MOTHERING AND PAID WORK:
considerations of ideology, practice and social change

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I am concerned to explore the connection between the change which takes place in women's relationship with the workforce after they have children, and their subordination in the broader society. Like most feminists, I would dispute the idea that there is a biological base to women's subordination. Rather, their ability to bear children is used to preclude them from equal access to strategic resources including paid work.

The relationship of mothers to the workforce is affected by both ideologies - of the significance of paid work and the importance of mothering - and a range of structures, such as child care provision and the organisation of the working day. There is a lack, in feminist theory, of explorations of the mutually reinforcing effects of ideologies and structures, and a recent neglect of the latter. Through my thesis, I explore the relationship between ideologies, structures and people's practices, and the role of all of these in social change. I argue that a fruitful strategy for the those interested in changing the position of women is a concentration on changing structures, and particularly on improving the provision of child care. This should give women a choice of an integrated life combining mothering and paid work, which is not currently available.
SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

My preoccupation with the issue of society's construction of the relationship between mothers and work springs in large part from the change in my own life situation over the last five years. I left a job as a committed secondary teacher to have my first child and subsequently have been involved in, at various times, bearing and looking after a second child, full-time work, full-time child-raising, and full-time study.

I had been alerted to feminist issues in my late teens through reading Friedan, Greer and Millet,1 but this awareness revolved around notions of socialisation rather than structure. Whilst I was not in agreement with de Beauvoir's view that a woman can choose transcendence or, in "bad faith", immanence, 2 I had no notion of the strength and structural nature of women's oppression until I had children. I would further argue that I am not unique in this. Many middle class, educated, relatively well-paid and child-free women of my acquaintance have an exaggerated idea of the extent of women's equality and free choice. I would not attempt to outline how working class women might feel on this issue,

except to suggest that the issue of equality would be far more complex when one's experience includes class and/ or ethnic oppression. As New and David state, "Women's special oppression stands out more starkly when there is no material disadvantage coming from class position to contend with".3

Since I left my permanent, full-time job, there have been many subtle and not so subtle changes. In some senses, a new life opened up to me when I had children. I decided to spend more than the minimum amount of time out of the workforce to care for and enjoy my son and daughter. Full-time childraising is relatively separate from the public sphere. It is certainly intruded on by capitalism, yet is not dominated by a work/ wages relationship. Mothers work and sacrifice for love - in fact, passion would more adequately describe the intense feelings I have for my children, and the time I spent full-time mothering was largely a great pleasure. This is not to deny the negative circumstances and emotions also associated with motherhood, but like Mortimer I reject the either/ or thinking which "characterises much discussion of the experience of mothering as though it were not possible to experience several kinds of feelings simultaneously".4

The lived experience of mothering is rich and varied, and its effects are manifold. I found myself with far more domestic duties than before - those

4 Lorraine Mortimer, "Feminism and Motherhood", in Arena, 73, 1985, p. 62.
specifically associated with the physical care of extra people, those I took over from my partner whilst I was "not working", and those performed because I found it harder to live in a messy house than leave it behind in the morning. Furthermore, I was surprised at the extent to which ideologies about the relationship between the tidiness of one's house and one's competence and self-esteem affected me when the home was my main area of work.

During this time I shaped an interesting life for myself, spending lots of time with my children, undertaking part-time study, participating in the political life of the community and maintaining an involvement with a network of mothers and friends. I pursued goals which were worthwhile although certainly shaped by my circumstances, and which would be shaped differently and probably more severely in other classes and ethnic groups. Part of this life was participating in a culture of women and children - organised, active, interesting and continuous, yet unrecognised in the dominant public spheres of work and leisure.

I had no intention of continuing full-time mothering on a permanent basis. I, too, want to participate in that significant world of work, and yet I know my relationship with it will never have the same ease which it previously had. I have already moved in and out of the work and study arenas several times of late; this pattern of interrupted participation does not fit with the definition of "work" which applies in western
capitalist society. Work implies the entrance to a career at an early age and its pursuit through life until retirement. As Matthews points out, this measure of work excludes unskilled men with interrupted working lives and women.5 My recent relationship with work has been affected by my life-cycle and if I do return to work full-time, it will not be easy balancing this with the continuing needs of children. If I decide, like many women, to undertake part-time work, despite a personal commitment to the job which I would hope to have, society will construct my position as one lacking real commitment. My work will be seen either as a type of hobby, or as useful to buy extras for the house and family. Furthermore, part-time work can be viewed as a luxury available only to the affluent, when one considers that there may be little difference between the wage of a part-time teacher and a full-time process worker.

During the years I have pondered questions of motherhood and paid work and their relationship to women's subordination, my partner's work position has been consolidated. Middle class women now bear their children later in their lives,6 and this period of child-bearing and early child raising tends to coincide with a time of promotion, increased responsibilities and pay rises for professional or managerial males. Thus a strong material base is laid for greater importance being

attached to the male's job and the woman's continual or repeated withdrawal from the workforce to care for subsequent children or to cope with unexpected crises necessitating a full-time carer. My career is not well-established and in the case of such a crisis I, not my partner, would in all probability leave the workforce.

An added complication to the way the relationship between mothers and the workforce is set up is that the dominant ideology of motherhood is by no means straightforward. It is certainly true that ideas strengthened by the post second world war popularisation of the work of psychologists such as John Bowlby and Melanie Klein, purporting that young children need continuous mothering in order to ensure stable psychological and social development, still hold strong sway in our community.7 Mothers are expected to either want or be prepared to give up other wants or needs to attend to their child's upbringing. However, the work of mothering also has low status. Whilst "at home mothers" rarely suffer the disapproval of "working mothers", they are frequently perceived as being unintelligent and uninteresting.8

The place of children is also unclear. Women are still expected to bear more than one child and in terms of child-raising practices, it is said that we live in a more child centred society than ever before. Yet I am in agreement with Greer regarding the anti-child thrust of

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8 Ibid, pp. 39-42.
the Western lifestyle. The lives of adults and children are almost totally segregated, with restaurants, cinemas, even supermarkets and many homes, being no places for children. Mothers, due to their role as physical and emotional carers, share their children's ostracised condition.9

Ideologies of womanhood, as seen through the media, are incorporating working mothers but not freeing them from their roles as principal domestics and child rearers. Advertisers recognise that the large number of women in the paid workforce are important consumers and direct an increasing number of advertisements towards them. Cleo recently ran an article about the sexual and intellectual desirability of the working mother as opposed to the housewife. Television advertisements for beef and lamb "shortcuts" portray a woman enabled to work in an executive position, cook a tasty, healthy dinner and still have time to read her children bedtime stories, all due to particular cuts of meat.

The position of a woman with children is far from clear, but what is clear is that it is different from what it was before she became a mother. It is fascinating to me how the biological facts of my births and lactation periods (the latter seen by some feminists as oppressive but which I found to be both pleasurable and healthy for myself and my children) have been used as the building blocks for an elaborate ideological and structural framework of oppression largely unconnected

with biology. It is the interaction of the two systems of patriarchy and capitalism which produces and maintains this framework. Although the sexual division of labour, within the labour force, within the home, and between the two, is functional to capitalism, it is not a necessary part of its operation. We know that patriarchy and socialism can co-exist, and I would agree with Michèle Barrett that capitalism could survive if the sexual division of labour at work, or women’s primary responsibility for things domestic, did not exist. They came about largely because of ideologies of men’s and women’s roles which pre-dated capitalism, and "have been incorporated, possibly entrenched and exaggerated, into the structure of capitalist relations of production".10

Today, the sexual division of labour, a crucial aspect of women’s oppression, is maintained by the dominant ideologies of both the significance of paid work and the importance of mothering and the structures in which these ideologies find their form. In this thesis I will be exploring the relationship between these ideologies and structures and people’s social practices. I will attempt to combine an affirmative view of people’s practices and their ability to "become conscious of their conditions, organise to struggle against them and in fact transform them - without which no active policies can be conceived, let alone practised ... [with] an awareness of the fact that ... men and women are placed and positioned

in relations which constitute them as agents". An analysis of the relationship between ideology, structures, social practices and change is necessary in order that women come to a clear understanding both of the nature of their oppression and how change occurs, and that they might then be enabled to pursue fruitful strategies for change.

Ideology – an analytical tool.

Ideology plays a crucial role in the maintenance of women's oppression. However, it is a problematic concept which has been defined in many different ways and thus it is essential that I outline my view of its nature and role. Like Michèle Barrett, I reject the view of ideology as material, as incorporating institutions and practices. Whilst ideology is inscribed in social and institutional practices, it is not synonymous with them. To take the action of a woman washing a floor, her action may be an expression of dominant domestic ideology; its performance will also, in all probability, affect her personal ideologies. However, as people hold concurrently multiple perceptions of themselves and the world, any one of or a combination of these could prompt the woman's performance of her task. Furthermore, for the purposes of analysing existing circumstances and prescribing change, I see it as useful to separate the three areas of ideologies, practices and structures. As

Michèle Barrett states, in arguing against the materiality of ideology, "in drawing the net of ideology so wide we are left with no means, no tools, for distinguishing anything". 13 I would concur with Barrett that the term ideology should be restricted to "phenomena which are mental rather than material", to the category of meaning, and the "processes by which meaning is produced, challenged, reproduced, transformed". 14 I recognise the existence of dominant ideologies (of, for example, child-raising and work) in the broader society and sub-ideologies, held by individuals and/or small groups. These latter cannot be disregarded as false consciousness of a real situation. Stuart Hall points out one basic problem with the notion of false consciousness - no-one will admit to having it! It is simply not an adequate explanation of how meanings are constructed and changed. 15 We all contain within us many different and often contradictory ideologies - a feminist can wish to be a perfect mother and conform to society's ideal of slenderness as well as being politically active around a range of issues such as child-care and women's health. Our ideologies are constantly undergoing change and are both a creation of and creators of our practices.

Ideologies exist, for an individual, at the levels of both critical discourse and everyday experiences and practices. They function, as Giroux asserts, within the spheres of common sense, the unconscious, and critical

13 Ibid, p. 90.
15 Stuart Hall, Unpublished talk given at Latrobe University, Melbourne, April, 1983.
consciousness. Giroux acknowledges "the degree to which historical and objective societal forces leave their ideological imprint upon the psyche itself", and yet avoids the biological leanings of some psychoanalytical theorists, viewing the psychological sphere as comprising structured needs which "are historically conditioned (and so) can be changed". I agree with Giroux that a recognition of the unconscious grounding of human behaviour is only useful when allied to an acknowledgment of the possibility of a dialectical relationship between the conscious and the unconscious.

The sphere of common sense comprises contradictory forms of everyday behaviour and ideas, forms which favour both accommodation of and resistance to dominant ideologies and structures. These everyday practices, like the unconscious, are open to critical reflection on the values and power structures underlying them. Such reflection takes place at the level of critical consciousness. It can be aided by the availability of alternative discourses within the broader society and is a potential stimulus for social change.

Dominant ideologies are more than the sum of a myriad of sub ideologies, for they involve the operation of power. Although particular ideologies do not necessarily correspond with the class position of groups or individuals, there is a relationship between material life, social relations and the formulation of ideology.

The ruling class attempts the maintenance of the dominance of their ideologies through the operation of what Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatuses - the Church, the media, the education system and so on.17 This maintenance is not, as suggested by Althusser, uncontested and simply implanted on the subordinate classes at will. However, they are bombarded daily with the dominant ideologies in an attempt to change, modify or affirm their practices. This bombardment "assists in the perpetuation of hegemony", but its exact effects on the working classes depends on, in part, "the economic, political and cultural conditions of the day",18 but also the material and ideological situation of individuals. Like personal ideologies, dominant ideologies are flexible, adaptable and contradictory. They are susceptible to change, and yet, owing to the power of those whose interests they further, resistant to it.

Ideology is an important concept for feminist theorists, and need not, as Denise Riley fears, be confusing, mysterious, lending itself to impressions rather than true analysis, to a notion of power which is difficult to resist.19 Despite her fears, Riley relies on the concept of ideology, attempting to detect it in the specific historical period with which she is dealing, by "taking the measure of the distances - or lack of

distances - which obtained between politics, policies and psychology as they paid attention to each other, as they drew on each other's formulations to produce and apparently seamless fabric of self-confirming references, an unbroken mass of languages".20 Her separation of the different strands of ideology and other causes of the development of post-war pronatalism is clear and well-executed.

**Ideology, structures, practices and change**

As Riley asserts, a clear view of the nature and role of ideology is necessary if it is to be a useful analytical tool. Even more important is an understanding of the complex interplay between ideology, structures, practices and change. As previously stated, I think that explanatory power is enhanced by a separation of the areas of ideology, structures and practices. Ideology does, however, find its material representation in structures, or pre-existing patterns of social relations, such as sex-based segmentation of the workforce or divisions of responsibilities between managers and workers.

For significant social change to occur, ideology, structures and people's practices must *all* change. However, when looking at individual instances of change, it can be difficult to separate the strands to discover how the change was initiated. Kerreen Reiger argues that, in the case of the introduction of contraception to Australia, popular opinion and reproductive behaviour

20 Ibid, p. 15.
went ahead of the dominant, official ideology, although women often camouflaged their motive of greater control over their lives by an acceptable ideology of the production of sturdy children for the nation.21 On other occasions, structures have been affected by ideology rather than practices. Deborah Brennan and Carol O'Donnell argue that, despite the number of women who have always worked, child-care did not really become a political issue until after the 1960's wave of feminism, subsequent to which the Whitlam government devoted considerable attention to this issue.22 And of course there have been major historical examples where changes in structures have influenced social practices and ideology. One significant example of this process is the change in the structure of work which occurred as a result of the industrial revolution. This separation of the public sphere of work from the private sphere of domesticity and family life has strong implications for men, women and children today.

In all these cases, the integration of ideology, structures and practices is such that different arguments could be made as to the cause of change. However, the exercise of trying to pinpoint the cause of social change is of use to emphasise the possibilities of change and the importance of finding points of intervention. For, despite the existence of and possibilities for resistance

to and change in ideologies, they can be difficult to plan at the level of fruitful political strategies. Barrett and McIntosh, when discussing change in their book *The Anti-Social Family* (1982), suggest two areas through which to pursue change. The first is change in one’s own practices. They advocate ongoing examination of personal relationships for aspects of repression, for behaviour which may indicate a commitment to domesticity and so on. Whilst self-questioning is valid, it can be difficult to implement strategies to change your personal life given certain structures of present western society, and furthermore, the effects of such changes are limited. I would argue that the second arena of change suggested by Barrett and McIntosh, that of political, economic and legal structures, is potentially the most fruitful area on which to concentrate.23 Changes made to structures which extend the biological functions of women should enable changes in women’s practices and in both personal and dominant ideologies.

In the presentation of my argument regarding women and work and the theoretical considerations surrounding change, I will not be presenting any new empirical work. Instead I will attempt to make a contribution through an examination of existing literature relevant to the issues, and through this examination, present my view. I will begin with an exploration of the meaning of the ideologies of work and mothering for the lives of men and

women. I will consider the effects of both ideologies and structures on women’s participation in the workforce, taking account of class differences. I believe this drawing together of structural and ideological influences to be unusual in Australian feminist literature, and yet important to gain a thorough understanding of women’s subordination and the possibilities of change. The final chapter of the thesis will focus on specific structural changes aimed to improve the position of women.
SECTION 2

IDEOLOGIES CONSTRAINING WOMEN'S EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE

Chapter 1: The significance of work

Part 1: For men

"To ask a man why he worked would be like asking him why he lived". Harper and Richards.1

Work, paid and unpaid, is a central part of people's lives. In fact, according to Marx, man is his activity, and his activity is work. Marx, whilst not considering himself the first to have suggested that man creates himself by his own work, developed a unique theory of the worth and nature of work.2 Man, unlike animals "produces free of physical need and only genuinely so in freedom from such need". He thus "creates also according to the laws of beauty". Through work people produce themselves intellectually, and relate to the world they make and to their fellows.3

In capitalist society, however, Marx sees man as alienated from his work, as his activity is not free activity but a means to his existence. Marx saw Hegel's

view of labour as restricted as Hegel only perceived the creative nature of work and not the alienating conditions which accompanied it under capitalism.4 These conditions alienate man from his product, his world and his fellow man. Concomitant with Marx's view of the alienation of labour is a work/leisure dichotomy. "The worker does not affirm himself in his work, but denies himself"; thus he feels at ease only outside his work, undertaking what Marx refers as his animal functions - eating, drinking and procreating, whilst in his human functions, that is, work, he feels like an animal.5

The concept of alienation is male biased. Anthropologists have generally agreed that female occupation of the domestic arena as their sphere of influence and work has been cross cultural and trans historical.6 Emphasis by writers such as Adrienne Rich on the previous existence of matriarchal societies and goddess myths may be, as Rich suggests, spiritually validating and invigorating,7 but it appears to lack foundation. Rosaldo has not found "a single instance of a truly matriarchal - or, for that matter, sexually egalitarian - social form",8 which is not to suggest that

male dominated social formations are natural or that their continuation should be accepted. However, Marx's view of work as alienating, which relies on a conception of home as a place of freedom, does not fit the reality of women's experiences, for the majority of whom the home, even if not alienating, is not a place of easy relaxation. Further, his division of life into human and animal functions is a degradation of women's lives.

The distinction between work and leisure has been the basis of much of the struggle of workers' organisations throughout the history of capitalism. One outcome of this distinction and struggle has been an unfortunate non-integrated view of life as containing two oppositional compartments of non-pleasurable work, which one has to do for money, and leisure, which is enjoyable, one's real life, which should be separated from work as clearly as possible. This clear separation is not only impossible for women, bearing as they do the daily responsibilities to feed and care for their spouse and children, but not desirable. Far preferable would be an attempt to struggle for an integrated, enjoyable and worthwhile life.

The historical struggle for increased leisure for the working class was a struggle to improve the quality of life of workers, but like other battles such as those fought for the family wage and the assertion of skill, can also be seen to have a close relationship to sexist ideology. Ann Curthoys, in her article "The Sexual Division of Labour: Theoretical Arguments" (1986), has
clearly outlined the debates which have taken place in these latter two areas, the opposing poles being occupied by Heidi Hartmann and Jane Humphries. Hartmann argues that the exclusion of women from male trades and the maintenance of the family wage can be seen as "an exploitation of working class women by working class men". Humphries, on the other hand, views the family wage and occupational exclusion as essential to ensure financial security for the working class family, a unit whose existence she sees as crucial in enabling the working class to cope with the strains of nineteenth century industrial capitalism. My position lies between. There are various strategies which could have been pursued to ensure class survival or advancement. As Milkman argues, the fear of women undercutting men in the labour market could logically lead either to exclusion or inclusion (we must organize the women if they are not to undercut us). The particular tactics adopted by industrial organisations have advantaged the working class but at the expense of women. In the specific case of the struggle for increased leisure, I will argue later in this thesis that women would benefit far more from a shorter working day than a shorter working week or fortnight.

The consciousness of the working class of the alienation of their work and of their objective material conditions has the potential to lead to a rejection of the capitalist organisation of work. However, any consciousness of such lived experiences as unacceptable is severely weakened by patriarchal ideologies of motherhood and domesticity. Studies which have been done by both Willis and Cockburn emphasise men’s equation of work with masculinity. For Willis’s men, working on the shop floor, a visible connection can be made between the "sheer strength and brute skill" needed to survive hostile factory conditions and masculine pride in physical strength. This is not to suggest that women do not survive in equally hostile conditions but simply that, in a diminishing number of jobs, physical strength and exactitude are important. According to Willis, "the basic attitudes and values developed in such jobs are still very important in working class culture", an importance "vastly out of proportion to the number of people actually involved in such heavy work". The shop floor workers conflate manual work, masculinity and the wage packet. The latter is their reward for achieving, producing in a world too tough for women. Women do not achieve; they are in a state of "being" mothers, wives, daughters or sisters. Their work is not production but maintenance of the status quo.

The male workers studied by Cockburn were compositors aged between 30 and 65, caught in an era of vast technological innovation in their field of work. They were working class, but their job had a high status within their class which they and their families appreciated and the chapel, or union, attempted to preserve. Yet their work was still manual, thus retaining important associations with masculinity. "Some comps [compositors] chose print therefore as a satisfactory compromise, escaping from a family tradition or local job market that threatened to suck them into the life of a miner or a deep-sea fisherman, yet still remaining safely within the accepted boundaries of a respectable man's work."13 Small projects such as the Women's Printing Society Ltd., which by 1895 employed forty women, mainly on printing work connected with women's issues, proved that women were quite capable of doing composing work, but were never taken seriously by the trade societies. During the twentieth century, an active campaign has been waged against women compositors which, with the advent of photocomposition and the loss of many jobs, has currently changed form to a "diligent grading and regrading of occupations ... [to keep] women members as a group in inferior and lower paid jobs".14

The pressures experienced by the compositors over the past decade have been as much about gender relations as those of class, the latter including changes such as

their bargaining position with relation to employers, and relations with others in the industry including the semi-skilled and unskilled workers previously their social inferiors. The self respect of the compositors has been bound up with the notion that women could not do their jobs. Even the presence of one woman threatens this superiority.15 The deskilling, or reskilling, which they are experiencing as a result of new technology, is felt even more bitterly because it reduces them to the level of women. Paper work and typing are women's work, which is not real work, because women are seen primarily as domestic creatures.16 It has been very important to the compositors to be the male breadwinner. Along with Willis's shop floor men, many had wives who worked, but both groups emphasised that their wives' earnings were peripheral. Co-existing with their need for their women at home went the process of what Cockburn refers to as "cultural rape", the routine, verbal sexual handling of women. Both concepts of women are threatened by the increased participation of women in the compositors' new world of work, and, more broadly, changes in the position of women in society as a whole. And the compositors found the threat to their economic order much more straightforward to fight than the threat to the sexual order.

The identification of masculinity with work is not confined to manual labour. Graham Cleverley, in his book, *Managers and Magic* (1971) describes a fear of

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16 Ibid, p. 104.
"contagious effeminacy" as common amongst the managerial and administrative group of workers.17 Clare Burton uses this term in elaborating her view of the fear of such men of Equal Employment Opportunity programmes. According to Burton, some men believe not only that the status of their profession would be lowered by the entrance of women but that they would also value their own work less; it would not be "a reflection of their own masculinity" if women could do it. Like Cockburn, Burton stresses that women's participation in the paid workforce threatens men's position at home as well as at work. She argues that many managerial men do not object to the long hours demanded by their job as it enables them to avoid "the witching hour" of bathing and feeding tired children, and to preserve a position in the family which relies on the sexual division of labour.18 Carol Johnson also comments on this factor:

There is also the question of the extent to which the male worker himself benefits from not having to perform an equal amount of domestic labour, from his wife or lover's emotional support as part of her nurturing role and from the possible gratification to the male ego arising from women's subordinate position.19

Chapter 1: The significance of work

Part 2: For women

"The doubtful rubric of choice" Grieve.20

The social construction of the significance of work undoubtedly has a strong, but less clear-cut, influence on the thinking and lives of women. It will be obvious from the previous section that when I speak of the significance of work, I mean paid work. Whilst acknowledging "the gender bias of all knowledge, perception and experience", like Jill Matthews, I "fall back into the language of the male experience" at the same time as attempting to deconstruct its masculine bias.21

The public definition of work is one which suits the lives of men and as such ignores well over one third of the workforce. Values required include repression of emotion and an impersonal approach to the job.22 These criteria do not approximate what work is about for women. The dichotomies of public/private ignore the enormous amount of unpaid domestic, consumption and welfare work which women perform. Nor do they recognise the complex interplay between the "two worlds" which makes up a

woman's working life. Her paid work is affected by both her life-cycle - the bearing of children will usually cause her to move "home", out of the paid workforce - and the daily time commitments involved in servicing the needs of others, particularly children. To quote Matthews again, "female experience is of a fluid continuum rather than a rigid dichotomy".23

The use of the term "fluid" is not meant to imply that the process by which women balance the "public" and "private" worlds is an easy one. Whilst dominant definitions of these worlds do not fit women's lives, they exert an enormous influence over them. Women are subordinate and they do not set, but negotiate, the rules of the game. Norma Grieve says of the demands of professional/managerial occupations:

They assume hours of work, geographical mobility, home resources, and time to construct networks of influence and information that are incompatible with major responsibilities for parenting. Women march to a different drummer and they make their private choices and adjustments, which go under the doubtful rubric of choice. They balance their needs for autonomy and socially meaningful activity, needs to nurture and be nurtured, economic needs and role overload, "burn out", the double shift and other hazards now known to be associated with entry into male structured occupations"24

However, women still want to enter the labour force. Bearing in mind that women have always worked in both paid and unpaid fashions and that much of their paid work has gone unrecorded or been ignored in analysis,25 it is

also true to say that the increase in the participation of women, and more particularly married women, in the workforce in the post-war period, has been a significant social and economic phenomenon. This significance is not lessened but is complicated by the recent virtual halt in the movement of women into paid work. The question of why women want to work, what the significance of work is for them, has been analysed by Australian authors Jan Harper and Lyn Richards in *Mothers and Working Mothers* (1979) and by Sue Sharpe in her English investigation, *Double Identity* (1984). Both projects were based mainly on interview techniques because they were seen to provide more insight than statistical analysis. The Australian study (the book is actually a combination of two earlier studies done for the Royal Commission on Human Relationships, *Having Families* and *Two Options*) looked at women from all classes, among whom middle class women predominated, and included no migrant women or single mothers. Sue Sharpe mainly talked with working class women of whom one fifth were single mothers. Their conclusions are remarkably similar.

As Harper and Richards point out, "to ask a man why he worked would be like asking him why he lived". There is seldom the attempt to separate out the complex issues of self-esteem and the meaning of life from financial gain that takes place in analyses of women's paid work. Both English and Australian studies suggested

that women participated in paid work for a range of reasons, one of which was money, but the desire for money had more than one face. In the *Two Options* study, 25 of 195 women felt that work was their only option financially, and of these, 8 said that they gained nothing from work but money. Only 5 of the 195 stated that they would suffer no material loss through not working. However, of the 25 who saw a second income as essential, perceptions of need varied dramatically. Money was sometimes quoted as being needed for food and clothing, whereas in other cases house purchase, private school fees and even overseas trips were seen as virtual necessities.28

Although the issue of class is obviously important when examining the issue of working for money, money has a symbolic importance which crosses class barriers. Sue Sharpe comments on this:

> Earning money of your own can make a tremendous difference to the way you feel. In a society like our own, which is organised around the accumulation of capital, people are classified and judged by the work they do and the income they receive. Money provides power and status and the means to buy goods and services. To be without this is almost to be a non-valid person.29

The women interviewed stressed the benefits of financial independence from their husbands and had obviously felt it demeaning to have to ask for money. However, such independence went beyond the "smashing feeling" mentioned by Rachel,30 to a belief that their bringing of money

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28 Ibid, pp. 100-105.
30 Ibid.
into the home had affected the balance of power relations within the family. "I'd be less able to make decisions if I wasn't earning money, one Australian woman stated,31 whereas Jackie, an English cleaner, was able to cope with her partner's occasional threats, when in a bad mood, to withhold access to his wage, because of the small wage she brought in.32 An extension of Jackie's situation is that of several of the interviewed women for whom working meant potential or present survival in the absence of a spouse. One woman felt that through working she knew she had earning power if her husband should die; for another it had meant the ability to separate from her husband.33

Both studies maintained that money was often the immediate motivating factor in a woman's return to work, due to circumstances such as a husband's retrenchment or the desire to purchase a specific item, but that, subsequently, women realised they were happier working. Nearly one third of the women interviewed for Two Options were in this position.34 Norma Grieve also mentions the fact that "work once entered has its own logic on women's aspirations", whilst acknowledging difficulty in assessing research done on the issue of women's motivation to work. She quotes an Australian survey as stating that 60% of married women who worked permanently would stop if they were paid an equivalent amount, although one third of these women would not cease work if their husband's pay increased similarly. "Clearly some

33 Ibid, p. 76.
elements of autonomy are involved here", states Grieve, but goes on to caution against survey findings because of the necessarily simple nature of the questions and the tendency for people to answer in a socially desirable way.35 Certainly the work of Sharpe, Harper and Richards suggests that only a small minority of women would consider giving up work altogether if they had more money, but that the money motive itself must be seen as playing a very complicated role in women’s choice to work.

For many women, social and psychological reasons for working are at least as important as economic ones. Both English and Australian women referred to the common practice of defining women in terms of their relationships with others – someone’s daughter, wife or mother – and expressed the need for a separate identity.36 Many women, particularly those who had been absent from the workforce for some time, had experienced an increase in self-confidence and assertiveness since working, and for some a consequence of feeling less "boring" was an improved relationship with their husbands. Ambivalence and depression about being an "at home mother" was also commonly expressed, involving criticism of the isolation of motherhood in western society.37 Both studies revealed mothers who had been on anti-depressant drugs whilst caring for small children, whilst a number of Sharpe’s interviewees had suffered

37 Sharpe, Op. cit., Chapter 1, "Memories of Motherhood".
from agoraphobia - the fear of social and public situations which is also known as "housewives disease" - and even nervous breakdowns. Returning to work was usually viewed as a crucial factor in overcoming the depression experienced as full-time mothers.38

The above analysis of women's reasons for working is not to suggest an opposition between depressed mothers at home and fulfilled working mothers. Firstly, whilst I have concentrated on the positive aspects of working, many women found combining work and domestic duties to be extremely tiring. The vast majority also suffered guilt regarding the effects of their working on their children. Sue Sharpe comments that when she asked mothers whether they considered their children were affected in any way at all by their working, they almost all assumed she meant ill-effects. The majority of both sets of interviewees experienced guilt, even if not agreeing with it intellectually, but coped. Harper and Richards concluded:

Between the extremes, the majority swallowed the guilt, resisted the pulls of old norms, convinced themselves their decision was right, struggled against the pressure of social disapproval and coped with the rescheduling of arrangements with holidays or sickness; they concluded that there was no perfect answer and that their own personal compromise worked fairly well.39

Secondly, Harper and Richards also interviewed a significant number of women who had decided to stay home, both "old style mothers", dominated by notions of being a

good mother, and the necessity of children for a full family life, and "career mothers" who combined the old values of full-time mothering with new values of stimulation and education for children. These mothers, whilst also experiencing confusion about their role as mothers were equally happy with their decision as working mothers, though they are declining in number. Their choice will be discussed more fully in the next section, "The Importance of Mothering".

One cannot discuss the issue of choice in regard to women's work without an examination of the effects of social class. Women are not an undifferentiated group and work obviously has different meanings for different individuals, class and ethnic groups. Harper and Richards found that, whilst the picture of whether women worked by choice was complicated by factors such as differing assessments of need, money was the most obvious factor limiting work related choices women made. Middle class women had more choices open to them whether they stayed home or went to work. If they chose to work, their job was more likely to offer intrinsic satisfaction, there was more flexibility in working hours and their salaries enabled them to afford good quality child care and help in the house. If they desired to stay home, their husbands had enough money to support them and their education led them to an involvement in activities which broke down the potential isolation of the home. According to Harper and Richards, working class women were more likely to emphasise the negatives
in either choice. At home they were more likely to feel trapped and bored; if working they were concerned about the constant rush and lack of time to deal adequately with domestic duties.40

However, clear cut differences across the range of issues affecting working mothers do not come through in either set of interviews. Both working and middle class mothers were concerned with the lack of convenient jobs, contradictory ideas about motherhood, lack of affordable, quality child care, guilt about leaving their children and the dual burden of work and domestic organisation. Sue Sharpe comments that despite the obvious material differences between middle and working class families, and the even more limited opportunities available to working class women, they face similar problems, and "it is a situation that potentially unites rather than divides women."41

The ideology of the significance of work has been dealt with in this chapter largely through people's perceptions, and it is in this context that I have dealt with the relationship of class to work. The nature of the differences in work across classes will be dealt with in a further chapter dealing with women's actual participation in the workforce, as will any implications of these differences for the positive view of the place of work in women's lives which I am taking. However, ideologies surrounding paid work for women cannot be

40 Ibid, Chapter 8, "Choice is for the Chosen".  
understood without reference to the ideology of motherhood, with which they are closely entwined.
Chapter 2: The importance of mothering

"All our bondage is bought by the soft pressure of fingers"  
Steedman.1

It is obvious that paid work is significant for late twentieth century Australian women, but this is not reflected in the dominant ideology which, whilst accepting working mothers, certainly does not encourage them. Women's main satisfaction in life is still supposed to come from motherhood. As previously noted, anthropologists such as Michelle Rosaldo rejected the view, based on Engels, that the relegation of women to the domestic sphere is a relatively recent phenomenon, growing out of the development of industrial capitalism. She maintains that women's responsibility for the care of children is universal and a crucial part of her relegation to the domestic sphere, and thus, subordination.2  Her position is that women's oppression is cultural, whereas some other feminists have located it more firmly in biology. Perhaps the best known of these is Shulamith Firestone, who asserts that women are not "equally privileged" in their biology. Childbirth, menstruation and menopause are debilitating, and the long period of human infant dependency and the psychological effects of this lead to the division of labour between

the sexes. Escape for women will come through the conception, growth and birth of babies outside their bodies, combined with the socialisation of child-care, Firestone maintains.3

There are other feminists who, whilst purporting to reject biological determinism, in practice slide towards it. According to Judith Okely, de Beauvoir is one of these. Whilst not adhering to crude types of biological reductionism, "there are times when she over-elaborates the consequences of the female's capacity to gestate and lactate, using it to explain an inevitable division of labour between men and women".4 De Beauvoir speaks of menstruation, pregnancy and lactation in terms of alienation and enslavement. Okely finds that her general anti-biologist conclusions are not borne out in her particular arguments. She "does not break free of her personal and historical context".5

Hester Eisenstein has drawn attention to a similar slide in the work of Sherry Ortner. Ortner, an anthropologist, agrees theoretically with Rosaldo's view that women's oppression is located in culture. Human consciousness has created the categories nature and culture, Ortner argues, and because of women's reproductive function, ability to lactate and socialisation of infants, they became associated with nature - their concerns were familial and domestic. However, drawing on Chodorow's work, Ortner argues

3 Ibid, p. 16-17.
further that women then developed a "feminine personality" which was "immediate, interpersonal, subjective, that is, was connected to the particular rather than the general". At this point women being associated with things natural is collapsed into their being like things natural.6 Like de Beauvoir, Ortner in the final analysis contends that it is institutions and cultural assumptions which maintain women's subordination, and yet biological determinism lurks behind her analysis.

Biological differences have also been viewed positively by some feminist theorists. Mary O'Brien argues that women's reproductive labour confirms their integration, and differentiates the reproductive and temporal consciousness of males and females. "Female temporal consciousness is continuous, whereas male temporal consciousness is discontinuous", she states.7 Rich also takes a positive view of child-bearing capacity, maintaining that women's bodies have the power to revolutionise experience.8

Of late there has been a further increase in focus on the body as part of feminist debate; according to Alison Caddick, "the body now emerges as the locus of a new set of differences which supersede the earlier contestation between radical feminists and marxist

socialist feminists"9 Caddick explores the contestation between androgynists and difference theorists, focusing strongly on a group of French feminists who put forward a theory based on the "sensual universe" of the female body. She is concerned that "the inconsequentiality of the body has been firmly entrenched in sociological theoretical endeavour",10 but believes that the French feminists, because of their refusal to give "woman" any definable form, continue the train of thought which disembodies women - and men.11

Denise Riley is also concerned with sociology's dismissal of biology. She sees biologism and culturalism as unsatisfactory alternatives for explaining human behaviour. "There really is biology which must be conceived more clearly," Riley argues.12 She maintains that although biology is never lived out in a pure form, it is lived. Illness, infancy, menstruation, the menopause, childbirth, "all of these embody irreducible biological components".13 For women particularly a significant proportion of social experience is socialised biology. Reproductive experience is an example of this and Riley makes clear that it also has political dimensions. However, biology must not be submerged under the social. The relations between the two, in areas such as developmental psychology, which plays a crucial role

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9 Alison Caddick, "Feminism and the Body", Arena 74, 1986, p. 60.
10 Ibid, p. 65.
in the ideological construction of motherhood, must be teased out.14

Riley also points out that social existence influences biology, citing the social formation of human instincts such as hunger and sexuality.15 This theory is argued in more detail by Hirst and Woolley in their book Social Relations and Human Attributes (1982). They assert, in discussing evolution, that "the limited bipedalism of Australopithecus made tool use possible and that the use of tools consequently altered the terms of natural selection by establishing pressures in favor of tool use and tool making which eventually resulted in the physical structure of modern man".16 More contemporary examples they explore include the effect of the development of print on mental attributes such as memory which changed its primary faculty from retention to selection and rejection.17 Like Riley, Hirst and Woolley are concerned to break down the division in explanation of human behaviour between biologists (and psychologists) and sociologists. In their view sociologists have "reinforced and theorized a traditional Western cultural opposition between nature and culture."18 In fact, they argue, the relationship between biology and culture is dialectical:

Biological and psychological capacities clearly do organise and limit social relations.

14 Ibid, pp. 36-41.
17 Ibid, p. 38.
18 Ibid, p. 23.
Without the capacity for tool use made possible by the opposable thumb and freeing forelimbs from the task of locomotion our social organisations would be very different and very limited. If our average intelligence level were what is measured by an I.Q. of 80, then again, social relations between humans would encounter severe limits. In both cases these biological and psychological capabilities are not independent of and have been shaped by the consequences of humans associating in social organisations. They impose limits, nonetheless, and cannot be legislated away.19

I am not about to dismiss biology as a factor in women's lives. I have previously stated that my reproductive experiences have meant significant change in my life, but they were not experiences of pure biology. I would not, like Firestone or the androgynists discussed by Caddick, wish to change or diminish my biology. Women should be able to celebrate the positive experiences enabled by their bodies without falling into either conservative traps of being limited solely to domestic life via such celebration or a position of asserting physical superiority over men. Further, I see no contradiction between celebrating my biology and wishing to maintain some control over it through the technology of, for example, birth control. In many ways human endeavour has been concerned with controlling the so-called natural givens of environment and biology, and it is ironical that many men who advocate such control believe a woman's place is rigidly determined by her ability to bear children. Thus although women are "embodied", and despite the close interaction between biology and culture, it is the use of biology to

19 Ibid.
construct an unequal place for women which concerns me in this thesis. Therefore I will be concentrating on the social construction of the relationship between women and work, and argue that such a tool of analysis need not result in "utterly discouraging vagueness" and dissolution of "the gendered body", as Riley fears, but may be specific and purposeful. I will turn to a brief historical analysis of women's mothering to show that, although women live their biology, and domestic responsibilities have been theirs across time and cultures, they have dealt with these responsibilities in varied ways.

Changing perceptions of motherhood

Philippe Aries' account of the history of the idea of childhood from the twelfth to the eighteenth century relies largely on a study of the portrayal of children in artworks of the periods. His analysis can be read not just for its history of childhood, but for what it tells us about women and family lives. In medieval society, the idea of childhood as we know it, involving an awareness of a particular distinction between children and adults, did not exist. Babies were of no account, because infant mortality rates were so high that it was not sensible to make a large emotional investment in someone who was quite likely to die. And as soon as children could live without their mothers' constant solicitude - they were often weaned at about age three - they entered adult society. 20

children portrayed them no differently in terms of dress and actions than adults - the only difference was in size.21

From the fourteenth century on, there was a tendency to express the perceived personality and significance of children in art, although they were still not portrayed alone. Unlike today, the world of work, relaxation, and sport contained both children and adults. By the sixteenth century, children, especially males were portrayed in different clothing from adults and "coddling" could be discerned. However, the treatment of children as different also led to the beginnings of the more modern expectation that children should inhabit a separate world from adults. And by the eighteenth century, "Everything to do with children and family has become a matter worthy of attention. Not only the child's future but his presence and his very existence are of concern: the child has taken a central place in the family."22

Although Aries is not centrally concerned to relate the change in ideology to societal changes, he does mention certain salient developments such as the extension of school education and changes in architecture as significant in the change in "the reality and idea of the family.23 Certainly the ideology and practices of the family have been strongly influenced by social processes, perhaps the most important being the

21 Ibid, p. 31.
22 Ibid, p. 130.
23 Ibid, p. 357.
industrial revolution, which separated work from home and meant that women could no longer easily combine domestic with productive responsibilities - nor could men be involved in child-care or children in work - but either had great difficulty in combining both roles or were confined much more exclusively to the private sphere.

Women's confinement varied according to time and place. Patricia Grimshaw's study of Australian colonial women suggests that urban women were far more constrained by the ideology of a woman's place than women living in gold-mining and agricultural communities, whose frontier life involved a combination of productive and reproductive activities.24 Kerreen Reiger in her book The disenchantment of the home (1985), concentrates on the increasing refinements to the mothering tasks of Australian urban women during the period 1880-1940. She explores the attempts by bourgeois philanthropists and a new group of professionals "to make the household more efficient and scientific and family life itself more rationally ordered".25 The two groups worked together, despite differences in the ideology they were promoting and the groups they were addressing - the philanthropists were concerned to spread the bourgeois domestic ideal to the working class, whereas the professional experts wished to educate all mothers in home management and scientific child care.26 Childbirth and socialisation of

26 Ibid, pp. 33-35.
children were no longer "natural", but were redefined as problems. Scientific supervision of childbirth (by doctors) and lactation (by Infant Welfare Sisters) was considered necessary and mothers were to supervise all aspects - physical, moral, social and intellectual - of their child's development.27 Women were not mere passive receivers of the new ideas. Bourgeois women were active in their promotion; working women rejected some, accepted others and were ahead of changes in ideology in areas such as the acceptance of the use of contraception.28

The role of the expert in child-rearing continued to strengthen as the twentieth century progressed. The psychological work of Klein, Winnicott and Bowlby have all "contributed to the normalisation and regulation of motherhood, through social work and medical practice, in the arguments used against providing nursery provision and so on".29 Perhaps no child development theory has been popularised to the extent of John Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation, which purports that a separation of mothers from their children, particularly under the age of three, is "the agency of lasting psychic damage to the young child".30 Riley makes the point in regard to the popularisation of Klein, Winnicott and Bowlby that "popularisation" cannot be understood as separate from the theory, a type of coarsening or vulgarisation.

27 Ibid, Chapter 6, "Producing the model modern baby", pp. 128-152.
29 Julian Henriques et al, Changing the Subject, p. 211.
Many of the analysts and psychologists who were most influential in Britain in the late 1930's, the 1940's and the 1950's were the authors of their own popularisations. They turned not only to the clinical practices of psychoanalytic treatment but to the business of giving advice to parents, broadcasting on national radio programmes, writing articles in newspapers and women's magazines, and generally hurling themselves with apparent enthusiasm into the dissemination of their theories.31

In this particular period of British sociopsychology and psychoanalysis, Riley maintains, it is difficult to separate popularisation from the work itself.

Riley asserts that Bowlby's work "cannot, in itself, be held fully accountable for the phenomenon of "Bowlbyism" - that is, the intense concentration on the married mother permanently in the home with the child as the unique and adequate guarantee of the child's psychic health, the defence against delinquency, and family and therefore social breakdown".32 Her enterprise includes an analysis of the range of factors which interrelated to produce such a phenomenon, but does not explore the way Bowlbyism has become part of our common-sense understanding of mothering. Marilyn Helterline is concerned with changes in this understanding in her article "The Emergence of Modern Motherhood in England 1899-1959" (1980). According to Helterline, the good nineteenth century mother was a guide and exemplar to her children, with only her intermittent presence required to achieve this.33 Perhaps, as Steedman suggests, "the

32 Ibid.
lineaments of modern good mothering" were being developed during this period by nannies and primary school teachers, but Helterline maintains that features of our everyday understanding of mothering such as a belief in the practice of child care as the responsibility of natural mothers and the necessity of the constant presence of a reliable and loved adult, are only forty years old.

Mothering today

The requirement that mothers give young children constant physical and emotional support now has strong currency across classes in Western capitalist countries. It may have originated in the middle classes but the work of both Ann Oakley in England and Betsy Wearing in Australia suggest that working class mothers also measure their worth in terms of the constancy of their presence with the child. In fact, Wearing maintains that working class women are more likely to hold such attitudes than other social classes. Michèle Barrett and Mary MacIntosh's analysis of familial ideology, whilst not reducible to a study of the ideology of motherhood, is useful for realising the hegemonic nature of concepts of family, including motherhood. They point out how such ideas extend beyond the private sphere of the family to the public arenas of institutional care.

schooling, the media and so on, all of which are
saturated with and in the case of institutions, run
according to family principles including the
psychological effectiveness of love and the need for a
constant mother.38

Cathy Urwin's article "Constructing Motherhood: the
persuasion of normal development" (1985), examines, more
specifically, contemporary definitions of the role of
mothers through "such now routine social practices as
infant testing and check-ups with the doctor and health
visitor, and what John and Elizabeth Newson have
described as "the cult of child psychology".39 The
latter refers to the explosion of books, pamphlets and
magazine articles, published in apparently ever-
increasing numbers, which is mainly directed at first-
time mothers and is concerned almost exclusively with
infancy and the pre-school years. Urwin also focuses on
women's own aspirations and desires. Although regular
check-ups with the health-care visitors were important to
the mothers for they gave them tangible evidence of the
baby's progress and their own competence, they appeared
to place far greater emphasis on popularised notions of
child psychology which Urwin sees as emanating not only
from Bowlby and Winnicott, but psychologists of the '60s
and '70s such as Bruner, White and others.40 The mothers

39 J. and E. Newson, "Aspects of childrearing in the
English-speaking world", quoted in Cathy Urwin,
"Constructing Motherhood: the persuasion of normal
development", in Carolyn Steedman, et al (eds), Language,
Gender and Childhood, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London,
1985, p. 165.
she interviewed stated that notions of child centredness and the educative role of the mother are "all around you", but mentioned some sources of their ideas as being television, magazines, their own professional training and child care books.41 Urwin's discussion emphasised that ideas from developmental psychology had not only affected orthodoxies on how child rearing should take place, but had affected women's beliefs and practices. Nor had these notions been imposed on women; they actively took them up, which Urwin argues is because they appealed to already held desires and fantasies.42

For the women Cathy Urwin interviewed, as for most others, the ideology of motherhood was not without its contradictions. For example, some mothers, particularly of older children, questioned the relationship between a child's development and the actions of its mother, believing that certain stages of development happened regardless of what mothers did, and further that the way children "turned out" was too haphazard to be related to good or bad mothering.43 The ideology of motherhood and feminist literature dealing with the ideology and reality of women's lives are riddled with such contradictions. Much of the literature, such as New and David's book For The Children's Sake (1985) stresses that, due to the hegemonic nature of familial and mothering ideologies, the having of children cannot even be viewed as a choice.44 In fact, I would agree with the statement in

41 Ibid, p. 185.
42 Ibid, p. 197.
Changing the Subject (1984) that "it is neither a question of free choice, nor of false consciousness". Other writers stress structural encouragements in areas such as taxation and cash transfers which encourage women to limit themselves to a mothering role. And yet Germaine Greer purports that there is a profound lack of desire for children prevailing in Western society. She states:

The scale and speed of our world is all anti-child: children cannot be allowed to roam the streets, but must run a terrifying gauntlet to get to the prime locus of their segregation, school. They cannot open doors or windows, cannot see on top of counters, are stifled and trampled in crowds, hushed when they speak or cry before strangers, apologised for by harassed mothers condemned to share their ostracised condition.

Certainly many of the women interviewed by Sharpe, Harper and Richards were aware of a strong disjunction between the official status of mothers and the actual low status and lack of practical support accorded them. Mothers face further contradictions due to their economic position. As New and David comment:

A childless woman is less than complete. But at the same time a true mother, a good mother, is supposed to be at least partly economically dependent on a man, and as such, she is not a full adult, an equal citizen, for only people who support themselves are fully adult.

A major theme in Kerreen Reiger's book is that of contradiction. She explores the idea that the

professionalisation of motherhood lays bare a profound contradiction between the notion that one must be taught to mother and the idea of motherhood being natural for women. She views this contradiction as presenting a major difficulty for the ideology of motherhood and sees possibilities of breaking down the ideologies which buttress the institution of motherhood through contradictions such as these.49 She is, I think, unduly optimistic, and reliant on a rigid concept of ideology. Whilst the notion of contradictions is important for individual and group resistance, and resistance can affect ideological change, I see the ideology of motherhood and ideology generally as being flexible and adaptable enough to contain many images and incorporate changes in structures and practices without necessarily being placed under undue strain. As previously discussed, this is presently occurring with the concept of women participating in paid work. In fact, interviews with career women in magazines such as New Idea are invariably concluded with a question of the woman as to whether, if it came to a choice, her family would come before her career. Of course her answer is yes.

Women's experience of mothering, reflected in and reflecting the ideology and literature, is multifaceted. Adrienne Rich was one of the first feminist writers to attempt to reclaim mothering for feminism, with her insightful division between the experience and the institution of mothering. She recognised that maternity

was a keystone of male control and yet saw it as containing the potential for great creativity and joy.  

Her description of her own mothering is evidence for the truth of Lorraine Mortimer’s claim that mothers can experience several kinds of feelings simultaneously. It is the same at-home mother who is lonely and depressed without adult companionship who enjoys her baby and swears that having the child is the best thing she has done. Rather than conclude that she is lying, or does not know her own mind, we should try harder to theoretically distinguish different and contradictory things happening at the same time.  

Recuperations of motherhood, such as Rich and Mortimer have attempted, are important for feminism, but not more so than the writings of Nicholson, Oakley and Steedman which attempt to break down the myths surrounding motherhood.  

These three writers have all written autobiographical type accounts describing, in the case of Nicholson and Oakley, their own negative experiences of mothering and, in Steedman’s case, the burden of being told that she and her sister had ruined her mother’s life. Ann Oakley has also made detailed studies of the perceptions and realities of the lives of many women who were full-time mothers and/ or domestic workers in their own homes. These writers have particular significance because such statements about the lived reality of many mothers who are unhappy with their

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lives are rarely made - as a mother I would feel they are virtually forbidden - in the mainstream of our society. This taboo is breaking down slowly: a recent survey by the Clemenger advertising group found that the majority of full-time mothers with young children had low life satisfaction scores, 53 and the trend towards voluntary childlessness among small sections of the middle-class is being accepted in limited but broader groups and will probably grow. 54 It is important that such experiences and perceptions be voiced, in part to make available alternative positions for women making vital decisions about their lives. Judith Okley was able to use the anti-mothering stance adopted by Simone de Beauvoir in this way - to escape what she and her peers viewed in the 1950's as compulsory maternity. 55

However, feminism is now also recognising women such as those interviewed by Wearing and Urwin, who view their mothering extremely positively, and is seeing them as more than victims. These women are engaged in an active construction of their own lives and culture outside the arena of paid work and generally outside the company of men. There is much creative work done and worthwhile contributions to the community made as part of these lives, which usually extend beyond the private home into many areas including kindergartens, schools and friendship networks. Cathy Urwin attempts to explore the

potential for change in such networks. Their very existence points to mothers' recognition of their own needs beyond the normalised notion of child centredness, Urwin argues. She sees two main uses of friendship by the women she interviewed; for some, a form of consciousness raising took place whereby they gradually recognised or began to speak of limitations in their lives, ambivalence about their motherhood and doubts about the normative images of children presented to them. However, there was a stronger indication that their supportive network helped the women cope with and maintain their role, and "cement rather than confront their emotional investments in the traditional family".56

In either case, as Urwin suggests, "it is imperative to write in this aspect of women's contemporary history",57 and to take up Mortimer's challenge of providing theory which can encompass all aspects of women's mothering. This should include the task of attempting to understand the production of women's desire to mother which has already been undertaken by Nancy Chodorow among others. Chodorow explains such a desire in terms of a differing psychic structure which exists in women and men, due mainly to the different ways mothers rear male and female children. According to Chodorow, mothers perceive and treat male children as separate from themselves, while they perceive and treat female children as continuous. They thus tend to unnecessarily prolong an initial period of oneness with girl infants and

57 Ibid.
therefore delay the Oedipal stage. Unlike a boy, a girl does not need to reject her earliest attachment to her mother and the retention of this attachment causes girls "to define and experience themselves as continuous with others." 58 Such experiences impell women to mother and the converse of this for boys is to "cut off or curtail relational possibilities for [their] parenting". 59

Chodorow’s analysis is of value for women in that it does not emphasise the Oedipal stage to the extent of Freud and his followers. However, it still presents what I see as major problems in the use of psychoanalysis as a tool for understanding women’s lives. It is universalist, 60 and, although Chodorow maintains that the cycle of women’s mothering can be broken through an equal sharing of parenting between men and women, unnecessarily deterministic. Like most psycholanalytic theorists, she pays insufficient attention to the cultural, including material, aspects of women’s lives, and seems reluctant to recognise that "unconscious motivations are only one component of action ... [and] are amenable to reality testing". 61

Women do make differing decisions in their lives. They may have desires including the desire to mother, but they take it up at different times, in different degrees, with different intentions, or not at all. And the

limitations placed on their lives by making a decision to
mother are greatly affected by pre-existing structures.
By analysing these structures and their relationship to
ideology and people's practices, women may be able to
"enter the world and attempt to change it", 62 thus
avoiding, if they wish, Simone de Beauvoir's dictum that
if they wish for equality, they must refuse to mother. 63

63 Alice Schwartzer, Simone de Beauvoir Today, Chatto and
Windus/Hogarth Press, London, 1983, quoted in Steedman,
SECTION 3

STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES AFFECTING WOMEN'S WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

Chapter 3: Structures affecting women's paid work

Ideologies of work and motherhood find their material representation in a range of structures which do not acknowledge women as paid workers. These structures cover a broad spectrum of areas including education, child care, the organisation of work and the sexual division of labour. There has been much valuable Australian - and overseas - analysis, particularly in the last decade, of the operation of such structures, some examples being Game and Pringle's work on the sexual division of labour, Bettina Cass on welfare and Jean Blackburn on education. Despite the value of these and many other contributions in building up a picture of the reality of women's experiences, there is a lack in feminist literature of an adequate theory analysing the importance and role of structures in the maintenance of women's oppression.

Studies concentrating on women's lives are relatively new in sociology and the "private" sphere and "the family" have only blossomed as areas of serious
research since the 1970’s. Marxist feminists have been prominent in the development of this field. Their work has drawn on a Marxist framework to analyse questions about ideology. This framework, developed from Marx largely by Louis Althusser, has a base-superstructure relationship, seeing ideology as a reflection of material conditions and dependent on them at least in the last instance. It influenced writers in the 1970’s such as Elizabeth Wilson and Juliet Mitchell, whose analyses of the welfare state and other structures portray structures as determining both women’s position in society and ideology, and ideologies in their turn as obscuring social relations. More recently Marxist writers such as Barrett have been concerned to give due weight to ideology and have moved to a position espousing a more reciprocal relationship between the material and the ideological. This is a position with which I concur.

The move to recognise the importance of ideology and culture has had a strong impact on feminist and social theory, leading to extensive examinations of and reflections on the nature and significance of ideology and culture. In my view, this redress of a previous lack has led to a neglect of the importance of structures. Issues centring around structures - for example questions of economics, politics, and institutional practices -

2 Ibid, pp. 103-106.
3 Barrett, p. 89.
should be restored to their proper place in feminist analysis, a place of equal importance to ideological issues, and the mutually reinforcing role of structures and ideology in the oppression of women explored. To this end, I will now examine the major structures which restrict women's lives, and in particular their participation in paid work.

Public child care

Child care provision is an example of a structure integrally related to the ideologies of mothering and work discussed in the previous chapter and which places serious constraints on women's lives. There is a cluster of ideologies which fit together to form the ideology of womanhood,4 - romantic ideology, domestic ideology, the ideology of motherhood and so on. The ideology of motherhood, as discussed in the previous chapter, includes certain normative ideas about child care such as the need for a pre-school child to have the full-time care of its natural mother. This ideology has a strong influence on the provision of child care. Deborah Brennan and Carol O'Donnell state:

Why have Australian governments displayed such a reluctance to become involved in the provision of child care and to develop policies aimed at supporting families in rearing their children? One important reason is that the care of young children has traditionally been regarded as a "family" responsibility and governments have been unwilling to be seen as undermining the functions of the family. Of course, when we look more closely, "family" turns out to mean "female", and what is really

4 This notion of a cluster of ideologies which fit together despite apparent contradictions is currently being explored by Sandra Taylor.
being preserved is women's responsibility for the care of children.5

Here the reciprocal relationship between ideology and structures can be seen. Ideology influences provision, and structures, as set up by government policies, preserve women's place as child carers and buttress the accompanying ideology.

Issues surrounding the provision of child care, both public and private, are far more complex than the traditional socialist feminist demands for free, or cheap, available and flexible care for all women would suggest. Recent work done by Denise Riley, Caroline New and Miriam David has raised many interesting questions. New and David express their concern that "children's care is not seen as of equal importance with women's oppression" and that some socialist feminist writers have viewed children as women's oppressors along with men.6 Riley takes up a similar issue, yet complains that feminists have too often spoken as if women's and children's needs are in "some automatic harmony". "Adults need and children's needs are neither necessarily consonant nor necessarily incompatible; not everything can be accurately read off from the categories of men, women and children."7 In my view, both arguments

7 Denise Riley, "The Serious Burdens of Love" in Lynne Segal, What is to be Done about the Family?, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1983, p.139-140.
have validity. As Riley states, the child care issue draws together contesting strands of feminism concerning the needs of mothers and the refusal "to elevate maternity into some engulfing feminist principle", but it does not "knit them [the tensions] comfortably into a smooth fabric".8 She raises a range of questions around the broader one of whether there are "general and distinct socialist and feminist objectives in the care of children, or a quintessentially feminist set of demands to be made."9

Riley does not provide answers to the questions she poses, but sees no reason for despair in this. She, along with New and David, is deeply concerned with maintaining the battle for better and more flexible care for children under the Thatcher government in Britain. New and David explore the experiences of children at home and in different types of public care in an effort to show that one cannot judge the quality of care by ascertaining whether the care givers are the children’s natural mothers. Australian authors Brennan and O’Donnell are also concerned to show that public care of children can in fact be more beneficial to a child than continual care by a mother within a nuclear family.

It is politically essential to research and publicise positive aspects of public child care in order to break down the belief of its inferiority to mother care. However, there is a danger in entering a debate conducted by child psychologists and others, which

8 Ibid, p. 151.
9 Ibid, p. 141.
assumes a universally and "naturally" best way of caring for children. My view is rather that there are a variety of different ways in which child-rearing can and has taken place according to specific ideologies, social relations and structured needs. However, children do have needs and rights that can be socially agreed upon, and one of them is to a life providing love and security. These can be provided in a variety of ways, but, as Brennan and O'Donnell point out, are more likely to flourish "in a society where people's choices are widest and when they are not constrained through economic hardship, sexual inequality and rigid social expectations".10

Brennan and O'Donnell's book, Caring for Australia's Children, (1986) details the paucity of public child care facilities in Australia. Only 5.8% of under five year olds attend creches or family day care schemes. Of these under 4% attend government funded programmes and 40% of these do so fewer than 10 hours per week.11 In this provision, we lag far behind other nations - Sweden provides 23%, France 31%, the German Democratic Republic, 50%. Even the United States, generally regarded as having a low level of child care, provides 11%.12 Given the fact that a large number of children below school age (97,000 in 1980) have both their parents or their sole parent in full-time employment (and a further 187,000 had

11 Ibid. p.1.
12 Deborah Brennan, Children's Services in Australia, the state of play, Haymarket, New South Wales, Family and Children's Services Agency, 1982, p. viii.
one parent in full time and the other in part-time employment) the 11% who attend child care centres for over 40 hours per week is surprisingly low. In fact almost half a million children are minded by relatives, friends and neighbours and over 5000 children below school age are left home unattended for at least some part of the week. This figure is likely to underestimate the number of children left alone since many people would not be prepared to admit to doing this.13

Research shows that most women do not choose non-creche care by preference, but because of lack of availability and cost. One study of 300 members of the Electrical Trades Union showed that although 11% used centre based care, 40% preferred it. 60% of parents using relatives as child minders and 90% who used private minders would have preferred another arrangement, while 82% of those who used child care centres were satisfied. It has also been found that "the likelihood of a woman using any kind of child care (formal or informal) is closely linked to her level of education and thus to her income and class position."14 Child care provision is expensive and government subsidy is necessary if the cost is to be held down. In Sweden, parents pay an average of 10% of the full cost of child care, in Hungary and West Germany approximately 15%. In Australian government sponsored centres, the fee is means tested and parents who are charged the maximum fee pay between 70% and 90%
of the cost of the care, an amount which is equivalent to that which is paid for private school fees.15

The need for public care is growing. Brennan and O'Donnell "examine some of the changes which have taken place in Australian society during the post-war period and which have contributed to the increased demand for child care services".16 They cite factors such as changes in family structures including the growth of the number of single parents and the number of women in and seeking paid employment. An Australian Bureau of Statistics survey of discouraged job seekers in 1981 revealed that 120,000 women would like a job if child care was available, although more recently this group was estimated at 69,400.17 Social structures are thus affecting the practices of these women. Their financial dependence, and full-time domestic/mothering role is being maintained by the lack of alternatives to parental care of children. Whether child care provision would lead to broader changes in the relationship between men and women is an issue which will be explored in the final chapter of this thesis.

The sexual division of labour

Game and Pringle dispute the potential of an increased participation in the workforce for bringing about equality for women. They are at pains to point out that masculinity and femininity are constructed at the

16 Ibid, p.5.
workplace as much as anywhere else. The sexual division of labour within the Australian workforce is the highest in the OECD countries and the decline in this segregation is among the smallest for this group of countries. Women are concentrated in low paid, insecure, part-time positions in areas such as clerical, sales and service and professional work, particularly jobs which can be seen as extensions of their traditional role, for example, teaching, nursing and cleaning. Game and Pringle argue that the sexual division of labour "is not fixed but undergoes a process of continuous redefinition, which intersects with changes in technology and the ways in which the work is organised." In their book *Gender at Work* (1983), they examine the operation of this process of redefinition in the whitegoods, banking, retailing computer and health industries. The computer industry is of special interest as it is a new industry where one might expect jobs to be non-sex typed. However, jobs quickly became stereotyped with women predominating on the bottom rung of the career ladder as keypunch operators and men filling most of the programming, systems analysis and management jobs.

According to Game and Pringle, the sexual division of labour "operates as a means of control both in

conscious and not so conscious ways". Management deliberately employ women so that they will be able to handle job loss through natural wastage,21 - keypunching work will soon be phased out and women operators "expected to disappear quietly into the home, though they are the group that can least afford such luxury".22 Night shifts in data processing are seen as suitable to be staffed by married women so that they can do their second shift - domestic and child care work - during the day.23 However, a more subtle dimension to the sexual division of labour is its relationship to the construction of masculinity of both managers and workers. Its easy acceptance by men is surely related to the "illusion of control" which they gain from its existence.24

The close relationship between ideology, structure and practices can be seen in a study of the sexual division of labor. Brennan and O'Donnell state that it is the expectation that women will be primarily responsible for the rearing of children which has produced the sexual division of labour, but this is only partially true.25 The structure in operation protects men's jobs, places women in jobs where pay rates assume a male breadwinner and creates jobs whose long and unpredictable hours mean that only superwomen can combine

them with private life.26 Thus people’s practices are constrained through the structure of the sexual division of labour, and the formulation of their common sense and discursive ideologies is affected through their daily practices. Furthermore, they are not passive in this complex interplay of factors, for at the same time as they experience structural constraints, "Both men and women are actively involved in reproducing it [the sexual division of labour] in the way they go about their daily lives, both at work and outside the workplace".27

Sexual division of labour - within the home

The division of labour within the home found its contemporary form after the industrial revolution. As Zaretsky puts it, "The housewife emerged, alongside the proletarian - the two characteristic laborers of developed capitalist society".28 Today, whether women participate in the paid workforce or not, they perform many hours of necessary and often hidden domestic work. A recent study by Patricia Gowland estimated this time to be between 60 and 80 hours for those women for whom it is their major occupation.29 Women in the workforce, whilst sustaining a longer overall working week, tend to spend less time on housework, although their husbands do not spend more. An American study showed that women who were in paid employment for over 30 hours per week spent an

average of 76 hours in total work time, and more if their children were young.30 The introduction of labour saving devices has not reduced significantly the amount of time spent on housework. This is largely due the development of an ideology of domesticity which equates housework with love, and to changes in notions of child care which entail mothers devoting more time to their children. Household technology has been developed on an individual, familial basis, thus increasing the privatised nature of the domestic work which women perform.31

The combination of the ideology of domesticity and the structured conditions of women's housework influences the choices available to them in their "life-plan".32 Job opportunities are opened or closed to or by women, because of "real and imaginary ideas about the limited availability and competence of women because of their domestic work".33 The constraints imposed by their domestic duties are particularly visible in women's preference for part-time work, which is taking over as the normal work pattern for women. This pattern, combined with the minor change in men's role in domestic work, has "arisen in the context of a gender-divided society", and as Cass states, "exacerbates workforce

31 Ibid, p. 140.
segmentation and reinforces the domestic division of labour".34

Role division in the "private" sphere is further reinforced by taxation, wages and social security policies in Britain, Australia and the United States, which do not treat women as separate and individual persons. Meredith Edwards is concerned about the inequities that develop when the standard unit of analysis in social policy is the couple or family, maintaining that there is no evidence that income is shared equally within households. She suggests the abolition of the dependent spouse rebate, payment of unemployment benefits to individuals regardless of marital status, and increased family allowances as changes which would decrease the emphasis on the married couple, a norm which no longer accords with reality, and increase equity of distribution of resources between men and women.35 Bettina Cass is also concerned with the effects of the tax and cash transfer systems on the ideologies and practices of women, and sees them as central to the construction of the work/ non-work dichotomy.36 Clare Burton explains the relationship between such government policies and ideology thus:

State activity maintains a particular type of household - male breadwinner, dependent spouse and children. But it does not do this in any

mechanistic way, nor solely for the purpose of oppressing women. It certainly does it in accord with prevailing assumptions about women which many would prefer to leave unquestioned. But these assumptions are perpetuated by the ways in which women are constrained to organise their lives, given the limited choices imposed by state policies.37

Burton is concerned with the way structures (she frequently uses the term institutions) interact to sustain gender separation, and explores, amongst others, the areas of education and the family. She raises the important issue of the disjunction between the length of the school and working days and the way this is predicated on the existence of a traditional family with a parent free from paid labour during the day. According to Burton, the demands made on mothers by the education system in terms both of interpreting school to the young child and more mundane matters such as tuckshops, meetings, fundraising and so on are such that they affect women's ability to enter the paid workforce.38

Furthermore, the issue of before and after school child care is crucial, and usually neglected in analysis for that of under five care. The length of the working day of middle class men is often such that it requires the existence of a domestic support structure which is simply not available to women and should not be required of either sex. Although many more mothers work when their children are of school age, the majority work part-time - women presently comprise 30.3% of full-time workers and

38 Ibid, p. 127.
78.2% of part-time workers. The lack of a relationship between the length of the school and working days and the broader expectations of mothers by the education system limit women's options and "inhibit dramatic changes in family-work relationships". Burton asserts that they have not been given due attention in terms of their maintenance of the ideal family form.

There are many other structures constraining women which could be explored, and I will briefly touch on some of these. Maternity leave provision, whilst disadvantaging working class women and reinforcing women's ideological identification with mothering, is also an important recognition and encouragement of women's participation in the paid labour force. In Australia, such provisions lag far behind many European countries. Whilst the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission in 1979 recognised the right of women in the workforce to unpaid maternity leave of up to twelve months, hardly any private sector employees operate under awards where they gain such a benefit. This, combined with promotional structures based on seniority and a non-recognition of child-raising as legitimate experience, means women are kept out of the workforce or on its lower rungs. Furthermore, there has been no serious attempt to give access to education and training to "those women whose educational and occupational opportunities have

40 Ibid., p. 128.
been restricted by the important social function of 
child-rearing".42 As Burton states,

The fact that women produce babies bears no 
relation to female subordination unless, 
through socially constructed patterns, it 
precludes them from access to strategic 
resources. It certainly does that in 
capitalist societies.43

Part of the value of Burton's work is that it does 
theorise the importance of structures, and it does this 
in a reproduction framework. Burton disagrees with the 
position of Connell and his associates who, in Making the 
Difference (1982), oppose reproduction theorists because, 
in their view, they imply that individuals do not 
understand what is happening to them.44 In contrast, 
Burton sees reproduction theories as valid attempts to 
explain the persistence of class and gender inequalities, 
whilst still upholding an active role for individuals in 
the construction of their lives. The crucial determinant 
is power, and Burton affirms its role in gender 
construction:

Quite simply put, we are required to 
investigate not only women's active agency, but 
men's as well and the different capacities of 
different groups to effect fundamental social 
change. To argue that gender inequalities are 
reproduced is not to argue that there is a 
"logic of reproduction"; Connell and 
associates are quite correct when they claim 
that "[if] "reproduction" predominates in a 
given case, it is because that side of things 
has won out in a contest with other tendencies, 
not because it is guaranteed by some 
sociological law".

42 Kaye Hargreaves, Women At Work, Penguin, Ringwood, 
1982, p. 79.
44 Robert Connell et al, Making the Difference: Schools, 
Families and Social Division, George Allen & Unwin, 
p. 122-123.
The exercise of this power can be read in the ideology and structures of our society which, despite their continual production and reproduction by both men and women, still favour men.
Chapter 4: Women's workforce practices

This chapter will examine women's actual work practices, how they differ from men's and how they vary across class and ethnic groups. The purpose of this is to gain an insight into the material consequences of the mutually reinforcing ideological and structural frameworks discussed above for the lives of women workers.

Segmentation of the labour force

The participation of women in the Australian labour force has risen remarkably since the end of the second world war, from 25% in 1947 to 48.5% in 1986. Their proportional representation has risen from less than one-quarter of the paid workforce to 39.8% during the same period.¹ The most significant part of this increase has been in the workforce participation of married women. In 1986, 44.8% of married women work, compared with 6.5% in 1947, and in fact today's figure differs little from that of all females.

However, these participation figures, whilst in some senses to be viewed positively, conceal the segmentation of the labour force discussed in the previous chapter. There are many different ways to analyse the divisions within the workforce. One which is valuable for this analysis of the position of women in the workforce is the dual labour market theory, which divides the labour force

into primary and secondary. The primary division comprises permanent, well-trained workers with relatively high wages and good working conditions and the latter, workers in insecure, badly paid jobs. However, there are other divisions which cut across these, for example, service and industrial, manual and non-manual, and there are individual occupations which fit into both. For instance, there are workers in industrial plants who are well paid and secure and professional workers who are exploited in terms of pay and working hours and insecure in terms of tenure.

Despite the divisions within the female workforce, with which I will deal shortly, women in general fit into the secondary segment of the labour force. Firstly, their participation in paid work is of an interrupted nature. In February, 1985, 82.8% of males were full-year labour force participants compared with 64.4% of all females. There was little difference between the proportion of married females and all females who were in the labour force a full year, suggesting that it is not only women’s commitment to child bearing and rearing which leads to their discontinuous employment. Employers have consistently overestimated the level of women’s withdrawal from the workforce in comparison to men’s.

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2 Elizabeth Garnsey et al, in their article, "Labour market structure and work-force divisions" in Deem and Salaman, (eds), Op. cit., point out that the dual labour market theory is a simplification and that "primary and secondary employment conditions are essentially ideal types rather than a description of facts." (p. 52)

Despite a relationship between women's workforce participation and the ages of their children - participation is far greater when children are of school age - in reality women's unstable employment patterns are more likely to be related to the nature of the jobs they are able to obtain.

Despite their increased participation in the labour force, females continue to be concentrated in the clerical, service, sport and recreation and sales areas, working largely as stenographers, typists, sales assistants, waitresses and cleaners.4 Their occupational segregation can act as a protective device in periods of recession, and has been used to argue against the "reserve army" theory of women's employment. This latter theory purports that women are employed in times of economic prosperity only to be sacked during an economic downturn, but women's workforce segregation can ensure that they retain their jobs when they are not competing in the male job market. However, segregation has many other disadvantages for women. During the current period of swift technological development, women are bearing more than their share of the consequent job displacement because of their concentration in occupations where the spread of micro-electronics is rapid. Among the occupations at risk are the traditional "female" jobs of cashier, bookkeeper, stenographer, typist and keypuncher.5

Women are under-represented in administrative, executive and managerial positions, in agricultural work, transport and communications, the trades, process work and labouring. Their comparative absence from administrative and managerial work is an absence not only from positions of power in our society, but from a high earning sector of the job market. Despite the acceptance of the principles of both "equal pay for equal work" (1969) and "equal pay for work of equal value" (1972), and the joint abandonment of the family wage concept and introduction of an equal minimum wage for women (1974), the average total weekly earnings of Australian women are only 67% of men's. Whilst this is certainly affected by the higher proportion of part time workers who are women, female full time workers' earnings are 80% of men's.6 Furthermore, the gap between the total composition of average weekly earnings of men and women is widening: between May 1975 and May 1983 female earnings increased by 115.8% and male earnings by 121.1%.7 As Cora Baldock states:

Equal pay is not just a matter of minimum award wages. Differentials in over-award payments, restrictions on the access of women to certain jobs, and generally the distinction between women's jobs and men's jobs, with most women's jobs in the secondary sector of the labour market, were still maintained.8

The persistence of sex segregation in the Australian labour market across this century,9 in conjunction with a

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growing number of female breadwinners, is certainly contributing to the social phenomenon known as the "feminisation of poverty". Single parent families, the overwhelming majority of which are headed by women, increased by two thirds between 1975 and 1982. 70% of these are solely or principally dependent on social security, a situation encouraged by the stringent regulations as to the amount women can earn outside their benefits, and in 1984, 59% of mother-headed families were estimated to be living in poverty.10 The needs of female breadwinners are continually ignored, and they and their families pay a high cost for a segregated labour force which pays few women an income which can sustain a family at a decent standard of living.11

The sexual division of labour clearly reflects and is reflected in ideologies of womanhood. As pointed out in the previous chapter, many of the jobs which women choose or are assigned to are extensions of their constructed domestic/maternal roles, some examples being teaching, nursing, secretarial work and cleaning. Other gendered divisions may not be so obvious, but are usually based on dominant ideologies of masculinity and femininity. Game and Pringle point out how the whitegoods industry structures its jobs around a series of polarities such as skilled/unskilled, heavy/light, dangerous/less dangerous, dirty/clean.

interesting/boring, mobile/immobile, the first of each couplet being seen as appropriate for men and the second for women. Whilst women whitegoods workers are allocated the boring, repetitive, sedentary jobs, they maintain that the differences in requisite skill and/or strength are more perceived than real. In an industry where there is "little control of the process on the part of the work force", men retain the jobs with a greater sense of control. However, as Game and Pringle maintain, "the degradation of all work is obscured by the allocation of the most degraded jobs to women."12

Cora Baldock makes an interesting point about a further side effect of the sex segregation of the work force. Because many of the jobs held by women demand "strict obedience to machine tempos, subservience to other personnel, and low initiative", these properties are frequently alleged to be those pertaining to the workers themselves. Thus women workers are said to be passive and docile. As Baldock points out, this issue is particularly relevant with the growing use of technology and consequent deskilling in office and service work, whereby control of the processes is increasingly passing out of the hands of the female workers.13

Segmentation within the female labour force

Segmentation of the labour force is not confined to divisions between men and women; strong class and ethnic

based divisions exist within the female labour force, which according to Denis, developed in the years of the post-war expansion of women's paid work. During this period, an active immigration policy brought large numbers of unskilled men and women to Australia, and migrant women, mostly married, filled the need for industrial workers to produce textiles, clothing and food. The participation of migrant women (other than those born on the United Kingdom) in 1954 was 29.2%, compared with an Australian-born participation rate of 10.9%. It was not until the late 1960's and 1970's, with the expansion of the tertiary sector, that the participation in the labour force of Australian women increased significantly. Today "Australian-born women are five times less likely than Southern European born women to work in manufacturing as a process-worker", states Bettina Cass, but instead are found in professional, clerical and sales work. Kaye Hargreaves points out the differentiation within the migrant work force, noting that migrant women from the United Kingdom and Eire are far more evenly distributed throughout the occupational range than those from non-English speaking

backgrounds. Even more disadvantaged than migrant women are Aboriginal women, who are employed mainly in agriculture, in personal services and as process-workers, and earn consistently low wages in insecure, often seasonal jobs, and have an official unemployment rate vastly exceeding that of non-Aboriginal women.

Whilst maintaining that "all women in the paid workforce have been socially and economically at a disadvantage", Kaye Hargreaves concentrates on the work experiences and needs of migrant and other working class women in her book *Women and Work* (1982). She investigates part-time work, casual work, seasonal work, shiftwork and outwork, concurring with Patrick Kinnersley that "In terms of damage to physical, mental and social well-being, shiftwork is probably the worst of all." In 1976, 40% of shiftworkers were women and the need to care for children was the main reason given for wanting shiftwork. Other reasons were lack of choice, higher pay and time to do housework during the day. Their need to combine domestic and paid work meant that they reported fewer disadvantages of shiftwork than men, but according to Hargreaves, the combination occurred at the expense of opportunities to sleep, rest and spend time with family and friends. Increasing technological change means further pressure for shiftworkers to operate equipment twenty-four hours a day and adapt their own lives to the demands of the job.

Outwork, or "sweated labour of the 1980s" is a further division of the fragmented female labour market. Outwork is work done for an employer at piece rates in the worker's own home and includes sewing, packaging, light assembly work and repetitive tasks such as folding leaflets. Due to inadequate and unenforced laws regulating outwork, it is impossible to gauge the exact numbers of outworkers, but those in the clothing industry alone have been estimated to number 60,000. The Centre for Working Women, whose work includes involving female working class process workers with issues such as industrial health and safety, is concerned about the growth of outwork and other marginal work practices in the 1980s. Previous explanations advanced by Hargreaves among others, that a desire or need to stay home and look after their children is women's main motivation in undertaking outwork, are inadequate in the face of this growth. "There has been no sudden baby boom", states the report, *Women Outworkers* (1986).

According to the Centre, the growth in outwork is due to "the advantages it provides to employers who are able to pay low wages to their workers while avoiding their responsibilities as employers and offering none of the entitlements which are normal for regular workers."

23 Ibid, p. 6.
It is "a sign of a worsening labour market for women workers." Very few outworkers receive sick pay, holiday pay, overtime or paid public holidays. The flow of work and payment is irregular, and most of the outworkers interviewed complained of intimidation and pressure from middlemen. They are often paid at a lower rate per piece than factory workers doing the same work. Health problems result from the lack of non-adjustable work stations, and repetitive strain injury, stress and fatigue are common. Hargreaves summarises their untenable situation:

Women who do outwork have little or no choice. Usually they desperately need money for without their income from outwork they would either have nothing, or they would be dependent on poverty-line wages of their husbands or social security benefits. Most outworkers are migrant women whose isolation and lack of knowledge about rights and entitlements is made worse by their language and cultural difficulties ....thousands of women are trapped at home with no alternative to exploitative working conditions, in isolation from the mainstream of the workforce.

As with shiftwork, outwork is likely to continue to increase, particularly in the computer industry. Women at home are already entering this field and Game and Pringle fear that their isolation and probable consequent lack of unionisation will lead to their exploitation as "a cheap and flexible supply of labour".

Women who are involved in outwork have often been involved in other work practices which are susceptible to marginalisation such as seasonal, casual or part-time

24 Ibid, p. 6-7.
work. According to the Centre for Working Women, seasonal workers have some specific problems. They rarely work long enough with the same people to build up a relationship with their co-workers, often receive inadequate training and lack job security.27 Casual workers receive no sick or holiday pay and often are not paid their loadings on their hours’ rate of pay to make up for this. Many part-time workers are in fact employed on a casual basis.28

Part-time work

Part-time work can be seen as part of the primary/secondary division of the labour force and also part of the segmentation which exists within the female workforce. However, because of its dominance in the work patterns of women, it plays an important structural role in women’s subordination, and therefore I will deal with it separately. Part-time work has become the major work pattern of an increasing number of women, for despite the fact that women comprise 39% of the labour force, they make up 80% of part-time and only 30% of full time workers.29 The growth in part-time work for women accounts for about 70% of the total growth in women’s employment during the 1970’s, and 60% of married women in paid work hold part-time jobs.30

Support for part-time work is widespread - sections of the women’s movement support it in order to open up

job opportunities and ease the load women carry.31
Employers use it to save money and gain flexibility to
extend or contract the working day according to demand.32
According to Eccles, 89% of married women and 77% of
unmarried women holding part-time jobs do not wish to
work more hours and 82% of married women and 51% of
single women not currently employed would prefer part-
time work.33

There are several points which need to be made
in terms of part-time employment. Firstly, its appeal
must be seen "in the context of the severe shortage of
child care and the present social structure under which
women take the main responsibility for unpaid work in the
home"34 However, research suggests that part-time work
does not enable women to satisfactorily overcome the
practical and ideological difficulties involved in being
a member of the labour force.35 Harper and Richards
found that women who worked part-time did not gain the
job satisfaction, status, security or pay of full-time
workers, and yet lacked the freedom and leisure that
mothers who had chosen to remain at home appreciated.
They did not employ someone to do their housework as some
full-time workers did and yet did just as much housework
as women who were at home full-time. They lacked
confidence and spoke of guilt more often than full-time
workers. "Not having made a full-time commitment, they

32 Angela Coyle, Redundant Women, The Women's Press Ltd.,
1984, p.132.
34 Ibid.
had not jumped down on one side of the normative fence but had remained teetering uncertainly at the top."36

Yet, part-time work is still a controversial issue among feminists. Hazel Moir supports it as an ideal way to incorporate female values into the structures of the workforce; she identifies these values as the opposite of four male values she defines as dominating the world of paid work: 1) it is paid work which counts, 2) a long working day which "essentially requires total irresponsibility towards the care of dependents", 3) industrial discipline, 4) the secondary importance of individuals and their personal relationships. "The bogey that part-time work creates a further second-class status for women workers is based on the existing values of the workforce", states Moir.37

Moir expresses an important and valid concern that "if we fight only for equality in this male-defined world we abrogate our right and responsibility to define, with them, the world in which we live and work."38 However, I would argue that it is unclear that any change in work-related structures such as Moir envisages have occurred as a result of women's high participation in the part-time workforce. Angela Coyle states in Redundant Women that:

"The cost of part-time working to women has been enormous. In the first place, it has made it possible for women to be wage earners and domestic labourers without there having been any real redistribution of domestic work

36 Ibid.
38 Ibid, p.100.
between men and women. As a result, women have remained defined in terms of the domestic and through this are structured as a secondary, marginal and *subordinate* labour force*.*

Part-time work for Australian women exists mainly in the service, sales, clerical and professional occupations (the same areas in which full-time women workers predominate). Professional women work mainly in the traditional female jobs of teaching and nursing, and the area of teaching is one in which much progress has been made in terms of achieving pro-rata benefits for part-time workers. As with maternity leave, it is easier to make and regulate such gains in government employment and part-time teachers and public servants have been used as a model in the argument in favour of more part-time work for women. However, as Hargreaves states, "they remain a relatively privileged minority compared to the women in clerical, sales, service and manufacturing industries"40, many of whom are, in fact, casuals - the Australian Bureau of Statistics does not differentiate between the two - and have inferior security, pay, promotional prospects and conditions to full-time workers. It is quite possible that part-time work could operate to further entrench the inequalities within the female workforce and the labour market as a whole. Hargreaves quotes Gallagher on this issue:

> Part-time work may function to re-inforce the segmentation of the labourforce by sex, age, ethnicity occupation and industry ... The point is that part-time employment will not have a uniform effect on the structure of the labour market and accessibility to employment.

Rather, increasing part-time employment may entrench inequalities.41

There is a widespread fear among unions of the push for part-time work because of their perception of its introduction as an erosion of working conditions. It has been used to reduce the number of full-time positions and is not seen to be in the interests of the working class as a whole. Part-time work operates as a form of hidden unemployment when accepted by people who really want full-time jobs. It can also mean under-employment, through the lack of utilisation of skills and experiences which takes place when women's need for reduced working hours compels them to accept work which effectively deskills them.42 However, part-time work exists and, according to Coyle, is the only significant area of employment growth currently predicted.43 Given this, unions should take seriously the battle for decent pay, work patterns and security for part-time workers, including women. At the same time, they must pursue other strategies to protect the full-time job market and make it a more realistic choice for women. These should include a shorter working day, extended child care provision, and leave for essential parenting duties such as caring for sick children.

Unemployment

A discussion of the participation of women in the labour market cannot take place without consideration of unemployment. The unemployment rate of women is
consistently higher than that of males — in 1985 5.0% of men and 6.9% of women were unemployed,44 — without taking into account the notorious rate of hidden unemployment amongst women. Married women in Australia are not entitled to unemployment benefits if their husband is in work, and therefore many do not register as unemployed even when actively seeking work. Furthermore, females form a significantly higher proportion of discouraged job seekers than males.45 It has been noted in a paper by the Department of Employment and Youth Affairs that:

Empirical studies undertaken elsewhere have shown that women, youth and older workers are particularly likely to react to a reduction in job opportunities by dropping out of the workforce, and so the increasing discouragement resulting from rising unemployment will slowly erode labourforce participation of these demographic groups.46

Of recent concern regarding this trend is the increasing number of young women thought to be actively choosing teenage pregnancy as a response to the recession. It is suggested that this choice, enabled by the supporting parents' benefit, is an alternative way to provide meaning in their lives in the absence of employment prospects. The evidence regarding the relationship between unemployment and teenage pregnancies is contradictory and inadequate. However, there is some evidence to suggest that, whilst the overall teenage pregnancy rate has not risen, there has been a rise in pregnancies among the unemployed, or those socially

disadvantaged, and a decline in the more advantaged groups.47

Perhaps due to the widespread idea that work is not central in women's lives as it is in men’s, there have been few studies of the effects of unemployment on women. The recent book by Angela Coyle, Redundant Women (1984), is of value in redressing this lack. Coyle makes a detailed study of the responses of two groups of English women to their retrenchment from clothing factories in Yorkshire. She argues that whilst "familial ideology comes to the forefront in interpreting women's job loss" as causing less suffering than men’s, the Yorkshire women saw their redundancy as significant both in financial and psychological terms. Single women reduced to welfare payments managed "by having unheated houses, going nowhere and eating little". Married women found the male wage to be inadequate to support a family especially in a period of rising unemployment among their men. The lost wages of the women also meant a loss of personal independence and decision making power. As Coyle states, "work is axiomatic to their lives"; and in the words of a worker, "I went in, and all our side of the factory was empty. I sat down and cried... And to see me weep was amazing for them because I'm a hard person ... But when it happens to you, you think, "Oh God!"48 Such reactions are borne out by an Australian

report on the effects of unemployment on women. 49
Hargreaves states in her examination of this report that:

women take themselves seriously as workers, and suffer shock, depression, boredom, social isolation and loss of confidence as well as more tangible financial and family problems when they become unemployed.

Alongside the shock and loss of Coyle's interviewees went more ambivalent feelings inevitable considering the pressure not only of their work but of combining a job with domestic duties. Although most women began looking for work immediately, some used their redundancy as providing time for a rest at least until their redundancy pay ran out. They expanded their ongoing role within the family and Coyle suggests that the ability of women to do this limits the critical effects of their experience of unemployment. "Unemployment for women is not a crisis of gender identity and women's domestic role can offer ways of making sense of job loss." However, none saw home as a permanent retreat from the workforce. Rather, redundancy became another of the series of interruptions to their lives as paid workers. 50

Paid work and the recession

In the context of the current world-wide economic recession, Hargreaves views unemployment as the major problem facing the women's movement in the 1980s and sees a major goal as being the maintenance of the possibility of paid employment for women in the face of factors such

50 Ibid, pp. 44, 111, 121, 66.
as rising employment, increasing technology and the international division of labour, through which many traditional women’s – particularly migrant women’s – jobs are being relocated in Asia.51

"The politics of recession", to use Angela Coyle’s term, includes pessimism about the possibility of reform and a strengthening of the ideology of women’s traditional domestic and maternal roles. Sometimes the attempts to reassert this ideology are overt and include media attacks on married women for taking the jobs of men or young people. At other times, they take place through policy/structural change such as cutbacks in the provision of child care and spending on the aged, resulting in the forced relocation of these services and their providers, women, in the home.

At the same time, a recession makes it more imperative that women work. As Coyle maintains, “Recession, inflation and high levels of unemployment devalue the male wage, interrupt men’s capacity to work at all and exposes [sic] the material fallacy of the male wage as a family breadwinner’s wage”.52 The adoption of monetarist economic policies is a further widespread characteristic of the current recession. Monetarism dominates the political agenda in Australia, the United States and Britain at present. Its philosophy of deregulation of the labour market is dangerous for the working class and has particularly serious implications

for women. Women outworkers already suffer the consequences of working in a deregulated situation, and deregulation would certainly lead to the marginalisation of many more women in the labour force, as they tend to work in industries which do not have strong unions. Coyle comments on the contradictions implicit in this, whereby cheap women's wages make them a preferred source of labour at the same time as ideological pressures to return them to the home increase.

Monetarism has many prongs and both needs women in the home, taking on the burden of care in order to reduce public spending, and needs women in the labour market to effect a downward pressure on wages.

Cora Baldock attempts to explore the relationship between economic conditions, domestic and paid work in the conclusion to her article "Public policies and paid work" (1983). Both she and Coyle argue that women's improved position in the paid workforce in terms of participation and formal equal opportunity has been enabled by, and in fact harnessed to, prosperous economic conditions.

This is not the end of the matter. Issues of equality for women which were on the agenda for women of the '60s and '70s are still issues for the '80s. Both Baldock and Coyle suggest that there are contradictions in the need of capitalist economies for labour power and the reproduction of the social relations of production which can be exploited for change. Women's desire for work has not disappeared during the recession; nor has the possibility of their empowerment through it. It is
important that structural change to both protect and make
gains continue to be pursued by individual women, groups
of women, unions and government. This should be done
with an eye to both the immediate needs of women, and to
overall societal changes necessitated by our particular
historical situation of economic recession and swift
technological change.
SECTION 4

CONCLUSION

Change

I see paid work as a positive aspect of women's lives and as having potential in regard to changing the overall structural and ideological oppression of women. But one need only look at the subordination of many working-class, migrant, full-time labouring women to realise that there is no simple, straightforward relationship between paid work and liberation. This is not to deny a connection.

In asserting the value of paid work, I am making no universal prescription. For many women, the choice to stay home or enter the labour market is one of the few choices they have in their lives. It is a choice made within many constraints, as are the choices of all oppressed people, but it is sometimes a genuine choice. The unpaid work of women at home is varied and valuable, often a combination of caring for dependents physically and emotionally, production such as sewing and gardening and working in the community. It has been noted, in this thesis and elsewhere, that institutions such as schools rely on the unpaid work of women for their effective functioning and that this expectation has other effects such as lowering women's participation in the workforce. In my experience, many women find involvement in their children's school-hours activities
workforce. In my experience, many women find involvement in their children’s school-hours activities satisfying and many men would like to be able to share more of their children’s lives at school, kindergarten and so on. As in so many cases, it is the structures and organisation of work which prevent this combination of productive and reproductive work in people’s lives.

Unpaid women workers often have power but not culturally legitimated authority. Rosaldo explains the distinction as meaning that whilst women do not have the right to make particular decisions and command obedience, they often exert a strong and systematic influence on decisions which are made.¹ However, their greater involvement in the private sphere must be seen in the context of dependence, in the case of married women, on their husbands, and for the growing number of single mothers, the state.

The dependence of women on welfare, who lack emotional ties to their financial supporter, is less oppressive in some senses. There are obligations which they are expected to meet such as refraining from co-habitation, but the absence of qualities such as love and intimacy from the dependency relationship means a greater capacity to maintain a resistance to such obligations. Certainly, most of these women live in the oppression of poverty, but this is not gender based.²

Nor does the financial dependence of married women necessarily lead to a lack of power; this seems to depend on a range of factors including the husband's income and the woman's access, in terms of training and information, to other possibilities. Such dependence can also facilitate some positive things such as women's rejection of capitalist values of competitive individualism, and the nexus between wages, work and intrinsic value, in favour of asserting the importance of caring for the vulnerable and loved. However, whilst structures exist which tie income to participation in the labour force, the personal independence of women reliant on their husbands' wages ultimately depends on their husbands' goodwill. And the qualities of love and intimacy which are a part of their relationship make resistance to obligations much more difficult.

Thus whilst women's oppression will not end with their participation in the workforce and whilst they should not feel obliged to undertake paid work, most women are choosing to combine paid work with their domestic responsibilities. There has been an overemphasis in feminist scholarship on the question of why women choose to work; in fact, it is usually for the same reason as men - economic necessity, and, to a lesser extent, more personal motives. 3 The "unexamined assumption that women's participation in paid work always requires a special explanation"4 has always ignored women

who do not marry, but is particularly unacceptable today
with the growing number of female heads of households.

Strategies for change

I have not attempted in this thesis, nor do I see as
essential, to provide an overarching explanation of
women's subordination. As Eva Cox maintains, we do not
need to know the origins of our oppression before
developing the means to change it. However, in the
present historical situation of Australian women living
in a country with a capitalist economy and patriarchal/
capitalist ideologies which tie social status and self
esteem to participation in the workforce, genuine equal
access to all types of paid work and the rewards they
bring is mandatory.

Part-time work is not the solution to this lack of
equal access. The upgrading of part-time work in terms
of pay, conditions, security, promotion and so on which
is taking place in some industries such as the Victorian
Public Service will improve the lives of the growing
number of part-time workers, but until a significant
number of males take up the option of part-time work,
these initiatives will not affect the division of labour
by which men are assigned to the breadwinning role and
women to the domestic sphere. Furthermore, it is
important that the arguments advanced for both parents
being able to work part-time and care for their children
in their non-working hours do not include or encourage

5 Eva Cox and Susan Magarey, "Can there be justice for
cit., p. 188.
the notion that children are better off being looked after solely by their natural parents. As previously argued, a range of ways of caring for and socialising children, whilst ensuring them love and security, are possible.

A reduction in the length of the working day for all may be a more fruitful political strategy to pursue in the short term to advance the interests of women who participate in, or wish to enter, the paid workforce. Presently, in Australia, shorter working hours are being pursued by unions. Many workers receive one day off a month and work the same length of time each day, or, not infrequently, choose to work a longer working day so that they can increase their rostered days off. But one long weekend per month will not change the gendered division of labour. Unions must pursue a shorter working day, to enable men to participate in childcare and other domestic responsibilities and to reduce the stress and fatigue of working women whilst enabling them to pursue careers commensurate with their skills and interests. In addition people would have more time to relax together and to be involved in their communities. Currently, the Victorian Government is encouraging devolution of decision making in schools and other institutions and yet one wonders where a working parent would find the time for such involvement. A shorter working day would enable people to make real choices about democratic participation, creative activities, their health, paid work and leisure.
opportunities. Writers such as Barry Jones and Andre Gorz warn that the development of technology will mean a drastic change in the role and nature of work.6 According to Gorz, "The choice is not between the abolition of work and the re-establishment of well-rounded trades in which everyone can find satisfaction. The choice is: either a socially controlled, emancipatory abolition of work or its oppressive, anti-social abolition".7

Such a scenario should not be uncritically accepted by unions, governments and community groups who can be a part of deciding what change is desirable and/or necessary. However, in the context of existing and growing reduction in work opportunities, a shorter working day is one way of sharing socially necessary work more equitably. It does not, in itself, fulfill Ann Game's desire for the diminished importance of waged work,8 although I think this would be a highly probable consequence of its introduction, as people change the balance between their paid and unpaid activities.

Affirmative action policies are also vital to enable a more equal participation of women in paid work. Affirmative Action has the potential to do far more than help senior women up hierarchichal career ladders. It

7 Gorz, Op. cit., p. 8,
8 Ann Game, "Men and Machines", in Ms Muffet, No 21, December, 1983.
Affirmative action policies are also vital to enable a more equal participation of women in paid work. Affirmative Action has the potential to do far more than help senior women up hierarchical career ladders. It can give women access to a wider variety of education and training, and so gain their entry to all kinds and levels of work, including senior positions. The procurement by working class women of traditionally male jobs could enable them to escape impossible financial situations.

The potential of the legislation is broad, containing the possibility of not only increasing the numbers and levels of women in particular jobs, but questioning the systems of values attaching to certain types of work behaviour.9

Increased participation of women in the labour force also has the potential to break down the division between the public and private spheres. I say this in the knowledge that despite the increased numbers of Australian women undertaking paid work since World War 2, little has been achieved in this area. Patriarchal ideologies and structures have existed for a long time and are deeply embedded; change to patriarchy will also be slow. However, it should be emphasised that some gains have been made.

Housework is no longer considered sufficient reason for women to remain at home full-time. As a mother of pre-school children, my participation in paid work is accepted whilst not encouraged; when my children are at

school, my contribution in the labour market and to the family income will be the norm. Such possibilities were not available to my mother. In some unions and industries, "private" issues such as child care and leave for child birth and rearing for men and women are high on the agenda or already translated into government policies and action. The division between public and private spheres is not a reality in women's lives. Their presence in the workplace can assault these categories and change the public ideologies and structures which sustain them.

**Child care provision and change**

The most fruitful way for feminists to attempt to change the position of women is through structures, which have a dialectical relationship with ideology and practices. There are many arenas in which feminist aims - here I speak loosely, knowing how these vary - can be pursued, the most obvious being 1) participation in the state bureaucracy, and attempting to exert influence over policy; 2) working through the union movement to change traditional union priorities; 3) working through grass-roots political/community organisations both for specific wants and to change the political agenda.

The allocation to women of the care of their children has a profound influence on their daily and long-term life practices and thus I see public provision of child care as the crucial area for structural change. Provision of universally accessible, affordable (ultimately free) child care would affect women's and children's practices and both dominant and individual/
group ideologies. In terms of practices, some effects would be as follows. Children who are currently left unattended while their parents work would have a safe and stimulating environment, which would also relieve their parents of much anxiety. Women who wished to enter the labour force to avoid poverty, gain self-esteem, independence and so on would be enabled to do so. Furthermore, they would have a job choice less restricted by particular hours demanded by some occupations. Women who experience stress and isolation in the sole care of their children or simply wish to pursue interests other than paid work would have increased opportunities.

A number of notions bound up in the ideologies of womanhood could be affected by child care provision. For example, the idea that public care of children is inferior to a parent’s care, particularly in the case of pre-school children, could be broken down. This could happen through changed perceptions of the women making use of the child care and people close to them. Also, public discourse regarding child care would inevitably change as a consequence of the implementation of a policy of universal provision, giving women a freer choice to take up available child care places. The implications of a changed notion of the relationship between mothers and small children would be significant for the ideology of motherhood, currently based almost solely on the idea of the necessity of the mother’s presence for the social and psychological health of the child and future adult. It
should also have consequences for publicly and privately held notions of the role of fathers.

Ideas regarding the inevitable separation of the public and private would be affected by the unavoidable conveyance of "private" concerns about children into the public world of child care centres, probably even more so when these are situated in the workplace. Issues affecting women and children can become issues that legitimately affect work and bring about changes in its organisation.

Ultimately, such issues should be seen to affect and be the responsibility of not just individual men and women or even employers and governments but the whole society. And in such a society the lives of all men, women and children would not be compartmentalised into work/non-work, public/private and the range of dichotomies which ultimately come down to man/woman, power/subordination. Instead, our lives could involve real choices, including the choice of an integrated mix of paid and unpaid work, parenting and participation in the broader community.
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