feminist object relations school of thought goes on to argue that the process of separation from the mother is both more important and more complete for boys than for girls, underpinning the apparent need for detachment and rationality that supports a masculinist approach to the conduct of the self. These writers suggest that the basis of men's need to dominate women is their early attempts to separate from the mother figure and construct an individual identity. They argue that it is in this process of differentiation that men develop an intense fear, anger and resentment towards women. Boys' rejection of the engulfing, threatening mother and the embracing of the father becomes the rejection of women and things deemed feminine, and hence is the cause of adult men's attempts to dominate women.

In her influential book *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) and in a collection of essays, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (1989), Chodorow argues that girls also recognize that they must gain autonomy from the

maternal body, but feel less inclined to separate themselves because they identify with their mothers as women; they incorporate their mothers into their own identity. Mothers, for their part, treat their children differently according to whether they are male or female. As women, they see their daughters as more like an extension of the self, while their sons are more likely to be perceived as 'other' and are pushed towards differentiation. Chodorow asserts that through their more symbiotic relationships with their mothers, women develop a 'self-in-relation', while men develop a self that tends to deny relatedness. Men remain psychologically defensive and insecure, while women may, at least in favourable circumstances, gain better psychological security for they have less of a need for differentiation from the primary care-giver.

This approach recognizes that both men and women experience the ambivalences around the desire for autonomy and independence and the desire for dependency, connectedness and intimacy with another that produces the same pleasures experienced in infancy with the maternal body. However, the process of becoming a gendered subject subsequently shapes the nature and manifestation of these responses. While both boys and girls go through the psychic processes of individuation in early infancy, due to sociocultural assumptions and expectations around gender boys rather than girls are eventually acculturated to find intimacy, closeness with and dependency upon another more frightening and threatening to their presentation of the self. As part of performing masculinity, boys have more at stake than do girls in constructing and presenting a self that is autonomous. It is later in a child's development, in interactions with others and in the context of institutions such as the family, the mass media and the education system that she or he comes to recognize the gendered meanings around autonomy/intimacy and rationality/emotionality and learns how to phrase her or his own emotional responses through dominant discourses on gender.

There are implications in this work for understanding both the role of fathers in producing gendered subjectivities and men's relationships as adults with intimate others, including their children, although Chodorow tends to focus on the former rather than the latter. In Chodorow's schema it is more difficult for men to take on a caring role because of their more strongly-differentiated sense of self and unconscious need to remain separate from others. As a result, she argues, as fathers men have difficulty in engaging with their children emotionally and understanding their needs in comparison with women's more empathetic, other-centred approaches. Chodorow (1978) contends that changes in the ways in which child care is divided between women and men, with men taking more responsibility, would lead to changes in gender roles for ensuing generations. Boys and girls would first identify equally with both parents and would then go through the process of separation from them both. As such, boys would not need to become so resistant to, afraid, and dismissive of, the mother/femininity in establishing their independence and masculine persona. Both boys and girls could develop an individuated and strong sense of self and secure gender identity that does not

involve either defensiveness and denial of connection to others or ego-boundary confusion.

Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976) has taken this approach even further, arguing that mothers produce 'maimed', 'semi-human', 'monstrous' adults who harbour fury against their mothers because of the stifling, absolute power they hold over their helpless children. For Dinnerstein as for Chodorow, the way out is to construct an alternative psychic scenario whereby infants develop the initial relationship with both parents and thereby project their earliest feelings onto both the mother and the father. The consequence of this, she argues, would be that the hostility, dread, rage and frustration inevitably aroused through the psychic separation process would be diverted from women as the sole target.

The object relations approach provides a number of insights for understanding parenthood and gender differentiation and, by extension, fatherhood. However, it has been subject to criticism on several grounds. There is a strong structuralist tendency in this work, at least as it was formulated in the 1970s, with the construction of gender reduced to reproduction via family relationships. Object relations theory has been criticized for its ethnocentricity, ahistoricity and its essentialist tendencies in referring to 'the mother' and 'the child' in the context of the westernized, one-to-one relationship of mothers with their children (Burack, 1992: 500–1; Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994: 33). Another criticism is that this perspective privileges such characteristics as separation and individuation, focusing on the conflict, and indeed even hostility, supposedly inherent in breaking the symbiotic maternal–infant attachment rather than the pleasures and benefits of interrelationships and emotional connections with others (Burack, 1992: 500).

Further, there are a number of assumptions made about gender by some proponents of object relations theory that tend to present a homogeneous, universalized account of masculinity and femininity. These include the assertion that men cannot engage in nurturing roles because of their need to defend themselves against what they perceive to be 'feminine' characteristics, and the assumption that women are psychically predisposed towards nurturing, and feel less ambivalence about merging their identities with another individual. There is little examination of how men in different life circumstances based on their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, generational group, sexual preference and so on may respond differently to fatherhood. Nor does this body of literature provide explanations for how individual men may transcend the defensive position into which they are placed as a result of unconscious processes of individuation. Schwartz (1994: 249) asks, for instance, how it is that some men *do* assume the role of primary care-takers and nurturers and how does Chodorow's model apply to gay male couples with children? Such theory tends to imply that neither men nor women can escape the bounds of gender roles; if men are disposed towards differentiation, how can they begin to take on a nurturing response that is expected of them? These criticisms would suggest the need for a less essentialist understanding of how men and

women come to develop gendered approaches to intimate relationships.

In her more recent work, Chodorow (1995a, 1995b) has addressed some of these criticisms, moving away from some of her originally essentialist tendencies. She now emphasizes the importance of recognizing the variation and complexity that are evident in the ways that individuals take up gender and engage in intimate relations. Chodorow notes that her own work as a psychotherapist has demonstrated to her that the emotions and fantasies invested in mother–daughter relationships, the symbolizations of the self and the mother, differ widely between her female patients. So too, Chodorow found that for the women she was treating, the personal and cultural meanings of the father were contingent, albeit strongly influenced by dominant sociocultural discourses about gender. Thus, she concludes: 'Anyone's emotionally and linguistically constructed gender, the personally animated gendered self and world she inhabits, is a continuously invoked and reshaped project involving self, identity, body imagery, sexual fantasy, images and fantasies about parents, cultural stories, and unconscious and conscious fantasies about intimacy, dependency, and nurturance' (1995a: 541).

As a feminist who has more recently taken up Kleinian approaches to theorizing gender relations and sexuality, Wendy Hollway similarly rejects a deterministic approach, arguing that individuals experience individuation in different ways, which has implications for their subsequent intimate relationships. She has a somewhat more optimistic approach to how people may deal with the unconscious anxieties produced through individuation, arguing that 'Depending on the quality of early object relations, people can achieve relations in adulthood in which the need for recognition and the wish for autonomy can coexist, albeit in tension' (Hollway, 1995: 96–7).

Both Hollway's and Chodorow's more recent theorizing on subjectivity and intimate relationships underline the importance of avoiding over-generalization and the need to acknowledge the shifting nature of gendered subjectivities. Individuals, they argue, may be understood as constructing, experiencing and understanding their own position as a gendered subject as an individual creation that is personally inflected as well as shaped more broadly through language and culture. As a result, 'there are many individual masculinities and femininities', although these may share some similarities with others (Chodorow, 1995a: 521). This approach recognizes that while there are certain anatomical and sociocultural conditions that tend to structure individuals' responses to others, the nature of individuals' personal biographies – their lived experiences, their observations of the experiences of others, their relationships with others (including their own parents), their sensual, emotional, embodied interactions with the world – mediate the outcome of these conditions. It emphasizes the ways in which different sources of the self intertwine and become important at different times for the same person. In one context, for example, gender may be particularly important for an individual's sense of self and presentation of the self; in another, it may be her or his sexual preference, occupation, position as a parent or non-parent, or as a member of a particular ethnic or cultural group.

Blurring the Boundaries: Pleasures and Anxieties

The anthropologist Clifford Geertz once described the dominant western notion of personhood as 'a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgement and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against a social and natural background' (quoted in Sampson, 1989: 1). As this suggests, in contemporary western cultures one's body is conceptualized as an organism that as one's 'being-to-the-world' is generally kept and understood as separate from other bodies, even as it is established through interrelationships with others. Like the bourgeois subject that is privileged in western notions of personhood, the ideal body is understood to be separate from others, self-contained, autonomous. This ideal body is regarded as 'civilized', as controlled and regulated, its boundaries from others and from 'the outside world' kept firmly policed. The opposition to the 'civilized' body is the 'grotesque' body, the body that is unable to regulate and control its boundaries or behaviour, the body that allows too much in and out (such as bodily fluids, emotions, food and drink). The notion of the 'civilized' body includes keeping a distance from others, avoiding too much emotional or physical contact, remaining aloof (Shilling, 1993).

This concept of the body/self is relatively recent even in western cultures. In early seventeenth-century Europe the body was not yet conceptualized as discrete, isolated from the network of social relations or the physical world surrounding it. Instead, the body was understood as essentially porous, open to the elements, allowing a constant interchange of the elements between inside and outside the body (Duden, 1991: 11). During the course of that century, however, bodies gradually became privatized and, to some degree, invisible and unacknowledged (albeit constrained by a proliferation of sensibilities around their conduct). The broad context for this reformulation of subjectivity was the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the rise of the modern state (Barker, 1984: 10–12). In that period, the subject became 'self censoring'. By the late eighteenth century, the body had become individualized and viewed as 'owned' by the individual, signifying that person's social position (Elias, 1994). For writers such as Descartes and Hobbes, the body was understood as a machine-like object, amenable to domination by the rational power of reason: 'The most superior minds suffer least from the intrusions of the body' (Gatens, 1988: 60).

Despite this privileging of the individuated, autonomous body/self in contemporary western societies, there remain key points at which the experienced reality of the separate embodied self fades and blurs. Pregnancy is one of those points, as is, potentially, the experience of breastfeeding and holding or embracing intimately another person, sexually or otherwise. Feminist scholars have vividly written about the ways in which their bodies are experienced as diversified through pregnancy and childbirth. For instance, Iris Young (1990) has described the unique experience of pregnant

embodiment, involving the simultaneous experience of multiplicity as well as continuing singularity, the blurring between 'inside' and 'outside' the self. She argues that the pregnant woman experiences her body as decentred, split or doubled, as herself and not herself. As such, the boundaries of her body are not as confined as are other bodies: 'The integrity of my body is undermined in pregnancy not only by this externality of the inside, but also by the fact that the boundaries of my body are themselves in flux. In pregnancy I literally do not have a firm sense of where my body ends and the world begins' (Young, 1990: 163). In another essay, Young discusses the fluidity of embodiment that is part of the breasted experience for many women: 'Many women's breasts are much more like a fluid than a solid; in movement, they sway, jiggle, bounce, ripple even when movement is small' (1990: 195). Breasts, she argues, are not simply the 'property' of the woman, but are also thought of as belonging to her sexual partner and her suckling infant. They therefore provide another blurring of one's 'own body' and desires and those of others.

While pregnancy, and to some extent breastfeeding, may represent the apotheosis of this self/not self ontology, the practices of parenthood also potentially embrace a decentring of subjectivity. Just as pregnancy may evoke connections to repressed, preconscious aspects of existence, straddling language and instinct (Young, 1990: 166), the parenting body in close contact with an infant or small child may recall early infantile feelings and desires related to one's own relationship with the care-giving body. This blurring of the boundaries between one's body/self and that of another, however, challenges privileged concepts of the autonomous body/self in western societies.

The tension between wanting to maintain a sense of an individuated self and finding oneself physically or emotionally intertwined with another can be confronting and unsettling. Julia Kristeva (1982) has written vividly of the revulsion inspired by the 'abject' body, the maternal body that has blurred boundaries and therefore cannot easily be categorized as 'self' or 'other', as subject or object. The abject threatens self-identity in its lack of boundaries. For Kristeva, the abject

> is an extremely strong feeling which is at once somatic and symbolic, and which is above all a revolt of the person against an external menace from which one wants to keep oneself at a distance, but of which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace but that it may menace us from inside. So it is a desire for separation, for becoming autonomous and also the feeling of an impossibility of doing so. (1982: 135–6)

Kristeva conceptualizes the unconscious approach to the abject maternal body as a combination of both strong revulsion and strong desire. This body provides food and therefore life, but is also threatening because of its very omnipotence and its ownership of one's own body, having produced and nourished it from its own flesh. In its ambiguity, the maternal body revolts a cultural sense of order, but also fulfils a longing for unification with another.

Women who are mothers may find the blurring of boundaries between themselves and their foetuses/infants as confronting as well as pleasurable.

Women who give birth do not 'naturally' experience attachment to their infants as 'mothers'; some feel 'invaded' by the foetal body when pregnant or fear the constraints and demands of mothering. Urwin (1985) notes, for example, that the interests between infants and mothers may be contradictory, that the mother may have conflicting desires, both conscious and unconscious, when interacting with her infant which enter into the constitution of her role as mother. Women may feel symbolically 'devoured' by their children, or may feel antagonistic towards them as they lose their autonomy and sense of individuated self, or resentful that they become portrayed as mere containers for the foetus or providers of food for the infant (Cosslett, 1994: 126–9; see also Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; Flax, 1993).

While women may well experience these feelings of ambivalence about their children, they are positioned far more as embodied subjects than are men. It may be argued, therefore, that the blurring of body/self boundaries that may be an outcome of parenthood may be experienced as more confronting by men because it challenges specifically dominant ideals of masculinity. These ideals tend to position the male body/self as far more separate and autonomous than the female/body self. Women are conceptualized as lacking the rigidly defined bodily boundaries that men possess, as having 'leaky' bodies through such activities as menstruation, pregnancy and lactation; 'women's corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage', linked with the meanings of uncontrollability, contagion and disorder (Grosz, 1994: 203). Grosz argues that because at this stage in human history only women's bodies have had the potential to experience the duality of bodies/selves that pregnancy, childbirth and lactation provide, 'The relations between immanence and transcendence, between owning and being a body, between subject and object or one subject and another, are not the same for women as for men' (1994: 108). The experiences of having breasts and of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding, and perhaps even the assumption or knowledge of their potentiality, are ways of being for women that simply are not accessible to men. Women, indeed, are understood as far more embodied than men; women are constituted as 'bodies' in ways that men are not.

[4] For example, the pregnant woman who is disadvantaged through her social class or ethnic position is often portrayed in legal situations as 'mere body', a 'life-support system for a foetus' subject to court orders enforcing such procedures as prenatal screening, detention and intrauterine transfusions or surgery, with her own wishes discounted in the interest of the wellbeing of her foetus (Bordo, 1993: 76—7). Other disadvantaged women have been subjected to enforced sterilization because of perceptions of them as unruly bodies, as 'promiscuous breeder[s]' (Bordo, 1993: 79), or have been charged with 'abusing' their foetuses by taking drugs (including alcohol). It is this embodied understanding of women that is the source of much of the cultural negativity that surrounds women. As Bordo notes, if '*the body* is the negative term, and if woman *is* the body, then women *are* that negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death' (1993: 5,

original emphases). Given the common conflation between rationality and bodily and emotional containment of the self, women have therefore been historically understood as less rational and less able to ascribe to the ideals of the autonomous body than have men (Lloyd, 1984; Grosz, 1994).

Grosz (1994: 203) has suggested that men's own fears of loss of boundaries, their hatred of liquidities, are projected onto women in men's attempts to resolve these anxieties. Empirical research would seem to suggest that this is indeed the case. Using documentary evidence, Klaus Theweleit (1987) has written about the fears harboured by soldiers who were members of the German Freikorps in the years immediately following the First World War towards what they saw as the seeping, fluid bodies of women, and their own desires to keep their bodies contained. In response to the potential contamination of both women's bodies and the flood of revolution, the soldiers described themselves as stiffening, closing themselves off to form a discrete entity, holding themselves erect to ward off dissolution and stand above engulfment by fluids (Theweleit, 1987: 244). Women were associated, in the domestic sphere, with activity that engaged with hybrid substances: 'They turned solids into liquids when they cooked; and when they washed clothes and dishes, or took care of babies, they worked with, and in, things that were swampy, mushy' (1987: 409). To participate in such activities was considered unmasculine, as was the generation of such substances by the male's body. For the soldier male, 'Anything that affected his boundaries or orifices – anything that exited, entered, became moist, or flowed – was not only "forbidden", but lethal' (1987: 427). Against this the soldier male struggled to achieve the body as hard, cold machine, differentiated from and violent towards the mass that threatened to swallow him.

Such anxieties also emerged in Hollway's (1984) account of interviews with British men in which they expressed their fear of becoming emotionally 'engulfed', being 'sucked in' or 'getting in deep' in their relationships with women. The men experienced themselves as vulnerable in becoming emotionally close to women, positioned as the maternal 'Other'. At the same time they articulated a great desire for such closeness which was able to invoke the pleasures of contact with the mother they experienced in infancy. Hollway argued that the men typically dealt with this contradiction by unconsciously projecting weakness and emotionality onto women and positioning themselves as stronger and more contained, with fewer needs and anxieties.

These theoretical points are integral for understanding both the pleasures and the conflicts that men may experience as fathers. They suggest that because of the sociocultural meanings attributed to the importance of containment of one's body/self, to maintaining hardness and dryness, and because of the deeply gendered nature of these meanings, for men more than women to blur one's boundaries with another, to become plural and interdependent rather than autonomous (whether it be one's sexual partner or child), is potentially to incite anxieties and fears.

Concluding Comments

In drawing upon Foucauldian perspectives on discourse in conjunction with psychoanalytic theories, we can begin to move towards an understanding of the experiential, affective, embodied nature of fatherhood that may perhaps avoid the essentialism of much contemporary writing on the topic. This combination of theoretical perspectives remains a relatively new approach in inquiries into masculinities and male subjectivity and embodiment. As Jefferson recently commented, 'It is an exciting if barely started project' (1996: 342). Nonetheless, it is making itself increasingly known in the literature on masculinity: see, for example, several of the chapters in Mac an Ghaill (1996).

The implications of taking up these theories for our own work on fatherhood is that we seek to explore the biographical dimensions of becoming a father (a process which we would see as open-ended throughout a man's lifespan) as well as acknowledging the broader sociocultural context in which men are situated. We see these two contexts as inevitably interrelated. As Chodorow argues, an individual becomes a person 'in internal relation with the social world . . . People inevitably incorporate one another; our sociality is built into our psychic structure and there is no easy separation of individual and society or possibility of the individual apart from society' (1989: 149). Hence our decision both to investigate the dominant discourses circulating in integral texts, including the 'expert' and 'popular' literature, and to talk to men themselves about their experiences in a longitudinal project that is designed to focus attention on the shifting nature of taking up the father subject position in the context of individuals' specific and personalized life stories.

2

'Expert' Discourses and the Construction of Fatherhood

A central focus of Foucauldian-influenced research into parenting is identifying the ways in which the state and other agencies, supported by expert knowledge systems such as science, medicine and public health and the social sciences, have sought to measure, monitor and hence regulate the physical and mental characteristics of individuals in the attempt to manage and govern populations. As Rose has noted, 'For a domain to be governable, one not only needs the terms to speak and think about it, one also needs to be able to assess its conditions' (1989: 121). Such assessment requires continual monitoring, the recording of facts and figures, statistical calculation, the production of written reports and graphs and so on. These expert techniques and knowledges may be seen as 'techniques for the disciplining of human difference', serving to 'individualize' humans through processes of classification and calibration and developing norms (Rose, 1989: 123).

Over the past half century, the body of academic literature on parenthood and the family has proliferated. Mothers and fathers, and their children, have been major subjects of empirical research in the medical and social sciences, particularly for developmental psychology. Indeed, these bodies of knowledge have been central to the very constitution of the categories of 'mother', 'father' and 'child', particularly in identifying 'normality' and 'abnormality'. In this chapter, we build upon our discussions of the theoretical approaches to understanding fatherhood in the previous chapter to explore some of the dominant ways in which fathers and fatherhood have been studied and represented in the social and health care sciences. As we have noted, the weight of authority carried by 'expert' knowledges means that they play an integral role in shaping contemporary notions of what fatherhood is and how it should be conducted.

The chapter begins with a historical overview of the ways in which these 'expert' knowledges have gradually colonized the family, serving to measure and monitor, and therefore constitute it in certain ways. We then go on to look at the field of psychology and how it has been used to research fatherhood, followed by an analysis of the family health and welfare literature, applied sociological research and academic writings on masculinity. In conducting this analysis, we are assuming that, as the sites for the production of discourses in themselves, the health and social sciences cannot be isolated as separate from the sociocultural context in which they operate and construct certain types of individuals and social groups as 'problems'. None of the

Conclusion

In Chapter 1, we reviewed a range of theoretical perspectives that we suggested were insightful in addressing the ontology of fatherhood. We discussed how parenthood is now dominantly conceptualized as a considered enterprise, part of the project of the self. Children are viewed and treated both as 'sacred' and as 'planning objects', requiring much investment of time, thought and the seeking out of information on the part of their parents so that their quality is maximized. The child is often considered as an opportunity for parents to fulfil their unrealized dreams and hopes, to produce a better version of themselves. As we showed in Chapters 2 and 3, in both 'expert' and popular forums it is typically argued that the 'normal' and 'successful' development and maturation of children into adulthood is dependent upon the kind of care and attention given them by their parents. Further, it is believed that it is via careful and successful parenting, amongst other influences such as formal education, that children come to learn to engage in self-regulation and work upon the self: that is, to become 'civilized'. The construction of parenting as problematic has provided a spring-board for mothers and fathers to engage in continual self-reflection and questioning of their activities as parents, to work towards the ideal of the 'good' mother and the 'good' father.

This approach to parenting might be described as the 'rational' level of human action, which is largely produced and represented through discourse. At the 'extra-rational' level of meaning and action, we have suggested, the affective, embodied, sensual dimensions of parenting also need to be considered, for they are also vital to the meanings of contemporary parenthood. Caring for a child involves heightened physical and emotional sensations that go beyond 'rational' action and originate from individuals' earliest experiences with their primary care-givers. The parent–child relationship is endowed with high emotion from even before a child is born. The physical contact that infants have with their care-givers is the basis of their earliest diffuse sensations of pleasure and emotional states, including the smell and feel of the care-givers' skin, the sound and rhythm of their voices, breathing and heartbeat, the warmth and taste of the milk they feed the infant. The meanings of these sensations go beyond the discursive, constituted as they are before the acquisition of language. Emotion, therefore, is a central component of the parent–child relationship, as is the interplay between unconscious phantasy and a consciously perceived 'reality'. As Chodorow argues, 'our experiences as men and women come from deep within, both within our

pasts and, relatedly, within the deepest structures of unconscious meaning and the most emotionally moving relationships that help constitute our daily lives' (1989: 2).

Unlike in previous centuries, children are not valued for their working capacity but solely for affective needs – providing their parents with self-fulfilment, giving their lives a new meaning, a sense of purpose and responsibility, allowing them to express unconditional love and so on. In a world which is considered to be characterized by superficial, self-serving and uncertain relationships with others (including one's marital partner), a child offers a loving relationship that will be stable: 'Where other aims seem arbitrary and interchangeable, belief in the afterlife vanishes and hopes in this world prove evanescent, a child provides one with a chance to find a firm footing and a home' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 107).

These contentions are supported by our research with fathers. As demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5, a number of dominant discourses about fathers and fatherhood emerged in the men's accounts. These include the following: fatherhood as logical step, a 'natural' part of adult masculinity; fatherhood as a revelation, an opening up to intense feeling; fatherhood as overwhelming; fatherhood as an enterprise, something that needs to be worked at, requiring continued devotion and time; fatherhood as a major responsibility; father as protector; father as provider; fatherhood as transformative of the self, an integral life experience that causes the father to reassess and change his sense of self; fatherhood as demanding, a source of stress and strain; 'good' fatherhood as close involvement with one's child; 'good' fatherhood as 'being there'; fatherhood as an opportunity to guide and shape another's life; fatherhood as a source of fulfilment, joy and wellspring of love; fatherhood as an opportunity for intimacy with another (the child). As we noted in previous chapters, many of these discourses may also be identified in a range of media, including both 'expert' and more popular texts.

All of our interviewees drew upon most of these discourses at some point or another when describing their experiences and feelings related to first-time fatherhood, and many articulated them constantly as a means of making sense of their experience and presenting themselves as fathers. Some of these discourses were more dominant at different points of the men's experience, while others competed for prominence simultaneously. While, for example, the men seemed to see fatherhood as something that was 'natural' or 'just happened' when describing it before the birth of their child, the notion that fatherhood was 'an enterprise' and 'something that needs to be worked at' was also commonly espoused at this time. Fatherhood was said to involve much preparation, thinking about appropriate behaviour and financial arrangements, as well as 'talking things over' with one's partner in relation to the management of domestic labour and child care tasks. This discourse intensified in men's accounts in the first few weeks after the birth of their child. The men also appeared to have tended to take up the notion of the 'sacred child', seeing other people and demands as secondary to the priority of meeting what they perceived to be the child's needs. There appeared to be

a continual tension, according to the men's accounts, between their desire to maintain a 'rational', controlled approach to parenting, involving preparation, the seeking after and acquisition of knowledge and negotiation with their partner about respective responsibilities and methods of dealing with the infant, and the representation of the child as an anarchic phenomenon, causing continual disruption, provoking 'irrational' or 'overwhelming' responses and emotional states (including intense love as well as frustration, anger and despair) and generally confounding the parents' attempts to maintain order.

It appeared to be very important to most of the men in our study that they could develop an emotionally close relationship with their child from early infancy onwards, that they could 'get to know' the child. They articulated a longing, a desire for closeness with their children, and they felt frustrated and anxious if they found this relationship not developing as they hoped. The men appeared to see this 'close' and 'involved' relationship as important for the child's development as well as for themselves in providing them with a fulfilling parenting experience. The men often described their loving and protective feelings towards their children as different from those they had ever experienced with others, and they sometimes found it difficult to put into words their strong feelings. These men did not conform to the archetype of the 'emotionally inexpressive male' (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993). Rather, they were quite open in expressing the strong feelings of love they felt for their children, and their distress at not being able to spend much time with them. Several used the term 'falling in love' when describing how their feelings for their children began to emerge. Many men also talked in detail about intimate features of their relationship with their female partners, including the strains on the marriage as well as the greater feelings of love they had for their partners after their child was born.

Further, the men drew on a discourse privileging the expression of affection and love in describing their relationships with their fathers and their idealized notions of how they would like to father their own children. Nearly all the men positioned their own fathers as 'absent', as perhaps doing their best to provide economically for the family but as 'emotionally distant'. Whether or not this was in fact the case, the dominant discourse circulating in contemporary forums labelling the last generation of fathers as 'absent' has proved powerful in this generation's tendency to identify 'absence' as a problem. As we have suggested, for many men the solution to this problematic absence is the discourse of 'being there', a rather amorphous term that suggests, above all, some kind of presence rather than absence. This typical juxtaposition of the negative 'absent' father versus the positive 'involved' father who is 'there' denotes the men's desire for intimate closeness with their own fathers that is projected onto their children. Appropriate masculinity, in this sense, is related to the ability to express and engage in fatherly love for one's child as well as to provide material resources for the family. The men not only wanted their children to love them as they themselves wanted to love their own fathers, but also wished to be able to invest their own love

freely in their children, in a reciprocal, mutually loving relationship which was not 'forced'.

There was little indication in most of these men's accounts that 'nurturance' and 'caring' are non-masculine attributes. This would suggest that the ways that attitudes to intimacy are articulated are very much phrased through contemporary discourses on subjectivity and gender. Just as in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many bourgeois men were quite capable of, and comfortable in, expressing their deep feelings of love for each other, including kissing each other fraternally (Yacavone, 1990), and found the public display of weeping an appropriate expression of fine sensitivity (Vincent-Buffault, 1991), the ability to express affection for one's children openly is championed as part of a masculine demeanour in the late twentieth century.

Fatherhood, for most of the men in our study, did challenge their sense of being 'in control'. This loss of control was associated with distress and frustration, as well as anxieties about dealing physically with a tiny infant. At the same time, however, they found much pleasure in being part of 'the family unit' and taking on responsibility for a child. They commonly described their position as fathers as involving seeing the child as 'a part of me', and as having their futures inextricably linked to that of the child, involving constant responsibility for her or him. Unlike men's relationships with their female partners, the love they can offer to and receive from a child is regarded as more permanent: they will always be their fathers and ideally will always be positioned, in some way, as the guardian and guide for their children. The men's positioning of themselves in this way provides them with a sense of strength and mastery. The infant's response to its father – its recognition of him as 'the father' through such embodied responses as smiling and head-turning as well as its manifestation of physical or personality traits that the father can recognize as 'inherited' from himself – provide an important means for men of connecting emotionally with their child. These responses also give men a sense of potency that they may otherwise lack in dealing with their young children, partly because they have not been able to develop a sense of expertise and control in interacting with them to the same extent as they observe in their female partners.

We found, then, that despite the fact that most of the men in the study described their family of origin as conforming to the archetypal gendered division of labour, with the mother providing most of the child care and the father as generally 'absent' from the home, undertaking paid employment to support the family, they were also able to articulate a desire for closeness and intimacy with their children. This challenges the contentions from feminist theorists using object relations theory that men are not able to develop a 'relatedness' to others – including their children – unless they themselves have been parented by both men and women. Nonetheless, there was still evidence that at least some of the men were struggling with the privileged discourse of emotional 'involvement' with their children. The men's tendency to draw on notions of 'protector' and 'provider', the person who ideally is 'strong' and 'controlled' when describing how best to deal with fatherhood,

suggests a discourse of fatherhood that continues to be phrased through gendered assumptions.

This supports Hollway's (1995: 94) argument that as part of their defence against the unconscious anxieties first produced in infancy in the process of individuation from the mother, both men and women may seek recourse in taking up the gender-differentiated discourses available to them. The prevailing sociocultural meanings constructed around femininities and masculinities, therefore, will tend to shape the ways that individuals deal with these anxieties. In the interests of performing 'good' motherhood and presenting themselves as 'good' mothers, for example, women rather than men may have much more invested in worrying about their children, and in describing this concern to an interviewer. As Walzer (1996: 221) has noted, worrying is culturally understood as 'something that mothers do', and the absence of this may challenge the definition of a 'good' mother for a mother herself or her partner. Similarly, the dominant discourse that privileges the notion of fathers acting as economic providers may mean that men are more likely to emphasize this role when describing their experiences of fatherhood. Because the prevailing discourses around fatherhood privilege both the 'father as provider and protector' and 'father as emotionally involved' discourses, men are articulating both as a means of dealing with this challenging new relationship.

The infant, in its state of unpredictable behaviour, its 'uncivilized' lack of control over its body, is a problematic source of love. Infants constantly threaten rationality and order by the grotesqueness of their uncontained bodies, with all the associated work, lack of sleep, noise and 'dirt' (the various bodily fluids they constantly emit) this entails (Murcott, 1993). We suggested in Chapter 1 that because of the sociocultural meanings privileging the contained body/self, and bestowing a masculine rather than feminine gender upon this ideal notion of subjectivity and embodiment, and because men lack some of the physical capacities for merging the body/self with another that women possess (such as pregnancy and breastfeeding), men are more likely than women to find the uncontained liquidities and physical excesses of the infant body confronting. Alan Brien, an English novelist and father of now adult children, has written vividly of the dread and revulsion inspired in men by some of the odours and textures produced by the infant body:

> There seems to be something about that cheesy, beany, cassoulet smell of the infant shit, the ammoniac whiff of infant piss somewhere between a very sour white wine and a concentrated paint stripper, that is too overwhelmingly intimate for the virgin nose of the pre-paternal male. Some fathers never get over this and make sure they will remain forever a stranger to the slopping potty, the warm rubber blanket, the caked sick down the back of the jacket. (1993: 17)

Infants' perceived state of innocence and vulnerability may evoke feelings of affection and the desire to protect them, but their incessant demands may be experienced as excessive, calling into question a man's ability to regulate his life as he was used to.

Men's desires for intimacy with their children are developed and expressed in a sociocultural setting in which men are still expected to work to support their families and where the 'stay-at-home husband' continues to be regarded as an oddity (Russell, 1987; Grbich, 1995). Men's interactions with their children are constrained by the demands of their paid employment. They may also be constrained by women's own desires and anxieties about their role as mothers, the meanings of which are themselves inflected through dominant discourses on the 'good' mother. While some men may want to be the one who stays at home to engage in the kind of personalized, attentive child care that is considered essential for a child's optimal development, the fact that they earn more money than their female partner, or that their partner prefers to be the one to stay home, confounds this. Interestingly enough, we found in our research that an anatomical difference between men and women – women's capacity for breastfeeding – combined with a currently hegemonic discourse that insists upon the importance of breastfeeding infants both for health reasons and for maternal–child 'bonding' often served to shut men out of experiencing a close embodied relationship with their child to the extent they would have liked. We found in the interview data from the women in our study that several of them ascribed so strongly to this discourse of 'breastfeeding is best' that they struggled to continue to breastfeed their child despite experiencing continuing pain or severe discomfort.

The cultural expectations and assumptions around gendered bodies explains why it is that women, as more embodied and emotional subjects, are expected to 'know what to do' with infants and small children, not only through their 'maternal instincts' but because they have a bodily or intuitive/emotional sense of the child's needs and feelings, which men, as more disembodied and rational subjects, are generally assumed to lack. It is assumed, therefore, that women require somewhat less guidance, less reflection upon parenting than do men. There is little that is regarded as 'instinctive' about fatherhood, particularly in relation to the expression of nurturing and emotional sensitivity that is regarded as essential to the practice of 'new' or 'involved' fatherhood. That is, while writers commonly argue that men have a certain *capacity* for nurturance that lies within, fatherhood itself is portrayed as something that is essentially learnt and requires practice and work to allow this nurturance to emerge in appropriate ways. Successful fatherhood is portrayed as the product of acquired knowledge and mastery of action. Motherhood, in contrast, still tends to be represented as having an instinctive core. While women are also encouraged to seek out information about pregnancy, childbirth and parenting, motherhood is still commonly seen as more essentially a part of femininity, not as split from womanhood as fatherhood may sometimes be split from manhood. Men and women, therefore, are negotiating parenting arrangements in a context in which it is still considered that the mother is more important to her child's welfare than the father and 'instinctively' possesses a greater capacity for nurturance.

Counter to these taken-for-granted assumptions, we suggest that men and women should be viewed as possessing equally the capacity for developing a close, intimate relationship with their children through regular caring activities. It is often the female partner who becomes knowledgeable about the child because she is the one engaging in regular, everyday caring. As we found in our study, it is all too easy for men to lag behind their female partner in developing the skills of caring for their children, even when the men may strongly wish to do so, and it can be difficult for them to make up for lost ground. Once it becomes established that one parent 'knows' more about the child and her or his needs and is more competent in dealing with the child, then it is difficult for the other to acquire equivalent knowledge and expertise. It then tends to be assumed that the more expert parent will take major responsibility for child care – it seems 'easier' that way. This defining of the 'more expert' and 'less expert' parent is generally based in early activities such as feeding and soothing the infant. The pleasure that the 'more expert' parent may derive from his or her greater knowledge and ability in dealing with the child may also prove a barrier to allowing the other parent to participate.

If men do not have the opportunity to engage in these activities, they cannot develop a sense of the child's needs to respond to them in ways that their female partners would see as adequate. Barbara Katz Rothman (1994) discusses the importance of practising embodied care for intimate relationships in describing the ways that her own and her husband's approach to caring for others changed after they had had children. Rothman recalls her own awkwardness in having to touch her mother's body in caring for her during an illness, and that of her husband towards herself when he attended the birth of their first child. After caring for the child over a period of years, Rothman notes, her husband had reoriented his approach:

> Nursing me through my first labour, he was infinitely well-meaning. Nursing me through my second, he knew what he was doing. He had been nurturing for seven years of nursing earaches, bellyaches, changing diapers, calming night terrors, holding pans for vomit, taking out splinters, washing bloody wounds. He had grown accustomed to the sheer physicality of the body, the sights and sounds and smells. More essentially, what I showed him in my pain and my fear was not foreign – he saw the baby, the child in me, not the one I was birthing, but the one I myself am, and he nursed it. Now *that* is a man to enter old age with. (Rothman, 1994: 156; original emphasis)

As Rothman's remarks would suggest, the regular embodied caring of a child may overcome the disgust or dislike of the 'dirty' bodily fluids it emits or its other uncontained bodily activities such as prolonged crying. Thus, although men cannot experience pregnancy, childbirth or lactation, their bodies have other potentialities for merging with another. Fatherhood is commonly experienced as a diversification of the body/self from autonomous, single body/self to a joint body/self. This may occur experientially through a man's realization after the birth of his child that he is now responsible for another, vulnerable person's wellbeing and that this other person is (genetically or

emotionally or both) 'part of him'. While he is unable physically to experience pregnancy or breastfeeding, a father may engage in a series of other embodied activities with his child that may blur the boundaries between his body and that of his child, such as cuddling or sleeping with the child or bathing together.

This caring may engender intimacy and deep affection through such close physical contact with the child's body. It is the basis for the 'maternal thinking' we discussed in Chapter 5, and for the kind of abiding loving relationship with one's small child for which men are expressing such a strong desire. One man interviewed in our study quite explicitly discussed how his experiences in caring for his child had led him to see the world differently – he could not understand how people could hit their children, for example. He also described how he became emotionally distressed at hearing news reports of children being killed, his responses intensified because of his own position as a father with a much-loved child. Even those men who were not participating to a great extent in child care often reported spending time thinking about their child while at work, including planning the child's future, and ringing home during the day to check on her or him. As we noted above, some men – typically those who had gained much pleasure from their interactions with their children – were even wishing that they were at home engaging with the child rather than at work, and had discussed with their partner the possibility of staying at home while she went back to paid employment.

To some extent, an insistence upon differences between feminine and masculine positions can become somewhat static and reductionist. This may particularly be the case if other sources of shaping and experiencing subjectivity are not acknowledged, for 'gender forms only one axis of a complex, heterogeneous construction, constantly interpenetrating, in historically specific ways, with multiple other axes of identity' (Bordo, 1993: 222). In discussing the subject positions of father and mother, we need also to recognize the importance of acknowledging these positions as other than gendered subjects. That is, the ways in which men's and women's experiences of parenting are similar as well as different should be acknowledged. For both men and women, for example, becoming a parent involves a potential transformation in viewing the self that draws upon both their early experiences as an infant and small child of being cared for by their parents and later experiences with or perceptions of infants and children.

It is generally assumed that women's 'private' or 'domestic' roles as wives or partners, mothers and their other family roles (daughter, sister, grandmother) are integral to their sense of self and their manner of conducting everyday life. Much sociological and psychological research directed at this issue has supported this assumption. In contrast, it is assumed that men's roles as husband or partner, father and so on are less important to their subjectivity, with their 'public' work role providing the most significant definition of the self. To what extent does this assumed difference in the way men and women define their subjectivity exist? Is the oft-made division between the

'male-dominated public sphere' and the 'female-dominated private sphere' valid (if it ever was) as the twentieth century draws to its close?

We would suggest that continuing to draw a distinction between the 'private' and the 'public' spheres in relation to both fatherhood and motherhood is somewhat arbitrary and a false dichotomy. The family and parenthood are by no means separate from the 'outside world'. The body of 'expert' and popular literature that provides advice and norms to parents for the raising of their children we described in Chapters 2 and 3, the legislation around children (for example, in relation to the registering of births, children's schooling and parental neglect) and the power held by the social welfare system to remove children from their parents, are all examples of the ways in which childbirth and child rearing are constantly monitored and regulated by state and other bodies. Further, both women and men are now confronted with dealing with competing imperatives between paid labour and the family. Market economies tend to position their workers as having no demands outside the workplace, expecting them to be flexible, single-minded and ambitious (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 144). As we have shown, however, men often tend to approach their work lives differently once they have become fathers and feel themselves responsible for supporting their children and sometimes their female partners. Fatherhood may provide a point of mutual interest with work colleagues, both male and female, who also have children, allowing men to participate at work in a social network of parents in ways that men without children cannot. The role of fatherhood may also lend a certain gravitas to men in the work context, a sign to their colleagues of their greater 'maturity' and sense of responsibility.

In the contemporary context in which women are called upon to present themselves as masculinized, highly regulated and autonomous subjects in the paid workplace to achieve professional success, motherhood now may confront women (particularly those who have enjoyed success in high status, traditionally male occupations) with similar anxieties and frustrations (see the remarks made about professional women who become mothers in Nippert-Eng, 1996: 219–20). Just as the ambivalence that many women feel around motherhood is linked to their concerns about their own individuality and their role as mothers, including how to balance paid work, other interests and relationships with others with the responsibilities, anxieties and pleasures of child raising, men are confronted with similar concerns.

Continuing to define parenting roles in terms of, on the one hand, notions of 'patriarchy' or, on the other hand, the different 'functions' that fathers and mothers fulfil in response to inherent dispositions or gender norms and expectations, fails to recognize the complexity and constantly changing and negotiated nature of contemporary parenthood. Gender differences in the way men and women approach and experience parenthood remain evident. We have argued, however, that these differences are not simply the result of one gender being 'naturally' or 'instinctively' better at some tasks than others, or the outcome of men setting out to oppress their passive female partners, imposing the burden of child care upon them. Rather, there is a complex

intertwining of acculturation and personal biography at work. This involves an interplay of aspects peculiar to couples' immediate situations, such as the nature of their paid work, their infant's behaviour and disposition, the availability of support from family or friends and individuals' experiences with, and observations of, their own parents, with broader sociocultural trends, such as the range of dominant discourses circulating on how a 'good' father and 'good' mother should approach and conduct parenting.